

“How do you say ‘preparar’”? L1 use in EFL oral production and task-related differences

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This study analyses the influence of Spanish and/or Catalan (L1) on English (L2) oral production of adult learners of English as a foreign language (EFL) under three different task conditions. The analysis focuses on L1 uses found at the lexical level in an interview, a picture description/narration, and a role-play. The data were codified for both number of L1 uses (against the total number of turns per subject) and types of L1 uses, both adapted and non-adapted, with a total of twelve different categories. Statistical analysis of the results showed significant task-related differences in some L1 uses, specifically between the narration and the other two tasks.

1. Introduction and review of the literature

Ellis (1994: 341) claims that “no theory of L2 acquisition is complete without an account of L1 transfer”. From the origins of research on language transfer under the framework of behaviourist theories of language learning and teaching until the recent interest in the multilingual speaker, the issue of influence between languages has been one of the main concerns of researchers (see Gass and Selinker (eds.) 1983, Kellerman and Sharwood-Smith (eds.) 1986, Ringbom 1987, Odlin 1989, Celaya 1992, Cenoz, Hufeisen and Jessner (eds.) 2001). Nowadays, and according to Odlin (2003), there is full evidence for the existence of transfer at all linguistic levels.

This section contains two parts, first an overview of some of the most relevant research studies on transfer at the lexical level in production (mainly in oral production) with special emphasis on the variables that have been shown to affect cross-linguistic influence, and a second part that describes the tasks used in the present study by drawing on relevant research on performance variability between tasks.

1.1 Lexical transfer

Proficiency seems to be one of the most important variables when determining the probability of language transfer. In this sense, there is general agreement in the fact that language transfer is more likely to occur at lower levels of proficiency (Poulisse and Bongaerts 1994 and Poulisse 1999). Language typology is another relevant variable, with the general consensus that typological closeness between the L1 and the L2

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facilitates language transfer (Dewaele 1998, Williams and Hammarberg 1998, De Angelis and Selinker 2001, and Hammarberg 2001) and that psychotypology also plays a relevant role (Cenoz 2001 and Herwig 2001). Frequency is another relevant variable in studies on cross-linguistic influence. According to Poulisse and Bongaerts (1994), highly frequent L1 lexical items are candidates for unintentional lexical transfer due to their high activation levels during the early stages of L2 learning. However, Williams and Hammarberg (1998) and Miralpeix (2002) contradict these findings.

What is very interesting in the studies above is that they show the interaction of several variables. That is, in Herwig (2001), for example, psychotypology interacts with proficiency and in other studies, proficiency and typology also interact with recency and L2 status (Williams and Hammarberg 1998, Cenoz 2001, De Angelis and Selinker 2001, Hammarberg 2001, Sánchez y Celaya 2003). Dewaele (2001), for instance, deals with the interaction of the amount of formal instruction, the status of the interlanguage, and the frequency of use outside the classroom to explain individual variation.

1.2 Task effects

There is yet another variable that has received little attention in relation to language transfer and this is the effect of tasks, which is precisely the objective of the present study. In the literature on SLA, language pedagogy and language assessment, one finds little consensus on what a task is. As Bachman (2002: 458) says, “definitions vary from including virtually anything that is done to distinguishing between ‘real-world tasks’ and ‘pedagogic tasks’”. In general, a tendency towards considering a task as a real-world activity can be observed, but what we find in the literature is a division between tasks that exert more control over the learners’ performance and tasks that exert less control (e.g. Larsen-Freeman and Long 1991), controlled tasks and ‘natural’ tasks (e.g. Poulisse 1999), indirect testing formats or formats which do not reflect real-world tasks (e.g. multiple-choice and cloze) and more direct formats or formats which attempt to simulate real-world tasks (Cohen 1999). As authors such as Larsen-Freeman and Long (1992), Kasper and Rose (2002) and Nunan (1992) show, different elicitation procedures (or tasks) serve different purposes. This is why we are going to compare here the three tasks used in the experiment: an interview, a picture description/narration, and a role-play.

Larsen-Freeman and Long (1992) present twelve kinds of tasks used in SLA research ordered from those exerting more control over the learner’s performance to

those exerting less control. We can consider the picture description procedure in the present study to be moderately controlled, as it combines characteristics of a controlled and a natural task. It is controlled in that the pictures that make up the story, and, therefore, some items that can be considered problematic have been selected by the researcher. On the other hand, it is natural in the sense that it is a story telling and, according to Poulisse (1999: 86), “stories are naturally monologues”.

We can also view the role-play and oral interview to be quite ‘natural’ tasks. In the opinion of Fraser, Rintell and Walters (1980) a role-play is a useful means to study learners’ pragmatic competence. Concerning the oral interview, Larsen-Freeman and Long (1992) state that researchers vary in the way they use it as an elicitation procedure. Some researchers exercise control over the topics to make the subjects produce the structure under study; others allow subjects freedom in choosing what topics should be discussed. We can consider the oral interview to be an informal semi-guided conversation.

In her study, Poulisse (1990) found great variability between the tasks she used with respect to the choice of compensatory strategies. The subjects predominantly used elaborate analytic strategies in the picture description task, while in the interview task they used many short holistic strategies and transfer strategies. According to Larsen-Freeman and Long (1992: 30, 31) “we must not only be concerned with whether or not performance resulting from elicitation procedures parallels natural performance, but we must also be aware that subjects’ performance varies from task to task”. Ellis (1994) refers to this interlanguage variation as *task-induced variability*.

A good example of a study where different elicitation tasks were chosen to analyse oral production is Duff (1993). The variation found between task types was accompanied by variation within the same task. Duff’s results, together with Tarone (1989), for example, who claims that interlanguage variability associated with the use of different tasks is caused by the shifts in the degree of attention paid to language form, give evidence for the fact that, in addition to the various elicitation tasks, there may be certain conditions accompanying the tasks themselves which cause variable performance, such as the amount of planning time or the subjects’ attention to form or content.

The purpose of the present study is to examine L1 use in EFL oral production of one group of adult learners of English as a foreign language at a beginner level in three

different tasks. To this end, and on the basis of the literature reviewed here, the following research question is addressed:

Are there any significant task-related differences in the L1 uses produced by the learners: Does the number of L1 uses vary from task to task? Do the types of L1 uses vary from task to task?

2. Method

2.1 Participants

The participants in this research study were 52 adults, aged between 19 and 48, learning English in both University and official language schools in Barcelona. They form part of a larger sample in the BAF Project (Barcelona Age Factor Project), which is being carried out at the English Department of the University of Barcelona.² All the participants had Catalan and/or Spanish as their first language and lived in Catalonia. They had started to learn English at the age of 18 or older and at the time of data collection they had received 200 hours of formal instruction in English.

2.2 Materials

The instruments used in this study consist of a questionnaire to obtain both personal and linguistic information and an oral test which included three different tasks: an interview, a picture description / narration and a role-play.

2.3 Procedure

The three tasks were administered to the participants by the researchers and research assistants and were audiotaped and later transcribed. In the present study all cases of cross-linguistic influence at the lexical level were identified and classified into the categories that are explained below. An inter-rater analysis was carried out with 10% of the data with a reliability of 84.88%. Then, the data were quantified and analysed with SPSS 11.

2.4 Categorization

The L1 uses have been firstly divided into *adapted to the target language* and *non-adapted to the target language* following and adapting Poulisse and Bongaerts (1994) and other studies, as explained below. Examples for all the categories are provided in Appendix 1.

² We are grateful to the research assistant Maria del Mar Suarez for her invaluable help with the data files.

The *adapted L1 uses* have been subdivided into the categories *Lexical invention*, *Lexical substitution* and *Calque*. The term *lexical inventions* is used by Dewaele (1998) to talk about the interlanguage lexemes which are morphophonologically adapted to the target language but which are never used by native speakers. This category corresponds to Bialystok's (1983) and Cenoz's (2001) *foreignizing*, Poullisse and Bongaert's (1994) *unintentional adapted language switches*, and Ringbom's (2001) *coinage*. The term *Lexical substitution* has been taken from Poullisse (1999) and refers to L2 words used with L1 meaning. This type of L1 use also corresponds to Ringbom's *semantic extensions* and *totally or partially deceptive cognates*. The category *Calque* (James 1998) consists of literal translations of a lexical item or structure from one language to another.

The *non-adapted L1 uses* have been adapted from Williams and Hammarberg (1998). However, some changes have been made. The categories *Edit*, *Meta frame*, *Insert: explicit elicit*, *Insert: implicit elicit* have been kept exactly the same. But *Meta comment* and *Insert: non-elicited* have been both subdivided. *Meta comment* has been subdivided into *Meta comment* and *Meta comment translation*, which comprises the comments or questions, that are a translation of what the interviewer is saying or asking. *Insert: non-elicited* has been subdivided into *Insert: non-elicited sociopsychologically motivated*³ (which are non-elicited, intentional and sociopsychologically motivated switches), *Insert: non-elicited non-sociopsychologically motivated* (which are non-elicited, probably intentional, but non-sociopsychologically motivated), and *Insert: accidental switches*.

Every participant's L1 uses were measured against the total number of turns he/she had in every task. A turn is "one or more streams of speech bounded by speech of another, usually an interlocutor" (Crookes 1990: 185). We didn't count as speech interactional markers such as *aha*, *er* or the unintelligible turns produced by the subjects.

³ Williams and Hammarberg (1998) don't specify what sociopsychologically motivated switches are, although they say that they consider them to be instances of codeswitching which appear to be used in much the same way as proficient bilinguals might codeswitch. We consider the non-elicited sociopsychologically motivated switches as switches which for whatever reason are totally intentionally produced.

3. Results and discussion

The number of L1 uses produced in each task will be examined first to see whether it is task-related. Then, the numbers will be distributed according to types to see whether the type of L1 use is also task-related.

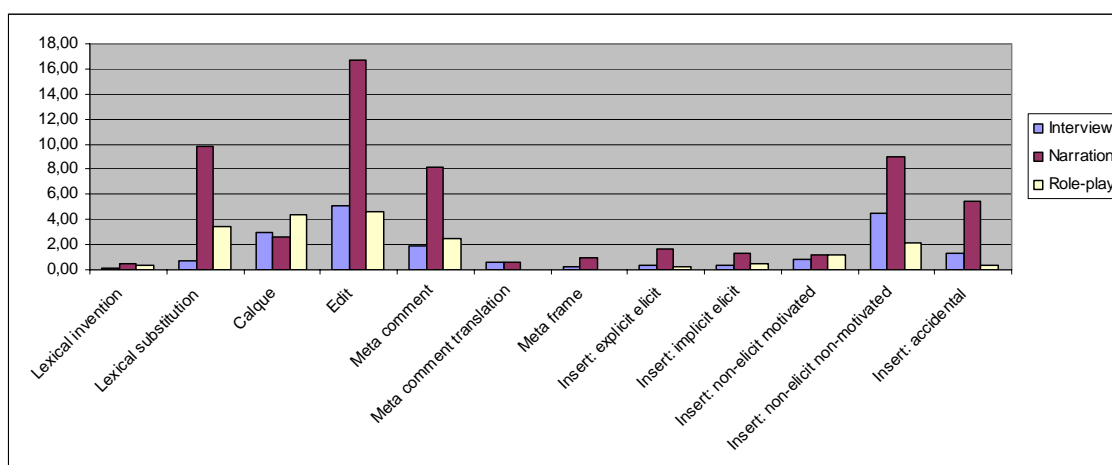
The means of L1 uses produced across the three tasks are given in Table 1.

Table 1. Summary of descriptive statistics for task type

Interview			Picture description / Narration			Role-play		
N	Mean	S.D.	N	Mean	S.D.	N	Mean	S.D.
52	18.86	5.27	52	57.74	11.08	50	19.89	6.59

The comparison of the means shows that the number of L1 uses varies from task to task. A great difference can be observed at first sight between the Picture description / Narration (narration from now on) and the other two tasks. This result could be a first indication that different tasks elicit different behaviours (i.e. Larsen-Freeman and Long 1992, Nunan 1992, Cohen 1999, Poulisse 1999, Kasper and Rose 2002). If we have a look now at Figure 1 below, which shows a comparison of the type of L1 uses produced in each task, we will observe some variation in the L1 uses produced across tasks.

Figure 1. Types of L1 use: Task comparison



As Figure 1 shows, *Lexical substitution*, *Edit*, *Meta comment*, *Insert: explicit elicit*, *Insert: non-elicited non-motivated* and *Insert: accidental* seem to be clearly task-dependent. That is, while there are relatively a low number of L1 uses of these types in the Interview and the Role-play, we find a high number in the Narration task.

As compared with the Role-play, the Narration presents a large number of *Insert: non-elicited non-motivated* and *Insert: accidental*. On the other hand, the Interview task also presents a large number of *Insert: non-elicited non-motivated* and *Insert: accidental* when compared to the Role-play. Poulisse (1990) found an increased use of transfer in her story retelling task and in her interview too, which she explains by saying that since transfer is a compensatory strategy that requires little processing effort, it is an easy solution in situations when time is limited, and particularly in complex tasks, where there is little attention to spare. She adds that the time constraint and the cognitive complexity of the task explains the large number of transfer strategies realized as “borrowing” (*Insert: non-elicited non-motivated*) in her interview, which requires the least processing effort of all compensatory strategies.

The large presence of accidental uses in the Narration and the Interview as compared to the Role-play may have more or less the same explanation as that given for the *Insert: non-elicited non-motivated* (Poulisse’s *borrowing*). In this case, however, the pressure to go on narrating the story while paying attention to the syntactic structure of the sentences as well as to the structure of the story, and the time constraint posed by conversational rules in the Interview may trigger the accidental production of L1 uses which the subjects immediately correct.

To probe further into these differences a series of post hoc pairwise contrast tests were performed to compare the mean differences in the variables for each pair of tasks in order to find out which pairs of means are significantly different. The contrast analyses were run with the Wilcoxon Signed-Rank test with the alpha level set at 0.05.

The significant results of the post hoc analysis, as summarized in Table 2, indicate that most of the differences were found between Narration and Role-play with significant results observed in the variables *Lexical substitution*, *Edit*, *Meta comment*, *Insert: explicit elicited*, *Insert: non-elicited non-motivated* and *Insert: accidental*. Between the Narration and the Interview differences were found in *Lexical substitution*, *Edit*, *Meta comment*, and *Insert: explicit elicited*. Finally, a significant difference in the category of *Lexical substitutions* was found in the Interview when compared with the Role-play, and a significant difference in *Insert: non-elicited non-motivated*, and *Insert: accidental* was found in the Role-play in contrast to the Interview.

Table 2. Post hoc pairwise contrast tests with significant results (Z value)

Variables	Narration	vs.	Role-play	vs.	Role-play	vs.
	Interview		Interview		Narration	
<i>Lexical substitution</i>	-4.663a*		-2.139a*		-3.079b*	
<i>Edit</i>	-2.773a*				-3.038b*	
<i>Meta comment</i>	-3.493a*				-3.004b*	
<i>Insert: explicit elicit</i>	-2.202a*				-2.549b*	
<i>Insert: non-elicited non-motivated</i>			-2.083b*		-3.357b*	
<i>Insert: accidental</i>			-3.086b*		-3.053b*	

* Significant at $p < 0.05$. Blanks indicate non-significant results.

a. Based on negative ranks.

b. Based on positive ranks.

The most striking difference is between the Narration and the other tasks. The large number of L1 uses found in this task as compared with the other two may also be explained by the fact that a narrative is a monologue (Poullisse 1999) and an extended text (Kellerman 2001). Certainly, these two factors may trigger the (conscious or unconscious) production of L1 uses, as according to Kellerman (2001: 171) “narrators will need to have (or will need to compensate for the lack of) the requisite discourse-organisational skills as well as the grammatical structures and words needed to bring the story across successfully”. Poullisse (1990), who also found a large use of transfer strategies in her story-retelling task, thinks that transfer strategies are largely used in narrations because they are effective and require little effort.

The production of *Lexical substitutions* in the three tasks is worth analysing. Poullisse (1990) found that the 70% of the transfer strategies that occurred in her picture description task and her story-retelling task were foreignizings. This finding supports Poullisse’s (1990) conclusion that ‘task’ is an important factor determining the use of compensatory strategies. However, as Poullisse (1990: 147), we also think that probably “there are certain item effects” too in the Narration task. As stated by Pienemann (1999: 306), the selection of lexical items is determined by the task, that is, “whichever pictures are used to support a task, the objects depicted there materialise, naturally, as lexical items, sometimes with high frequency”. These statements may explain the large use of *Lexical Substitutions* in the Narration task. On the one hand, for example, the task requires the extended use of third person possessive pronouns (*his/her/their*), which triggered quite a lot of lexical substitutions as in Spanish they are realized as a single form (*su*). On the other hand, the task poses some lexical problems that are as well often

solved by the use of lexical substitutions (e.g. the use of “the boys” instead of “the children” to refer to a boy and a girl as in Spanish and Catalan). *Lexical substitutions* are not so likely to occur in the Interview and in the Role-play tasks because, to a certain extent, learners can choose the vocabulary to use in these tasks and also because, as these other tasks are not monologues, learners are more likely to use other type of L1 uses as they are conscious that they will receive feedback.

As shown in Table 2, statistically significant differences were also found between the Narration and the other tasks in other variables. Because it is a monologue, it is not surprising to find a larger production of editing terms in the Narration than in the Role-play and in the Interview in this low proficiency group. The story needs to be individually brought across successfully (Kellerman, 2001) so narrators will find the (conscious or unconscious) use of editing terms useful, for example, to link their stories and to have time to think. According to Poulisse and Bongaerts (1994), editing terms tend to be short and highly frequent; they are automatized terms and very difficult to deactivate. As the L2 of beginners is not automatized at all, they opt to pay more attention to the selection of content words as these are the ones which carry the meaning and leave function words "to look after themselves".

Conclusion

After the analysis of the data, we can conclude that the answer to whether the type of task influences the number and type of L1 uses is that the production of certain L1 uses seems to be task-related. We have seen that the production of *Edit*, *Insert: non-elicited non-motivated*, and *Insert: accidental* are clearly task-dependent whereas the production of *Lexical substitution* can be considered as either task-dependent or item-dependent. Task variability has been mainly found between the Narration and the other two tasks, as in fact there is hardly any variation between the Interview and the Role-play.

As different elicitation procedures (or tasks) serve different purposes (Larsen-Freeman and Long 1992, Nunan 1992, Kasper and Rose 2002), there may exist clear implications for second language research as well as for second language testing and second language teaching. For these purposes the selection of tasks should receive the necessary attention. With respect to research, on the one hand, researchers should be aware of the aspects in which tasks differ from each other and should exploit the possibility of manipulating these (Poulisse 1990); on the other, researchers must be

aware that findings on single tasks may not be generalized (Elder, Iwashita and McNamara 2002).

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APPENDIX 1.

Adapted L1 uses

- Lexical invention. Example:
S35I1: the next year I think er I finished the [/] the some **assignatures** [=English pronunciation] and I make the CAP .
- Lexical substitution. Example:
S4N1: the mother # is um [/] is: **teach** of a [//] <the: children &some> [//] something.
- Calque. Example:
S20N1: they can eat er **more later** in the evening when they come to house.

Non-adapted L1 uses

- Edit. Example:
S20I1: how ?
INT: old ?
S20I1: er a **ve(u)re** er age [/] ten . [+c]
- Meta comment. Example:
S7N1 **es un mantel ?**
INT no it's a map.
- Meta comment translation. Example:
INT: no what time did you arrive [/] arrive ?
S13I1: ah **y ahora me preguntas cuándo salgo ?**
- Meta frame. Example:
S18N1: **com es diu** cistella ?
- Insert: explicit elicit. Example:
S14N1: eat bueno how do you say **preparar?**
- Insert: implicit elicit. Example:
S63I2: yes and I have always an [/] an [/] ["'] <**dietari**> ? [+c]
- Insert: non-elicited motivated. Example:
S4N1: ## <com es diu berenar>?
INT: you can say it in Catalan if you don't know.
S4N1: <the **berenar**>
- Insert: non-elicited non-motivated. Example:
INT: ok where is the dog where?
S13N1: in the **cesta** .
- Insert: accidental. Example:
13N1: er her mother er left er <the **plan**> [//] <the map> [/] the map.