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Un estudio de caso exploratorio sobre el desarrollo  
de la interlengua en inglés como lengua extranjera  
An exploratory case study of interlanguage  
development in EFL

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## Abstract

This dissertation pursues to show how a non-native speaker of English engages in writing in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) at a B2 level. To do so, it draws on the theories and concepts of the broad fields of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) and Second Language Learning (SLL). By applying error analysis, the study specifically analyses a range of factors such as motivation, self-confidence and anxiety and their connection with learning a language in a better way. Data show that the student is able to compose texts at a B2 level of competence. Insights from the learner further reveal that anxiety and motivation play a key role in the process of learning to write at an advanced stage of interlanguage development.

**Keywords:** Second language acquisition, language learning, motivation, anxiety, input, interlanguage.

## Resumen

El propósito de este trabajo es mostrar cómo un hablante no nativo de inglés hace uso de su habilidad escrita de inglés como lengua extranjera (ELE) en un nivel de B2. Para ello, se han utilizado las teorías y conceptos de los campos de la Adquisición de Segundas Lenguas (ASL) y el Aprendizaje de Segundas Lenguas (ASL). A través del análisis de errores, este trabajo indaga específicamente en el papel que desempeñan ciertos filtros, tales como la motivación, seguridad y ansiedad, en la adquisición del lenguaje. Los resultados muestran que el alumno es capaz de escribir textos acordes a un nivel de B2. Este estudio implica el análisis de cómo la ansiedad y la motivación desarrollan un papel clave en el aprendizaje.

Palabras clave: Adquisición de segundas lenguas, aprendizaje de lenguas, motivación, ansiedad, input, interlengua.

## 1. Introduction

In this case study, my main objective is to explore how a non-native student of English as a second (foreign) language learns to write and engages in writing in English at a B2 level according to the CEFR (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages) (Council of Europe, 2018). Since the second half of the twentieth century to date there have been numerous studies regarding how L2 English learners acquire a second language. “Second” refers to any language that is learned other than the mother tongue (Ellis, 1997). Ellis defines L2 acquisition as the process through which learners learn a language different from their first language. This learning can occur inside or outside a classroom.

To understand how learners acquire an L2 and how they engage in writing, a way of doing it is to collect samples of learner language in their target language and analyse them comparing them to previous and further samples. If we want this comparison to be rigorous and systematic, we need to examine the learner’s language production set against reliable language assessment tools such as the CEFR level and also, and importantly, take into account the learner’s profile and individual differences.

A key goal of SLA is the study and description of L2 acquisition processes, that is to say, the study of how the learner is learning the language and the process s/he is following to succeed. Another goal is swexplanation, and therefore the researcher must identify the external and internal factors that account for why learners acquire the L2 in the way they do. Scholarly research also contends that external factors may influence the process of learning and therefore we need to consider the social conditions the learners are involved in (Mitchel & Myles, 1998; Spolsky, 1985). As L2 learners have already learned their first language, they have developed communication strategies that can help them to use the L2 knowledge they are acquiring appropriately (Ellis, 1997).

In the 1970s Stephen Krashen proposed a model to explain language acquisition. One of the hypotheses he posed in this model is the “Input Hypothesis”. The Input Hypothesis claims that “exposure to comprehensible input is both necessary and sufficient for SLL to take place” (Krashen, 1985, p. 33). This hypothesis states that “humans acquire language in only one way – by understanding messages, or by receiving ‘comprehensible input’...We move from  $i$ , our current level, to  $i + 1$ , the next level along the natural order, by understanding input containing  $i + 1$ ” (Krashen, 1985, p. 33). SLA research demonstrates that talk addressed to learners was usually grammatically regular, but normally it was simpler compared to talk among native speakers of a language. Learners of a language tend to use shorter utterances and a narrower range of vocabulary or less complex grammar, as Long (1983) explains. Taking Krashen’s Input Hypothesis as a point of departure, Long proposed the “Interaction Hypothesis”. He conducted a study of 32 pairs of native-native speakers and native-non-native speakers and found that, grammatically speaking, there was not much difference between the native and the non-native pairs. But regarding face-to-face oral tasks, he concluded that native-non-native speakers tended to use conversational tactics such as repetitions or clarification requests.

In this study, I aim to enquire into L2 writing production, focusing on analysing the quality of writing (through error analysis) and the influence of linguistic input and other contextual factors on the second language acquisition process of an L2 learner, in this case a 18-year-old student of English as a Foreign Language (EFL). Analysing what the student has written and enquiring into how he has acquired the necessary language skills is necessary to better understand how he engages in L2 writing. There are four steps in conducting error analysis, the first one is to identify the errors and decide if they are errors or mistakes; the second step is to describe the errors, the third one is to explain them and finally to assess the errors in relation to the quality of writing. Through error analysis, it is possible to determine



the skills the learner has developed and the aspects that require further development. Moreover, it is also possible to identify the language competence level of the learner. Alongside this, it is also important to assess the role of individual differences, as they are key in understanding how SLA and SLL processes account for and/or influence the way a learner writes, in particular, language aptitude (measured by standard tests) and language attitude (with a focus on student motivation) (Mitchel & Myles, 1998).

## 2. Rationale and Aim of the Study

As the seminal SLA and SLL literature claims, learning a language is different from acquiring it. When we talk about learning, we refer to formal, planned, and systematic learning. Normally, language learning occurs in an instructed, classroom-based environment (Mitchel & Myles, 1998). Second language learning is a process in which a language other than the mother tongue is learnt. Language learning requires formal and conscious learning, usually supported by formal instruction, and intersects with subconscious acquisition processes through exposure to the L2 (Krashen, 1984; Mitchel & Myles, 1998). The language learning process involves considerable time and effort if the learner wants, needs, or wishes to acquire full competence in the second (or foreign) language. For that, developing speaking and writing skills, both of them language production skills, can lead to successful language learning (Ellis, 1997). According to Stephen Krashen's Input Hypothesis, speaking is a result of acquisition and not its cause. To acquire a language, it is necessary to understand language and its meaning. When the linguistic input is comprehensible, the language forms contained in such input are automatically stored in the short term memory (Mitchel & Myles, 1998).

When we learn a language, we develop four abilities, reading, listening, writing, and speaking. All of them are equally important to acquire a language and become a competent user of it. In this dissertation, I will focus on writing skills to first describe and then explain how a non-native speaker has learnt how to write in English as an L2. According to the B2 level descriptors of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), a B2 level student can understand the main ideas of complex text on both concrete and abstract topics, including technical discussions in his/her field of specialisation. S/he is able to interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible without strain for either party. At this level the learner is also able to produce clear, detailed text on a wide range of subjects and explain a viewpoint on a topical

issue giving the advantages and disadvantages of various options. Developing these skills in writing is not an easy task, and challenging at times and therefore it is important to understand how each individual engages in writing and develops these skills to become a successful, competent writer.

### 3. Theoretical Framework

According to Ellis, a second language can be defined as any language other than the mother tongue. Second language acquisition is the process through which people learn languages in an environment other than the strict lesson in class (Ellis, 1997). This process occurs sometime after the acquisition of the first language of the speaker. 'Foreign' languages are also included under this term, as the underlying learning process is essentially the same for more local and more remote target languages. Languages only differ in purposes and circumstances (Mitchel & Myles, 1998). Drawing on Spolsky's (1985) general model of second language learning, which includes the range of conditions that can make L2 learning more or less likely (see Appendix), we can deduce that two of the most important factors when learning a language are the attitudes of the speaker towards the new language and the motivation of the subject. Therefore, it is worth exploring aspects of learning to write in relation to individual differences and the learner's conditions that may account for his/her success in learning how to write in English as an L2. Some of the conditions that are worth investigating, as they have been widely examined by extant scholarly literature, are age, personality, individual capabilities, and the learner's previous knowledge of the language.

### 3.1. L2 acquisition

Second language acquisition has focused on the formal features of language that linguistics has analysed in recent years. As Ellis notes, the importance of L2 pronunciation is not the main aim of a person learning a language, as it is something that can be changed and corrected when the learning process has come to an end. When acquiring a language, the relationship between the person and the language that he/she aims to learn is important. It is crucial to determine if the person is learning the language voluntarily or involuntarily. Also, it is important to determine if the learning of the language is going to be based on an inductive or a deductive approach, or maybe both. For example, the learner may be exposed to the language in a forced way, and then the learner may be more reluctant to learn it than in an optional environment if s/he has chosen independently to study that language because s/he has decided it with a specific purpose or, say as a hobby. If the student is forced to do it for a reason and not as a personal decision, s/he might be more reluctant to learn the language and difficulties might arise. As we have previously seen, second language learners already know a language, so they have acquired the mental and communicative strategies that are going to be useful for them in the L2 learning process. To acquire a language, learners internalize chunks of language structures and the rules of the language (Ellis, 1997). Each language has its own rules and its way of processing, so it is important to find connections and understand how communication takes place to successfully achieve the purpose of learning. To acquire a language, the learner must acquire some explanation of the reasons why things occur in that way. Grammatical explanations and understanding of the main basic aspects of a language are utterly necessary if learners aim to acquire a language and become capable of communicating in it, both in written form and orally.

### 3.2. Instruction and L2 acquisition

For SLA, one of its main objectives is to support and improve language teaching. One of the reasons why many people, especially young students, are reluctant to learn languages (English) is because of the way it is taught in schools. Traditionally, language teaching has focused on form-focused instruction. The typical methods when teaching a language were the Grammar Translation Method, popular between the 1840s and the 1940s. In this method, classes are taught in the mother tongue, the focus is on creating lists of vocabulary and grammar is taught to follow the specific rules that enable us to put words together and create sentences. There was no attention given to pronunciation, and the way of practising the language was by giving the students sentences to make them practise translation. This method followed a structural view, focusing on phonological units and grammatical operations (Mitchel & Myles, 1998). The Audio-lingual Method was also popular. Originated after the Second World War, and it focuses on enabling students to speak and write in the target language without taking much time. It is connected to Skinner's Behaviourism theory of learning, as he argues that the learning process takes place once something has been repeated several times (Skinner, 1985). This method follows a formal/structural syllabus, which is based on structuralism. This method pays attention to the different levels of language, such as phonetics and syntax and the oral language and practice of spoken communication are prioritised over writing practice. The focus is on the mastery of speech, which is important, but without having a basic notion and being able to create complex chunks of writing language learning is incomplete. At present, language pedagogy emphasizes the importance of exposing learners to real communicative experiences to acquire the four language skills (both reception skills and production skills) in an integrated manner (Ellis, 1997). For example, in the Communicative Language Teaching Method grammar is not necessarily taught since the focus is on learning how to communicate. Learners acquire

grammar subconsciously (automatically) in the process of learning how to communicate in the L2. Communicative Language Teaching is based on the idea that the main function of language use is communication. The goal of teaching is to help learners develop communicative competence (Hymes, 1972). Communicative competence is the ability to understand and use language effectively to communicate in authentic social environments.

### 3.3 Interlanguage and interlanguage development

To talk about interlanguage, we must consider the behaviourist learning theory first. “The basic assumption in SLA research is that learners create a language system, known as Interlanguage (IL). This system is composed of numerous elements, not the least of which are elements from the NL and the TL. What is important is that learners themselves impose structure on the available linguistic data and formulate an internalized system” (Gass & Selinker, 2008, p. 14). According to this theory, language learning involves habit formation. Habits are formed when learners respond to stimuli and their responses are reinforced so that they are remembered. “Behaviourism is not the science of human behaviour; it is the philosophy of that science” (Skinner, About Behaviorism, 1976). This theory of learning only focuses on observable behaviours and does not take into account mental activities. Behaviour theorists define learning as the acquisition of new behaviour. We learn by repetition. The problem with this theory is that it requires a lot of time to learn a language, and there is not a mental activity involved. It is based on the theory of conditioning: classical conditioning is a learning process in which an association is made between a previously neutral stimulus and a stimulus that naturally evokes a response. Classical conditioning occurs when a natural reflex responds to a stimulus. Specific behaviours are acquired in response to specific stimuli. If we follow this theory, learning takes place when learners could practice making the correct response to a given stimulus. As learners imitate correct models of language, they receive positive or negative reinforcement (Ellis, 1997). The term “interlanguage” was coined by Larry Selinker, an American linguist who argues that L2 learners construct a linguistic system that works from the learners’ L1 but varies from it. A learner’s interlanguage is a unique linguistic system (Selinker, 1972). The concept of interlanguage is a complex one, which involves different premises such as the construction of a system of abstract linguistic rules, underlying comprehension, and production of the L2. This is seen as “mental



grammar". Moreover, the learners' grammar is open to being influenced by the linguistic output the learner produces and the linguistic input the learner is exposed to. Evidence of internal processing can be traced through error analysis for example in the omission, the overgeneralization, and the transfer of errors.

Error analysis has been conceptualised as consisting of four steps, identification, description, explanation and evaluation. In each stage we should focus on different things. In the first step we should identify the errors and decide if they are errors or mistakes. Errors reflect a gap in the learners knowledge and they occur when the learner doesn't know what is correct. Furthermore, mistakes reflects an occasional lap in performance, they occur because the learner is unable to perform what they know. In order to distinguish between error and mistake we should check the consistency of the learner performance. If the learner consistently use the wrong form, it is an error. But if the learner uses the incorrect form and sometimes the correct one, it is probably a mistake. To describe the errors, we have to diagnose problems and plot how changes in error patterns occur over time. Errors can be described by classifying them into grammatical categories. According to Saville-Troike, there are several areas of knowledge which every L2 learner must acquire, such as the lexicon (vocabulary) which includes word meaning, pronunciation (and spelling for written languages), the grammatical category (as part of the speech) and the possible occurrence in combination with other words and idioms. Also, the phonology (sound system) includes speech sounds that make a difference in meaning, the possible sequences of consonants and vowels, that is, the syllable structure. Also the intonation and rhythmic patterns, together with tone. The morphology is also key when describing errors in SLA, as we should consider the parts of the words that have meaning (morphemes), the inflections that carry grammatical information and the prefixes and suffixes that may be added to change the meaning of words or their grammatical categories. Also the syntax, involving word order, the agreement

between sentence elements and the ways to form questions, negate assertions, and to focus or structure information with sentences. Discourse should also be taken into account when describing errors, as it includes the ways to connect sentences, and to organize information across sentence boundaries, the structures for telling stories and engaging in conversations.

Moreover, in order to diagnose language learning problems we should compare learners' utterances with the reconstructed target-language utterances identifying how they differ. When describing errors, we should divide them into three categories. These are omission errors (i.e. leaving out an item that is required for an utterance in order to be grammatical), misinformation errors (i.e. to use one grammatical form in place of another grammatical form), and misordering errors (i.e. putting the words in an utterance in the wrong word order). In the step 3, we have to explain the sources of errors, deciding if there is an omission of some linguistic form, or if there is an overgeneralization of the forms learners find easy to learn and process. Also, we should explain if they are transfer errors from their L1 to the language they are learning. Finally, we have to evaluate the errors and put the attention on those that interfere with the overall intelligibility of the utterance expressed by the learner. We have to distinguish between global errors or local errors. Global errors are those that violate the overall structure of a sentence and make it difficult to process whereas local errors only affect a single constituent of the sentence and may be less likely to create processing problems.

#### 4. Methodology

The method used in this dissertation is case study research. A case study is longitudinal, and it involves a collection of samples of the learner's writing. In this case study I am going to focus on the distinction between errors and mistakes. Case study research is a qualitative research method widely used in the field of SLA research. In this method the researcher uses theories from the existing literature to look for patterns or generalizations, also aiming to interpret emerging themes from the data analysed. In case study research the researcher collects information of the individual learner under investigation (Creswell, 2013). To work on the case study of M., I am going to use a collection of samples of some of his writings for high school from the last six months. M. is an eighteen-year-old student and a native speaker of Spanish. He has been taught English since he was three. M's first contact with the English language occurred in primary school when he began learning the animals and the colours, like every child in the Spanish education system in the 2010s. This was so, as established by the educational curriculum at that time. His initial contact with the language was therefore through images and short videos and songs. His teachers wanted him to discover the language and to feel comfortable to create an interest in him to discover individually the language. Language learning and interlanguage development were therefore associated with the Audiolingual Method.

As he was subconsciously exposed to the language, he didn't feel anxious about learning it and his motivation was high. He wanted to learn more and more about the language, so he asked to receive extracurricular lessons in his free time. Also, he spent some summers abroad and attended English-medium camps and travelling to some English-speaking places such as London or Ireland. He also was exposed to social interaction with U.S. students thanks to a high school teacher who travelled there. He therefore spent two years interacting and interchanging letters with an American pen pal from Utah and

practising his writing skills. It is because of all these external factors and exposure to language input in English that he feels attracted by the language and wants to develop grammatical skills and now is studying to acquire a C1 level of competence, as described in the CEFR (Council of Europe, 2018).

In this dissertation, I aimed to explore M.'s writing skills through error analysis. To do so, I compared several sample texts to identify recurring errors and mistakes in his independent writing. It is important to differentiate between error and mistake in order to be clear when analysing the texts written by the student. According to Ellis (1977, p. 18), errors are systematic and predictable. Most of them are universal. On the contrary, mistakes are punctual and can be made due to misunderstandings or lack of attention, but the student knows the rules of the language. Mistakes are something punctual whereas errors are recurrent.

When students are exposed to a language in a forced or strict way, their results and improvements tend to be worse than if they are given the possibility to learn the language in a stress-free environment. To achieve a successful case study of this project I am going to use several writings of the student already corrected by his high school teacher. The topics of these compositions are Food and health, Social Media and Migration, with a view to tentatively exploring the analysis of motivation in the process of writing.

## 5. Results

According to the CEFR, a B2 level student “[c]an understand the main ideas of complex text on both concrete and abstract topics, including technical discussions in his/her field of specialisation. Can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible without strain for either party. Can produce clear, detailed text on a wide range of subjects and explain a viewpoint on a topical issue giving the advantages and disadvantages of various options. In Sample 1, he made a total of 14 mistakes. The first on it is the spelling of the word “obesity” twice, writing it with double “s”; the second mistake is the use of “Health and nutrition” as a bad word choice, the student should have used “nutrition” instead. Moreover, the student used “with” instead of “through” in the sentence “With a call”. Also, he mislead the grammatical categories using “healthy” instead of “health”. Regarding the mistakes in morphology, the student committed nine mistakes. In many of them, he used plurals when singulars were needed as in “lots” and “Others” instead of “lot” and “other”. Moreover, he did not use the suffix “ever” in “whatever” and “whenever” on two occasions. A recurrent mistake in M.’s writing was the use of “this” instead of “these”, a misinformation error. This inflection carries out number, so it affects the meaning of the text. The student also incorrectly used verb tenses, as he used “promoted” and “wanted”, that should have been used in the present tense in the text. After “promoted”, he wrote “to do”, which should be eliminated from the text. This should be eliminated because healthier food cannot be done, as we should say in Spanish (hacer comida más sana). Nonetheless healthier food can be promoted, or in any case, cooked. Finally, he used “depends in” when the grammatically correct form is “depends on”. Finally, the student has made a misordering error (“go usually”, instead of usually go”).

In the second textual sample, there were fewer mistakes, although some were mistakes that also occurred in Sample 1. The first mistake, the student has incorrectly written

“possibility”, missing one “s” to obtain “possibility”. When using the term “university”, the “U” should be capitalized. Moreover, “relationed”, a possible L1 transfer, was used instead of related. This occurs spontaneously, so we can say it is a mistake and not an error. Use of prepositions was not grammatically correct, for example when using the preposition “to”. Firstly, he used “with” instead of “To”, and later on the text, he used “To” where “in” was the correct choice. Other mistakes in the use of English were “worst” instead of “worse” in a comparative sentence and “choose” when the expected verb form was “chosen”, and also “haven’t” instead of “won’t”. He also forgot to add “to” to the verbs “look” and “study”,

In the third sample analysed, the student misspelled several words, such as “disspear” instead of “disappeared”; “erradicate”, which has an extra “-r” due to not rereading the text; and “actitudes” instead of “attitudes”. He also wrote the plural of “person”, as it is “people” and not “persons”. “[W]omen’s” instead of “women”, occurred twice in the text, again possibly suggesting a misinformation error, as it occurs systematically. The same applies to the use of “men’s” instead of “men”. Regarding word structure, he has wrongly written “have less salary”, as it should be said “earn less money”. He was not able to differentiate appropriately when to use “This” and when to use the plural form “These”. Spelling and grammatical mistakes were again found in this sample text, as in “disspear” instead of “disappeared”. Also, lack of subject-verb agreement when using “persist” instead of “persists” was found in this text. Moreover, he wrote “for the colour of the skin”, another possible L1 transfer, instead of saying “because of the skin colour”. He also wrote “took” instead of “have taken” in the sentence “We’ve been doing things very well and recently women took more importance in our society”. He should have used present perfect because the adverb “recently” makes compulsory to use present perfect because otherwise the adverb will not coordinate with the present perfect.

The last sample analysed contained fewer errors than in the previous ones. The form “advert” when referring to a “warning”, and “conscients” when he wanted to say “aware”. These are false friends that point to L1 transfer again. Prepositions were not used correctly, for example “with” and “to” or “on”, in the expression “On my opinion” when the acceptable thing is “In my opinion”. Other grammar mistakes concerned verb agreement (e.g. the use of “seems” instead of “seem”), this can be analysed as an incorrect subject-verb agreement. Also, he used “could” instead of “do”.

## 5.1 Commentary of results

In his first writing, M. obtained a 6 out of 10 according to his teacher's marking criteria. This writing was about the topic "Health and nutrition" and was corrected according to the descriptors of the B2 level in the CEFR. The most important mistakes in this writing are the ones related to verb tenses. The student failed to use appropriately the '-ed' suffix, as he used it wrongly twice in this writing. He did not use the appropriate verb tense, even if he knew the rule and how to use it correctly. As the student knows how to use it appropriately, it is something punctual and not a systematic error. It can be hypothesised that these verb tenses incorrectly written are related to the limited time spent in writing. The main aim of the writing practice was to focus on fluency, not on accuracy, as described in the CEFR. In other words, the focus was to be able to communicate and be understood and not to use grammar correctly. The student also misleads 'this' and 'these'. This is a common error of non-native EFL learners, as it is sometimes difficult to ensure which one should be used if one writes when putting the focus on getting the message across, without paying attention to language forms. As the sentence is plural, the speaker says, "this places". 'This' should be replaced by its plural form to successfully correspond to the plural "places". He also used incorrectly the linker "With a call", the teacher marked that he should have used "Through", a more common phrase for introducing a sentence and an opinion about health and nutrition in this case. From the analysis of this writing, it can be deduced that the student showed an understanding of English knowledge and extended control of vocabulary but failed in succeeding in grammatical accuracy. It can be further hypothesised here that task motivation acts as a negative affective filter, as the topic "Health and nutrition" might not be of interest to the learner. Follow-up interviewing with the learner confirmed that, he explained that his aim was only to complete the task and not to express their opinion and point of view critically.



The second writing considered for this case study was about whether a university study programme should be chosen because of money or because of the passion we feel for the area of study. In this writing, M. obtained 6.75 out of 10 but the ideas expressed looked clearer than in the previous writing. Some of the mistakes related to verb tenses again. The choice of verbs is sometimes incorrect, as use of “will” or “won’t” was not appropriate. The past tense was also wrongly used in this writing, as he did not use the correct past participle form, “chosen”. Instead, he used the word “choose” for talking in the past. M. has successfully divided his writing into different paragraphs corresponding to an introduction, two main paragraphs and also a conclusion. The information organisation of his writing corresponds with the CEFR B2 level descriptors of the rubric, as he supported his arguments with examples. In this text, even if it contained several mistakes, we can nonetheless hypothesise that motivation played an important role as the topic is much more relevant for the student (personal communication). Motivation is a key factor in learner language development. As it is expected, the student’s interest is closer to choosing a study programme and deciding whether to study it to earn a living in the future or choosing it to spend his life working on it. The student showed more interest than when talking about food and health, as normally a teenager normally is not interested in having good eating habits and concerned about health and nutrition. The importance of motivation can be seen in the effort the student made to express his opinion with arguments and counterarguments. Prepositions are also important when analysing M.’s writing. He used incorrectly some prepositions such as “by”, “to”, and “into”, possibly because he did not paid attention to it when writing, since M. was exposed to the language from an early age and therefore acquired language through subconscious processes. Probably he must have acquired these language forms in an unconscious way. As a naturalistic learner, he must have focused on fluency instead of accuracy, therefore not paying attention to mistakes. M.’s level of anxiety was low when he

wrote this composition, because it a recurrent topic in among pre-university students (personal communication). It is possible that this topic has already been debated in class and the student therefore had previous knowledge background of it. Also, writing about personal opinions and showing his perspective on how decisions is generally is easier than assessing critically an abstract theme such as health and nutrition.

The third text was graded with 8 out of 10, indicating a clear improvement in M.'s writing competence. The topic of this third topic was "Discrimination" and motivation was also a key factor in this writing process (personal communication). One important thing to highlight that connects this dissertation with the previous one is the repetition of the error "these/this". The student again made this mistake as in the previous writing pieces, as in this case he talked about how people's attitudes influence discrimination in general. In this case, verb tenses mistakes indicated that the student only used them incorrectly twice. Plurals were confusing for the student, as we can see that he wrote the plural of "person" using "persons" instead of "people". Moreover, the student showed difficulty with plurals and the use of the Saxon genitive with irregular plurals. In this writing, we can see improvement in the usage of vocabulary and a wider range of discourse linkers. Also, we can see the student's interest in social terms as he shows determination in his opinion and is aware of the dimensions of the topic dealt with in the composition. The student tries to be fluent whole also accurate as the emphasis is placed on meaning and being understood. M. wanted to get his ideas across. Learner language shows progression at the level of grammar and use of English, which may explain the teacher's assessment (mark).

The topic of the last piece of writing was about social media platforms and the student's perspective and opinion about them. In this essay, M. received a 9.25 out of 10. In this essay, the student did not make any mistakes regarding verb tenses, therefore showing increased accuracy in the use of the language. There were some punctuation mistakes

(missing commas). Notwithstanding, the structure of the text was well organised, which suggests M.'s awareness of discourse cohesion in texts. It was divided into three paragraphs. In the first one, the student introduced the topic and demonstrated he was aware of the current situation and the importance social media has on our lives. He presented the topic and showed from the very beginning that he was aware of the impact social media on teenagers and also the challenges they pose to young people. In the second paragraph, the student gives us his opinion on the topic and also he supported his statements respectfully. Finally, the last paragraph is devoted to the conclusion and some suggestions on how to control social media risks and encourage people to use social media respectfully and being conscious of the dangers of addictions. This last writing has also presented the idea of social media as the possibility to interact with others and the improvements this has caused in our daily lives. The student demonstrates he is aware of the implications of using social media and how things have changed from the past to the present. Motivation is crucial when talking about this topic, as the student shows control over the theme and can clearly express himself.

It is possible that along with motivation, instructed formal learning may account for differences in the patterns of errors, decreased considerable comparing M's first writing with the last one. Needless to say, these four written texts are not enough to analyse in depth a student's progress when aiming to understand his acquisition of English as a Foreign language, but we can analyse his improvement in one academic year and the importance of giving feedback and encouragement. Writing is one important aspect of learning a language and it should be improved and revised accordingly to the CEFR descriptors established across languages for communication. Anxiety also plays a key role, when we are confronted with topics we don't know about or are not into actual situations and decisions made to succeed. As the student was given feedback and was encouraged to continue writing and improving his communication skills, his level of anxiety (personal communication) decreased (Council

of Europe, 2018). It is important to bear in mind here that the CEFR does not measure or assess accuracy in the use of the language (and therefore mistakes are not relevant), but rather communicative competence (i.e. what the learner is able to do with the language and what he or she is able to communicate).

In terms of interlanguage development, this case study has shown that motivation is one of the key factors regarding learning, as the writing in which M. has obtained a best mark is the one in which the topic was more interesting for him. This coincides with what Krashen states about how motivation play its role and is crucial as an affective factor (Krashen, *Second Language Acquisition and Second Language Learning*, 1981). Although the main focus of this dissertation is to analyse M.'s errors, and even though some errors and mistakes have been identified, the student is able to produce text successfully according to a B2 level, as for the CEFR, the main point is to be able to communicate regardless of the mistakes committed by the speaker (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), Council of Europe, 2018).

## 6. Conclusion

After analysing the theories of second language learning and language acquisition and studying in detail the four writings of the case study, we can talk about different mistakes and errors of the student. As we have seen, one of the most important factors in the process of acquiring a language, if not the most important one, since Krashen said that motivation was a key element when learning a language. As we have seen in the writings and after talking with the student personally, motivation plays an important role in the development of the writing process and the fulfilment of the aim successfully. The student has been exposed to four different topics and has responded to them better when motivation was higher. As can be seen in the marks given by his high school teacher, the student's highest motivation theme is social media and apps, as for a teenager the mobile phone is one of the most valuable objects. Social media is an outstanding topic nowadays and is present in all fields, as technology cannot be denied is useful and is improving our lives. Motivation about this topic is high as the student is aware of the dangers of using them and the risks the internet may have when speaking to people.

Also, the level of anxiety lowers as M. feels comfortable talking about the topic and developing his arguments about why it is important to control your privacy. This was seen after talking with the student and after exposing him to some tests of personal aspects and letting him express his feelings towards the texts and the language. Anxiety is key when acquiring language unconsciously, if we are exposed to a language in an environment in which anxiety is present, people are going to close themselves and improvement is not going to occur. Communication is the most important thing when learning a language, as grammatical syllabuses are important but not should be relied upon as the only thing to consider when teaching. Second language exposure is crucial for understanding a language and being able to learn it independently. The student has been exposed to the language in an

academic environment since childhood but also because of a personal decision when he chooses to travel to English-speaking countries. Learning is voluntary up to a point, as we are not forced to learn a language and to improve our oral skills, but we are all encouraged to control as many languages as possible. Interlanguage is nowadays an issue and the more languages we have the easiest is to obtain job possibilities.

All skills are equally important when learning a language, although some of them are acquired firstly (such as the receptive skills, namely reading or listening) and some are relegated to a more advanced stage of interlanguage development, all should be known at an expert level to be considered a competent user of that language. As we have seen in the discussion part of the dissertation, the focus of this assignment is on writing and understanding how a student has developed his writing skills according to a B2 level, the one the subject is qualified with. Reading and listening should be acceptable to succeed when writing about different themes. Writing needs to occur in a comfortable environment as creativity is also key to success and offering acceptable ideas. Some students master reading or listening skills but then are reluctant to practice speaking or writing. All skills should be equally worked in the educational atmosphere and equal attention should be played to be successful and to improve gaining proficiency. The student has successfully learned how to write and as his writings are revised we can say that he has improved successfully and has obtained the necessary skills to be both accurate and fluent in his second language.

## 7. References and webgraphy

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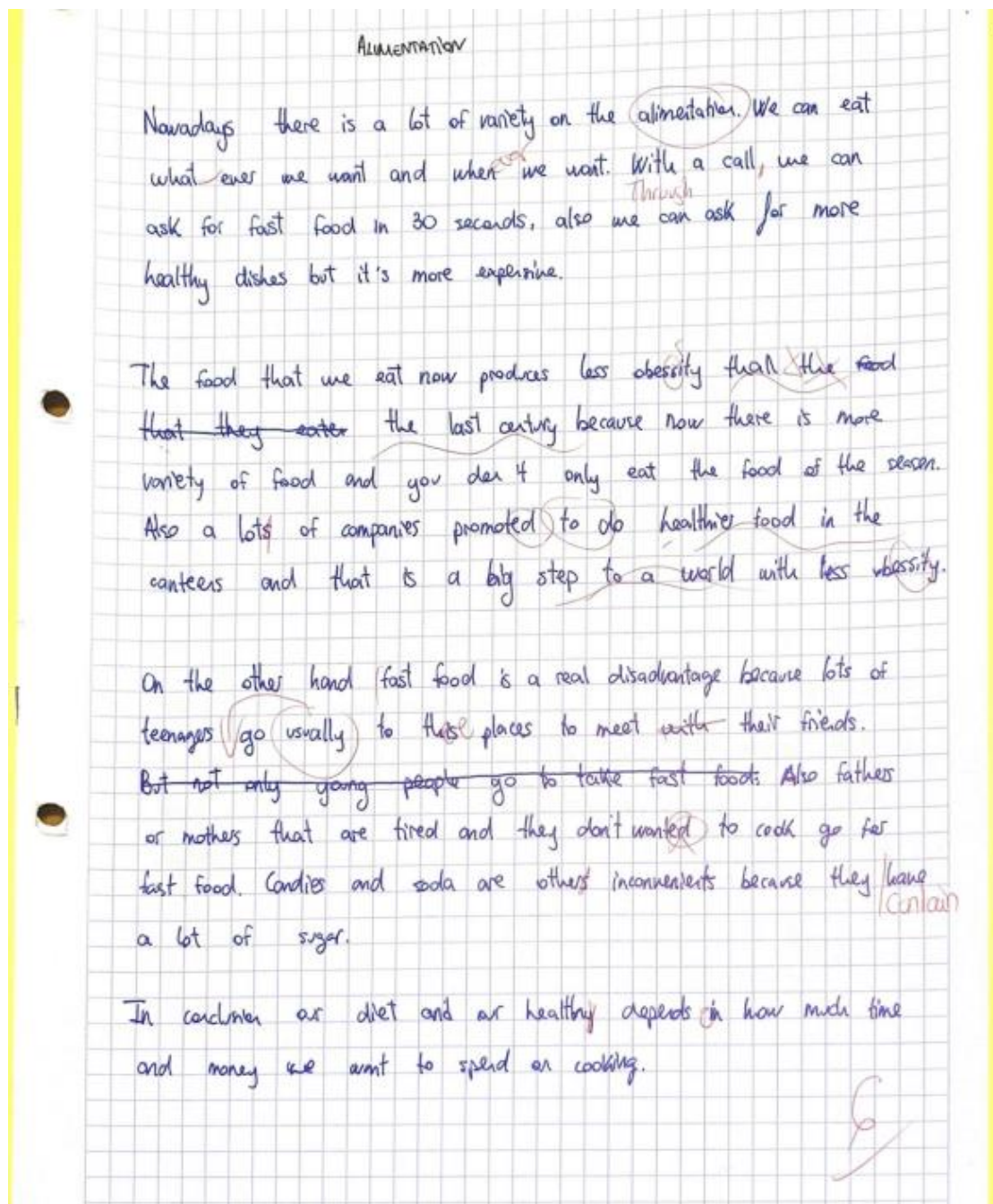
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## 8. Appendix



Writing 1 was used for the case study.

Should our future <sup>university</sup> degree choice be based on money or passion?

Since I was a child, my dream was to study something <sup>related</sup> with sports. I've choose<sup>to</sup> this degree because it's my passion and I don't mind how much effort I will have to do to enter <sup>into</sup> this degree.

When I choose this degree, I haven't <sup>must</sup> take a look to the salary that I'd <sup>will</sup> have <sup>set think</sup> working of this because it's my passion. For me, if your job is only <sup>for</sup> money all the day, <sup>will</sup> be <sup>worst</sup> than if it's for passion because when you like the <sup>thing</sup> that you're doing, it's much easier to spend your life doing this work.

In my case, I'm going to choose my degree <sup>by</sup> passion but I also understand the people that want more money when they don't know what degree <sup>to</sup> study and they have two degrees that they want to do then is a <sup>possibility</sup> look to the salary of the two degrees.

Writing 2 was used for the case study.

### WRITING TASKS (120-160 words)

1. Does it persist any type of discrimination in our society currently?
2. Express your opinion on the following statement. Social media.

#### 1. Discrimination

Has discrimination ~~had~~ disappeared in our society? No, it ~~hasn't~~ <sup>hasn't</sup>. Discrimination has been appearing every time in the past. Nowadays there's a decrease of discrimination in our society but it ~~still~~ <sup>still</sup> persists with us.

There are a lot of types of discrimination such as racism, that means ~~that~~ <sup>because of</sup> you discriminate other people for ~~being~~ <sup>coming from</sup> another country or for the ~~color~~ <sup>skin color</sup> of the skin. Actually racism is more unusual but there's a lot of work to do if we want to ~~stop with~~ <sup>stop</sup> discrimination. Another type of discrimination is that women ~~for~~ <sup>earn less money</sup> for the same job as men ~~have~~ <sup>have taken</sup> less salary. We've been doing things very well and recently women ~~took~~ <sup>have taken</sup> more importance in our society, that is a very good ~~new~~ <sup>news</sup>.

To conclude, discrimination persists in our society but we have to work all together to ~~eradicate~~ <sup>eradicate</sup> this ~~attitudes~~ <sup>attitudes</sup> of some ~~people~~ <sup>people</sup>. There's a long way until we could finish with the discrimination.

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Writing 3 was used for the case study.



## 2. SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS.

Which social media platforms have you installed in your smartphone? Probably you will have more than three. Social media is increasing every day and new companies are bringing us new apps to communicate with other people.

Social media could be dangerous if we don't know how to use it. We can talk <sup>to</sup> with people than we don't know and that seems to be the dangerous part of social media but, in my opinion, we are taking more risks, such as using a lot that app and create a dependence on it. For that reason, I think that the companies have to give us that advert on the screen when we open the social media platform.

To conclude, in my opinion, we could have more things to prevent an addiction to social media that it may cause mental health problems. One solution that comes to my mind is to have conferences in schools and offices of work to make them aware of the problem that it could be for them the excessive use of social media.

9/25

Writing 4 was used for the case study.