Vocabulary Teaching: Insights from Lexical Errors

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Abstract

This paper offers a theoretical approach to vocabulary instruction from the evidence provided by lexical errors as the main sources of difficulty in the EFL acquisition process, it reviews previous research and from it suggests new ways of dealing with lexical errors in the classroom. Some practical implications are concluded which rely on lexical error categories identified in previous studies. Our main starting point is that lexical errors can serve as a guideline for teachers and researchers to improve vocabulary instruction. Identifying the main causes of lexical errors can help teachers understand the difficulties of their learners and assist them in planning and designing lessons and materials for the vocabulary class. Embarking from this premise, we have reviewed the main lexical error sources identified in the literature and provided some suggestions for vocabulary instruction.

Introduction

Previous research on lexical errors has revealed a series of difficulty areas within lexical acquisition. Descriptive studies reporting on lexical errors allow researchers, teachers or material designers to identify the nature as well as the origin or source of lexical errors. We believe that this information can be used to act upon the problematic aspects identified and help deal with them. Lexical learning is a difficult and lifelong task and lexical errors are most undesirable since they distort communication and can have a negative impact on the image of the learners. However, they are also positive signs of vocabulary development. We believe that teaching learners the origin and causes of their lexical misuse and how to remedy and prevent it, is a good start for successful and effective lexical acquisition (Agustín-Llach, 2004, 2015; Hemchua & Schmitt, 2006). This paper intends to compile main findings and tendencies drawn from lexical error analysis in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) vocabulary acquisition as a starting point to propose a set of actions to help learners overcome those difficulties.

Analysis of these studies shows that we need to go further into detail beyond simple L1 versus L2 influenced errors. In fact, these studies show that considering the L1 as a unitary source of influence is an oversimplification. L1 influence intermingles and collaborates with other sources, mainly L2 influence via overgeneralization or confusion, in originating lexical errors. Descriptive studies of lexical errors have achieved a refinement in etiologies which has allowed us to identify the most problematic areas which should be dealt with in the foreign language classroom.

In what follows, we intend to, first, give account of the most frequent lexical error types found by previous research and of their outstanding role in vocabulary acquisition, and then to propose some pedagogical interventions or actions aimed at teaching vocabulary and remedying and preventing lexical errors in the interlanguage of EFL learners in the light of those previous findings.

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Lexical Errors in Learners' Productions

Lexical errors have only recently started to capture the attention of researchers as objects of study on their own (e.g. Agustín-Llach, 2011; Bouvy, 2000; Celaya & Torras, 2001; Hemchua & Schmitt, 2006, James, 1998; Ringbom, e.g., 2001; Zimmermann, 1986). General studies on errors traditionally focused on grammar errors, since they were considered easier to systematize, classify, generalize, and remedy. Ferris (1999) even made a distinction between grammar or "treatable" errors and lexical or word choice errors, which she considered "untreatable". Hemchua and Schmitt (2006) also believe the line between lexical and grammatical errors is rather blurred. However, research specifically dealing with errors in vocabulary could distinguish different types of lexical errors, design explanations for the source and origin of the errors, and systematize into patterns the instances of lexical errors (Hemchua & Schmitt, 2006; Warren, 1982). From this systematization teachers and researchers can develop instructional approaches to vocabulary acquisition. This is what we attempt to do here. First, we provide a general review addressing the role of lexical errors in second language acquisition. We continue then to list and explain the main sources of lexical errors as have been described in previous studies. With this information, we develop further pedagogical implications in the last section.

Lexical Errors and SLA

Not only are lexical errors very frequent in learners' language – even commoner than grammatical ones (cf. Bouvy, 2000; Jiménez Catalán, 1992; Meara, 1984) - they also play a relevant role in the second language vocabulary acquisition process. There are three reasons that make lexical errors crucial in Second Language Acquisition (SLA) *á la* Corder (1967).

First, they are an important source of information for teachers and researchers of the L2 vocabulary acquisition process, since they serve as evidence of the said process. In this sense, lexical errors reveal the underlying processes of L2 vocabulary acquisition, and they contribute to a better understanding of the organization of the mental lexicon (Ellis, 1994; Meara, 1996). The different types of lexical errors can provide information about the relationships established in the mind of the learners when performing in EFL. For instance, semantic confusions might reveal that lexical items are stored according to their meaning relations, formal confusion or misformation, however, may indicate that lexical items are also associated via formal resemblance (orthographic or phonological). Similarly, L1 influenced-errors, overgeneralizations, or errors derived from faulty application of rules might be pointing to processes, strategies, or principles followed during foreign language vocabulary acquisition.

Second, they are useful for learners to realize the gaps between their lexical knowledge and their communicative needs. Calling students' attention to the lexical errors they produce serves as a way for awareness-raising. Learners have to realize and notice the gap between what they want to transmit, i.e. the message they need to get across, and the linguistic or lexical tools they have at their disposal. Noticing the gap between actual and required knowledge has been considered the first step in successful learning (cf. Schmidt, 2001). Learners, therefore, can and should learn from their lexical errors.

And finally, lexical errors have pedagogical implications, because they indicate to teachers the problem areas of lexical learning. They also provide information about the strategies or stratagems learners use to overcome these problems, but only when they result in faulty outcomes; lexical errors do not provide hints about felicitous use of vocabulary strategies. Moreover, lexical errors have also been found to serve as predictors of language quality and proficiency level (Albrechtsen, Henriksen & Faerch, 1980; Engber, 1995), and can thus help establish objective evaluation criteria (also see below).

Main Sources of Lexical Error Production

The types of lexical errors found in the literature delimit the areas of lexis where EFL learners have been found to have the most problems and thus they point to the main sources of difficulty for EFL learners within an

educational context. Establishing the source or main causes of lexical errors in EFL productions will allow us to conclude some pedagogical implications for vocabulary instruction as hinted above. Among the most frequent and important lexical error types in EFL, previous findings highlight the following (Agustín-Llach, 2011; Bouvy, 2000; James, 1998; Warren, 1982):

1) Borrowings, which are bare L1 insertions into the L2 syntax; for instance, from Spanish L1:

My <u>ciudad</u> is very big (Eng. *city*).

We need to acknowledge that, while use of native words is a very frequent cause in EFL learners with typologically closer L1s to English like French, Spanish, or German; it is a much rarer cause of interference or difficulty in learners who speak native languages which are distant from English such as Chinese, Thai, Hebrew, or Arabic. Nevertheless, code switching from the L1 is a communication strategy to overcome lexical lack of knowledge, and to scaffold their acquisition process. In this sense borrowings tend to be marked in the students' productions with e.g. inverted commas, capital letters, change of intonation or pronunciation, or underlining. If the teacher and students share L1, then inserting L1 words into the L2 discourse is a communication strategy which can result in successful message transmission disregarding the source L1.

2) Lexical adaptation of an L1 word to the L2 morphological or phonological rules *so that it sounds or looks English* (Celaya & Torras, 2001, p.7). An example of such lexical error appears in the following sentence:

My favorite <u>deport</u> is football (Eng. *sport*, Sp. *deporte*).

Psychotypological perceptions of similarity or rather of transferability (e.g. Kellermann, 1979) might explain these types of adaptations. If learners perceive a lexical item can be transferred or is similar to the L2 target, then they will try to tailor it to the L2 norm. Success of this strategy is certainly frequent, e.g. *contribution* from *contribución* (Sp.) or *come* from *kommen* (G.).

3) Semantic confusion originates when the learner confounds two words which are semantically related in the L2 such as for example in

My <u>uncle's</u> name is Ana (for *aunt*) or in

In my city there are <u>very</u> shops (for *many*).

Especially conspicuous is the confusion of two auxiliary verbs: *to have* and *to be*. It is frequent to find sentences in learners' data in which these two verbs are confused:

<u>I'm</u> an older sister, her name is Ana (for *I have*), or

I <u>have</u> eleven years old (for *I am*).

Some instances of this confusion can be traced back to L1 influence, however in some other cases the explanations are unfortunately not so straightforward and finding a plausible interpretation for this confusion is extremely difficult. Confusions can also have a formal origin thus giving rise to lexical errors of the type:

I'm <u>board</u> (for *bored*) or

I <u>lake</u> playing basketball (for *like*).

We tend to call them phonetic or formal confusions. Semantic and formal confusions reveal a certain degree of word knowledge, incomplete or imperfect knowledge, though. We might wonder whether the learner knows both the target and the error word, and confuses them because of their similarity or whether they ignore the target word and use a proximal, close word they have knowledge of. The first example might illustrate the first case, and the second example the latter:

*My <u>hear</u> is blond (*for *hair*)

My favourite <u>eat</u> is pasta with meat (for *food*)

4) Learners also tend to calque L1 words or expressions when they lack exact lexical knowledge of the L2 equivalents. A calque or literal translation originates when a learner literally translates a L1 word and transfers the semantic and even syntactic properties of the L1 word into a L2

equivalent which has a different contextual distribution (cf. Zimmermann, 1986). Adjectival and verbal structures or word order in compounds of phrases are likely candidates for literal translation. The following sentences are good examples of this phenomenon:

I like <u>ballhand</u> (for Eng. *handball*, Sp. *balonmano*) and

My favourite <u>plate</u> is pasta and rice (from Sp. *plato*, Eng. *dish*)

5) Previous research with (for example) Spanish EFL learners has revealed that they display wrong cognate use such as in the sentence, *In the evenings, I go to an <u>academy</u>* (Eng. *private tuition school*, Sp. *academia*), where the word is used as it is in Spanish with the semantic and contextual restrictions of the L1 and not of the L2. German EFL learners display a similar behaviour and tend to use cognates in the L1 sense (Agustín-Llach, 2014) (for examples from other languages see e.g. Bouvy, 2000; Ringbom, 2001; Warren, 1982). This type of lexical error could also be considered as an extension or particular manifestation of word confusion (see above).

6) Spelling problems are probably the most frequent category of lexical errors in EFL learners' writings (cf. Bouvy, 2000; Fernández, 1997; Lindell, 1973). These are violations of the orthographic conventions of English. The lack of congruence between spelling and pronunciation so characteristic of the English language is mostly responsible for these difficulties. EFL learners face the problem of having to cope with the complicated English encoding system in which one sound, especially vowel sounds, can be rendered in multiple ways, i.e. through different letters, and *vice versa* where one letter can be pronounced in different ways. Double letters, silent letters, or triphthongs also cause problems for learners. Thus, we find the following misspellings as an example: *beautifull, verday, ritting, inteligent* for *beautiful, birthday, writing, and intelligent,* respectively. A particular type of spelling error arises as the result of what is called phonetic spelling, i.e. writing the words the way they are pronounced. Thus, we find the following examples that illustrate this phenomenon: *Reichel* for *Rachel*, *keik* for *cake*, *spik* for *speak*, *braun* for *brown*, or *saebyet* for *subject*.

7) Construction errors make up the last category of lexical errors. These are the result of a faulty use of constructions regarding for instance, choice of prepositions, reflexivity, transitiveness. Very recent research trends within cognitive linguistics have identified constructions as central units of the language, and take, therefore, a relevant role in SLA (cf. Goldberg, e.g. 2006). Constructions represent the lexical-grammatical interface and thus errors in the arguments of the verb could be termed "construction errors". Learning a new language implies learning new ways of encoding or conceptualizing reality, hence errors with transitive and reflexive verbs, with prepositions, phrases or characteristics of verb arguments (e.g. animate/inanimate) tend to be frequent, especially at higher levels of proficiency (Verspoor et al., 2012). In previous lexical error-related research, we were able to identify some lexical errors which could originate in constructions (Agustín- Llach, 2015):

I donate <u>at</u> poor, for I donate <u>to</u> the poor.

I can relax <u>me</u>, for I can relax.

I am writing to introduce <u>you</u> <u>myself</u>, for I am writing to introduce myself (to you).

I meet friends <u>for play</u>, for I meet friends <u>to</u> play.

He visit <u>to</u> me always, for He visits me always.

Films romantic doesn't love with me for I do not like/love romantic films.

In the examples above, we observe a misuse of a preposition in the first one, a reflexivization of a non-reflexive verb in the second one, the wrong use of the dative in the third one, the wrong preposition in a finality clause in the fourth example, the transformation of a transitive verb into

a non-transitive one in the fifth example sentence, and in the last one the learner uses an inanimate subject to the sentence where an animate subject is necessary.

Constructions could also traditionally have fallen under the heading literal translations. The main difference is founded on the fact that construction errors pertain to more fixed expressions, whereas calques or literal translations appear in freer word combinations or compound words.

Focusing on these tendencies of lexical inconsistencies identified in previous research on lexical errors, we are going to propose some instructional actions to tackle these problems in the classroom on the way to L2 vocabulary teaching and acquisition. This is not a treaty about error correction, but rather our intention is to take a deep look into the vocabulary areas which cause major problems for Spanish EFL learners and describe possible pedagogical interventions to remedy them. We have departed from identifying lexical errors to learn from them and use them as a starting point for lines of vocabulary instruction. The following section offers some suggestions for remedial and preventive vocabulary instruction.

Suggestions for Vocabulary Instruction in the Classroom

Lexical errors inform researchers, teachers, and learners about how lexical development is proceeding; they highlight the steps learners go through in the acquisition of new L2 words, and they make evident the difficulties learners face in this L2 vocabulary acquisition process; thus defining and delimiting the way vocabulary should be taught.

Approaching Vocabulary Teaching

A double-fold perspective with two steps guides this proposal for vocabulary teaching from lexical errors, in particular: awareness-raising explanations followed by practice activities to remedy lexical errors. Remedial actions, basically, follow from prior identification of lexical inconsistencies, and are aimed at remedying or eliminating those errors. This, in a way, could reflect the *Focus on Form* methodology, where learners' attention is called to the items that give rise to problems in the flow of classroom communication or task performance (e.g. Long, 1991; Richards, 2008). By contrast, preventive interventions are conducted to prevent lexical errors from happening, taking as a reference point lexical errors committed by other similar student populations previously studied.

Explicit explanations of the lexical errors produced are the first step towards remediation and/or prevention. Learners should be presented with the erroneous and the correct lexical item and be told the exact nature of the lexical error. Only by noticing the gap or the mismatch between their actual production, i.e. their interlanguage, and L2 norms, can they learn vocabulary (Schmidt, 2001, the *Noticing Hypothesis*). Glossing, either in the form of L1 translation or via definitions, can also be an example of input provision in the form of explicit instruction. In this sense, Solís Hernández (2011) proved that raising learners awareness contributed to remedying their lexical errors. In a like way, Hemchua and Schmitt (2006) believe that a good pedagogical approach banking on lexical errors is the explanation of the reasons that lead to the error and to then establish comparisons between L1 and L2 lexical systems.

Once awareness concerning specific lexical errors has been raised, learners should be encouraged to practice these lexical items in oral and written form, in context and in isolation. Contextualized activities can help introduce new vocabulary and consolidate word knowledge through meaningful learning. Since words in context create their meaning in solidarity with the surrounding words, they are easier to learn and retain. Exposing learners to language-rich environments such as book reading, television watching, or internet surfing can help them learn new words and practice already known words in meaningful communicative situations (cf. Graves et al., 2012). These additional activities can help consolidate words in memory and enable a more effective contextual use. Instances of calques and misspellings where learners display some knowledge of the words at stake, but fail to remember the form-meaning link adequately can especially benefit from a focus on forms approach

where lexical items are presented and practiced in isolation deprived of communicative context. Computer assisted instruction can be very useful to implement this *focus on forms* approach to minimize the effect of lexical errors. Computer resources can enhance and facilitate vocabulary teaching, as well. We illustrate some possibilities of computer enhanced vocabulary teaching below for the corresponding lexical problem. This manifold practice approach should be the basis of an effective vocabulary teaching intervention.

This double-step approach mirrors the input-output orientation (cf. interactionist SLA perspectives e.g. Long, 1996). First, learners are provided with input in the form of explicit explanations of the causes of errors and of how the correct version should look like. These explanations trigger noticing. Dictionaries, corpora, thesauruses can also be used to provide learners with explicit lexical input (e.g. McWhinney, 2005). Additionally, promoting self-discovery and developing learners' autonomy are two crucial steps to remedy their lexical errors. Then, they are encouraged to produce L2 lexical items, i.e. pushed output. This approach is believed to enhance lexical learning and provide learners with multiple opportunities for acquisition. Furthermore, pushing learners further towards lexical progress can also help prevent fossilization and help them move over a possible "plateau effect". If learners' attention is not called over recurrent errors, they might just be unable to spot and correct them. Similarly, either conscious or most frequently unconsciously, learners stop developing their lexical accuracy when they have reached communicative success (cf. Richards, 2008). They need to be urged to continue learning and to be accurate.

Still, we can think of a transversal approach which is central in lexical learning and lexical error prevention, namely explicit vocabulary strategy training. Lexical errors are on many occasions the result of a faulty application of vocabulary learning or communication strategies.[1] In this sense, it is recommended to train learners in the use of effective vocabulary strategies to improve their lexical production. Using cognate knowledge, using word-parts (inflectional or derivational prefixes or suffixes, Latin and Greek roots), or using the dictionary sensibly will arguably result in fewer lexical errors and better lexical use (Graves et al., 2012). McWhinney (2005) proposes together with dictionary use, two other strategies to maximize learners' full learning potential, namely recoding or constructing new images or new concepts for new words or phrases and linking word forms and meanings relating them to L1 equivalents, such as in the keyword method. We believe with McWhinney (2005) that these strategies can be very helpful to cope with learners' lexical learning challenge. Finally, learning collocations and chunks or fixed expressions is highly recommended to prevent and remedy lexical errors and to increase learners' vocabulary knowledge (cf. Richards, 2008).

Learning Vocabulary from Lexical Errors

We will try to tackle each main lexical error category generalized from research related studies and to propose remedial and preventive actions, respectively. Furthermore, we have to take into account the conceptualization of lexical errors within a teaching approach where the lexical error is not perceived as a failure, but as a positive indicator of learning progress. Within this approximation to vocabulary instruction, learners' lexical needs are prioritized and there is an effort to increase learners' confidence in their accurate use of English. Frustration should be avoided and cooperation, autonomy and confidence encouraged. Such a vocabulary teaching approach based on lexical errors will reduce anxiety and stress levels and increase motivation. In this sense, we do not talk of lexical error correction, but rather the lexical error is a helper, a window into learners' mental lexicon which will aid further lexical learning. We learn from the lexical errors.

1, 2, 3, 4) Lexical creations, borrowings, and calques have their origin in L1 influence. The influence of the native language is pervasive during the whole L2 acquisition process, but it is even stronger in the first stages. Counteracting the effects of the L1 is very difficult, if not impossible, so it would be a far better option to ally with it for L2 vocabulary instruction. In this sense, the L1 can serve as a scaffold or support towards independent lexical use.

Offering students contrastive explanations can be the first step, since the L1 has been found to be active during L2 processing even at high levels of proficiency (Schmitt, 2008; Sunderman & Kroll, 2006). Raising learners' awareness of the differences and similarities between L1 and L2 lexico-semantic systems is crucial for

successful vocabulary acquisition as Hemchua and Schmitt (2006) probed in their analysis L1 originated errors in learners' compositions. Moreover, warning learners of the dangers of literal translation and of lack of straightforward semantic and contextual equivalence between L1 and L2 words or expressions is essential (cf. Warren, 1982). This is of special relevance, since as Schmitt (2008) notes learners firmly believe that translating will help them learn vocabulary words, idioms, and phrases.

5) Nevertheless, English shares a number of cognates with other languages, not to speak of international words most of which come from English, which can be very helpful in articulating discourse. Learners can be instructed on cognates and international words so that they can take advantage of these similarities and use them to their advantage. Instructing learners to take advantage of their L1 lexical knowledge by resorting to cognate use is a good way to increase learners' vocabulary competence. Moreover, teaching them false friends will presumably prevent erroneous word meaning inference.

Translation activities could also promote instances of positive L1 influence at the lexical level. Laufer and Girsai (2008) found translation to be a particularly successful instructional condition, since it is an ideal task for pushed output and fosters the mobilization of linguistic resources such as contrastive comparisons. Schmitt (2008) also points to the benefits of using the L1 to establish initial form-meaning links, and since at the first stages of acquisition learners are unlikely to absorb much contextualized knowledge about the words, there are few possible negative effects of L1 use. However, at more advanced stages of acquisition the value of the L1 lessens and words should be presented in context, because learners can learn more from this (Schmitt, 2008).

Phonetic or formal confusions arise when two similarly looking or sounding words are mixed up. Warren (1982) suggests that learners should be taught the form-meaning link of both words: the incorrectly used word and the target word, contrasting them. Furthermore, teachers should also instruct learners on homophones and give them examples. Homophones, or words which sound the same but have a different meaning, can be a potential source of formal confusion. Similarly, words which have a similar meaning but a slightly different contextual distribution in the L1 and L2 are also strong candidates for explicit instruction. The teaching of formally, and especially of semantically similar words, has been prey to some controversy. Some authors have claimed for a simultaneous teaching of semantically related words such as synonyms, antonyms, or hyponyms (e.g. Nation, 2001; Tagashira et al., 2010). The idea that these semantic webs reflect the way the mental lexicon is organized underlies and justifies this technique (Nation, 2001; Stoller & Grabe, 1995). However, a different trend in research (Nation, 1990; Waring, 2007) has highlighted the higher likelihood of confusion when related words are taught together at the same time, and advocate for teaching one member of the pair/tryad first, and the other only when the first one has been properly mastered. From the evidence of lexical error production, we believe that contrasting formally or semantically similar words and teaching them accordingly might be an adequate approach to solve these problems of confusion. In this line of reasoning, we agree with Warren (1982) when she calls for the identification of the common semantic trait(s) or semma(s) of the confused words and the isolation of the distinguishing feature(s) to understand the confusion. This identification can proceed in two ways, either the teacher gives explicit account of it, or they let learners deduce those features from a series of contextualized examples. Using pictures, as we suggest below, can be an efficient way of contextualizing lexical items.

Creating a meaningful context in which lexical learning is related to feelings and experiences is a technique which will surely enhance vocabulary acquisition through deep processing (cf. Arnold & Foncubierta, 2013). Establishing emotional links between the lexical items and learners' personal memories and experiences will not only help them remember better the words they wish to learn, but will also presumably prevent lexical errors. This trend of exploring sensory-emotional intelligence and linking it to lexical learning has been recently brought to light by some researchers such as Arnold and Foncubierta (2013) who propose tasks and exercises that exploit this relationship in the FL classroom. We certainly believe this is a very fertile avenue for lexical instruction and lexical error remediation.

We can think of a series of activities that can help learners reinforce the form-meaning link of the new words and activate prior knowledge and contrast word meanings (cf. Graves et al, 2012). Semantic or conceptual

maps with both pictures and word forms evidence the relationships between words and make the specific traits patent (cf. Barreras Gómez, 2004); in this sense, of special interest are virtual tools that can help the teacher and the students also create conceptual mappings allowing for different colors, sizes, or movement. Semantic feature analysis has been found to lead to robust word learning surpassing traditional vocabulary instruction (Bos, Allen , & Scanlon, 1989). This technique would allow learners to dissect the meaning(s) of the target and the error word and compare and contrast them. Additionally, a semantic field bingo (food, family, school) can be a fun tool to practice related words highlighting common and distinctive features (cf. Barreras Gómez, 2004). Finally, providing learners with the L1 equivalent of the target and error word might be the most effective intervention (Warren, 1982). In this, Webb and Kagimoto (2011) found a beneficial effect of providing glosses to help learners learn collocations in the L2.

6) Spelling problems are, as commented on above, very numerous in EFL learners' productions, including the particular group of phonetic spelling. In traditional EFL classrooms, spelling and the link between spelling and pronunciation was not paid much attention to. However, more recent teaching methodologies include explanations concerning the different written renderings of vowel and consonant sounds as well as the multiple plausible pronunciations of specific letters.

Grouping words according to their spelling and/or pronunciation is a good activity to learn how to write and pronounce them. These kinds of explanations and subsequent exercises can help learners become familiar with the grapho-phonological rules of the English language and thus overcome the problems posed by the discordance between spelling and pronunciation. Using morphological knowledge of e.g. inflectional suffixes, derivational prefixes or suffixes or knowledge of Latin or Greek roots can greatly enhance spelling abilities and reduce misspellings considerably. Teaching learners English morphology, morphological patterns, building words from word parts: roots plus affixes, breaking words into morphemes, identifying lexical units within compound words, and teaching how this relates to lexical knowledge, and how to apply this to avoid lexical errors can be a useful and interesting idea, for instance, morphemes such as *-less, -ful, -able, in-, im-, un-*, roots such as "*tract*" or "*voc*", or the units of complex or compound words such as *screwdriver*, *schoolbag*, *blackboard*.

Computer assisted vocabulary instruction can be very useful to prevent learners from committing misspellings and phonetic spelling errors. By using a sound and recording device, learners can be encouraged to produce the problematic lexical items and to check the gap between the native pronunciation, their pronunciation, and the written rendering of the words. Similarly, using still and motion graphics and colors to highlight new or difficult orthographic patterns, e.g. double consonants, silent letters, affixes can also be very interesting.

But teaching cannot stop with controlled and guided *focus on forms* activities; increasing free written and oral production within communicative tasks would mean a great step towards remedying and preventing misspellings. Furthermore, if these communicative tasks include (language) games or ludic activities, such as crosswords, word search puzzles, or hangman, their effectiveness towards the desired EFL learning outcomes could be augmented.

EFL teaching to young learners is starting to incorporate the "Jolly Phonics" method. This method was designed by Lloyd and Wernham (1992, 2012) and has traditionally been used in English language teaching to native children. It consists in relating pronunciation and spelling, joining isolated sounds to make up larger sound combinations and form words. The segmentation of words into sounds is the other alternative of the method. When generalizations or systematizations do not work, e.g. with words defying graphophonetic rules, then learners are encouraged to practice those words in extra activities. This method is especially appropriate for children, since it presents words whose meanings can be inferred from actions, mimicry, pictures, flashcards, or objects. But its multisensory character, which links new words with learners' multiple intelligencies such as musical, kinesthetic, intrapersonal, or spatial (e.g. García de Celis, 2005; Gardner, 1994) makes it a good candidate technique for vocabulary teaching at all levels. Furthermore, this relates to the above mentioned idea of linking new words to old experiences and making vocabulary teaching acquisition an experiential and sensitive activity (cf. Arnold & Foncubierta, 2013). With these considerations in mind, we might contend that this method might be instructionally more helpful than previous attempts at teaching the pronunciation-spelling link.

7) Researchers working in cognitive linguistics and construction theory also advocate for explicit instruction of the new and problematic structures in the lexico-grammar continuum. They have given this approach the name of "Pedagogical grammar" (e.g. Dirven 2001). Together with explicit explanations and L1-L2 comparisons, cognitive linguistic and sociocultural approaches to language pedagogy call for other techniques and activities such as input enhancement to increase the perceptual salience of the lexical items to help retention or to highlight their communicative relevance (Della Putta, 2015; Della Putta & Visigalli, 2012). We agree with Della Putta (2015) in the need to help learners "unlearn" certain linguistic features and encourage them to reconceptualize the reality around them according to the rules and codes of the L2. We need to clarify the way the L2 embodies reality by explicit explanations, mimicry, or pictures, by promoting interaction and meaning negotiation (e.g. Long, 1996), and by manipulating the input to lead learners to notice the new lexical items.

Not only do lexical errors have teaching pedagogical applications, we can also think of them as quality reference. In general, their presence in learners' productions would make them score lower. However, the correlation is not straightforward. Lexical creations or misspellings do not represent important communication breakdowns (cf. Agustin-Llach. 2011), but borrowings or calques are relevant communication disturbers. Their seriousness resides in whether they cause intelligibility problems (Hughes & Lascatatou. 1982; Johansson. 1978). Their relative importance also derives from the acquisition stage at which the learner finds him or herself. Research has been able to associate lexical error types with specific acquisition stages (cf. Agustín-Llach, e.g. 2011, Hemchua & Schmitt, 2006), so that if a learner commits lexical errors typical of further stages of acquisition, they cannot be considered as serious. Lyster et al. (2013) also highlight the importance of lexical errors as crucial instruments in comprehension and call for the need to target them in L2 vocabulary instruction.

Conclusion

This is an exploratory theoretical paper in which we try to join two research trends. First, the examination and systematization of lexical errors constitutes a major research area within SLA and lexical studies. Here, we have not accounted for lexical error results of a particular population, but have rather presented general findings of some previous main lexical error studies of EFL learners. Research-based generalizations of lexical error production will lead our pedagogical implications. Thus, secondly, banking on these frequent developmental lexical errors, we have tried to propose some lines for pedagogical actions and interventions in vocabulary instruction in EFL - a vivid line of research.

In the present study, we give no frequencies of lexical errors because we base on generalizations of previous studies. The review of lexical error types comes from the need to find tendencies or systematizations of those lexical error categories and mainly of their causes, since they are going to be the stepping stones upon which we are going to propose some pedagogical actions. Similarly, we do not intend to rank lexical errors or vocabulary teaching activities or tasks according to their impact in vocabulary acquisition, but rather show some general possibilities for the EFL classroom, always with the information of problem areas from lexical errors in mind. The systematization of causes of lexical errors in EFL learners allows us to suggest some vocabulary instruction and practical implementations.

This paper is of theoretical stance with some aspiration for practical application. Likewise, have not conducted a specific study with actual informants and derived our proposal from the findings. Rather, we have generalized findings from previous studies addressing the exploration of lexical errors in actual EFL learners' productions and have extracted common tendencies and devised some lines for vocabulary instruction based on those observed trends. Among the main conclusions to be drawn from this theoretical paper, however, we can highlight one which affects foreign language teaching policies and refers to the need of explicit instruction of vocabulary not only as concerns the form-meaning link exclusively, but also its relation to the L1 equivalents, the spelling-pronunciation link, and its contextual distribution in syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic contexts. From these observations and considerations, we also agree with Schmitt (2008) who concludes that evidence of

research studies suggests that different teaching methods may be appropriate at different stages of vocabulary learning.

Further research should focus on experimentally testing these suggestions in the EFL classroom to check for their effectiveness in vocabulary acquisition. A thorough analysis of lexical errors which extends through several years can help us better understand the process of lexical development. Moreover, identifying the variables that affect such process such as learner age, gender, native language, instructional approach, or intralexical factors will be of great help to maximize lexical learning. Applying the results of such studies to practical vocabulary instruction is a task which should receive far more attention in future research.

Endnotes

[1] At this point we need to make two clarifications. First, lexical errors can also derive from lack of word knowledge simply, faulty rule application, or overgeneralization or transfer. Second, the application of vocabulary learning and communication strategies does not necessarily lead to the commission of a lexical error. On the contrary, myriad are the examples of successful application of vocabulary strategies that result in correct language use.

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