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**L1 Spanish transfer
in the acquisition of the phenomenon of
that-deletion in English**

Student's name: Núria Guirado Puiggròs

Supervisor's name: Mireia Llinàs Grau

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1. Introduction

The concept of *Second Language* (L2), which is one of the most impressive aspects of human development, refers to “a language that is learned subsequent to the one that is first learned as a child” (Loewen & Reinders, 2011: 152). Concerning that, the study of a second language in a context where that language is not the dominant in society may affect the process of having access to the L2 and, in consequence, lead to “transfer errors” as learners assume that L2 functions in a similar way to their First Language (L1).

This observation represents the main idea of this project since it resides in the significant notions of *transfer* and Second Language Acquisition (SLA). However, these two notions are analysed through the study based on a particular English construction, known as the phenomenon of *that*-deletion. This phenomenon refers to the embedded English clauses which do not require an explicit presence of *that* when a particular verb □ such as *say*, *believe* or *think* □ is the main verb of the sentence (*I think (that) I should call the police*). Then, being a specific construction in English, it is likely that L2 learners of English produce “transfer errors” as their languages lack it. Therefore, the project is based on the analysis of L2 learners of English in order to consider whether or not they display L1 interference in the acquisition of the phenomenon of *that*-deletion in English. The L2 learners of English who have participated in the study are mostly bilingual Spanish/Catalan, however the project only focuses on the Spanish language as both languages hold the same syntactic functioning regarding the use and deletion of their complementisers and, because of that, neither Catalan nor bilingualism are considered in this issue. Moreover, following the studies of Llinàs-Grau & Fernández-Sánchez (2012, 2013) and Llinàs-Grau, Pladevall & Capdevila (2013), the hypothesis of this project is set up on the idea that Spanish L2 learners of English from

different levels display L1 interference, through written and oral channels, in the acquisition of the *that*-deletion phenomenon.

Although sometimes L1 may coincide with L2 in the grammar and syntax, the English and Spanish complementisers, *that* and *que* respectively, which normally are considered to be equivalent in their use, appear to be divergent in certain contexts. For instance, as is observed in (1), the embedded clauses of the main sentences, which are governed by a verb of thinking (*think*), demonstrate that the presence or absence of the English complementiser seems not to have any semantic repercussion:

(1) a. I think *that* his birthday is in January and not in October.

b. I think his birthday is in January and not in October.

However, if the same construction is used in Spanish, the *que*-complementiser is essential and required:

(2) a. Creo *que* su aniversario es en enero y no en octubre.

b. *Creo su aniversario es en enero y no en octubre.

Hence, the study of this particular construction not only provides new insights but also empirical evidence on the possible L1 influence during the apprenticeship of a L2.

Therefore, in order to examine this conjecture, the framework of this project is divided into two parts which are composed of different sections. The first part is mainly devoted to two concerns: on the one hand, the English and the Spanish language are analysed and compared in order to scrutinize the equivalences and divergences that they have regarding their finite complement clauses and their complementisers. On the other hand, the second concern focuses mainly on the notions of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) and transfer in which studies such as White (2000) and Hawkins (2001) are taken into account. Moreover, in this section I will refer to Chomsky (1981) and the theory of *Principles* and *Parameters* considering, at the same time, the phenomenon of *that*-deletion in English. The second part of

the study is where the hypothesis will be tested by means of an experimental study. Thus, in order to know whether or not there is L1 interference in the use of *that*-deletion, the present project is based on testing four Spanish groups of students with different English levels which range from pre-intermediate to advanced/proficiency. The test consists of a written and an oral task in which the students use the verbs *say*, *think* and *believe* in different contexts in order to know the range of incidence of the L1 influence upon the English phenomenon of *that*-deletion. Apart from that, regarding their range of *that*-deletion occurrence in the distinct written and oral contexts, a control group of English native speakers is included in order to contrast the results from the analysis of the different Spanish learners of English.

2. Embedded clauses

This first section of the study is precisely devoted to provide a first approach to the concept of *clause*. Moreover, a brief definition is offered in order to furnish the key concepts that are relevant for the study of the English phenomenon of *that*-deletion.

Before referring to the meaning of *clause*, it is important to review the notion of *sentence*. According to Huddleston & Pullum (2002), a sentence is the maximal syntactic unit of grammatical analysis which must be composed of a subject and a predicate. This predicate must contain a *finite verb* which plays the role of predicator and, at the same time, may comprise other elements — i.e. a direct object, indirect object, adverbial complement, adjuncts and so on —. Thus, as a sentence cannot take place inside another one, the term *clause* is used to name the syntactic construction which can be embedded within a larger one and does not necessarily contain a finite verb.

As far as clauses are concerned, they may be either independent or embedded: while the former is characterized by a subject and a finite verb which may constitute a grammatically complete sentence as is represented in (3); the latter represents constituent parts of another

clause that can be either non-finite as in (4) or finite as in (5) which, in this case, is sometimes initiated by a formal maker at the beginning of the internal structure of the clause.

(3) Maria tasted lemon.

(4) I want Maria to taste Lemon.

(5) I think (that) Maria tasted lemon.

Enquiring on the notion of embedded or subordinate clauses, subordination is normally distinguished on the basis of dependency. It is impossible for a subordinate clause to occur in isolation since it is embedded into the main clause as a constituent of it which, at the same time, devises a semantic relationship. Having said that, in the subsequent parts of this work, a concise account will allude to the different types of subordinate clauses with a finite verb, however, this study will focus comprehensively on the subordinate finite complement clause in English and Spanish, respectively.

2.1. Finite Complement Clauses

In general terms, finite subordinate clauses are characterized by containing a verb phrase “which is marked for tense or modality [and] by a clause link, either a subordinator or a *wh*-word” (Biber, *et alli*, 1999: 193). Henceforth, before moving on to the English and Spanish finite complement clauses, it is necessary to mention the basic types of finite subordinate clauses that are present in both languages and the distinction between finite and non-finite complement clauses.

Following Biber, *et alli* (1999) and the RAE (2010), three main types of finite subordinate clauses can be distinguished: the first one corresponds to *adverbial clauses* which are marked by a subordinator pointing out the relationship to the main clause:

(6) a. The storm will come before he moves on.

b. Voy a buscar el libro de matemáticas para que lo entiendas.

In addition, it is important to mention that, opposite to the others, adverbial subordinate clauses “are optional and have some freedom of positioning; both initial and final placement are common” (Biber, *et alli*, 1999: 194). The second type is commonly known as *relative clause*. It is introduced by a *wh*-word and refers to the head of the noun phrase and it accomplishes the function of a postmodifier:

(7) a. We have qualified teachers who are working from 10pm to 21pm.

b. El chico que venía de Inglaterra.

Finally, the third type, and the most important one for this project, is the *complement clause* which will be explained in 2.1.1.§ and 2.1.2.§:

(8) a. I know (that) John is angry with you.

b. Julio pensó que las flores eran la mejor solución.

English and Spanish finite complement clauses are importantly related to the notion of (non)-*finiteness*. Both languages may be presented with both a *finite* or *non-finite* verb, as is illustrated in (9) and (10), respectively:

(9) a. I think (that) he *will come*.

b. Tengo que *limpiar* el coche.

(10) a. I don't know what *to do*.

b. No se si *venir* o *quedarme* en casa.

As is appreciated in (9), finite complement clauses contain a verb phrase which has tense and modality and they are normally marked by a clause link either a subordinator or a *wh*-word (Quirk, *et alli*, 1985: 193). As opposite, (10) constitutes non-finite complement clauses since they have not got either tense or modality. Although both languages, English and Spanish, use either finite and non-finite complement clauses, it is important to say that, in Spanish, the finite verb used in the embedded clause may be expressed in either indicative or subjunctive. The fact that English lacks a proper subjunctive tense implies, as will be

explained in the following section 3.2.§, a divergence in the use and deletion of the Spanish and English complementisers in finite complement clauses.

2.1.1. English Finite Complement Clauses

The English complement clauses that this project will concentrate on are the finite subordinate clauses which function as an argument of a predicate. They may basically operate as a subject (11), extraposed subject (12), internal complement of a verb (13), complement of a noun (14) or complement of an adjective (15).

(11) That they came didn't surprise us.

(12) It is obvious that they will get married soon.

(13) I think (that) it is a good idea.

(14) There is a fear that a new international war will start.

(15) John was unaware that he was in a magic land.

Apart from that, the finite English complement clauses can be divided into three types considering the marker of subordination. The first type has to do with embedded clauses which use the *that*-complementiser:

(16) That Peter was late angered the teacher.

(17) Peter noticed that he had angered the teacher.

(18) It is known that Peter had angered the teacher.

The other subordinators which indicate that the clause they introduce is also a complement clause are, on the one hand, clauses marked by *if* or *whether* which constitute the *if-complement* clauses as is illustrated in (19) and, on the other hand, the *wh*-pronoun or *wh*-adverb that introduce *wh-complement* as is represented in (20).

(19) He wonders if Mary is ill.

(20) Mary knows what a complainer Peter is.

As is explained in Huddleston & Pullum (1988: 951), although these three subordinators do not have lexical descriptive content, they provide illocutionary force, that is to say, they “suggest that the clause is simply selected for its semantic content”. Therefore, the embedded clauses that use *that*-complementiser imply declarative force which belongs to “a grammatically definable subclass whose members are used, characteristically [...] to make (neutral or non-neutral) statements” (Collins, 1999: 155). The *if*-complement clause is associated with a hypothetical meaning and suggests a closed interrogative. And, finally, the *wh*-complement clauses have a specific syntactic structure setting them apart from both *that*- and *if*-complements since they are introduced by a *wh*-word serving as an argument or adjunct in the embedded clause. Therefore, while the complementisers *that* and *if* are lexical items that introduce finite clauses, the *wh*-pronouns/adverbs serve a semantic role within the embedded clause and normally develop either an open interrogative (*I wonder which one is the best*) or an exclamative sense (*I realised what an excellent person she is*).

As far as the study of the phenomenon of *that*-deletion in English is concerned, the English finite complement clause which is relevant for this study is clearly the embedded clauses that use *that*-complementiser; however, as has been said, it may occasionally be represented without any marker of subordination. Therefore, the presence or absence of the complementiser subdivides the embedded clauses that use *that*-complementiser clause into *expanded declaratives*, which include the subordinator (*Mary thinks that the world is flat*) and *bare declaratives*, in which the *that* is not present in the clause (*Mary thinks the world is flat*) (Huddleston & Pullum, 1988: 951).

Finally, another important aspect to comment on is the discourse functions of *that*-clauses. On the one hand, extraposed *that*-clauses (18) and *that*-clauses in subject position (16) “involve a main clause that often reports an attitude or stance which is not overtly attributed

to any person” (Biber, *et alli*, 1999: 661). On the other hand, those which occur in post-predicate position (17) are usually used to “report the speech, thoughts, attitudes or emotions of humans”. Biber, *et alli* (1999: 666) classify, the verbs which take a *that*-complement clause in post predicate position as embracing one of the following three semantic domains: the first one referring to the verbs which express people’s mental states and processes commonly named *mental verbs* (think, know, believe etc.) which, at the same time, includes some verbs that denote *emotive/affective* content (hope, wish, etc.) and *receptive processing of communication* (read, hear); the second one which accounts for the *speech act verbs* that report what somebody said (say, tell, etc.) and the last one which has to do with communication verbs that not necessarily imply speech (show, prove, suggest, etc.). Having said this, it is important to mention that my project will focus only on three verbs: *think*, *believe* and *say*. However, I will not study how the semantic domain of these verbs affects the process of *that*-deletion.

2.1.2. Spanish Finite Complement Clauses

Directing attention to the complement clauses in Spanish, they are traditionally denominated “oraciones subordinadas sustantivas”. As in English, they may function as a subject (21), extraposed subject (22), internal complement of a verb (23), complement of a noun (24) and complement of an adjective (25).

(21) Que cante o balie me da igual.

(22) No me gusta que vengas.

(23) María quiso que Pedro le comprara unas flores.

(24) La idea que me contaste.

(25) Sorprendida de que la hayan despedido.

Three pivotal groups can be distinguished for the Spanish complement clauses (RAE, 2010: 820): the first group corresponds to those complement clauses which express declarative content and are known as *declarative subordinate clauses*. In these clauses normally there is the presence of the *que*-complementiser, however, just as the *that*-complementiser in English, the presence or absence of the *que*-complementiser is associated with specific constructions which will be discussed in 3.2.§. The second group represents the denominated *indirect interrogatives* which are introduced by either the conjunction *si* in Spanish, which represents the *if* in English, or interrogative pronouns, determiners and adverbs. Nevertheless, as well as in English, both the *si* conjunction and indirect interrogatives in Spanish provide to the subordinate clause a meaning which expresses possibility; two suitable illustrations are provided in order to show this connotation:

(26) Me pregunto si vendrá a comer.

(27) Me pregunto cómo lo hace.

Finally, the third group is termed indirect exclamatives. They are sometimes considered a variation of the indirect interrogatives, however, what makes the indirect exclamatives different from them is the partiality they display and the *wh*-element that they introduce since it is always exclamative:

(28) Es sorprendente cómo te han recibido.

Having explained that, it is important to mention that the Spanish complement clause which is relevant for the present study is the declarative complement clause since is the one which uses the *que*-complementiser.

Apart from that, it is also important to consider that finite clauses function as subject or direct complement which admits a large number of verbs from different semantic classes. However, this project, in parallel to the English section, takes into account only the verbs

decir which expresses *information* and *communication* and also the verbs *pensar* and *creer* which refer to *thinking* and *judgement*.

Summing up, 2.1.1.§ and 2.1.2.§ demonstrate that English and Spanish do not show a huge difference when comparing their finite complement clauses in terms of types. Nevertheless, in relation to the phenomenon of *that*-deletion in English, we will see how the complementisers differ with respect to their possibilities of being absent or present.

3. Divergence between Complementisers: *That* and *Que*

In the following sections 3.1, 3.2 and 3.3§, a discussion and comparison is provided regarding the absence or presence of English and Spanish complementisers, *that* and *que* respectively, in finite complement clauses.

3.1. *That* use and deletion in English Finite Complement Clauses

This section, which deals with *that*-clauses in English, assumes without discussion that the subordinator *that* in a finite complement clause may be present or absent. However, from a semantic perspective, it seems that these presence or absence alternatives of the *that*-complementiser are optional choices as they have no effect on the meaning of the clause. However, *that* clauses of the type illustrated in the following examples demonstrate that there are indeed a number of factors under which *that* is obligatory (29), not permitted (30) or likely to be deleted (31):

(29) That Mary sings in the church is now quite obvious.

(30) Who does the detective think ø is the thief?

(31) I think (that) she will come.

The *that* clause of the example (29) is distinguished from the others since it needs the *that*-complementiser. Therefore, one of the conditions under which the presence of *that* is

compulsory in the clause is when the content clause is either subject or precedes the main predicator. In fact, if (29) is compared to *It is quite obvious (that) Mary sings in the church*, a notable distinction is made: on the one hand, in (29) the function of the complementiser has an essential role since if the *that* is deleted (*Mary sings in the church*), the subordinate clause would be understood, at first, as a main clause; on the other hand, in the extraposed subject construction, in which the copula *be* functions as a predicate in the combination with various noun phrases, the matrix *It is quite obvious...*, understood as “the superordinate clause minus its subordinate clause” (Quirk, *et alli*, 1985: 991), prepares the ground for a subordinate clause in which a marker of the complementiser is not essentially needed.

Apart from that, there are other conditions under which the *that*-complementiser is needed in the finite complement clause: one of the conditions is when the content clause is an adjunct since, in that case, *that* shows the relationship that the adjunct has to the matrix structure, as is illustrated in (32). Another example of the obligatory presence of *that* is when the *that*-clause such as in (33) has a passive form and, therefore, “obeys the same rules as other *that*-clause as subject” (Quirk, *et alli*, 1985: 1179). Oppositely, *that* in the passive is considered optional only when the passive has *it* and extraposition as it is exemplified in (34). Moreover, in Culicover (1997), it is mentioned that there are certain verbs which permit *that*-deletion in either the active or the passive, but do not permit *that*-deletion when there is a *by*-phrase intervening between the verb and the *that*-clause (35 a.) or coordinated *that*-clauses, as it is demonstrated in (35 b.).

(32) He appealed to us to bring his case to the attention of the authorities that justice might be done. (taken from Huddleston & Pullum, 1988: 952)

(33) That she will come is thought.

(34) It is thought (that) she will come.

(35) a. *It is believed by Peter Mary sings in the church.

- b. The already divorced couple agreed that she will have all the properties and that he will receive all the fortune.

Considering now the restriction of *that*, the subordinator is not permitted “when the content clause is embedded within an unbounded dependency construction in such a way that its subject is realised by a gap” (Huddleston & Pullum, 1988: 953). This condition is usually known with the term of *that-trace-effect*. If (30) is contrasted with **Who does the detective think that is the thief?*, it is appreciated that in (30) the subject of *is the thief* is realised by a gap which is associated with *who* in the interrogative clause. In relation to these constructions containing traces, Franks (2005) accounts for the fact that there are some verbs which restrict, lexically speaking, *that*-complementiser in object complement clauses. Therefore, Franks, following Chomsky (1977), takes into account two classes of verbs taking clausal complements: the former is denominated “bridge-verbs” (*Sophie said that she saw a strange man*) and the latter are termed “non-bridge-verbs” (*Sophie quipped that she saw a strange man*). As it is observed in the examples (36) and (37), these two verb classes “contrast in terms of whether or not they permit extraction from their complements” (Franks, 2005: 8):

(36) What did Sophie say that she saw?

(37) *What did Sophie quip that she saw?

Therefore, whereas in (36) verbs of this class “form “bridge” across which the *wh*-phrase can escape from the embedded clause to the matrix clause”, in (37) the *wh*-phrase cannot. However, although these constructions involve gaps, they constitute the object of the clause and not the subject as is represented in (30).

Finally, the conditions under which *that* can be deleted are noticeably related with pragmatic factors. Following Llinàs-Grau & Fernández-Sánchez (2013), it is known that this pragmatic aspect that allows the complementiser to be dropped in embedded complement

clauses is a distinctive trait in the English language since it does not appear in other languages such as Spanish; as will be seen in the following section 3.2.8.

As is demonstrated in Biber, *et alli* (1999: 681), the complementiser is more likely to be deleted in informal than in formal speech. A common aspect that all languages have is that typically in conversations, which are either face-to-face or online, it is usual to reduce or delete constituents; therefore, it is quite predictable that the *that*-complementiser will be deleted as it does not have any effect in the syntax. At the opposite extreme, in academic prose, the *that*-complementiser is expected to be present in the complement clause since formal speech is written in a meticulous, expository and elaborated structure.

However, just as Huddleston & Pullum (1988) explain, the relative likelihood of dropping the *that* depends largely on the structure of the matrix clause but also on the content clause itself. *I think (that) he will come* and *Tengo que limpiar el coche* favour the deletion of *that* since the content clause is complement to a common and quite general verb of cognition or communication such as the verbs *think*, *believe*, *say*. Moreover, *that*-deletion may apply only when the *that*-clause is adjacent to the main verb of the sentence.

3.2. *Que* use and deletion in Spanish Finite Complement Clauses

The following section is devoted to analysing the contexts where the Spanish *que*-complementiser is present or absent in finite complement clauses. Despite the fact that, at first, the *que*-complementiser may be considered to be equivalent to the English *that*-complementiser, the conditions under which the *que*-complementiser is either present or absent seem to manifest that *que* and *that*-deletion are radically different phenomena.

The Spanish declarative complement clauses normally are preceded by the *que*-complementiser and only in limited contexts the complementiser is absent. Typically, the contexts, in which *que*-complementiser appears, are related with the absence of the subject

known as null-subject parameter and declarative contexts (*Pienso que tendrías que tomarte unas vacaciones*). Following Llinàs-Grau & Fernández-Sánchez (2013:1), it seems that while in English the narrow syntax does not influence the phenomenon of *that*-deletion; in Spanish and other Romance languages such as Catalan and Italian the responsible factor of the absence of the *que*-complementiser is a syntactic process that has to do with the movement of the verb.

In addition, the limited contexts under which the *que*-complementiser is deleted have to do with a formal speech normally used in epistolary, administrative and juridical language; as is illustrated in (38). Moreover, *que*-deletion is more frequent when the subordinate verb is in the subjunctive mood and appears adjacent to the main verb of the sentence, as represented in (39). In fact, the subjunctive mood appears to replace the *that* function as if it became the marker of subordination (RAE, 2010: 822).

(38) a. Espero guardéis silencio.

b. Conjuróte me respondas por la virtud del gran poder. (Rojas, Celestina)

(39) a. *Espero durante la visita al laboratorio guardéis silencio.

b. Espero guardéis silencio durante la visita al laboratorio.

Therefore, the process that allows the absence of the *que*-complementiser is V-movement to C, a strategy that Spanish and the Romance languages have (see Gallego 2007):

(40) a. *Lamento María piense eso (From Gallego 2007)

b. Lamento piense eso María.

Therefore, the *que*-complementiser in Spanish finite complement clauses appears to be a different phenomenon with regard to the *that*-complementiser in English finite complement clauses. In the following section (3.3.§), more information is reported in order to provide a more perceptible and detailed comparison between the complementisers.

3.3. Contrast between the complementisers *That* and *Que*

Considering the phenomenon of *that* and *que*-deletion in English and Spanish, it is important to state that the presence and absence of the *that* and *que*-complementisers in finite complement clauses displays a contrast between the two languages. Hence, in this section, a comparison between these two complementisers is provided in order to establish the contrasts that exist between them.

Two main divergences can be ascertained between the Spanish and English complementisers. On the one hand, as has been expressed in the previous sections, formal registers favour the presence of *that* in English, whereas in Spanish and other Romance languages we find the opposite phenomenon, that is to say, the formal, written contexts, favour the absence of *que*. In contrast, while, in informal English contexts, the *that*-complementiser is normally deleted provided that the main verb of the clause is a *bridge*-verb, (Franks, 2005); in informal Spanish contexts, the *que*-complementiser is present regardless of the type of verb that is displayed in the sentence. On the other hand, in Romance languages, *que*-deletion is employed when the verb in the embedded clause is in subjunctive mood as can be seen in (38); whereas, in English, this condition causes the *that*-complementiser to be obligatorily present in the finite complement clause, as is illustrated in (41):

(41) a. *He ordered the mural be taken down.

b. He ordered *that* the mural be taken down.

Having established the contrasts between these complementisers, it is a suitable point from which to introduce the notion of Second Language Acquisition, which will be explained in 4.§, since these divergences that exist in English and Spanish may imply the existence of L1 language transfer in L2 learning as the Spanish students of a second language may assume

that L2 functions in a similar way to their L1 regarding the phenomenon of *that*-deletion in English.

4. Second Language Acquisition

This section is especially devoted to Second Language Acquisition (SLA) and the concept of transfer, which is developed in 4.1.§. However, before referring to SLA, it is relevant, at first, to begin with an overview of Chomsky's theory of *Principles* and *Parameters*. Subsequently, the study focuses on SLA by means of exploring some basic similarities and differences between L1 and L2 acquisition.

Language is an innate trait of the human mind (Culicover, 1997: 1). From this statement, it is assumed that the learner, either from L1 or L2, must acquire a grammar “on the basis of input, a grammar which constitutes a mental representation of the language being acquired, and which is involved in the comprehension and production of a language” (White, 2000: 131). Nevertheless, the manner in which a language is acquired depends fundamentally on whether that language is L1 or L2.

The linguist Noam Chomsky engendered a linguistic theory which has had a profound and revolutionary effect on the study of both L1 and L2. Since the 1960s, Noam Chomsky and his followers professed that the human species is genetically endowed with innate knowledge which is built into the human mind and allows for the acquisition of language known as *language faculty*. These linguistic ideas of language acquisition were discussed in Chomsky's first linguistic framework — *Transformational-Generative Grammar* (1957, 1965)—, however, his theories have evolved from there to *Principles and Parameters* (1981) — often called the *Government and Binding model* — and to the *Minimalist Program* (1995). The language faculty, which Chomsky refers to, proves that all languages share similarities. According to Culicover (1997: 4), “the universal knowledge concerns the *principles* that

determine the basic architecture of any linguistic system, and the *parameters* that govern the range of variation that this architecture may display”. Therefore, the set of *principles*, which has been conceptualized as Universal Grammar (UG), is understood as the properties that all languages in the world have. Nevertheless, some of these principles allow for *parameters* which constitute the possibility of variation among languages in the way their constructions are realised. For instance, a valuable example of *principle* is that every phrase in each and every language has the same elements including a Head — i.e. a Noun Phrase (NP) must have a noun (N) as a head, and so forth —. In contrast, an example of *parameter* is the position of the Head in relation to the other elements in the phrase (Head Parameter). The two possible alternatives — head-initial or head-final — represent a variation among languages.

Turning now to language acquisition, just as Lydia White states (2000: 133), both L1 and L2 acquisition have a similar task which is based on the fact that “the learner must acquire a mental representation on the basis of deficient input”; however, the process of both languages cannot be equated. L1, which is acquired as a child, is understood to be assumed mostly from naturalistic and unconscious language use. In words of Saville-Troike (2006: 57), the input that the children receive enables them to construct the appropriate L1 grammar which is strictly constrained and channelled by UG. Therefore, *Principles* and *Parameters* are assumed to be built into the Language Acquisition Device (LAD), a fact that explains why L1 acquisition for children is always relatively rapid and always successful. Apart from that, as Ghazali (2006:17) states, an L1 language is not fully acquired without imitation, practise and habit formation, nor without exposure and interaction. Moreover, as Saville-Troike (2006: 15) expresses, despite the fact that the same innate mechanisms, applied in L1, should allow second language learners to built subconscious mental grammars, SLA may be influenced by

prior knowledge of the L1 and also by many individual and social, cultural, and economic contextual factors.

On this view, a brief analysis, divided into three phases, can be carried out between L1 and L2 acquisition. Just as Saville-Troike (2006: 26-31) states, the first phase comprises the *initial state* which “includes the underlying knowledge about language structures and principles at the very start of L1 or L2 acquisition”. That is to say, in this stage, while L1 acquisition is innate, L2 has the competence of the L1 which can be both an asset and an impediment. The second phase corresponds to the *intermediate state* which contains the basis of the basic language development. On this phase, the difference between L1 and L2 rests on the idea that while L1 is associated with cognitive maturation and interaction; SLA has to do with transfer (see 4.1.§) and interplay. However, the interplay does not have to be necessarily through social communication; actually, in SLA, an L2 learner may achieve relative proficiency level through non-reciprocal sources such as television, books or radio. Finally, the third phase constitutes the *final state*, which is understood to be the result of L1 and L2 acquisition and while L1 learners possess native linguistic competence, L2 learners cannot accomplish it completely since, at this point, the L2 learners, due to their L1, still incorporate different structures that any native speaker of the L2 could ever produce.

Having said that, all languages share some properties, however, they have also specific particularities that some languages share whereas others do not. Consequently, this leads to variation among languages which may cause *transfer* from the L1 to the L2; an aspect discussed in the following section.

4.1. Transfer in Second language acquisition

The role of transfer has been a constant long-debated issue in SLA since previous knowledge of the L1 has traditionally been associated with the idea that it influences the

acquisition of an L2. Among the variety of definitions proposed, the conception of transfer, which is selected in this project, is illustrated by Lado in his *Linguistics across Cultures* (1957: 2):

That individuals tend to transfer the forms and meanings, and the distribution of forms and meanings of their native language and culture to the foreign language and culture — both productively when attempting to speak the language and to act in the culture, and receptively when attempting to grasp and understand the language and the culture as practiced by natives.

As stated in the quotation, the influence of the L1 on the L2 produces an effect. In order to test this, this project focuses on whether or not L2 bilingual Spanish learners of English display L1 transfer in the acquisition of the phenomenon of *that*-deletion in English. However, this effect can be either positive or negative. According to Alonso (2002: 22), there is *positive transfer* when an L1 structure or rule is appropriate in the L2 utterance which signifies that it may facilitate L2 learning as both L1 and L2 share the same structure or rule. In contrast, the term *negative transfer* is used when an L1 structure or rule is inappropriate in an L2 utterance and, consequently, produces errors in the L2. Moreover, it may be postulated that both *positive* and *negative transfer* are closely related with Chomsky's theory of *principles* and *parameters* since the parameters of UG can be used with the purpose of explaining language transfer. In other words, just as Lydia White (1985) declares, if UG is accessible to L2 learners, language transfer can be predicted by parameters, because learners apply their L1 parameters to the L2.

Lydia White (2000) identifies five distinct perspectives in the study of SLA regarding, on the one hand, the range of involvement of the L1 grammar — which can be full transfer, partial transfer or no transfer — and, on the other hand, the extent of the access to UG in the acquisition process— which can be full access, partial access or no access —. As far as *that*-deletion is concerned, although assuming that there is transfer, I cannot argue for one or

another of White's perspectives as the *that*-deletion phenomenon is not a parameter, as will be argued in the following section.

Summing up, learners of L2 use background experience and prior knowledge in their first language in order to formulate hypotheses about second language rules. However, when the L1 does not have the same properties that L2 has, the learner has to dismiss the input of L1 and learn the accurate properties of the L2.

4.2. *That* and *que* transfer

In 2.§, it has been examined that both English and Spanish complementisers coincide in introducing finite declarative embedded clauses. However, these two elements are not considered to be equivalent since there are specific conditions under which the complementisers do not coincide. The conditions are mainly based on the type of register that is used since while, as has been explained in section 3.§, the English language normally uses the *that*-complementiser in formal registers, the Spanish language uses the *que*-complementiser in informal speech regardless of the type of verb that is displayed in the sentence, and when the English language deletes the *that*-complementiser in informal speech with a "bridge-verb" as the main verb of the sentence, the Spanish language deletes the *que*-complementiser in very limited formal contexts when the verb in the embedded clause is in subjunctive mood.

Moreover, as far as Comsmy's approach of *Principles* and *Parameters* is concerned, it may be assumed that using a complementiser in order to introduce a finite declarative complement clause is a general property of languages since it is present in languages such as English (42), Spanish (43), Catalan (44), French (45), German (46) and so on. Thus, it may be assumed that the deletion of the complementiser is a variation which not all languages have.

(42) The news announced that spring is coming.

(43) María pensaba que nadie la vendría a buscar.

(44) En Joan va dir que l'estimava,

(45) J'ai dit qu' elle était malade.

(46) Ich weiß, dass Matilde im Supermarkt gegangen ist.

However, the phenomenon of *that*-deletion in English is not considered a parameter since it seems not to have any semantic consequences. Thus, it is understood to be a characteristic construction of the English language.

Therefore, this may cause transfer when a Spanish learner of English applies the known construction of his own language in a context where the *that*-complementiser in English is deleted. Having said that, this statement relates to the purpose of the project which is based on the study of a group of Spanish students who are learning English and their possible transfer that they unconsciously may produce regarding the phenomenon of *that*-deletion in English.

5. Methodology

5.1. Subjects

The data reported in this project is from a total of 55 bilingual Spanish/Catalan subjects. Moreover, 10 native English speakers provide data for the control group.

The L2 participants are divided into four experimental groups which are organized depending on the course they are studying. That is the reason why they are classified into four groups: the first group is made up of secondary school students from 4th year of ESO (Educación Secundaria Obligatoria). The second group comprises students from 2nd year of Bachillerato. The third group analyzes 1st year university students who are studying either English Studies or Combined Studies with English. Finally, the fourth group consists of the analysis of the production of 4th year university students who, as in the third group, are studying either English Studies or Combined Studies with English.

As has been argued previously, the aim of the project is focused on whether or not Spanish L2 learners of English from different courses display L1 interference, through written and oral channels, in the acquisition of the English construction known as *that*-deletion phenomenon. The aim of the project does not focus on the English level of the L2 subjects but rather on the range of *that*-presence and *that*-absence in the formal and informal contexts provided in the experiment (explained in section 5.3.§). However, I will also consider the L1 interference that may exist in the different levels of English considering their frequency of *that*-presence and absence. It is expected that those participants who have a lower level of English (students from 4th year of ESO and 2nd year of Bachillerato) have fairly strong L1 influence and those who have a higher level (1st and 4th year university students) show relatively low influence. Therefore, apart from revealing either L1 interference or not, the results enable the project to study the possible contrasts that may exist in the frequency of *that*-presence and absence from the distinct participants who have different proficiency levels.

In addition, the project includes a control group composed of British-English native speakers. The control group, who has done the same experiment as the L2 participants, allows for the comparison between their range of *that*-presence and *that*-absence occurrence and the results from the Spanish L2 learners of English. In the following table (Table I) the number of subjects of each group is illustrated:

Table I. Number of Participants.

Group	Number
English controls	10
4 th year of ESO	15
2 nd year of Bachillerato	15
1 st year of university	14
4 th year of university	11

5.2. Method and procedure

In order to gain information about L2 English learner's competence regarding the *that*-deletion phenomenon, the subjects were asked to carry out two tasks involving the verbs *say*, *think* and *believe*. As has been explained in 3.1.§, the *that*-complementiser tends to occur more frequently in formal written speech while it is likely to be more frequently absent in informal speech. Thus, the presence and absence of the *that*-complementiser has to do with pragmatic factors. That is the reason why the experiment consisted of an oral task which was designed to use informal register and a written task which included an exercise that was associated to formal register.

In the written task, the participants were requested to complete two exercises: the first one (Table II) consisted of writing a short opinion letter for the newspaper *The Guardian*. The participants had to choose one of the three topics suggested and use at least one of the phrases provided which included either the verb *say*, *think* or *believe*. In this exercise all the participants, including the control group, were expected to use the *that*-complementiser because the context provided was formal as they were writing for a newspaper. The second exercise (Table III) consisted of translating 12 informal Spanish sentences into informal English sentences. Four distractors were included in the exercise so that participants could not discover the topic of the project (Table IV). It is important to say that this second exercise was only carried out by Spanish L1 learners of English since the purpose of this exercise was focused on demonstrating the possible L1 influence and the knowledge that the Spanish learners of English have regarding the phenomenon of *that*-deletion. For this reason what was taken into account is the range of *that* absence and presence in the sentences.

Table II. Written task: topics from the first exercise

A	Facebook has in fact created anti-social lives for many of its users, despite appearing to promote the complete opposite.
B	Racism is a problem that has not been solved yet, the only thing that society has done is to have hidden it behind the prominence of liberal values.
C	José Wert is wrong to have decided that the Catalan language should have less importance in Catalanian Schools.

Table III. Written task: translation activity

2	Yo creo que su cumpleaños fue en enero y no en marzo.
3	No me has entendido, he dicho que vendré.
4	Yo sé que ella tiene razón.
5	Ella quiere estar aquí, pero yo creo que no debería.
7	Creo que tengo dolor de cabeza.
9	Él dice que están en París.
10	Pienso que es una buena idea.
11	Ella decía que habían tenido unas buenas vacaciones en Londres.

Table IV. Written task: distractors from the translation activity

1	Ella está preguntando cuántas personas vendrán a la fiesta.
6	No he podido encontrar el libro de ciencias que quería.
8	Me pregunto qué estará haciendo.
12	Espero se solucionen pronto los problemas.

In the oral task, the participants were asked to give their opinion about ordinary and informal situations (Table V) which most of the students have experienced or at least have been familiar with. These predetermined situational contexts had to be answered by employing either *I would say...*, *Personally, I think...* or *I believe...* as a start which made the participants use the specific sequence in order to elicit a particular grammatical structure: an embedded clause and, consequently, test the presence or absence of the *that*-complementiser. Therefore, the task was based on elicited production since learners were asked to give their opinion about an informal situation which favoured the use of *that*-deletion. In the Appendix section a sample of both tasks (written and oral) are included (p.41)

Table V. Oral task: situations

A	A very good friend of yours has asked you to go shopping with her. She really wants to buy a dress that she has just tried on, but unfortunately the dress does not fit her. Give her your opinion.
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B	Your brother has been really rude to your mother. The only thing your mother wanted from him was to help her to clean up the table. You do not like his behaviour. Let him know.
C	You are in the Romanticism English class. Your teacher is analyzing a poem and you do not agree with what she is saying. Let her know.
D	Someone has come to you this morning and has explained that he knows something about you that only your best friend knows. You cannot believe that your best friend has broken the promise by not keeping the secret that you have confided in her. Let her know.

Apart from that, it is important to mention the importance of the timing in order to do the two tasks since it could affect the results of the project. These tasks were carried out in a short period of time: the written task was done in 15 minutes and the oral task in 5 minutes. The purpose of not letting the participants go back and change their responses means that the project is based on spontaneous answers and, thus, this implies that the presence or absence of the complementiser is used unconsciously.

Finally, the scoring in this project depends on a dichotomous choice, that is to say, whether or not the *that* complementiser is present or absent after the verbs *say*, *think* and *believe*. Considering the first exercise of the written task and the oral task, they were scored taking into account the number of times that *say*, *think* and *believe* appeared in the exercises and, then, the number of times that the *that* was present or absent with each of these verbs. In the second exercise of the written task, each sentence, apart from the distractors, contained one of the three verbs and the participants had to translate the sentence either using the complementiser or not. Therefore, the second exercise considers the number of times the participants used or deleted the *that*-complementiser when they translated the sentences.

6. Results

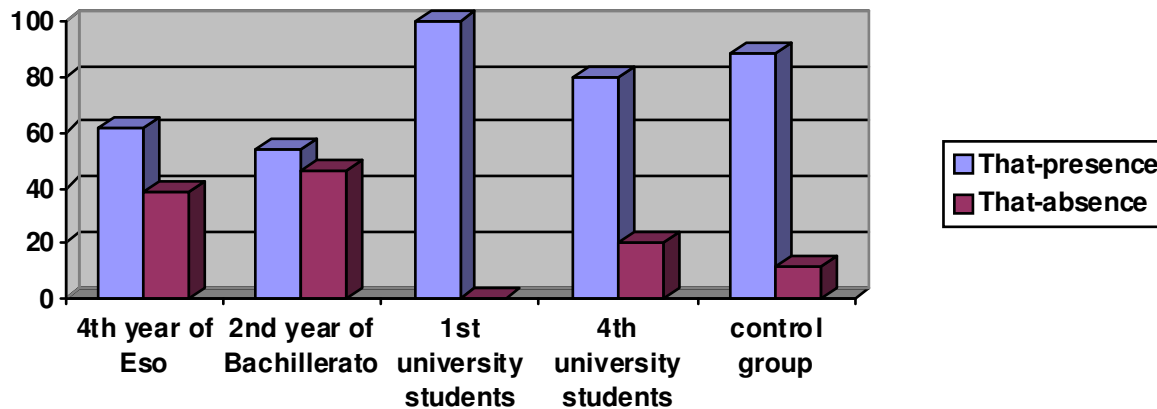
6.1. Written task: absence vs. presence of the *that*-complementiser

6.1.1 Exercise 1: Opinion letter

Figures I, II and III summarise the results of the first written exercise. Each figure shows the range of absence and presence of the *that*-complementiser in each verb: *think*, *say* and *believe*, respectively. Moreover, Figure IV is included in order to show a general percentage on *that*-absence and presence taken from the results of the three different verbs.

Moving on to the results, it is important to mention that, as has been explained in 3.3.§, in this exercise, all the participants are expected to use the *that*-complementiser since they are asked to write a short opinion letter for the newspaper *The Guardian*. Thus, the intention of this exercise is to write in a formal register.

Figure I. *That*-presence and absence with the verb think



As can be seen in Figure I, all the students used mainly *that*-presence with the verb think. However, *that*-absence is used in all the groups except from the first university students as they use *that*-presence in a 100%. The participants of 4th year of ESO and 2nd year of Bachillerato show that although *that*-presence is more used in the exercise (61,54% and 53,85%, respectively), the use of *that*-absence is quite perceptible in comparison to the other groups since they show an incidence of 38,46% and 46,15%, respectively; while the other

groups, both 4th university students and the control group of native-speakers, use *that*-absence to a lesser degree, the former a 20% and the latter a 11,11%. Therefore, it is appreciated that the only participants that have completely used the construction expected in a formal register are the 1st year university students.

Figure II. *That*-presence and absence with the verb believe

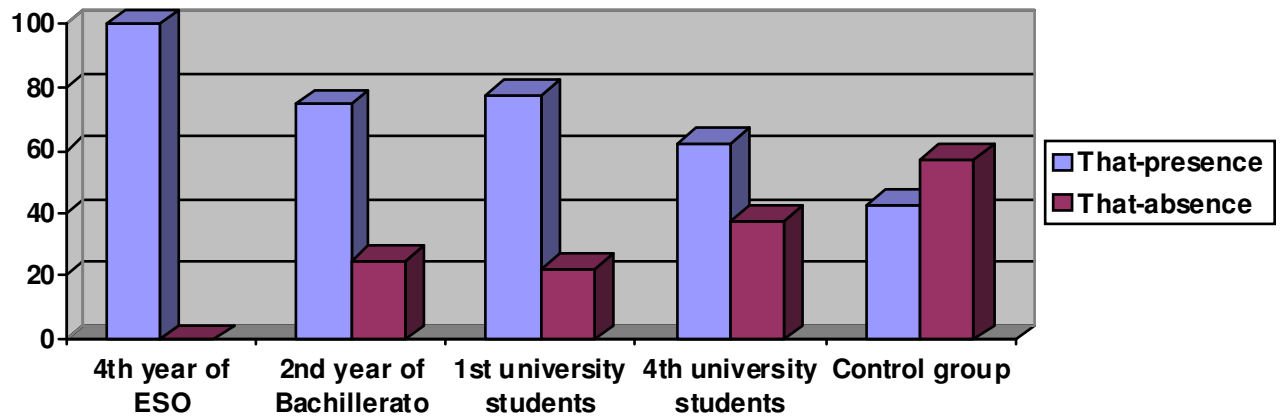


Figure II shows that while students of 4th year of ESO use 100% of *that*-presence with the verb believe, the other groups employ both *that*-presence and absence in the exercise. While the participants from 2nd year of Bachillerato use *that*-presence in a 75% and *that*-absence in a 25%, the students of 1st year university display 77,78% of *that*-presence and 22,22% of *that*-absence. The participants from 4th year university have used *that*-presence in a 62,5% and 37,5% of *that*-absence which means that the absence of the *that*-complementiser is more used than in the other groups. In contrast, the Control group utilize more *that*-absence (57,14%) than *that*-presence (42,86%). Thus, except from the control group which there is a slightly predominance of *that*-absence, the other groups show a higher percentage of *that*-presence.

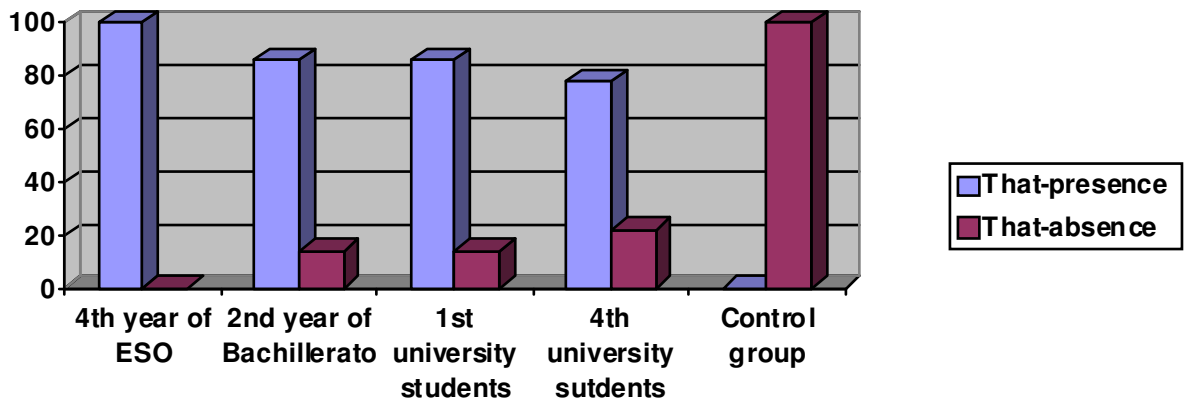
Figure III. *That*-presence and absence with the verb *say*

Figure III shows the range of the *that*-complementiser with the verb *say*. In this case, there is a predominance of *that*-presence in all the Spanish L2 learners of English whereas the control group use 100% *that*-absence. As far as Spanish L2 learners is concerned, whereas students from 4th year of ESO displays 100% of *that*-presence, students from 2nd of Bachillerato use *that*-presence in a 75% and *that*-absence in a 25%. Concerning university students, 1st and 4th year participants use *that*-presence in a higher degree (85,71% and 77,78%, respectively) than *that*-absence (14,29% and 22,22%, respectively).

Thus, it is appreciated that in general terms, there is a predominance of using the *that*-presence in all the Spanish L2 learners of English. However, it is observed that the control group differs significantly in their judgements as they have used mainly *that*-presence with the verb *think* while with the other verbs they have not used *that*-complementiser.

Having established the influence of *that*-absence and *that*-presence in each of the three verbs, the following figure shows a general percentage that takes into account all the results from the previous verb's results.

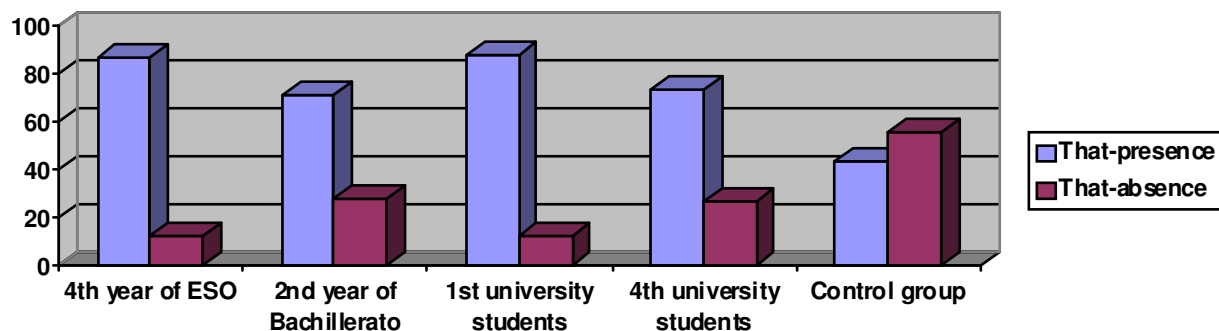
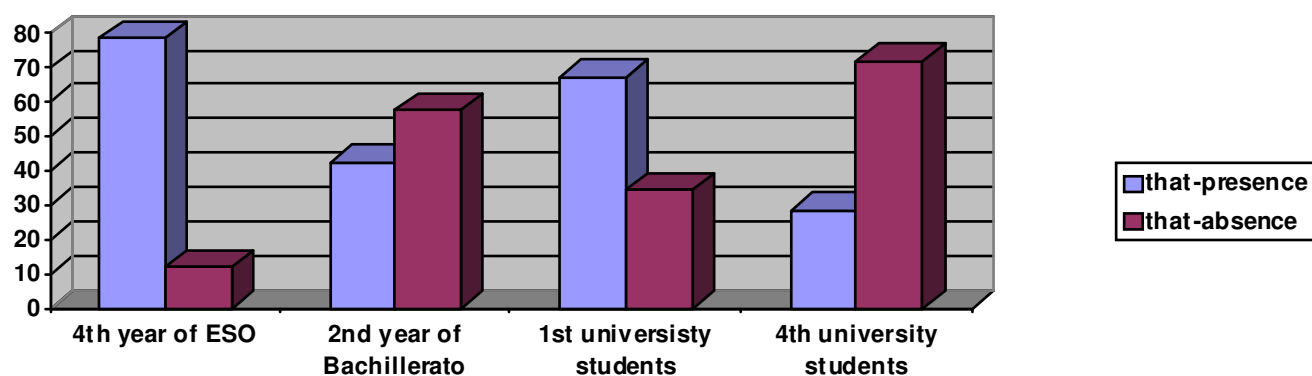
Figure IV. Opinion activity: General percentage

Figure IV. shows that L2 learners of English in general use more *that*-presence than the control group. The groups that use more *that*-presence are students from 4th year of ESO (87,18%) and 1st university students (87,83%). Students from 2nd year of Bachillerato and 4th university students employ *that*-absence in a 71,52% and 73,43%, respectively. Hence, the use of *that*-absence is relatively low in this exercise (4th year of ESO: 12,82%; 2nd year of Bachillerato: 28,48%; 1st university students: 12,17 and 4th university students: 26,57%). In contrast, the control group employ more *that*-absence (56,08) than *that*-presence (43,92).

6.1.2. Exercise 2: Translation

As has been explained in section 3.3.§, the aim of this exercise is to demonstrate whether or not there is L1 influence on the use of the *that*-complementiser in English. Figure V illustrates the result of the range of *that*-presence and *that*-absence in the L2 Spanish groups when translating from Spanish to English. It is important to mention that the distractors used in the activity are not analysed as they are not relevant for the project; thus, the sentences that are taken into account are those from Table III.: (S.2, S.3, S.4, S. 5, S.7, S.9, S.10 and S.11). Apart from that, in the appendix, there are the figures IV-VII which analyse the incidence of *that*-presence and *that*-absence in each group.

Figure V. Translation activity results

As can be appreciated from Figure V, while the students from 4th year of ESO and 1st year students from university use more *that*-presence (78,43% and 66,96%, respectively) than *that*-absence (11,67% and 34,28%, respectively), students from 2nd Bachillerato and 4th year university students utilize more *that*-absence (57,50% and 71,59, respectively) than *that*-presence (42,50% and 28,41%, respectively). However, students from 2nd Bachillerato display not such a big difference between the use of *that*-presence and *that*-absence, while the other groups do, either employing *that*-presence or absence. These results confirm that there is strong influence of L1 on L2 learners of 4th year of ESO but there is less influence of L1 on those students who are studying English studies or a Comined degree in English.

6.2. Oral task: absence vs. presence of the *that*-complementiser

Figures VI, VII and VIII present the results of the oral task taken from the four situations that the participants were asked to answer. Each figure shows the range of absence and presence of the *that*-complementiser in each verb: *think*, *say* and *believe*, respectively. In the appendix (p.77), there are the results of the different situations, each situation analyses the range of *that*-presence or absence with each of the three verbs. In addition, as in the formal opinion letter exercise, Figure IX is included in order to provide a general percentage on *that*-absence and presence having taken into account the verbs' results of the previous figures.

As far as the oral task is concerned and as has been commented in 3.3.§, the task is considered to be informal in register as the task is oral and deals with personal opinion. Therefore, it is expected from the participants to use more *that*-absence than *that*-presence.

Figure VI. *That*-presence and absence with the verb think

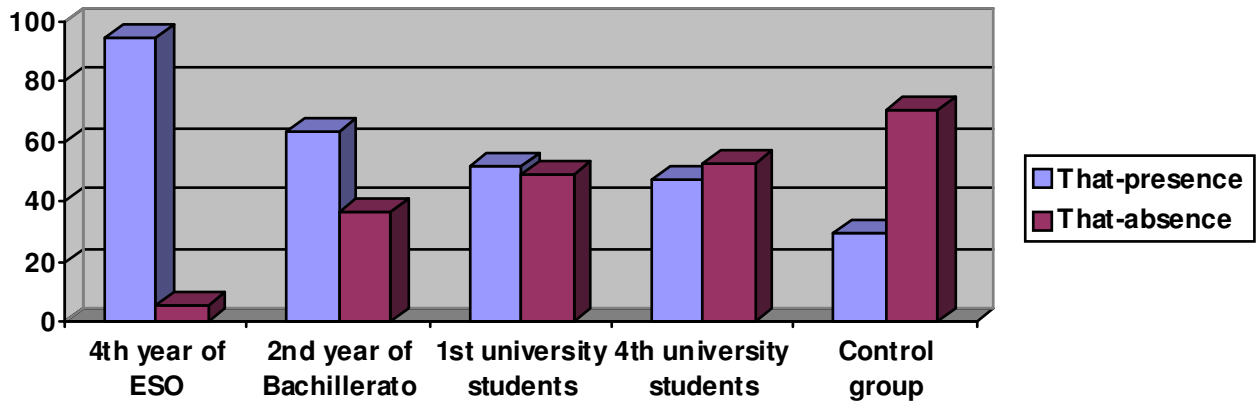
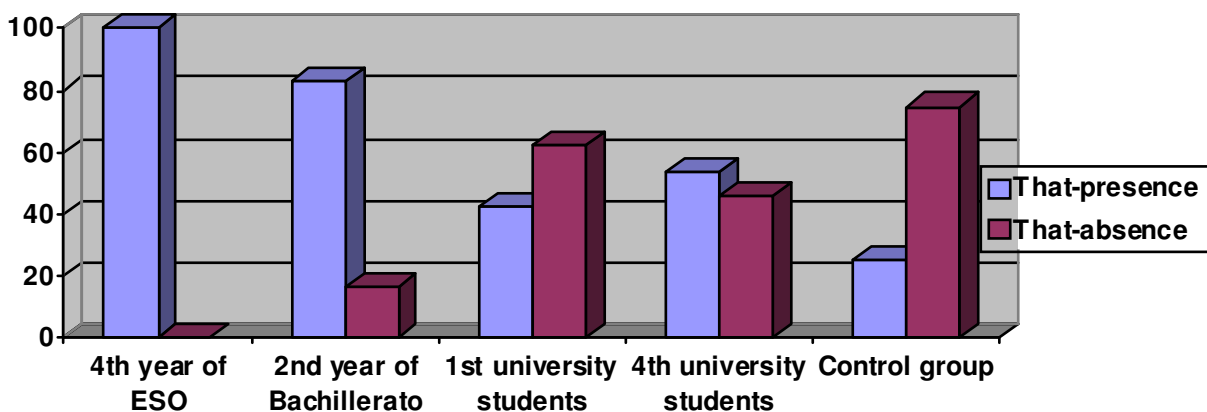


Figure VI. demonstrates that the group of students from 4th year of ESO use *that* in a nearly 95%. The following group, students from 2nd Bachillerato, have a high percentage of *that*-presence (63,57%) regarding of the use of *that*-absence (36,43%). Students from 1st and 4th year of university degree do not show a high difference between the use of *that*-presence (51,39% and 47,09%, respectively) and absence (48,61% and 52,91% respectively), however *that*-absence is more employed by students from 4th year of university. Finally, is important to mention that although the control group displays 30% of *that*-presence, they show 70% of *that*-absence in the informal contexts when the verb *think* is used and introduces a finite embedded clause.

Figure VII. *That*-presence and absence with the verb believe



As is appreciated in Figure VII., the range of *that*-presence and absence with the verb believe is varied. Firstly, students from 4th year of ESO use *that*-presence in a 100%. Secondly, the same happens with the students from 2nd of Bachillerato, even though they display 16,16% of *that*-absence. Thirdly, the 1st university students use *that*-absence in a 62,5% more than the 4th university students which use it only 46,03%. Considering the control group, although there is an incidence of 25% of *that*-presence, it clearly shows the importance of *that*-absence (75%) when using a finite embedded clause preceded by the verb believe in informal contexts.

Figure VIII. *That*-presence and absence with the verb say

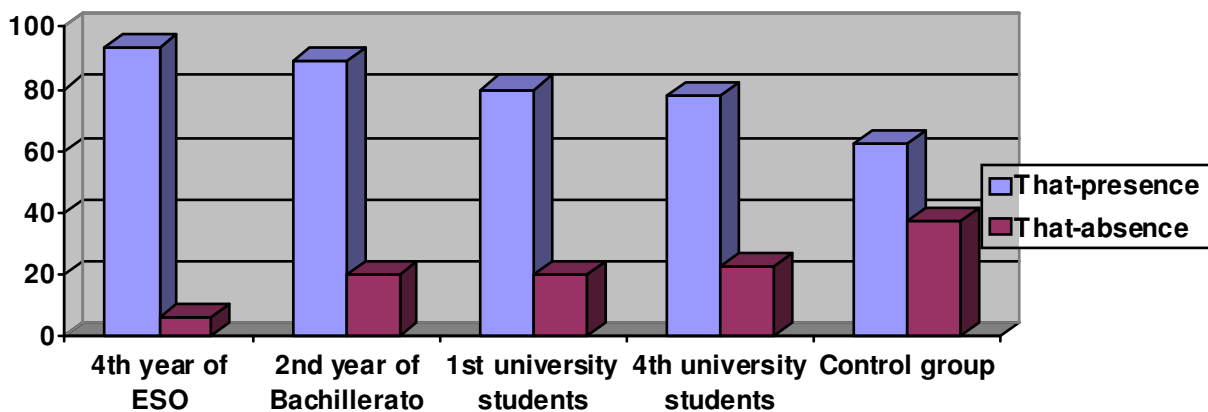
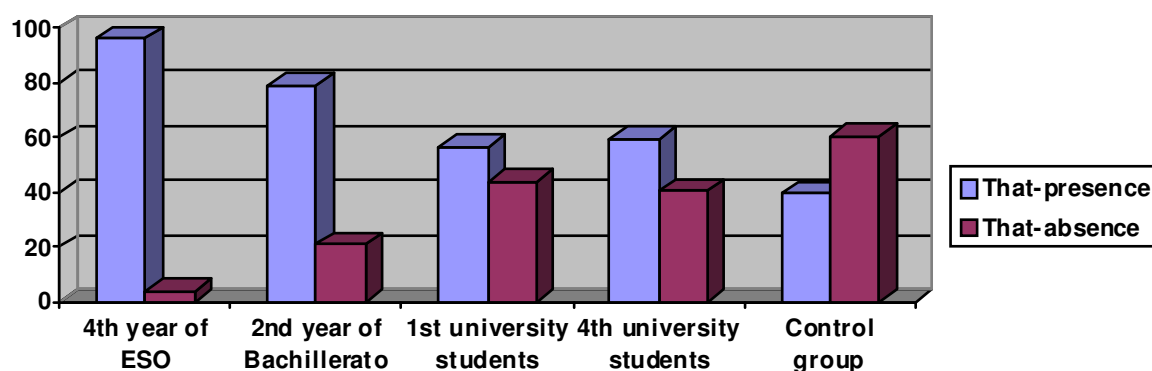


Figure VIII. represents a contrast in comparison to the other figures commented above since there is a major presence in the use of the *that*-complementiser when the verb *say* is used, even in the control group. However, the range of the presence of the *that*-complementiser decreases regarding the level of the L2 Spanish learners and the Control group: while students of 4th year of ESO use it in a 93,60%, students of 2nd year of Bachillerato utilize it in a 89,09%. Students from 1st year of university and 4th year of university employ it in a 80% and 77,75% , respectively. The control group, although utilizing *that*-presence in 62,5%, it is the group which uses more *that*-absence in comparison to the others (37,50%). The *that*-absence from the L2 Spanish groups also show a increasing use of

it depending on their level of English since while students from 4th year of ESO utilize it in a 6,4%, students of 2nd year of Bachillerato, 1st year of university and 4th year of university employ it in a 10,91%, 20% and 22,25%, respectively.

Having established the influence of *that*-absence and *that*-presence in each of the three verbs, the following Figure (Figure IX) shows a percentage which includes all the verbs. Because of that, it can be appreciated the general use of *that*-absence and presence in each of the participants' groups.

Figure IX. Oral task: General percentage



As is appreciated in Figure IX, *that*-presence is dominant in the Spanish groups while *that*-absence is predominant in the control group. Moreover, the percentages of L2 participants, except from 4th university students, show a relatively decrease in the use of *that*: while 4th year of ESO display 96,20% *that*-presence and 3,80% *that*-absence, 2nd year of Bachillerato uses *that*-presence in a 78,83% and *that*-absence in a 21,17%; and 1st university students employ *that*-presence in a 56,30% and *that*-absence in a 43,70%. In contrast, although it is not a big difference, 4th year university students use *that*-presence (59,60%) in a higher degree than 1st university students and *that*-absence (40,40%) in a lower degree. The control group makes a difference in comparison to the other participants as they use more *that*-absence (60,83%) than *that*-presence (39,17%).

7. Discussion and Conclusion

The results demonstrated that there is L1 interference in the acquisition of the *that*-complementiser in English, however there were differences regarding the presence and absence of the *that*-complementiser across the different verbs that have been used and the groups which have different levels of English. Although none of the Spanish L2 groups showed full proficiency in using *that*-absence in informal register and *that*-presence in formal register, 1st year and 4th year university students' results showed a lower influence of L1 in comparison to the others.

Regarding the first exercise of the written task which was an opinion letter for the newspaper *The Guardian*, all the groups used, in most of the occasions, the *that*-complementiser. From this first exercise, the complete use of *that* presence was expected; hence, the *that*-absence employed in this exercise is understood as either that they used alternatively *that*-absence and presence, or that the participants did not interpret that writing an opinion letter for a newspaper constituted a formal register.

The results from the second exercise of the written task, which consisted of translating sentences from Spanish to English, showed that while students from 4th year of ESO and 1st year of university used *that*-presence in a higher degree than *that*-absence, students from 2nd year of Bachillerato and 4th year of university employed more *that*-absence than *that*-presence. At this point, the results of the written task showed that, first of all, there is L1 interference in the acquisition of the *that*-complementiser in English. Secondly, the contrast that exists between the different Spanish L2 groups cannot be related to their level of English. Then, it can be considered that the existing contrast between the groups is associated to the knowledge of the use of the *that*-deletion in English or the unconscious and alternative use of it since in the second exercise students from 1st year university used more *that*-presence than

the ones studying 2nd year of Bachillerato. Hence, whereas *that*-absence was expected to be more used as the level of proficiency becomes higher; in this exercise it was not appreciated.

Considering the oral task, it is important to say that there is indeed a progressively L1 influence in the different L2 Spanish groups. While the students from 4th year of ESO and 2nd year of Bachillerato, which are supposed to have a lower level in comparison to the other groups, showed little use of *that*-absence and high use of *that*-presence; it is observed that students from 1st and 4th year university showed a higher use of *that*-absence, although *that*-presence was predominant. Therefore, in this activity, L2 learners show L1 interference in the acquisition of the *that*-deletion in English. However, it also demonstrates a progressive use of *that*-absence depending on the English level of the group, although 1st university students used slightly more *that*-absence than 4th university students.

Apart from that, the Control group, in general terms, showed a great presence of *that*-absence in all the exercises either in the written or in the oral. In the first exercise of the written task, native English speakers used in a higher degree *that*-absence than *that*-presence, a fact that was not expected since the intention of the exercise was to be written in a formal register and, thus, it was assumed that the dominant option in this exercise would be *that*-presence. Then, it may be argued that either *that*-absence in English is so strong that even in a formal register natives tend to omit the *that*-complementiser or the control group has not understood that the exercise implied a formal register. Because of that, a more detailed analysis is needed in order to establish whether or not the result from the formal written letter is a manifestation of their use of *that*-deletion phenomenon in formal registers.

In the oral task, the control group used *that*-absence in a higher degree, however, in some occasions, the native-English speakers employed *that*-presence when it was not expected. Therefore, it may be stated that, in general, *that*-deletion in English is a very

predominant phenomenon; however, as has been shown in the experiment, the presence or the absence of *that* depends basically on the speaker since not always native speakers use *that*-absence in informal situations and *that*-presence in formal situations.

For further investigation, it would be interesting, on the one hand, to carry out the experiment of the Spanish L2 learners after having done an English placement level test. Then, it would be known for sure that all the groups have the same level since the participants in this project have been distributed by their year of study and sometimes the level of the participants in the same group may be different. On the other hand, it would be interesting to study and investigate why English-native speakers in some contexts do not follow the tendency of *that*-deletion observed by other studies on the phenomenon (Biber, *et alli*: 1999).

Summing up, whereas English and Spanish have a similar use when comparing their finite complement clauses, they differ in the presence and absence of their complementisers, *that* and *que*, respectively. In English, the *that*-complementiser tends to be absent when it is used in an informal register by a common and quite general verb of cognition and it is normally present in formal register. Contrastively, in Spanish, the *que*-complementiser appears to be present in most of the occasions and it is only absent in very formal speech (such as epistolary, juridical, and so on) and when the subordinate verb is in the subjunctive tense. Therefore, these differences between complementisers may imply the existence of L1 language transfer in L2 Spanish learners as they may presume that L2 is similar to their L1 considering the phenomenon of *that*-deletion in English. However, it is important to mention that the *that*-deletion phenomenon is not a clear parameter regarding Chomsky's approach on *Principles* and *Parameters* since it does not have any semantic consequences. Having said this, the hypothesis was tested in an experiment that has analysed whether or not there was L1 interference in the use of *that*-deletion by L2 English learners. Moreover, the results from the

Spanish L2 were compared with a control group. Then, the results from the experiment can demonstrate that, firstly, there is L1 interference in the acquisition of the *that*-complementiser in English. Secondly, there are contrasts in the frequency of *that*-presence and absence from the participants who have different levels of English. Thirdly, there is a difference between the results obtained from the Spanish L2 learners of English and from the Control group since while the former used, in a higher degree, *that*-presence; the latter used *that*-absence in most of the occasions. Finally, these results show how experimental research in language acquisition can contribute to the investigation of ongoing linguistic change.

8. Bibliography

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