Error Analysis and Interlanguage in the Use of the Term 'ICT' in an Online Learner Corpus

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Abstract. The main objective of this study is to highlight the need to advise students to revise their online written productions to avoid the incorrect use of forms which differ from their L1. In order to do so, this paper explores a specific error: misuse of the initialism 'ICT'. Even though the analysis deals with this term, the conclusion can be applied to similar cases. The subjects are university students who use English as a vehicular language in the classroom but who have very different levels of proficiency. After analysing their written productions in an online forum it was observed that misuse of 'ICT' could be either an error, due to a gap in knowledge, or a mistake, due to interlingual transfer. Taking Selinker's (1972) and Corder's (1981) theories as a starting point, we then explore what to do in these cases considering the specific form of instruction that these students receive. Consequently, explicit teaching of the term in the classroom is proposed taking into account the learners' age factor and the revised theories.

Keywords: Error analysis, Interlanguage, English as a vehicular language, explicit vs. implicit teaching.

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1. Introduction

As teachers, we want our students to reach a successful learning. For this reason, we need to analyse their productions to try to solve the most common reappearing mistakes. By means of error analysis (Corder 1981) and corpus linguistics, we can isolate patterns allowing us to grasp with some clarity the students' problems that we must tackle. However, error analysis is not an exact methodology and we need to analyse the type of mistake before we understand its origin and possible solution

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in the classroom. In cases such as the one in hand, it is useful to resort to the concept of interlanguage (Selinker 1972; 1992) and see how it applies to these situations.

Among the failures committed by these students, we can find lack of capitalization of words which differ from their L1 or L2, such as the first person singular pronoun or the word 'English':

> 43TOENICTB.txt (...) i think is very important keep in mind the (...)
> 34TOENICTA.txt (...) english book that were specially written for an english beginners. These kind of products used new (...)
> Lack of subject:
> 17TOENTICA (…) why aren´t going to use it?
> Or structures from the students L1 (Spanish):
> 47TOENICTA I am totally agree with my partners (…)

These can be attributed to the influence of interlanguage, a bad command of the language or the use of CMC (computer mediated communication). However, there is another type of error which seems more interesting and which appears to be related to the previous ones. The error under analysis here is the improper use of the initialism 'ICT' (Information and Communication Technology) in speakers of English as a foreign language: they are students who are not being taught the target language (TL), but who use it as the vehicular language of a module. Thus, we are concerned with solving an improper use that derives from an incorrect application of rules, whether it is an interlingual error or a different type of problem acquired by students outside the module in question. We must consider this factor, as students are not as concerned with grammatical correctness as they are with making themselves understood by their peers. Our role is not merely to correct, but also to analyse and address this problem so as to provide a solution that really works. Furthermore, we are dealing with students who use ICT for their training—as they are engaged in online learning—, which means that their use of technology must also be taken into account when analysing the errors they commit.

2. Theoretical background

Our starting point is that errors are a natural part of the learning process (Corder 1981), whether they are intralingual (such as, for instance, applying regular patterns to irregular constructions) or interlingual (for instance, applying L1 patterns to the FL because both are similar) (Ellis & Barkhuizen 2005: 65). Taking this into account, the error under discussion is completely normal and anticipatable. The process of conscious acquisition of successive languages is more analytical and self-aware than the acquisition of the mother tongue, so that the new speaker expects grammatical structures and norms that constitute a model that can be followed. Where two languages share features, the tendency is to export from the L1 to the FL everything that makes grammatical sense for as long as the acquisition process lasts (Lado 1990; 1991: 15; Barlow 2005: 343). We are therefore not dealing with errors in the negative sense of the word, but with errors that are part of a correct process. According to Selinker (1994: 151; see also Ellis & Barkhuizen

2005: 55), the mistakes made by learners of a language are not haphazard but systematic; they are positive because they enable the speaker to test hypotheses. We cannot expect our students' use of the FL to be perfect from the beginning, in the same way that young children do not speak perfectly when acquiring their L1. Nevertheless, it seems that at a given stage the interlanguage undergoes a process of fossilization and stops developing: thus, an adult acquiring a FL will not reach the proficiency of a child who is acquiring that same language as a L1 (Bever 1981). However, the exact moment where the critical period in language acquisition comes to a close remains an open-ended question (see for instance Hurford 1991: 161-2). Part of the problem is that it is never clear what we are talking about when discussing the critical period. In this connection, it is salutary to bear in mind Johnson and Newport's distinction between the exercise hypothesis and the maturational state hypothesis (see Johnson and Newport 1989: 64). Hurford's own interference hypothesis (1991: 163) might be closest to the type of problem with which this paper is concerned. Johnson and Newport (1991) delve deeper into the status and properties of the critical period, albeit from a theoretical standpoint which lies outside the scope of this paper.

In the present case, which concerns EFL, we have the opportunity to analyse this phenomenon in written form by using online forums produced by students (see our section on methodology). However, bearing in mind the habitual use of ICT in present-day society, where typically oral language prevails, we should not refer to it as written language, but as oral language in written form (Torrado-Cespón 2015). Despite the fact that our corpus is composed of activities with an academic character, the forum nevertheless displays informal traits that are typical of oral discussions in a traditional classroom: students use a language that they tend not to revise. This makes the forum a stable source for error analysis as it faithfully mirrors the students' spontaneous use of the language. Error analysis in this instance is of great help as it allows us to observe the strategies used by the students; it forces us, as educators, to question those errors; and it makes us want to reach a solution (Erdogan 2005: 269).

Error analysis thus becomes an extraordinarily useful tool for educators who want their students to improve. We must resist the urge to constantly correct those mistakes, as this would turn the learning of a language and its use into an unpleasant experience: it is the duty of the educator to use correction constructively. Errors are thus an indication that the target language is still being acquired (Corder 1981: 25) and, as educators, we must view them as a natural and correct part of the process. A further relevant aspect of the forum under study is that the participants are not learning the FL as such: they are using it to express themselves in a module which is taught in English but which does not delve into the correct use of the language. Consequently, they use the language more confidently. The fact that they are contributing to a forum and not sitting an examination makes students pay less attention to their errors.

Errors, then, are essential feedback for educators to correctly perform their duties (Haider 2015: 189) and tailor their methodology to the needs of their students, should this be necessary. However, students are not aware that many of their errors are, indeed, errors: if they were, they would be able to prevent them (Haider 2015: 193). In the case of the term 'ICT', students seem unaware of their incorrect usage most of the times (see results). This may be attributed to two possible causes: first,

a possible misuse of the term on the part of the teaching staff. This possibility is ruled out after viewing the video sessions of the modules that make up the corpus. The second possibility is related to interlanguage and the use of an incorrect term through the influence of Spanish. Interlanguage theory posits that, when it comes to choosing a given term within his/her interlanguage repertoire, the learner follows rules (Song 2012: 779) and thus educators may predict this kind of errors. As we will see in due course, the extent to which we may predict misuse of this term makes us wonder whether we really are dealing with a case of interlanguage.

We must also consider whether we are dealing with errors or mistakes. In order to ascertain this, we must examine if the learner resorts systematically to the wrong term: in this case, we are dealing with an error; if the wrong term is used only occasionally, it is a mistake (Al-Khresheh 2016: 51; Ellis & Barkhuizen 2005: 62). As educators, we can design techniques to correct errors but not mistakes, as these are the product of other factors unrelated to the learning of the target language.

Why does a term such as 'ICT' pose problems? Rather than with a function word (say, an article), we are faced with a noun; and in both Spanish and English nouns display number inflection. The transference is therefore clear. Speakers are at a stage of knowledge of English where they are able to apply this analogy between the two languages using other nouns as a foundation. This suggests an interlingual error; we can, however, take its analysis one step further and read it as being between interlanguage and intralanguage. In Spanish, writing initialisms without a plural inflection is a relatively recent (2010) RAE (Real Academia Española de la Lengua) command. Because this is a recent development, many native speakers of Spanish are unaware of the norm or apply it incorrectly: this phenomenon can be appraised by simply typing 'Tics' in any Internet search engine. We thus have a norm that has not yet been widely adopted amongst native speakers and whose misuse is eventually reflected in the target language, where curiously enough it *is* correct. We may therefore put forward two hypotheses to explain the correct use of the term 'ICT' in our corpus:

    i.   A correct use in the target language stemming from an interlingual error in the mother tongue: the learner writes 'ICTs' because he/she also writes 'TICs'.

    ii.   A correct use in the target language stemming from a correct awareness of the term 'ICT': the student writes 'ICTs' because he/she knows that this is a correct form, whereas he/she uses 'TIC' for the Spanish plural.

We may also consider a further hypothesis concerning an incorrect use of the plural term with no plural inflection:

    iii.   An incorrect use stemming from an interlanguage error (L1-TL): the learner writes 'ICT' rather than 'ICTs' because he/she applies the same norm as in Spanish.

As to the case of glaringly incorrect terms such as 'ITC' and 'ITCs', their use might be due to a variety of causes, from simple inattention to dyslexia. In the case of 'TIC' and 'TICs', learners are directly transposing the Spanish term into English: 'TIC' stems from an interlingual error and 'TICs' comes from an interlingual error which in turn originates in an intralingual one. There are some cases of 'TIC's' too, which can be attributed to the extended and indiscriminate use of the genitive among Spanish speakers who do not have a good command of the TL. To

be more accurate, these terms must be seen in context and the language the participant uses must be checked.

However, there is yet another factor that should not be overlooked in a technologically enabled context: technology itself. Students at this university use the Internet for all their academic assignments. If use of the web is common enough amongst students following more traditional methodologies, it will obviously be even more prevalent in our case. There is a big difference between handwriting and typing and it is necessary to take that into account so in this context. Handwriting requires practice and perseverance in order to achieve proficiency. When typing, first, the subject recognises the characters in the keyboard and then memorises their position. Typewriting has more to do with visuomotor ability than visual recognition once it is established, it is less precise and makes the relationship between the input and output more abstract and disconnected (Velay & Longcamp 2012: 371; Magen & Velay 2014: 76). In fact, when teaching characters to any group age, recognition is easier if they have practised them with pen and paper before than using a keyboard (Velay & Longcamp 2012: 372). Therefore, when using ICT the writing system is simpler and less demanding in terms of processing. The result is texts that present grammar and/or typography mistakes.

We also need to consider that these are students with a very diverse level of proficiency in English and that, although the lecturer does not penalize grammar and expression errors to the same extent as in English language modules, he/she does try to make students use correct language. A wrongful but frequent resource which students use are online translation tools. Instances of their use can be difficult to detect if the student revises the text before uploading it to the learning platform, but this elementary precaution is not always taken. We have found cases where use of these tools is obvious and 'ICT' is incorrectly used as a plural form. After trying to replicate the result using Google Translate, it does not seem that the problem stems from a poor automatic translation, except if the user entered the term 'ICT' directly: in that case, the translation tool would identify it as singular or plural depending on the determinants and/or modifiers accompanying it.

3. Methodology

This paper examines the use of the term 'ICT' in a learner corpus. The learners' posts were first analysed through corpus analysis software (AntConc 3.2) and then through a statistics program (SPSS) so as to observe more closely the misuse of the term in question. Bearing in mind the theories presented in the previous section, we can eventually suggest solutions to implement in the classroom and thus suppress this misuse. This may be extrapolated to other similar conflictive areas, where similar patterns are applied.

In order to analyse the term 'ICT', we took into account other possible variants used by learners. As a consequence, we have analysed the use of 'ICT' and its plural form 'ICTs':

 i. The use of the singular form where the plural should have been used.
 ii. The use of the term 'ITC', which does not exist but nonetheless appears in the corpus.

     iii.   The use of the Spanish term, either in the correct form, 'TIC', in the incorrect but widely used 'TICs' or even 'TIC's'.

After recounting all the occurrences of the term, we have analysed them individually to check whether they should be considered as mistakes or errors. In order to do this, we have observed the participants' recurrent use of the term and, even, their self-correction.

4. Objectives

The objective of this paper is to highlight the need to advise students to revise their online written productions to avoid the incorrect use of forms which differ from their L1 and L2 (Basque, Catalan, Galician or Spanish) taking the incorrect use of the initialism 'ICT' as an example. Additionally, this analysis deals with the nature of these failures, classifying them as errors or mistakes in order to provide the most suitable feedback to the students. Thus, the results can be extrapolated to other conflictive areas. Emphasis may be made on the one language with which they are all familiar, i.e., Spanish. Our concern is, therefore, to find out whether we are faced with an interlingual error for which a specific solution can be found, and which can be extrapolated to other similar cases. Part of our job as educators, regardless of the level at which we teach, is to know our students, analyse their written production and guide them towards a correct use of language. The fact that we work with university students on modules that are not explicitly about languages does exempt us from these matters.

5. Participants and Data

The term under scrutiny in this paper is 'ICT' (Information and Communication Technology). In English, this is a singular term with 'ICTs' as its correct plural form. However, the plural form is scarcely used amongst native speakers. This is confusing for our learners, who are, for the most part, speakers of Spanish as a first or second language and are accustomed to 'TIC' (Tecnologías de la información y la comunicación) as its Spanish equivalent. The term 'TIC' is always plural (e.g., "el uso de las TIC"), but, as the RAE indicates, initialisms have no plural inflection. Because of an interlingual problem, learners experience difficulties with the English term when it comes to writing it properly and/or to displaying correct syntactic concordance.

    The corpus ENTERCOR has been compiled using the online forums from different subjects at Universidad Internacional de La Rioja and it is divided into two sub-corpora, TICOR and TRAINCOR, with a total of 470,088 word tokens. This study has analysed the occurrences of ICT in the first sub-corpus. This sub-corpus is divided into two more components (Table 1). Both components collect posts from the compulsory forums of ICT Tools Applied to the Learning of English, a module from the English teaching specialty for early years education and primary education. In these forums, learners express their opinion regarding a topic suggested in the syllabus and debate it amongst themselves, with no intervention from the lecturer. The learners' level of English is not homogeneous, although they all

fluctuate between C1 and B1/B2 according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages.

Table. 1. Sub-corpus TICOR.

	Component 1: ICT	Component 2: TIC	Corpus TICOR
Number of participants	155	511	620
Word types	4,816	9,320	14,136
Word tokens	107,042	317,759	367,790
Occurrences of 'ICT'	648	1,804	2,452
Occurrences of 'ICT' incorrectly used as a plural	74	160	234
Occurrences of 'ICTs'	55	142	197
Occurrences of 'ICT's'	0	14	14
Occurrences of 'ITC'	30	151	181
Occurrences of 'ITCs'	5	11	16
Occurrences of 'TIC'	8	20	28
Occurrences of 'TICs'	1	13	14
Occurrences of 'TIC's'	0	3	3

After taking a look at all the correct and incorrect forms used by learners, the term appears in the first component 747 times. Of those, 629 are either correct or there are not enough data (the word appears as a modifier) and 118 are incorrect; in other words, the term is used wrongly in 15.80% of the occurrences. For example:

(1) (...) in fact ICT were used almost every minute. 02TOENICTA
(2) (...) the ICT are very important in the school now, (...). 14TOENICTA

To be more accurate, we should pay attention to the fact that the wrong use of the term appears recurrently in several participants. It is also worth noting that some participants use the term incorrectly and correctly at the same time (Table 2). It also seems appropriate to examine the productions of these participants individually and check whether the misuse of the word ICT comes along with the misuse of other forms and a poor command of the language in general. So, the variable 'other mistakes' includes poor grammar performance in general (In the first college had digital blackboard (…) 01TOENICTA). Lack of capitalization sentence initial or in words which differ from the students L1 or L2 have not been included due to the fact that they deserve a more detailed analysis as described in a previous research (Torrado-Cespón and Font Paz 2016).

Table. 2. Use of the term in the first component.

Participants	Occurrences	Wrong	Right	NA	Other mistakes
Participant 01	5	4		1	YES
Participant 08	4	2		2	YES
Participant 11	14	3		11	NO
Participant 12	3	1	1	1	NO
Participant 14	9	5		4	YES
Participant 15	20	8		12	NO
Participant 17	6	1		5	YES
Participant 19	19	3	5	11	NO
Participant 23	19	3	1	15	NO
Participant 31	14	1		13	NO
Participant 34	3	2		1	YES
Participant 39	4	3		1	NO
Participant 40	3	1		2	YES
Participant 41	5	4		1	NO
Participant 47	3	1		2	YES
Participant 52	6	2		4	NO
Participant 59	7	1		6	NO
Participant 61	4	1		3	NO
Participant 62	14	3	3	8	NO
Participant 63	4	2		2	YES
Participant 64	6	3		3	NO
Participant 65	11	1		10	NO
Participant 69	5	1	1	3	YES
Participant 76	6	2		4	YES
Participant 90	13	1	4	8	NO
Participant 102	8	1	1	6	YES

Participant 104	13	1		12	NO
Participant 114	7	4		3	NO
Participant 116	10	1	1	8	NO
Participant 124	9	2	3	4	NO
Participant 127	11	3		8	NO
Participant 133	12	3	3	6	YES
	277	**74**	**23**	**180**	

In the second component the term appears 2,158 times, of which 1,786 are either correct or there are not enough data (the word appears as a modifier) and 372 are incorrect. The term is thus used wrongly in 17.23% of the occurrences. For example:

> (3) I think ICT are adequate to promote English language teaching (...) 03TOENTICA
> (4) I have had good experience with ICT, I like them. 20TOENTICA

Again, to be more accurate, we should pay attention to the fact that the wrong use of the term appears recurrently in several participants and also some of them use the wrong and correct form of the word at the same time. The variable 'other mistakes' has also been included here (Table 3):

Table. 3. Use of the term in the second component.

Participant	Occurrences	Wrong	Right	NA	Other mistakes
Participant 01	2	1		1	YES
Participant 03	6	1		5	NO
Participant 13	10	4	3	3	NO
Participant 17	2	2			YES
Participant 20	10	2	1	7	NO
Participant 35	11	2	1	8	YES
Participant 36	5	1		4	NO
Participant 39	7	1		6	NO
Participant 43	6	2		4	NO
Participant 45	3	2		1	NO
Participant 101	6	1		5	NO

Participant 108	4	1		3	YES
Participant 120	7	1	2	4	NO
Participant 121	1	1			YES
Participant 123	17	5	2	10	NO
Participant 127	3	1		2	NO
Participant 129	3	1	1	1	NO
Participant 139	9	2		7	YES
Participant 143	9	1	1	7	NO
Participant 150	4	1		3	YES
Participant 153	5	1		4	YES
Participant 154	6	2		4	NO
Participant 155	4	1		3	YES
Participant 160	15	1	2	12	NO
Participant 166	8	3		5	NO
Participant 176	3	1		2	YES
Participant 181	13	2	4	7	YES
Participant 182	4	3		1	YES
Participant 185	6	2	1	3	NO
Participant 186	10	2	2	6	YES
Participant 189	5	1		4	YES
Participant 198	7	2		5	NO
Participant 209	14	4	1	9	YES
Participant 219	8	5		3	YES
Participant 222	2	2			NO
Participant 225	23	1		22	YES
Participant 229	11	2		9	NO
Participant 230	2	1		1	NO
Participant 232	13	1	6	6	NO

Participant 235	36	2	3	31	NO
Participant 239	4	1		3	YES
Participant 242	4	1		3	NO
Participant 244	8	3		5	NO
Participant 251	8	1		7	NO
Participant 259	5	1		4	YES
Participant 261	8	2		6	NO
Participant 264	14	3		11	YES
Participant 272	6	1	1	4	YES
Participant 275	3	2		1	NO
Participant 291	2	1		1	NO
Participant 295	4	2		2	NO
Participant 296	11	2	1	8	YES
Participant 314	4	3		1	YES
Participant 316	7	4		3	NO
Participant 334	9	1		8	NO
Participant 348	6	2		4	NO
Participant 353	12	4	3	5	NO
Participant 362	6	1	1	4	NO
Participant 363	5	1		4	YES
Participant 364	19	4		15	NO
Participant 368	12	2		10	NO
Participant 369	18	1	2	15	YES
Participant 370	10	1	1	8	NO
Participant 374	7	1		6	NO
Participant 375	7	2		5	NO
Participant 381	3	1		2	YES
Participant 382	2	1		1	NO

Participant 383	2	1		1	NO
Participant 386	1	1			YES
Participant 389	4	1		3	YES
Participant 390	1	1			NO
Participant 391	8	1		7	NO
Participant 395	10	3		7	NO
Participant 398	9	1		8	NO
Participant 400	3	1		2	NO
Participant 403	14	2		12	NO
Participant 405	9	2		7	YES
Participant 416	15	5		10	NO
Participant 428	6	1		5	NO
Participant 434	2	1		1	YES
Participant 437	14	3	5	6	NO
Participant 438	12	2	2	8	YES
Participant 446	9	3	1	5	NO
Participant 447	2	1		1	NO
Participant 448	4	2		2	NO
Participant 455	6	2		4	NO
Participant 459	4	1		3	YES
Participant 461	12	3	1	8	NO
Participant 462	10	1		9	YES
	681	**160**	**48**	**473**	

Thus, we find 234 cases (74 in the degree in Early Years Education and 160 in the degree in Primary Education) of incorrect use of 'ICT' as a plural. In the corpus, we also find a correct use of the plural form ('ICTs') in 197 cases (55 in the degree in Early Years Education and 142 in the degree in Primary Education):

- In both cases ICTs are essential to my work because (...) 10TOENICTA (Early Years Education).

- Moreover, ICTs are a fantastic tool for children (...) 84TOENICTA (Early Years Education).
- ICTs offer an enormous range of chances to learn, (...) 05TOENTICA (Primary Education).
- As far as I can remember, ICTs were not used at all when I went (...) 07TOENTICA (Primary Education).

However, within those 197 cases we may find an interlingual problem yet again: on eleven occasions, the term appears as modifier to a noun, and therefore its use in plural is incorrect in English. This is only found in three participants belonging to the degree in Early Years Education sub-corpus:

- The use of ICTs resources allows students to be motivated and (...) 54TOENICTA.
- For this kind of exams are very useful ICTs resources, just to practice both oral and (...) 58TOENICTA.
- (...) formation in the subject and the lack of ICTs materials in our schools. 84TOENICTA.
- ICTs resources stimulate teachers and (...) 129TOENICTA.

6. Results

Bearing in mind Tables 2 and 3, included in the methodology section, we may classify our results as errors or mistakes depending on the specific usage of the participants. According to Ellis (in Erdogan 2005: 263), we must observe whether the student uses the term correctly sometimes, incorrectly others: in this case, we would be dealing with a mistake. If the term is systematically used incorrectly, we are dealing with an error. Another possibility is asking the learner to correct the term: if she/he is not able to, it is an error. Considering this, we are facing the following errors / mistakes:

    i.   The incorrect use of ICT as a plural form.
    ii.   The use of incorrect forms, namely, 'ICT's', 'ITC', 'ITC's', 'TIC', 'TICs' and 'TIC's'.

6.1. ICT as Plural

As may be seen in the tables included in the methodology section, the number of participants who use our term incorrectly is 32 (20.64%) in the Early Years Education component and 89 (19.14%) in the Primary Education one. Misuse seems to be more or less equivalent in both components and amounts for 26.30% of all cases. The fact that many of the cases do not feature references that would allow us to know whether they are correct or not does not mean that the student is using the term correctly. This is particularly true in those cases where he/she uses it incorrectly in all occasions that can be checked. In those cases where the term appears as a modifier or, simply, not as a subject, we usually lack information so as to classify use. Taking into consideration only the participants who use the term incor-

rectly, we have 180 cases in the Early Years Education component and 473 in the Primary Education one. We can analyze results taking the following variables:

- The participant uses the term both correctly and incorrectly in all verifiable cases.
- The participant always uses the term incorrectly.

In the first case we are faced with 31.25% of the Early Years Education component and 28.09% of the Primary Education one. We can thus see that the term is incorrectly used in most of the cases for which we have sufficient data. This kind of misuse appears in verb—head of the noun phrase concordance or in subsequent use of pronouns, as we can see in the following examples:

- In the second college the ict *were* non-existent (…) 01TOENICTA
- To get familiar with ICT and use *them* inside the classrooms (…) 102TOENICTA
- I think ICT *are* adequate to promote English language teaching (…) 03TOENTICA
- The introduction of ICT in primary classrooms and the use of *them* with the subject of English (…) 05TOENTICA

Taking into account the points made by Ellis (in Erdogan 2005: 263), we are now in a position to decide whether those are errors or mistakes. In those cases where the student uses the term both correctly and incorrectly we are faced with a mistake caused by lack of attention, a momentary lapse or other factors which do not stem from a deficient knowledge of the TL's grammar. Further proof of this can be found in the fact that there are cases in which the student notices that he/she made a mistake and posts in the forum again in order to acknowledge this:

- I wanted to say *ICT is not are*, sorry. 23TOENICTA
- I am sorry, I have discovered some mistakes in my previous contribution. ICT means Information and communication technology, not technologies, so, the correct spelling is: ICT offers a good way… / ICT also has… / ICT is important.133TOENICTA

In all other cases use of the term 'ICT' as a plural is always incorrect: this indicates a mistake stemming from the student's ignorance of the grammatical rule.

As we have previously pointed out, we find cases where the correct plural, 'ICTs', appears as a modifier. This does not indicate a misuse of the term, but rather an error in the application of the rules of the TL. After observing all the participants' interventions, we may observe the following:

- Participant 54TOENICTA does not display the same problem when the modifier is an adjective. He/she always uses the term 'ICTs' as a modifier and it does not appear in his/her contributions as head of a noun phrase in plural or in singular. We may therefore think that it is an error circumscribed to the form 'ICTs'. We might consider it as an interlingual error

- regarding use of plural in modifiers in Spanish, but we do not have enough data.
- Participant 58TOENICTA uses 'ICT' as a modifier ("ICT tool") and as a subject ("ICT is part of our dayly life"). The use of 'ICTs' as a modifier seems somewhat isolated and occasional: we are therefore dealing with a mistake. Similar cases include 84TOENICTA and 129TOENICTA.

6.2. Use of Incorrect Forms

Besides the use of 'ICT' as a plural, other forms appear that merit our attention. First, we may find the untranslated term 'TIC' and its made-up plural 'TICs' or even 'TIC's'. 'TIC' appears in 28 instances in the corpus, used by four students of the Degree in Early Years Education sub-corpus and thirteen from the Degree in Primary Education one. For example:

- (…) most of you considerate use TIC is one of the best tools (…) 112TOENICTB
- In my opinion TIC can have advantages and disadvantages (…) 227TOENTICA

In this case we may talk about mistakes in those cases where the use of 'TIC' is occasional and appears side by side with 'ICT': there are ten instances of this. In the case of two of the participants (227TOENTICA and 444TOENTIC) it would be an error, since it appears in several occasions. For the other five participants, the available data do not allow us to reach a conclusion, as they only use the term once and do not display any alternative spelling. As far as interlanguage is concerned, we can see 'TIC' as a loan from Spanish, used as a singular and as a plural. Because in English the term is singular, we can find different degrees of adaptation of the term to the TL's rules. Thus, those participants who use the plural 'TICs' use the singular form 'TIC' in much the same way as they would use 'ICT' and 'ICTs'. Only in one case do we find a case of the plural formed as in Spanish:

> TIC play an important role (…) 234TOENTICA

As far as 'TIC's' is concerned, we are facing a misinterpretation of the Saxon genitive which is widely extended amongst the Spanish population. The resulting amalgam is a term that seems plural and convincingly English to the eyes of the learner, but which is really incorrect. The two participants who use 'TIC's' are very different cases: 137TOENICTA uses the incorrect term once, and for the rest of his/her grammatically correct contributions he/she uses 'ICT'. 392TOENTICA uses only the incorrect term and displays numerous grammatical errors.

Another striking form is 'ITC'. This is nonsensical, as it corresponds to no possible alternative. The use of this term can be classified into two different groups depending on whether they make a mistake or an error. The first group would include those who use the incorrect term alongside the correct one, which suggests an occasional mistake that might even be due to the placement of the letters on a QWERTY keyboard. This is the case of 37 participants (5 from the Early Years Education sub-corpus and 31 from the Primary Education one). We may highlight

participant 455TOENTICA, who notices the mistake and posts a message in the forum to correct it:

> Sorry for spelling mistake! I meant to say ICT! 455TOENTICA

We would be dealing with an error in the case of eighteen participants; in the case of a further eleven, we do not have enough data.

In this case it is also necessary to pay attention to the correct use of the term as far as number is concerned. Unlike the cases of the loaned term 'TIC' or the made-up ones 'TICs' or 'TIC's', the term 'ITC' is not due to an interlingual question but to a spelling problem. Thus, the student uses the term in the belief that it is correct. Here we also find some cases (eleven) where it is used as a plural:

- I think ITC are very important now. 191TOENTICA
- (…) we have to take ITC as a tool. They will help us (…) 182TOENTICA

6.3. Other Mistakes

It is interesting take a look at the grammar performance of the subjects analysed. Thus, it can be stated whether the failure is related to low proficiency or it should be attributed to other factors. After analyzing the individually each participant, the results are as follows (Table 4):

Table. 4. Other errors.

	Wrong use of the term, accurate grammar	Wrong use of the term, inaccurate grammar	Right and wrong use of the term, accurate grammar	Right and wrong use of the term, inaccurate grammar
Component 1: ICT	13 40.62%	9 28.12%	7 21.87%	3 9.37%
Component 1: TIC	41 46.06%	25 28.08%	15 16.85%	8 8.98%

It seems, therefore, that the problem has little to do with the participants' grammar knowledge. As a consequence, the misuse of the term 'ICT' is not related to lack of proficiency, but actually with the acquisition of an initialism which also implies problems of usage in the students' L1. It could be said that this type of error is not interlingual, but metainterlingual.

7. Discussion

After taking into account the theoretical background and the results, it seems necessary to consider a further factor: adults present different needs in FL learning (Stefanova & Bobkina 2015: 2567). Selinker (1972) talks about the possibility of a permanent lack of mastery even when adult learners are given all types of opportunities. Therefore, it is necessary to make them aware of their errors to minimize this age factor. Therefore, we should consider the use of explicit instruction (Ellis, 2008). Even though implicit teaching is desirable when learning a language, when the students are adults, we will need to resort to explicit teaching to avoid fossilization. However, a caveat is necessary at this point. As Selinker (1992: 251-2) points out, there are many possible explanations for fossilization, so that the phenomenon cannot be reduced to a single cause. Age, in this case, can certainly be seen as an important factor but no univocal cause-effect relationship can be posited. Furthermore, it is a central tenet of the fossilization hypothesis that it will occur no matter what, particularly when learners lack regular interaction with native speakers of the TL (Selinker 1992: 252 & 256). As a consequence, our best hope is to be able to *circumvent* fossilization or, in Selinker's eloquent formulation, "get round" it (Ibid.). Explicit learning can perhaps allow us to achieve this circumvention or, at the very least, contribute to it. Implicit learning seems the most natural approach to achieve a certain degree of mastery when we talk about children (see Theoretical Background); however, learners are not really aware of what they have learnt. In the case of explicit instruction, they know the rules they are applying and their meaning to construct correct utterances. So, even though some educators argue that FLA or SLA is rather autonomous and spontaneous if teaching provides plentiful opportunities to deal with the TL (Tu & Talley 2016: 204), we must take into account that sometimes explicit norms are needed to better understand how the TL works and verbalize it (Ellis 2009: 3). In much the same way the participants in our corpus should, explicitly, be made aware of the plural rule that the term studied follows in their native languages. So, although Krashen's approaches (Krashen 1986) favouring the implicit teaching of a language are efficient, we should combine both explicit and implicit teaching when facing adult learners who are learning the TL and need to rely on well-constructed rules to apply them consciously. Consequently, we should use negative feedback in with this type of students when an error is committed so we are sure they understand where the failure is.

8. Conclusions

One of the questions that arise after examining the available data is whether we are confronted by an error or a mistake. In our case, after analysing instances where the term is used correctly some times and incorrectly others, we reach the conclusion that they either know the correct use but they forget it due to interlingual interference or they do not know how to use it correctly and they keep committing the error in their interventions. Faced with this recurring error, the solution is probably to be more explicit from the beginning of the term. This is likely to be effective because learners seem unaware of the correct use of the term

for the aforementioned reasons. With this explanation, learners will understand that they must pay attention to the correct use of the TL as well as of their own L1. After having done this, it would be necessary to analyse one more time the learners' subsequent contributions to the forums, so that we can ascertain whether this tactic works as intended. We must remember that the classroom is not an authentic environment where the language is used as it is in the external world, and that we are talking about people who use the TL as a FL, not as a L2 or L1. Therefore, there are contents that must be explicitly addressed, so that problematic cases can be corrected before they become fossilized. This explicit correction can be applied to other problematic areas which are not related to the lack of proficiency, such as, for example, the aforementioned lack of capitalization.

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