

DON'T RUB YOUR MISTAKES OUT.

LEARN FROM THEM.

~Analysis of the compositions from students at 4th ESO.~



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1. Introduction.

Research Projects are usually based on what people want to do in the future, and I have chosen this topic because it may be very useful for the University degree I want to study. I like languages a lot, especially the foreign ones, and I would love to study Translation and Interpretation in English. My Research Project is about the linguistic analysis of the writings made by the English students from 4th ESO at Pere Borrell high school.

It is true that we are used to speak, read and listen to anything in our own language, but what we use less is the writing skill. We do not write a lot, and this is probably the cause why people find this part the most difficult and why they make more mistakes. With this Research Project, I wanted to discover which the most common mistakes made by the students of 4th ESO at my high school are. I wanted to see where the problem comes from.

On the one hand, my Research Project has a theoretical part, which talks about the methodology of error correction, how do the teachers help and teach their students to do less mistakes, or which are the most common errors made in English –specially based on that kind of mistakes made by Spanish and Catalan people–; as well as which different types of writings there are, the different topics students may be asked to write, why it is important to test students, and so on. On the other hand, there is a practical part which analyzes those students' writings and which has leaded me to get to my own conclusion. Working on this practical part, I have got to the conclusion of what my purpose was: **which mistakes are the most common**. I have analyzed and classified all the compositions from those students on different genres (email, application letter and conditional compositions) and, in each of those genres, I have classified the compositions by their marks (from 0 to 2.5, from 2.6 to 4.9, from 5 to 7.9 and from 8 to 10). After having analyzed all of them (writing their mistakes and correcting them), I have done some statistics to see which are the most common mistakes in each genre and depending on their mark. Once I have checked it, I have been able to get to the final conclusion.



I strongly believe that this Research Project has helped me a lot as far as writing mistakes are concerned. I think that this is very important for anyone who wants to write properly in any language not to make many mistakes and, above all, I am sure that this is a very important fact in the career I want to study. Moreover, searching for the information in English and developing my project in this language, has also been very profitable for me. Furthermore, I have been able to look at a lot of mistakes done by students at (more or less) my age. I believe this has helped me a lot to write more carefully and be more conscious about all the mistakes that exist and how we can classify them.



2. Theoretical part.

2.1. Describing Learners.

EFSL, ESL, ESOL.

During a lot of years, there has been some distinction between 2 different ways of learning English. In each way, students learn and use some skills and vocabulary that will help them to have a better knowledge of the kind of English they want to know and use. Those ways are:

- **EFL (English as a Foreign Language).** This is the one that people learn so that they can use it when they go travelling or just to communicate with other English speakers.
- **ESL (English as a Second Language).** People use it mostly to live in any community that uses English as the first or second language.

However, if we look at how people use English in a global context, even if it is for travelling or just communicating with someone, we describe this type of learning English as **ESOL** (English for Speakers of Other Languages).

Learner differences (age: adolescence).

We call “adolescents” those students aged from 12 to 17, approximately. Adolescents should have developed a better knowledge of English than children by the time they have grown up. They can talk about some different ideas and topics that children would find difficult. At the age of adolescence, their learning skills make it easier for them to learn than at the age of childhood, and they are more creative when they write or speak. If they are motivated and interested in things that passionate them, they can cooperate successfully with the class. That is one of the reasons why Penny Ur¹ classifies adolescents as the best language students.

1. Penny Ur was born in 1944 in England. She studied a Master of Arts at Oxford University, she achieved a Postgraduate Certificate in Education at Cambridge University and she did a Master of Arts in Teaching English as a Foreign Language at Reading University. She taught English for 30 years on both primary and secondary schools in Israel (where she moved in 1967). Ur is interested in language-teaching methodologies and the changes of how teachers teach. She writes for the Learning English section of The Guardian Weekly. She has been awarded for her work as an English teacher with the “Officer of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire”.



However, teenagers are not usually as motivated, responsible with their learning and well behaved as adults, and so, they can cause some discipline problems in the class and among the other students or they may not cooperate in class. This is why they may become “poor language learners”.

Good learner characteristics.

Both, Joan Rubin² and Irene Thompson³ made a list of fourteen characteristic of good learning students.

For them, good learners are those students who have a “self-way” to learn, they are those who are creative and make clever guesses, they mean the ones that make their own opportunities for practise, the ones that learn from errors... Some countries like Australia, Britain and America, try to promote autonomy as a main characteristic for students to learn. Those students are encouraged to read texts without searching the words that they do not understand in a dictionary, so that they can guess them from the context, and learn more and be more concentrated on what they are doing. Those students also need to talk without stopping or hesitating even if they do not know or they found it hard to pronounce a word, so they can communicate easily with other people. Students are also asked to write some creative compositions and see how their level improves while they are learning, which motivates them even more.

2. Joan Rubin achieved a PhD (“Doctor of Philosophy”, usually referring to a Doctorate) at Yale University. She also has a M.A. (Master) in Linguistics and a B.A. (an education in various aspects of language) in Linguistics and ESL at the University of Michigan. Rubin has experience in training teachers to promote learner self-management (learner control of their own learning); she has a complete knowledge of adult learning theory and she is pioneer in identifying and researching the characteristics of successful second language learners (among others). Joan Rubin also has conversational skills in Portuguese, French and Spanish, as well as some fluency in Indonesian, Japanese, Russian and Guarani.

3. Irene Thompson achieved a PhD in Experimental Psychology at The George Washington University. She has a M.S. (“Master of Science”, also known as a Master Degree) in Linguistics at Georgetown University and a B.S. (an education in various aspects of science) in Linguistics at Georgetown University. Thompson had been a Chair Department of Slavic Languages and a Professor, Associate Professor and Associate Professor of Russian at The George Washington University; and a Linguistic Supervisor of the Russian Program at the Foreign Service Institute. She has taught all levels of Russian Language (including distance learning), Russian and Slavic Linguistics, Applied Linguistics, the Language Teaching Methodology and Second Language Acquisition.

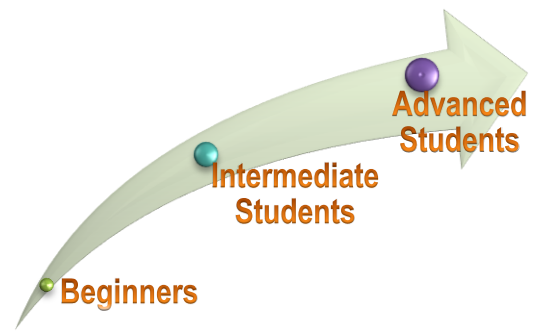
Joan Rubin and Irene Thompson wrote a book called “*How to be a More Successful Learner*”, published in 1994 by Heinle & Heinle.



Language levels.

Beginners, Intermediate and Advanced students.

Students are usually divided into three different categories, depending on their English level. They can be **beginners**, **intermediate students** or **advanced students**.



When we talk about beginners, we are talking about those students who barely know English. Advanced students are the ones that have a very good English level and can easily understand complicated texts, as well as write or talk about some complicated situations, too. When we refer to intermediate students, we are talking about those students who have the knowledge between beginners and advanced students, that is, students that can communicate well in everyday situations, but not in specific ones.

Certificates

If a student wants to have a certificate which indicates his level (in the language he is studying –in this case it would be English-), he can take some public examinations, internationally recognized, such as:

–TOEFL: it is the Test of English as a Foreign Language which evaluates the ability of a person to understand and use American English at a college or university level. TOEFL exams are provided by the College Board in the US. Those tests can be taken by computer in any Test Centre and people can do them all over the world.

–TOEIC: it is the Test of English International Communication. Once you take it, you can measure your English Level as a non-English native-speaking so you can use it for your job activities. TOEIC exams are in charge of the US –based Educational Testing Service–. Those exams consist in a two-hour exam with 200 multiple-choice questions. There are 100 multiple-choice listening comprehension questions and 100 multiple-choice reading comprehension questions.



–The Common European Framework: (CEF) it provides a common basis all across Europe for the curriculum guidelines, examinations, textbooks, etc. in any European language. The CEF describes in an easily understandable way, what the learners of any European language (in this case, English) have to learn or be capable of doing in order to use the language they are learning for daily communications and the skills they need to achieve and develop to make this communication easier. In the CEF there are different level exams that measure the knowledge that the student has of the language he is studying. Students can take those exams in order to see their progress and to have a certificate. Those different levels are evaluated between Basic Users (A), Independent Users (B) and Proficient Users (C). We can divide Basic Users between A1 Students (Breakthrough) and A2 Students (Waystage). Independent Users can be divided between B1 (Threshold) and B2 (Vantage). The last ones are the Proficient Users that can be divided between C1 (Effective Operational Proficiency) and C2 (Mastery).

–Basic Users: A1 Students (Breakthrough) are those students that can understand and use familiar expressions and can make very basic phrases to describe a little bit its needs. They can also describe themselves and other people and are able to answer simple questions of personal information. They can interact in a very simple way if the person they are talking to talks to them clearly and is ready to help them. A2 Students (Waystage) are those students that can understand a little more complicated sentences and they use expressions related to themselves, employment, local geography, etc. They can communicate in a simple way talking about routine tasks and exchanging some information with the person they are talking to, although its information must be simple and clear. The conversations they are able to have are the ones about family and routine habits. They can write simple descriptions of themselves, the environmental matters and information about immediate needs.

–Independent Users: B1 Students (Threshold) are those students that can understand the main points about routine conversations, which can be held at home, school, work, and so on. They can travel to places where the language is spoken and they can deal with most situations there. They can produce simple texts on different topics they are interested in or are familiar to them. They can also describe experiences and events, hopes, dreams, etc. and



they can also give reasons and explanations about their opinions and arguments. B2 Students (Vantage) are those students who can understand the main ideas of complex texts on concrete and abstract topics. They can interact fluently and spontaneously with other people as if it was a regular conversation with native speakers. They can write clear and detailed compositions on different subjects and they can also explain a viewpoint on topical issues giving on it the advantages and disadvantages of various opinions.

-Proficient Users: C1 Students (Effective Operational Proficiency) are those students who can easily understand long and more complicated texts and recognize its implicit meaning. They can express themselves fluently and spontaneously (much more than the B1 students) without looking for expressions at the moment they are talking. They can use a wide range of grammar and language expressions for social, academic or professional purposes. They can write compositions which are well-structured, clear and detailed on difficult subjects. Those students show a big control of the use of the language as for example how to use connectors or cohesive devices. C2 Students (Mastery) are those students who can understand everything they hear or read. They can also summarise information from different written or spoken sources, reconstruct its arguments and make a coherent presentation. Those students can express themselves spontaneously very precisely and fluently either if they are in a simple or complex situation.

The Common European Framework offers some other English exams that students can take such as the Cambridge ESOL Exams or the Trinity College of London ESOL Exams.

-Cambridge ESOL exams: First of all, as we said at the beginning of the project, ESOL stands for “English for Speakers of Other Languages”. Those exams are guided by the different levels (already mentioned), from A1 to C2:

- The A1 level corresponds to the Starters, Movers and Flyers exams in English.
- The A2 level corresponds to the KET exam (Key English Test).
- The B1 level corresponds to the PET exam (Preliminary English Test).
- The B2 level corresponds to the FCE exam (First Certificate in English).



- The C1 level corresponds to the CAE exam (Certificate in Advanced English).
- The C2 level corresponds to the CPE (Certificate of Proficiency in English).

All the Cambridge exams consist on the testing of the four different skills (Reading, Writing, Listening and Speaking).

-Trinity exams: There are different types of Trinity Exams. The GESE (Graded Exams in Spoken English), the ISE exams (Integrated Skills in English) and the SEW exams (Spoken English for Work).

-GESE: for those students who have been learning English as a foreign, second or additional language. Those exams evaluate the level of speaking and listening that the students have. The students must be, at least, 5 years old. There are 12 GESE grades: Initial Grade (from 1 to 3), Elementary Grade (from 4 to 6), Intermediate Grade (from 7 to 9) and Advanced Grade (from 10 to 12). Each level has different characteristics:

Grades 1 – 3	Grades 4 – 6	Grades 7 – 9	Grades 10 – 12
Initial	Elementary	Intermediate	Advanced
5 – 7 minutes	10 minutes	15 minutes	25 minutes
			Topic presentation
			Topic discussion
		Topic presentation & Discussion	Interactive task
	Topic discussion	Interactive task	Listening task
Conversation	Conversation	Conversation	Conversation

-ISE: those exams include the testing of the four skills of Reading, Writing, Listening and Speaking. The ISE exams have 3 components: a Portfolio Task (there is a different Portfolio each year, and students have to prepare it before the speaking task and hand it in to the examiner before starting the speaking test. This portfolio may contain the reading part and a writing part which is not the exam); a Controlled Written Exam (which means

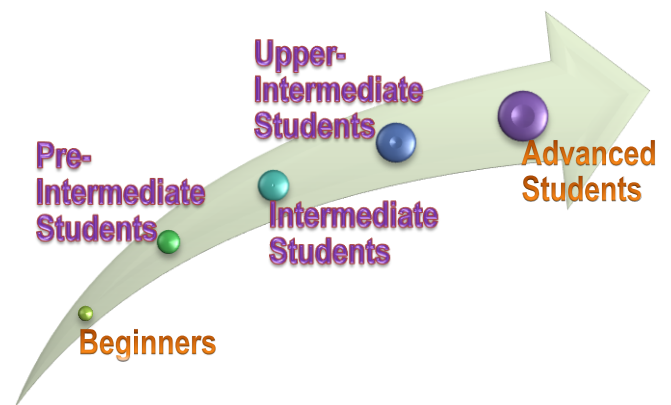


that students have a guided exam so it will be easier to them) and a Spoken Interview, which takes place six weeks after having done the Controlled Written Exam (in this spoken interview, the student may be asked by the examiner to answer some questions about something that the examiner reads to him; this will be the listening part of the exam).

-SEW: is the only assessment of spoken English for these people who need it for work. Those exams give the students a lot of speaking and listening tasks that are required day-to-day at work. SEW exams go from level B1 to C2 in the Common European Framework.

Intermediate Students.

I am going to focus more on Intermediate Students as far as my Research Project is based on the students that finished 4th ESO in June 2013 and now they are in 1st Batxillerat. The intermediate students' goal is to have a basic but fluid competence in



speaking and writing, and to be able to understand quite straightforward readings and listenings. Those students must know authentic English expressions and have to understand a fluid English conversation in a basic level. One way to classify them is into three groups: **pre-intermediate students**, **intermediate students** and **upper-intermediate students**.

However, if we want to classify them as the Common European Framework does, we would do two groups: B1 students and B2 students. Depending on the category they are, they will be asked to have a determined level of English in each of the four skills.

-B1 Students:

Listening: they are able to understand the main points of a conversation or clear standard speech on topics that are familiar to them. They can also understand what is being



said on the radio or on the TV about topics of professional or personal interest when it is being said clearly and slowly.

Reading: they are able to understand texts that use everyday expressions or simple language. They can also understand descriptions of events, wishes, feelings or personal letters, too.

Spoken Interaction: those students can easily travel to any place where this language is spoken and have a simple conversation with native people from there. They can talk about topics that are closer to them or that they are interested in without having prepared them before.

Spoken Production: they can describe experiences and events connecting phrases in simple ways to make the description more understandable. They can give opinions and explain anything and then give the reason of why they have said what they have said. Those students can also make a summary of a book or film and also tell a story.

Writing: those students are asked to write simple texts on topics that are closer to them or talking about something that interests them. They also have to be able to describe experiences, impressions or to write personal letters.

-B2 Students:

Listening: those students are able to understand extended speech and lectures, and follow complex lines of arguments on a topic that can be quite familiar to them. They can also understand most of the TV news and different programmes. Those students also understand most of the films in the original language.

Reading: those students are able to read authentic articles and reports talking about modern issues in which the author adopts some particular attitudes or give some points of view. They can also understand modern literary prose.



Spoken Interaction: those students can interact with other people in a fluent way and spontaneously (it makes more possible the fact of talking to a native person). They can discuss familiar topics and give their arguments and reasons and their points of view, too.

Spoken Production: they can give detailed and clear descriptions on different subjects they are interested in. Those students can also give various points of views in different issues and tell the advantages or disadvantages of the different options.

Writing: those students can write on different subjects related to their interests in a clear and detailed way. Those students can easily write essays and reports giving opinions and different arguments about a particular point of view. They are also able to write letters foregrounding the significance of events and personal experiences.

In general, beginner students find it easy to see how they are progressing and doing a good job, but this is not so simple for intermediate students. They barely see how they are working and improving their English as they already have a good level which allows them to communicate in a good way with other people and to read some complicated texts. Those students want to have a better English knowledge, but it is hard for them to see how they are improving. This situation is known as the Plateau Effect. When students are found in that situation, their teacher has to try hard to make them understand and see how their knowledge of English is improving gradually. Motivation is a key point at this stage. The role that the teacher plays here is essential for the students, so they do not get discouraged. This is also applied in nature, when the human body experiments that it has already done something and has shown its ability in doing so and later, it tries to do it again and it is incapable of doing it. A person enters in a period of where he does not improve on his skills or he decreases in its performance. Hermann Ebbinghaus⁴ gave this name to the hypothesis of the exponential nature of forgetting (in case of talking about the Plateau Effect in learning).

4. Hermann Ebbinghaus was a German psychologist (born in 1850 and dead in 1909). He was the pioneer of the study of the memory. He is known for his discovery of the forgetting curve and the learning curve. He achieved a Doctor of Philosophy in Psychology at the University of Bonn (Germany).



The Plateau Effect was popularized in 2013 when Bob Sullivan⁵ and Hugh Thompson⁶ published a book called “*The Plateau Effect: Getting from Stuck to Success*”. The book talks about the common causes of plateaus and the authors give their opinion of how to overcome with these plateaus. As far as both authors are concerned, the main causes of plateaus may come from immunity, bad timing, distractions and perfectionism (among others).

2.2. Describing Language

We have to follow some rules to make correct sentences and communicate in a good way. For writing, we have to concentrate ourselves in **grammar** and **vocabulary**, in the **linking words** we use to connect the sentences, so that the text can be **followed fluently**, in the **organization of paragraphs**, in the **coherence** that it needs to have, and so on.

Grammar and vocabulary.

As grammar is concerned, first of all, we need to know that we have different types of sentences: Simple sentences are the ones that have a Subject and a Predicate. A simple sentence describes one idea, thing or question, and it has only **one** verb.

There also exist Compound Sentences (which are complex sentences) that are made by two or more simple clauses. Those sentences explain more than one idea and have **more than one** verb in them (each simple clause has its own verb). Those simple clauses are united using a **conjunction** (e.g. and, or, but...).

E.g. “My mum read this book but she didn't like it.”

[“My mum read this book”]_{clause 1} *but*_(co-ordinating conjunction) [she didn't like it.”]_{clause 2}.

5. Bob Sullivan was born in 1968 in New Jersey. He was awarded winning the “American online journalist”. He got a B.A. in History at Fairfield University (1990) and a M.A. in Journalism at the Missouri School of Journalism (1996). He is the author of two New York Time Best Sellers (“*Stop Getting Ripped Off*” and “*Gotcha Capitalism*”).

6. Hugh Thompson achieved a Doctor of Philosophy in Applied Mathematics at Florida Institute of Technology and has a CISSP (Certified Information Systems Security Professional). He has worked as trainer of security tester and software developing for famous companies as Microsoft or VISA (among others).



We also have the Subordinate Sentences (that are complex sentences, too) which also express more than one thing or idea and have **more than one** verb. Complex sentences are made by more than one simple clause. One of these clauses is the main clause (which has a meaning by itself) and the other one is the dependent clause (which does not mean anything by itself).

E.g. “We needed to put our raincoat on because it was raining so heavily.”

[“We needed to put our raincoat on”]independent and main clause *because*(subordinating conjunction) [it was raining so heavily”]dependent clause (this sentence has no sense by itself).

In order to make a good sentence, we need to put some elements in a correct order so the sentence will make sense. In case of making a simple sentence (e.g. “The weather in the mountains is very cold; it is snowing heavily.”), we need a **noun** that works as a **subject** (it is the person or thing that does the main action. The subject is usually the first word of the sentence and is usually a noun -in this case: “The weather”), a **verb** (it is the most important part of the sentence. Verbs can describe the action that the subject does or the state of the subject –in this case, it tells us the state of the subject: “is”), the **object** (there are two different objects: **direct objects** -that refer to people or things which are affected by the verb: e.g. “She turned on the radio”, the direct object is ‘radio’– and **indirect objects** -that refer to the person or thing that “benefits” from the action: e.g. “Claire called me to go shopping”, the indirect object is ‘me’).

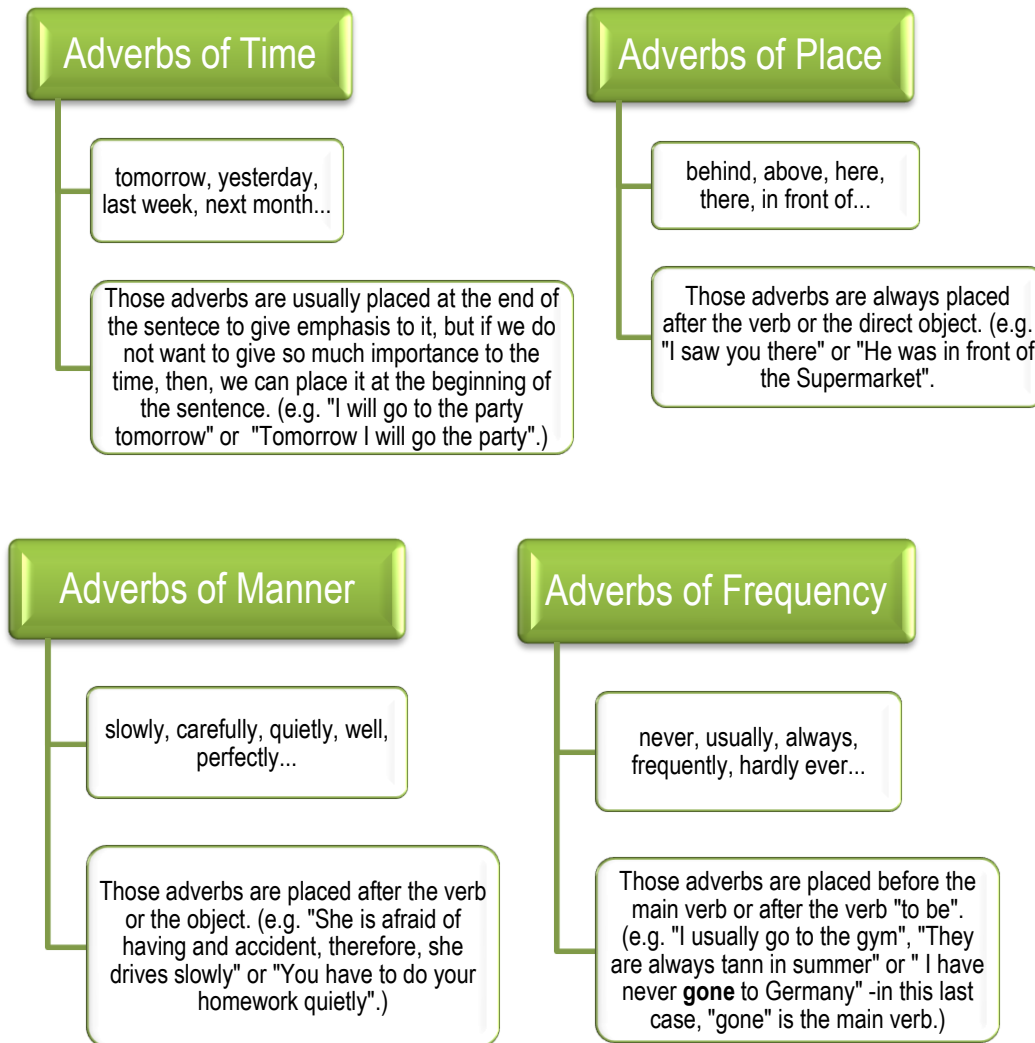
E.g. “I gave Mary a present yesterday.”



And, coming to an end, we can also have an **adverb** (it tells you how the action of the verb has been done, and gives you more information about the subject or the object, as well. Adverbs work as **complements**. There are different adverbs: adverbs of time, of manner, of place... –in this case: “heavily” and “very cold”. To create an adverb, in general, we just need



to add “-ly” at the end of the adjective –quiet → quietly–, but some of them are irregular and we need to know its specific form –good → well–). As we have already seen, we can classify adverbs depending on what kind of information do they give us:



We can talk about the **object**, too. There are two different objects: **direct objects** (that refer to people or things which are affected by the verb –“She turned on the radio”, the direct object is ‘radio’) and **indirect objects** (that refer to the person or thing that “benefits” from the action –“Claire called me to go shopping”, the indirect object is ‘me’).



When we talk about vocabulary we mean the words that we choose to express something in a specific way. The meaning of a word is defined by the relationship that this word has with other words. There are different types of words:

-Nouns are the words by themselves that can be used as a subject for a sentence, as an object or as a verb complement (e.g. “apple” → “The apple was red” –used as the subject–; “I did not like the apple” –used as the object– or “They are cats” –used as the verb complement). We use them to express different additional meanings to words, such as concepts, qualities, sensations and so on. There are different types of nouns, we can classify them in “countable nouns” and “uncountable nouns”; countable nouns have a singular and a plural form, while uncountable nouns only have one form (the singular one). Some names have regular forms for their plural (e.g. “table” → “tables”) and some of them have irregular forms (e.g. “woman” → “women”).

-Adjectives modify nouns or pronouns by describing them, they provide us information about the qualities of something described (e.g. “She is tall”, “Maria has a blue fish”). Adjectives are related to nouns or verbs (e.g. “beautiful” → “beauty” –noun– or “talkative” → “talk” –verb–).

-Adverbs can modify a verb, an adjective, another adverb, or even a clause or a sentence. (e.g. “She finished the work quickly”, “They never took skiing lessons”). We can classify adverbs in different categories such as manner (quickly), frequency (hardly ever), time (now), place (there), relative time (already), degree (extremely), quantity (a lot), focusing (particularly) and attitude markers (fortunately).

-Articles belong to the larger class of determiner, and tell us something about the quantity of the word we have after each article. We can classify articles in two groups: definite articles (such as “the”) or indefinite articles (such as “a, an”).

-Quantifiers belong to the larger class of determiner and tell us something about the quantity, too (e.g. “I’ve got some apples in the kitchen”).



-The verb is that word that gives us the main information of the sentence: the action (e.g. "Laura went to Marbella"). Apart from the action, verbs can also give us information such as existence of something (e.g. "When he finished studying, he became a doctor"), mental conditions and processes (e.g. "John believes in God", "I enjoyed a lot my stay in the USA") or relationships (e.g. "We will go out depending on the weather). We can classify verbs into two groups: the main verbs (don't need to be accompanied by any other verb) or the auxiliary verbs (such as "be" and "have"; e.g. "She has gone to the supermarket" or "I have been in London twice"). Verbs have different tenses such as present simple (e.g. "He listens to music"), past simple (e.g. "I went shopping yesterday"), future simple (e.g. "She will sing in the AMA"), the present continuous (e.g. "I am having dinner"), the present perfect (e.g. "I have gone to the dentist three hours ago"); and so on. There also exist the multiword verbs that are formed by more than one word (mainly, one verb and one preposition) and that have an exact meaning (e.g. "took off" –'enlairar'– or "get up" –'llevar-se'–). The modal verbs are those verbs that are used to make an assessment, judgement or interpretation of what we are talking about, and we can also express our attitude to this (e.g. "I can swim"). Modal verbs can have multiple meanings (e.g. "Can we go out?" –permission– or "Mike can run very fast" –ability–).

All these words can be (or have) **antonyms** or **synonyms**. When we talk about antonyms, we are referring to those words whose meaning is the opposite of another word (e.g. complete / incomplete). On the other hand, if we talk about synonyms, we are referring to those words whose meaning is exactly the same as another word (e.g. complicated / complex). If we do not want to make it more repetitive and we want to show a big knowledge of vocabulary, we need to make use of them and replace these words that we want to change for some other ones with the same meaning (in case of synonyms) or with a completely opposite meaning (in case of antonyms).

-Prepositions are used as linkers for nouns or pronouns to any other word in a sentence; they usually define the place, position or movement of a person or thing (e.g. "My notebook is on the table", "The cat is under my bed"). Prepositions are, probably, the most common words in English and many of them are very short words (e.g. for, in, at...); but some



longer words can also work as prepositions as well (e.g. despite of, except from, according to...). Some participles can be also used as prepositions (e.g. concerning, granted, regarding...).

-Conjunctions link words and clauses to other words or clauses (e.g. “Marta has a cat and a dog”, “Decide yourself: you can start playing tennis or you can join a karate club”).

When we talk about words, we need to mention word families. Those word families are groups of words that have a common meaning or that are closely enough to belong to a ‘family’ (e.g. “beauty –noun–, beautiful –adjective–, beautifully –adverb–”).

There also exist false friends. Those false friends are words that may seem to be similar to our mother tongue, as they are written or pronounced in a similar way, but they do not mean the same. It is easy to confuse them, so students need to pay attention and to memorise them (e.g. “adequate” is not ‘adequat’ in Catalan, but ‘suficient’, “actually” is not ‘actualment’ in Catalan, but ‘de fet’, “success” is not ‘succès’ in Catalan, but ‘tenir èxit’...).

Another important point is how students need to learn vocabulary. It is said that some of the best ways of learning vocabulary are the following ones:

-Reading: When students read and they do not know a word, they usually need to look for it at the dictionary and check its meaning. Once they have done so, they will know what this word means and how it is used in context. They will need to memorise it to be able to use it later or they will memorise it unconsciously because they come across it several times in the book. Sometimes, they will not need to look for it in the dictionary because they will guess its meaning from the context.

-Vocabulary lists: where they can check the meaning of different words and then memorise them, translating them from their mother tongue to the language they are learning or vice versa. After that, they could take a vocabulary exam or make themselves a cheat exam to check if they have memorised the words. Once they have memorised them, the students will be able to use them in sentences, translations, etc.



-Sticking "Post-its": students can stick post-its on the different things they have at home, on the different rooms or machines. They will see those post-its a lot of times during the day or week and they will end up memorising them, almost unconsciously.

-Changing cards: students have two envelopes: one has a lot of cards inside and the other one is empty. In each of those cards, there is written the name of something in English and at the reverse of the card, the name of this thing in their mother tongue, or a definition. When they have already memorised the translation or definition of one card, they move this card from one envelope to the other. They repeat this action each time that they know a word and they will find themselves with the envelope that was full, empty; and the one that was empty, full of cards whose meaning they already know.

-Playing with words. This means that they can spend some time playing at different games like "Scrabble" or "Boggle" and create words. It will be easy for them to write the ones that they already know, but if someone creates a different word whose meaning they do not know, they will also need to check for its meaning.

Forms and meanings.

A verb form can express different meanings and a meaning can be expressed by different forms.

One form, many meanings.

As examples of how can one form express many meanings, we have:

The **present continuous** verb form can express both present and future tenses.

E.g. -Present: "I am doing the laundry".

-Future: "I am going to see Marta this evening".

There's also the **present simple**, which can describe a habit or routine.

E.g. -Habit: "I get up at 7:30am every day".



It can also be used as a future tense for timetables.

E.g. “Emma comes at 6pm”.

Words can express different things, too (e.g. “book”: you can read it, a list of bets, to “reserve” something...). When words have more than one meaning, it is the context of the word which tells us which meaning has the word in the situation.

One meaning, many forms.

A concept can be expressed in different ways. The speaker or writer decides how to express his or her idea. That is why we can say or read the same thing but expressed in different ways.

E.g. “I can type really fast on the computer.”, “I am able to type really fast on the computer”.

Anaphoric and Cataphoric reference.

When we are structuring a written discourse, we sometimes repeat some words. To avoid this situation, we can replace those words by pronouns.

E.g. “Claire is my best friend. Claire lives in the USA. When I went to California, Claire’s family came to visit me.”

→ “Claire is my best friend. She lives in the USA. When I went to California, her family came to visit me”).

When we use this method to make reference to something that we have already mentioned before, this is called **anaphoric reference**. In case of using it to refer to something that is going to be explained later, we call it **cataphoric reference**.

E.g. “When she was running, Jenny fell”.



We can also use linking words. These words are usually conjunctions and we use them to connect our ideas or sentences, so the text is more fluent and people can understand it better.

E.g. “When I went to the USA I did a stopover in Miami and then I flew to LAX”).

Not only sentence analysis but also text analysis are very important so we can easily understand what is being said in the text. The sequence of the words and the text organisation has to be logical. It is very important that students are aware of that, because it will help them to do better compositions.

Genre.

We call genre to any type of literature or other art forms of entertainment (such as music or theatre). Genres conventions are on constant change, as new genres are invented and the oldest ones are less used. Sometimes we can find a genre that is mixed with another one.

There are different types of writing that we can describe as different writing genres (e.g. letters, essays, reports, etc). That variety of genres gives the student the opportunity to learn and use the different ways of communicating something in a language and how he needs to do it depending on his purpose, context or situation. If teachers help students to make the difference between the different types of genres, they will easily understand what they are reading or, in case of writing, it will be easier for them to know how they need to work on their composition.

Language variables.

English speakers use grammar, vocabulary, spelling and pronunciation in different ways depending on some variables. We found these variables in both spoken and written English. It can be influenced by the way we talk or we write. That is why we put some



words together in a concrete order to create a specific sentence to express what we want to say. If we are speaking, we can use different tones of voice (e.g. we can shout “I am glad to see you!”, for example), but if we are writing, we may need to use some tricks to express whatever we want or need to (e.g. exclamation marks (!), dashes (–), new paragraphs, comas (,), full stops (.), capital letters, etc.). Writers use them to give some rhythm, effect or more emphasis to the sentence. Professional writers usually use totally correct grammar and some specific vocabulary depending on what they want to write or who they are writing to. Showed by some research, they usually use a lot of “content words” (words with a meaning, such as “car”, “laptop”, “pencil”...) more than “function words” (which replace the ones we have just mentioned, such as “which”, “that”...). On the other hand, speakers are more used to use function words than content words.

2.3. Writing

2.3.1. Points to have in mind when teaching Writing

Structuring discourse.

If we want to communicate successfully with anyone, the first thing we need to do is to structure our writing, so people can understand it. We have to pay attention to the fact that our text is cohesive and coherent. On the one hand, when a text is coherent, it means that it makes sense because you can clearly understand what is being said. On the other hand, when a text is cohesive, it means that we need to concentrate on how we have to connect the different ideas during all the text (cohesion is something more technical) so people can understand it and the text will make sense. Those linguistic ways of connection can be called “**chains of reference**”. As chains of reference, we use what is called “**language features**” like lexical repetitions, synonyms and pronouns to make reference to things or ideas that have already been explained. We also use different “**linkers**”.

E.g. To add more information: In addition: moreover, also, too...

To show: Cause and effect: so, therefore, consequently...



To show: Contrast: still, although, however, nevertheless...

To show: Time: afterwards, then, while...

Apart from the different linkers that students can use, it is very important that they divide their writing into three or more paragraphs, so it will be better structured and people who read it will understand it easier. The structure followed should be the “basic” one: **introduction + body + ending**.

Different styles, different genres.

People can write about different things in different ways because they know different writing styles and genres, too. English writing, as every language in the world, is determined by different factors we need to follow if we want our writing to be correctly done and make sense.

Firstly, we need to know which our purpose is. After that, we need to choose the correct genre we are going to use to achieve our purpose.

E.g. Instruction: to tell the reader how to do something.

Narrative: to tell a story (true or not) to the reader.

Report: an information text talking about a topic (news, history, art...).

Explanation: to tell the reader the process why something works.

Argument: to persuade the reader to have the same idea as us.

Apart from that, there is an intimacy level which we should consider. People should make the difference depending on the “distance”, on the relationship with the person we are writing to. When writing in a distant way, we will use full forms and well-structured sentences and, when writing in a closer way, we will write more spontaneously, with contractions, sometimes with no-grammatically correct sentences, and so on.



People write closely notes when they write for themselves or for their friends, postcards, etc, while formal articles, some novels, reports and essays are more distant. Some magazine articles, fiction novels and advertisements are written in a neutral way. As far as e-mails are concerned, if we are writing to our family, friends or maybe workmates, our mails will be close; but if we are writing an e-mail to our boss, the doctor, and so on, they will be more distant; however, a lot of people are used to write in a neutral way to a wide range of addresses. Sometimes, book writers also use a different language depending on the reaction they want to cause to the reader.

So, students need to know how to write in different genres and styles. The grammar and vocabulary they learn will also be very useful to them when they want to write distantly or closely.

Dealing with difficulty: problems and solutions

When a person (it does not matter which language he is using) do not know a word, he has different options to use so he can solve the problem. They can use either “**foreignising**” or “**paraphrasing**”. This is mostly used in speaking, because writers usually have the help of a dictionary, but it sometimes happens in writing as well. The “problem” is that students are not allowed to have a dictionary during the exams.

Foreignising

Writers (and speakers, too), tend to use a word they know very well (in another language) and they “foreignise” it. They hope that changing it, the word will have the same meaning as what they want to express (e.g. “similar” -which is the same in Spanish and, in this case, it would be correct- or “preparing” to say “preparing” - which is not the same in Spanish and so, in this case, it would be incorrect-).

Paraphrasing

People do it to talk about an idea but not saying it directly, so they say it in another way, but they keep the meaning of the idea, so the person they are talking to can understand it. (e.g. “It is really cold in here.” - “It is not hot at all in here.”).



Students may find writings a really difficult task, but that is the reason why teachers need to know some different ways to help them in their learning process. There is a very important thing which is that teachers must remember that students are not used to write spontaneously neither in their own language nor in any foreign language (the last one is the one they are probably less used to). Teachers should also help students to build up their own confidence while writing, so students trust in themselves and so it is easier for them to try to do it better. And, at last but not least, teachers also need to help students with the problems they can have with the language they need to use depending on the topic they are writing about. Teachers, therefore, play a very hard and important role in the learning process of students.

The use of dictionaries.

A lot of students use bilingual dictionaries to translate a word directly from their own language into English, hoping it will be grammatically correct in the sentence they want to say. Although there is nothing wrong with those bilingual dictionaries, they just give the translation and, usually, the word they use is not correct in the context they are going to use it. Another problem is that students usually use the first word they have found in the dictionary. Instead of doing so, they should look at all the translations the dictionary gives, and if they are not sure of which one is the correct, they should check the meaning in their language.

Bilingual Dictionaries

Those dictionaries give us the exact translation of a word or sentence from one language to anotherone. They can be unidirectional or bidirectional. (Unidirectional Bilingual Dictionaries: "apple" → "poma" // Bidirectional Bilingual Dictionaries: "book" → "llibre" / "llibre" → "book").



Reference Dictionaries

They give students the meaning of the words and tell them how to use it, pronounce it and spell it (among other information). Students use them when they already know what a word means and they want to make sure that they know how to use it (e.g. Cambridge Dictionary: "disaster" → "1. An occurrence that causes great distress or destruction. 2. A thing, project, etc., that fails or has been ruined.").

Production Dictionaries

Those dictionaries give us the meaning and after that definition, we have the word we were looking for. In those dictionaries, students use to look for a word that they already know and that can be similar to what they want to say. (Longman Essential Activator: "an extremely bad accident when people are killed" → "disaster", "catastrophe"...).

Picture Dictionaries

Those dictionaries shows us a picture of the word we are looking for. (Culturally Authentic Pictorial Lexicon Longman: "pliers").



Mistakes (slips, errors and attempts).

All students make mistakes. Mistakes can be done because of different reasons:

–The students may have not understood, studied or memorised what has been said in class and they keep on making those mistakes.



–They can also make mistakes because they may want to say something and they do not know how to say it, because they have not been taught how to do it, so they just translate it from their own language into English or just make a guess. The idea they want to express will not probably be correct once they have literally translated it.

–Sometimes they may know the rule or word but they do not use it because they probably have not noticed the mistake or because they probably do not remember it at the moment of speaking or writing.

Slips

- This is the kind of mistake which students can correct themselves once someone has pointed it to them. (e.g. "He ~~have~~ two pens." -the student does not realise the mistake and once the teacher tells "He" to him, the student corrects himself: "He **has** two pens.")

Errors

- Those mistakes cannot be corrected by the students and they need to be explained to them again. (e.g. "Yesterday it ~~has rained~~ for half an hour." -the student has not understood when he needs to use present perfect of past simple and the teacher needs to explain it again so that he can learn from the error: "Yesterday it **rained** for half an hour.")

Attempts

- Those mistakes are made by students when they try to say something but they do not know how to say it properly because it has not been taught to them. (e.g. "Maria is ~~more tall~~ than Paul." -when the teacher has not taught to the student how to do comparative sentences and the student tries to do it by itself, usually translating from his mother tongue. Once they know it, they will correct it: "Maria is **taller** than Paul.")

We use "mistake", as a general word, to refer to these things that students do not do correctly. However, not all the mistakes are the same. In fact (and as we have just seen), we can divide them into three different categories: we can talk about **slips**, we can talk about **errors** and we can also talk about **attempts**.

Students can improve by doing some exercises that can be provided to them by their teacher or that may be at the end of every lesson in their books or files. Correcting mistakes is a good way for students to learn from them. Once they have been taught something new, students need to practise it to check if they have understood it. When they make some mistakes, a good option is to give them the opportunity to correct those mistakes by themselves; however, if they do not know how to correct them, another student can be asked to do so or



even the teacher can correct it. Another way of correcting the students' mistakes is generalising. Teachers can take the most common mistakes made by their students and comment them on the blackboard so students can take notes about what is being said and, later, they can try to correct their own mistakes. Apart from this, sometimes teachers give students some sheets of paper where they have three different columns (each one with a title: "Mistake", "Type of mistake", "Correction") so students can write their mistakes on it, analyze those mistakes and write their correction.

As far as the foreign languages department at INS Pere Borrell is concerned, there is an established way of correcting mistakes. In the English's case, those indications are the following ones:

^ → there is something missing (e.g. "My mother is **^** teacher" – "My mother is **a** teacher").

Gr → grammar mistake (e.g. "She likes **dance**" – "She likes **dancing**").

T → verbal tense (e.g. "She **cooks** now" – "She **is cooking** now").

Sp → spelling (e.g. "I have **recieved** a letter" – "I have **received** a letter").

WO → word other (e.g. "I like **very much travelling**" – "I like **travelling very much**").

Voc → vocabulary (e.g. "My **fathers** are at home" – "My **parents** are at home").

Prep → preposition (e.g. "He left it **in** the table" – "He left it **on** the table").

Correction exercises are essential for students to learn from their mistakes and be conscious of how to correct them and not making them anymore. That is the reason why I wanted to work on this topic for my Research Project, because I think it is really important for students to realise which mistakes are the ones that they make the most and, once they know it, they are able to be more careful next time not to make them. When we make mistakes, we can rub them out and write the correct word again, but that will not help us to learn from them. If we truly want to learn from our mistakes, we have to go through them and try to solve them by our own, analyzing the reason why we made them and trying to rectify them.



Topics to write compositions

Students need to be interested in the topics they are writing, so they can do a better work and their effort will be productive. In case that they are not interested in them, they may not pay attention to what they are writing and their compositions will not be as good as they could be. The same happens with the genres: if they do not know how to work on it, they will find it extremely difficult and they will not probably succeed. In an ideal world, students should be able to choose a topic they like to write about it. Once they have chosen it, it will be easier for them to write about it or, at least, they will be interested in what they are talking about and they will try to do it better, paying more attention than if they were writing about something they do not know about or they do not like. However, in the real world, students need to have some knowledge of all genres so they can write in all of them and succeed in their compositions.

There are different topics for students to write. Each of those topics has its own characteristics and students need to know them in order to write them properly.

Informal Letters

People use to write informal letters to write to someone close to them, like their family or friends. The vocabulary and the language that we use in those letters are friendly and we use contractions; it should look like if we were talking to the person we are writing to. When we write an informal letter, we use to give information about ourselves (or our family or friends), as well as we talk about our life and things that have been happening to us lately. Those informal letters must include:

–The heading, that goes in the upper-right-hand corner of the letter and it must include the date and, if the writer wants to include it for a specific reason, it can also include his address (although it is not usual).

–The greeting, that is the beginning of the letter (such as Dear aunty, Hi John, Hello Mary, and so on).

–The opening paragraph, which contains the main reason we are writing for (which could be an invitation, a reply to a letter we have received, and apologize, etcetera).



–The body of the letter may be formed by one or more than one paragraphs. Those paragraphs can be related to the reason for the one we are writing. In case of having more than one paragraph, we must change the paragraph each time that the subject changes.

–The final sentence (or paragraph) is the one that makes the reader know that this is the end of our letter. This paragraph or sentence includes a reason for ending, a wish for the person we are writing to or a hope of seeing him (or them) soon (e.g. “I hope to hear from you soon”).

–The closing is not longer than a short sentence (or word), written at the end of our letter (e.g. “Take care”).

–The signature of the writer –our name (e.g. “Elsa Schiffer”).

Formal letters.

Those letters are usually written to apply for a job or admission somewhere, to express an opinion (usually somewhere where it is going to be published, like in the press), to complain about something or to ask for information about something. The language we will use to write formal letters is polite and respectful, as we do not usually know the person we are writing to. This is the reason why we must keep talking about the main subject do not ask for personal information, we must not use contractions and we will not use informal language. Formal letters follow this structure:

–The heading is placed in the upper right-hand corner of the letter. This heading must include our address and the date.

–The inside address is placed on the left-hand side. It must include the name (in case of knowing it) and title of the person that we are writing to (in case of knowing it) and his business address.

–The greeting, which is some polite word or expression to begin our letter (Dear Mr. Smith, Dear Sir or Dear Madams –if we do not know the surname– and so on).

–The opening paragraph, which will only include the clear and main reason for our writing, going directly to this point.

–The body of the letter will include one paragraph or more, where we will develop and express our reason for writing. In the body of the letter, we have to give only relevant information related to the reason of our writing, and that can be useful to the reader.



–The final sentence (or paragraph) will help the reader to notice that our letter is ending. For being polite, we will express a polite wish to the person we are writing to on it (e.g. “My best wishes for you”).

–The closing is a short sentence that we write to finish our letter at the end of it (e.g. “Yours faithfully”).

–The signature must be formed by our signature and our full name written underneath (e.g. “John Curtney”).

Describing people.

When we describe people, we need to include some descriptions as the physical appearance of the person we are describing, the attitudes or/and behaviour of the person, his interests, hobbies or/and profession, his personality and character, his biographical details that may be interesting for our description, and, finally, our personal experience with that person (in case of knowing them).

Describing places.

When we describe places, we should include the location of the place we are referring to, the physical characteristics, as well as the atmosphere, the special features and the points of interest it may have, the people who live in it, their way of life and the culture of the place, and, to conclude, the historical details.

Describing things.

When we describe things, our composition should include the physical appearance of the thing we are talking about, its origin (the place where it was made) and the use of it (what people do with this thing). We may add any relevant information related to this object.

→ Every description should be rich in describing words (such as adverbs or adjectives) that create a clear and colourful mental picture of the thing, person, or place, we are describing to the reader. The more descriptive details we give, the more rich our description will be, and it will also be easier for the reader to have a clear idea of what we are talking about.



Narrating.

When we are narrating, the language we will use will depend on our subject and the audience that will read our composition. We always need to use connectors, since they play a very important role in a narrative. Connectors are useful to guide the reader while reading, showing him the chronological order and making it easier to follow the composition.

When we are talking about events in our narrative story, we usually need to report what someone said; to do so, we can use two different speeches:

–Direct speech is the one we will use if we want to report someone's exact words. If we write in direct speech, we have to put the speaker's words between quotation marks (“[...]”); we have to start the quotation with a capital letter; we have to put a comma before the quotation (e.g. Elisa said, “Let's go to the shopping mall!”); and we have two different ways of ending the quotation: we can finish the quotation with a full stop and a question or exclamation mark, if the quotation is placed at the end of the sentence (e.g. John asked me “Would you like to go for a walk?”); or with a comma and a question or exclamation mark, in case that the quotation is placed at the beginning of the sentence (E.g. “I am very tired,” Felix said).

–Indirect speech is the one that we will use if we do not want to say the exact words that someone has used. This speech does not need any special punctuation and the only change we need to do is the verb tense.

Journal writing

Asking students to work on journal writing may help them to develop what they have learnt in class and realise how their learning has improved with the activities that they have done in class. Another similar option is to do some teacher-student journal, that is almost the same as the Student Journal, but there is an interaction with the teacher. It means that students write some of their ideas and the teacher comments on them. This is a good way for both of them to get to know each other better. As those types of writings do not need to be very long, the students can do one of them every day (or week), and this is a very good way of



practicing the writing skill. This is a way of training them on writing and so, it will help them to become more fluent writers. Those writings will make students start liking writing in English, as far as they do not need to write about a specific topic and they can do it freely. They can write about themselves, about what they learn, about a story that they have already listened to (or read), and so on. Students should be asked to bring a small notebook to use as their Journal writing file. This notebook does not need to be very big, so students can carry it every day because it will not be heavy at all. When teachers correct it, they should try to write some agreements with the students' ideas or encourage them by writing and recognizing what they have done well, because if students see a lot of corrections they will get depressed and they will think they are not able to write in English. After the teacher has corrected it, he should give it back to the student so he can spend some time in the class re-correcting the mistakes he has and understanding why this is not correct (asking the teacher if he does not know how to correct it).

However, there is always a problem, which is time. If the teacher needs to correct all the journals of a whole class (what would be about 25 or 30 students), it would take a lot of time for him to correct them. That is the reason why this is not very used in schools, because it takes a lot of time for teachers to correct it, and teacher do not only have one class, but about five or even more. It is sometimes used in private language schools where teachers have smaller and fewer groups.

Creative writing

Creative writing has benefits for students in some ways because it is stimulating, since it needs to be creative, it must be something that students are interested in, and so, they will enjoy working on it. However, creative writing is not as simple as it seems to be, because to create a poem, a story, or any genre we want to use; we need to know the specific vocabulary, form and structure of it, and this is a little more complicated and requires some practice and experience.

On the other hand, as it happens with journal writing, the problem of teacher's time comes out again.



2.3.2. Teaching Writing

The writing process

Before starting any writing compositions, we need to follow some steps. First of all we need to plan what we have thought to write (**planning**); after that and before writing it definitively we should **draft it**. Then, we have to review the draft to check grammar and vocabulary but also to see if all the ideas are well-organised and the paragraphs well-structured (**reviewing**). Once we have already reviewed it, we have to **edit** (or modify) the changes we want to make and then, we can, finally, write the final composition.

However, a lot of students think that doing this is a little bit absurd and that only beginner students should do it, but, in fact, this is very useful and everybody should do it when they write. Furthermore, it sometimes requires to “re-do” all the steps again and again. This means “re-draft” our idea, “re-edit” it, etc. In fact, one of the reasons why compositions are usually not so well done is because of the lack of these previous steps.

Apart from this, a good way of helping students to get used to write before writing whole essays is the option of instant writing. This means to tell them some sentences out loud and they have to write them and they have to complete them (e.g. “I went to London last year because ...”). There is also the option of asking them to write some sentences without telling them anything, or to give them some words and ask them to write a sentence with them. This will make students more comfortable because they will have time to review their sentences before they say what they have written, and it will make them more conscious of the mistakes they do.

Writing conventions

In writing, there are different facts that separate writing from speaking. Apart from the differences between the grammar and the vocabulary we use when we write or the one we use when we talk, we also have to pay attention to our handwriting (to make it



understandable to everyone who can get to read our text or composition), the spelling of the words, the punctuation we use and how we organise the text.

Spelling: In general, an incorrect spelling does not mean that the person who is reading the text will not understand it, but if we have done a lot of spelling mistakes, it will seem to the reader that we barely care of how we write or, even, our lack of education. Students of English find it difficult to write because of the spelling, as the way we pronounce a word (the sound) and the way we write it (the spelling), is not always very clear. Another difference among some specific languages is the capitalisation of months, names, the personal pronoun “I”, the name of the school subjects, etcetera. There is also a difficulty to add at the spelling and this is that there are different varieties of English and not all of them spell the words equally. That is the reason why students should focus on a specific variety of English (American, British...) so they can use its spelling and they will not get confused with others.

Layout and punctuation: Depending on what we are writing (e.g. a letter, a report...) we will use different punctuation marks and layout (the way we organise and write the text). For example a lot of English writers or editors use a lot of comas instead of changing them by full stops; in this case, they overuse the coma, so when foreign people write in English, it would be better if they also do so. There are also some differences on the punctuation depending on the language we are writing in.

Apart from this, if we want to write properly and succeed in what we do, it does not matter the language we are using to write, we need to be careful with the layouts (leave margins, good handwriting, clear separation of paragraphs, and so on) so people who read it can easily understand it.

Process and product

When teaching writing, it is essential to focus on both the writing process and the product we want to achieve. If we only focus on the product, this means that we only care about the way our work will finally look. If we focus on the writing process, we will pay attention to what



we write, being careful with the spelling, the verb forms, the punctuation, and so on. If students focus on both process and product, they will make a good work and they will have learnt much more than if they only care about the final product.

Obviously, the writing process is really complex, as we have to draft our writing, review it (correct the mistakes we have done, check the spelling of the words, look at how we have used the punctuation, the separation of paragraphs...), redraft it, correct the mistakes we have done, check the spelling of the words, look at how we have used the punctuation, review it again, and finally write it. The product process, instead, is not as complicated as the process because students only look for the message they want to transmit once they have finished the text. And what is worse is that many times, they do not even think of what they want to say before starting writing. Another big problem of the writing process is that it takes a lot of time, probably more or less half an hour, or even more. And, why is it a problem? Easy; students think that spending so much time on writing something is a waste of time and they want to do more things, so they do not spend the time that writing process requires and their compositions end up being much poorer than they could be.

Writing and genre

Students study texts in the genre they are going to write about later, so they know how each genre is written and how they have to work on their own later. This is more used for students of English which have Specific Purposes, but it is very useful for all the students of English, it does not matter which level they have, so they can write something they can be proud of, as far as they had previously learnt how to work with the specific genre they have used.

Apart from reading some texts in the same genre they are going to write, the students also need to know more things about their future writing: they need to have some knowledge about the topic they are going to write, they have to know they style of genre and how to deal with it, they must remember that their writing is going to be read and who is going to read it.



However, students need to be motivated to write and they have to see writing as a creative art, and not as a “reproduction” of what they have already read. Imitation is their first step they learn so they can easily write, but once they have improved a bit and they are able to show what they know, they need to be creative and surprise others with their writings and the way they write them.

Writing as a cooperative activity

When students work in group they have more and different options to use in their work, they have different ideas and their works end up being broader than if they had worked by their own, individually.

Cooperative writing works very well on process writing because more than one person is working on it and when they review it, somebody can see a mistake that someone else did not realise, they will give more ideas of how to organise the text and at the end, the text will probably be better than if only one person would have been working on it.

Students are also more motivated if they work together with other students than if they have to do it by their own, as they can research together, discuss about how they are going to organise it, help each other...

However, letting students work in groups can cause problems in class. Some students can probably not feel good with their group mates. A big problem of working in groups is that probably a student who is really good in English, can get a lower mark because other people in the group do not have such a good level; however, if the teacher gives the mark that they deserve to each student, this problem could easily be solved. Another problem on it is that sometimes students spend their time talking among other people in their group and they do not work on what is important, in what has been asked to them to do.



2.3.3. Testing Writing

Reasons for testing

During the term, it is very common to do **progress tests** to students, that let the teachers know if their students have understood what it has been taught to them over the last lessons and if they have (or not) assimilated it. Those tests are similar to the **continuous assessment**, means that their efforts and achievements are not only tested at the end of the year but along the lessons period. Apart from these progress tests students will probably do an **achievement test** (also known as **exit tests**). Those tests are useful to know how have students improved during the year and they can also determine in which level they will be next year. Exist tests can also be used to give the students some type of “school-leaving certificate”.

Some students probably want to take **public examinations** like the ones provided by the University of Cambridge or the Trinity College of London (in the United Kingdom), the different levels from A1 to C2 of the European Common Framework (in all Europe) or the TOEFL of Michigan Exams and TOEIC (in the United States). Those exams, known as **proficiency tests**, let the students know which level they have.

Direct and Indirect test items

When we talk about **direct** test items, we are referring to those kinds of tests that ask the students to perform the communicative skill (speaking, listening, writing or reading) that are being tested in that exam. Those types of exams use more real-life vocabulary. We refer to **indirect** test items when we want to talk about those exams that want to measure the students' knowledge and ability by the different receptive (reading and listening) and productive (writing and speaking) skills. Indirect test items try to find the students knowledge by more controlled items, not as similar as the ones used in direct tests items, not so “quotidian”.

There also exist two more different exams: the **discrete-point** that asks just one thing (e.g. ask the students to match the correct verb tense), or the **integrative** tests that want students to use different language at the same time (e.g. asking them to write a composition).



Direct test item types

The Direct tests have to follow some stages:

1- It has to create a "level playing field". This means that, in case of a writing test, teachers do not have to ask a very high level to the students depending on their ability and knowledge on the topic they need to write about.

2- It has to replicate "real-life" interaction. This means changing a little bit the writing tests. The traditional writing exams used to be based on general questions about writing an essay on a specific topic. Nowadays, writing tests are more likely to ask students to write about something that can be related to real-life tasks.

Those are some of the direct item types that meet the criteria mentioned above:

- * Writing compositions and stories.
- * Transactional letters where candidates reply to a job advertisement, or pen a complaint to a hotel or restaurant. Students are based on the information that is been already given to them in the exam sheet.
- * Information leaflets about their school or a place they know (e.g. their town).
- * A set of instructions for some common task that they know.
- * Newspaper articles about a recent event.

Indirect test item types

Indirect test items have two different options for "writing":

* Transformation and paraphrase. In those exams, students are given some sentences and they have to rewrite them in a different way but without changing the meaning that the first sentences had. For the students to complete them successfully they have to understand the first sentence that we have given to them and they have to know how to change it for an equivalent grammatically correct with the same meaning.

* Sentence re-ordering. In those tests students are given some words to make a sentence but the words are not in order, so they have to put them correctly to make a correct



sentence. It is true that this exercise is a little bit easier than some other ones (for example, the one of “transformation and paraphrase”), but if students don't know how does the syntax work and how they have to order the lexico-grammatical elements, then, the exercise will turn a little bit difficult to them.



3. Practical part

3.1. Writing

As it has already been mentioned, my Research Project is based on the analysis of the compositions from the students at an Intermediate Level in my high school (INS Pere Borrell). Those students should finish their last course of ESO with a B1 level of English.

Before starting writing, students need to plan what they want to write on their compositions. Students at the B1 level must be able to communicate the main points of the topic they are talking about, finding new ways of expressing it and limiting the message to what they want to say.

When students are working on a Creative writing, as well as working on reports or/and essays, they must be able to:

- Give detailed descriptions about different subjects that are familiar to them, as well as people or things, using a wide range of vocabulary that will make their composition richer and will help the reader to create a mental picture of what it is being described to him.

- Write about experiences and include the description of their reactions and feelings.

- Describe an event (even if it is true or not).

- Narrate a story (that can be true or not) using connectors and an adequate language depending on who is going to read the story, as well as using the correct vocabulary. When students are narrating a story, they need to answer the “Wh- questions”: who? (who is main character related to the story), what? (what happened), when? (when did it happen), where? (when did it happen), why? (why did it happen) –in some cases, we may add “which?” at those questions (e.g. in case of having to choose between two books: “Which one would you like?”).

- Write a short essay or report, giving reasons for or against a particular point of view, talking about the advantages and disadvantages of different options, developing an appropriate argument systematically and reinforcing the main points, and evaluating different ideas or solutions to solve a problem.



- Give their summarised opinion about a lot of information that they know well (e.g. the daily life in their family), or anything that is close to them.
- Write informal letters, writing to someone close to them, maybe to invite them somewhere or telling them about their holidays.
- Write formal letters, writing to someone they do not know and, probably, applying for a job or giving an opinion (usually in the press). In those compositions, the vocabulary and the forms students will use, must be more formal and only giving and asking for the main information (not the personal one).
- Discuss issues and express opinions about something they are asked to talk about, giving their opinion in favour or against the topic, talking about the advantages or disadvantages it could have, and maybe, their personal opinion.

Before students write their definitive composition in a paper, to hand it in to the teacher later, they have to follow different steps. They need to think about what they are going to talk about, they also need to draft it, check what they have written (in case of finding any mistakes, correcting them) and once they are sure that their drafts are correct, write the final composition in a paper (this is going to be the definitive one).

In case of being an exam, students will be given a paper where they will be able to draft their writings, write their “brain-storming” (if they want to write down some expressions that can be useful to them for their writing), and so on. After having written their compositions in this paper, they will need to rewrite them in their exam sheet and hand it in to their teacher. This option helps a lot to the students in their exams, but they need to be very fast and never forget that the time flies by really fast and they can get to the end of the hour, where the time will have already run out and they will not have finished to rewrite their compositions yet, or maybe they will not have even started to rewrite them.

While they are writing their compositions, students need to know how to compensate their writings. For example, students at the B1 level need to know how to define something (a feeling, thing or expression) that they do not remember the word they usually use, so they need to paraphrase.



When they have already finished their writings, students have to reread it and look for any possible mistakes they may have committed while writing. Students may also correct the verb tenses or expressions that they have written and are not correct; check if the connectors are correct or if they need more, and so on.

If some students do not have already achieved the Intermediate level in writing (what would be considered as having an A2 Level), they may do a more modest version of the composition (what is known as Avoidance strategies). On the other hand, if they have a higher level (depending on their level, if it is much higher, this could be considered as having an upper-intermediate level –B2 Level), they may write more complex compositions (what is known as Achievement strategies).

In my Research Project, I have analyzed three different types of compositions: **emails**, **application letters** and **conditional compositions**. With those compositions I have been able to see if students at 4th ESO have the level that they should have when they finish the ESO (the B1 Level of English). Whether if the majority of them have it or not, I have also been able to see which are the most common mistakes made by them depending on their different marks or different types of genres; what was my main purpose.

3.2. Typical learners difficulties

Once I have already analyzed the different compositions and I have checked the different mistakes that students make (look at “Annex 1” and “Annex 2”), I have got to the conclusion that the most typical mistakes among students at the B1 Level are the following ones:

Nouns

The most common problem that students have with nouns comes from not knowing the meaning of them. The ignorance of these words usually affects the comprehension of texts.



Apart from this, some nouns have related adjective forms (“happy” – “happiness”) and students usually make clever guesses about these forms. So, from “sad” they make a guess to form the noun: “sadness”. However, this is not always like this, so, the noun corresponding to the adjective “beautiful” is not “beautifulness” but “beauty”.

On the other hand, problems can come from the difficulty that learners may have when distinguishing countable and uncountable nouns (“How **many** money?” – “How **much** money?”).

Another typical problem on learners is the fact that they may use wrong plural forms as far as they are used to make regular plural forms even if the word they are using is irregular (e.g. “Four **mans**” – “Four **men**”). Apart from this, it is probably that students may be confused with the uncountable nouns which end in **s** (e.g. “news”), the singular nouns which end in **s** (e.g. “means”), the nouns that only have the plural form (e.g. “clothes”) or the nouns that end in **s** and can be plural or uncountable (e.g. “politics”).

Adjectives

One of the most common problems that learners have with adjectives is the way to place them. In English, adjectives are placed before nouns, but Spanish students are used to place the adjective after the noun in their own language, so this makes more difficult for them to write sentences in English in the correct order. Apart from placing the adjectives before the nouns, students also need to know how to place them, as far as depending on the category of the adjective, they have a specific order.

Another problem that can be caused by their L1 interference is that students sometimes create a plural adjective form. In the case of Spanish students, this could be a very typical mistake because in Spanish, the adjectives also have a plural form. There is also a typical mistake caused by the L1 interference, which is that students may add a conjunction between adjectives, which is not correct in English if the adjectives are placed before the noun (e.g. “**She has got a big and blue car**” – “**She has got a big blue car**”). However, if the adjectives



are placed after the noun, students will need to add a conjunction between them (“Her car was big blue” – “Her car was big and blue”).

On the other hand, there is also another common mistake which is the comparative and the superlative forms. Students need to be conscious of how to do the comparative and the superlative forms: if the adjective has one or two syllables, students will add “-er” (in case of being a comparative) or “-est” (in case of being a superlative) at the end of the adjective. If the adjective has three syllables or more, students will write “more” (in case of being a comparative) or “most” (in case of being a superlative) before the adjective.

Apart from all of these mistakes, students also need to know which adjectives can be intensified and which ones cannot be so.

Adverbs

Students sometimes over-generalise the rule of adding “-ly” at the adjectives to create adverbs without knowing that there can be some exceptions. For example, there are some adjectives with no corresponding adverb form (e.g. “good → goodly” – “good → well”).

Another problem is that students sometimes write the adverbs between the verb and the direct object, when it must be placed after the direct object (e.g. “She likes very much Taylor Swift’s music” – “She likes Taylor Swift’s music very much”). This is, usually, a problem caused by the L1 interference (most common in many European languages).

Apart from that, even though students should already know it at the B1 Level, they probably do not remember (maybe because of the nerves in an exam) that the subject and the verb phrase are inverted after a negative adverb (e.g. “Rarely we ever saw him”). Coming from the negation form, another problem caused by this is that students do not realise that once they have a negation form (“have not”) they do not need to write “never” as an adverb of time because they already have a negation form. In case of using “never”, students will not write the



verb form in negative (e.g. “I had not never visited you before” – “I had never visited you before”).

Students need to know which intensifiers they need to use if they want to intensify a verb, because not all the verbs can be intensified with the same adverb.

Apart from that and depending on their category, the adjectives have a specific order in a sentence. First of all, we will place the **possessive** adjectives (as well as the quantity, the weigh, the age, the quality and so on). After them, we will place the **colour** adjectives (as well as the nationality and the gender). In third place, we will add the **permanent quality** adjectives (the substance); and, finally, we will write the **noun**.

E.g. → “Your nice tight blue cotton dress.”

Articles

Making mistakes with articles is not something really important or that can cause serious problems of communications, but if learners are constantly making mistakes when using them, their readers or the people they are talking to, will need to make a harder effort to understand them. The most typically articles that are missed by learners are “an” or “a” (e.g. “He is singer” – “He is a singer”). However, students sometimes write articles when they are not needed (e.g. “I watched a TV yesterday evening” – “I watched TV yesterday evening” or “The life in La Cerdanya is very peaceful” – “Life in La Cerdanya is very peaceful”).

Depending on the mother tongue of the students, they may be used to use “one” instead of “a/an” (e.g. “We went to one shopping mall last week” – “We went to a shopping mall last week”).



Quantifiers

If students do not know or do not notice quantifiers in a text or listening comprehension, this could lead them to some problems to understand correctly what they are reading or listening to.

Students usually use the neutral quantifiers “some” and “any” because it is easier for them to remember how to use them. The problem that comes to here is when students are very used to use “any” and they sometimes use it in an affirmative sentence with no negative form before or instead of using “no”. When using “much” or “many”, students concentrate a lot on the nouns, trying to indentify if they are countable or uncountable, and they forget that they need to pay attention to the sentence in case of being affirmative and using “a lot of” (e.g. “**I have many sweets**” – “**I have a lot of sweets**”).

After using the quantifiers, students need to pay attention to the verb tense, because they sometimes tend to use “a lot of” and then write a singular verb form after it.

Prepositions

When writing, students can make several mistakes with prepositions but there are many reasons why they could have done them. Firstly, some prepositions may have a very similar meaning and probably the student's L1 does not make such equivalent distinctions. Secondly, some verbs, adjectives and nouns with similar meanings, may require different prepositions that students need to memorise. Thirdly, some verbs may require a specific preposition, while other verbs with a similar meaning may not require it. In the fourth place, if some verbs in the student's L1 require some specific prepositions, verbs with similar meanings in English probably will not need prepositions or will need different prepositions from the ones that the student is used to use in his own language. And, the last one is, that the same word may require different prepositions in different parts of its speech.

Some other typical mistakes may be that students probably miss some prepositions (e.g. “**I listen music**” – “**I listen to music**”); they probably use the wrong preposition;



they sometimes use prepositions where they are not needed or they usually use the infinitive form of a verb instead of using “to + -ing”.

Verbs

The most common mistakes done by students are the following ones:

Students sometimes use state verbs in tenses that they are not usually used (e.g. “know” – “knowing”). Another “big” problem that students with a low B1 Level may have with verbs, is that they probably do not write the questions properly (e.g. “You like macaronis?” – “Do you like macaronis?”), as well as the question and the negative forms of “be” (e.g. “I did not be” – “I was not” or “Did you be there when Mike hit John?” – “Were you there when Mike hit John?”). There is another problem with verbs but this problem can only be solved if students memorise it: irregular verbs forms. Some verbs are irregular and students need to learn them by heart in order to be able to use them correctly.

Some verbs need a preposition because they have a different meaning if they have this preposition or if they do not have it. Some students do not know the preposition they need to use or they do not remember it and the meaning of the verb can be completely changed, or the verb can simply have no meaning with this wrong preposition. Apart from that, students should know the difference between some verbs that mean exactly the same but that, depending on the context, we use one or another (e.g. “He did a cake” – “He made a cake”).

With the **modal verbs**, students sometimes prefer using other ways of expressing what they want to say because they probably do not know the correct modal verb to say it or because they probably do not know how to use it; but if students get used to using these constructions, the sentence will probably look odd or even unacceptable if the student has used an incorrect tense. Sometimes, students with a low B1 Level may make wrong questions or negative forms because they do not use properly the modal verb (e.g. “Do you can sing?” – “Can you sing?”).



When students use **infinitives** they sometimes do not know how to use them correctly. There are some words that have to be followed by an infinitive, and sometimes students do not realise it (e.g. “My mum allowed me going to the cinema with you” – “My mum allowed me to go to the cinema with you”). Moreover, students also tend to use an infinitive form after a preposition (e.g. “I am interested in to go to the cinema” – “I am interested in going to the cinema”).

When students (once again, with a low B1 Level) are using the **present simple**, the mistake they use to commit the most, is leaving off the third person “-s” (e.g. “My mother cook everyday” – “My mother cooks everyday”). Nevertheless, when they are making a question, they will probably write the third person twice (e.g. “Does he likes Clara?” – “Does he like Clara?”). Students find it more difficult to use the **present perfect** and this is why they prefer writing with the present simple or continuous. Once students have learnt that, in a lot of cases, the present perfect form goes with expressions like “for”, “since” or “How long..?” they start paying a lot of attention to using the present perfect when they see a sentence starting by those expressions, even if in this case, the present perfect is not the appropriate form of the verb.

In general, one of the most common mistakes in students is that they find it hard to choose which verb tense is the correct to express what they want to say. For example, in English there are different forms that express a **future tense**. After that, students need to know the time conjunctions because they often use a future tense instead of a present tense after having a time conjunction. Sometimes students also miss out the auxiliary verb, which makes the sentence incorrect (e.g. “I going to read a book” – “I am going to read a book”).

Some students find it difficult to choose between the **past simple** and the **present perfect** because their mother tongue does not make such difference between them. When students sometimes use the past simple instead of the present perfect simple, is considered incorrect as far as British English is concerned (e.g. “I did it this morning” → “I have done it this morning”), but in American English will be considered correct (e.g. “I did it this morning” or “I have done it this morning”, both options would be considered grammatically



correct in American English as far as American people do not tend to make such a strict distinction between these two tenses). Above all, a really common mistake is, once again, the regular and irregular forms. Students should have learnt them before trying to write them because otherwise, they will do it incorrectly.

When students try to simplify the form of the verb, instead of using the –ing form or the past participle, they use an infinitive. They sometimes even leave out the auxiliary verb or, if they are asking questions, they probably they will not even change the words order.

The “**used to**” and the “**would**” forms may be a little difficult for learners to use because they need to know how to use them or their meaning, and they do not know when to use them. However, students also auto-assume that “use to” must be the present form of “used to” and when they need to write it in present, they automatically change it.

When students are writing in indirect speech, they need to know how to report the verbs correctly. Apart from that, students need to know which verbs are used for reporting the content of what someone said and which ones are used to refer to what they said. Something a little bit more difficult for students may be reporting questions because they need to change the order and the way of saying it (e.g. “**He asked her did she like watching TV**” – “**He asked her if she likes watching TV**”).

Sometimes students use “when” or “in case” instead of using “if”. They are probably influenced by their mother tongue. When they do so and people listen to them, they will probably understand a different thing than the one that the speakers wanted to express (“**When you hand me the project in on time, I will not fail you**” – “**If you hand me the project in on time, I will not fail you**”)

The most common mistakes that students make when writing may be the wrong position of subjects, when they reverse the order of subjects and no-object verbs; the wrong position of adverbs between verbs and their direct object (which is considered as a mistake in English) and the position of direct object, that students sometimes place between auxiliary verbs



and main verbs. Something that students should have clear in mind is that there are several verbs that require indirect objects, but some others that do not require them. They sometimes also place the adjectives after the noun, which is not really common in English, and they sometimes even leave out dummy subjects (e.g. “Was very sunny last week” – “It was very sunny last week”). However, students sometimes use “it” instead of “there” (e.g. “It is a rubber under your chair” – “There is a rubber under your chair”).

3.3. Spelling

Plural nouns

Regular plural forms end in “-s” (e.g. “rubber” – “rubbers”), but sometimes we need to add “-es” (e.g. “church” – “churches”) at the end of the word, or we may even change the spelling of the word if it ends in “-y” and we will make the plural changing the “y” for “i” and adding “-es” (e.g. “body” – “bodies”; “life” – “lives”; “knife” – “knives”).

Adverbs which end in “-ly”

The majority of the adverbs end in “-ly” (e.g. “slow” – “slowly”), but sometimes, we need to change the spelling of the adjective to create the adverb and, once more, if the adjective ends in “-y”, we will change the “y” for an “i” and we will add “-ly” at the end of it (e.g. “angry” – “angrily”); however, there are some exceptions that can be written with “-ly” (e.g. “dry”: “drily” or “dryly”). Moreover, when an adjective ends in “-e”, we will take this “-e” off and we will directly add the “-ly” at the end of the adjective (e.g. “true” – “truly”). When an adjective finishes in “-le” we will change the “-e” for an “-y” (e.g. “possible” – “possibly”); and if the adjective finishes in “-ic”, we will add “-ally” at the end of this adjective (e.g. “fantastic” – “fantastically”).



Comparative and superlative adjectives and adverbs

We are used to add “-er” to create the comparative form of an adjective, or the “-est” to create the superlative form of it. However, in some cases we need to add some different combinations. When an adjective already finishes in “-e”, we will just need to add “-r” (in case of wanting to create the comparative form– “brave”: “braver”) or “-est” (in case of wanting to create the superlative form– “brave”: “bravest”). If the adjective ends in “-y”, we will change the “y” for an “i” and we will add “-er” or “-est” at the end of it (e.g. “dry” – “drier”, “driest”). If the adjective ends with a consonant and it has only one syllabus, we will double the last consonant and we will add “-er” or “-est” at the end (e.g. “fit”: “fitter” or “fittest”).

“-ing” forms

In the majority of the cases, we just need to add “-ing” at the end of the infinitive form of a verb, but if the verb ends in “-e”, we will need to take the “e” off and add directly the “-ing” (e.g. “live” – “living”). If the verb ends in consonant, we will double the consonant and we will add “-ing” (e.g. “travel” – “travelling” or “refer” – “referring”). If the verb ends in “-ic” we will add a “-k” at the end of the verb and, after that, we will also add the “-ing” (e.g. “panic” – “panicking”).

Past forms

Regular verbs always end with “-ed” at the end of the infinitive form, but if the verb is irregular, students do not have any other option than memorising their irregular forms. If the verb finishes in “-e”, we will just add a “-d” at the end of the infinitive form (e.g. “like” – “liked”). If the verb ends in “-y”, we will change the “y” for “i” and we will end “-ed” at the end of it (e.g. “cry” – “cried”). In case that the verb ends in consonant, we will double the last consonant and we will add “-ed” at the end (e.g. “ram” – “rammed” or “offer” – “offered”). If the verb ends with a vowel + c, we will add a “-k” after the “c” and, after it, we will add “-ed” (e.g. “picnic” – “picnicked”).



The present simple third person “-s”

Depending on how the infinitive of the verb ends, we will add “-s” or “-es” at the end of the infinitive form to create the third person of singular. When the infinitive form of the verb ends in **-ch, -s, -sh, -z, -x** or **-o**, we will add “-es” at the end of the infinitive form (e.g. “watch” – “watches”, “fiz” – “fizzes” or “go” – “goes”). If the infinitive form of the verb ends in “-y”, we will change the “y” for an “i” and we will add “-es” at the end of it (e.g. “worry” – “worries”). In any other infinitives forms, we will just add “-s” at the end of it (e.g. “love” – “loves”, “pay” – “pays” or “fight” – “fights”).



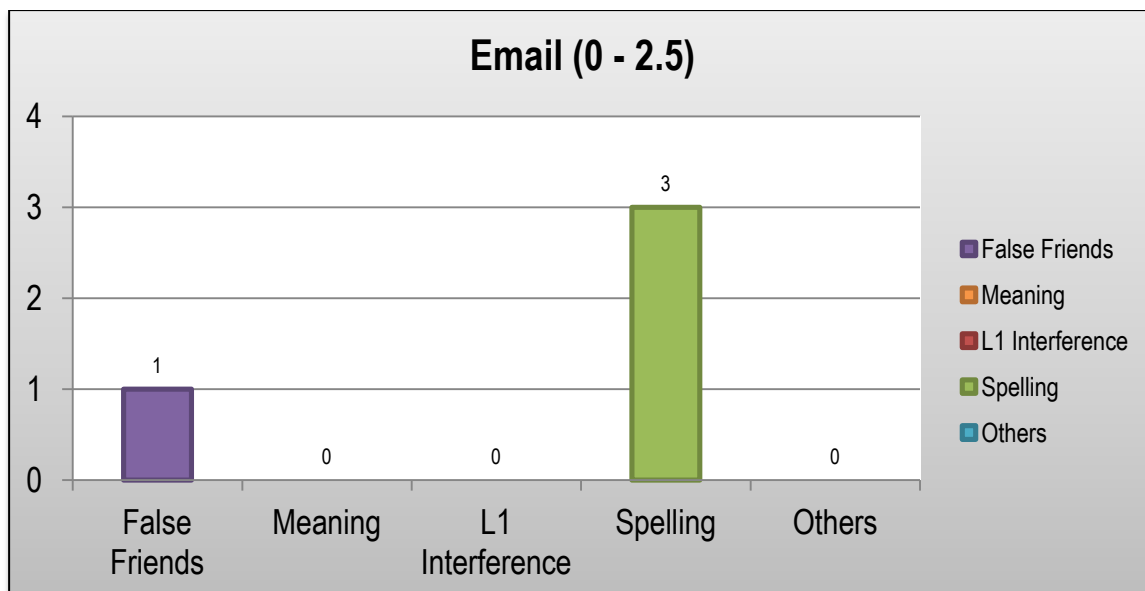
4. CONCLUSIONS

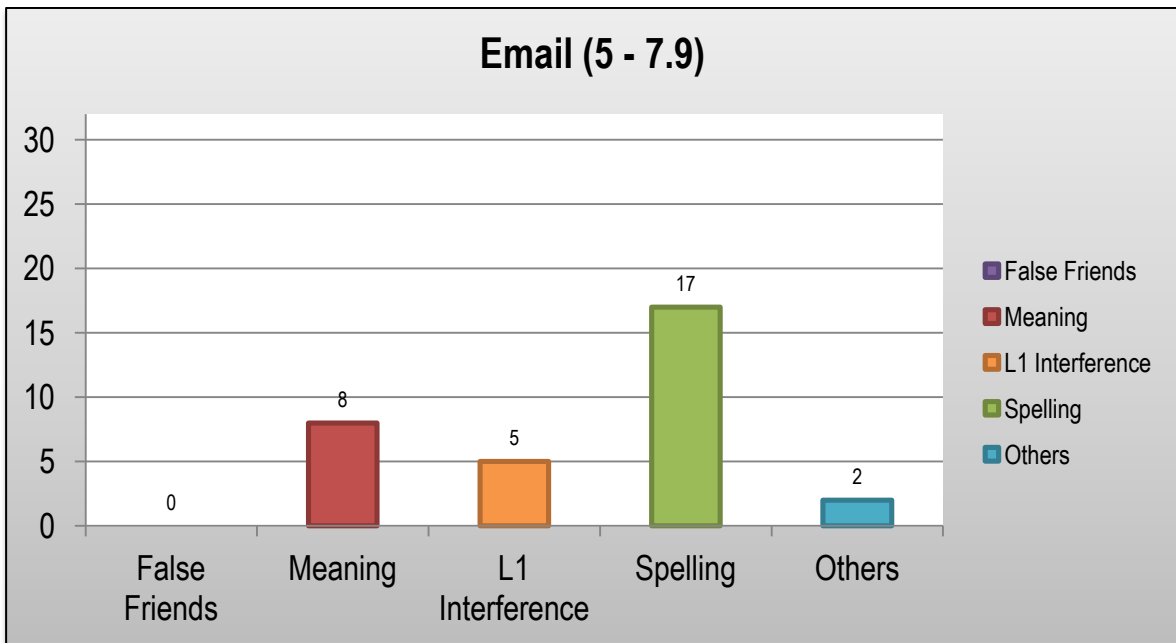
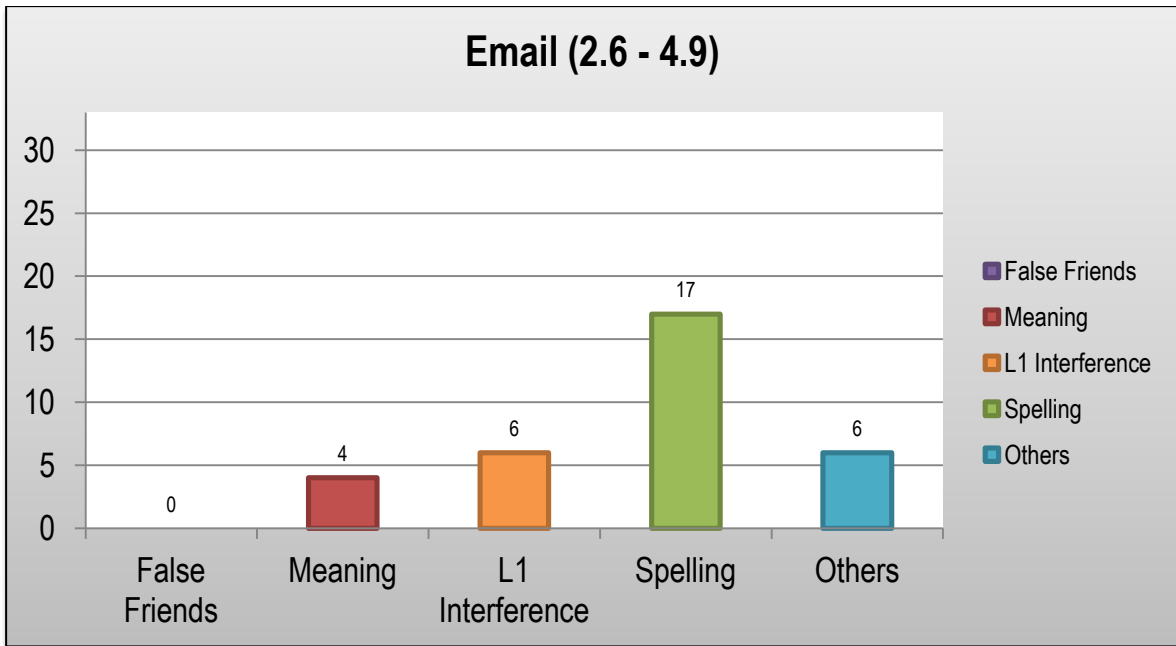
As far as you have been able to see all along both, the Theoretical and the Practical part, my Research Project is based on the compositions from the students at 4th ESO (look at “Annex 2”).

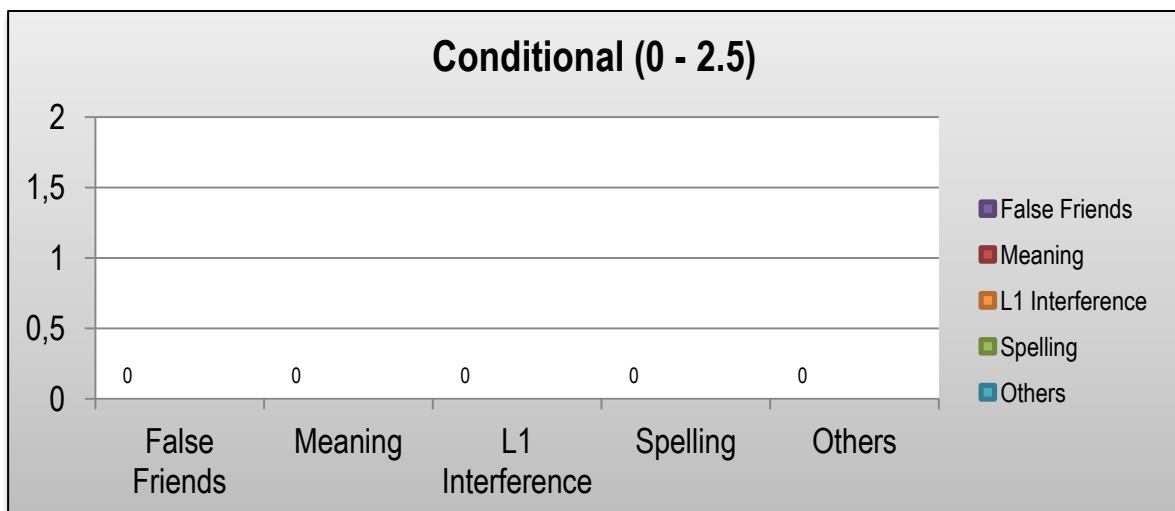
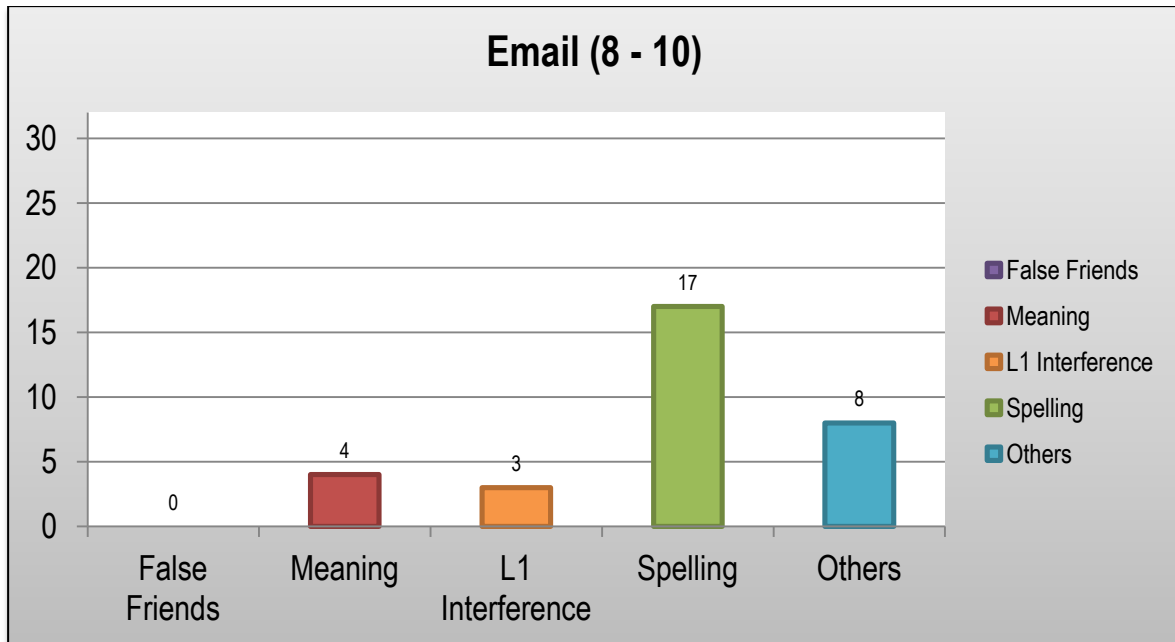
The first thing that I have done is to divide the compositions I have into three groups depending on the topic: writing an **email**, writing an **application form**, and writing about a **hypothesis**. Then, I have divided each group into four, depending on the mark (from **0 to 2.5**, from **2.6 to 4.9**, from **5 to 7.9** and from **8 to 10**) to see if I was something relevant. After this, I have analyzed them and checked which mistakes are the most common. Once I have analyzed them, I have counted them and made some statistics that have led me to the conclusion that I wanted to get to. The results have been the following ones:

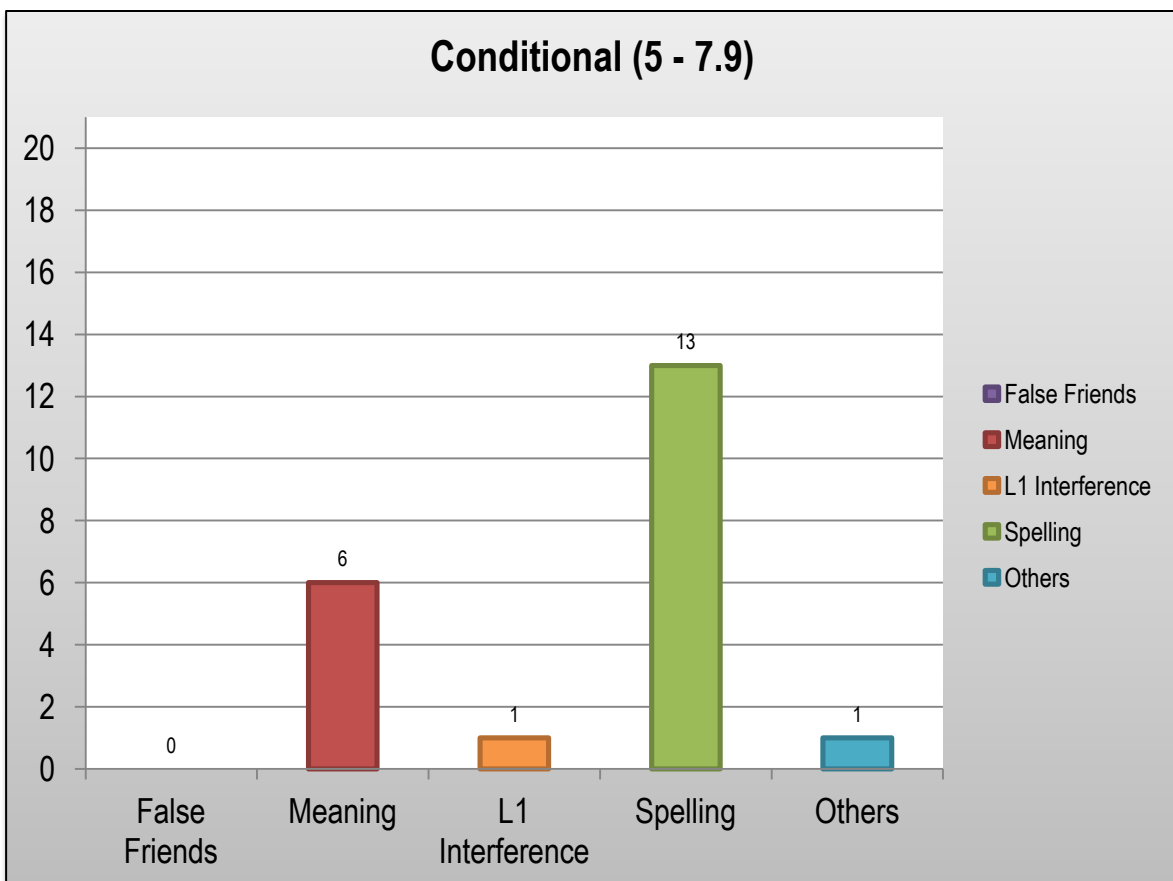
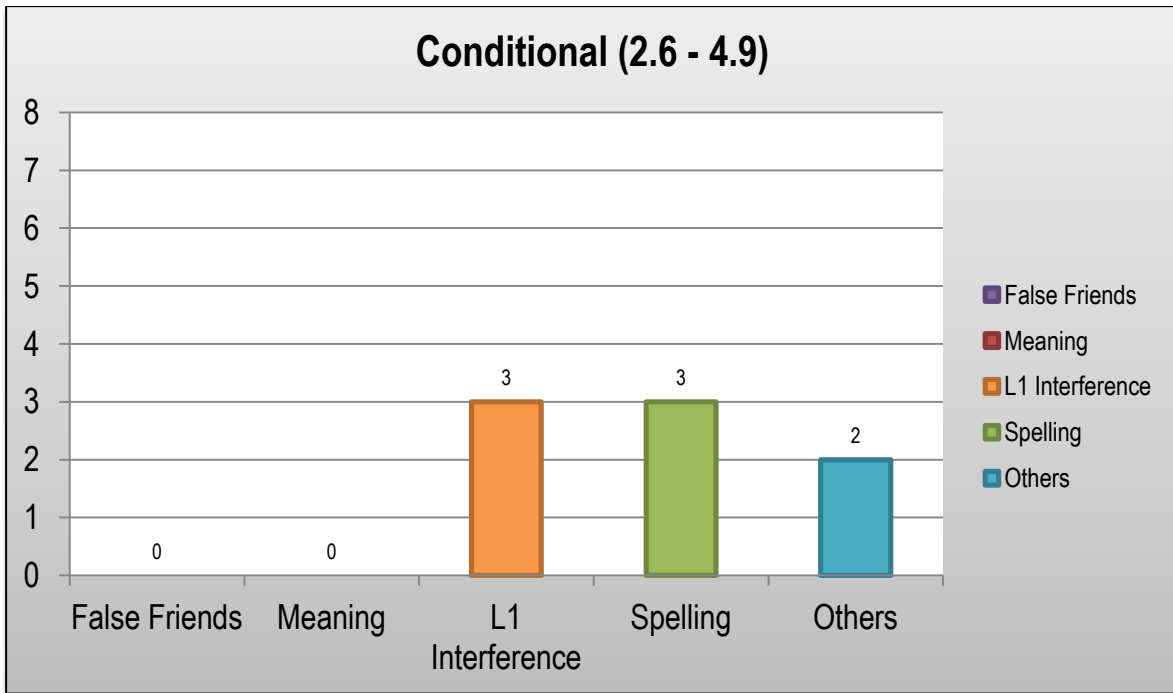
4.1. Statistics

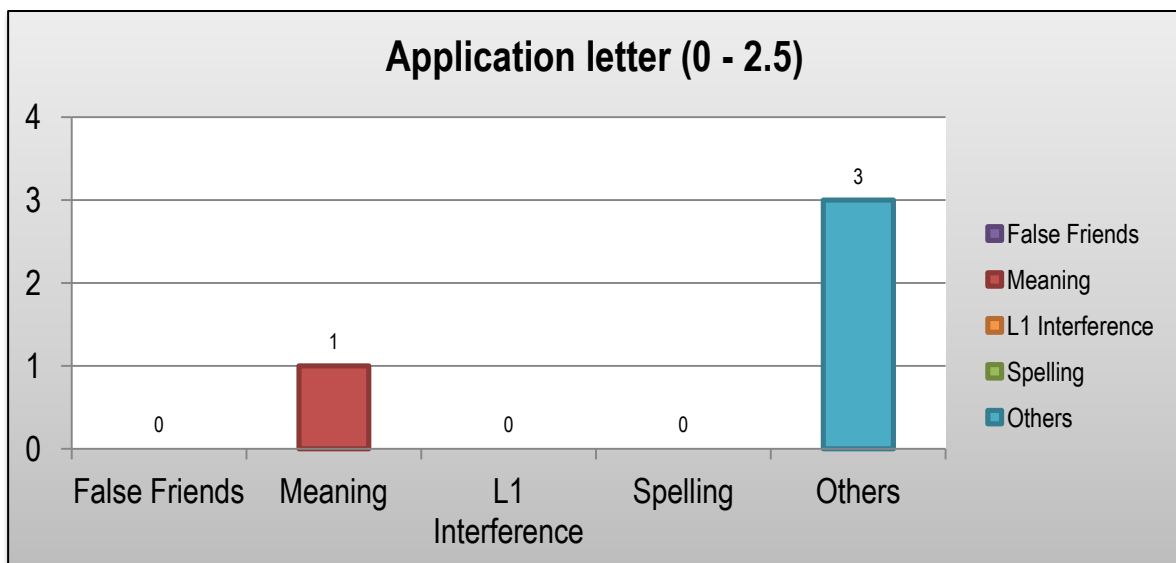
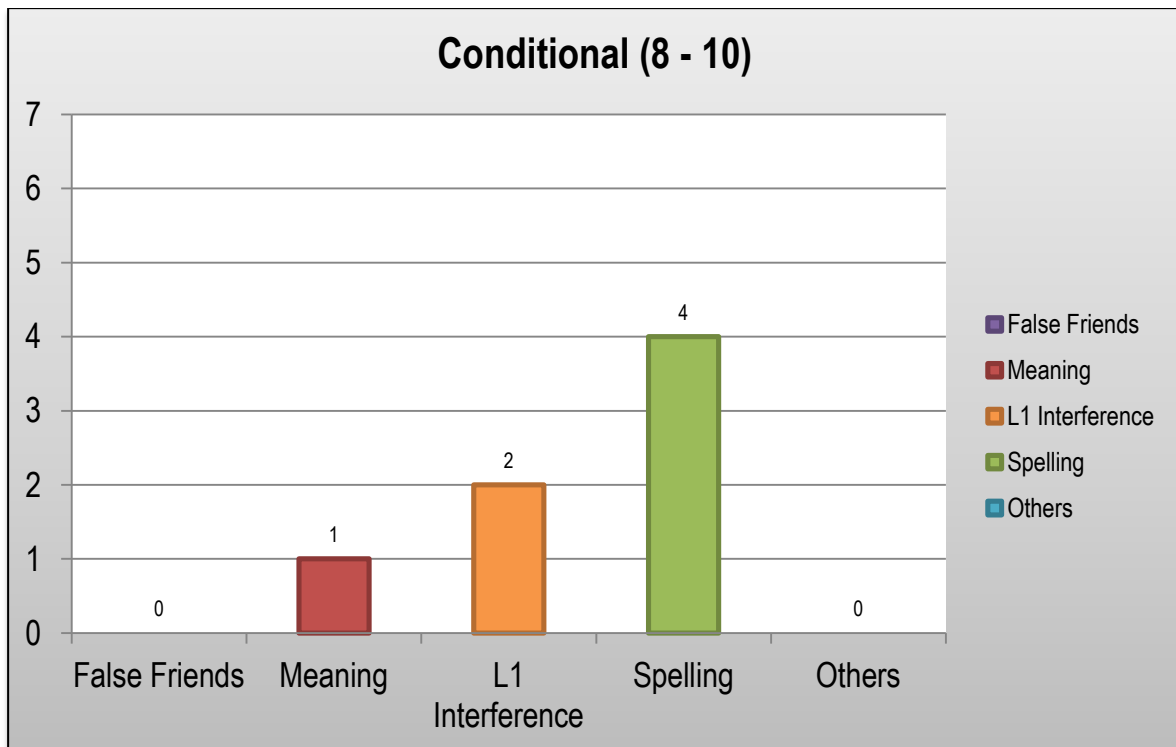
VOCABULARY

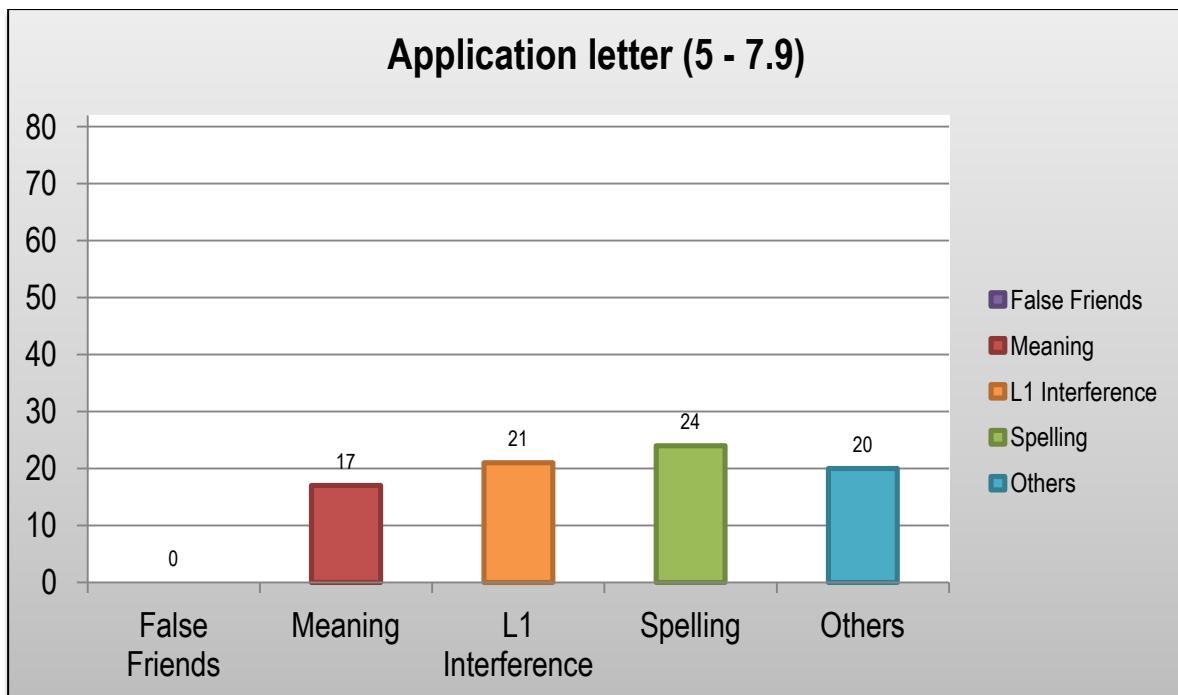
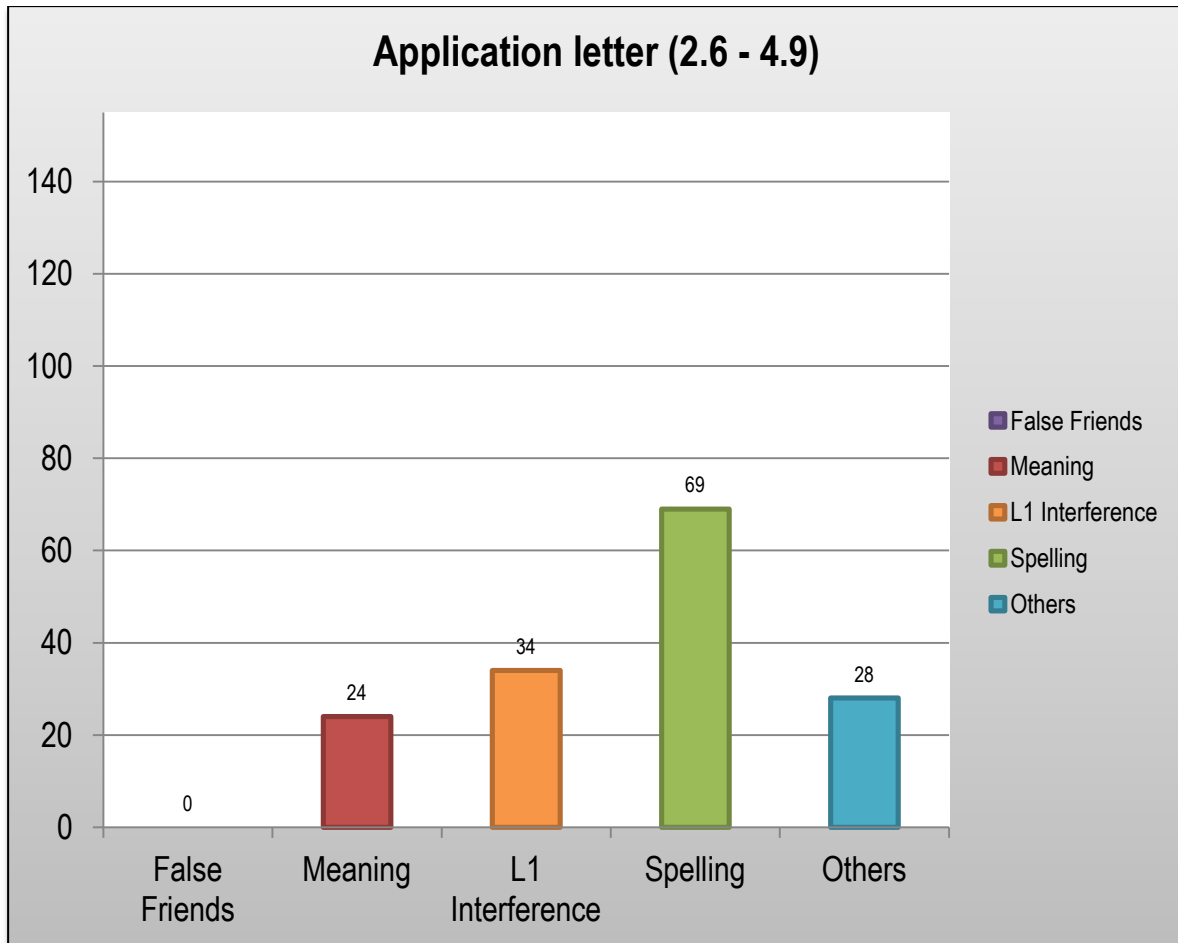


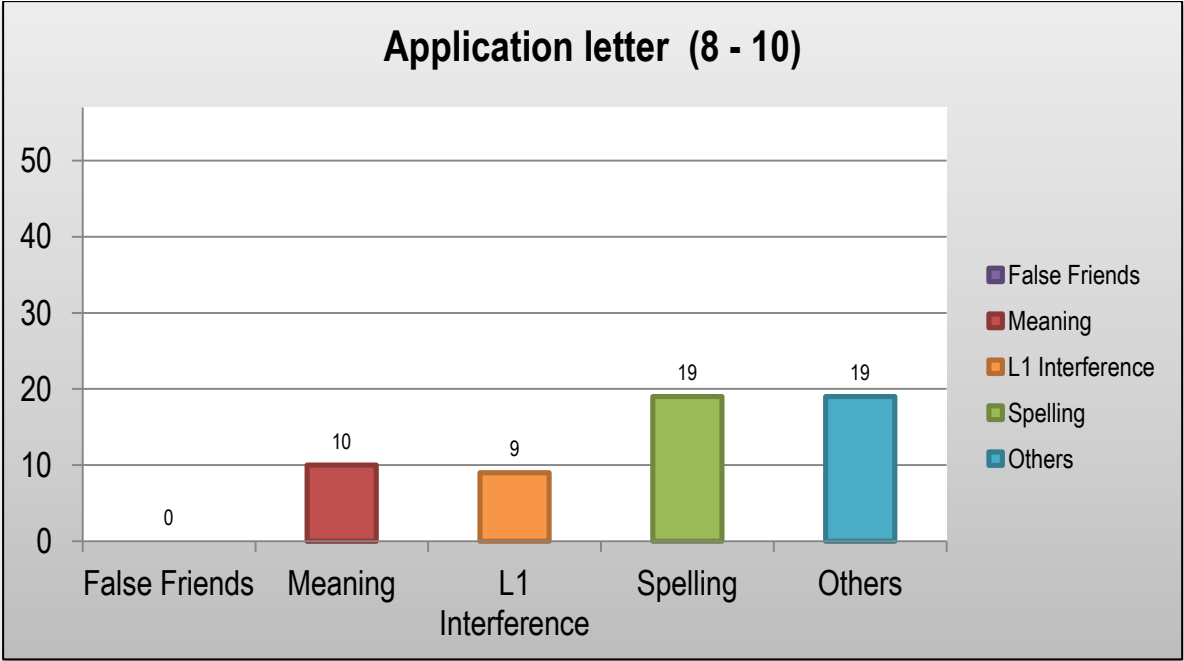






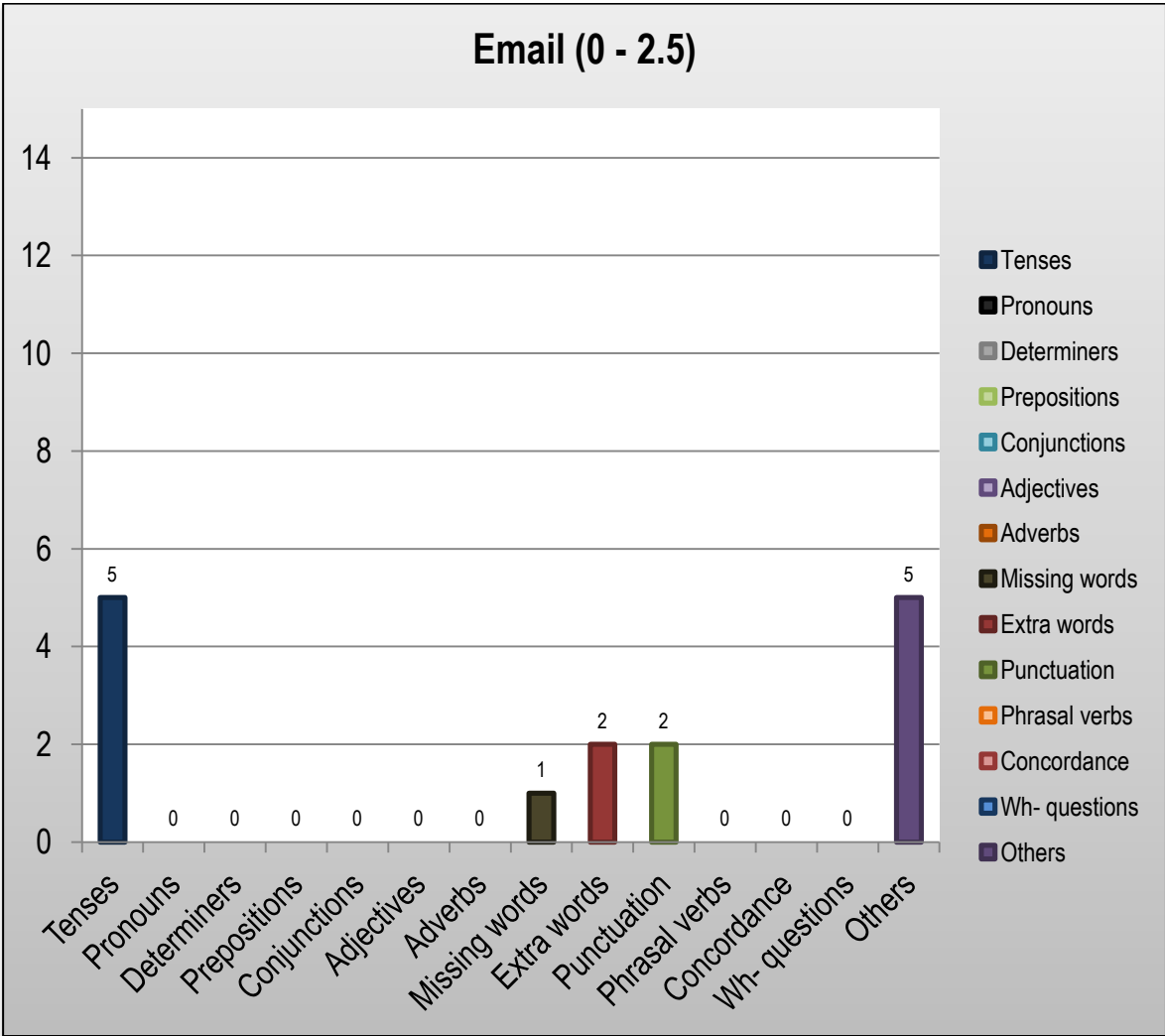


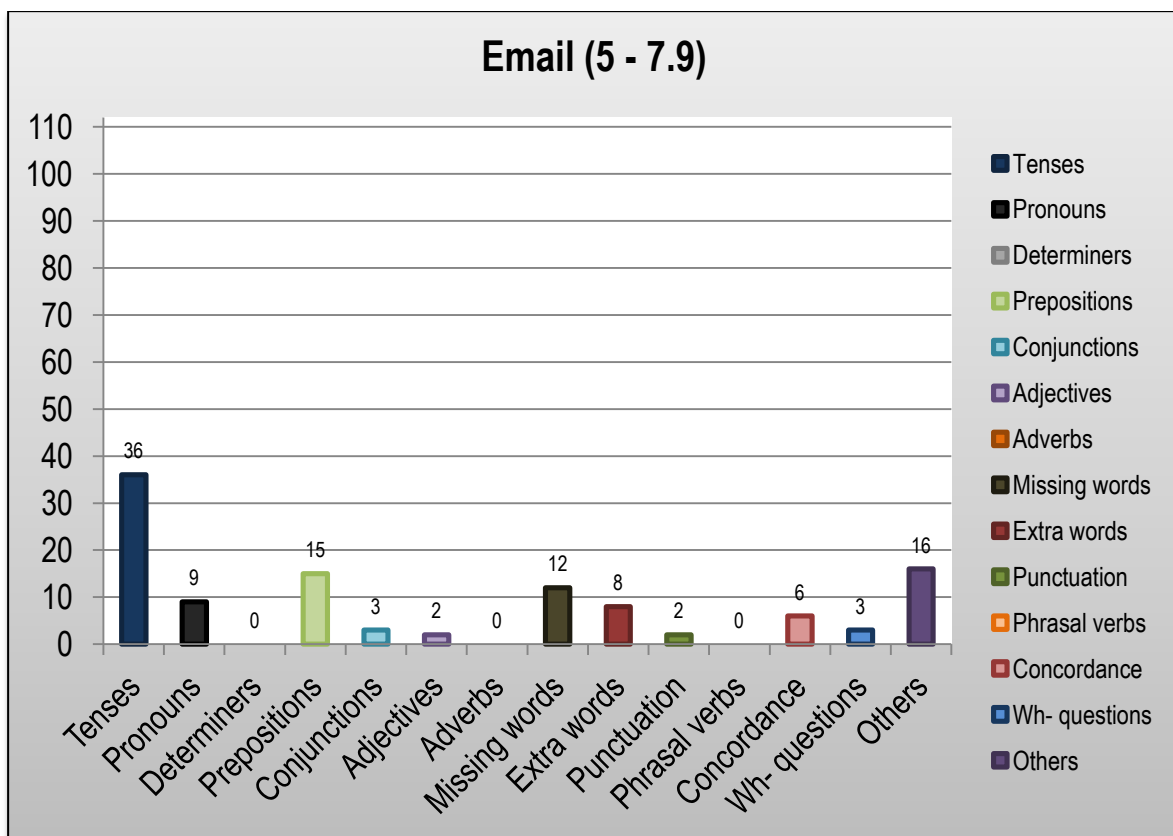
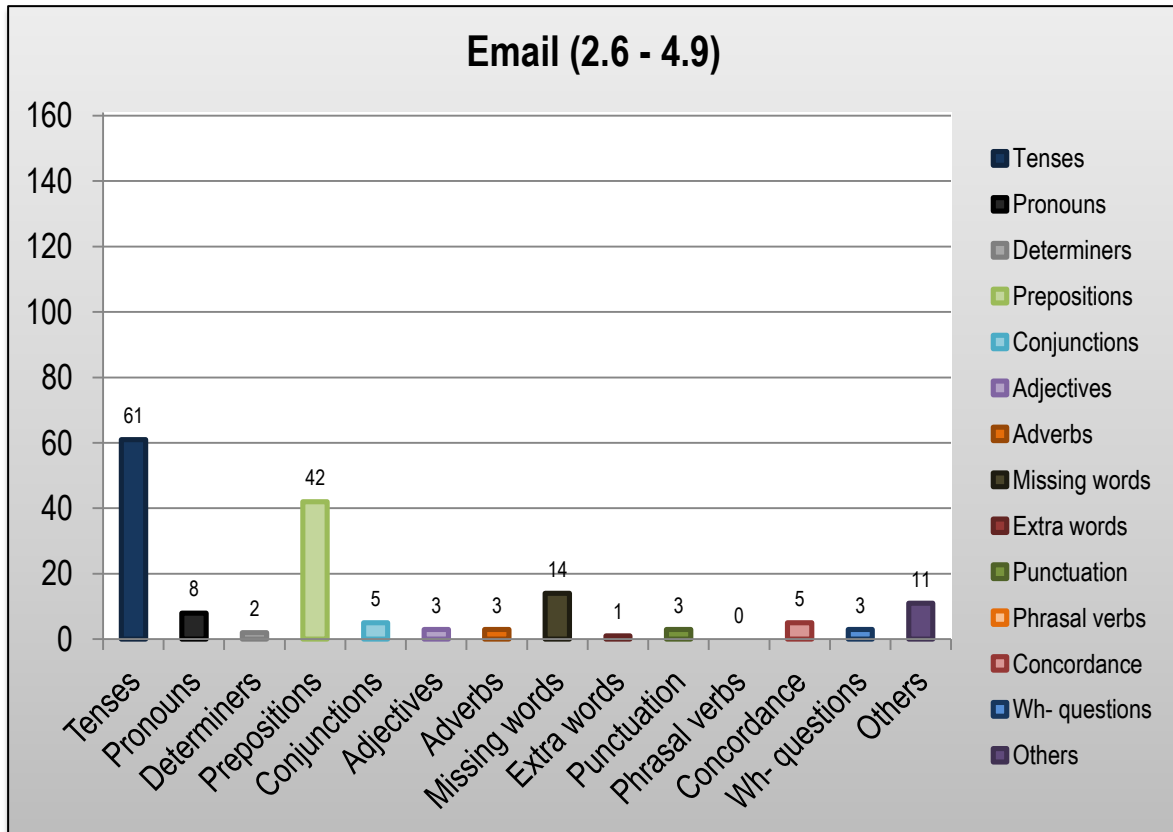


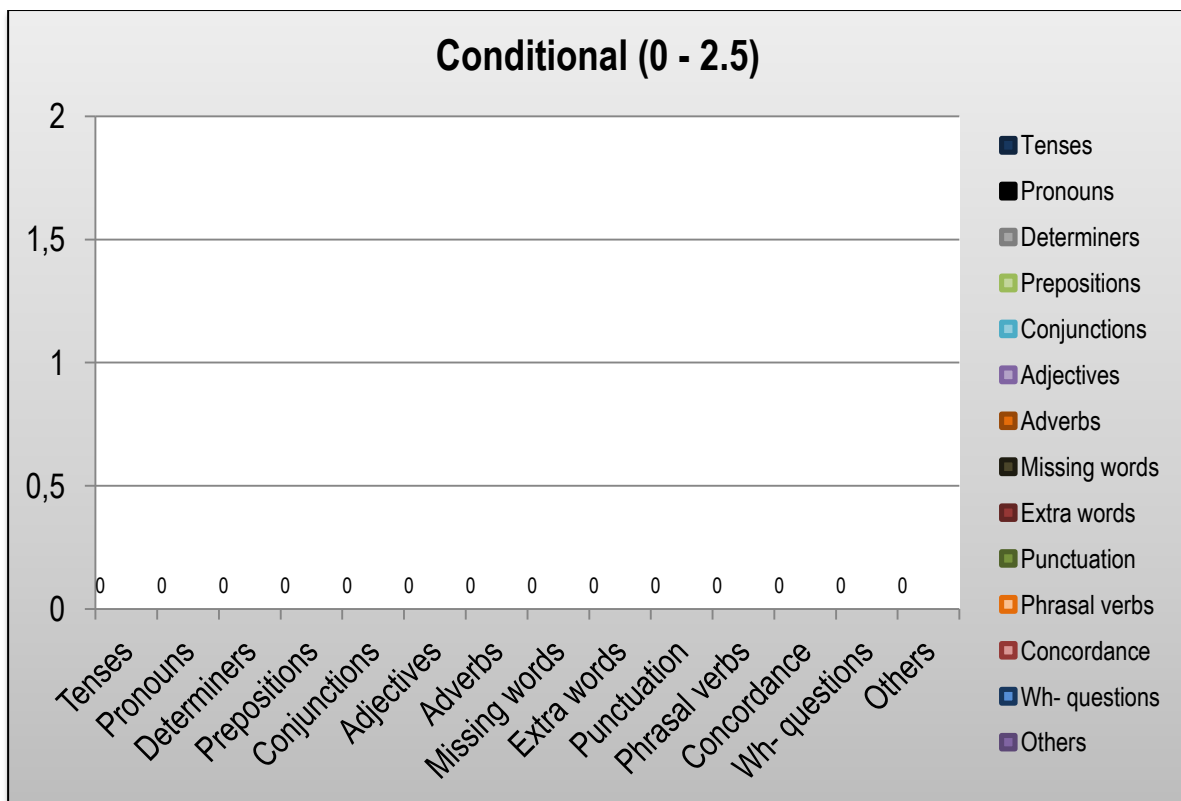
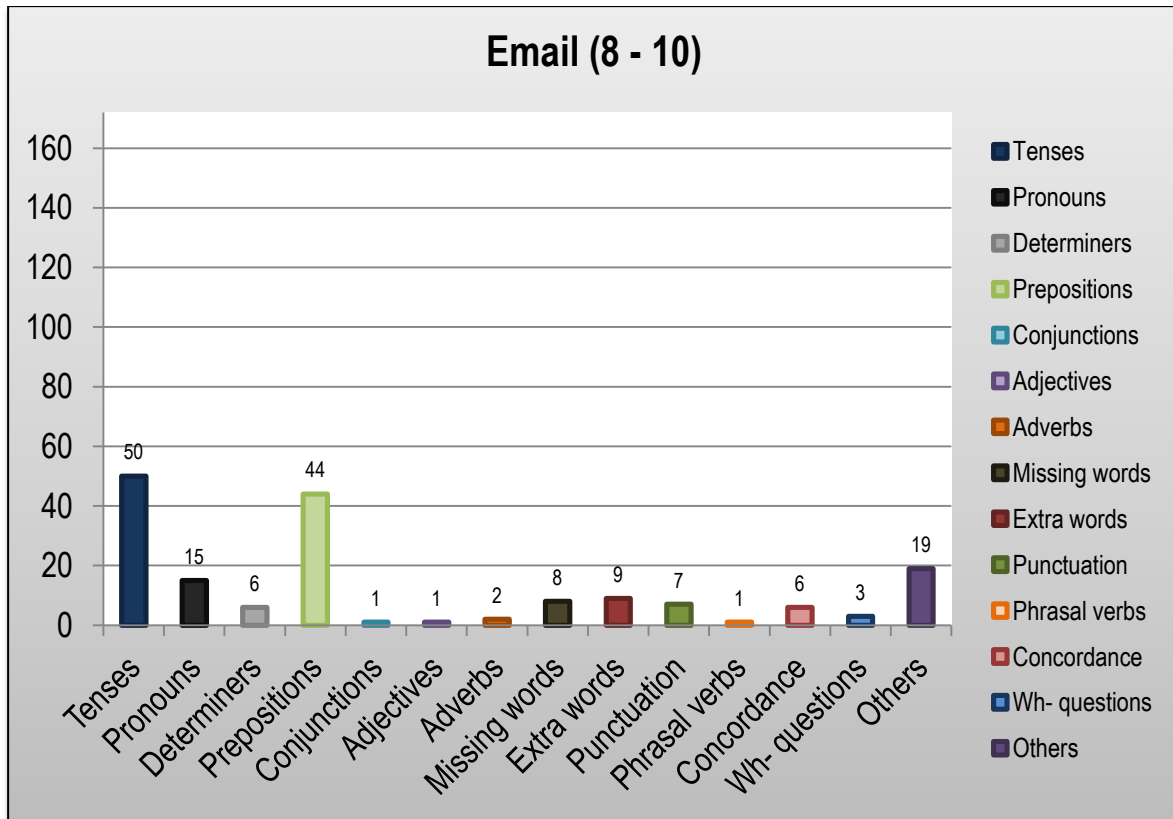


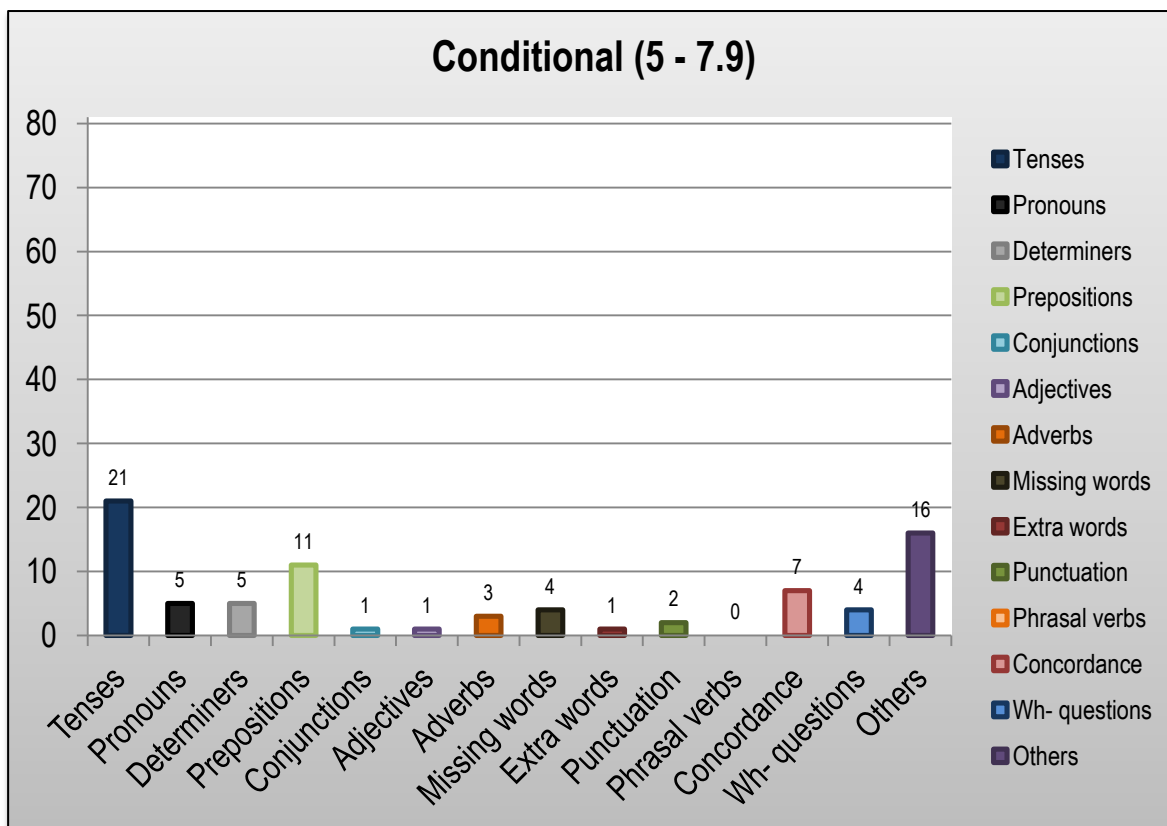
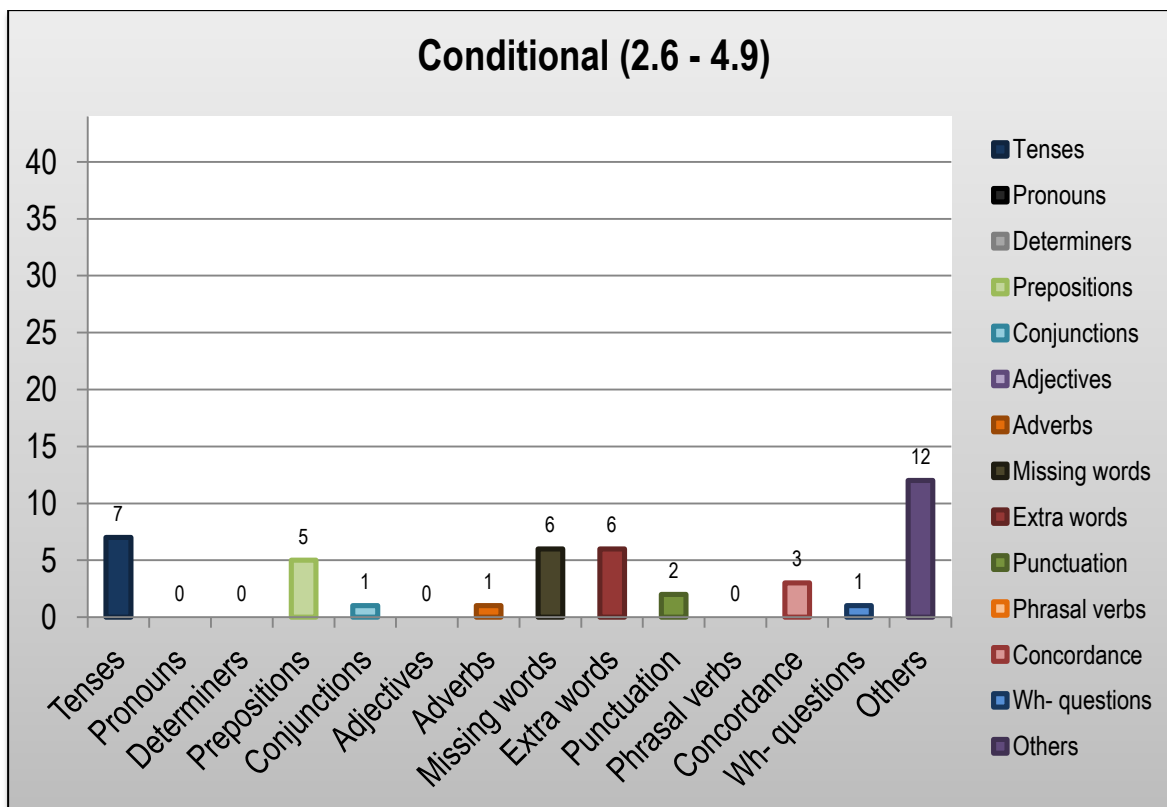


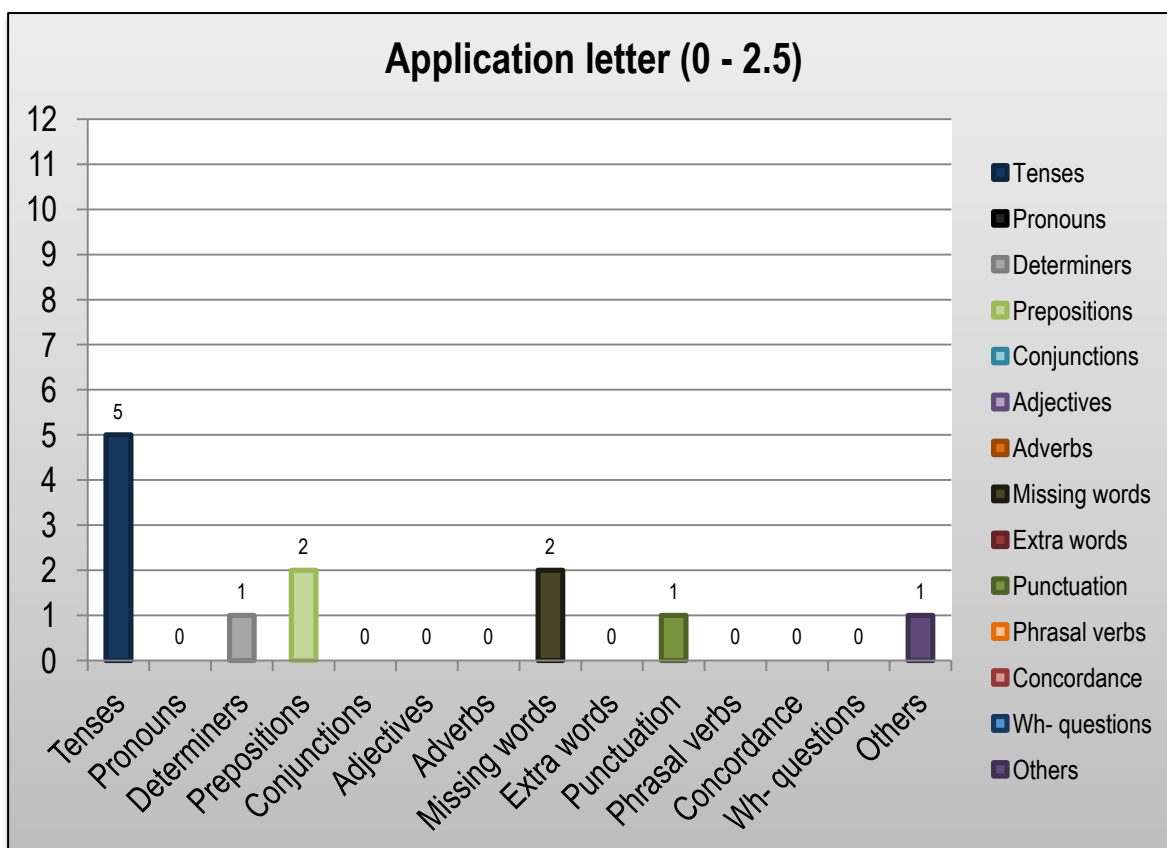
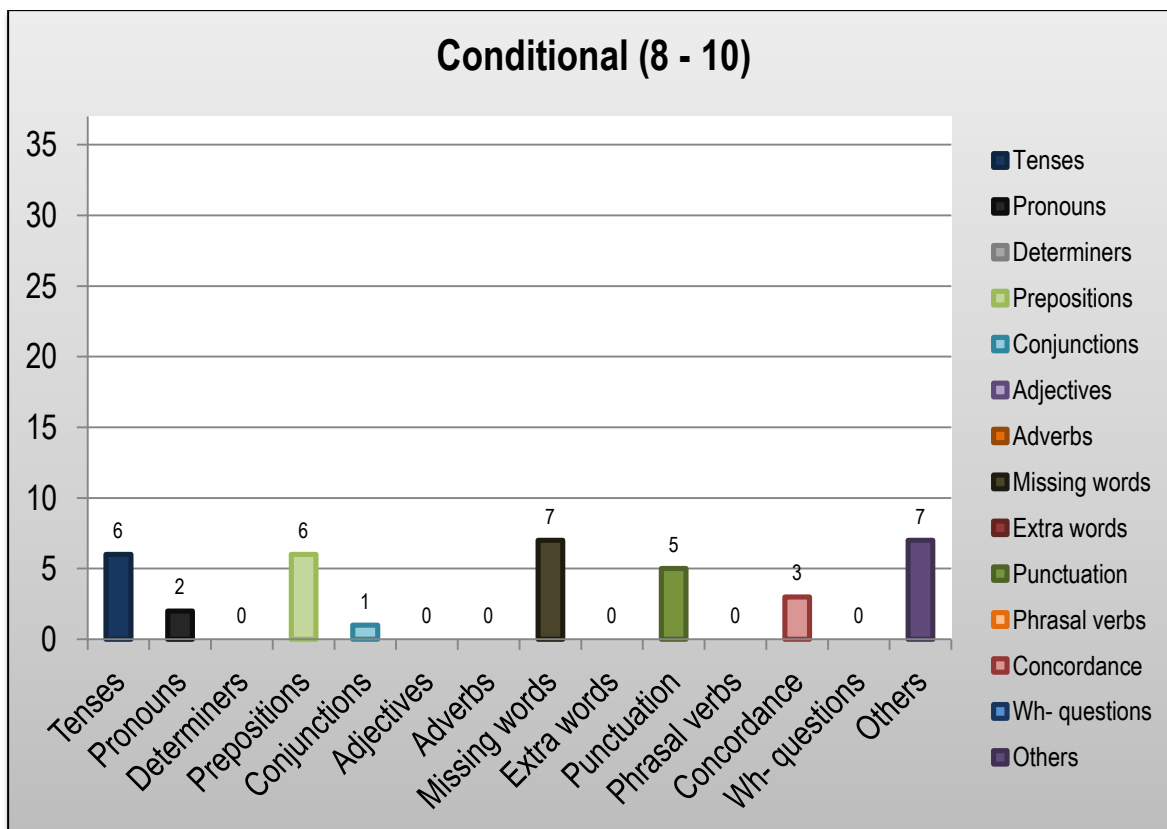
GRAMMAR

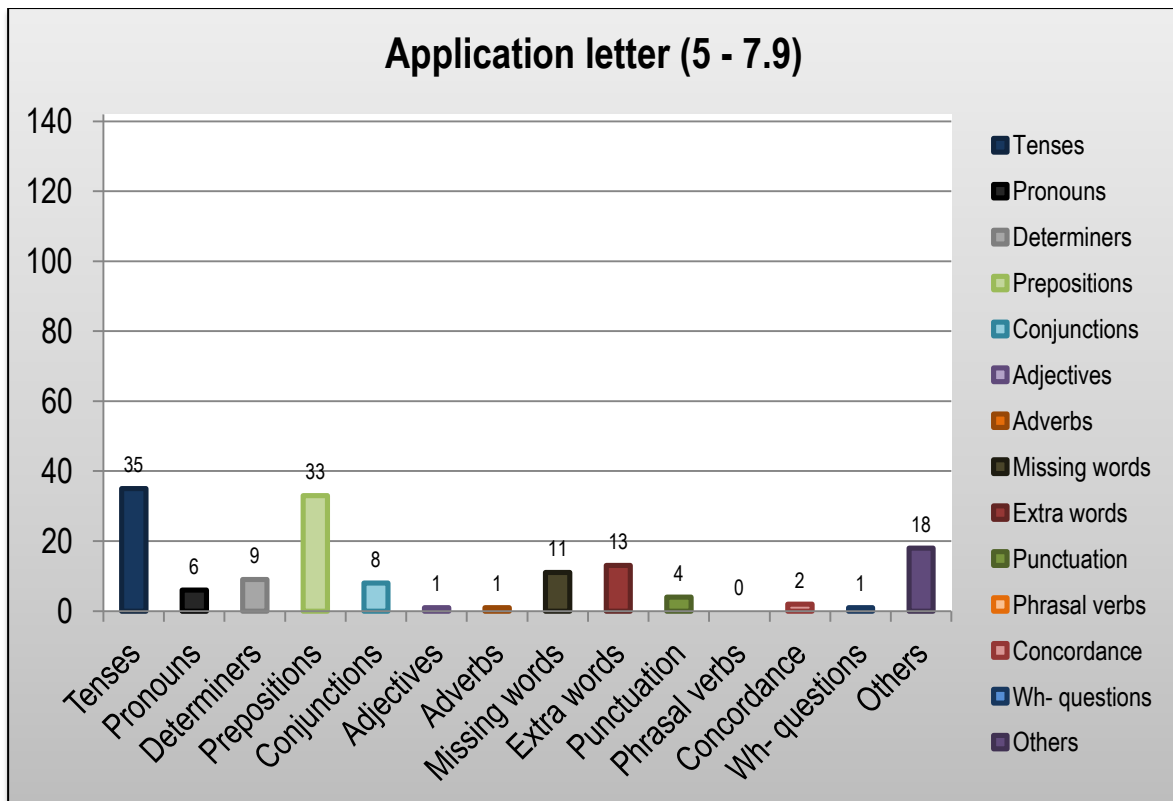
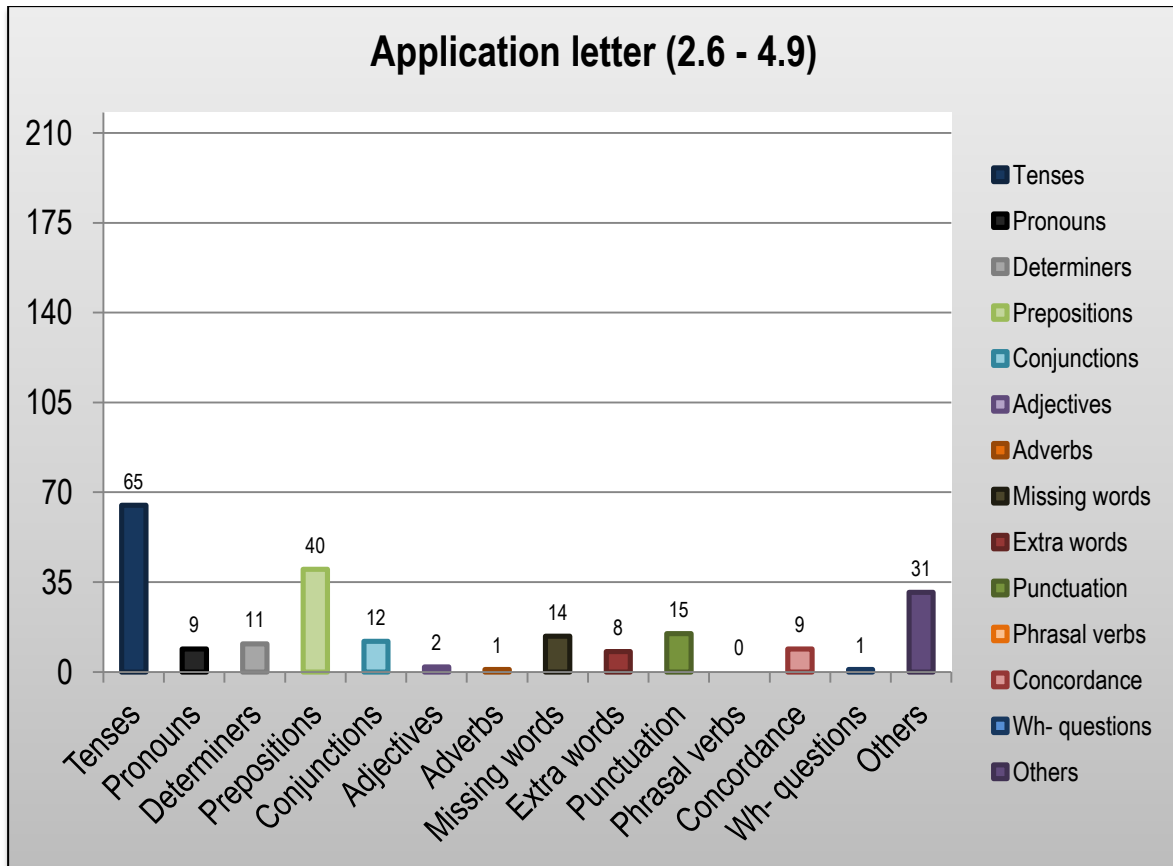


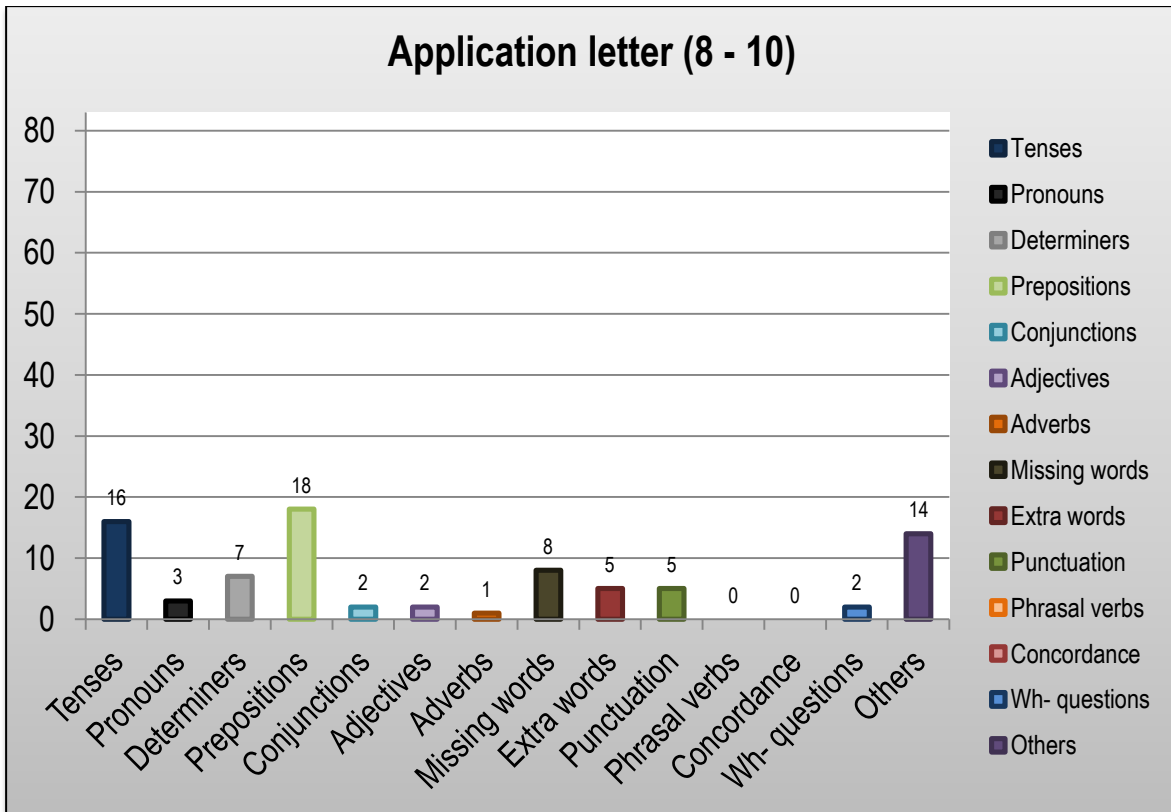






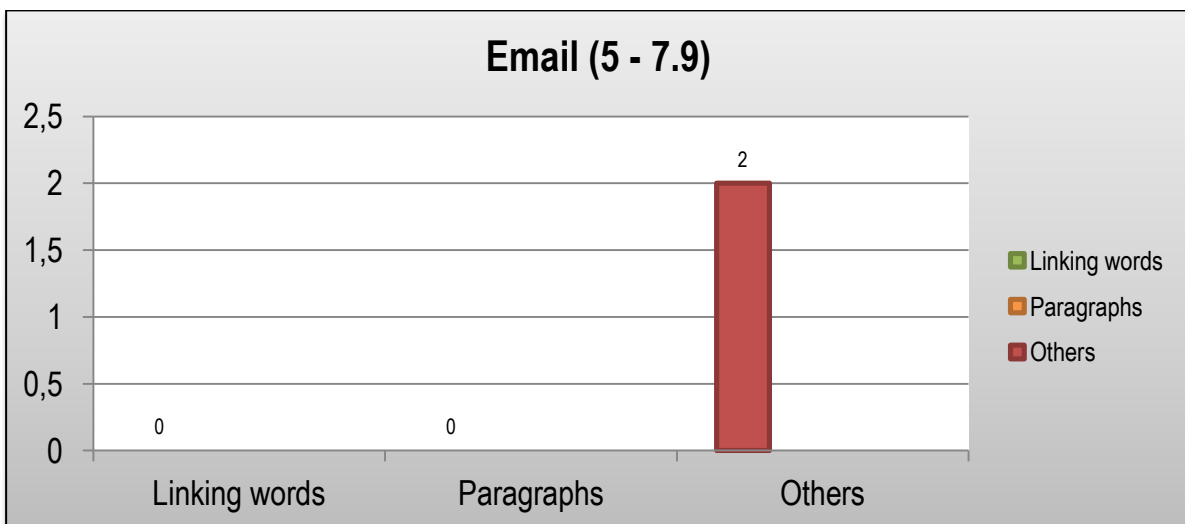
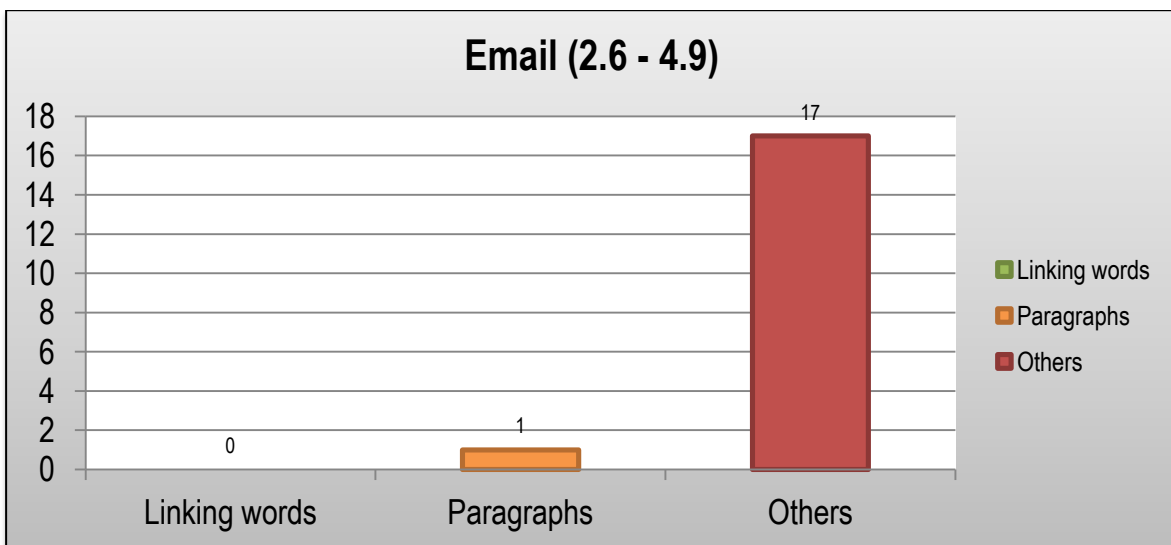
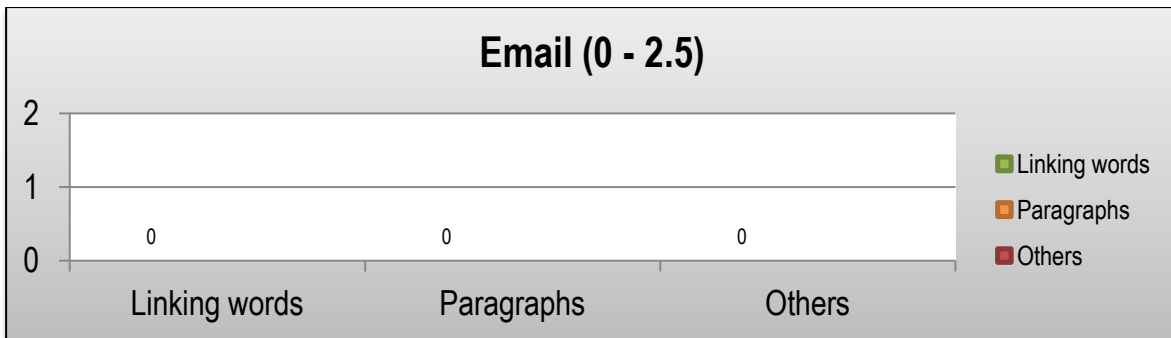


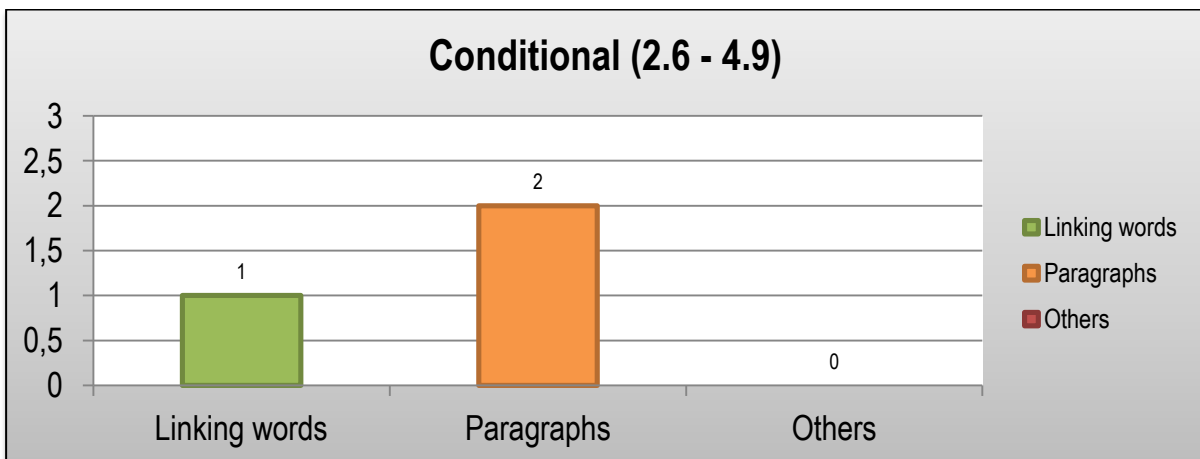
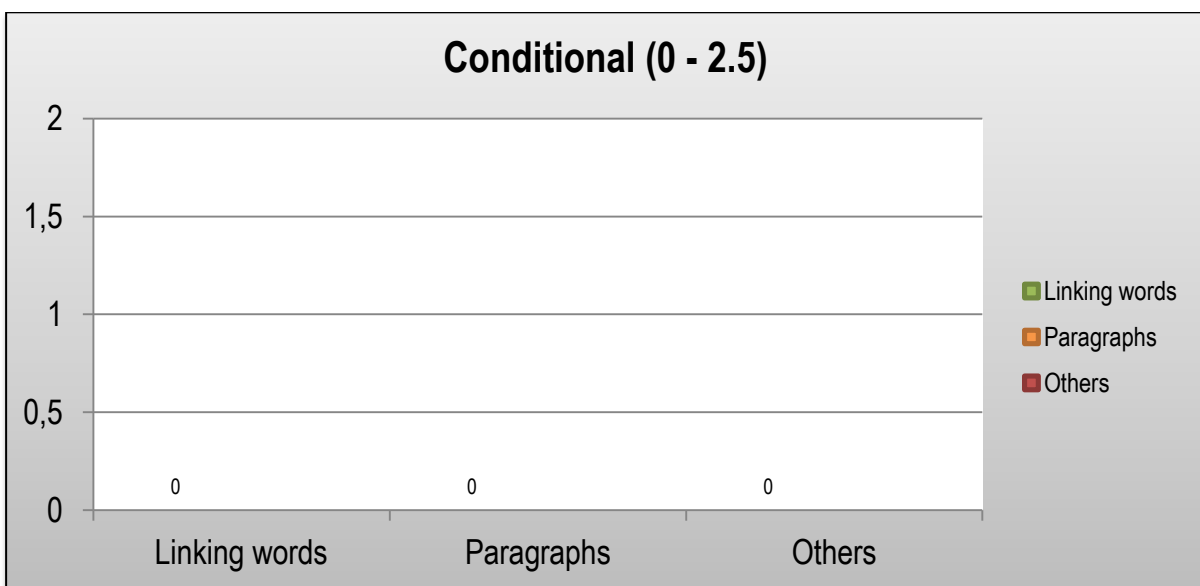
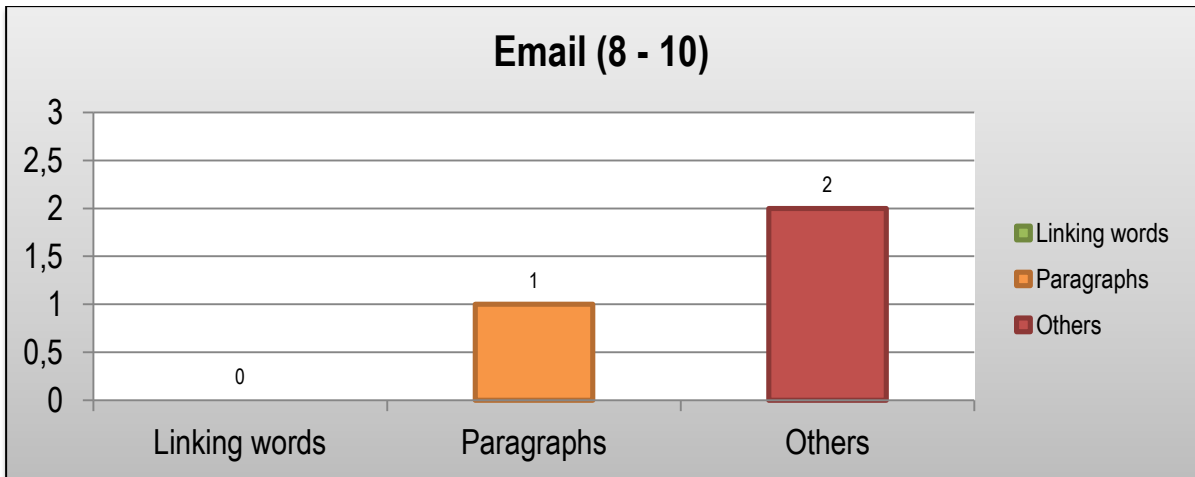


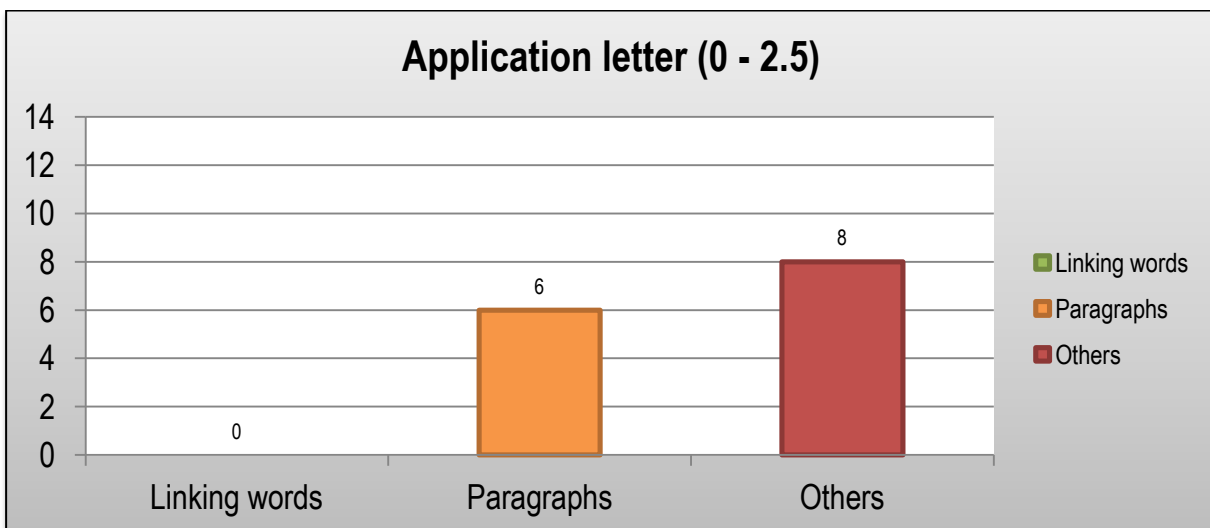
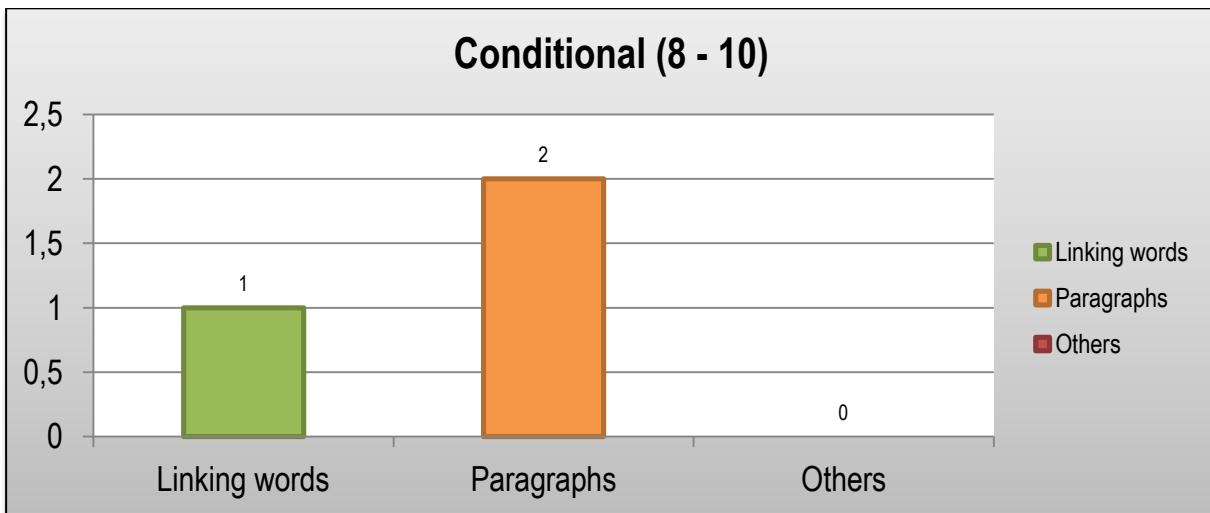
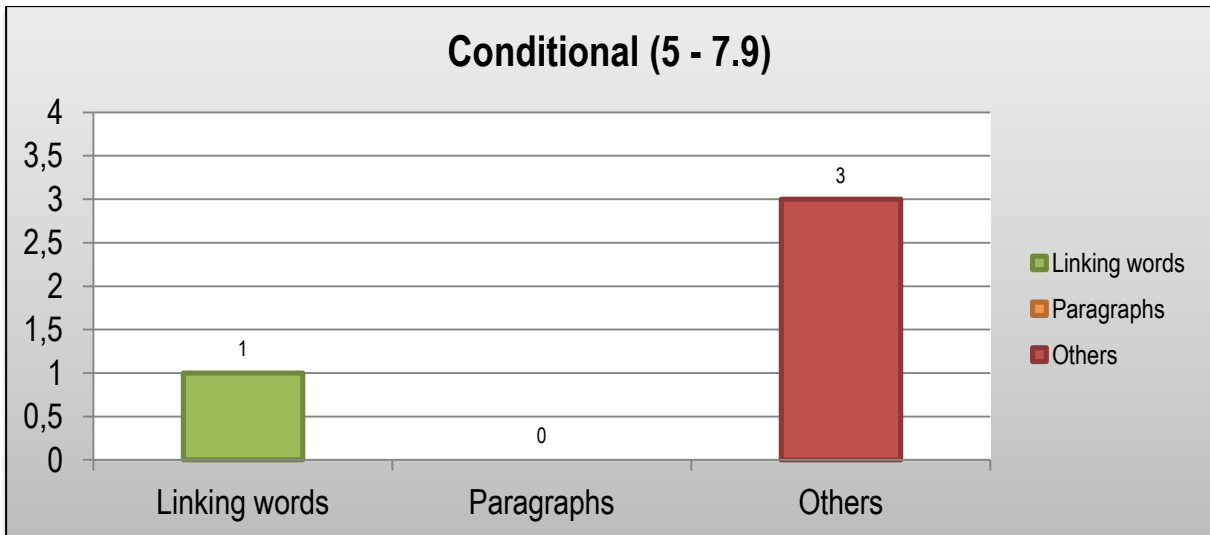


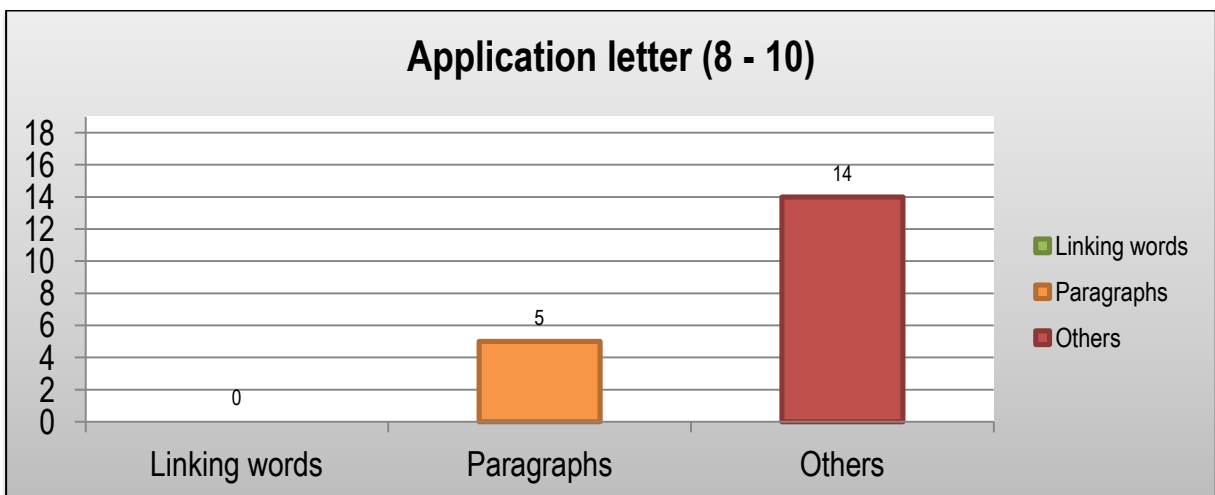
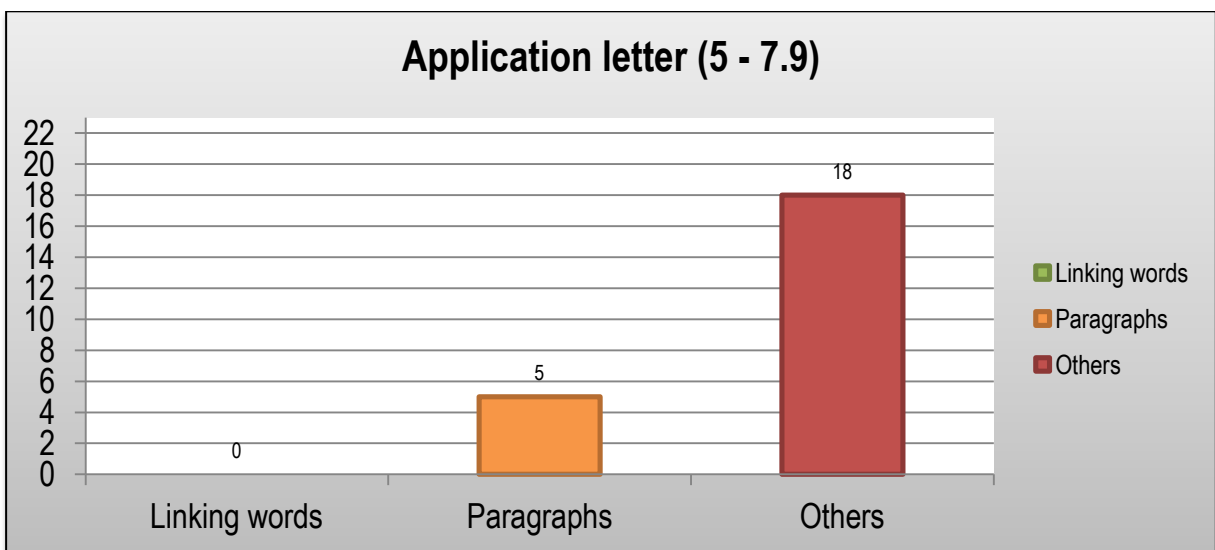
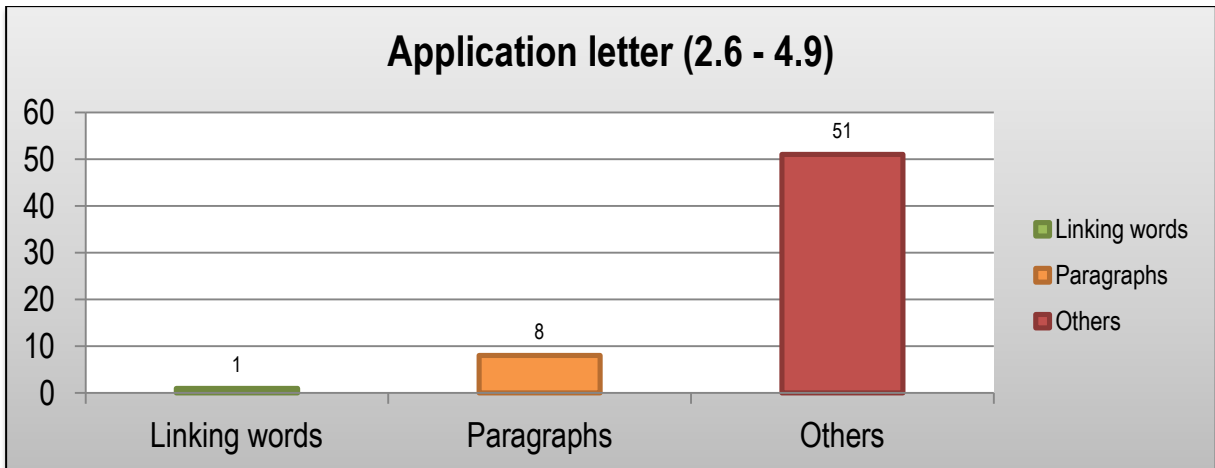


TEXT STRUCTURE



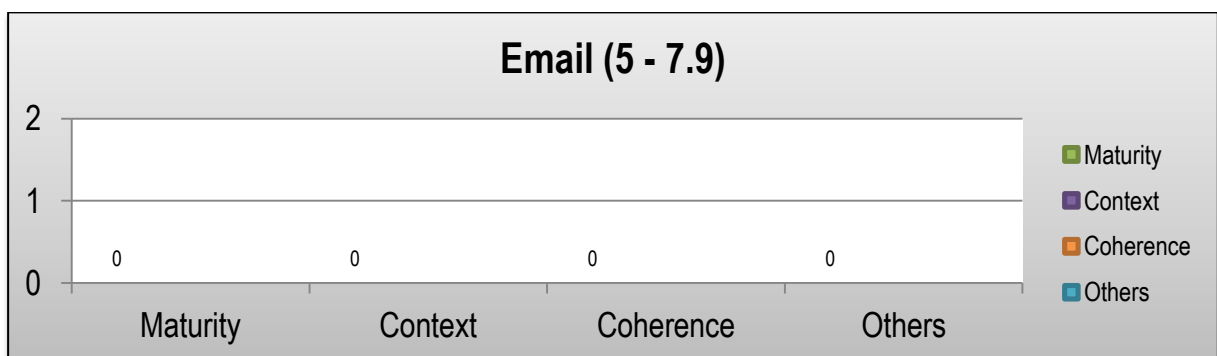
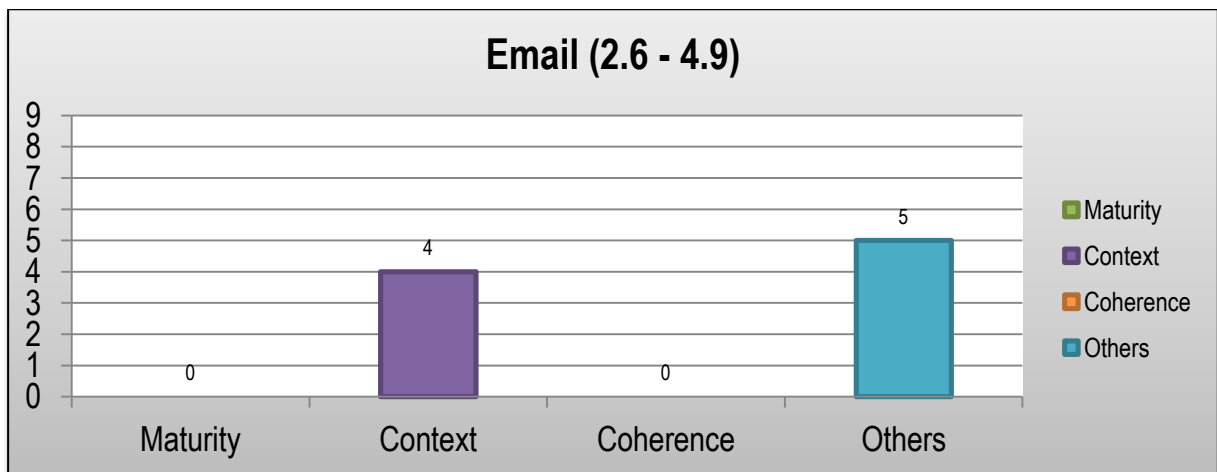
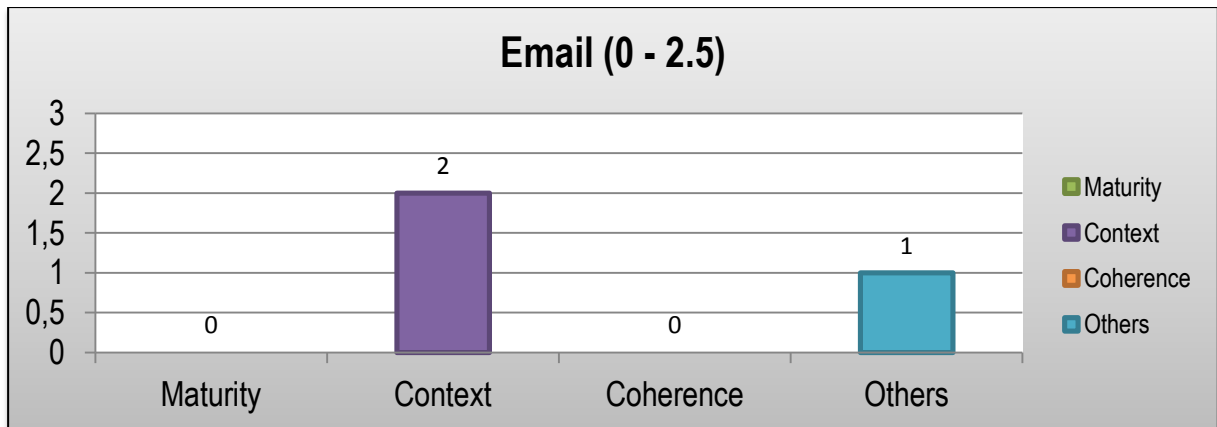


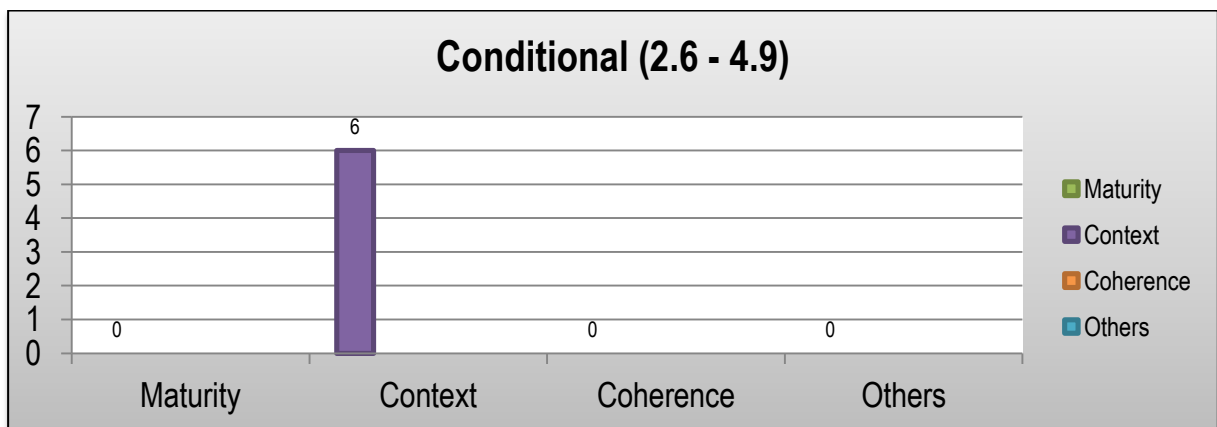
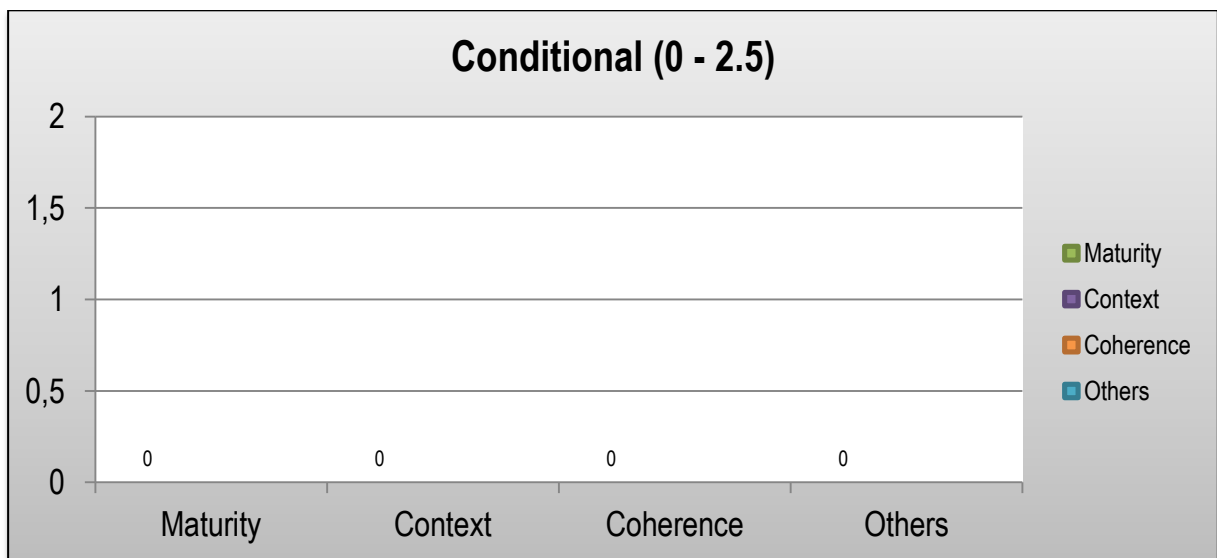
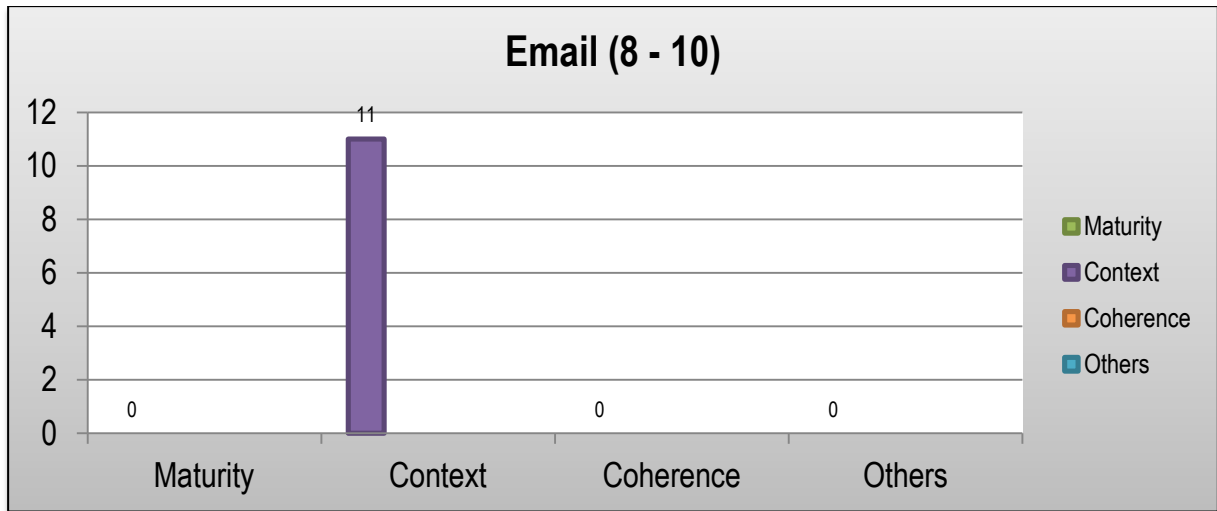


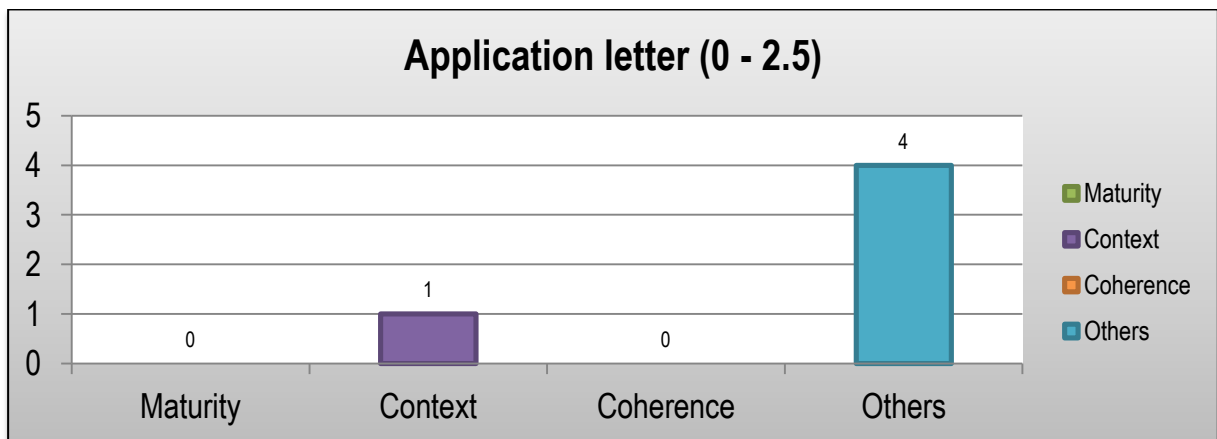
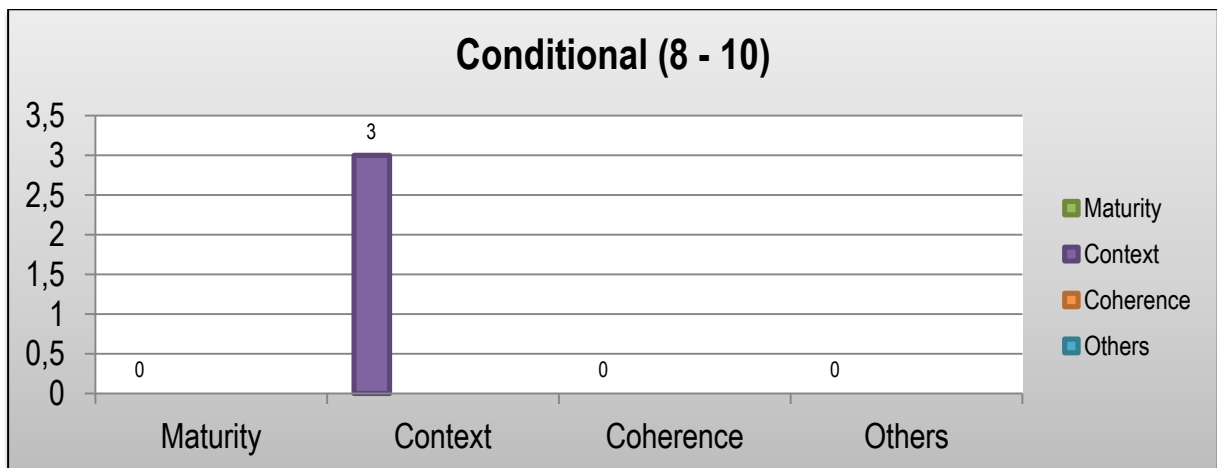
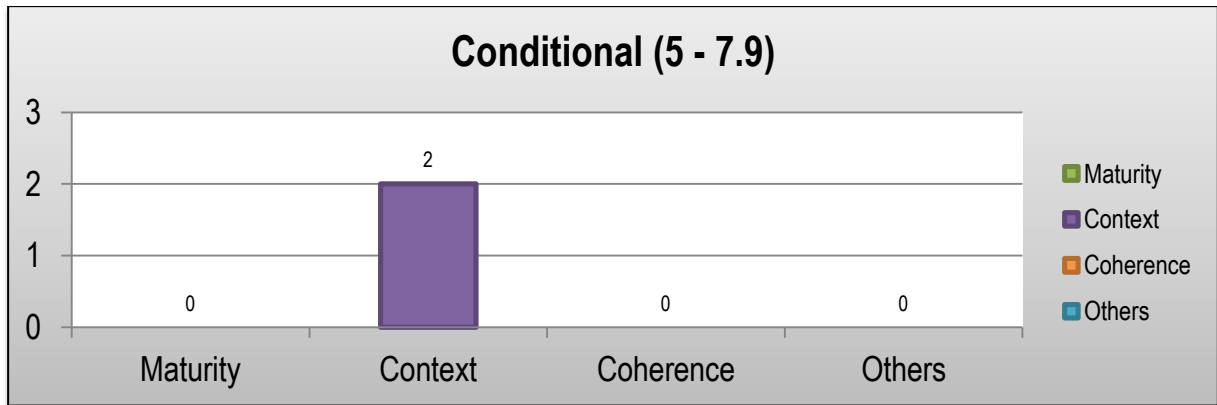


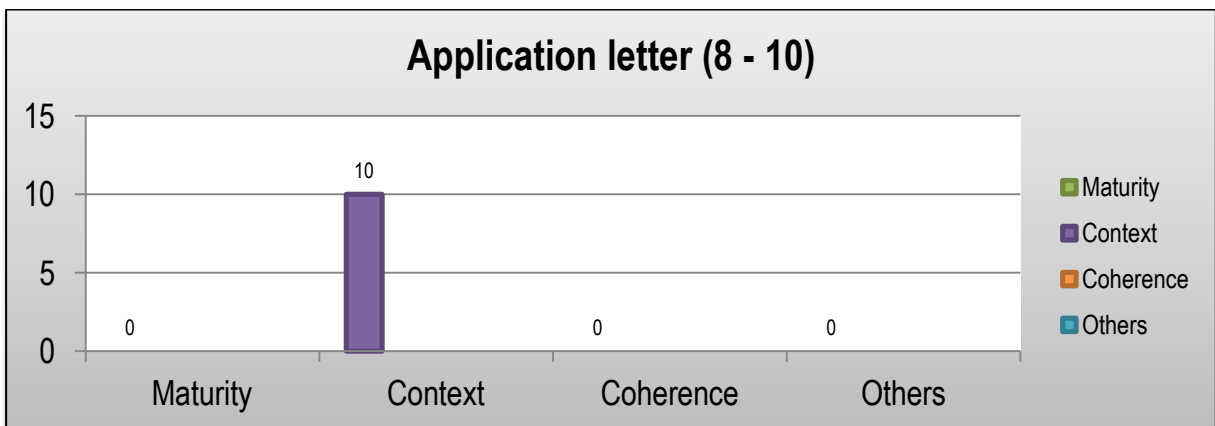
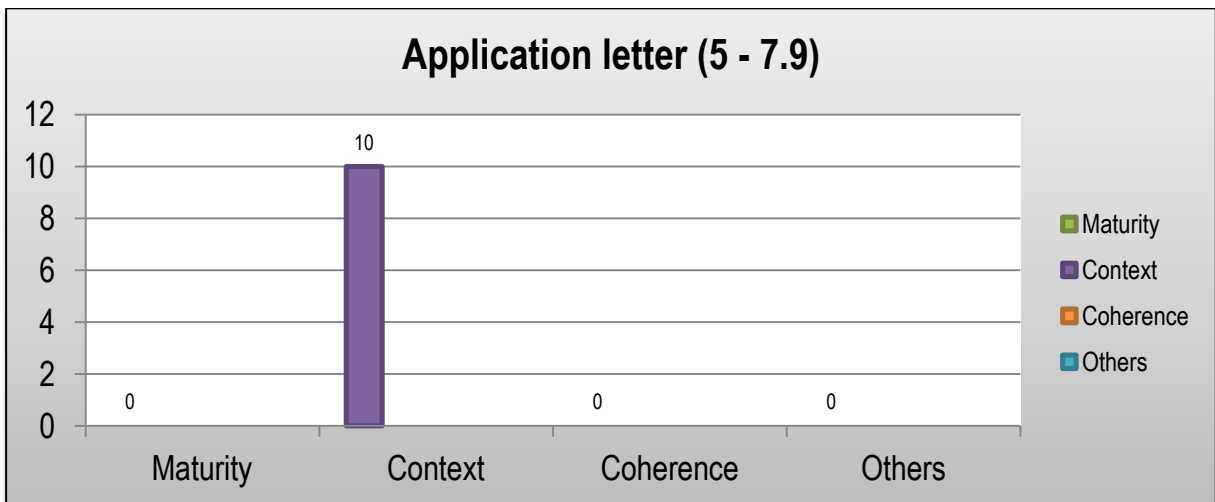
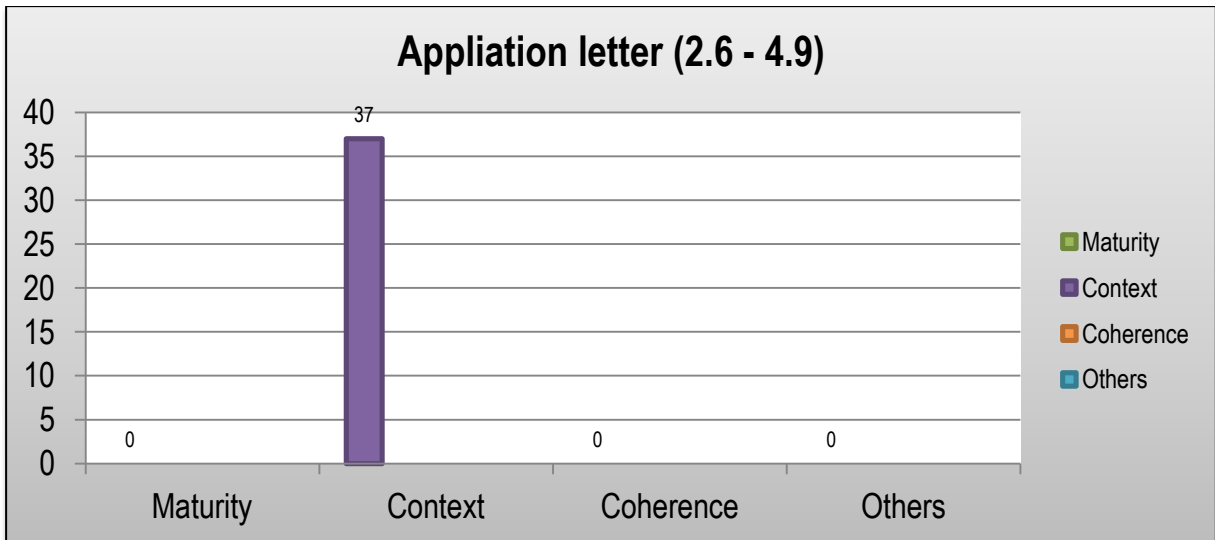


OTHERS











4.2. Conclusions

4.2.1. Specific conclusions

Vocabulary

When looking at the mistakes related to vocabulary, I have classified them depending on if they were a problem of **false friends**, a problem of **meaning**, a problem of **L1 interference**, a problem of **spelling** or **another** problem. Once I have analyzed the compositions (look at “Annex 2”), I can reach the following conclusions:

Email

→ Among the “email” compositions, students with a mark between **0 and 2.5** have made more **spelling** mistakes.

→ Those students who have a mark between **2.6 and 4.9** have made more **spelling** mistakes, probably because they have tried to write the words as they sound and this is not correct (e.g. “told” instead of “tall”).

→ Students whose mark is between **5 and 7.9** have made more **spelling** mistakes probably because they have tried to spell them in a similar way of how these words are pronounced (e.g. “plain” instead of “plane”).

→ Finally, students with a mark between **8 and 10** have also made more **spelling** mistakes.

In general, as far as vocabulary is concerned, when students with an Intermediate Level of English (B1 level –or pre-intermediate (A level) because they do not reach the objectives of the intermediate level–) write an email composition, they tend to make more spelling mistakes. However, although students have made the same types of mistakes, the vocabulary they used was, each time, more complicated. Students that had a mark between 2.6 and 4.9 used a more simple vocabulary than those that had a mark between 5 and 7.9, but their mistakes have been mostly spelling mistakes.



Conditional

→ Among the “conditional” compositions, there are no students with a mark between **0 and 2.5**.

→ Those students who have a mark between **2.6 and 4.9** have made more **spelling** mistakes and mistakes caused by their **L1 interference**.

→ Students whose mark is between **5 and 7.9** have made more **spelling** mistakes, mostly because they do not know how to make the plural form correctly in some cases.

→ Finally, students with a mark between **8 and 10** have also made more **spelling** mistakes.

In general, as far as vocabulary is concerned, when students with an Intermediate Level of English (B1 level) write a composition using the conditional form (it does not matter the mark that they got in their compositions), they tend to make more spelling mistakes. Although their marks are different, students have made the same type of mistakes but in different levels of vocabulary (simpler or more complex words).

Application letter

→ Among the “application letter” compositions, students with a mark between **0 and 2.5** have made more **other** different mistakes from “false friends” mistakes, “meaning” mistakes, “L1 interference” mistakes or even “spelling” mistakes (e.g. “courset” instead of “course”).

→ Those students who have a mark between **2.6 and 4.9** have made more **spelling** mistakes.

→ Those students whose mark is between **5 and 7.9** have made more **spelling** mistakes.

→ Finally, students with a mark between **8 and 10** have made more **spelling** mistakes and **other** different mistakes from “false friends” mistakes, “meaning” mistakes or even “L1 interference” mistakes –these last ones, mostly because students write words that do not make sense in the sentence or the context that they have written them– (e.g. “curriculum” instead of “CV”).



In general, when students with an Intermediate Level of English (B1 level) write an application letter composition, they tend to make more spelling mistakes. It seems that pre-intermediate (A2 level), those with a mark between 0 and 2.5, have made other types of mistakes. However, I would say that it looks strange and that the tendency should show that they also had a problem with spelling. As a following step to this research project, I would suggest to check this point by analyzing more compositions.

General

In general, students with an Intermediate Level of English (B1 level) tend to make more spelling mistakes (as far as vocabulary mistakes are concerned) when they write. Those mistakes are probably made because students do not pay attention when they are learning vocabulary and then, once they write it, they do not probably know how to write the words properly and make those kinds of mistakes. It could also be because they do not pay attention when they write and because they do not revise their writing before handing them in.

Grammar

When looking at the mistakes related to grammar, I have classified them depending on if they were a problem of **verb tenses, pronouns, determiners or articles, prepositions, conjunctions, adjectives, adverbs, missing words, extra words, punctuation, phrasal verbs, concordance, Wh- questions** or **another** kind of problem different from the ones mentioned. Once I have analyzed the compositions (look at “Annex 2”), I can reach the following conclusions:

Email

→ Among the “email” compositions, students with a mark between **0 and 2.5** have made more **verb tenses** mistakes and **other** different mistakes from “pronouns”, “determiners”, “prepositions”, “conjunctions”, “adjectives”, “adverbs”, “missing words”, “extra words”, “punctuation”, “phrasal verbs”, “concordance” or “Wh- questions” mistakes. The “verb tenses” mistakes are done because students have a big confusion of when they need to use the present simple or the present continuous form. This should not happen at this level, because



this was worked in 2nd ESO, this is why they probably obtain these marks. The “other mistakes” are done because students do not write the sentences in the correct order or because they want to say something and they do not know the way to say it properly and this becomes a grammatical mistake.

→ Those students who have a mark between **2.6 and 4.9** have made more **verb tenses** mistakes because they do not use the correct tense and they mostly write a future tense when they should write in past or vice versa. Apart from that, students sometimes use a future tense but they do not use the correct one (given that the future tense may have different ways of being expressed); or they sometimes write present simple when they need to write present continuous or vice versa. Another verb tenses problem is that students do not make the third person properly and they forget the “-s” that the third person needs to have in present simple. Again, this should not happen at this level and this may be one of the reasons why they have failed the composition.

→ Students whose mark is between **5 and 7.9** have made more **verb tenses** mistakes because students do not write the “-s” that belongs to the third person in the present simple and they sometimes write in another tense that the one they should be using (e.g. “I wrote” instead of “I am writing”). This also happens with students whose mark goes from 0 to 2.5, but students with these marks (from 5 to 7.9) probably make these mistakes because they do not pay enough attention to what they are writing, and not because they do not know it, as it may be the case of the students with lower marks.

→ Finally, students with a mark between **8 and 10** have also made more **verb tenses** mistakes because they are not conscious because they do not know when they need to use a modal verb (e.g. “I like to [...]” instead of “I'd like to [...]”) and because when they are writing in a future tense, they do not use the correct one, among other mistakes that are not as repeated as these ones.

In general, when students with an Intermediate Level of English (B1 level) write an email composition (it does not matter the mark that they got in their compositions), they tend to make more verb tenses mistakes. Those mistakes (similar in all the compositions) are probably done because the first two groups (A2 level) have not assimilated it and because the two other groups (B1 level) do not concentrate enough or do not revise their compositions.



Conditional

→ Among the “conditional” compositions, there are no students with a mark between **0 and 2.5**.

→ Those students who have a mark between **2.6 and 4.9** have made more **other** different mistakes from “tenses”, “pronouns”, “determiners”, “prepositions”, “conjunctions”, “adjectives”, “adverbs”, “missing words”, “extra words”, “punctuation”, “phrasal verbs”, “concordance” or “Wh- questions” mistakes; mostly because they write sentences that make no sense or because they write sentences that do not follow the correct order that the English language requires.

→ Students whose mark is between **5 and 7.9** have made more **verb tenses** mistakes, mostly because students still get confused because they do not know when they need to use the present simple or the present continuous.

→ Finally, students with a mark between **8 and 10** have made more **missing words** mistakes (mostly because they miss prepositions or subjects that are quite important for the sentence to be grammatically correct) and **other** different mistakes from “tenses”, “pronouns”, “determiners”, “prepositions”, “conjunctions”, “adjectives”, “adverbs”, “extra words”, “punctuation”, “phrasal verbs”, “concordance or “Wh- questions” mistakes (mostly because they do not write the sentence in the correct order that this should be).

In general, when students with an Intermediate Level of English (B1 level) write a composition using the conditional form (it does not matter the mark that they got in their compositions), they tend to make more “other mistakes” (as for example wrong structured sentences: “The tic-tac of the clock” instead of “The clock tic-tac”). So, this means that, mostly, students have understood how a conditional sentence is formed.

Application letter

→ Among the “application letter” compositions, students with a mark between **0 and 2.5** have made more **verb tenses** mistakes, mostly because students get quite confused because they do not know when they need to use the present simple or the present continuous form, or the past simple or the present perfect. Again, these students have not achieved the B1 level, because these grammatical items were explained in 2nd and 3rd ESO.



→ Those students who have a mark between **2.6 and 4.9** have made more **verb tenses** mistakes, mostly because students get quite confused because they do not know when they need to use the present continuous or the present simple form. These students have probably made these mistakes because they were not paying attention to what they were writing.

→ Those students whose mark is between **5 and 7.9** have made more **verb tenses** mistakes, once again, because students get sometimes confused because they do not know when they need to use the present simple or the present continuous, or the past simple or the present perfect. They change the verb tenses and they seem to do not understand how to use them, but this should not happen at this level.

→ Finally, students with a mark between **8 and 10** have made more **prepositions** mistakes, either because they forget to write the prepositions or because they use a wrong preposition, but they do not have problems with the use of verb tenses.

In general, when students with a pre-intermediate level (A2) or a low Intermediate Level of English (B1 level) write an application letter composition, they tend to make more verb tenses mistakes, while the highest students have a problem with prepositions.

General

In general, students with an Intermediate Level of English (B1 level) tend to make more verb tenses mistakes (as far as grammar mistakes are concerned) when they write. Those mistakes are probably made because students do not pay attention when they are writing their compositions and sometimes they do not realize that they have changed the tense of the verb, or maybe because the lower students do not know when they need to use a tense or another one and so, they do it by random.

Text structure

When looking at the mistakes related to text structure, I have focused on **separation of paragraphs, linking words and others**. Once I have analyzed the compositions (look at “Annex 2”), I can reach the following conclusions:



Email

→ Among the “email” compositions, students with a mark between **0 and 2.5** have made no mistakes as far as the text structure is concerned, probably because of the simplicity of the text or because of the poor length of the text.

→ Those students who have a mark between **2.6 and 4.9** have made more **other** different mistakes (such as sentences that make no sense in the context of the composition) from “linking words” or “paragraphs” mistakes, mostly because they have written sentences that do not make sense either on the text or by their own.

→ Students whose mark is between **5 and 7.9** have made more **other** different mistakes (once again, they have written sentences that make no sense on the text), mostly because they have also written sentences that make no sense.

→ Finally, students with a mark between **8 and 10** have also made, once again, more **other** different mistakes (such as unnecessary formal endings) because they have written sentences that do not make sense.

In general, when students with an Intermediate Level of English (B1 level) write an email composition (it does not matter the mark that they got in their compositions), they tend to make more other different mistakes from “linking words” or “paragraphs” mistakes; such as writing a lot of sentences to make the text longer, but that, in the end, those sentences are incorrect and they just confuse the reader when reading it. So, it can be said, that they manage how to separate the paragraphs or use the linking words.

Conditional

→ Among the “conditional” compositions, there are no students with a mark between **0 and 2.5**.

→ Those students who have a mark between **2.6 and 4.9** have made more **paragraphs** mistakes, mostly because they leave unfinished paragraphs.

→ Students whose mark is between **5 and 7.9** have made more **other** different mistakes from “linking words” or “paragraphs” mistakes, mostly because students write sentences that do not make sense either on the text or by their own.



→ Finally, students with a mark between **8 and 10** have made more **paragraphs** mistakes, mostly because they leave paragraphs unfinished or because they do not make the paragraphs separation.

In general, when students with an Intermediate Level of English (B1 level) write a composition using the conditional form (it does not matter the mark that they got in their compositions), they tend to make more paragraphs mistakes; both because some students do not finish their paragraphs, but mostly because they do not separate them and this makes the composition harder to read.

Application letter

→ Among the “application letter” compositions, students with a mark between **0 and 2.5** have made more **other** different mistakes from “linking words” or “paragraphs” mistakes, mostly because students write sentences that do not make sense either on the text or by their own.

→ Those students who have a mark between **2.6 and 4.9** have made more **other** different mistakes, mostly because students have written sentences that do not make sense.

→ Those students whose mark is between **5 and 7.9** have made more **other** different mistakes, mostly because they have written sentences that do not make sense.

→ Finally, students with a mark between **8 and 10** have made more **other** different mistakes because they have written sentences that do not make sense.

In general, when students with an Intermediate Level of English (B1 level) write an application letter composition (it does not matter the mark that they got in their compositions), they tend to make more other different mistakes from “linking words” or “paragraphs” mistakes. Once again, students at all levels have made the same mistakes but each one depending on their possibilities; students with a mark between 0 and 2.5 have made much more simple sentences than those students whose marks go from 8 to 10. However, the mistakes seems to be the same in all cases, so this is probably because they want to make their



compositions longer and they do not think about the fact that what they are writing may not be necessary and, on the contrary, it may confuse people when reading it.

General

In general, students with an Intermediate Level of English (B1 level) tend to make more other different mistakes from “linking word” or “paragraphs” mistakes (as far as text structure mistakes are concerned) when they write. Those mistakes are probably made because students do not know how to say something and they just invent the sentences; despite this is not a good solution, as far as it is better a short text but well written, than a large one that is not understandable. This is probably the main cause why their sentences do not make sense.

It looks strange, however, that although it seems that they have no problems in organising paragraphs and using linking words, they have done these mistakes in the composition where they had to use the conditional tense. A further step in this research project should be in checking it through more compositions, and if so, analyzing why this is like this.

Others

Apart from having a look at vocabulary, grammar and text structure mistakes, I have also had a look at other concepts such as **maturity**, **context**, **coherence** or **other** types of similar mistakes. This has probably been more difficult due to the fact that it is more subjective. However, once I have analyzed the compositions (look at “Annex 2”), I can reach the following conclusions:

Email

→ Among the “email” compositions, students with a mark between **0 and 2.5** have made more **context** mistakes, mostly because students have missed some words in their sentences that are necessary for a good understanding of the text.



→ Those students who have a mark between **2.6 and 4.9** have made more **other** different mistakes from “maturity”, “context” or “coherence” mistakes, mostly because they have written texts with no sense or they have developed a wrong topic.

→ Students whose mark is between **5 and 7.9** have not made any mistake.

→ Finally, students with a mark between **8 and 10** have also made, once again, more **context** mistakes, mostly because students have missed some words in their sentences that are necessary for a good understanding of the text.

In general, when students with an Intermediate Level of English (B1 level) write an email composition (it does not matter the mark that they got in their compositions), they tend to make more context mistakes. These mistakes can probably be done because students believe that what they say is going to be enough for the reader to understand everything, but they do not realize that the person who is going to read their compositions do not know what they (the students) have in mind, and so, if they miss some words, the reader can be really confused. It is better to have more words to specify clearly all the objects and subjects, and refer clearly to what they want to say than trying to omit some words and let the composition unfinished or with a possible bad understanding of it.

Conditional

→ Among the “conditional” compositions, there are no students with a mark between **0 and 2.5**.

→ Those students who have a mark between **2.6 and 4.9** have made more **context** mistakes, mostly because they have missed some words in their sentences that are necessary for a good understanding of the text.

→ Those students whose mark is between **5 and 7.9** have made more **context** mistakes, mostly because they have also missed some words in their sentences that are necessary for a good understanding of the text.

→ Finally, students with a mark between **8 and 10** have made more **context** mistakes (once again), mostly because they have missed some words in their sentences that are necessary for a good understanding of the text, too.



In general, when students with an Intermediate Level of English (B1 level) write a composition using the conditional form (it does not matter the mark that they got in their compositions), they tend to make more context mistakes. Once again, the problem is that students think that the person who reads the text already knows what they want to say, and they miss some words that can be essential for the reader to make a good understanding of the composition.

Application letter

→ Among the “application letter” compositions, students with a mark between **0 and 2.5** have made more **other** different mistakes from “maturity”, “context” or “coherence” mistakes, mostly because students have developed a wrong topic.

→ Those students who have a mark between **2.6 and 4.9** have made more **context** mistakes, mostly because they have missed some words in their sentences that are necessary for a good understanding of the text.

→ Those students whose mark is between **5 and 7.9** have made more **context** mistakes, mostly because they have also missed some words in their sentences that are necessary for a good understanding of the text.

→ Finally, students with a mark between **8 and 10** have made more **context** mistakes, too, because they have missed, once again, some words in their sentences that are necessary for a good understanding of the text.

In general, when students with an Intermediate Level of English (B1 level) write an application letter composition (it does not matter the mark that they got in their compositions), they tend to make more context mistakes.

General

In general, students with an Intermediate Level of English (B1 level) tend to make more context mistakes (as far as other mistakes are concerned) when they write. Those mistakes are probably made because students think that the words they are missing are not really important and they do not realize how important they are to understand the text in a good way. They should not be afraid of repeating some words or ideas (as far as they do not



make an excessive use of them), because this is even better for the person who is reading the compositions to understand them clearly with just reading them once or twice, but not more.

4.2.2. General conclusions

Analyzing all the compositions in general, we get to the conclusion that students tend to commit more **grammar mistakes**. Most of those mistakes are found within all the “**email**” compositions, where there is a maximum of **460** grammar mistakes (most of them made by students whose marks are between 5 and 10), and most of these mistakes are verb tenses mistakes (there is a maximum of **162** grammar mistakes in “**conditional compositions**” and maximum of **445** grammar mistakes in “**application letter compositions**”). The majority of students who have made these mistakes, seem not to pay attention to what they are writing because most of these mistakes come from the missing “-s” of the third person in the present simple; as well as it seems that they tend to confuse the moment in which they need to write a future or a conditional tense. I am sure that if they revised their compositions carefully before handing them in, the results would be different, since most of these mistakes are slips, that is, that students can correct themselves if they pay attention.

As far as the theoretical part is concerned, I strongly believe that correcting mistakes in class is very useful for students to learn from them, but it requires some effort from the students' part. If students really want to be involved in their learning, they should work on the mistakes they make to learn from them: as I say in the title of my project “**Don't rub your mistakes out. Learn from them.**” But before learning from their own mistakes, they should start by listening to what is being said during the lessons at the high school, and then they would do many fewer! To get involved in your learning is not something that can be done in one day, or even one week or month. This is a progressive work that requires effort, attention to the lessons and time to practise. This is the only way they will be able to succeed in writing.

I must say that I am really satisfied because with this project I have been able to get to the conclusion of my initial question “which mistakes are the most common among students in 4th ESO”. Apart from getting to know it, I have also been able to see, more or less, why students



make these mistakes and what should they know at their level. Once I have known the knowledge students in an Intermediate level should have acquired, it was easier for me to correct the compositions as well as understand the marks students got. I really think that this project has been very useful for me to learn from my own mistakes as the project was going on. With this project I have had the opportunity to realise what I did wrong and try to correct it, as well as I have learned a lot more about the English Language, its grammar and, above all, how to write in this language.

I have always wanted to study Translation and Interpretation in English as a degree, and working on this project has made me see that this is truly what I want to do in the future. I have learnt a lot, both from the theoretical and the practical part. This has definitively been a hard project (mostly as far as the analysis is concerned, because I have had some worrying problems with the Excel files) but, above all, I think that in the end, it has been very gratifying.



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