

## **S-V agreement errors in English L2 and Spanish L3 of L1 Norwegian learners**

Exploring the correlation between subject-verb agreement errors in L2 English and Spanish L3.

REBECCA ANASTACIA TORKILDSEN

SUPERVISOR

Eli-Marie Danbolt Drange

**University of Agder, Spring 2024**

Department of Foreign Languages and Translation

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## Acknowledgements

At the start of this journey, I must admit, the thought of making it this far was daunting! Today, however, I type this letter with a heart full of gratitude for those that have given me the strength and support I needed to carry through even when I did not think it was possible. Although it was an emotional experience to write this thesis, I feel an utter obligation to acknowledge my appreciation not only in spoken words, but in words that attest to the accomplishments that I feel. This section has been the part that I have looked forward to the most. I could have never completed this thesis without the help and support of my family, friends, and colleagues. I will be forever eternally grateful!

First and foremost, I would like to thank my thesis supervisors Lenka Garshol and Eli-Marie Danbolt Drange. To Lenka for getting me started on this thesis, and for your guidance in helping me to put my thoughts into words. To Eli-Marie for your kindness in taking me on at such a short notice, your constructive advice and encouragement has kept me moving forward. I would not be able to finish this thesis without your help. It has been a pleasure working with you as my supervisor during the last year at the University of Agder.

Secondly, I would like to thank Trine Lilleås for your help and kindness, giving me constructive feedback. I am so grateful for being your colleague, for our conversations about my thesis, and a shoulder to cry on. Also, thank you to Kristine Hasund and the members of the TRAWL group who have given me additional support that I needed along the way. I am very grateful that you have checked up on me and collaborated with me regarding the challenges of my paper. It has been a blessing to have your guidance so thank you kindly.

The reality of writing a Master thesis has been an exhausting process and for that reason I would like to spotlight the support of my family! To my mom and dad, Mary and Jon, thank you for pushing me and for making me believe that I could and would accomplish this. It has been a long road but all along you had faith in me. I am finally able to say it aloud, 'we did it'.

To my mother- and father-in-law, Laila and Terje, you have been utterly amazing towards me, and have lifted me up when I was down. I am so very thankful for your encouraging and loving words, and all the support and help you have given me. To my sisters, Isabel and Madelen, who have been with me through it all, thank you with all my heart. Isabel, I am eternally grateful for you always pushing me to go on and

encouraging me along the way, and for believing in me, even in the darkest hours. Thank you for putting up with me for countless hours on FaceTime and for helping me with school, work, and applications. You have gone above and beyond!

I want to thank my dearest friends, who have patiently listened to me talk about my worries with my master thesis. Thank you, Erica Weatherford, for your support, help, and friendship. A special thanks goes to Nicole Genz who has been a huge help during my bachelor and now my master thesis as well.

Finally, I dedicate this work to my amazing husband, Chris André Torkildsen. Your love and devotion have encouraged me to power through even the heaviest of workloads. You have supported me by taking care of our pets, plants, house, garden, and so much more so that I could focus on my writing. You are the essential piece that has allowed me to put this puzzle together into the beautiful accomplishment that I feel. You have been and will continue to be the best part of my reason to keep processing. Thank you for the many everyday acts of kindness that always brighten my day! Your humor has made me laugh when I have wanted to cry. I am so grateful that you have been by my side through the close of this chapter and the beginning of a new one. There is no one else I would rather share it with!

With a heart full of gratitude, I end this acknowledgement. Once more, thank you to all.

Rebecca Anastacia Torkildsen

Kristiansand, May 2024

## Abstract

Grammar is an important part of the process of language acquisition, and this thesis investigates the hypothesis regarding subject-verb agreement being the bottleneck of second language acquisition. My study is conducted on the data provided by the research group TRAWL, comprised by 19 participants who have handed in texts in both L2 English and L3 Spanish during their years of English and Spanish instruction enrolled in either lower- or upper secondary schools around Norway. Afterward, I handpicked the data from TRAWL necessary for my sub corpus and investigation. From there, I analyzed the data manually, and then I discussed the results.

The goal with my thesis was to investigate whether or not subject-verb agreement was indeed the bottleneck in L2 acquisition, as there are studies who have looked at morphosyntax in different aspects, which led me to assume that I would find many S-V agreement errors produced by L1 Norwegian learners in both the L2 English and the L3 Spanish.

My results show that L1 Norwegian learners of L2 English and L3 Spanish in Norwegian lower- and upper secondary schools do produce SVA agreement errors in the respective languages. However, the results do not confirm the theory that subject-verb agreement is the bottleneck of L2 acquisition. However, the results indicate that within SVA, pupils make the most *omission* errors in L2 English production. In Spanish however, the results show that 40% of the errors are due to overgeneralization errors, where the pupils use plural subject, but fail to inflect the verb according to the subject.

Keywords: First language acquisition, L1 Norwegian, second language acquisition, SLA, L2 English, foreign language acquisition, FLA, L3 Spanish, S-V agreement, agreement errors, subject-verb agreement, SVA, lower secondary school, upper secondary school

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## 1 Introduction

English and Spanish are among the most widely spoken languages in the world and contribute to communication across national borders (Zeidan, 2023). In Europe by 2021, English is acquired by 98.3% of the pupils in lower secondary, and 86.3% of the pupils in upper secondary (Eurostat, 2023). Spanish makes up 18.2% of the pupils in lower secondary, and 17.9% of the pupils in upper secondary who acquired Spanish as a foreign language (Eurostat, 2023).

In Norway by 2021, 95.2% of pupils in lower secondary acquired English (Eurostat, 2023). With Spanish, being the most popular foreign language to acquire, there were between 35% - 40% of the pupils in lower secondary who acquired the language (Øksenvåg, 2021a). In upper secondary, 42.8% of the pupils acquired English, and 46% acquired Spanish (Eurostat, 2023; Øksenvåg, 2021b).

Seeing the above-mentioned, there are many reasons to claim that language learning has been an important topic of research, and indeed it has been for many years, to get a clearer understanding of how the human brain stores and processes during language acquisition. For that reason, researchers have been very interested in, not only the research of a child's first language, but also the languages acquired after the first language, that is, the acquisition of a second language, which has been a widely researched topic within the field of linguistics.

An area within second language acquisition (SLA) known to be problematic for learners is grammar, in both a structural but also a functional manner (Slabakova, 2016, 2019). This is known as functional morphology which looks at understanding both structure and function of a language. More specifically, language learners struggle with what is known as concord or subject-verb agreement (SVA) (Basnet, 2017; Garshol, 2019; Nndwamato, 2017; Slabakova, 2019). In SVA the subject is in relation with the verb, which means that the features of the subject are *'inherent and logically prior to those of the verb'* (Butterworth et al., 1996). That is, the features on a subject, such as person, number and gender transfer from the subject to the verb (Butterworth et al., 1996). SVA is an essential aspect of linguistics which plays an important role in understanding how language functions, and hence, functional morphology *'is the single most important form-function mapping that learners have to master'* (Slabakova, 2016).

Slabakova (2008, 2019) presented The Bottleneck Hypothesis where she claims that functional morphology is the bottleneck of SLA, which means that SVA is the part of grammar more difficult for language learners to acquire in a second language (L2). Ample research support Slabakova's hypothesis investigating this impairment of functional morphology, in this case, agreement morphology (Garshol, 2019; Gonzalez et al., 2022; Gunawan et al., 2018; Jensen et al., 2020; Jensen & Westergaard, 2021; Mancini et al., 2011; Ocampo, 2013; Slabakova, 2009).

Furthermore, Garshol (2019, p. ii) investigated SVA errors in L2 English written production of L1 Norwegian upper secondary school pupils, and found evidence that even well into advanced stages, the learners produce SVA errors. Jensen and Westgaard (2021) looked at syntax and morphology, testing Slabakova's Bottleneck Hypothesis with Norwegian youth from ages 11-18 during English SLA. Their study partially supports the hypothesis, however, they claim that one has to take the L1 transfer and variation of the input into consideration to be able to assess the level of difficulty acquiring different parts of the L2 grammar (Jensen & Westergaard, 2021, p. 97). The results show that their participants' performance was weak and lingered at lower accuracy levels, finding functional morphology to be difficult despite factors working in its favor (Jensen et al., 2020, p. 4). Jensen et al. (2020) tested the Bottleneck Hypothesis with one of the constructions involving SVA. Here, the results show SVA as a more persistent problem in English SLA, corresponding to the pattern found in Garshol (2019). Jensen et al. speculated that their findings might be due to massive overlearning and effective overgeneralizations of the morpheme -s (2020, p. 20).

Thus, my thesis will take it a step further looking at more than one language, namely L2 English and L3 Spanish by L1 Norwegian learners, as it is not done before to the best of my knowledge. Hence, my study is concerned with L1 Norwegian learners in the process of SLA and their production of SVA errors found in texts the learners have produced in both L2 English and L3 Spanish. I will look at what types of errors and the frequencies of these, as well as the correlation between the learners' L1, L2 and L3.

Considering the broader context and to comprehensively address these SVA errors, an examination of SVA marking in Norwegian, English and Spanish must be included as a theoretical foundation for this thesis, as well as examining transfer and interlanguage concepts, assessing their impact as either beneficial or hindering to language acquisition.

I try to answer my research questions based on data collected from the research group Tracking Written Learner Language (See Dirdal et al., 2022). Here, I analyze L2 English and L3 Spanish texts produced by L1 Norwegian learners, selected from the TRAWL Corpus. As further described in chapter 4, the L1 Norwegian participants are enrolled in either lower secondary schools or upper secondary schools around Norway, ranging in ages between 15-17 years. With that said, I have formulated the following research questions:

RQ1: What types of SVA errors are found in L1 Norwegian pupils' production of written L2 English and L3 Spanish texts?

RQ2: What types of SVA errors are the most frequent?

RQ3: What is the correlation between SVA errors produced by L1 Norwegian learners of L2 English compared to the SVA errors found in L3 Spanish produced by the same learners?

RQ4: Are the SVA errors produced in L3 Spanish affected by the learners' L2 English, if not, by their L1 Norwegian?

## 1.2 The structure

My thesis consists of nine chapters. In this chapter I give a brief introduction to the topic of my thesis, as well as presenting my research questions. The second chapter provides an overview which gives my thesis context. Here, I will discuss and clarify terms, abbreviations as well as acronyms. In addition, I also found it necessary to include a brief description of the Norwegian School System and the exposure of English and Spanish in Norway. At last, in this section, I give an overview of subject-verb agreement marking in Norwegian, English and Spanish.

As a backdrop for my thesis, I present theory in the third chapter, where I focus on the important parts of language acquisition, subject-verb agreement and previous research, in order to execute this investigation of SVA errors. In addition, I also discuss SVA and show previous research in the field, as well as looking at different errors within subject-verb agreement. The chapter also covers long distance-agreement and corpus linguistics which are highly relevant for my thesis, and lastly, I present my research questions for my study.

The fourth chapter provides the methodology of the thesis and gives information on my criteria, as well as information about the TRAWL Corpus, the participants I have selected into my sub corpus, as well as what kind of tasks they have been answering, as these are the texts I display with the results in chapter five, as well as the analysis of the texts in chapter six.

Chapter five I, as mentioned above, present the results of all the data manually analyzed, before giving an overview of the distribution of SVA errors found in my sub corpus. Afterward, in chapter six, I go into more details on the analysis showing in detail all the errors each participant individually has made, in both English and Spanish. Furthermore, in chapter seven I discuss my findings up against my research questions and the theory, before I end the chapter by explaining the limitations of my study. Finally, in chapter eight I will give my conclusion and my thoughts on further research.

## 2 Context

### 2.1 Terms and main concepts

In this section, I will discuss subject-verb agreement, the two terms ‘acquisition’ and ‘learning’, the usage of the abbreviations L1, L2, L3, and FL, as well as the acronym SLA. In addition, when referring generically to participants in my study as well as to certain examples from participants, I will use the masculine pronoun he.

To begin with, as this thesis focuses on subject-verb agreement, I will use the terms SVA and S-V agreement interchangeably when referring to this phenomenon. In addition, the first language a child learns during its critical early years is referred to as its ‘first language’ or ‘L1’. The acronym ‘SLA’ will be used to refer to both the field and discipline of second language acquisition. As the child is in the process of learning a second language, in which the SLA takes place after the acquisition of the first language, I will refer to this as either the ‘second language’, ‘L2’, or the ‘target language’ (TL).

Research has earlier tried to distinguish between the two terms of ‘acquisition’ and ‘learning’ (Ortega, 2013). However, as the contemporary SLA terminology has no distinction between these two terms, that is, in this thesis, unless referred to in a specific theory, acquisition and learning will be used simultaneously throughout this thesis.

The distinction between English as a second language and English as a foreign language is a topic of ongoing debate in Norway. In their book ‘English Teaching

Strategies,' Drew and Sørheim (2016) dedicate a chapter about learning a foreign language, where they classify English as a second, but also, according to the chapter, a foreign language. This distinction often hinges on the extent of learning opportunities and their sources (Cook, 2016, pp. 14-15; Richards, 1974). Hence, whether English is a second or a foreign language in Norway, in reality depends on the learners' source of learning opportunities (Cook, 2016, pp. 14-15; Richards, 1974). If these opportunities primarily come from the school curriculum, both English and Spanish can be regarded as foreign languages. That is, a language acquired among native Norwegian speakers. If learning mainly occurs outside of formal education, English may be considered a second language, however, the Spanish language still remains a foreign language in Norway. The debate on this topic is continuous, however, most children are introduced to English much earlier than that of Spanish, and thus, with the clear division of curriculums, Spanish is categorized as a third and a foreign language in Norway, and English as L1 Norwegians' second language.

To conclude this section, I have clarified the key language acquisition terminology and the terms 'acquisition' and 'learning' and how these will be used interchangeably, unless specified. I have also highlighted the debate over classifying English in Norway, where the status of English and Spanish depends on the source of learning opportunities. In this thesis, I will generically refer to English as our second language and Spanish as our third and foreign language. However, as discussed above, since English might also be a foreign language to some Norwegians, and Spanish is also a language acquired after Norwegian, there might be some instances where I use the umbrella term L2 when referring to both English and Spanish acquisition. A more detailed discussion of this classification and the reasons behind it will be further supported in a subsequent section.

## 2.2 The Norwegian Educational System

In 1969, English became a mandatory subject for all pupils in compulsory primary and lower secondary school (Bøhn et al., 2018). Between 1969 and 2006, the curriculum underwent several major reforms. In 2020 a new reform, LK20, was developed and introduced over a three-year period, and it was not until 2023 that it was fully implemented across all levels. Hence, this thesis is centered around the Knowledge Promotion Reform 2006 (LK06), which was in effect when the participants in the

TRAWL corpus were undergoing their education. The more recent reform of 2020 falls outside the scope of my study, as was implemented after the commencement of this research.

The LK06 was the Norwegian educational framework introduced in 2006, and the English version revised in 2013, which replaced the old framework from 1997, and outlined the national curriculum for compulsory education in Norway (The Ministry of Education and Research, 2013a, 2013b). The framework covers all subjects in school and provides guidelines and goals for what pupils should learn at different grade levels, that is, second-, fourth-, seventh-, tenth-, and eleventh grade.

LK06 defines the core curriculum, the quality framework, the subject curricula, the distribution of teaching hours per subject and individual assessment (Drew & Sørheim, 2016, p. 41). The English and Spanish curricula define the main subject areas, the distribution of teaching hours for each subject, individual assessment, in addition to basic skills. The core subject areas encompass language acquisition, cultural studies, literature, and communication (The Ministry of Education and Research, 2006, 2013a). Nonetheless, it is worth noting that while the English curriculum makes a clear distinction between written and oral communication, the Spanish curriculum places a significant emphasis on communication as a holistic concept. This difference is an interesting aspect to consider as we explore this topic further below.

It is interesting to note the distribution of teaching hours for each subject, especially for English and Spanish. The hours allotted to each subject might have an impact on or play a role in the pupils' language acquisition. The ENG1-03 regulations read that pupils are required (or entitled) to have a total of 366 hours of English instruction in primary school (2013a). However, when the same pupils start at lower secondary school, they only acquire 222 hours of English distributed over three years (The Ministry of Education and Research, 2013a). Lastly, note that there are two different routes to choose between when enrolling at upper secondary school. The one I am focusing on in my thesis is the program for general studies, in which English is only obligatory in the first year of upper secondary school (The Ministry of Education and Research, 2013a).

According to the foreign language curriculum, FSP1-01, pupils in eighth through tenth grade are required to complete a total of 227 hours of foreign language instruction (The Ministry of Education and Research, 2006). If pupils in lower secondary school,

after completing three years with, for instance, Spanish, opt to continue with the same language in the upper secondary school, the pupils are only required two more years of instruction. That is, after three years of studying Spanish in the lower secondary school, the pupils start at level II in 11<sup>th</sup> grade, building on their language knowledge from the previous years, which is classified as level I. Considering the pupils from the upper secondary school, who were participants in this thesis, they had completed approximately 227 hours of teaching hours from the lower secondary school, and were undergoing their first year of upper secondary school allotted 113 hours of foreign language instruction during the time of my study.

In 2013, ENG1-03 curriculum outlined the aims of the study as follows:

*“The aims of the study are to enable pupils to use central patterns for orthography, word inflection, sentence and text construction to produce texts, identify significant linguistic similarities and differences between English and one’s native language, and use this knowledge in one’s own language learning”* (The Ministry of Education and Research, 2013a).

In comparison, the aims in foreign languages according to the FSP1-01 curriculum was stated as follows:

*“The aims of the study are to enable pupils to use basic linguistic structures and grammar to connect text, use the alphabet and characters of the language, participate in simple, spontaneous conversations, express their own opinions and feelings, communicate with understandable pronunciation, understand and use vocabulary for everyday situations, adapt to some extent his/her language to various communication situations, and write texts that narrate, describe, or inform”* (The Ministry of Education and Research, 2006).

Common in both subjects is the ability to use terminology to describe morphology and textual structures. While this specific aim is not explicitly listed in either of the language regulations, the mentioned aims indirectly suggest the importance of metalinguistic knowledge in both the English and Spanish language. This knowledge is unlikely to be acquired solely through exposure and requires explicit grammar instruction. However, both teachers and pupils face challenges in reaching these aims due to differences in instruction hours. Pupils may attain a basic terminology to describe morphology and textual structures after three years of English instruction in lower secondary school. It is essential to note that these pupils begin to learn English at a

young age, starting at six. Over 10 years in school, they receive a combination of explicit grammar and communicative instruction, making the achievement of this aim more comprehensible in terms of their English language proficiency.

Acquiring a third language, in this case, Spanish, might pose challenges for the pupils. As previously discussed, children start learning English at a later age than their Norwegian L1, and when it comes to their third and foreign language, they begin at the age of 13. Within three years, they are expected to in a way master a new language. The Norwegian learners of L3 Spanish are required to achieve the following in just 222 hours of Spanish instruction: using linguistic structures and grammar for text connection, using the alphabet and language characters, engaging in simple spontaneous conversations, understanding and using everyday vocabulary, adapting their language to different communication situations, and writing texts for narration, description, or information. All of this is to be accomplished within 222 hours of Spanish instruction. When spread across 38 weeks of school, this amounts to 1.9 hours of foreign language instruction per week.

### 2.3 Hours of language instruction

Following the 2013 update of the subject curriculum, English L2 has undergone a significant shift towards a stronger emphasis on communicative skills. The aims for the English subject, which pupils are expected to achieve by the end of the tenth grade, have been revised in this updated version of the curriculum. Consequently, the focus on grammar instruction has been reduced, making way for a more pronounced emphasis on the communicative aspect of the language. With a decreased need for extensive explicit grammar instruction, pupils are now encouraged to immerse themselves in as much English input as possible. This approach aligns with the ideas of Krashen, who asserts that there is no direct correlation between grammar study and writing (Pihlstrøm, 2013, p. 39).

In addition to Krashen's perspective, behaviorists, innatists, and interactionists all maintain that language learning is enhanced when learners are exposed to the target language extensively. The curriculum update has granted teachers the flexibility to focus less on the formal, explicit teaching of grammar and more on fostering communication using authentic and engaging L2 materials. However, it is essential to note that the change in focus does not automatically imply that teachers will immediately adjust their



teaching style. Many teachers, having grown accustomed to their existing teaching methods over the years, might continue to instruct in familiar ways despite the curriculum change. Though, it is important to note that the 2013 update did not incorporate specific changes to the regulations for foreign languages, and there are valid reasons for this omission. The primary objective for students learning a third or foreign language is to attain proficiency in the language and apply it effectively. This objective is at the core of language acquisition, emphasizing practical usage.

In the subsequent grammar section, I will discuss the rationale behind Spanish teachers' inclination towards explicit grammar instruction. To put it into context, it is worth considering that L3 Spanish learners are expected to be able to express themselves and to communicate the language within a mere three years of instruction, a total of only 222 hours. This is in stark contrast to the 588 hours of instruction received over ten years of English instruction, though important to stress that these learners are not expected to reach the same level in L3 Spanish as in L2 English. However, given the condensed timeframe for L3 Spanish acquisition, it is reasonable to anticipate a higher occurrence of errors when compared to L2 English.

Unfortunately, it does not stop here, as the typical L1 Norwegian learners of L2 English and L3 Spanish must juggle these languages alongside a full roster of other subjects. This means that their focus is most likely divided among various subjects and not solely on the English and the Spanish subjects. Moreover, both English and Spanish instruction are confined to scheduled classroom hours in both lower secondary and upper secondary school, which can create a sense of time constraints for the pupils. Learning not just one, but two languages in such limited time of hours can be overwhelming. In addition, to acquire proficiency in the languages themselves, pupils are also expected to explore the cultures of the countries where these languages are spoken. It is worth noting that Spanish is the primary language in 21 different countries, and English is the primary language in more countries than that of Spanish, which clearly poses a unique set of challenges to the prior, particularly when pupils have limited exposure to the languages and cultures outside the classroom. Here, both English and Spanish may present a greater challenge in this regard.

## 2.4 Exposure of English and Spanish

Prior to this section, I elaborated on the details of hours allotted L1 Norwegian learners of L2 English and L3 Spanish instruction, that is, the exposure of the respective languages inside the classroom with an instructor. As these hours of language exposure are limited, I now want to shift focus onto the language exposure outside the classroom, to get a wider perspective on contributing factors on second and foreign language acquisition.

As already established, pupils in (public) schools around Norway are allotted fewer hours of English instruction than the hours spent on Norwegian instruction, and thus, even fewer hours are given to foreign language instruction, in this case Spanish. To anyone who has taught a language, or acquired one, there is no doubt that it is essential for the learner of a new language to be exposed to as much target language as possible, and also to practice it with others. Lightbown and Spada (2021) point this out in their book *How languages are learned*, by mentioning Jim Lantolf and Richard Donato among others, who were interested in showing how the latter could help language learners acquire the target language through collaboration and interaction with others. This was done by extending the Vygotskian theory to L2 acquisition (2021, p. 124), in terms of the zone of proximal development (ZPD) where novice-expert communications take place. However, due to recent work, novice-novice and learner-learner interactions are now also included in the term confirming the initial claim above (Lightbown & Spada, 2021, p. 124).

Exposure to the target language outside the classroom plays an important role, as it shows how widespread the English language is in Norway compared to the Spanish language. As children grow up, their early start of explicit English instruction is amplified by the implicit acquisition through exposure from music, radio, social media, and through television such as movies and series. These different platforms and interactions are mostly given the option to be set up either in Norwegian or English as default, whereas movies and series are mostly in English with the option of Norwegian subtitles. Depending on the interest in the Spanish language, unless a child is bilingual with any of the parents being Spanish, and it speaks both languages, most Norwegian children are more likely not to be exposed to any or very little Spanish content (unless one has an older sibling who is in the process of Spanish acquisition, etc.).

However, as L1 Norwegians are more exposed to English, as I discuss further below, there might be a few songs on the radio where both English and Spanish are combined, e.g., 'Despacito', or an occasional series on Netflix, e.g., 'casa de papel'. However, Netflix and other platforms are subscription-based platforms which means that children and adolescents under the age of 18 are dependent on their parents to pay for subscription to exploit the content provided by the carrier. Streaming platforms, such as Twitch, often have age-limits, limiting their access.

There are most likely no children nor adolescents who would choose the Spanish language above the English language in video games or movies and series in general, due to such diversity of English based content found online and because children are already used to English if not the Norwegian language is provided as an option. This altogether, their English instruction and exposure, will help them improve their English skills and give children and adolescents self-confidence in practicing the English language on their own.

Looking at the options for adolescents to learn the target language by the product of output, that is, practicing the target language by speaking and writing it, they need to have someone to talk to or communicate with. As gaming has become very popular amongst people today, companies produce not only solo-playing video games, but also multiplayer online games.

In solo-playing video games the initial download steps give you the option to choose your preferred instruction language or storyline language throughout the specific game. Here, if the game provides, one is able to choose Norwegian, however, some games do not have the option for Norwegian, and the children or adolescents are left with English as the preferred option as the only acquired language provided. The other option is to play multiplayer online games such as League of Legends, World of Warcraft, Minecraft among many other video games on the market. These online games allow players to interact with others around the world, both by speaking together or in-game chats.

Before the eighth grade, unless a child is bilingual, L1 Norwegian children have not yet acquired any other languages than Norwegian and English, and thus the only way to communicate with others is through either of the languages. As children and adolescents meet foreigners online, they use English as the 'lingua franca' to be able to communicate with each other. By the time the children become teenagers and start in

eighth grade, they have practiced and learned both explicitly and implicitly for about seven years. This gives them the opportunity to be able to communicate with and at the same time be exposed to the target language, by practicing it with either L1 English speakers or L2 English learners. When the adolescents start in eight grade and want to learn L3 Spanish, both the output and the input will be limited.

Whereas people would not have to make much effort in bumping into English speaking people and exposure in general, Spanish content and exposure, however, are more on the rare side and most likely not attested on Norwegian television and hard to come by to be able to speak to them, unless one has an interest in the Spanish language and seeks it. Additionally, as English is thus more common for many, L1 Norwegians are more likely exposed to English and hence steadier in the language, which might be a deciding factor for Norwegians to choose English over Spanish and it might also play an important role in language acquisition.

## 2.5 The verb system in Norwegian, English and Spanish

There is reason to believe that subject-verb agreement is difficult for L1 Norwegian learners of L2 English and L3 Spanish, and people in general, whose language is built up differently with other rules applied in their language system, and where SVA is not attested. SVA is not overtly in the Norwegian language, which is clear when looking at the conjugation of Norwegian verbs. Verbs do not get affected by the person or number of the subject (Garshol, 2019). Therefore, the form of the verb, for instance: 'å spise' [to eat], is only determined by the tense, and marked accordingly. There is an obligatory morpheme -(e)r marking in the present tense. Hence, finite verbs, such as 'å spise' [to eat], are thus always overtly marked for tense, with the obligatory present tense marker '-(e)r' as shown in Table 1 below.

*Table 1 Conjugation pattern of Norwegian Lexical verb 'TO EAT' in the present tense.*

<b>Å SPISE (TO EAT)</b>	<b>Singular</b>	<b>Plural</b>
<b>1<sup>st</sup> person</b>	Jeg spiser	Vi spiser
<b>2<sup>nd</sup> person</b>	Du spiser	Dere spiser
<b>3<sup>rd</sup> person</b>	Han/Hun/Det spiser	De spiser

Table 2 demonstrates the finite forms of the verb 'være' [be]. This verb, along with other modal verbs in Norwegian, have suppletive forms in both the present tense and the past tense. However, the forms are identical to all the combinations with person and number, as they do not mark for agreement.

*Table 2 Conjugation pattern of the Norwegian verb 'BE' in present and past tense.*

<b>Person</b>	<b>Present tense singular</b>	<b>Present tense plural</b>	<b>Past singular</b>	<b>Past plural</b>
<b>1<sup>st</sup></b>	Jeg <b>er</b>	Vi <b>er</b>	Jeg <b>var</b>	Vi <b>var</b>
<b>2<sup>nd</sup></b>	Du <b>er</b>	Dere <b>er</b>	Du <b>var</b>	Dere <b>var</b>
<b>3<sup>rd</sup></b>	Han/hun/det <b>er</b>	De <b>er</b>	Han/hun/det <b>var</b>	De <b>var</b>

### 2.5.1 The description of SVA systems

In the Standard English language agreement is only marked on lexical verbs (3rd person marker -s) and non-modal auxiliaries in the present tense, as displayed in Table 3 (Butterworth et al., 1996).

*Table 3 Conjugation pattern of English Lexical verb 'TO EAT' in the present tense.*

<b>TO EAT</b>	<b>Singular</b>	<b>Plural</b>
<b>1<sup>st</sup> person</b>	I eat	We eat
<b>2<sup>nd</sup> person</b>	You eat	You eat
<b>3<sup>rd</sup> person</b>	He/she/it eats	They eat

However, according to Garshol (2019) the conjugation pattern in present-day English is just a part of a more complex pattern found in the old English, but was gradually lost in the subsequent varieties. The suppletive forms of the verb 'BE' overtly mark agreement in both present tense and in the past tense. As seen in Table 4 below, the finite verb "BE" shows two different agreement patterns. One as demonstrated below in the present tense, and the other in the past tense, marking overt agreement in both of these tenses with suppletive forms:

*Table 4 Conjugation pattern of the English verb 'BE' in the present and past tense.*

<b>Person</b>	<b>Present tense singular</b>	<b>Present tense plural</b>	<b>Past singular</b>	<b>Past plural</b>
<b>1<sup>st</sup></b>	<b>I am</b>	<b>We are</b>	<b>I was</b>	<b>We were</b>
<b>2<sup>nd</sup></b>	<b>You are</b>	<b>You are</b>	<b>You were</b>	<b>You were</b>
<b>3<sup>rd</sup></b>	<b>He/she/it is</b>	<b>They are</b>	<b>He/she/it was</b>	<b>They were</b>

English finite auxiliaries raise different patterns compared to lexical verbs, hence it has been argued that L2 learners find it 'easier' to mark agreement on auxiliaries than on lexical verbs with the 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular -s, and because of that, acquire agreement on auxiliaries earlier than they acquire agreement on lexical verbs (Garshol, 2019, p. 9; White, 1992).

All Spanish verbs are always marked for person, number and tense (Butterworth et al., 1996). Additionally, conjugated verbs, known as inflected forms, consist of a stem (i.e., 'com-' in the infinitive verb 'comer' [to eat]) and usually one or more suffixes ('-er' from 'comer'). Table 5 shows the marking of the verb 'comer' [to eat] in the present tense to show inflections in both person and number. As illustrated here, conjugated forms of the Spanish verbs are always inflected for number and person to agree with the subject.

*Table 5 Conjugation pattern of Spanish Lexical verb 'TO EAT' in the present tense.*

<b>COMER (TO EAT)</b>	<b>Singular</b>	<b>Plural</b>
<b>1<sup>st</sup> person</b>	Yo (I) <b>como</b>	Nosotros (We) <b>comemos</b>
<b>2<sup>nd</sup> person</b>	Tú (You) <b>comes</b>	Vosotros (You) <b>coméis</b>
<b>3<sup>rd</sup> person</b>	Él/ella/usted (He/She/You) <b>come</b>	Ellos/ellas/ustedes (They) <b>comen</b>

Furthermore, Table 6 shows the conjugation pattern of the Spanish verb 'BE' in both present and past tense. However, it is important to remember that, depending on which country, the different dialects within the Spanish language vary in both the overall richness of morphology and on the richness of number morphology expressed in

the noun phrase. Some dialects express less morphology in the verb, than others (Foote & Bock, 2012, p. 434).

In addition, it is important to emphasize that Spanish is a prodrop language (Butterworth et al., 1996; White, 2003, p. 5), that is, in the contexts of where the subject of the verb is evident, the subject pronouns are very often omitted (White, 2003). Where Norwegian and English require the pronoun, the pronoun is not required in Spanish, which means that it is both highly necessary and important to mark agreement in Spanish. Due to the subject of a sentence can be dropped in Spanish, the sentence thus relies on the conjugated verb. I.e., the agreement marking in Spanish has a communicative purpose, which means that without the agreement markings you do not know who the subject or the doer of the action is. This is as shown in table 6, where there is a clear difference between the 'you'-singular doing the verb in comparison to, for instance, the 'you'-plural. As mentioned, in English and Norwegian the verb would need its subject, but in Spanish, being a prodrop language, this is not the case.

*Table 6 Conjugation pattern of the Spanish verb 'BE' in the present and past tense*

<b>Person</b>	<b>Singular - present</b>	<b>Plural - present</b>	<b>Singular - past tense</b>	<b>Plural - past tense</b>
<b>1<sup>st</sup></b>	Yo <b>soy</b>	Nosotros <b>somos</b>	Yo <b>fui</b>	Nosotros <b>fuimos</b>
<b>2<sup>nd</sup></b>	Tú <b>eres</b>	Vosotros <b>sois</b>	Tú <b>fuiste</b>	Vosotros <b>fuisteis</b>
<b>3<sup>rd</sup></b>	Él/ella/usted <b>es</b>	Ellos/ellas/ustedes <b>son</b>	Él/ella/usted <b>fue</b>	Ellos/ellas/ustedes <b>fueron</b>

As discussed in this chapter, the English curriculum first made a clear distinction between written communication and oral communication, in contrast to the Spanish curriculum which places a significant emphasis on the communication as a holistic concept. However, the focus on grammar instruction has, according to the 2013 updated revision, been reduced in English. By reducing the explicit English grammar instruction, it gives room to the teachers, encouraging their pupils to immerse themselves in as much TL input as possible. As was pointed out by researchers who maintained that language learning is enhanced when the language learners are exposed to the TL extensively. Also, as previously discussed, both input and output play big roles in SLA.

Because the Norwegian language is built up differently with other rules applied in its language system and SVA is not attested in Norwegian, this gives reason to believe that SVA is difficult for L1 Norwegian learners of L2 English and L3 Spanish to acquire and master on the same level as one native to the language.

Furthermore, it has been argued that learners find SVA marking on auxiliaries 'easier' as well as able to acquire it earlier than with the agreement marking on the lexical verbs with the 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular -s marker (Garshol, 2019). However, in Spanish, all Spanish verbs are always marked for person, number and tense. Because it is a prodrop language, it is highly important to mark Spanish verbs for agreement, as the sentence relies on the agreement marking on the verb. Though, as we have seen above, in Norwegian as well as in English the pronouns are required.



### 3 Theoretical backgrounds

This part of the thesis is devoted to the theoretical backgrounds needed to understand the process of language acquisition, particularly second and foreign language acquisition. First, I start with different language acquisition theories relevant to my research questions. Then I turn to subject-verb agreement and the different agreement errors, as well as previous research done within the field. I further discuss corpus linguistics in section 3.4, which is an important part of the background needed for my methodology. Lastly, I end the chapter by introducing the research questions laying down the foundation for my thesis.

#### 3.1 Language acquisition of L1, L2 and L3

Language acquisition is a multifaceted field with diverse approaches that have evolved over time. The first field investigates first language acquisition in the case of monolingual language acquisition, which is viewed as the first language a child learns before the age of four, and these cases of monolingual language acquisition are the minority relative to the rest of the world (Ortega, 2013). The second field consists of other cases more common, such as the phenomena of bilingualism, in which researchers study the dual first language acquisition of children during their childhood, and how the respective languages are represented in the brain (Ortega, 2013).

The third field within language acquisition is the field of second language acquisition. It is, however, important to emphasize that there are essential differences in learning a new language compared to the acquisition of a first language. Transitioning to the domain of SLA, we encounter a distinct set of challenges and dynamics. In contrast to L1 acquisition, where children acquire their first language in natural settings through exposure in the environment in which they grow up, children who acquire a second language have to create a new language system with limited exposure compared to the abundance of exposure in L1 acquisition (Gass, 2013). Learning a second language entails that one has already acquired a first language (Cook, 2008; Harley, 2016; VanPatten & Williams, 2015). This field of research can be approached from both functional and generative viewpoints. While functionalism encompasses a diverse range of approaches, there are tenets common among functional linguists that set them apart from generative linguists (Geeslin, 2013). One important difference between

functionalists and generativists is their perspective on linguistic analysis. Functionalists argue that syntax should be considered in connection with “*meaning, discourse, and language use*” (Geeslin, 2013, p. 30). They reject the idea of syntax functioning independently or autonomously and instead emphasize its interdependence with meaning (Geeslin, 2013). Another key principle of functionalism is that the structure of a language is influenced and molded by the functions it serves within communication, often explained through external influences (Geeslin, 2013). Such a view can be seen in the work by Stephen Krashen and Burrhus Frederik Skinner.

Krashen, behaviorists like Skinner, and other researchers, have explored language acquisition from distinct viewpoints. While Krashen’s work emphasizes the role of comprehensible input (1992), behaviorists like Skinner view language acquisition as result of condition and repetition, where language is seen as a set of behavioral habits, influenced by environmental stimuli and responses (Brown & Lee, 2015; Lightbown & Spada, 2021; Lobato & Gargallo, 2016; Skinner, 2015).

The generativists, on the other hand, with Noam Chomsky being a leading figure in linguistics, build on the premises that challenge the behaviorist view (Lightbown & Spada, 2021). Chomsky initially proposed the Language Acquisition Device (LAD) which was later replaced by the theory of Universal Grammar (UG). The UG suggests that all humans possess a set of grammatical rules that underlie language learning, emphasizing the internal knowledge that a learner has and not the external, or the environment that influences their language acquisition (Geeslin, 2013; Harley, 2016; Hoque, 2020; Lobato & Gargallo, 2016). This led Chomsky’s theories to challenge the behaviorist perspective and sparked the development of the modern study of language acquisition.

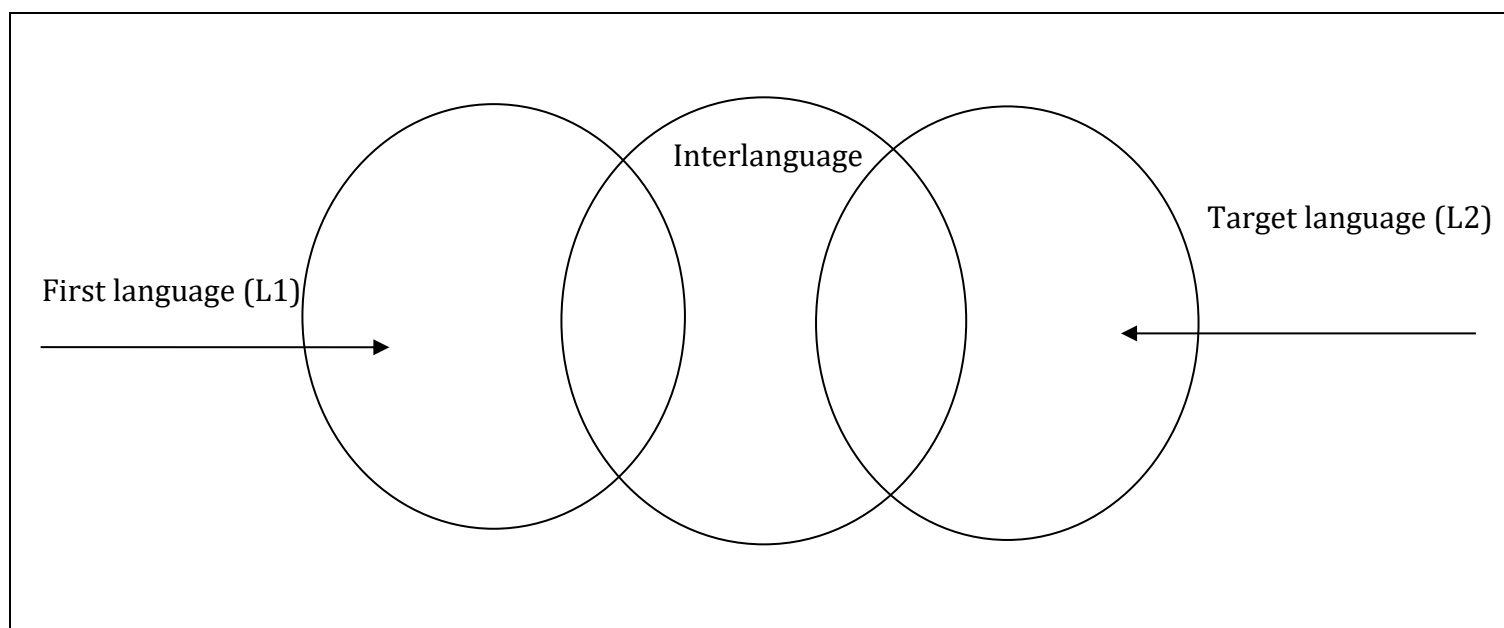
### 3.1.1 Influences on the SLA process

Given a broad overview of language acquisition, I now turn the focus to research relevant to my thesis, which address factors that might impact Norwegian pupils’ language acquisition, potentially influencing the production of SVA errors in both English L2 and Spanish L3. I discuss two phenomena which can be observed during language acquisition and that can be accounted for when errors are produced, namely interlanguage and language transfer. Lastly, I also find it important to discuss long-distance agreement.

As mentioned before, learning a second language presupposes that an individual has already acquired a first language (Cook, 2008; Harley, 2016; VanPatten & Williams, 2015). However, during the acquisition of a second language after the first, a new language with its own linguistic system is formed, independent of the learner's L1 and L2 (Al-Khresheh, 2015; Selinker, 1972). This new separate linguistic system is known as 'interlanguage' (IL), introduced by Selinker (1972), and commonly employed by other researchers as well (Ellis, 2015; Gass, 2013).

Selinker (1972) describes IL as a dialect 'whose rules share characteristics of two social dialects, whether these languages themselves share rules or not' (Corder, 1981). In this case, the two social dialects could be Norwegian and English, Norwegian and Spanish, or English and Spanish. Selinker calls the languages social dialects due to the languages sharing some rules and characteristics, and dialects because they share some rules of grammar (Corder, 1981; 1972).

*Figure 1 The Notion of Interlanguage (Corder, 1981).*



IL is described by Corder as a new language formed between the mother tongue and the target language, built on the knowledge of the respective languages, developed as a distinct language system non like the first language nor the second language (Al-Khresheh, 2015; Corder, 1981). I.e., in the process of second language acquisition, the learner forms an interlanguage as a gradation before acquiring the linguistic system of

the target language, however, as one would think it would be a linguistic system referring to the first language and second language, some argue that interlanguage makes up a language built on its own linguistic system (Al-Khresheh, 2015; Corder, 1981; Gargallo in Lobato & Gargallo, 2016), and not by the phenomenon of language transfer. That is, a learner transfers knowledge of L1 vocabulary and grammar into the early stages of L2 acquisition (Falk & Bardel, 2010; Montrul in Geeslin, 2013; Jarvis & Pavlenko, 2008; Richards, 1974).

Given the considerable similarities in syntax and vocabulary between Norwegian and English, this may lead to positive transfer, facilitating the learner of the second language (Ellis, 2015). However, Harley (2016) suggests that learners may face difficulties when the languages differ significantly. That is, by comparing the Norwegian language to the Spanish language. He argues that 'the more idiosyncratic a feature is in a particular language relative to other languages, the more difficult it will be to acquire' (Harley, 2016, p. 159), which can be attributed to negative transfer, impeding language acquisition (Ellis, 2015). Jarvis et al. on the other hand, began to describe earlier views on the language transfer phenomenon as a sign of peoples' sloppiness, and narrow mindset, as well as people being too lazy and lack of interest in changing their L1 behavior when applying it to another language (2008). However, this way of describing the phenomenon of crosslinguistic transfer was challenged when it was viewed as an unavoidable feature in the process of language acquisition (Jarvis & Pavlenko, 2008). Harley (2016) points to a study conducted on L1 Czech learners of L2 English, where he maintains that there is evidence claiming that the time course of L2 acquisition follows a U-shaped curve. I.e., the initial learning, but the learners' performance declines in terms of restructuring their knowledge, before they become skilled again as they '*move from learning by rote to using syntactic rules, utterances tend to become shorter*' (Harley, 2016, p. 159).

Dewaele (1998) states that the usual source of crosslinguistic influence in the interlanguage of a person learning an L2 language is the learner's L1. However, it is not automatically given that the main source of cross-linguistic influence in the L3 of a speaker is the L1. So, Dewaele investigates this phenomenon in context of nontarget-like lexemes in the advanced oral French interlanguage. Participants are Dutch L1 speakers, 32 of them are French L2 and English L3 speakers, seven participants are English L2 and French L3 speakers. The results show that the cross-linguistic influence is visible in both

groups, however, it seems like L3 French speakers draw more on their English L2 grammar, which suggests that principles block L1 transfer in L3 learners in terms of spreading activation.

Muroya (2018) explored the role of the first language in second language acquisition of inflectional morphology on native speaking Japanese lower secondary school learners and university pupils of second language English. She applied the Feature Reassembly Hypothesis (FRH), which deals with the hypothesis that in order to acquire a language successfully one must acquire the phonological, syntactic and semantic features, bundled together on the lexical items of every language (Slabakova, 2016). The results show a difference in respect to accuracy rates and error types from previous second language English studies, in terms of tense-aspect morphology. These findings prove evidence for the FRH's prediction that attributes morphological variability to first language-second language contrasts in reassembly of features matrices for morpholexical items. That is, pupils are less accurate in SVA which can be an indication that already assembled morpholexical items from the L1 are difficult for the L2 learners to unlearn.

Researchers who have conducted study on Norwegian learners are Listhaug et al. (2021) who investigated L1 and L2 impact in L3 acquisition, and have looked at two sentence types with lexical verbs where Norwegian L1, English L2 and French L3 differ in systematic ways. They test non-subject initial declarative main clauses and subject-initial declarative main clauses with a short sentence medial adverbial. The students completed acceptability judgment tasks in both L2 English and L3 French. The results did not indicate that either of the languages could be seen having the status as the main source of transfer. Rather, the French L3 may be influenced by both Norwegian L1 and English L2 (Listhaug et al., 2021). Due to an indeterminacy, Listhaug et. al. debate whether this reflects an insecurity rather than a transfer, though cross-linguistic influence might have been the reason for their insecurities shown in the test. However, when testing further, the insecurity might have been due to influence from L2 English, and whether the uncertainty about verb placement relative to sentence adverbial placement may be a result of influence in a combination of Norwegian L1 and English L2 (Listhaug et al., 2021). That is, because they realized that English and French are similar in other structures of the respective languages. This might have caused the participants

to generalize this similarity to hold constructions with sentence adverbial (Listhaug et al., 2021).

More cognate to my thesis, is the study carried out by Anna Saraeva (2015) who looked at cross-linguistic influence in L3 acquisition of English by child heritage speakers of Russian in Norway. The participants were tested through an acceptability task in conditions targeting among SVA. One of her control groups were L1 Norwegian learners of L2 English. Here, both the L1 Russian and bilinguals outperformed the L1 Norwegian learners of English L2 in both SVA conditions (Saraeva, 2023). Her study concludes that based on structural similarities between languages, the findings of the study indicate cross-linguistic influence from both languages in the acquisition of the target language, indicating both facilitative and non-facilitative influence occurring in the third language acquisition (Saraeva, 2023).

Difficulties L1 Norwegian learners of L2 English face during SLA, and some very typical errors the same learners do, according to Drew and Sørheim (2016), are instances of interference of Norwegian in L2 English production and acquisition. Drew et al. claim that there is an interference of Norwegian in the production of English formed as a habit when they try to express themselves in English, in a way that is directly translated from how one would most likely have expressed oneself in Norwegian (2016). They call it 'Norwegianism' which also could have been called 'Swedishism' or 'Danishism', as they could easily have been applied to L1 Swedish and L1 Danish learners of L2 English (Drew & Sørheim, 2016). However, although Drew et al. claim there is no term to this phenomenon specifically, it should be noted that this could also be seen as an L1 Norwegian transfer during the acquisition and production of L2 English. Drew et al. also claim this phenomenon is common to all learners of English, and that it occurs due to "*the languages being so close in many areas of syntax and vocabulary*"(2016, p. 17) in which the second language learners' attitude goes along the line "*what works in Norwegian always work in English*" (2016, p. 17), which can be both traced back to and with Jarvis et al.'s claim of L1 Norwegians being sloppy and lazy, lacking the interest in changing L1 behavior when applying it to language acquisition (Jarvis & Pavlenko, 2008).

Another example of L1 Norwegian learners is the study by Olsen (1999) who found errors in native Norwegian learners' L2 English where the learners inserted elements from their L1 into their interlanguage due to lack of forms in the L2, which is

the clearest case of crosslinguistic influence. Further Olsen (1999) points out that it is especially found in texts written by less proficient learners. One example is that rules for writing in the first language can be transferred, as when the Norwegian orthographic rule of double consonant in short syllables can be traced in these words: *visitts, sitt, awfull, admitts, beautifull, funn, satt* (Olsen, 1999). ‘Norwegianism’ can also be seen in another example where Olsen’s participant writes: “I go in a dark gate” using the Norwegian ‘gate’ instead of the English word ‘street’. Though that is not the case for others. Thus, will be further described in the subsequent chapter, as SVA errors might be examples of interlanguage.

## 3.2 Subject-verb agreement (SVA)

### 3.2.1 Previous Research on SVA

At the beginning of my thesis, I addressed that inflectional morphology was termed the ‘bottleneck’ of SLA by Slabakova (2008, 2013) as the properties of functional morphology have been considered one of the most challenging parts of SLA. Hence, one would automatically think that grammar in detail, in this case SVA, would be a widely researched topic. On the contrary, there are only a few studies of agreement conducted on a detailed level of grammar, however, very few of these studies analyze agreement errors in detail (Garshol, 2019; Tsukanaka, 2023). Besides, the few studies that are to be found have their focus on either university pupils or adult English L2 and Spanish L3 learners (Butterworth et al., 1996; Garshol, 2019; Thagg Fisher, 1985).

One of the few exceptions is Garshol (2019), who conducted a PhD with the focus on subject-verb agreement errors produced by Norwegian high school pupils learning English as a second language (ESL). It is a corpus study where she discusses subject-verb agreement errors in written English production of 199 15–16-year-old Norwegian pupils in their first year (11th grade) of upper secondary school, 123 pupils in general studies and 76 in the vocational program. Moreover, she focuses on the description of subject-verb agreement errors produced by these learners. Furthermore, the corpus material of Norwegian upper secondary school pupils consists of over 430,000 words, with an average of 2,265 words (median value) contributed by each pupil (2019). She records nearly 3,000 agreement errors in the corpus material. The agreement errors analysis reveals that the pupils produce a higher number of overgeneralization errors

than previously reported. Additionally, the pupils also tend to overuse the plural forms of the verb BE when they make errors in suppletive agreement (Garshol, 2019).

Another study on SVA is conducted by Isabel N. Jensen, Roumaya Slabakova, Marit Westgaard and Björn Lundquist (2020) testing The Bottleneck Hypothesis in the L2 English acquisition of Norwegian native speakers. The study includes sixty participants in the age groups of 11-12 years and 15-18 years (Jensen et al., 2020). Jensen et al. (2020) found out that the pupils' most vulnerable place is in identifying ungrammatical S-V agreement, as well as the pupils most often make mistakes if there were long-distance between the subject and the verb.

### 3.2.2 Different types of English SVA errors

In this section I discuss the different types of SVA errors as a basis for my analysis in chapter 6. Firstly, I address the affixal agreement errors and give some examples on these found in the literature, then I discuss suppletive agreement errors displayed in both present tense and past tense in the Norwegian language, as well as looking at a few suppletive agreement errors found in research as well. Moreover, Garshol (2019) interestingly points at the likenesses between the pronunciations of the Norwegian and the English *BE*, in which I find important to address in my thesis as well, as will be illustrated in Table 7 below.

In addition to affixal and suppletive agreement errors, it is also important to address long-distance SVA and its errors discussed in section 3.3, which might affect the SVA errors produced in both languages, L2 English and L3 Spanish, but especially in L2 English.

#### 3.2.2.1 Affixal agreement errors

Affixal agreement errors happen when there is an omission of the obligatory marking of 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular. In her study, Garshol (2019) indicates that the most frequent problem L2 learners of English have with the SVA is the omission of the obligatory marking of the 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular as illustrated in (1) to (3):

- (1) he go... (Fisher in Garshol, 2019)
- (2) he get the diploma. (Breiteneder in Garshol, 2019)
- (3) Dancing school start late in the evening (Garshol, 2019)



However, even though it is rarely mentioned in literature discussing L2 English, Garshol also claims that Norwegian students produce as many overgeneralization errors as omission errors with only a 3,7% distinction between errors made by overgeneralizations and omission (2019). However, when overgeneralization is mentioned in the literature these are in the minority, compared to the omission errors (Breiteneder, 2005, and Dröschel, 2011 in Garshol, 2019).

### 3.2.2.2 Suppletive agreement errors

Suppletive agreement errors happen when there are agreement errors in clauses with the verb *BE*, such as errors with *is* and *are* in present tense and *was* and *were* in the past tense. As mentioned in chapter 2, section 2.5, the verb *BE*, along with other modal verbs in Norwegian, have suppletive forms in both present tense and past tense. Garshol (2019) points at the higher frequency of present tense and thus more errors were detected in the corpus of present tense than of errors detected in instances of past tense.

More interestingly, Garshol points out the *BE* paradigm of Norwegian and English, as the languages are relatively closely related, some forms of the *BE* paradigm are phonologically similar in the respective languages (2019), as demonstrated in Table 7, where the Norwegian transcription is the standard version of Bokmål. As previously mentioned in section 2.5, even though the finite forms of the verb '*være*' [*BE*] has suppletive forms in both present tense and past tense, they do not mark agreement, as they are identical to all combinations with person and number. Due to different pronunciations of Norwegian dialects, L1 Norwegians might encounter problems with similarities between the Norwegian *er* and the English *are* (Garshol, 2019, pp. 45-46). In addition, as Norwegians often struggle distinguishing the /v/ and /w/ sound in English (Garshol, 2019), they are most likely to perceive the Norwegian *var* as sounding similar to the English *were* (Garshol, 2019). Based on this, Garshol expects to find an overuse of the English forms *are* and *were* by L1 Norwegian learners of L2 English in the errors of suppletive agreement (2019).

Table 7 Overview of 'BE' paradigms in English and Norwegian with phonological (Adapted from Garshol, 2019)

Present	English		Norwegian	
<b>Singular</b>	is	/ɪz/	Er	/ær/
<b>Plural</b>	are	/ɑr, ər/		
Past	English		Norwegian	
<b>Singular</b>	was	/wʌz, wɒz, wəz/	Var	/var/
<b>Plural</b>	were	/wɜr, wər/		

In her results, Garshol finds out that *is* is the most erroneously used form of the verb *BE* (2019, p. 46). This is due to her findings showing that the participants in her study use *is* in over 9000 instances, and erroneously used the form *is* in 44.36% of these instances (2019). Whereas *was* followed in closer to almost 4000 instances and erroneously used in 5.25% of these instances. The form *were* was erroneously used in 15.26% of the approximately 1.100 instances recorded in the corpus (Garshol, 2019, p. 46).

### 3.3 Long-distance agreement

Ocampo (2013) examines the structural distance and the plural markedness, by looking at their effects on morphosyntactic variability in L1 Spanish speaking learners of L2 English. Moreover, she also investigates “the effect of task demands on processing of agreement morphology” (Ocampo, 2013, p. iii). She maintains that to discover “whether the increases in structural distance between agreeing elements leads to decreases in sensitivity to agreement violations” (2013, p. iii), it is established S-V agreement across a prepositional phrase (in warm southern Mexico) or a more complexed relative clause structurally (who hunted in Mexico). Ocampo (2013) manipulates the subject number of singular or plural to examine whether the plural feature marked on verbs is facilitated even when the distance between the subject and the verb has increased.

Her study consists of a group of L1 English speakers who was “*placed under a memory load while administering a reading comprehension task*” (Ocampo, 2013, p. 14), to determine whether task effects cause native speakers to show learner-like patterns of

agreement variability. The results of the study show that structural distance affects the learners' agreement marking, i.e., the learners became less sensitive to violations that occurred during the relative clause condition (Ocampo, 2013). In addition to the effects of structural distance, Ocampo observed weak effects of plural markedness which emerged in the learner results. These are indicated by a greater sensitivity to errors in pairwise comparisons than to the plural subject-relative clause intervener condition over the singular subject counterpart (Ocampo, 2013, pp. 50-51).

Lastly, the weak similarities in the variability between the L2 learner and the native speaker group tentatively suggest that learners' variability may be caused by general processing limitations, not deficits in the learners' L2 grammatical knowledge. The assumption then is that L1 Norwegian learners of L2 English should show evidence that the S-V agreement errors produced in the target language are not deficits in L2 grammatical knowledge, rather the errors caused by general processing limitations in sentences with intervening elements, i.e., long-distance S-V agreement.

### 3.4 Corpus Linguistics

The main goal in second language acquisition research is to build models for the learners interlanguage and to provide a '*principled account on how that knowledge is acquired and how it develops*' (Mendikoetxea in Geeslin, 2013, p. 11). Mendikoetxea (2013) claims that learner corpora should occupy a central role in second language learning as well as the research field relies on having access to good quality data. She claims that large L2 corpora was scarce and relatively little use has been made of corpora in L2 (2013), however, in the last decade there has been a shift, with '*increasing numbers of resources, a broadening of the uses learner corpora are put to, as well as a wider diversity of users*' (Mendikoetxea in Geeslin, 2013, p. 14). Nonetheless, what has not changed is the importance of access to good quality data.

Furthermore, Granger points to the term 'Contrastive Interlanguage Analysis', which is a term used to establish comparisons between, for instance, first and second language grammars, by comparing native and non-native corpora, such as the TRAWL corpus (Granger in Geeslin, 2013, p. 13). Among such studies are divided into two categories 1) hypothesis-driven/corpus-based studies and 2) hypothesis-finding/corpus-driven studies, which reflects tension between a deductive approach and an inductive approach within language acquisition research, as Mendikoetxea claims

most studies fall within the second category (Mendikoetxea in Geeslin, 2013). My study, however, falls within the first category which is driven by the hypothesis of Slabakova, based on the corpus from TRAWL, which is described further in detail in chapter 4 Methodology.

### 3.5 Research questions (RQs)

As we have seen in this chapter, the purpose of my thesis is to investigate SVA errors in the production of English and Spanish texts by native Norwegian learners of the respective languages as their second and third language. As mentioned before, there has been conducted research in this area (Bråthen, 2023; Butterworth et al., 1996; Duffield, 2013; Foote & Bock, 2012; Garshol, 2019; Gillespie & Pearlmutter, 2011; Gunawan et al., 2018; Jensen, 2016; Jensen et al., 2020; Jensen & Westergaard, 2021; Kokvoll, 2021; Mancini et al., 2011; Ocampo, 2013; Platzack, 2003; Sagarra & Rodriguez, 2022; Son, 2020), however, I was not able to identify research on SVA errors of Norwegian learners in a combination of the two languages in focus in my thesis, namely English and Spanish, only on L1 Norwegian learners in a combination solely with English, or with French, Polish, Russian and Swedish (See Bråthen, 2023; Hedlund, 2020; Saraeva, 2023; Thagg Fisher, 1985; Tsukanaka, 2023).

Due to this, I saw this as my opportunity to take it a step further, by filling the gap by investigating SVA errors produced both in English and Spanish by the same L1 Norwegian learners. Furthermore, as there is done research on correlation between learners of different L1s learning a second language (See Bråthen, 2023; Encheva, 2021; Muroya, 2018; Saraeva, 2023), this thesis investigates the correlation between learners Norwegian L1, English L2 and Spanish L3 in the light of subject-verb agreement errors found in the two latter languages. With that said, I have formulated the following research questions:

RQ1: What types of SVA errors are found in L1 Norwegian pupils' production of written L2 English and L3 Spanish texts?

RQ2: What types of SVA errors are most frequent?

RQ3: What is the correlation between SVA errors produced by L1 Norwegian learners of L2 English compared to the SVA errors found in L3 Spanish produced by the same learners?

RQ4: Are the SVA errors produced in L3 Spanish affected by the learners' L2 English, if not, by their L1 Norwegian?

## 4 Methodology

This chapter presents my material utilized to be able to investigate and answer the research questions in section 3.5 Research questions (RQs) above. Section 4.1 The Material elaborates on the data corpus, the criteria for my study, as well as the participants included in my sub corpus. Section 4.1.4 Collection of TRAWL Data describes my method and the predictions prior to my study. Section 4.1.5 Sub Corpus Tasks and section 4.1.6 My Sub Corpus show in detail the tasks the pupils and participants of my study have been given, in addition to the inclusions that I have made into my study. Lastly, the last section 4.4 Ethics explains important information of the precautions the TRAWL group has taken prior to the corpus was included in my thesis.

### 4.1 The Material

In research one depends on gathering information to carry out experiments and trying to answer the research questions and predictions one has. The information comes in the form of, for instance, questionnaires, interviews, texts, etc. Such a process takes time, fortunately, I was able to work alongside the established research group Tracking Written Learner Language (TRAWL) whose members had already started the process beforehand. The research group collects written texts to its TRAWL Corpus, as well as information from pupils enrolled in lower and upper secondary schools around Norway (Dirdal et al., 2022). This gave me an opportunity to handpick the data I needed to answer my research questions and predictions, as shown in section 4.1.4 Collection of TRAWL Data.

#### 4.1.1 The research group – Tracking written learner data (TRAWL)

Tracking Written Learner Language (2022) , abbreviated TRAWL, is an international research group which aims through its project to establish a longitudinal corpus of written learner language. The outcome contributes to further research in the field of second- and foreign language acquisition, as well as enabling language teachers to be aware of their pupils' most common obstacles during the process of language acquisition (Hasund et al., 2022).

TRAWL-UiA is a subgroup in Kristiansand, Norway, whose members are eager to contribute to collect authentic texts from Norwegian youth enrolled at lower- and upper

secondary schools around Norway. Their goal is to collect pupils' texts and to explore their written skills in L2 English, as well as the L3 languages, such as Spanish, French and German, offered at most schools in Norway. The group investigates factors that may affect learner L2 development, and in the process, they also map grammatical, lexical and text coherence features that characterize learner language at various stages and age levels (Dirdal et al., 2022). This enables an analysis of cross-sectional data as the first stage. At the second stage the data will be genuinely longitudinal, that is, by collecting texts from the same pupils over three years, the texts will contribute with unique empirical evidence for L2 and L3 proficiency development and be compiled into a learner language corpus (Dirdal et al., 2022). Today the first version of the corpus is published at <https://tekstlab.uio.no/trawl/> and remains accessible providing data to researchers, teacher students and active teachers who want to improve their practice and to bring their knowledge up to date.

#### 4.1.2 The Criteria of this present study

This section lays the criteria as a framework for my study. To use data from the TRAWL corpus, the first criterion took basis in this thesis' investigation of L1 Norwegian learners, and thus the participants had to have listed their mother tongue as Norwegian. This excluded all pupils who listed another L1 on their questionnaire other than Norwegian, or bilinguals as described in the subsequent section.

To be able to investigate SVA errors in L2 English and L3 Spanish, the overt and second criterion was the requirement that the participants must have both English and Spanish instruction in school. Also, on this latter basis, the third criterion required that they had produced and handed in written texts in both languages. That is, a minimum of one text in each language. If a pupil had only handed in texts in one language, either English or Spanish, the pupil was excluded from my study. This leads to the fourth criterion, requiring each text to consist of a bare minimum of a few sentences to be viable for analysis.

#### 4.1.3 Present Study TRAWL Participants

As mentioned in the beginning of the chapter, this current study includes participants that have handed in texts to the TRAWL corpus. Prior to this study, the participants have given their consent to TRAWL for the research group obtains their data and to use it in

their corpus in exchange for anonymity. Therefore, the pupils I have handpicked have exceeded my criteria, as described above, and been used as participants in my case study. See below for further details on anonymity.

In the TRAWL corpus some of the participants have listed different first languages and acquired knowledge of different second languages than English and Spanish, by listing two L1. Because these TRAWL participants have listed other L1 than L1 Norwegian, they were not included in my study. This was done to exclusively look at native Norwegian learners of second languages, namely L2 English and L3 Spanish.

Initially, I only collected texts from pupils, in the TRAWL corpus, who were enrolled in the lower secondary school. However, finding produced texts from both L2 English and L3 Spanish of the same L1 Norwegian learners in the data available for me at the moment of finding texts was difficult, and the texts were sparse. This resulted in widening my range, including a group of pupils from the upper secondary school as well, as the pupils' levels are close in proximity.

Lastly, from a total of 52 pupils who had given their consent and were included in the TRAWL corpus, only 25 of these pupils had Spanish as a subject in addition to English. However, only 21 of these had handed in one or more texts in both English and Spanish. Out of the 21 pupils left, two pupils were bilinguals, reducing the participants to 19 pupils in total and were included in my sub corpus.

It is important to point out that the participants are given anonymity to be used in the TRAWL corpus, as further explained in detail in section 4.4 Ethics. This means that instead of exposing their names, the participants are given a unique code. For instance, one of their participants also included in this study, and used as an example in an excerpt below, is given the unique code 'P60502', and another is given the unique code 'P60505'. Because there are different Spanish and English classes, led by different teachers, in the lower secondary school, I divided the pupils into two groups. Group1 and Group 2, as well as Group3 being the pupils in the upper secondary school. Therefore, the pupils in both lower secondary and upper secondary school have exceeded my criteria, as described above, and thus been used as participants in my case study.

Group1 consists of six pupils in the lower secondary school with codes starting with P60502 – P60525. Group2 consists of eight pupils in the lower secondary school starting with codes P60531 – P60549. Lastly, Group3 consists of seven pupils in the



upper secondary school with the codes from P70077 – P70096, in total from all the three groups is 21 pupils included as participants in my study after exceeding my criteria, as described in section 4.1.2 The Criteria of this present study.

To conclude this section, I have selected 21 TRAWL participants whose first language is Norwegian and who also are instructed in both English and Spanish. They have all handed in at least one viable text in both of the languages English and Spanish. In addition, the participants are pupils aging from 15 to 17, enrolled in either lower- or upper secondary schools around Norway. Namely, 14 pupils enrolled in the lower secondary school, and seven pupils enrolled in the upper secondary school.

#### 4.1.4 Collection of TRAWL Data

According to Postholm and Jacobsen (2011), those who gather qualitative data are often more aware of the topic in which they want to research, but certain quantitative studies are more left open, i.e., researchers are not sure on what the data will show. The data that is gathered needs to be considered thoroughly and systematically organized.

There are different ways to collect data, for instance, watching or listening (observations), questions (questionnaires) and conversations (individual interviews and/or group interviews). The research assistants for the TRAWL project collect consent forms, and questionnaires filled out by the participants. Also, they collect the pupils' written texts from the teachers in the subjects like Norwegian, English, Spanish, French and German. These texts vary as the tasks vary, for instance, some are answers to exam questions (e.g., MIVF and POWE), classroom tests (e.g., TOPE) some are handed-in as homework (e.g., UCVE and GHPE) and some texts are produced during a lesson.

In the processing of the data, the research assistants note who the author of each text is, the date of when the texts are written and what the instruction or task is. In addition, they also note what type of text it is, whether the text is individually written or co-written, and whether the text is a test, or a task carried out at school or at home.

After the TRAWL research assistants have obtained Norwegian, English, Spanish, French and/or German texts from different schools, they start the process of anonymization, to make sure the participants' personal information is removed. After, the assistants are coding the texts, to make the texts and the pupils' information ready to be put into the corpus. Then, when this was done, I was able to go into the corpus and select the texts needed for my thesis, based on the criteria as described above.

However, there are a few things that need to be pointed out when it comes to the texts and how one is able to tell the texts apart. As described above, each participant has its own unique code, for instance, 'P60502'. Each text also has its own unique code. In the excerpt below, the text is given the code 'P60502\_Y10\_TOPE\_V0\_ORIG'. That is, the text is written by a pupil with its unique code P60502, and Y10 stands for Year 10, i.e., the text is written by a pupil in the lower secondary school.

Abbreviations, such as TOPE, are given by the researchers to recognize the text and what kind of assignment it relates to. Other abbreviations appear in this study as some learners have handed in different texts in the same subject. For instance, TOPE and POWE are both English texts written by the same learners. There are also different versions of a text, signified in their unique codes either by 'V0', 'V1' or 'V2' depending on the version. The text is marked V0 when a pupil has handed in its text, and it is the only version that exists. Whereas V1 is the first version of a text that has been handed in, where a second version (V2) of the text exists. In most cases, the V1 texts contain corrective feedback from the teacher. Resulting in a second version (V2), the pupil has had a chance to both correct errors pointed out in the teacher's feedback and add more text to improve its V1, before handing it in a second time, then marked V2 in the corpus. However, in my thesis, I am only focusing on the V0 and V1, as displayed by the selected texts in chapter 5.

If a text is marked at the end by the term 'ORIG', which stands for original, this means that the document only contains the pupil's text and nothing else. If ORIG is replaced by COMM, the text includes the comments from the teacher in the margin, or in the text itself. Whether it is an ORIG or a COMM differs from text to text and from teacher to teacher.

Lastly, it is important to note that some of these texts are not yet in the corpus, and thus I have manually analyzed them., see further description of analyzation process below.

#### 4.1.5 Sub Corpus Tasks

Before I go into the details of my sub corpus in the section below, I find it necessary to address the tasks that my participants have given answers to, as their texts are analyzed and mentioned in the fifth chapter Results and in the sixth chapter Analysis. This is done to give an idea of what the L1 learners of L2 English and L3 Spanish have answered as

they have produced L2 English texts and L3 Spanish texts, as well as given their texts as data to my thesis. I have systematically organized them in the same manner as how they are presented in chapter 5 Results.

#### *4.1.5.1 TOPE*

TOPE is given as an English test to Group1 (P60505-P 60525) which reads as follow: “write about how you feel and what your thoughts are about the Presidential Election, and what the potential outcome could be if Biden or Trump wins”.

#### *4.1.5.2 POWE*

POWE is given as an English term test for both groups in lower secondary school, where only the second part of the term test is handed over as data to my sub corpus, that usually being the longest part of a term test. The tasks from which the pupils have answered one of the tasks, read as follow:

**2a:** Create a text about how words can be used to help **make changes in society**.

**2b:** Create a text in which you reflect on why choices of names used for events, places and people can be particularly important to Indigenous people.

**2c:** All quotes below touch on the power of words in different ways. Create a text about the power of words using one of these quotes.

#### *4.1.5.3 THAE*

The text THAE is an English written assignment Group1 has been given in class as a classroom writing prompt. The pupils were asked to write a five-paragraph essay about the election in the USA. They were only given two hours to work on their assignment.

#### *4.1.5.4 GHPE*

The English assignment GHPE was given to the pupils at the upper secondary school as homework, i.e. Group3. They were asked to write a summary of a maximum of one page about the text Going Home by Pete Hamill.

#### 4.1.5.5 UCVE

The Spanish assignment UCVE is given as homework to both Group1 and Group2. They were asked to write about their summer vacation using present perfect simple (present verb “haber” and participle).

#### 4.1.5.6 HESA

The Spanish assignment HESA asked both Group 1 and Group 2 to write about what they had done during their previous weekend at the time when this task took place. In this task, the teacher gave the pupils examples and glossary as help for them to produce Spanish sentences.

In addition, the pupils were also provided with questions and translations of certain lemmas and additional information as shown below, see Figure 2 as well:

:

“A qué hora te levantas? desayunas?

vas al colegio empieza el coleigo? termina? cenas?

te acuestas?

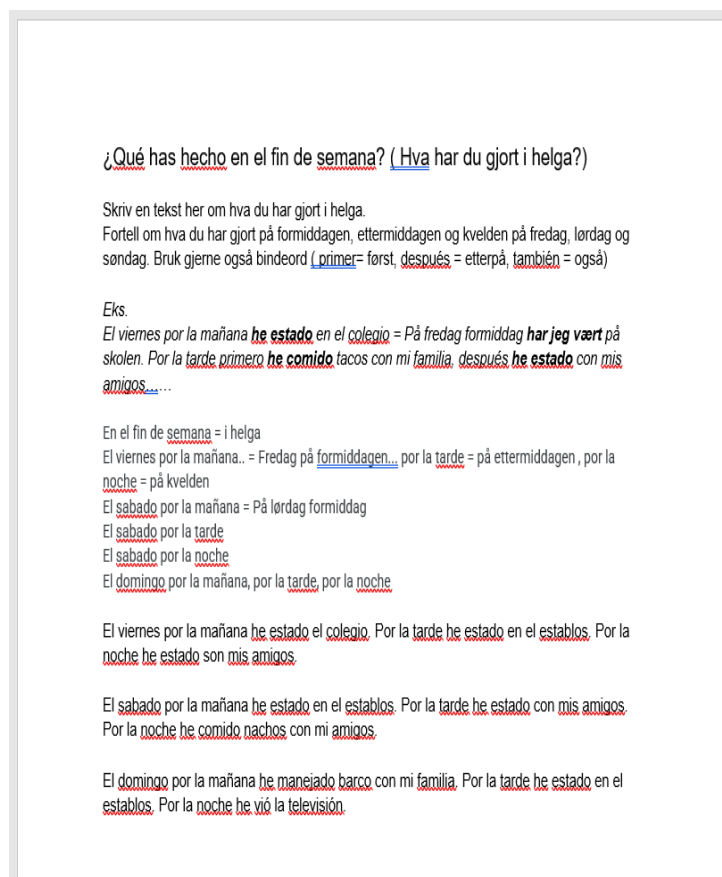
¿Que haces por la tarde? = Hva gjør du på ettermiddagen?

¿Qué haces por la noche? = Hva gjør du på kvelden?

¿Qué te gusta hacer en tu tiempo libre? = Hva liker du å gjøre på fritiden?

¿Tienes una asignatura favorita? ¿Qué haces en un día normal?”

Figure 2 Screenshot of a Spanish task given Group1 and Group2.



#### 4.1.5.7 MIVF

The Spanish assignment MIVF was given Group3 in upper secondary school as the second part of a Spanish term test. In this second part, the pupils were given two tasks. The first task asked them to write six sentences based on facts concerning the cultural diversity in Central America using at least six words from a word bank provided in the task (as shown in the picture below).

The second and longer form assignment was given the title “Mi viaje fantástico” (My fantastic journey) as shown in Figure 3. This task gave the pupils a prompt they had to answer, which read as follow:

*“Last summer you were on a long journey together with your family. You can choose for yourself where you travelled to. Write about what you did, bought, ate, were about, where you stayed, what you saw, where you went, visited, etc. during your stay.*

*Remember to show that you are able to use past simple (pretérito indefinido) in different persons (for instance “I”, “he/she”, “we”, “they”). You are mainly to use the past tense but try also to use present tense where it’s natural (for instance when describing).*

Title: "Mi viaje fantástico"

You can start like this: *El Verano pasado viajé a... con mi familia.*

Write +/- 150 words." [My own translation]

Figure 3 Screenshot of a Spanish task given Group3.

[Del 2: Med hjelpemiddel\(gloseark\). Skriv på eget ark](#)

**9) Kortsvarsoppgave:** Skriv 6 **faktasetninger** om temaet kulturell mangfold i Mellom-Amerika der du bruker minst 6 av disse ordene:

*diversidad cultural, origen, descendientes, lenguas, esclavos, población, mestizos, indígenas, gran variedad, gente, culturas, víctimas*

**Eksempel:** Hay una gran diversidad cultural en América Central.

**10) Langsvar: "Mi viaje fantástico"**

I fjor sommer var du på en lang reise med din familie. Du velger selv hvor dere var. Fortell om hva du/dere gjorde, kjøpte, spiste, var, bodde, så, dro, besøkte, etc., under oppholdet.

Husk å vise at du kan bruke **pretérito indefinido** i forskjellige personer (f.eks. "jeg", "han/hun", "vi", "de" -formene). Du skal bruke hovedsakelig preteritum, men prøv også å bruke presens der det er naturlig (eks. ved beskrivelser).

**Tittel:** "Mi viaje fantástico"

Du kan begynne slik: *El verano pasado viajé a ..... con mi familia.*

Skriv +/- 150 ord.

**Forslag til bindeord/ tidsuttrykk:**

- La primera /segunda /última semana = den første / andre / siste uken
- También = også
- Porque = fordi
- Por eso = derfor
- Primero = først
- Después = etterpå
- Todos los días = hver dag
- El último día = den siste dagen
- Un mes entero = en hel måned
- Cuando = når
- Todo el tiempo = hele tiden
- Siempre = alltid
- Nunca = aldri

**¡Buena suerte!**

#### 4.1.6 My Sub Corpus

My sub corpus collected from TRAWL consists of a total of 29 English texts and 27 Spanish texts, which is a total of 56 texts. Each of the participants have, as mentioned in section 4.1.2 The Criteria of this present study, all handed in at least one English text and one Spanish text to the TRAWL Corpus, and thus included in my thesis, as shown in Table 8.

In the case of my study, the texts are mostly marked as individually written and carried out at school in the form of tasks or tests. Some of the texts I use are also marked as homework. Though I also have the V2 of many of the pupils' texts, I only concentrate on V0 and V1. As demonstrated in the table below, this is the overview of the sub corpus.

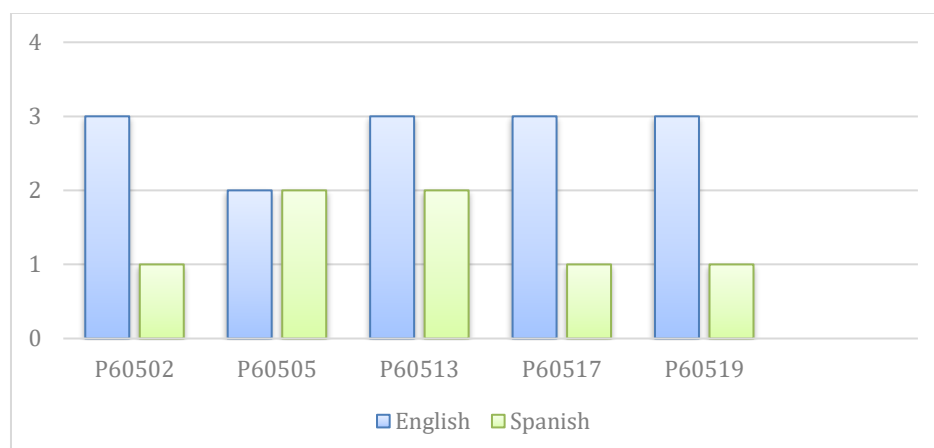
*Table 8 Overview sub corpus.*

	<b>10<sup>th</sup> grade Tasks</b>	<b>Number of Texts</b>	<b>Wordcount in Total</b>	<b>11<sup>th</sup> grade Tasks</b>	<b>Number of Texts</b>	<b>Wordcount in Total</b>
<b>English</b>	THAE	4	1.385	GHPE	7	3.472
	TOPE	5	1.333			
	POWE	13	7.540			
<b>Spanish</b>	UCVE	10	888	MIVF	7	1909
	HESA	10	1886			

Aid provided beyond a bilingual dictionary, is unclear and cannot be controlled for. Though it is important to note there is a possibility that the pupils have used other types of aid, due to some of the texts being homework or classroom writings. Because this current study focuses on SVA errors in L2 English and L3 Spanish, as well as to look at the correlation between the errors in the respective languages, grades on the pupils' papers are not accounted for.

To elaborate on Table 8, Figure 4 shows the number distribution of Group1 for my material, i.e., how many texts each of the pupils from Group1 in the lower secondary school who has handed in respectively, as illustrated below:

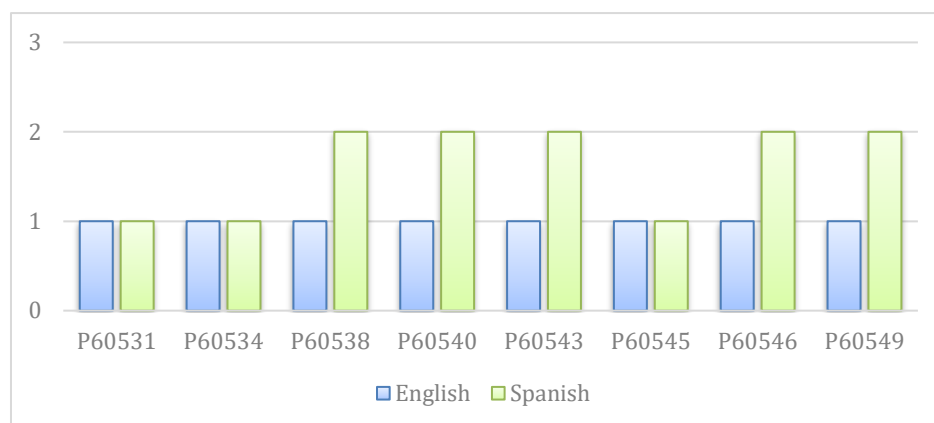
*Figure 4 Pupil distribution of texts in L2 English and L3 Spanish.*



Group1 has in total written 6.287 words from the 14 English texts that were collected. From the seven Spanish texts they handed in give a total of 1.203 written words. This gives a total of 7.490 words produced by Group1.

Figure 5 illustrates how many texts each of the pupils from Group2 has handed in to the TRAWL Corpus and included in my study. Here, the pupils have either written as many Spanish texts as English texts or produced more Spanish texts than English texts:

*Figure 5 Pupil distribution of texts in L2 English and L3 Spanish.*



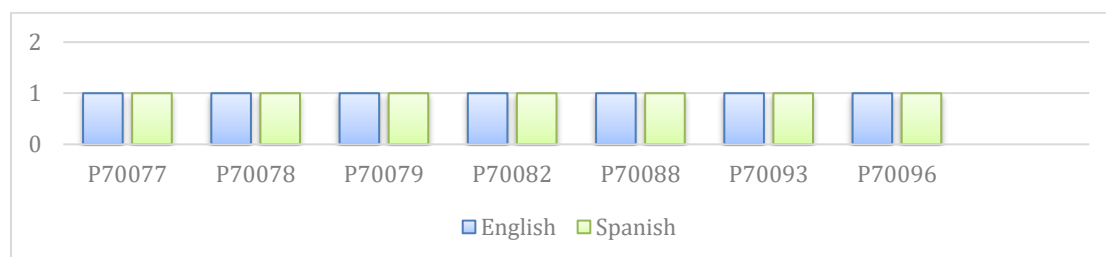
Group2 has in total written 3.971 words from the eight English texts that were collected, and 1.571 words from a total of 13 Spanish texts handed in to TRAWL Corpus. This gives a total of 5.542 words produced by Group2.

Group3 moreover, has only handed in one English text each and one Spanish text each, which gives a total of 5.381 words all together. Out of the English texts they



produced 3.472 words, and 1.909 Spanish words. This is illustrated by the 14 texts that were handed in shown in Figure 6:

*Figure 6 Pupil distribution of texts in L2 English and L3 Spanish.*



As shown in Figure 6 above, my sub corpus consists of 29 English texts and 27 Spanish texts handed in from pupils in both the lower secondary school and from the upper secondary school. This gives a total of 13.730 words produced in English, and 4.683 Spanish produced words, giving my sub corpus a total of 18.413 words all together.

#### 4.2 Different categories for Spanish SVA errors

There are different types of SVA agreement errors in the Spanish language. In order to keep it structurally organized, I decided to keep the categories similar to those in English. However, since all Spanish verbs are marked for person, number and tense, as discussed in chapter 3, as well as conjugated forms of the Spanish verbs are always inflected for number and person to agree with the subject, the categories utilized in my thesis for Spanish verbs have emerged on the basis of my data, and thus, I have made some adjustments to the categories applied to the marking of Spanish SVA errors.

The first category deals with the instances of *omissions*, this covers the singular subjects who are displayed with plural verbs. The second category is *overgeneralization*, here as well, it covers the plural subjects who are marked singular on the verb, and therefore displayed in the sentence with a plural subject and a singular verb. The third category concerns the erroneous use of the different pronouns, here called *erroneous pronouns*, where the verb is correctly displayed, but the pronoun is not. Lastly, the fourth category covers all the *erroneous inflected verbs* where usually the pronoun is not attested in the text, but from the context given it shows that the verb does not agree with the intended pronoun of the sentence.

### 4.3 Text analysis and marking of SVA errors

After the selection of participants, as described in detail in section 4.1.2 and section 4.1.3, I have worked thoroughly and systematically through the pupils' L2 English and L3 Spanish texts that I collected to my sub corpus. After I read a text, I went through and marked all verbs in the present tense, as well as the instances of BE in both present and past tense, as demonstrated in the excerpt Figure 7:

Figure 7 An excerpt from the process of marking verbs for agreement intent.

P60502\_Y10\_TOPE\_V0\_ORIG

I **feel** like Trump **is** going to win no matter who actually **wins**. I **think** Trump **is** going to cheat in some way to be able to keep being the president of the USA. I **have** the impression that Trump never **likes** to lose and he will do anything in his power to win. I **like** working with the election as the outcome **doesn't** only affect the USA but also other countries around the world. If Trump **gets** elected as president for another 4 years, I **think** he might try to add a law that **says** he will be president for the rest of his life. I also **think** he will ruin the political system in the USA.

As earlier mentioned, the verbs are categorized in a manner similar to Garshol (2019), as she also investigated SVA errors among pupils in the secondary schools around Norway, though only learners of English. Therefore, I have managed to categorize the verbs and the subjects in English in the same manner as Garshol as illustrated in Figure 8:

Figure 8 An excerpt from the process of categorizing the different verbs in excel.

Text code	am	is	are	TO BE (am, is, are)	was	were	TO BE (was, were)	Verbs in present tense	Total verbs	Errors
P70077_Y11_GHPE_V0_ORIG	0	19	1	20	6	0	6	18	44	1
P70078_Y11_GHPE_V0_ORIG	0	18	0	18	1	0	1	29	48	3
P70079_Y11_GHPE_V0_ORIG	0	7	1	8	11	1	12	4	24	2
P70082_Y11_GHPE_V0_ORIG	0	8	0	8	13	2	15	19	42	1
P70088_Y11_GHPE_V0_ORIG	0	5	1	6	5	2	7	19	32	2
P70093_Y11_GHPE_V0_ORIG	1	6	2	9	4	1	5	26	40	0
P70096_Y11_GHPE_V0_ORIG	0	8	4	12	12	3	15	18	45	1
In total	1	71	9	81	52	9	61	133		

However, due to the lack of research carried out on L1 Norwegian pupils of L3 Spanish, I decided to make my own categories based on the data I retrieved from the TRAWL corpus and included into my sub corpus as shown in Figure 9:

Figure 9 An excerpt from the process of categorizing the different Spanish verbs in excel.

Text UCVE			
Omission (singular subject and plural verb)	Overgeneralization (plural subject and singular verb)	erroneous use of pronouns	erroneous inflected verbs
0	2	0	1

In text, I have marked all the verbs that are marked for agreement, as shown in Figure 10 below. The categories are explained in detail in the previous section, and further looked at in chapter 6 of the Analysis.

Figure 10 An excerpt from the process of marking Spanish verbs for agreement in text.

## Carta del verano

Querida abuela.

¿Como **estas**? ¡**Espero** tú estado bien!

Me **gusto** del verano mucho.

¿Qué **has** hecho en el verano?

**He** estado en Noruega casi entero del verano, causa de Corona. Normalmente **he** visitado España, en NAME\_PLACE12 y hablado mucho español. A veces segundo país en Europa. Primero en el verano **he** estado una semana en NAME\_PLACE1, con mis amigas. Me y mis amigas bañado mucho en NAME\_PLACE2. También **hemos** bailado mucho simulatáneo nosotros escuchado música.

### 4.4 Ethics

The data utilized in my study coheres with the Norwegian Research Council and the ethical guidelines provided. Because the data was collected beforehand by the researchers at TRAWL, the participants have signed their informed consent sheets and their texts have been thoroughly and fully anonymized by the members of the TRAWL research group prior to the inclusion in this thesis. Hence, the data that I have looked at is fully anonymized, and thus my research does not provide any burden on the participants in this study.

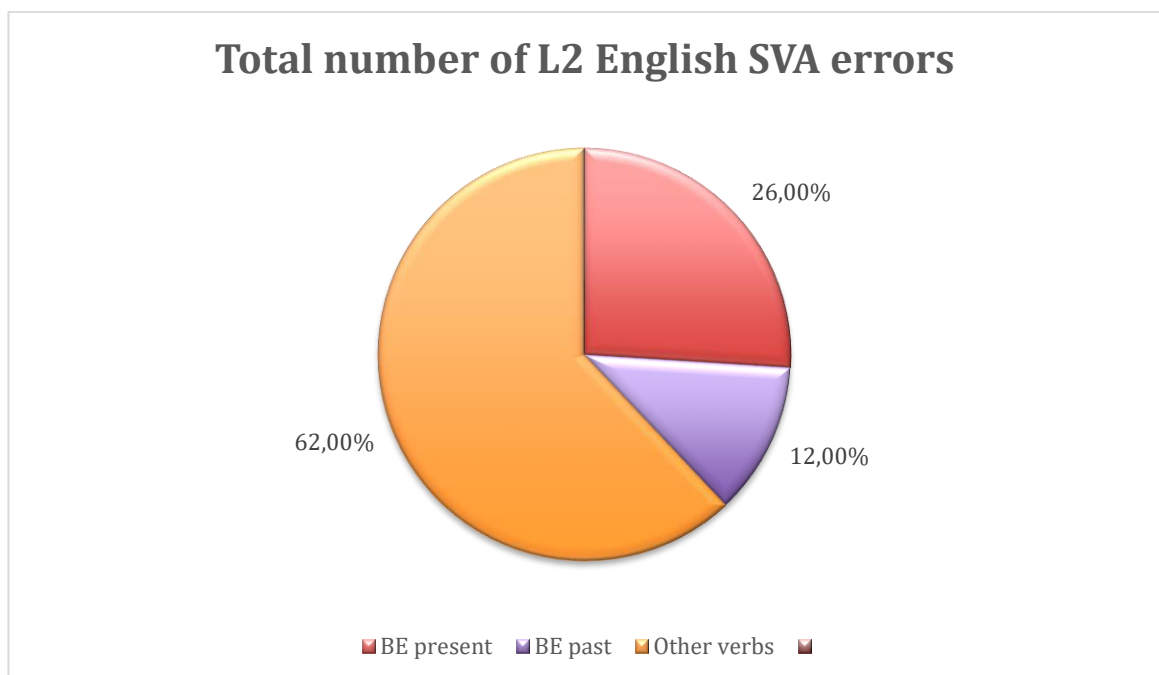
Furthermore, in chapter 5 I show examples of omitted SVA errors from my sub corpus, and thus I try to make my process of research transparent, in order for others to be able to carry out the same analysis, and to secure validity as well as reliability.

## 5 Results

To seek answers to my research questions which investigate SVA behavior of Norwegian learners of second language English and third language Spanish, which is the more frequent of the errors, and whether there is a correlation between the SVA errors made in the respective languages, I have conducted a study using TRAWL corpus, manually analyzed the selected data. I have read thoroughly and systematically through each of the texts gathered from the corpus and marked all the verbs for agreement in present and past tense. In total, there were 84 English and Spanish subject-verb agreement errors detected in my sub corpus.

Out of the 85 SVA errors detected, 50 (59,52%) SVA errors were detected in my English data, 31 (62%) of them are in clauses with other verbs other than *BE*, and 19 of the errors (38%) are in clauses with *BE* as the finite verb (26% in the present tense 12% in the past tense) as illustrated in the chart in Figure 11:

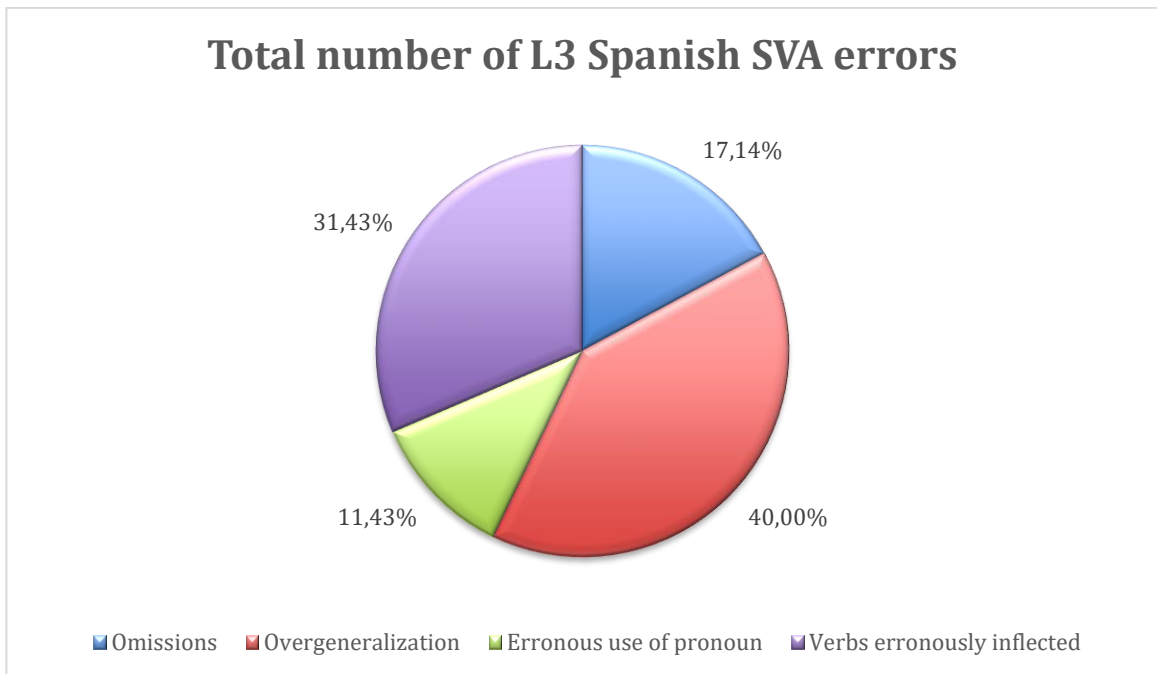
*Figure 11 Proportion of English SVA errors in each of the verbal categories.*



Out of the 85 SVA errors found, there were 35 (41,67%) SVA errors displayed in my Spanish sub corpus. Six of these SVA errors were labelled as *omission* errors (17,14%), 14 of the errors were *overgeneralizations* (40%), four

SVA errors were due to *erroneous use of pronoun* (11,43%) and the last 11 SVA errors were *erroneous inflected verbs* (31,43%), as shown in the chart Figure 12:

Figure 12 Proportion of Spanish SVA errors in each of the verbal categories.



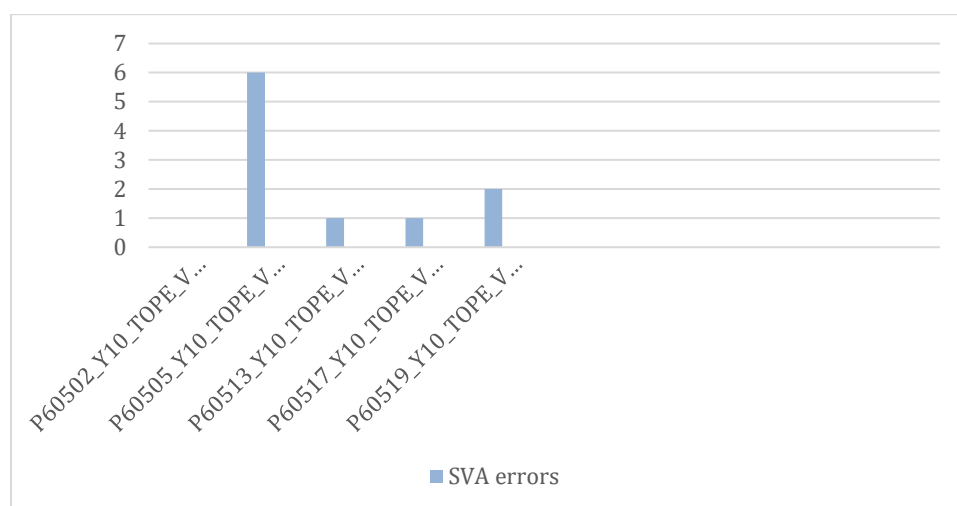
In cases where I was in a reasonable amount of doubt, where I questioned whether it was a construction of an SVA error or an acceptable variation in standard dialect of English or Spanish, or the apparent error was perhaps caused by other factors, such as an ambiguous subject or some typological factors, I decided to extract them from my sub corpus and listed them below in (4) and (10)

- (4) When it comes to friendship it can be hard to understand each other and **end** up with a lot of misunderstandings. (P60505\_Y10\_POWE)
- (5) ...and this is just some of the things... (P60513\_Y10\_THAE)
- (6) **It's** a lot of emotions, protests, arguments and attempts to cheat. (P60505\_Y10\_TOPE)
- (7) A word can **feels** like a weapon (P60549\_Y10\_POWE)
- (8) Mi hermana **tuvo**... (P70079\_Y11\_MIVF)
- (9) Los garífuna **son** descendientes (P70096\_Y11\_MIVF)
- (10) ...un texto sobre todos las cosas hes hicimes. (P70093\_Y11\_MIVF)

## 5.1 TOPE

In my sub corpus I have five texts answering the task TOPE. As illustrated in Figure 13, one of the texts does not contain any SVA errors, while the four remaining texts contain 10 SVA errors altogether.

*Figure 13 Distribution on number of SVA errors produced by Group1 in TOPE.*



It is interesting to note one participant who sticks out from the rest of the group. As two pupils only have made one SVA error each, and the third one has made two SVA errors in its text, as shown in Figure 13 above, pupil P60505 has made six SVA errors throughout its text. These errors are shown in detail in Table 9 below, which illustrates the different SVA errors found in each of the pupils' texts.

*Table 9 Distribution of SVA errors in the texts from task TOPE.*

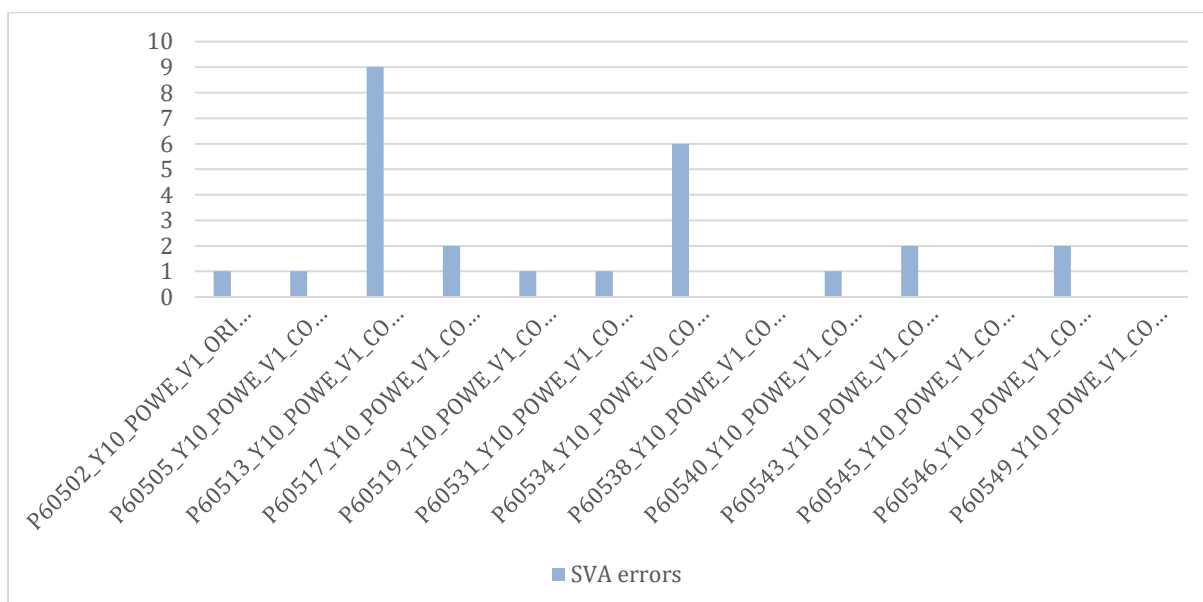
Pupil	SVA errors
<b>P60505_Y10_TOPE_V1_ORIG</b>	<b>Do</b> America have 4 more years
	when <u>women's</u> almost not allowed
	<b>It's</b> a lot of emotions, protests, arguments and attempts to cheat.
	First of all <u>Donald Trump</u> and <u>Joe Biden is</u> really different.

	<u>Trump tolerate</u> that over
	Some <u>things</u> he has said <b>is</b> not nice at all.
<b>P60513_Y10_TOPE_V1_ORIG</b>	I really hope that <b>Joe Biden</b> takes this win and <u>show</u> people that they did the right thing.
<b>P60517_Y10_TOPE_V0_ORIG</b>	<u>Politics</u> and <u>english</u> class <b>is</b> something i find...
<b>P60519_Y10_TOPE_V0_ORIG</b>	all the stupid things <u>he</u> <b>have</b> done in
	<u>all the Trump-supporters</u> <b>stands</b> for their

## 5.2 POWE

The task POWE consists of 13 texts. The errors are as shown in Figure 14, in which three of the texts do not contain any SVA errors. However, five of the texts contain only one SVA error each, three texts display two errors each, and two of them contain more than five SVA errors. This gives a total of 27 SVA errors.

Figure 14 Distribution on number of SVA errors produced by Group1 and Group2 in TOPE.



Here, two of the pupils stand out from the rest of the two groups, Group1 and Group2. P60534 has made six SVA errors, however, P60513 has made nine SVA errors

throughout its text. Moreover, Table 10 illustrates in detail the errors produced by each of the pupils:

*Table 10 Distribution of SVA errors in the texts from task POWE.*

Pupil	SVA errors
P60502_Y10_POWE_V1_ORIG.pdf	...that we let <u>places</u> that's already named
P60505_Y10_POWE_V1_COMM.pdf	Maybe because <u>they</u> were too scared, had too little self-confidence, or <b>was</b> too weak.
P60513_Y10_POWE_V1_COMM.pdf	The USA is one of the places that most of <u>the protests</u> have been and <b>has</b> been the most aggressive.
	...protest <u>young people</u> <b>has</b> been involved...
	The <u>young peoples</u> voices <b>is</b> something...
	...of how the <u>young people</u> <b>sees</b> the situation.
	<u>Names</u> <b>has</b> been a big...
	<u>These people</u> <b>is</b> known...
	<u>Society change</u> every day and...
P60517_Y10_POWE_V1_COMM.pdf	<u>He</u> finally <b>let</b> go...
	...but <u>this hard thing</u> <b>hit</b> my head...
P60519_Y10_POWE_V1_COMM.pdf	...his <u>words</u> that <b>makes</b> the people...
P60531_Y10_POWE_V1_COMM.pdf	A bully is an example of <u>rude people</u> that <b>uses</b> words in negative ways...
P60534_Y10_POWE_V0_COMM.pdf	... and <u>the list</u> just <b>go</b> on and on
	... <u>the white men</u> <b>has</b> all of the power...
	... because <u>the white seats</u> <b>was</b> all taken.
	<u>The women</u> <b>is</b> also a representation of this...

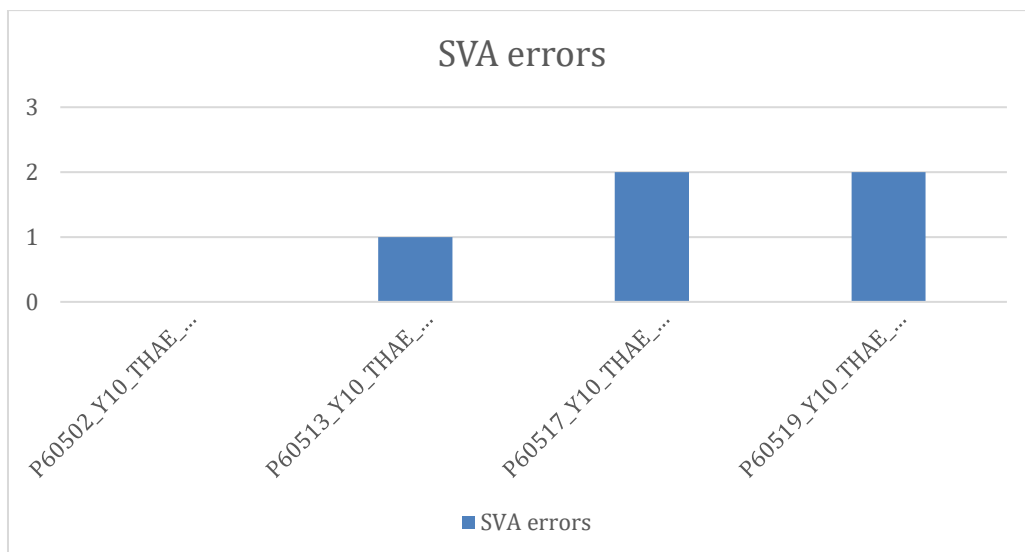


	... between <u>the sexes</u> who <b>does</b> the same job...
	I think <u>she</u> <b>are</b> going
P60540_Y10_POWE_V1_COMM.pdf	... and <u>advance post</u> <b>were</b> illegal.
P60543_Y10_POWE_V1_COMM.pdf	<u>The courange</u> to speak up <b>lead</b> to change.
	Ja-Rey Klipatrick who is <u>a young Native American</u> <b>speak</b> up about...
P60546_Y10_POWE_V1_COMM.pdf	... to <u>Repupicans</u> who <b>is</b> voting Democratic...
	<u>This</u> leads to Repupicans who is voting Democratic instead and <b>show</b> us how important...

### 5.3 THAE

The task THAE consists of four texts handed in by the pupils in Group1. As illustrated in Figure 15 below, one text does not contain any SVA errors, another text displays one SVA error, while the two last texts display two SVA errors each. This gives a total of five SVA errors.

Figure 15 Distribution on number of SVA errors produced by Group1 of English texts.



In these texts, which answer the task THAE, none of the pupils stands out when it comes to the number of SVA errors found in their texts. Though, the SVA errors they did make are illustrated in Table 11:

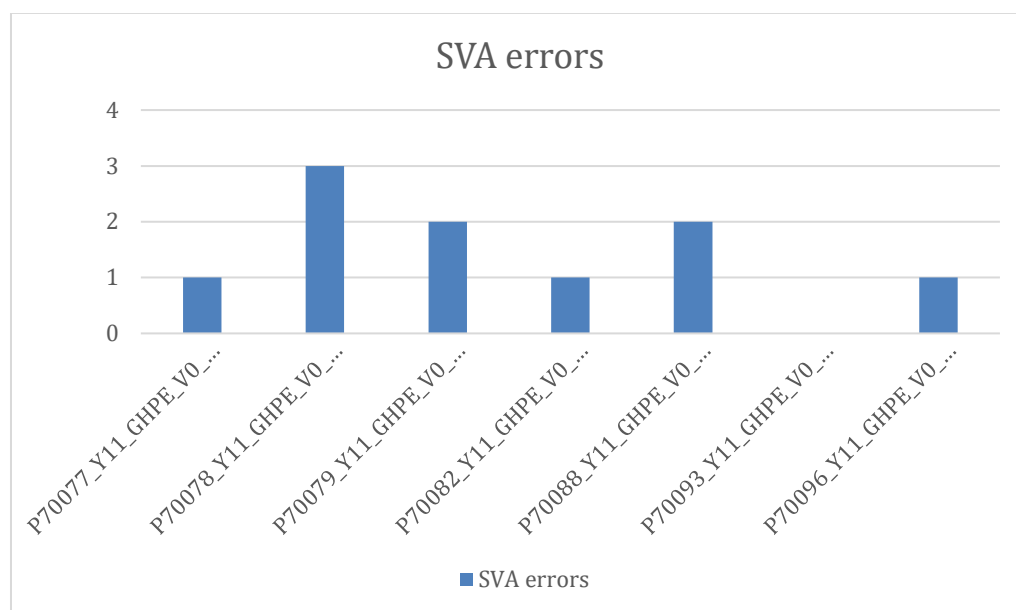
*Table 11 Distribution of SVA errors in the texts from task THAE.*

Pupil	SVA errors
P60513_Y10_THAE_V0_ORIG.pdf	... and <b>this is</b> just some of the <u>things</u> ...
P60517_Y10_THAE_V0_ORIG.pdf	<u>He</u> <b>have</b> made alot of stupid decisions.
	But <u>that</u> <b>do</b> not change the fact...
P60519_Y10_THAE_V0_ORIG.pdf	<u>People</u> <b>means</b> that Trump...
	... go deeper into what <u>his thoughts</u> about coronavirus <b>was</b> .

5.4 GHPE

The task GHPE consists of seven texts handed in by the pupils in Group3. There was one text which did not contain any SVA errors. However, the rest of the pupils made one or more SVA errors as shown in Figure 16. Apart from the one text that does not contain any SVA errors, three of the texts display one SVA error each, two of the texts contain two SVA errors each, and the last text displays three SVA errors. In all there were ten SVA errors detected in the texts by Group3.

Figure 16 Distribution on number of SVA errors produced by Group3 of English texts.



There is not anyone who stands out in particular, however, one pupil makes more errors than the rest of the group, as observed in Figure 16. Table 12, however, shows the errors the pupils have made in detail:

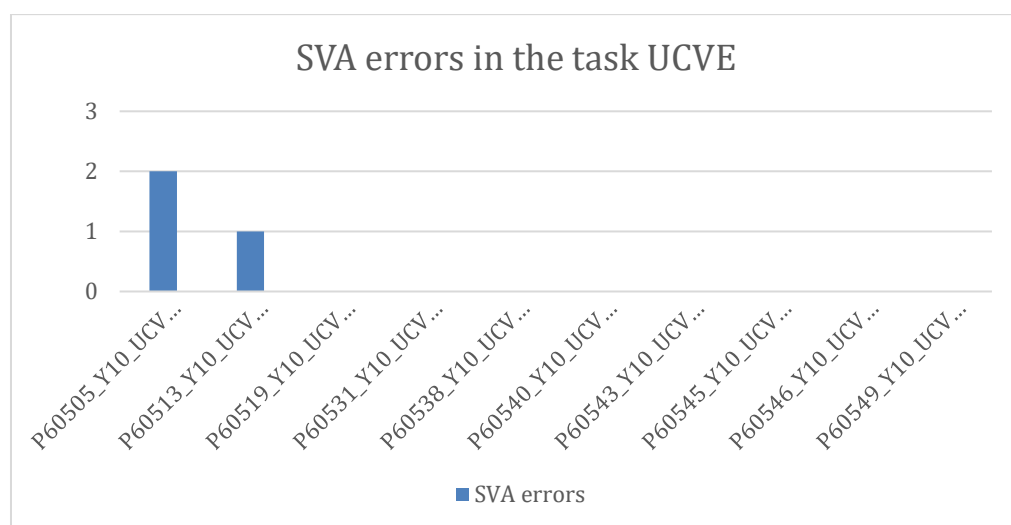
Table 12 Distribution of SVA errors in the texts from task GHPE.

Pupil	SVA errors
P70077_Y11_GHPE_V0_ORIG	<u>He</u> is a shy person, who <b>have</b> had some...
P70078_Y11_GHPE_V0_ORIG	<u>His characteristics</u> on the other end <b>is</b> ...
	but rather be grateful for <u>the good things</u> that <b>happens</b> to you.
	in the text <u>Vingo</u> <b>do</b> not expect to ...
P70079_Y11_GHPE_V0_ORIG	She said that <u>they're</u> <b>was</b> going to Florida
	He said <u>he</u> <b>don't</b> know.
P70082_Y11_GHPE_V0_ORIG	... <u>the themes</u> of the short story <b>is</b> ...
P70088_Y11_GHPE_V0_ORIG	...and <u>it</u> <b>were</b> covered in...
	...even though <u>she</u> <b>don't</b> know him.
P70096_Y11_GHPE_V0_ORIG	<u>The teenagers</u> in the story <b>describes</b> ...

## 5.5 UCVE

The task UCVE consists of ten texts handed in by pupils from both Group1 and Group2. Eight out of the ten texts, as illustrated in Figure 17, do not contain any SVA errors at all. One of the texts displays one SVA error, while in the last text there are two SVA errors detected.

*Figure 17 Distribution on number of SVA errors produced by Group1 and Group2 of Spanish texts.*



In comparison to the other pupils who have not made any SVA errors, the text from pupil P60505 stands out by containing two SVA errors. The SVA errors found in these two texts, are shown in Table 13 below:

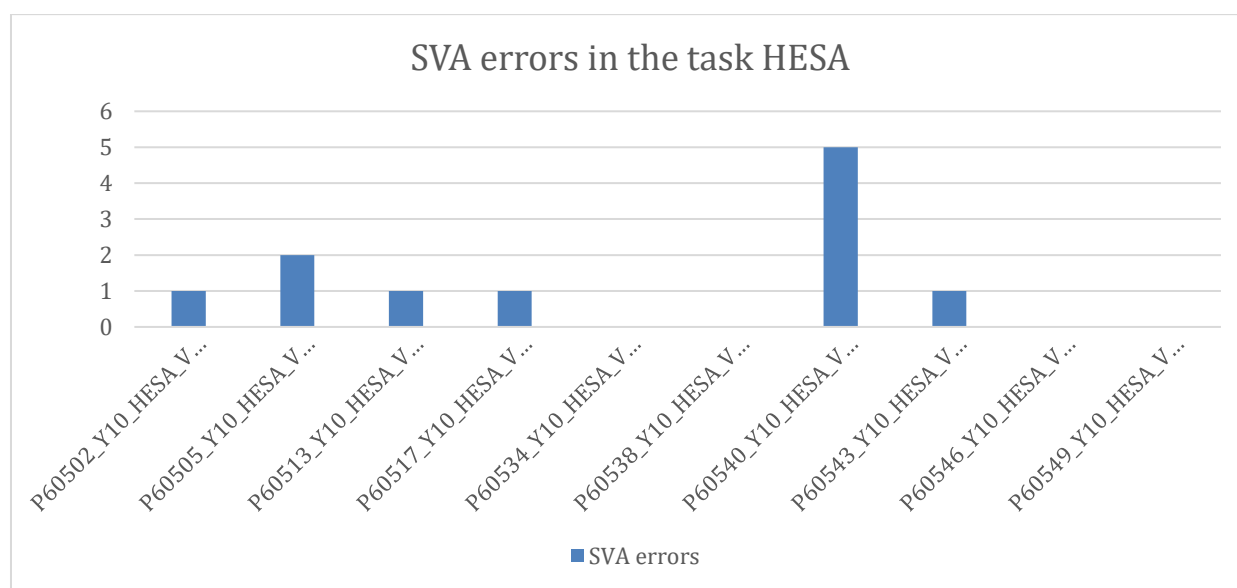
*Table 13 Distribution of SVA errors in the texts from task UCVE.*

Pupil	SVA errors
<b>P60505_Y10_UCVE_V1_ORIG</b>	... que <b>es</b> <u>montañas</u>
	hemos <b>es</b> <u>muchos niños</u> .
<b>P60513_Y10_UCVE_V1_ORIG</b>	Espero que todo está bien contigo y que <u>el verano</u> <b>he</b> pasado muy bien.

## 5.6 HESA

The task HESA consists of ten texts from both Group1 and Group2. Here, four pupils have not made any SVA errors in their texts. There are an additional four pupils who have made one SVA error each, while one pupil has made five SVA errors. This gives a total of 11 SVA errors, as illustrated in Figure 18:

*Figure 18 Distribution on number of SVA errors produced by Group1 and Group2 of Spanish texts.*



Looking at Figure 18, in comparison with the other pupils who have only made one or two SVA errors, pupil P60540 stands out as there are five SVA errors displayed in its text. Furthermore, these errors are presented in Table 14:

*Table 14 Distribution of SVA errors in the texts from task HESA.*

Pupil	SVA errors
<b>P60502_Y10_HESA</b>	[Yo] En el noche ... <b>acostó</b> a las diez.
<b>P60505_Y10_HESA</b>	<u>Mi asignatura favorita es español, noruego, ciencias naturales y matemáticas.</u>
	<u>Mi comida favorita es taco y pizza</u>

P60513_Y10_HESA	[Yo] <u>se</u> <b>maquillio</b> <sup>1</sup>
P60517_Y10_HESA	... <u>yo</u> como, y/o <b>están</b> con amigos.
P60540_Y10_HESA	En el miércoles <u>yo</u> <b>acuesto</b> <sup>2</sup> a las...
	Primero [ <u>yo</u> ] <b>empieza</b> el día con dos horas de...
	[Yo] <u>Me</u> <b>gusto</b> desayuno
	[ <u>yo</u> ]...veo mucho televisión y <u>se</u> <sup>3</sup> relaja.
	[ <u>yo</u> ]...veo mucho televisión y se <b>relaja</b> .
P60543_Y10_HESA	...porque <b>me encanta</b> <u>la pizza y el taco</u> .

## 5.7 MIVF

The task MIVF consists of seven texts handed in by Group3. One of the texts contains one SVA error, three texts show two SVA errors each, while another one displays three SVA errors. The sixth text has four SVA errors detected, while the last text contains seven SVA errors. This gives a total of 21 SVA errors altogether, all distributed in Figure 19:

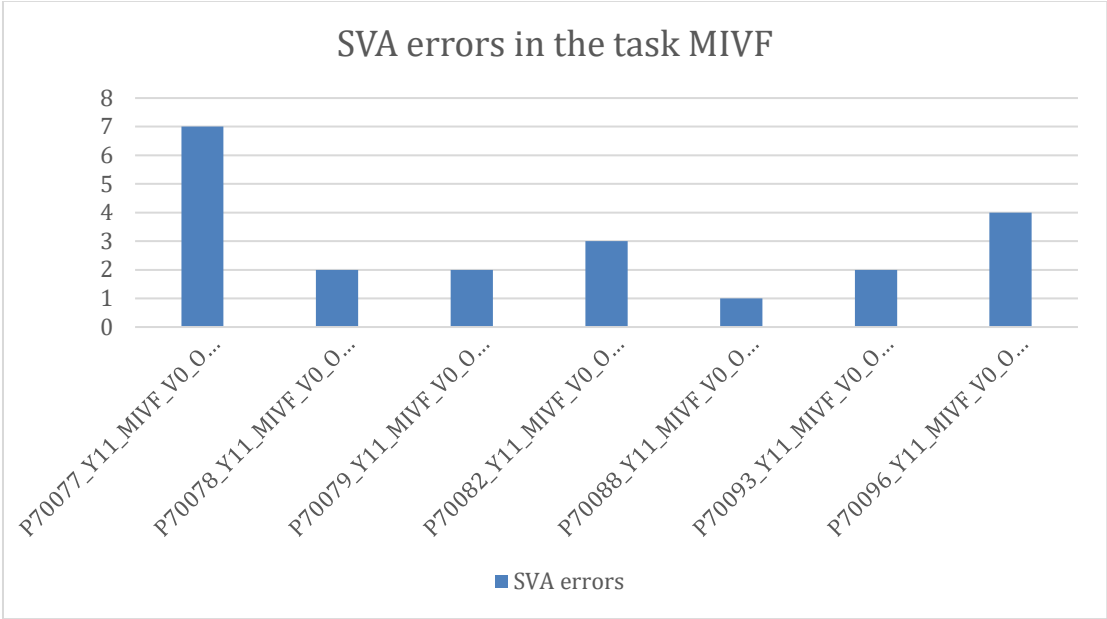
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<sup>1</sup> This is 1 out of 3 examples of erroneous use of a reflexive pronoun, though I decided to keep it due to the reflexive pronoun does not agree with the verb.

<sup>2</sup> This is 2 out of 3 examples, however here, the reflexive pronoun is absent.

<sup>3</sup> This is 3 out of 3 examples of erroneous use of a reflexive pronoun.

Figure 19 Distribution on number of SVA errors produced by Group3 of Spanish texts.



Pupil P70077 stands out, particularly, due to its many SVA errors produced in its text. In addition, P70096 also stands out from the rest of the pupils, as it has made four

SVA errors in its text. Table 15 gives information in detail on the SVA errors produced in each text, as such:

*Table 15 Distribution of SVA errors in the texts from task MIVF*

<b>Pupil</b>	<b>SVA errors</b>
<b>P70077_Y11_MIVF_V0_ORIG</b>	...hay <u>muchas personas</u> que <b>tiene</b> otro origen.
	Hay <u>personas</u> que <b>tiene</b> otro modo de vida...
	[ellos]...hablan otras lenguas y <b>tiene</b> otras culturas.
	... mi hermana <b>jugaste</b> ál fútbol.
	...mi hermana <b>comiste</b> pizza...
	<u>Mi padre</u> <b>comiste</b> pescado.
	<u>[él]</u> ... <b>bebiste</b> agua.
<b>P70078_Y11_MIVF_V0_ORIG</b>	<u>La Garifuna</u> <b>son</b> descendientes...
	<u>La Garifuna</u> ... que [ <b>escapakan</b> ]...
<b>P70079_Y11_MIVF_V0_ORIG</b>	<u>Nosotros</u> <b>celebra</b> en un restarante...
	... <b>es</b> una <i>indígenas</i> <b>se llama</b> Garífuna.
<b>P70082_Y11_MIVF_V0_ORIG</b>	<u>La gente</u> de America-central <b>son</b> amable
	<u>La gente</u> de America-central <b>son</b> pobre.
	<u>La publicación</u> indigenas <b>fueron</b> víctimas de...
<b>P70088_Y11_MIVF_V0_ORIG</b>	<u>mi hermano</u> <b>comiste</b> mucho helado
<b>P70093_Y11_MIVF_V0_ORIG</b>	...la <u>musica y el bailo</u> que <b>es</b> [un] gran parte de la cultura.
	Tambien <u>he</u> <b>viste</b> el pueblo indigena
<b>P70096_Y11_MIVF_V0_ORIG</b>	Hay <u>muchas personas</u> que <b>tiene</b> otro origen
	<u>Mi familia y yo</u> <b>tiene</b> un perro...
	También <b>me gusta</b> <u>la naturaleza y el mar</u>
	<u>Mis padres</u> <b>le gusta</b> salir a caminar...

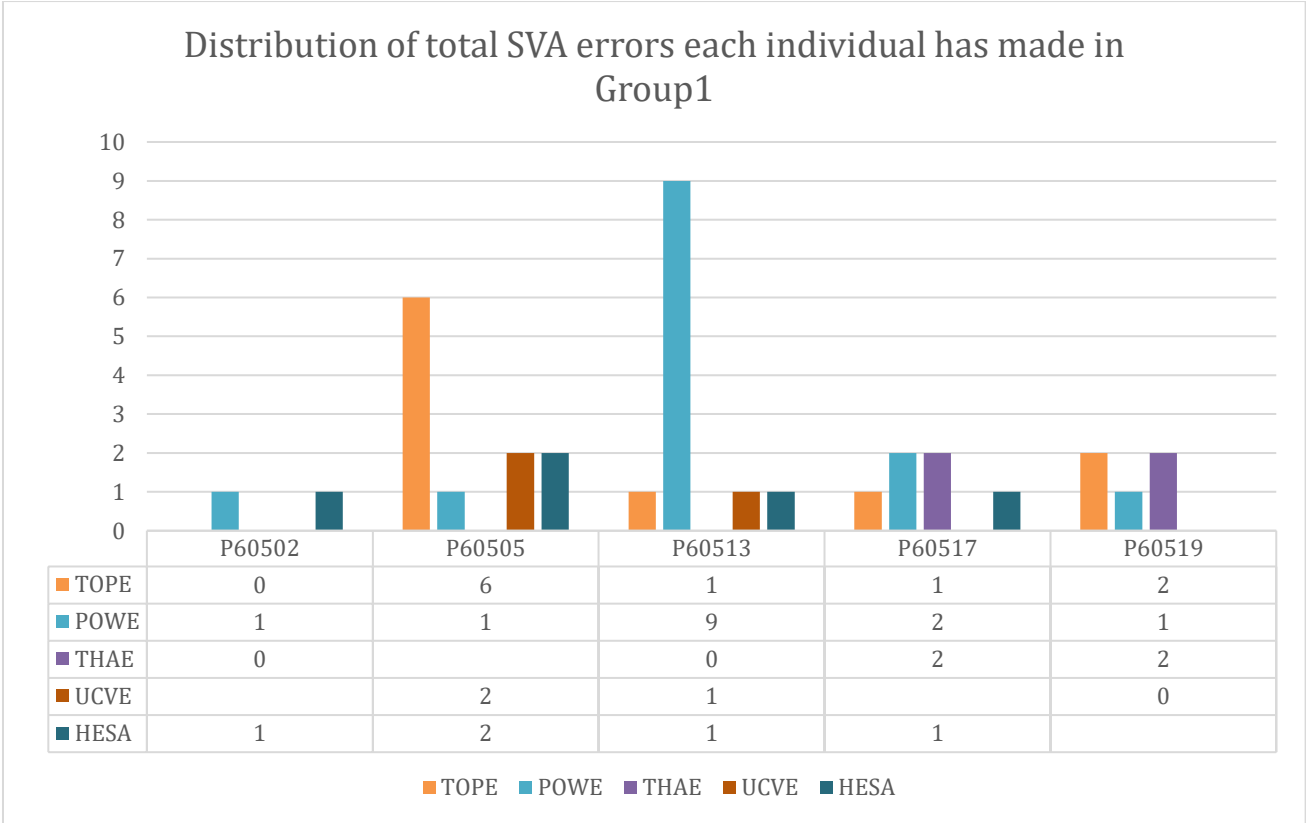


5.8 Overview of the distribution of SVA errors among the pupils

As I have now described all the SVA errors in detail, I want to give an overview of the three groups and their errors individually. This is done by illustrating the distribution of the total number of SVA errors each participant has made in its texts.

As mentioned earlier, Group1 consists of five pupils in the lower secondary school. In the instances where numbers are missing, the pupils have not handed in their answer to that specific task, as shown in Figure 20 displaying clear boxes. If the pupil has handed in its text but there are no SVA errors displayed, this is marked by a zero in the box.

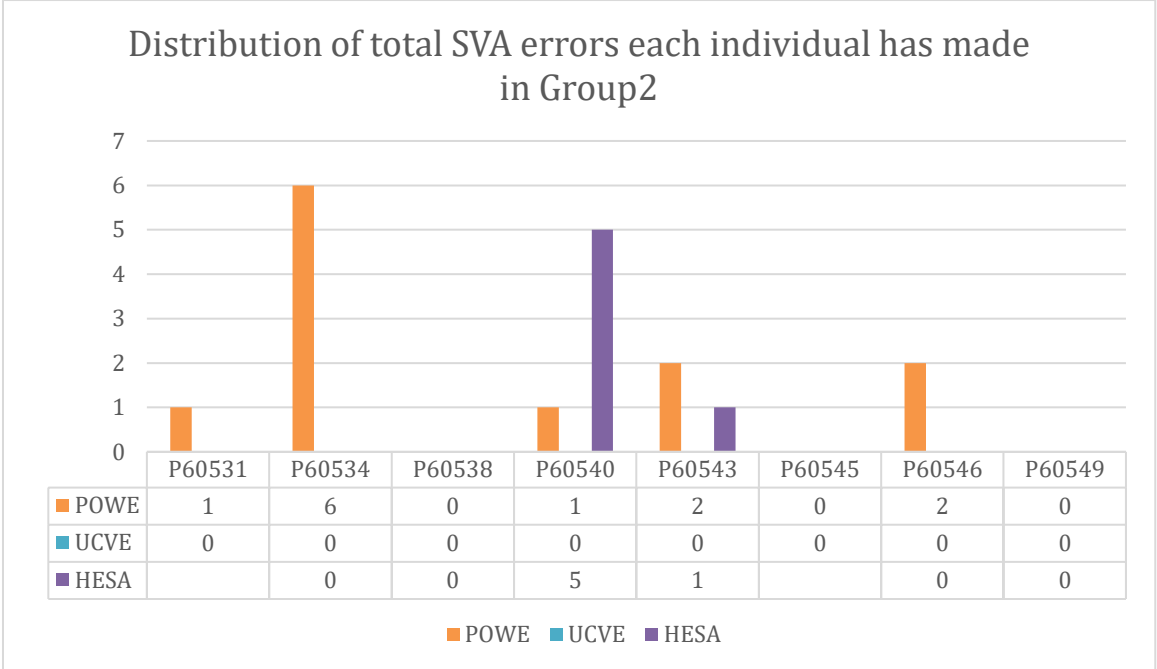
Figure 20 Total number distribution of SVA errors in Group1.



Group2 consists of, as discussed before, eight pupils from the lower secondary school. Also here, in the instances where numbers are missing, the pupils have not handed in an answer to that specific task, as shown in Figure 21 displaying clear boxes instead of the number zero which means the pupil has not made any SVA errors in its

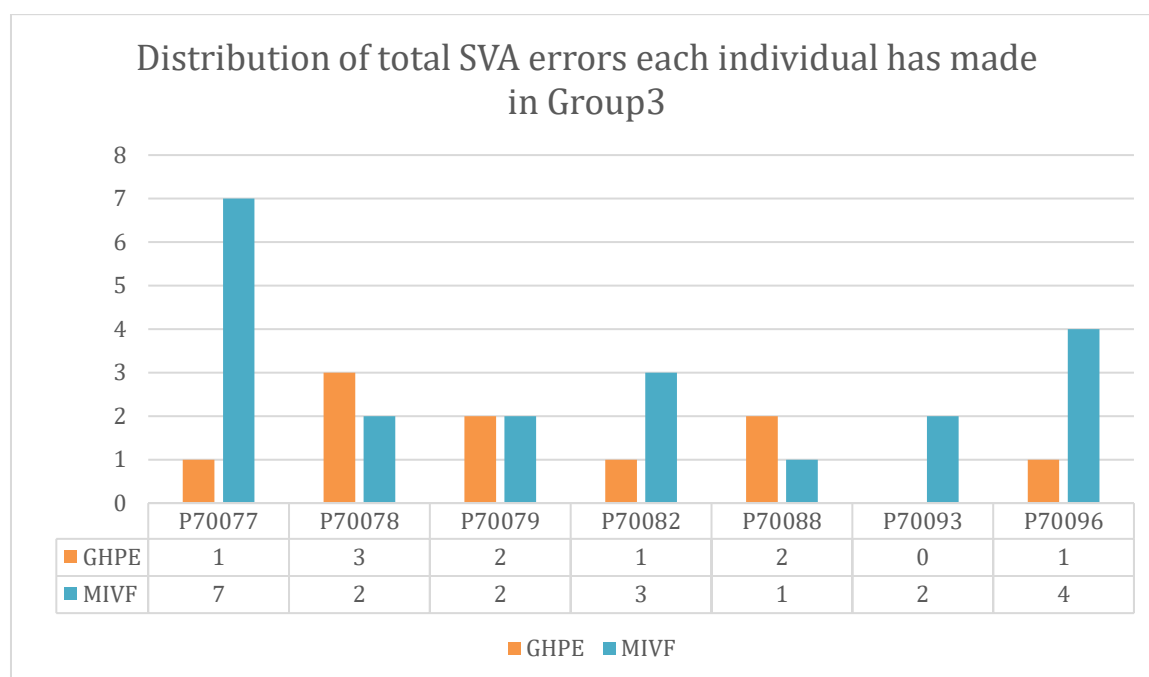
text. Additionally, none of the pupils in Group2 has answered the tasks TOPE and THAE, and thus these are not displayed below.

Figure 21 Total number distribution of SVA errors in Group2.



The last group is Group3 which consists of seven pupils from the upper secondary school. These pupils have all handed in one text in each of the languages as illustrated in Figure 22 below:

Figure 22 Total number distribution of SVA errors in Group3.



## 6 Analysis

All the English SVA errors which were included in my sub corpus were classified in close relative to way Garshol classified her SVA errors(2019), however, as Garshol looked at both the type of verb and the type of subject, I have only looked at the type of verb.

As discussed in chapter 3, the type of verb is either affixal agreement errors on lexical verbs and the auxiliary verbs *have* and *do*, or suppletive agreement errors on auxiliary and copula *BE* in both present tense and past tense.

In the following paragraphs I firstly discuss affixal agreement errors, i.e. other verbs other than *BE*. Then I turn to the suppletive agreement errors, that is, agreement errors with the verb *BE*. Note that the affixal errors with lexical verbs and non-modal auxiliaries do not include the verb *BE*, as *BE* is the only English verb which marks agreement in both present tense and past tense and which also marks agreement with suppletive morphs, and thus these SVA errors are treated separately (Garshol, 2019). Lastly, I present the Spanish agreement errors and the different categories, discussed in detail in section 3.2.3.

## 6.1 Affixal agreement errors

The affixal errors which were also discussed in chapter 3, as being agreement errors with lexical verbs and non-modal auxiliaries, are divided into two categories based on the number of the verb. Here, agreement errors involving 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular subject, and a plural verb are labelled *omission* errors, while the agreement errors involving a non-3<sup>rd</sup> person singular subject and a singular verb marked with the 3<sup>rd</sup> person marker -s, were labelled *overgeneralization* errors, and thus corresponds to the system and classifications like the one of Garshol (2019).

Out of the 489 instances of clauses with verbs other than *BE*, there were 31 (6,34%) affixal agreement errors detected in my sub corpus. Out of the 31 affixal agreement errors, 19 (61,29%) of the errors are *omission* errors as shown in (11) and (12), and 12 (38,71%) of the errors are *overgeneralization* errors, as shown in (13) and (14):

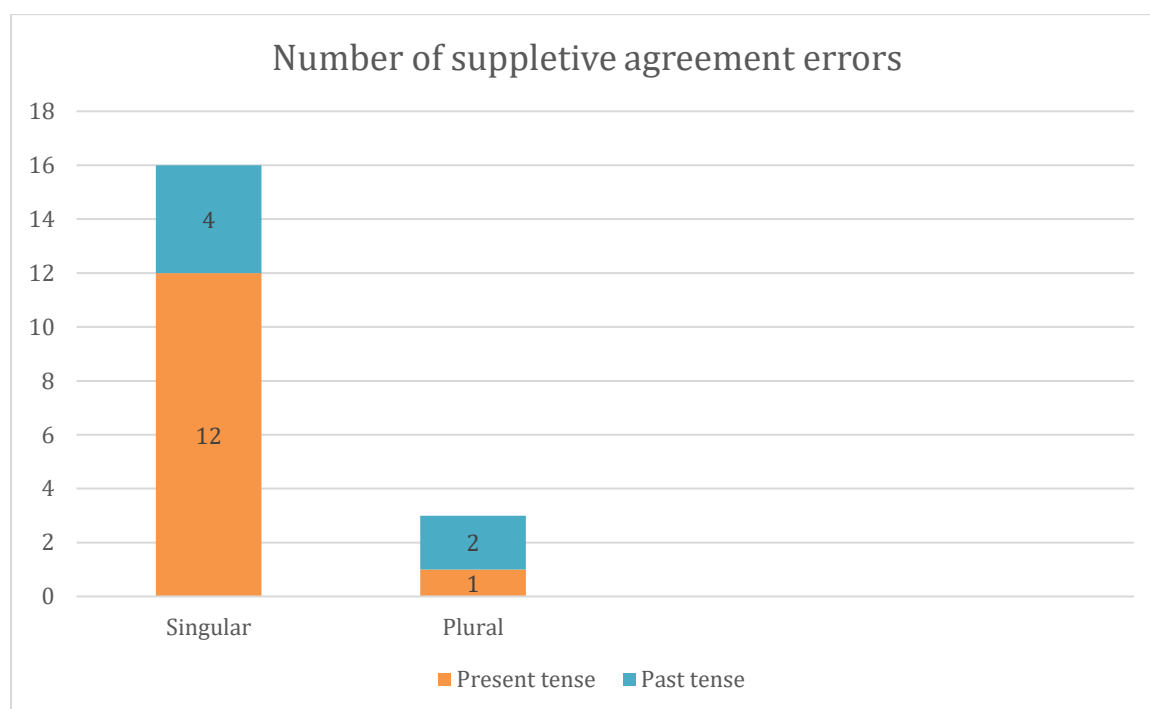
- |      |  |                   |
|------|--|-------------------|
| (11) | <u>Trump</u> <b>tolerate</b> that over...          | (P60505_Y10_TOPE) |
| (12) | He said <u>he</u> <b>don't</b> know.               | (P70079_Y11_GHPE) |
| (13) | .. <u>young people</u> <b>has</b> been involved... | (P60513_Y10_POWE) |
| (14) | <u>People</u> <b>means</b> that Trump...           | (P60519_Y10_THAE) |

## 6.2 Suppletive agreement errors

The suppletive agreement as initially discussed in the third chapter of my thesis, covers the clauses with the verb *BE* in both the present tense and past tense. Such errors which are detected are with *is* and *are* in present tense and *was* and *were* in the past tense, and thus no instances were detected with the erroneous use of *am* in my sub corpus.

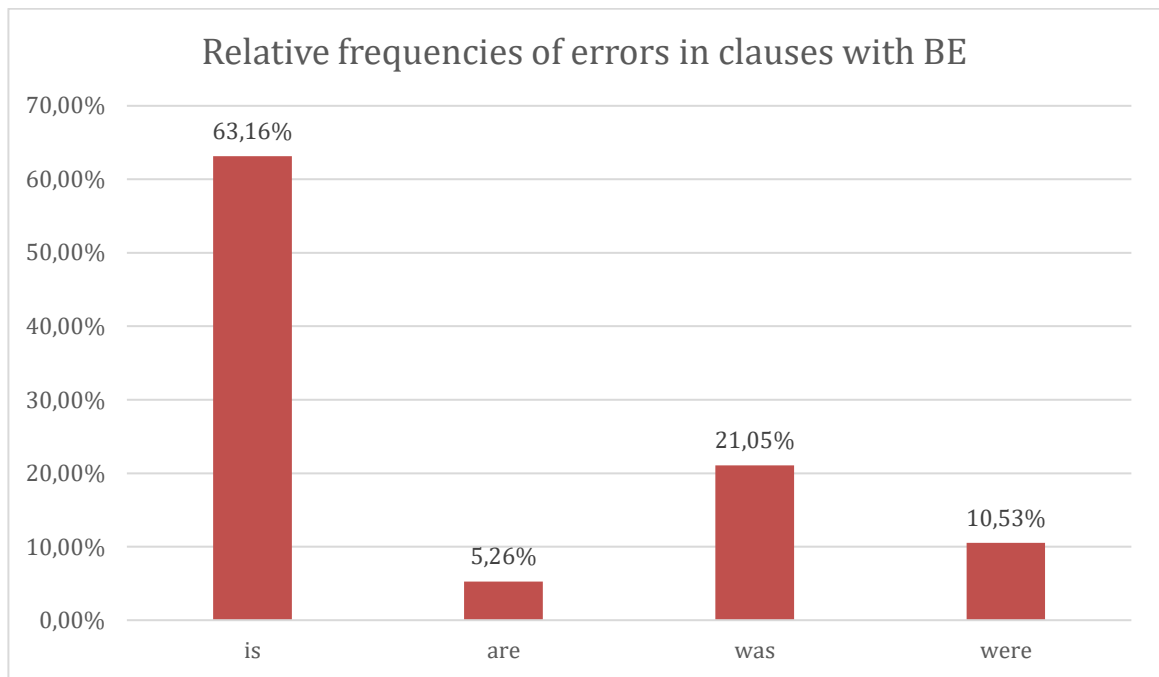
Out of 557 instances of clauses with the verb *BE* (60,32% of the forms in the present tense and 39,68% of the forms in the past tense), 19 (3,41%) suppletive agreement errors are displayed in my corpus. That is, 13 (68,42%) of the errors found in clauses with *BE* in the present tense, and six (31,58%) of the errors found in clauses with *BE* in the past tense, as illustrated in Figure 23 below:

Figure 23 Number of suppletive agreement errors.



Moreover, 19 (38%) of the 50 agreement errors were suppletive agreement errors, whereas 12 (63,16%) of these errors were with the present BE form *is* and one (5,26%) error was detected with the present BE form *are*. In the past BE form, there were four (21,05%) suppletive agreement errors detected with the past BE form *was*, while two errors were displayed (10,53%) with the past BE form *were*, as illustrated in Figure 24:

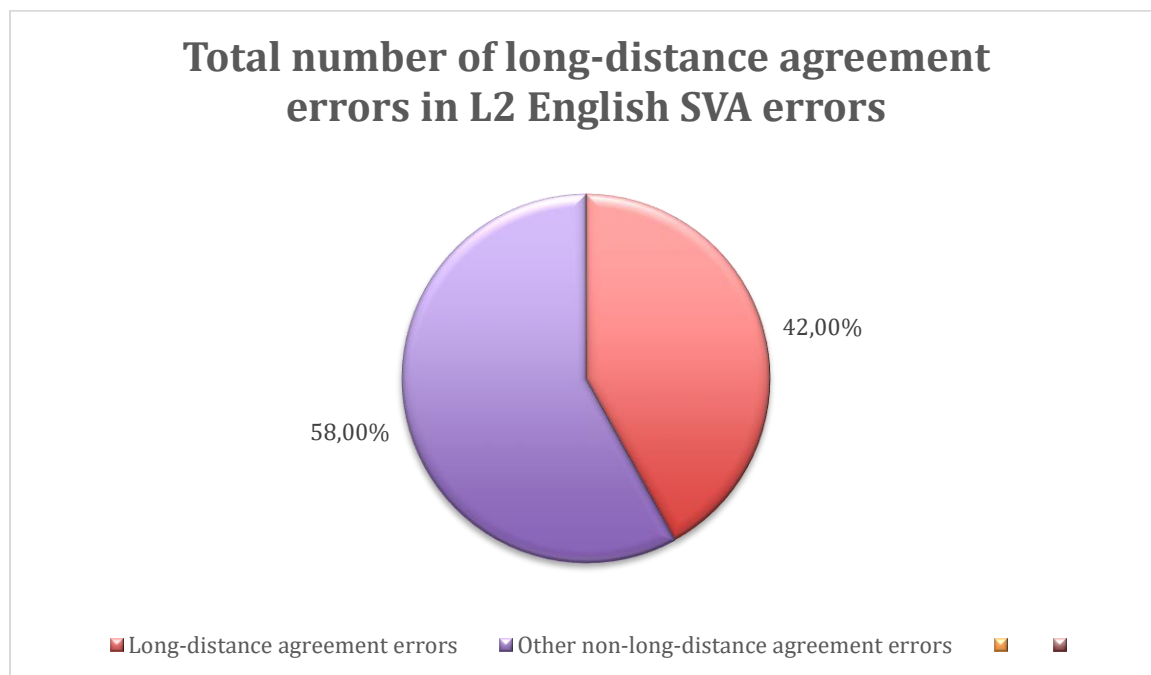
Figure 24 Erroneous use of the present and past tense forms of the verb BE in percentages of the total occurrences of the individual finite forms in the sub corpus.



### 6.3 Long-distance agreement errors

In my sub corpus I have detected 50 SVA errors of both affixal agreement errors and suppletive agreement errors. As long-distance agreement can be seen in both categories, long-distance agreement errors are thus found in both the pupils' affixal agreement errors and suppletive agreement errors. In my results 21 long-distance agreement errors are displayed in my English sub corpus, as illustrated in Figure 25

Figure 25 Number distribution of long-distance agreement errors compared to the other errors not being caused by long-distance between the subject and the verb.



As previously pointed out in chapter 3, long-distance agreement appears when there is an increase in the structural distance between the agreeing elements which might lead to a decrease in sensitivity to agreement violations, as shown in the examples (15) - (18):

- (15) ... go deeper into what his thoughts about coronavirus **was**. (P60519\_Y10\_THAE)
- (16) He is a shy person, who **have** had some... (P70077\_Y11\_GHPE\_V0\_ORIG)
- (17) Some things he has said **is** not nice at all. (P60505\_Y10\_TOPE\_V1\_ORIG)
- (18) The USA is one of the places that most of the protests *have been and* **has** been the most aggressive.

### 6.3 Spanish agreement errors

Out of my Spanish sub corpus, 35 SVA errors were detected. As explained in chapter 4, I decided to divide these Spanish SVA errors into different categories.

The first category deals with the instances of *omissions*, this covers the singular subjects who are displayed with plural verbs, as shown in (19) and (20). The second category is *overgeneralization*, here as well, it covers the plural subjects who are marked singular on the verb, and therefore displayed in the sentence with a plural subject and a

singular verb, as shown in (21) and (22). The third category concerns the erroneous uses of the different pronouns, here called *erroneous pronouns*, where the verb is correctly displayed, but the pronoun is not, as shown in (23) and (24). The last and fourth category covers all the *erroneous inflected verbs* where usually the pronoun is not attested in the text, but from context given it shows that the verb does not agree with the intended pronoun of the sentence, as demonstrated in (25) and (26):

- (19) La Garifuna **son** descendientes (P70078\_Y11\_MIVF)
- (20) La gente de America-central **son** amable (P70082\_Y11\_MIVF)
- (21) ...que **es** montañas (P60505\_Y10\_UCVE)
- (22) Hay personas que **tiene** otro modo de vida... (P70077\_Y11\_MIVF)
- (23) [yo] se **maquillio**... (P60513\_Y10\_HESA)
- (24) Mis padres **le** gusta salir a caminar... (P70096\_Y11\_MIVF)
- (25) Mi padre **comiste** pescado (P70077\_Y11\_MIVF)
- (26) ...[yo] como cena noche y **acostó** a las diez. (P60502\_Y10\_HESA)

As illustrated earlier in the chart Figure 12 shown in the beginning of chapter 5, out of the 35 SVA errors detected in the L3 Spanish data, six (17,14%) of the SVA errors were *omissions*, 14 (40%) of the SVA errors were *overgeneralization* errors. Four (11,43%) SVA errors were *erroneous pronouns*, and the last 11 (31,43%) SVA errors detected were *erroneous inflected verbs*.



## 7 Discussion and limitations

I have dedicated this chapter to answering my research questions that initially started my investigation. In addition, I will point out the limitations of my study at the end of this chapter.

My first research question (RQ1) asks: What types of SVA errors are found in L1 Norwegian pupils' production of written L2 English and L3 Spanish? My results show that the types of SVA errors found in my English sub corpus are both affixal and suppletive agreement errors. The affixal agreement errors were divided into two different categories, the first being labelled *omission* errors and the second category being labelled the *overgeneralization* errors. The suppletive agreement errors were SVA errors in clauses with the verb BE in both present and past tense, that is, in present tense the BE form *is* and *are*. In the past tense the BE form *was* and *were*. There were SVA errors detected in all the categories.

Due to the little research done of L1 Norwegian learners of L3 Spanish, the categories utilized in my thesis were made based on the findings in my data, as discussed in chapter six. Therefore, there were detected SVA errors in all of the categories in the pupils' production of L3 Spanish. That is, SVA errors due to omission, overgeneralization, as well as erroneous use of or lack of pronouns and erroneous inflected verbs.

In addition, as discussed in chapter 3, the results in chapter 5 also show several instances in which there are elements interfering between the subject and the verb in the sentence. This is especially seen in the English data of my sub corpus. This means that, in addition to the affix agreement errors and the suppletive agreement errors, there are also several instances of long-distance agreement errors, which agrees with the results Ocampo found in her research.

The second research question (RQ2) asks: What types of SVA errors are the most frequent? In my analysis I detected 85 SVA errors together from both of the language. There were displayed 50 SVA errors in the English corpus. 31 of these SVA errors were affixal agreement errors, which makes up 62% of the total of errors, showing that the highest frequencies in the data are affixal agreement errors, compared to the 19 suppletive agreement errors which makes up 38% of the total. Moreover, within the different categories affixal errors were divided into, that is, the omission errors and the overgeneralization errors. Here, out of the 31 affixal agreement errors, 19 (61,29%) of

the errors were omission errors, which indicates that the most frequent problem L2 learners of English have with SVA is with the omission of the obligatory marking of the 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular, as shown in the examples in both chapter five and six.

My results do not match the results of Garshol, as discussed in chapter 3, as she claims Norwegian learners of L2 English produce as many overgeneralization errors as omission errors, with a mere 3,7% distinction. In my results concerning the English SVA errors, the overgeneralization errors are fewer than the omission errors, with a 22,58% distinction between the two categories. Though the percentage is higher in my study, I find it important to note that I do not have as much data in my sub corpus as Garshol had in hers, and thus it may affect my results. However, my results do agree with that of Dröschel and Breiteneder who have also claimed that overgeneralization errors are in the minority compared to the omission errors.

Furthermore, in the Spanish data, there were 35 SVA errors detected, where 14 (40%) of the SVA errors were overgeneralization errors. This shows that the most frequent SVA error in my Spanish sub corpus is the overgeneralization error. Which again, indicates that the most frequent problem L3 learners of Spanish have with SVA is with the omission of inflecting verbs according to the plural subject in the sentence.

Here, it is also interesting to note that the second most frequent error the pupils have made, is that of erroneous inflected verbs, which also deals with L3 learners who seem to struggle to inflect the verb correctly according to the subject in the sentence.

The third research question (RQ3) asks: What is the correlation between SVA errors produced by L1 Norwegian learners of L2 English compared to the SVA errors found in L3 Spanish produced by the same learners? My thought on this question was that if the pupils produced many SVA errors in English, there would be a bigger chance to detect more errors displayed in the written production of Spanish texts. The reason for that is due to the longer period of English instruction and therefore better language knowledge, but also due to the amount of exposure from the English language, both inside and outside the classroom. However, I find it difficult to see this correlation, which is due to the fact that in the instances where the pupils have made many English SVA errors, there is not detected any or very few SVA errors in their Spanish texts. On the other hand, where the pupils have made considerably more errors in Spanish, they have none or very few errors produced in their English text.

This leads to the fourth research question (RQ4), which asks: Are the SVA errors produced in L3 Spanish affected by the learners' L2 English, if not, by their L1 Norwegian? In the instances where the pupils have produced many SVA errors in their Spanish texts, there are not detected many SVA errors in their English texts. For instance, pupil P60540 had five SVA errors mostly consisting of erroneous inflection of verbs, but also one instance of erroneous use of pronoun and one instance where the pupil had omitted the pronoun. However, in the instance of the pronoun being omitted, the pronoun was a reflexive pronoun, and thus necessary to be included in the sentence. However, when I looked at the pupil's English text POWE, the only SVA error displayed was a suppletive agreement error with the past form BE *were*.

Also, as I discussed in chapter 3, Garshol pointed to the likenesses of the *BE* paradigm in English and Norwegian, and due to the similarities of Norwegian *er* and the English *are*, the Norwegian *var* and the English *were*, she expected to find an overuse of the English forms *are* and *were* by L1 Norwegian learners of L2 English in the errors of suppletive agreement. In her results, she found out that *is* was the most erroneously used form of the *BE*. This matches the same predictions I had, as well as the same pattern showing up in my results. As illustrated in Figure 23 in section 6.2, I found 557 instances of clauses with the verb BE, where 60,32% of the forms were in the present tense and 39,68% of the forms were in the past tense. Moreover, 13 (68,42%) of the errors found in clauses with *BE* in the present tense, and six (31,58%) of the errors found in clauses with *BE* in the past tense. Which means that the pupils erroneously used the form *is* in 12 (63,16%) of the instances, one instance (5,26%) with the present *BE* form *are*, four instances (21,05%) with the past tense *was* and two (10,53) instances with the form *were*. This shows that our patterns, in our results, match.

Also here, the results might have been affected differently if I had access to more material of the same L1 learners in both of the languages, but especially in this case of L3 Spanish production. In addition, I find it quite interesting that the pupils have not made as many SVA errors in the respective languages of L2 English and L3 Spanish, as I had expected, due to Slabakova's claim about SVA being the bottleneck, and the patterns in the results of both Garshol and Jensen et al. as discussed in chapter 3.

As discussed in chapter 3, Harley suggested that learners may face difficulties when the languages in syntax and vocabulary differ significantly. If this was the case, this would have been a negative transfer, impeding language acquisition. However, since the

errors are very few, this might actually indicate that the pupils have successfully progressed their interlanguage in the way that they are able to avoid this language transfer from English to Spanish and have made their own interlanguage built on its own linguistic system.

I find it important to point out some limitations to my study. The first limitation is in terms of the level of L2 English and L3 Spanish knowledge each of the participants are on. At the moment of when I started to collect texts in the respective languages of English and Spanish, the pupils in the lower secondary school had just completed the 9<sup>th</sup> grade, before starting in the 10<sup>th</sup> grade. The pupils in the upper secondary school, however, had just completed the 10<sup>th</sup> grade, leaving a year gap in knowledge between the groups. This is not necessarily overt in the results shown in my thesis, when compared to the SVA errors each of the groups have produced. However, due to this language knowledge gap, Group3 writes longer Spanish texts with an average of 272,7 words per text, while the highest average of Group1 is 181,75 words produced in HESA, while Group2 has an average of 193,17 words also produced while answering the task HESA (total average of both groups answering HESA was 188,6 words). This can mean that the chances for SVA errors are higher in the longer texts produced by Group3 than any of the other Spanish texts by Group1 and Group2 answering HESA.

Lastly, I also think it is important to point out that because the texts in my sub corpus deals with learner language in which I have had to interpret some of what the pupils have written, and thus there might be some instances where I have interpreted differently compared to what to pupils meant when writing their texts.

## 8 Conclusion and Further Research

In my master thesis I aim to investigate the S-V agreement errors produced in the written production of L2 English and L3 Spanish texts by L1 Norwegian teenagers, enrolled at both lower upper secondary and upper secondary schools around Norway. In the context chapter, I presented an overview of different terms and main concepts utilized throughout my thesis, as well as an overview of the Norwegian educational system where I pointed to the educational framework in both the English and the Spanish subjects. In the two subsequent sections, I pointed at the few hours of English and Spanish instruction as well as the exposure to the languages inside, but also outside the classroom. Here, I noted that the English L2 had undergone a significant shift towards a stronger emphasis on communicative skills, such emphasis which was already imposed in the LK06 in foreign language subject curriculum. However, as I discussed, this shift did not automatically imply that teachers would immediately adjust their teaching style, and some might have continued in the familiar way of grammar instruction.

In the chapter concerning the SVA marking, I presented an overview of the marking in Norwegian, English and Spanish. Although SVA errors are a part of the grammar and are most likely commented on and seen as a serious error in the Norwegian school, an error such as an SVA error does not obstruct the communication nor the comprehension of the sentence in English. However, in Spanish, as I discussed before, one is not required to include the pronoun in the sentence, as it is a prodrop language, and thus the information is found in the way the verb is inflected. Hence, it is more important to be aware of such errors in order to not hinder the Spanish oral and/or written communication and comprehension.

In the theoretical backgrounds chapter, I presented an overview of different theories of first language, second language and third language acquisition, as a backdrop for my thesis. Additionally, in the section on influences on the learners' SLA process, I addressed the different factors such as the interlanguage and language transfer, which can be accounted for when errors are produced. By addressing these factors, I also discussed relevant research within the fields of interlanguage and language transfer. Dewaele (1998) found that cross-linguistic transfer influence was visible in the data, which indicated that L3 French speakers drew more on their English L2 grammar, than of the L1. However, Listhaug et al. (2021) investigated L1 and L2 impact on L3

acquisition, and their results did not indicate that either of the languages could be seen having the status as the main source of transfer, rather both L1 and L2 might influence the L3, and by the results the similarities in structure might have caused the participants to generalize this similarity to hold constructions with sentence adverbial.

My study is conducted on the basis of 56 texts, 29 English texts and 27 Spanish texts, from pupils attending both lower secondary school and the general studies in upper secondary school. The results of my study, presented in the two preceding chapters, showed that the L1 learners do make SVA errors in both L2 English and L3 Spanish. However, given the data provided in my sub corpus, I did not find subject-verb agreement as being the bottleneck of the pupils' language acquisition in either of the languages. Though, I find it important that L2 English and L3 Spanish teachers are aware of the errors produced by the pupils, especially the errors of affixal agreement, in which omission errors were imposed a greater problem than any of the other English categories. Whereas, in Spanish, 40% of the errors were due to overgeneralization errors, where the pupils used plural subject, but failed to inflect the verb according to the subject.

Though, as mentioned before, with the emphasis on communicative competence in both languages, but also in the English subject after the revision in 2013, I do not believe that the SVA hinders pupils in English communication, however, an insufficient vocabulary, on the other hand, might impose a greater challenge for the pupils. In Spanish communication, however, SVA errors, in addition to an insufficient vocabulary might be the bottleneck of L3 Spanish acquisition, though the same cannot be said for L2 English language acquisition, on the basis of my study and results.

When it comes to further research, I want to address that there is not much research done on L1 Norwegian learners of L3 Spanish, to the best of my knowledge, and therefore, I found it difficult not to be able to compare my data and my results with previous research. Thus, this should be investigated on a much greater scale than the size of my study.

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