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AVOIDANCE OR IGNORANCE:  
A STUDY IN SECOND LANGUAGE USE

Marilyn Chasan

A Thesis  
in  
The TESL Centre

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ABSTRACT

This study was designed to ascertain whether the systematic absence of a syntactic feature in the written production of Spanish-speaking learners of English could be attributed to avoidance rather than to ignorance of the form and/or function of this feature. The study also attempted to determine contexts in which native speakers of English used this same feature. The syntactic feature in question was the present perfect and all of the subjects participated in writing tasks designed to elicit this form.

The results indicated that on the average, Spanish speakers produced fewer present perfect forms in English compositions than native speakers of English and native speakers produced fewer present perfect forms than expected. No agreement was shown by the native English speakers as to when this form was appropriate. The evidence from this study indicated that the absence of the present perfect in the production of the Spanish learners was due to ignorance of the functions served by the present perfect rather than avoidance based on difficulty with its forms.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	i
LIST OF CHARTS .....	ii
I INTRODUCTION .....	1
II. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY .....	2
Contrastive Analysis and Error Analysis .....	2
Avoidance .....	5
III THE STUDY .....	11
Objectives of the Study .....	11
Pilot Study .....	13
Subjects .....	14
Procedures .....	15
Results and Discussion .....	18
IV CONCLUSIONS .....	29
Recommendations for Future Research .....	31
REFERENCES .....	33
APPENDICES .....	36

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LIST OF CHARTS

1	Verb Phrases in Compositions .....	17
2	Number of Verbs Used in Spanish and English Compositions According to Group .....	18
3	Choice of Present Perfect in the Contextual Cues Task .....	20
4	Correct Answers in Isolated Sentences Task .....	21
5	Use of Present Perfect in English in Three Written Tasks by EL2 Subjects .....	22

INTRODUCTION

An interest in the process of second language learning and years of classroom experience have made me aware of possible problem areas confronted by the second language learner. Several researchers have suggested that second language learners may avoid the use of specific language features which they find difficult rather than risk making errors. This study is concerned with the phenomenon called "avoidance". The specific linguistic problem which is the focus of this study is one which appears to be characteristic of the use of the present perfect by Spanish-speaking learners of English.

## II.

### BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

#### Contrastive Analysis and Error Analysis

In an attempt to explain some of the difficulties which are encountered by students of English as a second or foreign language, linguists and language teachers have used the techniques of contrastive analysis and error analysis or a combination of both. A basic premise of the traditional contrastive analysis approach to foreign language learning is that learner difficulties can be predicted by contrasting the target language with the mother tongue of the learner in search for differences as well as similarities between the two. The results of this analysis are expected to indicate which features will cause the learner linguistic difficulties and which will be easier for him to learn. The assumption is that those elements which are similar in both languages will be simpler for the learner in the target language and that the degree of difficulty will be determined by the number of elements of contrast (Lado, 1957; Lee, 1970; Banathy, Trager and Waddle, 1966).

As a result of recent developments and research, some linguists view the role of contrastive analysis in language learning differently from the traditional one. On the one



hand, contrastive analysis has been divided into two distinct hypotheses, the strong or a priori hypothesis and the weak or a posteriori hypothesis (Wardhaugh, 1970). According to the a priori hypothesis, errors and difficulties can be predicted, while according to the a posteriori hypothesis, contrastive analysis can have only an explanatory role because learner difficulties become evident from the errors that are actually made by the learner rather than from a comparison made between the two languages (Corder, 1975; Gradman, 1971). A more radical view is taken by those who feel that contrastive analysis has no role, predictive or explanatory, in the study of second language acquisition (Dulay and Burt, 1974; Ritchie, 1975). At the moment, most linguists and language teachers agree that while contrastive analysis does not explain all of the problems in language teaching and learning (Valdman, 1975), it can be helpful when combined with other approaches (Catford, 1968). Studies in contrastive analysis are available in Thiem (1969), Nickel (1971), and Eliasson (1973).

According to error analysis, learner errors are instruments which enable the teacher or linguist "to gain insight into the processes of second language learning and at the same time understand something about the various strategies of language learners" (Corder, 1975: 409). Error analysis focuses directly on learner production and is concerned with what the learner actually does rather than what,

according to a priori contrastive analysis, we think he may do (Schachter, 1974). Learner errors are analyzed by the teacher or researcher who attempts to determine what specific learning strategies the learner has used when making these errors (Richards, 1974). Some proponents of this approach prefer to use the terms interlanguage (Selinker, 1974), approximative systems (Nemser, 1973), or transitional competence (Corder, 1975) when describing the learner's interim grammar.

According to Corder (1975), error analysis was originally concerned with learner-centered investigation rather than with practical classroom application; nevertheless, proponents of this approach are now incorporating the information they receive from error analysis into the preparation of materials for teaching (Valdman, 1975) as well as the preparation of teacher training courses (Cohen, 1975). A review of the state of the art is available in Corder (1977) and studies done in the area of error analysis are collected in volumes edited by Richards (1974) and by Schumann and Stensen (1975).

At present, most scholars agree that contrastive analysis and error analysis are not mutually exclusive but rather that both may be helpful in describing second language acquisition and leading to understanding of the acquisition process which may improve teaching and eventually make acquisition more successful for the learner (Schachter, 1974).

### Avoidance

The absence of specific features in a learner's use of the target language has only recently begun to be explored by researchers, yet it is very likely that a careful examination of this phenomenon will provide the linguist and language teacher with information that may not be available or observable in learner production (Schachter, 1974). A number of researchers have suggested that the absence of a form or structure is due to "avoidance" -- a strategy whereby learners simply avoid using structures and forms which they know are difficult for them.

According to Varadi, (cited in Cohen, 1974) the learner, who is aware of difficulties he may have with particular forms or structures of the target language, attempts to compensate for these difficulties by using various communication strategies. Varadi identifies these strategies as message abandonment, formal replacement and message adjustment. In message abandonment, the learner doesn't say anything rather than make a mistake. In formal replacement, the learner resorts to word coinage or description. In message adjustment, the learner relies on generalization. Ickenroth (1975, cited in Kleinman, 1977) refers to these strategies of compensation as "escape routes" and gives examples such as paraphrasing, choosing synonyms and superordinate terms. Stevick (1976) refers to the phenomenon of avoidance as "lathophobic aphasia", an unwillingness to speak for fear of

making a mistake.

Since error analysis focuses directly on learner production, it cannot account for the absence of a structure or form. Contrastive analysis can predict avoidance only insofar as it predicts difficulty (James, 1977). If a specific feature of L2 is considered to be linguistically difficult for the learner according to the contrastive analysis hypothesis, then it is very likely that the learner will avoid using this feature rather than risk making a mistake. This may be, however, an indication of the learner's ignorance of a specific feature rather than his conscious avoidance of it. As Kleinman indicates, "to be able to avoid some linguistic feature presupposes being able to choose not to avoid it, i.e., to use it" (Kleinman, 1977).

Studies of avoidance have been undertaken by Swain (1975), Perkins and Larsen-Freeman (1975), and Tarone, Frauenfelder and Selinker (1975) with second-language learners of French. Studies of avoidance with second-language learners of English have been described by Schachter (1974), Seliger (1977), and Kleinman (1977). As Kleinman indicates, the studies that were done with French speakers as well as Schachter's study deal with difficulty or ignorance rather than with avoidance (Kleinman, 1977).

Schachter's research dealt with the comparison of contrastive analysis a priori and a posteriori and the relative effectiveness of these approaches in accounting for learner

difficulties. The results of her investigation indicated that although the a posteriori approach would explain actual errors which were due to language transfer, the a priori approach predicted the difficulties certain groups of learners would have with a specific feature even though no errors actually occurred. Schachter's conclusions were based on evidence that her native Chinese and Japanese students committed fewer errors with English relative clauses than Persian and Arab students. The results appeared to indicate that these clauses were less difficult for Chinese and Japanese students than they were for Persian and Arab students. However, she observed that the Chinese and Japanese students produced significantly fewer relative clauses than the Persian and Arab students. Schachter concluded that relative clauses in Chinese and Japanese differed more from relative clauses in English than did relative clauses in Arabic. This difference, she believed, resulted in avoidance of their use which in turn resulted in fewer errors produced by the Chinese and Japanese students.

What Schachter suggests in her research is that error analysis is deficient because it is incapable of explaining the phenomenon of avoidance whereas contrastive analysis a priori is better able to account for this phenomenon by predicting difficulties.

Kleinman (1977) has focused his investigation on avoidance and the linguistic and psychological factors which

he believes are involved in this phenomenon. His study was designed to determine whether syntactic avoidance behavior could be demonstrated with contrastive analysis predictions. Kleinman's subjects were native speakers of Arabic and native speakers of Spanish and Portuguese. These learners of English as a second language performed tasks which were designed to elicit passive, present progressive, infinitive complement, and direct object pronoun structures. His findings indicated that although contrastive analysis is a fairly efficient method for predicting avoidance, there are also psychological variables which may affect learner behavior in the second language. He suggests that structures that would ordinarily be avoided are often produced in accordance with the affective state of the learner and at the same time structures which are often produced may be avoided because of the learner's affective state. The psychological variables mentioned by Kleinman are not relevant to this study and will not be commented on.

There does, however, seem to be a discrepancy in Kleinman's research which is fundamental to his conclusions. Kleinman indicates at the outset of his study that difficulty predictions are based on contrastive analysis which, to this reader, implies the analysis of both the form and function of a particular feature in both the target language and the mother tongue in question. Initially, Kleinman indicates that a certain feature (e.g., present progressive) should

not be difficult for the learner to produce because of the similarities between L1 and L2. Nevertheless, in discussing the results of the study, he attributes the avoidance of this feature to the fact that it is more difficult than it appears to be superficially. He says that although the feature is similar in form in both languages, the function of the feature is different in the two languages. This appears to indicate the type of contrastive analysis undertaken by Kleinman was a superficial one since a more exhaustive contrastive analysis would have taken into account these differences in function.

Seliger's research; which was described in a paper delivered at the 1977 TESOL convention, deals with conceptually equivalent structures between L1 and L2 and the phenomenon of avoidance (Seliger, 1977). Seliger's study involved the passive voice, a structure which, according to Seliger, is functionally equivalent in English and Hebrew, but which is nevertheless avoided by the adult Hebrew learner of English. The full report of Seliger's study has not yet been published; however a brief quotation from the abstract of his paper states the reason to which Seliger attributes this avoidance. "Avoidance operates at levels much deeper than linguistic descriptions provide and seems to depend on the semantic presuppositions which are a prerequisite to the selection of a language form" (Abstract, p. 150).

It is important to distinguish between ignorance and

avoidance. In order to claim that something has been avoided, it must first be made clear that it has been understood. If the learner has no control of the feature, that is, if he has never learned to use it in even the most restricted context, then its absence from his production must be interpreted as ignorance rather than avoidance.



### III

#### THE STUDY

##### Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study were to determine whether the systematic absence of a specific feature in written learner production can be attributed to avoidance rather than ignorance. The structure under consideration for this study is the present perfect. Although the present perfect is considered by some to be one of the most common structures in the English language, it is also one which learners find difficult to master even when a similar category exists in the learner's mother tongue (Allen, 1967, cited in Kaluza, 1969; Moy, 1977; Peterson, 1970). A contrastive analysis of the language systems of English and Spanish would not predict this structure to be a problem since it is similar in form as well as function in both English and Spanish. Rather than call the present perfect an equivalent structure in English and Spanish, I will refer to it as a similar or analogous structure in both languages. As Krezeszowski indicates, there are few if any truly congruent structures between two languages (Krezeszowski, 1971, in Kachru, 1975).

Spanish forms the present perfect with the present

tense of the auxiliary verb haber (haber-have) and the past participle of the main verb. The ending for the past participle in Spanish is -do. Regarding function, Spanish present perfect is used to mark an event as anterior to a point in time but continuing to be relevant to this point (Stockwell, Bowen and Martin, 1965, Chap. 6). According to Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech and Svartvik (1972: 3.2) English present perfect is used to denote a period of time stretching backward into some earlier time. It is a past event with current relevance.

The concept of present/past time (present perfect) may also be conveyed in Spanish with the simple present tense and an adverbial of time or external modifier.

Ex. Vivo aquí desde hace cinco años.

\*I live here since five years ago.

This form is frequently used in Latin America instead of the present perfect.

Ex. He vivido aquí desde hace cinco años.

\*I have lived here since five years ago.

If present perfect is similar in both form and function in English and Spanish, as it appears to be, the question remains as to why this particular feature is not produced more frequently by intermediate and advanced Spanish-speaking students of English. My experience as a teacher of English as a foreign language, has led me to believe that although these learners learn the correct form for the

present perfect and respond to certain contextual cues for its use, they seldom produce this form in written and spoken English because they are not confident that they know when it is appropriate to use it. Thus I formulated the following hypotheses for this study:

1) In a spontaneous writing situation wherein either present perfect or simple past tense can be used, advanced learners of English as a second language whose first language is Spanish will choose to use the simple past tense.

2) In a structured writing situation, the subjects will produce the present perfect without difficulty when provided with specific instructions to do so or when given appropriate linguistic cues for the present perfect.

#### Pilot Study

In a pilot study, a set of compositions from 40 Spanish-speaking learners of English was examined. (All of these learners had passed the Michigan Language Proficiency Examination with a score of 80 or above). There were 17 different topics distributed among the 40 students and each composition was approximately 150 words long. The present perfect was used by only three of the learners and only one attempted to use it consistently. The three who did use it, did so successfully. I am not suggesting that the omission of the present perfect in these compositions is evidence of avoidance, since the topics may not have lent themselves to the use of this structure. The choice of certain topics will

usually elicit very specific syntactic patterns from the second-language learner (Selinker, 1974: 45). On the other hand, it does seem that the written medium is one which lends itself to the learner's demonstrating more of his repertoire of the language because he is given more time to think and make more corrections than in the oral medium. As Krashen indicates, "conscious linguistic knowledge acts only as a monitor altering the output of the acquired system when time and conditions permit" (Krashen, 1976).

In an earlier study undertaken with Spanish-speaking students enrolled in the Continuing Education courses at Concordia University, R. Banko and I made an attempt to discover if these learners knew how to form the present perfect and when they used it in English. The results indicated that although these learners used the present perfect in controlled situations, in both written and oral tasks, only one subject produced this structure in free conversation and writing. Rather than use the present perfect, the subjects used the simple past and were able to communicate their ideas without any difficulties. There was insufficient evidence to support any explanation as to why this feature was not employed.

#### Subjects

The experimental group of subjects for this study consisted of 16 Spanish-speaking learners of English who were enrolled in the ESL 100 and 201 courses at the TESL centre

of Concordia University. These students will be referred to as the EL2 (English Second Language) group.

The control group was made up of 16 native speakers of English who were undergraduate students in the TESL program at the same institution. These students will be referred to as the EL1 (English First Language) group.

### Procedures

The EL2 group was divided into two groups: A and B. Group A was asked to write a letter in English on the topic "What your life has been like since you came to Montreal". Group B was asked to write the same letter in Spanish. The subjects in the control group were asked to write a letter with the instructions "Imagine you have just come to Montreal, explain what your life has been like since you arrived". These tasks were administered in order to determine the frequency with which the EL1 group used the present perfect compared to the frequency with which the EL2 group used this form in Spanish and in English.

The EL2 group was asked to perform two more structured tasks. In the first, the contextual cues task, they were asked to provide the correct form of the verb presented in non-conjugated form in a reading selection where they were provided with contextual cues for use of simple past or present perfect (see Appendix 1). In the second task, the isolated sentences task, they were asked to provide the present perfect form of verbs given in their uninflected form in 10

isolated sentences (see Appendix 2). These tasks were administered to determine whether the subjects knew the form of the present perfect and how they responded to cues (e.g. words such as "since" or "for") for its use. An EL1 group was also asked to perform the first writing task in order to compare their answers with those of the EL2 group. The subjects in the EL1 group who did the structured writing task were not the same as those who wrote the letter. The EL1 group was not asked to perform the second structured writing task because I assumed that native speakers would not have any difficulty in changing uninflected verbs into the present perfect.

The analysis of the data will focus on the following points:

- 1) The frequency of the present perfect in the compositions of EL2 subjects and the EL1 group.
- 2) The contexts in which present perfect is used.
- 3) The correctness of the present perfect forms.
  - (a) Correct auxiliary.
  - (b) Correct participle.

Chart 1

Verb Phrases in Compositions

	EL1	EL2	Spanish
Total No. Verb Phrases	392	365	326
Present Perfect	40	31	34
Simple Present	164	101	81
Present Progressive	80	90	120
Simple Past	48	58	60
Other	60	85	31

Range: Total Verb Phrases For Individual Subjects:

EL1 11-48  
EL2 11-32  
Span. 11-32

Range: Present Perfect For Individual Subjects:

EL1 0-12  
EL2 0-9  
Span. 0-6

Results and Discussion

The results of the tasks are illustrated in Charts 1-5. Chart 1 indicates the total number of verbs used by the subjects in EL1, EL2 and Spanish compositions. The EL2 subjects used a total of 326 verbs in Spanish and 365 in English while the EL1 group used 392 verbs. Present perfect was used a total of 40 times in EL1 compositions, 31 times in EL2, and 34 times in Spanish. The simple present was the tense used most frequently by the EL1 group and the EL2 group. It was used a total of 164 times in EL1 and 101 times in EL2. It was used in Spanish only 81 times. Present progressive was used 80 times in EL1 and 90 times in EL2. In Spanish, the present progressive was used 120 times and was the tense most frequently used. Simple past tense was used 48 times in EL1, 58 times in EL2 and 60 times in Spanish.

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Chart 2

Number of Verbs Used in Spanish and English  
Compositions According to Group

	Total No. Verbs Spanish	Total No. Verbs English.	Present Perfect Spanish	Present Perfect English
Group A	189	170	19	16
Group B	176	195	15	18

Note: Group A wrote first in English, then in Spanish;

Group B wrote in Spanish, then in English.



Chart 2 indicates the total number of verbs and the total number of present perfect used by the EL2 group according to the order in which they performed the writing task. Group A wrote first in English and then in Spanish. Group B wrote first in Spanish and then in English. Group A produced a total of 189 verbs in Spanish and 19 present perfect forms. Group B produced a total of 176 verbs in Spanish and 15 present perfect forms. In EL2, Group A produced 170 verbs in English and 16 present perfect forms. Group B produced 195 verbs in English and 18 present perfect forms.

Chart 3 shows the results of the structured writing task with contextual cues for different verb forms. There were 13 items that could have been answered in the present perfect for a total of 208 answers per group (16 subjects x 13 possible answers). The results indicate that the EL1 group chose the present perfect a total of 136 times (65%) and that the EL2 group chose it only 50 times (24%). Item 4 was chosen most frequently by the EL1 group, and item 2 was chosen most frequently by the EL2 group. A further breakdown of the choices made by both groups for the entire exercise is included in Appendix 3.

Chart 4 indicates the results of the exercise designed to elicit the correct form of the present perfect. The total number of correct possible answers was 160 (10 x 16 subjects). The combined group score was 108 (68%) on this task. The item which proved to be most difficult was item 1 where there

Chart 3

Choice of Present Perfect in the Contextual Cues Task

Responses to Contextual Writing Task

	EL1	EL2
Item 2	9	7
4	15	4
6	10	3
8	14	5
9	11	4
12	9	3
13	12	4
14	13	6
15	8	2
16	12	6
18	8	4
19	10	2
20	13	4
Total	136	50

Note: For each item, maximum N = 16. Only those items in which present perfect would have been appropriate are listed.

Chart 4

Correct Answers in Isolated Sentences Task

<u>Item</u>	<u>No. Correct (N=16)</u>
1	8
2	14
3	12
4	12
5	9
6	11
7	12
8	10
9	11
10	9

were only 8 (50%) correct answers. Item 2 was the easiest and produced 14 (88%) correct answers. Items 3, 4 and 7 appeared to be relatively easy for this group. Items 5, 6, 8, 9, and 10 were more difficult than items 2, 3, 4 and 7 but less difficult than item 1.

Chart 5 illustrates the individual performance of the EL2 group in the use of the present perfect in the three written tasks in English.

In the compositions, the EL1 group used the present perfect an average of only 2.5 times per subject. This may be explained by the fact that although the topic lent itself

Chart 5

Use of Present Perfect in English in Three Written  
Tasks by EL2 Subjects

Subject	Composition	Contextual Function (out of 13)	Correct Form (out of 13)	Hypotheses Confirmed
1	-	-	6	+
2	1	5	8	+
3	1	13	8	-
4	4	4	9	+
5	1	6	9	+
6	2	3	8	+
7	-	1	10	+
8	3	-	9	+
9	4	2	8	+
10	-	-	6	+
11	-	-	6	+
12	-	-	8	+
13	1	-	6	+
14	6	7	6	-
15	6	6	1	-
16	2	3	-	-
Total	31	50	108	

to the use of the present perfect, several of the subjects chose to write about the city of Montreal rather than their experiences in the city. Perhaps because they were asked to "imagine" a situation rather than write about something authentic, they modified the topic and in this way avoided writing something which would have required more thought on

their part. A description of the city lent itself to the use of the present tense and past tense more than it did to the present perfect. The subject who used the greatest number of verbs in the present perfect was one of the few who attempted to write the composition on the topic which had been assigned.

The Spanish compositions written by the EL2 group contained fewer occurrences of the present perfect than the English compositions of the EL1 group. They used the alternate form for expressing the past with present relevance time concept in Spanish, the simple present with an external modifier, on only five occasions.

Ex. Hace tres años que estoy viviendo aquí.

Hace tres años -- three years ago

estoy -- am viviendo -- living aquí -- here

ya -- now

\*I'm living here since three years ago now.

Hace 6 meses que estoy aquí.

\*It's 6 months that I am here.

The fact that the subjects chose the present perfect form more frequently than the present plus the external modifier may be an indication that for this particular group, present perfect is considered more appropriate for the written medium. As in the case of the EL1 group, the tenses most frequently used were the simple present and past. Unlike the EL1 group, however, the Spanish speakers did not modify the

topic. They explained what their lives had been like since they came to Montreal, using present progressive, simple present and past, primarily. They wrote their compositions about past experiences or they described the daily events in their lives.

The EL2 group used the present perfect in English with almost the same frequency as in Spanish. However, there was no relationship between the number of times an individual chose the present perfect in Spanish with the number of times he chose it in English. Group A used more verbs and present forms in Spanish than they did in English. Group B used more verbs and present perfect forms in English than they did in Spanish. The compositions in both Spanish and EL2 reflected the same content and organization.

Only one subject wrote a sentence which required present perfect and failed to use it.

Ex. \*Since I live here my behavior changed.  
This would appear to be an example of negative transfer from Spanish to English. Although this type of negative transfer is quite frequently produced in the early stages of learning the present perfect, the tendency to make this type of error may decrease as the learner progresses from the elementary to the intermediate and advanced stages of learning. Since the error was made only once, the case may be as Kellerman indicates that "they have learned what they cannot do" (Kellerman, 1977: 100). That is to say the absence of this

type of transfer in the majority of the production of the EL2 group may indicate that although these learners have not advanced to a stage where they can express present/past relationships in a native like manner, they are aware that they cannot express this relationship as they would in Spanish. The subject who made this error also demonstrated that he had the greatest number of difficulties with all the verb forms.

A comparison of the results of the tasks between the two groups indicated that the EL2 group produced fewer verb phrases and fewer present perfect forms than the EL1 group in written compositions and that in the case of both groups, the present perfect was produced infrequently. When this form was produced by the EL2 group, it was produced correctly. This could be interpreted as evidence that the subjects "know" it. Nevertheless, as Schachter has pointed out, the fact that a feature is used infrequently but correctly may be an indication of learner difficulty, rather than learner comprehension (Schachter, 1974).

In the contextual writing task, the EL1 subjects preferred the present perfect to the past in every case except one, where the present perfect was considered the appropriate answer; however, there was not complete agreement in their choices. The results do not indicate any particular pattern that these subjects may have followed when making their choice. Item 4 is the only one of 13 possible

appropriate present perfect answers which received 15 out of a possible 16 answers. For item 2, which appears to require present perfect because of the information provided to the reader in the preceding sentences, only 9 EL1 subjects chose present perfect. In items 6, 8 and 9, the choices were clearly divided between the present perfect and past. In items 15, 16, 18; 19 and 20, where either past or present perfect were considered to be appropriate, the choices were divided between the two. (See Appendix 3).

These results seem to indicate that some of the subjects in this group viewed the text as a group of isolated sentences rather than a complete text since they did not always respond to the contextual cues which were included in order to elicit present perfect. The opening sentence of the text was deliberately structured in the simple present tense to establish the time, yet this appears to have been overlooked by many in the EL1 group.

The EL2 group preferred the past tense to the present perfect in every item except item 2. Indeed, with few exceptions, the subjects chose the past tense for all of the items. They either ignored the contextual cues which were included or they did not know how to use them. In this same exercise, the EL2 group demonstrated that they were able to use the present perfect form correctly except with the verb "begin". The past participle "begun" was difficult for several subjects. "Has began" was produced by one subject.



At the same time, the simple past tense form of this verb proved to be difficult for several subjects who produced "begam" and "begon"; however, these may merely be spelling errors. The past tense form of the verb "see", "saw" also proved to be difficult and was often spelled "sow" and the verb "prefer" was spelled incorrectly in the past tense by both the EL1 subjects and the EL2 subjects.

The EL2 group performed fairly well on the isolated sentences task designed to elicit the correct verb form. They were able to produce the correct present perfect form of unconjugated verbs in isolated sentences. Item 1 presented the greatest number of difficulties because of the participle "begun". The past participles of the verbs "make", "call", and "tell" were also difficult for some. Only three subjects had difficulty producing the correct form of the auxiliary verb "have". Two subjects seemed to have confused the instructions that were given and produced the past perfect form in several items. Subject #15, who scored well in the other two tasks, made this mistake.

Subjects #12 and #16, who performed poorly in both structured writing tasks (see Chart 5) were obviously ignorant of the form as well as the function of the present perfect. Subject #3, who scored highly on both structured writing tasks, produced the form on only one occasion in spontaneous writing. This subject is the only one who may have been avoiding present perfect since she appears to know

both form and function. Her composition reflected strict adherence to an organizational model which is recommended to students in the ESL classes in which the students were enrolled. She restricted her composition to 3 brief paragraphs and in each paragraph developed a single idea. It may be that her concern for organization was greater than for expression of ideas. The results from the other subjects indicated that although they knew the form, they were ignorant of the function of present perfect. The fact that many of these subjects produced the present perfect on one or more occasions in the composition may only be an indication that they have memorized a certain number of sentences in the present perfect and are able to use them in specific writing situations where they feel their function appropriate.

b

#### IV

#### CONCLUSIONS

The evidence from this study would appear to confirm the hypothesis that EL2 learners would produce present perfect correctly when the form was elicited in structured situations. However, contrary to the hypothesis, they did not respond to contextual cues for the present perfect. They demonstrated their preference for the present and past tense both in spontaneous writing and in structured writing with contextual cues indicating the appropriateness of the present perfect. The fact that the EL2 subjects were all intermediate and advanced learners led me to believe that their performance would be at a higher level than it actually was. Certainly, with respect to the present perfect, the level of performance was lower than expected.

It appears evident that with the exception of subject #3, the absence of the present perfect in the compositions and contextual exercises of this group can be attributed to ignorance of function rather than any other factor. The fact that neither group EL1 or EL2 responded to the contextual cue as they were expected to do, leads one to question the role that contextual cues play in determining the choice of present perfect instead of past. On the other

hand, the cues that were provided may not have been appropriate ones. As other researchers have indicated (Kaluza, 1969; Moy, 1977) it may very well be that in attempting to teach present perfect, EL2 teachers and textbook writers alike have relied too heavily on contextual cues as teaching aids. When the learners do respond to these cues in the classroom, it is because "free expression may merely be the restatement of previously learned material rather than the creation of novel utterances" (Savignon, 1972: 11).

The fact that native speakers used present perfect infrequently and inconsistently in these tasks may be an indication that the use of this structure may not be as clearly defined nor as frequent as one would expect it to be. I have heard commentaries from linguists who feel that the present perfect is no longer used frequently by native speakers of English in North America (M. Long, H. Seliger, personal communication). This may or may not be true, and I have found no literature to support this suggestion. Nevertheless, if its use by native speakers of English is limited, it could result in the EL2 learner having little exposure to this feature. Thus, although he may have learned the form, his exposure to it is limited to classroom situations, and he never fully grasps the scope of meaning the form conveys. If the present perfect is used more frequently in the written form than the spoken form, the EL2 learner who is learning through an audio-lingual approach

may have few opportunities to perceive the way the form is used.

#### Recommendations For Future Research

Further research with a greater number of EL1 speakers as well as EL2 speakers would probably reveal more about the use of the present perfect than this study has indicated. At the same time, it appears that more advanced learners of English would probably contribute more conclusive evidence as to whether certain phenomena are best explained by avoidance or ignorance. The EL2 subjects in this study were in fact less advanced than they appeared on the basis of their placement in advanced classes.

More recent research has indicated that the choice of present perfect is more easily elicited when contrasted with the simple present (Moy, 1977) than with the simple past tense as I attempted to do in the contextual writing exercise. This implies that future research on this feature should include contextual exercises which contain present tense to emphasize the relationship between present and present perfect.

I believe that it is important to point out that this experiment was not conducted under the conditions that were foreseen in the experimental design stage. The subjects were completely unprepared to participate in a study they knew very little about and were quite resentful about losing their normal class time. Since they received no reassurance

about losing their regular classes, they were more concerned with completing the tasks quickly than with actually concentrating on what they were being asked to do. Research with students carried out under more favorable conditions might also obtain different results.

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APPENDIX 1

Writing With Contextual Cues

TESL Center

First Language: \_\_\_\_\_

Other Languages: \_\_\_\_\_

Instructions: Fill in the blank with the correct form of the verb in parenthesis. Read the whole sentence first.

Joe Torres lives in Montreal. He \_\_\_\_\_ in  
(arrive)  
Montreal about a year ago. He \_\_\_\_\_ here for a year. He  
(live)  
\_\_\_\_\_ a room near the university and \_\_\_\_\_ there ever  
(rent) (live)  
since. Joe \_\_\_\_\_ to Montreal in order to study English.  
(come)  
He could \_\_\_\_\_ in any other part of Canada but he \_\_\_\_\_  
(study) (prefer)  
Montreal. Since his arrival, Joe \_\_\_\_\_ many new friends who  
(make)  
\_\_\_\_\_ him adjust to his new life here.  
(help)  
Joe \_\_\_\_\_ English for about two years in his own  
(study)  
country. Since his classes \_\_\_\_\_ here a year ago he  
(begin)  
\_\_\_\_\_ English grammar and vocabulary everyday. For the  
(review)  
past six months, he \_\_\_\_\_ compositions daily in class. As  
(wrote)  
a result of this, his writing and speaking \_\_\_\_\_  
(improve)

Lately, Joe            to feel homesick for his family.  
(begin)

It            some time since he last            them. At last, he  
(be) (see)

           to take a vacation and visit them. For the past  
(decide)

three days, he            nothing but shop for gifts. He             
(do) (wait)

a long time for this moment.

APPENDIX 2

Written Exercise For Correctness of Form of Present Perfect

Native Language:

Other Languages:

Instructions: Write the verbs in the following sentences in the present perfect.

Ex. She (wait) for a long time.

She has waited for a long time.

1. The movie already (begin).
2. He (come) here before.
3. We (start) to work.
4. They (decide) to travel.
5. Their flight (arrive) late.
6. Tom (call) for a reservation.
7. I (live) there for a long time.
8. Our bus (be) delayed.
9. I (tell) them that before.
10. Jill (make) new friends.



to Montreal in order to study English. He

EL 1	EL2
P.P. 63%	P.P. 19%
Past	Past 31%

could \_\_\_\_\_ in any other part of Canada but  
 (study)  
 (6)

EL1	EL2
P.P. -	P.P. -
Past 75%	Past 69%

he \_\_\_\_\_ Montreal. Since his arrival, Joe  
 (prefer)  
 (7)

EL1	EL2
P.P. 88%	P.P. 31%
Past 125%	Past 50%

EL1	EL2
P.P. 69%	P.P. 25%
Past 25%	Past 50%

\_\_\_\_\_ many new friends who \_\_\_\_\_  
 (make) (help)  
 (8) (9)

him adjust to his new life here..

EL1	EL2
P.P. -	P.P. 6%
Past 87%	Past 81%

Joe \_\_\_\_\_ English for about two years in his own  
 (study)  
 (10)

EL 1	EL2
P.P. 19%	P.P. -
Past 81%	Past 75%

country. Since his classes \_\_\_\_\_ here a year  
 (begin)  
 (11)

EL 1	EL2
P.P. 56%	P.P. 19%
Past 25%	Past 25%

ago he \_\_\_\_\_ English grammar and vocabulary  
 (review)  
 (12)

EL 1	EL2
P.P. 75%	P.P. 25%
Past 19%	Past 56%

everyday. For the past six months, he \_\_\_\_\_  
 (write)  
 (13)

compositions daily in class. As a result of this, his writing

EL1	EL2
P.P. 81%	P.P. 38%
Past 19%	Past 44%

and speaking \_\_\_\_\_  
 (improve)  
 (14)

EL1	EL2
P.P. 50%	P.P. 13%
Past 50%	Past 63%

Lately, Joe \_\_\_\_\_ to feel homesick for his  
 (begin)  
 (15)

EL1	EL2
P.P. 75%	P.P. 38%
Past 6%	Past 56%

family. It \_\_\_\_\_ some time since he last  
 (be)  
 (16)

EL1	EL2
P.P. 6%	P.P. 6%
Past 81%	Past 88%

EL1	EL2
P.P. 50%	P.P. 25%
Past 50%	Past 63%

\_\_\_\_\_ them. At last, he \_\_\_\_\_ to  
(see) (decide)  
(17) (18)

take a vacation and visit them. For the past three days,

EL1	EL2
P.P. 63%	P.P. 13%
Past 31%	Past 63%

he \_\_\_\_\_ nothing but shop for gifts. He  
(do)  
(19)

EL1	EL2
P.P. 81%	P.P. 25%
Past 19%	Past 50%

\_\_\_\_\_ for a long time for this moment.  
(wait)  
(20)