



USING WHATSAPP IN TOURISM ESP CLASSES

A linguistic analysis of the language used, and grammatical mistakes made

El uso del WhatsApp en clases de inglés específico para el turismo
Un análisis lingüístico del lenguaje utilizado y los errores gramaticales cometidos

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ABSTRACT

In this paper, we will analyse the language used by a group of Tourism ESP students on WhatsApp. The data will be analysed from different perspectives: a) the grammatical mistakes made, and b) the students' degree of adaptation to the most common linguistic features in text messages. The results indicate that these students continue to make some basic grammatical mistakes they should have already overcome. Moreover, many linguistic features of text messages were encountered in their interventions such as punctuation overuse and deletion and overuse of sounds. Finally, they insert many emojis in their messages to express different meanings.

PALABRAS CLAVE

Inglés para el turismo
Expresión escrita
Análisis de errores
Gramática
Redes sociales
Lenguaje informal
Emojis

RESUMEN

En este artículo analizaremos el lenguaje utilizado en WhatsApp por un grupo de alumnos de turismo estudiando inglés para fines específicos. Los datos se analizarán desde varias perspectivas: a) errores gramaticales cometidos, y b) grado de adaptación a las características lingüísticas más comunes en mensajes de texto. Los resultados indican que siguen cometiendo errores gramaticales básicos que deberían haber superado. Además, se encontraron ejemplos de muchas características lingüísticas comunes en mensajes de texto como el sobreuso y la eliminación de los signos de puntuación, así como el sobreuso de sonidos. Asimismo, utilizaron gran cantidad de emojis para expresar diferentes significados.

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1. Introduction

As Botella-Tejera and Galindo-Merino (2017, p. 90) point out, “the last decade has turned into a tech revolution.” Many of us live surrounded by technology from the moment we get up until we go to bed, a fact that specially applies to the younger generations (teenagers and young adults). Therefore, it is not surprising that younger people are commonly referred to as digital natives (Prensky, 2001) because of their abilities to understand computer language, video games and other digital resources from an early age.

A direct consequence that this technological boom has had on the educational system is that the way today’s younger populations learn theoretical and practical contents is different in comparison to previous generations (Sakkir *et al.*, 2020) and, therefore, their academic and professional needs have also changed. To exemplify, Afsyah (2019) explains that students nowadays are expected to develop their critical thinking skills, to find ways of connecting with the real world and to communicate and collaborate with people from diverse backgrounds, whilst also enhancing their digital competences to face this technological world. It is hence crucial that teachers offer their students enough opportunities for developing all the previously mentioned skills and qualities during their high-school and undergraduate university studies.

The language classroom is by no means an exception to the previous situation, it “cannot be conceived without the help of technology anymore” (Botella-Tejera & Galindo-Merino, 2017, p. 89) since many technology-enhanced resources and materials are constantly being introduced and adapted to engage and motivate students to learn the foreign language (Yudi-Wahyudin & Mulya-Sari, 2018). Two technological resources (university) students use daily are social networks and/or mobile instant messaging (MIM from here onwards) services (Ellison & Steinfield, 2006; Kuppuswamy & Naravan, 2010). The former have enhanced new ways of interacting and communicating with different people (Berti, 2020) and can hence be defined as a “set of Web 2.0 e-platforms used to socialize, gossip, share information, and hang out” (Boyd, 2014; as quoted in Handayani, 2016, p. 320). MIMs, on the other hand, are “online tools that facilitate synchronous communication” (Conde *et al.*, 2021, p. 241). Although people began by using these technological resources in their personal lives, Kulavuz and Vásquez (2018, p. 240), point out that they are now also “an integral part of our social and professional lives.”

Some advantages commonly adduced for using social networks in the classroom are the fact that they are free, ubiquitous, and easily accessible (Reinhardt & Chen, 2013; Warner & Chen, 2017; Berti, 2020) and allow users to both create their own content and comment on texts, images... designed and published by others (Handayani, 2017). Consequently, they allow people to work in a collaborative way (Handayani, 2017) by not only sending text messages but also sharing multimedia content, such as videos and pictures. Another advantage is that the information we send is immediately shared with others; therefore, they are good tools for “providing time-management assistance to students” (Lauricella & Kay, 2013, p. 3). Furthermore, as aforementioned, today’s younger generations become familiar with many technological resources from an early age including social media platforms and MIMs (Yunus *et al.*, 2012; Handayani, 2017). Finally, they give students opportunities to share content with other learners and teachers, thus, allowing students from different places of origin to connect with each other to practice the language (Handayani, 2017).

Regarding the language classroom, an additional reason for using social networks is the fact that they offer “authentic digital resources that may not be accessible otherwise” (Berti, 2020, p. 5). In addition, they have been found to give students a chance to practise English in an informal context, which “gets them away from the strictness of the classroom” (Garrote, 2018, p. 20).

In this study we will focus on one specific tool that can be considered both a social network and a MIM app, namely WhatsApp since, on the one hand, it allows people to share written text, recorded audio files, audio-visual materials, and other digital contents with others and, on the other, it allows users to share messages in just instants away from each other, no matter where each person is.

1.1. Using WhatsApp in the language classroom

As aforementioned, younger generations tend to use social networks and MIMs daily for personal, academic, and even professional reasons; consequently, some teachers are gradually beginning to use these tools from time to time in their language lessons.

Consequently, quite a lot of research has been conducted on the use of social media and MIMs in language classes in the last decade; most studies can be classified into the following 2 thematic groups: 1) empirical studies which analyse students’ improvement in any aspect of the language, and 2) students’ opinions about using these tools to learn a foreign language.

1.1.1. Group 1: language improvement after using WhatsApp

A high number of studies have analysed the degree of improvement certain participants show in the foreign language after having used WhatsApp inside and/or outside the classroom. These studies can be further sub-classified according to the language areas or skills they focused on.

To begin with, researchers such as Han and Keskin (2016), Andújar-Vaca and Cruz-Martínez (2017), Minalla (2018), Mustafa (2018), and Albogami and Algethanmi (2022) analyse whether their participants speaking skills improved in any way. All five studies conducted research with a group of university EFL learners and, broadly speaking, all of them obtained positive outcomes. More specifically, one of the main results that Han and Heskin (2016) and Albogami and Algethani (2022) obtained were that their students' anxiety and/or fear levels for speaking in the foreign language dropped after using WhatsApp to orally communicate with their classmates and teacher. The remaining three studies focused on analyzing their students' improvement while producing spoken language and interacting with others. In Minalla (2018), two groups of students were distinguished (control and experimental); all of them used WhatsApp in their English classes to send traditional written text messages but the students belonging to the experimental group also exchanged interactive voice messages with each other outside the classrooms. At the end of the experiment, the experimental group had improved their spoken production and interaction skills more than the control students. Mustafa (2018) encouraged the use of WhatsApp, Skype and other online call programmes both inside and outside the classroom; via a pre-test and a post-test, he found that, once again, the students' oral skills had clearly improved. Finally, the participants in Andújar-Vaca and Cruz-Martín (2017) daily interacted with each other in spoken form for 6 months; the results obtained indicated that their spoken skills had also improved, especially regarding moments in which they have to negotiate meanings of words.

Fathy (2015), Andújar-Vaca (2016), Bataineh *et al.* (2018), Al Akibi (2021) and Ebadi and Bashir (2021) studied improvements in students' writing skills. Fathy (2015) and Al Akibi (2021) carried out their research with university EFL students. In Fathy (2015), the control group of students only received traditional instruction via the textbook; the experimental group of participants, on the other hand, used WhatsApp and they were taught the five different stages within the writing process, i.e., pre-writing, drafting, reviewing, editing, and publishing. At the end of the study, both groups completed the following assessment tests: answering three questions, punctuating a paragraph, correcting a paragraph, and writing an essay. The author compared the correct use of punctuation marks, sentence structures and ways of generating ideas in the tests completed by both groups of students and found that the experimental group outperformed the control group in many respects. In contrast, the writing scores of the experimental group of students in Al-Akibi (2021) after using WhatsApp were slightly better than the control group learners but still not enough to be statistically relevant. Andújar-Vaca (2016) analysed the written skills of a group of students enrolled in a B1 English course after having daily interacted with their classmates and teacher on WhatsApp during six months. He found that the control group students had improved at a lexical and grammatical level and made less mistakes than the control group subjects; nevertheless, no statistically significant differences were found concerning syntactic complexity nor lexical density when comparing both groups. Finally, Bataineh *et al.* (2018) and Ebadi and Bashir (2021) looked at gender differences within the written skills of a group of students after using WhatsApp; both of them found that the female participants had improved their writing skills more than their male classmates.

Ahmed (2019a, 2019b) used WhatsApp with a group of EFL undergraduates; the main objectives were to share information, comment on news articles and chat with the teacher and other classmates. At the end of the study, the students had benefited in many ways, namely, their reading and writing skills were better and they had improved their grammar and vocabulary.

Alzubi and Singh (2018) and Hazea and Alzubi (2018), among others, focus on the improvement of students' reading skills. In Alzubi and Singh (2018), the control group could use their own smartphones to enhance several social strategies in some of the sessions such as to look for information, chat on WhatsApp, consult dictionaries... They conclude that these activities helped the students become socio-culturally autonomous learners; furthermore, they had developed social strategies such as mutual support, self-worth and interaction. In similar lines, Hazea and Alzubi (2018) also looked at whether the use of WhatsApp with some university students could help them become more autonomous. WhatsApp was used to share extra reading materials and to communicate with the teacher and classmates; once again, the results obtained were positive since the students especially learnt how to take responsibility and to make decisions regarding the selection of reading materials, when and where to read such materials, etc.

Finally, scholars like Ashiyan and Salehi (2016), Jafari and Chalak (2016), Bensalem (2018) and Hashemifardnia *et al.* (2018) studied whether WhatsApp could help students improve at a lexical level. The university participants in the experimental groups of Ashiyan and Salehi (2016) used WhatsApp to practise different collocations; at the end of the study, they outperformed their control group classmates, and their retention level was also higher. Jafari and Chalak (2016) and Hashemifardnia *et al.* (2018) also divided their students into an experimental and control group. The experimental students in the former study received instructions and materials to practise

vocabulary on WhatsApp whereas Hashemifardnia's (2018) learners were sent different words via WhatsApp to further practise outside the classroom. In both studies, the control group students only received the traditional textbook type of instruction. Once again, the scores of the experimental group participants in the final tests of both studies were better than the control ones. The main activities both the experimental and control group of students in Bensalem (2018) had to complete included looking up words in a dictionary and afterwards building sentences in which the previous words should be correctly used in context. The experimental students used WhatsApp whereas the control group wrote down their answers on paper. As in many studies described up to now, the results of the experimental students in the final vocabulary test were much higher than those belonging to the control group.

1.1.2. Group 2: students' attitudes towards the use of WhatsApp in the language classroom

In the last decade, quite a few studies have also been conducted on analysing students' views regarding the use of WhatsApp inside or outside the classroom.

To begin with, the high school students in Aktas and Can (2019) affirmed they felt more confident to read and listen in English and less scared to speak in the foreign language after using WhatsApp to socialize with others and discuss several things for 8 weeks. Likewise, the university students in Hanif and Sajid (2019) also stated that their level of confidence to use English had increased and the activities done on WhatsApp have "helped them to overcome their fear of using English" (Hanif & Sajid, 2019, p. 35). Other points of view that the high school participants in Hanif and Sajid (2019) expressed are that WhatsApp voice chatting: a) has helped them improve all skills, but especially regarding vocabulary and listening, b) made them think in English, and c) improved their vocabulary retention. In similar lines, the subjects in Sahan *et al.*'s study (2016) also believe WhatsApp can be used to improve both productive and receptive skills. More particularly, they used this social network "to share sentences they find online from several sources, and explore the meanings of the idioms by asking questions to their peers and the instructor" (Sahan *et al.*, 2016, p. 1236) and indicated this experience had given them the chance to communicate in English with their classmates outside the classroom and had motivated them to continue learning because the activities were intriguing.

A stronger self-confidence level was also acknowledged as one of the benefits of WhatsApp for the students in Kheryadi (2018), Alghamdy (2019) and Hasri *et al.* (2020). The latter students also described a sense of feeling more relaxed and interested in the foreign language after having used WhatsApp. Kheryadi's (2018) participants reported feeling more independent and enthusiastic about learning English whereas the EFL learners in Alghamdy (2019) stressed the fact that WhatsApp had helped them increase their social skills and maintain a positive relationship with their teacher and classmates; moreover, the latter participants think using this social network to learn English can even help them improve their grades.

The belief that WhatsApp helps one develop their vocabulary skills was also reported in Bensalem (2018) and Khan *et al.* (2021). More specifically, in Bensalem (2018), 40 undergraduate EFL learners used WhatsApp as a tool for sharing sentences they had created with a series of words given by the teacher. They rated this technological approach to learning vocabulary as interesting and believe it is a useful way of remembering the words introduced. The vocabulary activities used in Khan *et al.* (2021), on the other hand, included creating "vocabulary cards with the description of the targeted words, containing translation, example sentence of the words and pictures" (Khan *et al.*, 2021, p. 5). Other views these participants have are that learning vocabulary through WhatsApp saves time, it is fun and makes learning more attractive.

Several authors have indicated that their students believe their motivation level also increased thanks to the instruction received via WhatsApp. Some examples include Akas and Can (2019) and Alghamdy (2019), whose subjects reported feeling more motivated to continue learning English in general; moreover, Allagui's (2015) and Awada's (2015) learners expressed that their motivation for writing in English had increased whereas Gutiérrez-Colón *et al.* (2019) point out their participants are more motivated to continue reading in English.

Finally, a group of studies looked at students' attitudes towards using this methodology again and/or their preference towards traditional or more modern approaches. More specifically, the students in Hanif and Sajid (2019) affirmed they would prefer that their teacher used WhatsApp from now onwards rather than going back to traditional textbook-based methodologies and the high school students in Cetinkaya and Soner (2018) stated that they would like to use this type of methodology again since it represented an unconscious way of learning.

Despite the usefulness of all the previously mentioned studies, in this article, we intend to focus on something different, namely, the actual language used by a group of Spanish students on WhatsApp. Although scholars such as Alcántara-Plá (2014), Vázquez-Cano *et al.* (2015) or Sampietro (2016) have already conducted research within this area, they analyse the language used by Spanish native speakers communicating on WhatsApp in Spanish. Nevertheless, to the best of our knowledge, scarce research has been conducted on analysing the messages that non-native speakers of a language write in social media and MIMs to express themselves in the foreign language they are learning. Moreover, most research conducted with English learners has been carried out with English

as a foreign language (EFL) students; however, very few studies have looked at the language used by English for Specific Purposes (ESP) students. The present study hence aims to contribute to the field in the sense that we will thoroughly describe the language used in WhatsApp by a group of ESP students studying a degree in Tourism. Attention will be paid to both the grammatical mistakes made and the informal language used.

This article will be structured as follows. In section 2 we will state the aims and research questions our study is based on. In section 3, we will explain in more detail the ESP context in which the study has been carried out, the participants, research material and data analysis procedures followed. Section 4 and 5 contain a thorough analysis of the results and further discussion of the findings, respectively. Finally, in section 6 we will draw some conclusions and discuss possible topics for future research.

2. Objectives

As briefly explained above, the main aim of this study is to analyse the instant messages written in English by a group of Spanish tourism undergraduates on WhatsApp from two different perspectives: a) the grammatical mistakes made and, b) the extent to which they have adapted their language to the most frequent linguistic and non-linguistic features in written instant-messaging texts. In other words, we will be looking both at the grammatical problems students have when communicating in these informal contexts and their degree of adaptation to the field of text-messaging regarding the language used. Our research questions are thus the following:

RQ1: Do Tourism undergraduates continue to make basic grammatical mistakes at the end of their first obligatory ESP course? If so, what are the most productive types of errors? Prepositions? Verb tenses? Word order? Pronouns?

RQ2: Do Tourism ESP students use non-verbal features in their English text messages sent via WhatsApp? If so, which ones? Emoticons? Emojis? Gifs?

RQ3: Do Tourism students adapt the language they use to the context? For example, do they use commonly known WhatsApp features such as abbreviations, condensed forms, or incorrect spellings?

RQ4: What is the main meaning conveyed when the students use non-verbal data such as emojis?

RQ5: What types of informal language do they use?

3. Methodology

In this section we will describe the methodology used in the study by referring to the specific ESP context in which the study was conducted, the participants, the research material used and the data analysis procedures followed.

3.1. ESP context

The present study was conducted in the subject English 1 within the degree of Tourism at the University of the Balearic Islands (UIB). It is a first-year compulsory instrumental ESP subject. Students receive two 90-minute classes per week. The main objective in this module is to introduce students to the language required to provide customer service and tourism information; therefore, topics such as transport, the airline industry, accommodation, or bookings are covered. The materials are designed at an intermediate B1 level and students are expected to have reached a B1+ Common European Framework for Languages (CEFR) level at the end of the semester.

The traditional assessment system within this subject is based on three activities: a) a mid-term exam which students sit just before or after the Easter holidays; it is based on multiple choice questions to assess the grammatical and lexical components covered in the first units and the writing of a cover letter to apply for a job and it is worth 20% of the final grade; b) two speaking exams. On the one hand, an individual exam in which the students must talk about some previously prepared topics related to the subject (transport, airports, jobs in tourism...). On the other, they must record two videos in pairs; in one of them they simulate booking a hotel room over the phone and in the other perform a role-play on a problem at the airport (lost luggage, arriving late to the boarding gate...). These exams are worth 30% of the final mark; and c) a final exam worth 50% which comprises multiple choice questions on the grammatical and lexical contents seen throughout the whole 8 thematic units as well as some reading and listening activities.

In the present academic year, however, some of the groups were offered an alternative assessment system; they could either stick with the traditional methodology or be part of a teaching innovation project (the current study) which would entail their mid-term exam being worth 10% and the remaining 10% would correspond to the current project.

3.2. Participants

Nine students out of 15 enrolled in one of our teaching groups opted for the continuous assessment option, i.e., to do the 10% project. Two of them were males and the remaining 7 were females. Their age ranged from 18 to 20 years old at the time the study was conducted, and they were all bilingual speakers of both Spanish and Catalan

(Majorcan variety). They were asked to form pairs or small groups. In the end, the participants were organised as follows: 3 groups of pairs and 1 group of 3 people.

3.3. Research material

The pairs and groups of students were asked to create a WhatsApp group which should be exclusively used for the project; hence, they were expected to only exchange messages in English. As this activity was a writing task, most of their interventions were expected to be in written form; nevertheless, they were told that it was also possible to use website links, audio files, etc. To protect both the participants' and our own personal data, they were instructed to send their teacher their conversations and interventions by email. If they opted for including links or audio files, they should send them separately and indicate where each of them would go within the written interventions exchanged on WhatsApp. They were given 5 weeks to complete the activity.

The main aim of this task was to design a once-in-a-life-time trip. More specifically, they had won a competition and the prize was a holiday for 2-4 people to whichever destination they wished to travel to. Some of the decisions they had to make were: the type of holiday (sun and sand, adventure, cultural, religious, theme park, health and well-being retreat, large city), dates, the destination, advantages and disadvantages of one destination over another, prices, transport options, accommodation, places to visit, excursions and leisure activities... Due to the once-in-a-lifetime trip format, there were no restrictions regarding the budget for travelling.

3.4. Data analysis

As will be described in more detail in section 4, we will distinguish 2 different aspects in our data analysis: a) grammar mistakes and b) linguistic analysis. In the following paragraphs we will describe in more detail the data analysis procedures carried out for each of the previously mentioned issues.

3.4.1. Grammar mistakes

The grammatical mistakes identified were classified into different groups and, on some occasions into sub-categories. More specifically, we will distinguish between: a) problems with verb tenses; b) problems related to omission; c) problems with word order; d) problems involving the wrong choice of a preposition, pronoun, article or adverb; and, e) other problems registered.

3.4.2. Linguistic analysis

3.4.2.1. Presence of common text-messaging features

Before analysing the data collected for this study, we looked at the linguistic classifications that previous scholars had suggested for text-messaging language. To begin with, we considered Biber and Conrad's (2009) list of linguistic features (as quoted in Alazzawie, 2022, pp. 4-6) which included aspects such as a) abbreviated forms and non-standard punctuation and capitalization; b) use of condensed forms; c) repeated use of certain condensed forms for making the typing task easier; d) absence of formal genre markers for opening and closing; e) frequent use of first and second person pronouns; and g) frequent use of verbs, pronouns and nouns. Afterwards, we looked at the typology that Gómez-Camacho and Gómez del Castillo (2015) and Gómez del Castillo (2017) had suggested for classifying textisms in Spanish. These included: a) lack of capital letters; b) changing orthographic letters to better resemble the phonetic features; c) joining words; d) consciously made spelling mistakes; e) omitting orthographic letters, especially vowels; f) use of capital letters to emphasise a message; and g) using foreign words.

Despite the usefulness of the previous two types of analysis, we believed they would not be able to explain all the features we found in our data. Hence, we decided to follow Jamal-Kaid's and Salim's (2011, pp. 3-7) classification as it is the most detailed one that we have come across. As table 1 below shows, they distinguish between different categories and sub-categories, namely, a) features at a morphosyntactic level; b) phonological characteristics; and c) code-mixing. Each subcategory has been ascribed a code; hence, MS1 for example means morphosyntactic level, subcategory 1.

Table 1. Linguistic categories and subcategories distinguished in our data analysis

Categories	Sub-categories	Code
Morphosyntactic level (MS)	Subject deletion	MS1
	Deletion of functional head	MS2
	Deletion of punctuation	MS3
	Clippings	MS4
	Contractions	MS5
	Words with upper case	MS6
	Words with lower case	MS7
	Overuse of punctuation	MS8
Phonological level (PH)	Deletion of consonants	PH1
	Deletion of vowels	PH2
	Substitution of equivalent sounds	PH3
	Substitution of a single letter for a phone(s)	PH4
	Substitution of numbers(s) for phone(s)	PH5
	Words represented by single letters	PH6
	Overuse of sounds	PH7
Code-mixing (CM)	Mixed nouns	CM1
	Mixed adjectives	CM2
	Mixed adverbs	CM3

Fuente: adaptado de Jamal-Kaid and Salim (2011, pp. 3-7)

3.4.2.2. Other informal language used

Another aspect we will bear in mind is the use of other informal types of language expected in these types of conversations such as slang, colloquialisms, informal ways of addressing someone, exclamations or swearwords.

3.4.2.3. Use of emojis, emoticons or Gifs

As aforementioned, this study also aims at analysing when and how frequently these students use emojis, emoticons or Gifs in their messages. Once again, we consulted different sources before choosing the most adequate classification for our data. Firstly, we looked at Calero-Vaquera's (2014, p. 102) general classification of these three elements. More specifically, he points out that emoticons, emojis and GIFs can be used a) to transmit ideas and feelings; b) to emphasize and redound content present in the message; or, c) "to act as correctors or subduers within certain interferences or as a way of disambiguating messages with an ironic load" (Calero-Vaquera, 2014, p. 102; my translation). However, the most detailed and we believe most adequate classification system we have found is the one suggested by Al Rashdi (2018, pp. 119-125) who distinguished between different 8 meanings that emojis can express:¹ a) to indicate emotions; b) to act as contextual cues; c) to indicate celebration; d) to indicate approval; e) to respond to thanking's and compliments; f) to signal openings and closings of conversations; and g) as a linking device.

4. Results and discussion

The students produced a total of 286 interventions which were individually analysed in search of grammar mistakes and the presence of typical text-messaging features, informal language and emojis. The findings obtained for each of these categories will be explained below, in sections 4.1-4.4.

4.1. Grammar mistakes

A total of 104 grammar mistakes were identified in our data. As explained in section 3.4.1, they were afterwards divided into one of the following groups: a) verb tenses, b) omission, c) word order, d) wrong choice of a preposition, pronoun, article or adverb, or e) other problems.

To begin with, as table 2 below shows, the students used an incorrect verb tense on 24 occasions; more particularly, the most productive mistakes they made were opting for an incorrect present simple tense instead of

¹ We have eliminated the last meaning from our analysis, i.e., to indicate that a task has been fulfilled since the author states this is something only common in the Omani culture (see Al Rashdi, 2018, pp. 124-125).

the correct past simple (9 times), conditional with *would* (4 times) or the future with *will* form (4 times), followed by 2 mistakes in which they use the past simple instead of the present perfect.

Table 2. Problems registered with verb tenses (own elaboration)

Incorrect tense used > correct tense	Frequency
Present simple > past simple	9
Present simple > conditional	4
Present simple > future with will	4
Past simple > present perfect	2
Future with will > present simple	1
Present continuous > future continuous	1
Present simple > present perfect	1
Past continuous > past perfect continuous	1
Infinitive without to > gerund	1
TOTAL	24

Fuente: elaboración propia, 2022.

Some examples of this type of mistake are:

**I found these flights to go to Paris* > have found

**Well, I look for flights tonight* > will look

[Talking about locations] **I see this one!!!! And I don't have words!!!!* > saw / have seen

**Tbh, it's the first time I heard about it 😊 did you go there?* > have you been there?

Another productive group of mistakes registered involve the omission of an important (and hence, obligatory) sentence component. More specifically, we detected 22 omissions in our data analysis. As can be inferred from table 3, the two function-word-types these students omitted most frequently were: a) prepositions like *from*, *for*, *to* or *of* (on a total of 10 occasions as in examples 6 and 8) and, b) the article *the* (8 times; see example 5). Moreover, between 1 and 2 instances of verb, pronoun and adverb omission were also found.

Table 3. Problems related to omission (own elaboration)

Omission (categories)	Omission (subcategories)	Frequency
Preposition	<i>From</i>	2
	<i>On</i>	1
	<i>At</i>	1
	<i>For</i>	2
	<i>To</i>	2
	<i>Of</i>	2
Verb		2
Article	<i>the</i>	8
Pronoun	<i>which/that</i>	1
Adverb	<i>away</i>	1
TOTAL		22

Fuente: elaboración propia, 2022.

(5) **We could maybe go in winter* > the winter

(6) **I'm going to start looking the hotel in Paris* > to start looking for

(7) **What else left?* > What else is left?

(8) **singapore and thailand are very far spain* > far (away) from

Despite the strict SVO order that English follows, the participants made 16 word-order related mistakes, especially regarding the order of subjects and verbs/objects (as in (9) below). In addition, 5 mistakes in which they incorrectly placed some verbs and frequency adverbs were registered (see example 11).

- (9) **In the price are included the basic tickets* > basic tickets are included in the price
- (10) **For me the two ideas are amazing* > the two ideas are amazing for me
- (11) **LOL, I never have expected that* 😬 > LOL I have never expected that

Table 4. Problems registered with word order (own elaboration)

Problem	Frequency
Verb - adverbs	5
Subject - verb	8
Verb - complements	3
TOTAL	16

Fuente: elaboración propia, 2022.

Twenty-seven mistakes involving choosing the wrong function or lexical word were also found, especially regarding prepositions, adverbs, and pronouns. More specifically, the students used an incorrect preposition like *with*, *in*, *on* or *for* on 14 occasions; furthermore, they confused the pronouns *it* versus *that* and *which* versus *what* 3 and 2 times, respectively. In addition, pronouns like *all*, *everywhere*, *something*, *somewhere*, *everywhere* or *anywhere* also continue to pose some difficulties for our participants (as can be inferred from table 5, almost all the mistakes involved not knowing which forms to use in the negative and interrogative forms (cf. example 13) or confusing the type of information each pronoun expresses, as in (16) where the subject uses *something* to refer to a country).

- (12) **I liked what I saw in Google and would like to go there* > on
- (13) **And what about hotels? Did you find something good?* > anything
- (14) **It's not a bad idea* > that's not a bad idea
- (15) **It will be very funny* > really funny
- (16) **I prefer to travel in summer, maybe to Thailand or something like this* > somewhere

Table 5. Problems involving the choice of an incorrect pronoun, preposition, adverb, or article (own elaboration)

Categories	Incorrect > correct forms	Frequency	
Pronoun	<i>It > that</i>	3	11
	<i>All > everything</i>	3	
	<i>Something > somewhere</i>	2	
	<i>Everywhere > anywhere</i>	1	
	<i>Which > what</i>	2	
Article	<i>An > a</i>		1
Preposition	<i>Between</i>	1	14
	<i>With</i>	2	
	<i>In</i>	5	
	<i>At</i>	1	
	<i>To</i>	1	
	<i>On</i>	3	
	<i>For</i>	1	
Adverb	<i>Funny > fun</i>		7
TOTAL			27

Fuente: elaboración propia, 2022.

Finally, other types of mistakes which do not fall into any of the previous categories were also found; to exemplify, the use of an unnecessary *with* preposition (see example 21), number agreement (as in 19 and 20), a double subject with *it* (see 18) or double negation (as in 17).

- (17) **But I don't not think it's a good idea > don't think*
- (18) **Why don't you think this urban hotel it is a nice place? > (...) hotel is a nice place?*
- (19) **I think Cancun, Mexico or Hawaii is a good option, do you agree? > are good options*
- (20) **This are the hotel options > these*
- (21) **Okey perfect so let me contact with the travel agent and send them all the details > contact the travel agency*
- (22) **It will be very funny > really fun*

Table 6. Other problems registered (own elaboration)

Categories	Mistakes	Frequency
Intensifier adverbs	<i>very > really</i>	1
Number agreement	Subject-verb	7
	<i>this-these</i>	3
Unnecessary preposition	<i>with</i>	1
Double negation	<i>don't + not</i>	1
Double subject	<i>hotel / trip+ it</i>	2
TOTAL		15

Fuente: elaboración propia, 2022.

4.2. Linguistic features common in text messages

As explained in section 3.4.2, we have followed Jamal-Kaid's and Salim's (2011, pp. 3-7) classification of linguistic features commonly used in text messages and their sub-division into characteristics at a morphological, phonological, and code-mixing level. As can be inferred from tables 7 and 8 below, we found quite a few instances of morphosyntactic and phonological features within the WhatsApp interventions of our students, namely 277 instances of the former and 45 of the latter. However, no instances of code-mixing features were encountered in the data analysed.

By far the most productive morphosyntactic feature these students use (or rather do not use) is the deletion of punctuation marks, with 240 instances recorded (see table 7). Out of these, the most frequently omitted punctuation marks were full stops (194 times; see examples 23 and 24) and commas (23 mistakes; cf. example 25), followed by the non-use of capital letters at the beginning of a sentence (15 occasions as in example 26) and non-capitalisation of proper nouns (5 instances recorded; look at examples 26 and 27). Finally, the question marks had been removed in 3 interventions (see example 28).

- (23) *Allright, let's do it*
- (24) *Well we can try both bro*
- (25) *My favourite places to visit would be france mexico and egypt.*
- (26) *i have found a flight for the days of december.*
- (27) *I really want 2 visit eiffel tower.*
- (28) *I absolutely love it*

The next most frequently used morphosyntactic characteristic is an overuse of punctuation, i.e., using more punctuation marks than necessary. As shown in table 7, the participants used more than one question mark at the end of 10 questions (see examples 29 and 30) and more than one exclamation mark at the end of a sentence on 9 occasions (as in example 31 below).

Table 7. Morphosyntactic characteristics identified (own elaboration)

Problem		Frequency	
Subject deletion (MS1)		4	
Deletion of punctuation (MS3)	Capital letters	15	240
	Full stops	194	
	Proper nouns	5	
	Commas	23	
	Question marks	3	
Contractions (MS5)	<i>Don't</i>	3	13
	<i>I'll</i>	1	
	<i>I'm</i>	4	
	<i>Can't</i>	1	
	<i>That's</i>	4	
Words with upper case (MS6)	<i>LOL</i>	1	
Overuse of punctuation (MS8)	Question marks	10	19
	Exclamation marks	9	
TOTAL		277	

Fuente: elaboración propia, 2022.

- (29) *What do you think???*
- (30) *No way!!! Is it real????*
- (31) *Yessss!!!*

In addition, 13 examples of contractions were registered within the words *don't*, *I'm*, *that's*, *I'll* or *can't* (see examples 32 and 33 below) and 4 instances of subject deletion were found (as in example 34). Finally, the only word which was written in full upper case was the acronym *LOL* (*laughing out loud*; cf. example 35).

- (32) *I don't care*
- (33) *That's for sure bro*
- (34) *Hope that too ☹*
- (35) *LOL, I've never expected that ☹*

Moving on now to subclassifying the phonological features identified, table 8 below shows that 20 instances of overuse of sounds were found. We have personally divided this category into two sub-groups, depending on whether the letters that are overused are consonants or vowels; twelve out of the total 20 instances of this type represent an overuse of consonants (see examples 36 and 37) whereas in the remaining 8 occasions, the sounds (and/or orthographic letters) which are extended are vowels (as in 38 and 39).

- (36) *Perfecttttt!!!!*
- (37) *Ohhhhh yeahhhhhh that sounds great*
- (38) *See youuuuu l8r*
- (39) *Hellooooooooo*

In addition, between 10 and 12 instances of PH6 (words represented by single letters) and PH4 (substitution of a single letter for a phone) were identified (see 40 and 41 for some examples of the former sub-category and 42 and 43 for the latter). Finally, 2 cases of substitutions of numbers for phone(s) (PH5) were detected (cf. example 44) and 1 instance of the deletion of vowels in the word *babies* (PH2; see example 45).

- (40) *Well, i have tried skiing. But tbh I would like to try snowboarding (= to be honest)*
- (41) *We are going to NY in summer (= New York)*
- (42) *See u girlzzzz (= you)*
- (43) *Ok, sure (= okay)*
- (44) *Gr8t ☹ ☹ ☹ ☹*
- (45) *Hi bbys ☹☹*

Table 8. Phonological characteristics identified (own elaboration)

Problem	Frequency	
Deletion of vowels (PH2)		1
Substitution of a single letter for a phone(s) (PH4)		10
Substitution of number(s) for phone(s) (PH5)		2
Words represented by single letters (PH6)		12
Overuse of sounds (PH7)	Consonants	12
	Vowels	8
TOTAL		45

Fuente: elaboración propia, 2022.

4.3. Other informal language used

Firstly, we found 6 different colloquial ways of addressing someone (*bro*, *darling*, *sweatheart*, *bbys*, *girls* and *friend*; see examples 46 and 47); these informal terms were used 15 times in total, especially *bro* by one of the pairs of students. Moreover, we found two examples of interjections that are commonly used in spoken language, but the students have inserted them into their written interventions on WhatsApp, namely, *eeemmm* and *mmmmm* (cf. examples 48 and 49). Thirdly, 1 example of the over-repetition of the affirmative adverb *yes* was registered (example 50) and we also encountered 10 instances of informal exclamations such as *yas*, *yeah*, *wow* or *sure* (as in example 51).

(46) *Hello girlsss 😊*

(47) *Yeah bro, anything related with adventure or sport is always welcome*

(48) *Eeeem... 😊 Hawai is interesting*

(49) *Mmmm, it sounds good 🔥*

(50) *Yes yes yes. And how much does it costs? 🇪🇺*

(51) *Yas!! It's perfect!*

Table 9. Other informal language used by the participants (own elaboration)

Category	Frequency		
Colloquial ways of addressing each other	<i>friend</i>	1	15
	<i>darling</i>	2	
	<i>girls</i>	2	
	<i>bbys</i>	1	
	<i>sweatheart</i>	1	
	<i>bro</i>	8	
Use of interjections	<i>eeemmm</i>	1	4
	<i>mmmmm</i>	3	
Over-repetition of words for emphasis	<i>Yes, yes, yes</i>		1
Exclamations	<i>Yas</i>	3	10
	<i>Wow</i>	1	
	<i>Yeah</i>	5	
	<i>Sure</i>	1	
TOTAL			30

Fuente: elaboración propia, 2022.

4.4. Emojis

Jeremy Burge founded the website Emojipedia in 2013. Among other things, it contains explanations of the origins of each emoji and the meanings they can express. From 2020, the person who has been in charge of writing the definitions on this website is Jane Solomon. Table 10 below contains the meanings Solomon (2020, n.p.) has

ascribed to some of the most-frequently used emojis, all of which, as will be explained below in more detail, were found in the data we analysed. For instance, the smiling face with heart eyes 🥰 normally used to express “enthusiastic feelings of love, infatuation, and adoration” whilst the sparkles emoji ✨ can denote a range of positive feelings such as “love, happiness, beauty, gratitude, and excitement, as well as newness and cleanliness.”

Table 10. Meaning(s) the most important emojis express (own elaboration)

Emoji	Meaning(s) according to Emojipedia (Solomon, 2020, n.p)
Smiling face with heart eyes 🥰	“Often conveys enthusiastic feelings of love, infatuation, and adoration.”
Grinning face with smiley eyes 😄	“Often conveys general happiness and good-natured amusement.”
Star-struck 🌟	“May express that someone or something is amazing, fascinating, impressive, or exciting.”
Sparkling heart 💖	“Showing your admiration for someone.” (n.a) ²
Face screaming with fear 😱	“While intended to represent horror and fright, it commonly conveys such feelings as shock, awe, disbelief, and intense excitement, as a screaming fan.”
Smiling face with hearts 🥰	“Expresses a range of happy, affectionate feelings, especially being in love.”
Smiling face with sunglasses 😎	“Often used to convey the slang sense of cool. May also express a confident, carefree attitude or that something is excellent.”
Sparkles ✨	“Commonly used to indicate various positive sentiments, including love, happiness, beauty, gratitude, and excitement, as well as newness or cleanliness.”
Thinking 🤔	“Intended to show a person pondering or deep in thought. Often used to scorn something or someone (...) Tone varies, including earnest, playful, puzzled, skeptical, and mocking.”
Woman dancing 🕺	“Often used to represent a sense of fun or as a positive affirmation, e.g., 🕺great!🕺”
Partying 🎉	“Used for celebrating joyous occasions (...) and enjoying good times more generally.”

Fuente: elaboración propia, 2022.

Our students’ WhatsApp interventions were full of emojis; more particularly, 120 instances of these faces and objects were found in our data analysis. Broadly speaking, as can be inferred from table 12 below, the participants used a wide range of different emoji faces and activities to express emotions such as excitement, surprise, laughter, fascination, hope, agreement, love, happiness, horror, or celebration.

Following Al Rashdi’s (2018) list of the different meanings that emojis can express in WhatsApp messages (see section 3.4.2), we can say that our participants used emojis in a wide variety of contexts. More specifically, as can be inferred from table 11 below, they especially used emojis: a) to provide some contextual cues (on 22 occasions as in examples 52, 53 or 54), b) to express the feeling of love (see examples 55 and 56) and, c) to indicate approval (19 times in contexts such as 57 and 58).

(52) *And how much does it costs?* 🇪🇺

(53) *I was thinking we could go to New York for the week of New Year* 🇺🇸

(54) *So, do you agree with me? Then lets find a cool place to ski and snowboarding* 🎿

(55) *I love it, it’s so pretty* 🌟 😊

(56) *It’s soooo beautiful* 🥰

(57) *For me its ok too* 🙆

(58) *Sounds nice, I’m up for it* 😎

Furthermore, quite a few emojis were used: a) to indicate celebration (9 times, see example 59), b) to signal closings (on 9 occasions; cf. examples 60 and 61), c) to express doubt (8 times registered; see example 62), d) to express laughter / humour (7 times as in example 63) and, e) to express excitement (6 times, see example 64).

² All the definitions in this table have been extracted from the website Emojipedia (Burge, 2013) except for the meaning of the sparkling heart, which was extracted from emojis.wiki (Sparkling heart emoji, 2013) since the former website did not offer a definition for this emoji.

- (59) *Gr8t* 🎉 🎉 🎉 🎉
- (60) *Bye ...* 🙋 🙋 🙋
- (61) *Perfectttt!!! Xoxo* 🙋
- (62) *What activities do we want to do?* 🙋
- (63) *This is another option* 🙋 🙋
- (64) *I'm really excited* 🙋

Finally, less than 5 instances were found of emojis used to: a) signal openings, b) indicate importance / priority, hope, happiness, and shock and, c) to respond to a compliment.

Table 11. Reasons the emojis were inserted (own elaboration)

Reason(s)	Frequency	
Signal openings	4	
Signal closings	9	
To indicate emotions	Importance / priority	4
	Laughter / humour	7
	Hope	1
	Doubt	8
	Happiness	4
	Love	22
	Excitement	6
	Shock	2
To indicate approval	19	
To act as contextual cues	22	
To respond to a compliment	3	
To indicate celebration	9	
TOTAL	120	

Fuente: elaboración propia, 2022.

Regarding frequency, the emoji which was used much more frequently than others was the smiling face with heart eyes (😍) which, according to Emojipedia means “enthusiastic feelings of love, infatuation, and adoration” (Solomon, 2020, n.p). Eighteen examples of this emoji were found in the data analysed; as can be inferred from examples (65) and (66) below, the contexts in which the students used this emoji were to express love or intense admiration towards different places.

- (65) *It's soooo beautiful* 😍
- (66) *Look at this* 😍😍😍😍

Other emojis used quite productively include: a) the grinning face with smiley eyes (used on 8 occasions as in examples 67 and 68), b) star-struck (7 instances found, as in examples 69 and 70), c) the sparkling heart and the face screaming in fear, both with 6 instances registered (see examples 71-75), d) the smiling face with sunglasses and the smiling face with hearts (used on 5 occasions each as in examples 76-79), e) the thinking face, the attention notice, the sparkles symbol, the partying face and the woman dancing emoji, each found on 4 different occasions (see examples 80-86).

- (67) *This is another option* 😊 😊
- (68) *I'm so excited to do this travel with you* 😊
- (69) *We have won it [the competition]* 🙋 🙋
- (70) *For me the two ideas are amazing* 🙋
- (71) *Hello sweathearts* 💕
- (72) *See u girlzzzz* 💕
- (73) *We can book an helicopter flight? What do you think about it?* 🚁 🚁 🚁 🚁 💕 💕 💕 💕
- (74) *I have never gone in a helicopter* 😱 😱
- (75) *No way!! Is it real???* LOL, *I've never expected that* 😱
- (76) *We can even do snowboard if we go to a colder place* 😎 *have you ever try it?*
- (77) *Ok, so check-in on December 21st and check-out on 14th and we can travel with rayener. Sounds good to you????* 🙋

- (78) *I'm really excited* 🤔
- (79) *I love it, it's so pretty* 🤔
- (80) *Eeeem...* 🤔
- (81) *What activities do you want to do?* 🤔
- (82) *Okey, attention* 🤔🤔🤔🤔🤔🤔
- (83) *Exactly, we'll see what we want to do when we get there, I'm sure we'll find many interesting things to do like surfing and other activities* 🤔 🤔
- (84) *Bye...* 🤔🤔🤔
- (85) *OHHHHHHH WELLLLLL I LIKE IT* 🤔 🤔 🤔 🤔
- (86) *Gr8t* 🤔 🤔 🤔 🤔

Table 12. Emojis used by the participants (own elaboration)

Emoji face / object	Frequency	Emoji	Frequency
Thinking 🤔	4	Winking and showing tongue 🤔	3
Attention notice ⚠️	4	Sweat droplets 🤔	3
Smiling face with heart eyes 😍	18	Fire 🔥	3
Face screaming in fear 😱	6	Canoe 🚣	1
Smiling face with hearts 😊	5	Person surfing 🏄	1
Kiss mark 💋	1	Folded hands 🙏	3
Rolling on the floor laughing 🤣	3	Heat 🤔	3
Grinning face with smiley eyes 😄	8	Slightly smiling 🤔	1
Skier 🏂	1	Smiling face with sunglasses 😎	5
Thumbs up 👍	1	Statue of Liberty 🗽	1
Exclamation heart 💓	2	Woman dancing 💃	4
Face with rolling eyes 🙄	3	Money 💰	1
Sparkling heart 💖	6	Party popper 🎉	1
Person with hand on eyes 🙈	1	Helicopter 🚁	4
Star-struck 🤩	7	Crossed fingers 🤞	1
Sparkles ✨	4	Partying 🎉	4
Winking 🤔	2	Pilot 🙎	2
Water wave 🌊	1	Cold face 🥶	1
TOTAL	120		

Fuente: elaboración propia, 2022.

5. Discussion

Before further commenting on the interesting results obtained in this study, we believe it is important to mention that the reason why the students were given 5 weeks to complete this activity was to make it more authentic in the sense that, organizing a one-in-a-life time trip in real life will take more than a few days as there are many decisions to make and things to consider. However, most of the messages the participants in this study sent to their group/pair members was either on the same day or over a few days. Therefore, we could say that the students focused more on the language they were expected to use than on making the activity seem as authentic as possible. This is something that will be taken into consideration in future versions of the task; one way to do so may be by giving them more specific instructions such as a timeline with examples of the contents and decisions they should talk about each week. We will now discuss some of our findings in more detail.

5.1. Grammar mistakes

Concerning the grammatical mistakes made, we first believe it is important to mention that the phenomenon of subject deletion was first considered as a mistake in our data analysis; however, we afterwards changed our

mind since this feature has been found to be a common characteristic of text messaging language and hence, any instances of subject deletion in our students messages should be considered as positive adaptations to text-messaging language rather than grammar mistakes. On the other hand, there were other aspects which we still regard as grammar mistakes (such as the wrong choice of a preposition or omitting an obligatory preposition) since they have not yet been listed as typical characteristics of text-messaging language; nevertheless, as the field of language use, especially regarding youth language, evolves so quickly, we believe some of the aspects we have considered mistakes may no longer be regarded so in the future.

Although a more thorough analysis would be needed, most of the mistakes registered can be explained by a negative influence of Spanish onto the students' use of English, that is, they are examples of grammatical transfers or cross-linguistic interference (Jarvis & Pavlenko, 2008).

From our point of view, some of the grammatical mistakes registered in our data are basic mistakes that these university ESP students should have overcome by now since they have been studying English for over 12 years. Some of these include:

- The tendency to overuse the present simple in contexts in which the past simple, conditional, or future with *will* should be used.
- Omitting the article *the* on occasions it is required; articles are present in all textbook-levels, from elementary to advanced. Hence, our students will most-likely have reviewed them every year at primary and high school and should know how to use them correctly by now. Surprisingly, though, hardly any mistakes were found involving problems with the indefinite articles *a/an*.³
- Basic mistakes with the strict SVO order in English such as in "in the price are included the basic tickets" (example 9) instead of "the basic tickets are included in the price". As aforementioned, on most occasions, the mistakes made by the students in our study are due to the negative influence of Spanish onto their use of English and example 9 perfectly reflects this influence since it is possible to say "en el precio van/están incluidos los billetes sencillos/básicos" although we believe the alternative "los billetes sencillos/básicos están incluidos en el precio" would still sound more natural, i.e., following the same SVO order as the English counterpart.
- Confusing the pronouns: a) *somewhere, anywhere, nowhere, someone, anyone, something* and/or *anything* and, b) *which* versus *what* and other relative pronouns. These pronouns are also repeatedly taught in EFL classes year after year and we believe learning when to use them is not difficult since there are specific pronouns for places, for people, for things, etc.
- Subject-verb agreement, something essential is almost any language.

5.2. Linguistic analysis

To begin with, something we found very surprising was the fact that the students, except for a few examples such as *bbys* for *babies*, hardly ever eliminated the vowels of different words in their WhatsApp messages since in Spanish, there is a tendency for vowels to be frequently omitted (Vázquez-Cano *et al.*, 2015, 94) and we strongly believed our students would have adapted this phenomenon to their English text messages. Likewise, hardly any examples of words in upper case were encountered and we did not find any instances of clippings.

On the other hand, the subjects have successfully adapted to text messaging language in many other ways:

- Use of letters to represent different words, such as *tbh* ("to be honest") or *omg* ("oh my God").
- Overuse of sounds, both consonants and vowels.
- Deletion of punctuation marks, especially full stops, commas, and capital letters.
- Overuse of question and exclamation marks.

Two other aspects we find surprising are: a) the fact that our students hardly ever deleted the subject and, b) the presence of contracted forms was quite low in comparison to full forms used. A possible explanation for the former context may be the fact that language teachers consider subject deletion a serious mistake in essays, exams...; thus, our students may have assimilated this idea so well that it is now difficult for them to do the opposite, even in informal contexts. In similar lines, most written assignments students complete belong to formal registers like letters or reports in which contractions should not be used, whereas in this study they were facing an informal way of writing.

Finally, although no instances of code-mixing were registered, we would like to comment two examples we believe are interesting. Firstly, one of the male subjects spelt *Ryanair* as *rayaner*, that is, in a way which completely resembles how this word is pronounced in Spanish. This may be explained by the fact that Spanish follows an almost completely transparent system of correspondences between spelling and pronunciation, which means that an orthographical letter is always pronounced in the same way (something that does not happen that frequently

³ As explained in section 4.1., other words that the students commonly omitted were prepositions as in **I'm going to start looking the hotel in Paris* > to start looking for (example 6 above); however, the learning of prepositions and phrasal and prepositional verbs are commonly among the most difficult things to learn in a language; thus, we would not consider omitting prepositions a basic mistake, especially in cases like example 6 since the corresponding Spanish verb *buscar* does not require a preposition, which could somehow explain why the students did not use a preposition for the English verb *look* either.

in English, especially regarding vowel sounds). Secondly, some students used the full form of the exclamation *okay*; however, they spelt it as it is written in Spanish, *okey*. These examples could have been considered as code-mixing within Jamal-Kaid's and Salim's (2011) classification but we believe they are just isolated instances and code-mixing implies longer stretches of language.

5.3. Informal language and emojis used

Although the students used many emojis in their text messages, we were surprised that only a few of them were used to close their conversations and even less appear in their openings. However, a positive finding is that examples of emojis were found for almost all the scenarios contemplated by Al Rashid (2018), including providing contextual cues, indicating approvals and celebrations, or expressing different feelings. It is important, though, to state that, on some occasions, up to 4 or 5 emojis were placed in the same intervention and sometimes, the same emojis repeated several times were used (see examples 59, 66 or 73).

In broad terms, the students mainly inserted emojis to express positive feelings such as love, admiration, surprise, or excitement and to contextualise some utterances; this seems feasible since the main objective of the activity, to organise a once-in-a-life-time trip which would normally be something exciting and pleasant to do. It would, however, be interesting to look at the emojis tourism students use in other contexts, for example, in more formal context exchanges with work mates, managers, clients... or situations that are not *a priori* pleasant and exciting.

Table 10 contains the main meanings each emoji normally conveys; nevertheless, when analysing our data, we found examples of emojis used for a particular reason and the meaning did not necessarily correspond to the one pointed out by Solomon (2020) nor other related emoji-data-base websites. To exemplify, the fire emoji 🔥 is said to be used "for various metaphorical expressions related to fire" and heat, "including the slang *hot*" (Solomon, 2020, n.p.) but our students used it to indicate approval as in examples 49 and 57 above. For reasons of time and space, we have not been able to analyse these features in depth, but it would also be interesting to do so in the near future. Another possibility could be to conduct interviews with students and ask them to explain why they have inserted certain emojis in particular places and what meaning they wanted to express.

Finally, gender differences have not been taken into consideration in this study; however, we did observe some possible gender-related contrasts when analysing the data. Firstly, the pair of male students who worked together used more informal addressing terms than their female classmates. Furthermore, the interventions written by the female participants generally contained a higher amount of emojis, especially regarding those used to express feelings of love, admiration, and excitement. However, no significant gender differences were noticed regarding issues like punctuation overuse or deletion or use of abbreviations in our preliminary observations. As the number of students who participated in this study was quite low, we would need to analyse extra data before making empirical assumptions, but there appears to be some interesting differences in the text messages written by men and women which should be further researched and exploited.

6. Conclusions

Spanish youngsters use technological tools such as social networks and MIMs daily to communicate with different people in their native language(s); nevertheless, they do not do so that often in English. For this reason, in this study, we have encouraged some Tourism ESP students to use WhatsApp to write to each other in English to organise a once-in-a-life-time trip. The language used by the participants has been analysed from different perspectives: a) the basic grammatical mistakes made (without counting those that are not considered errors in text-messages such as subject deletion); and, b) the verbal and non-verbal features included.

In general lines, the students' messages were full of emojis and linguistic features commonly used in text messages (overuse of sounds, overuse, and deletion of punctuation, etc). More specifically, our findings indicate that tourism students: a) still make quite a few basic grammar mistakes they should have overcome by now; and, b) are generally familiar with the expected format of text messages, including aspects related to linguistic features, use of informal language (exclamations, repeated words, colloquial forms of addressing people) and the insertion of emojis to express different meanings.

Regarding our research questions, we can now say that:

- The grammatical aspects that continue to pose most difficulties for these ESP learners are verb tenses, prepositions, and pronouns (choosing the right one or omitting a necessary one), articles (the use of *the*) and subject-verb agreement (RQ1). As explained in section 5, most of the mistakes identified in our data analysis may be explained by a negative transfer from Spanish and/or Catalan into the English equivalent.
- Tourism students use many non-verbal features when writing text messages, especially emojis (RQ2). They are also familiar with other linguistic features and constantly use them, e.g., overuse of consonant and vowel sounds, overuse and/or deletion of punctuation marks (full stops, commas, capital letters, exclamation, and question marks), the representation of words by single letters, or contractions (RQ3).

- The main meanings conveyed by the emojis inserted in our students' interventions are to provide a context for a cue (for instance, inserting a cold face emoji ❄️ when talking about going skiing or the Statue of Liberty emoji 🗽 to suggest going to visit it), to express positive meanings (generally love and excitement with emojis like 😍👉❤️👉) or to indicate approval (RQ4).
- Apart from emojis and linguistic features typical of text-messages, these students also used other types of informal language, namely, colloquial forms of addressing someone and exclamations and interjections such as *eeemmm*, *mmmm*, *yas*, *yeah*, *wow* or *sure* (RQ5).

We believe this study has contributed to the language learning field and filled in a gap within the teaching of ESP because scarce attention has been paid to the use of social networks within these specific contexts, especially regarding the analysis of language used by these students when communicating in foreign languages they are learning (cf. section 1.1.2. for more information); however, more research needs to be done on some of the aspects discussed here such as gender differences, code-mixing, or specific meanings conveyed by emojis (see section 5.3.). Finally, it may also be interesting to conduct similar studies with students with different ESP profiles, e.g., people studying medicine, history, or engineering since they may use emojis, informal language... differently and make other grammatical mistakes.

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