Revisiting Second Language Sociolinguistics

Revisiting Second Language Sociolinguistics:

Case Studies from Across the Globe

Edited by

Elena Kkese

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

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This book first published 2023

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN (10): 1-5275-1868-X
ISBN (13): 978-1-5275-1868-1

To My Family

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INTRODUCTION

ELENA KKESE

Language is primarily seen as a 'human communication' aspect as it allows us to convey meaning, and refer to ideas, events or entities that exist outside language (Mesthrie et al., 2000). Even if speakers use language mainly to communicate, they unintentionally give signals about their social and personal background. This may involve information about their social position, region of origin, ethnicity, gender, age group, occupation, education, religion, family, and interests, among other variables. Therefore, language cannot be solely defined in an abstract, human communication term, as historical and geographical boundaries, as well as sociopolitical criteria, need to be taken into consideration. Language is, consequently, embedded in a context that is both social and historical and can be only entirely appreciated when these contexts are understood. Trying to define *Sociolinguistics* leads to the conclusion that it is the part of linguistics that deals with 'the study of language in relation to society' (Hudson, 1996). The sociolinguist's aim is to move towards a theory which provides a motivated account of the way language is used in a community, and of the choices people make when they use language' (Holmes, 1992: 16).

In view of this, the present volume examines the interaction between language and specifically second language (L2) and social variables presenting evidence based on theoretical and empirical research on the linguistic situation in different countries—Malta, Greece, Catalonia, the United Arab Emirates, the Republic of Cyprus, and Malaysia as well as the virtual context of YouTube. The chapters in this volume are grouped under two themes. Five papers in Part 1 discuss issues providing sociolinguistic insights into the L2 society such as attitudes, identity issues, and standardisation efforts; four papers in Part 2 focus on issues providing sociolinguistic insights into the level of the L2 linguistic structure such as language choice, code-switching, morphophonology, and syntax.

The five chapters in Part 1 provide sociolinguistic insights into the L2 society in different linguistic contexts—Malta, Greece, Catalonia, and

Finland as well as in the virtual context of YouTube. The chapters reveal the gap between L2 performance and attitudes/judgements.

In the first paper of the volume, a keen observer of society investigates the role of English in Malta, which is one of the two official languages of the island. The research stems from an-oft cited preoccupation, particularly among educators, that the standard of English has declined in the context under investigation. In her paper, 'Reported Versus Actual Written English Proficiency in Officially Bilingual Malta,' Lydia Sciriha explores Maltese perceptions concerning the standard of English in Malta and their perceptions of their own written English proficiency based on the CEFR scales as well as their performance when it comes to a specific writing task to check whether this concern is justified. The large-scale scientifically-representative survey involved in-person interviews indicating that there is a quite a chasm between the respondents' reported English language written proficiency and their actual proficiency.

The second paper addresses first language (L1) and second language (L2) interaction and specifically Greek (L1) and Albanian (L2) interaction in the speech of Greek-Albanian bilinguals living or been raised in Greece. Pagona-Niki Efstathopoulou focuses on the sociolinguist aspects of the interaction providing a preliminary discussion on identity issues in her paper 'Sociolinguistic Aspects and Identity Issues in the Speech of Greek-Albanian Bilinguals'. A careful review of the existing studies on the linguistic behaviour of these second-generation bilinguals indicates that there is a language shift from the language of heritage (Albanian) to the language of prestige/acceptance (Greek) and most Greek-Albanian bilinguals exhibit a new hybrid post-national identity that positions them within Greek society, while acknowledging their Albanian roots.

The author of the third chapter examines Catalan-Spanish bilingualism in Catalonia from a language policy perspective, focusing on ongoing standardisation efforts for Catalan as the minority language. Marc Gandarillas in 'Language Standardisation Efforts in Multilingual Catalonia: Between a Rock and a Hard Place?' provides a historical interview of how standardisation efforts for the Catalan language stand as of 2023. According to the author, Catalan standardisation efforts should commit to three distinct goals in order to be successful: (a) advocating for a standard language that is both inclusive (e.g., registers, geographical varieties) and based on broad consensus, working collaboratively in order to minimise the threat of language secession; (b) updating the language immersion model in education, and defining its ramifications as applied to language policy and effective enforcement; and (c) empowering language presence in technology.

In their chapter 'An endless supply of audio and video … spoken by native speakers': Analysing Sociolinguistic Attitudes in Metalinguistic Videos on Youtube', Ekiyokere Ekiye and Paolo Delogu explore the sociolinguistic attitudes contained in widely viewed metalinguistic videos for English language learning on YouTube. The emphasis is on the taught varieties of English and the promoted sociolinguistic attitudes. The data for the analysis come from the British localised version of YouTube, and five clips were identified through the search terms '*English accent*' and '*English pronunciation*'. The findings suggest that the overall makeup of the metalinguistic videos on YouTube, including its pedagogical practices, emerges as an alternative context for learning English, which is characterised by hierarchical and prescriptive attitudes towards different varieties of English, and integrates features and trends that reinforce native-speakerism.

The authors of the final chapter in Part 1 of the book examine the differences between L2 and L1 cultures and whether these have an impact on the typology of irony, joke-lore, and taboos. In their paper 'The Influence of the Language of Surroundings on the Humour in Emigration', Maria Yelenevskaya and Ekaterina Protassova explore Finnish, German, Hebrew, and some other cases of jokes in Russian as L1 under the influence of the language of surroundings. By examining some clichés about Finns and other reflections from the press, the authors look at Russian speaking immigrants' humour on Facebook suggesting that, unfortunately, much of the immigrant humour stays within the community as in order to appreciate it one needs a linguistic and cultural background similar to that of the people who create it. Bilingual immigrant humour is a complex and multifaceted aspect of identity, and it can play a powerful role in shaping and expressing the identity of immigrant individuals and communities.

Part 2 of this volume contains four chapters on research providing sociolinguistic insights into the L2 linguistic structure in different linguistic contexts—United Arab Emirates, the Republic of Cyprus, and Malaysia. The chapters reveal the gap between young learners' experience and the educational system's expectations.

The status and use of English in the United Arab Emirates is the focus of Eliaine Lorenz's chapter 'The Status of English in the United Arab Emirates: University Students' Language Use and Usage Contexts'. English in the United Arab Emirates is the de facto lingua franca used for academic success and career perspectives, as well as in the private sector and is used by all participants on a daily basis, even though Arabic is the official language. In this chapter, L2 English use, cultural norms, and expectations are investigated via semi-structured interviews conducted with 115 university students (both Emirati and non-Emirati). Whereas the findings hold for the Emirati and non-Emirati participants alike, there are observable language use differences between Emirati and Arab expatriates, on the one hand, and South Asian and other citizenships, on the other hand, which are additionally mediated by the instructional language(s) employed during their pre-university education. These differences, however, are mainly related to the use of Arabic and not the use of English. The results are additionally supported with selected students' comments while some directions for future research are also provided.

In her chapter 'Code-Switching in Tertiary Education in Greek-Speaking Cyprus: Gender and Politeness in the Spotlight', Elena Kkese seeks to explore the complex interplay between code-switching, gender, and politeness. In the context of a community that speaks more than one language, as in Greek-speaking Cyprus, code-switching is expected to occur in almost any situation. This leads L1 CG users to forming attitudes toward the linguistic codes present in the Cypriot-Greek context and code-switching figures as a gender and/or a politeness indicator. For this study, questionnaires were used to collect data on attitudes from 101 bilingual undergraduate students at two different universities in Greek-speaking Cyprus. The results of the data analysis revealed that the tendency to use switches is more strongly present in females; further, code-switches have pragmatic functions, particularly indicating politeness largely of the negative kind.

The penultimate paper in Part 2 examines the formation of the past tense in English, which involves both regular and irregular forms. In their paper 'Written Production of Regular and Irregular L2 Past Tense Morphology by CG users of English and Its Connection to Phonological Factors', Elena Kkese and Natalia Pavlou examine the way L1 CG users of L2 English process regular and irregular English past tense inflection at the sentence level as this phenomenon constitutes a challenge to L2 users. The participants of the study were 123 L1 CG users of L2 English, who completed a written elicitation task that was administered as a multiple-choice task with a circling response mode. The findings indicated that overall performance was better in regular verbs and that factors such as voicing and syllable structure affect performance as participants did better in the voiceless single codas /t/ for both regular and irregular verbs pointing to the fact that phonology plays a role in L2 morphosyntactic performance.

This volume concludes with ‘Malay “kena” in “bahasa rojak”: The Interplay of Spoken Languages in Malaysia’. Ralf Vollmann and Soon Tek Wooi discuss the multi-ethnic and multilingual situation in Malaysia, where the spoken English, Malay, Chinese, and South-Sinitic idioms are used. Loanwords, syntactic structures, and shared function words lead to communicative practices termed *bahasa rojak* (‘language mix’). In their study, the two researchers analyse the Malay function word *kena* in the speech of ethnic Malays and Chinese, both in Bazaar Malay / Colloquial Malay / Baba Malay and in English. This is done in an effort to assess ethnolectal differences in the use of shared languages. The findings indicate that the two ethnic groups show small ethnolectal differences when speaking Malay or English. Due to the influence of education, younger speakers seem to reverse the achieved convergence to some degree in favour of the standard forms of the languages involved.

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PART I:

SOCIOLINGUISTIC INSIGHTS INTO THE L2 SOCIETY

CHAPTER ONE

REPORTED VERSUS ACTUAL WRITTEN ENGLISH PROFICIENCY IN OFFICIALLY BILINGUAL MALTA

LYDIA SCIRIHA

Abstract

This study stems from an-oft cited preoccupation particularly among educators that the standard of English, one of the two official languages in Malta, has declined. To check whether this concern is justified, the researcher embarked on a large-scale scientifically-representative survey where in-person interviews were conducted with 500 Maltese. The participants were first asked for their own perceptions regarding the standard of English in Malta. They were also asked to self-assess their proficiency in written English based on the CEFR scales. Afterwards, they were given a specific writing task. The findings reveal that there is a quite a chasm between the respondents' reported English language written proficiency and their actual proficiency.

Keywords: perceptions; proficiency; self-evaluation; written English

1. Introduction

Both English and Maltese are introduced to children in Malta as soon as they start formal schooling. In total, they receive as many as eleven years of instruction in the two official languages. In view of the position of Maltese as the national language and one of the official languages of the European Union, the Maltese government encourages its use in written communication. This notwithstanding, previous studies by Sciriha and Vassallo (2001, 2006) have revealed that compared to English, Maltese is not as frequently used as English in written correspondence. This in itself should perhaps reveal a greater competence in written English than in written Maltese. However, numerous complaints are heard among educators, parents, and employers that the command of English in Malta, especially among the younger generations, has recently taken a deep plunge. It seems that the Maltese are encountering problems with writing a simple English sentence.

2. The Present Study

In view of the official status of English in Malta, it should be axiomatic that the Maltese should have a good command of their second language. The very fact that there is a growing preoccupation that the standard of English in Malta has declined is worrying and the current debate suggests that the issue needs to be addressed. In her opinion article in one of the local newspapers, Bianchi (2014) considers the 'hostile attitude to use of the English language in public, coupled with the population's reluctance to read books', as factors contributing to this decline. It is for this reason that this study is an attempt to check whether this concern is warranted. The findings of this study derive from a large-scale scientifically-representative survey prior to the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic. In-person interviews were conducted with 500 Maltese (Table 1) by a team of bilingual interviewers. The instrument used for this survey was a structured questionnaire which comprised five sections. Nevertheless, the focus for this paper is on only three sections of this questionnaire in which: (i) the participants were asked whether they perceive a lowering of standards in English and to give reasons for their choice; (ii) they were then asked to self-report their proficiency levels in written English; and (iii) finally, they all completed a written task so that an objective assessment of participants' actual English written skills could be made as part of this research exercise.

In this paper two main research questions will be answered:

1. Are the Maltese at large preoccupied with the perceived falling standards in English?

2. Do respondents' self-evaluations of written English match their actual performance in the written task?

Sample Profile and Educational Attainment

The sample profile (Table 1) reflects the demographic spread of the Maltese population aged 18 upwards. Thus, more females (50.6%) than males (49.4%) took part, with the largest cohort belonging to those aged 31-50 (33%). The smallest percentages of participants are those who are over 66 years of age (16.8%) and those who belong to the youngest age cohort (23.4%).

Table 1: Sample Profile

	Total	Male	Female
N=	500	247	253
18-30	117	60	57
%	23.4	24.3	22.5
31-50	165	85	84
%	33.0	34.4	33.2
51-65	134	66	68
%	26.8	26.7	26.9
66+	84	35	49
%	16.8	14.2	19.4

Base=All

Since all participants were 18 years and over and had thus completed mandatory formal schooling, they were also asked for their educational background. In fact, when compared to males, a higher percentage of females (Table 2) only have primary school education (females: 8.4% vs. males: 5.2%), and these belong to the two oldest age groups. This was not wholly unexpected since although in 1970 secondary education was introduced for all students, it was only the 1974 Education Act which enforced compulsory education until students were either 16 years of age or had completed their final year at secondary school. Besides, up until the late 1960s, most parents preferred investing in their sons' education and not in their daughters, since they considered the latter would marry, set up a home with a husband and offspring and really did not need much education. Such a myopic mentality was widespread but hardly surprising. After all, until 1981, female government employees were forced to resign from their jobs once they got married and their careers came to a grinding halt once they tied the knot.

Following the 1981 change in working conditions, coupled with the introduction of the University Student-Worker scheme (1989-1987), which was replaced by a universal stipend system in 1987, there has been a growing positive mentality towards tertiary education since students are no longer a financial burden on their parents. Such a measure proved decisive not only because it has bolstered the student body of the University of Malta, but also the numbers of female university students registered remarkable high increases when compared to the 1960s and 1970s (Sciriha, 1999).

Table 2 gives a breakdown of the sample profile by age and educational attainment. More females (6.3%) than males (5.3%) in the youngest age group (18-30) are university graduates, but lower percentages are registered for the females in the 51-65 (1.6% vs. males: 3.6%) and the 66+ (0.8% vs. males: 3.2%) age groups. Such data confirms that tertiary education has now become accessible to all and young Maltese have more choices in the different institutions of higher learning. In fact, the gender composition at the University of Malta at present overwhelmingly favours females (60% versus 40% males).

Table 2: Sample Profile by Age and Education

	Total	18-30	31-50	51-65	66+
N=	500	117	165	134	84
Primary	68	0	0	28	40
%	13.6	0.0	0.0	20.9	47.6
Secondary	228	36	97	70	25
%	45.6	30.8	58.8	52.2	29.8
Post-Secondary	80	27	31	16	6
%	16.0	23.1	18.8	11.9	7.1
Technical School	24	4	9	8	3
%	4.8	3.4	5.5	6.0	3.6
Malta College of Arts, Science & Technology	25	21	4	0	0
%	5.0	17.9	2.4	0.0	0.0
University of Malta	75	29	24	12	10
%	15.0	24.8	14.5	9.0	11.9

Base=All

3. Findings

This section gives the results grouped by research question.

Research Question 1: Do the Maltese consider the standard of English to be good in Malta?

Since the impetus for conducting this survey stemmed from the general perceptions regarding the declining standards in English, it was apposite to actually obtain the participants' opinions on this matter. Participants were accordingly asked a direct question *In general, do you think that the standard of English in Malta is good?* The results (Table 3) reveal that the overwhelming majority (73.2%) have positive perceptions regarding English. In fact, they consider the Maltese to possess a good standard of English, while a much lower 26.8% do not think this is the case.

Table 3: Whether the Perceived Standard of English is good

	N=	%
Yes	366	73.2
No	134	26.8
Total	500	100.0

Base=All

In an attempt to discover why the participants hold positive or negative views on the level of English, they were in turn asked to provide reasons for their views. As evident in Table 4 the most frequently-cited reason which contributes to their positive outlook on the standard of English is the fact that according to them 'we watch TV in English' (22.9%), followed by 'we read books/newspapers in English' (16.6%).

Furthermore, the respondents' positive perceptions were cited as resulting from having: (i) 'good teachers of English in Secondary schools' (19.7%); (ii) 'the majority of the subjects are taught in English' (10.3%); (iii) 'English is taught in English and not in Maltese' (5.19%); (iv) 'the majority of the textbooks are in English' (3.55%) and also because (v) 'English is a compulsory subject from Grade One at primary school' (1.37%).

Other factors which respondents attributed to a good standard of English included the general exposure to English. Respondents gave these replies: firstly because 'we were a British colony' (14.8%) and secondly 'many tourists who visit Malta are English speaking' (4.1%). However, having

'English as an official language' was also considered to be a contributing factor to the good standard of English by a mere 1.1% of the Maltese. New technology is also helping the Maltese maintain a good level of English because they pointed out that the 'use of the internet which is in English' (12.2%) is a valuable contribution. Moreover, the fact that some 'parents also speak English to their children' (3.82%) needs to be factored in. It is apt to note that since respondents could give more than one reason, the numbers add up to more than 100%.

Table 4: Reasons contributing to a good standard of English

	N=	%
Total	366	100
We read books/newspapers in English	61	16.6
When abroad we speak English	36	9.8
We watch TV in English	84	22.9
We use internet which is in English	45	12.2
We have good teachers of English in Primary Schools	99	27.0
We have good teachers of English in Secondary schools	72	19.7
We have the opportunity to listen to English on radio	5	1.3
In our schools, English is taught in English and not in Maltese	19	5.19
At school, the majority of the subjects are taught in English	38	10.3
Parents speak English with their children	14	3.8
The majority of textbooks are in English	13	3.6
We were a British colony	54	14.8
Many tourists who visit Malta are English speaking	15	4.1
English is an official language in Malta	4	1.1
English is a compulsory subject from Grade 1 at primary school	5	1.4
English is our second language	10	2.7
Many foreign students come to Malta to learn English	1	0.3

Base=All those who have positive perceptions on the standard of English in Malta

In contrast, fewer Maltese perceived the standard of English as not being a good one and gave reasons (Table 5) for their negative perception.

Table 5: Factors *Not* contributing to a Good Standard of English

	N=	%
Total	134	100
We do not read books/newspapers in English	35	26.1
We no longer have contact with English people as when we were a British colony	17	12.7
We do not watch TV in English	18	13.4
We do not have good teachers of English at the primary level	24	17.9
We do not have good teachers of English at the secondary level	14	10.4
We are constantly speaking Maltese	19	14.1
We do not listen to English programmes on radio	1	0.74
In schools, English is taught in Maltese	14	10.4
The English exams are easy and everyone passes	3	2.2
Parents code-switch a lot when speaking to their children	19	14.7
Most Maltese people code-switch all the time	24	17.9
Anti-English attitude	5	3.7

Base=All those who do not have positive perceptions of the standard of English in Malta

The factors that received the highest mention are that 'we do not read books/newspapers in English' (26.1%); 'we do not watch TV in English (13.4%) and 'we do not listen to English programmes on the radio' (0.74%).

The Maltese school system is also to blame for not having a good standard of English because according to the respondents 'we do not have good teachers of English at the primary level' (17.9%) and 'at the secondary level' (10.4%). Also, some teachers teach in their first language [i.e., in Maltese] rather than in English and 'in schools, English is taught in Maltese' (10.4%). Moreover, passing the English exam is not so problematic since 'the English exams are easy and everyone passes' (2.2%).

Of particular note is the fact that the educational system is not the sole culprit that is mentioned by the respondents. The fact that 'parents code-switch a lot when speaking to their children' (14.7%) might possibly have a deleterious effect on the standard of English. Another 17.9% of the Maltese also mentioned the fact that ‘the Maltese code-switch all the time’.

Most noteworthy is the reason mentioned by 3.7% of the Maltese, namely that the standard of English is a result of an ‘anti-English attitude’. As in the previous table since respondents could give more than one reason, the numbers add up to more than 100%.

When these positive and negative perceptions were cross-tabulated by the formal qualifications of the respondents (Table 6), it is worth noting that the majority of the Maltese (47.4%) who consider the standard of English to be good do not even have any paper qualifications whatsoever. On the other hand, all those in possession of degrees, albeit very small in number (N=5), do not perceive the level of English to be good.

Table 6: Type of Perceptions of the quality of English among the Maltese *by Formal English Academic Qualifications*

	Positive Perception	**Negative Perception**
N=	366	134
No formal qualifications	237	35
%	64.8	26.1
SEC	95	62
%	26.0	46.3
Intermediate	18	12
%	4.9	9
Advanced	16	20
%	4.4	14.9
First Degree	0	3
%	0.0	2.2
Second Degree	0	2
%	0.0	1.5

Base=All

Self-assessments of Written English

Research Question 2: Do the participants’ self-evaluations of written English tally with their actual performance in the written task?

In view of the overwhelming positive perceptions of the Maltese in respect of the standard of English, they were also asked to self-assess their proficiency levels in written English based on the competencies as listed in the Common European Framework of Reference document as issued by the Council of Europe (CEFR). This document defines the different competencies by a series of descriptors.

For the respondents' self-assessment to be as accurate as possible, during the face-to-face interviews with the participants, the interviewers gave a show card with the CEFR descriptors to each respondent to read before asking them to self-evaluate their written English competence. In this way, the respondents' self-assessment of their proficiencies would be focused and not based on just broad and undefined terms like 'good' or 'not bad', 'a little' or 'none' as have been used in the language section of the 2011 Census of Malta.

Self-evaluation of Written English

Self-assessment is fraught with difficulties since quite often there is a tendency for respondents to over-rate their competence in languages, especially when the language in question is considered to be prestigious, as is the case with English.

As shown in Table 7, a total of 65.4%, (C2:29.4% + C1: 36.0%) and that of 25.2% (B2 17.6% + B1: 7.6%) of the Maltese declared that they have C2 (proficient users) and B2 levels (Independent users) of written English respectively. Contrastingly, much lower percentages are registered at the basic user levels (A2: 5.2%; A1: 4.2%). All in all, the majority of the Maltese (65.4%) claimed having a proficient user level (C2-C1) in written English.

Table 7: Self-assessment of Written English

		N=	**%**
Total		500	100.0
C2	**Proficient**	147	29.4
C1	**User**	180	36.0
B2	**Independent**	88	17.6
B1	**User**	38	7.6
A2	**Basic**	26	5.2
A1	**User**	21	4.2

Base=All

Actual Proficiency in Written English: Language Analysis

Over the years a number of scientifically-representative language surveys have been conducted by Sciriha and Vassallo (2001, 2006) in which the Maltese were also asked to assess their proficiency in Maltese, English and other foreign languages that are taught at school. However, in none of these surveys has there ever been any attempt to obtain the respondents' *actual* proficiency by means of a specific written task.

This study differs in that it also focusses on the actual proficiency of written English by the Maltese. This was operationalised at the end of each in-person interview, when all the participants in the present study were given a written task to complete. They were asked to translate into English a total of ten Maltese sentences. Each sentence was specifically chosen for particular aspects of grammar, syntax and vocabulary.

Prior to the analysis of the results from this test, an explanation of the methodology adopted is apposite.

Methodology on Written Task

Over the years, Language Analysis has triggered considerable interest among linguists, particularly since it can take place within various fields of linguistics. These may include analysis within the fields of morphology (the study of word formation), syntax (the formation of phrases and sentences), phonology (the study of the language sound system), as well as semantics (the study of how meaning is inferred from word symbols).

A branch of Language Analysis, which is being used as the basis for this study, is *Error Analysis*. Originally, studying the nature and occurrence of errors enabled researchers to detect problem areas in the acquisition of the language under study in order to aid teachers, syllabus designers as well as textbook writers to design remedial exercises. It enabled language specialists to focus more on the defects which hinder the smooth acquisition of a foreign language (Abushihab, El-Omari, & Tobat, 2011: 543).

In order to measure proficiency in written English and to analyse certain errors which the participants made, an error analysis approach was used. This approach has been traditionally associated with second language acquisition and pedagogy and the steps involved collecting samples of learner language, identifying the errors in the sample, describing these errors, classifying them according to their causes, and then evaluating them (Corder, 1974).

Prior to identifying and analysing the deviations, it was necessary to decide what constitutes an error. In this study an error is defined as ‘a deviation from the norms of the target language’ (Ellis, 1994: 53) in this case, from Standard English. Thus, the correction was based on a comparison of the participants’ sentences to the correct form in Standard English.

For the purpose of this survey, the classification of errors was based on Dulay, Burt and Krashen’s (1982) major linguistic categories of errors: orthography, lexicon and semantics (vocabulary and meaning), syntax and morphology (grammar). For instance, grammatical errors comprise structure, the use of articles, tenses, aspect and prepositions. Examples of lexical errors include incorrect lexical items and lexical choices.

The written sentences produced by participants in this study were analysed manually and every instance of error was examined. Once a deviation was noticed, it was marked according to its category, and a raw score was assigned to the sentence, depending on the type of error made and its frequency. Blank answers received 0 points.

Moreover, since the main aim of this correction was to provide a raw score that would be a general indication of written language proficiency, a holistic rating scale was developed (Table 8). Holistic scoring involves ‘the assignment of a single score to a piece of writing’ (Hughes, 2003: 94). This type of rating score was chosen as it enables the scorers to carry out rapid marking. Moreover, it was chosen as it was deemed suitable, since relatively short sentences, rather than long texts, had to be scored. The scale was piloted using a small sample of questionnaires. Two markers corrected the sentences and assigned a score using the holistic rating scale. The participants’ sentences were compared to the descriptions in this scale and a raw score (with 0 being the lowest score possible and 10 the highest score) was assigned. The scores were compared and, after consistency was ensured, the rating score was deemed suitable for the purpose of this study.