

## Reverse Transfer: L1 Written Production of Native Spanish Students Following the English National Curriculum in the Community of Madrid

### Resumen

Como es bien sabido, una exposición temprana a una segunda lengua conlleva innumerables ventajas lingüísticas, metalingüísticas, cognitivas y pragmáticas en niños y jóvenes. Sin embargo, el bilingüismo tiene también el potencial de interferir tanto en las habilidades de recepción como de producción, provocando errores motivados por la transferencia interlingüística. Este estudio tiene el objetivo de evaluar algunos de los efectos lingüísticos negativos en términos de transferencia lingüística de la L2 (inglés) a la L1 (español) en la producción escrita que experimentan la mayoría de alumnos españoles que estudian el Currículo Nacional Británico en colegios ingleses de la Comunidad de Madrid. Esta exposición temprana al inglés como L2 da lugar a interferencias, así como a distintas velocidades de adquisición en ambas lenguas si lo comparamos con alumnos españoles que siguen el Programa Bilingüe español-inglés en colegios de la Comunidad de Madrid, donde la exposición al inglés no es tan alta. En lo referente al fenómeno de la transferencia inversa, presto especial atención a las interferencias léxicas y gramaticales del inglés al español que presentan estos dos grupos diferenciados de alumnos en lo relativo a la producción escrita en L1.

### Abstract

It is well-known that an early exposure to a second language results in countless linguistic, metalinguistic, cognitive and pragmatic advantages in young learners. However, bilingualism also has the potential of interfering with receptive and productive skills by influencing errors resulting from cross-linguistic transfer. This study aims at evaluating some of the negative linguistic implications studying the English National Curriculum has for native Spanish students who attend British schools in the Community of Madrid in terms of language transfer from L2 (English) to L1 (Spanish) in their written production. As Spanish speakers, the early exposure to English as an L2 results in interferences as well as in different language acquisition speeds in both languages if compared to native Spanish students who follow the Community of Madrid English-Spanish Bilingual Program, where the exposure to English is not that high. Within the phenomenon of reverse transfer, I will specifically focus on the lexical and grammar interferences from English into Spanish these two differentiated groups of students present in what concerns their L1 written production.

### Palabras clave

Transferencia inversa, erosión lingüística, adquisición temprana de segundas lenguas, influencia interlingüística

### Keywords

Reverse transfer, language attrition, early second language acquisition, cross-linguistic influence

## Introduction

It has been some years now that I have been evaluating the linguistic implications studying the English National Curriculum has for native Spanish students who attend British schools in the Community of Madrid, specifically in their written production skills. As Spanish speakers, the early exposure to English as an L2 will result in interferences from L1 to L2 and vice versa, as well as in different language acquisition speeds in both languages if compared to native Spanish students who follow the Community of Madrid English-Spanish Bilingual Program.

Despite having Spanish as their mother tongue and living in Spain, Spanish students attending British schools since Key Stage 1 (Infant Education) soon start thinking in English and using their L2 for their day-to-day interactions in the classroom and playground. This early exposure to English will influence their mental processing, not only language-wise but also ability-wise. If we limit ourselves to the linguistic consequences this early exposure to English has on Spanish children, we will not be off-track stating that some aspects of their language proficiency in L1 will be diminished by their L2 acquisition. However, such an early L2 exposure will result in many other linguistic, metalinguistic, cognitive and pragmatic advantages.

## Acquisition versus learning

Krashen was the first one to draw a distinction between acquisition and learning in his Monitor Hypothesis Theory (1982). He defined language acquisition as being a natural process as opposed to language learning, which is a conscious one. In acquisition processes the communicative situation is natural and the language is acquired in an informal and implicit way; in learning processes focus is placed on the study of grammar rules in an explicit, formal and conscious way, and error correction is present.

In this sense, Krashen (1984) and Dulay & Burt (1974) argue that L2 acquisition responds to mechanisms which are similar to the ones present in child L1 acquisition. These mechanisms are not dependent on the learner's L1. Instead, they enable the individual to inductively and gradually reconstruct language rules as a result of being exposed to the language in the acquisition process. This was known as the Creative Construction Hypothesis.

Spanish students who follow the English National Curriculum have acquired Spanish, their first language and mother tongue in an informal and implicit way. Concerning, English, their second language and dominant language at school, we can consider they have acquired it because, despite it having been developed in a classroom environment (i.e. a formal context typical of learning processes), the students have always used it in meaningful interactions and communicative exercises, using the language to convey and exchange information with their interlocutors.

## Bilingualism

It has been estimated that more than half of the world's population is bilingual (Saville-Troike, 2006, 8). This is one of the reasons why bilingualism has become increasingly popular over the past four decades and has given rise to different schools of thought.

Many researchers have attempted to define bilingualism, and definitions vary depending of what the researcher wants to investigate. I subscribe to the definition which considers bilingualism as the ability to encode and decode linguistic signs from different languages (Blanco, 1981, 51) where the speaker possesses a high proficiency level. As Grosjean puts it, bilinguals are "unique speaker-hearers" (1985), and not "failed monolinguals" who have partial knowledge of each language (2010).

Due to the strong exposure to English Spanish students attending British schools are under, they are fluent in both Spanish and English (cf. Brumfit & Byram, 2000, 82) but present more grammar and lexical mistakes in their written compositions than their monolingual peers attending monolingual schools due to the existence of interference and negative language transfers from English (L2) into Spanish (L1).

### Types of bilingualism

Spanish students following the English National Curriculum are consecutive bilinguals, or, in Cook's (1991) terminology, "second language users" as opposed to "second language learners" who use their L2 in real-life situations (i.e. the academic context in our case) which require the deployment of cognitive and practical skills whilst using the language. The group subject of this study is a very homogeneous group composed of Spanish nationality students who have Spanish parents and have started attending a British school from the age of three, four or five. In this sense, despite being consecutive bilinguals, they are close to being compound bilinguals because, in most cases, they have developed a single mental representation for one same concept, despite having two verbal representations which they can use to refer to it. Rosenberg (1996), for instance, brought about the term *balanced bilinguals*, which may also perfectly apply to this type of students since they have more or less the same fluency in two languages.

Linguistic interferences, both lexical and grammatical, often occur in all types of bilingualism, but they are more common in consecutive bilingualism because the individual experiences "the influence of one language on the other when the linguistic environment favours one language [...], especially in the domain of vocabulary and idioms" (Grosjean, 1982, 181). In the case of these students, English functions as their dominant language at school and exerts a strong influence in terms of lexis and grammar on their L1.

### Language loss

In their recent study, Siu and Ho (2015) point out that transfer works in two directions, from the L1 to the L2 and from the L2 to the L1. Similarly, Montrul's (2010) study searches reveal that the influence of L1 in an adult's L2 is similar to the influence of an L2 in early bilinguals' L1.

Language transfer can take place between any languages, albeit their differential features. It is true to say that cross-linguistic influence is more common to take place between closely related languages (Connor, 1996), but it can also happen between languages with less common characteristics.

Transfer can take the form of different types of interference, which include several language features which influence each other such as "grammar, definitions, vocabulary, pragmatics, syntax, functions, pronunciation" (Gonca, 2016). The language results produced vary in relation to the L1 and L2 proficiency level of the learners.

Nevertheless, the effects of L2 transfer on the L1 are generally considered under the concept of "language loss". First language loss is a conceptually different process to first language transfer. In general terms, L1 loss refers to the process an L1 undergoes when an L2 is acquired and used in a context where L1 use is reduced. Linguists have made the split between "language shift" and "language attrition" within the general term of "language loss". In the first case, language shift happens at group level and refers to a phenomenon associated with diglossia situations; in the second, language attrition occurs at individual level.

In fact, findings in this field reveal that speaking and writing skills (i.e. productive skills) are more susceptible to the phenomenon of attrition than reading or listening skills (i.e. receptive skills) (Weltens, 1988; Weltens & Grendel, 1993) since the recall efforts required in productive

skills are much more demanding than simple recognition in listening or reading skills (Hansen, 2011). Despite Spanish hardly being used at school by students following the English National Curriculum, the fact that it is their L1 makes attrition more complicated since they have native Spanish parents and use Spanish at home when they leave school. In this sense, their retention of the language is very high (Mehotcheva, 2010). However, some authors claim that rehearsal and use of the language during the attrition period is not enough to prevent the phenomenon from happening (Xu, 2010).

Herdina and Jessner (2002) developed the Dynamic Model of Multilingualism (DMM) which purports that a multilingual language system is made up of different sub-systems (i.e. the languages an individual speaks) which constantly adjust to each other and to the environment. If we apply this model to our study, we can say that the lack of L1 use at school by Spanish students following the English National Curriculum will lead to negative growth, resulting in gradual language attrition. Herdina and Jessner consider this process as “the mirrored process of language acquisition” (2002, 91).

It must be said, however, that complete or severe language loss does not take place after a certain proficiency level has been reached. In the case of Spanish students attending British schools, Spanish is their first language and, therefore, language attrition can never be very severe because they keep using Spanish and are exposed to it in their daily lives. As Herdina and Jessner (2002) put it in their Language Maintenance Effort (LME) hypothesis, daily use of the languages will prevent language deterioration and severe attrition.

Another theory which accounts for language attrition is the Neurolinguistic Theory of Bilingualism (NTB) and its Activation Threshold Hypothesis (ATH) developed by Paradis in 1993. According to this author, the more a linguistic item is used, the lower the activation threshold of that item. When this happens, its possible competitors are inhibited by raising their activation thresholds. In this sense, the frequency and recency of use of the linguistic items give rise to different activation levels (Paradis, 2004). This theory suggests that, in the case of Spanish bilingual students, lexical borrowings happen in L1 because similar words (i.e. false friends) have been frequently and recently used in L2. In other words, the use of these lexical items in L2 has led to the lowering of their activation threshold and to the inhibition of the correct lexical items in L1. This has resulted in the transfer of the incorrect lexical items (i.e. false friends) to the L1, which have been easily (erroneously) accessed and recalled due to their low activation threshold.

Nevertheless, there are a series of extralinguistic factors which promote language retention and which apply to Spanish students attending British schools. These include:

- Age at the onset of the attrition process: The possibilities for language attrition diminish after puberty. According to Bylund (2009), there is a critical period for attrition which is between the ages of 9 and 13. Therefore, Spanish students following the English National Curriculum falling within that age range are very susceptible of language attrition.
- Proficiency level of the language subject of attrition: The higher the proficiency level attained, the less possibilities there are for attrition to take place (Neisser, 1984). In the case of Spanish students attending British schools, they have a native L1 level despite the language not being used at school. Consequently, this factor does not influence attrition in their case.
- Length of exposure and use of the language subject of attrition: The longer a person is in contact with a language and the more he/she uses that language will result in a higher linguistic retention (Hansen, 2011). The frequency and recency of use of the linguistic

items give rise to different activation levels (Paradis, 2004). The longer the exposure to the language and the higher the use, the lower its activation threshold will be and the more accessible it will become. In the case of Spanish students following the English National Curriculum, they can experiment deterioration of their academic linguistic skills in their L1 because their exposure to their native language at school is very limited.

- Typological proximity between the languages in contact: This concept refers to language distance, that is, the structural similarities and differences existing between languages (Kellerman, 1995). In cases of language contact, a language influencing another can have a facilitatory or an inhibitory role. The former makes reference to similarities between languages which favour retention, such as the case of cognates. The latter refers to similarities between languages which generate interferences (de Bot, 1997).
- Attitude towards the language subject of attrition: Despite there not being sufficient consensus on the effect of attitude and motivation on attrition, studies which rely on self-evaluation tests to assess language loss show that the lower the motivation and esteem towards the language, the higher the level of attrition (Schmid, 2006). In the case of Spanish students attending British schools, their motivation levels concerning their L1 are allegedly high since it is the language they use to communicate in their personal and private sphere (i.e. with family and friends), thus resulting in an irrelevant factor regarding L1 attrition.

Scott Jarvis (2003) carried out a research study where he examined the effects the length of residence (i.e. exposure and language usage) had on the L1 of his native Finnish subject living in a foreign English-speaking country. As a result of the increased exposure to the L2, this person had adopted English lexical and semantic expressions when speaking in Finnish. After analysing the linguistic production of his subject, Jarvis concluded that “L2 induced patterns do not seem to have replaced or led to a deterioration in L1 knowledge, but instead seem to have been added to L1 competence as additional options of expression” (2003: 101). These findings are particularly relevant because they suggest that L1 attrition works in conjunction with reverse transfer. In other words, incorrect terms and expressions are transferred from the L2 to the L1 and, gradually, the correct L1 terms and expressions stop being used and some even eventually become inaccessible.

### Reverse transfer

Reverse transfer was inherent in Weinreich’s definition of interference in his book *Languages in Contact*. He formulated it as: “those instances of deviation from the norms of either language which occur in the speech of bilinguals as a result of the familiarity with more than one language, i.e. as a result of language contact” (1953, 1). In fact, there are two aspects of the definition which can be perfectly applied to reverse transfer. On the one hand, the “deviation” from a language norm and, on the other, the “familiarity” with which an individual uses two or more languages. De Groot et al. (2010) restated Weinreich’s definition as “the influence of the non-selected language on the selected language in language use by bilinguals (and multilinguals) or the influence of an earlier acquired language (e.g. L1) on the acquisition of a new language (e.g. L2)”.

In Spanish students attending British schools, the deviation takes place from the students’ L2 (non-selected language) to their L1 (selected language). Both languages are used with familiarity by students in their everyday lives at school and at home and have been acquired in their early years of life (L1) and schooling (L2). This deviation takes the form of lexical and

grammar transfers from English to Spanish. The lexical and grammar errors identified in the present study are classified within specific categories which include:

Lexical error categories:

- Spelling: Spelling errors are induced by L2 interference. Nevertheless, some may also be L1 intrinsic errors caused by the way the words are pronounced in Spanish. As Hassan (2014) argues, the pronunciation of words influences to a large extent the way they are spelt or written.
- Lexical borrowing: This phenomenon implies the incorporation of words from a learner's source language(s) into the target language, often resulting from a "lack of vocabulary" in the target language" (Holmes, 2008, 43). The most frequent lexical borrowing errors concerning Spanish students following the English National Curriculum can be classified under the category of lexical errors as "transfer lapses", that is, non-intentional language switches that take place "when another language has been erroneously accessed" (Cenoz, 2003, 107).
- Literal translation: This is a word-level error.

Grammar error categories:

- Transliteration: Each item in the source language is given an equivalent item in the target language. According to Cristal (2003), it is defined as the "conversion of one writing system into another". These errors are induced by L2 interference.
- Subject duplication: This type of error is induced by L2 interference.
- Determiner-use errors: This type of error is induced by L2 interference.

Similarly, the level of difficulty of these errors is measured according to Prator's hierarchy of error difficulty categories (1967; cited in Brown, 2006). These categories range from Level 0 to Level 5. Level 0 refers to transfer, where there is no difference between the source language and the target language; Level 1 refers to coalescence, where two items in the source language become one in the target language; Level 2 refers to underdifferentiation, where a source language item is inexistent in the target language; Level 3 refers to reinterpretation, where a source language item acquires a new shape in the target language; Level 4 refers to overdifferentiation, where a target language item is completely different to the source language item; and Level 5 refers to split, where one item in the source language becomes two in the target language.

### **L2 transfer: Models and language areas**

Various contemporary researchers have shed light on possible factors influencing L2 transfer. These are: typological similarity between the two languages, L2 proficiency and exposure, recency of use, affective and cognitive factors, and age (Jarvis & Pavlenko, 2008), which coincide with the factors referred to above affecting attrition, but in this case seen under a different perspective (i.e. L2 (English) influence rather than L1 (Spanish) loss).

Concerning typological proximity, it must be said that influence from the L2 is favoured if the two languages are typologically close. A series of learning strategies are employed to "facilitate extension of competence" (Clyne, 1997, 102). These range from identification and correspondence, which relate similar forms, to differentiation and contrast, which establish differences between the languages (Schmid, 1996). In the case of Spanish and English, lexical and syntactic transfer is influenced by the similarity between them, being both European languages (Rothman, 2010). Indeed, authors like as Croft have claimed that Indo-European languages share "language universals", that is, features languages have in common (2003, 46).

In this sense, Spanish and English are mostly synthetic rather than analytic languages, right-branching rather than left-branching and tend to follow the structure SVO in their main clause. Similarly, unmarked language features are the ones which are more susceptible of being transferred (Eckman, 1977).

L2 proficiency and exposure are also key factors influencing L2 transfer. L2 transfer is fostered by a high proficiency in the language and a high exposure to that language (Ringbom, 2001). This characteristic strictly applies to Spanish students attending British schools since they possess a high proficiency in their L2 (English), and are strongly exposed to the language during their whole schooling period. Similarly, these students have acquired and used English in “natural situations” (Hammarberg, 2001, 23), since a very young age, interacting with their classmates at school. This circumstance also favours L2 transfer.

Concerning recency of use, it must be said that L2 transfer is favoured by recency of use (Hammarberg, 2001). This happens because if a language is fresh in the user’s mind, all its grammar and lexical features will be active and thus susceptible of being transferred to another language in the production process.

As regards to affective and cognitive factors influencing L2 transfer, some authors claim that L2 transfer is sometimes reduced in situations where the learner experiences stress or language distance. The first situation includes, for instance, formal classroom contexts where students perceive a certain degree of stress caused by peer pressure or fear of failure, for example (De Angelis, 2007). The second situation refers to the learner’s perception of both languages as being distant from one another. Consequently, the learner tends to “avoid” using certain language structures which are similar in the L1 and the L2 in order to avoid producing similar structures and incurring in language transfer (Kellerman, 1995).

Age is another determining factor concerning L2 transfer. Having in mind that if an L2 is acquired by a child in his early years, the child will acquire the language naturally under the principles of Chomsky’s universal grammar (1957). In the case of the Spanish students following the English National Curriculum subject of this study, this acquisition is favoured by the fact that they have been exposed from the age of three, four or five maximum, to significant target language input with which they have interacted daily both in formal (i.e. classroom written exercises) and informal contexts (i.e. games and practical work). On the contrary, when individuals learn an L2 at an older age, they tend to experience a stronger cross-linguistic influence in the form of transfer (De Angelis & Selinker, 2001). This is why the age variable has been strictly applied when selecting the sample in this study.

Concerning the language areas of L2 transfer, we can say that such transfer is possible in the areas of lexis, phonetics and phonology, morphology and syntax (De Angelis, 2007), as well as semantics and pragmatics in the discourse level.

Linguistically speaking, in general terms “cross-linguistic transfer is easier to determine at the lexical than at the syntactic level” (Dewaele, 1998, 488). In other words, L2 transfer is more susceptible to happen in lexis than in grammar. Ringbom suggests that for L2 transfer to happen in grammar, the learner must have a high L2 proficiency and be strongly exposed to the L2, to the point that L2 proficiency and input must be “closely approaching that of the L1” (2001, 67). To this, Williams and Hammarberg (1998) add that “the recency effect” also plays a role in determining “the extent of grammatical L2-influence”. Nevertheless, grammar (i.e. morphosyntactical) transfer is more easily recognised than transfer of meaning in languages which are typologically related (De Angelis and Selinker, 2001).

### **Empirical study and remedial work: The ‘Diagnostic test’ and the ‘Method’**

After having proven that reverse transfer is a reality in students following the English Curriculum at school, a remedial work (i.e. the ‘Method’) has been designed and implemented in native Spanish Key Stage 3 students following the English National Curriculum in a British school in the Community of Madrid in order to counteract the lexical and grammatical interferences between the students’ L1 and L2 in their Spanish written production caused by the bilingual environment they are immersed in. It is true to say that linguistic influences between L1 and L2 are inevitable; however, the negative interferences can be counterbalanced by the implementation of a ‘Method’ which will focus on the specific aspects the students are inclined to make mistakes on.

The ‘Method’ was designed based on the transfer errors and mistakes Spanish students following the English National Curriculum (target group and control group) incurred in in the ‘Diagnostic test’. Such test is divided into three parts: a first part, which enabled to me obtain information on the students’ linguistic background, perceptions and attitudes; a second part, which contains errors and mistakes based on structural differences in terms of lexis and grammar (i.e. syntax) between English and Spanish which the students had to identify; and a third part, where the students had to produce a creative written text in which the transfer of errors and mistakes the students incurred in was analysed.

As an example of Part 1 of the ‘Diagnostic test’, we can mention the following:

**Cuando escribes en español, ¿se te vienen a la cabeza expresiones o palabras en inglés que te cuesta expresar/traducir al español?**

Sí, muchas veces.	Sí, a veces.	Alguna vez, pero no normalmente.	Casi nunca.
Nunca.	Nunca.		

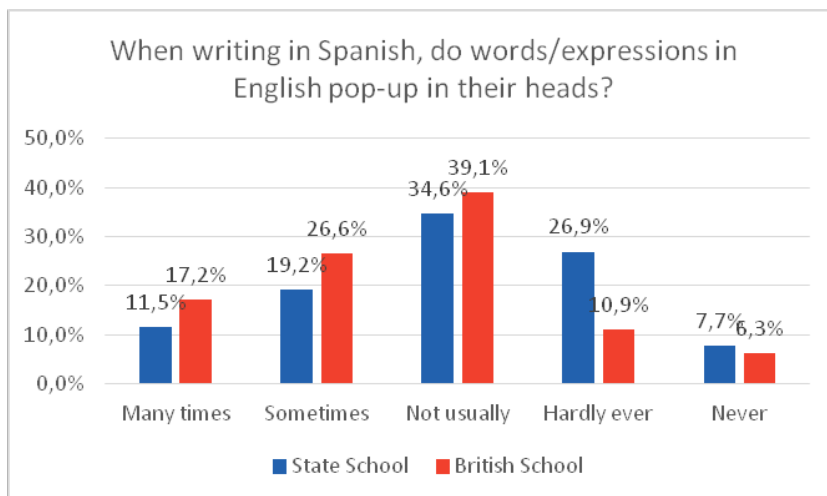
This question has the objective of measuring the phenomenon of reverse transfer and interferences from L2 to L1. The problem with this question is that, in actual fact, what the question really measures is the self-awareness students have of such a phenomenon, something which may be misleading and may not fully correspond to reality.

As can be seen in the bar chart below, which includes the results obtained from students following the English National Curriculum and students following the Community of Madrid English-Spanish Bilingual Program in state schools, 30.7% of the state school students claim to have difficulty –many times or sometimes– in conveying certain English words or expressions when writing in Spanish, as opposed to 43.8% of the British school students. This shows that interferences from L2 to L1 are more common in British school students than in state school students.

In this sense, we can also draw the conclusion that state school students think predominantly in Spanish when writing in Spanish. In fact, according to the results, 69.2% of the state school students never, hardly ever or don’t usually translate words or expressions from English when writing in Spanish. This figure is 12.9% lower in the case of the British school students, where 56.3% of the students claim that they never, hardly ever or don’t usually present interferences from their L2 (English) to their L1 (Spanish) when writing in their mother tongue.

**Bar chart 1: Perception of L2 (English) interference production by native Spanish state school students and native Spanish British school students when writing in their L1 (Spanish)**





The bar chart shows that the two most common answers were, in the case of the state school students, ‘Not usually’ and ‘Hardly ever’, which constitute 61.5% of the students from that group; and, in the case of the British school students, ‘Not usually’ and ‘Sometimes’, which constitute 65.7% of the students from that group.

Overall, the results show that the students from both schools perceive that they do not usually translate from English when writing in their L1, although the British school students tended to be more aware than state school students of the language transfer they are subject to.

In Part 2 of the ‘Diagnostic test’, the students had to read the following text and identify lexical and grammar transfers from their L2 (English) and mistakes in their L1 (Spanish):

**Lee la siguiente historia y rodea aquellas palabras o expresiones que sean erróneas o que no te suenen bien:**

Hace unas semanas mi amigo David me contó un secreto: se había enamorado. ¿Pero de quién? No lo sé, él no me lo quiso decir. Lo único que me dijo fue que yo la conocía, por lo que supóni que era alguien de nuestra clase. A día de hoy todavía no sé quién es, y todo me empieza a parecer un poco raro porque no veo a David mirar a ninguna chica de clase en especial. Ayer en el corredor, antes de entrar en clase, me dijo:

–Jo tío, ¡lo más que la miro, lo más que me gusta!

Y enseguida entramos en clase, por lo que no pude preguntarle más sobre la misteriosa chica.

Ayer por la tarde nos dieron nuestros resultados de los exámenes. Tanto David como yo pasamos todas las asignaturas, ¡no nos lo creíamos! En cuanto sonó la campana, subimos a la librería a devolver unos libros que vencían y, pocos minutos después, ya estábamos en el campo de fútbol corriendo y celebrándolo. Antes David y yo solíamos jugar más tenis que fútbol, pero ahora nos creemos los dos Cristiano Ronaldo.


Al volver a casa esa tarde, me encontré a Laura, la profesora de lengua, en el autobús. Iba acompañada de un chico. Al verme, ella se me acercó y me introdujo al hombre que estaba con ella. Se llamaba Paul, era un ingeniero, y llevaba poco tiempo en España a juzgar por lo mal que hablaba el español. Empezamos a hablar sin parar sobre el colegio, los amigos y la vida en general. Laura es una de mis profesoras favoritas, es joven y guapa, y se puede hablar con ella de todo. Cuando estábamos casi a punto de llegar me dijo:

–Qué pena me da, Víctor, el mes que viene voy a moverme con Paul a otra casa a los suburbios de Madrid... y tendré que dejar este colegio porque está lejísimos de la zona en la que vamos a vivir...

Me dio tanta pena que no supe qué decir... el colegio sin Laura ya no sería el mismo. En cuanto me bajé del autobús, vi que David estaba conectado al *WhatsApp* y le escribí para contárselo. Los dos *ticks* se volvieron azules pero no me contestó.

Hoy, de camino al colegio, he vuelto a mirar el *WhatsApp* y he visto que David no se ha vuelto a conectar desde que leyó mi mensaje de ayer. Laura acaba de entrar en clase y está escribiendo la fecha de hoy en la pizarra. David todavía no ha llegado, algo totalmente inusual en él ya que siempre es de los primeros... ¿Dónde estará? ¿Por qué no contesta a mis mensajes y no mira el móvil desde ayer?


The students should have identified the following six lexical transfers:

 False friends (words or expressions with similar forms but different meanings):

- **corredor** (from the English word *corridor*, instead of the Spanish word *pasillo*).
- **pasamos todas las asignaturas** (from the English *we passed all our subjects*, instead of the Spanish *aprobamos todas las asignaturas*).
- **librería** (from the English word *library*, instead of the Spanish word *biblioteca*).
- **introdujo** (from the English word *introduced*, instead of the Spanish word *presentó*).
- **moverme** (from the English word *move*, instead of the Spanish word *mudarme*).
- **suburbios** (from the English word *suburbs*, instead of the Spanish word *afueras*).


The British school students correctly identified 17% of these lexical transfers as opposed to the 24% the state school students identified. This proves that Spanish students following the English National Curriculum have interiorised the English form of the concept the words represent and transferred it to their mother tongue, applying the Spanish grammar rules to the original lexical term in English.

Concerning grammar transfers, the students should have identified the following six grammatical interferences, which have been grouped into three categories:

 Expression of subject pronouns:


- **él no me lo quiso decir** (from the English *he didn't want to tell me*, instead of the Spanish *no me lo quiso decir*).
- **ella se me acercó** (from the English *she came near me*, instead of the Spanish *se me acercó*).

In English it is mandatory to use the subject pronoun in lieu of the nominal subject (person or thing) of a verb in any sentence. This is not the case in Spanish, where the subject of a sentence can appear or not. In fact, in Spanish the verb provides all the information about the subject and it is not necessary –in most of the cases– to duplicate that information with a nominal subject or a subject pronoun. However, in English a sentence must always be formulated with a nominal subject or a pronoun accompanying the verb.

 Possessive determiner instead of definite article:

- *nos dieron **nuestros** resultados* (from the English *our results*, instead of the Spanish *los resultados*).

In English the possessive determiner is always used when making reference to body parts or clothes. The grammar transfer in this case is to use a possessive determiner in Spanish instead of a definite article, which is what should be used instead.


 Literal transfer of syntactic constructions from English into Spanish:

- *¡lo más que la miro, lo más que me gusta!* (from the English *the more I look at her, the more I like her!*, instead of the Spanish *¡cuanto más la miro, más me gusta!*).
- *jugar más tenis que fútbol* (from the English *play more tennis than football*, instead of the Spanish *jugar más al tenis que al fútbol*).
- *era un ingeniero* (from the English *he was an engineer*, instead of the Spanish *era ingeniero*).

These three examples show that certain syntactic constructions are transferred from one language to another. British school students have more difficulty in identifying these transfers because they do not perceive them as such. In fact, they are so used to hearing or reading such constructions in English that, when they come across them in Spanish, they do not see them as an ungrammatical literal translation from English. Their brain subconsciously assimilates the erroneous Spanish form to the English form and draws the attention away from the mistaken Spanish construction, focusing on the meaning rather than on the form.

The British school students identified only 13% of these grammar transfers as opposed to the 21% the state school students identified. This result is proof of the fact that Spanish students following the English National Curriculum interiorise certain grammar constructions in English and transfer them to their mother tongue.

Finally, as regards to grammar mistakes, the students should have identified the following:

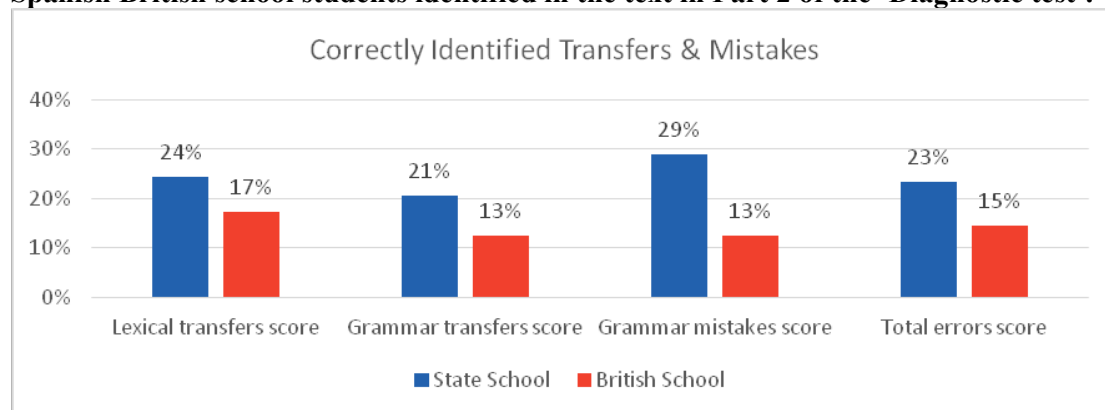
 General mistakes:

- *suponí* (instead of *supuse*)  
– Verb conjugation mistake.
- *a los suburbios* (instead of *en los suburbios / a las afueras*)  
– Preposition collocation mistake.

The British school students identified only 13% of these mistakes as opposed to the 29% the state school students identified. This proves that students following the English National Curriculum are not so familiarised with Spanish irregular verb forms or with specific preposition collocations. Among other reasons, this may be due to the fact that Spanish state school students devote more time to reading in Spanish than Spanish British school students, who are less exposed to their L1 in the schooling environment.

In general, as can be seen in the chart below, state school students are more aware of transfers between languages than British school students. In this sense, the former identified an average of 23% of the lexical and grammar transfers together (see ‘Total errors score’ below), whilst the latter identified 15% of the overall lexical and grammar transfers in the text.

**Bar chart 2: Transfers and mistakes native Spanish state school students and native Spanish British school students identified in the text in Part 2 of the ‘Diagnostic test’.**

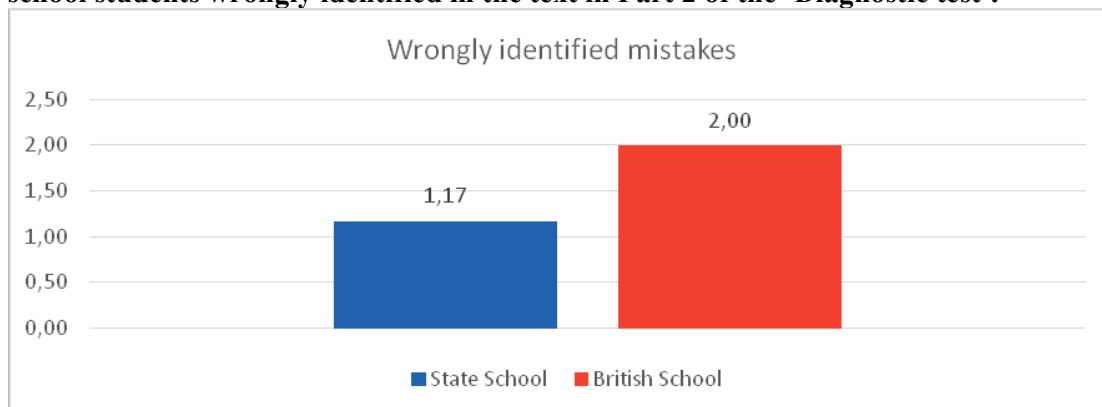


The graph reveals that, in the case of the state school students, mistakes shock them more than transfers: they identified 29% of the mistakes as opposed to 23% of the interferences. It is worth noting that the last item called ‘Total errors score’ shows the average between the ‘Lexical transfers score’ and the ‘Grammar transfers score’. Again, one of the reasons for this may be related to the fact that the state school students read more in Spanish, are more exposed to the language and may, therefore, recognise mistakes more easily.

However, in the case of the British school students, the bar chart shows that the presence of transfers and mistakes shocks them equally. That is, they did not identify more mistakes (13% of them) than they did with transfers (15% of them). That 2% difference is minimal and may be explained by the fact that, since they read more in English than in Spanish, they have not seen the correct terms written out in Spanish as much as their state school counterparts have, and do not, therefore, recognise the terms as transfers or mistakes so easily.

It is interesting that the British school students, despite correctly identifying less transfers and mistakes than the state school students, erroneously crossed out more words and expressions that they considered as mistakes when, in reality, they were not. In this sense, the British school students wrongly identified an average of 2 mistakes/student which were not really mistakes. On their part, the state school students identified an average of 1.17 mistakes which were not such mistakes. These results may be interpreted in two possible ways: on the one hand, they may show that the British school students are more self-aware of the fact that there are differences between the two languages, and, on the other, they may reveal that the British school students are more hesitant when recognising mistakes because their command and knowledge of the Spanish language is less than the one their state school counterparts have.

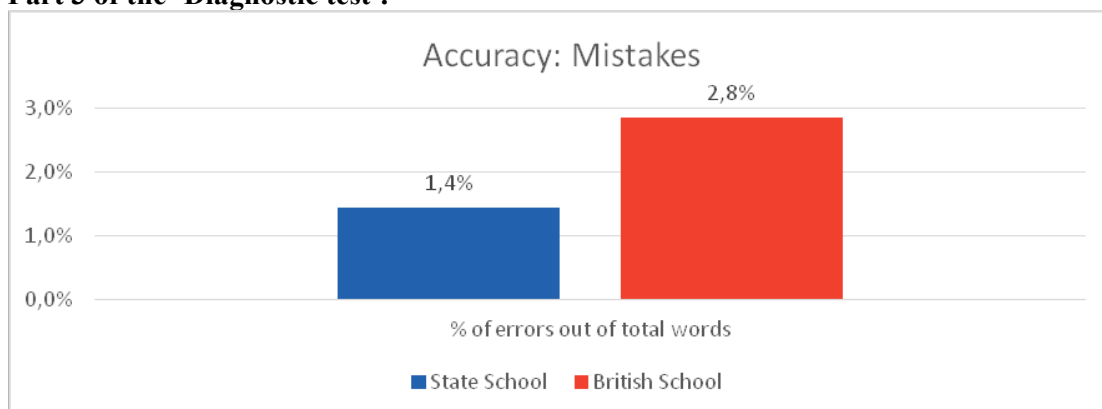
**Bar chart 3: Mistakes native Spanish state school students and native Spanish British school students wrongly identified in the text in Part 2 of the ‘Diagnostic test’.**



Part 3 of the ‘Diagnostic test’ enabled me to evaluate the accuracy of the texts produced by the students. The criteria taken into consideration were the number of mistakes committed by the students and the average number of negative transfers present in their written texts, both calculated on an average mistakes or transfers/total words basis.

Concerning mistakes, as can be seen in the chart below, Spanish students following the English National Curriculum presented on average 2.8% of mistakes in their written texts as opposed to 1.4% of mistakes committed on average by Spanish state school students.

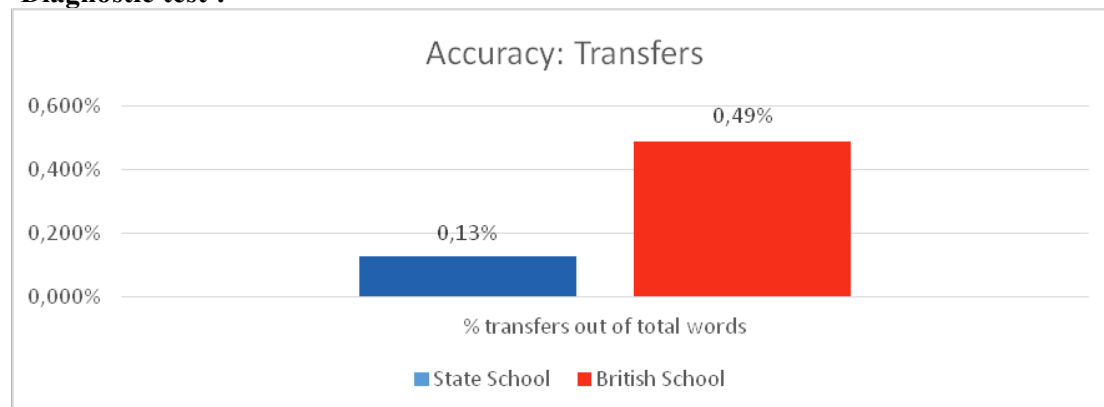
**Bar chart 4: Average number of mistakes (calculated accordingly taking into consideration the total number of words in the text) native Spanish state school students and native Spanish British school students committed in the written text they produced for Part 3 of the ‘Diagnostic test’.**



Similarly, concerning the average number of transfers students produced, calculated proportionately on the basis of the number of words in their texts, it must be said that Spanish state school students produced 0.13% transfers/text as opposed to 0.49% transfers/text produced by Spanish students attending British schooling.

**Bar chart 5: Average number of transfers (calculated accordingly taking into consideration the total number of words in the text) native Spanish state school students**

and native Spanish British school students produced in the text they wrote for Part 3 of the ‘Diagnostic test’.



In order to counteract these language transfers and mistakes, the ‘Method’ was applied on two thirds of the Key Stage 3 native Spanish students following the English National Curriculum (the ‘target group’). Those students were originally in Year 8 and moved on to Year 9 on the following year, where they continued working with a revised version of the ‘Method’. The remaining third constituted the ‘control group’, on which the ‘Method’ was not applied. From time to time, progress tests were carried out on both groups in order to monitor the effectiveness of the ‘Method’.

### Conclusions

Research into reverse transfer is still in its infancy. There are studies addressing the issue from the fields of applied linguistics, bilingualism, second language acquisition and language pedagogy, but they are still very few.

The ‘Method’ designed and implemented in native Spanish Key Stage 3 students following the English National Curriculum in a British school in the Community of Madrid has proven to be effective in counteracting the cross-linguistic interference (i.e. the lexical and grammar transfers) between their L1 and L2 caused by the bilingual environment they are immersed in at school.

Linguistic influence from L2 to L1 has proven to activate the students’ linguistic self-awareness concerning errors and mistakes caused by language transfer. In general, Spanish bilingual students are more self-aware of transfer errors than Spanish state school students. The fact that these cognitive strategies are more common among bilingual students may be due to the fact that they master two languages at high proficiency levels and, consequently, this may raise their metalinguistic awareness concerning language transfer (Jessner, 2006).

This remedial method can also be further developed for subsequent schooling years, taking into consideration the phenomenon of error fossilisation. In this sense, research could focus on identifying which errors are susceptible of disappearing with the years (i.e. with an increased exposure to the contact languages) and which are not, maybe due to the fact that they are new developmental errors, communication strategies errors or that they are fossilised L2 interferences.

The study carried out has been successful in proving that bilingualism has the potential to interfere with productive and receptive skills (i.e. reading comprehension and written

production) by influencing errors resulting from non-native language transfer or negative transfer/interference from L2 to L1.

The cross-linguistic interplay between the Spanish and the English language Spanish students following the English National Curriculum experience in their L1 production is an intricate mental process where students unconsciously apply an inventory of cognitive, metacognitive and rhetorical strategies (Mu & Carrington, 2007). In this sense, reverse transfer constitutes a mental and communicative process by which students activate and use their previous linguistic knowledge. As Jessner (2006) claims, experienced learners express their cross-linguistic awareness by making use their supporter languages during the production of the target language. All this evidence suggests that reverse transfer in bilingual contexts is a reality which may be of future interest in terms of multilingual language processing where more than two languages are present in order to address methodological issues in language teaching.

As Jarvis & Pavlenko (2008) affirm, studies of reverse transfer are still rare. In the future, research should be conducted to address the issue of locus of transfer, that is, at what point in the production process transfer happens. Similarly, research on transfer should be carried out among non-western languages in order to increase the sample of studies on transferability, which are mostly of Indo-European languages only.

It is important that more dialogue takes place between SLA, bilingualism, language contact and language attrition researchers in order to shed light on the field of transfer and cross-linguistic influence in written production skills.

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