

# English at Primary Education In Madrid. Biliteracy or Bilingualism? Writing Skills

## Inglés en Educación Primaria en Madrid. ¿Bialfabetismo o bilingüismo? Destrezas escritas

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### Resumen

Este estudio pretende hacer una valoración (primer acercamiento) del nivel de inglés escrito de alumnos de 3º de Educación Primaria de dos colegios de la Comunidad de Madrid (bilingüe y no bilingüe). La metodología utilizada es tanto cuantitativa (recuento de fallos encontrados en un dictado realizado en clase) como cualitativa (análisis de dichos fallos). Los resultados obtenidos muestran que más de un 90% de los alumnos analizados cometen fallos en un dictado adecuado a su nivel y que, a pesar del esfuerzo realizado por la Administración desde el curso 2004-2005 por implantar una educación bilingüe de calidad (con más centros, auxiliares de conversación, horas de inglés y profesores habilitados), el colegio bilingüe tiene un nivel relativamente bajo y el no bilingüe está por debajo del anterior. Estos datos indican que, aunque la enseñanza de inglés en la Comunidad de Madrid ha mejorado desde su implantación, aún no ha conseguido los objetivos pretendidos (que en 2º, 4º y 6º de Educación Primaria los alumnos obtengan los niveles A1, A2 y B1). Sería necesario ampliar el estudio para confirmar este hecho.

**Palabras clave:** bialfabetismo, bilingüismo, destrezas escritas, Educación Primaria

### Abstract

This study aims to assess (first approach) the level of written English of 3rd graders from two Primary Education schools in the Community of Madrid (bilingual and non-bilingual). Both quantitative (amount of mistakes made in a dictation activity carried out in class) and qualitative (analysis of aforementioned mistakes) measures have been used. More

than 90% of the analysed students made mistakes in the graded dictation showing that, although the Government has made a great effort to implement quality bilingual education since the 2004-2005 academic year (by increasing the number of centres, language assistants, English lessons and qualified teachers), the students in the bilingual school have a low level of written English and those from the non-bilingual school an even lower one. This suggests that although the teaching of English in the Community of Madrid has improved since the program's implementation, the intended objectives have not yet been fulfilled (students from 2nd, 3rd and 6th grades of Primary Education reach A1, A2 and B1 levels). It would be necessary to broaden this study in order to confirm this fact.

**Keywords:** biliteracy, bilingualism, writing skills, Primary Education

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Throughout history, all civilizations have experienced the need to learn a foreign language. Usually, this need has been associated with the prevalence of a certain "empire". Looking back, Greek, Latin, French and Spanish are the main languages that have assumed this role. This day in age English is taking over and is the most commonly learned second language. In Spain the study of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) is becoming increasingly important. For that reason, it is worth observing the strengths and weaknesses of the program and studying whether or not the teaching-learning process of English is appropriate in achieving intended communicative objectives. A comprehensive analysis of all these aspects would need to look at all language skills.

The English level of many Spanish learners is often behind that of other European students' (Eurostat, 2013). Why do students from The Netherlands, the Scandinavian Peninsula, Germany or even Romania have a better English level —both spoken and written— than Spanish students? Why do they become biliterate and bilingual more quickly despite the fact that they sometimes have less guided learning hours?

The answers to these questions cannot be exclusively found in the teaching hours. We have to take into account other aspects such as the Indoeuropean roots of the languages in use (Germanic or Romance, among many others), students' exposure to English, students' profile, social aspects (the dubbing of films, second language learning tradition, family background and profile, or history), teachers' training, and teaching methodologies and techniques, among others (Martín, 2000 y Pastor, 2004).

The following research is a first approach to the study of English writing skills in two Spanish schools. We will focus on work done by two groups of Primary Education 3rd

graders (from two schools —one bilingual and one non-bilingual— located in the southern area of Madrid).

In this study we try to prove that English-Spanish biliteracy and bilingualism could be improved in the aforementioned schools. We also try to explain why this is through the classification and analysis of the problems encountered and the way students face them. This will constitute a milestone towards the improvement of their academic results.

## **2. RELATED LITERATURE**

### **2.1. Literacy and biliteracy. An overview**

When people talk about literacy, they usually refer to the development of reading and writing skills in any mother tongue (henceforth L1) and when they talk about biliteracy, they refer to the development of the same skills but in two languages, usually the L1 and a second language (henceforth L2).

However, is literacy as simple as we might think? According to UNESCO (2005: 147): "At first glance, 'literacy' would seem to be a term that everyone understands. But at the same time, literacy as a concept has proved to be both complex and dynamic [...]". Reading and writing do not only involve learning a set code and being able to decode it to interpret messages and information. When individuals learn to read and write they are not isolated, they receive constant input from outside and, in most occasions, make use of other basic skills (such as listening and speaking) that complement the other two.

Meek (1991), Lawton and Gordon (1996), UNESCO (2005) and UNICEF (2007), among many others, provide a wide range of definitions of the term but there is not a generally accepted one. Blake and Hanley (1995: 89) state that "[t]he attribute of literacy is generally recognised as one of the key educational objectives of compulsory schooling. It refers to the ability to read and write to an appropriate level of fluency". This is probably the definition that best applies to the present study.

From the moment babies are born a communication process is put into practice to understand and be understood. Reading and writing are a step further in maturity and communication processes but there is no ideal age at which these abilities should be developed (Read, 2007).

On this matter, Read (2007: 17) points out:

When children start learning [...] at primary school, there is usually an emphasis on developing listening and speaking skills. Through listening [...], children are led naturally into speaking. [...], children gradually develop the ability to produce language and to interact with others in a more extended way.

If these initial skills are not well established, evolution in communication cannot be guaranteed. As Read (2007) has highlighted, there is a gradual development.

Therefore, reading and writing are two additional basic skills students have to start developing in their early years. Although, as previously mentioned, there is no specific age or time at which they should master them. The education legislation in force (among other factors) will establish and make decisions about what, when and how students should acquire the aforementioned skills.

In this regard, Read (2007: 48) states:

One of the main debates is not about whether children should learn to read and write [...] but when it is most beneficial to start. The answer is not clear-cut not conclusive and depends on the context and a range of factors, such as the children's L1, and whether this shares the Roman script, the children's existing literacy skills in L1[...].

In the learning process to communicate, taking into account the logical steps to develop L1 communication skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing), reading and writing come after listening and speaking. The same pattern should apply to biliteracy. Unfortunately, this does not always happen.

Traditional teaching methods, such as the grammar-translation method that started being used in the late XVIII<sup>th</sup> century and that has continued being used —although substantially less— until today (Martín, 2000), focuses on reading and writing, disregarding listening and speaking. At the present time, the tendency is to develop the four skills paying particular attention to speaking and listening (communicative approach) in order to fulfil social communicative needs.

Nowadays, biliteracy plays an important role within schools that may or may not follow a bilingual program because learning a foreign language is compulsory in any modern educational system. Biliteracy therefore contributes to the development of the two aforementioned skills (reading and writing).

That being said, schools should make a sound interpretation of the different curricula and legislation to ensure that students develop reading and writing skills.

Byalistok, Luk and Kwan (2005: 44) highlight that:

There are two reasons that literacy may proceed differently for bilingual and monolingual children: The first is that bilinguals develop several of the background skills for literacy differently from monolinguals; the second is that bilinguals may

have the opportunity to transfer the skills acquired for reading in one language to reading in the other. In both cases, the relation between the writing systems in the two languages determines the commonality in the cognitive skills required for reading and may also determine the extent to which bilingualism affects literacy acquisition.

The educational community and the administration should recognize that, even though bilingualism in English is a common aim in countries such as Spain, the proper atmosphere and conditions must be provided for it to become a reality.

## **2.2. Bilingualism and the concept of culture**

Bilingualism is a broad term in which two languages, cultures and many other aspects are involved. Here we are referring to bilingual competence since we are focused on the first stages that may lead to bilingualism in the future. Attending lessons at a bilingual school does not mean becoming bilingual but developing bilingual competence to a certain extent. These two terms, “competence” and “bilingualism” are, according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (henceforth CEFRL), identified and summarized in three very simple words “knowledge, skills and attitudes” (CEFRL, 2001: 101-130).

Concerning bilingualism, NALDIC (National Association for Language Development in the Curriculum), which is the national association for English as an additional language (EAL) in the UK, states that it “[...] is the ability to use two languages” (Franson, 2011). They admit that this definition is very simple for such a complicated concept. Bilingualism is defined this way because there is lack of agreement on how much knowledge of two languages is required for someone to be considered bilingual.

Bathia’s and Ritchie’s definition combines the two terms (“bilingual” and “competence”): “Bilingual Competence is defined as ‘the ability to use the target languages effectively and appropriately for authentic personal, educational, social, and/or work-related purposes’”. (Bathia and Richie, 2004: 549).

This definition involves having the ability to communicate (communicative competence) and to communicate effectively, which also requires having a deep cultural knowledge of the languages to be used.

We can find traces of our culture both in the L1 and in the L2 we try to learn. Spanish is spoken in different territories around the world and, although there are objective rules established by the Spanish Royal Academy that apply to the Spanish language, there are always specific nuances linked to the place we come from. This also applies to English. In

consequence, can we say that English follows the same standards everywhere? Can we state that we all speak the same English? The answer is Yes and No.

Yes, because we speak the international English that can be understood globally. That is to say, English has become a lingua franca that makes understanding between people possible.

The need for a global language is particularly appreciated by the international academy and business communities, and it is here that the adoption of a single lingua franca is most in evidence [...] as well as thousands of individual contacts being made daily all over the globe. (Crystal, 2003:13).

No, because we do not speak English with the same features as English native speakers do in their countries of origin (the United States of America, Australia, Ireland or South Africa, etc.). What most people speak is a hybrid English, in which cultural aspects are disregarded.

### **2.3. Bilingual Education in the Community of Madrid**

In Spain there is a national education law (LOMCE, 2013) which regulates education in a broad sense, and two royal decrees both for Primary (126/2014) and Secondary Education (1105/2014). Each community is completely autonomous concerning their regional education legislation (always based on the national one). The legislation in Madrid is related to decrees 89/2014 (Primary Education) and 48/2015 (Secondary Education) which establish the curricula for both educational stages.

There is also total freedom for the Spanish regions to decide to what extent and how to implement bilingualism. In Madrid, there are two orders: Order 5958/2010 (Primary Education) and Order 3331/2010 (Secondary Education). Legislation for private schools and high schools is different but this paper will focus on public primary education.

The main features of bilingual primary schools and high schools are related to the subjects and number of lessons taught in English, teachers' training and profile requirements and external exams.

Students have lessons in English 5 days a week. The only subjects that are compulsory to be taught in Spanish are Mathematics, Spanish Language and Literature (Primary Education). In Secondary Education there is also a second foreign language in addition to English.

In Primary Education, Social Science, Natural Science and Arts have to be taught in English. Schools have the freedom to include more subjects in English (usually Music, Physical

Education or both). The same criteria apply to Secondary Education; the only difference between the two is the existence of additional subjects such as History, Geography, Biology and Geology.

Teachers are required to obtain the *Habilitación* or *Acreditación* certificates (by passing an exam) from the Community of Madrid (C1-C2 levels) or validate their Cambridge or Trinity C1 or C2 certificates.

In relation to external exams, it is compulsory for the students to pass certain external tests (usually Trinity or Cambridge, as agreed upon by the Community of Madrid). These tests take place in 3rd and 6th grades of Primary Education; and the 2nd and 4th years of Secondary Education. Something essential to be taken into account is that if students in the 6th grade of Primary do not obtain the level expected by the Community, they will not have the opportunity to enter the Bilingual Section at Bilingual High Schools, just the Bilingual Program. This is stated in Order 3331 (2010: 221).

In Madrid, non-bilingual primary schools and high schools usually include English in their compulsory subjects. The differences between bilingual and non-bilingual schools are the subjects taught in English (just English Language in non-bilingual schools) and the amount of weekly hours (3 hours in non-bilingual schools).

#### **2.4. Errors and mistakes**

As in our study we analyse the errors and mistakes Spanish students make in written English, this section will highlight those topics.

The learning process of an L2 is never perfect. The lack of knowledge in that L2 leads to logical errors and mistakes. Corder (1967) differentiates between the two by saying that errors happen due to a capability failure, while mistakes are related to a performance failure. Nevertheless, the difference is not always clear.

In this process there is an evolution towards perfection where different stages or *interlanguages* (Selinker, 1982) exist. Interlanguages are independent languages halfway between the L1 and the L2 that the student is learning. There is no limited number of interlanguages, the amount of them is not linked to the type of L2 being learned and they do not necessarily involve a perfect learning process (Marin, 2013: 182-198).

Alexopoulou (2010) studies interlanguages along with errors and mistakes based on the difficulties and problems any foreign language learner encounters.

Marin (2013) tries to explain different error levels and identifies three major groups: errors by linguistic category; errors by linguistic levels; and target modification taxonomy. He also presents some strategies learners use to communicate. Among them, he found that

*simplification, generalization, omission, silence, interference* and *transference* are the most relevant.

Taking into account that when learning any L2 there are some phenomena that may arise and that this usually happens depending on the genetic distance between the users' L1 and L2, Alexopoulou (2010) pays especial attention to *fossilization, transfer, systematicity, variability, permeability* and *acculturation*. As this taxonomy is very important for our study, we will analyse it in depth.

Tarone (2006: 748) states that "[c]entral to the notion of interlanguage is the phenomenon of fossilization —that process in which the learner's interlanguage stops developing, apparently permanently". Sometimes users feel that they cannot improve or that their L2 proficiency level is not advancing.

As for *transfer*, Corder (1981: 99-100) states that:

Transfer has usually been invoked as a learning strategy —the incorporation into the interlanguage grammar of mother tongue systems. [...] The notion, however, of 'transfer' as a learning strategy would account for the generation of sentences having mother tongue-like features which, where if the L1, system were not identical with the L2 would be counted as 'interference errors'.

This is also a very common phenomenon since learners tend to take advantage of resources they are familiar with and that may fit their communicative needs. The similarities between L1 and L2 cause users to take risks. When this transfer becomes common, it leads to the following phenomenon: *systematicity*. That is why Corder (1981: 67) also highlights:

The terms interlanguage and interlingua suggest that the learner's language will show systematic features both of the target language and of other languages he may know, most obviously of his mother tongue. In other words his system is a mixed or intermediate one.

*Variability* occurs when there is a variation due to inconsistent hypothesis or data. Corder (1981: 75) once more explains that "[...] variability in the characteristics of the interlanguage of language learners can be accounted for by appeal of the influences of inconsistent data, a variety of different heuristic hypotheses, and differing treatments in teaching [...]".

Variability is sometimes associated with permeability but they are different phenomena. Sharwood (1988: 175) explains it very clearly by indicating that "[t]he notion of

*permeability* therefore essentially reflected not only the greater degree of instability possessed by learner grammatical systems as opposed to those of native speakers but also to the special role of the L1 system in L2 grammars".

In this sense, permeability is not just related to the proficiency level of users in the L2 but also to the L2 itself, its grammar (closer or further from the L1).

The last phenomenon, *acculturation*, is defined by Berry (2005: 698) as "[...] the dual process of cultural and psychological change that takes place as a result of contact between two or more cultural groups and their individual members".

Marin (2013) states that acculturation is probably the most sensitive phenomenon because of the consequences that the contact with and practice of both L1 and L2 may trigger.

As we have seen, the concepts "error" and "mistake" have different connotations and may involve changes in many linguistic and cultural aspects. Although the exposed phenomena can happen in all languages being learned, each linguistic system will have specific samples.

### **3. RESEARCH DESIGN**

#### **3.1. Objectives**

The main aim of this research is to see whether Spanish 3rd graders from bilingual and non-bilingual Primary Education schools in the Community of Madrid are proficient enough in English (writing skills). Depending on the results, we will be able to state if we are effectively implementing bilingual education or if we are still focusing on biliteracy.

The second aim is to analyse the types of errors and mistakes Spanish third graders make when writing in English.

The third aim is to reflect on whether the English teaching-learning process is better in the bilingual or in the non-bilingual school according to the results obtained.

#### **3.2. Method (methodology, participants, instrument, procedures)**

##### *3.2.1. Methodology*

The methodology used to carry out this research is quantitative as well as qualitative.

It is quantitative as we study the amount of errors and mistakes made by 46 Primary Education third graders when writing their first dictation in a bilingual and in a non-bilingual school. The research is likewise qualitative as we study the nature of the mistakes found according to the classification discussed in Section 2.4. of the related literature.

### 3.2.2. Participants

There were 46 students (boys and girls between 8-9 years old) who wrote a dictation to be analysed. 23 of those students follow an English bilingual program while the other 23 receive a traditional Spanish monolingual education where English is just one subject. There were 2 teachers (1 from a bilingual school and 1 from a non-bilingual school) who read the dictation.

### 3.2.3. Instrument

We took a dictation from *Essential Grammar in Use* for elementary learners (Murphy, 2007: 12-13).

It should be noted that in the aforementioned pages (12 and 13) there are no specific dictations but several sentences related to the verb 'to be' in the present simple tense. The dictation is therefore a combination of twelve sentences chosen by the teachers. Both the vocabulary and the grammar follow the Primary Education curriculum established in the Community of Madrid (Decree 89/2014, 4<sup>th</sup> July).

My name is Lisa.  
I'm 22.  
I'm American.  
I'm from Chicago.  
I'm a student.  
I'm not married.  
My brother is very tall.  
He's a policeman.  
It's ten o'clock.  
You're late again.  
Tom isn't interested in Politics.  
He's interested in Music. (Murphy, 2007: 12-13)

This edition of *Essential Grammar in Use* for elementary learners is addressed to people who want to learn EFL at an introductory stage. According to the CEFR, this book is useful for A1-B1 students (the book itself includes this information).

Contents on pages 12 and 13 correspond to the first unit where the verb "to be" is presented.

As stated by the Primary Education curriculum of the Community of Madrid, this type of content, along with the appropriate writing and listening skills necessary to write a dictation, start to be studied in 1<sup>st</sup> grade. In the following years, contents are expanded and build on previous knowledge. Consequently, students participating in this research should be able to understand and replicate each of the sentences in the dictation.

Furthermore, by the end of 3<sup>rd</sup> grade, it is compulsory for all students to participate in some external examinations in order to assess their level of Mathematics, Spanish Language and English Language.

As for English, students are expected to reach, at the least, an A1 level (both in bilingual and non-bilingual schools). Therefore, students from bilingual schools should find this dictation easy and those from non-bilingual schools at least achievable.

#### *3.2.4. Procedures*

The dictation was performed at the beginning of the second term. By that time, students were more familiar with English as they had been in class for nearly four months. Additionally, they had studied English for the previous two academic years

As a first step, students practiced listening, reading, basic grammar, speaking and pronunciation daily so as to assimilate the rules.

As there are some common writing rules in English and Spanish (for example, the capitalization of proper nouns), simple parallelisms between both languages were studied. Students also copied texts from other sources in order to become familiar with words and how to write them.

After nearly three months with these routines, students faced their first dictation in February 2017 (our test).

In order to follow objective guidelines concerning listening tests, we have followed those established by Cambridge and Trinity exams (listening exercises were repeated twice and reading speed took into account students' grade).

Once the dictation was finished, a final reading was done at a normal speed.

As for the study of the data obtained, a sentence by sentence analysis was conducted. There were 12 sentences in total that were examined by focusing on the errors and mistakes encountered and the amount of students who made them.

The dictations were analysed in two separate blocks. One corresponded to the bilingual school and the other to the non-bilingual school.

The data obtained has helped uncover whether or not differences exist between bilingual and non-bilingual education; if so, whether or not those differences are relevant and therefore if bilingual education programs are working. In the case that they are not, we could suggest how to improve them.

### **3.3. Results**

For reasons of space, it is not possible to include all of the responses in which errors and mistakes could be easily identified; therefore we provide some of the most remarkable examples.

### 3.3.1. Bilingual school

#### 1. My name is Lisa.

All students wrote this sentence correctly. Only one of them wrote "Lisa" in lower-case letters. We can consider that a slip.

#### 2. I'm 22.

There were 4 students who made mistakes in this sentence.

a) 2 of them wrote "I'm" as "**Im**", which means they were not familiar with apostrophes (punctuation rules). We can state this because later in their dictations they repeated the same mistake.

b) 1 student wrote "I'm" phonetically ("**Aim**"). This mistake shows that the student (who repeated the same mistake later in the dictation) was not familiar with the English spelling and pronunciation patterns. He/she transferred Spanish rules (you write what you hear).

c) 1 student wrote "I" without capitalization ("**i**"). In this particular case, it could have been a slip since this mistake was not made again.

#### 3. I'm American.

This sentence was wrongly written by 10 students. Mistakes can be classified as:

a) "American" was not capitalized by 5 students which was a capitalization mistake.

b) 4 students wrote "America" instead of "American". This was a listening problem.

c) 2 students wrote "I'm" without an apostrophe (punctuation mistake). Out of these 2, there was one who made a spelling mistake ("Amer**ir**ican").

d) 2 students ended "American" with a spelling mistake: "americand" (spelling + capitalization) and "Americant".

e) 1 student wrote "**Aim**" instead of "I'm". As previously stated, this mistake shows that the student was not familiar with the English spelling and pronunciation patterns. He/she transferred Spanish rules.

#### 4. I'm from Chicago.

This sentence was wrongly written by 8 students.

a) 5 students had problems with the spelling of "Chicago": **chicago**, **Chigo**, **Chicagon**, **Chigago**, **Chcago**. Some of them can be considered slips while others, such as **chicago**, reflect capitalization problems.

b) 2 students wrote "from" incorrectly (**fron**, **froon**). It is very common to have problems with final -m as this letter never appears in final position in Spanish. Students tend to pronounce/read it incorrectly by using -n.

c) 2 students wrote "**Im**" instead of "I'm", which shows a lack concerning punctuation rules (use of apostrophes).

d) 1 student, the same as in the previous sentences containing "I'm", wrote it phonetically as "**Aim**" (see explanation in sentence 2).

5. *I'm a student.*

There were 9 students who made a mistake when writing this sentence.

a) 3 students wrote "I'm" incorrectly. 2 of them omitted the apostrophe (punctuation mistake), "**Im**". These students were the same as in the previous sentences. 1 of them had previously written the word phonetically as "**Aim**". For further explanation, see sentences above.

b) 1 student did not write the indefinite article "a" (listening problem).

c) 7 students wrote the word "student" incorrectly.

2 of them wrote the word phonetically, which shows an unawareness of English writing and pronunciation rules as well as Spanish-English transfer (**studient** and **stiudent**).

2 students were clearly affected by Spanish pronunciation as they wrote an initial e- before -s- (**estudent**). They overgeneralized the Spanish rule (transfer problem).

1 student did not write the final -t, likely because in Spanish there are no words with this ending (**studen**).

1 student, **student**, maybe committing the largest error, added an apostrophe (**studen't**).

1 student had trouble with subject-verb-adjective agreement (**a students**).

6. *I'm not married.*

As in all the previous sentences, there were 2 students whose mistake was related to the lack of apostrophe in "I'm" (**Im**) and another student who wrote "I'm" phonetically (**Aim**).

There were 12 students in total who made some kind of mistake related to this sentence and more specifically with the word "married" (**marriet**, **madrid**, **marrit**, **marrid**, **marit**, **marid**, **maried**). These students had problems with the endings due to phonetic issues).

Once again, in Spanish words are written as they sound.

7. *My brother is very tall.*

10 students made mistakes in this sentence.

a) 8 students wrote the word "brother" incorrectly. The main issue was phonetic as "th" is pronounced /ð/. This sound could be identified with the Spanish /d/ (overgeneralization and transfer). We found the following responses: **broder**, **brhoder**, **broter** and **broterh**. The examples containing "h" show that students had seen/read the word sometime before.

b) 3 students omitted part of the sentence. They might not have known how to write the words or simply got lost.

c) 6 students wrote "very" with -b. 2 of them also wrote -i instead of -y, and another one wrote **brari**.

d) 5 students wrote "tall" incorrectly. All of them used -o- instead of -a- (phonetic mistake) and some of them had problems with the -ll ending (**toll, tol, talk, top**). They did not know that they might be using words with different meanings, such as toll, talk and top.

*8. He is a policeman.*

Only 5 pupils wrote this sentence correctly.

a) 1 student avoided writing the sentence.

b) 6 students had problems with "He's". 2 of them omitted the subject and 2 others used the possessive pronoun "**his**". In both cases students showed the existence of phonetic problems and a lack of knowledge of English grammatical rules. 1 student wrote "her." Finally, another student wrote "He's" as "he is". He might not have interiorized the punctuation rules (apostrophes).

c) 15 students could not write "policeman" correctly. In all the cases, they wrote it phonetically. 14 of them wrote: **polisman, plisman, polsemen, polesman, polation, policiman, polieman, policieman, and polioman.**

d) One student wrote the collective noun "police". This student probably had doubts about the compound word "policeman" and opted to write something he/she knew that could be correct.

*9. It's ten o'clock.*

5 students wrote this sentence correctly and 6 more made only a very simple mistake related to the word "o'clock". They forgot the apostrophe. English punctuation is difficult to understand for Spanish students at early stages.

As for the rest, we had the following examples:

a) 1 student omitted the sentence.

b) Concerning, "It's", 3 students just wrote the pronoun "It" without the verb. They showed a lack of grammatical knowledge, as in English all sentences need a subject. 4 students wrote "Its" which could mean two things: either they had problems with apostrophes or they lacked grammatical knowledge (subject+verb "to be" is not the same as a possessive pronoun).

c) 11 students had problems with the spelling of "o'clock". The different spelling options were: **o'cllok, oclok, ocloc, okolok, o clock, o kloc, o clok.** All of them were related to phonetics and the transfer from Spanish rules.

*10. You're late again.*

As in sentences 8 and 9, only 5 students made no mistakes. 2 other students wrote this sentence perfectly but did not contract the verb. Their sentence was: "You are late again."

1 student omitted it.

15 students made some kind of mistake.

a) 8 students wrote "You're" incorrectly. 2 wrote the possessive adjective "**Your**". Although they are pronounced in the same way (homophones), they are not interchangeable. Students showed a grammatical lack.

1 student wrote the subject but not the verb ("**You**"). Again an important grammatical mistake took place.

5 students showed a lack of very basic English by writing: **yoo ar, yuor, yor, llour are**. They wrote things that sound similar but have no meaning.

b) 8 students wrote "late" wrongly. In most cases, they made a phonetic mistake: **leit, leyt, lite\*, later\*, liter\*, let\***. "Lite", "liter" and "let" (with asterisks) show that the students did not recognize the pronunciation of the English vowels. As for "later", although this word exists, the student might have been absent for a second or might have misinterpreted.

c) Concerning "again", 2 students omitted it, while 11 wrote it phonetically: **egen, agan, egain**. "**Egen**" was written by the majority.

#### *11. Tom isn't interested in Politics.*

This sentence posed two main difficulties: "interested" and "Politics". 6 students wrote the whole sentence correctly with only one mistake, the capitalization of "Politics" ("**p**olitics").

a) 5 students did not capitalize "Tom". This showed a problem with the capitalization of proper nouns, a rule that exists in both Spanish and English.

b) 3 students did not know the contracted negative form of the verb "to be". 3rd person singular was written as: **in't, isen't, is**.

c) 11 students wrote "interested" phonetically. Adjectives taken from participial forms are very difficult to understand at early stages. We found the following responses: **interestid, interestided, interestind, interestik, interesited, interesit**. "Interestid" was written most often. This mistake could not be considered extremely important (Spanish phonetic transfer). Listening problems were quite obvious.

d) Concerning "Politics", 7 students wrote it correctly but in lower-case letters. 10 students had problems with the capitalization and the last syllable of the word. When two or more consonants appear together (cluster), Spanish students tend to have problems as this never happens in their mother tongue. The responses were: **politic, politik, polities, politicts, poletist, politis, poletiss**.

#### *12. He's interested in Music.*

The last sentence was correctly written by 9 students who just made a small mistake related to the capitalization of the word "Music" (**music**)

a) 3 students omitted the subject while 1 used the possessive pronoun "his" instead of "he's". Although the pronunciation is similar, they mean different things.

b) As in sentence 11, 10 students had spelling problems concerning "interested". Only one student corrected his/her mistake the second time.

The variations in the spelling of "interested" were the same as in sentence 11.

c) 16 students wrote "Music" correctly. As with "Politics", students disregarded capitalization.

1 student omitted the word while 6 wrote it phonetically: **miusic, miusik, musik, miusek, mosic**.

### 3.3.2. Non-Bilingual school

#### 1. My name is Lisa.

a) 6 students wrote the sentence correctly and 6 only had problems concerning the spelling of the proper name: **Lissa, Lyssa, Elisa, Lissi**. These mistakes could be considered unimportant compared to, for example, those related to verbs, common nouns, adjectives or adverbs. Proper nouns do not always follow a fixed pronunciation pattern (there are many proper nouns of foreign origin), particularly diminutives.

b) Concerning "My", there was a tendency to write it phonetically (8 students): **May, Mi, Mai**.

c) "Name" was wrongly written by 8 students. There were several responses that indicated that the students had doubts about some letters (**namn**, 1 student); 3 students wrote it phonetically as **neim, neime, neimei**, and 4 students showed lack of knowledge about what they had to write: **men, neen, nay**. This was an unexpected mistake as "name" is considered a basic word that students should recognize.

d) Only 1 student seemed to have doubt concerning "is" and he/she wrote: **its**. This mistake showed problems related to sentence structure.

#### 2. I'm 22.

Only 4 students wrote this sentence correctly and 3 forgot the apostrophe in "I'm" ("**Im**") which was not considered significant compared to other mistakes.

a) 6 students disregarded the subject in "I'm": **An, Am, Aim**. This showed that they had not interiorized the order and compulsory elements of the English sentence (S+V+O). They followed the Spanish pattern where the subject is not compulsory. 10 more students showed serious difficulties. It seems that they tried to follow the dictation closely but

produced letter combinations very different than the proper spelling: **haim, ham, hoim, Aym, and, Ay.**

1 student wrote the sentence without any kind of separation between words, reflecting a lack of English knowledge: "**imtientithu**".

b) Number "22" was surprising because there were 3 students who wrote **12**, 1 student who wrote **92**, another one who did not write anything, and 3 more who wrote the number as: **tienti, ten two, toaty two.**

### 3. *I'm American.*

This sentence was written correctly by 5 students. The mistakes of the other 18 could be classified as:

a) "I'm" was written with the same mistakes as in sentence 2. Some of them lacked the subject, wrote it phonetically or invented the contraction.

b) Only 9 students wrote "American" correctly. 6 students wrote "America" instead of "American". 1 student wrote "Ameryca". This could be a listening problem.

c) 8 students wrote phonetically what they thought they had heard but it showed they had neither understood nor recognized the word "American": **Amico, aneri cart, a meyical, arerica, Averi cart, a mami can, a merri can.**

### 4. *I'm from Chicago.*

This sentence was correctly written by 4 students. One of them made a small mistake related to the spelling of Chicago: **Chigarrot**. This could be considered a listening problem.

a) "I'm" was wrongly written by most of the students. 2 students wrote **"I"** and forgot about the verb. There was a tendency to write either the verb or the pronoun: **Am, An**. These examples show Spanish-English transfer issues and lack of listening skills. In general terms, students did not understand neither the verb "to be" nor the personal pronouns: **Ain, aiam, on, ai, and, aim, ay, haim.**

b) 6 students wrote "from" correctly while 7 wrote "fron" It is very common to have problems with final -m as this letter never appears in final position in Spanish. This could be considered a transfer issue. 9 students did not understand this word, writing: **fon, form** (maybe in these 2 cases there was a listening mistake), also **fou, Ø, for, four, frod, froim.**

c) Only 8 students had problems with the spelling of "Chicago": **chicago, chicoli, chigarrot, chicaco, Chicagou, Chicado, sicutu, Chigo, Chicagon, Ø**. As we saw, some of them could be considered slips while others, such as **chicago**, reflected capitalization problems. Lack of knowledge and listening issues also had to be taken into account.

### 5. *I'm a student.*

No student wrote this sentence correctly.

a) Only 3 students wrote "I'm" correctly. There were 10 students who made mistakes related to phonetics and wrote: **Aim, am, im, Im, ain, ay am**. It seemed that the rest of the students did not know what to write: **Ø, a em** (among other options).

b) Just 1 student identified the indefinite article "a" while the other 22 did not write anything.

c) As for "student", only 1 student wrote it correctly.

There was a tendency to write the word phonetically, which showed an unawareness of English rules concerning writing and pronunciation. We also found examples of Spanish-English transfer (**studient, stiudent, styiden**).

Several students were clearly influenced by Spanish pronunciation writing an e- before the -s- (**estudent, estudan, estudon, estudidet, estiuran, estution, estiudon, eschudam, estutan, estiubed**). Here they overgeneralised a Spanish rule (transfer problem).

Some of the answers were: **Ø, studon, es tiudam, study, staidon, stelven, steven**.

6. *I'm not married.*

No student wrote this sentence correctly.

Only 7 out of 23 students were able to write a sentence close to the one in the dictation: **I'm not marret, Him not merrit, An not merry, Am note merry, Im not merit, I'm not merry, I not merriet, im not marrying, hay not merit**. Only the first example seems to reflect an understanding of the dictation while the other 6 students seem to have identified three phonetic elements and tried to write them. The rest of the responses were unintelligible.

"I'm" was written like in the previous sentences already analyzed.

There were different spellings for "married", too. Apart from problems related to word endings due to phonetic issues (Spanish words are written as they sound), there was an important lack of English language knowledge.

7. *My brother is very tall.*

Only 1 student wrote the sentence without any mistakes. 2 had non-meaningful mistakes: **My bhothor** is very **toll** and **My brother** is very **tool**. We considered them spelling and phonetic mistakes.

a) 5 students wrote the word "brother" correctly. The main issue was phonetic as "th" is pronounced /ð/. This sound could be identified with the Spanish /d/ (overgeneralization and transfer). We found the following responses: **froder, roller, broder, droder, roster, brhoder, broter, bhothor, bhrothrl, brhoter, brohtehr**. The examples containing "h" showed that students had seen/read the word before.

b) 1 student omitted the whole sentence. He/she probably did not know how to write it or got lost.

c) "is" was written correctly by 17 students. The other 6 either omitted it or wrote it as "its". This could be considered a phonetic and grammatical mistake.

d) 11 students wrote "very" correctly. Some switched -v with -b. Others used -i instead of -y or -r-instead of -rr-.

e) Only 1 student wrote "tall" correctly. The rest tended to use -o- instead of -a- (phonetic mistake) and some had problems with the ending -ll. They wrote -l or other endings from words that sound similarly (**toll, tol, tou, tool, told, tale, stol, tom, tory**). Some used words with different meaning, such as toll, told, tory and tool without realizing.

f) 4 students omitted the word.

#### 8. *He is a policeman.*

No pupil wrote this sentence correctly.

a) 1 student avoided writing the sentence.

b) 3 students had a small problem with "He's". They wrote **Hes** (no apostrophe) and **His** (possessive pronoun). In both cases these students had phonetic problems and a lack of knowledge concerning English grammatical rules. The rest of the students (20) omitted the subject and wrote the verb as can be done in Spanish (phonetic and transfer issue).

c) Only 2 students spelled "policeman" correctly. The rest wrote it phonetically: **polisman, polismen, polisme, policeØ, polisnan, polisnaØ**. 3 examples could not be read.

#### 9. *It's ten o'clock.*

1 student wrote the sentence perfectly. 2 made a little mistake by not writing the apostrophe in "It's" (**Its**) which shows a lack of grammatical knowledge (subject+verb versus possessive pronoun). 5 more had some spelling mistakes concerning the same word (**I'ts, Its, I'st**). The rest of them omitted the subject, as in previous sentences, and wrote the verb on its own.

a) 2 students omitted the sentence.

b) Concerning, "It's", most of students omitted the subject once more. This mistake showed a lack of grammatical knowledge as in English all sentences need a subject.

c) 13 students wrote "o'clock" correctly, 8 had spelling problems and 2 did not write anything. The different spelling options were: **o'clok, oclok, ocloc, a clok, clock**. All of them were related to phonetic and transfer (Spanish-English) issues.

#### 10. *You're late again.*

This sentence seemed to be very complicated for the students as none of them wrote it correctly. Only 6 wrote something readable.

a) 4 out of the 6 students wrote "You're" incorrectly. They wrote the possessive adjective "**Your**". Although the words are homophones, they are not interchangeable. Students showed a lack of knowledge of grammatical rules.

The other 2 students wrote a nonexistent word: **Yoy**.

b) 2 (out of 6) students wrote "late" correctly. In most cases, it was written phonetically: **leit, leigt**.

c) Only 1 student spelled "again" correctly although he/she did not clearly separate this word from the previous one. The other responses followed a phonetic spelling: **agani, eggan, game, ogen**.

#### 11. *Tom isn't interested in Politics.*

This sentence posed two main difficulties: "interested" and "Politics". No student wrote this sentence correctly. Only 4 of them wrote something readable.

a) 2 of the 4 students had capitalization problems concerning proper nouns. They did not write "Tom" with capital letters. This issue showed that they had not interiorized the rule in their L1.

b) Only 1 student wrote "isn't" correctly. The other 3 did not know the contracted negative form of the verb "to be," writing: **is, isen, is an't**.

c) None of the 4 students wrote "interested" correctly. All of them wrote different phonetic options. It seems that students were more familiar with the adjective form, adding the ending -ing instead of -ed for the participial form. We found the following spellings: **interesting, interestin, intreit, intreti**.

d) Concerning "Politics", only 2 wrote it correctly. The other 22 had problems with capitalization (they used lower-case letters mostly). As in previous sentences, when two or more consonants appeared together (cluster), students had problems as this never happens in Spanish. In consequence, we found: **politis, politic, Politans, politik, Ø, police, Politicks, politik, Politick, polites**. Several responses could not be read.

#### 12. *He's interested in Music.*

The last sentence is probably the most complicated to analyze. Maybe students felt tired as a good number of them omitted it. None of them wrote the sentence correctly. There was only 1 logical sample: **I's interestit in Music**.

In that sentence, we could see that "He's interested" had been phonetically interpreted and the aspiration of the personal pronoun "he" was disregarded.

a) "Music" was the only word that could be analyzed from all the students. They tended to make phonetic interpretations:

12 students wrote the word correctly with the capitalization variations and no spelling mistakes.

8 students wrote words that could not be interpreted, were wrongly written or omitted it.

The other 3 answers were good examples of Spanish transfer: **miusik**, **musi** and **musik**.

b) Something that should be highlighted is that some students, for the first time in the dictation, wrote "He's" as: **gis**. Some isolated words could be read although within the sentence they had no meaning. Some examples are: **is**, **in**, **I's**.

### 3.3.3. Types of errors and mistakes

In Section 2, we referred to Marin's classification of errors and mistakes (2013). Following his classification, our 46 students used different strategies to complete their dictations:

*Simplification.* They tended to join words and use apostrophes incorrectly to make things shorter. They should have been able to differentiate between contracted and uncontracted forms. They also missed words (sometimes the subject or the indefinite article) because their phonetic skills were still very basic.

*Generalization.* Sometimes students mixed and misunderstood "its and it's" (and similar samples). This shows a lack of grammatical knowledge.

*Omission.* In many occasions students, especially students from our non-bilingual school, omitted words that they did not know or recognize.

*Silence.* This strategy was not used since we implemented a written record.

*Interference.* Sometimes students used "Spanglish" structures. The lack of subjects in sentences was one example.

*Transference.* Phonetic transferences were quite common. Students tended to guess words or letters they did not know by applying Spanish pronunciation rules to consonant endings of words.

Interference and transference were, without a doubt, the two strategies students used the most in this study.

One's own culture plays an essential role in the way a person writes and speaks. As Kramsch (1998: 3) states: "Through all its verbal and non-verbal aspects, language embodies cultural reality". According to this statement, the students' cultural components were behind every dictation in which traces of Spanish were found.

## 4. DISCUSSION

According to the aforementioned errors and mistakes, we can see that the dictation provided important information about the English level of the 46 students.

Table 1. Mistaken Students in Bilingual and Non-Bilingual Schools per Sentence

SENTENCE No.	Bilingual School (out of 23)	Non-Bilingual School (out of 23)
1	0	17
2	4	18
3	10	18
4	8	19
5	9	23
6	9	23
7	10	22
8	18	23
9	18	22
10	15	23
11	17	23
12	14	23

The results reveal that there are two important aspects to be discussed.

One aspect is related to the high number of mistakes made by students from ordinary education (Non-Bilingual School column). Apart from their lack of basic English knowledge compared to students from bilingual education (Bilingual School column), the organisation of what they wrote showed a writing literacy problem in English. The other aspect arises in the in-depth analysis provided in Section 3, where we can note that most pupils (above 90%) were neither able to recognize what was read in the dictation nor to build a logical sentence close to the original one.

Concerning students from the bilingual program, although their results were much better than those from ordinary education students, their mistakes were substantial. This is remarkable as these students have been in English bilingual education since their 1st year of Primary Education.

The dictation should have been easy for the students as the grammar was based on the present forms of the verb "to be". According to Decree 89/2014 that establishes the curriculum for Primary Education in the Community of Madrid, this content is firstly taught in 1<sup>st</sup> year of Primary, and is expanded upon in 2<sup>nd</sup> and in 3<sup>rd</sup> grades. Order 5958/2010, that governs bilingual schools in the Community of Madrid, highlights that this content has to be acquired at the end of the first cycle of Primary Education (when pupils finish their 2<sup>nd</sup> year of Primary school). This Order states that even the future "to be

going to" and the simple past should be introduced in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade. So, in theory, any effective and comprehensive bilingual program should enhance, promote and, in the end, teach students so as to reach an optimum level of biliteracy (Field, 2014).

The results reflect that there might be a teaching problem in the bilingual school. As bilingual education is still a recent model that is gradually being implemented (it started in 2004-2005 in 26 public schools and now is present in 353), many Primary Education centres are improving their internal functioning and new teachers are becoming qualified to teach in these schools.

The learning of writing skills is difficult. "Writing is the most difficult task for learners [...] Clearly, pupils' listening, speaking and reading skills will evolve at a faster pace than their writing skills [...]" (Order 5958, 2010: 45). However, in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade writing should not be new but something in progress.

As far as we knew, there was no correlation between the teaching of the L1 and the L2 in the schools subject to study.

Therefore it is unlikely that the situation that Wiese (2004: 70) describes occurs at our particular bilingual education centre:

Bilingual education programme models incorporate instruction in the native language and English, and beginning literacy instruction in the native language for language minority students. According to a growing body of research, knowledge that one acquires through one language will pave the way for knowledge acquisition in the second language.

The lack of the aforementioned connection stops the natural process of language acquisition and makes literacy in the L2 (English) difficult.

Among the difficulties these students encountered, we found that many of them recognized what they heard but that they were not able to properly reproduce it as they still lacked reading and writing skills.

During the activity, some students demonstrated frustration. Bilingual programs should aim to continue teaching the basic grammatical and spelling rules in a way that makes students feel secure and happy. Teachers' training is essential if we really want our students to advance. This is exactly what Cevallos (2014: ii) highlights:

Recommendations are offered for stakeholders, such as the need to include courses in biliteracy as part of the initial teaching license, deliver courses in Spanish, and provide practicum experiences that prepare bilingual teachers and reading specialists to collaborate with colleagues and families.

In theory, "bilingual education programmes are socially constructed, not implemented, at both the school and classroom level" (Wiese, 2004: 86). That is to say, the management teams and teachers should work together in order to make our students learn effectively and meet the social needs stated in the legislation.

Another issue is related to the type of errors and mistakes made by the students. If we refer back to Section 2, we can see that our 3rd graders made mistakes, not errors. We can state this because they are involved in a learning process and their English knowledge is not totally developed yet. They do not have bad habits, they simply try to communicate and use the knowledge that they have.

To conclude, this first approach in analyzing bilingualism and biliteracy through the observation of writing skills has been both enriching and revealing. Broader research may lead us to acknowledge that Primary Education schools in the Community of Madrid should change their teaching methodology, where teachers are a key element.

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