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## Computer assisted focus on form to minimise lexical errors in young learners<sup>1</sup>

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### Resumen

El componente léxico juega un papel muy importante en los primeros estadios de la adquisición de lenguas. Por lo tanto es esencial aprender y usar las palabras de manera apropiada. Basándonos en los resultados obtenidos en un estudio sobre competencia léxica en inglés de 283 alumnos de primaria hispanohablantes, en este artículo mostramos una forma de enseñanza de vocabulario a aprendices jóvenes de inglés. Con el fin de disminuir la producción de errores léxicos y motivar al alumnado se aplica un Enfoque en la Forma combinado con un tipo de Enseñanza de Lenguas Asistida por Ordenador. Ilustramos esta práctica con dos tipos de actividades, una de ellas centrada en errores ortográficos y la otra en errores de elección de palabra debidos a transferencia.

**Palabras clave:** Error léxico, Enfoque en la Forma, Enseñanza de Lenguas Asistida por Ordenador, Educación primaria, Lengua inglesa.

### Abstract

The lexical component plays a paramount role in the first stages of language acquisition. Hence, it is crucial to learn and use words appropriately. Based on the results obtained on a study carried out on the lexical competence in English of 283 Spanish speaking primary learners, the present article investigates a way of teaching vocabulary to young Spanish learners of English. With the aim of diminishing lexical error production and motivate learners, we adopt a Focus on Form approach enhanced by the use of computer assisted language teaching. Two types of activities are proposed to illustrate this practice: one of them focuses on spelling errors and the other on word choice errors due to transfer.

**Keywords:** Lexical error, Focus on Form (FonF), Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL), Primary education, English language.

### Introduction

Words are a central component of communication; they serve the purpose of transmitting our messages. Compared to words, grammar represents a mere instrument to better articulate those ideas, being just an auxiliary element in communication. Moreover, in the first stages of language acquisition the lexical component plays a paramount role. (Harley 1995). Considering this, it is essential that words be learned and used appropriately.

The aims of our paper are manifold: 1. Stress the importance of some kind of direct teaching of vocabulary within the current meaning-/ process-oriented paradigm of language teaching; 2. Detect most frequent lexical errors in the written production of young learners; and 3. Propose a computer assisted FonF

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model to deal with vocabulary learning by young learners, and thus, minimise their most frequent lexical errors.

The paper is organised around three different parts: the first part covers the different dimensions involved in knowing a word, using a word (lexical errors), and teaching a word (implicit or explicit teaching to young learners, teaching techniques, use of CALL); the second part includes a brief summary of a study carried out on the lexical competence in English of 283 Spanish speaking primary learners whose results on lexical errors serve as the basis and justification of two types of vocabulary instruction exercises proposed in the third part of this paper.

## 1. Learning and teaching a word

### 1.1 Knowing a word

Different authors have provided their definitions on what knowing a word implies in language learning. Common aspects can be pointed out.

Based on Richards (1976) and Nation (1988), Laufer (1990: 148) sets out the following components of word knowledge: Form: recognizing the spoken and written form, being able to pronounce and spell the word correctly; Word structure: recognizing the basic free morpheme and the bound morphemes; being able to produce some derivations of the word; Syntactic pattern or behaviour of the word in a phrase or sentence; Meaning: paying attention to three types of meaning, i.e. referential, affective and pragmatic meaning.

On his part, Ellis (1995) points out that learning a word is recognizing it as a word and entering it into the mental lexicon. He specifies the following factors of what knowing a word means: listen to the word; read it, recognize a new orthographic pattern; pronounce it; write it, use the new orthographic pattern; syntactic properties; lexical relationships; semantic properties; referential properties.

Jiménez Catalán (2002) gathered and described studies on lexical competence from 1975 until 2000. The compilation reveals that knowing a word implies being competent in the following dimensions: linguistic dimension, i.e. phonology, morphology, syntax and semantics; sociolinguistic dimension, which implies contextual knowledge of the use of words; psycholinguistic dimension, i.e. recognizing the word, and receptive and productive knowledge, among others; and a pedagogical dimension, i.e. word learnability.

When some of these variables are violated, that is to say, when the learner does not observe any of these variables, then, a lexical error appears.

### 1.2 Lexical Errors: On the Way Towards Knowing a Word

Lexical errors are found to be the most numerous type of errors in several studies (Jiménez Catalán, 1992; Lennon 1996; Bouvy, 2000). For this reason and for their importance in foreign language communication and assessment, they need special consideration (see Ambroso, 2000). Lexical errors are of extreme relevance in the process of second language acquisition for three major reasons. First, they help the learner realise the gaps in his/her lexical repertoire and, therefore, the already mastered lexical aspects. Secondly, they serve the teacher to spot the problematic areas of second language vocabulary acquisition, and to act consequently choosing the appropriate materials and exercises to use in class, and the particular lexical items to treat and work with. Finally, they are very useful for the researcher to investigate the underlying processes in L2 vocabulary acquisition, providing him/her with insights into those processes. Lexical errors are the most conspicuous feature of the learners' lexical knowledge.

The importance of lexical errors in non-native interaction lies in their role as communication distractors. Several studies (e.g. Albrechtsen, Henriksen and Faerch, 1980; Faerch and Kasper, 1983) have proved that, contrary to what the general belief may be, grammatical accuracy is not essential in communication. Intelligibility and grammatical correctness do not relate closely. However, while grammar errors are not significant in communicative terms, lexical errors affect the transmission and understanding of the message variably, depending on the type of lexical error.

Inappropriate lexical use often results in an inability on the part of the hearer to decode the message of the speaker. Communication breakdowns originate generally in lexical limitations and lack of knowledge (Haastrup and Phillipson 1983). If the hearer misunderstands a lexical item, or simply cannot understand it, a disruption in communication takes place. Lexical errors have a negative effect on intelligibility and, as a consequence, they obstruct communication.

Irritation is a further consequence of the lexical error. Gass (1988) notes that obscure and puzzling utterances can have serious and damaging consequences on the public image of the learner. This learner may be considered impolite, rude, or even rather odd, if his/her contribution in the foreign language is not completely and correctly understood by the interlocutor.

Closely linked to their role as communication disturbers is the fact that lexical errors are judged the most severely, i.e. are considered the most important and serious type of errors, by native and non-native judges, and even by the learners themselves. Their destructive communicative effect is seen as responsible for this negative consideration of lexical errors in learners' production. The more an error interferes with communication, the more serious it is from the point of view of the L2 learner and teacher (Johansson 1978; Politzer 1978; Hughes and Lacarato 1982). Consistently, when a wrong word is used, the meaning is very likely to be obscured, and thus, communication fails or is interrupted.

The work by Santos (1988) is illustrative of this claim. Lexical errors were rated as the most serious ones by a set of native and non-native professors, revealing that a greater emphasis on vocabulary improvement and lexical selection is needed to improve second language writing. The author advocates including vocabulary exercises in writing courses, since faulty vocabulary resulted in an important cause leading to poor grading.

Lexical errors are frequently used as measures of second language lexical and/or general proficiency, and as markers of quality writing, e.g. scores of written compositions are based on the percentage of lexical errors (vs. effectively and well-used vocabulary) contained in that writing, among other lexical measures (frequency, originality, variation) (Engber 1995).

Consideration of these three aspects where lexical errors play a relevant role: second language vocabulary acquisition and teaching, non-native interaction and communication, and second language proficiency and quality assessment criteria, gives an idea of the importance of lexical errors and of the necessity to study them thoroughly. Determination of the particular lexical errors committed by young learners of English, and establishment of the causes that generate them will help the teacher delimitate his/her approach to English vocabulary teaching and devise exercises directed to the practice of problematic lexical areas and to remedy already existent lexical problems.

### 1.3 Lexical explicit teaching to young learners

Teachers should be aware of what knowing a word means and of what kind of learning strategies learners use when facing vocabulary tasks in order to devise tasks or activities aimed at minimising the number of

lexical errors committed by learners, enlarging their mental lexicons, and providing opportunities for them to apprehend new words satisfactorily.

Teaching a foreign language to young learners, e.g. primary learners, is a complex task. Teachers know that learners at this age are not especially interested in direct language instruction. They feel at ease when they interact with language through games, realia, photographs, mime and gestures, among others (Halliwell 1993). However, research points to a new direction which states that explicit teaching is required for success in vocabulary learning even in young learners.

The debate about whether or not to draw the learner's attention to linguistic form is not new at all. Krashen (1989), one of the strongest supporters of the non-interventionist position, maintains that comprehensible input, meaning-focused instruction and extensive reading are indicators of success in lexical learning. Against indirect learning, the lexical explicit position is exemplified by second language acquisition researchers who heavily rely on vocabulary frequency lists, i.e. lists of words which should be taught first, e.g. West's (1953) General Service List.

Overall, in second language learning, the last decade has witnessed a re-conciliation of both extremes by revealing FonF as a necessary practice of direct instruction within a communicative framework. In other words, FonF implies a focus on linguistic form during a meaning based activity when communication is at risk.

So far, FonF has been mostly applied to grammar rather than to lexis. Current research sheds a light on the need of some kind of lexical direct instruction in a formal context as evidenced in the results reviewed by Coady (1997). Long and Robinson (1999) and Swain (1998) also assert some sort of direct instruction and training in lexical acquisition. Paribakht and Wesche (1997) and Zimmerman (1997) provide sound evidence of the benefits of reading plus contextualized vocabulary instruction in detriment of reading alone. Groot (2000) points to the fact that within direct learning of vocabulary, context-free bilingual vocabulary lists are good for short-term retention whereas contextual presentation is advisable if long-term retention is aimed. Some researchers like Laufer (2004) go one step further in providing empirical evidence in favour of the adoption of a Focus on FormS perspective in vocabulary teaching. Be that as it may, whether focus on a particular linguistic form at a specific moment or on a list of forms, the need to include some kind of direct instruction in vocabulary teaching is completely research supported.

To our knowledge, no study targeting teaching vocabulary to young learners through FonF has been attempted (Laufer, personal communication, January 2, 2005). It seems clear that learners' characteristics match a content-oriented model of language teaching more than one oriented exclusively to language, that is to say, they prefer an implicit way of learning more than an explicit one. However, when coping with vocabulary it is an undeniable fact that, for communication purposes, children need to learn the first 1000-2000 most common words as soon as possible. Then, they will have to be first exposed to direct teaching of these word lists before they follow indirect, implicit or independent ways of learning in a formal environment (Hunt and Beglar 1998).

#### 1.4. Computer Assisted Focus on Form

Computers' technical features appear as extremely useful in fostering vocabulary teaching. On the one hand, computers are intrinsically motivating resources for children. Today's children are surrounded by technology in their daily lives. On the contrary, in many cases computers become children's playmates. On the other hand, computers allow multimodality, i.e. the integration of visual and aural features which may be really valuable in the classroom practice, e.g. still and motion graphics, photographs, sound, text animation, use of

colours, voice recording, hyperlinks, or access to Internet resources (online dictionaries, glossaries, thesauri, etc.).

Computers offer us a way to develop dynamic teaching/learning activities. Regarding vocabulary teaching, most studies show positive effects of computer use. Wood (2001:182-184) points to some possible capabilities of new technologies to develop learners' lexical knowledge, e.g. to stimulate the deep processing of new words or to provide opportunities to apply new words to novel situations. Wood (2001:179) also refers to the positive effects of using hypertext versus linear text in activities designed to enhance children's vocabulary learning: it allows children to more readily tap into prior knowledge, to create semantic webs, to experience a new word in a variety of contexts, to take charge of their own learning by selecting the links that satisfy their curiosity, or to access online definitions, glossaries or dictionaries.

Research carried out by Al-Seghayer (2001) on the impact of glossing individual vocabulary items suggests that the use of printed text definition coupled with videoclips or animations is more effective than a still picture or a printed text definition alone. One of the reasons the author provides is that «video better builds a mental image, better creates curiosity leading to increased concentration, and embodies an advantageous combination of modalities (vivid or dynamic image, sound and printed text)» (Al-Seghayer 2001:202). The same results are obtained in a study by Clement (1997) where participants working with a motion graphics software showed superiority over a still graphics group.

## 2. Corpus

The following sections offer a brief summary of a research study on the lexical competence in English of Spanish speaking primary learners. The results yielded by the analysis and classification of lexical errors, (regarding their origin and considering what they reveal about vocabulary learning processes and strategies in English), will be used as the basis and justification of the proposed vocabulary instruction exercises collected in the third and last part of this paper. The data here used are part of the data collected for the research project BFF 2003-04009-C02-02 funded by the Spanish Ministry of Science and Technology.

### 2.1. Subjects

A total of 283 subjects participated in the study. These were Spanish-speaking beginner learners of English. All were 4<sup>th</sup> graders, and therefore, of around 10 years of age. Participants come from four primary schools in Logroño. Intact classes, representative of typical Spanish educational system, beginner learners of English as a foreign language, were chosen for the experiment. The production of 270 subjects was at the researcher's disposal.

Subjects had received a total of 419 hours of instruction in English to ensure consistency in the level of the participants, two level tests were implemented. These tests were a cloze procedure and a reading comprehension passage taken from the *Key English Tests* from the KET series of Cambridge University Press (2003).

### 2.2. Materials and procedures

The instruments used for the experiment were the written compositions produced by the young subjects. A 30 minute subject-bound composition was implemented by each participant, where they simulated writing a letter to a prospective English host family. In that letter they had to introduce themselves and talk about their family, their school, their hometown, their hobbies, and any other interesting thing.

This topic was chosen for two major reasons. First, it presented the advantage that it was subject-based and it somehow limited the content of the essays. However, it was also a very broad topic that allowed for a great variety of language structures and a wide range of vocabulary items, since it did not impose any great constraints on the type of language, vocabulary and grammar expected. Thus, differences in the resulting essays concerning length or thematic and linguistic content due to varying subject knowledge were ruled out.

Compositions were transformed into a computer-readable format, read and scrutinised for lexical errors. A total of 1576 lexical errors were identified, described, analysed, and classified. Repeated lexical errors by the same subject were not considered. Lexical errors were defined as deviations from the lexical norm in any way, i.e. at the phonetic/ orthographic level, at the morphological, syntactical, semantic or pragmatic levels. These lexical errors are, in short, the result of the wrong form or use of vocabulary items. Once the lexical errors contained in the 270 compositions were spotted, their analysis began. It consisted in determining the form (descriptive analysis) and source (interpretative analysis) of the lexical errors, and according to this information, they were classified into a taxonomy.

In order to determine the underlying psycholinguistic processes going on in vocabulary learning and to find out what happens during that acquisition process, i.e. learning and communication strategies, not only a definition of the object of study is necessary, but also a working taxonomy of lexical errors. This categorisation should provide information about the form and the source of the lexical error, so that it can be traced back to its origin.

In the taxonomy used in the present study, two main categories are distinguished: spelling and word choice errors. A spelling lexical error is an error in which the learner simply miswrites an existing English word:

- 1) I'm *beautifull*.

A word choice error originates when the learner chooses the wrong word for that particular context:

- 2) My *happy birthday* is in the autumn

*happy birthday* is used instead of *birthday* or in

- 3) I *leave* in the Spain

*leave* instead of *live*. In these cases the wrongly chosen word exists in English, although with a different meaning and/or use. However, the most frequent type of word choice errors generates in an intrusion of an L1 word (Spanish) in the L2 syntax:

- 4) My *pelicula preferida* is The Lord of the Rings

My favourite movie is The Lord of the Rings

## 2.3 Results and discussion

The category containing the vast majority of lexical errors is that of spelling errors due to phonological or orthographic difficulties, with more than half of the total of lexical errors. The following wrong renderings of *birthday* are a good example:

- 5) My *bidray* is in febroary.
- 6) My *birthey* is the third of April.
- 7) My *birday* is in September.
- 8) My *verdey* is day 22 may.
- 9) On friday is my *birdhay*.

It seems that the cluster *-rthd-* is quite difficult for Spanish learners, who cannot apparently remember it correctly. Furthermore, the disagreement between the pronunciation of both vowels: /ɜ:/ and /eɪ/, and their written rendering as *-ir-* and *-a-*, respectively, confuses the subjects and leads to spelling errors. Other examples found in this category are:

- 10) I'm tall, *beatfall*, thin,... for beautiful.
- 11) My *famili* is: *mather*, father, brother,... for family and mother, respectively.
- 12) My *frens* is Mario,... for friends.
- 13) My *ticher* is Isabel, for teacher.

These examples clearly illustrate the claim that Spanish learners have great problems to keep pronunciation and spelling separated, and they tend to spell English words as they are pronounced, such as they do in their L1, Spanish. The disagreement between pronunciation and spelling of the English system is a characteristic completely foreign to the Spanish native-speaker, who is accustomed to the enormous stability of the phonetic and orthographic systems of Spanish, and to the correspondence between both.

When Spanish learners are faced with an unknown word in English to express their thoughts, they decide to write that word in their L1. Confronted with the impossibility of employing their knowledge of the L2 system, learners must resort to the only linguistic system they are familiar with, that is, their mother tongue, Spanish in this case. This probably happens, because they know that both their teacher and the researcher were Spanish natives, and would understand them. This statement can be related to Meisel (1983, cited in Celaya 1992: 57) and Manchón (1988, cited in Celaya 1992: 91) which claim that foreign language learners tend to make use of their L1 knowledge, when they assume or know that the interlocutor understands their L1. Transfer in the form of *complete language shift* is being here used as a communication strategy. Some examples in this category of lexical error type are:

- 14) My favourite *comida* (Eng. food) is spaghetti, strawberries, ham, chicken.
- 15) My class is big, *acojedora* (Eng. snug, cosy) and *espaciosa* (Eng. big).
- 16) My father is tall, big and *lento* (Eng. slow).
- 17) My *ciudad* (Eng. city) is Logroño.

Spanish subjects opt in a number of cases for the adaptation of an L1 word to make it sound and look English. Although they seem to be aware that their "creation" is not completely correct, they underline the Spanish words, write them within brackets, or write them in different size or form, they like to have a try. The most common "adaptation procedures" are addition of an English morpheme, like the suffixes: *-ent*, in *ciudent* from *ciudad* (Eng. city), or elimination of word endings: *divert*, from *divertido* (Eng. funny) or *deport* from *deporte* (Eng. sport). These are clear instances of an overgeneralization strategy being applied. It requires careful observation of the English morphological rules and attentive comparison of Spanish and English morphological systems from which they abstract formation rules to be used in the anglicification processes. The fact that this process demands a deeper knowledge of the L2 system can be considered the reason why subjects in the present experiment use it so rarely. These are ten year old beginner learners with scarce knowledge of the English morphological system, and even of the Spanish. This lack of internalization of the linguistic target system also explains the large number of spelling errors due to phonological and/or orthographic difficulties. The following examples illustrate this:

- 18) My rabbit is small, very *divert* (Sp. *divertido*, Eng. funny).
- 19) In mai house is famili: fatter, matter, *tater* and mai (Sp. *tato*, Eng. (younger) brother, fam.)
- 20) My favourite *deport* is football (Sp. *deporte*, Eng. sport)
- 21) My *ciudent* is Logroño (Sp. *ciudad*, Eng. city);

Table 1 summarises the distribution of lexical errors into types.

Lexical error type	Number of errors	total %
spelling	972	61,67
word choice	604	38,33
TOTAL	1576	100

Table 1. Summary of the results for distribution of lexical error types

Regarding the information revealed by the analysis of the lexical errors relative to the learning and communication strategies employed and to the vocabulary acquisition process undergone, two major tendencies can be observed in the lexical behaviour of the young Spanish participants. First, in those “easy” words, i.e. lexical items they already more or less mastered concerning form, meaning and use, learners have problems with their orthography, more specifically with the spelling of consonant clusters, such as *-th-* with pronunciation /θ/ or /ð/, *mother, birthday*, e.g.: *mader, birtday; sch*, like in *school*, e.g. *scoool*; also with the spelling of the sounds /ou/, *hello*, e.g., *hellow*, /o:/, *small* e.g. *smooll*, and in general with vowel sounds: *muiscic, inglisch, keis*.

Second, the results also show a strong tendency on the part of the learners to rely on their mother tongue, Spanish. In this case, to develop the linguistic and, above all, lexical scaffolding in the target language; to enlarge the size of their L2 lexicon, and to make up for gaps and deficiencies in their knowledge of the second language, either by translating literally from Spanish:

- (24) I don't eat *vegetal* (Sp. *vegetales*, Eng. vegetables)
- (25) My favourite subject is *gym* (Sp. *gimnasia*, Eng. sport);

by adapting a Spanish word to the foreign phonetic, morphological and/or orthographic system, e.g. *plate, divert, deport, jinasty, ciudent*; or simply by including the Spanish word directly in the English text, for example:

- (28) My eyes are *marrones* (Eng. brown)
- (29) My house is very big and *ordenada* (Eng. tidy)

Strategies based on the target language appear to be of little importance and are practically absent from the repertoire of strategies used by these subjects. Except for a few overgeneralization learning and communicating strategies, learners do not resort to the second language to support their process of language learning and language use.

The analysis and classification of lexical errors yield, in short, two major evidences: the important impact of pronunciation and alien spelling on the written performance of Spanish young learners of English, and the influence of the mother tongue and of transfer strategies in the process of vocabulary development in young ESL beginners.

Summing up this last section, when pupils want to employ words they already know (concrete nouns basically), they use those L2 words, although usually committing a spelling error. If they want to say something, but lack the lexical items to express themselves (usually items belonging to the word class verb, adverb or adjective), they simply use the L1/ Spanish word to overcome that knowledge lack.

### 3. The teaching of Words to Young Learners: Some Practical Hints

#### 3.1 Enhancing Word Knowledge through Computer

Most of the computer's resources can facilitate vocabulary teaching. Depending on which vocabulary feature we want learners to focus on we may make use of a technical resource. As an example, Figure 1 displays in a difficulty continuum, the main components of lexical competence which may be enhanced by the use of one or various computer's features (in red colour). Many other possibilities can be taken into account.

KNOWING A WORD		
INITIAL WORD KNOWLEDGE ----- FURTHER WORD KNOWLEDGE		
<b>PHONOLOGY</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Listen</li> <li>• Pronounce</li> </ul> <span style="color: red;">Sound and recording device</span>	<b>ORTHOGRAPHY</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Read</li> <li>• Write</li> </ul> <span style="color: red;">Still and motion graphics, use of colours to highlight new orthographic patterns</span>	<b>MORPHOLOGY</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Root plus affixes</li> <li>• Compound words</li> <li>• Derivation</li> <li>• Others</li> </ul> <span style="color: red;">Still and motion graphics, use of colours to highlight affixes</span>
See a new word	Form a clear visual or aural image of the form of the word / Learn the meaning and/or definition  <span style="color: red;">Still and motion graphics / online resources, i.e. dictionaries or thesauri.</span>	<b>SYNTACTIC BEHAVIOUR</b> <b>SEMANTIC BEHAVIOUR</b> <b>LEXICAL RELATIONS</b> <span style="color: red;">Hyperlinks, online conceptual mappings, visual thesauri. Software allowing movement among parts to express syntactic relations, e.g. Macromedia Flash or Swishmax.</span>  Use the word

Figure 1. Components of knowing a word enhanced by the computer's technical features. Adapted from Ellis (1994), Laufer (1990), Jiménez Catalán (2002:56), and Brown and Payne (1994, cited in Nelson 1998:428).

Heretofore, we have suggested improving the knowledge of a lexical item that young learners may have with the aid of a computer. Besides, as stated above, knowing a word also means being able to retain, recall and use it in oral and written mode. In order to attain this kind of knowledge the teacher must help the learners by providing them with enough practice opportunities, e.g. extensive reading, peer interaction in the target language or writing practice. It is important to highlight that explicit instruction by FonF activities must be present all through the process of vocabulary acquisition.

#### 3.2 Sample Activities

Basing on the findings of the study reported above on lexical error production in young learners, two activities based on a model which integrates computer and FonF are presented below.

##### 3.2.1 Syllable matching

Spelling lexical errors turned out to be the most numerous of our learners' sample. See Table 1. Facing the impossibility of coping with the complicated orthographical system of the English language, Spanish learners frequently make spelling errors. The disagreements in English between spelling and pronunciation together with the differences in the syllable patterning of mother and target languages are the source of this type of lexical errors. Bearing this in mind, it is reasonable to think that acquainting learners with word parts,

e.g. roots and affixes, as well as encouraging them to break up words into syllables would be useful in helping learners to acquire, retain and recall new words.

The next activity addresses the issue of spelling difficulties and illustrates a possible way to treat them. By splitting up the sample word *birthday* and the wrong renderings of this word found in the compositions of our corpus, a series of right and wrong syllable-like occurrences is obtained. The learners' task is to match these occurrences in order to find the correctly spelled word.

**Title: Flying Affixes**

**Age:** Primary school goers

**Description**

After watching a slideshow of rightly spelled words, e.g. wardrobe, spaghetti, beautiful, birthday, learners are confronted with split up words which include the correct version and their most frequent wrong renderings. By matching the right parts learners must get at the right words, either the expected right word appeared in the previous slideshow, e.g. birthday, or newly created words out of it, e.g. bird, they, day.

**Goals**

- Learners must notice the correct spelling of the word birthday.
- Learners must be made aware of the possible spelling errors affecting this word.
- Learners must learn the morphology of the word birthday.
- Bonus: Phonological information of the word birthday can be included.

**Procedure**

Once the most numerous spelling lexical errors of the target group have been spotted, the teacher prepares a Powerpoint slideshow that includes the correctly spelled target words displayed in subsequent slides. Following this slideshow, the screen fills with flying word parts. Learners have to get the right words by joining these word parts.

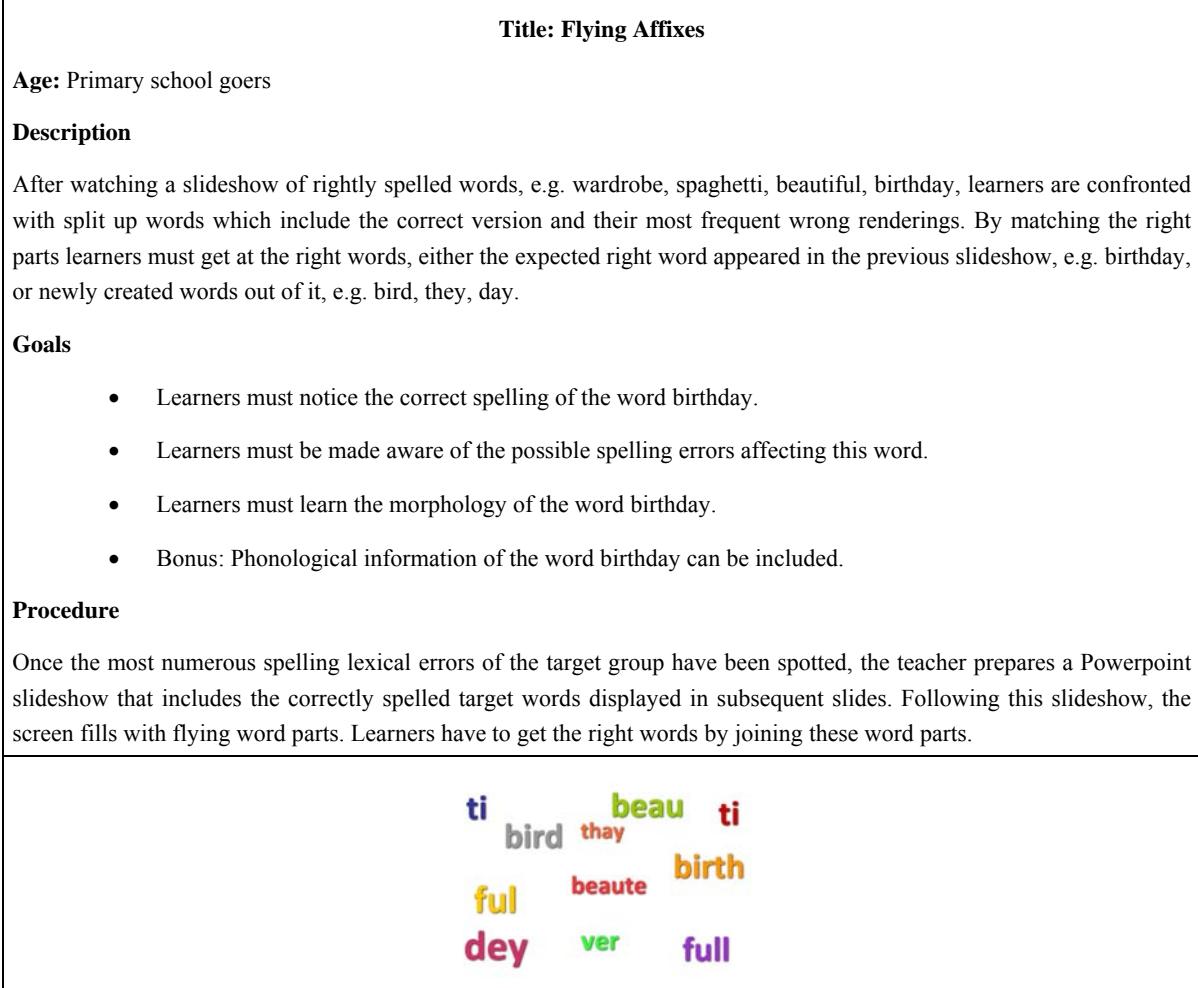


Figure 2. Flying Affixes

### 3.2.2 Visual mindmap

The analysis of the lexical error production by our ten year old subjects has revealed that word choice errors are the second most frequent type of lexical errors. See Table 1. Word choice lexical errors often originate in the insertion of an L1 word into the English syntax. The obvious cause for this type of error is the learners' lack of lexical knowledge, i.e. the learners simply do not know the word in English and they use the only lexical knowledge available to them, their mother tongue. The solution to this lack of knowledge is to enlarge the learners' vocabulary through explicit teaching activities. One of the best ways to make learners notice, learn and better retain and recall words is by means of visual information and motion graphics. (Rieber and Kini 1991, cited in Clement 1997:22-23, 31).

Next, embedded in a task-based framework, a mindmap activity is shown. In its implementation we have made use of computer facilities such as motion, images and sound. In order to carry this out, we have

included the use of an online thesaurus, Visual Thesaurus, since we consider it to be a powerful vocabulary teaching resource in the display of lexical information, e.g. meaning, lexical relations, collocations, morphology, and syntactic behaviour.

It is relevant to point out that in such an exercise new words must go hand in hand with known ones. Learners will get to know those new words through the ones they already master. The basis of this assumption lies on Ausubel's (1983) theory of significative learning.

**Title: Mind the Map!**

**Age:** Primary school goers

**Description**

Based on a visual mindmap of *city* and related words learners have to fill in the blanks responding to the different requirements in each case, e.g. match word with definition, match image with written word, match spoken word to written form, write a sentence with the word(s).

**Goals**

- Learners must be made aware of the lexical relations of the sample word *city*.
- Learners must learn the meaning of *city* and related (new and known) words.
- Learners must learn contextual use of the word *city*.
- Bonus: Phonological information of these words could be provided as well.

**Procedure**

Once the most common lexical errors of the group have been identified, the teacher will devise a semantic network or mindmap with blanks for learners to fill them in as the one shown above.

The map should combine still and motion images and graphics with aural and written information. Thus, the map could be presented through Powerpoint or alike, software which allows the integration of all these features. Other options include more sophisticated software such as Macromedia Flash, Swish or Macromedia Director.

Apart from that, the teacher could also make use of online resources such as websites on different cities, pictures of urban furniture, dictionaries and thesauri.

Figure 3. Mind the Map!

## Conclusion

The present paper was designed to explore one of the ways of teaching second language vocabulary to young learners by using FonF. To do this, we based on the research findings of a previous study on lexical errors produced by young Spanish learners in written compositions. Literature on vocabulary acquisition proves that some kind of explicit instruction is required for a better attainment of lexical competence, i.e. learning words. This teaching practice is not out of place in adult education. However, working with children makes this task more complicated. As shown above, young learners can benefit from the use of computers in

teaching. By using images, sounds and animations children's motivation does not suffer from this focus on form approach. The activities here proposed attempted to minimise young learner's lexical error production by applying a focus on form approach assisted by computer applications.

Unfortunately space limitations prevent us from providing a wider range of possible activities addressing the different subtypes of lexical errors found in the research. Obviously, these activities have to be adapted to the lexical knowledge and lexical error production of each particular target group of learners. The activities above proposed and the underlying eclectic framework should be tested for efficacy in a real school context. We plan to carry out a further study to prove in a real classroom whether activities within this framework do actually result in successful learning of English vocabulary among children.

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## La competencia intercultural en la enseñanza del inglés dentro del contexto turístico

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### Resumen

La aportación de conceptos tan relevantes como el de competencia lingüística e intercultural suponen la esencia teórica para la exploración de los mecanismos y procesos implicados en la enseñanza del inglés como segunda lengua en el contexto específico del Turismo. Abordamos pues la importancia de la lengua inglesa dentro del área del Turismo, con especial hincapié en la profesión reglada de Guía Turístico, donde el conocimiento idiomático y el elemento intercultural conviven de manera intrínseca.

**Palabras Clave:** competencia lingüística y cultural, enseñanza del inglés, guía turístico.

### Abstract

The contribution of concepts as relevant as that of linguistic and intercultural competence are presumably the theoretical essence for the exploration of the mechanisms and processes involved in english teaching as a second language in the specific context of Tourism. We approach the importance of the english language in the area of Tourism, with special effort in the ruled profession of Tourist Guide, where the idiomatic knowledge and the intercultural element coexist in an intrinsic way.

**Key words:** linguistic and intercultural competence, english teaching, tourist guide.

### 1. Introducción

*Gracias* se escribe en ucraniano äÿêóø. La transcripción fonética de su pronunciación sería "dyakuyu". Para un español, incluso de alto nivel cultural, salvo por un contacto expreso con ese país y su idioma, esta palabra que será de las de uso más corriente para los ciudadanos ucranianos resulta absolutamente ininteligible tanto en su forma escrita como su sonido —y eso que pese a utilizar el ucraniano básicamente el alfabeto cirílico, como reconocibles, aquí contamos con cuatro letras latinas y sus respectivos signos ortográficos de acentuación—. En las mismas circunstancias un erudito rumano no podrá hacerse entender en su lengua por un portugués cultivado y viceversa, esto es así ya entre culturas e idiomas del mismo ámbito geográfico incluso cultural o hasta de raíces idiomáticas comunes. Hemos tomado ejemplos de diferenciación que podemos calificar de “medianos”; la incomprendición llega a extremos inimaginables, si cabe, cuando establecemos la comparación alejándonos geográfica y culturalmente como sería entre Europa Occidental con Asia, África, Oceanía...

El lenguaje, siendo la primera, más inmediata e importante herramienta en la comunicación humana se revela con una gran paradoja al mostrarse en los diferentes y variados idiomas que llegan a hacer incapaz, en la mayor parte de los casos, el más mínimo entendimiento entre los hablantes de unos y de otros.

La paradoja de la diversidad idiomática propone un esquema que podemos enunciar del siguiente modo: El hombre siente la necesidad y la curiosidad de comunicarse con congéneres que han adquirido una lengua

materna distinta, con los que, por tanto, es incapaz de satisfacer su objetivo. Para superar esta inconveniencia debe aprender una lengua diferente a la materna que coincide con la de su interlocutor o ambos aprender una tercera lengua en la que puedan entenderse.

Cuando en los tiempos prehistóricos las familias, los clanes y las tribus se desplazan por motivos de alimentación y habitación, entran en contacto con otros grupos humanos de lenguaje diferente al suyo y ya deben iniciar este nuevo fenómeno de aprender una lengua “artificialmente”. Cuando las culturas van desarrollándose los intercambios con gentes de otra lengua se amplían y se diversifica la motivación: comercio, conquista, interés cultural, curiosidad, afán artístico, científico, descubrimientos... llegamos a nuestros días con la globalización a todos los niveles, viaje, economía etc. En todos los casos y momentos persiste la necesidad del aprendizaje de lenguas extranjeras y en cada estadio con tendencia a una mayor apetencia.

Los estudios de la Diplomatura de Turismo por la prestancia de la actividad en nuestro entorno ponen a los alumnos en disposición de trabajar en el sector de modo inmediato: hoteles, agencias de viajes, mayoristas, compañías de transporte; servicios complementarios del turismo: deportivos, culturales, guías turísticos, entre otros.

Quizá en cualquier otro ámbito de intercambio empresarial, institucional, cultural, científico etc., se pueda soslayar el bagaje personal de conocimiento de inglés con medios adecuados como traductores profesionales, programas informáticos de traducción, etc. Pero, en el ámbito de las actividades en que recalcan mayoritariamente estos alumnos, futuros Diplomados en Turismo se necesita hacer uso del inglés de modo personal, aplicado, práctico, inmediato y directo. En la recepción de un hotel tienen que poder comunicarse de modo incluso si se quiere sencillo pero inexcusable con ciudadanos de cualquier parte del mundo en inglés como lengua internacional. En otras palabras, un Licenciado en Economía o en Física tendrá o no que hacer uso de sus conocimientos del inglés estudiado y podrá ayudarse de medios complementarios como traductores o programas informáticos; en cambio, para la mayor parte de los alumnos de Turismo no cabrá en gran medida este recurso a medios interpuestos y deberá enfrentarse personalmente a hablar, entender, escribir y leer en esa lengua para su trabajo diario.

Las cosas, los actos y las ideas moldean al lenguaje con el que se comunican, transmiten y explican. Como en un ciclo en espiral, el lenguaje a su vez influye en el devenir y formación de los sucesos y las ideas. Sabemos que tras cada cultura hay una lengua y viceversa y que ambas se influyen mutua y recíprocamente. Cada lengua da soporte a la manera de ser de sus hablantes, su historia, sus costumbres... a su cultura, en definitiva. Siempre se ha tenido la sensación, sin duda certera, de que hay que conocer una lengua para acceder a la mentalidad, la manera de ser y la cultura del pueblo que la habla; a la recíproca, no cabe duda que no se puede llegar al conocimiento profundo y auténtico de una lengua si se desconocen esos elementos de sus hablantes maternos.

## **2. La importancia del inglés para los futuros profesionales del turismo**

En el marco general del aprendizaje de lenguas extranjeras, para cubrir el afán comunicativo, el fenómeno de una tercera lengua para su uso como comodín, adquirida por interlocutores que no comparten la misma materna ha estado siempre presente. De la experiencia en nuestro área geográfica y cultural en Europa Occidental con el latín y griego clásicos en su momento, asistimos en la segunda mitad del siglo XX a la implantación del inglés como lengua universal o más difundida como lengua comodín. Sin duda la extensión y hegemonía del Imperio Inglés, que alcanza su máximo esplendor y dimensión en el siglo XIX, extiende esta lengua por todo el orbe,

como antes hicieron otras lenguas que se impusieron siguiendo la implantación de los pueblos de origen primero militar y políticamente, luego, económica y culturalmente. El arraigo definitivo del inglés a escala mundial se produce por un encadenamiento entre la vigencia del propio Imperio Británico y la sucesión en este protagonismo de los Estados Unidos de Norteamérica como potencia universal dominante a partir de mediados del siglo pasado, dándose la circunstancia de que la lengua de ambos es el inglés como hija que fue la nación norteamericana del Imperio Británico y su formación como Colonia de éste. Finalmente, el fenómeno de la implantación del inglés como lengua internacional se muestra acrecentado y reformado por el efecto catalizador de la comunicación global y la alta tecnología que se aplica a la misma y mediante una doble acción de causalidad: por la propia necesidad de una lengua común y por la propia facilidad de su difusión todo lo cual ha convertido a la lengua inglesa en este fenómeno de “lengua universal”.

El contacto con el público destaca como una diferencia básica entre el lenguaje del turismo y la comunicación profesional en general (Calvi 2001). Los estudiantes de Turismo tienen que estar preparados para establecer una comunicación tanto con turistas como con profesionales del sector. En la mayoría de ámbitos de negocios, la comunicación se da entre especialistas. Sin embargo, la dimensión comunicativa del turismo es más amplia por su vertiente orientada hacia los clientes que utilizan sus servicios. Esta vertiente tiene su implicación pedagógica en la importancia de las destrezas orales y escritas que hay que tener en cuenta en el proceso de adquisición del inglés para turismo. Dentro de la industria turística, los profesionales tienen que tratar con los clientes por teléfono, cara a cara o por escrito.

Bosch Abarca y Giménez Moreno (2001) destacan la importancia de las necesidades del turista cuando se diseñan actividades en la clase de Inglés para la Diplomatura de Turismo. Según estas autoras, una correcta respuesta a las necesidades del consumidor en la industria turística supone tener en cuenta tres niveles diferentes de formación: nivel de respuesta a las demandas operativas básicas, un nivel de respuesta a las necesidades promocionales e informativas complementarias y un nivel de respuesta a las necesidades personales y subjetivas. Los estudiantes de turismo necesitan un enfoque objetivo sobre las tareas en las que deberán utilizar la lengua inglesa en su contexto profesional y un enfoque subjetivo de cómo la lengua y destrezas han de utilizarse de forma efectiva en una situación específica determinada, es decir, que el enfoque dentro de la clase de inglés para turismo ha de establecer un equilibrio entre las capacidades que se relacionan con los procedimientos y las destrezas personales complementarias que respondan de forma eficaz a las necesidades de los clientes.

Cuando los especialistas del sector turístico se enfrentan a las necesidades comunicativas de sus clientes se dan cuenta que la mejor forma de satisfacer las expectativas del consumidor no depende de la complejidad del proceso de la transacción comercial en inglés sino de la habilidad para captar las necesidades subjetivas, emocionales y físicas que estimulan el éxito de la transacción (Bosch Abarca y Giménez Moreno 2001). Las destrezas profesionales incluyen y dependen de su capacidad para comunicarse desde un punto de vista humano y para conseguir que el cliente quede satisfecho.

Junto con estos datos encontramos que el campo de investigación relacionado con el desarrollo de la industria turística se encuentra en un momento de gran expansión. La cantidad de profesionales con una necesidad de formación adecuada en este campo está aumentando de forma

acusada (García Artiles 2001) especialmente en aquellos aspectos relacionados con la comunicación y colaboración internacionales.

La necesidad de aumentar la competitividad en la industria turística española para poder adaptarse a la nueva realidad tecnológica y socioeconómica de la sociedad actual ha sido puesta de relieve por el gobierno, las universidades y las compañías turísticas en general. Estas demandas están recibiendo respuesta del mundo académico con el incremento de Estudios de Turismo en muchas universidades españolas con una clara prioridad en la enseñanza de lenguas extranjeras, destacando el inglés como el medio de comunicación más extendido internacionalmente dentro del sector empresarial en general.

Desde luego hoy día podemos establecer también la necesidad del conocimiento de idiomas como un requisito importante para poder optar a un puesto de trabajo. Este hecho afecta en mayor medida a las empresas del sector turístico. Las barreras del lenguaje crean en ocasiones malentendidos y un cierto sentimiento de frustración que se puede evitar si el personal de cualquier sector relacionado con el turismo tiene un buen conocimiento de lenguas extranjeras como parte integral de un servicio de calidad (Dale y Oliver 2000). En muchas profesiones relacionadas con el turismo se exige un nivel de competencia en lenguas extranjeras muy avanzado, tanto en los aspectos interactivos como en la corrección formal.

Graddol (1997) presenta una lista de los doce campos principales internacionales en los que el inglés es la lengua predominante. En el sexto puesto aparece el turismo internacional. De hecho, ya desde hace bastantes años, la lengua que prima dentro de la gran industria turística es el inglés (Graddol 1997). Así, Kruse y Kruse (1982) ya apuntaron que la gente que trabaja en el mundo del turismo debe hablar inglés perfectamente ya que se ha convertido en una lengua común para las personas que viajan desde diferentes países.

Un estudio sobre ofertas de trabajo para el sector turístico publicadas por los periódicos ABC y El País, llevado a cabo para analizar las necesidades del mercado laboral dio como resultado un 79% de anuncios solicitando conocimiento de la lengua inglesa como requisito imprescindible (García Berzosa 1999). Las preferencias de las empresas varían: unas veces solicitan competencia escrita, otras competencia oral y, en muchas ocasiones, requieren un dominio de la lengua inglesa tanto oral como escrito.

Estas conclusiones parecen ser lógicas si tenemos en cuenta que el inglés se está convirtiendo en la lengua de comunicación global en Europa y la mayoría de turistas internacionales que visitan España son europeos. Además no hay que olvidar que siendo España un mercado turístico emisor con una clara preferencia hacia Europa, el inglés puede ser un medio de comunicación importante para los futuros profesionales de la industria turística en nuestro país a la hora de comunicarse con otros profesionales y preparar viajes para clientes a diversos destinos internacionales. Esto en cuanto a Europa y más concretamente Europa Occidental, pues cuanto más alejado o diferente es un país, digamos de la cultura occidental europea, más necesidad y más afán tienen sus ciudadanos en acceder al inglés como lengua para relacionarse con el exterior. Es el caso, como vimos, de los países emergentes de Asia, hoy con China a la cabeza, que incluso están llamados a aportar al inminente futuro del turismo una gran masa de consumidores, y fenómeno que en su momento ya

comenzó con los antiguos países comunistas del este de Europa que en lenta pero continua progresión van enviando cada vez más turistas concretamente a España, siendo ellos mismos receptores.

### 3. La competencia lingüística e intercultural

El desarrollo de la competencia lingüística es esencial para el desarrollo de la competencia cultural, y ambas son una condición *sine qua non* para la adquisición de una verdadera competencia comunicativa en una lengua extranjera, para que el estudiante se sienta a gusto y cómodo en ese nuevo mundo que va desvelando. Por lo tanto, la dimensión sociocultural debe constituir una parte integral del currículo —especie de marco directriz (Lifszyc y Schammah 1998) que arrope los contenidos léxico-morfo-sintácticos— y no quedar relegada a un segundo plano en el proceso de enseñanza/aprendizaje. Esta revalorización de la importancia conjunta del contexto y del estímulo lingüístico y cultural auténtico se manifiesta ya en el nuevo protagonismo otorgado a lo cultural en los materiales y métodos elaborados recientemente.

Nos detendremos en señalar la relevancia que adquiere la competencia intercultural; nos referimos a la necesidad que tiene el aprendiz de otra lengua de conocer la cultura de los hablantes de la misma.

Dubin et al. (1986) se refieren al proceso lector como un comportamiento cognitivo basado en los distintos tipos de conocimientos de la estructura cognitiva del sujeto. Dicha estructura la integran sus conocimientos, que constituyen a su vez lo que se ha llamado esquema (*schema* o *schemata* en inglés) en la memoria a largo plazo. Smith (1972) define la memoria a largo plazo que según él consiste en nuestro conocimiento más o menos estable del mundo, frente a la memoria a corto plazo que es un receptáculo transitorio para todo aquello que azarosamente atendemos en cualquier momento. Cuanto mejor sea la destreza lectora de una persona, más rápido podrá llevar a cabo el proceso. Durante la lectura el sujeto hace predicciones sobre el significado del texto, a medida que lo va reconstruyendo. Los resultados dependen de sus conocimientos y de su capacidad de razonamiento. Se trata de un proceso doblemente interactivo, en tanto que abarca la interacción del lector con sus conocimientos y con el texto.

La enseñanza comunicativa se caracteriza por estar centrada en el alumno. El papel del profesor no es sólo de transmisor de conocimientos sino que ha de ayudar al alumno a construir una nueva realidad: la de la lengua meta. Es una responsabilidad como docentes inducir a nuestros alumnos a la reflexión sobre su propia realidad, a partir de la cual han desarrollado su identidad. Sólo así podrán entender la lengua objeto (LO) como una realidad en sí misma. Tal y como afirma Yule (1998) las lenguas reflejan las culturas.

Esta observación no implica en ningún caso, que no sean tenidos en cuenta los aspectos relacionados con la competencia lingüística. Cassani et al. (1998) definen la lengua como la llave de la cultura, ya que nos permite transmitir el mundo de fuera y el de dentro y organizar nuestro pensamiento. La lengua es también un corpus teórico importante que define las formas y las relaciones de un código.

Consideramos de gran importancia el papel del elemento sociocultural dentro del aprendizaje de segundas lenguas desde la perspectiva intercultural y para ello abogamos por subrayar la importancia de adoptar una postura integradora y conciliadora de todas las subcompetencias que integran la competencia comunicativa. En este contexto, la lectura de textos literarios, especialmente en el nivel avanzado y superior es una herramienta fundamental para el desarrollo de la competencia sociocultural.

En la obra *Mediating Language and Cultures: Towards an Intercultural Theory of Foreign Language Education* (1991), Meyer hace referencia a la competencia intercultural, como parte de una amplia competencia del hablante de una lengua extranjera e identifica la habilidad de una persona de actuar de

forma adecuada cuando se enfrenta con actitudes de personas de otras culturas. La adecuación implica poseer un conocimiento de las diferencias culturales entre la cultura extranjera y la propia y ser capaz también de solucionar problemas interculturales como consecuencia de dichas diferencias. En esta perspectiva, la competencia intercultural supone la creación de una conciencia y el desarrollo de destrezas y capacidades interculturales; la capacidad de orientarse en una cultura diferente a la propia, basándose en el propio sistema de referencia cultural, empleando para ello estrategias de comunicación intercultural; establecer contraste entre las propias representaciones mentales y valores culturales y las representaciones y valores de la cultura meta; al igual que el desarrollo de una percepción de los acontecimientos culturales, planteándose comparaciones no valorativas.

Ahora bien, el proceso de enseñanza-aprendizaje de la competencia intercultural exige que el aprendiente pase por una serie de estadios, que según la visión de Wessling (1999) y de Denis y Matas (2002) se concretan en cuatro etapas: sensibilización, concienciación, relativización y organización e implicación.

En la etapa de sensibilización, se precisa la adopción de un punto de vista crítico que permita reconocer los elementos que condicionan la propia percepción de la realidad, para poder así concebir la existencia de otras realidades, así como formas de ordenación diferentes.

La etapa de concienciación habla de la adquisición de estrategias que permitan indagar e interpretar los significados de las formas lingüísticas, situaciones comunicativas, actitudes y manifestaciones culturales pertenecientes a la lengua y cultura extranjera. Se precisa, pues, un reconocimiento de las representaciones propias y las del otro y una reflexión sobre su origen.

En la etapa de relativización y organización, se requiere que el alumno sea capaz de establecer comparaciones y de interpretar acontecimientos culturales, en atención al contexto en el que se inscriben, a través del diálogo y del contraste de puntos de vista. Se aborda, así, el desarrollo de la competencia comunicativa en situaciones interculturales y de estrategias que permitan la resolución de conflictos, así como la reflexión sobre el sistema y la comunicación.

En la etapa de implicación, el aprendiente tomará conciencia de la adquisición de una tercera perspectiva, desarrollará destrezas que le permitan ejercer la mediación en situaciones interculturales y que, a su vez, propicien en él una reflexión metacultural, así como el descubrimiento de nuevas situaciones más allá del espacio del aula.

Celce-Murcia y Olhstain en su obra *Discourse and Context in Language Teaching. A guide for Language Teachers* (2000) subrayan la importancia del contexto y lo sociocultural en la construcción de la competencia comunicativa.

Por otro lado, las autoras citadas acotan que la adquisición de las destrezas comunicativas en la primera lengua es un proceso que se extiende a lo largo de la vida, no ocurriendo lo mismo con las destrezas básicas que se adquieren a muy temprana edad. Ahora bien, para el aprendizaje de otra lengua es preciso ampliar, cambiar y reajustar esas estrategias innatas, pues es a partir de ellas que se abordará la lengua y cultura nuevas. De allí otra de las ventajas de inscribir la enseñanza de lenguas en un enfoque que, además de situar el discurso y el contexto –otra de las nociones claves del modelo de Celce-Murcia y Olshtain (2000)– en un lugar privilegiado, focaliza su atención en el desarrollo e integración de las destrezas y estrategias comunicativas, refiriéndose a la importancia de combinar el conocimiento de la lengua meta con destrezas y estrategias que nos permitan hacer un uso efectivo y apropiado de la lengua en diferentes contextos sociales y culturales.

Las líneas de trabajo adoptadas por Byram y Zarate para la descripción de la competencia sociocultural –recogidas en el documento *The Sociocultural and Intercultural Dimension of Language Learning and*

*Teaching* (1997)– parten del postulado de que las personas que aprenden abordan el descubrimiento de una cultura extranjera con actitudes y saberes que han sido construidos empíricamente a través de su propia cultura. Por eso el contexto académico constituye sólo uno de los espacios donde tales actitudes y saberes han de ser sometidos a un análisis crítico.

A grandes rasgos, los autores señalan que un aprendiente en posesión de una competencia sociocultural será capaz de interpretar y de establecer relaciones entre sistemas culturales diferentes, de reconocer marcas sociales distintivas en un sistema cultural extranjero, de manejar el conflicto, entendido como los desórdenes y las resistencias propias que puede acarrear la comunicación intercultural.

#### **4. La competencia intercultural en el mundo del turismo**

Dada la variedad de ámbitos profesionales que podemos encontrar en la industria turística, y la condición del inglés como lengua internacional dentro de la misma, es muy importante tener en cuenta el factor cultural. Un conocimiento básico de las diferencias entre culturas ayuda al profesional del turismo a hacer preguntas apropiadas en cada caso y a adaptarse a las necesidades específicas de cada cliente (Dale y Oliver 2000). Algunos autores que tratan las lenguas para turismo han destacado el papel crucial que desempeña el conocimiento de los aspectos culturales que afectan a cada lengua (Suárez y Moss 2000).

Los profesionales del turismo deben conocer las distintas convenciones culturales. Los estudiantes de turismo necesitan conocimientos socioculturales sobre otros países para comprender la diversidad cultural que pueden encontrar en un futuro y poder evitar así problemas de comunicación tanto con clientes como con otros profesionales del sector turístico de distinta nacionalidad. Estos aspectos culturales también están presentes en el inglés de los negocios (Calleja Medel 2002), sobre todo a la hora de llevar a cabo negociaciones (Donna 2000) o utilizar unas estrategias u otras en la correspondencia. Sin embargo, la competencia intercultural adquiere una especial relevancia en la industria turística.

Calvi (2001) describe cuatro componentes que conforman la competencia intercultural que todo profesional del turismo debe tener:

- Identificación y superación de los estereotipos relativos a la cultura extranjera.
- Conciencia intercultural (*cultural awareness*), entendida como la capacidad de reconocer las características de una cultura extranjera comparándola con la propia y con otras conocidas.
- Competencia comunicativa y pragmática, es decir, el conocimiento de los comportamientos sociales y capacidad de actuación en diversas situaciones interactivas.
- Conocimientos de diversas disciplinas como el arte, la gastronomía o la geografía, y la capacidad de relacionarlos con los elementos lingüísticos pertinentes.

Es interesante prestar especial atención al conocimiento de costumbres, geografía, o patrimonio de otros países y relacionarlo con la enseñanza de la lengua. Se trata de incorporar aspectos históricos, sociales, culturales y artísticos que rodean a las regiones y ciudades más destacadas de cada país. No se trata únicamente de evitar conflictos debidos a diferencias culturales, sino de tener un buen conocimiento cultural sobre la historia, el arte, la gastronomía o las fiestas de un lugar.

Por consiguiente, el estudiante de inglés para turismo, como el de cualquier lengua extranjera para turismo, debe adquirir una competencia lingüística basada «no sólo en el saber técnico de especialidad sino también en la especificidad cultural de los principales destinos turísticos en los que se habla la lengua en cuestión» (Calvi 2001: 300). Esta característica no se da en el mundo de los negocios en general y, por tanto, supone otra diferencia con el ámbito turístico. Es por ello que consideramos de gran interés hacer alusión a

una de las profesiones del ámbito turístico en las que la competencia intercultural y la lingüística están relacionadas en gran medida. Hablamos seguidamente de los Guías Turísticos como paradigma de la competencia intercultural en una especialidad turística.

La atención reglada del ejercicio de la actividad y profesión de Guía Turístico en la Comunidad Autónoma de Castilla y León presenta aspectos en diferentes sentidos tales como el administrativo, ejercicio material de la actividad, habilitaciones de profesionales de otros países o comunidades autónomas, pruebas, registro, control y actualización de datos, consideraciones sobre publicación y cobro de honorarios, etc. Aquí nos interesaremos en particular sobre el aspecto formativo de los guías y fundamentalmente en su parte idiomática.

Es evidente que el afán de regular esta actividad, como decimos para dar prestancia al patrimonio cultural y fomentar el turismo en una adecuada relación y calidad, exige de modo básico y preferente dos aspectos: por un lado, conocimiento del medio sobre el que versa la actuación del guía o el bagaje de su formación sobre el patrimonio cultural; y, por otro, capacidad para transmitir de modo personal y profesional a sus interlocutores turistas o visitantes *esta información para lo que se le exige de manera inmediata el manejo en lenguas extranjeras*.

Dentro del esquema de la ordenación de las pruebas que debe superar el aspirante a Guía Turístico descubrimos nuevamente la naturaleza de la coyuntura que supone su papel entre el sector turístico y el patrimonio cultural a cuyo servicio se entrega con protagonismo propio del dominio de lenguas extranjeras. Así, en el artículo 6 del Decreto 101/1995 se indica literalmente:

1. Las personas que, reuniendo los requisitos establecidos en el artículo anterior, pretendan acceder a la condición de Guía de Turismo de la Comunidad Autónoma de Castilla y León deberán superar las pruebas que se establezcan por la Consejería competente en materia de turismo.
2. Las pruebas a que se refiere el párrafo anterior versarán sobre los siguientes temas:
  - A) Técnica turística.
  - B) Patrimonio cultural y natural de la Comunidad Autónoma en su conjunto, para el acceso a la condición de Guía Regional, y de la provincia correspondiente, para el acceso a la condición de Guía Provincial.
  - C) Idiomas extranjeros y, en su caso, castellano.
3. Podrá eximirse de la superación de alguna o algunas de las pruebas que se establezcan a aquellos profesionales que cumplan los requisitos que se determinen por la Consejería competente en materia de turismo.

Pruebas, por tanto, de técnica turística, de conocimiento del medio y de idiomas. En este último apartado, llamar la atención sobre la opción de los aspirantes con lengua materna o con origen en países cuya lengua oficial no sea el Castellano, en cuyo caso además de dos idiomas distintos al Castellano, deberán superar una prueba específica relativa a esta última lengua, aspecto que podemos entender tanto como por que en gran medida los turistas puedan ser los propios nacionales, como por que la lengua es un medio en el que está embebida la historia y la cultura en el término más amplio y sin su dominio raramente se puede llegar a sintonizar con los matices necesarios de un patrimonio cultural.

En la prueba para la obtención de la habilitación como guía los aspirantes han de examinarse de dos idiomas obligatorios.

## 5. A modo de conclusión

Con la más escrupulosa y aséptica intención en mi ánimo debo mencionar que como filóloga en lengua inglesa admiro y envídeo a los que sin ni siquiera llegar a hacer de ello su profesión o especialidad, conocen y hablan lenguas distintas al inglés, particularmente aquellas que por su marcada diferenciación del castellano, lenguas románicas o aquellas relativamente asequibles como el propio inglés o incluso el alemán.

Me refiero a idiomas como ruso, árabe, chino, japonés... lenguas importantes, muy extendidas en número de hablantes y cuyo conocimiento, en caso de tener que atender a ciudadanos de tales orígenes, daría prestigio y calidad destacados a cualquier Guía Turístico.

Sin embargo el idioma inglés, a mí parecer, se establece como lengua "casi obligatoria en la práctica" ya que en este fenómeno de comunicación y globalización mundial, aplicado relevantemente a nuestro tema turístico, el inglés es un comodín o lenguaje universal de referencia. Precisamente es la alternativa para viajar y relacionarse con el exterior adoptada por los ciudadanos de lenguas más complejas o extrañas, tipo de las mencionadas. Un buen ejemplo de esto y del reforzamiento del inglés como lengua internacional nos lo da la reciente ampliación de la Unión Europea con la incorporación desde primero de mayo de 2004 de diez nuevos miembros provenientes en su mayor parte de Europa Oriental: Estonia, Letonia, Lituania, Polonia, Hungría, Chequia, Eslovaquia, Eslovenia y las islas de Malta y zona griega de Chipre, y en 2007 Bulgaria y Rumanía. Evidentemente en los foros de intercambios de las instituciones comunitarias el inglés cobra más protagonismo o presencia ya que si antes un español podía entenderse coloquialmente con un italiano en cualquier de sus propios idiomas, o en ambos a la vez, si un belga con un inglés podía utilizar así mismo el francés o el inglés y con un alemán hasta este tercer idioma, parece evidente que en cuanto se sume a estas tertulias un polaco, un eslovaco o un lituano, el lenguaje común de entendimiento pasara a ser con preferencia el inglés por no decir en exclusiva. Parece por tanto razonable prevenir que el Guía Turístico se equipe con el conocimiento adecuado a su trabajo del inglés lo que se supervisará, en su caso, por las pruebas de capacitación.

El turismo es hoy día un fenómeno de extraordinaria relevancia económica pero también cultural y social en todos los ámbitos. Como actividad creciente y masiva genera una dinámica de medios aplicados materiales y humanos amplios y diversos: gestión, comunicación, transporte, hostelería y restauración, salud, ocio, cultura, deporte, educación, etc.; es determinante en sectores base de actividad como la construcción —hoteles, centros de vacaciones, complejos residenciales, parques temáticos, museos, etc.—; y, llega a influir en las determinaciones de grandes infraestructuras de obras públicas y servicios: abastecimientos de agua y energía, carreteras, ferrocarril, puertos y aeropuertos, etc. También en el aspecto inmaterial alcanza un protagonismo moldeador de hábitos sociales y cultura, pasando por la política y las relaciones internacionales; en este aspecto, opera como una consecuencia y a su vez un estímulo de la globalización.

El turismo es, en la ya cultura globalizada, una actividad de apetencia y consumo generalizado y tanto se convierten en destino turístico cada vez más sitios, como cada vez ciudadanos de todo origen acceden a hacerlo. Esto en términos internacionales, donde juega el fenómeno de las lenguas extranjeras y el inglés en particular que ha ocupado en especial nuestra atención en este artículo.

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## In-service teachers' beliefs, perceptions and knowledge in the Nicaraguan EFL context

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### Abstract

The following is the description of a research project carried out at the National Autonomous University of Nicaragua (UNAN-Leon). The study was undertaken at the English Department of the Faculty of Educational Sciences and Humanities of UNAN-Leon. One of the main programs of this Department is the Saturday English Program, which has been designed for in-service teachers who do not have the necessary academic qualifications to teach English as a Foreign Language<sup>2</sup>. The study involved 15 in-service teachers of this program. The main objective was to explore and analyze the teachers' knowledge, beliefs and perceptions concerning the teaching-learning process of EFL and the influence these elements exert on the teachers' performance and behavior in the classroom. The research was carried out devoting considerable attention to the context in which instruction was taking place. The results of this analysis led to a series of recommendations aimed at providing the teachers with the necessary tools for teaching English effectively within the Nicaraguan EFL context. The study also shed significant light on some important aspects for strengthening the Saturday English Program.

**Keywords:** teachers' thought, action research, teacher training, teacher development

### Resumen

El presente artículo describe un proyecto de investigación realizado en la Universidad Nacional Autónoma de Nicaragua (UNAN-León). El estudio fue llevado a cabo en el Departamento de Inglés de la Facultad de Ciencias de la Educación y Humanidades de la UNAN-León. Uno de los principales programas de este Departamento es el Programa de Inglés Sabatino que ha sido diseñado para profesores de inglés que no cuentan con la calificación académica necesaria para enseñar inglés como lengua extranjera. El estudio involucra a 15 profesores de este Programa. El objetivo principal era explorar y analizar el conocimiento, creencias y percepciones de los profesores en cuanto al proceso de enseñanza-aprendizaje de inglés como lengua extranjera (EFL) y la influencia que estos elementos ejercen en el comportamiento y las acciones de los profesores en el aula de clase. La investigación fue realizada tomando en consideración el contexto de los procesos de instrucción. Los resultados de este análisis arrojaron una serie de recomendaciones destinadas a proveer a los profesores de las herramientas necesarias para enseñar inglés con efectividad dentro del contexto educativo nicaragüense. El estudio también proveyó importantes elementos para el fortalecimiento del Programa de Inglés Sabatino.

**Palabras clave:** pensamiento del profesor, investigación–acción, formación del profesorado, desarrollo del profesorado

### 1. Introduction

The current state of the teaching of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) at secondary school levels in Nicaragua is an issue that deserves special attention, as it is an area with a number of significant problems. Some of the most substantial constraints are the lack of a consistent national curriculum, scarce didactic materials, lack of equipment and libraries, and large classes. The situation is worsened by the fact that a large number of

<sup>1</sup> This research project, part of a Doctorate program, was mentored by Fernando Cerezal from the University of Alcalá.

<sup>2</sup> The Program was launched in 1993 within the framework of a Cooperation link between UNAN-León and the University of Alcalá.

English teachers are currently teaching without appropriate professional qualifications and training. All of these factors combined result in poor instructional quality.

There were two specific concerns related to the current situation of EFL teaching in Nicaragua underlying this investigation. Firstly, the phenomenon that after five years of English lessons three times a week during school years, students still do not manage to have appropriate proficiency levels at the end of their secondary studies. This situation places a heavy burden on teachers' shoulders, as they are attributed a great deal of responsibility in their students' final level of linguistic competence and proficiency. The second concern is the strong personal conviction that any substantial and far-reaching changes and attempts to improve the instructional processes should be carried out taking into account the teachers' perception, and with their active participation.

Based on this perception of the teachers' role, the study intended to contribute to understanding the complex and difficult world of EFL teachers in Nicaragua. The research was carried out with a group of 15 in-service teachers who were, at the time of the study, in the IV year of the Saturday English Program at UNAN. It concentrated on gaining substantial knowledge concerning the beliefs, assumptions and perceptions on which these teachers based their teaching practice. In addition, it aimed at examining teachers' knowledge base, and its possible connection with teachers' performance, and behavior in the classroom. A lot of attention was given to the teachers' situational contexts and to the multifaceted factors involved in the teaching-learning process, such as institutional policies, instructional settings, program, and didactic materials. Contextual issues exert powerful influence on the instructional processes in a number of different ways and, therefore, should not be undervalued if the world of language teachers is to be understood. As Bigelow and Walker (2003) accurately state "it is thus impossible to understand the full picture of a language teaching/learning situation and the participating learners...without fully comprehending the specific contexts...in which the event takes place". (Bigelow and Walker, 2003: 7). Regarding this it is important to point out that the study as a whole was based on a human and sympathetic perspective of the teachers' work within the characteristics of their situational contexts. That is to say, there was the implicit willingness and concern to vindicate EFL teachers in Nicaragua, praise their efforts, and assign due importance to their work, as they try to do their best while facing extremely difficult constraints and challenges.

## **2. Background studies**

There was a previous large-scale study in the EFL area, which addressed the situation of EFL teaching in Nicaragua. Its scope was certainly much larger than the one of the present study. Nevertheless, it shared important elements covered by the present study worth exploring. This major effort was carried out by Tony and Michelle Luxon. The study was funded by the ODA ELT Project (ODA stands for Overseas Development Administration, a branch of the Foreign Office of the British government). It was carried out in 1993 jointly with two of the largest public universities: UCA and UNAN Managua, and with the Nicaraguan Association of English Teachers (ANPI). It also counted on the support of authorities of the Ministry of Education. Two general aims were the main focus of the research: to explore and find out the conditions in which EFL teaching was taking place at secondary school levels throughout the country, and to provide practical, feasible, and relevant solutions to the problems identified. The project involved 47 secondary schools, more than 60 teachers and 518 students. The data collection instruments included questionnaires, interviews and classroom observations.

Some of the most significant findings of the research related to the teachers' professional qualifications and performance. Out of the more than 60 teachers involved in the study, only 19 (27%) were graduates of a pedagogical training program. The great majority of teachers were unlicensed teachers. Nevertheless, the study showed no significant differences between graduates and unlicensed teachers, in terms of language proficiency and range and kinds of teaching techniques. Other important difficulties identified were the physical conditions of the classrooms, the lack of availability of resources and equipment, and the quality of the didactic materials. The prevailing means for language instruction used by teachers were chalk and the board. The national syllabus established was also identified as having significant constraints. It was based on the series of books *Pathways to English* (H.B. Allen et. al.1994). A number of problems concerning these textbooks were identified. Out of the series of six books, only books 1 to 3 were used. In fact, they were the basis of the whole English instruction for secondary school studies. There were not enough samples for all students, and there was a lack of enough samples of the teachers' edition for most teachers. In addition, the book is linguistically outdated (it has been around for more than 20 years now), and is unrelated to the Nicaraguan contextual reality.

There were also important findings regarding the characteristics of classroom instruction. Spanish was used most of the time, and the teaching processes were based on a teacher-centered approach. This approach was identified as being influenced by the teachers own experience as learners as they had the tendency to repeat their previous teachers' traditional roles and techniques (which was identified as the Craft Model). There were very few opportunities for students' interaction, free practice and production. Students' performance was based on lots of repetition drills that were used for pronunciation practice, and no real listening comprehension skills were involved whatsoever. As for the planning and implementation of the classes, they were not organized into clearly divided stages. Language items, grammatical structures and vocabulary were all presented, explained and exemplified on the board according to the sequence in the book, and students would do a lot of note taking.

After identifying the main problems, a feasibility study of the possible ways to address them was undertaken. Thus, it was decided that the most practical course of action was to promote and carry out changes and improvements in EFL teaching through the teachers. The plan of action involved providing teachers with the training they needed to work with the existing syllabus and materials. The main objective was to strengthen the in-service teachers' abilities to be able to cope with the scarce resources and limitations that they faced. For this purpose, a number of measures were taken in the second stage of the process. Although there were several major issues addressed by these measures, two of them are of particular interest for the scope of the present study. On the one hand, a number of teacher training sessions nationwide, which reached approximately 400 teachers from different regions and cities of the country, were planned and established. This process was known as the "Cascade Project" as teachers trained would then favor the training of their fellow teachers. On the other hand, the program offered by UNAN-Managua for unlicensed in-service teachers was reformed and improved.

### **3. Context of the research**

#### **3.1 The national socioeconomic conditions in Nicaraguan basic education**

Education in Nicaragua is a very complex issue since the country is currently going through a deep social crisis characterized by high levels of poverty, and corruption at government levels. The civil war, which ended in the 80's, and the subsequent establishment of different kinds of government have all caused several drastic sociopolitical changes that have exerted great influence on the educational processes. The lack of consistent measures and general indifference of the different governments in power have caused the deterioration of both primary and secondary educational systems in state schools in several important aspects. For instance, because

of policies in terms of budget allocations for the educational system, teachers were one of the worst paid sectors within the labor force in the country (the average salary of teachers in Nicaragua was at the time 5 times lower than in other Central American countries). In addition, there have been few significant efforts to increase the quality of the educational systems, build more and better-equipped schools, and provide the existing ones with appropriate, suitable, and updated didactic materials

### 3.2 The national educational context in EFL processes

The Ministry of Education of Nicaragua (MINED) was promoting a National Educational Plan (2002-2015) with the financial help of different world organizations and the participation of authorities from different educational sectors. A new program in EFL, based on both communicative competence and the educational philosophy of constructivism, was started as a pilot program in several schools in 2004. The program was not based on a particular textbook and had been designed to provide the teachers with the pedagogical support to develop their English classes. At the end of the year 2006, more than seventy schools nationwide were using this program. The predictions were that by 2007 all national schools would be implementing it as the framework for the ELT instructional processes. Nevertheless, because of changes of national educational authorities in 2006, the policies changed as well, and the process stopped. Nowadays, little is known of the new current policies for EFL language instruction.

Concerning the conditions of EFL in schools no major changes had taken place since the time of the Luxon's study. There was still a lack of consistency in the organization of EFL processes. There seemed to be more flexibility in the policies for ruling the instructional processes, as a reform process was taking place. Nevertheless, as no official guidelines had come out, there was some kind of "anarchy" going on. For example, private schools were allowed to establish their own criteria for the kind of English instruction and materials that they wanted. Since private schools have more financial resources, they were often able to devote efforts to purchase books. As a result, a number of varied and different English textbooks were being used in private schools nationwide. This was not a problem in itself, if there had not been diverse teaching approaches and lack of consistent educational policies in terms of curriculum. In public schools, the situation was quite different. In spite of the seeming flexibility of the current policies, the former national program was still being used in most schools. This program, based on the contents of the series *Pathways to English* as already mentioned, had the advantage that the teachers were familiar with it and that there were still samples available in some school libraries.

### 3.4 The Saturday English Program at UNAN-Leon

The Saturday English Program of UNAN-Leon is aimed at contributing to the professional training of unlicensed in-service teachers. It started in 1993 with the consistent support of the Spanish University of Alcala, within the framework of a sister universities cooperation program. This link favored the creation of the English Department at UNAN, established the beginning of its Didactic Program, and provided academic support for the curriculum design of the Saturday Program, as well as bibliography and didactic materials. Over the first few years ever since it was launched, the study plan of this Program had some minor changes. In 2006, however, a major curriculum reform, intended to be implemented in the academic year 2007, took place. Up to the present date, more than 300 teachers from the western region of Nicaragua have enrolled in this program.

### 3.5 The course *Methodology in ELT I* and the target population

The curriculum plan of the Saturday English Program includes four components focused on methodological and didactic aspects. Out of these components, the course *Methodology in ELT I* (second semester of IV year) was

the framework of the present study. The nature of this course provided optimal grounds to establish close contact with the target population to explore their views. The development of the class and the research process went on jointly during the time that the data collection process lasted (July-December of 2005).

The target population belonged to the generation of students integrated into the Saturday English Program for the period 2002-2006. Out of the 27 students, only 15 were in-service teachers. These 15 in-service teachers were the focus of the study. The following table provides general information about them.

**Teachers' information**

CODE	AGE	GENDER	TEACHING EXPERIENCE	YEARS STUDYING ENGLISH	PLACE OF WORK
T-1	43	M	16	20	Urban area
T-2	30	F	2	6	Rural area
T-3	27	F	8	10	Urban area
T-4	28	M	6	10	Urban area
T-5	26	M	4	7	Urban area
T-6	34	F	8	12	Urban area
T-7	27	M	1 month	7	Urban area
T-8	23	M	4	5	Rural area
T-9	30	F	1	8	Rural area
T-10	31	F	4	4	Urban area
T-11	25	M	2 months	6	Rural area
T-12	31	M	6	10	Urban area
T-13	27	M	4	4	Rural area
T-14	22	M	1	6	Rural area
T-15	30	M	8	10	Urban area

#### **4. Research methodology**

##### 4.1 Type of research: The ethnographic nature of the study

The study was of an ethnographic, explorative and interpretive kind carried out based on a naturalistic, non-interventionist approach. The researcher tried to collect as much information as possible about the teachers' thoughts and their contextual realities without interfering in any of the processes observed and analyzed. The study shared an important feature of ethnographic studies in the sense that it was not an experimental study. According to Nunan, ethnography involves "the study of the culture/characteristics of a group in real-world rather than laboratory settings" (Nunan 1992: 55). Within this perspective, the researcher does nothing to alter, change or interfere in the observed phenomena. Implications, generalizations, and language theories emerge naturally from the researchers' close contact and observation of the subjects under study in context, a major issue underlying this study. In addition, a great deal of importance is given to the perceptions of the main agents involved: the ones of the researcher and of the subjects under study. As Wilson states, "human behavior cannot be understood without incorporating into the research the subjective perception and belief system of those involved in the research, both as researchers and subjects" (cited in Nunan 1992: 54). Indeed, during all steps of the study the teachers were asked to reflect on and to articulate their subjective perceptions and views concerning the different aspects analyzed as part of the research process. Likewise, the researchers' perceptions were systematically contrasted, confronted and compared with those of the in-service teachers throughout the research project.

## 4.2 Stages of the research

The research process was organized in two major stages, the first of which involved the activities carried out to collect the primary data for the study. These data collection activities took place in the second semester of 2005. During this time, the teachers attended 16 training sessions. The second stage was carried out during the first semester of 2006. This stage involved the main activities of the data analysis and exploration, including the categorization, analysis and interpretation of the data, the literature review, the collection of complementary or secondary information, and the writing of the research report.

## 4.3 Data collection instruments

The data collection instruments were valuable means for the exploration of the teachers' views and actions. Interviews, surveys, questionnaires, and classroom observations were all used. Overall, each instrument was designed to collect specific pieces of information. Nevertheless, each was also designed in order to have some kind of interrelation with the others. This was especially helpful to contrast and compare information from different perspectives for validity purposes.

## 5. Theoretical issues

Ethnographic studies assign great importance to the data collection process and its subsequent interpretation. Theory is arrived at through data analysis, exploration and interpretation. This process has been defined as "grounded theory." According to Nunan, ethnography has sometimes been defined as "data in search of a hypothesis." He admits that this statement is somehow "an exaggeration," as most of the time researchers have previous assumptions about the subjects and topic under study. However, he agrees with this statement in the sense that ethnography is characterized by an interaction between data and theory and that "questions and hypothesis often emerge during the course of the investigation, rather than beforehand" (Nunan 1992: 57). Based on this premise, some of the most important theoretical aspects that emerged were the following:

- *Effective Language Teaching* As the research explored the teachers' perceptions of teaching EFL and their actual performance in the classroom, there was a revision of some of the most important aspects related to effective teaching. This led to the exploration of elements regarded as accurate and central aspects of teaching such as lesson stages, effective presentation and practice, the role of teachers in planning and implementing lessons, and approaches to effective classroom management and interaction.
- *Current approaches recommended for teaching EFL* In order to have the reference elements to contrast the teachers' approaches to teaching EFL, some of the approaches viewed as effective and the theory underlying them were revised. Some of the most important aspects regarding conceptions in language teaching covered were the concept of language used for communication, communicative competence and the issue of learner-centered processes.
- *The teachers* included the revision of important internal aspects that determine largely the performance of teachers, and the reasons to analyze these aspects. Overall, it was determined what kind of elements are involved in teachers' thinking and beliefs, and what kind of influence teachers' qualities, professional qualification, knowledge, personalities and roles exert on the teaching-learning processes.
- *External factors* included some of the most important elements that exert great influence on the teachers' decision-making, or are related to their performance in the classroom such as institutional issues and the teaching context. In addition, the program and curriculum, the instructional material, and the importance of

the lesson plan were widely covered. Also, some relevant elements related to the learners and the elements they bring to the process were taken into account: e.g. their learning styles, motivation, and involvement in the learning process.

- *Teachers' professionalization* addressed the issue of how to provide teachers with the necessary tools they need to widen, change, and improve their teaching approaches in practice. In this concern, the issues of teacher training and teacher development were thoroughly covered, as well as important concepts such as reflective teaching, classroom observations, peer observation, teachers as researchers, and action research.

## 5. Research findings

The premise underlying the selection of information among the numerous data gathered was the relevance and interest of the information to the EFL area in Nicaragua. The data were categorized, sorted out and grouped according to the major issues under analysis. They are: the teachers' situational context, teacher's teaching philosophies and knowledge base of TEFL concepts, the main source of teacher's beliefs, teachers' approaches to lesson planning, and the nature of the teaching-learning processes.

### 5.1 Teachers and their situational contexts

On the whole, it was made evident that most teachers were strongly affected by the number of limitations of their situational contexts. The lack of formal and consistent guidelines in terms of the national program for EFL process was perceived as the major problem along with the unsuitability of the instructional materials. The book *Pathways to English* was still in use in most cases, either alone, or in combination with other books. In addition, in the majority of the cases, students did not have access to the original book (either *Pathways to English* or any of the other books in use) and access to photocopies was very limited.

Teachers' motivation and attitudes were perceived as major problems as well. This was not surprising taking into account that teachers did not get the financial retribution necessary to make ends meet. In several cases, they had to work two or even three shifts a day. The average monthly salary of a public EFL teacher at the time was between 1800 and 2000 cordobas (about 120 dollars). On the other hand, teachers' working loads were in many cases extreme, as most of them had to teach many hours, face different kinds of students, and be in charge of teaching large amounts of students per classroom. Given all of these facts, it was not surprising to identify lack of motivation as a major problem. It is certainly very difficult to be motivated if the resources are limited, the contextual conditions are not adequate, the work is extreme, and the salary is too low.

An underestimated perception of English within the institutions was perceived as a significant problem as well. Most teachers complained that not enough importance was given to the area, as English was not considered a priority. This fact was made more evident by the short time and frequency assigned to language instruction (3 forty-five-minute sessions a week) and by the lack of concern in providing adequate conditions (libraries and language labs) and equipment such as TV sets or tape recorders. The situation accurately reflected what Richards and Lockhart (1994) imply when they say that one of the aspects that any language program reflects is the "culture of the institution". This is to say, "The particular ways of thinking and doing things that are valued in the institution" (Richards and Lockhart 1994:32).

Also, the lack of due attention to the improvement of the area was evidenced by the poor concern for providing teachers with enough opportunities for teacher training. Teachers acknowledged the benefits of the Saturday English Program of UNAN as a good training opportunity, but they also stated that more help was

needed in order to achieve a more substantial improvement. They highlighted the lack of institutional support based on the difficulties they experience to participate in training courses such as the national conferences organized by ANPI once a year, or academic programs offered by national universities.

Another significant constraint was the way teachers' appraisal processes were organized. The term mostly used for this process in the Nicaraguan context is "supervisions". This in itself suggests positive processes. Nevertheless, the term has a negative connotation for teachers, since supervisions are most of the time aimed at providing judgmental feedback about their performance. The situation is aggravated by the fact that in most cases people who are not related to the area carry out this appraisal system. The external observers in charge are diverse: the director, sub-director, the school academic coordinator (also called supervisor), or even somebody from other disciplines (Spanish, for example).

Overall it was perceived that the institutional factors conditioned and limited teachers' performance significantly and exerted strong influence on the kind and quality of language instruction. These major problems equally affected teachers' range of action and decision making, the nature and characteristics of the processes, and students' acquisition of the language. Certainly, change and improvement in the EFL teachers' contextual conditions in Nicaragua is not in the teachers' hands.

## 5.2 Teacher's teaching philosophies and knowledge base of TEFL concepts

One of the main objectives of this study was to explore the teaching philosophy of the teachers and their background knowledge base of theoretical aspects in EFL teaching, and understand how these sustain and are consistent with their performance in the classroom. In general, the findings evidenced that most teachers' teaching philosophies were, for the most part, unconscious and undetermined. They did not have a clear, conscious idea of the principles underlying their teaching practice which made it difficult their initial identification. In order to be able to identify their teaching beliefs, teachers had to be led to reflection on their views concerning several important aspects regarding language teaching. Among others, the nature of language learning, the role of the mother tongue vs. the role of the target language, and the goal of language teaching (Larsen-Freeman, 1986).

Most teachers' identified their teaching philosophy as being influenced by the AL method and the Communicative Approach. Nevertheless, these views were in disagreement with their actual actions and performance in the classroom, as the approach observed in most cases was the Grammar Translation Method. Although paradoxical, this lack of consistency between what teachers believed and what they actually did was perceived as both encouraging and worrying. On the one hand, it was encouraging to know that deep inside teachers showed fondness of less traditional views of language teaching (a language should be used for communication, meaning is more important than form, grammar should be taught implicitly rather than explicitly). This suggests that most teachers were open to changes and innovations and that their current grammar based approach to teaching did not satisfy them. On the other hand, it was worrying to know that the Saturday English Program did not provide the teachers with the necessary knowledge base regarding teaching methods and approaches that helped them to achieve consistency between their beliefs and practice. Teachers' theoretical knowledge of EFL methods should be addressed with a critical perspective; not to prescribe any particular method as the best way to teach, or as something that should be used blindly and exclusively. Rather, they should be led to realize that the principles and techniques of particular methods might be useful for some teaching situation, but not for others. Ultimately, through this analytical perspective teachers will be able to construct their own language teaching theory. That is to say, they will be able to make well-informed decisions to integrate, combine, adopt or adapt optional teaching approaches autonomously.

Teachers' content knowledge of specialized terminology of language teaching was perceived as having significant gaps and constraints as well. This was made evident in their definition of terms, (method, task, activity, technique, syllabus, and curriculum) provided through a diagnostic test. In this concern the teachers' definitions often overlapped, mixed, and lacked deepness and accuracy in several cases. This particular finding clearly shows that teachers had not achieved appropriate competence in their knowledge base of the theoretical, practical and basic concepts regarding their teaching practice. As far as syllabus and curriculum are concerned, the situation was even more worrying as most teachers did not have an accurate perception of what each involves. The current situation of EFL in Nicaragua seems to indicate that very soon teachers might face the role of syllabus designers. It seems, however, that the teachers' current knowledge base would not allow them to address this challenge properly.

### 5.3 Main sources of teacher's beliefs

According to the results obtained, teachers' beliefs were perceived to stem from different sources. The culture of their particular institution and the degree of involvement that teachers were given in the organization of the instructional processes were considered to exert great influence. Teachers' involvement in what was to be taught was low, as their participation in the learning processes was limited in most cases to follow the guidelines established either by their institutions or by the national system. The latter identified as having serious problems and limitations (among others, the lack of a consistent language program and teachers' effective appraisal system).

On the other hand, teachers' beliefs were also perceived as being influenced by their experience of what works best and by their tendency to stick to "ritual behavior" and performance in the classrooms (Maingay, 1988: 118-119). This was considered to determine to a great extent the nature of the classroom activity and the teachers' performance and actions observed. In this sense, evidence was provided that the degree of teachers' decision making in the classroom events themselves was high, which is indeed encouraging. Certainly, teachers should be given a much more active participation in what is to be taught, but the fact that most of them had considerable degree of autonomy in how is to be taught is considered as generally positive. It suggests that there are high possibilities of room for change and improvement in the way the teachers articulate their thinking to provide effective classroom instruction, thus in the overall improvement of the instructional processes in EFL. Nevertheless, teachers need consistent help to carry out these changes and improvements effectively.

### 5.4 Teachers' approaches to lesson planning

Lesson planning is closely related to the degree of success or failure of a particular class. As Nunan and Lamb state "The potential success or relative failure of a lesson will often be determined by the...planning and preparation the teacher is able to devote to the lesson" (Nunan and Lamb, 1996: 43) The lesson plan is indeed a practical and useful tool for teachers, particularly for inexperienced ones, since it guides them to address the several aspects of a lesson and provides them with the opportunity to integrate changes as improvements.

According to the findings, lesson planning was another aspect that deserved special attention. On the whole, the teachers' approaches to plan their lessons were in most cases the result of their own efforts, which certainly have to be praised and acknowledged. The data revealed that ten out of the 15 teachers use their own format. The other five teachers use the format provided by their schools. In no cases teachers stated that they use the format provided by the MINED. This finding reveals that most teachers have considerable freedom to structure their lessons according to their own perception. This fact, in itself, is considered to be generally positive, as teachers' decision-making is high in this concern. Nevertheless, evidence was also provided that they need

help in order to be equipped with more effective approaches to plan their lessons. This was best reflected by the fact that in most cases important elements such as lesson stages, and classroom management and interaction were missing. This particular weakness had a direct correlation with the nature and characteristics of the classroom activity observed as there were serious inconsistencies between what teachers planned and what actually happened in the classroom. For instance, a teacher objective would be "*to practice reading comprehension skills*". Nevertheless, at the time of the lesson no comprehension skills were involved whatsoever. Rather, the class activity would be limited to extract the new vocabulary, and use the reading text for the purposes of translation. All these findings reveal that special measures should be taken to provide teachers with effective ideas and pedagogical suggestions on how to plan their lessons.

### 5.5 The nature of the teaching learning processes

The nature and characteristics of the processes observed showed significant and clear evidence of the areas in which teachers' needed to improve their performance in the classroom. The findings concerning the way most of the processes observed were handled revealed significant constraints in most teachers' repertoire of teaching techniques, range and variety of activities, use of instructional materials and integration of realia and authentic material.

The limitations mentioned in 5.4 above concerning effective lesson planning were, obviously, more evidenced at the time of implementation. For instance, class time distribution was an issue as in most cases it was difficult to distinguish the different stages of the lesson. Moreover, in several cases the lessons were perceived as consisting of a long activity (usually revolving around the same language item) or several short ones without clear objectives and without further checking students' understanding.

In addition there was a strong tendency to organize classroom instruction as whole class (with students sitting in rows) and most teachers tended to assume teacher-centered roles. Given the contextual conditions provided for language instruction (little time, small classrooms, large groups, teachers' workload) this is not surprising. It has to be admitted that this approach to teaching is the easiest way to handle the teaching-learning processes, and, unfortunately, teachers' had powerful reasons to be fond of this approach. Nevertheless, students' successful language acquisition, was seriously affected as they were regarded as mere receptors of knowledge. In the few cases that the teachers' attempted to organize pair or group work they had problems in organizing classroom interaction effectively. It was evident that the teachers were not used to this approach.

On the other hand, teachers spent considerable class time providing students with difficult (and very often unclear) grammar explanations, and writing on the board. The teachers' talking time had a direct correlation with the nature and characteristics of the classroom activity observed, as in the majority of cases students' degree of involvement was limited to a very passive and receptive role. Interaction would follow the IRF approach - Initiation- Response-Feedback (Sinclair and Coulthard 1975). According to this model, it is the teacher who initiates the interactional exchange (usually in the form of a question) one of the students answers, then the teacher provides feedback (assesses, corrects, comments) and initiates the next question (cited in Ur 1991: 226). This approach fostered the participation of the most advanced students. Nevertheless, the rest of the students' participation would be limited to be spectators who spent a lot of time copying in their notebooks or doing grammar exercises. With so little degree of students' involvement and participation in the development of the language learning processes, it is not surprising that they do not get adequate levels of language proficiency at the end of their secondary school studies.

Regarding the use of the target language, in most cases the medium of communication was the mother tongue and/or the target language with immediate translations into Spanish. The use of natural and comprehensible language was perceived to need further reinforcements as well. There were consequential shortcomings in some teachers' linguistic competence in pronunciation, accuracy, and fluency. This was perceived to exert great influence on the teachers' choice to use the mother tongue as they lacked self-confidence regarding their command of the target language. Because of this lack of language proficiency students were exposed to unnatural, inaccurate and unreal language in many cases.

## **6. Final conclusions and remarks**

Overall, the findings of this study have shed significant light on the different areas where teachers need urgent help to improve their performance in and out the classroom. Teachers need to widen their knowledge base of TEFL concepts, be equipped with a critical understanding of language learning theories, methods and approaches, improve their linguistic skills, and expand their range of teaching techniques and activities with views to the improvement of the language learning processes at the classroom level. The need to improve the EFL instructional process through the teachers' own improvement is perceived as a pertinent and imperative endeavor.

The situational contexts were identified as major negative influencing sources on teachers' thinking, behavior and decision making in and out of the classroom. Thus, it is highly important to find out effective alternatives to carry out teachers' improvement taken into account the powerful effect of context on teachers' range of action. Johnson (2000) recognizes this influence as well as the challenges imposed to teachers by their specific contexts. She highlights how important it is that teacher preparation programs "create structures to enable teachers to work within and around the settings where they find themselves" and, "implement alternative professional development experiences for teachers so as to enable them to look beyond local obstacles" (Johnson, 2000:5).

These insights lead to several reflections with important implications for academic teacher education programs in Nicaragua. In this sense it is worth asking: Are we Nicaraguan universities really creating these enabling structures? To what extent are our ELT programs providing teachers with the professional alternatives for development they need for effective language instruction? How do we address the important issue of teachers' contextual knowledge base with views to their empowerment? How can our teacher education programs foster teacher development within the existing contextual conditions? What elements are needed in order to help teachers so that they become competent, well equipped agents that promote improvement and change within their particular teaching situations? Indeed, all of these questions that have been brought forth by the present study are worth exploring. In fact, they are highly recommended as further areas of research. I strongly believe that finding the answers to these questions and acting accordingly will foster sustainable teacher development in the secondary EFL area in Nicaragua.

On the other hand, since the current contextual conditions in Nicaragua have been identified as major constraints affecting teachers' effective work, the present research report would not be complete without making further comments in this regard. Moreover, not doing so would be a significant gap in the main conclusions of this study. Two major issues concerning the contextual conditions will be emphasized. Firstly, that the efforts (unfortunately stopped at the moment) made by the national educational authorities to conduct a curriculum reform process in the EFL area are perceived as very positive and pertinent. As identified by the present study the major and most disturbing contextual constraint that teachers' face is the lack of consistent curriculum guidelines. Certainly, relevant and deep curriculum changes are needed in the EFL area. The obvious reason is

that we have dealt with an inappropriate curriculum plan that has proven to be ineffective for more than 20 years. The time has certainly come to promote and establish better and more effective curriculum policies to regulate the teaching/learning EFL process at secondary school levels in Nicaragua. It is well known that the efforts made resulted in a document with pedagogical suggestions and that these efforts involved the investment of considerable financial resources and the participation and collaboration of different stakeholders from the academic EFL world in Nicaragua. Moreover, the Ministry of Education of Nicaragua was promoting teacher training workshops so that teachers could be better prepared to face the curriculum reform process. There was an open call so that Nicaraguan universities offering ELT programs provided the pertinent training. The participation of academics from national universities in the improvement of the EFL teachers' teaching skills and knowledge was, indeed, an accurate measure. Overall, the joint effort being promoted suggests that national educational authorities identified and prioritized EFL learning as a very important area for the development of the country. It is highly recommended to give a follow up to this initiative by carrying out a wider consultation process of the resulting curriculum policies, and by undertaking the necessary piloting and evaluation to refine the curriculum proposal. In such a process the participation and involvement of the teachers should be consistently taken into account. By doing so, important meaningful changes and improvements can be achieved in the area.

Secondly, given the number of limitations and problems identified by the present study, regarding the situational contexts, national authorities and educational institutions cannot put aside important factors such as the physical conditions of the schools, the instructional materials, and the resources and equipment available. Certainly, curriculum issues cannot be separated from the contextual conditions provided for the instructional processes. More importantly, the teachers' professional treatment, assigned workloads, appraisal systems, and financial retribution should not be undervalued, as their performance is highly conditioned and determined by the combination of all of these factors. The efforts should be aimed at addressing these problems as well, if quality in the intended changes in EFL teaching-learning processes is to be achieved.

To conclude this report, it must be acknowledged that the study as a whole has been a very enriching and rewarding experience at both professional and personal levels. Professionally speaking, the study has represented a difficult and significant challenge given the complexity of its scope and the variety of factors involved. Nevertheless, the exploration of the processes, the attempts to find answers and explanations to the teachers' views and actions, and the search of theoretical aspects that could shed some light on the many aspects unfolded and analyzed, have all represented significant sources of professional development. On the other hand, the contributions of the study at personal levels stem directly from its human dimension. That is to say, the close contact and relationship with the teachers, and the findings regarding their problems and needs contributed to higher levels of empathy and identification with them. Moreover, the realization of the teachers' genuine desire to improve and give their best in spite of the number of problems they face has been an enlightening and life-enhancing experience.

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## Guiding a four-week teaching placement abroad in primary schools: A joint international project

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### Resumen

Las Escuelas Universitarias de Educación de Ávila y Zamora, ambas pertenecientes a la Universidad de Salamanca, y la Facultad de Educación de la Universidad de Nottingham Trent están desarrollando un proyecto de prácticas docentes internacionales, patrocinado por el Ministerio de Educación y Ciencia español y la Agencia de Desarrollo y Formación británica. Este reciente acuerdo internacional nos ha animado a adaptar los documentos de referencia general del proyecto a las necesidades específicas de nuestros estudiantes, lo que hemos llevado a cabo elaborando conjuntamente una guía bilingüe con el objetivo de clarificar los temas relativos al intercambio de nuestros estudiantes. El libro resultante proporciona información acerca de los programas de formación de los dos países y universidades, un plan de trabajo consensuado con una clara exposición de los objetivos y expectativas de todos los participantes, muestras de informes de evaluación y cuestionarios para contribuir a la reflexión sobre aspectos interculturales clave de las prácticas docente en el extranjero.

**Palabras clave:** Prácticas docentes internacionales, Educación Primaria, Formación lingüística, educativa e intercultural.

### Abstract

The Schools of Education of Ávila and Zamora, both of which pertain to the University of Salamanca, and the Faculty of Education of Nottingham Trent University are involved in a project of international practice teaching, sponsored by the Spanish Ministry of Education and Science and the British Training and Development Agency (TDA). Their recent international agreement prompted us to adapt general reference documents to the specific needs of our students, which we have done by jointly writing a bilingual guide to address issues concerning the exchange of our trainees. The resulting book provides background information on the training schemes of the two countries and universities, an agreed working plan with a clear statement of aims and expectations for all participants, samples of assessment reports and questionnaires to help reflect on key intercultural aspects of the placement abroad.

**Keywords:** International Practice Teaching, Primary Education, Lingüistic, Educational & Intercultural Training

### Introduction

Both Spain and the UK recognise how vital it is that children start learning other languages in their primary school years. The long-standing partnership between the University of Salamanca and Nottingham Trent University has provided an excellent context within which to develop a training programme within a shared European vision of teacher education. The *International Guide for Placement Abroad in Primary Schools* (Durán, Gutiérrez and Beltrán 2006), which we will briefly present in these pages, is specifically directed to students in the UK and Spain in their practice teaching stage, under the guidance of teachers/lecturers at universities in both countries for a four-week period. It aims to support the publication of the recent bilingual *Common Reference Framework. The competences, skills and expectations for trainees whilst on school*

*placement abroad* (2004) (English-French / English-Spanish) by the British *Teacher Development Agency (TDA)*, the French *Instituts Universitaires de Formation des Maîtres*, and the Spanish *MEC*. This document describes the competences that trainees are to attain in the fields of pedagogy, language and intercultural development during a four-week placement in primary schools abroad: France, Spain or the United Kingdom.

The objective of our own *International Guide for Placement Abroad* (Durán, Gutiérrez and Beltrán 2006) is to adapt this general framework to the specific needs of the students at the Universities of Salamanca and Nottingham Trent, keeping the original outline, and to contribute to enriching the programme of international teaching practice established between the two universities. This is an initiative which in recent years has brought about on a small scale those important changes that society is demanding and that governments and institutions are attempting to foster on a large scale.

## **1. Teacher training models: an overall perspective**

### **1.1. Language training**

Nowadays, any educational proposal with a European scope, as our *International Guide for Placement Abroad*, should also be consistent with the objectives and methodological suggestions advocated by the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment* (hereafter “CEF”)<sup>1</sup>. This is another indispensable tool for any joint initiative in the education and language fields among the countries in Europe. The CEF presents a common foundation and guidelines for all across Europe with regard to language teaching programmes, curricular norms, valid assessment criteria for foreign language students in different countries, the use of textbooks, suggestions for methodology, etc. Besides fostering transparency in courses, programmes and qualifications at the European level, thus contributing to the construction of the European Higher Education Area, this document also pursues political and intercultural objectives such as preparing all Europeans for the challenge of increasing international mobility, the promoting of mutual understanding and tolerance, respecting the identities and cultural diversity of the member States, the satisfaction of socio-economic needs in a multilingual Europe, etc.

The CEF defends the functional, active and communicative use of language and favours a language teaching approach based on the communication needs of students and on the use of material and methods suitable for this need, with the idea that the main objective of the educational intervention in the area of foreign languages is to attain effective degrees of communicative competence. The different legal frameworks that both in Spain and the U.K. regulate educational practice also justify the primacy of communication within the area of foreign languages based on the needs of today’s society: the project of a European community, citizen mobility, the new information and communication technologies, and the forming of a spirit that is tolerant towards other forms of culture and at the same time aware of its own identity. All of these recognize that the purpose of the curriculum in the area of foreign languages for primary education is to learn to communicate in a second language. These new situations also contribute to orientating language teaching towards the acquisition of communicative competence, and more and more this is not only for instrumental purposes but also for cultural understanding.

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<sup>1</sup> *Common European Framework for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment.* (2001) Council for Cultural Cooperation Education Committee. Language Policy Division. Strasbourg. Web version [http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/CADRE\\_EN.asp](http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/CADRE_EN.asp)

Whereas the Spanish *Decree of Minimums* (1991) emphasized the development of language competence (Grammatical, Discursive, Sociolinguistic Strategic and Socio-cultural), the CEF (2001) adopts a more inclusive, overall and integrative perspective, establishing a difference between knowledge (Declarative knowledge, Skills and know-how, Existential competence and Ability to learn) and competencies (Linguistic, Sociolinguistic and Pragmatic). A superficial analysis of the competencies mentioned, both general and specifically communicative, clearly shows their degree of complexity and richness, and situates the latter far from the anti-grammatical model which even today they are occasionally and erroneously associated with. Any type of educational intervention in the classroom can be related to one or several of the competencies offered in both documents, although in any kind of International Guide for Placement Abroad the elements related to intercultural skills and abilities should be highlighted.

For its part, the document recently published in England, *KS2 Framework for languages (10/2005)*, which includes the guidelines for language teaching in primary school, establishes their objectives based on the following skills:

ORACY: Listening, speaking and spoken interaction.

LITERACY: Reading and writing.

INTERCULTURAL UNDERSTANDING: Understanding one's lives in the context of exploring the lives of others.

KNOWLEDGE ABOUT LANGUAGE: Reinforcing and reinterpreting knowledge and understanding gained in learning the first language and developing insights into the nature of language and its social cultural value.

LEARNING STRATEGIES: Awareness of how children learn languages and learning of strategies that can be applied to the learning of any language.

## 1.2. Educational training

In our *International Guide for Placement Abroad in Primary Schools* (2006: 35-63) we have presented two different models of training that suggest, in a complementary way, the profile that MFL primary school teachers should have. The first model, which comes from the Spanish educational system, is more specialized, while the second one, characteristic of the British system, offers a more general profile. In this section we will briefly mention the key elements of a feasible profile of "Teacher Specialized in English" following the triple training model - language-orientated (scientific-cultural training), professional (psycho-pedagogical training) and pragmatic (attitudinal training) - proposed by Vez Jeremías and Valcárcel Pérez for training teachers of English as a second language<sup>2</sup>. This model provides a profile of a teacher who:

- takes into account the language and learning needs of their students, as well as their interests, attitudes, motivations, cognitive and social strategies, in order to orientate the teaching-learning process in the most authentic way possible.
- has knowledge of the linguistic system of English (formal and semantic properties) and the rules of usage governing the pragmatic aspects of communication.
- has a command of the strategies needed to direct and control language operations in English.
- places the student at the centre of learning and not the subject matter.
- is capable of analysing what students need to learn and how to learn it: the cognitive and social strategies they develop to progress in their competence and use of the new language.
- takes into account that knowledge of a language involves not only a command of the grammar rules and an inventory of the structures and lexicon, but also those rules governing the social behaviour system of the speaker.
- is able to develop learning strategies focused on interaction and communication, creating a classroom climate of "authentic learning".

<sup>2</sup> *La Formación de Profesores en Didáctica del Inglés. Orientaciones para la Enseñanza Básica Obligatoria.* Universidad de Murcia, 1989: 59-60.

- knows how to listen to what students have to say, who knows how to “be with the students” and at the same time keep them “in contact with English”.

On the other hand, the profile of the Primary Education Teacher in England is generalist rather than specialist. The competencies or minimum levels needed by future teachers to obtain teaching qualifications are included in the document *Teaching Qualifications. Professional levels for obtaining the official degree of teacher and requirements for initial teacher training*<sup>3</sup>. (2002:5) They are the following:

- **Professional values and practises**

These establish the attitudes that anyone receiving the official qualification as teacher should have, as well as the commitments they must make.

- **Knowledge and understanding**

These levels require newly qualified teachers to have the necessary confidence and adequate knowledge of the subject matter, as well as a clear idea of how pupils should progress in their learning (children’s learning progress) and the objectives they should achieve.

- **Teaching**

These levels are related to planning, follow-up and assessment skills, as well as to teaching and class organization techniques. These skills are based on the values and knowledge mentioned in the first two sections.

They are applicable to all trainees, regardless of the path they have chosen to obtain their official teaching qualifications. The levels give training providers autonomy to organize the training and satisfy the specific needs of the trainees. They do not lay down a curriculum or specify how the training is to be organized or administered. The levels are a rigorous set of expectations and establish the minimum legal requirements<sup>4</sup>.

More specifically, the similarities and differences in the training of teachers specializing in foreign languages at the Universities of Salamanca and Nottingham Trent are shown in Table 1.

### 1.3. Intercultural training

As the previous table shows the profile of the students in each country is very different, with regard to age (generally older in the British case), prior experience in foreign stays (much less in the Spanish case) and cultural, linguistic and academic background. For British students, their insertion into Spanish schools represents a change in framework but not a redefinition of the standards previously defined at Nottingham Trent University. For students from the University of Salamanca, the placement in Nottingham may be their first experience abroad and the academic goals accompanying their objectives of cultural assimilation and psychological adaptation are much broader. In order to prepare the students to confront this culture shock, we propose, following Byram (2002), the following model of teaching exchange:

**Preparatory Phase:** Before the placement abroad:

- 1) An initial preparation session during which students express their expectations and concerns regarding their stay in the host country. It is very useful to know the students’ concerns in order to examine their fears and work to shore up their confidence.
- 2) Both the British Council, in co-ordination with the University of Salamanca, and the Spanish Ministry of Education office in London organize a session or series of sessions about the educational systems in both countries to give the students an idea of the environment in which they will carry out their teaching practice.

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<sup>3</sup> *Teaching Qualifications. Professional levels for obtaining the official degree of teacher and requirements for initial teacher training*. 2002. London: Teacher Training Agency y Department for Education and Skills.

<sup>4</sup> Recently these profesional standards have been modified in the document Draft Revised Standards for Classroom Teachers, version viii-final (6 April 2006).

TABLE 1: ACCESS TO THE TEACHING PROFESSION

	<b>University of Salamanca</b>	<b>PGCE Nottingham Trent University</b>
Access to the training programme	Have passed Bachillerato  There is no further selection of students	Have completed an undergraduate university course.  Selection of students by a process of presentations and interviews.
Students' Profiles	Traditionally young students with little or non-existent working experience or travel abroad.	Mature students and in general with a broad working experience and visits abroad.
Length of training programme	A three-year course undergraduate programme.	A year long post graduate programme
Aims	Linguistic: Level CEF B2  Professional: teaching competence	Obtain the teaching qualifications included in the document <i>Teaching Qualifications. Professional levels for obtaining the official degree of teacher and requirements for initial teacher training</i> .
Teaching Placement	Practicum I: generalist practice (4 weeks).  Practicum II: MFL specialist practice in Spain or the UK (6 weeks).	Link Practice Plus: Placement prior to the placement abroad, in UK schools (5 weeks).  SBTP 2 in Spain: 4 weeks.  Final placement: 6 weeks.
Access to the teaching Profession	<i>Oposiciones</i> (Competitive exams) for state schools.  Interviews for private or denominational schools	Getting <i>Qualified Teacher Status</i> after finishing successfully a PGCE programme and a year in a school as NQT.

**Teaching Practice Phase:** This experience requires enormous effort from the students, who may find themselves overwhelmed by the new situations they have to face in the host country. To help them to be successful, they are given the opportunity to reflect on the context they are immersed in an individual way by keeping a diary or blog reflecting their feelings and their reactions to their feelings, and in a group way to be able to compare their own experiences and interpretations with those of other students.

**Follow-Up Phase: Spanish Day/English Day.** Once the stay is over, a one-day session is held between university tutors and students in order to reflect on and contrast experiences and see what they have in common and what is different about their experiences and learning. This will help them to analyse and conceptualise everything they have experienced with the aim of better understanding the context and the people recently encountered.

On the one hand, the University of Salamanca has until now emphasized the second phase, but attention to the first and third phases will have to take on priority in the future. Nottingham Trent University, on the other hand, has a protocol for action in the first and third phases. In one way or another, all the agents participating in the exchange, without exception, are obliged to try and understand the perspectives of others, to try to put ourselves in the others' skin, and we should make an effort to clarify our own starting

suppositions and ask others to make them equally explicit in order to avoid hasty judgements based on ignorance.

## 2. Development of the period of placement abroad

### 2.1. Aims and expectations

#### The students'

Our aim has been to make the placement abroad in both countries as similar and effective as possible. Both placements are of a very different nature due to the two very different training programmes. So we decided to follow, with some alterations, the British model at the same time that we ask the British students to accommodate to patterns and characteristics of the schools in Ávila and Zamora without neglecting what is expected from them from their home university.

Regarding the common expectations for the students of both countries, they are spelled out in the document as follows:

- 1.- To get acquainted with the English/Spanish system of education through an immersion in real primary school settings.
- 2.- To benefit from their participation in programmes of good professional teaching practice.
- 3.- To become aware of differences and similarities between English and Spanish school visions, management, organization and pedagogical resources, strategies and teaching procedures.
- 4.- To improve their language and teaching skills by being offered the opportunity to teach some Spanish/English, support the teaching of other subjects, introduce topics, prepare displays, (help) organize a Spanish/English club, contribute activities for a Spanish/English day at school, and help prepare teaching materials (labels, recordings of stories for children such as *Where is Spot*, *Elmer the Elephant*, *We're going on a bear hunt*, *The very hungry caterpillar* which can be found in both languages and are popular among school children of the two countries, etc), learn from the tutor's teaching expertise, learn classroom English expressions and learn how children routinely read and interact.
- 5.- To contribute to the educational aims of the host school by becoming a positive presence, offering support to the tutor as deemed appropriate, helping children and showing their appreciation of them as well as sensitizing them to their own language and culture through songs, basic expressions of greetings, games, and appealing materials.
- 6.- To get to appreciate the tremendous educational potential of establishing international links at a Primary level.
- 7.- To help orient their practice towards a truly European citizenship.

The tutors': The school mentors' commitments, some of them the same as the university tutors' are:

- 1.- Maintain regular link between the school and the University.
- 2.- Meet with the students on their arrival and acquaint them with school life and vision, timetables, routines, expected attitudes, responsibilities, assisting tasks and commitments, and with classroom dynamics during their stay.
- 3.- Orient trainees' intervention in the class by monitoring the design of lesson plans, providing advice for the trainees' performance and revising entries into their school-experience diary, observation notes and teaching practice files or report.
- 4.- Review the work of the trainees in school, with trainees, and the designated University supervisor, throughout the placement.
- 5.- Observe lessons of their trainees in school, review and evaluate their work and provide feedback in liaison with the designated supervisor.
- 6.- Participate in the review and evaluation of course provision.
- 7.- Write individual reports assessing the trainees' performance at the end of their placement and report on the overall TP experience.

The university tutors'. Regarding the commitments from the university tutors these are:

A- In the academic context:

- 1.- Maintain regular contacts between the school and the University, ensuring that host class teachers are familiar with the expectations of the four-week placement abroad and the procedures for the formative assessment of the trainees' progress. In order to achieve this, they need to:
- 2.- Liaise with school mentor and home country university tutor.
- 3.- Meet with the students on their arrival, during their stay and on their departure.
- 4.- Review the work of the trainees in school, with trainees, and the designated mentor/tutor, throughout the placement.
- 5.- Observe one lesson of each trainee in school, review and evaluate their work and provide feedback in liaison with the designated mentor.
- 6.- Participate in the review and evaluation of course provision.
- 7.- Write individual reports assessing the trainees' performance at the end of their placement and a final report on the overall TP experience.

B – In the organizational context:

- 1.- Exchange profiles of students in time for host families/schools/tutors to receive with letter outlining hosting arrangements.
- 2.- Welcome Day Agenda to be organized in the two countries.
- 3.- Arrange a meeting for schools having the Spanish/English students on placement:
  - (a) to discuss
    - Nature and purpose of the practice
    - Students' practical teaching experience to date
    - Nature of the foreign students in comparison with home trainees
  - (b) to clarify the assessment process.
  - (c) to provide information on preparation regarding cultural differences.
- 4.- Advise students to telephone host families/mentors on arrival in England/Spain.
- 5.- Expectations about being 'hosted' need to be clarified, e.g. help with washing up, sort own laundry, etc.
- 6.- If any new schools are to be involved, ensure that expectations for NTU / USAL students are clear for teaching staff, e.g. observations, files/report, planning, the standards, assisting tasks and suggested patterns for the four-week placement. Ensure School Heads know that students are not to be used as supply cover.
- 7.- Ensure Spanish students come with evidence of CRB clearance.

## 2.2. Programme

A sample of a weekly plan: tasks and commitments in and out of the class. This is only the grid for one week out of the overall four-week working pattern included in the published guide.

## Suggested pattern for WEEK ONE

	<b>StEP 1 Professional Attitudes &amp; Relationships</b>	<b>STeP 2 “PLANNING”</b>	<b>STeP 3 “Doing”</b>	<b>STeP 4 “Reviewing”</b>
<b>TRAINEE</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Induction.</li> <li>Health and Safety induction.</li> <li>Gather information on school policies, the curriculum, class routines and the role of other adults.</li> <li>Begin to build good relationships with pupils and staff in the host school.</li> <li>Identify linguistic needs and seek assistance when necessary.</li> <li>Start building your educational language repertoire.</li> <li>Evaluate the strength and weakness of your own cultural awareness.</li> <li>Take an active part in the cultural life of the school.</li> <li>Share previous report and set priorities for development.</li> <li>Action plan for SBTP 1 [OBS]*</li> <li>Use 30% non-contact time productively.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Plan some teaching for week one [OBS].</li> <li>Complete grid of teaching themes (Spanish, Mathematics, English + 2 additional themes) [OBS].</li> <li>Become familiar with school's resources.</li> <li>Draft plans for four week block</li> <li>Negotiate timetable for week ½ to include co-teaching of Spanish, mathematics and English and supervised teaching of other subjects [OBS].</li> <li>Explore suitable timetable for preparation of Spanish display, activities for a Spanish day at school, teaching materials, and for (helping) organize a Spanish club (OSS)*.</li> </ul> <p>*[OBS]= Only British Students *[OSS]= Only Spanish Students</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Observe lesson structure, the teacher-pupil relationships, expectations of learning, use of space, etc.</li> <li>Familiarise yourself with management routines and teaching and learning instructions.</li> <li>Become familiar with the learning and teaching resources and compile a list.</li> <li>Support teacher's sessions by working with groups and individuals.</li> <li>Co-teach – 2 lessons</li> <li>Lead some teaching – 1 lesson, at least 1 English lesson [OBS].</li> <li>Compare the curriculum and timetable of the host country with the home curriculum and timetable.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Review own teaching.</li> <li>Use rangefinders and select 3 profiled children [OBS].</li> <li>Conduct assessment conferences with 3 profiled children and establish records [OBS].</li> <li>Observe and review 4 of your teacher's teaching sessions.</li> <li>Weekly review and action plan.</li> </ul>
<b>CLASS TEACHER</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Induction to school/class.</li> <li>Health and Safety Induction.</li> <li>Review previous report and set development priorities.</li> <li>Draft programme of support.</li> <li>Support trainees in establishing appropriate relationships.</li> <li>Timetable 30% non-contact time.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide explicit information re-schools planning four-week block.</li> <li>Agree teaching themes + responsibilities for four week placement.</li> <li>Timetable trainee's teaching for Block Week.</li> <li>Review draft plans and focus revisions.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ensure school's approaches to issues of management and control are understood by trainee.</li> <li>Support trainee's whole class experiences and prepare for collaborative teaching.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Review individual children's responses to trainee's teaching and feedback.</li> <li>Support in identification of 3 profiled children [OBS].</li> <li>Monitor progress of file/TP Report by the end of the week &amp; offer feedback.</li> <li>Review the trainee's progress over the week.</li> <li>Ensure sufficient planning information has been received.</li> </ul>
<b>LINK TUTOR Spanish University</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Make initial contact (phone).</li> <li>Exchange contact information.</li> <li>Clarify roles.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Arrange a date for visit 1 in week ½ – for review of planning and preparation and initial observation.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Clarify purposes of the week.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Review the trainees progress over the week (phone).</li> </ul>

## The Spanish Report and the British File: format and content

To write up their reports, the students from the University of Salamanca use the following model, adapted from the Universidad Autónoma de Barcelona, which has been modified to suit our own programme aims and expectations. The model, of which we have selected the headings of the main sections, provides non-compulsory guidelines for the students.

### ***GUIDELINES FOR THE PRACTICUM REPORT (SPANISH STUDENTS)***

*In every section of your Practicum Report you are supposed to **describe** the reality observed and **discuss** (reflect and analyse) the incidents described.*

#### **1. The School**

You should gather relevant information about the school (from the school brochure, web page, etc.) and include it in the appendix. You are also advised to take pictures of significant features and use them to illustrate what you say.

The school setting. The school and the community. School organisation and educational principles. The school assemblies. Languages and cultures present at school. The role of foreign languages in the school curriculum. The use of space in the school and in the classrooms. Health and safety.

#### **2. The Classroom**

2.1. Background information about **your** class (if you are placed mainly in one group): Group characteristics; the classroom setting (significant features, flexibility in the use of the different areas, etc.); the class tutor (and other teachers teaching that group); other people participating in class (class assistants, parents, etc.); teaching/learning in the different subjects; co-ordination between the different teachers and subjects; classroom management (grouping, flexibility, common forms of interaction, discipline, etc.); students with special characteristics/needs; assessment; discipline, etc.

2.2. Focus on specific themes:

Choose **one** of the above themes to describe and discuss more in depth.

#### **3. Foreign Languages (FL) in the school curriculum**

The role of FL in the school. FL taught in the school. Preference of students' choice of FL. The FL Syllabus. Timetable, textbooks and other materials and resources. The language/languages of communication in the FL class. If there is a special class for the FL lessons, include a plan of the classroom and notes on significant features. Usual seating arrangement. Corners. Methodology. Co-ordination of the FL teacher with other teachers/areas.

Teaching practice as a teacher of Spanish as a foreign language and in curricular areas other than Spanish: A reflection on the activities you have carried out, lessons you have taught, support given to the class tutor, etc., following the day-by-day, session-by-session concise description and reflection that you have included in the appendix.

Classroom language; Materials and resources for TEFL discovered in the school; Stories, songs, games, activities, projects, festivals, special events, etc. that you have experienced during your stay and that you find of interest for the teaching of English as a foreign language; The school and the classroom in the UK and at home: similarities and differences; Out of school visits.

#### **4. Ways of obtaining a QTS (Qualified Teacher Status) and possibilities to get a teaching job in the UK**

#### **5. Conclusions**

What have you gained with the experience? Highlight the most important aspects. Reflect on the work you have done as well as on the way you have done it and on the difficulties you have encountered.

#### **Bibliography**

**Appendix.** The appendix should include: A contents page; A day-by-day, session-by-session concise description and reflection on the work you have done (including your timetable, activity plans, lesson plans, worksheets, bibliography used, etc.); Documents that you consider useful to illustrate what have been presented in your report: class list, class timetable, classroom plan, the FL specialist timetable, calendar of teachers' meetings, samples of children's work, samples of tests, assessment records, the school magazine, special events, etc.

On the other hand, the British students are required to maintain a file throughout their time on the placement. This is a professional journal which records their developing awareness and proficiency. It is intended to be a working document which promotes positive communication between the trainee, the mentor and university tutor.

The file should be systematically ordered according to the Standards of Teaching Proficiency (STePs) in the following 5 main sections:

1. School information and policies/class information, e.g. information about the school, class routines, timetable.
2. Medium term plans, e.g. grid of teaching themes, evidence of research to support teaching, materials to support developing subject knowledge.
3. Week by week plans, e.g. weekly timetable, weekly plans, individual lesson plans.
4. Assessment and Record Keeping, e.g. range finders, monitoring records, records of four profiled children (PICLES).
5. Professional development, e.g. previous placement report, weekly review and target setting records, mentor/university tutor feedback from observations.

#### Assessment: criteria and report

Up until now, we have been using two different assessment models. Our hope is that in the future, once we all get more familiar with our different assessment models, although both with very similar qualitative elements, we would be able to use a common model or to adapt one of them for both institutions. What is important is to realise the capital importance of completing the assessment documents for each one of the students. They are an indispensable training tool and not just a mere administrative task. The observation-based reports are read by the students and they play an important role in their academic and professional future. In our *International Guide for Placement Abroad in Primary Schools* (2006) we have offered a model of observation and of a report already completed in order to facilitate the tutors' tasks. The assessment documents offered are different for the students from the two different countries to respect both training models but they do not necessarily exclude each other, they rather complement each other.

### **3. Conclusion**

The path taken up until now allows for a certain optimism with respect to the new challenges awaiting us. Among these are the following: making the linguistic and cultural experience a central component in teacher training; fostering the role of university students as true cultural ambassadors; promoting ever greater links between the host schools of both countries through the exchange of material, videoconferencing, e-correspondence, visits, etc.; favouring the formal "twinning" of schools in order to create, from the school, a greater and better European citizenship; encouraging the design of harmonized school programmes among practice schools in both countries; extending integrated teaching or content-based programmes in foreign languages and among the schools involved in both countries; broadening the network of links with other primary schools beyond the specific programme of the International Practicum through the Comenius programme or others. In the area of teacher training, another big challenge would be to jointly develop school teaching modules, pre-service and in-service training programmes, and educational materials, etc. All of these possibilities clearly show that the exchange programme for international practice teaching that is the

subject of the guide of which we have offered a synthesis is only the tip of the iceberg and that growing levels of cooperation can be channelled through it. This in itself is already proving to be of immense value to all: children, students, form teachers, individual school administrations, university educators and local, regional and national education authorities.

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## Aprendizaje y técnicas de enseñanza del inglés en la escuela

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### Resumen

Este artículo tiene como finalidad plantear ideas básicas y prácticas que sirvan de orientación y apoyo a los docentes de segundas lenguas (lenguas extrajeras) en la escuela. En primer lugar, se hace referencia a la adquisición del lenguaje y concretamente al aprendizaje temprano de una segunda lengua. A continuación, abordamos específicamente las rutinas, las transiciones y las fórmulas como posibles vías para enseñar inglés en Infantil y en Primaria. El Apéndice incluye rimas, canciones y fórmulas para ayudar a los docentes a presentar el inglés en clase.

**Palabras clave:** adquisición del lenguaje, aprendizaje temprano de segundas lenguas, el contexto de aprendizaje, los datos lingüísticos del entorno, las rutinas, las transiciones y las fórmulas.

### Abstract

The main objective of this article is to give basic and practical ideas to help second language (foreign language) teachers at school. Firstly, we refer to language acquisition and more specifically to child second language learning. Then, we consider routines, transitions and formulaic language as vehicles to teach English in the Early Years and Primary. The Appendix includes rhymes, songs and formulas to be used in English in class.

**Key words:** language acquisition, child second language learning, language context, input, routines, transitions and formulaic language.

### Introducción

Durante la última década se ha puesto en marcha en muchas escuelas la enseñanza de una lengua extranjera a una edad temprana y numerosos estudios de adquisición del lenguaje han contribuido a esta expansión. Los estudios de adquisición apuntan a que cuando los niños aprenden segundas lenguas a una edad temprana, desarrollan sus sistemas gramaticales de manera no consciente y natural, por el hecho de entrar en contacto con los datos lingüísticos de la lengua en cuestión.

Los estudios sobre cómo los niños interiorizan los sistemas no nativos (L2) aportan evidencia a los especialistas sobre cómo se llevan a cabo los procesos de adquisición y sirven para enseñar mejor dichas lenguas en la escuela. En este artículo se dan ideas prácticas encaminadas a facilitar la tarea de la enseñanza del inglés en Infantil y Primaria, teniendo presentes las necesidades de los aprendices durante las etapas tempranas de aprendizaje y teniendo en cuenta también factores tales como el contexto de aprendizaje o el tiempo de exposición a los datos lingüísticos del entorno.

Este artículo tiene un objetivo doble, por una lado contribuir a la mejora de la enseñanza del inglés en Infantil y en las primeras etapas de Primaria y por el otro, entender mejor cómo se lleva a cabo el aprendizaje de una segunda lengua (L2)<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> A lo largo del artículo utilizaremos indistintamente los términos lenguaje no nativo, lengua segunda y L2.

El artículo está organizado de la siguiente manera: en primer lugar haremos referencia a algunas propiedades del lenguaje en general y a la adquisición de segundas lenguas cuando los aprendices son niños. En segundo lugar, sugerimos rutinas y actividades para presentar el inglés en el aula a los más pequeños; por último, incluimos el material relacionado con las prácticas a las que hacemos referencia.

## 1. Los niños y la L1

Durante el proceso de adquisición de la lengua materna (L1) los niños no reciben información explícita sobre las reglas de su gramática ya que se trata de un aprendizaje no consciente y cuando el proceso termina, alrededor de los 5 años, los hablantes de las distintas lenguas naturales que se hablan en el mundo han adquirido con éxito, sin esfuerzo, independientemente de su grado de inteligencia la lengua meta. Las lenguas maternas se aprenden estando inmersos en ellas, interaccionando con los adultos o con otros niños, dando sentido al habla del entorno, analizando los sonidos, la entonación y las estructuras gramaticales, incluso como apunta la doctora Kuhl, desde antes del nacimiento:

“At birth, infants have been shown to prefer the language spoken by their mothers during pregnancy, as opposed to another language..., additional evidence that the learning of speech patterns commences *in utero* stems from studies showing infant preference for their mother’s voice over another female at birth and their preference for stories read by the mother during the last 10 weeks of pregnancy” (Kuhl, 2000:54).

Para autores como Pinker (1995) el lenguaje es producto de un instinto biológico bien confeccionado; se trata de un producto de la selección natural de la evolución de las especies; de una adaptación biológica para comunicar información:

“El lenguaje es una pieza singular de la maquinaria biológica de nuestro cerebro..., un instinto, ya que esta palabra transmite la idea de que las personas saben hablar en el mismo sentido que las arañas saben tejer sus telas” (Pinker, 1995: 18).

El lenguaje entendido como órgano mental crece y el niño no puede negarse a que le crezca la lengua materna y este crecimiento se produce al entrar en contacto con la lengua del entorno. Un requisito necesario de este contacto es que el lenguaje al que el niño está expuesto sea interpretable, es decir que un niño no podría aprender una lengua con oír sólo la radio (O’Grady, 2005). En el Cuadro I queda reflejado el modelo innatista<sup>2</sup> que nos va a servir también para explicar la adquisición temprana de una L2.

Cuadro I

**L1**

Dotación innata + Datos lingüísticos-x (*input*) = Lengua-x

Como queda reflejado en el Cuadro I, los datos lingüísticos del entorno tienen gran relevancia en la tarea de la adquisición porque constituyen el estímulo externo que dirige a los niños durante todo el proceso. Los niños entran en contacto con los datos lingüísticos de la lengua que están aprendiendo y ponen en funcionamiento operaciones mentales de manera no consciente para conseguir la información necesaria que les ayude a proyectar las reglas y los principios que subyacen a esa lengua. De esta manera, el niño construye un sistema gramatical que va mucho más allá de los datos a los que ha tenido acceso y es capaz de construir oraciones que no ha oído antes. Los niños no aprenden las lenguas de golpe, sino que la inmersión es de varios años; durante este tiempo, siguen un proceso de desarrollo que a grandes rasgos coincide en todas las lenguas naturales: atraviesan por distintas etapas que van desde el balbuceo a las etapas de una o dos palabras, para llegar a la producción de múltiples palabras, etapa esta en la que los niños construyen primero las oraciones simples y más tarde las compuestas.

<sup>2</sup> Hipótesis innatista de Chomsky (1965).

A este respecto, se podría pensar que los niños se enfrentan a la adquisición de una lengua en un ambiente especialmente diseñado para facilitar su aprendizaje, y que los adultos, con su manera típica de hablar a los niños, facilitarían esa tarea. Pero esta no es la norma y los niños aprenden a hablar dentro de una gran variedad de condiciones y de contextos de aprendizaje:

"Children acquire...languages quite successfully even though no special care is taken to teach them and no special attention is given to their progress (Chomsky, 1965: 200-1).

A veces los padres se toman mucho empeño en esta tarea y en otras también consiguen el mismo resultado, como en el caso de los hijos de sordomudos, que aún teniendo acceso a un número reducido de *input* en el entorno familiar, si su contacto con el medio lingüístico es normal, no muestran ninguna diferencia al compararlos con los demás niños. Se ha observado también que en algunas comunidades (Quiché, Guatemala) la actitud de los padres es ignorar a los niños hasta que estos no son capaces de producir emisiones de varías palabras, y sin embargo, los niños de estas culturas consiguen el dominio de la lengua de los adultos.

Antes de pasar a tratar el tema del aprendizaje de las lenguas no-nativas hacemos referencia a la importancia de la edad de los aprendices para adquirir el lenguaje. Al parecer, si se trata de una lengua materna, la edad está restringida a la primera infancia, es decir, desde el nacimiento, o según algunas teorías desde antes del nacimiento, hasta la edad de 6 años aproximadamente porque después al parecer no es posible la adquisición normal del lenguaje y se convierte en una tarea difícil o incompleta. La única evidencia de la que disponemos procede de los niños que han vivido bajo aislamientos extremos que indican que no es posible la adquisición normal del lenguaje cuando éste tiene lugar después de la edad biológicamente adecuada; bien porque la capacidad lingüística ha disminuido, bien por razones emocionales o de índole psicológico. De tres casos conocidos de niños que han vivido en aislamientos extremos: Genie (13 años), Chelsie (31 años), e Isabelle (6 años), sólo Isabelle fue capaz de acometer el aprendizaje de la lengua y de generar y producir oraciones complejas en año y medio. En cuanto a Genie y Chelsie, aunque fueron capaces de aprender palabras sueltas y componer oraciones simplificadas, ninguna de las dos pudo aprender las reglas gramaticales que subyacen a la lengua. Otro indicio de que la plasticidad de la mente/cerebro disminuye con la edad, la aportan los casos de niños que tienen que superar lesiones cerebrales que afectan a este modulo. Comparando a los niños con los adultos que sufren daños cerebrales y dependiendo del daño, es más posible que los niños recuperen la capacidad del lenguaje que los adultos. Como consecuencia de todo esto, se observa que los niños aprenden a hablar dentro de un programa de maduración y después de que han ejercitado y refinado otros circuitos cerebrales tales como el centro del control motor, por el que el niño coge un objeto, se sienta, gatea y después camina o el sistema visual, otro centro que no se desarrollaría si no se ejercitase. Hay un periodo concreto de maduración en el que la vista, el lenguaje, el caminar se desarrollan y maduran con la estimulación adecuada, pero antes de ese momento o después resulta o muy difícil o imposible.

Hasta aquí nos hemos referido a algunas características del lenguaje y a cómo la mente del niño parece estar programada para llevar a cabo con éxito el aprendizaje de cualquier lengua natural. También nos hemos referido a la importancia de la edad y los datos lingüísticos del entorno, que son como el motor que pone en marcha todo el mecanismo de aprendizaje y los que aportan al niño la información necesaria para adquirir una u otra lengua por medio de la selección rasgos y de parámetros.

## 2. Los niños y la L2

Tomando como punto de partida algunas características de la adquisición de la lengua materna, en este apartado acometemos la adquisición de los sistemas no nativos y en concreto, del inglés en la escuela. Los

humanos, además de alcanzar el dominio del lenguaje nativo, tenemos la capacidad potencial de aprender una o varias lenguas segundas y los estudios que giran en torno a la adquisición del lenguaje no nativo intentan explicar cómo se aprende un segundo sistema de reglas y cómo esas dos o más gramáticas se relacionan en la mente del aprendiz.

Frente al éxito indiscutible y generalizado que, en condiciones normales, alcanzan los hablantes de una lengua materna, encontramos que los resultados finales a los que llegan los hablantes de segundas lenguas varían considerablemente de unos a otros debido a las múltiples variables que entran en juego a la hora de aprender una L2. Uno de los factores que determinan las diferencias de éxito entre los aprendices está fuertemente vinculado a la edad cuando acometen el aprendizaje de un segundo sistema lingüístico. Al parecer, las posibilidades de éxito son mayores si el aprendizaje de la L2 es continuado y se lleva a cabo durante la infancia. Para defender esta postura, algunos autores se apoyan en la propuesta de Lenneberg (1967) de la que se desprende que la capacidad para adquirir una lengua disminuye dramáticamente a partir de la pubertad. Para este autor, la dificultad que representa el aprendizaje de una L2 está directamente relacionada con el deterioro de la plasticidad del cerebro y con el proceso progresivo de lateralización de la mente.

Los sistemas no nativos distan del sistema del lenguaje nativo pero siguen siendo sistemas de lenguaje. Para dar cuenta de los mecanismos que entran en funcionamiento durante los procesos de aprendizaje de estos sistemas, algunos autores, como Selinker (1972), se apoyan en la propuesta postulada anteriormente por Lenneberg (1967) y por Chomsky (1965) de que el cerebro dispone de una estructura lingüística latente. Para Selinker, las propiedades de las *interlenguas*<sup>3</sup> surgen como resultado de la superposición de estructuras del intelecto que activan una estructura diferente a la que Selinker denomina *estructura psicológica latente*, la cual permite la adquisición de segundas lenguas después de que se ha adquirido la L1. Aunque la adquisición del lenguaje no nativo no está restringida a una determinada edad, como apuntábamos anteriormente para el lenguaje nativo, la edad de los aprendices parece ser un factor determinante a la hora de acometer con éxito la adquisición de lenguas segundas. Selinker apunta que aprender un sistema lingüístico nuevo después de la pubertad puede convertirse en un proceso lento y la mayoría de las veces en un proceso incompleto.

En cuanto al tema de la edad se refiere, y retomando lo anteriormente expuesto para la adquisición de una L1, todo parece indicar que los niños son unos candidatos idóneos para aprender lenguas. Si los niños establecen contacto estable y continuo con dos lenguas desde el nacimiento, las adquieren de manera simultánea y por lo general llegan a alcanzar un nivel de nativo en ambas lenguas, convirtiéndose en *bilingües precoces* o, como algunos autores los denominan, *monolingües en dos lenguas*. En estos casos, los niños desarrollan dos sistemas gramaticales paralelos y por separado y las etapas de desarrollo que siguen para cada una de las lenguas son las mismas que si se tratase de dos lenguas maternas (de Houwer, 1990; Barreña 1997; Pérez Vidal, 1995, entre otros). De Houwer (1990) estudia el desarrollo morfosintáctico del inglés y del holandés de Kate, una niña que está expuesta a estas dos lenguas desde el nacimiento. Pérez Vidal (1995) analiza los datos de su hijo Andreu, que adquiere catalán e inglés y Barreña (1997) analiza los datos de un niño aprendiendo euskera y español. En los tres casos los autores llegan a la conclusión de que los procesos de aprendizaje de las dos lenguas se de forma independiente y que las dos gramáticas se desarrollan simultáneamente y por separado.

Cuando la adquisición comienza después de los tres años, se lleva a cabo de manera consecutiva puesto que la lengua materna ha alcanzado un determinado grado de desarrollo y ha evolucionado hasta un cierto nivel, lo cual no implica que no se pueda alcanzar el grado de bilingüe o de casi nativo en la L2. Los estudios

<sup>3</sup> Selinker (1976) denomina *interlenguas* a las gramáticas intermedias por las que atraviesan los aprendices de segundas lenguas: G0---G1---}G2---}G3---}Gn.

recientes de adquisición del inglés no nativo se basan en el desarrollo gramatical de los datos espontáneos de algunos niños (Marta, Cheo, Muriel, Uguisu, Greg, Kenny, Jean-Marc, Patrick, Erdem, entre otros). Originalmente, estos datos fueron objeto de estudio para algunos investigadores y, en los últimos años, otro grupo de investigadores los han utilizado para fundamentar sus hipótesis sobre el desarrollo de las interlenguas (Lakshmanan 1995; Eubank 1993/1994; Haznedar, 1997 y Lee 2001, entre otros). En muchos casos para dialogar con los niños y así obtener datos, los autores utilizan cuentos no sólo en los estudios del inglés no nativo (Erdem) sino también en estudios de inglés nativo (Hein), como se recoge en el trabajo de Haegeman (1995).

Como venimos recogiendo en este artículo, la exposición a los datos lingüísticos del entorno influye decisivamente en los resultados que alcanzan los aprendices y este dato queda reflejado en algunos trabajos llevados a cabo para el inglés en distintos contextos de aprendizaje (Haznedar, 1997, Fleta, 1999 y Lázaro, 2002). El seguimiento longitudinal de dieciocho meses que lleva a cabo Haznedar (1997) sobre la interlengua de Erdem, un niño hablante nativo de turco que aprende inglés en un contexto natural, le indica que el aprendiz tiene adquiridas la mayoría de las estructuras morfo-sintácticas del inglés al finalizar el estudio.

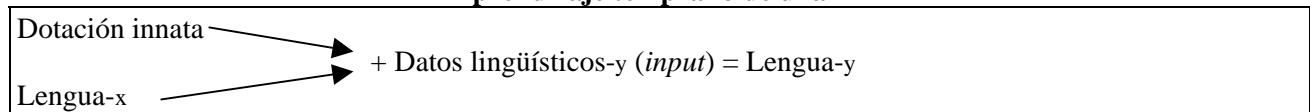
El estudio longitudinal de tres años de duración llevado a cabo por Fleta (1999) en un colegio bilingüe de inmersión inglés/español con cuatro hablantes nativos de español (Andrés, Beatriz, Carlos y Diana) apunta a que su interlengua es comparable a la de Erdem y también a la de los niños nativos porque en los resultados quedan reflejados los mecanismos y estrategias de aprendizaje que se ponen en marcha en las situaciones en las que los datos lingüísticos del entorno se presentan a los niños de manera espontánea y sin instrucción formal en un contexto institucional. El desarrollo morfo-sintáctico del inglés de los cuatro niños, estratificado por etapas fundamentadas una en otras es lento y de características idiosincrásicas, y es comparable al de los niños nativos y al de los no nativos en situaciones de inmersión total.

En el caso de Lázaro (2002), los datos pertenecen a tres proyectos de investigación que se centran en la adquisición del inglés como lengua extranjera (L3) por aprendices bilingües euskera/castellano de educación primaria y secundaria. Para esta autora, la edad de los aprendices parece ser un factor determinante para el desarrollo morfosintáctico del inglés L3 en un contexto institucional. Los niños más pequeños, que llevan menos tiempo de instrucción y en consecuencia con menor exposición a los datos lingüísticos del entorno siguen un proceso más lento, pero produciendo estructuras que se asemejan más a datos de los niños en contexto de inmersión o de contexto natural. Con los aprendices adolescentes, por su parte, se produce un mayor avance, mientras que con los de mayor edad este avance se frena.

Como refleja la Cuadro II, cuando los niños acometen el aprendizaje de la L2 en Infantil y en Primaria, parten de la dotación innata para adquirir lenguas y de la experiencia que significa haber adquirido su lengua materna:

Cuadro II

**Aprendizaje temprano de una L2**



En el caso de la adquisición de lenguas no nativas, no se trata únicamente la edad de los aprendices sino que existen otras variables individuales y contextuales que condicionan en mayor o en menor medida la cantidad de datos lingüísticos del entorno (el *input*) a los que los aprendices tienen acceso. Por una parte encontramos factores directamente relacionados con los aprendices tales como, la aptitud, la actitud, la motivación, o incluso el sentido del ridículo y por otra, factores relacionados con el contexto de aprendizaje.

Las situaciones en las que los niños tienen acceso a más de una lengua varían; en ocasiones, los encargados de presentar dos lenguas distintas a los niños son los padres, que hablan dos lenguas maternas diferentes. A veces los niños cambian de comunidad lingüística y se encuentran en una situación en la que en casa hablan la lengua materna pero por el hecho de vivir en otro país, aprenden la lengua del entorno y frecuentemente se escolarizan en ella. También puede suceder que hayan nacido en una comunidad bilingüe, en cuyo caso también tienen acceso a dos lenguas desde el primer momento. Las exigencias de los sistemas educativos contemplan el aprendizaje de una lengua extranjera, y por regla general los niños tienen acceso a sistemas no nativos en el colegio durante unas horas semanales a lo largo del curso escolar. Una variante de los sistemas educativos considera que la educación de los niños se lleve a cabo en la lengua extranjera y en la materna, dando lugar a los denominados colegios bilingües. En los centros de enseñanza bilingüe, los aprendices reciben instrucción formal en dos lenguas y desarrollan las cuatro destrezas básicas del lenguaje (entender, hablar, leer y escribir) en la lengua materna y en la segunda lengua o lengua extranjera y llegan a conseguir niveles de competencia en ambas a lo largo del currículum. La enseñanza de las distintas áreas del currículum (matemáticas, música, ciencias, gimnasia, etc.) se canaliza a través de las dos lenguas indistintamente, por lo que para poder entender los conceptos, los alumnos deben dominar el lenguaje específico de cada materia, reflexionar sobre ellos y dejar constancia en los exámenes o en los trabajos.

Resumiendo, si comparamos la adquisición de la L1 con la adquisición temprana de una L2 encontramos diferencias en cuanto a las etapas del proceso y a su desarrollo así como también en cuanto a la competencia lingüística última que alcanzan los aprendices que están condicionadas ambas por el tipo de *input* (cantidad y calidad) y por la edad de los aprendices. Los estudios de adquisición a los que hemos hecho referencia apuntan a que el aprendizaje temprano del inglés L2 es más o menos lento aunque de características similares al de la lengua materna y que la infancia es el momento “ideal” para acometer el aprendizaje de una L2. Durante esta etapa, los niños son receptivos al aprendizaje de lenguas y al entrar en contacto con el estímulo externo, desarrollan las capacidades necesarias para extraer y abstraer las reglas que subyacen a las gramáticas. Parece lógico pensar que a los 3,4,5 o 6 años se trata de un proceso no consciente y natural como el de la lengua materna y que como apunta Halliwell (1992), los niños a estas edades se centran más en el mensaje que quieren comunicar que en la forma en la que tienen que comunicarlo:

“Young learners do not come to the language classroom learning empty-handed. They bring with them an already well-established set of instincts, skills and characteristics which will help them to learn another language. We need to identify those and make the most of them.” Halliwell (1992:3).

Además habría que añadir que, desde el punto de vista psico-social, los niños son unos aprendices potenciales óptimos porque se relacionan bien aunque tengan poco conocimiento de la L2 y son capaces de usarla aún sin dominarla; para lo cual ponen en funcionamiento los pocos recursos lingüísticos que poseen de manera creativa y, lo que es más, carecen del sentido del ridículo que acompaña a veces a muchos adultos.

### 3. La L2 y la escuela

En el apartado anterior veímos que los datos lingüísticos del entorno desempeñan un papel indispensable para aprender lenguas y que cuando los aprendices son niños, las segundas lenguas se aprenden, como la primera, sin instrucción explícita de las reglas de las gramáticas. También veímos que el entorno de aprendizaje está directamente relacionado con los datos lingüísticos a los que los niños tienen acceso y que en un contexto de aprendizaje natural la calidad y la cantidad del *input* es superior a la de un colegio bilingüe y este a su vez, es superior a la de un colegio en el que se aprende inglés durante unas horas a la semana.

En esta sección damos ideas prácticas para crear un entorno de aprendizaje rico en inglés en Infantil y en las primeras etapas de Primaria, basadas en la experiencia del trabajo en el aula. Estas sugerencias tienen como objetivo principal acercar más adecuadamente el inglés a los niños, es decir, teniendo en cuenta su

maduración lingüística, cognitiva, y su conocimiento del mundo entre los 3 y 7 años. Se trata de aplicar el estímulo lingüístico adecuado a cada momento del día escolar para que los aprendices puedan ir comprendiendo las actividades docentes programadas y que el inglés se convierta en una lengua familiar que aflore en las situaciones más cotidianas de la escuela y teniendo en cuenta que como apunta Moon (2000) el profesor es la única fuente lingüística de la que los aprendices beben:

"The different contexts in which children can learn English affect the quality and quantity of language input which children get. In a foreign language situation, children will depend almost entirely on the school environment for input, so you as their teacher, may be the only source of language, which makes your role in children's language learning very important" (Moon, 2000:14).

Visto desde esta perspectiva, el inglés se convierte en un instrumento de comunicación, en un medio para desarrollar las distintas inteligencias de los aprendices y en un vehículo para la transmisión de conocimientos de las distintas materias, utilizándose siempre en situaciones de interacción en las que los niños comparten información de manera significativa con los profesores y con los demás niños. En suma, se trata de tener en cuenta algunos de los aspectos del aprendizaje de la lengua materna y extrapolarlos al aprendizaje del inglés L2 en la escuela.

Las actividades que presentamos están pensadas para abarcar a todos y a cada uno de los aprendices, sus distintas inteligencias y sus distintas maneras de aprender. La teoría de las inteligencias múltiples pluraliza el concepto tradicional de la inteligencia y propone hasta siete inteligencias diferentes para cada individuo (lingüística, lógico-matemática, musical, cinético-corporal, espacial, interpersonal, intrapersonal). Según esta teoría, cada individuo posee una combinación de las distintas inteligencias y a una edad temprana, el entorno de aprendizaje influye directamente en el desarrollo de dichas inteligencias; por esta razón, es conveniente, como apunta Gardner (1995), que cuando se presenten las actividades a los niños, se utilicen distintas técnicas para con ello favorecer el desarrollo de las distintas inteligencias de los aprendices:

"We are not all the same, we do not all have the same kinds of minds, and education works most effectively for most individuals if...human differences are taken seriously" (Gardner, 1995:208).

Las técnicas que proponemos a continuación están pensadas para aprovechar mejor el horario escolar y el aula como contexto de aprendizaje, lugar y momentos estos durante los que los niños entran en contacto con el inglés L2 en la escuela y a los que los profesores pueden sacar gran partido.

### 3.1. Las rutinas

Un vehículo para presentar a los aprendices el inglés en la escuela es aprovechar las rutinas en clase. Las rutinas son acciones que se llevan a cabo con cierta regularidad, cada día o cada semana y con las que los niños están familiarizados, de la misma manera que lavarse los dientes, ponerse el pijama y escuchar un cuento al irse a la cama es un ritual que indica al niño cada día que es la hora de dormir. Como apunta Cameron (2003) las rutinas aportan a los niños múltiples beneficios:

"Routines can provide opportunities for meaningful language development; they allow the child to actively make sense of new language from familiar experience and provide a space for language growth. Routines will open many possibilities for developing language skills" (Cameron 2003:10).

Las rutinas no sólo ayudan a organizar el día en casa, sino que también ayudan a organizar el día escolar. En la escuela, las rutinas contribuyen a que los niños se acostumbren a las normas, a orientarse en el espacio y en el tiempo, a familiarizarse con las situaciones y a que se sientan más seguros. Los niños participan espontáneamente de las rutinas escolares al llegar y marcharse de la escuela, durante las horas de las comidas (almuerzo, comida y merienda), recogiendo la clase o preparándose para la siesta y cuanto más pequeños son los niños, mayor relevancia tienen las rutinas.

Para sacarles más partido a las rutinas en la clase de inglés, se puede hacer uso de lo que llamaríamos "rutinas lingüísticas" que consiste en utilizar las mismas expresiones, palabras o fórmulas en inglés mientras

se llevan a cabo las distintas rutinas escolares. Una secuencia de expresiones como: *good morning, come in, take your coat off, hang your coat on your peg and sit on the carpet*, dichas en clase cada mañana cuando los niños llegan a la escuela se convierten en una rutina, aportan significado, contribuyen a que los niños se familiaricen con la situación y se convierten en cimientos sobre los que los niños van a ir construyendo la segunda lengua.

Además de la rutina de la llegada de los niños a la escuela por mañana, los momentos que se repiten a lo largo del día escolar son múltiples: la sesión en la alfombra por la mañana en la que se habla de la fecha, del tiempo, de las estaciones del año, de la hora o de los cumpleaños; sacar y recoger los juguetes o preparar el material para trabajar; contar cuentos; lavarse las manos antes de comer o ponerse los abrigos antes de ir a casa. Durante la rutina de los cumpleaños, por ejemplo, los aprendices oyen las mismas expresiones y se llevan a cabo las mismas acciones cada vez que un niño cumple años: *it's birthday time; who's got a birthday today?; how old are you today?; sing the happy birthday song and clap hands*. De esta manera, con las rutinas, las repeticiones, la mimética y las acciones que conllevan las actividades y las expresiones lingüísticas que las acompañan, se facilita a los aprendices la comprensión y el aprendizaje de la lengua.

Resumiendo, éstas y otras rutinas son algunos de los momentos para facilitar la interacción entre el profesor y los niños en el aula en inglés. El profesor primero presenta el lenguaje a los niños y más tarde puede beneficiarse de ello y proponer que sea un niño el que salude a los otros niños en inglés por la mañana; o en el caso de la rutina de los cumpleaños, que sea un niño el que repita la rutina lingüística. De esta manera aprovechando la escuela como entorno de aprendizaje, cualquier lugar (aula, pasillos, comedor, recreo, etc.) y en cualquier momento del día se pueden crear oportunidades para interaccionar en inglés de manera sistemática, lo cual favorece la exposición a los datos lingüísticos que a su vez da paso a la gramática del inglés y que a su vez contribuye a que la gramática pueda ir creciendo en las mentes de los niños. Si como se dice los niños son como esponjas, cuanto más inglés les demos -y cuanto más mejor- más absorberán.

### 3.2. Las transiciones

Las transiciones son los períodos de tiempo entre actividades, es decir, los períodos de tiempo en los que los profesores tienen que dirigir a los niños desde el final de una actividad hasta el comienzo de la siguiente. En algunas ocasiones estos períodos de tiempo entre el cambio de actividades se convierten en momentos caóticos y de confusión no sólo en el contexto de aprendizaje de la segunda lengua sino también en el de la primera. En este apartado veremos cómo estos períodos de tiempo entre actividades pueden ser más llevaderos y muy valiosos al convertirse en vehículos para introducir la segunda lengua en el aula (del autobús a casa y viceversa; de la alfombra a las mesas; de la clase al comedor; de la clase al aseo, etc.).

Las actividades y las estructuras lingüísticas que acompañan a las transiciones ayudan al profesor y al alumno tanto como las rutinas y para conseguir que sean verdaderamente efectivas deberían programarse juntas. Así, se debería pensar qué tipo de canción, rima, poema o juego se puede llevar a cabo mientras esperamos que todos los niños terminen de almorzar para luego pasar a la siguiente actividad o que canciones, rimas, poemas o juegos podemos poner en práctica estando en fila esperando al autobús que no llega.

Para captar la atención de los niños en clase cuando están desarrollando una actividad se pueden utilizar recursos verbales y no verbales. Como apunta Cameron (2001) las señas no verbales (fotos, carteles, letreros) son especialmente importantes en este contexto de aprendizaje porque anticipan explícitamente a los aprendices la actividad que se va a llevar a cabo después:

“Instructions can be supported with pictures relevant to key stages, left on the board or the wall in the right order to act as a reminder” (Cameron, 2003:210).

Cuando conocemos las rutinas de la clase, lo más aconsejable es que se programen de antemano las estrategias que acompañarán a las transiciones; tener en cuenta las secuencias de actividades al planificar un aumento o declive gradual del nivel de actividad y los recursos que se van a utilizar al pasar de momentos de gran actividad a momentos en los que se requiere silencio (del gimnasio a tomar la merienda, por ejemplo). No sólo es importante lo que los niños tienen que hacer sino también cuándo y cómo lo tienen que llevar a cabo. A continuación damos una serie de ideas para evitar que el cambio de actividades en clase o los desplazamientos sean momentos de confusión y frustrantes para el profesor y evitar con ello el comportamiento negativo de algunos niños.

- *Recursos sonoros*: Se puede utilizar un timbre, un pito, una pandereta, tocar palmas, una canción, una rima, etc. Cuando los niños los oyen dejan lo que están haciendo y miran al profesor en espera de instrucciones.
- *Mímica para transiciones* con movimientos simples de las manos se facilita el significado de las palabras y de las estructuras más complejas y se pueden incorporar a las rutinas y a las transiciones: “Clap your hands and wiggle your fingers”. “Statue of...” “Roly Poly up up up”<sup>4</sup>.
- *Canciones y rimas para transiciones*: “From the carpet to the chair”, “When I’m in class, I sit on the floor”, “Get in line now”, “Stay in line”, “Picking up toys”, “Washing hands”.
- *Recordatorios verbales* que anticipan una transición: “five minutes before lunch”, “it’s almost time to tidy up”, “if you can hear my voice, clap three times/stop what you are doing and look at me”, “after we clean up, we are going to go for lunch”.

Las rutinas y las transiciones son momentos de aprendizaje especialmente valiosos dado que el contexto determina los diferentes usos del lenguaje y a los que el profesor de segunda lengua puede sacar mucho partido. Se puede practicar los números, el alfabeto, ejercitarse la psicomotricidad fina, fomentar la interacción en clase (individual, por parejas o en grupo), fomentar el compañerismo o el comportamiento en grupo, cantar, etc. En el apéndice se incluyen canciones y rimas para usar en clase.

### 3.3. Formulas

Hasta ahora hemos visto que a una edad temprana los niños están todavía construyendo el vocabulario y las estructuras gramaticales de su lengua materna y que en el caso de los aprendices de una L2, esta construcción está relacionada con su desarrollo cognitivo y con su conocimiento del mundo y con la exposición a los datos lingüísticos del entorno. El lenguaje formulálico o pre-fabricado es un tipo de *input* lingüístico que se puede presentar a los niños en clase porque cumple con uno de los objetivos principales de la comunicación: aprender una lengua y usarla. Se trata de una herramienta útil para comunicarse en los distintos contextos escolares.

Las fórmulas son expresiones que se utilizan siempre para las mismas situaciones y durante las primeras etapas proporcionan a los aprendices las herramientas básicas para poder utilizar la L2. Al principio, por ejemplo, cuando los niños piden permiso para ir al aseo, pueden utilizar una fórmula corta como: *toilet, please*, entre otras cosas porque los niños a la edad de tres años no construyen frases largas ni siquiera en su L1; después, se puede introducir la fórmula: *can I go to the toilet, please?*. Con las frases hechas utilizadas de manera continua y sistemática se estimula la producción oral de los niños.

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<sup>4</sup> En el Apéndice se incluyen algunas rimas, canciones y fórmulas a las que hacemos referencia.

## 4. Conclusión

En este artículo hemos visto que las rutinas y las transiciones son oportunidades al alcance del profesor para crear un entorno lingüístico rico en la segunda lengua en la escuela. Tanto las rutinas como las transiciones conllevan actividades visuales y auditivas que incluyen tarjetas, carteles, canciones, poemas, rimas y mímica que los aprendices deben reconocer y recordar en inglés.

Por un lado, las rutinas y las transiciones y por otro, las fórmulas y las estructuras gramaticales que se utilizan mientras se llevan a cabo las unas y las otras, constituyen los datos lingüísticos del entorno a los que los niños tienen acceso en la escuela. Las actividades y el estímulo lingüístico que las acompaña ayudan al profesor en la tarea de la enseñanza de la segunda lengua y al estar inmersos ella, ayudan también a los niños a que la aprendan.

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## Appendix

### I. Mímica para transiciones

<b>Roly Poly</b> <i>Traditional Rhyme/Adapted</i>	<b>Activity:</b> Roll your hands, reach up with your hands, clap your hands (change the word "tap" to "clap"), and lay your hands in your lap – all while you speak the fun <i>Roly Poly</i> rhyme.  Next, use a pair of rhythm sticks and do the same thing, this
Roly poly, roly poly, up, up, up. Roly poly, roly poly, out, out, out. Roly poly, roly poly, tap, tap, tap,	

Roly poly, roly poly, lay them in your lap.	time <i>tapping</i> the sticks on the third line.
	Finally, start the rhyme slowly. Then speak it and do the motions a little faster. And then <i>very quickly!</i> Could you do it? Now teach the rhyme to someone else! Can you teach your friend how to do <i>Roly Poly</i> with just her thumbs? How about with her feet?

## II. Canciones y rimas para transiciones

### From the carpet to the chair

(Melody: *She'll be coming round the mountain*)

Let's go from the carpet to the chair  
 Let's go from the carpet to the chair  
 Let's go from the carpet  
 go from the carpet  
 go from the carpet  
 to the chair.

### Get in line

(Melody: *Blue bird*)

Quiet, quiet, let's be quiet  
 Quiet, quiet, let's be quiet  
 Quiet, quiet, let's be quiet  
 We want it very quiet

Stand up, stand up and be quiet  
 Stand up, stand up and be quiet  
 Stand up, stand up and be quiet  
 We're standing and we're quiet

Slowly, slowly get in line now  
 Slowly, slowly get in line now  
 Slowly, slowly get in line now  
 We're getting in a line now

Softly, softly walk so softly  
 Softly, softly walk so softly  
 Softly, softly walk so softly ,  
 We're walking very softly

### Stay in line

(Melody: *London Bridge*)

Children, children stay in line  
 Stay in line, stay in line  
 Children, children, stay in line  
 Walk together.

### When I'm in class I sit on the floor

(Melody: *Here we go round the Mulberry Bush*)

When I'm in class I sit on the floor, sit on the floor, sit on the floor,  
 When I'm in class I sit on the floor; I like to hear my teacher.

### Get in line now

(Melody: *La cucaracha*)

Get in a line now, get in a line now  
 We are going to go to class  
 Get in a line now, get in a line now  
 We are ready to have fun

### We're ready for lunch chant

We're ready for lunch (*clap, clap*)  
 We're ready for lunch (*clap, clap*)  
 Stand up (*clap*)  
 Stand up (*clap*)  
 Line up (*clap*)

## This is the way we wash our hands

(Melody: *Here we go round the Mulberry Bush*)

This is the way we wash our hands, wash our hands, wash our hands

This is the way we wash our hands before we drink our milk.

- before we eat our snack.

## III. Ejemplos de fórmulas

Function	What you might say	
Greeting	Good morning (girls and boys)!	Good afternoon!
Introducing yourself	I'm your English teacher. My name is.... What's your name?	
Living commands	Stand up! Switch on the light! Close your eyes! Listen carefully! Listen to	Sit down! Ears open, lips closed Look at me! Can you repeat/say that?

	Raise your hands! Do it like me! Hurry up! Be quiet! Watch out! Wait at the door! Don't run (rush)! Walk slowly! Stand up Fold your arms. Hands up. Put it in the bin. Put your chair under the table Share your toys. Sit down on the carpet/your chair Colour the pictures Say it again Take off your coats Let's put things away Put your work in your bags Please, wait. Close the door. Please, do your coat up.	Put up your hands! Let's be quiet Be quick! Quiet, please! Be careful! Wait your turn/a minute What did you say? Say it again Copy this Start here Time to stop Collect crayons Put it in the bin Line up/tidy up/ be quiet Draw around Listen again Stop working Pencils away Time to go home/for lunch/toilet Stop and look.... Wash your hands Come here. Sit down. Show me
Starting	Let's begin! Let's start!	Let's say/sing it together Let's go on!
Stopping it	Stop it (that), please.	Don't do that
Handing over something	Bring me the...., please!	Give me the....., please!
Opening / closing something	Open the door!	Shut the door!
	Shut the window(s)!	
	Open your book!	
	Open your book at page...!	
Asking for the English word	In English, please, What's .... in English?	
Asking for repetition	Repeat (after me)! Say it again! Let's repeat! Again!	I don't understand Pardon Once more (again)!
Telling who	All together Only you.	Now you, and you, then you.... Now in groups.
Asking to speak differently	Louder, please! Slow down, please!	Speak up! Say it again, please.
Asking for understanding	Did you understand? Do you understand me?	Who's done...?
Suggesting something	Let's play a game!	

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## The value of songs and chants for young learners

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### Abstract

Chants and songs have long been recognised as fun and child-friendly tools in both First and Second Language Acquisition. This article proposes that this pedagogic recourse has a strong linguistic justification based on recent neurological studies on how the brain processes and produces speech. However, the main focus of the article is looking at the why and how of using songs and chants in the young learner classroom.

**Key words:** Pedagogical tools, Prosody, Pronunciation, Didactics of EFL, Music and rhythm

### Resumen

Canciones y trozos de lenguaje rítmico (es decir *chants*) han ganado un lugar merecido en la enseñanza de una lengua, primera o segunda. Este artículo propone que este recurso pedagógico tiene probada justificación lingüística basada en estudios neurológicos que investigan como el cerebro procesa y produce el habla. El énfasis principal de este artículo será examinar como mejor aprovechar este recurso pedagógica con alumnos en los primeros años de primaria.

**Palabras clave:** herramientas pedagógicas, prosodia, pronunciación, didáctica de EFL, música y ritmo

### 1. The Value of Songs and Chants for Young Learners

Two basic questions will be asked in this article and an attempt made to respond to them. First of all WHY should songs and chants be an important element in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) class and secondly some ideas as to HOW to make the best use of this teaching resource.

#### Why teach songs and chants

Here are some of the reasons that I believe justify an increased and systematic use of songs and chants.

- Children will noticeably increase their vocabulary bank of lexical items and multi-word structures. These multi-word structures can include a range of sociolinguistic situations appropriate to the age and needs of the pupils such as greetings, leave-takings, requests and any language items necessary for basic classroom functions and routines.
- There will be an improvement in English speech rhythms, intonation and pronunciation.
- Memorisation of longer word strings will be facilitated.
- Music and rhythm work can be dovetailed into grammar and language activities and allow for fun and creative uses of classroom time outside of the specific time allotted for “English”. This gives the

practitioner more scope and time for teaching and allows more and varied opportunities for the pupils to practise new language skills.

### The Neurological Aspect

It has long been established that, in most people, the left hemisphere is the part of the brain where most language tasks are processed. However, many recent studies suggest an important role for the right hemisphere (RH) in specific language tasks. Evidence seems to suggest that the RH deals with the prosody of language, that is to say the musicality and rhythm of a language which include elements such as accent, intonation, etc. The RH deals with broader semantic information while the left hemisphere (LH) deals with smaller, more analytical details. In other words the RH does not tend to analyse the relationships between words but rather takes in the “wholeness” of a phrase and puts it into a broader semantic context. The message is what is important to the RH leaving the analysis to the LH. Now, given this evidence we might theorise that the RH is where songs and chants are first processed, when it is the musicality or rhythmic and communicative aspect that is being given importance. Now, why is this important to us as teachers? It is important because it tells us something about how to best make use of songs and chants in the classroom. To explain a bit further I will need to make reference to two different types of learning processes: the explicit and implicit modes of learning. To learn something implicitly means that it is a more unconscious learning process, like the learning of a song or a chant or like the way that young children learn to speak their native language. The explicit learning mode is a much more conscious, analytical process of learning. The explicit mode is used when an individual attends to a particular aspect of a linguistic stimulus, not the whole message. A good example would be in the learning of a structure such as “My name is \_\_\_\_\_”. Most young children in an EFL classroom learn this structure implicitly at first as a communicative tool, only later perhaps being asked to analyse the structure of the sentence, which would be the explicit mode at work. Going back to the why question posed at the beginning of this article, the answer begins to become clearer. When we teach songs and chants to young children we are using the implicit approach which is probably situated in the RH. Later, to be able to make the children aware of these structures and how and when to use them, we will have to go at it from a more explicit fashion, thus pushing the LH into play. But before going into more detail as to how to go about this, there is another important benefit of the teaching of songs and chants that will give us a broader picture of the why question posed above.

### The Linguistic Aspect - Prosody

English is a stressed timed language. This means that in any given stretch of language, some syllables are of longer duration than others. This is opposed to the syllable timed languages where each syllable receives approximately the same amount of emphasis and time. This is an extremely difficult aspect to teach to young learners and cannot be approached from an analytical perspective. With older learners this facet of English can be taught from a phonetic point of view known as the bottom-up approach where you go from sound to prosody. With younger learners this is neither viable nor possible and a top-down approach which goes from prosody to sound is much more recommendable. This is where chants and songs come into the picture. Chants can be defined as stretches of real language put into a rhythmic framework. This same rhythmic framework lends itself well to teaching a stress timed language since a certain number of syllables have to fit into specific time pattern. This is an efficient way of teaching where the stresses lie in a phrase and which syllables or words have less emphasis.

### The Linguistic Aspect – Vocabulary and Grammar

Songs and chants are also useful in teaching long stretches of real language. We have all had the experience of trying to remember the words to a song and failing dismally until a musical cue was given to us and then the words just seemed to fall into place along with the musical pattern. This is why musically or

rhythmically based learning allows us to teach longer stretches of language. These songs and chants can be related to classroom functions, daily routines or communicative situations that are relevant to the age of the students. These same songs and chants can also later be used to illustrate or exemplify a structural or grammatical point. The students will already be “using” the grammar point in question, in the context of the song or chant, of course, and will find it easier to then understand the grammatical explication given by the teacher and situate it within their own linguistic experience.

## 2. How to teach songs and chants

The obvious first step is simply that: teach the chant or song. But the question is how to best go about this. The first step to take into consideration is the age of the students and the second is the relevance of the song or chant. Young children will love anything with music or a beat so why not take advantage of this to teach them vocabulary items and language items that will also be useful to them in basic communication acts or classroom situations. This does not mean to say that all songs or chants taught have to be relevant or classroom related, sometimes the fun of a nonsense song or rhyme is just that, having some fun! Some basic guidelines could be the following:

- Start off orally, leave the written element for later.
- A little each lesson is better than longer, more concentrated spans of time.
- Review what you did the previous lesson and add a bit more.
- Revisiting learned songs and chants offers opportunity for review and confidence building.

A second stage of the teaching of songs and chants could be the following:

- Expand on the chant for further grammar or vocabulary.
- Use chants to teach speech rhythm and stress.
- Invent your own chant to suit specific needs.

The actual process of teaching a chant would look something like this:

- Teacher takes the longer part leaving the repetition to the pupils.
- Eventually have the pupils take on more of the oral load.
- Then establish dialogues using the chants.
- Once the chant is learned, add variations so vocabulary and grammar structures are extended.
- Create opportunities to use the structures learned through the chants so that they become incorporated into the analytical “left brain”.

The majority of textbooks on the market today make wide use of songs to teach English. I have a personal favourite for the chants and songs that I use in my classroom: “*Jazz Chants for Children*” by Carolyn Graham and the example that I am going to use now to illustrate the points listed above comes from that book.

### Where's Jack

Where's Jack?

He's not here.

Where did he go?

I don't know.

Where's Mary?

She's not here.

Where did she go?

I don't know.

Where are Sue and Bobby?

They're not here.

Where did they go?

I don't know.

Where's Mr. Brown?

He's over there.

Where?

Over there,  
asleep in the chair.

(Taken from "Jazz Chants for Children" by Carolyn Graham, Oxford University Press 1979).

This chant could be done even with very young children and is readily connected to that basic classroom routine of taking the register every morning. The only initial language elements that the children have to learn are very basic "He/she's not here" and "I don't know". This could then be expanded to include the plural form "They're not here". The teacher would initially carry the heavier load with the children simply responding in group but this could soon change to individual children responding accordingly and then a group of children formulating the questions and another group responding thus creating dialogue situations. Whenever appropriate the personal pronouns could be pointed out and emphasized. The chant could be expanded on to include inanimate objects and thereby include a wider range of pronouns and perhaps some prepositions. The structure "I don't know" could be extracted from the chant and used in many other different communicative situations and thus pushing it into the left brain for later and more creative use. So, in the process of a few weeks time and using just a few minutes a day we can efficiently mesh vocabulary and grammar in a space not usually allotted for "English" as such. This will allow our pupils to see English as something both fun and useful and totally integrated into their normal school routines.

But there's still another very important element of chants that should be exploited in the EFL classroom and that is the use of songs and chants to improve intonation, pronunciation and speech rhythm. This article has already sung the praises of chants in the teaching of these aspects of English language but the question we are looking at here is HOW to go about this.

The basic idea for this type of exercise came from the reading of two different articles; the first by H. Nakano, N. Yoshida and K. Natsume, and the second by Robin Walker and the sources are cited in the references.

Once a chant has been taught to the children the rhythmic aspect could be given a special focus. Carolyn Graham has recently written a book called "Creating Chants and Songs" and anyone interested in finding out more about how to go about designing your own chants would find a wealth of useful information in this book. But, if we want to get down to very simple basic concepts we could say that chants are usually organised into 4 rhythmic beats. If this were presented in a more graphic form our chant "Where's Jack" would look something like this:

### **Where's Jack**

Where's Jack? He's not here.

Where did he go? I don't know.

Where's Mary? She's not here.

Where did she go? I don't know.

Where are Sue and Bobby? They're not here.

Where did they go? I don't know.

Where's Mr. Brown He's over there.

Where? Over there, asleep in the chair.

The bigger squares indicate the stronger emphasis and the chant could be accompanied with clapping or with some type of percussion instruments giving a stronger beat to the bigger square-shaped symbols. Each question and answer dialogue component should “fit” within a 4 beat rhythm pattern. This format ensures that all the words have to be enunciated within this rhythmic time slot and the children will begin to get a feel for the stress timed aspect of English. We could then take this idea one step further and combine work on both rhythm and vocabulary and thereby putting both brain hemispheres into play. Such an activity might look something like this:

### **Where's Jack**

Where's Jack? He's not here.

Where did he go? I don't know.

Where's Mr. Brown He's over there.

Where? Over there, asleep in the chair.

In this way the children would only have the rhythmic pattern to guide them and would have to make use of their memory to fill in the vocabulary gaps. This is a type of oral cloze activity and gets all kind of neural endings firing! The clapping and use of gestures also makes use of all those elements recommended by the Total Physical Response approach to teaching and one that is particularly appropriate for younger children.

The final step proposed at the beginning of this article was to design chants and songs to fit specific needs in the classroom. Every group of children is different and the teacher may have a specific language structure or classroom routine that needs attention. There are two simple ways to go about creating your own song or chant. If the teacher feels more comfortable with a melodic approach, then the answer would be to find a song that the children already know and simply put new words to the song. Familiar melodies with new words are easily learned and retained. For example, a simple classroom routine like tidying up the class before a break could be put into simple language structures and then into a well-known melody. Once learned the teacher could give the “musical cue” and the children would start to sing and work (with a little training) at the same time.

Designing a chant would follow a slightly different format. First a language structure needs to be decided upon and then that structure put into a rhythmic pattern, keeping it simple to start with, using the basic 4 count pattern. Here’s a possible example based on a daily classroom routine; entering the classroom and hanging up coats, putting away bags and snacks in the right place. This could be teacher led with the children chanting along until the task is completed.

**Hang up coats, bags away**

**Put your snacks in the tray**

The words in black print get more emphasis than the other elements and there is a clear 4 count rhythm in each phrase. The rhyming element facilitates memorisation and is a useful tool to expand upon later when dealing with word analysis and spelling skills. These simple rhythmic patterns could be expanded on and include extra claps and different basic rhythms for older children.

### 3. Conclusion

The basic purpose of this article is to examine some pedagogical resources useful for teaching English to Young Learners. Songs and chants are a part of most teachers’ daily didactic routine but this article proposes some explanations as to why this tool is so useful in the primary class and how to use this resource to facilitate the learning experience in areas such as prosody and pronunciation.

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## Should we correct our students errors in L2 learning?

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Lightbown & Spada (1999:16)

### Abstract

In teaching and learning a foreign language, there is a general belief of not leaving an erroneous utterance in the air but correct it; however, this is a very complex issue which depends on many internal and external factors affecting the language acquisition and learning process.

This article opens a debate about the topic in a thought-provoking way by analysing the most representative research done so far, the set of reasons to account for and against error correction and a critical evaluation of positive and negative ways of correction and its methodological implications for a direct application in the language classroom.

**Key words:** Second language, error, correction

### Resumen

En el ámbito de la enseñanza/aprendizaje de segundas lenguas existe una tendencia generalizada a creer que una expresión errónea no puede quedar impune y ha de ser siempre corregida. Sin embargo, estamos ante un aspecto realmente complejo que va a depender de muchos factores externos e internos que afectan al proceso de aprendizaje y adquisición de una segunda lengua.

El objetivo de este artículo es abrir un debate que nos haga reflexionar sobre las investigaciones más representativas llevadas a cabo hasta nuestros días sobre el tema, establecer una serie de razones a favor y en contra de la corrección y evaluar de forma crítica tipos de correcciones efectivas e ineffectivas junto con sus implicaciones metodológicas para que así podamos aplicarlas en el aula de idiomas.

**Palabras Clave:** Segunda lengua, errores, corrección

## **1. Introduction**

A lot of research has been devoted to study how a second language should be taught; however, a very good technique or a very competent teacher does not always mean that a better learning process will take place. The good teacher is not only the one who has got a good competence in the language or has graduated with honors, but the one who is aware of the students needs and difficulties and focus his teaching on them and interacts with the students as a moderator or guide of their own learning process. In other words, the good teacher is actually the one who can see beyond the face of the students and beyond the grammar books he is using to do his teaching.

There's no doubt among teaching professionals that, although we as teachers play a very important role in second language teaching, it is the learner who plays the main role in the learning process. According to the Personal Agenda hypothesis proposed by Schumann & Schumann (1977), every student has his personal view on what he wants to learn and how he wants to do it. The reason why some learners do pick up some things but not others, could be due to the learners' ability to take from a lesson only those things that they want and in the manner they want. Thus, as a very important starting point, we need to be aware of the variety of students individual learning styles, individual factors affecting their acquisition and learning and be flexible enough to adapt to the students individual needs; this way, we will have the key for success in both language teaching and language learning.

## **2. Errors in L2 learning**

Although there is a general belief of not leaving an erroneous utterance in the air, but correct it, this is a very complex matter which depends on many factors as we will analyze below.

Sometimes errors should be corrected, others should not; the methods used for correction sometimes work, some others do not... This is a complex issue which will depend basically on the learner personal agenda, his personality and some other individual factors which are implied in his learning style and preferences.

Nevertheless, before going into greater detail about the debate of whether the errors should be corrected or not, I will start by looking at the positive versus the negative concept of errors. Thus, whenever we listen to the word "error" in language learning, we immediately associate it with a deviance from the native language and something which has to be avoided by all means. However, despite the negative connotations this word may have, it also has positive connotations, as it is considered as evidence that the learning process is taking place. Following this idea, Edge (1989) does not use the word "mistake" or "error" but "learning steps". Thus, from the teacher's point of view, errors provide them with feedback so as to know the effectiveness of their teaching and enable them to decide whether they should spend more time on a specific item or go on with a new one.

A distinction has been made between errors which affect the linguistic competence –grammatical errors– or the communicative competence –communicative errors–. Grammatical errors or local errors are minimal constituents in the sentence which do not affect the comprehension, whereas the communicative or global errors do. The fact that our students use a definite instead of the indefinite article, or that they use an incorrect form of the past, the wrong preposition, etc, despite being deviances from the English system, they do not affect communication. Since language learning has been considered in terms of communication (when talking about English as a second language, it is learnt basically as the language of international communication), accuracy does not play such an important role; thus, according to this point of view, it would be more important to get the meaning through than being accurate.

Edge supports this theory by emphasizing the importance on communication as a motivational aspect in second language learning. :

"They need to feel that people are listening to what they are saying, not to how they are saying it. [...] If learners can feel their own emotions being expressed in a language, this will build up a relationship with the language which will help them learn it" (Edge,1989:37).

Nevertheless, it is not communication all that matters; thus, Allright (1986) supports the importance of grammatical errors by suggesting that two steps are taken by learners when they interact: the first one is to get the message across and understand it, and the second one is to use the interaction as an opportunity to observe and produce features of the language. The first one corresponds to the communicative function whereas the second is the learning function. Thus, getting the meaning of the message is the main function although the input received is also very important in order to build or rebuild the learner's grammar. This theory will help teachers to be aware of this distinction, consider the students needs and students expectations and account for one or the other kind of correction or even for both whenever required.

### **3. Against error correction**

Although there is the general belief that a wrong utterance should be corrected, some theories in Second Language Acquisition deny the role of error correction by supporting that students go through systematic stages in learning and they just acquire a structure when they are ready for it, but not before. Thus, the Morpheme Studies and Krashen's Natural Order Hypothesis account that we acquire the rules of language in a predictable way and this is independent of the order in which rules are taught in language classes (Krashen 1982, Brown 1973, Dulay & Burt 1973, 1974; Bailey et al. 1974). This is a very important aspect which is overlooked by some teachers who keep correcting the student with no successful result.

Moreover, research done by Horwitz, Horwitz & Cope (1986), Tuscott (1996,1998, 1999), Young (1991) - among others- supports that correction of errors has also been considered to have negative effects. Walker (1973) for instance, found in his study that students preferred not to be corrected for each speaking and writing error because this practice undermined their confidence and forced them to waste so much effort on details that they used to lose the overall ability to use language. Thus, correction turns to be a way to break the flow of conversation -specially when the teacher interrupts the student before he has finished his utterance-, and it is also a way to lower the student's motivation as only his failures and not his goals are highlighted.

Excessive feedback on error can also have a negative effect on motivation and can also prevent learning steps to take place because, if everything is corrected, students do not take risk and do not say anything unless they are sure it is correct.

Edge (1989) criticize what he calls <<the over-corrected teacher>>, i.e. a teacher –normally non native- who focus too much on accuracy when speaking. Although he asks the students to talk freely, the students end up following the teacher's way and focusing too much on accuracy rather than on communication and fluency. Norrish (1983) also supports this idea by defending that teachers should emphasize the idea of the language as an instrument for communication and encourage their students to express themselves rather than worrying too much on whether they do it right or not. He tries to encourage teachers to be more tolerant with the students errors so as to let them risk, guess, enjoy the learning and provide them with a feeling of security to use the language.

#### **4. For error correction**

There is no doubt that conversational interactions are very important; however, focusing too much on “what they say” rather than on “how they say it” can be dangerous. This can result in a situation where learners provide each other with input which is often incorrect and incomplete and which other learners process as if it were right. This can lead us to support that form focus and error correction is also necessary, that correction of errors should be made, otherwise they can create false hypothesis and fossilize. However, we cannot take it too seriously as too much emphasis on accuracy will inhibit students to talk. The right balance is again sought and we must not forget that when correcting it is important to take into account the students sense of achievement, success and learning preferences.

The positive influence that corrective feedback has in SLA is supported by research done by Carroll & Merrill (1993), Doughty and Varela (1998) Iwashita (2003), Long, Shunji, Ortega (1998), Lyster (2001), Lyster and Ranta, 1997 and White, Spada, Lightbown and Ranta (1991). The theory of SLA by excellence which accounts for error correction is the Behaviouristic theory (Watson 1924, Thorndike 1932 and Skinner 1957) which suggests that it is through correction that learning happens, i.e. when a mistake is made, the teacher should correct it immediately and then repeat the correct version to be learnt by the rest of the class.

Students’ attitude towards correction is sometimes positive, specially in advance levels where students specially want to be corrected in order to improve their language and avoid errors to be fossilized.

Levine (1975) also accounts for the positive effects on correction and talks in his book about the dangerous consequences of non correction. He analyses the effects of non giving confirmation nor disconfirmation to the students’ guesses and accounts that if an error is not corrected, both the speaker and the rest of the class will consider it a right utterance to be learnt. He carries out an experiment and proves his hypothesis that the teachers response to wrong utterances is very important as part of the learning process as they cause the subject to alter a negative hypothesis he had wrongly thought of.

As pointed out before in this article, errors are learning steps and we have to look at them in a positive way and make the most of them in order to overcome them and go a step beyond in the interlanguage stage.

#### **5. Do’s and don’ts of error correction**

As we have analyzed in the previous sections, the correction of errors is sometimes necessary and positive but some other times it has a negative effect. Being able to know about our students individual learning styles and preferences will give us the clue so as to know whether we should correct them or not and how error correction could improve their linguistic and communicative competence.

This last section suggests some insights on different ways of correction and their positive and negative effects, so that teachers can use the correct techniques for better results.

So as to start, it is important to distinguish that there are two types of correction, the implicit and the explicit one. The problem with the first one, i.e. feedback on error which takes the form of recast or repetitions may be interpreted by the learners as a continuation of the conversation, therefore, explicit correction may also be needed and it is more effective sometimes. Another problem implicit correction can mislead us to is that teachers sometimes do not highlight where the error is, therefore, the student may not realize where the focus of difficulty is and changes other elements which are completely right.

The most typical way of correcting is by interrupting the student before he has finished speaking. This could have a negative effect, specially among anxious students as they normally loose the track, forget what they were talking about and their anxiety levels are increased.

Some other times teachers do not wait the time necessary for the student to assimilate the correction. A useful technique is to wait, write down the correction and find correction at a later time. This issue has to do with the Incubation Hypothesis which accounts that students need an incubation period before the new structure starts to appear in their performance. This is also another reason why teachers should correct an error which is performed by the student some minutes later.

Another problem occurs when teachers correct students' errors which are beyond the students' level. They just correct them because it is not the English standard form without realizing that this correction is beyond the students' capacity.

The problem with this is also that the teacher has to stop and explain the new concept. Therefore, only those errors which correspond to the grammar it is being learning should be corrected.

Moreover, emphasis on error should be done on the lexicon, intonation and pronunciation because they are the main areas for the understanding of the message. According to Vázquez (1987) pragmatics and semantics play a more important role than morphosyntax in the comprehension of the message, so we should take this into account when deciding which type of errors to correct.

A very useful, practical and effective way of correction is the use of an inductive method in which the teacher asks the student to correct himself (self-correction) and realize on what he did wrong. This way it will allow the student to carry out an error processing which actually helps him more to retain the right form in his mind.

Another effective way of correction, specially if we think of the teacher not only as the great source of knowledge but as a moderator or guide in the language classroom is to wait until someone comes out with the right answer. It is also important to encourage self correction rather than teacher correction and it is also very useful to discuss correction with students.

So as to finish this section, I would like to focus on some questions proposed by Bartram and Walton (2002), which are very useful to decide whether to let an error go or not:

1. Does the mistake affect communication?
2. Are we concentrating on accuracy at the moment?
3. Is it really wrong? Or is it my imagination?
4. Why did the student make the mistake?
5. Is it the first time the student has spoken for a long time?
6. Could the student react badly to my correction?
7. Have they met this language point in the current lesson?
8. Is it something the students have already met?
9. Is this a mistake that several students are making?
10. Would the mistake irritate someone?

## 6. Conclusion

Error correction is definitely needed at some point in the learning process to a lesser or a wider extent; however, a very wide range of individual factors defining our students make this task a very complicated one which will depend on factors such as the learner's age, aptitude, stage in the language process, proficiency level, motivation, anxiety, metalinguistic sophistication, individual preferences, learning styles, learning strategies and previous achievement, factors which turn to be crucial information for the language teacher in order to improve the learning process.

Teachers should try to get the most information as possible from the students in order to know what their learning styles and preferences are. Thus, teachers should consider on the first hand the students' reaction to error correction, because some want to be corrected and others do not, and also which errors should be corrected and which ones should be left uncorrected, depending on the students level and students' needs.

Throughout this article, we have emphasize the role of communication as a first and most important one in second language learning. So, despite the exceptions which are normally applied to advanced levels, we can suggest that teachers should correct errors which interrupt the interaction, specially in the first stages, because in everyday situation it is more important to communicate successfully than to communicate perfectly. In the same way, teachers should also encourage students to take risks and make errors if necessary so as to develop their learning steps which in turn is the main goal of language teaching and learning.

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## Variaciones culturales en la correspondencia comercial en inglés

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### Resumen

El inglés es considerado como la lengua de comunicación internacional tanto en el mundo del comercio, de los negocios, como en el mundo académico y científico. Como consecuencia, esta circunstancia le afecta directamente en su uso, pues al adaptarse a las distintas formas de expresión de los países que la utilizan como lengua franca, le hace perder de alguna manera su identidad propia. Ello también afecta a la enseñanza del inglés específico de los negocios o para fines comerciales, que ha experimentado un desarrollo vertiginoso en los últimos años. Los rasgos culturales del usuario de una segunda lengua influyen en la forma de expresarse y aunque se utilice de forma correcta, siempre existen expresiones que delatan la nacionalidad del escritor. En este artículo analizaremos si la influencia de la lengua materna (L1) provoca variaciones culturales en la organización textual de cartas de solicitud de empleo, escritas en lengua inglesa (L2) por estudiantes españoles de Ciencias Empresariales. Vamos a valorar si estas variaciones afectan a la comunicación formal en inglés de los negocios o si, por el contrario, los estudiantes no se dejan influir por la L1 y siguen las directrices de la L2 propuestas en los libros de texto y aprendidas en el aula.

**Palabras clave:** variación; cultura; inglés comercial.

### Abstract

English is considered an international language in the business, the academic and the scientific environment. The English language is used by speakers with different cultural backgrounds who make use of it as a lingua franca; as a consequence, this fact produces a change and variation in the use of the second language. This affects to the teaching of specific business English or English for commercial purposes, that has suffered an important expansion recently. The cultural characteristics of the producer of a second language interfere in the way he/she expresses, and although the language use is correct, there are expressions or formal words that show us the nationality of the writer. In this article, we analyze if the influence of the mother tongue (L1) causes cultural variations in the textual organization of application letters, written in English language (L2) by Spanish students of Business Studies. We evaluate if these variations affect to formal communication in business English or if, on the contrary, the students are not affected by their L1 and follow the instructions of the L2 proposed by textbooks and practiced in class.

**Key words:** variation; culture; business English.

### 1. Introducción

El aprendizaje y enseñanza de la lengua inglesa como segunda lengua (L2) ha sido objeto de investigación desde hace varias décadas, ya que no siempre se logran obtener resultados satisfactorios, debido, en ciertas ocasiones, a las influencias socio-culturales de cada país. Como señala Ellis (1994: 15), “The role of SLA is the description and explanation of the learner’s linguistic or communicative competence”. Al analizar la forma en que se adquiere una segunda lengua hemos de tener en cuenta variantes como las vías de comunicación, las interferencias y las disfunciones lingüísticas.

Un ejemplo es el aprendizaje del inglés para fines específicos, en el que se enseña la lengua inglesa de forma específica así como las destrezas comunicativas que en el futuro los aprendices van a necesitar en su profesión. Este tipo de aprendizaje pone en evidencia la diversidad cultural del inglés de los negocios (IN), puesto que la misma empresa que tiene distintas filiales varía sus formas de comunicación o de publicitarse según las características culturales de cada país. Según Dudley-Evans y St. John (1998) el IN ha estado siempre más abierto a la idea de la diversidad cultural que el inglés para fines académicos, ya que éste último se ha basado más en las reglas y directrices establecidas por las autoridades académicas norteamericanas. En el contexto académico, el hablante no nativo necesita estar integrado y conocer todas sus vertientes, puesto que la lengua es la base de la comunicación y para ello existen unos estereotipos. Sin embargo, en el contexto de los negocios, la lengua comunica, pero hay otras circunstancias que influyen, como la cultura del hablante. De la misma forma, la diversidad cultural tiene que afectar a la creación de materiales didácticos y a los contenidos de los cursos, pero si se integran las variaciones culturales, existe una comunicación completa y diversa en el ámbito internacional de los negocios.

Para comunicarnos con otros hablantes en una segunda lengua, es necesario tener en cuenta las diferencias culturales y las normas de protocolo y de convivencia de los diferentes países, ya que, una lengua es un reflejo inequívoco de la cultura del hablante. Todo esto es más evidente en culturas muy dispares como la occidental y oriental, pero no hemos de olvidar que dentro de los países occidentales también hay una gran diversidad de costumbres, estilos de vida y tradiciones que el inglés se encarga de propagar. La comunicación se basa en el lenguaje, pero al estar integrado en una sociedad determinada, ésta última condiciona los contenidos y formas de transmitirla.

Ser capaces de comunicarnos a través de la escritura con personas con las que no compartimos una herencia cultural es una habilidad que hemos adquirido en la era de las tecnologías de la comunicación y la información. La existencia de la comunicación electrónica ha reafirmado la lengua inglesa como lengua franca, pero en la actualidad, las influencias culturales de los hablantes y escritores que la utilizan han provocado variaciones en su producción. Bhatia (1993: 37) explica este fenómeno de la siguiente forma: “It has been well known for some time that various cultures organize and develop ideas differently when writing expository texts and these differences persist when users of these languages learn to write in a new language”.

Es fundamental aprender a redactar correctamente en una segunda lengua y más cuando se están utilizando registros estereotipados, como es el caso del inglés de los negocios. No sólo es importante la corrección lingüística, sino también la efectividad de la comunicación, ya que como bien señala Alcaraz (2000: 149), la expresión escrita es la destreza más difícil de dominar. Por esta razón, muchos estudiantes universitarios, cuando finalizan sus estudios y se enfrentan al mundo laboral, se percatan de las lagunas que no han podido superar en su periodo de formación. Debido a esta carencia en la formación lingüística, creemos que es necesario poner especial atención en la preparación lingüística y comunicativa dentro del contexto universitario, puesto que es el previo a su incorporación en el mundo laboral.

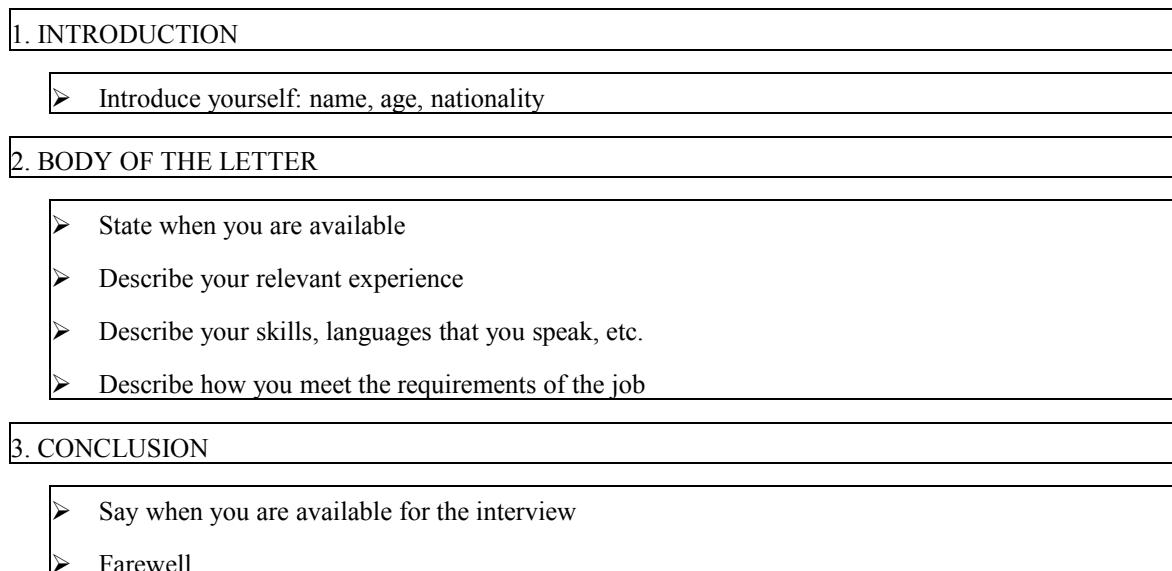
Desde la perspectiva del análisis de géneros, Bhatia (1993: 59) realiza un análisis de las cartas promocionales, incluyendo en este género las cartas de promoción de ventas y las cartas de solicitud de empleo. Realiza una subdivisión de la macroestructura en siete movimientos, atendiendo a los objetivos comunicativos de cada uno de ellos (Bhatia, 1993: 93). Estos movimientos son: establecer credenciales, introducción de la candidatura, ofrecimiento de incentivos, adjuntar documentos, solicitar respuesta, utilizar tácticas de presión y finalizar cortésmente.

Este estudio tiene como objetivo discernir si la lengua inglesa incorpora nuevos registros en la comunicación entre hablantes que poseen una tradición cultural distinta. Para ello se van a clasificar las variaciones culturales que la lengua materna provoca al redactar una carta de solicitud de empleo,

verificando si se siguen los movimientos determinados por Bathia (1993), así como se va a determinar si dichas variaciones afectan a la comunicación. En caso que se refutara esta hipótesis, pasaremos a determinar cuáles son las implicaciones pedagógicas que se derivan y si se han deben incorporar a la enseñanza de la redacción formal de la correspondencia, puesto que se demostraría que no se siguen las pautas estipuladas en los manuales ni las que recomienda Bathia (1993).

## 2. Metodología

Para nuestro estudio, en primer lugar, se recopilaron diversos manuales de IN que ofrecen diversas editoriales a los docentes del inglés comercial. Estos libros de texto (Ashley, 1992; Tullis & Trappe, 2000; Jones y Alexander, 1989; Nauton, 2000; Lougheed, 2003 y Cotton, Falvey & Kent, 2000) nos sirvieron para determinar los tres movimientos básicos que se delimitan en los libros de texto para realizar cartas de petición de empleo en inglés y que se aprecian en la figura 1:



Como se puede apreciar, estos movimientos no concuerdan en su totalidad con los mencionados anteriormente por Bathia, pero, dado que los libros de texto los establecen como recomendaciones, decidimos comparar los resultados de nuestro corpus con estas recomendaciones.

A continuación, se seleccionó un anuncio de trabajo que aparecía en el libro de texto *New International Business English* (nivel intermedio) al que los alumnos tenían que contestar. La actividad se realizó en una clase de la asignatura de “Inglés de los Negocios” del 2º año de la titulación “Ciencias Empresariales” en el curso 2005-06. Participaron 34 alumnos con nivel intermedio-bajo de la Facultad de Estudios de la Empresa (Universidad Católica de Valencia), a los que se les indicaron las pautas a seguir y se les dio el anuncio mencionado anteriormente. Asimismo, se les indicó que podían incluir los movimientos que quisieran, no se les exigía un orden determinado; debían enviar las cartas por correo electrónico a la dirección de la profesora; no debían consultar ningún libro de texto para la realización del ejercicio y disponían de una hora para escribir la carta.

A continuación, se elaboró una plantilla y se procedió a detectar y clasificar todas las variaciones de los movimientos recomendados en las cartas. En primer lugar, se clasificaron las cartas según habían establecido unos movimientos (disposición de los párrafos) diferenciados o no; después se contrastaron los contenidos para verificar si se habían seguido los movimientos recomendados por los libros de texto para escribir una carta de solicitud de empleo o si, por el contrario, la división había sido aleatoria.

### 3. Resultados y discusión

#### 1. Establecimiento de movimientos explícitos en las cartas

Se detectaron dos grandes grupos de organización textual al escribir las cartas, la división clara del discurso textual en movimientos y el mantenimiento de un único texto, sin separaciones. En la tabla 1 apreciamos que es mayor el porcentaje de cartas que establecen una división en movimientos:

Cartas sin división en movimientos	12 cartas (35,3%)
Cartas con división en movimientos	22 cartas (64,7%)
<b>Total</b>	34 cartas (100,0%)

Tabla 1. División textual de las cartas en movimientos.

Analizando las cartas que establecen una división textual de los movimientos, en la tabla 2 podemos apreciar que no existe un criterio claro entre los alumnos en lo que respecta a su número, ya que han dividido las cartas de forma aleatoria, sin atenerse a una norma.

Número de movimientos textuales	Casos y porcentajes
3 divisiones	6 cartas (27,3%)
4 divisiones	4 cartas (18,2%)
5 divisiones	4 cartas (18,2%)
6 divisiones	5 cartas (22,7%)
7 – 8 divisiones	3 cartas (13,6%)
<b>Total</b>	22 cartas (100,0%)

Tabla 2. Casos de número de movimientos textuales

#### 2. Verificación del contenido de los movimientos en las cartas con divisiones

A continuación, en las tablas 3, 4 y 5 se detallan los contenidos de los movimientos de introducción, cuerpo y despedida de las cartas, para determinar si se han tenido en cuenta los estereotipos formales que establecen los libros de texto o si se ha seguido otro tipo de criterio:

Introducción de la carta	Casos y porcentajes
Presentación personal	16 (72,8%)
Referencia al trabajo	3 (13,6%)
Referencia al anuncio	3 (13,6%)
<b>Total</b>	22 (100,0%)

Tabla 3. Contenido de la introducción de las cartas.

Cuerpo de la carta	Casos y porcentajes
Seguimiento de las pautas sugeridas	14 (63,6%)
Alteración del orden con diversas combinaciones	8 (36,4%)
<b>Total</b>	22 (100,0%)

Tabla 4. Contenido del cuerpo de las cartas.

Conclusión y despedida	Casos y porcentajes
Inclusión del párrafo de despedida	13 (59,1%)
Omisión del párrafo de despedida	9 (40,9%)
<b>Total</b>	22 (100,0%)

Tabla 5. Conclusión o despedida de las cartas.

Hemos de destacar que un 72,8% del total del corpus recopilado ha iniciado la carta presentándose y un 63,6% han seguido las pautas respecto al cuerpo de la carta, y por último, un 59,1% han incluido un párrafo como despedida, como recomiendan los manuales consultados.

### 3. Contenido de las cartas sin movimientos delimitados textualmente

Por último, explicaremos los resultados obtenidos en el grupo de cartas (12 casos) que no han delimitado los movimientos con una separación textual en párrafos, pero que, sin embargo, sí que han realizado una separación en el contenido:

Delimitación de los movimientos	Casos y porcentajes
Incluyen una presentación	10 (83,3% de un total de 12)
Incluyen un cuerpo	7 (58,3 % de un total de 12)
Incluyen despedida	5 (41,7% de un total de 12)

Tabla 6. Movimientos seguidos en las cartas sin división textual.

En la tabla 6 se observa que la mayoría de ese grupo inicia la carta presentándose y un 58,3% ha seguido las pautas sugeridas por los libros de texto respecto al cuerpo, aunque, por otra parte, un 58,3% ha omitido la despedida. Debemos remarcar que, tanto en las cartas en las que se han hecho divisiones de los movimientos como en las que no, se han seguido las recomendaciones marcadas por los libros de texto en lo que respecta a la introducción y al cuerpo, mientras que no se han seguido en lo que respecta a la despedida, ya que la mayoría de alumnos no ha incluido este movimiento final.

### 4. Conclusiones

Podemos constatar a través de este estudio que los usuarios de una segunda lengua incorporan nuevas pautas en la comunicación formal, ya que incorporan las tradiciones culturales o las deficiencias en el aprendizaje académico. Prueba de ello es que la división en tres movimientos, que es la que normalmente aconsejan los manuales, ha sido realizada solamente en seis casos, y el resto (16 casos) ha incluido un número de divisiones textuales que no concuerdan con los movimientos recomendados. Los alumnos no tienen una estructura clara de cómo distribuir y estructurar una carta formal, a pesar de ser un aspecto que se incluye en los manuales básicos de inglés comercial, debido a una deficiencia en su aprendizaje y a que no existen estas pautas formales en su lengua nativa.

Sin embargo, si consideramos la distribución y organización de las ideas, se han seguido generalmente los movimientos que nos indica Bhatia (1993), tanto en las cartas que han establecido los movimientos explícitamente como en las que no: el estudiante se presenta en primer lugar; a continuación incluye toda la información que se le solicita y, por último, se despide. No obstante, un número representativo de cartas no ha incluido una despedida, debido a que los estudiantes españoles que se encuentran en ciclos superiores de formación reciben una instrucción escasa sobre técnicas de redacción y este hecho tiene una clara influencia en su producción escrita, y aún más en la redacción en una segunda lengua.

La comunicación ha resultado menos fluida en las cartas que no han explicitado los movimientos, no solamente por este hecho, sino porque se ha omitido información necesaria para la comunicación. El estilo que se usa es demasiado sintético y más similar al que se utiliza en un mensaje que se envía a través del correo electrónico que a una carta formal. La lengua castellana posee más flexibilidad para estructurar una carta que en la lengua inglesa, así como no es tan concisa y directa, por lo tanto, los alumnos imitarían el modelo de la lengua materna (L1) al incluir más divisiones textuales. Asimismo, el uso cada vez mayor de

los correos electrónicos, que no guardan un formato tan rígido como el de las cartas, influye cada vez más en la escritura comercial.

Por todo ello, consideramos que los manuales de inglés de los negocios deberían aportar mayor información sobre técnicas de redacción en general, cubriendo aspectos como los agentes cohesivos, la estructura de los párrafos, contenidos informativos de dichos párrafos, etc. Hemos observado también que los alumnos tienen interés por conocer las fórmulas de comunicación y de coherencia textual, puesto que son conscientes de la importancia de seguir un proceso estructural de la escritura que sea comprendido por la mayoría. En los manuales de inglés de los negocios para niveles de formación superior se presupone que se conocen los movimientos de los formalismos comerciales pero, como hemos comprobado en los resultados, no siempre es así. Asimismo, se consideran solamente las directrices anglosajonas para los escritos formales en inglés, pero dado que el inglés es en la actualidad una lengua franca, se deberían de flexibilizar los modelos incorporando aquellos aspectos que otras culturas utilizan en los formulismos y que, sin impedir la comunicación, incorporan riqueza en la expresión de la lengua inglesa.

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## Drama in language learning

Liliana Russo Rastelli

### 1. Definition of Drama

Drama interaction is an activity which can be considered as essential in the learning process of a foreign language. It helps students and teacher in many ways and has many psychological benefits as well. But contrary to what we may think, it is not widely used in schools because some teachers are afraid of not being able to carry out all the activities or because they feel they cannot handle it. Anyway it should be encouraged because it is a practise which does not involve too much time and gives many benefits to teachers and students alike.

Depending on your group you can choose some activities or you can invent the ones that suit you and your students' best, but having everything ready makes it easier to use especially the first time you decide to use a dramatic test to perform. I would recommend teachers to have a look at prospective plays and have a selection ready to choose from when the moment comes, this is easier than having to browse through lots of pages in a hurry! We should bear in mind the fact that we are doing dramatic activities when we read a story aloud or when we do pair work and there are many ways to practise before getting into a full fledged play.

So now let us examine what is drama. I like one definition which says that drama is written dialogue which involves a wide range of responses and gives stimuli for the development of speaking, listening and writing activities.

We can distinguish between Drama which is a process of activity and Theatre which is more interested in the product, that is to say the performance. A performance demands more time and care while drama is an everyday activity. We make use of dramatic instances when we do dialogues, readings or we represent parts of a lesson. And in this way we give life to the words written on the page and help students become aware of speech features, paralinguistic and extra linguistic features. It also helps to make learning more memorable because students get the idea that dramatic activities are fun and so they relax and produce more.

### 2. Advantages

There are many reasons as to why we should use dramatic activities in the classroom, especially if we are speaking of primary school children. Students become aware of different possibilities of expression. They can express what the text says and also what they want it to say. They realise there are many possibilities when reading a text and many more when performing because there is no "right" reading but a conveyance of meaning.

Doing dramatic activities can help communication, motivation, speaking skills, team work, collaboration and building up confidence among other factors.

Let us have a look at each of these factors:

- Communication is improved because they have to use the language to communicate the idea of the play or dialogue they are reading.
- The children are motivated because it is something different from what they do everyday.
- Speaking skills are improved because they need to make use of good diction in order to be understood and they pay attention to intonation as well.
- As far as team work is concerned, it is important to work together for the realization of one goal, the performance as a group. Nothing works if one wants to show off; we should all have the same goal in mind. So there is a need to help the others, to rehearse together and try to help the weaker members of the group. At the same time this helps build up their confidence as learners and they are motivated so we have a complete circle and positive feedback.

We should bear in mind the process of using drama: reading, understanding, interpretation and representation.

The reading part can be done first by the teacher and then practised by the students with the help of the teacher. We should explain anything that needs further explanation and help them see the nuances of the play. Then we should help in the interpretation, giving them clues as to how to go about it and praising them in their improvisation (as far as the play admits it) and finally the big moment of representation when we have to help perform in the best way possible to put the message of the play and the group across.

It is important to follow some steps so as to ensure the understanding of the students and the participation as well. If they see they can do something, they will be more receptive and will be able to relax more at the time of using drama as a means of communication.

### **3. Disadvantages**

Some teachers consider that there are too many drawbacks as regards using Drama. For example they argue that it can take too much time, they can be afraid of being mocked by the students or they may feel that they lose control of the class.

I think all those objections can be ruled out because you do not need to be an expert in order to use drama in your classroom and you can overrule the difficulties by reading or asking a colleague how to go about it. Perhaps attending some workshops can cure teachers of their fears. I think we should be ready to try new things in teaching as in all walks of life so following the same line we can say that some teachers will be more adventurous than others and this will be reflected in their classes.

### **4. Some tips on the use of dramatic instances in class**

One of the secrets of having a good class making use of drama is to have a good time, to encourage students to improvise and take it easy. You do not need to correct every single sentence the student utters, you must be there but let them interact with each other and see what comes out offering encouragement. When you have to correct something you can do it in group and not as criticism but as a way to improve the play. It is

very important for students to see the attitude of the teacher; a relaxed teacher will obtain much better results than a teacher who feels uncomfortable with the whole process.

A good posture is necessary in order to make good use of our voice and paralinguistic features. The Alexander Technique consists of thinking to the body rather than actively doing anything with it. To overcome his difficulty, Alexander developed four specific mental directions to guide his body into an improved use.

1. Allow your neck to release so the head can balance forward and up.
2. Let the torso lengthen and widen.
3. Let the legs release away from the torso.
4. Release your shoulders out to the sides.

All these positions plus a good use of voice and relaxation techniques can be used at the beginning of the rehearsal to allow you and your students to start the task in a confident and relaxed manner. In fact I sometimes start my classes with a massage so that students calm down and feel the contact with the others thus allowing us to work better as a team and not to have individuals trying to monopolise the teacher for instance.



Before we start using a play in class we should explain why we may want to do that activity: it may be that a group needs bonding and we decide that the best way to do it is through drama but there should be other reasons as well for it to be worth while, the use of proper pronunciation and intonation patterns for instance.

## 5. The Little Red Riding Hood experience

The first steps to take are: explain why we want to do a play, see if the children are enthusiastic with the idea (we should be enthusiastic ourselves if we really want to do it), and then we have to examine the play or give them a choice among several plays that have already been read by the teacher and considered to be convenient. Once the play has been chosen, we have to read it aloud and explain some characteristics (if it is a comedy or a happy ending story etc). In order to assign the roles we should have an audition and the rest of the students should give their opinions as to who is best for each part.

Personal choices have to be taken into account too, there may be students who do not want to have a big part for fear of not remembering the part or others who love being stars and want the longest part... There should be a part for each student and it should be invented if it is not there. In the Little Red Riding Hood version that I used there was only one girl and I had a 4 year old and an 8 year old so we decided that in our play Little Red Riding Hood had a younger sister and they were supposed to go together, they also complained that their lines were too short so we invented a longer dialogue and they decided what they wanted to say and in the end it turned out to be a dialogue between the two sisters. Another of the girls did not want to act but she was very helpful as prompter so that was another role successfully assigned.

As to the costumes, everything had to be prepared out of the clothes we had at home: One of the girls came dressed as Dulcinea and it was good enough to play the part of big sister, granny was wearing an apron, the woodcutter his father's trousers and shirt etc, so there was no expense and no extra work for the mothers.

There were some rules or tips which were to rehearse for ten minutes at the beginning or end of the class but only if they behaved very well (which they did) and I was quite strict with the time limit so as not to have a whole class devoted to rehearsing.

One of the best experiences has been the bonding between students and teacher because our relationship grew a lot and that has enabled us to work even better, there is more confidence and they feel that learning English can be fun too.

I saw in the BritLit page that they had worked with Little Red Riding Hood and was curious as to what they had done with it. Being an old tale I assumed that not much could be done but I was wrong so I put the idea to my students and we started working on the project. First of all I downloaded all the arts material and selected the tasks to be done according to ages. The youngest girl was going to colour the pictures we would need to prepare a poster, while the others would be in charge of doing “mix and match” or working on vocabulary. Then I put the idea to the children of trying to see what could be done with this play and perhaps performing it. They accepted the idea and we had an audition to select the different characters and who was going to do what. There was a Chinese girl, very nice but very shy, who decided she did not want to act so we offered her the position of prompter. Then we had to audition for the parts of woodcutter and wolf. Initially there were no problems but when we had rehearsed all the parts, the wolf decided he wanted to be the woodcutter so we reached an agreement: either he played the part or my dog would do it. Seeing that he couldn’t exchange parts with the woodcutter, he decided to do it himself and in this way we avoided a major crisis because the other children are a bit tired of the “stardom” of this boy.

The following text is what I downloaded from the BritLit page and what I used for the production of the play.

#### *Carolyne Ardron and Sue Clarke. Illustrations by Paul Millard*

All around the world children love listening to and reading fairy tales in their mother-tongue. Whatever the reason, fairy tales provide both children and teachers with a familiar starting. All in all it must have taken perhaps 8 classes to prepare but only using up a little rehearsal time at the beginning and end of class. Little Red Riding Hood point from which to explore stories in a second language.

This kit contains a variety of resources, from text and tasks to illustrations, flashcards and presentations, for you to download and use in your classroom. You can also find computer based interactive materials for students on British Council's [LearnEnglish Kids](#) website.

#### **Downloads** The downloads are divided into five sections

- [Activities](#) - is a collection of materials related to the story
- [Chants](#) - is a collection of spoken drill type activities
- [Flashcards](#) -is to help you build up vocabulary and support understanding
- [Play](#) - helps you to use the materials to produce a short play
- [Story](#) -helps you to tell the story

#### **Activities** - is a collection of materials related to the story

- [Introduction](#) - tells you how you can use the materials in class
- [Charades](#)
- [Big or Little?](#)
- [Big, Bad Wolf](#)
- [Bingo](#)
- [Categorise words](#)
- [Colour in the characters](#)
- [Colour in Little Red Riding Hood](#)
- [Label Little Red Riding Hood](#)
- [Match characters and descriptions](#)
- [Match character's speech](#)
- [My Little Red Riding Hood story](#)
- [Picture dictionary](#)
- [Picture wordsearch](#)
- [Story review](#)

- Vocabulary checklist
- Wanted posters
- What can you see?
- What have I got?
- What's the time, Mr Wolf?

**Chants** - is a collection of spoken drill type activities

- Let's go to Grandma's
- Please don't play in the wood
- Tummy, teeth and tail
- What a good girl!
- Wow Whee!

**Flashcards** - is to help you build up vocabulary and support understanding

- Working with flashcards
- Characters
- Body
- Clothes
- Food
- Home
- Little Red Riding Hood
- Wood
- Word cue cards

**Play** - helps you to use the materials to produce a short play

- Working with plays
- Making masks
- Making masks colour
- Play – Version 1
- Play – Version 2
- Play – Version 3

**Story** - helps you to tell the story

- Working with stories
- Story A4 flashcards
- Story flashcards on PowerPoint
- Story filmstrip
- Storyboard

These plays can be adapted for different groups and you can use at least one every year as a sort of consolidation activity or rounding up of the school year. The activities I chose were the ones which were more significant for the task ahead but they gave a purpose to the whole acting activity.

The project art was done according to ages and according to preferences, if a child likes colouring, or cutting and sticking together or doing crossword etc, they could choose the activity they liked best.

We all have to work to obtain something and in this case it was a nice performance and to show the parents that they could say and do things in English. I placed a lot of importance on the collaborative factor and I explained that to the parents because the children had behaved very well indeed. But before asking parents to come we had to have several groups watching us and giving their opinions which was very valuable because they were given in a very positive way and as pieces of advice.

As we advanced into the story we discovered that we were learning many things and that there was a lot of collaborative work being done because there was one aim in common and that was to have a nice time and a nice performance.

These children even asked if they could come and rehearse on their own and I told them they had to be very quiet because I had other classes. And in fact they behaved very well and obviously I had to praise them. They grew in responsibility and collaborative work.

## 6. Another play

On the other hand, I had another group with older students (11 years old) and I had to look for another type of play. I found one called “The Police” where there were several parts but no enough for everybody so we decided to have 2 children for each part and I gave them the choice of performing twice or of performing together and they chose to do it together and they shared their parts very well. There were two little sisters in the group and they were presenters. So we had a part for everybody and they could all collaborate in the outcome of the play.

# The police

**Scene** A public meeting at which Inspector Black is giving a talk about the British police force  
**Characters** Inspector Black  
PC Green  
WPC Brown  
PC Grey

**Black** Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. My name is Inspector Black, and I've come here tonight to talk to you about the police force in Great Britain. The police force in Great Britain is very professional, very intelligent and very...professional. So, I'd like you to meet some of my very professional and intelligent police officers. First of all, I'd like you to meet PC Green. Ladies and gentlemen, PC Green.

**PC Green enters.**

**Black** Good evening, PC Green.  
**Green** Good evening, Inspector Black.  
**Black** Now, what does PC mean? Tell them, Green.  
**Green** I beg your pardon, Inspector?  
**Black** Tell them.  
**Green** Tell them what, Inspector?  
**Black** What do the letters 'PC' stand for?  
**Green** Oh! 'PC' stands for 'Peter Christopher'.  
**Black** What?  
**Green** It's my name, Inspector. Peter Christopher Green – PC Green.  
**Black** Green...  
**Green** Yes, Inspector?  
**Black** Do you think that we call you 'PC Green' because your name is Peter Christopher Green?  
**Green** Yes, Inspector.  
**Black** Well, you're wrong. 'PC' stands for something else.  
**Green** Really?  
**Black** Yes. Now think: What does 'PC' stand for?  
**Green** Postcard?  
**Black** No!  
**Green** Personal computer?  
**Black** No!!  
**Green** Oh, I know! Prince Charles!

**Black** Green, 'PC' does not mean 'Prince Charles', or 'postcard', or 'personal computer'. It means 'Police Constable'!  
**Green** Really? I didn't know that.  
**Black** You are Police Constable Green.  
**Green** Thank you, Inspector.  
**Black** Now, ladies and gentlemen, I'd like you to meet another British police officer: WPC Brown.

**WPC Brown enters.**

**Brown** Hello.  
**Black** Now, if 'PC' means 'Police Constable', what does 'WPC' mean?  
**Brown** 'Wife of Police Constable.'  
**Black** Don't be stupid, Brown! You are not 'Wife of Police Constable'!  
**Brown** Yes, I am, Inspector. I'm married to PC Green.  
**Green** That's right, sir. We're very happy.  
**Black** 'WPC' means 'Woman Police Constable'. Now, ladies and gentlemen, as you can see, Green and Brown are wearing nice blue and white uniforms.

**Green and Brown demonstrate their uniforms like fashion models.**

**Black** Hat – or helmet. Blouse – or shirt. Skirt – or trousers. Boots...or boots. So, this is a police uniform. But there are a lot of police officers out there in the street with no uniform.  
**Green** No uniform?!  
**Brown** They must be very cold, Inspector.  
**Black** No! They're wearing normal clothes.  
**Brown** Why's that, Inspector?  
**Black** They're wearing normal clothes because they want to look like normal people. So...here is a police officer dressed exactly like a normal person. Ladies and gentlemen, PC Grey.

**PC Grey enters. He is wearing a police helmet and boots, and a pair of long shorts and a brightly-coloured shirt.**

**Black** Now, as you can see, there is no way that you would know that PC Grey is a police officer.  
**Brown** Except for the helmet.  
**Black** Except for the helmet.  
**Green** And the boots.  
**Black** And the boots. Except for the helmet and the boots, there is no way that you would know that Police Constable Grey is a police officer.

**PC Grey does not look very pleased.**

**Black** Now, Grey – tell these people what it feels like to be a police officer with no uniform.  
**Grey** It feels stupid.  
**Black** What?  
**Grey** It feels stupid. I mean, I'm a police officer: I want to wear a uniform!

The police 3

**Black** That's enough, Grey.  
**Grey** I don't want to walk the streets looking like this!  
**Black** Grey! Get back in line!  
**Grey** Would you walk the streets looking like this?

**The Inspector blows his whistle. Grey gets back in line.**

**Black** Green! Brown! Grey! It's time for equipment demonstration.

**Green**  
**Brown** Equipment demonstration!  
**Grey**

**Black** Now, every police officer has three important pieces of equipment. A whistle –

**Green produces a whistle.**

**Black** – a truncheon –

**Brown produces a truncheon.**

**Black** – and a notebook.

**Grey produces a comic.**

**Black** A notebook, Grey, not a comic.

**Grey** They didn't give me a notebook.

**Black** I see.

**Grey** No uniform, no notebook. It's ridiculous!

**The Inspector blows his whistle.**

**Black** That's enough, Grey! Now, what are these very important pieces of equipment for? First of all, the whistle. The whistle is used to attract the attention of other police officers. Like this:

**Green blows his whistle.**

**Green** Oi!

**Brown blows her whistle.**

**Brown** Oi!

**Grey has no whistle.**

**Grey** No uniform, no notebook – and no whistle!

**Black** And now, the truncheon. Green, Brown, Grey – ready with your truncheons!

**Green** Sir!

**Brown** Sir!

**Grey has no truncheon.**

**Grey** No uniform, no notebook, no whistle – and no truncheon!

*The Inspector blows his whistle.*

**Black** Right – forget the truncheons. The notebook. Green?

**Green** Yes, Inspector?

**Black** What is the notebook for?

**Green** For making notes, Inspector.

**Black** Very good, Green. Brown?

**Brown** Yes, Inspector?

**Black** Have you got anything in your notebook?

**Brown** Yes, Inspector.

**Black** Good. Read it.

**Brown** Oh. All right. (*Reading*) ' "What I did today", by Woman Police Constable Brown, aged twenty-five...and a half. Got up. Said "Hello" to Police Constable Green. Made a cup of coffee –'

**Black** Thank you, Brown. Grey?

**Grey** Yes, Inspector?

**Black** Have you got anything in your notebook?

**Grey** (*Holding up the comic*) You mean this?

**Black** Yes.

**Grey** Yes. (*Reading*) ' "Mickey Mouse goes for a picnic." On Saturday, Mickey and his friends –'

**Black** Grey! I mean: Have you written anything in it?

**Grey** No.

**Black** Why not?

**Grey** Because they didn't give me a pen!!

**Black** All right, all right, all right. Here you are.

*The Inspector gives Grey a pen.*

**Grey** Thank you, Inspector.

**Black** Now, have you all got everything you need? Whistle?

**Green** Yes!

**Brown** Yes!

**Grey** No!

**Black** Truncheon?

**Green** Yes!

**Brown** Yes!

**Grey** No!

**Black** Notebook?

**Green** Yes!

**Brown** Yes!  
**Grey** No!  
**Black** Boots?  
**Green** Yes!  
**Brown** Yes!  
**Grey** Yes!  
**Black** Helmet?  
**Green** Yes!  
**Brown** No!  
**Grey** Yes!  
**Black** (*Slightly confused*) Well, that seems all right. Now it's time for action!  
**Green** Action! Right!  
**Brown** Action! Right!  
**Grey** Action! Right!  
**Black** I want you to get out there, in the street!  
**Green** In the street! Right!  
**Brown** In the street! Right!  
**Grey** In the street! Right!  
**Black** And find some criminals!  
**Green** Criminals! Right!  
**Brown** Criminals! Right!  
**Grey** Criminals! Right!  
**Black** And when you find them...  
**Green** Right!  
**Brown** Right!  
**Grey** Right!  
**Black** You know what to do!  
**Green** What?  
**Brown** What?  
**Grey** What?  
**Black** You arrest them!  
**Green** Arrest them! Right!  
**Brown** Arrest them! Right!  
**Grey** Arrest them! Right!  
**Black** And then there won't be any criminals left!  
**Green** Right!  
**Brown** Right!  
**Grey** Right!  
**All** Left! Right! Left! Right! Left! Right!...

*They all march away.*

As you can see the whole play is a long dialogue where there is one “narrator”, Black, and he is the one to guide the others in what they have to say so it is important to choose a “good” Black in order to have a successful play. It is also important to explain the characteristics of the other characters because in this way children can give them the different intonation patterns and body language that is needed and perhaps they can not get it themselves if it is not explained to them.

The problem with this play was the use of irony and obviously children were not ready for this so the way I read the story and how I explained the different nuances of voice and character to them was all important. So much so that they were very good in getting into the part of Police officers and boss by using different ways of interaction.

As we got into the rehearsing the children got enthusiastic and they wanted to invite their parents to a performance. We decided to use the garage and not to prepare many things as regards setting. We divided the garage into two parts, one as a stage and the other as place for the audience.

Before that, we decided to rehearse in front of some companions and they gave us their opinions and we changed things accordingly. Then we talked about costumes and decided to use whatever could be found at home and not to have to spend any money.

They characterized themselves and decided to perform together so they agreed that the two or three students who performed the same part would get dressed with something similar, similar colour or hat or something that they considered appropriate.

At the beginning I was worried about discipline and the way of interacting of the students but it soon became apparent that they knew how to behave when they were really interested in what they were doing.

## 7. Conclusion

I have learnt that using dramatic text or doing dramatic representations help a lot because the level of interaction reached is very valuable for future projects.

When I set about doing both activities I just wanted to see if they could work, now I know that they work and the idea for prospective plays is to choose plays where they can have fun and at the same time stretch their knowledge a bit more, it can be by using a play that has more vocabulary and we have to work on that or something a bit more complicated than what we have currently been doing as ways of consolidation or extra teaching.

It may also be convenient to use at the end of the year because children are tired and they see drama as a ludic activity and it is a great tool to consolidate what has been taught before and to use elements like body language and use of voices in order to stimulate imagination as well.

By using plays in my classes I have grown as a teacher because I can explore different venues that I had not thought of before, classes are more entertaining and I can notice the progress of some children who in a traditional class would not have thrived.

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## Intercambios universitarios: ¿continuidad y/o ruptura? Análisis de biografías lingüísticas

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### Resumen

Las entrevistas biográficas, cuyo uso ha comenzado a desarrollarse en Sociología y Psicología Social, se han convertido en herramientas imprescindibles para analizar los mecanismos individuales y colectivos de aprendizaje de una lengua y de su universo cultural.

Con el fin de explorar el alcance de los programas de intercambios internacionales de estudiantes, hemos reunido y analizado un corpus de entrevistas biográficas de alumnos extranjeros de la U.C.M con el fin de intentar evaluar, en una primera aproximación a esta problemática, la formación multicultural de esos programas y su rentabilidad en el progreso de los conocimientos lingüísticos.

Describiré en esta comunicación: 1) las repercusiones en el nivel representacional del concepto de “lengua” y 2) la autoevaluación de los progresos. Centraré mi análisis en las nociones de “continuidad” y “ruptura”, conceptos claves del proceso de integración de las representaciones lingüísticas y culturales.

**Palabras clave:** Biografías lingüísticas, multilingüismo, multiculturalismo, programas de intercambios de estudiantes.

### Résumés

Les entretiens biographiques dont l'usage a commencé à se développer en sociologie et en psychologie sociale, se sont convertis en outils indispensables pour l'analyse des mécanismes individuels et collectifs d'un dynamique d'apprentissage d'une langue et de son univers culturel.

Dans le but d'explorer la portée des programmes d'échanges internationaux des étudiants, nous avons réuni et analysé un corpus d'entretiens biographiques d'étudiants étrangers de l'UCM. Il s'agit d'une première approche à cette problématique pour essayer d'évaluer l'objectif de formation multiculturelle de ces programmes et leur rentabilité dans l'évolution de leurs connaissances linguistiques.

Cette communication portera sur : 1) les répercussions au niveau représentational du concept de « langue » et 2) l'autoévaluation des progrès linguistiques. Je centrerai mon analyse autour des notions de « continuité » et « rupture », en tant que concepts clefs du processus d'intégration des représentations linguistiques et culturelles.

**Mots clés:** Biographies langagières, multilinguisme, multiculturalisme, programmes d'échanges d'étudiants.

### Introducción

Las entrevistas biográficas o los relatos de vida, cuyo uso ha comenzado a desarrollarse en sociología y psicología social, se han convertido en herramientas imprescindibles para analizar los mecanismos individuales y colectivos de una dinámica de aprendizaje o de transmisión de una lengua y de su universo cultural. Por ello, desde hace algunos años, estas técnicas han sido adoptadas tanto en sociolingüística como en didáctica; los sociolingüistas, por su parte, se han dedicado al estudio de los fenómenos de contacto de lenguas provocados por el desplazamiento de personas o de poblaciones y, por otra, los especialistas en didáctica han trabajado dentro del campo de la adquisición de una lengua en situación plurilingüe y multicultural.

En esta perspectiva, con el fin de explorar el alcance de los programas de intercambios internacionales de estudiantes y los efectos en su formación, hemos reunido y analizado a lo largo del curso de doctorado 2004-05 un corpus de entrevistas biográficas de estudiantes extranjeros de la Facultad de Filología de la Universidad Complutense de Madrid (UCM)<sup>1</sup>. Se trata de una primera aproximación a esta problemática para intentar evaluar el objetivo de formación multicultural de estos programas y su rentabilidad en la transformación de la aprehensión del mundo por los jóvenes, del progreso de sus conocimientos lingüísticos y de sus valoraciones de las diferencias culturales.

En un primer momento, describiré en este artículo: 1) los distintos tipos de alumnos entrevistados y sus proyectos para, luego, analizar 2) las repercusiones en el nivel representacional del concepto de “lengua” y 3) la autoevaluación de sus progresos, así como 4) las modificaciones de las motivaciones, vivencias y estereotipos a lo largo de una experiencia de cambio civilizacional en el curso de un currículo universitario. Centraré mi análisis en las nociones de “continuidad” y “ruptura”, como conceptos claves del proceso de integración de un nuevo sistema de valores, de representación de sus propios progresos lingüísticos y apreciación de sus semejanzas y diferencias respecto a los “otros”.

## **1. Método de recogida de datos y características de la muestra entrevistada**

El método de recogida de datos y la representabilidad de la muestra son esenciales para el análisis, sobre todo en el caso de una muestra restringida.

### 1.1. Método de recogida de datos

Para recoger las biografías con una atención especial a la problemática lingüística, hemos optado por la elaboración y uso de entrevistas directivas concebidas como situación social de intercambio y como modo de investigación científica.

Como lo apunta N. Papin (2002), la entrevista directiva atenúa en cierta medida las tres dimensiones necesarias para el estudio de los procesos de las representaciones sociales en los documentos biográficos realizados por los sujetos: descripción, categorización y asimilación. Es cierto que, en el marco de una entrevista directiva, por su forma estandarizada, la descripción se ve limitada en parte por la visión del mundo propuesta en el cuestionario, cuestionario que, además, activa y enmarca las categorías y los procesos de categorización, condicionando de este modo, en cierta medida, la expresión de los sujetos entrevistados. Sin embargo, este método ofrece la ventaja de recoger datos comparables de una entrevista a otra y, además, hemos comprobado que este mismo carácter directivo pierde de su importancia al verse envuelto en un proceso de conversacionalización en el que el sujeto puede inscribirse como sujeto social de manera individualizada.

Para propiciar una mayor espontaneidad en las respuestas, hemos estructurado la entrevista siguiendo la forma narrativa prototípica del género “relato de vida”. Se ha comprobado, como dice Ch. Deprez (2002), que los relatos de vida de inmigrantes presentan unas secuencias regulares cuyo encadenamiento se guía por la cronología de los acontecimientos. El núcleo central es el “acontecimiento migratorio”, momento en el que todo cambia –preparativos, salida, llegada–, con un “antes” –situaciones en el país de origen, motivaciones– y un “después” –primeras dificultades, estrategias de superación, situación actual–.

Por ello, el cuestionario aplicado a los estudiantes de la muestra se divide en tres partes conformes al modelo que acabo de describir con una especial atención a las lenguas, su uso, así como a los estereotipos culturales y a la apreciación de su situación como sujeto social, resaltando los puntos que enmarcan la

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<sup>1</sup> Programa Erasmus y otros programas de intercambios con distintos países

experiencia en una continuidad de vivencia –universidad, estudios, compañeros-, y en una ruptura con su sistema de referencias y hábitos– uso de las lenguas, alejamiento de la familia, vivienda, costumbres de la nueva sociedad.

Como en cualquier cuestionario, se han previsto preguntas que retoman el mismo tema en una contextualización diferente para comprobar la veracidad de las respuestas.

## 1.2. Características de la muestra

### 1.2.1. Repartición de la muestra

Se ha recogido en esta primera fase de la investigación una muestra restringida y relativamente homogénea ya que sólo se ha pretendido delimitar el campo de estudio y plantear unas hipótesis que puedan servir de punto de partida a un trabajo de mayor alcance. La muestra se compone de 11 estudiantes extranjeros de la Facultad de Filología de la Universidad Complutense de Madrid que responden a criterios de orígenes diversos, desde el punto de vista geográfico, y a los dos niveles de estudios habituales de inserción de alumnos en intercambios, - segundo Ciclo de Licenciatura y doctorado -, se reparten de la manera siguiente:

Tipo de estancia	Semestral	Anual	Más de un año	Sexo	País de destino
Segundo Ciclo: Programa Erasmus y otros intercambios		USA 1 Alemania 2 Francia 2 España 1		Mujeres	España España España Suecia
Doctorado	Italia 1		Taiwan 1 USA 1	Varones	España
Con ocupación laboral		China 1 USA 1		Mujeres	España

Los alumnos de los programas Erasmus y de intercambios de segundo Ciclo norteamericanos tienen entre 20 y 22 años, los de doctorado entre 24 y 28, con la excepción de un estudiante taiwanés de 35. Sólo dos estudiantes postgraduados se han dedicado a una ocupación laboral a tiempo completo y uno a tiempo parcial.

La selección de la muestra<sup>2</sup> es representativa de la variedad de los alumnos extranjeros en Madrid y da cuenta de distintos grados de distancia cultural, además se ha entrevistado a una alumna española que estudia en Suecia. Se compone, dentro del programa Erasmus, de pares culturales europeos cercanos desde el punto de vista lingüístico (1) y más alejados (2), (3):

Grupos	País de acogida	Países de origen
(1)	España	Francia e Italia
(2)	España	Alemania
(3)	Suecia	España

En cuanto a los demás programas, reflejan una distancia cultural mayor y de naturaleza diferente:

Grupos	País de acogida	Países de origen
(4)	España	USA
(5)	España	China,
(6)	España	Taiwán

<sup>2</sup> Se han excluido a los estudiantes suramericanos por ser hispanohablantes.

Por ello, se puede esperar cierta homogeneidad cultural y lingüística y una mayor facilidad de comprensión de la sociedad de acogida en los componentes del grupo (1), unas diferencias lingüísticas y culturales mayores en los (2) y (3), una homogeneidad cultural parcial entre estos tres grupos y el grupo (4), y una mayor distancia cultural entre el conjunto de los grupos precedentes y los componentes de los grupos (5) y (6). Este parámetro sociolingüístico –distancia lingüística y cultural– adquiere un valor de primera categorización de los factores de asimilación de las vivencias en la sociedad de acogida.

### 1.2.2. Duración de la estancia y expectativas

Las estancias tienen una duración de un semestre o un año para los alumnos de Segundo Ciclo, incluso si algunos de ellos declaran querer prolongarlas, y son más largas para los estudiantes de doctorado. El caso del estudiante de Taiwán – 11 años y sin proyecto de quedarse - es atípico, ya que este alumno ha tenido que volver a cursar un título de licenciatura antes de empezar el doctorado. La estudiante china y una de las norteamericanas (USA.1) han optado por una integración laboral a tiempo completo que les sitúa algo al margen del sistema universitario regular y tres estudiantes tienen el proyecto de instalarse en España (Fr.1, USA.3, Fr.2), los dos primeros porque piensan casarse con españoles y asentarse de manera definitiva, la tercera porque proyecta vivir en casa de una hermana ya residente. El caso de esta última alumna es particular: se trata de la única estudiante, de nacionalidad francesa, que tiene orígenes multiculturales, ya que su familia es originaria de Tetuán y, al situarse siempre respecto a estas tres experiencias –Francia, España y Marruecos–, su sentimiento de identidad se revela más fluctuante.

Tratándose de un grupo social homogéneo – estudiantes universitarios –, el análisis de los resultados pone de manifiesto los numerosos aspectos sociales que dan a los estudiantes una impresión de continuidad tanto en su vida personal como universitaria.

## 2. Factores sociales e individuales de la continuidad

La noción de “continuidad” se inscribe en un entorno social y generacional que caracteriza esta clase de alumnos de estudios superiores de tipo lingüístico cuyo perfil es portador de un sentimiento de universalidad, perfil basado en el conocimiento de lenguas y civilizaciones, que coincide con el objetivo fundamental de los programas de intercambios.

Los factores que estructuran esta continuidad formativa son numerosos y se sitúan en niveles diferentes: el nivel de formación del alumno, su medio social, el apoyo de las familias, la institución universitaria que se asemeja de un país a otro, las motivaciones que suscitan los programas de intercambios y la movilidad que favorecen, ya que permiten a los alumnos seguir sus estudios en distintos de países sin pérdida de tiempo al integrar estas estancias en el currículo de la Universidad del país de origen.

### 2.1. Una formación de alto nivel

El alto nivel de formación de los alumnos, la especialidad y la posición social similar a que están acostumbrados en los dos países –estudiantes universitarios– son evidentemente unos factores unificadores del conjunto de los sujetos de la muestra ya que borran en gran parte la aprehensión de las diferencias culturales por:

- (i) las motivaciones expresadas, ya que todos habían planificado desde el principio de sus estudios una estancia en el extranjero,
- (ii) los conocimientos de idiomas, todos afirman conocer al menos otros dos idiomas además de la lengua materna, y
- (iii) el grado de conocimientos de otros países en estancias y viajes anteriores.

### 2.1.1. Motivaciones del intercambio

En la actualidad, muchos alumnos programan con antelación un intercambio en el curso de sus estudios, a veces, desde la enseñanza secundaria: *Porque desde que empecé español quise venirme a España y sólo podía venir de Erasmus, así que tuve que estar 5 años para poder ya venir, así que después de 5 años planteándomelo dije allá voy.* (Fr.1), *Desde que comencé mis estudios universitarios pensé en la posibilidad de cursar un año en el extranjero para profundizar mis conocimientos. Gracias a una amiga sueca comencé a interesarme no sólo por la lengua, sino también por la cultura, hasta el punto final de querer venir a Estocolmo.* (Es.1)

Los proyectos profesionales o de futuro desempeñan casi siempre un papel fundamental en sus decisiones: *Porque quería tener más experiencia de (y) capacidad de estudiar y trabajar independientemente. (Elegí) España porque creo que español es un idioma potencial y me gusta el arte español(a).* (China.1), *I wanted to live outside the United States for a while. It looks good on graduate school applications if you have international experience and I wanted to teach English. It looks good on grad. school applications if you have teaching experience.* (USA.2)<sup>3</sup>

También pueden intervenir motivos de tipo sentimental: *Yo había conocido a mi novia hace dos años y pico, yo estaba terminando mi master en Estados Unidos y cuando yo estaba buscando un programa de doctorado pues sabía que iba a tener que venir aquí o ella venirse a Estados Unidos y ella no quería irse, así que vine aquí* (USA.3).

La mayoría de los entrevistados, sin embargo, han venido a Madrid porque son estudiantes de español y les gusta España: *Porque me gusta mucho la historia y cultura española y latinoamericana, en Taiwán había estudiado español, y por eso elegí España para estudiar la historia.* (Taiwan.1).

Otros escogen Madrid por la lengua española en sustitución a una estancia en América del Sur: *La lengua me gusta y en segundo lugar que no podía ir a América Latina con mi beca pero me gustaría ir a Perú o Chile después.* (Al.2).

Si bien hay una variedad en las motivaciones, todas las razones aludidas demuestran la madurez de los estudiantes y la planificación de sus estudios adoptando todas las posibilidades a su alcance.

### 2.1.2. Los conocimientos lingüísticos

Todos los estudiantes conocen varios idiomas, sobre todo los estudiantes europeos, la que más idiomas conoce es la estudiante española que está en Suecia:

	LM	LE
Es.1	Español	Nivel alto: sueco, alemán Nivel medio: inglés, francés, ruso

Luego vienen las estudiantes alemanas, francesas, el estudiante italiano y la estudiante de licenciatura de USA , Universidad de Georgetown. Sólo una alumna – Fr.2 – es bilingüe desde la pequeña infancia – francés/árabe dialectal de Tetuán –, los demás han aprendido las lenguas que hablan en distintos niveles en el marco escolar:

	LM	LE
Al.1	Alemán	Nivel alto: francés Nivel medio: español, inglés
Al.2	Alemán	Nivel alto: inglés Nivel medio: español francés, portugués
Fr.1	Francés	Nivel alto: español Nivel medio: inglés, italiano
Fr.2	Francés	Nivel alto: inglés, árabe dialectal, español

<sup>3</sup> Se han recogido las entrevistas en inglés y no se han traducido.

It.1	Italiano	Nivel alto: español, alemán, inglés Nivel medio: francés
USA.3	Inglés	Nivel alto: español Nivel medio: francés Nivel bajo: italiano

Los otros dos estudiantes norteamericanos y los asiáticos son los que menos idiomas saben:

USA.1	Inglés	Nivel medio: español Nivel bajo: francés
USA.2	Inglés	Nivel alto: español, italiano Nivel bajo: francés
China1	Chino	Nivel alto: inglés, español
Taiwan.1	Chino	Nivel alto: español Nivel medio: inglés

A pesar del nivel evaluado en español, cinco de los estudiantes han optado por contestar al cuestionario en su lengua materna, la estudiante española en Suecia - ya que participaba en una encuesta española -, los estudiantes asiáticos - entrevistas recogidas por una estudiante taiwanesa que tradujo las respuestas -, y dos estudiantes norteamericanos – entrevistados por un alumno norteamericano.

Se puede comprobar que los sujetos de la muestra han estudiado básicamente los mismos idiomas, lo que da al grupo una gran homogeneidad y un universo cultural de referencia compartido. Sin duda el hecho de que sean estudiantes lingüistas acentúa sus semejanzas y, después de esta experiencia, la mayoría de ellos piensa mejorar el nivel de las lenguas conocidas o aprender otras.

#### 2.1.3. Estancias anteriores y viajes en otros países

Excepto los alumnos asiáticos que no han ido a ningún otro país ni viajado durante las vacaciones, todos los demás tienen experiencias más o menos largas de estancias o viajes anteriores. Varios mencionan cursos de verano, estancias semestrales o de larga duración en varios sitios: Alemania, Austria, Italia, Chequia y Canadá, Francia y Suiza. Los demás han viajado durante los veranos con su familia o amigos y nombran países que, a menudo son los mismos de un alumno a otro como: Francia, España, Inglaterra, Italia, pero también: Túnez, Marruecos, Brasil y Méjico. Los que más han viajado para conocer países son los europeos, los estudiantes norteamericanos, siempre vinculan sus viajes con los estudios y las estancias de aprendizaje lingüístico o de formación profesional.

En conjunto este grupo de alumnos tiene cierta experiencia del mundo y de su diversidad. Estas características individuales de los sujetos conforman un grupo de personas que, a pesar de su diversidad, presenta numerosos rasgos comunes que permiten pronosticar una adaptabilidad y unas representaciones del mundo abiertas al aprendizaje de las lenguas y a las culturas.

#### 2.2. El medio social y económico de la familia

Socialmente, los componentes de los distintos grupos tienen además una gran homogeneidad en cuanto a la pertenencia a la misma clase social en sus países de origen. Son todos de clase media y media alta.

#### 2.2.1. El entorno familiar

En general, los alumnos provienen de familias acomodadas con un nivel de formación alto que apoyan moral y económicamente la estancia de sus hijos fuera de sus países, a la pregunta sobre las reacciones de la familia, contestan: *Muy bien, a mi madre le gusta que viaje mucho y vea diferente gente y culturas y todo eso.* (Al.2), *Muy bien, porque llevo 5 años preparándoles para la idea, así que ya saben que quiero vivir aquí* (Fr.1)-.

En este punto, hay que subrayar que el apoyo económico es también cultural y característico de los países europeos y asiáticos, sin embargo, los estudiantes norteamericanos son muy orgullosos de su autonomía respecto a la familia: *Nothing really They've never really pushed me or cared what I do.* (USA.1), *No me dijeron mucho. Eso es lo que pasa en Estados Unidos que cuando no vives con tus padres y no te pagan, no pueden juzgarte si te has equivocado o lo que sea, no es su decisión, yo sé que me apoyan.* (USA.3). En todos los casos, la relación con la familia es muy fuerte y no viven la separación como una ruptura.

## 2.2.2. El estatuto social

Estas características de los sujetos explican las razones por las cuales tienen la impresión de no encontrar ningún tipo de cambio de estatuto social y vivir esta experiencia dentro de una continuidad, a la pregunta si han notado algún cambio en su posición y estatuto social contestan: *no, no he notado ningún cambio* (Fr.2), *No it's basically the same.* (Usa.1), *No, nunca.* (China.1). Esta similitud entre la posición personal en el país de acogida y el de origen marca una gran diferencia con la situación de los inmigrantes por razones económicas y es característica de un grupo creciente de individuos, sobre todo en Europa que, gracias a los programas europeos y la libre circulación, puede pensar su vida personal y profesional sin tener en cuenta las fronteras.

## 3. Los factores de ruptura

Sin embargo, cualquier cambio se caracteriza por una serie de rupturas en las vivencias. La noción de “ruptura” que coexiste con la de “continuidad” a lo largo de la estancia se instituye dentro de un proceso dialéctico en evolución constante y en busca de un equilibrio. La continuidad permite a los alumnos percibir los factores de ruptura y la concienciación de estos factores permite estructurar su nivel mental representacional de las diferencias asegurando la continuidad.

La impresión de ruptura se sitúa esencialmente dentro de la especificidad del país de acogida, su lengua y las vivencias de la vida diaria.

### 3.1. La lengua como primer factor de ruptura

La lengua del país de acogida se erige en el principal factor de ruptura. Si bien la mayoría de los alumnos tienen conocimientos previos de la lengua, la consideran como perfeccionable y constituye, a la vez, un obstáculo a la plena comunicación y una prueba personal que superar. Todos los alumnos consideran el aprendizaje de la lengua como el objetivo principal de su estancia y su progreso se ve sometido al tiempo.

#### 3.1.1.- El nivel lingüístico y problemas de comunicación a principio de la estancia

Excepto una estudiante norteamericana (USA.1) que era principiante completa a su llegada, todos los demás tenían conocimientos previos de la lengua del país de acogida, cinco de ellos –Es.1, Fr.1, Fr.2, It.1 y USA.3– estiman su nivel alto o bastante alto en el momento de su llegada, los demás lo evalúan como medio, lo que no impide numerosas dificultades de comunicación debidas en gran parte al tipo de enseñanza escolar que han recibido. Este aprendizaje se centra esencialmente en el conocimiento del sistema de la lengua y no en su uso, por lo que han tenido que enfrentarse con la problemática de los intercambios diarios –variedad de interlocutores, registros diversos, características sociales y geográficas de los locutores nativos.

Al principio de la estancia, afirman no haber recurrido en ningún momento a un intérprete y cuando no han podido comunicar han optado esencialmente por dos estrategias: 1) el uso de medios extraverbales - *con las manos y diccionario* (Al.2), *In the beginning, I just pointed and got what I wanted* (USA.!) -, y 2) verbales, utilizando el inglés como lengua internacional –*A veces, intentaba explicar con el inglés, buscaba*

*palabras sinónimas.* (China.1) -, pero en conjunto dicen haber logrado comunicar sin recurrir a intermediarios, pidiendo al interlocutor repetir o, a su vez, repitiendo con variantes y metáforas lo que querían decir hasta hacerse entender. En el caso de las dos estudiantes francesas y el italiano, la proximidad cultural y lingüística ha desempeñado un factor favorecedor en la comprensión.

Según la autoevaluación realizada en las entrevistas, los alumnos clasifican sus dificultades en función de dos ejes esenciales: 1) comprensión y producción propia, y 2) recepción por los interlocutores y relación con los nativos. La comprensión se instituye en el principal punto de referencia de la comunicabilidad con los demás. Todos afirman en un principio no haber tenido problemas de comunicación pero luego desglosan una realidad muy distinta.

Los de menor nivel lingüístico denuncian cierto aislamiento basado en la incomprendición lingüística: *Es que no hablo mucho con los alumnos porque ellos no..., no sé, pero a veces es muy difícil entender en los cursos* (Al.2). Las causas son variadas pero, en general, son relativas al acento o a la rapidez de habla de los nativos: *cuando hablo con mi compañero de piso que es argentino no entiendo nada. Tampoco con mi portero. Murmuran o hablan muy rápido*" (USA.3), *Al principio no podía entenderles bien por la rapidez que hablaban.* (Taiwán.1).

Apuntan siempre que la falta de comprensión no es homogénea sino relativa a personas concretas o a grupos de personas. En este proceso de autoevaluación, se ve que influye también el método de enseñanza recibido en el país de origen, una enseñanza orientada hacia el desarrollo de una conciencia gramatical muy perfeccionista, como es el caso en Francia, frena la espontaneidad del habla. De hecho, las dos estudiantes de este país son las únicas en centrarse en la producción y decir necesitar tiempo para construir una estructura lingüística correcta y satisfactoria, sobre todo, en los puntos que consideran zonas de interferencia o dificultades específicas del español respecto al francés: *La diferencia entre ser y estar, y las preposiciones* (Fr.1), *el tiempo porque lo que pasa es que las cosas tenemos que pensarlas antes y la concordancia de tiempo, por lo menos, el uso del subjuntivo, y eso me costaba un poco y ahora también me cuesta un poco* (Fr.2).

Al problema de no entender bien a los demás se añade el de no ser entendido por ellos: *The only time I would say when it's not good to be able to communicate is when I can say something without everyone understanding me*" (USA.2), y se convierte en una prueba personal que superar, que va acompañada del rechazo como interlocutor por parte de los demás, sobre todo sus pares - los estudiantes - creando un entorno hostil: *los estudiantes españoles no se comunican con nosotras porque al comienzo tenemos problemas al hablar y eso lo saben o lo ven y no hacemos mucha amistad con españoles si no mejoramos* (Al.1), *porque los alumnos se conocen todos y van a clase y luego no hablas, y claro vas a clase y luego te vas a casa, y aunque te quedes en la universidad no es fácil.* (Fr.1).

Las estrategias de superación son similares en todos los casos y demuestran el esfuerzo y la presión continua al que se ven sometidos: *La práctica diaria y la motivación han sido las estrategias*" (Es.1). Cuando se interrumpe el proceso de comprensión, piden ayuda a los interlocutores: *Pedía a la gente que hablara más despacio*" (Taiwán.1) o se aíslan: *Si, claro, hay problemas todo el día, tienes que preguntar otra vez, algunas veces no entiendes lo que hablan pero así funciona* (Al.1).

Los alumnos viven el aprendizaje como un largo proceso, un desafío, una lucha diaria que evoluciona a lo largo del día en función de las situaciones de comunicación, de los interlocutores y del cansancio mental, sin embargo, son muy atentos a los progresos que evalúan detalladamente .

### 3.1.2. La autoevaluación del progreso en comprensión lingüística

El análisis de la mejoría del nivel de comprensión lingüístico es, en efecto, muy detallado en todas las entrevistas, se basa en una autoevaluación continua y en la validación de los progresos por locutores nativos: *Sí, creo que he mejorado, ya noté una notable mejoría el año pasado. Lo noto en que sigo sin problemas radio, tele, las conversaciones y además en que la gente me lo dice.* (Es.1)-

Establecen de más a menos las distintas situaciones de comprensión dentro de una graduación de menor a mayor dificultad: 1) intercambios presenciales, periódicos, tele, 2) clases, radio 3) conversaciones telefónicas, conversaciones ajenas en la calle o los medios de transportes.

Son las dos últimas situaciones las que plantean mayores dificultades de comprensión: *That's the hardest.* (USA.1), pueden crear hasta aprensión: *Sí, ahora sí. Antes me costaba y me ponía muy nerviosa* (Es.1). El no ver al interlocutor, en el caso de la conversación telefónica, parece ser el mayor obstáculo: *Eso es mucho más difícil porque yo tengo que ver a la persona cuando hablo con ella* (Al.1), y algunos optan por una estrategia de sustitución: *Sí, pero suelo mandar mensajes de texto porque sobre todo a mi no me gusta hablar por teléfono.* (USA.3).

El entender lo que se dice a su alrededor o entrar en una conversación empezada se instituye también como un factor de integración social y representa un nivel pleno de comprensión lingüística, ya que hay que identificar el tema o el escenario a partir de elementos puramente lingüísticos. Para algunos, escuchar conversaciones se convierte en un ejercicio: *Sí, además, me gusta mucho poner la antena para ver si entiendo cuando me siento en el tren y la gente habla por teléfono sin participar, cuando escucho conversaciones ajenas* (Es.1). Son situaciones que indican hasta qué punto la lengua de comunicación espontánea y familiar es más difícil de entender por sujetos que han tenido un aprendizaje muy escolar y normativo: *Eso sí, si no emplean un dialecto o un vocabulario muy familiar, expresiones o fórmulas hechas que, a veces, no entiendo* (Fr.1). En todos los casos, el conocimiento del tema, o escenario, desempeña un papel relevante en la comprensión, que es siempre un proceso interpretativo y se apoya en este esquema mental: *It depends, if they say something to me the first time from out of nowhere, I have to ask them to repeat it but I get it the second time.* (USA.2).

En paralelo con esta autoevaluación de la comprensión, describen sus dificultades y estrategias de progreso en producción y la vinculan con la relación entre su propio nivel de comprensión y la capacidad de hacerse comprender por sus interlocutores.

### 3.1.3. La autoevaluación de la producción lingüística

Hablar se convierte a lo largo del día en una batalla que los estudiantes tienen que ganar cada vez que toman la palabra, saben que van a ser juzgados, escuchados o rechazados como interlocutores y desarrollan estrategias diversas frente a este desafío en cada una de las situaciones de comunicación. Además, para ellos, al tener que participar en clase y realizar trabajos o exámenes, el adquirir un alto nivel de producción es imprescindible y cobra una especial importancia tanto en el oral como en el escrito.

#### 3.1.3.1. Las limitaciones

El no inhibirse frente a los demás constituye el primer objetivo que reivindican como un deber y un derecho a tomar la palabra cual sea su nivel lingüístico y sea cual sea la circunstancia: *Sí. Claro que sé que cometo errores pero no tengo ningún miedo a hablar, y siempre cumple el objetivo: que me entiendan.* (Es.1).

Son muy conscientes de sus limitaciones que vinculan con la diversidad de sus interlocutores en función de su posición dentro de la relación social que establecen, el tema del intercambio y el contexto de comunicación: *Es que limitaciones tengo según el tema o la persona con la que hablo. Estoy limitada dependiendo del contexto sobre todo, dependiendo de la persona con la que hable si me siento nerviosa.* (Es.1).

Optan por adoptar actitudes distintas en función del estatuto de su interlocutor, en particular, para preservar su cara en una relación jerarquizada: *Depende de muchas cosas: a quién hable o con quién hable o en qué contexto. Si estoy hablando por ejemplo con un profesor suelo decir lo mínimo para no cometer errores, pero con mis amigos da igual.* (USA.3), o se autolimitan para no perder la cara: *Yo digo lo que sé* (fr.1). Aluden a características personales de naturaleza psicológica para atenuar su eventual renuncia: *I'm really shy so I don't always like to talk.* (USA.2), pero, cuando su prestigio como sujeto social no está en juego, optan por una intercomprensión más libre, descuidando las normas lingüísticas: *I don't always say everything in the most elegant way possible, but I do alright* (USA.1).

### 3.1.3..2. Estrategias de producción

Las estrategias para suplir las carencias lingüísticas en producción son de dos tipos, ya que no recurren a un intérprete: 1) la superación del problema en la misma lengua o la creación de neologismos a partir de otra lengua, y 2) la inserción de palabras de otras lenguas que juzgan comprensibles o el code-switching cuando lo permiten los interlocutores.

En el primer caso, sobre todo al principio de la estancia, para establecer una intercomprensión cuando fallaban los conocimientos seguros, dicen haber recurrido al uso del diccionario: *al principio llevaba siempre mi diccionario de bolsillo a mano.* (Es.1), pero, para agilizar la comunicación suelen crear unidades léxicas sobre bases distintas. Pueden inventar sin mayor referencia: *como lo hubiera hecho en francés, si me quiero inventar una palabra pues me la invento.* (Fr.2), o a partir de las raíces supuestamente comunes entre lenguas de misma familia o del latín como lengua de formación de palabras cultas: *El francés tiene relación con el español y eso me ayuda un poco* (Al.1), *Algunas veces, intento crear una mezcla o bien con el inglés (tienen muchas palabras iguales) o el español (por los préstamos del latín que tienen).* (Es.1).

En el segundo caso, adoptan dos tipos de estrategias: 1) cambian de sistema lingüístico dentro de una misma frase introduciendo esencialmente palabras en inglés, que adquiere de este modo un valor de “lingua franca”: *A veces inglés* (Al.2), o 2) recurren al code-switching cuando están con interlocutores que estiman conocer suficientemente la otra lengua: *If I know the other person speaks English I do. Yes, mostly with my American friends or with my Spanish friends who can speak English.* (USA.2), *Yes, mostly with my American friends or with my Spanish friends who can speak English.* (USA.2). Este cambio de código es característico de sujetos bilingües y la estudiante francesa de origen marroquí subraya la importancia de este recurso que libera al locutor, ya que es ella la que más afirma inventar palabras y estar muy propensa al code-switching: *lo hago desde pequeña* (Fr.2).

### 3.1.3..3. Progresión de la producción lingüística

Como en el caso de la comprensión, desglosan las distintas situaciones que marcan el progreso en producción lingüística, diferenciando la competencia en producción escrita - ámbito de la Universidad -, y en producción oral, - que engloba el conjunto de las relaciones sociales.

La producción escrita, de gran importancia en los estudios universitarios, representa un obstáculo mayor, sobre todo para los que tienen un menor nivel y necesitan tiempo y ayuda: *Sí, con mi diccionario y con mucho tiempo sí* (Al.2), en conjunto, el escribir representa un esfuerzo: *Pues con la práctica, poco a poco he ido notando como mejoraba la coherencia en el texto, como suena a sueco.* (Es.1), así como todo lo que atañe a las clases y a los hábitos universitarios: *Por ejemplo cuando no estoy segura en un curso de si tengo que hacer esto o lo otro pregunto a la gente, cuándo tengo que hacer el examen y cosas así, pero porque los cursos son muy diferentes de los de Colonia o Alemania* (Al.1).

El volumen dedicado a la producción oral es masivo, ya que engloba todos los campos de la vida diaria y el conocimiento del nivel pragmático de la lengua, nivel, que es el que más desconocen; la mayoría tiene

dificultad con el uso de distintos registros lingüísticos y, como mucho, diferencian dos: *Sí, con determinadas personas hablo de un modo más coloquial, y con otras intento usar un lenguaje más correcto.* (Es.1). Afirman todos tener dificultad para adaptarse lingüísticamente a los cambios de situaciones y se sienten más a gusto con el nivel cuidado de la lengua: *Pues sí pero más el vocabulario universitario que el vocabulario de la vida corriente* (Fr.1).

### 3.1.3.4. Dificultades en producción

Vinculan las dificultades en producción con las temáticas y subrayan los dos tipos de temas que mayor dificultad de expresión presentan: 1) los temas íntimos, que vinculan con rasgos de su personalidad y aumentan con el uso de una lengua extranjera: *Sí, pero me cuesta. Psicológicamente soy una persona más conservadora en cuanto a mis pensamientos más íntimos, así que aun en inglés me pongo un poco nervioso y es peor en español.* (USA.3), y 2) experimentan especiales limitaciones en el momento de hablar de temas abstractos y defender sus ideas. Las causas son variadas: 1) de orden lingüístico: por falta de vocabulario: *Creo que no, puedo leer sobre un tema abstracto y puedo escribir si tengo un diccionario* (Al.1), 2) por dificultad en seguir el ritmo de la conversación: *Si me dejan tiempo de hacer mi frase pero si la gente lo suelta un poco rápido pues me cuesta un poco* (Fr.1) o 3) de orden pragmático y sociolingüístico, por las costumbres y tonos de los interlocutores: *me cuesta, viene de que los españoles usan un estilo más agresivo en cuanto a los argumentos y las discusiones que los americanos, así que me pongo un poco nervioso. Pero yo siempre lo hago. Efectivamente me encanta discutir.* (USA.3).

Para todos, el criterio esencial de progreso en producción es el conseguir pensar directamente en la lengua meta, aunque algunos no lo consiguen todavía en el momento de la entrevista: *Pienso todo el día en alemán* (Al.1). Se diferencian dos casos diferentes: 1) los que lo consiguen progresivamente, se trata de los que tenían conocimientos previos y han seguido un aprendizaje más escolar;: *Pues al estar inmersa todo el rato en el sueco, a los pocos meses, ahora pienso en sueco.* (Es.1), y 2) los que aprenden la lengua en inmersión sin conocimientos previos: *Honestly, I can't remember ever thinking in my own language when I spoke. I never took Spanish in the U.S. so there was never any separate class time and practice time. I learned new words and I used them, sometimes not even knowing what the English word would be for the weird stuff we don't have a word for.* (USA.1).

Además, el encontrarse en un país distinto provoca una ruptura profunda en las funciones sociales asumidas por las lenguas que conocen.

### 3.1.3.5. Funciones sociales de las distintas lenguas

Un cambio de residencia a otro país implica generalmente un profundo cambio social y lingüístico. Las lenguas ocupan esferas de comunicación distintas y las nuevas redes de relaciones sociales que se establecen obligan a una modificación de las funciones sociales de las lenguas conocidas. En el caso de los alumnos, la lengua del país de acogida pasa a ocupar la esfera de las relaciones con la comunidad exterior –Universidad, vida diaria, ocio, instituciones– anteriormente asumida por la lengua materna, y ésta se ve relegada a la esfera personal –relaciones con la familia a distancia y amigos, eventualmente parte del ocio–. Este cambio es uno de los principales factores de ruptura que afecta tanto a la expresión lingüística como a los esquemas representativos y a la estructura del sujeto social que, por su parte, pasa de formar parte de una mayoría a formar parte de una minoría, situación que puede plantear numerosos problemas, crear rechazo o influir en la construcción de las representaciones mentales tanto positiva como negativamente.

Al no darse ninguna alteración del estatuto social –factor de continuidad–, como lo hemos visto anteriormente, los alumnos viven estos cambios con un sentimiento de igualdad y, a veces, de superioridad, siempre con un deseo de conocer y aprovechar la estancia en función de sus objetivos, lo que convierte el

sentimiento de pertenencia a una minoría en el de pertenencia a una élite que se siente capaz de comparar, valorar las diferencias y afirmar su identidad a la luz de esta experiencia internacional.

#### **4. Las representaciones mentales y la ruptura cultural**

A pesar de que la lengua sea un factor de ruptura que modifica la situación social de los alumnos y constituye un obstáculo importante a una comunicación fluida, siempre la consideran como un objetivo positivo que alcanzar, perteneciendo a sus expectativas. Sin embargo, juzgan con mayor distancia el universo de los hechos culturales en los que se ven inmersos y construyen un nuevo universo mental autónomo que les libera de la presión de sus vivencias y les permite construir su identidad como adultos al enriquecer su experiencia y al afinar sus juicios sobre la base de comparaciones.

Las representaciones mentales que construyen del nuevo país están vinculadas con la experiencia personal y las imágenes, recibidas con anterioridad, que circulan sobre las distintas culturas. La distancia civilizacional tiene gran importancia en este campo y desempeña un papel fundamental. Cuanta más cercanía hay entre dos países, más numerosos son los estereotipos y prejuicios previos; sin embargo, todos los alumnos rechazan la idea de compartir tales tópicos acerca del país de acogida: *No, no me dejo influenciar por estereotipos, quiero hacerme mi propia imagen* (Al.1), se trata de un rasgo de formación de alto nivel.

##### 4.1. La vida diaria

A pesar de estas afirmaciones, vuelven a surgir en las entrevistas todos los tópicos habituales sobre los hábitos de los nativos que sirven de pantalla a un sentimiento de continuidad y desarrollan detalladamente las diferencias negativas sobre una base comparativa. En Madrid, les molesta sobre todo: 1) la falta de puntualidad: *Por ejemplo si un alemán dice que estará a esta hora aquí los españoles están mucho más tarde* (Al.1), 2) el hablar excesivamente alto y el ruido en general: *Los españoles hablan bastante fuerte, y que en los bares no me entero de nada porque no me oigo con la persona que hablo* (Fr.1), y 3) la familiaridad del tuteo que llega a chocarlos e interpretan como mala educación: *A mi siempre me sorprende cuando voy a comprar algo y una persona me dice que quieres o dime. Viniendo de la cultura anglosajona es maleducado* (USA.3). Pero lo que más les afecta es el trato diario con las personas que los rodean, viven la diferencia de costumbres como un rechazo personal, no se sienten acogidos a pesar de una impresión general de amabilidad: *They don't (people in Madrid) don't really receive foreign people well. There seems to be the attitude that we're just invading their space, which is weird because there are a lot of foreigners here.* (USA.1). Además se añade para algunos la dificultad en adaptarse a una gran ciudad: *I hate that Madrid is so packed with people* (USA.1), *La calle es bastante sucia* (China.1), defectos que se superponen a los anteriores y les da un sentimiento de dureza ambiental.

En conjunto, se trata de rupturas debidas a factores externos pero lo que más les cuesta son las debidas a factores más internos, como el no conseguir tratar amistad con jóvenes de su edad y, así, construir un círculo protector.

##### 4.2. El círculo de los pares

En el caso de estos alumnos, los mediadores naturales que permitirían su integración en el país de acogida son sus pares, - los estudiantes de la Universidad del país de intercambio. Todos subrayan la dificultad en hacerse amigos con los alumnos nativos: *No tengo muchos amigos españoles* (Al.1), y subrayan que, en España, las relaciones son meramente sociales: *creo que la amistad que tengo con los españoles es*

*superficial* (China.1). Atribuyen esta dificultad al carácter de los españoles que dicen no querer profundizar en sus relaciones personales, incluso en el caso de la estudiante española en Suecia: *Depende de la persona; los amigos suecos que tengo, son buenos amigos, no son conocidos como en España, muchas veces se tiene muchos conocidos. El primer contacto es más difícil, no como en España que el primer contacto es más fácil, aunque si tienes un amigo aquí es para siempre, a veces no se tiene la misma sensación en casa.* (Es.1).

En casi todos los casos, establecen más lazos y se sienten más a gusto con personas de su misma nacionalidad: *Los italianos me conocen de verdad.* (It.1), o de una civilización más cercana a la suya: *Hay un fenómeno, creo, yo no sé si es verdad, eso me parece que hay un fenómeno de ser americano, de cualquier país americano, que los latinoamericanos y los americanos se llevan muy bien. Es un concepto de americanismo. Me llevo muy bien con todos pero especialmente con los latinoamericanos.* (USA.3), o también con otros extranjeros que comparten sus mismas necesidades al encontrarse en una situación de aislamiento: *Yeah, I have friends from all different countries. I definitely tend to bond more with foreigners. They're looking for friends. Some people (Spanish people) kinda close themselves off to the possibility of making new friends, but foreign people have to, so I tend to be attracted to them.* (USA.1).

A esta dificultad de entrar en el tejido social del país se añade el sentimiento de cercanía o alejamiento cultural que se convierte en el factor fundamental de la construcción de las imágenes de la sociedad en la que se ven inmersos.

#### 4.3. Imágenes de la sociedad de acogida

La distancia cultural genera juicios de valor e imágenes que entran en conflicto con los hábitos sociales adquiridos y acentúan la ruptura de vivencias. En las encuestas, los juicios son matizados, se construyen siempre sobre la base de comparaciones.

Las reacciones pueden ser positivas, a favor del país de acogida: *No me gusta generalizar con el comportamiento de los suecos y de los españoles, depende de cada persona, pero un rasgo en la sociedad sueca es la tolerancia y el respeto, que muchas veces en España escasea* (Es.1).

En realidad, estos jóvenes no encuentran ninguna sociedad perfecta, siempre buscan rasgos positivos y negativos, valorando cualidades y defectos de manera imparcial: *me parece que Francia está, la mentalidad está un poco más avanzada, bueno, digo mucho mas creo. España tiene el día a día de Francia y la mentalidad de Marruecos me parece. Los países mediterráneos así se van a quedar creo y los andaluces sobretodo, son mas machistas que los franceses y se parecen mas a los árabes que a los franceses y en cuanto a la mentalidad, la gente me parece que en España disfruta mucho mas y vive mucho mas mientras que en Francia no dejan de trabajar y viven para trabajar* (Fr.2), *Yo creo que los españoles piensan de una manera distinta, me parece que son mas reaccionistas en cuanto a pro activistas, que eso es lo que procuramos ser en Estados Unidos, que tratamos de evitar problemas en vez de reaccionar una vez que ha surgido un problema. Aquí me parece que algo surge y todo el mundo se pone completamente frenético, es una manera distinta de pensar. Tratamos de planificar todo, hasta nosequé. No me parece bueno, aquí es un poco diferente.* (USA.1).

Estas experiencias de estancia en países extranjeros representan en todos los casos un cambio sustancial en su vida y en su manera de concebir el mundo.

#### 4.4. Los cambios de valores

Incluso si estas experiencias no son más que un paso en su trayectoria personal, reconocen que remodelan su personalidad y propician una evolución personal en su sistema de valores. Casi todos apuntan que han crecido y madurado al alejarse de su vida en familia y de su medio habitual: *He cambiado, de hábitos,*

*intento adaptarme a las costumbres del país para poder introducirme en la nueva sociedad. Creo que he madurado, he empezado a vivir nuevas experiencias, y también me ha ayudado a valorarme más, el hecho de hablar otro idioma. Además me he hecho más tolerante. (Es.1), en cuanto a mi misma me siento mas independiente y mas no se un poco mas adulta y responsable. (Fr.2).*

Sin embargo, el enfrentarse con una sociedad distinta les conduce a reafirmar su identidad de origen: *Italia es Italia. (It.1), I identify more with my own country now for sure. (USA.2)*, incluso si piensan vivir más definitivamente en el país de acogida: *Sé que no soy sueca, jamás podré hablar el sueco como un nativo, pero sin embargo mi carácter y mi manera de pensar es muy parecida, por eso me siento a gusto aquí. (Es.1), yo sé lógicamente que nunca voy a ser español, aunque algún día tenga el pasaporte nunca voy a ser español en cuanto a mis pensamientos (USA.3).*

El seguir siendo uno mismo en un país extranjero al mismo tiempo que reconocer los valores positivos y negativos de la sociedad en la que se vive representa para ellos un progreso en la construcción de su identidad. Para ellos, ser bilingüe no significa asumir la visión del mundo subyacente al sistema de la lengua, de modo que diferencian dos procesos bien distintos: por una parte, la adquisición de la lengua y, por otra, la asimilación de los hábitos sociales, que se limitan a entender y situarse, tanto con respecto a este nuevo sistema de representaciones como con respecto al de su lengua materna, siendo este último el que predomina en la construcción de su personalidad.

## 5. A modo de conclusión

El balance provisional de estos intercambios es eminentemente positivo pero todavía poco rentabilizado socialmente. Se ve claramente que los intercambios Erasmus desarrollan una política educativa de construcción europea de gran importancia que facilita una futura evolución social en la que se irán modificando las representaciones mentales de los ciudadanos hasta establecer una conciencia y una identidad europea por el conocimiento directo de las lenguas y las culturas que forman parte de la C.E.

Sin embargo, a pesar de presentarse como una política organizada que se dirige a una clase de edad y a un grupo social determinado, estos intercambios se presentan no tanto como un programa, sino más bien como un marco de actuación poco definido, de manera que los alumnos viven esta experiencia de manera individualizada sin referencia a un marco común y subrayan los objetivos y las conquistas o dificultades personales que, dada la limitación de tiempo de las estancias, consideran transitorias. Los estudiantes dan más importancia al aprendizaje de la lengua que a la inserción en la sociedad, se sitúan siempre fuera de las sociedades en las que viven y dividen a los demás compañeros de estudios en grupos desiguales: uno o dos amigos de su país de origen, los demás extranjeros y la masa de los nativos en la que no intentan o no pueden penetrar.

Por ahora, da la impresión que las Universidades de acogida no tengan conciencia de la presencia, sin embargo masiva, de estos alumnos y que no haya una formación específica del profesorado respecto a su presencia en las aulas, lo que deja en una posición desprotegida a los alumnos extranjeros y hace que estos intercambios sean esencialmente accesibles a un tipo muy maduro de alumnos.

A pesar de estas limitaciones, según todos los datos analizados en las encuestas, los estudiantes de este final del siglo XX y principio del XXI aceptan como un plus positivo esta internacionalización de su formación y la planifican dentro de una estrategia de mejoría de sus conocimientos lingüísticos – objetivo principal de la estancia -, de sus posibilidades de integración profesional, de vida personal y de una curiosidad propia de su edad por conocer el mundo y reconstruir su representación en función de su experiencia.

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## Algunos posibles resultados de la educación bilingüe. (Informe preliminar de investigación en el aula)

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### 1. Planteamiento y marco de la investigación.

El centro de Enseñanza Secundaria donde se realiza este estudio está ubicado en Coslada, y está adscrito al proyecto de enseñanza bilingüe promovido por el *British Council*, por medio del cual los alumnos integrados en el mismo provienen de un colegio también bilingüe, y continúan recibiendo este tipo de formación hasta 3º ESO, curso hasta el que (de momento) está establecido el proyecto.

Tras participar en un par de clases en un curso de 2º ESO bilingüe donde he realizado mis prácticas, mi tutora me asignó la tarea de corregir unos trabajos que habían realizado los alumnos. Fue aquí cuando surgió el tema a observar en cuestión, cuando detecté muchos fallos gramaticales, sintácticos y, en general, de expresión escrita en los trabajos de los alumnos. Cuando digo muchos, me refiero en cuanto a lo que cabría esperar tratándose de un curso que lleva varios años (desde primaria) recibiendo formación bilingüe. Una vez comentado con mi tutora de prácticas el hecho de que me sorprendiera que los alumnos cometieran tantos fallos, especialmente gramaticales, ella me contestó que el nivel de estos chicos no era medible con una escala de fallos gramaticales, pues sus competencias destacables eran otras, como la comprensión oral.

Después de un breve tiempo de reflexión, me planteé que el objeto de mi investigación podría ser, suponiendo que el nivel de competencia oral de esta clase debiera ser superior, testar el nivel de competencia escrita y, especialmente, habilidad gramatical de las y los estudiantes comparándolo con una clase común de 2º ESO. Para ello usaría en ambos cursos una misma herramienta, es decir, un idéntico cuestionario para intentar corroborar mi hipótesis de trabajo.

**Hipótesis.** Tras estar presente en varias clases, y sobre la base de la experiencia que poseo trabajando con alumnos de la ESO, observé claramente que el nivel de competencia oral de la clase de 2º ESO *Bilingüe* era bastante más elevado que el de un 2º ESO *común*.

Los alumnos entendían perfectamente todas las explicaciones en inglés de la profesora, incluso cuando introducía nuevo vocabulario. Pero, sobre todo, era en lo referente a la producción del lenguaje donde más se apreciaba la diferencia, pues los alumnos de bilingüe se comunicaban sin reparos en la lengua segunda, mientras que los alumnos de la clase de 2º común apenas eran capaces de emitir una sola frase en la misma. Sin embargo, tras ver los ejercicios de los primeros (como ya he explicado anteriormente), pude esbozar la hipótesis de que esta destacable competencia oral no era trasladable al campo de la competencia escrita, y más concretamente a la gramática. Siguiendo la lógica, cabría esperar que la formación recibida por estos

alumnos en la L2 (inglés), se traduciría en una mejoría en todas las destrezas de la L2; sin embargo, sospeché que no era así.

## 2. El plan de acción.

### Los instrumentos del análisis.

Procedí a la recopilación de fuentes indirectas por medio del *test de nivel*, diseñando para ello un breve *test* que reuniese las siguientes características:

- Que pudiese realizarse en ambas clases: un 2º ESO bilingüe y un 2º ESO ordinario.
- Cuyos ejercicios ilustraran las destrezas que yo quería analizar.
- Que fuera lo más efectivo posible teniendo en cuenta el poco tiempo del que disponía.

El tiempo que me llevó pasar los tests fue de unos 20 minutos en cada clase, las y los estudiantes se mostraron colaboradores en general, a pesar de que ninguna de las clases fue avisada con antelación, por lo que los resultados son espontáneos. Puse especial atención en que las condiciones fueran exactamente las mismas en ambas clases en cuanto a tiempos, explicaciones, ejemplos... y cualquier otro factor que pudiese incidir en la realización del test.

El cuestionario agrupaba tres tipos de ejercicios:

#### 1) Competencia oral. Ejercicio de *listening*.

Para esta prueba descarté usar una grabación, y en su lugar otra profesora y yo escenificamos un pequeño diálogo. Varios fueron los motivos para esta elección: el material así era más auténtico, pues la otra persona era una nativa americana; la calidad sonora era mejor que en una grabación; los chic@s sienten más curiosidad ante una pequeña escenificación; el hecho de leer nosotras el diálogo nos daba más libertad para cambiar y enfatizar partes del mismo, adecuándolo al nivel requerido por el grupo no-bilingüe.

El ejercicio constaba de dos apartados. Parte A: El primero de ellos, a su vez, englobaba el análisis de la destreza de *writing*, pues había que escribir una frase resumiendo lo que sucedía. Parte B: El segundo eran dos frases a clasificar como *True/False*, muy sencillo a simple vista, pero con algún término de vocabulario elegido a propósito que podría despistar si no se ponía especial atención a su significado.

#### 2) Productividad y semántica. Ejercicio de *vocabulario*.

El segundo era un *word-families exercise*, un ejercicio abierto donde había que escribir 6 palabras relacionadas con el tema de cada grupo. Los temas en cada familia eran accesibles y de sobra conocidos, de manera que cada alumno tendría opción de escribir términos o bien básicos o bien más rebuscados.

#### 3) Gramática y sintaxis.

El tercer ejercicio era para demostrar conocimientos de gramática y orden sintáctico, es decir, el típico ejercicio donde se debían aplicar las reglas de concordancia entre el sujeto y el verbo, y ordenar la frase siguiendo el esquema (sujeto+auxiliar+negación+verbo+complementos), con sus respectivas variaciones dependiendo de la forma negativa e interrogativa.

Los contenidos gramaticales eran los tiempos verbales: *Present Simple*, *Past Simple* y *Past Continuous*. Todos eran tiempos conocidos por los alumnos, excepto el último; en este caso, mi intención fue ver como lo deducían a partir de dominar el Presente Continuo (como debiera ser el caso de la mayoría.)

### 3. Los resultados del análisis

De entrada he de decir que, para el análisis de los tests, decidí escoger 10 de cada curso, los 10 mejores en cada caso. La razón es que, en el 2º curso común había un grupo numeroso de chavales con características especiales (repetidores, de integración...) que no resolvieron el test adecuadamente, por lo que no eran representativos de la media general.

Para distinguir entre ambos cursos, los denominaremos como 2ºB al curso Bilingüe, y como 2º N-B al ordinario.

#### 1) Competencia oral. Ejercicio de *listening*.

	2º N-B		2º B	
	Parte A	Parte B	Parte A	Parte B
Nº Alumnos (sobre 10) capaces de escribir una frase de 2 líneas coherente con el contenido del <i>listening</i> .	4		8	
Nº Alumnos (sobre 10) que acertaron al marcar T or F en ambas frases.		5		6

Acerca del último resultado, he de decir que no es muy fiable, pues en muchos de los tests había tachones, lo que da que pensar que pudieran haber contestado al azar o cambiar resultados en el último momento, tras aclararles el significado de la palabra *afraid*. De ahí que haya tan poca diferencia entre ambos cursos.

#### 2) Productividad y semántica. Ejercicio de *vocabulario*.

	2º N-B	2º B
Nº Alumnos capaces de llegar al 50%, es decir, igual o más de 15 palabras (sobre 30 palabras.)	8	4
Nº Alumnos que lograron sobrepasar las 25 palabras correctas.	2	6

#### 3) Gramática y sintaxis

	2º N-B	2º B
1.Nº Alumnos (sobre 10) capaces de cambiar la frase en <i>Simple Present</i> sólo a Negativa, respetando el orden sintáctico.	5	7
2.Nº Alumnos (sobre 10) capaces de cambiar la frase en <i>Simple Present</i> a Negativa e Interrogativa, respetando el orden sintáctico.	5	2
3.Nº Alumnos capaces de hacer lo anterior en <i>Past Continuous</i> .	5	8
4.Nº Alumnos capaces de hacer lo mismo en <i>Simple Past</i> .	3	5
5.Nº Alumnos que lograron hacer perfectas las 6 frases.	2	2

He dividido la 1ª categoría en dos porque el hecho de dominar o no el *Simple Present* me parece lo más significativo, pues bien es cierto que en 2º N-B no habían dado aún el *Simple Past* este año (sí el anterior.) Lo mismo ocurría con el *Past Continuous* y, sin embargo, 5 alumnos lo hicieron bien por deducción y asimilación con el *Present Continuous*. En 2ºB sin embargo, manejan frecuentemente el tiempo pasado de forma oral en clase, aunque sólo 3 alumnos lo reflejaron correctamente por escrito.

### 4. Conclusiones

Una vez observadas las tablas, estas serían mis conclusiones respecto a los tres tipos de ejercicios:

1) Competencia oral: En la parte A del ejercicio de *listening*, como se puede ver el número de alumnos de 2ºB dobla a los otros, es decir, es mucha la diferencia en cuanto a la capacidad de redactar, tras la

comprensión, lo que han entendido del diálogo. Es curioso como, dentro de este grupo, y respecto a la parte B, hay una diferencia de 8 a 6 alumnos, es decir, que 2 alumnos no han sido capaces de interpretar correctamente el significado de las frases del ejercicio, aunque sí han cogido la idea general del *listening*. Esto es lo que, dentro de la terminología inglesa, se califica como la diferencia entre *listening for skimming* vs. *listening for scanning*. Además, otro aspecto a destacar es la falta de rigor en el *writing*, pues la mayoría de los alumnos se equivoca en el *spelling*, es decir, escribe las palabras tal y como les suena, p. ejem: \**draiver*. Esto no sucede en el otro grupo, donde apenas se observa este error, pues lo poco que escriben lo hacen correctamente.

Respecto a estos otros alumnos de 2º N-B, en la parte B del ejercicio existe muy poca diferencia con la otra clase, aunque bien es cierto que, a pesar de que sólo 5 (la mitad) han comprendido las frases específicas sobre lo que sucedía en el diálogo, sólo 4 han sido capaces de reflejarlo.

Como conclusión a este apartado, diría que aquí (como comenté al comienzo, en el planteamiento) esperaba mejores resultados de la clase 2ºB, pues no hay tanta diferencia en cuanto a comprensión con respecto al otro grupo, podemos decir que un 60% frente a un 50% (aunque como ya dije arriba quizás estos resultados no sean del todo fiables). Lo que está claro es que los bilingües son capaces de reflejarlo por escrito, y lo que yo me pregunto es: ¿de qué les sirve a los alumnos de la otra clase entender el contenido, si luego no son capaces de reproducir correctamente nada de ello?

### 2) Productividad de vocabulario.

En este apartado podemos hablar tanto de la cantidad como de la calidad del vocabulario. Respecto a lo primero, de nuevo queda aquí de manifiesto el mayor grado de productividad de los alumnos de 2ºB, pues 6 de ellos sobrepasaron las 25 palabras, frente a los sólo 2 de 2ºN-B. No obstante, debo decir que de nuevo me sorprende negativamente el grupo 2ºB, puesto que el vocabulario propuesto era muy básico, y tanto yo como la tutora esperábamos que llenasen las familias, superando incluso las 30 palabras. Lo mismo sucede con la calidad del vocabulario, en este caso dirigiéndome a ambos cursos. No hay esfuerzo de ningún tipo por buscar términos que salgan de lo común: *car, driver, play* y en general palabras tan comunes, han sido repetidas hasta la saciedad. Por ejemplo, en el apartado de *Weather*, aparecen muy pocos adjetivos y hay abundancia de nombres como *sun* y *sky*. En *free time activities*, sólo un par de ellos han escrito acciones terminadas en ING, repitiendo constantemente *run, eat, watch*. En general, se ve un exceso de términos que se aprenden a muy tempranas edades en primaria, y esto no era lo que (al menos yo) esperaba de un curso que lleva tantos años recibiendo formación bilingüe.

### 3) Gramática y sintaxis.

Éste es el apartado que más me interesa analizar de cara a valorar mi hipótesis, aunque hasta aquí se deduce bastante de los resultados.

En el punto 1 de la tabla, para mí es sorprendente que los 10 mejores alumnos de la clase bilingüe no sean capaces de escribir una frase correctamente en negativa en Presente Simple, aunque no tanto como ver, en el apartado 2, como sólo 2 alumnos son capaces de hacerlo también en interrogativa, frente a los 5 del grupo 2º N-B.

En el apartado 3, hay que destacar el acierto de esos 5 alumnos que no habían dado aún el *Past Continuous*, y sin embargo lo resolvieron por la similitud con el *Present Continuous*, aplicando la lógica.

El apartado 4 dice poco del grupo 2ºB, pues sólo la mitad fue capaz de aplicar las reglas del Pasado, a pesar de haberlo estudiado (a diferencia de la otra clase) y usarlo frecuentemente hablando, y oírlo en las explicaciones de la profesora.

Y, sobre todo, es el último apartado el que más dice de los conocimientos gramaticales de estos alumnos y alumnas, pues no me queda más remedio que manifestar mi asombro: sólo 2 alumnos del grupo 2ºB han resuelto las 6 frases, los mismos que en el grupo no-bilingüe. Y de aquí parte mi reflexión final: ¿era este hecho esperable de un curso como éste? ; una clase que lleva años recibiendo formación en otro idioma, y que ni siquiera domina las reglas más básicas de la gramática...

## 5. Evaluación y reflexión final

Como conclusión final, me atrevo a decir que mi hipótesis se ha visto confirmada, por las siguientes razones:

A) Efectivamente, los alumnos de la clase bilingüe tienen un mayor nivel de comprensión y expresión oral, lo que como dije al principio es algo obvio que se aprecia desde el primer encuentro con ellos. La mayoría no presenta reparo alguno en dirigirse a los demás en la L2 y son capaces de entender en mayor o menor grado las explicaciones de los profesores. De hecho, les di las instrucciones de mi test en inglés y no hubo ningún problema, incluso todas las dudas las preguntaban también en esta lengua. Sin embargo, en la clase de 2ºN-B intenté también hacer lo mismo, para tener que acabar finalmente repitiéndolo en castellano.

B) Sin embargo, estos estudiantes no presentan ningún tipo de rigor gramatical ni sintáctico; como ya he dicho, reconocen las estructuras al oírlas, pero no son capaces de reproducirlas correctamente, cometiendo continuos fallos de puntuación, gramática y sintaxis a la hora de escribir aunque, eso sí, mostrando un alto grado de fluidez.

Mi reflexión personal, por tanto, se orienta hacia el hecho de que los progresos y beneficios indiscutibles de la enseñanza bilingüe pueden apreciarse sobre todo en la competencia lingüística oral y fluidez de los alumnos, lo que es muy positivo. Sin embargo, el nivel de gramática adquirido es equiparable al nivel de un 2ºESO normal, al menos en el ejemplo que aquí se ha estudiado.

Con todo esto, no pretendo decir que la gramática sea más importante, pues precisamente hasta nuestros tiempos el fracaso de la enseñanza de los idiomas ha venido dado básicamente por incidir demasiado en la adquisición de estructuras gramaticales. Sin embargo, pienso que la gramática no puede ni debe descuidarse en un proyecto de esta envergadura, que debería (a mi parecer) traducirse en una mejoría en todos los campos, y nunca en un estancamiento (o retroceso) en alguna de las destrezas de la L2 que es adquirida.

Por último, he de decir que de sobra soy consciente de que no se puede generalizar estudiando sólo un caso concreto, sino que sería necesario hacer más comparaciones y estudios en otras condiciones y contextos. De hecho, lo ideal sería que la investigación se extendiese a largo plazo (al menos durante un trimestre) para poder emitir un juicio realmente crítico y objetivo sobre los niveles, profundizando así en el grado de efectividad de la enseñanza bilingüe, que sin duda es todavía pronto para determinar. Por tanto, si fuera ésta mi propia clase de forma indefinida, pondría en práctica una continuación de la observación, el diseño de una metodología con herramientas adecuadas, y posteriormente el estudio de los resultados, para intentar mejorar esta notoria carencia que aquí se ha puesto de manifiesto.

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Revista de investigación e innovación en la clase de lenguas  
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## An Action-Research Project in the English Literacy Classroom (A preliminary report)

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### 1. Initial reflection

During my teaching practice in a secondary school I worked with 2º ESO (Seconday) level students. They are immerse in the MEC-British Council bilingual program and my observation has taken place during the English Literacy lessons. These students take five hours per week, that is, one per day, of English Literacy, which consists not only of the study of grammar and vocabulary, but also of topics concerning the language itself. The students in this class have a homogeneous level in general, although it is worth noting the presence of both some outstanding students and some others with some problems to adapt to the average level of the class.

During my observation I have realised how the students are, in general, inattentive, talkative and most of the times off-task. Because of this, the environment created in class is not a very good one to work in, since the teacher needs to be constantly addressing their bad behaviour (talking, not paying attention, not doing the tasks assigned...). The signs of boredom and lack of interest leads most of the times to the lack of participation even when the teacher tries to make them collaborate by asking them. This lack of participation and being off-task can be seen above all during the explanations provided by the teacher and in the activities subsequent to these explanations.

### 2. Observation

In order to deal with these problems of lack of interest and boredom that leads the students to be off-task, and in order to find out a possible common cause which made students behave that way and feel so demotivated to pay attention in class and be collaborative and on-task, I decided:

- To analyse the organisation of the lesson and the timing of the activities. I will observe how the lessons are presented by analysing different factors, concerning the teacher's role; the suitability of materials and procedures; the organisation of the classroom; the maintenance of students' interest and participation and how the teacher motivates the students when presenting the lesson; and assessment and correction, since all these can be a possible cause for students' demotivation and lack of interest.
- To analyse the type of activities that the students are asked to do after those explanations by taking into account their suitability to the students' needs and preferences.

- To observe the students' behaviour when they have to listen to the teacher and when they are given time to do the activities by using some patterns of observation, such as keeping a diary or filling in some classroom scheme sheets with the students' behaviour when off-task.
  - To talk to the teacher before the class in order to see how she has prepared the materials and how is she going to present them to the students, and compare her expectations with what actually happens inside the classroom once she begins the lesson; how the students react to the activities proposed and the reasons for this reaction
  - To analyse the materials that the students are presented, since they do not use a book for this subject.

In order to do this, I firstly observed and took notes on the teacher's performance while explaining and on the students' behaviour while they were working in a model of the class on paper. Secondly, I reflected on the results and tried to find a possible cause that could be dealt with; and, finally, I designed an action plan with some strategies to tackle this problem as far as I can.

After the observation, these are the results I reached:

1. The dynamics of the lesson: the teacher comes into the class, gives the students some photocopies for them to follow the lesson; as I said, they do not have a book for this subject, and the teachers explains – lectures– and expands what the students can see in the copy. After the explanation, students are asked to do some activities related to what has been explained and, if they have time, the activities proposed are corrected. The teacher is the one who talks mainly (too much *Teacher Talking Time*), and she does not make the students part of the process since they do not participate actively in the lesson. Because of this, most of the students disconnect and their level of motivation to follow the lesson lowers; therefore, they begin doing some other things than listening and working.
  2. Students' attitude: As the lesson is not presented to the students in an attractive way and their attention is not caught since the beginning of the explanation, students' attitude tends to be like this: writing notes to pass them to other student, talking with a partner, writing in their copies, daydreaming, interrupting the teachers' explanation, etc. They stop listening because they are not given a reason to pay attention, and I mean a real reason, a reason that makes them be attentive, since when the teacher menaces them with not having the break at 11 they all are suddenly quiet, but still not listening, only painting their copies or looking through the window.
  3. The type of activities proposed is not very motivating either. The students are not offered a real context to work on. The examples and activities provided have been made up for them to work on what the teacher wants at each moment; most of them are not authentic texts and materials, and they do not deal with topics related to their interests.
  4. When the students are exposed to the activities, mainly written texts, the only previous task has been to listen to the teacher's explanation. There has not been interaction between teacher and students, and communication has only taken place from teacher to students; the teacher has not asked them, she has not related the topic to the students' real lives and world, she has not attracted their attention to the topic and therefore the students have had no time to reflect on the topic, to activate their previous knowledge or to relate their own vision and experiences to what is being dealt with, and this is one of the reasons why the moment they have to do the activities, they do not have any interest on them and if they do something, is just mechanically, but not paying attention on what they are asked to do.

### **3. Action plan**

As the class does not follow a book, it is very easy to adapt the different topics we have to deal with to the students' needs and preferences. This situation offers many advantages, since the teacher is able to present the students texts they feel comfortable with and interested in. Because of the millions of possibilities that this situation offers, I decided to take action: the lesson they have to work with now is "Drama". I asked the teacher what the students are supposed to learn, which are the objectives and the kind of activities, related specific vocabulary, theoretical explanations, etc. She told me some things about it and she showed me the plan she intended to follow, which was the same as usual. Students were supposed to deal with dramatic terms and texts, so I read thoroughly the copies that the students were going to receive and the tasks they were supposed to work with. After that, I thought about how to present the unit in another way, and I had the idea that it could be good to present the students some real, authentic materials they were familiar with, so I went to the internet and found the real scripts of some famous films and TV series in English. I decided to talk about this to the teacher, and I proposed her if I could create some activities around that material. She gave me her permission to do it and told me that it could even be done in the laboratory of English, where they have computers for all the students and internet connection, since she was going to explain later in the year some text types related to computers and the internet. Because of this, I decided to plan a session of drama, where theoretical explanation and working in activities were included, so I decided to prepare not a lecture-kind lesson, but an inductive plan, one in which students were involved since the beginning of the lesson.

I prepared a website with some activities to work in.<sup>1</sup> Firstly, we did a warm-up task, where I asked them questions about drama and dramatic terms, to provide them a context to work on. By doing this, I had attracted the students' attention. They had to listen to me and to the rest of their classmates because they were all included, not only me as a teacher was the one who had all the knowledge. With this warming up activity, the students had time to activate their correct schemata and previous knowledge about the topic, and now, after having reached to some conclusions, among them that dramatic scripts could be found in television and cinema, they were ready to start working. I had prepared some activities on-line which dealt with the scripts of current films and TV series. The activities I prepared were supposed to be done in pairs. I thought that pair work could work in this case since the students were going to practise firstly with another classmate before they were asked to answer in front of the whole class, and so their level of anxiety would be lowered and they would participate more.

As for the activities offered, I tried to present the students as many possibilities and choices as I could, so that they worked in those scripts that they were more interested in. They were in front of real, authentic materials that were known and appealing to them and this way they were on-task and working. As the activities were very open, the students were able to be creative as there was not a "correct" answer, but many possible options, and the fact that the activities were more open ended than usual was also motivating for them. As for results, they were very positive. When working on the worksheet on dramatic terms, students got 71% of correct answers on average, but apart from numerical results, the most important thing was that I fulfilled my first objective: during the completion of the activities, the students, who were attentive because I had "included" them in the lesson from the very first minute when we started revising theory, were on-task, interested in doing things and putting hands up to ask things and helping one another.

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<sup>1</sup> The website I created can be seen at <http://dramapractice.googlepages.com>

#### 4. FINAL REFLECTION

The changes I have introduced have been positive, and even the students have realised that things can be learnt in many different ways and that something that can seem boring can be dealt with and become something interesting and appealing. The teacher was with me in the laboratory and at the end of the activity, the students told her that they should do these things more often, that they had liked to work on Drama that way. Moreover, after the activity, I passed a little questionnaire to the students to see how had they liked the activity, and the results are great. Some of them have made very interesting comments that should be analysed and taken into account very carefully by the teacher; for instance, when asked “Which things did you like about the activity?”, there are comments such as “*the type of learn*” or “*that all can be learn with a play*” (I suppose the student meant that for them the activity was a kind of game but that they learnt a lot); or that the things they liked the most was to work with things they knew, that were interesting and relevant for them “*because it was my favourite programme*”. In my opinion, apart from offering them motivating and interesting materials and including them in the lesson, making the students feel part of the process of learning, both by interacting with them when explaining and asking for their opinions in a questionnaire is very positive for them, for the development of their learning awareness and to feel motivated as they see that what they think and what they say also counts.

It is true that even though the activity has worked well, some students asked for more time to do them, and I am aware that students cannot be the whole year doing activities in the internet lab; however, the activities I have created could have been presented printed and done in class. If I introduced the lab component was for two reasons: the teacher was going to explain the students some e-text types as the next topic (blogs, commercial letters, emails...) and the introduction of the new technologies can be a very motivating activity if done properly.

In short, with this project I have changed the method from deductive to inductive, I have given the students a purpose to work, I have offered them authentic texts and materials which were relevant to their interests and I have included them in the process of learning. By doing this, the students have been more motivated and the initial problem of lack of interest and being off-task has been significantly reduced.

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## An example of natural teaching

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### Abstract

This essay is an introduction to one natural, evolutionary-based approach to teaching English language to Spanish children of 5 years old. It takes the view that teaching of any kind is a natural process and that learning is equally natural, and essentially analytical. It puts forward the idea that the teacher, not the textbook, should be the chief tool of the child. It gives an example of a natural learning and teaching situation, and gives an example of how this may be applied in the classroom. It outlines some topics for future discussion.

### Resumen

Este ensayo es una introducción a un enfoque natural de enseñanza de lengua inglesa a niños españoles de 5 años, basado en la evolución. Propone que la enseñanza de cualquier tipo es un proceso natural y que el aprendizaje es igual de natural y fundamentalmente analítico. Propone, también, que es el profesor, y no el libro, el que debería servir como herramienta principal del alumno. Da un ejemplo de una situación de enseñanza y aprendizaje natural, y da un ejemplo de cómo se puede adaptarlo al aula. Hace referencia a otros tópicos para debatir en el futuro.

**Key words:** Socrates, successfully-evolved, pre-programmed, analytical-learning, blank-page, evolution, child, language, English

This is an essay which I seek to challenge some of our perceptions about children, learning, teaching and teachers. If we are to help our children, if we are to specialize our society so far as to outsource one of the most important functions in it, then we must rely on those who are involved and we must understand what they are up to.

In 399 BC the Athenian philosopher Socrates was given cold hemlock to drink for “Corrupting the minds of the youth of Athens”. He had taught them to question, and to analytically reason out answers for themselves. He took the view that giving the problem correctly was the teacher’s job (teaching) and analysing the question and reasoning out the answer was the students’ job (learning). The job has not changed; and, sadly, it seems sometimes neither have the expectations.

Humans have been successfully learning for 2.5 million years, whereas they have been being taught - in the modern sense- with books for the past 200. The human mind is very weak and puny when compared to the human brain. It is the brain we seek to have learn, not the mind. If the student is conscious of *what it is learning*- that learning will probably be much less effective.

A fundamental concept is that a child is not a blank-page, rather it is a sophisticated, successfully-evolved creature whose success in evolution and whose sophistication are due to its pre-programmed ability to learn analytically. I believe it is a teacher’s role to guide and feed that learning, and to use that natural ability as much as possible. As such, the teacher is the chief tool of the child.

Teaching books are inadequate, counter productive and really of value only to a state which does not wish to invest in teacher training- it's a lot easier to control three or four publishing houses than many thousands of teachers free to think for themselves- and to publishing houses, which profit by their sale. A good example of the rationale for this view of books may be found in Stephen Jay Gould's essay "The Case of the Creeping Fox Terrier Clone" published in "Bully for Brontosaurus": Hutchinson Radius, 1991.

In this first essay I shall simply recount a story, enumerating the points which it illustrates, and giving one small example of how this can be applied to the classroom. In this essay I will not deal with all the points raised.

The story is very simple. The vast majority of people, of whatever nationality, of whatever culture, age, or sex would react in the same way. The story is as follows.

### Story 1

*It's Saturday morning and here comes Johnny, into the kitchen. He is two years old and he is not too steady on his feet. Johnny points at the jar of biscuits on the shelf. "Aah ha ga ha," says Johnny and makes his very big eyes very wide.*

*I raise both eyebrows as I look at him. I hold the look, and then smile too, because he's Johnny and he knows that I love him really. Then I take down the jar, screw off the top and hold out a biscuit. Slowly and clearly I say, "Can I have a biscuit, please." Johnny looks at me, and Johnny looks at the biscuit and then Johnny looks at me again, at my raised eyebrows. There is no choice.*

*"Biscuit," says Johnny.*

*"Can I have a biscuit, please?" say I.*

*"Can I have a biscuit?" says Johnny slowly and not too confidently.*

*I raise my eyebrows just a shade higher.*

*"Please" says Johnny.*

*"Well done, Johnny."*

*Johnny gets his biscuit.*

\*\*\*\*\*

*It's Sunday morning and here comes Johnny, into the kitchen. He is still two years old and he is still not too steady on his feet. Johnny points at the jar of biscuits on the shelf. "Aah ha ga ha," says Johnny and makes his eyes very, very wide.*

*I raise both eyebrows as I look at him. I hold the look, and then smile too, because he's Johnny and he knows that I love him really. Then I turn back to the sink and get on with what I'm doing.*

*"Biscuit," says Johnny and makes his eyes very, very, very wide.*

*I turn round and smile and nod, "Yes, there are biscuits on the shelf. Good boy Johnny.", and then turn back to the sink and get on with what I'm doing.*

*"Can I," says Johnny, then looks puzzled.*

*"Have," say I*

*"Have a biscuit?" says Johnny. I turn myself round, I raise my eyebrows just a shade.*

*"Please" says Johnny.*

*And Johnny gets his biscuit.*

*"What do you say, Johnny?" Johnny looks at me*

*"Thank you," say I*

*"Thank you," says Johnny.*

We have seen a scene which is not strange- we can imagine ourselves- our mothers, our fathers, our grandparents, even our eternally monosyllabic totally adolescent children doing this... because this is natural. We are pre-programmed to use language and to teach its use to any and all. We would do it without thinking.

But what exactly have we seen?

- 1      A child with a need- not an urgent or life-threatening need- but a need looking for fulfilment of that need.
- 2      The adult response to that, which is to demand the use of language.
- 3      The child has been reassured by the adult- there is no threat.
- 4      The child has been shown what to do.

- 5      The child has done what is required.
- 6      The child has been rewarded with exactly what it wanted.
- 7      The child has been applauded by the adult.
- 8      The child has been expected to remember the lesson.
- 9      The child has been taught firmly that it will not get what it wants without the use of language.
- 10     The child has been helped to do what is required but less so than previously.
- 11     The child has simply been given what it wished. The applause of the adult only comes the first time.
- 12     The child at all times has understood exactly what it is doing. (This is critical)

We have also seen that the child has learned the language as a by-product of learning to ask for a biscuit. The child did not want to learn the language, the language is only a quick way of satisfying a need.

Furthermore what we have seen is that the adult teaching the child, spoke to the child in that language. Though teaching English Philology through Spanish may be useful, teaching English through Spanish is not. As teachers of English, I believe we are teaching a language not studying a language. Most children can speak long before they first enter a language class. Most adults will remember that what they did in language class except for the reading and writing was boring and pointless. Those who would disagree are probably now Philologists.

This is *not* arguing for only native teachers. English teachers who are native Spanish speakers frequently have a surer grasp, as well as a greater knowledge, of the problems of Spanish learners of English. The approach is equally successful, I have found, with both native and non-native teachers.

Can we now translate that to a classroom? One simple example is plasticine.

The teacher enters with a box full of little balls of different colours of plasticine. Starting with the first child, the teacher looks at the child and plays with the plasticine throwing and catching it. Then the teacher raises their eyebrows and hold out the ball of plasticine to the child. The child holds out its hand and the teacher smiles and says slowly “Can I”

The child will almost automatically repeat “Can I”

“Play with”  
“play with”  
“Plasticine”  
“Plasticine”  
“Please”  
“Please”

The child comes to get the plasticine. The teacher then begins the process with the next child. If any child tries to take out a pencil or any object to play with the plasticine then the teacher must indicate that this is not permissible- this is a later lesson. If the child persists then the teacher, with a gentle sad smile, takes away the plasticine and puts it in the box. The same happens if the any child tries to talk while playing with the plasticine.

When the last child has its plasticine. The teacher allows them 3 minutes and then claps hands and tells the children to tidy up. The children will understand if the teacher gently takes the plasticine from the first child and while shouting “Make a ball” makes a ball and puts it in the box.

The following day the teacher indicates to the first child again and if it is capable of producing some part of the request then the teacher helps, and if not the teacher turns to the next child, or the next until some part of the utterance is given. Then the teacher helps that child and then continues to the next.

Each day the teacher should expect a more perfect utterance before giving the child the plasticine.

By the end of 6 or 7 weeks, at four hours per week, the following dialogue should be possible with most of the children:

Child "Can I have some plasticine, please?"

Teach "Ok, what colour would you like?"

Child "Can I have blue, please?"

Teach "OK, take the blue?"

Child "Can I take out a pencil, please?"

Teach "Yes, ok, one pencil."

Child "Can I take out another pencil, please?"

Teach "Yes, ok, 1 more pencil."

Child "Can I put away my plasticine and pencils and read a book, please?"

Teach "Yes."

This is merely one activity requiring perhaps 10 minutes of a class and not every class, but it illustrates how this methodology can be used to expect from children a continuously advancing grasp of language.

It is important to state here that what we are doing is, in a very real sense, not teaching but allowing children to learn. The teacher is simply manipulating the situation to create a need in a child which can then be satisfied if that child uses language. If that child uses language to satisfy a need, its brain will learn that language because it is more efficient, quicker, to learn it and to have it ready to use than to be taught afresh each time. All learning, I believe, is simply that.

## How to provide more auditory stimuli to my students (A preliminary classroom-research report)

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ELT Trainer

### 1. Introduction. Identifying the problem

As teachers we should be aware that we have to assess our practices to see if we are really catering for our student's needs. This has to be done in order to change or improve any given situation which is not balanced for the children. I can say that it is important for teachers to know their students learning styles in order to help them in the acquisition of the language. It is also important to teach students to recognize their learning styles to improve and maximise their learning.

The first thing we should do is to recognize our learning style and that of our students. Learning styles are simply different approaches or ways of learning. There are different learning styles and these can condition the way we learn and see the world, so as teachers we should be aware of them in order to reach the greater number of students. I am going to examine the different learning styles so as to see how I can recognise them and improve my communication and teaching through them.

### 2. Learning styles

Taking into account that visual learners learn by watching and noticing, they like to see things written down, read books, look at pictures and diagrams, we should incorporate visual stimuli when using textbooks. They like to see what they read and to see what we are teaching; they need physical representation of things. This style is the one most currently catered for because all the textbooks have pictures and posters and they are full of visual aids.

There are some tips in order to discover these learners so I asked some of my older students, if they identified themselves with any of the following: (in the case of very young learners I based myself on observation).

#### 2.1 Visual learners

Visual learners tend to do some or many of these things:

- Sit up straight
- Follow the teacher with the eyes.
- Speak quickly.
- Be careful in choosing clothes and combination of clothes.
- Be good spellers, they see the words in their minds.
- Memorise by visual association.

- Are not usually distracted by noise.
- Demonstrate rather than speak,
- Like visual arts more than music.
- Know what to say but can't find the right words.
- Have trouble remembering verbal instructions unless they are written down.
- Be fast readers.

## 2.2 Auditory learners

As far as auditory learners are concerned, these are some of the characteristics we can base ourselves in order to recognise them:

They tend to:

- Learn by listening and discussing.
- Get information through their ears.
- Like to hear things being said or listen to cassettes.
- Appear not to be listening and gazing out of the window, but they usually follow your movements by turning their dominant ear towards you.-
- Find it distracting to look at the same time they are listening.

These students normally:

- Speak rhythmically
- Follow the speaker with the ears.
- Can repeat back and mimic the tone
- Are good at imitating voices.
- Talk to themselves while working.
- Are easily distracted by noise.
- Subvocalise: move their lips and pronounce words as they read.
- Enjoy reading aloud and listening to stories.
- Find writing difficult and are better at telling.
- Tend to like music more than visual arts.
- Learn by listening and remembering
- Are talkative.
- Spell better out loud than in written form.

## 2.3 Kinaesthetic learners

Kinaesthetic learners like to get information through their hands or bodies or emotions. They like to touch things, move their hands and feet walk around the room, take notes (because the movement of their hands help them absorb the information.)

There are two types of kinaesthetic learners:

- The tactile/movement oriented ones (who have a great need to touch anything and everything, they get out of their seats, drum on their desks, rock on their chairs)
- The feeling/oriented ones who want to be comfortable feel loved and safe.

### **3. Case study**

I realised I'm a visual-kinaesthetic learner and I don't pay so much attention to the auditory side so I noticed that auditory learners may have it more difficult to learn with me as their teacher. So my objective this term is to try and provide more auditory stimuli to my students.

So having examined the problem, I decided I had to prepare things very carefully and detect who the more energetic are and which type of learners they are.

### **4. Study group**

I worked with a group of 6 children between the ages of 3 and 8. As my group was heterogeneous I had to provide activities for all of them and –as they were young– I had to be careful because they could get bored and they were not patient while you tried to work with their companions.

Maria, 3 years old, is very sweet and likes all the activities I tell her to do. She's no problem because we play a lot and she loves painting and doing creative work with paper, etc. She may well be a visual learner. She observes everything and likes a cuddle or two.

Laura, 5 year old, is another sweet girl and works very well too. They both like songs and they pronounce very well and they like sharing activities. Here we have another visual learner.

Sofía, 6 year old, is very restless and is absolutely auditory, so much so, that after working with me for some time she still can't write numbers orthographically, she does it phonetically. She has very nice pronunciation and she loves all types of activities but she tries to catch my attention and she wants to be the star.... She's always humming and talking to herself.

Marcos, 6 year old, he only wants to do written work. He's very impatient and doesn't like participating in activities with the rest of the children, he's restless too and a bit stubborn. He's kinaesthetic.

Victor is 8 and he can be patient and helpful, so he is good to work with because he likes asking things and collaborates. He's a visual learner.

Javier, 7 year old, is very, very restless and he's always up to something so it is very difficult to work with him. It is necessary to keep him busy all the time because he doesn't respect the time for his companions and he doesn't like to share activities. Apart from this he is a compulsive taboo word user so he uses one of those words in practically every sentence he utters and the others try to copy and laugh at his antics. He's kinaesthetic and visual.

All in all it was a very nice group to work with because they were fast learners so the first thing I had to do was to make them spend a little bit of energy in order to keep them quiet during the class. This could be done by singing a song and doing some TPR activities.

### **5. Activities**

As far as oral activities are concerned, I decided to introduce more listenings from their CDs and to play their own songs while we work. Then we were ready for action. The beginning of the class consisted of a routine: they hanged their coats in the racks, they got into the classroom, took their books, and sat down.

I decided to give it a try with a version of the "Three Little Pigs" which in this case is "Three Little Friends" and told them the story. I used visual and auditory stimuli because, apart from telling the story, I was using big pictures to show the actions and some kinaesthetic activity as well because the children have

to blow (they have to imitate the wolf). Revision with flashcards and a competition: I gave a number of flashcards to the students and they had to tell me the name of the object.

Work with numbers; different activities to be done with numbers according to their ages. Saying numbers aloud, counting with different objects etc. and as far as counting is concerned, using nursery rhymes to teach and consolidate numbers. In our story we had numbers one, two and three and with the different nursery rhymes, I wanted to teach up to ten to the youngest girls, to teach them how to write the numbers to the others.

The nursery rhymes were: “Baa, Baa, Black Sheep”, “One, Two, Three, Four, Five” and “Ten Little Elephants” so we would go gradually up the numbers.

Some nursery rhymes can be used as well because they can help a lot with the auditory style and they can also be performed which is another positive aspect in this age group.

Then I would introduce the making of a house out of chopsticks and decorate it as well and talk about the wolf who wanted to pull down the houses (while they build the houses they listen to the story or sing a song about the wolf). So here we have a kinaesthetic activity at the same time as an auditory one.

## 6. Conclusion

So as a conclusion I can say that, having realised that my learning style is primarily visual, I need more auditory activities for some of my students because I was not catering to their leaning needs. I decided to pay more attention to that area and, at the same time, to use a lot of kinaesthetic stimuli as well because very young learners need to do things and that doing is not only colouring activities.

Being more conscious that more auditory stimuli was needed, I also tried to give them more time to produce and say things in English. At this stage in their learning process they have to be exposed to a lot of oral English, so apart from talking in English all the time, I should give them opportunities to watch adapted videos and listen to different people if possible.

At this early stage in their learning lives, the auditory mode is the one most used by children, but as soon as they start school writing is introduced, thus creating a dual form of learning for the children. If a child does very well in writing, he will probably lose a bit of their auditory capacity and we can have the opposite case which is a child who cannot write because he does so in a phonic manner and this is not appropriate for school. So this child can become a “poor” learner according to the school teacher because he does not conform to the model proposed at school and on the other hand he may be learning and producing the language in an adequate way for the teacher who has the overall development in mind.

The general idea is to realize what their learning styles are, compare them with mine, and make the learning experience as positive as possible and to help them enjoy their learning of L2. Emotional ties can help a lot because students tend to lean on the teacher, and having a very affective relationship, helps to reinforce the learning process. Positive feedback can help the learning process a lot and also help students feel happy with what they are learning.

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## RECENSIÓN

Durán, R., Sánchez-Reyes, S., Beltrán F. 2007. *Propuestas para la Formación del Profesorado de Lengua Inglesa en el Espacio Educativo Europeo*. (2<sup>a</sup> edición revisada, actualizada y aumentada del libro *La Formación del Profesorado de Lengua Inglesa en un Contexto Europeo*).

Salamanca: Ed. Ambos Mundos. Colección Almar Anglística. Serie Manuales. ISBN: 978-84-7455-110-5

**Antonio Rodríguez Celada**

La buena acogida de la primera edición de este libro (de 2004) ha obligado a sus autores a preparar una segunda edición que se presenta a continuación. Los cambios continuos en el tema que en él se aborda han hecho que vieran en ello una ocasión para revisar y actualizar los últimos datos legislativos además de añadir unos anexos forzosamente breves pero imprescindibles para dar a conocer de manera clara las tendencias más recientes en la enseñanza de la lengua inglesa y en la formación de su profesorado, además de una sólida propuesta de Practicum internacional y una selección muy rica de recursos para la enseñanza en la red.

El mundo cuenta, en la actualidad, con una cifra aproximada de 5.000 lenguas utilizadas en algo menos de 200 estados. La relevancia específica de las lenguas en el mundo moderno no guarda una relación directa con su número de hablantes, sino más bien con su capacidad específica para enfrentarse a la modernidad. En efecto, por lo que respecta a su capacidad para asumir o crear conceptos nuevos capaces de difundir las ciencias y las técnicas, a través de sus canales o “soportes” de información, y de forma muy particular, hoy, mediante las tecnologías de la información y de la comunicación, tan sólo conviven con estas últimas un número aproximado de 100 lenguas.

En el contexto histórico del último tercio del siglo XX, el idioma inglés ha sido reconocido universalmente como la nueva “*lingua franca*” utilizada en todo tipo de relaciones humanas, comerciales, científicas, políticas, culturales y, en el centro de todas ellas y desempeñando un papel de creciente relevancia, educativas.

Dentro, pues, de este mapamundi de las lenguas dibujado en trazos gruesos, este libro representa una herramienta útil y práctica para asumir los retos de la formación del profesorado de lengua inglesa en un contexto europeo y dentro de un escenario de creciente complejidad, lleno de oportunidades y de retos.

La propuesta en su conjunto, tramada a partir de un sistema de ofertas modulares específicas, sumamente prácticas y avaladas por años de ejercicio profesional de sus autores, viene precedida por elementos indispensables de información. El esquema del libro se configura según un diseño sumamente coherente, que va conduciendo a sus lectores de manera fluida desde lo general (el mundo y Europa) hasta lo particular (aulas universitarias y escolares), desde los contextos (culturales) hasta los textos (lingüísticos), desde las prescripciones (directrices europeas) hasta las descripciones (metodológicas), desde una mirada retrospectiva (a partir de las lecciones del pasado más reciente) hasta una mirada prospectiva (con los ojos puestos en el

presente y en el futuro educativo que ya se está cimentando) y finalmente, desde las limitaciones concretas (institucionales o personales) hasta las posibilidades amplias de mejora profesional y educativa.

Las teorías comunicativas más recientes se enmarcan en nuevas dimensiones educativas, lingüísticas y, por supuesto, sociales. El enfoque comunicativo se asume como ángulo preponderante en la enseñanza del inglés en nuestras aulas. En la inserción del decurso histórico español en el discurso europeo e internacional, y en la conjunción de los textos escolares y los contextos sociales, la lengua inglesa adquiere nueva relevancia hasta el punto de constituir una nueva, y necesaria, “alfabetización”, garante de una nueva ciudadanía internacional.

Este versátil manual, lleno de sugerencias, ideas, experiencias y fuentes documentales riquísimas, comienza por introducir a los profesionales de la lengua inglesa, en ejercicio o en formación, los contextos amplios de la enseñanza del idioma inglés en nuestro mundo globalizado. A partir de las perspectivas axiales del lenguaje, la educación y la cultura contemporáneas, se presentan, a continuación, los marcos necesarios para la formación docente, esto es, acercamientos analíticos didácticos y lingüísticos que preparan el terreno para mejor entender, y asumir como propio, el enfoque comunicativo, tal y como éste se ha ido forjando a lo largo de años de investigación lingüística aplicada y de acción educativa hasta constituir el eje articulador del Marco común europeo de referencia para la enseñanza, aprendizaje y evaluación de las lenguas extranjeras. Este documento, de obligado conocimiento para todos los educadores de las segundas lenguas, se presenta de una manera clara que permite situar la práctica profesional de la enseñanza de la lengua inglesa dentro de una plataforma de actuaciones compartidas por colegas y estudiantes de toda Europa.

La primera parte está escrita con rigor y a la vez de una forma muy accesible, ilustrada con ejemplos vivos y salpicada de sugerencias originales y muy factibles, como sólo podrían encontrarse entre los profesionales “a pie de aula”, estudiosos apasionados de la educación “sobre el terreno”. Aunque tiene validez en sí misma, su aplicabilidad real se confirma en la segunda parte, una novedosa y sumamente convincente, por lo cabal y creativo de la misma, formulación metodológica, que constituye el mejor modelo de lo que ella misma predica. A partir de un engarce coherente de contenidos cuya validez práctica han corroborado estudiantes y profesionales de la enseñanza, despliega un abanico de contenidos y está plagada de ideas, materiales, actividades, recursos materiales y humanos, elementos teórico-prácticos y posibilidades de mejora lingüística, pedagógica y profesional como pocas veces se pueden encontrar reunidos en un solo volumen.

El libro, en suma, constituye un material inestimable para los estudiantes que se dispongan a preparar el temario de las oposiciones al cuerpo de maestros así como para los profesionales que estén “habilitando” su especialidad docente o para otros estudiantes, o estudiosos, de Filología Inglesa que deseen preparar las oposiciones para la enseñanza secundaria o que simplemente quieran adentrarse en el campo de la lingüística aplicada a la enseñanza de la lengua inglesa. Los profesores de enseñanza secundaria en ejercicio sin duda agradecerán conocer el perfil de formación de los maestros, hacer propias muchas de sus sugerencias, tal y como vienen definidas o adaptadas, y poder coordinar mejor los contenidos y los enfoques metodológicos de los dos niveles de la enseñanza obligatoria. Así pues, se trata de un manual que podrán leer con gusto y con provecho los estudiantes universitarios de magisterio y sus formadores, así como los estudiantes de Filología Inglesa de cualquiera de los tres ciclos y sus profesores universitarios y, por supuesto, los maestros de inglés de enseñanza primaria y los tutores de las prácticas docentes en colegios de educación primaria o institutos de educación secundaria. Por último, proporciona un mapa fiable para que los responsables de las políticas docentes en las administraciones educativas provinciales, de las comunidades autónomas, nacionales y europeas supieran por donde transitan, en el día a día, los educadores a quienes se ha encomendado la noble tarea de la formación directa del profesorado en lengua inglesa.

Los autores merecen mi más sincera felicitación por este empeño constructivo, pero también quiero extender dicha felicitación a los lectores de este volumen por la oportunidad de disponer de una herramienta de enorme valor con la que podrán responder mejor a los desafíos y aprovechar las oportunidades de este ámbito de formación que, de manera comprensible, esta mereciendo una especial atención en el espacio educativo europeo.