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Moroccan Immigrants Learning Spanish Writing (Compared with Vernacular Children)

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ABSTRACT: In this article we present a comparative and qualitative study of the phenomena observed in the development of writing by non-native adults of Moroccan origin who are becoming literate in Spanish. Writing samples were gathered in Granada, Spain, and analyzed using a theoretical framework based on the classification of stages of Spanish L1 children's development of writing as presented by Ferreiro and Teberosky (1979). The results suggest that non-native adults go through the same stages in learning to write as native children although some differences are observed, mainly with regard absence of a syllabical stage in adults and their familiarity with other languages and writing systems. In order to obtain more representative results, future studies should gather samples of other immigrant communities.

KEY WORDS: non-native adults, immigration, children, emergent literacy, emergent writing

1. Introduction and Literature Review

Given the scarcity of specific studies on the writing development in the case of immigrant adult learners of Spanish, this paper sets out to fill the gap by answering the following question: can published research on the development of native language writing by children be of help in the analysis of L2 writing development by adult immigrants? And, specifically: is there evidence that adult immigrants with emergent literacy go through similar stages in learning to write Spanish L2 as children learning to write Spanish L1?

We think that it can and to demonstrate it we need, in the first place, to briefly refer to the main findings about the development of Spanish speaking children's writing. We will then compare their production to the samples provided by adult Moroccan immigrants with low literacy levels.

1.1. Children and adults

In XXI century Spain there are two large groups of people who learn how to write: children whose native language is Spanish and adult immigrant learners of Spanish L2 with few prior experiences with formal learning in their native language. The two groups differ in their relationship to literacy learning. Children usually need to learn and practice the cultural conventions related to the writing in their mother tongue, while adult immigrants frequently confront the writing system of a language that they did not learn in childhood and that they are

presently learning. Children are highly familiar with written Spanish language in their environment, starting from the first months of their lives. They observe signs, posters, advertisements, tv screens, etc. on a daily basis. Adult immigrants, however, may have less exposure to written Spanish in their new living environment. And, of course, the cognitive development of children who try to write for the first time (when they are one or two years old) is very different to that of immigrant adults.

For historical, social and economic reasons easy to imagine, the literacy learning process of native children has been studied for several centuries, and, until now, at least in the Hispanic field, many of the studies have focused on the virtues and defects of reading and writing methods -Braslavsky (1962), Bellenger (1979) Cuetos et al. (2003), Galera (2003) - or on the level of maturity required for children to have access to written language -Cohen (1980), Defior (1996), Lebrero and Lebrero (1999).

From a more modern cognitive perspective, also in the Hispanic context, mostly following the research of Ferreiro and Teberosky (1979), research on the writing of Spanish speaking children has changed its orientation. Authors now focus on the processes of acquiring writing conventions, rather than the supposed student maturity or adequacy of teaching methods. This perspective is adopted in numerous studies such as Ferreiro (1986), Author (2012, 2014), Tolchinsky and Teberosky (1998), Tolchinsky and Sandbank (2016), etc.

Interest in the process of child literacy also applies to immigrant children –Blommaert (2010) and Blommaert, Creve and Willaert (2006) in the case of Flanders or Chireac, and Serrat and Huguet (2011) with reference to Romanian child immigrants in Spain. However, there are very few studies about the processes of acquisition of writing conventions by immigrants with beginning levels of literacy, especially those focused on the early stages, or ‘early literacy’ as defined by Kurvers and Katelaars (2011).

Here we can quote Kurvers and Katelaars (2011), Kurvers, van Hout and Vallen (2009) in the case of Dutch, or Boon (2014) for Tetun (a language from East Timor). While Boon (2014) focuses on the evaluation of different methods and requirements for reading and writing, the works of Kurvers and Katelaars (2011) and Kurvers, van Hout and Vallen (2009) present results

that are somewhat more comparable to those of this study since they start from the knowledge of the child stages described by Ferreiro and Teberosky (1979), adapted to Dutch.

In the case adult of learners of Spanish, research on writing development is even more scarce, with the exception of the doctoral dissertation of Chao (2020). In his work, Chao applies the results of Kurvers and Boon to the classification of errors in writing productions of a large group of adult immigrants living in Madrid who take a Spanish language test called LETRA. However, he does not pay special attention to the Moroccans nor does he refer to Ferreiro and Teberosky's classification. Cassany (2014) examines the relation of BA and MA immigrant students with writing, but these are clearly literate in their native languages, and not adult L2 writers with emergent literacy (sometimes referred to as LESLLA (Literacy Education and Second Language Learning for Adults)/ NESLLA (Non-Educated Second Language and Literacy Acquisition) individuals) who are our focus in this paper.

More recent studies by Chao (2017) and Chao and Mavrou (2017) focus exclusively on reading comprehension. Finally, Mavrou and Martín Leralta (2018) study the writing of adult immigrants with a higher level of literacy than our informants' and include more than one group, not only new residents of Moroccan origin. That research, which also uses the materials from the LETRA exam, studies the influence of a number of individual and social factors on the score obtained in different sections, but does not study writing in depth.

1.2. Children's Stages of Acquisition of Writing in Spanish L1

It is now accepted that most Spanish speaking children go through similar stages in learning to write in their native language. The basic premises of the studies founded on the discoveries of Ferreiro and Teberosky (1979) are as follows:

a) Learning to write is a cognitive process which consists of the gradual mental acquisition of the system of the written form of the language.

b) Within the frame of that cognitive process, child learners establish hypotheses (representations) about how "good writing" should be.

(c) Although there is, of course, individual variation, these hypotheses in many cases are

common to most children, so it is possible to speak of common stages of development

(d) Children's literacy does not start in school: the whole environment around the child is full of writing that is observed and learned from a very early age.

(e) Of course, the child's ideas or hypotheses do not coincide with those of the native adult who has already learned, if not all, then most of the conventions of the writing system in his or her environment.

(f) Writing researchers and teachers need to become familiar with non-adult or non-conventional forms of writing in order to understand the cognitive processes that underlie those hypotheses or representations.

According to Ferreiro and Teberosky (1979) and Ferreiro (1986), who carried out a year-long study with 30 children from a "villa miseria" in greater Buenos Aires, there are two major periods in children's acquisition of writing in Spanish L1, presented here in summarized form, without describing the transitions between them:

1) Pre-phonetic stages, in which writing does not attempt to represent sounds. The child manages to differentiate the writing system from other systems of representation, such as drawing. The first attempts to write produce signs that are no longer drawings, but neither are they conventional letters: they are primitive signs that try to resemble letters, arranged in a disordered way, without conventional alignment or orientation, without control of quantity, etc. Initially they may be wavy or broken lines, sticks, circles. Then child writers begin to arrange the graphic elements - pseudo-letters or letters - horizontally one after another. It is usual for children in this phase to represent the linearity of writing and speech with some minimal graphic elements such as circles, sticks or letters learned from their names. An example of this stage is provided in

Figure 1, where the child writes *<tigre que pelea>* (tiger that fights). It should be noted that the teacher has written down the meaning the child gives to his/her writing.



Figure 1. Example of pre-phonetic stage (Author, 2012)

2) Phonetic stages, in which the child acquires the basic idea that the graphic signs of her/his environment represent sounds. At the same time, usually there are sub-stages:

2.a) Syllabic sub-stage, in which each grapheme tries to represent one syllable. To illustrate, the interpretation of the writing in Figure 2 becomes easier if we know that the child has written <Un barco de cañones> (7 syllables) meaning ‘a boat with guns’, <tiburones> (4 syllables) meaning ‘sharks’, <biblioteca> (4 syllables) meaning ‘library’.

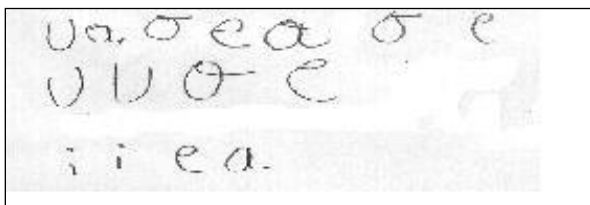


Figure 2. Example of syllabic writing (Author, 2012)

There is an exact correspondence between number of graphemes and the number of syllables in each line in Figure 2, for example 4 syllables in <tiburones> and 4 graphemes to represent the word. It is clear that the privileged graphemes are based on the vowels, which, at least in Spanish, are always the sounds that constitute the core of the syllable and are therefore perceptibly more prominent.

2.b.) Alphabetical sub-stage in which each grapheme approximates representation of a phoneme. This phase presents a series of very interesting hypotheses, giving clues both to the cognitive processes of learners and to the characteristics of the language in question. Among the most important hypotheses, we highlight three:

(i) The hypothesis of the "good" syllable. Since in Spanish the most common syllable has a CV structure (consonant+vowel) and, in addition, CV writing complies with the rule of diversity of signs (in contrast to the mathematical notation where signs can be repeated -111 is a *good* number-, in writing the repetition of signs is not usual -*EEE* is not a *good* word-), it is usual for a beginner learner to insert, delete or exchange letters in order to maintain a canonical syllabic structure CV. This is what appears in Figure 3.

A photograph of a child's handwritten text in Spanish. The text is written on a light-colored background and reads: "Tengo 3 re Manos a Hora vivo con Miq remana". The handwriting is somewhat messy and shows signs of being a learner's attempt at writing.

Figure 3. 'Good syllable hypothesis' Alphabetic writing with the inversion of letters (Author, 2012).

The sample in figure 3 is transliterated as follows: <Tengo 3 re manos a hora vivo con mi remana>. This means, in standard Spanish, <Tengo 3 hermanos ahora. Vivo con mi hermana>. ('I have 3 brothers now. I live with my sister.') Although there are many things that deserve a comment in this writing sample, what interests us now is the writing of <remanos> and <remana>. It is evident that no Spanish speaker, neither young nor adult, pronounces /re'mana/ instead of /e' mana/ (*hermana*, or 'sister') but the non-existing form <remana> is perfect from the point of view of the conservation of the CV structure.

(ii) The radical phonetic hypothesis. As one might expect, learners later make the hypothesis that each grapheme corresponds to a phoneme, and that each phoneme corresponds to a grapheme. In Spanish this is not always the case, so there is a long process of experimentation until the diversity of spellings for the representation of a single sound is understood. For example, in Spanish, to represent the phoneme /k/ the graphemes <c>, <k> and <qu> are used. On the other hand, the letter <u> of the group <qu>, which in this case does not correspond to any phoneme, is the canonical representation of the vowel /u/. It is therefore understandable that the learner experiments and, as can be seen in Figure 4, we find for the phoneme /k/, correct spellings from the child's point of view as <cueva> (cave), or <escondía> (was hiding), but other unusual ones such as <oscura> (<oscura>), meaning 'dark'.

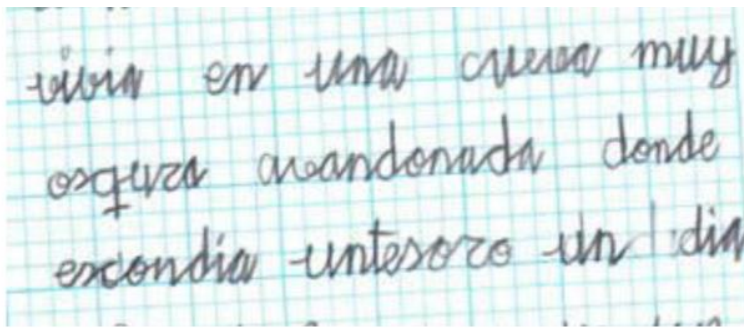


Figure. 4. Examples of 'Radical phonetic hypothesis' Alphabetic representations of the phoneme /k/ (Author, 2012)

Within the frame of the radical phonetic hypothesis we can place the numerous cases of non-canonical writing influenced by the particular phonetics of the variety spoken in the area where the learner lives. It is not rare to find cases of *s* instead of <z> (or <c>) and of <z> or <c> instead of <s> in areas where the distinction of sibilants /s/ and /θ/ does not exist (minority distinction in the Hispanic world, but predominant in the European Spanish; for a complete description of the Spanish phonetics and phonology see Real Academia Española [2011], Quilis [1993], Hidalgo and Quilis [2002], Martínez Celdrán [1989]).

(iii) The segmentation hypothesis. In oral language speakers create phonic groups, which express an idea or thought, of varying length (in Spanish the most usual is eight syllables), so that most word separations are conventional. It is true that full words (in Tesnière's terminology, (1959)): adjectives, verbs, nouns and adverbs have a prosodic accent that helps to delimit them, but there are many words (empty in Tesnière's terminology) without an accent, with a grammatical meaning and pronunciation linked to those of more acoustic prominence. That is why it is normal to find cases of hyposegmentation (represented in writing by the absence of spaces between words) as well as hypersegmentation (separation within a word). Almost always these non-canonical segmentations, such as those that appear in the writing sample in Figure 5 below, have a logical explanation.

Henry is one of the Spanish children studied in the doctoral thesis of Díaz Perea (2008) (directed by Manjón-Cabeza) in which the orthographic development of 224 children between the ages of six and ten from various localities of the province of Toledo (Castilla-La Mancha) was investigated. Henry is a seven year old student with a good lecto-writing development.

El delfin Henry
soy un del fin hoy he ydo ha
nadado ebisto un galapago
y era muy grande
le fui persigien y lo perdi
mea entrado anbre meido a
casa y des pues de comer
luego mefuy a fuerca y
me encotce ha un tibeuron
mefue muy mal un tibeuron
me estubo persigiendo
estaque me perdi
mis amigos me encontraron

Figure 5. 'Segmentation hypothesis' Alphabetic text with examples of hyphosegmentation and hypersegmentation (Díaz, 2008)

In Figure 5, we can note some cases of hyphosegmentation due to the influence of orality on writing. Cases in which the clitic (atonic word) is linked to the verb are common. Thus, for example, Henry writes <meido> instead of *me he ido* (I have gone), <mefuy> instead of <me fuy> or <me fui> (I went) or <mefue> instead of <me fue> (It was for me). Similarly, we see cases in which the compound verbal form is simplified in writing, either by joining the first part with the participle, as in <ebisto> for <he visto> (I have seen) or by joining it to the personal clitic as in <mea entrado> instead of <me ha entrado> (I have felt).

Along with cases of insufficient segmentation we find cases of hypersegmentation or excessive segmentation. Normally these cases respond to the influence of writing on one's own writing. In the cases of <del fin> for <delfín> (dolphin) and <a fuera> for <afuera> (outside), observed in Figure 5, that seems to be the explanation. In Spanish both the separate words, *del*, a contracted masculine article with the preposition *de*, and *fin* (end), a noun, as well as the preposition *fuera* (out), an adverb, and the words that are supposed to be represented (*delfín*, a noun, and *afuera*, an adverb) exist. A recent study on these phenomena of segmentation in children's writing and their evolution appears in Alegría and Díaz (2017) who find more hyphosegmentations than hypersegmentations, especially when a functional (empty) word is involved, in a study with 90 students aged 7-10 from Nayarit, Mexico.

2. Methods

Participants

To answer the research questions we have studied written productions of a group of 22 participants (17 women and 5 men) of Moroccan origin, living in Granada, with beginning levels of literacy in both Arabic and Spanish, according to the initial assessment of the educational center. The age of the informants ranged from 25 to 45 years.

The choice of Moroccan emigrants was not made by chance, since it must be remembered that the population of Moroccans in Spain is very high. In fact, if we only count foreigners, and not those who have acquired Spanish nationality, it is the most numerous group of immigrants in Spain. This is confirmed by the data from the census of the National Statistics Institute (INE)

	Spain	Granada
Foreign population	5,025,264	60,813
Moroccans	812,412	15,075
% of Moroccans	16.17%	24.79%

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Tabl

e 1. Absolute values and percentages of the total number of foreigners and Moroccans in Spain and in Granada (source: INE [National Statistics Institute], October, 2019)

As can be seen in Table 1, Moroccans comprise not only a major group in Spain, but a group whose importance increases in Granada where the percentage of Moroccans, compared to the whole population of foreign origin, is almost 25%, clearly higher than the national percentage of 16.17%.

Data Collection

The collection of data took place during the last few months of 2016 and the first months of 2017. They were collected by two teachers, Rejón Molina and Sosinski, who were teaching Spanish language and literacy in several public and private centres in Granada: Granada Acoge, Caritas, Centro de Formación Permanente de San Matías y Centro de Educación de Adultos Albaldul.

The instruments used to collect the data were:

1) Guided written productions. Each student produced three texts. In this case, learners were given a sheet with images of various professions that they had to label. An example is shown in Figure 6.



Figure 6. Example of guided writing task and response: labeling professions

2) Semi-free written productions. Participants were asked to write two lists: things needed for a party and things needed for a special meal. An example of writing elicited by the latter can be seen in Figure 7.

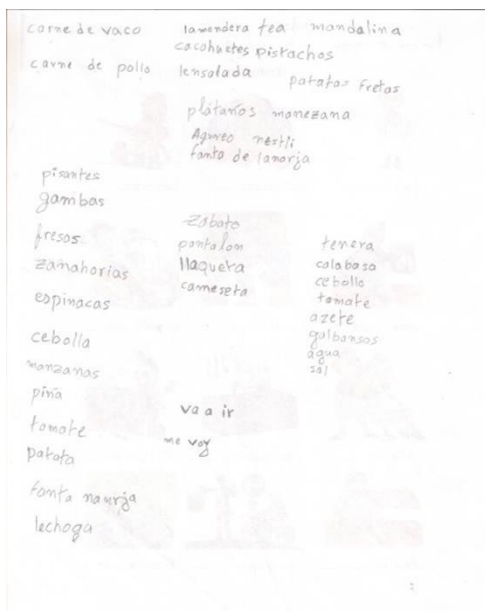


Figure 7. Example of writing on a semi-free task: shopping list

3) Free written productions in which the students were asked to write whatever they wanted, although almost all of them decided to write their personal descriptions, as shown in Figure 8.

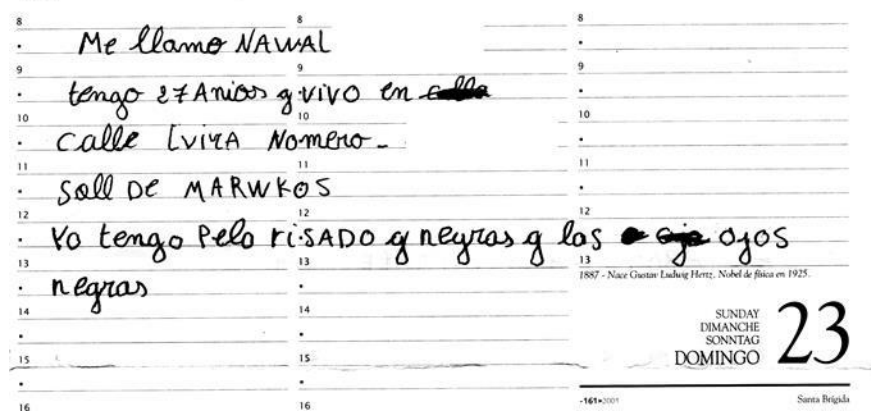


Figure 8. Example of free writing: self-description of Nawal (last name deleted).

3. Findings and Discussion

Qualitative analysis of the written productions of adult Moroccan migrants with emergent literacy produced numerous examples reflecting similar phenomena in their development of writing in Spanish L2 to those documented for children learning to write in Spanish L1.

However, while some of the data are similar to those of L1 children, others are not; that is, they are unique to adults who are learning to write in Spanish L2.

For example, there are infantile phases of which we have not found evidence in the writings of adults: the pre-phonetic stage and the syllabic sub-stage (one of the phonetic stages), that is, the initial ones in vernacular children. On the other hand, the writings of Moroccan adults studied in this paper illustrate various phenomena, characteristic for the alphabetical sub-stage, which we will now comment on. The first three are similar to those observed in children (although the manifestation of the radical phonetic hypothesis is influenced by the adults' interlingua phonology), while the last one, the omission of vowels, is unusual for native learners.

1) The hypothesis of the “good syllable”, that is to say, errors may be due to the attempt to standardize the syllable with the CV structure (consonant+vowel). In this attempt, the learners can follow several strategies, as can be seen in Figure 9.



Figure 9. Examples of 3 writing processes favoring CV: a) insertion b) deletion c) inversion

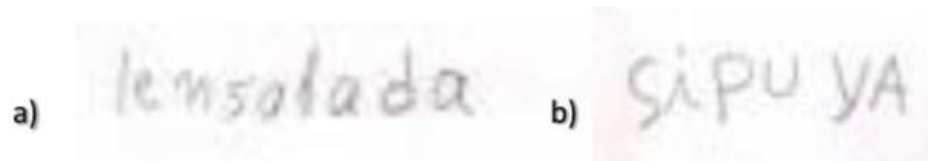
If we analyze the words that appear in Figure 9, in example a) we find a consonant <r> inserted, as the writer tries to write <agua> (water), a word whose structure is not very canonical in terms of normal written syllables in Spanish. The insertion of the <r> is not random, but produces two CV syllables: <gu> and <ra>.

In b), another student deletes the <l> in <plátano> (banana), so that the word becomes an expression of three canonical CV syllables: <pa>-<ta>-<no>.

The case shown in c) illustrates 2 processes. In the first, we have the inversion of the <l> on the first syllable so that a VC syllable that is not very canonical, the initial syllable <al> of <almendra> (almond), becomes a CV syllable <la>. In the second process, the writer applies the same insertion strategy that we noted in a), this time adding a vowel <e> to convert the unusual CCV syllable <dra> into two CV syllables: <de>-<ra>.

2) The segmentation hypothesis. Adult L2 learners of writing, although less frequently than L1 children, produce similar examples of non-canonical segmentations, influenced by the phonic

and lexical structure of Spanish.



Examples of this stage can be seen in

Figure 10.

Figure 10. Examples of adult emergent writing with non-canonical segmentations: a) hyposegmentation b) hypersegmentation.

In Figure 10, example a), <lensalada> has been written instead of <la ensalada> (the salad). This is a clear example of hyposegmentation in which the vowel in the article <la> has been merged with the initial vowel <e> in the first syllable of <ensalada>. This process is favored by

the atonic character of the Spanish article in the oral language, which makes it rely on the noun it precedes. It does not seem to be a coincidence that the vowel that remains in the first syllable is precisely the <e> of the noun <ensalada> that prevails over the <a> of the article <la>.

In example b) we can see that the writing is <sipu ya> instead of <cebolla> (onion). Although there are several interesting phenomena in this example, we highlight here the process of excessive segmentation with respect to the standard form. This hypersegmentation consists of the separation of the last syllable of the word, which may be favored by the existence of the frequently used adverb <ya>. The exposure of the migrant to the standard Spanish script may favor this type of representation.

3) The radical phonetic hypothesis. In this stage of development in the writing of an alphabetic script, the learner establishes the hypothesis that each phoneme has a corresponding grapheme and each grapheme represents a single phoneme. Here we can place two large groups of phenomena: the influence on writing of the learner's phonology, and experimentation in cases of obvious disparity between the phonology of the language and its graphemic representation.

Data produced in the present study suggest that the influence of the learner's phonology in the case of Spanish L2 adults with emergent literacy is somewhat different from that of L1 children, as documented in the published literature. The influence of the local variety of Andalusian Spanish appears to be similar in adult migrants and vernacular children. This can be seen in examples (a) and (b) in Figure 11.

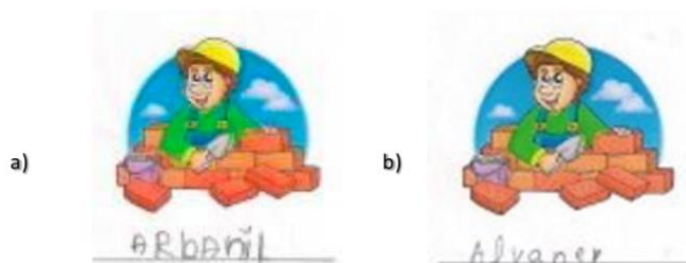


Figure 11. Examples of L2 adult emergent writing influenced by local phonology

In Figure 11 there are two representations of the word <albañil> (mason). In both cases we observe the expression of a local pronunciation derived from the neutralization of the phonemes /-l/ and /-r/ in the final position of a syllable. At present, in Andalusia, if neutralization occurs, the /-r/ tends to be used for the /-l/ and this explains the non-canonical <r> in the first syllable in the case of example a) and in the last syllable in the case of example b).

Figure 12 illustrates spellings that are typical of the writing of adult immigrants and do not appear in the writing of Spanish L1 children. In the cases we are dealing with, adult learners' interlanguage phonology evidences transfer from L1 Arabic. Although the range of possibilities is wide, the most usual is confusion between the vowels <e>/<i> and <o>/<u>, on the one hand, and the consonants <p>/, on the other. We must remember at this point that Arabic has a vowel system of three elements (with a long and a short series), so the confusion is usually between the palatal vowels, /e/ and /i/, and between the velar vowels, /o/ and /u/. Examples are shown in Figure 12.



Figure 12. Examples of adult emergent L2 writing influenced by interlanguage phonology (vowels)

In example a) the learner has written <mandarenas> instead of <mandarinas> (tangerines); that is, an <e> appears instead of <i> in the third syllable, because that substitution is a frequent pronunciation of Moroccan immigrants. A similar phenomenon can be observed in example b), <somo naranja> instead of <zumo de naranja> (orange juice), with particular focus on the graphemes representing the velar Spanish vowels. Thus, the first word is <somo> instead of <zumo>. We observe the use of the letter <o> instead of <u> (the <s> instead of the <z> can be analyzed as a reflection of local pronunciation).

In the case of consonants, Moroccan adult learners are often very hesitant in the use of the grapheme <p>, which represents the voiceless bilabial occlusive /p/, a phoneme which does not exist in Arabic, their mother tongue, as well as of the graphemes and <v>, which (due to the peculiarity of Spanish orthography) both represent the voiced bilabial phoneme /b/. This explains, for example, that in figure 10 b) <sipu ya> is written instead of <cebolla>, with <p> instead of .



Figure 13. Examples of adult emergent writing influenced by interlanguage phonology (consonants)

In Figure 13, example a) shows <bolisea> instead of <policía> (police). Here we see the use of the grapheme for the consonant /p/, consistent with the oral interlanguage phonology of Moroccan immigrants. In example b), the L2 learner has written <vemento> instead of <pimiento> (pepper). In the latter case, the letter used to replace <p> is <v> which in Spanish represents the phoneme /b/ just like the grapheme .

In this section, where we deal with the radical phonetic hypothesis, we must also comment on the numerous cases of experimentation, when the graphic and phonetic systems diverge. As can be expected, the Spanish orthography offers several examples. It should be noted that there is a common assumption among Spanish speakers that Spanish writing is very clearly linked to phonetics. It is a topic that must be nuanced. It is true that reading is very transparent because there are relatively fixed and rigid rules of pronunciation, which make it possible for educated Spanish speakers to pronounce what we read in a very similar way and without great hesitation even though we have never seen a particular word written; but this is not so much true in the case of writing. In the case of a sequence of phonemes not written before like /aba'koe/ we could propose many transcripts: <habacoe>, <havacoe>, <abacoe>, <avakoe>, <avacohe>, etc. Needless to say, this is one of the most difficult tasks that learners have to face.

One of the most striking examples of that divergence is the writing of graphemes representing the palatal sounds. In this case we find the following:

a) The <ch> and the <ll> are digraphs that represent a single phoneme: the <ch> represents /tʃ/ as in the word <mucho> and the <ll> of <Sevilla> represents /j/ (rarely the original phoneme /ʎ/). But the components of those digraphs can be used separately to represent other phonemes. Thus, a <c> can represent /k/ as in <casa> (house), /θ/ in <cielo> (or /s/ in many varieties of Spanish); the <h> in standard Spanish represents a phonetic zero, as in <hoy> (today), and <l> represents the phoneme /l/ in, for example, <lunes> (Monday).

b) The phoneme /tʃ/, represented by <ch> in writing, is an affricate sound, that is to say, with two

moments of articulation, except, sometimes, in Southern Spanish where it can be pronounced as [j].

c) The <ll> represents /j/, a phoneme that can also be represented by the grapheme <y>, as in <yo> (I).

d) The grapheme <y> can also represent the vowel /i/ as in <soy> (I am) so in a sentence as basic as <yo soy> (I am) we find the same grapheme representing two different phonemes.

In such a difficult situation for a learner, cases of experimentation, approximation and testing are inevitable. Some of these cases are reflected in Figure 14.

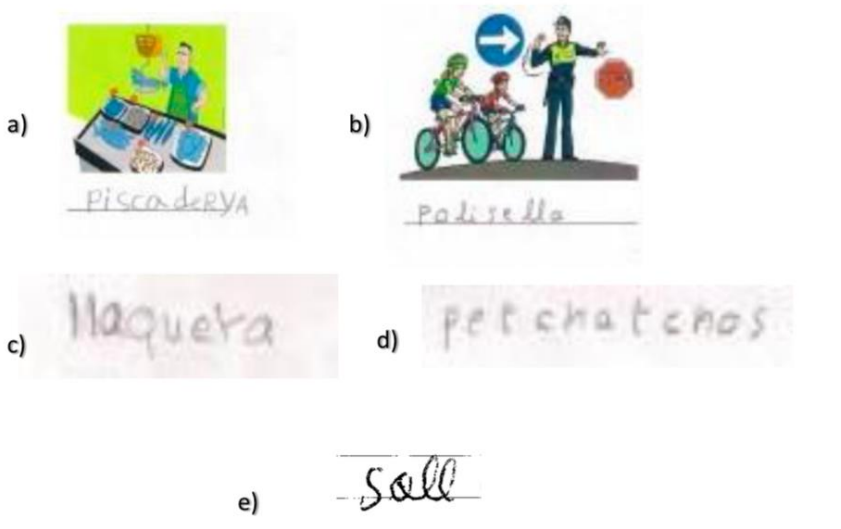


Figure 14. Examples of L2 adult emergent writing of graphemes representing palatal sounds

Figure 14 gives several examples of L2 adult emergent writing experimenting with graphemes that represent palatal sounds in Spanish. In example a), a <y> is used for the <i> in <piscaderya> that should be <pescadería> (fish shop), while in example b) a <ll> is used for the <i> in <polisella> meaning ‘policía’ (police). In example c), <llaqueta> has been written for <chaqueta> (jacket), that is to say, a digraph that represents a palatal sound is replaced by another digraph representing a palatal sound which, though logical, is incorrect. Example d) also represents a case of experimentation. The learner has written <petchachos> for <pistachos> (pistachios); here it appears that, whilst they know there is a sound with two movements of articulation somewhere in the word, they are only able to represent them by adding two <t> graphemes (we cannot be absolutely sure, but the first sequence of letters <tch> instead of <st>

makes us suspect that that it is an attempt to reflect the local pronunciation where the /st/ sequence can be pronounced as an affricate sound). Finally, in example e) we find <soil> to represent <soy>, an unusual form for a proficient Spanish writer, but very logical from the adult learner's point of view.

4) The omission of vowels. It is very common for adult L2 learners with emergent literacy to omit vowels in their first written productions. Examples can be seen in Figure 15.

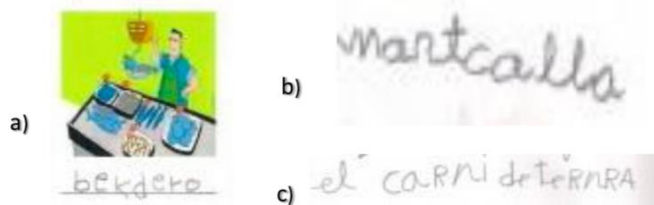


Figure 15. Examples of vowel omission in writing by adult L2 learners with emergent literacy

In example a) we find <bekjero> written for < pescadero > (fishmonger), in which the vowel <a> is omitted, and in example b), <mantcalla> instead of the canonical <mantequilla> (butter) where the vowel <e> has been omitted. Finally, in example c) we read <el carni de ternera> where we would expect the standard Spanish <la carne de ternera> (the veal). It is to be noted, then, that in this last example, along with other phenomena characteristic of early writing, there is an omission of the second <e> of <ternera>.

It is unusual for Spanish speaking children learning to write in their L1 to present examples of this type; rather, they seem to be particular to the emergent writing of L2 adults. In that sense, let's point out that the examples in this section could be interpreted as a sample of productions characteristic of the syllabic sub-stage. However, there are arguments against that interpretation: native children always use the vowels to represent the syllables and that is because, in Spanish, vowels are more prominent; secondly, the adults studied here are clearly in the alphabetical sub-stage which is related to their level of cognitive development.

We believe that there are several possible and not mutually exclusive explanations:

a) Possible influence of other writing systems. In today's world all people, except in cases of extreme isolation, have contact with writing systems. Of course, that is also the case for adult L2 learners with emergent literacy coming from Morocco. In their country of origin there is television, signs, diverse posters, graffiti on the walls, etc. that contribute to their familiarization

with some of the writing conventions for Arabic script, even if only at very initial levels. That is why we should not be surprised by the possible appearance of interferences between Spanish and Arabic writing (in addition to the influence of the Arabic script, one must take into account that of French, the language of the former colonial metropolis, and that of English, the current dominant language in the globalized world). It is known that Arabic, given its particular morphological and phonological system, has developed writing where consonants are prevalent. These constitute the basis of writing and vowels do not have to be represented; furthermore, if they are represented, they are subordinate to the consonants. It should be noted that this possible tendency to eliminate vowels would be the opposite of the good syllable or CV hypothesis, and it also conflicts with standard Spanish writing where the accumulation of consonants in both orality and writing is unusual.

b) Possible influence of teaching method. Since many consonants cannot be pronounced in isolation, many teachers are forced to name the letters using CV syllables: $k = ka$, $t = te$, $n = ne$, etc. This could explain why some students might create a false equivalence between graphemes and CV syllables ($t = te$), so that the syllable *te* of *mantequilla* would appear only as <t>, as in Figure 15 above.

Although these explanations do not have to be mutually exclusive, they should be explored in the case of other immigrant groups, including those that have not been in contact with the Arabic writing system, in order to refute or validate our explanations. If the omission of vowels does not occur as frequently in the writing of Chinese or Romanian immigrants, for example, then the explanation of the influence of Arabic script would be supported, while if these groups also omit vowels, the explanation of the influence of teaching method, in encouraging learners to use graphemes to represent CV syllables, would be supported.

c) Along with the influence of dominant written script in the country of origin of the Moroccan immigrants, we should not be surprised by the influence of other languages, as is the case in English. While the English alphabetic script is very similar to the Spanish one, there are some cases of divergence where we can trace the possible influence of English writing. We believe that is what is reflected in Figure 16 below.

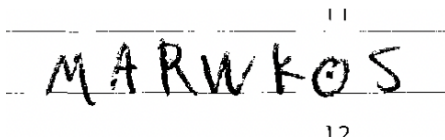


Figure 16. Influence of English orthography in the writing of Spanish L2 adults with emergent literacy

In Figure 16 the learner has written <MARWKOS> for <Marruecos> (Morocco). The insertion of the grapheme *w* is striking, since it obviously does not exist in Arabic and in Spanish is only used in a few words, all of these having English etymology. This graphic experiment of the learner is very interesting because, although she makes other mistakes in spelling the name of her country of origin, the learner has fully succeeded in writing a grapheme that in English represents a sound equivalent to a similar Spanish semivowel. This example seems especially interesting as an illustration of the fact that it is possible to hypothesize about multiple and mixed explanations for phenomena manifested in written productions of adult L2 writers with emergent literacy. The <*w*> grapheme in the word <Marwkos> could be also interpreted as an oversized lowercase *u* that has been incorrectly located in a word where all the other characters are capital letters. This hypothesis is based on the fact that, as can be seen in Figure 8, *w* is the same grapheme the learner uses to spell her name, <Nawal>. That name is written <Naoual> in French, the most widespread foreign language in Morocco, and used in official contexts there, so this could be a case of an omission of the vowel <*o*> and a confusion between capital and lowercase letters <*u*> and <*w*>. Of course, the name *Nawal* can also be written using the English convention, which the student may also know¹, and consequently associate the phoneme /w/ with the grapheme <*w*>. It is even possible that, in the learner's mind, the two graphemes, <*u*> and <*w*>, coexist and represent the same phoneme.

5. Conclusions

We believe that our method of analysis based on the Spanish L1 writing development framework of Emilia Ferreiro and her collaborators helps us to understand the writing development of adult

¹ An example is the name of the Moroccan athlete, Nawal El Moutawakel, who often writes her name with the grapheme <*w*>. evident influence of their interlingua (mainly confusion of the letters <*i*>/<*e*>, <*o*>/<*u*>, <*p*>/<*b*>, <*v*>) as well as of other languages and their orthographies. It is logical that those influences can be linked to Arabic, with which they are familiar in their country of origin (perhaps reflected in the omission of vowels), but it is also possible to hypothesize, for example, about the unexpected influence of English, the dominant language in the globalized world or French, also present in Morocco.

migrant Spanish L2 learners with emergent literacy. There is no doubt that there are errors in writing of an idiosyncratic, personal nature which cannot be completely explained, but it is no less true that there are many regularities in the modifications made to the canonical writing system, which leads us to affirm that, like children, those adult L2 learners also go through similar stages in the acquisition of a new writing system. Thus, the concept of error, in these cases, must be relativized from a cognitive point of view, and seen as a result of hypothesis formation.

There are similarities and differences in the stage of writing development we have identified in adult L2 learners as opposed to L1 children. The similarities are the stages with similar hypotheses regarding the “good syllable” (CV); segmentation, both hypersegmentation and of hyposegmentation; and the radical phonetic hypothesis which includes the influence of the learners’ phonologies, as well as graphic experimentation. The differences that we have identified in our analysis of the writing of adult L2 learners with emergent literacy have to do with the adults’ lack of a syllabic stage, and the influence of other scripts and languages the adult knows, something not documented in the literature on the writing development of children. It is also necessary to mention the potential impact of the methodology used to teach adults the names of letters, and the possibility of complementary and/or alternative explanations in many cases.

It seems clear that the differences found between the writing development of Spanish L1 children and adult L2 learners with emergent literacy are due to the personal background of both groups, such as the evident differences in cognitive maturity that explain the absence of pre-literacy phases in adults, and interference from other languages known or scripts encountered.

The constructivist analysis we have used in this study, which takes into account the hypotheses of learners, should lead us to a different perspective in teaching because it enables us to understand the logic of these emerging writings. That understanding should lead us to consider deviances from the standard not as errors, but as a starting point for improvement. From that perspective, the acceptance of such non-canonical writings as acceptable from a cognitive point of view helps the teacher combine the usual feeling of understanding of the newly arrived immigrant with the understanding of his/her written productions. Such an attitude contrasts with the frequent rejection of migrants and their definition in negative terms as people with different

kinds of deficiencies (Miquel, 1995, 2003; Villalba and Hernández, 1999, 2003, 2005, 2010) whose writing is also rejected as an example of not being able to use the language, not being integrated, and so on.

This is an initial study and there is much more to be done, especially because we have analyzed the samples only from a qualitative point of view, and also because all the informants in this study shared the same country of origin. In the future, we will have to move on to a quantitative analysis that will undoubtedly be enriching and will help us to answer such specific questions as: in the learner's choice between the graphemes <e>/<i>, does the accent on the syllable have any influence? What is the importance of the number of syllables in a word? In these cases, is the <e> or the <i> preferred? How does that confusion relate to teaching methods used in class and the time required for learning?

Unfortunately this type of quantitative study is a challenge, at least in Spain, partly because teachers of adult L2 learners with emergent literacy tend to follow very controlled methods encouraging the imitation of canonical models rather than freedom of writing, and also because the social and economic situation of these students more often than not makes it impossible for them to remain in the classroom for longer periods of time. This makes it extremely difficult for the researcher to collect and analyze data on their writing development over the long term. Nevertheless, in spite of such difficulties, the study of the writing development of adult L2 learners with emergent literacy is an exciting challenge both from a scientific and a didactic point of view.

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