

Immigrant children and access to school language. A comparative study between Latin American and non-Latin American students in Spain

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Abstract

Spain has recently become the main host country for immigrant citizens arriving in the European Union. As a result, immigrant children are being incorporated into the Spanish school system, therefore posing a set of challenges unknown until very recently. Teachers are mostly concerned about students' achievement of the necessary level of linguistic competence, as this is a key issue in order to successfully complete their schooling in a language that very often is different from their own L1. In this study, a sample of 49 immigrant boys and girls was compared to a group of 44 autochthonous students of the same age and school level. The analysis concentrated on the development of competence in Spanish, as well as on the role played by certain factors (such as length of stay in the host country or home language) in the acquisition of the language. The results obtained indicate that the process is a long and complex one, even when dealing with pupils whose L1 is a Latin American variety of Spanish.

Keywords: Spanish, linguistic knowledge, immigrant children, length of stay, L1/L2

Resumen

España se ha convertido en los últimos años en el mayor receptor de inmigrantes de la Unión Europea. Consecuentemente, sus hijos e hijas se han incorporado a nuestras escuelas planteando unos retos hasta hace poco desconocidos. Uno de ellos, y tal vez el que más preocupa al profesorado, se refiere al desarrollo de niveles de competencia lingüística suficientes para poder seguir de forma exitosa una escolaridad vehiculada a través de una lengua que en muchas ocasiones tiene poco en común con la suya propia (L1). En este contexto, a partir de una muestra de 49 niños y niñas inmigrantes que fueron comparados con un grupo de 44 escolares autóctonos de su misma edad y nivel escolar, nuestro trabajo analiza el progreso en el conocimiento de la lengua castellana y la incidencia que en ello tienen factores como el tiempo de estancia en el país de acogida y la lengua familiar. Los resultados obtenidos apuntan a un proceso lento y complejo del que no queda excluido incluso aquél alumnado cuya lengua L1 coincide con variantes hispanoamericanas del castellano.

Palabras clave: Castellano, conocimiento lingüístico, inmigración, tiempo de estancia, L1/L2

1. Introduction

Spain has always been referred to as a ‘country of migrants’. However, due to structural changes taking place in the Spanish society over the last few decades, today we can talk about a ‘country of immigrants’. Although at present immigration rates are above 12% (Instituto Nacional de Estadística, 2011), what really sets Spain apart from countries such as Great Britain, France or Germany is that the transition has been a rapid one. The sixfold (and even slightly higher) increase in the number of immigrants in Spain since 2000 has put the country, proportionally, at the forefront of immigration in the European Union (Eurostat, 2010).

This phenomenon is reflected in public opinion polls. In 1999 immigration was not even mentioned in the study carried out by the Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas (Centre for Sociological Research) on social issues worrying people. In 2001, however, 31% of the informants referred to this question as a problematic one. Nowadays immigration is one of the most important concerns for Spanish citizens (Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas, 2011).

Under favourable conditions families tend to regroup on a mid-term basis, which has brought about certain social changes in Spain still to be tackled by schools (Defensor del Pueblo -Ombudsman-, 2003). During the last decade the number of

pupils of immigrant origin in primary and secondary state schools has increased from 107,303 (academic year 1999/2000) to 762,746 (academic year 2009/2010). These figures (9.6% of the overall number of students in the country) are still increasing, even in a context of global economic crisis. The distribution of immigrant students according to Autonomous Communities ranges from barely 5% in Extremadura, Galicia or Asturias to, approximately, 15% in Catalonia, Madrid or the Balearic Islands (Ministerio de Educación, 2010).

A significant number of new students arrive with little or no knowledge of the language of instruction (L2). This is so in certain areas such as Madrid, where the official language (Spanish) has international prestige, and even more so in Catalonia or in the Basque Country, where pupils are taught mainly in minority languages (Catalan and Basque, respectively), which are hardly spoken outside the regional boundaries. These two communities are of particular interest insofar as both adopted a bilingual education system in the 1980s. Apart from playing a key role in terms of language revitalisation (Catalan and Basque), when compared to other monolingual Spanish autonomous communities the bilingual model applied in each case guarantees that using Catalan or Basque as the vehicular language is not detrimental to Spanish or other basic curricular abilities (Huguet, 2007; Huguet, Lasagabaster & Vila, 2008; Pérez, Juan & Bel, 2008). In the light of the success of the Basque and Catalan experiences with Spanish speaking students, some current proposals advocate for the participation of immigrant children in this type of linguistic bilingual immersion programme.

One should not forget that not all bilingual programmes coincide in their format and curricular design. Sometimes it is generally assumed that all cases of home-school language shift are dealt with following exactly the same guidelines. In this respect, a distinction between immersion and submersion linguistic programmes should be clearly drawn (Skutnabb-Kangas, 1990; Arnau, 1992; May, 2008). According to research that has been carried out for decades, the former type of programme (immersion) is characterised by its efficiency, while the latter tends to result in linguistic and academic difficulties for the student (Genesee, Lindholm-Leary, Saunders & Christian, 2006; Cummins & Hornberger, 2008; García, 2008).

Bearing this distinction in mind, Serra & Vila (2005) point out some basic characteristics necessary in order to successfully carry out an immersion programme: no knowledge of L2 by students, bilingual and well trained teachers with good knowledge of the students' L2 and L1 and voluntary participation of the students' family in the programme. Theoretically speaking, all these variables contribute to generating positive attitudes towards the L2, a fundamental element in the acquisition of a new language (Gardner & Clément, 1990; Baker, 1992; Huguet, 2006).

At this point it is important to remember that the conditions mentioned in the previous paragraph, as put forward by Serra & Vila (2005), are at the very basis of excellent results in immersion programmes implemented by Lambert and his team in the 1960s (Lambert, 1974). At the same time, we should not forget that when these conditions are not observed, in the case of home-school language shift we are in front of a submersion programme. This situation tends to take place with both immigrant students (i.e., speakers of African languages living in Europe, or Spanish speakers in the USA) as well as with those belonging to ethnic or linguistic minorities (i.e., indigenous peoples of some American countries or certain linguistic minority groups in Europe). In these cases, there exists a high risk of academic failure (Hernández-Chávez, 1984; Licón-Khisty, 1992; Cummins, 1996, 2000a; Cummins & Hornberger, 2008).

However, the aim of this paper is not to develop psycholinguistic and cognitive theoretical constructs that justify the contrasting consequences of immersion and submersion programmes. For the time being, it is enough to emphasise that very often the degree of fluency in the L2 allows the speaker to use it only in certain contextualised settings of interpersonal communication where it is possible to negotiate meaning. Contrarily, L2 use is extremely restricted in collective situations or in academically demanding activities (where a more in-depth knowledge of the language is required) when taken out of context. All these implications are further developed by Cummins (1981a) when he establishes a distinction between BICS (Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills) and CALP (Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency)⁽¹⁾. The only way for students to develop their capacity to use language in decontextualised, cognitively demanding situations is, of course, first learning to use it in very contextualised communicative situations (Wells, 1981; Bruner, 1983, 1986). This is particularly significant when dealing with educational settings where students are taught in a language different from their L1 (Cummins, 2008; Hugué, 2008, 2009).

This concise theoretical overview justifies some of the difficulties faced by immigrant students when learning the language of the school, a process that obviously brings about curricular and academic obstacles. Next, drawing on Cummins' revision (2000a) of numerous studies on this subject carried out in English-speaking countries, we will refer to the few studies carried out in Spain. Lastly, we will present the results of our research, and discuss them using the conceptual framework put forward so far.

¹ This distinction BICS/CALP and has been strongly discussed in several studies; see, for example, Edelsky, Hudelson, Flores, Barkin, Altweger & Jilbert, 1983 or Edelsky, 1996. The author has responded to criticism in different works: Cummins & Swain, 1983; Cummins, 2000a, 2000b; among others

The arrival of immigrants in Spain is a relatively new phenomenon. Therefore, it is not until recently that their integration into our educational system has been approached with relative interest. Conversely, research in other western countries, which have experienced immigration for a long time, shows enough empirical evidence to state that difficulties in the acquisition of the language of the school and academic failure tend to be found mainly with immigrant students. More specifically, in a study carried out thirty years ago in Canada with non-English speaking immigrant students, Cummins (1981b) concluded that between 5 and 7 years are necessary to obtain a level in that language equivalent to that of an English-speaking model. After 3 years in the country, although the immigrant students were relatively fluent in conversation, it was still possible to detect 1 standard deviation in the scores obtained. After 5 years, a mismatch of 1/2 standard deviation was detected in these pupils when mastering academic English.

Later on, comparable results were obtained by Collier (1987), Ramirez (1992), Klesmer (1994), Gándara (1999), Thomas & Collier (1997) and Hakuta, Butler & Witt (2000). All of them agree with Skutnabb-Kangas & Toukomaa's theses (1976), which show that some immigrant Finnish boys and girls in Sweden, despite expressing themselves fluently both in Finnish and Swedish, given their age and educational level, showed a considerably low level of academic performance in relation to expectations.

The analysis of these and other similar works lead Cummins (2000a) to voice his concern that:

Research studies since early 1980s have shown that immigrant students can quickly acquire considerable fluency in the dominant language of the society when they are exposed to it in the environment and at school. However, despite this rapid growth in conversational fluency, it generally takes a minimum of about five years (and frequently much longer) for them to catch up to native-speakers in academic aspects of the language (Cummins, 2000a: 34).

As we have already pointed out, there are certain reasons to think that in Spain the situation does not differ from Cummins' portrayal, even more so when compared to other countries with an extensive research tradition on language, school and immigration. Although they mostly focus on academic failure rates, mention must be made of several works (Mesa & Sánchez (1996) in Melilla, a Spanish protectorate in northern Africa; Serra (1997) and Fullana, Besalú & Vilà (2003) in Girona (Catalonia); Siguan (1998) in Barcelona and Madrid or Montes (2002) in Murcia (southern Spain)). All of them show that immigrant students are worst hit by academic failure.

As to research focusing mainly on L2 acquisition of any of the languages of the country, it generally refers to adult learners of Spanish with a mid/high sociocultural level (Soto-Aranda, 2002; Trujillo, 2004). Nevertheless, some reports have paid attention to the process of acquisition of the language of the school by immigrant students, both from a qualitative perspective and with a reduced sample (due to the difficulty involved in elaborating this type of study). Díaz-Aguado, Baraja & Royo (1996) focused on students with different geographical origins in their 3rd and 6th year of Primary Education in the Autonomous Community of Madrid. Their research, which also took into account teachers' perceptions, concluded that there are two clearly defined levels as to the rate of acquisition of Spanish. Basic comprehension and expression skills are rapidly acquired (between 2½ and 4 months), but the most frequent difficulties are observed when students need the appropriate level to follow classroom explanations and to express their ideas accurately (between 1 and 3 years, respectively). This study may appear as excessively optimistic when compared to results from the quantitative works developed outside Spain. However, what the work highlights is that more cooperation between tutors and support teachers is needed if students are to be able to overcome the difficulties that arise in this second level of formal language.

The results offered by Maruny & Molina (2000) are much more in line with those obtained in other host countries. The study, which took place in the Catalan region of Baix Empordà (Girona) analysed, by means of an interview, language learning (Catalan) in a group of students of Moroccan origin. The learners, schooled between 3rd year of Primary Education and 4th year of Secondary Education, were selected according to length of stay in Catalonia (less than 18 months, 18 to 36 months and more than 36 months). According to the results we can state that at least 3 years are necessary to develop sufficient conversational competence in the language of the school; that 5 years are needed to show acceptable reading comprehension level; and that even more time is required for mastering writing and other skills which guarantee academic success. As a matter of fact, none of the members of the sample attained an appropriate level in these skills.

As we have observed so far, length of stay in the host country is a totally relevant dimension in terms of the linguistic skills developed by immigrant students (Jarvis & Pavlenko, 2008; Chireac, Serrat & Huguet, 2011); this, of course, should have an obvious effect on the way these students are taught. In this sense, the main aim of our research is to analyse the impact of this variable on the process of acquisition of the language of the school (Spanish). In order to do so, we will also bear in mind the outstanding fact that a fairly high number of recently arrived students speak

Latin American varieties of Spanish⁽²⁾. Likewise, as opposed to primarily qualitative analyses carried out in Spain, we adopt a more quantitative approach centred on a key period in schooling: the transition from Primary Education to Secondary Compulsory Education (Educación Secundaria Obligatoria – ESO).

2. Method

2.1. Participants

Given the importance of the educational change implied by the access to Secondary Education, our research focused on the 1st year of ESO. Usually, all teachers tend to expect students to have a good linguistic knowledge at this point of their schooling, which obviously influences their approach to teaching the language of the school (Vila, 1993).

With this idea in mind, we contacted all public schools (20) in the Huesca province (northern Spain) that had incorporated immigrant students in that particular school year, and all of them took part in the study. All the schools had some members in their staff who, either in or (mostly) outside the classroom, gave linguistic support to the students (mainly non-Latin American, recently arrived students) who needed it.

The global population added up to 59 participants. However, the final sample only comprised those students who had taken part in the entire test (semi-structured interview and five parts of the Spanish linguistic test; see Materials section below). From this group of recently arrived students, those who had not been schooled in their homelands were also excluded. Thus, the final sample was made up of 49 students (25 boys and 24 girls) aged 12 to 13, speakers of 12 different languages. The average length of stay in Spain was 3.404 years, with a standard deviation of 3.201 and minimum and maximum values of 1 and 13 years. The sample is distributed according to the most significant variables (see Table 1).

² As will be seen, our language test evaluates the peninsular variety of Spanish, i.e, the type of competence necessary to be successful at a Spanish school. Of course, Latin American students have a different educational background; in all likelihood, if local students were evaluated in Latin American varieties Spanish results would be different.

Table 1: Sample characteristics (number of subjects in brackets)

Area of origin	Home language ⁽³⁾	Length of stay	Social professional status
<i>Africa:</i> Morocco (5), Ecuadorian Guinea (1), Mauritania (1), Mali (1), Republic of Sahara (1)	L1 speaker (1) Bilingual+L1 (4) Bilingual+Spanish (3) Spanish speaker (1)	Less than 3 years (1) From 4 to 6 years (4) More than 6 years (2) No answer (2)	High-High (-) Mid-High (2) Mid-low (2) Low-low (5) No answer (-)
<i>America:</i> Ecuador (6), Argentina (4), Dominican Republic (3), Colombia (2), Brazil (1), United States (1), Mexico (1), Nicaragua (1), Peru (1)	L1 speaker (-) Bilingual+L1 (1) Bilingual+Spanish (2) Spanish speaker (17)	Less than 3 years (14) From 4 to 6 years (3) More than 6 years (3) No answer (-)	High-High (-) Mid-high (2) Mid-low (9) Low-low (9) No answer (-)
<i>Europe:</i> Bulgaria (6), Romania (6), Poland (4), Italy (1), Lithuania (1), Russia (1), Ukraine (1)	L1 speaker (3) Bilingual+L1 (12) Bilingual+Spanish (5) Spanish speaker (-)	Less than 3 years (16) From 4 to 6 years (1) More than 6 years (3) No answer (-)	High-High (-) Mid-high (5) Mid-low (8) Low-low (5) No answer (2)
<i>Total (49):</i> Africa (9), America (20), Europe (20)	L1 speaker (4) Bilingual+L1 (17) Bilingual+Spanish (10) Spanish speaker (18)	Less than 3 years (31) From 4 to 6 years (8) More than 6 years (8) No answer (2)	High-High (-) Mid-high (9) Mid-low (19) Low-low (19) No answer (2)

Logically, the 17 Spanish-speaking Latin American students made up a group, *Latin American*, in which we included one girl from Ecuador (bilingual Quechua-Spanish) and another Spanish-speaking girl from Ecuadorian Guinea (n=19). The rest of immigrant students (n=30) were assigned to the group *non-Latin American*.

At the time the research was carried out no valid scales were available for the Spanish test. Therefore, following the advice of educational authorities, two groups of 1st year ESO, regarded as students with an average level of Spanish, were taken as control groups. One of these groups was located in a school in a working-class, urban area (21 students); the other was situated in a rural area, characterised by agrarian economy (23 students). In all cases the students (20 boys and 24 girls) were aged 12 to 13 and belonged to Spanish-speaking families of predominantly mid-low (42.86%), low-low (40.48%) and mid-high (16.67%) social and professional status.

³ L1 speaker: the home language is some language other than Spanish. Bilingual + L1: the home language is different from Spanish, but it is relatively present / Bilingual + Spanish: the predominant home language is Spanish, but the other language is relatively present / Spanish speaker: the home language is Spanish.

2.2. Variables

As may be seen from the main aim of our study, the most relevant independent variables for our research are *length of stay* in Spain and *home language*, closely linked to the geographical area of origin in the case of Latin-American students. Moreover, other relevant aspects, such as *area or country of origin or social and professional status*, were considered⁴.

The categories corresponding to the variables are as follows:

- Length of stay: Less than 3 years / From 3 to 6 years / More than 6 years
- Mother tongue: L1 speaker / bilingual + L1 / bilingual + Spanish / Spanish
- Social professional status: high-high / mid-high / mid-low / low-low

In all cases, similar criteria to those used in previous studies were used to assign the categories. With regard to length of stay special attention was paid to the works by Díaz-Aguado, Baraja & Royo (1996) about Spanish, Thomas & Collier (1997) about English and Maruny & Molina (2000) about Catalan. As far as home language and social professional status are concerned, the classifications taken into account are usually employed in other studies both in traditionally bilingual contexts in Spain (Huguet, Lapresta & Madariaga, 2008) and in more complex immigration settings (Huguet, Janés & Chireac, 2008). Lastly, our dependent variable is *Spanish linguistic knowledge*. This variable was subdivided into the different skills analysed, each of them contributing with its specific grade to the global score.

2.3. Materials

Basically, two different types of instruments were used: a semi-structured interview and a Spanish linguistic test. While the first helped us control independent variables, the second allowed us to examine linguistic knowledge in the language of the school.

The semi-structured interview was conducted in order to identify the following categories for all the members of the sample: country of origin, home language, social and professional status and length of stay in Spain. Home language was defined thanks to a series of questions about the language normally used by all family members. Social professional status was obtained according to the parents' professional category and academic level. Generally, as we have already mentioned, the basic structure of the interview was taken from models previously implemented

⁴ Apart from the variables considered here, many others may have influenced our study as regards immigrant students. Anyhow, apart from those already mentioned, other variables were controlled. For instance, only those students already schooled in their home countries before coming to Spain were considered for the final sample.

in other multilingual settings in Spain (Huguet, Janés & Chireac, 2008; Huguet, Lapresta & Madariaga, 2008).

In order to evaluate linguistic knowledge in Spanish we implemented a test elaborated from the work of Bel, Serra & Vila (1991) and used in previous studies (Huguet, Vila & Llurda, 2000; Huguet, 2008). This test analyses the following dimensions: Oral Comprehension (OC), Morpho-syntax (MS), Phonetics-Orthography (ORT), Written Comprehension (WC) and Written Expression (WE). It was always necessary to use a second handout to record answers, and a limited amount of time was allotted for each of the subtests, and all questions were given marks (0-100) according to the number of right and wrong answers. Apart from assessing each subsection, there is a global score (GS), which corresponds to the average of the five subtests and reflects the final grade of the overall test.

Difficulty indexes, correlations and reliability (following the split-halves method) are widely developed in Bel, Serra & Vila (1991); in all subtests Pearson's correlation indexes obtained to measure reliability oscillated between $r=0,61$ y $r=0,80$.

As a summary, Table 2 shows the activities appearing in each of the sections of the test.

Table 2: Activities corresponding to each of the subtests of linguistic knowledge in Spanish.

Oral comprehension	Morpho-syntax	Phonetics-Orthography	Written comprehension	Written expression
Interpretation and identificaton of oral texts	Plural building	Phonetic discrimination	Interpretation of commands	Writing texts
Recognition of a varied typology of oral texts	Verbal inflection	Spelling	Identification of basic information in a text	
Idiomatic expressions and phrases	Word substitution within a sentence		Utilization of comprehension strategies	
Oral text comprehension	Identification of nouns, verbs and adjectives within a sentence		Identification of words according to their meaning	

2.4. Procedure

All the aforementioned evaluation instruments were implemented during the first term of the school year by a specifically selected and trained group of researchers. Meetings with regional educational authorities and with school boards were also previously arranged in order to clarify the aims of the study and the dates of implementation. Another informative meeting with language support teachers was also organised to ask for their cooperation.

Whenever several students (autochthonous and/or immigrants) attended the same school, they were grouped in a regular room in order to facilitate test implementation. When dealing with single students in a given school, the test took place individually in the school adviser's office. The test lasted 75 minutes, distributed as follows: Oral Comprehension (15 minutes), Morpho-syntax (20 minutes), Phonetics-Orthography (10 minutes), Written Comprehension (15 minutes) and Written Expression (15 minutes). All students were interviewed individually for about 30 minutes, and families were contacted if there were doubts regarding answers to some of the independent variables.

We have already mentioned that local students attended schools in working-class areas. Both in that group and in the immigrants' sample around 80% of the families belonged to medium-low and low-low social and professional status. In order to contrast similar family backgrounds as regards this variable, a chi-square test rendered a similarity index $\chi^2=0.0108$ ($p=0.9476$) between both groups.

3. Results

This section starts presenting global data corresponding to autochthonous and immigrant students' knowledge of Spanish, bearing in mind the distinction between those of Latin American origin and the rest of groups. Next, the influence of the variable length of stay in Spain is analysed considering (i) a global perspective which includes all students of immigrant origin and (ii) a partial sample of Latin American students, whose home language is similar to the language of instruction.

3.1. Knowledge of Spanish: autochthonous vs. immigrant students

In order to tackle this question, variance analysis was carried out contrasting the results of local and immigrant students in each of the subtests and in relation to the global indexes GS.

As has been previously stated, immigrant students were further subdivided into two groups (Latin American and non-Latin American) taking into account their country of origin and home language. Table 3 shows the contrast in scores, and their level of significance, obtained by these two groups of immigrants in relation to local students.

Table 3: Comparison of average scores and standard deviations obtained by autochthonous students in relation to Latin American and non-Latin American students. Subtests OC, MS, ORT, WC and WE, global index GS and signification level in each particular case.

	Local	S. D.	LatAm	S. D.	P	Non-LatAm	S. D.	P
OC	60.298	15.483	44.163	16.548	0.0004*	33.487	18.182	<0.0001*
MS	79.273	13.091	65.684	17.733	0.0012*	46.523	24.251	<0.0001*
ORT	84.466	12.130	80.984	18.346	0.3769	69.440	23.378	0.0006*
WC	76.400	13.521	61.926	16.138	0.0005*	43.030	26.517	<0.0001*
WE	88.364	14.104	77.947	16.788	0.0137*	73.867	26.303	0.0030*
GS	77.760	10.202	66.141	14.175	0.0005*	53.268	20.162	<0.0001*

Irrespective of the group (Latin American or non-Latin American) scores are notably lower in the case of immigrant students in all subtests and indexes. Of course, this is reflected in the GS index, where we obtain values $F_{1,61}=13.504$ ($p=0.0005$) for Latin American and $F_{1,72}=47.364$ ($p<0.0001$) for non-Latin American. When compared to local students, both groups of immigrant students show slightly lower knowledge in the language of instruction.

Bearing these results in mind, it was considered relevant to analyse the differences between the two groups of immigrant students. Variance analysis turned out to be significant for the GS index, with a value of $F_{1,47}=5.880$ ($p=0.0192$) in favour of Latin American immigrants, and also for OC, MS and WC, with values of $F_{1,47}=4.293$ ($p=0.0438$), $F_{1,47}=8.837$ ($p=0.0046$) and $F_{1,47}=7.785$ ($p=0.0076$), respectively. Contrarily, no statistic difference was found in ORT and WE, with values $F_{1,47}=3.326$ ($p=0.0745$) and $F_{1,47}=0.362$ ($p=0.5502$), respectively.

3.2. Length of stay in the country and development in understanding of the school language

When reviewing previous research on the topic (Skutnabb-Kangas & Toukomaa, 1976; Cummins, 1981b; Collier, 1987; Ramírez, 1992; Klesmer, 1994; Thomas & Collier, 1997; Gándara, 1999; Hakuta, Butler & Witt, 2000) we already drew attention to the general agreement as to the importance of length of stay in the host country. A relatively long period of time is necessary for immigrant students to be able to use the language of the school in teaching and learning activities. Unfortunately, in Spain there are no further studies on Spanish linguistic skills that might parallel those reviewed. In order to shed some light on the topic, we decided to establish subgroups of immigrant students according to the length of their stay in Spain: less than 3 years, from 3 to 6 years and more than 6 years. Table 4 shows the average of GS when taking into account these categories and their respective standard deviation. Furthermore, Latin American students are differentiated from the rest of the group.

Table 2: Means and standard deviations of scores obtained in the GS index by all immigrant students according to length of stay in Spain. Latin American and non-Latin American students' results shown separately.

	Immigrants	S. D.	LatAm	S. D.	Non-LatAm	S. D.
- 3 years	55.637	20.323	65.557	15.926	47.467	20.280
3-6 years	61.200	16.534	66.820	1.442	59.327	19.117
+ 6 years	68.760	8.967	68.413	12.162	68.968	8.162

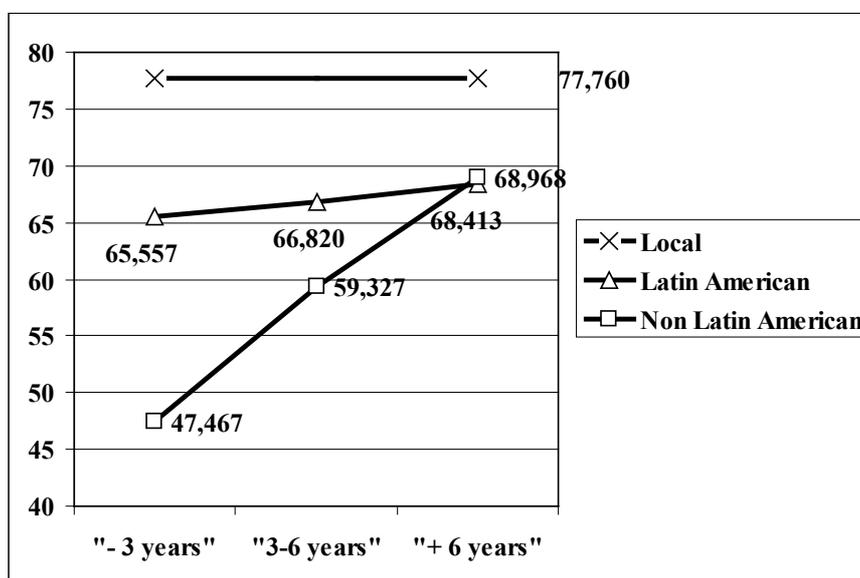
As may be clearly observed, when looking at the whole group of immigrants, those arriving in Spain more than six years ago obtain higher scores than those who arrived between 3 and 6 years ago. Correspondingly, these students score higher than those who have been in Spain for less than 3 years. The reduced size of the sample did not allow us to specify significant differences in any case [$F_{2,44}=1.072$ ($p=0.4494$) for the category “-3 years” vs. “3-6 years”; $F_{2,44}=1.072$ ($p=0.0787$) for the category “-3 years” vs. “+6 years” and $F_{2,44}=1.072$ ($p=0.4152$) for the category “3-6 years” vs. “+6 years”].

The same held true when analysing the results of Latin American students regardless of length of stay in the country [$F_{2,16}=0.4700$ ($p=0.9196$) for the “-3 years”

group against “3-6 years”; $F_{2,16}=0.4700$ ($p=0.7684$) for the group “-3 years” vs. “+6 years”; and $F_{2,16}=0.4700$ ($p=0.9088$) for the category “3-6 years” vs. “+6 years”]. Nevertheless, in the case of non-Latin American students, again the size of the sample did not let us observe statistical differences for the groups “-3 years” vs. “3-6 years” [$F_{2,25}=2.904$ ($p=0.1920$)] and “3-6 years” vs. “+6 years” [$F_{2,25}=2.904$ ($p=0.4008$)]. These differences arose in the group “-3 years” in relation to “+6 years”, with a value of $F_{2,25}=2.904$ ($p=0.0322$), which shows a remarkable progress of linguistic knowledge in Spanish within this group of students.

The phenomenon we have just emphasised seems to be confirmed when comparing length of stay in the country to the level of GS in Latin American and non-Latin American students. Up to 3 years after arriving in the country, significant differences appear in favour of the first group (Latin American), with a value of $F_{1,29}=7.376$ ($p=0.0110$). From that point on the difference becomes less obvious [$F_{1,6}=0.276$ ($p=0.6180$) for “3-6 years” groups] and after 6 years the knowledge of Spanish is rather similar, as may be observed in Figure 1 [$F_{1,6}=0.006$ ($p=0.9400$)]. However, in both cases the results are still lower than those obtained by autochthonous students.

Figure 1: Evolution of GS according to length of stay. Immigrant students presented in contrast to autochthonous students, distinguishing between Latin American and non-Latin American



4. Discussion

Several works in the English-speaking world (Cummins, 1981b; Collier, 1987; Ramírez, 1992; Klesmer, 1994; Thomas & Collier, 1997; Gándara, 1999; Hakuta, Butler & Witt, 2000) show that full skill development in the L2 by immigrant students is a long and complex process. Our global results seem to support the main conclusions found in previous research, also in the case of acquisition of Spanish by students recently arrived in Spain.

The data we have presented, similar in many aspects to those analysed by Maruny & Molina (2000) for the acquisition of Catalan, reveal the extent to which the variables home language and length of stay in the host country determine linguistic development in the language of instruction. Therefore we can state that there is lower linguistic knowledge in immigrant students on the whole when compared to local students of the same age and academic level. If these differences are obvious in the case of Latin American students, they are even more so when focusing on non-Latin American children. Furthermore, as can be expected, when comparing both groups (Latin American and non-Latin American) the first group tends to show relatively higher scores. It is necessary to underline the relative character of these scores in as much as, when analysing the incidence of length of stay, we observed that the evolution of linguistic skills according to this variable is scarcely noticeable among Latin American students. No significant intra-group differences appeared in this group, whereas progress among non-Latin American is remarkable. When considering exclusively those who have spent less than three years in Spain, we may observe a significantly better level in Latin American students. However, this situation is less obvious as length of stay increases until, at one point, the level is the same for students who have spent more than 6 years in our schools.

Anyhow, even in this case scores for both groups are still lower than those obtained by local students. In other words, after more than 6 years of stay and schooling in Spain, immigrant students still show difficulties in the language of the school language when compared to the average native student. This is so when their home language is a Latin American variety of Spanish or any other foreign language.

All this may come as a surprise for those who argue that bilingual immersion programmes, as such, should be used for this type of student. Nonetheless, we should not forget that for a fairly high number of immigrant students, schooling in the host country also implies home-school language shift. The starting point, though, is not the same for these students as it is for their Spanish-speaking counterparts, in as much as the latter have participated in immersion programmes in Catalonia or the Basque Country since the 80s. This has also been the case for English-speaking students who

have been following programmes in French-speaking Canada. In these cases, students' L1 does not generally coincide with the language used for teaching. Yet, they are taught by bilingual teachers who are thoroughly trained in a communicative and instrumental perspective of language which contextualises linguistic exchanges in order to negotiate meaning, without forcing L2 use on the students (Huguet, 2007; May, 2008). Another positive aspect is that students are generally capable of transferring L2 abilities to L1, as it is present in the social context (Cummins, 2008; Huguet, 2008, 2009). On the contrary, in most linguistic submersion programmes, such as the ones in which minority group or immigrant students tend to be schooled (Skutnabb-Kangas, 1990; Arnau, 1992), teachers are not competent in the students' L1. Additionally, if students possess a certain command of L2, this can have negative effects on their linguistic and academic progress. This may be so either because students are assumed to be able to follow tasks in that L2 or perhaps because teachers stop making an effort to contextualise language in situations where meaning is negotiated, given that many local students in the classroom already understand what is being said. One direct consequence is that immigrant students do not develop their linguistic competence neither in the L2 nor in the L1, as the latter is not present in school tasks. This has negative consequences on the rest of subjects taught through that L2 (Hernández-Chávez, 1984; Licón-Khistry, 1992; Cummins, 1996, 2000a; Cummins & Hornberger, 2008).

To conclude, any scholar concerned with the study of immigration knows only too well that educational policies are not enough to counteract the disappointing results we have just presented. He or she will also be aware of the overlap of psycholinguistic and didactic factors (as those referred to in the previous paragraph) and of the socio-political issues coming into play, which according to Cummins make up (2000a: 50) '(...) two sides of the same coin'. Thus, we cannot help asking ourselves what school and researchers can do to help adapt to this new social reality.

In the first place, we want to point out the need for more consistent research on this topic. The use of bigger samples would help us gain better understanding of the importance of the variables analysed here. On the other hand, the role played by variables not present in our study (didactic methodology, role and evolution of language attitudes, age of arrival, reception classes vs. transition classes, among others) could also be clarified.

At the same time, it would be extremely interesting to implement educational projects based on the development of intercultural programmes that, to a certain extent, take into account the language of immigrant students. Whilst being fully aware of the difficulties involved in the process: spectacular growth in the number of languages,

some of which cannot be used as means of instruction, and lack of competent teachers to teach them (Vila, 2006), but this type of programme has produced highly effective results in certain contexts (Coelho, 1998, 2003). In all honesty, we believe the possible benefits of this research are well worth the effort.

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