

Young Multilingual Immigrants in Spain. The Role of Individual and Social Variables

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Immigration in recent decades has configured a more multilingual space than there has ever been before in Spain. The double purpose of this study was to discover self-reported use of language by foreigners and their linguistic competence in both formal and informal Spanish environments. An Index of Linguistic Competence in Spanish (ILCS) based on oral, phonetic, written and comprehension capabilities was designed for this. Data were from a survey given to the foreign population aged 14 to 18 residing in the Province of Almería (Spain). The results show that the level they have acquired is lower than native students. Furthermore, there are considerable differences among the foreigners themselves by age, years of residence in Spain, years in school, and origin.
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Introduction

Linguistic communities not only provide an important basis for classification of the speakers, but are also indicative of ethnic identity. More specifically, ethnolinguistic vitality is understood as “what makes it possible for a group to behave as a distinctive entity and group in inter-group contacts” (Giles et al 1977: 308).

Among other changes, migratory flows are leading to a new multilingual dimension (Apple – Muysken 1996). This reality creates wide social, political and educational discussions about how this affects identity (reidentification) and the wealth and new opportunities multilingualism generates.

Linguistic diversity and the various levels of competence in the language of destination is probably one of the elements of greatest concern in an education system such as the one in Spain (Baker 1997; Mateo 1995; Salazar 2003), which until a short time ago was monolingual². This is immediately evident in the linguistic ability of Spaniards compared to other countries with a clearly bilingual orientation. It also demonstrates the present difficulties for foreign children in education and learning, leading to a higher rate of school failure

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² It was not until the Constitution of 1978 when Galician, Basque and Catalan, the languages of three different autonomous regions, were recognized in Spain as official languages. But emphasis on multilingual education is even more recent.

than native children, which is worse in those who enroll later, as shown by Huguet and Navarro (2006). Moreover, in some cases, the teachers themselves argue that immigrant children enrolled early learn the language naturally by immersion without the need for specific activities (Navarro and Huguet 2005, 2010), for which, as reality has shown, an in-depth revision of the educational perspective of the teaching staff is necessary, as recommended by Ruiz-Bikandi and Camps (2007).

In view of the above, the purpose of this article is to determine the level of foreign student competence in Spanish compared with native language skills in order to acquire information on their education and their future possibility for insertion, taking individual and structural variables from the segmented assimilation theory as a reference. To do this, first the major theories on immigrant integration in the host society applied to language are reviewed. Research in two aspects of language is described in the Results. First, the use of oral and written Spanish as a second language is analyzed in informal situations such as the family and neighborhood (*Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills*), that is, in conversational face-to-face contexts in which non-linguistic signals assist speakers in understanding the meaning and sense of linguistic production. Second, the skills in using language in formal situations (*Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency*) (Cummins 2002), understood as those in which there is no other speaker, are analyzed, and knowledge must be demonstrated only by linguistic procedures.

The article is therefore based on two different types of information. First, the foreigners' self-reported use of their native language and Spanish in spoken and written contexts, and secondly their proficiency in different aspects of the Spanish language (WE, OC, OE, PH). We attempt to distinguish their use of language and their level of competence in formal and informal contexts using the Index of Linguistic Competence in Spanish (ILCS) which was constructed for the purpose.

Theoretical perspective

The assimilationist theory has dominated the field of the linguistic accommodation of immigrants. This theory claims that there is a natural process by which various ethnic groups end up sharing the language of the host society as a common language, since it provides a better opportunity structure. In other words, immigrants gradually abandon cultural models in favor of those of the host society and in a few generations become monolingual (Gordon 1964; Nahirny – Fishman 1996). Specifically, Fishman (1972) argues that in North America, loss of the native language occurs in the third generation. There is no lack of studies on this subject, such as the one by Lopez (1978), in

which he observed that Latinos lost their mother language in the United States, just as the first waves of European immigrants did (Zhou 1997).

Critics of this model, especially of linear acculturation, point out that some immigrant communities, for example Hispanics and Asians in the United States, perpetuate their cultural patterns over time, generations in fact, and for this, language is fundamental. Social networks, development and better diffusion by communications media help them to maintain constant interaction with their home communities, and they therefore do not assimilate according to a concrete cultural pattern. That is, the consolidation of transnational communities³ (see, e.g., Glick Schiller et al 1992; Portes et al. 1999) in which immigrants retain permanent contact with their place of origin, prevents them from disconnecting from their ethnic context and can thereby impede acculturation. Transnationalism evokes an image of ceaseless movement to and from host and home countries. This produces pidginization, or linguistic hybridization, resulting in the *Spanglish* spoken by Latinos resident in the United States or the *Rumañol* of Romanians in Spain.

As a result, the problems of the assimilationist model for describing the accommodation of children of immigrants in the host society have caused other explanatory attempts to appear. Among these, the most outstanding is the multicultural stream. This perspective sees societies as the result of a collection of heterogeneous ethnic and racial groups (Glazer – Moynihan 1970) in which the host society is the result of an amalgam of minority groups in the framework of a more general society and culture, where individuals speak both their native languages and that of the host, usually producing clear multilingualism. This argument, however, does not explain how those cultural patterns are transmitted over a long period of time or why all individuals are not bilingual or identify with their home ethnic content.

In some way, the above explanations are excessively linear, leaving explanatory gaps in the face of differences in integration between groups and their descendents. Portes and Rumbaut (2006) suggest that interrelationships between the host context and immigrant group characteristics, especially human and social capital, are the most relevant to their integration. Moreover, the behavior and differentiated combination of those elements led Portes, et al. to propose another theoretical alternative called *segmented assimilation*, based on empirical studies of second and third generations. This theory argues that immigrant integration is not a linear process, and their inclusion depends on the stratification of the host society and group characteristics, the combination of

³ Transnational migration involves literally living across borders, including systematic participation in networks and interactions that transcend the borders of any given country (Glick Schiller 1999: 96). It is therefore a phenomenon in which people conserve the social, political and economic patterns of their own country, at the same time they build up links in the host country (Zanfiri 2004).

which results in different strategies. The first involves acculturation and integration in the country's middle class, coinciding with the classical concept of assimilation. The second goes in the opposite direction, that is, leads to permanent poverty and assimilation in the lower class, and native language usage. This shows that, in spite of possible economic progress, they deliberately choose to keep their own values and those of their homeland through community social networks and in-group solidarity (*selective acculturation*), also using the native language in their own settings and only using the host language for certain economic matters and relations with the outgroup.

Years before the appearance of this theory, Kremnitz (1979) proposed that in multilingual contexts, there are four attitudes in sociolinguistic domains. First, self-hate, characterized by rejection of the native language; second, compensatory, pushing for greater functional development of the native language to relieve its lack of sociolinguistic weight; third, solidarity, when the higher strata near the linguistic performance of the bases; and finally, the attitude of abstentionism, abandoning the native language in favor of the mainstream language, although not rejecting it as in the first attitude.

This model has not been exempt from criticism either, especially in its application to contexts outside of North America⁴. On the Old Continent, the literature shows that the adaptation of second generations, not only of different countries, but also of different groups, is irregular, following patterns that do not fit exactly or are different from those proposed by segmented assimilation. Furthermore, the role or influence of the State and its policies, which are not involved in this process in North America, are at issue (see, e.g., Crul and Vermeulen 2006; Thomson and Crul 2007). For example, Crul and Vermeulen (2003) underline the role of different systems of education in shaping the integration of the second and following generations.

In any case, as remarked by Zhou (1997), it is a process in which a multitude of factors intervene on the family, individual and contextual level. Among the most important individual elements are education, age, time of residence, desires and origin. Structural factors include the economic capacity of the family, ethnic group and place of residence.

During the last decades of the 20th century, the theoretical framework established by Cummins (1979, 1981) has strongly influenced research of the phenomenon of bi-/multilingualism. This concentrates mainly on the relationship between bilingualism and cognitive development (*dual iceberg model*). Three notions are analyzed: the distinction between basic interpersonal

⁴ Even in the North American context itself, Xie and Greenman (2005) explain, based on empirical data, that there are more than three pathways, since the initial proposal did not take into account the combination of all the socioeconomic scenarios possible with the different acculturation strategies.

communication skills (BICS) and cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP), the theory of interdependence, by which there is a connection between the two (or more) languages that a bilingual person speaks, and the threshold hypothesis, that learning Language 2 is based on knowledge of Language 1.

When results are analyzed from Cummins' perspective, a distinction is suggested between two types of skills, conversational skills in a second language acquired rather quickly in two or three years (BICS), and cognitive academic language proficiency, which is a longer process that can take from five to seven years (CALP).

For Cummins (1981), the distinction between the two kinds of competence is determined by the context in which the learner is acting: In the classroom he is in a limited communication context, predominated by the teacher's discourse, which uses a language that is not very understandable, and sometimes suited only to the subject. The student's linguistic skills in the second language associated with learning (CALP) need to be well developed to face the challenge. However, outside, with family or friends, the learner is in a wider context, where cognitive communication requirements are lower and only basic communication skills (BICS) are needed.

Cummins' research has not been without criticism. The first concerns the fact that the distinction between colloquial vs. academic language is an autonomous perspective on language that ignores its situation in social practices and power relationships (Edelsky et al., 1983; Wiley 1996). Furthermore, the CALP notion promotes a "deficit theory" to the extent that the school failure of bilingual students indicates "low cognitive capacity" instead of inadequate schooling (Edelsky 1990; Edelsky et al., 1983; Martín – Romaine 1986).

These criticisms are of great interest and are mentioned in this article because although the Cummins classification continues to be a very valuable tool for analysis of bilingualism, it has to be interwoven in a wider socioeconomic and legal context: the immigrant's success or failure in school is marked by educational policy.

It therefore becomes relevant to the two theoretical perspectives together. First, that which explains the different ways in which second generations become integrated in the host country, and second, the theory of the acquisition of linguistic competence. This provides results based not only on the individual capacity of the student, but also derived from the host context.

Method and data

The research carried out in the Province of Almería (Spain) is of interest for several reasons. The first is its geographic location in the south of the country, which makes it one of the major gateways for Africans entering Spain and

Europe. Second, it has the second highest immigration rate in Spain (21.6%) after Alicante (24.1%). And third, it is host to a population arriving from all continents totaling over one hundred different nationalities and as many languages (García and Carmona 2002).

Official Spanish statistics provide data neither on the generations of foreign populations, nor on their linguistic competence. These limitations required a specifically designed research methodology. A survey was given, originally taking the immigrant population, understood as foreigners⁵ who were not from the “old” European Union states (the EU 15)⁶, as the universe. This includes Africans and Asians aged 14 to 18 residing in municipalities and cities in the Province of Almería with a high immigration density in 2009⁷. The surveys were taken at 10 public schools in different municipalities that complied with the requirement that at least 15% of the student body had to be foreigners, according to data from the Provincial Delegation of Education. The level of confidence is 95.5%, with a sampling error of for a sample comprised of 221 surveys.

Table 1. **Survey technical data**

Origin	N	K	P	E	n
Eastern European	193	2 σ	0.5	\pm 5%	81
Maghrebi	172	2 σ	0.5	\pm 5%	71
Subsaharan	135	2 σ	0.5	\pm 5%	56
Asian	34	2 σ	0.5	\pm 5%	13
	534				221

N (universe), K (confidence level), P (variability), E (sampling error) n (simple size)

All Spaniards (n=345) in the classrooms selected on that day were also interviewed as a control group.

Concerning the measurement instruments, in informal situations, the students were asked what language, spoken and written, they used mainly outside of the school environment, especially in their families and homes. This was called active when they normally spoke mostly Spanish and otherwise passive.

To measure competence in Spanish in a formal setting, the school was chosen as the exclusive environment. The dependent variable is the index of linguistic competence in Spanish (ILCS). It is constructed from written

⁵ Not Spanish citizens. Although in the case of youngsters with double nationality, the foreign nationality was taken as a reference since the purpose of the study concentrated on the use of the mother tongue and Spanish.

⁶ The enlargement of the European Union in 2004 and 2007 was not included as they are, above all, countries which export labor to the rest of Europe.

⁷ Almería (capital), Roquetas de Mar, El Ejido, La Mojonera, Níjar, Vícar, Pulpí and Cuevas del Almanzora.

expression (WE), oral comprehension (OC), oral expression (OE) and phonetics (PH). Each section receives a score from 0 (very poor) to 4 (very good), based on the right and wrong answers to questions used in similar studies (Navarro – Huguet 2010). 1 point was given for the last two categories. Therefore, the index varies from 0 to 4 where 0 indicates no linguistic competence⁸. The ILCS for the formal context was constructed with the cooperation of the teachers, who checked each of the indicators proposed (WE, OC, OE, PH) on the student self-report forms as a validity test. However, the measurement of these categories using the ILCS in the informal sphere is more complicated, as we had to rely on the self-reported response. In spite of this methodological limitation, we expect that the results provided are valid.

According to the theory of segmented assimilation, there are two basic elements among the independent variables that should be considered in the analysis. First, the origin of the immigrants. Due to the diversity of their origins and numbers, we have grouped them into Eastern European, African (Maghrebi and Sub-Saharan) and Asian⁹. Second, the time factor. Integration is inherently different for new arrivals than for those who have been here longer or were born in the host country. We therefore took a generation as the reference.

The category of second generation (see Portes – Rumbaut 2006) immigrants includes: children of immigrants born in Almería (“Pure second generation”); those born in home country who arrived in Spain with their parents when under 12 and over 6 years of age (“Generation 1.5”); children of immigrants born abroad who arrived in Spain with their parents when over 12 and under 18 (“Generation 1.25”); and finally, those immigrants who arrived as the bridgehead (first generation) along with some other family member, or unaccompanied, and who are going to school.

Other independent variables included in the analysis, which were also used in previous studies (see e.g., Alba 1988; Alba et al. 2002; Lutz 2006; Stevens 1986), are Gender (male=1); Religion (Catholic=1); Years of school in Spain (years), Social class (high=1); Income (lowest percentile=1); Type of parental marriage (mixed marriage=1) and Neighborhood (majority foreigners=1).

Results

This section is divided into three parts. The first analyzes the spoken and written skills of the student in both his native language and in Spanish, in informal settings (family and friends and residential). The second approaches

⁸ Although the Spanish context is a multilingual reality, the analysis of competence using the ILCS was done only from a bilingual perspective comparing the native language to Spanish.

⁹ North Americans or people from Oceania are not included in the analysis because there were hardly any in the classrooms. The majority of these populations are over 18 years old. And for obvious reasons, Latin Americans are also excluded since Spanish is their native language.

formal linguistic competence at school through the index constructed for the purpose. And finally, a third where we attempt to find out the main variables that explain their variability.

As demonstrated by García and Carmona (2002), there are 101 different languages in the context of this study. Thirty of them are Indo-European, five Altaic, six Afro-Asiatic, forty-five Niger-Kordofanian, one Nilo-Saharan, four Austrian, nine Amerindian and two Sino-Tibetan. There are even speakers who use several languages, especially from territories which were colonized at some time in their history. As Calvet (2001) explains, in African urban areas, there is intense multilingualism as an imperative instrument of coexistence and a requirement for communication.

In this study, we used the definition of mother tongue (native language, popular language, mother language, or first language), from the Dictionary of the Real Academia Española (RAE), as the first language a person learns or the language spoken in his country (L1). The mother tongue is definitively the one a person knows best in the sense of subjective assessment by the individual with respect to the other languages he knows. It is also the language acquired naturally, through interaction with his immediate surroundings, without being taught and without conscious linguistic reflection. We understand the native language to be ancestral in nature and not, although known, imposed by colonization. In general, the mother tongue is learned from the family. Skill in the mother tongue is indispensable to later learning as it constitutes the basis of thought. Moreover, incomplete skill in the mother tongue is an impediment to learning Second Languages (L2). With this decision in mind, we proposed first finding out the self-reported use of written and spoken Languages 1 and 2. It was found that the native language (L1) was used in the destination (see Table 2) by everyone surveyed in the family setting, without distinction of origin or generation. However, differences appeared in their written skills. The first thing observed was that, except for Europeans, in the rest of the communities, the ability to write in the native language decreases as the generation advances. In other words, while most of the first generation can write their native language in formal environments, the same does not hold true in the second generation. This trend is observed more among Africans, as a result of educational deficiencies in those societies, especially in school enrolment.

Concerning the use of Spanish as a second language (L2), it was observed that in the neighborhood, the oral language was mostly active in all the groups analyzed, and this was accentuated with the passing generations. The situation of the written language is similar, although the figures are considerably lower, especially in the first generation, since these young people have spent less time in Spanish schools, and their main goal is finding employment in the labor market to assist in their home economy.

The immigrant need for accommodation in the host society explains the use of Spanish as the instrument for communication. Therefore, when use made by immigrants of L2 had been found, we proceeded to our second goal, which was to find out how correct that usage is.

Table 2. Use of native language and Spanish by origin and generation (%)

Origin	Generation	Native language (L1)				Second language (Spanish) (L2)			
		Spoken		Written		Spoken		Written	
		Active	Passive	Active	Passive	Active	Passive	Active	Passive
European	1	100	0	100	0	74.4	25.6	25	75
	1.25	100	0	100	0	87.5	12.5	36.5	63.5
	1.5	100	0	100	0	92.2	7.8	55	45
	2	100	0	100	0	98	2	60.5	39.5
Maghrebi	1	100	0	92.4	7.6	65.3	34.7	10	90
	1.25	100	0	92.3	7.7	72.3	27.7	13.2	86.8
	1.5	100	0	83.7	16.3	88	12	37	63
	2	100	0	63.6	36.4	93.1	6.9	45.2	54.8
Sub-Saharan	1	100	0	77.8	22.2	62.1	37.9	12	88
	1.25	100	0	72.2	27.8	63.7	36.3	13.1	86.9
	1.5	100	0	43.2	56.8	70.1	29.9	35.3	64.7
	2	100	0	29.3	70.7	74.3	25.7	41.4	58.6
Asian	1	100	0	99.3	0.7	54.9	45.1	7	93
	1.25	100	0	97	3	60.4	39.6	10.8	89.2
	1.5	100	0	75	25	68.8	32.2	31.4	68.6
	2	100	0	64	36	94	6	40.1	59.9

Source: by author.

To do this, we studied the use of Spanish in the formal school environment. The first thing shown by the data is the poor linguistic competence of foreign students in the schools analyzed (see Table 3), where the mean (1.8) is below the middle of the scale compared to 3.3 for natives. The greatest differences were in comprehension of a text, where foreigners scored a mean of 0.9 compared to 3.1 for natives. The least differences appeared in oral expression and phonetics. In all cases, the Fisher significance test for the means is significant. This difference in the use of Spanish between natives and immigrants is of fundamental importance in later competence for social insertion and/or employment.

Although it is true that Spanish as a second language is used quite a lot by all the groups and generations in their residential settings, they do not use it correctly according to linguistic rules.

It is observed that by origin, Europeans scored the highest. Several obvious reasons explain why their acquisition of skills is better. First, their education systems exert stricter control of school enrolment, which facilitates learning

other languages. Second, in some cases there are common language roots, for example Romanian, which is also the language of the largest population of Eastern Europeans in Spain. The rest of the groups show very similar data.

Table 3. **ILCS scores for foreigners and natives**

	Mean Immigrants	Mean natives	P
OC	0.9	3.1	<0.001
WE	1.8	3.3	<0.000
OE	2.2	3.2	<0.001
PH	2.4	3.8	<0.012
ILCS	1.8	3.3	

Source: by author.

ILCS scores: 0=very poor; 4=very good

As expected, scores are better for Second generation and Generation 1.5, since those populations have received most or all of their education in Spain.

Table 4. **ILCS by origin and generation**

Origin	Eastern European	Maghrebi	Sub-Saharan	Asian
OC	1.4	0.7	0.7	0.5
WE	2.6	1.4	1.5	1.7
OE	3	2.4	2.1	2
PH	3.2	2.5	2	2.2
ILCS	2.55	1.75	1.57	1.6

Generation	First generation	Generation 1.25	Generation 1.5	Second Generation
OC	0.4	0.6	1.3	1.8
WE	1	1.1	1.9	2.5
OE	1.6	1.8	2.7	3.3
PH	1.4	1.6	2.4	2.8
ILCS	1.1	1.27	2.07	2.6

Source: by author.

ILCS scores: 0=very poor; 4=very good

In the last step of the analysis, individual and social variability on the scale was evaluated. In the first model, we only included the origin and generation. In Model 2, we added the rest of the individual and social variables.

Model 1 shows the importance of generation in explaining acquisition of Spanish linguistic skills. More specifically, the second generation, with the first as the reference, is the variable that best explains the scale, followed by Generation 1.5. In other words, the children of foreigners born in Spain or who arrived at a young age have a better mastery of the language. Likewise,

immigrants of all origins, but especially the Eastern Europeans and Maghrebis, had better linguistic competence than the Sub-Saharanans.

In Model 2, data on origin and generation remain almost constant, although with a slight explanatory increase. It is again the generation, after individual and social variables have been included, which is the most important dimension in explaining variation on the scale. Among the individual variables, the most important are years at school and years of residence in Spain, male gender, and negatively, residing in a neighborhood with a majority population from the same country. So it is clear that the more time spent in school, the better their mastery of Spanish. The same is true of years of residence. Nevertheless, years in school are more important than years of residence, from which it is inferred that formal environments promote learning better than informal. Men also know the language better than women, as this is highly influenced by women from Africa and Asia, and they take a secondary position in education. This is also evident when they have to learn a second language. Finally, residing in a neighborhood where the majority is from the same country means they mostly speak the native language, reducing their use of Spanish. This residential segregation (Checa and Arjona, 2007) and resulting feedback from the mother tongue does not benefit integration in the host country under the same conditions as natives.

The other variables included in the regression analysis --social class, religion and mixed marriage with positive correlation and family income with negative correlation -- have little explanatory power in the model.

Table 5. Effects of individual and social variables on the ILCS

		Model 1	Model 2
Origin	Sub-Saharan Africa (reference)		
	Eastern Europe	0.241*	0.246*
	Maghreb	0.121*	0.121*
	Asia	0.023**	0.025**
Generation	First generation (reference)		
	Generation 1.25	0.107*	0.111*
	Generation 1.5	0.243*	0.256*
	Second generation	0.465*	0.476*
Individual variables	Sex (Male)		0.125**
	Social class (high)		0.097**
	Religion (Catholic)		0.038***
	Years of school in Spain		0.321*
Social variables	Family income (low)		-0.098**
	Mixed Marriage		0.056***
	Neighborhood (mostly foreign)		-0.123**
Coefficient R ²		0.32	0.41

Source: by author.

*P <0.001; **P < 0.01; *** P <0.05

Discussion and conclusions

Migration generates strong economic, legal, political, residential and health-care challenges in the host societies. This is accompanied by such contributing problems as linguistic diversity, a basic element in a globalized world. Thus in the latest Strategic Plan of the Spanish Government for integrating immigrants, the linguistic question is posed as a dual educational goal: learning Spanish, and maintaining the native language as a sign of cultural identity.

Therefore, the main purposes of this article are to examine immigrant use of the Spanish language, the linguistic competence of foreigners compared to Spaniards, and the variables that affect their variability.

The first thing the data show is the wide use of the native language in family settings after migration. Everyone surveyed stated that they used the native language exclusively at home with their families. Writing is different, since for Africans and Asians especially, the second generation either does not know it well, or not enough to be used habitually. They are therefore the ones who read and write letters or documents in Spanish.

However, once outside of the family setting, the use of Spanish as a communication instrument is more frequent, especially in the neighborhoods. Although here, differences are also evident in the use of spoken Spanish. In other words, the Europeans are again those who most use Spanish as a communication instrument in informal communication settings. This situation is explained mainly by residential segregation. Checa and Arjona (2007) show how Africans are the most residentially segregated in the Province of Almería. Spatial concentration means that their nearest neighbors are from the same country or share their native language or the language of colonization, making the language used for communication mainly that of their home country. This situation diminishes with second generation immigrants, since they already know the Spanish language quite well and are accustomed to using it with these same people at school.

As a result, segregated living implies reduced heterogeneity and a widening of social networks, which is basic in explaining linguistic continuity (Milroy and Wei 1990), since monolingualism prevails.

However, Europeans are much more homogeneously distributed, which allows them to have neighbors who are Spaniards as well as those from their own country, a situation which “obligates” them to use Spanish more frequently. In fact, in some cases, in the period when a second language is being acquired, linguistic hybridization occurs. That is, an interlingual stage is occasionally produced when it is necessary to find a minimum connection allowing interaction. This is the specific case of *Rumañol*, since they are further

united by a common linguistic family. With time, this tends to disappear, and it is more difficult to find interlingualism among second generation students.

However, an increased use of Spanish does not imply that it is used correctly, and we wanted to find out how well it was used. The data also showed that foreigners' linguistic knowledge is worse than natives in a formal setting such as school. This situation is repeated in other international environments (see, e.g., Cummins 2002; Thomas and Collier 1997) and elsewhere in Spain (Navarro and Huguet 2005, 2010). The differences are wider in oral comprehension and written expression, and to a lesser degree in oral expression and phonetics, which are habits acquired in places of daily interaction. Moreover, Singuan (1998) found that the differences between foreign and native students in Spain was more accentuated in subjects connected to language and less so in subjects like mathematics where the language is more universal. This led Thomas and Collier (1997) to suggest that for students to be able to acquire fluency in the mainstream language quickly, they must be exposed to it in their surroundings and at school, since there are important differences in the language in formal and informal situations.

In any case, this de facto situation in turn leads to more school failure than their native peers (Vila 2006, Siguan 1998) and later difficulty for integration in primary labor market segments (Piore 1974).

The relationship between the linguistic competence of immigrants and their achievements in the labor market has been one of the most common subjects of interest for language economics (Grin 2003). In Spain, Alarcón (2004) found differences in the selection and promotion of staff depending on their linguistic profiles, and in general, positions of superordination or subordination linked to national origin in business culture, and of some languages over others in staff stratification. Moreover, the few analytical studies on the influence of language knowledge on the ability of immigrants to get a job in Spain also show that linguistic community (specifically, South America) favors greater and faster assimilation of immigrant labor (Sanromá – Ramos – Simón 2006).

However, linguistic discrimination studies have not precisely resolved the question of whether that discriminatory result is due to “pure discriminatory orientation”, the fruit of the economic actors' preference or prejudice; or to a “statistical discrimination”, based on the fact that when employer and worker belong to the same linguistic community, the first can evaluate the potential productivity of the second; or whether it is simply a matter of more difficult communication among individuals of different ethno-linguistic groups.

In any case, we are in the presence of ethnodiscrimination “necessarily” linking immigrants to certain jobs depending on the preferences of the employer, masked by some kind of not very objectionable cultural justification in which linguistic competence becomes a means of discrimination.

There are also noticeable differences between the competence of first generation and Generation 1.25 foreigners and that acquired by second generation or Generation 1.75. It is clear that insertion at an early age in the Spanish education system confers knowledge of language that those who enter later do not have, even though they have taken the special language classes offered by the Spanish education system. Even within the inequalities predicted by the segmented assimilation theory, differences by origin appear. Thus Europeans acquire linguistic competence more rapidly than Africans and Asians, who learn it more slowly. As mentioned above, this situation is due to common linguistic roots and more consolidated education systems.

The opinion that if students have a certain mastery of the language in normal communicative situations, they have it in all environments is widely held. When, as Cummins (2002) reminds us, and as the data in this study also show, conversational language which the subject may acquire more or less easily should be differentiated from formal language which requires years of education.

There is no lack of international or Spanish studies (see Broeder and Mijares 2003; Coelho 2005; Extra and Yagmur 2002; Navarro and Lapestra 2007; Pedersen 2002) showing that to make this process more efficient, teachers should ideally become competent in the native languages of origin. Often, when activities are proposed to the foreign student thinking that he should be able to follow them without prior contextualization or negotiation of meanings, results are insufficient. Add to this the design of intercultural education itself, which is much more than just an intercultural week where dishes are tasted or typical costumes from various origins are worn.

Regression analysis showed that variability on the Index of Linguistic Competence in Spanish is mainly influenced by three variables: generation, years of school in Spain, and origin. The first two are logical, since the longer a student is in the Spanish education system, the better he uses the language. However, the differences in acquiring linguistic competence determined by origin transcend their own essence. That is, Europeans use and learn Spanish more than the rest of the groups studied. There are several reasons explaining this situation, some of which have been described above (education system in the home country, common family of languages or type of neighborhood), to which may be added economic possibilities and/or social class and transnationality. Arjona (2006) shows how Africans, Asians and Latins make up the majority of the population employed in secondary labor markets which, among other traits, are characterized by flexibility, irregularity, instability and precariousness. They provide low incomes and reduce the possibilities of acquiring education in other environments outside of school that generate additional costs. Furthermore, the jobs held by Africans are filled almost

exclusively by immigrants. This makes it more difficult for them to learn Spanish. However, Europeans occupy other labor niches which, in addition to providing more income, are also filled by Spaniards. Special mention should be made of Asians, mainly Chinese, who are employed in the service sector, especially in restaurants or “everything for 0.60€” shops. Their customers are mostly Spaniards although contact is reduced to charging or taking note of orders (in restaurants).

The transnational character of migration also favors maintenance of the native language. Europeans, once the Schengen Convention did away with borders, migrate with all or most of the family, leaving fewer links behind than Africans or Asians who have strong limitations for entering, even for regrouping the family. Frequent contact, due to the development of means of communication, of these transmigrants (Hannerz 1996; Pries 1999) with their homes makes it possible to maintain their cultural patterns over time, not to mention that family regrouping is an element for maintaining the native language, especially at home and in the first generation (García-Cano et al. 2010).

Gender also appears to have important statistical significance in variation on the scale. More specifically, men handle the language better than women. The reasons go beyond the formal environment, where teachers comment that girls get better grades than boys, especially in comprehension and written language. However, in oral expression they have more gaps. This situation is explained because their social networks are smaller than boys'. Beyond classmates, their social capital is very small, a situation which is open to men through football leagues or neighborhood gangs. Similarly, in Anglo-Saxon literature (Lutz 2006; Portes and Rumbaut 2006; Stevens 1986; Veltman 1981) women have been shown to tend to maintain or know the native language better over generations than men, especially due to daily structures of interaction.

The learning and use of Spanish definitely present perfectly differentiated trajectories, as suggested by the theory of segmented assimilation, but there are more than three itineraries, since in addition to the combination of generation and origin, other factors, such as residence, years of schooling and even sex, must be added.

We do not want to end this text without a reflection derived from both the data and from institutional management of this multilingual diversity. It seems clear that over time and generations, learning and use of the language of the destination country is consolidated. But also, as demonstrated by many studies referring to as many places, (Extra – Yagmur 2004; Fishman 1975; Stevens 1985, 1992; Thomas – Collier 1997), the tendency is for the native language to either disappear in the third generation or to leave only a residual knowledge,

and not for bilingualism to be used as a resource that widens opportunities for insertion in an ever more globalized world.

It is true that the Spanish education system in the last five years is making an enormous effort at bilingualism, especially with English, but it is not taking advantage of other varieties, such as Chinese, for example, which will be indispensable in a not very distant future, or Arabic, due to the proximity of Arabic-speaking countries. It could therefore take another generation to get on the multilingualism train.

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