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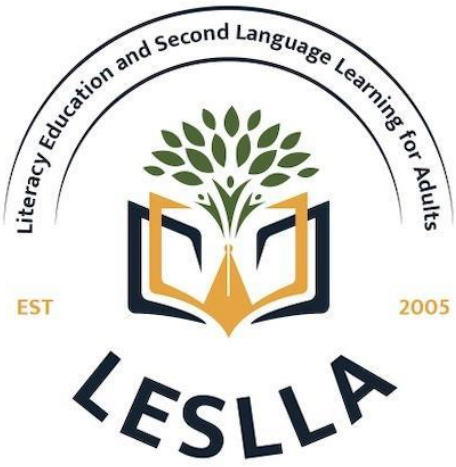

Recommended citation of this article

Chao Garcia, J., & Mavrou, I. (2021). Acquisition of Writing Skills by Adult Migrant Learners of Spanish . LESLLA Symposium Proceedings, 14(1), 127–149.

Citation for LESLLA Symposium Proceedings

This article is part of a collection of articles based on presentations from the 2018 Symposium held at University of Palermo, Palermo, Italy. Please note that the year of publication is often different than the year the symposium was held. We recommend the following citation when referencing the edited collection.

D'Agostino, M., Mocciaro, E. (Eds.) (2021). Languages and literacy in new migration. Research, practice and policy. Selected papers from the 14th Annual Meeting of LESLLA (Literacy education and second language learning for adults). Palermo University Press. https://lesllasp.journals.publicknowledgeproject.org/index.php/lesllasp/issue/view/478

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Acquisition of writing skills by adult migrant learners of Spanish

Javier Chao García – Irini Mavrou

The aim of the study was to identify the most common error types and spelling strategies in the written productions of 43 adult migrant learners of Spanish who took the Diploma LETRA exam. The results showed a clear prevalence of morphostructural errors and of phonetic and phonemic strategies. Length of stay in Spain was negatively correlated with the number of morphostructural errors and the number of words, while age was positively correlated with the number of morphostructural and total errors. Neither gender nor education level in the first language appeared to have an influence on the linguistic variables of the study.

Keywords: literacy, migrants, spelling strategies, writing errors, Diploma LETRA.

1. Introduction[1]

The acquisition of literacy skills in a second language (L2) is a challenging task for many migrant learners. This is probably due to the lower priority given to written expression within the communicative approaches of L2 teaching and learning, as well as to the fact that many migrants – especially those with a low or incomplete education level in their first language (L1) – might lack sufficient motivation to improve their literacy skills in the language of the host country.

The concepts of social identity, investment and relations of power also come into play when we try to understand the process of language acquisition in migration contexts (Norton Peirce 1995, 2000). For instance, the effort invested in learning the target language is related to the expected outcomes and benefits and is closely connected to learners' social identity. As Norton Peirce explains (1995: 18), the exchange of information in the target language implies

[1] This work was supported by the Community of Madrid and the European Social Fund [Grant number: H2015/HUM-3404 and H2019/HUM5772].

that L2 learners "are constantly organizing and reorganizing a sense of who they are and how they relate to the social world". Moreover, inequitable relations of power are often the reason why many migrants hesitate to practice the target language outside the classroom or with fluent native speakers (Norton Peirce 1995, 2000).

Although the above arguments mainly apply to L2 oral production, they can easily be extended to writing and literacy practices in general. Writing is a key element for everyday transactions that migrants have to carry out in order to find a job and be adequately integrated into the receiving societies (home, workplace, target language community, etc.). Therefore, reaching a minimum level of writing competence in the target language becomes not only an obvious need for this population but also a worthwhile investment for their personal and professional growth.

However, writing also differs from oral production in many aspects: purpose, planning, goals, rhetorical resources (Hayes and Flower 1980). Berninger (1994) established a distinction between text generation processes and low-level processes related to orthography and spelling, with the latter representing one of the most visible idiosyncrasies of written language. Spelling acquisition in alphabetical scripts has been viewed as a succession of developmental stages characterised by certain types of strategies (Bear and Templeton 1998; Ferreiro and Teberosky 1982; Gentry 1982; Henderson and Templeton 1986; Kurvers and Ketelaars 2011). Although spelling acquisition and first contact with literacy in migration contexts have been the focus of a growing number of studies, especially within the LESLLA (*Literacy Education and Second Language Learning for Adults*) framework (van de Craats et al. 2006), very little is known about the acquisition of L2 writing skills by migrant learners who have already mastered writing skills in their L1.

Based on the above ideas, the aim of the current study was twofold: first, to identify the most common error types and spelling strategies in the written productions of a group of migrant learners of Spanish with varied educational backgrounds; and second, to examine whether gender, age, education level, length of stay in Spain, and duration of Spanish language courses had an influence on the number of errors, words, and spelling strategies.

2. Literacy

Broadly speaking, the term *literacy* refers to all language activities related to written texts. Images, mathematical symbols, multimodal texts, and technological system management are also seen as important aspects of individuals' literacy skills. Therefore, literacy should be conceptualised from a more dynamic viewpoint in order to take into account its evolution over time. According to UNESCO (2004: 13):

> Literacy is the ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, communicate and compute, using printed and written materials associated with varying contexts. Literacy involves a continuum of learning in enabling individuals to achieve their goals, to develop their knowledge and potential, and to participate fully in their community and wider society.

Consequently, literacy is linked to several and, sometimes, quite different domains including cultural, historical, linguistic, religious, and socioeconomic spheres (UNESCO 2004), as well as executive, functional, instrumental, and epistemic ones (Wells 1987).

Literacy is also related to genre-specific knowledge. Discourse genres determine the ways in which the linguistic elements should be combined and used in specific communicative situations (Bajtin 1982). They represent complex and necessary solutions to deal with these situations (Günthner and Knoblauch 1995: 8). Therefore, it is important to understand how discourse genres are organised, what their formal features are, how these features vary depending on the situational or communicative context, as well as discourse genres' macrostructure (semantic content, global meaning) and superstructure (formal scheme) (van Dijk 1978). All of these interrelated concepts illustrate that rather than just a mental cognitive task, literacy is a social activity which arises within the society we live in and depends on pre-established sociocultural parameters (Cassany 2009: 23).

Drawing on literacy's sociocultural dimension, some authors (Cook-Gumperz and Gumperz 1981; Ong 2002) proposed a distinction between oral-alphabetised and written societies. It has been argued that such societies have an influence on individuals' ability to engage in and successfully carry out literacy tasks, since each society

promotes skills development in different ways (e.g. oral societies place emphasis on memorisation as opposed to abstraction, analysis, and reasoning in written societies).

However, this position has been challenged by Scribner and Cole (1978: 22), who claimed that:

> There is no basis for assuming, without further evidence, that the individual child, born into a society in which uses of literacy have been highly elaborated, must personally engage in writing operations in order to develop "literate modes of thought". That *may* be the case, but it requires proof, not simply extrapolation from cultural-historical studies.

The authors conducted a study with the Vai in Liberia, who use a phonetic writing system that comprises a limited number of characters and is acquired outside of instructional settings, without teaching materials and on the basis of memorisation and reading practices. This writing system coexists with two other scripts, the Arabic and the Roman alphabets. Although they did not find differences in performance on logical and classificatory tasks between non-schooled literates and non-literates, literates outperformed non-literates in communication, memory, and language analytical tasks, leading the authors to the conclusion that "literacy-without-schooling is associated with improved performance on certain cognitive tasks" (Scribner and Cole 1978: 35). It is also important to acknowledge that the term literacy *in plural* is becoming increasingly popular. The notions of *literacies* or *multiliteracies*, as suggested by Cope and Kalantzis (2009), go beyond the traditional emphasis on alphabetical literacy and highlight the wide range of phenomena related to multilingualism, different modes of conveying meaning (i.e. verbal, visual, audio, gestural, spatial, tactile) and different communication strategies. From this perspective, one of the main goals of multiliteracies pedagogy is to create the conditions for learning that allow individuals to be "comfortable with themselves as well as being flexible enough to collaborate and negotiate with others who are different from themselves in order to forge a common interest" (Cope and Kalantzis 2009: 174).

3. Writing

Writing is one of the most complex language skills, learned and mastered by a reduced number of people globally and used only occasionally in many cases (Cassany 2004). The acquisition of writing skills is influenced by diverse sociodemographic, sociocultural and psycholinguistic variables, although certain factors, such as phonemic awareness, appear to have a significant impact on writing development. Phonemic awareness is directly related to the *alphabetic principle*, that is, the letter-sound correspondence. This correspondence is found in languages that use alphabetic writing scripts (e.g. European languages), while it is not applicable to either ideographic (Chinese) or abjad (Arabic) writing systems. It has been suggested that word recognition goes through different stages that influence reading comprehension (Boon 2014; Boon and Kurvers 2008; Kurvers 2007). These stages are characterised by the use of increasingly refined decoding strategies that become more sophisticated as linguistic competence increases (i.e. visual recognition, letter naming, letter decoding, partial decoding, and direct word-recognition).

Writing development is also linked to the notions of *invented writing* and *invented spelling*, which are manifested in the use of non-conventional elements such as drawings, scribbles or any other incorrectly employed writing symbol. According to Hofslundsengen et al. (2016), these terms could also be used interchangeably in order to address the issue of invented spelling in a more general sense. Invented spelling is a common feature of *emergent writing*, that is, the gradual development of the ability to understand and use writing and orthography as a means of representing oral language (Kurvers and Ketelaars 2011: 49). Emergent writing is subject to certain developmental stages that have been defined based on different criteria (Bear and Templeton 1998; Ferreiro and Teberosky 1982; Gentry 1982, 2000; Kurvers and Ketelaars 2011). Focusing on adult learners with low literacy skills (LESLLA), Kurvers and Ketelaars (2011: 50) made the following remark: “Unlike young children, adult non-literates will not easily take a pen and pretend they are writing when asked to do so. Nevertheless, if they do, their early writings can be analysed using the developmental features brought forward by

Gibson and Levin (1976), Gentry (1982) and Tolchinsky (2003)". Indeed, methodology used in children's literacy acquisition research has recently been applied to low-literate learners, demonstrating a considerable qualitative leap in L2 acquisition by migrants. Drawing on the results of their study with low-literate participants and inspired by the proposals of Gentry (1982) and Henderson and Templeton (1986), Kurvers and Ketelaars (2011) identified five types of writing strategies: pre-phonetic strategies, semi-phonetic strategies, phonetic strategies, phonemic strategies, and conventional writing. Moreover, their findings showed a correspondence between these types of strategies and literacy level, supporting the idea that writing comprises several developmental stages, which are characterised by the prevalence of a certain type of strategy. Boon (2014) obtained similar results in her study on the acquisition of writing competence in Tetum L2 by low-literate learners, although she did not include phonemic strategies within her classification of writing strategies. Lastly, it is worth mentioning that research in the field of literacy development has predominantly focused on pre-school, primary and secondary – both L1 and L2 – learners, as well as on highly literate adult L2 learners. Studies examining literacy acquisition among low-literate migrants have been practically null (van de Craats et al. 2006: 8) and the same applies to adult migrants with varied educational backgrounds. Although a shift of interest has been recently observed, writing has still received minimal attention from researchers with few exceptions (Boon 2014; Kurvers and Ketelaars 2011).

4. Method

4.1. Participants

The written corpus was derived from 43 migrants, 18 males and 25 females, aged between 16 and 63 (M = 34.26, SD = 11.71), who attended the 5th edition of the Diploma LETRA examination (see Section 4.2) held in Madrid on the 28th and 29th of May 2016. Among the participants, 20 were from Romania, 11 were from Cameroon, and the remaining 12 participants were from Nigeria. It is important to note that there was considerable variability regarding participants'

education level and the amount of time they had lived in Spain ranging from some months to 18 years (M = 6.98, SD = 6.01). Eleven participants had a university degree, 8 had obtained a vocational degree, 5 had stopped their studies after high school (12 years of schooling), 16 after secondary education and 3 after primary education (10 and 6 years of schooling, respectively). Education level was established according to the information provided by the participants during registration on the day of the exam.

4.2. Instruments

The Diploma LETRA (*Lengua Española para Trabajadores Inmigrantes* 'Spanish Language for Migrant Workers') is a language proficiency test addressed to migrants whose linguistic competence in Spanish is equivalent to the A2-n level. This level is somewhat lower than the A2 level established by the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR; Council of Europe 2001). According to the CEFR, a learner at the A2 level:

> Can understand sentences and frequently used expressions related to areas of most immediate relevance (e.g. very basic personal and family information, shopping, local geography, employment). Can communicate in simple and routine tasks requiring a simple and direct exchange of information on familiar and routine matters. Can describe in simple terms aspects of his/her background, immediate environment and matters in areas of immediate need. (Council of Europe 2001: 24)

Since the purpose of the exam is to assess migrants' communicative ability to carry out everyday transactions related to public and professional domains, grammar correctness criteria are relatively flexible (Baralo 2012). The Diploma LETRA comprises four sections: reading comprehension, audiovisual comprehension, oral expression and interaction, and written expression and interaction. The data collected and analysed for the present study belong to the writing section of the exam (only Tasks 2 and 3). This section consists of three tasks and has a total duration of 20 minutes. In Task 1, candidates must fill in a form with personal information. In Task 2, they have to write a short essay in reply to an advertisement of a good

or a service from the public or personal domains, while in Task 3 candidates must respond to an email (e.g. accept or reject an invitation). Two independent raters assess candidates' performance in Tasks 2 and 3 using both a holistic and an analytic rubric. The holistic rubric gauges communicative effectiveness, legibility, and linguistic competence related to vocabulary and grammar. The analytic rubric includes the following descriptors: global expression and interaction, organisation and discourse cohesion and coherence, sociopragmatic competence, vocabulary accuracy and control, grammatical accuracy and control, and spelling skills (Baralo 2012: 20-22).

4.3. Procedure

4.3.1. Error analysis

Errors were classified into four categories: spelling errors, segmentation errors, grammatical errors, and lexical errors. Whereas grammatical and lexical errors reflect global linguistic deficiencies or lack of knowledge and are common in both L2 oral and written production, spelling errors indicate problems related to the graphic representation of the target language; thus, they provide a more reliable index of literacy development. Classifying errors into the abovementioned categories proved to be a difficult task due to several reasons. First, some errors seemed to be mere lapses or accidental errors (e.g. words written both correctly and incorrectly by the same participant). Second, the boundaries between error categories were often blurred. For example, it was difficult to determine whether common errors in the use of the Spanish pronouns *mí* and *me* were related to phonological difficulties (i.e. inability to perceive the difference between *i* and *e*) or to linguistic deficits (i.e. incomplete knowledge regarding the syntactic function of these pronouns). Third, as letter and word deletions were quite frequent in the written corpus, it was not always possible to establish which element(s) corresponded to the participants' final version. In these cases, only the letter or word for which the printed intensity in the original exam seemed greater was considered. Moreover, the number of errors was partially determined by the inferences that had to be made regarding

participants' communicative intention. For example, in the sentence **busca un camarero* ('we are looking for a waiter'), both *se busca* (impersonal form of the verb *buscar* which means 'look for') and *busco* (first person present tense of the verb *buscar*) would have been grammatically correct and acceptable. However, such errors were primarily grammar errors; in other words, the error would always have been counted as grammatical regardless of whether it was structural (*se busca*) or morphological (*busco*).

Another difficulty we had to deal with concerned the presence of different types of errors within the same word. We decided to count only one error in the following cases: letter reversal or transposition (**nesecitar* [*necesitar* 'to need'], **trajabar* [*trabajar* 'to work'], etc.); use of apostrophe between the definite article and the noun (**s'enteresa* [*te interesa* 'you are interested']); agreement errors (**la *otra país* [*el otro país* 'the other country']); homophonic forms (**haber* [*a ver* 'let's see']); chunks usually acquired as a whole, especially by learners of Spanish at an elementary level (**magustado* [*me ha gustado* 'I liked it']); and word omissions. On the other hand, names and personal information, capitalisation errors, use of dots instead of spaces between words, merged words, and punctuation marks were not taken into account. Moreover, omissions of articles and prepositions in Task 2 (job advertisement) were not counted, as long as they did not affect global coherence and would have been considered acceptable when replying to a job advertisement.

4.3.2. Spelling strategies

Drawing on previous research on emergent writing (Boon 2014; Kurvers and Ketelaars 2011), we attempted to identify, completely or partially, the same spelling strategies and establish a possible link between these strategies and writing development beyond emergent writing. To this end, both transcriptions and original written productions were used, whereas error analysis described in Section 4.3.1 proved to be particularly useful in identifying any strategies other than conventional writing. When different strategies were detected within the same word (e.g. **empesa* [*empieza* 'it starts'] includes a phonetic strategy – the omission of /i/ – and a phonemic

one – the use of *s* for *z*), only the more elementary spelling strategy was taken into account (the phonetic strategy in the above example).

4.3.3. Word counting

Word counting was also a difficult task, especially because of the irregular handwriting demonstrated by many participants. In addition, some lexical elements appeared to be superfluous when measuring text length or written fluency. For instance, the fact that migrants are able to write – correctly or incorrectly – their name and surname does not necessarily mean that they are more fluent in the target language. Thus, names and surnames were deemed as one single lexical unit. The same counting process was applied in the case of nicknames, contact or telephone numbers, emails, postal addresses, dates, abbreviated elements, words containing slashes (**dependentista/o* [*dependiente* 'shop assistant']) or split by a hyphen (**nueve-cientos* [*novecientos* 'nine hundred']), any amount of money expressed in euros, and illegible words or chunks.

On the other hand, segmentation errors did not affect word counting (e.g. **alas cuatro* [*a las cuatro* 'at four o'clock'] was counted as three words). Words such as *teléfono* ('telephone') or *tfn* ('tel.') before contact numbers were counted as one single word, while non-lexical elements (bullets, emoticons, signatures) were discarded from word counting. We also observed that many participants copied and used part of the writing instructions in their texts, which in turn might have resulted in a higher degree of linguistic accuracy or fluency. However, we opted to count these words as it seemed quite difficult to determine the boundaries for what constituted a copied or genuine written production.

5. Results

5.1. Error analysis and spelling strategies

Qualitative analysis of written productions yielded the following error categories:

1. Spelling errors: strictly spelling errors without considering punctuation marks, letter capitalisation, word separation, etc. (e.g. **experencia* [*experiencia* 'experience'], **hornada* [*jornada* 'working day'], **traier* [*traer* 'bring'], **nesesita* [*necesita* 'he/she needs'], etc.). Within this category, we observed errors not attributable to poor spelling skills but rather to circumstantial factors, such as poor handwriting, lapsus or calligraphic errors. For example, in Task 2 candidate 006 wrote **ne* instead of *me*, while she used the pronoun *me* correctly in other parts of her written discourse and demonstrated a clear ability to differentiate between *n* and *m*.
2. Segmentation errors: errors derived from the incorrect union or separation of two or more words (e.g. **voya* [*voy a* 'I'm going to'], **auna* [*a una* 'to one'], **acer* [*a ser* 'to be'], **alado* [*al lado* 'next to'], **seis cientos* [*seiscientos* 'six hundred'], **invita me* [*invítame* 'invite me'], etc.). We decided to include this category because of the difficulty in determining whether these errors resulted from poor spelling skills or the lack of vocabulary knowledge.
3. Morphostructural errors: errors related to syntactic and morphological aspects of Spanish as illustrated by the following examples: **quirero* [*quiero* 'I want'], *me *encantate* [*me encanta* 'I love it'], **buenos tardes* [*buenas tardes* 'good afternoon'], etc. It should be noted that syntactic errors mainly concerned prepositions (e.g. *voy *invitar* [*voy a invitar* 'I am going to invite'], *diez *por la noche* [*diez de la noche* 'ten o'clock at night'], etc.).
4. Lexical errors: errors in the choice of words (e.g. **suelo* ['ground', instead of *sueldo* 'salary'], **preció* ['price', instead of *sueldo* 'salary'], *coche con mucho *lugar* ['place', instead of *espacio* 'space'], etc.), omission of lexical elements (e.g. *fiesta de *curso* ['school year party', instead of *fiesta de fin de curso* 'end of school year party']), and language interferences (e.g., *el *dominiu* [*sector* 'sector, area'], **ball* [*pelota* 'ball'], etc.).

With respect to spelling strategies, conventional writing clearly prevailed, followed by phonetic and phonemic strategies. No pre-phonetic strategies were found, while only one participant used a semi-phonetic strategy (**war* [*voy a* 'I'm going to']). Features of phonetic and phonemic strategies were similar to those described by Kurvers and Ketelaars (2011). Regarding the former category, the phonetic structure of the word can be clearly identified but with errors in the use of its graphemes such as omissions (e.g. *me *encata* [*me*

encanta 'I love it'], **crso* [*curso* 'course'], **indefindo* [*indefinido* 'indefinite'], **nuesta* [*nuestra* 'our'], **compañante* [*acompañante* 'companion']), addition of redundant graphemes (e.g. **traier* [*traer* 'bring'], **contracto* [*contrato* 'contract']), and incorrect graphemes (e.g. **gustiria* [*gustaría* 'would like'], **guidad* [*cuidar* 'look after'], **quire* [*quise* 'I wanted']). On the other hand, the use of phonemic strategies shows that writers are aware of the phonemic structure of the word despite being unable to spell it correctly. In the present study, most confusions concerned the choice of graphemes such as *o/u, e/i, n/ñ/m* (**mananas* [*mañanas* 'mornings'], **tenporal* [*temporal* 'temporary']), *c/q/k* (**quarto* [*cuatro* 'four']), *d/t* (**posibilitades* [*posibilidades* 'possibilities']), *ch/c/s* (**nesesario* [*necesario* 'necessary']), *z/s* (**tailandeza* [*tailandesa* 'Thai']), *j/h* (**hornada* [*jornada* 'working day']), *s/x/z* (**escusas* [*excusas* 'excuses'], **hofresco* [*ofrezco* 'I offer']), and the use of *ni* or *ñi* instead of the Spanish letter *ñ* (**niñio* [*niño* 'kid'], **mañiana* [*mañana* 'tomorrow, morning']). Also frequent were the omission of the Spanish silent letter *h* (**orario* [*horario* 'schedule, timetable'], **asta* [*hasta* 'until']) and the use of double-letter words (**marrido* [*marido* 'husband'], **mess* [*mes* 'month']). This type of strategy also included words spelled incorrectly probably because of the influence of certain Spanish dialects (e.g. the omission of *-s* at the end of words).

5.2. Determining factors of writing skills

Based on the qualitative analysis described in Section 5.1, we conducted several quantitative analyses in order to determine the influence of certain individual and sociodemographic variables on writing errors and spelling strategies. Table 1 summarises the descriptive statistics for the following variables: participants' age; length of stay in Spain measured in years (LSS); duration of Spanish language courses (DSLC); number of words used in Task 2 (T2WORDS) and Task 3 (T3WORDS) of the writing section of the Diploma LETRA; number of spelling (SPEL), morphostructural (MORPH), lexical (LEX), and total errors (TOTAL) in each task; total number of errors in both tasks (T2T3TOTAL); and number of

phonetic (PHONETIC) and phonemic (PHONEMIC) strategies in each task.

	COUNTRY	MEAN	SD
Age	Romania	34.85	13.93
	Nigeria	37.25	6.80
	Cameroon	29.91	11.11
	Total	34.26	11.71
LSS	Romania	7.90	6.04
	Nigeria	9.75	6.43
	Cameroon	2.27	1.27
	Total	6.98	6.01
DSLC	Romania	7.50	6.18
	Nigeria	6.08	6.60
	Cameroon	2.45	2.21
	Total	5.81	5.84
T2WORDS	Romania	36.35	13.80
	Nigeria	35.75	12.54
	Cameroon	40.18	10.09
	Total	37.16	12.44
T2SPEL	Romania	1.50	2.04
	Nigeria	3.08	2.81
	Cameroon	2.27	2.57
	Total	2.14	2.45
T2MORPH	Romania	2.20	2.38
	Nigeria	3.83	3.54
	Cameroon	3.45	2.21
	Total	2.98	2.75
T2LEX	Romania	0.20	0.41
	Nigeria	0.50	0.67
	Cameroon	0.55	1.21
	Total	0.37	0.76
T2TOTAL	Romania	3.90	3.84
	Nigeria	7.42	5.66
	Cameroon	6.27	5.08
	Total	5.49	4.86
T3WORDS	Romania	33.85	9.52
	Nigeria	28.50	11.76
	Cameroon	37.91	10.63
	Total	33.40	10.79
T3SPEL	Romania	1.15	1.53
	Nigeria	1.75	2.01
	Cameroon	1.09	1.92
	Total	1.30	1.75
T3MORPH	Romania	1.95	2.16
	Nigeria	3.08	2.43

	Cameroon	3.18	4.07
	Total	2.58	2.82
T3LEX	Romania	0.10	0.45
	Nigeria	0.17	0.39
	Cameroon	0.64	1.29
	Total	0.26	0.76
T3TOTAL	Romania	3.20	3.02
	Nigeria	5.00	3.91
	Cameroon	4.91	5.77
	Total	4.14	4.10
T2T3TOTAL	Romania	7.10	6.48
	Nigeria	12.42	7.74
	Cameroon	11.18	9.74
	Total	9.62	7.95
T2PHONETIC	Romania	0.55	0.89
	Nigeria	1.75	1.91
	Cameroon	1.36	1.63
	Total	1.09	1.49
T2PHONEMIC	Romania	0.75	1.02
	Nigeria	1.25	1.71
	Cameroon	0.36	0.67
	Total	0.79	1.21
T3PHONETIC	Romania	0.50	0.69
	Nigeria	1.17	1.47
	Cameroon	0.73	1.49
	Total	0.74	1.18
T3PHONEMIC	Romania	0.65	1.04
	Nigeria	0.25	0.45
	Cameroon	0.27	0.47
	Total	0.44	0.80

Table 1. Descriptive statistics.

Pearson product-moment correlations were computed in order to examine the relation between the variables of the study (Table 2). The results showed negative and statistically significant correlations between length of stay in Spain, on the one hand, and the number of morphostructural errors in Task 2 (r = -.333, p = .029) and the number of words in Task 3 (r = -.363, p = .017), on the other. The same pattern of correlations was obtained with respect to the duration of Spanish language courses: participants who spent more years studying Spanish made fewer morphostructural errors in Task 2 (r = -.390, p = .010) and wrote shorter essays in Task 3 (r = -.319, p = .037). Age was positively correlated with the number of morphostructural errors and the total number of errors in Task 3 (r = .322, p = .035, and r =

.340, p = .026, respectively) and presented moderately low correlations with the number of spelling errors (r = .272, p = .077) and phonetic strategies in Task 3 (r = .268, p = .083), though the latter correlations were not statistically significant at the .05 level.

	Age	LSS	DSLC
T2WORDS	-.046	-.277	-.085
T2SPEL	.245	-.027	-.078
T2MORPH	-.009	-.333*	-.390*
T2LEX	.024	-.113	-.092
T2TOTAL	.122	-.220	-.274
T3WORDS	.137	-.363*	-.319*
T3SPEL	.272	-.185	-.238
T3MORPH	.322*	-.067	-.162
T3LEX	.011	-.155	-.150
T3TOTAL	.340*	-.153	-.241
T2T3TOTAL	.250	-.214	.119
T2PHONETIC	.166	-.093	-.178
T2PHONEMIC	.250	.131	.072
T3PHONETIC	.268	-.119	-.139
T3PHONEMIC	.128	-.267	-.243

Table 2. Correlations between age, length of stay in Spain, duration of Spanish language courses and linguistic aspects of written production.

To examine whether participants' gender had an influence on the linguistic variables of the study (words, errors, and spelling strategies) we ran a series of independent samples t-tests. As shown in Table 3, there were no statistically significant differences between male and female participants in the number of errors, words, and strategies they employed in Tasks 2 and 3.

Finally, an analysis of variance in years of formal education was carried out, for which 3 groups were established due to the small sample size: participants with low education level (primary and secondary education), participants who attended high school or vocational training programmes, and those who attended university. As can be seen in Table 4, there were no statistically significant differences, except for the number of words used in Task 3, as texts produced by tertiary education participants were longer (F(2,40) = 3.862, p = .029).

	t	Sig.
T2WORDS	1.252	.218
T3WORDS	1.357	.182
T2TOTAL	1.566	.125
T3TOTAL	0.863	.393
T2T3TOTAL	1.405	.168
T2PHONETIC	1.106	.275
T2PHONEMIC	0.965	.340
T3PHONETIC	- 0.625	.536
T3PHONEMIC	- 0.366	.716

Table 3. Gender differences in linguistic aspects of written production**.**

	F	Sig.
T2WORDS	1.684	.199
T2TOTAL	0.247	.782
T3WORDS	3.862	.029
T3TOTAL	0.558	.577
T2T3TOTAL	0.432	.652
T2PHONETIC	0.247	.782
T2PHONEMIC	0.108	.898
T3PHONETIC	0.027	.974
T3PHONEMIC	1.656	.204

Table 4. Influence of education on the linguistic aspects of written production.

6. Discussion

The present study aimed to identify the most common error types and spelling strategies in the written productions of a group of adult migrant learners of Spanish. Moreover, it sought to determine whether certain individual and sociodemographic variables had an influence on these errors and strategies.

Qualitative analysis yielded four categories of writing errors: spelling, segmentation, morphostructural, and lexical errors. These categories provide a clear picture of the kind of difficulties adult migrant learners of Spanish have to face while engaging in writing tasks with a communicative purpose (for similar results, see Chireac 2010; El-Madkouri Maataoui and Soto Aranda 2009; Mavrou and Santos-Sopena 2018a, 2018b). Although the present study did not attempt to examine the influence of L1 on interlanguage nor to

establish categories for specific error types, it provides descriptive and complementary information regarding the typology of the most frequent errors in a quite challenging context for migrant learners of Spanish (i.e. language proficiency examination). In addition, the clear prevalence of morphostructural errors in our corpus highlights the need to reinforce these aspects in the L2 classroom and eventually help migrant learners of Spanish achieve higher success rates in exams similar to the Diploma LETRA.

Regarding literacy strategies, we did not observe all developmental stages of literacy acquisition identified by other researchers (Boon 2014; Kurvers and Ketelaars 2011). These discrepancies may be attributable to methodological differences related to the research context, tasks, and migrants' linguistic background. For instance, the Diploma LETRA certifies a basic knowledge of the Spanish language (close to an A2 level).

Moreover, in our study both low- and high-literate learners coexist. In other words, contrary to previous studies that focused on learners who had a low level of linguistic competence in the target language, many participants of the present study had a relatively high degree of literacy in their L1. In the former case, it seems easier to observe the acquisition of the alphabetic principle, that is, the correspondence between phonemes and graphemes, which is reflected in the use of pre-phonetic and semi-phonetic strategies, rather than in phonetic and phonemic ones. Further, previous studies used dictation tasks and participants had to transcribe specific words. In the current study, however, participants had to carry out semi-open writing tasks, which promote the use of specific strategies when it comes to the choice (or avoidance) of certain words and grammatical structures.

As for the results yielded by quantitative analysis, they were complex and quite varied. Older participants tended to make more morphostructural errors in Task 3. This finding is congruent with previous studies that focused on both oral (Mavrou and Santos-Sopena 2018a, 2018b) and written production (Condelli and Wrigley 2006) of migrant L2 learners and could be attributable to either certain abilities that usually decline with advanced age or the fact that older migrants might be less motivated to learn the language of the host country or might believe that it is too late to invest in learning to write

in an L2 (for similar results, see also Huguet et al. 2007; Kurvers 2015; Kurvers et al. 2010; Mavrou and Doquin de Saint Preux 2017).

Age was also correlated with the number of phonetic strategies in Task 3. Although this correlation failed to reach statistical significance, it might indicate that older migrant learners tended to use more *basic* strategies. However, it is also possible that educational background exerted some influence on the abovementioned relationship. In other words, older participants probably used fewer conventional writing strategies not because of their age, but rather because of their lower education level. Future studies with larger sample sizes should try to elucidate this issue.

Length of stay in Spain was negatively correlated with the number of morphostructural errors in Task 2 and the number of words in Task 3. There is compelling evidence suggesting that length of stay in the host country enhances migrants' communicative competence in the target language. Studies that corroborate this relationship include those of Roesler (2007) carried out with 11 Romanian learners of Spanish, Oller and Vila (2011) with Romanian and Arabic migrant learners of Spanish and Catalan, and Mavrou and Santos-Sopena (2018b), who also found a negative correlation between length of stay in Spain and the number of errors made by Romanian and Portuguese migrants in the oral section of the Diploma LETRA (see also Huguet et al. 2007; Kurvers et al. 2010; Kurvers and van de Craats 2007).

A similar pattern of results was obtained with respect to the duration of Spanish language courses, that is, participants who had spent more time studying Spanish made fewer morphostructural errors in Task 2 and wrote shorter essays in Task 3. Kurvers (2015) observed that class attendance rate and time spent on self-study turned out to be strong determining factors of the writing competence of migrant learners of Dutch L2. Therefore, the results of the present study seem to suggest that L2 class attendance rate might have a positive impact at least on particular linguistic dimensions such as accuracy among migrant learners of Spanish.

Lastly, neither gender nor education level appeared to have an influence on writing errors and strategies. However, participants who attended university wrote longer essays in Task 3. Empirical evidence on migrant populations suggests that literacy level in the L1 plays a key role in the development of linguistic competence in the target

language (van de Craats et al. 2006). On the other hand, oral competence seems to be more influenced by variables such as immersion experiences, length of stay in the host country, and the amount of interaction with native speakers (Cummins 2001; Mavrou and Doquin de Saint Preux 2017). Therefore, the lack of statistically significant results could be attributable to the limited sample size and the fact that the education level of the majority of our participants was above primary education.

7. Conclusions

Language, migration, and literacy are interconnected and mutually influential concepts. Migration is a growing phenomenon that influences our lives; it is a reality that requires the conjoint collaboration of all implicated agents, the acceptance of diversity, and equal opportunities for all (Pujol Berché 2009). Decisions to migrate to a different country – if migration movements are to be successful – imply decisions related to language (Moreno Fernández 2009: 139). However, such decisions are not always viable and, sometimes, not even an option. Migration decision-making is also determined by factors such as employment opportunities, admission requirements, and possibilities of permanence and citizenship in the receiving country, among others (Otero Roth 2011). Whatever the case, the transition from a certain degree of stability (at least when migration is an option, rather than a forced decision) to the rapid integration into the host society and labour market may entail a significant culture, linguistic or self-identity shock.

Since literacy is a key element in enabling migrants to feel like and participate as full members in the receiving society and to avoid discrimination, we would like to highlight the importance of consolidating literacy-related contents within the teaching of Spanish L2 for migrants. In order to pursue such a goal, a formally established educational framework is required, which will necessarily imply new governmental policies regarding the allocation of funds and resources for the implementation of a specific curriculum for the teaching of Spanish for migrant learners.

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