

Use of error analysis for the diagnosis of spelling difficulties by bilingual speakers of english/spanish in Gibraltar

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ABSTRACT

Our proposal is related to the issue of bilingualism in Gibraltar within the frame of two of the disciplines of Linguistics: Psycholinguistics and Neurolinguistics. Our aim is a better understanding of the mechanisms involved in the lexical processing of Spanish and English by bilinguals from Gibraltar as well as the study of the incidence of dyslexia among them. By means of Error Analysis, we intend to analyse the main spelling difficulties observed among bilingual teenagers in Gibraltar and design an alternative methodology for schools, tailored to the specific needs of the population in the area.

Keywords: Bilingualism, Contrastive Analysis, Corpus Analysis, Dyslexia, Error Analysis, Gibraltar, Languages in contact, Spelling processing difficulties.

1. TARGET POPULATION AND SAMPLE

Our target population is the bilingual language community of Gibraltar, where “llanito” or “yanito” is spoken. This linguistic variety has developed over the years due to the language contact between Spanish and English in the area. Our sample was formed by 137 teenagers attending the last year at Westside School, a Comprehensive School for girls in Gibraltar.

2. PREVIOUS OBJECTIVES AND RESEARCH

- To provide new data for a better understanding of the mechanisms involved in the lexical processing of Spanish and English by bilinguals from Gibraltar from a psycholinguistic point of view.
- To detect possible learning disabilities, such as dyslexia and dysorthography, among the bilingual population in Gibraltar and study specific cases within the frame of Neurolinguistics.

3. METHODOLOGY

Our data were first gathered by means of 137 surveys in English, initially designed to study the lexical availability of bilingual speakers in Gibraltar -as part of the project “Lenguas en contacto y disponibilidad léxica: la situación lingüística e intercultural de Ceuta y Gibraltar” (BFF2000-0511).

The subjects were asked to fill in a form with English words related to 21 centres of interest. Sociolinguistic data, such as their parents’ place of birth/education, language spoken at home/outside school, etc., were collected too. We are currently using the errors found during our previous research and applying Error Analysis (EA) to describe and evaluate our corpus.

4. FIRST RESULTS

During our previous research, we found a large number of spelling errors in English, probably due to the fact that the subjects of our study tried to write the English words according to their pronunciation (maybe because of the influence of Spanish –a “transparent” orthography- on “opaque” English). Some dyslexic errors were also detected, which could show a possible correlation between bilingualism and some language disorders, such as dyslexia and dysorthography, in the area.

5. OUR OBJECTIVES

·To make a complete EA of our corpus -error identification, description, classification and diagnosis- in the frame of Applied Linguistics, in general, and Contrastive and EA, in particular (of both interlingual and intralingual errors).

·To analyse the syllabus used for teaching the English spelling at the schools in Gibraltar, and design an alternative methodology -for learning to read and write- tailored to the specific needs of the population.

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