

Una exploración de la transferencia interlingüística de la competencia metafórica en estudiantes bilingües (español/catalán) de inglés como lengua extranjera: un caso de estudio

Exploring cross-language transfer of metaphorical skills with bilingual Spanish/Catalan EFL learners: A case study.

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Resumen: Este caso de estudio describe el desarrollo y los resultados de una investigación diseñada con el objeto de explorar si el fenómeno de la transferencia interlingüística, que normalmente se conceptualiza en términos de las hipótesis de *interdependencia* y del *umbral lingüístico*, puede también identificarse en relación a la competencia metafórica en un contexto de enseñanza del inglés como lengua extranjera. Para este fin, se realizó un taller experimental de poesía con un grupo de estudiantes universitarios, bilingües (español/catalán) y alumnos de inglés como lengua extranjera. El taller se organizó teniendo en cuenta la lectura pedagógica que Jim Cummins (2007) sobre el fenómeno de transferencia interlingüística y su sugerencia de que puede *enseñarse para la transferencia*. La investigación también incluyó la realización de entrevistas semi-estructuradas con participantes, con el objeto de recopilar datos acerca de su bagaje multilingüe (español, catalán e inglés) y sobre su nivel de implicación y motivación con el taller de poesía. A pesar de la muestra reducida, los datos indicaron que, si la orientación pedagógica de la enseñanza de la lengua extranjera facilita la implicación del estudiantado, entonces la transferencia inter-lingüística también se activa en relación a la competencia metafórica.

Palabras clave: transferencia interlingüística, enseñar para la

transferencia, competencia lingüística metafórica.

Abstract: This case study aims to describe the development and findings of a research project designed to explore whether the phenomenon of cross-language transfer, regularly conceptualized in terms of the Linguistic Interdependence and Linguistic Threshold hypotheses (LIH and LTH), could also be identified vis-à-vis metaphorical language skills in an EFL educational context. An experimental English poetry workshop was developed in a university setting with a group of bilingual Spanish/Catalan EFL learners, and was designed in accordance with Jim Cummins' (2007) pedagogical reading of cross-language transfer and his suggestion that teachers can actually *teach for transfer*. The research also included semi-structured interviews with the participants to inquire about their multilingual literacy background (Spanish, Catalan and EFL) and their level of engagement with the EFL poetry workshop. Despite the limited sample, data indicated that, provided the pedagogical orientation leads to learner engagement, cross-language transfer to English also applies to metaphorical language skills in an EFL educational context.

Keywords: Cross-language transfer, teaching for transfer, metaphorical language skills.

1.- Introduction

This article aims to describe, in the form of a case study, the development and findings of a research designed to explore whether *cross-language transfer* could be identified vis-à-vis the use of *metaphorical language skills* in an EFL educational context. As a first step to acquaint the reader with the main terms of this research, let me introduce the two concepts which it brought into play.

1.1.- Cross-language transfer and teaching for transfer

Cross-language transfer has generally been conceptualized through the Language Interdependence and the Language Threshold

hypotheses (LIH and LTH) (DePalma & Ringer, 2011; Jimenez et al., 2012; Sotoca Sienes & Muños Hueso, 2014; Simon-Cerejido & Gutierrez-Clellen, 2009, Villacañas de Castro, 2016). The LIH argues that linguistic abilities displayed in one language may be transferred to the use of a different one as long as certain conditions are met (Cummins, 2005a; Huguet-Canalis, 2009). This thesis is normally accompanied by the LTH, which assumes that L2 level (either in a SL or FL) is the most important single enabling/disabling condition for this kind of transfer to occur, i.e., that a L2 language threshold must be attained before cross-language transfer can take place. As a result, the LTH and the LIH are frequently considered inseparable, and the LIH made dependent on student L2 language level. Norman, Degani, and Peleg (2016), for example, recently provided evidence of transfer of L1 word recognition processes during the initial stages of second language (L2) learning. Chuang, Joshi and Dixon (2012), on their part, confirmed the impact of L1 reading proficiency on L2 reading, hence of cross-language transfer in relation to reading. And finally, Vandergrift (2006) detected traces of positive transfer in relation to the listening skill.

All too often, however, blinded by the LTH and its emphasis on L2 level, research has given little or no credit to the impact of *pedagogy*—i.e., the quality and nature of the exposures to L2—on cross-language transfer. Lack of attention to the pedagogical dimension has become translated into the belief that cross-language transfer is independent from (or not affected by) the quality and nature of instruction, as a result of which the area of SL and FL teaching has for the most part remained disconnected from the LIH and the LTH, and has failed to integrate them as significant concepts for its theory and its practice (Villacañas de Castro, 2016). As a result, as Hornberger and Link (2012, 267) have recently reminded us, “Cummins’s (1979) groundbreaking proposal of the developmental interdependence and threshold hypotheses laid the theoretical ground for what remains a central tenet in scholarship on bilingualism (*if not, sadly, in educational practice*)” (my emphasis).

Cummins' growing insistence on the pedagogical dimension actually resulted in the claim that instructors can actually *teach for transfer* (Cummins, 2005; 2007), i.e., that certain language pedagogies promote interdependence and cross-language transfer more than others. Among the most important strategies to create an adequate *transfer climate* (James, 2010) was the use of bilingual forms of language instruction as a means to scaffold learners' production of *identity texts*. In the creation of identity texts, Cummins and Early (2011: 3) explained,

students invest their identities in the creation of [...] texts which can be written, spoken, visual, musical, dramatic, or combinations in multimodal form. The identity text then holds a mirror up to students in which their identities are reflected back in a positive light. When students share identity texts with multiple audiences (peers, teachers, parents, grandparents, sister classes, the media, etc.), they are likely to receive positive feedback and affirmation of self in interaction with these audiences.

In addition to this, bilingual forms of language instruction can be designed to allow students to creatively imbed their native language in the nonnative language classroom dynamics, since they had originally built their cognitive and cultural schemata in their L1. Contrary to dominant assumptions in L2 education, which place all the emphasis on quantitative time-exposure to L2 at the cost of ignoring qualitative pedagogical variables (Porter, 1991), Cummins' model for *teaching for transfer* intended precisely to facilitate cross-language connections by actually bringing together both languages inside the classroom and by making instructors encourage their overlapping, interdependence and combination through concrete practices. This line of reasoning has produced evidence through experiments conducted by Cummins himself (Cummins et. al 2005; Cummins & Early, 2011; Cummins et al, 2015) and by other researchers inspired by these findings. For instance, He (2011) contrasted L1 (Chinese) and L2 (English) pedagogies used in Hong Kong secondary schools to evaluate their potential to generate cross-language transfer. Poza (2016) argued for *translanguaging* classroom practices that allowed students to display their full bilingual capital. Creese and Blackledge (2010) reviewed two experimental SL

situations in which the fact that students were allowed to draw on their L1 helped them to produce richer and more cognitively-demanding oral/written interventions, ones which were actually appealing and interesting for them and their peers—even if, later on, they were asked to translate them fully into the target L2. Studies by Hornberger and Link (2013) followed from this approach and contributed to the consistency of the results.

1.2.- Metaphorical Language Skills

As it is well known, in addition to unearthing the connection between cross-language transfer and pedagogy, Cummins originally identified two different areas of *common underlying proficiency* (CUP), or two distinct language frameworks in relation to which cross-language transfer occurred: BICS and CALP. “I prefer to use the term ‘cognitive/academic language proficiency’ (CALP) [...] to refer to the dimension of language proficiency that is related to literacy skills. BICS [Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills] refers to cognitively undemanding manifestations of language proficiency in interpersonal situations” (Cummins, 2001: 112). Transfer was thus conceived as a phenomenon which always remained internal and restricted to specific areas of proficiency, which consisted of separate sets of linguistic competencies or abilities that remained active in, and determined learning and development of, any given language which students were exposed to.

For this research, I decided to consider metaphorical language skills as part of CALP, since one learns to understand and produce metaphorical language mainly through school instruction, as part of one’s academic literacy development. However, contrary to other forms of academic literacy such as conceptual proficiency and knowledge, metaphorical language skills make possible the understanding and production of unique and original forms that involve the “mapping of one domain of meaning onto a different one,” as formulated by Holme (2004: 410), not logical and semantic relationships which have already

been sanctioned by academic thought (see also Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). From this perspective, cross-language transfer of metaphorical skills would not imply the activation of skills or knowledge attained in one language in the use of another one as much as the ability to create and understand novel and original expressions in any given language, or the transfer of *metaphorical competence*, which Littlemore and Low (2006, 79) defined as “an individual’s ability to understand and produce metaphors”. Metaphorical language skills also seem to be related with Canale’s (1983: 340) notion of *autonomous language proficiency*, one involving “proficiency in less directly social, more intrapersonal uses of language such as problem solving, monitoring one’s thoughts, verbal play, poetry, or creative writing” (as cited in Cummins, 2000: 62). Actually, following from Canale’s definition, metaphors could even be seen as the outcome of an operation whereby elements of an autonomous, private—or even unconscious—cognitive domain are mapped onto a shared or common domain of meaning.

This novelty component is essential, and it would justify the hypothesis that conceptual proficiency would not translate immediately into metaphorical proficiency, for there is as yet no clear correlation between language proficiency and metaphorical competence. Thus, the existence of a proficiency threshold for metaphorical competence remains inconclusive (Johnson & Rosano, 1993; Littlemore, 2001; Hoang, 2014). No study of cross-language transfer has yet attempted to bear out its efficacy in relation to metaphorical language skills, much less so in an EFL educational context. Whilst language learners’ potential for metaphorical production (precisely on account of their shortage of vocabulary) has often been noted, as a rule the influence of L1 metaphorical competence on L2 metaphorical language skills has been approached from the angle of negative L1 *interference*, hence as a possible source of L2 mistakes (McArthur, 2010; Nacey, 2013; Littlemore et al., 2014). No sustained attempt has been made to consider metaphorical competence as a common, underlying proficiency instead of one which is specific of (and separate for) each language. Accordingly, no research has been done to show teachers how to encourage positive and successful transfer of metaphorical

competence—for example, in the form of learner’s creative or poetic language. The dominance of the native-speaker model and the complexity of assessing creative metaphorical language (standardized tests are ill-equipped to this aim) may account for this restricted perspective (Pragglejaz Group, 2007). In addition to this, the literature has scarcely given attention to learners’ ability to understand and produce metaphors in a language other than their native one. The explanation for this may lie in the dominant focus on receptive skills rather than on “how learners actually produce metaphors in their L2” (Hoang, 2014: 3), and in the feeling that the ability to produce metaphors in L2 is “of less immediate necessity” (Littlemore, 2010: 296).

This situation may account for Hoang’s (2014: 7) observation that “research on metaphor and L2 education remains scarce, and the practical applications of this knowledge for language teaching have not been explored”. As an exception (and even if his contribution is mainly significant for the field of general literacy and qualitative research methods) Hanauer (2004; 2010) went a long way in demonstrating that, provided that teachers proceed with sound pedagogical knowledge—indications of which he gives abundantly in his work—, reading and writing metaphorical poetry in ESL or EFL can provide a worthwhile educational experience for these learners, whereby their linguistic, cognitive, and affective dimensions become expanded. After gathering and analyzing a corpus of 844 poems written by advanced ESL students, Hanauer (2010: 52) concluded that, “at least within the present corpus of second language poetry these advanced writers were capable and did use poetic literacy categories to express and explore their personal experiences”. Hanauer’s (2010: 45) corpus showed that 39’09 % of the poems used similes and metaphors, and that their SL authors “were aware of and used poetic features in their writing”.

Hanauer made no attempt to approach these examples of metaphorical writing from the standpoint of cross-language transfer, however. Yet to the extent that Hanauer described these examples of ESL poetry in terms that very much resembled Cummins and Early’s

(2011) definition of *identity texts* (which are one of the key methodological instruments employed in this research of mine), his work anticipated the kind of analysis I am about to describe.

2.- Material and methods

My research was greatly indebted, methodologically speaking, to the main tenets of Cummins' understanding of cross-language transfer. I too treated pedagogy as a significant variable enabling language transfer, and I too embraced the notion that transfer remains internal and restricted to different areas of proficiency that operate across languages. Upon these premises, I organized a poetry workshop in English with EFL university learners (all of them bilingual in Spanish and Catalan), and qualitatively analyzed the resulting poems in search of figures of speech that involved metaphorical language. This case study is the result of the research I conducted to analyze the language processes that went on in that situated context.

According to Cummins and Early (2011: 19), educational “case studies [...] represent phenomena that theories and specific hypothesis must be able to explain”. The only hypothesis capable of explaining the phenomena described in this case study was that cross-language transfer of metaphorical language skills was activated in the context of the poetry workshop. The entire methodological framework was designed to bear out this simple hypothesis, which was suggested by my previous acquaintance with those who would become the participants: namely, provided the participants in the poetry workshop had neither been exposed to nor had previously had the opportunity to produce metaphorical language in EFL—as I suspected, familiar as I was with their literacy background—, then whatever examples of metaphorical language which surfaced in their EFL poems would have to be explained by the influence of metaphorical skills which had been originally built through instruction and practice in their native language (Catalan or Spanish), hence by CALP allowing transfer of metaphorical skills from one language to the other.

In order to test this hypothesis, I organized two EFL poetry workshops which took place during the second semester of the 2015-16 academic year, from 15 February to 11 March 2016, across 6 lessons. They were developed with two different groups of university students in the context of a module called “English as a Foreign Language” with 38 registered Spanish students in the 3rd year of their Degree in Primary Education, pursuing the specialty of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teaching. They were all studying in the Faculty of Education of the University of XXX (XXX), where I research and lecture, and their ages ranged mainly from 21-23 (76.6 %). Except for an Austrian student who also spoke EFL, the rest were native Catalan/Spanish bilingual speakers. In order to access the EFL teaching itinerary, these students had had to take a preliminary exam which took after the First Certificate of English, and their levels had spanned from a high B1 up to a low C1, according to the European Framework of Common Reference. According to Littlemore et al. (2014: 139), it is precisely at this stage around B2 “where learners use metaphor more creatively and, as a result, they make more errors. [...] As they move through to the higher levels they start to use metaphor more correctly”. Yet it must be borne in mind that the FCE test assessed language proficiency as a continuum and not as consisting of different and independent CUPS, which this kind of exam amalgamated and confounded into a universal linguistic proficiency (Taylor, 2014). It was my expectation that their scores would therefore not necessarily correlate with their metaphorical language skills.

Regarding the design of the workshop itself, I applied transfer-friendly pedagogical orientations so as to maximize cross-language transfer (Cummins, 2005; 2005a; 2007; 2014). I planned the different tasks in accordance with the principles summarized in the previous section, and dealt with the poems as *identity texts*:

- - o intensify identity investment, participants were encouraged to write about their own lives in EFL by drawing on their

cognitive background and previous experiences, but also to amplify their identities through critical reflection and dialogue with their peers.

- o facilitate cross-language connections by actually bringing together both languages inside the classroom, learners were allowed to make use, at any time, of their native languages and translation, although most of the time they felt comfortable enough with English as to not draw on their L1.
- o help learners share their poems and interact with different audiences, I organized a recital at the Faculty Library, in front of other students and members of staff.

The pedagogical organization needed to turn this challenging workshop into a worthwhile educational experience meant that I had to provide its participants with some examples of metaphorical language in English—otherwise I would have taken the risk of the participants feeling they had not been adequately prepared to attain the aims (Spiro, 2007). In addition, as expressed by Mattenklott (1979: 192), “in order to awake fantasy, one has to feed it; the spark of productivity inflames on the material” (cited in and translated by Schleppege, 2009: 10). Nevertheless, the familiarity which the participants gained with metaphorical language in English through these preliminary activities could not possibly have accounted for the metaphorical skills which were revealed by the resulting poems, since this exposure was insufficient to invalidate the provision on which the whole experiment rested.

I have kept the poems as they were originally written, having restrained myself from editing or correcting them. The purpose of the research is not to study the poems from the standpoint of correctedness or the participants’ mastery of discrete language skills, but to examine them in the light of Holme’s (2004: 410-411) broad definition of metaphor, as a specific operation involving “a deviant or paradoxical use of language that is meaningful while being logically meaningless”.

My understanding was also shaped by what Littlemore et al. (2014: 121), in their general study of metaphor use with EFL learners, defined as “direct metaphors (i.e. similes and the like)”. Unlike these authors, however, who identified “any lexical unit that has the potential to be processed metaphorically” (119), the fact that in this case metaphorical language skills were analyzed through poems (not standardized tasks, as is frequently the case) allowed me to focus more easily on creative metaphorical uses, ones which the learners had devised with this specific purpose in mind—what Littlemore et al. (2014) call “deliberate metaphors” (122).

Additionally, my final qualitative analysis of metaphorical figures of speech in the poems was based on Arlandis and Reyes-Torres (2013: 54) classification, and a variant of the Pragglejazz Group’s (2007) procedure was used to cross-check it, by asking a colleague of mine to carry out his own reading and classification of the tropes in the poems. A meeting was held to contrast our viewpoints and reach an agreement on the final results of the analysis. In this article, metaphorical tropes have been identified next to each line in the poem, on the left margin, through the following key: *m.* = metaphor, *i.* = image, *c.* = comparison, *a.* = allegory, *pro.* = prosopopeia, *s.* = synesthesia, and *p.* = paradox.

To prevent the academic and research motivations of the workshop from being confounded, and the participants’ responses from being biased towards the answers that they might suppose I wanted to obtain, the interviews finally took place after the summer holidays, during the month of October 2015 and 2016—when I was no longer their teacher—, inside my office. They were recorded, held in Spanish, lasted between 15 to 55 minutes, and were *semi-structured*, loosely organized around a list of 21 questions carefully designed (1) to explore the participants’ native and EFL literacy background, (2) to make sure that they met the first hypothesis set by my methodological framework—i.e., that they had previously neither been exposed to nor had the opportunity to produce metaphorical language in English—and finally (3) to inquire into the quality of their educational experience and test whether the pedagogical orientation I embraced had resulted in the

kind of engagement that, according to Cummins, maximized cross-language transfer. The flexible format chosen for the interviews allowed for digressions and encouraged the interviewees to give information that was significant for them, some of which I found valuable and decided to tackle explicitly in the subsequent interviews. Interviews were voluntary and only six of the original 43 participants in the workshops took part in them.

The findings presented below were obtained after analyzing the data collected from the twelve participants who took part in both phases of the research (the poetry workshop and the interviews), since only in their case could I confirm my hypotheses and bring together all the sources of evidence. All the participants agreed to their poems and interviews being made public as long as their identities remained undisclosed, which I respected. Also, I have translated the excerpts from their interviews into English.

3.- Findings

The 47 poems which resulted from the experimental workshop (some participants wrote more than one) contained examples of metaphorical language use, and so did those on which these results are based. Instances of metaphor, image, allegory, comparison, symbol, prosopopeia, synesthesia, oxymoron, and paradox abounded, though especially of the first two. In addition, the second phase of the research confirmed my expectation that none of the participants had previously been exposed to, nor had ever produced, metaphorical language in English, which confirmed my first hypothesis and validated my experimental frame. As a matter of fact, the interviews showed that none of the twelve participants had read literature in English of any kind—poetry, prose, drama—before the workshop, nor written metaphorically in English. This shared lack of acquaintance with metaphorical language in EFL suggested that the metaphors, images, allegories, comparisons, etc., found in the poems could only be explained as a result of the influence of skills which the participants in

the research had originally acquired through instruction and practice in any of their two local languages, Spanish and Catalan. In fact, according to the interviews, all the participants had been exposed to metaphorical language in their mother tongue, mainly through reading during their primary and secondary school years and in the context of their Spanish and Catalan language and literature classes. Taking all this into account, it could safely be concluded that the experiment succeeded in proving that CALP had allowed transfer of metaphorical skills from one language to the other, and from passive skills (reading) to active ones (writing).

Three clear-cut participant profiles soon emerged from the interviews, which responded to the information the participants provided when they gave information about three points dealt with. Let me present first the findings related to the first profile. Its only member—Carmen—showed the lowest degree of acquaintance with metaphorical literacy skills. She admitted to not reading literature in any language: not only hadn't she been exposed, through reading, to metaphorical language since she left high school, but she didn't enjoy producing this kind of language either. Her only experience had been as a teenager, when, driven by strong emotions created by the illness of her grandfather, she had attempted to write a poem in her native Catalan but left it unfinished, somewhat frustrated by the results. Notwithstanding her limited literacy background, her poem displayed all the essential elements of metaphorical language, as the reader can appreciate next:

“Youth and old age: Someday we will understand God's whole plan,” by Carmen

c Your hair is sparse
Mine grows like the grass
Your hair is falling out for ever
m I let my hair grow whenever
c You roof is full of snow
While mine is black like the darkness, and I don't know how.

Someday we will understand
God's whole plan.

You walk with canes
I do it with hands and knees
While you try to maintain your composure
I try to raise my figure.
Someday we will understand
God's whole plan

m.

I've left to see your shadow
But you became to see mine
And you don't know how.
Someday we will understand
God's whole plan.

m. My skin is thin
m. While you've got hair in your chin
m. Your eyes are light
Mine seem turn off the light.
Someday we will understand
God's whole plan.

In spite of the differences
We have got a similarities
I was born bald, like you now are
Nappies in any moment we wear.
Someday we will understand
God's whole plan.

p. One day you were like me
One day I will be like you
p. The same way, the same end
Live to die.
Someday we will understand
God's whole plan.

As could be expected from her poor reading habits, Carmen tended to appear at the bottom quadrant of this group whenever her English level was not assessed in relation to distinct areas of proficiency but as a continuum—as the First Certificate did, in which she barely made it to a high B1 mark. Precisely because of this, her poem proved that the use of metaphorical skills was compatible with lower levels of performance in other areas of EFL proficiency, such as BICS. Just as interesting as this was to find that she had connected her EFL poem to the only experience she had had in writing metaphorical language, which, as I have said, had taken place in Catalan, a long time ago:

Carmen. I wrote the poem about my grandfather... which is something that still affects me a lot ... so it [the poem] wrote itself. What I did try to do was to make it rhyme more or less, and to create metaphors.

The fact that Carmen resorted to the same cognitive and experiential wealth which had inspired her earlier attempts at producing literature years ago strengthens the view that metaphorical skills may indeed be inter-linguistic in nature, related to a common pool of knowledge and experiences that can become expressed in any language. At least in Carmen's case, the pedagogical/methodological design of the workshop had succeeded in teaching for transfer, since her own engagement had led her to integrate her private and meaningful interests into the activity, and do so in spite of the foreign nature of the language the workshop was conducted in.

There is an additional detail that I would like to analyze from the standpoint of cross-language transfer. Just as Carmen connected her FL poem with an earlier attempt of hers which she performed in her native language, she mentioned that her own attitude towards reading had changed as a result of this poem: she now read more in English, Catalan and Spanish. I interpret this as the effects of the workshop having an influence on the future. In accordance with Cummins' (2001)

understanding of cross-language transfer as admitting a reciprocal relationship between the native and the second or foreign languages, Carmen's literacy engagement in EFL had impacted positively on her general reading habits.

Let us now move on to the six students included in the second profile. Fernando, Luis, Eduardo, María, Raquel, and Victoria were learners who read literature in Spanish on a regular basis (and who, therefore, were frequently exposed to metaphorical uses in this language), but who did not produce metaphorical literature themselves, neither in English nor in Spanish or Catalan. They did write reflections in their native language on a wide range of topics—cinema, music, personal experiences...—but these were not normally made public and, if so, only to a very limited circle of acquaintances. In any case, they made it clear that metaphorical writing did not predominate in these texts. For both Raquel and Fernando this was the first poem they had ever written in any language, which did not prevent them from coming up with multilayered metaphors around intense and complex topics. Fernando, for example, made use of one of the richer figures of speech included in the typology: an allegory. His text was an extended metaphorical reflection on the poetry workshop and on poetry in general.

a. "Can you see how it flies?," by Fernando

m. The rules of this game
Everyone has the same
Sure, you have found a way
I'm listening. What do you say?

Something to learn, I mess
Who is who, I guess

p. Just shouting your whispers away
m. I can see arrows with names

Watch out, and open your eyes

- There's truth, maybe it hurts
There's no place for lies
m. Can you see how it flies?
- m.* I'm looking *Behind blue eyes*
Almost there, please don't hide
There are no cheats, no tricks
m. Maybe a lollipop for kids
- m.* You give water for the thirsty
Nothing for an *American beauty*
syn. No matter the color of your mind
You have a great heart inside
- m.* Let me a piece of your soul
I have a plenty place for you all
There's no place for lies
Can you see how it flies?

Raquel's poem also merits analysis, although I can't reproduce it due to space constraints. She dove into her past and found a significant, traumatic biographical event she was able to reconstruct, at the same time as she repositioned her own identity in relation to it, through the writing process and a number of effective images. In doing so, her text exemplified Hanauer's (2004: 10) understanding of poetry as "a literary text that presents the experiences, thoughts, and feelings of the writer through a self-referential use of language that creates for the reader and writer a new understanding of the experience, thought, or feeling expressed in the text". When analyzed through standardized tests, neither Raquel's nor Fernando's EFL level scored very high, especially because they often made many grammatical and orthographical mistakes, and sometimes did not string their ideas adequately through proper link words. Yet their poems revealed a well-developed literary taste and a sound practical knowledge of what metaphorical language was. Likewise, the intensity of their feelings betrayed the kind of

affective engagement which should aid cross-language transfer, as was actually confirmed by some of their answers to those questions which addressed their own writing process:

Raquel. I think that in an abstract way I had in my mind the idea of creating a metaphor, being poetic, more creative, in the activity you assigned us; but I think that I had many things holding me back which cannot be transferred in any way [sic.]. Some things, like vocabulary, or phonetics, are definitely specific to each language. And I think that those held me back a bit. [...] It's like the more material part was harder to apply, you know?, when it comes to doing this, [even though] maybe I did have a general idea.

“If you can be creative in one language, you will also be able to be creative in another language,” said Fernando. “The problem comes, of course, when you have to deal with grammar, or vocabulary, all that sort of thing... But imagination is there.” These fragments describe the kind of linguistic elements both participants were able to transfer from their native language to their EFL poems and those which they did not, and accordingly perceived as obstacles. Imagination, referred to as an abstract ability related to evoking images and creating metaphors, seemed to lend itself to transfer, whereas grammar, phonology or vocabulary—the more “material aspects,” as Raquel says, which basically coincide with the BICS area of proficiency—were described as being too language-specific for their Catalan/Spanish literacy to provide any advantage with them.

The third group of participants also underscored on this idea during their interviews, despite the fact that they had a different literacy profile: “In the same way as I think up a metaphor in Spanish I think it up in English, and it's easy to do so; now, making it all fit according to certain patterns, that's what's difficult,” said Pilar. The trait which distinguished this third group—Gloria, Pilar, Maite, Alberto and Ana—was that they frequently read and wrote metaphorically in their native language. The first three had written poetry in Spanish since they were children, when they had participated (even won) some school contests. At the time of the workshop, however, they mostly read and wrote literary prose, and especially produced short stories. Alberto had also

written poems and short stories in the past, mostly on a private blog which he had shared with one or two close friends, but for the last year he had been more inclined to drawing and writing comic strips. Drawing allowed him to express himself genuinely, he said. The EFL marks all three students obtained were among the top ones in this group, whenever language level was measured through standardized English tests.

In terms of inspiration and metaphorical creation, they claimed to have experienced these processes just as they did whenever they wrote in their native language. Gloria, for example, felt passionate about the workshop from the very start, and declared during the interview that it had reawakened her past desire and made her want to write poetry again. Furthermore, her description of how she came round to her poem reinforced the idea that the same processes become activated when one produces metaphorical language in a native language or a FL (English in this case), as if they were simply two sides of the same coin:

Gloria. It was as if I had regained a feeling at one moment and I felt like writing about it, but, instead of doing so in prose and in Spanish, I thought: why don't you try to express that feeling, that for me is so strong, in a poem, and in English? And I just started to write and I think I finished it in three minutes. The idea simply came to me, I recalled that feeling, and I knew how to express it. And I didn't think about it any further.

While there were common traits among this group of participants, it soon became clear that Alberto's experience of the workshop had differed (and had been less positive) in essential ways, not only from Gloria's, Maite's and Pilar's, but also from the rest of the students I had interviewed. In comparison to drawing, he did not find poetry a suitable means to express himself, and he also felt extremely uncomfortable about sharing his poem with the rest of his classmates, with many of whom he seemed to share no intimacy, nor did he feel comfortable with them. Pressed by these feelings, Alberto had adopted a series of

strategies in his own writing in order to depersonalize his poem and hedge his emotions. Ambitious and perfectionist as he was, yet at the same time unmotivated by the task, he didn't feel proud of his poem, which had clearly not become an identity text for him, on account of his emotional ambivalence. Given the motivational underpinnings of cross-language transfer, I was not surprised to hear from him what I interpreted as significant limits in transfer. Rather than opening himself up to metaphorical production, Alberto said he paid more attention to formal aspects such as the rhyme and rhythm of his poem, as a conscious attempt to neutralize his own implication in the poem and feel more comfortable. He looked for words with similar endings, made sure stresses added up, etc. Interestingly enough, he mentioned that these sound-related features were more language-dependent than the metaphorical ones, and were not easily transferable across languages:

Alberto. I think I paid more attention to the possibilities offered by the English language for using monosyllables or rhythms, and that I used these more than other type of resources such as, for example, metaphors. [...] I did not use things I had personally done because I suppose I did not find it appropriate, but had I not felt like this I would also have taken advantage of this, [since] I think that it is independent of the language one uses—the metaphoric devices.

Possibly due to the affective contradiction which he experienced, Alberto's poem seemed somewhat impoverished in terms of imagery and metaphorical invention, at least when compared with the rest of poems. Let me reproduce some of its verses:

“There Poland, Here Home,” by Alberto

[...] There, the streets are white, sky is dark,
As everyday it snows very hard.
Here, paths and roads, gray and brown,
They all cracked by our blinding sun.

There, for cold weather eat something heavy,
Soup, meat, potatoes or ‘pierogi.’
Here, tasty paella, delicious lamb,
Sauce over codfish and Serrano ham.

[...] There, I have finished a travel,
It have been like a whole life.

m. I carry out a chest of memories,
And a conclusion from this while:
That being back home,
For me is more than fine!

It seemed as if those elements which belonged to Alberto’s autonomous, private—or even unconscious—cognitive domain were not allowed to surface up, mingle and overlap with those other elements coming from common and shared domains of meaning, as needs to occur for a metaphor to arise. Gloria’s poem, on the contrary, showed a more fluent interchange between both levels:

“The other side of darkness,” by Gloria

m. I saw you crossing the wall
m. Trying to go to the other side
I saw you giving up
When everything began.

I saw you taking that fucking shit
Trying to sleep forever
I saw you giving up
When everything began.

I heard your voice on the phone
Saying, ‘I did it again.’
Did you ever think
About my pain?

m. I took myself into the limit
I hid the pain in a poker face
But inside it was raining

m. It was raining all day.

I felt the isolation
I couldn't sleep for nights
I just wanted the day to pass

m. I just looked for the light.

i. Every day was a nightmare

i. Every day was a fight

m. I was alone in the darkness
When I saw you giving up.

p. You're not you anymore

p. I'm not me any day
While you were pretending to die

m. I was dying every day.

I saw you giving up
When everything began.

4.- Discussion

The findings included in this case study presented a coherent pattern of evidence in relation to cross-language transfer and metaphorical language skills. On account of the limited sample, however, good sense advises me to interpret these findings tentatively and take them as a first step in the direction of a better understanding of the relationship between these two phenomena.

Notwithstanding this proviso, the findings were conclusive in relation to the hypothesis this research set out to explore: cross-language transfer from Spanish and Catalan to English definitely applied to metaphorical language skills. My hypothesis was confirmed by two essential facts. Firstly, among those participants whom the pedagogical orientation adopted in the workshop led to strong affective and cognitive engagement, cross-language of metaphorical skills clearly manifested itself in the form of EFL poems which displayed rich and complex imagery and a variety of metaphorical devices. The poem

written by the only participant who seemed somewhat detached from the activity and the methodology employed also showed signs of metaphorical language, yet these were less effective and less radical ones: the overlapping of the private and public realms of meaning was less bold, as if his inner self had not been allowed to mingle with the outer world. This isolated case didn't contradict my hypothesis since it confirmed the emotional and motivational component of cross-language transfer, which my pedagogical approach was able to guarantee in all cases except this one.

Secondly, all the participants managed to a greater or lesser extent to transfer their knowledge of metaphorical skills from their native Spanish and/or Catalan to their English poems, and did so irrespective of the other two factors (apart from their engagement in the workshop) which the research paid attention to: (1) the level which the participants had previously displayed in other areas of EFL proficiency, such as BICS; and (2) the intensity of their exposure to, or production of, metaphorical language in their native language at the time of the workshop. As has been said, no relationship seemed to hold between any of these two factors and cross-language transfer of metaphorical skills, nor was there any evidence of a threshold level enabling or disabling this kind of transfer. Actually, if any threshold was suggested in the data, it was more related with levels of motivation and engagement (the factors which pedagogy is more capable of impacting on), although the sample was too reduced for a trend to emerge. A possible explanation for these results may be found in the fact that the participants' instruction in, and exposure to, metaphorical language skills in the native language during primary and secondary levels of education (which was the only common factor shared by all the participants in the research) provided the key literacy common ground which all of them drew on and translated into active metaphorical language production in their EFL poems. This common factor resulted in the participants' common ability to transfer, so it seemed to be more determining than the individual differences related to the participants' level in other areas of EFL proficiency and their existing familiarity with metaphorical language at the time of the workshop.

As proof of this, it is interesting to emphasize that all twelve EFL learners produced metaphors which, according to Littlemore et al.'s (2014: 142) descriptors of metaphor use of each level of CEFR, were only expected to surface at the C2 level, such as “creative use of direct metaphor” or “personification metaphors as part of extended analogies and in combination with metonymy”. To the extent that my pedagogical decisions followed closely the *teaching for transfer* model, these results indicated that the strategies applied were able to activate transfer of *metaphorical* language skills—a fact for which there was no empirical evidence yet.

Of course, a larger sample is needed to confirm the phenomena suggested by the present case study, but I hope these findings encourage experimental research that either replicates or explores new conditions (both linguistic and pedagogical) for testing metaphorical cross-language transfer in ESL or EFL settings. Following from this article, future research may be interested in exploring the relationship between metaphorical language skills and other skills included in CALP, such as Turker (2016) has already started to produce by comparing L1 concept knowledge and the acquisition of L2 metaphorical expressions. I recommend that these new explorations draw explicitly on the distinction, laid out by Ringbom (2007), between how language skills which one has learnt passively but not practiced in one language may or may not transfer to active production in a different language, as actually occurred with many of the students involved in this research.

Once these issues have been settled, research will be able to explore the pedagogical role of metaphorical writing in ESL and EFL education, a topic which may lead to promising findings on account of the autonomy enjoyed by metaphorical language skills within CALP. If the phenomena suggested by this article are confirmed, giving learners the chance to display their metaphorical language skills in a SL or FL may provide significant pedagogical tools for language learning, independently of EFL levels in other domains of BICS and CALP. Actually, if the ability to create unique and original expressions

involving “the mapping of one domain of meaning onto a different one” (Holme, 2004, 410) does transfer across languages and manifest itself in the form of images, as seems to be the case, then the desire to put these images into EFL words could act as the engine driving the learning process forward, as learners experiment and improve their command of the new language pushed on and motivated only by the urge to express their unique creative voices.

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