

THE EFFECTS OF WRITTEN INPUT ON YOUNG EFL LEARNERS' ORAL OUTPUT¹

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ABSTRACT. *The present paper explores whether the incentive of written input affects oral language development of young learners of English in a minimal input situation. After an eight-week instruction period with both written and oral input in the experimental group and just oral input in the control group, data were obtained by means of an oral test consisting of question and answer, picture description and L1 translation tasks. The effects on the learners' oral output were measured with respect to the number of target words, semantic-pragmatic appropriateness, syntactic acceptability and L1 translation. The experimental group shows higher scores in all variables tested and a number of significant differences emerge with respect to the control group. These results are in line with studies conducted with other learner populations which suggest that students should write to learn and indicate that young learners' oral proficiency is benefitted from integrating written language with oral production.*

Keywords: Young learners, EFL, written input, oral output, integrated language-based instruction, minimal input.

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LOS EFECTOS DEL INPUT ESCRITO EN LA PRODUCCIÓN ORAL DE JÓVENES ESTUDIANTES DE INGLÉS COMO LENGUA EXTRANJERA

RESUMEN. *Este estudio explora si el incentivo del input escrito afecta el desarrollo del lenguaje oral en jóvenes estudiantes de inglés en una situación de input limitado. Después de un período de instrucción de ocho semanas usando ambos modos de input (escrito y oral) en el grupo experimental y solamente input oral en el grupo control, datos estadísticos fueron obtenidos por medio de una prueba oral consistente en tres tipos de tareas: preguntas y respuestas, descripción de imágenes y traducción a su lengua materna. Los efectos en la producción oral de los aprendices fueron medidos teniendo en cuenta el número de palabras correctas, uso apropiado de la semántico-pragmática, aceptabilidad sintáctica y traducción a la lengua materna. El grupo experimental muestra mejores resultados en todas las variables analizadas y varias diferencias significativas emergen con respecto al grupo control. Estos resultados confirman estudios llevados a cabo con otras poblaciones de estudiantes, que sugieren que los aprendices deberían escribir para aprender e indican que el dominio oral del lenguaje en estudiantes jóvenes se beneficia de la integración del lenguaje escrito en la producción oral.*

Palabras clave: Jóvenes aprendices, EFL, input escrito, producción oral, instrucción basada en el lenguaje, input limitado.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is to analyse the effect English written input has on oral language development of young learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context. The general tendency is for early foreign language teaching to prioritise the acquisition of oral skills rather than literacy –reading and writing– due to the common belief that early language teaching should ideally be communicative and imitate naturalistic settings as much as possible. The aforesaid lies on a sceptic view towards the possibility of written input bearing a beneficial effect on the oral output (Lotter 2012), which renders the essential motivation for the present study.

In contexts where English is a foreign language, the (lack of) command of this language is increasingly becoming a concern for parents, who enrol their children in language schools at very early ages. These young learners are frequently instructed by means of teaching methods that seek to imitate naturalistic exposure and only after some years of simply receiving oral input do they face written input, which is disregarded and postponed to further stages of acquisition.

A number of previous research studies claim that instead of learning to write, students should write to learn (El-Koumy 1998; Kim 2008; Williams 2008; Blake 2009). In Lotter's words, "integrating written language with oral production for young learners might lead to greater gains in oral proficiency" (2012: 54). Nelson, Balass and Perfetti (2005) conducted a study which shows that orthographic input is more advantageous than phonological input due to the former allowing more efficient retention. Such a claim is true for both adults and young children and has been supported by many authors within the field of educational psychology (Ehri and Wilce 1979; Reitsma 1983; Baddeley, Papagno and Vallar 1988; Dean, Yekovich and Gray 1988; Gallo *et al.* 2001; Ehri 2005).

The significance of this paper lies in its intention to analyse a more suitable way of developing oral production through providing written input, both read and written, which will be referred to as integrated language-based instruction (Kim 2008). By means of reading, learners gain both access to words and structures they were not aware of and consciousness of their form and linguistic use. Hence, the development of oral and written skills ought to be simultaneous (Elley and Mangubhai 1983; Hudelson 1984, 1986; Elley 1991, 1994; Gersten 1996; Fitzgerald 2001; Weber and Longhi-Chirlin 2001; Kim 2008). In addition, owing to the affective filter being lower in writing than in speaking tasks, learners can attempt to use such structures and gather enough confidence to appropriately use them orally (Rubin and Kang 2008; Williams 2008).

The main aim of the study is to explore whether the incentive of written input and written output affect oral production of young language learners in a minimal input situation in an EFL context. The specific research questions formulated as the basis of this study are as follows:

- How does integrated language-based instruction affect young learners' oral production in relation to (a) the accuracy of target lexical items, (b) the semantic-pragmatic appropriateness of target structures and (c) the syntactic acceptability of target structures?
- How does integrated language-based instruction affect young learners' L1 translation skills?

The study will be carried out in two groups of seven and eight-year-old children learning English in an EFL minimal input situation. Each of the distinct approaches to language instruction, namely integrated language-based –oral and written– and oral language-based –oral only– will be applied to one of the groups so that each of them receives one type of instruction. Assuming the claims that integrating written input with oral input benefits oral output (El-Koumy 1998; Kim 2008; Williams 2008; Blake 2009; Lotter 2012) and that orthographic inputs are more efficiently retained than phonological inputs (Ehri and Wilce 1979; Reitsma 1983; Baddeley *et al.* 1988;

Dean *et al.* 1988; Gallo *et al.* 2001; Ehri 2005; Nelson *et al.* 2005), our hypothesis is that the experimental group will achieve better scores in all variables explored than the control group and will hence show the benefits of written input on their oral output.

The paper is organised as follows: Section 2 will analyse the two different pedagogical methodologies under study and Section 3 will review a number of experimental research studies which discuss them. In Section 4 the methodological procedures carried out will be detailed. Section 5 will present and explain the hypotheses under inspection as well as describe the results obtained from the tests carried out with the experimental and the control groups. Section 6 will discuss the results extracted from the tests and Section 7 will offer concluding remarks.

2. INTEGRATED LANGUAGE-BASED VS. ORAL LANGUAGE-BASED INSTRUCTION

Foreign languages are typically introduced, taught and practised orally among Young Language Learners (YLL) and instead of treating the Speaking skill equally to the other three language skills –Listening, Reading and Writing– “the spoken form in the young learner classroom acts as the prime source and site of language learning” (Cameron 2001: 18). This is also true for the methodology used in the language school where this study will be conducted. Extracurricular English sessions are offered to very young children, who learn the language in an instruction context by means of a programme that claims to resemble the naturalistic approach. Notwithstanding, it is based on one-hour lessons that occur only once a week, which contradicts the basis of naturalistic learning. The type of instruction the children receive is hence based on minimal input. Classes are conducted with the teacher using English as the only language of communication, and structures are taught by means of massive repetition in a context of oral language-based instruction with no written input allowed until children reach the age of 9.

Educational psychology has explored the integrated language-based and oral language-based types of instruction in relation to word recognition and the effects of memory on the learning of lexical items. Learning lexical items is the outcome of students being presented with them in a variety of situations and experiences. Some words are learnt in connection to their translated counterparts into the L1 of the individual. Some other word forms are assimilated together with their corresponding oral representation. Even more, another way of learning a lexical item occurs if this is introduced to the learner for the first time in a meaningful context. In this study, both the word form and its meaning are related to the context (i.e. written or spoken) the lexical items are encountered in, which seems to have an influence on

the word assimilation (Nelson *et al.* 2005).

Perfetti, Wlotko and Hart (2005) argue that comprehension and reading skills may influence the learning of lexical items and claim that skilled readers learn new words more effectively than skilled comprehenders. The framework proposed by Reichle and Perfetti (2003) suggests that context-independent information such as phonology and orthography accumulates with repeated exposure to the new word and that this knowledge is reflected in how well the new lexical items are known (i.e. familiarity) and how easily they are accessed (i.e. availability). Yet learners most often:

encounter new words either visually or auditorily in a meaning context. Thus, an episodic trace of such an encounter is likely to include context-specific information such as visual or acoustic input features in addition to more context-independent information such as orthography or phonology. The orthographic and phonological traces are strengthened as they are repeated over many encounters, eventually creating the kind of unified traces required for an abstracted lexical entry, while more context-specific aspects of individual traces will not be strengthened with variable encounters with the word (Nelson *et al.* 2005: 26).

Word-recognition should be better if occurring in the same modality its learning process took place. Therefore, if an individual first encounters a certain lexical item visually, it is only natural that the word will be accessed more quickly in further stages if the next encounter is also visual, since the type of knowledge they have established for that word is visual, and the same is true vice versa. What this study is interested in exploring is whether these notions are also applicable for grammatical structures and which type of memory bonds or traces –visual or auditory– are stronger and more beneficial. Nelson *et al.* (2005) already provide evidence that orthographic inputs are more advantageous than phonological inputs, since they lead to a more effective retention. Such hypothesis is supported by many other authors and for both adult and young learners (Ehri and Wilce 1979; Reitsma 1983; Baddeley *et al.* 1988; Dean *et al.* 1988; Gallo *et al.* 2001; Ehri 2005) and will be explored in the present study in relation to L2 teaching.

3. RESEARCH ON THE EFFECT OF INTEGRATED LANGUAGE-BASED INSTRUCTION ON L2 LEARNERS

In this section, relevant studies on L2 effects of written input on oral output conducted on a variety of populations and/or contexts of instruction will be reviewed. All of them are relevant for the present paper to the extent that they provide evidence for the claim that orthographic inputs have a favourable effect on oral output.

Despite the fact that literacy and oral skills are mutually interdependent, speaking is typically conceived as a skill to be acquired prior to reading and writing

and is therefore magnified in L2 instruction. However, according to Harklau (2002) it is important to explore the issue of how students learn a second language through writing, since, unlike oral communication, written texts allow students to reread, to practice repeatedly and lead to better structure retention. Rubin and Kang (2008) also support the fact that writing allows for a higher amount of reflection and revision and claim that the fact of visualising language provides children with an additional support which helps them both to become more aware of word boundaries and to produce oral output more efficiently.

Kim (2008) holds the assumption that oral language and literacy skills can develop concurrently. She conducted a case-study with two beginning ESL students of 5 and 6 years of age, both of whom were enrolled in a multicultural western kindergarten. The two participants were provided with two different kinds of instruction: integrated (i.e. written and oral) and only oral language-based in order to compare the effectiveness of the two approaches and their influence in the learners' oral skills. Apart from revealing that young learners are able to develop literacy skills without a strong speaking foundation, that is to say without having achieved any predetermined command of oral skills, the results also indicated it was while receiving an integrated language-based instruction that both participants had a better performance on multiple oral language assessment measures. Hence, a direct consequence of her findings is that language skills such as English writing and reading are an effective structural support to develop oral language skills in young ESL learners.

Whilst Kim (2008) explored young language learners in an SLA context, El-Koumy (1998) addressed the issue of improving adult learners' oral fluency with dialogue journal in an EFL setting. His study was conducted to 136 university students in an Egyptian setting, a country where instruction on oral skills is frequently disregarded due to literacy skills being the ones exposed to formal examination. The participants were divided into two groups, both of which received regular classroom instruction of the English language, but only one of them was presented with additional training in dialogue journal writing. Both the experimental and the control groups were pre-tested in order to exclude the possibility of statistically significant differences and post-tested on English speech skills. The results showed that there not being statistically noteworthy differences between the two groups on the pre-test, the experimental group obtained significantly higher scores on the post-test and therefore the hypothesis that journal-writing training contributed to an improvement of the learners' speech skills was accepted.

Another relevant exploratory study was conducted by Blake (2009), who investigated the effect of Internet chats on adult learners' oral fluency in an ESL

setting. 34 university-level participants were separated into 3 groups, each of which received different instructional treatments, namely a text-based Internet chat environment, a traditional face-to-face environment and a control one with no student interaction of any kind. After 6 weeks of instruction, the learners were tested and the participants that received the text-based Internet chat kind of instructional environment were found to achieve significantly higher gain scores in oral assessment, specifically in phonation time ratio and mean length of run measures. Such text-based Internet chats were providing the students with additional written support and their use helped them build oral fluency by facilitating the automation of lexical and grammatical knowledge. Blake administered a survey to parents, instructors and learners as well, which revealed a high degree of scepticism towards the use of literacy skills in order to improve oral fluency and proficiency.

Thus far, all research studies which address the issue of improving oral skills by means of written input are based on populations of adult learners or on ESL instructional contexts. Lotter (2012) explored the perceptions of teachers, school managers, parents and curriculum writers on the influence of literacy skills on speaking skills for young English language learners in an EFL instructional setting in Taiwan. Her study was of a qualitative nature and data was gathered by means of classroom observation, curriculum material and teacher manuals review and several interviews. Her results seem to indicate that teachers are not fully aware of the fact that parents need their children to develop their literacy skills and that instructors wish to spend more time working on reading and writing but are restricted by a full curriculum.

Altogether, no studies have been found that conducted quantitative research on the two types of instructional practices in young EFL contexts. The present study contributes new data which compares the outcomes in terms of oral output of young EFL students that have been taught using two different approaches to language instruction: integrated language-based –oral and written– and oral language-based –oral only.

4. METHODOLOGY

4.1. PARTICIPANTS AND SETTING

This study was conducted in an English language centre located in Barcelona, Spain, where the teaching methodology followed in order to provide EFL instruction claims to be in line with the naturalistic approach. Nonetheless, what it is based on is a minimal input and oral-based type of instruction. The school embraces a population of over 1,200 students, 126 of whom are coursing second grade and are divided into 16 groups. Two of these groups, composed of 8 participants each, were

selected for the study. All the students were Catalan/Spanish bilinguals and all of them had been attending classes at the same school for at least 4 years, being therefore familiar with the methodology used.

Learners in both the experimental and the baseline control groups were similar in terms of age, all of them ranging from 7 to 8 years old. The percentage of female participants was higher in the experimental group (62.5%) than in the control one (25%). However, the final rate of girls who were tested and whose results are analysed in section 6 of the present paper is 57.1% for the experimental group and 28.6% for the control group. A male participant from the control group and a female one from the experimental group missed the final test and were hence excluded from the sample.

4.2. TREATMENTS AND PROCEDURE

The present study included eight 1-hour sessions of intervention and an additional testing one during a time period of 9 weeks. The structures the students were exposed to were constructions containing *can* and *have got* in affirmative, negative and interrogative sentences. Such expressions were taught by means of a story that integrated them and by means of follow-up activities which required the learners to use them in affirmative and negative declarative sentences as well as in interrogative ones.

The control group received oral language-based instruction, as opposed to the integrated language-based tuition that was given to the experimental group. The instruction rendered was identical for each of the treatments, the only difference being the lack of written input. Both groups were exposed to exactly the same structures each day by means of oral input, yet the experimental one was given additional written input, which they read from the blackboard. Furthermore, on the fifth and sixth weeks, the experimental group was also presented with activities of the *fill-in-the-gaps* or *circle-the-correct-answer* type, by means of which they received additional written input – both read and written. On the ninth week all learners were assessed.

In order to answer the previously-mentioned research questions, a test consisting of 21 items classified in three different task types (see Section 4.3) was designed and administered to the participants. Two versions –A and B– of the same test were created so as to prevent peer repetition from altering the results. Both of them tested the same structures, but with different items. A more qualitative observation of the process aimed at complementing the quantitative results. Follow-up notes were gathered in a diary after each class on a weekly basis and were analysed in order to assess the students' progress.

4.3. INSTRUMENTS/ASSESSMENT MEASURES

After 8 weeks of instruction, the participants completed a 10-minute oral test covering the previously-mentioned structures (see Tables below). Such testing instrument consisted of three different tasks, namely a question and answer task (Task 1), a picture description task (Task 2) and an L1 translation task (Task 3).

4.3.1. Question and Answer Task

The target grammatical structure *I can buy* was elicited twice by means of providing the students with a prompting question similar to “What can you buy at the greengrocer’s/clothes shop/etc.?”. Afterwards, the participants were to formulate the same question twice again, the prompts being pictures of different stores. Secondly, the use of such structure both in affirmative and negative was triggered by asking the learners two questions such as “Can you buy muffins/milk/etc. at the bakery/fishmonger’s/etc.?”. Likewise, the students were required to provide such questions twice, the prompts being two pictures, one representing a certain store and another one an item. The structure *have got* was then brought into focus. In order to obtain it in an affirmative and a negative context, the participants were asked two questions such as “Have you got one/two/etc. arms/eyes/etc.?”. Finally, two images, one containing a number and another one showing a part of the face, served as a means of eliciting the target construction within an interrogative sentence, a process that was repeated twice. Table 1 includes the test items for Task 1 in the two versions of the test.

Table 1. Test items and target utterances in Task 1.

Task 1 – Questions and Answers	
Test A	Test B
(1) What can you buy at the greengrocer’s? <i>Target utterance: At the greengrocer’s I can buy apples, bananas, carrots, etc.</i>	(1) What can you buy at the toy shop? <i>Target utterance: At the toyshop I can buy videogames, a ball, a robot, etc.</i>
(2) What can you buy at the clothes shop? <i>Target utterance: At the clothes shop I can buy a jacket, a T-shirt, trousers, etc.</i>	(2) What can you buy at the fishmonger’s? <i>Target utterance: At the fishmonger’s I can buy fish, octopus, shrimps, etc.</i>

Task 1 – Questions and Answers	
(3) Now ask me (showing them a picture of the café). <i>Target utterance: What can you buy at the café?</i>	(3) Now ask me (showing them a picture of the supermarket). <i>Target utterance: What can you buy at the supermarket?</i>
(4) Now ask me (showing them a picture of the petrol station). <i>Target utterance: What can you buy at the bakery?</i>	(4) Now ask me (showing them a picture of the bakery). <i>Target utterance: What can you buy at the bakery?</i>
(5) Can you buy muffins at the bakery? <i>Target utterance: Yes, I can.</i> <i>Target utterance: Yes, I can.</i>	(5) Can you buy a jacket at the clothes shop? <i>Target utterance: No, I can't.</i>
(6) Can you buy milk at the fishmonger's? <i>Target utterance: No, I can't.</i>	(6) Can you buy lollipops at the newsagent's? <i>Target utterance: No, I can't.</i>
(7) Now ask me (showing them two pictures: sweets and butcher's). <i>Target utterance: Can you buy sweets at the butcher's?</i>	(7) Now ask me (showing them two pictures: fish and petrol station). <i>Target utterance: Can you buy fish at the petrol station?</i>
(8) Now ask me (showing them two pictures: newspaper and shoe shop). <i>Target utterance: Can you buy newspapers at the shoe shop?</i>	(8) Now ask me (showing them two pictures: sausages and greengrocer's). <i>Target utterance: Can you buy sausages at the greengrocer's?</i>
(9) Have you got two arms? <i>Target utterance: Yes, I have.</i>	(9) Have you got one mouth? <i>Target utterance: Yes, I have.</i>
(10) Have you got three mouths? <i>Target utterance: No, I haven't.</i>	(10) Have you got seven arms? <i>Target utterance: Yes, I have.</i>
(11) Now ask me (showing them two pictures: number 1 and an eye). <i>Target utterance: Have you got one eye?</i>	(11) Now ask me (showing them two pictures: number 3 and an eye). <i>Target utterance: Have you got three eyes?</i>
(12) Now ask me (showing them two pictures: number 1 and a nose). <i>Target utterance: Have you got one nose?</i>	(12) Now ask me (showing them two pictures: number 1 and a nose). <i>Target utterance: Have you got five mouths?</i>

4.3.2. Picture Description Task

Such a task comprised a total of five strings of two pictures each, one depicting a store and the other one illustrating an item which could either be or not be bought at that shop. The learners were required to describe the pictures using structures similar to "At the café/toy shop/etc. I can/can't buy bananas/a ball/etc.". Specifically, there were three picture sets portraying a correct relationship and two representing an incorrect one. Table 2 includes the test items for Task 2 in the two versions of the test.

Table 2. Test items and target utterances in Task 2.

Task 2 – Picture Description	
Test A	Test B
(1) Picture of café + picture of bananas <i>Target utterance: At the café I can't buy bananas.</i>	(1) Picture of shoe shop + picture of sweets <i>Target utterance: At the shoe shop I can't buy sweets.</i>
(2) Picture of toy shop + picture of a ball <i>Target utterance: At the toyshop I can buy a ball.</i>	(2) Picture of supermarket + picture of a bottle of milk <i>Target utterance: At the supermarket I can buy milk.</i>
(3) Picture of fishmonger's + picture of fish <i>Target utterance: At the fishmonger's I can buy fish.</i>	(3) Picture of bakery + picture of croissants <i>Target utterance: At the bakery I can buy croissants.</i>
(4) Picture of newsagent's + picture of cereal packet <i>Target utterance: At the newsagent's I can't buy cereal.</i>	(4) Picture of greengrocer's + picture of boots <i>Target utterance: At the greengrocer's I can't buy boots/shoes.</i>
(5) Picture of clothes shop + picture of a jacket <i>Target utterance: At the clothes shop I can buy a jacket.</i>	(5) Picture of petrol station + picture of petrol <i>Target utterance: At the petrol station I can buy petrol.</i>

4.3.3. L1 translation task

This concluding task aimed at triggering a translation of both target structures into the participants' L1, Catalan. Four questions were asked, one containing the

structure *have got* in interrogative and the other three including *can buy* – one in affirmative, one in negative and the remaining one in an interrogative form. Table 3 includes the test items for Task 3 in the two versions of the test.

Table 3. Test items and target utterances in Task 3.

Task 3 – L1 Translation	
Test A	Test B
(1) How do you say “At the butcher’s I can buy sausages” in Catalan? <i>Target utterance: A la carnisseria (hi) puc comprar(-hi) salsitxes.</i>	(1) How do you say “At the fishmonger’s I can buy fish” in Catalan? <i>Target utterance: A la peixateria (hi) puc comprar(-hi) peix.</i>
(2) How do you say “At the supermarket I can’t buy croissants” in Catalan? <i>Target utterance: Al supermercat no (hi) puc comprar(-hi) croissants.</i>	(2) How do you say “At the toy shop I can’t buy apples” in Catalan? <i>Target utterance: A la botiga de joguines no (hi) puc comprar(-hi) pomes.</i>
(3) How do you say “What can you buy at the fishmonger’s” in Catalan? <i>Target utterance: Què pots comprar a la peixateria?</i>	(3) How do you say “What can you buy at the supermarket” in Catalan? <i>Target utterance: Què pots comprar al supermercat?</i>
(4) How do you say “Have you got two books” in Catalan? <i>Target utterance: Tens dos llibres?</i>	(4) How do you say “Have you got two dogs” in Catalan? <i>Target utterance: Tens dos gossos?</i>

4.4. DATA ANALYSIS

In order to assess how students responded to their respective instructional treatment, the children’s performance in the tasks were recorded and responses were transcribed and then coded using an adaptation of the scoring areas designed by Kim (2008). As far as Task 1 and Task 2 are concerned, the three following categories of analysis were regarded:

- (A) *Number of correct target words*: This notion accounts for the total number of comprehensible and accurate target words produced per utterance. The lexical terms referring to store names were contemplated as a single word for simplicity purposes. Contractions like *can’t* and *don’t* were also assumed to count as one single lexical item. For Items 1 and 2 in Task 1,

responses could include a number of possible articles that could be bought at the store of the relevant context. In the event that a participant provided more than one item, only the first one was considered, so that the number of correct target words was not affected. Additionally and for the same purpose, shop names were counted as one only word even though they consisted of two lexical terms or they were compounds, as for instance *clothes shop* or *petrol station*. If the learners provided a lexical item in their own L1 instead of in English, this affected the correct number of target words, but not the semantic-pragmatic appropriateness or the syntactic acceptability scores. For the number of correct target words in each item see Appendix A.

- (B) *Semantic-Pragmatic Appropriateness*: Adequacy of meaning and use in each utterance was tested according to a binary system. A 0 was given if the informant's response was not appropriate in terms of meaning and use and a 1 was granted if it was appropriate.
- (C) *Syntactic Acceptability*: This category assessed whether the learners' constructions were grammatical. A 0 was awarded if the answer was ungrammatical and a 1 was given if the respondents' sentence structure was grammatically acceptable.

As regards Task 3, responses were coded using an L1 Translation category by which responses were coded following a binary system. A set of criteria which included different possible translations of the target sentence were defined. They included possible null subjects, clitic pronouns and impersonal structures (see Appendix A). A 0 was given if the participant's answer did not conform to any of the acceptability criteria and a 1 was awarded if the answer was contemplated within such criteria.

The coding was carried out by one of the authors of the present paper and by an additional native English speaker for inter-rater reliability purposes. An inter-rater reliability analysis using the Kappa statistic was performed to determine consistency among raters, which was $Kappa = 1.000$ ($p < .001$) in all variables except for Task1A Can in which the reliability between the raters was $Kappa = .680$ ($p < .001$).

In order to determine the effect of providing written input to the experimental group, both qualitative and quantitative analyses have been carried out. As for the qualitative analysis, diary notes were gathered, analysed and incorporated into the discussion. As for the quantitative study, bearing in mind that the sample size was remarkably small, non-parametric statistical tests were applied. Intergroup analyses were conducted by means of Mann-Whitney U tests and the level of significance was $p = .05$ all throughout the analysis.

5. RESULTS

The comparative analysis contrasts the experimental and the control groups. As Table 4 shows, results are higher in the experimental group in all variables tested. For a visual representation of all the variable means, see Figure 1 below.

Table 4. Mann-Whitney U test between experimental and control groups.

Variable	Group	N	Mean	SD	Mann-Whitney U	p-value
Task1A Can	Control	7	39.57	7.185	8.500	.039*
	Experimental	7	45.86	2.545		
Task1A Have	Control	7	12.14	2.268	8.500	.038*
	Experimental	7	14.43	1.813		
Task1B Can	Control	7	6.57	1.618	16.500	.269
	Experimental	7	7.57	.535		
Task1B Have	Control	7	3.29	.951	14.000	.061
	Experimental	7	4.00	.00		
Task1C Can	Control	7	4.29	2.138	6.000	.015*
	Experimental	7	7.14	1.574		
Task1C Have	Control	7	2.14	1.215	14.000	.159
	Experimental	7	3.00	1.528		
Task2A	Control	7	30.57	5.623	11.000	.076
	Experimental	7	33.71	1.496		
Task2B	Control	7	3.00	1.528	11.500	.076
	Experimental	7	4.29	.951		
Task2C	Control	7	4.14	1.864	17.500	.142
	Experimental	7	5.00	.00		
Task3	Control	7	.86	.378	.000	.001*
	Experimental	7	3.86	.378		

As for the *Question and Answer Task* (Task 1), there is a significant difference in the scores for the percentage of the correct number of target words in the items containing *can* between the experimental ($M=45.86$, $SD=2.545$) and the control ($M=39.57$, $SD=7.185$) groups; ($U = 8.500$, $p = .039$). The same is true for the correct number of target words containing *have*, the experimental group scoring significantly higher ($M=14.43$, $SD=1.813$) than the control group ($M=12.14$, $SD=2.268$); ($U = 8.500$,

$p = .038$). The difference regarding semantic-pragmatic appropriateness is marginally significant ($U = 14.000, p = .061$) in those items containing a *have*-structure and non-significant in those containing a *can*-structure. As far as syntactic acceptability is concerned, even though no significant differences are detected in the items concerning *have*, the two groups seem to differ notably in those items containing *can* in favour of the experimental group, whose participants have scored significantly higher ($M=7.14, SD=1.574$) than the ones in the control group ($M=4.29, SD=2.138$); ($U = 6.000, p = .015$).

As for the *Picture Description Task* (Task 2) both groups obtained similar results in the three variables ($p > .05$). The discussion section will next deal with possible reasons that may account for these results. The major contrast is found in Task 3, namely the *L1 translation* task, where the experimental group scored significantly higher ($M=3.86, SD=.378$) than the control group ($M=.86, SD=.378$); ($U = .000, p = .001$).

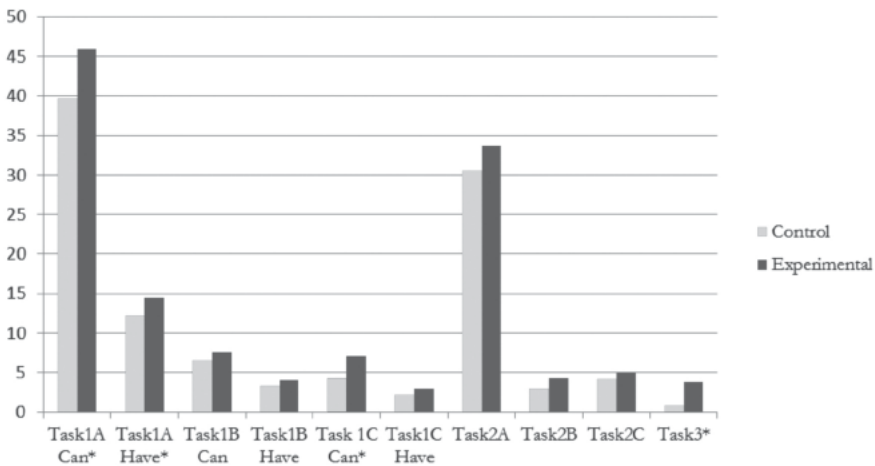


Figure 1. Clustered column chart of the variable means from the control and the experimental groups².

6. DISCUSSION

In the previous section, the results of the different statistical tests were presented. This section will discuss and interpret these results both quantitatively and qualitatively and in relation to the research questions addressed in the present study, namely the effects of integrated language-based instructions on young learners' oral

² An asterisk sign next to a variable accounts for the presence of a significant difference.

output with respect to the accurate number of target words, semantic-pragmatic appropriateness, syntactic acceptability and L1 translation.

The main finding of the study is that the experimental group scored higher in all variables tested and some significant differences were found between the groups. These results generally confirm our hypothesis and are in line with previous related studies which suggest that an instructional approach where oral input is supported with written input leads to better results (El-Koumy 1998; Harklau 2002; Rubin and Kang 2008; Kim 2008; Blake 2009).

Hence, the present study seems to indicate that whether language is encountered in a written or a spoken context has an influence on learners' assimilation, orthographical inputs being more beneficial. A variety of authors in the area of educational psychology (Ehri and Wilce 1979; Reitsma 1983; Baddeley *et al.* 1988; Dean *et al.* 1988; Gallo *et al.* 2001; Ehri 2005; Nelson *et al.* 2005) have supported this assumption as well.

Task 1 involved question-answer interaction with the instructor. As for the correct number of target words and as expected, significantly higher results were observed in the experimental group. This suggests that the fact of seeing the constructions in written form helps students to both see exactly what words are being used in each construction and assimilate them more effectively in order to produce them more accurately. Illustrating this point is the fact that some participants of the control group had a tendency to confuse the words *buy* and *bike*, which are phonetically similar. In addition, they were inconsistent in their use of both words, using *buy* in some of their answers and *bike* in the immediate following answer of a similar nature, as if they did not know which one to use. None of the learners of the experimental group displayed this problem, probably because they had seen the construction written many times, which helped them achieve a significantly better score on uttering the correct number of target lexical items.

Regarding semantic-pragmatic appropriateness, there not being significant differences might be due to the fact that the learners had received such a remarkably great exposure to the structures that even the ones who were not given additional written input understood the notions. If a child understood what can be bought in each store and could relate that to saying yes or no, they already achieved the correct score for semantic-pragmatic appropriateness. This was also true for children providing answers, such as "Yes, I can" to questions that required a syntactically different structure, as "Have you got two arms?". For this specific instance, the participant was incorrectly marked for syntactic acceptability, but he achieved a correct score for semantic-pragmatic appropriateness, since he understood what he was being asked, but did not know what grammatical structure to use in order to

express the intended meaning. This might lead to think that written input does not affect adequacy of meaning and use as much as it affects the other variables tested.

Furthermore, learners from the experimental group also proved to produce significantly more syntactically acceptable *can*-structures. As for *have*-structures, although the scores were better in the experimental group, they did not prove to be significantly different. This might be due to the latter containing an inferior number of lexical items, which would allow for a lower probability of producing syntactic mistakes when combining words or the fact that these *have*-structures are normally present in their school books and tasks, which makes them more familiar with the structure.

A number of participants presented problems producing the word *sausages* and solved it by pronouncing a mixture of it and its Catalan counterpart *salsitxes*. However, as stated in section 5.4, this affected the score for the total number of correct target words, but not the ones on semantic-pragmatic appropriateness or syntactic acceptability.

In addition, in some cases the same learner provided a syntactically and semantic-pragmatically incorrect answer to a question, but responded syntactically and semantic-pragmatically correctly to the following question which tested the same structure. For instance, to the question "Can you buy muffins at the bakery?" a student responded "No, I haven't" and to the ensuing question "Can you buy milk at the fishmonger's?" the answer provided was "No, I can't". This might suggest that the student is clever enough to listen to the construction of my question and merely copy the structure the second time he hears it, which could be an argument to account for significant differences not surfacing in some variables.

Task 2 involved picture description, without any oral input, but just visual strings of images. The strings contained two pictures each, one portraying a shop and the other one depicting an item which could either be or not be bought at that store. This task was one of the central activities during the instruction period and it was carried out in every session. Due to the kind of instructional approach applied putting much emphasis on repetition of structures, the participants of both groups were required to describe strings of pictures on a daily basis, repeating all the possible combinations. This might account for the fact that, even though the experimental group scored higher in all three variables, no significant differences were found between the two groups in any of the variables under assessment. Nevertheless, whilst the students of the experimental group showed capacities to accomplish this task independently by session two, the ones belonging to the control group did not begin to utter correct sentences without my help until the sixth session. Therefore, in qualitative terms, there were differences between the two groups and these seem to indicate that written input provides a faster understanding of L2 propositions.

As for Task 3, namely the translation of constructions into Catalan, the experimental group achieved significantly better scores than the control group. Nearly all the participants of the experimental group achieved a 100% translation score. The rater impressions after analysing the data of this task were that without written input, the learners conceive the structure to be a matching one, that is to say that they think what they are being required to do is to provide a matching sentence, similar to “*bread goes with bakery*” and “*dress doesn’t go with shoe shop*”. This is so because the majority of the control group participants’ answers for this task were the Catalan counterparts of “At the *name of shop* there are(n’t) *item*” or “*item goes/doesn’t go with name of shop*”).

Even though the students in the control group did not translate the structures appropriately, it must be stated that all of them seemed to understand when the sentences were affirmative or negative and reproduced this feature properly in their L1 translation. For instance, in order to translate “At the supermarket I can’t buy croissants” a learner provided the utterance: “*Al supermercat no van els croissants*”, the lexical item *no* acting as a negation particle. This fact seems to indicate that although none of the individuals was able to translate any of the *can*-structures correctly, all of them managed to appropriately translate the *affirmative/negative* feature.

In qualitative terms and as the notes gathered on the weekly diary indicate, the learners started reacting different to both kinds of instructional approaches from the very first session. The students of the control group were introduced to the structures by means of oral input and on the first session they looked quite lost. What they did was repeat after the teacher imitating the intonation pattern, but they seemed to drop certain words or sounds. Sometimes they would drop half a word, exhibiting a lack of understanding of what the word limits were. Conversely, the students of the experimental group were given additional written support and on the first session they seemed to generally understand the constructions more clearly. Only two of the participants showed certain problems to answer the researcher’s questions or to use the target constructions. Notwithstanding, they showed more confidence than the students of the control group. At the beginning of the first class, not all of them pronounced the final /t/ in *can’t*, but by the end of it and after many repetitions and by seeing the words on the board, the majority of them were already answering the questions individually, without much difficulty and some of them without even looking at the written support.

On the second class, the learners of the experimental group showed immediate understanding when they were asked questions using the constructions. Whereas the participants of the control group were dropping the words *have* or *got* from the structure *I have got*, or the words *buy* or *can* from the structure *I can buy*, the ones from the experimental group were producing all the lexical items without the

instructors' help and by the end of the class none of them were using the written support.

In order to ensure students were not only reproducing the same construction, other questions were asked so as to trigger the use of *can*, *can't*, *have got* and *haven't got* in different contexts. The results were clearly favourable for the learners of the experimental group, who were able to answer appropriately using the target constructions, as opposed to the participants of the control group who seemed to understand whether they had to answer affirmatively or negatively, but were not able to answer accordingly with the correct structures.

Not until the sixth session did some of the participants of the control group start showing a certain degree of understanding and began to utter the whole structures without dropping any words. By then, the experimental group had already mastered both constructions. The experimental group of students had also been required to write the constructions in order to enhance written output.

Overall, the present study produced results which seem to confirm our hypothesis and the findings of previous research in this field at least as far as young learners in a minimal input situation are concerned. The findings of the current paper are consistent with those which found that written input leads to more effective retention than oral input (Ehri and Wilce 1979; Reitsma 1983; Baddeley *et al.* 1988; Dean *et al.* 1988; Gallo *et al.* 2001; Ehri 2005; Nelson *et al.* 2005). This study also supports previous research into second and foreign language teaching which links written skills and greater gains on oral production (El-Koumy 1998; Harklau 2002; Rubin and Kang 2008; Kim 2008; Blake 2009).

Bearing in mind the results analysed and discussed so far and in relation to Research Question 1.1, integrated language-based instruction seems to positively affect young learners' oral production in relation to the accuracy of target lexical items. This can be claimed since the results of Task 1 for this category are significantly different. There were no significant differences for this variable in Task 2, but this might be due to a possible inefficient design of the test as already mentioned above.

As for Research Question 1.2, the evidence resulting from the data suggests that additional written input is not as necessary for the oral production of target structures in relation to semantic-pragmatic appropriateness. It might be that seeing the target structures written does not help to understand adequacy of meaning and use. As a matter of fact, just by understanding the vocabulary or by seeing the images, the children might have been able to understand their meaning and to answer accordingly.

Regarding Research Question 1.3, there are significant differences as far as the *can*-structures are concerned, but not for the *have*-structures. As previously argued,

this might be owing to the latter having fewer lexical items, which hints again that there might have been a problem in the design of the tests. Another reason to account for this is that participants are more familiar with the *have*-structures, since they are normally present in their school books.

Finally, as for Research Question 2 the results show a significant difference in Task 3 and thus, it can be claimed that integrated language-based instruction seems to positively affect young learners' L1 translation skills. L1 translations of participants in the control group were generally poor. None of them gave a correct translation for the *can*-structures according to the defined criteria in Table 1 and the majority of them interpreted the target sentences as a matching game. Conversely, nearly all the participants in the experimental group gave correct L1 translations in Task 3.

7. CONCLUSIONS

The present study aimed at exploring whether the incentive of integrated language-based instruction affected oral output of young language learners in a minimal input situation in an EFL context. According to the data obtained and analysed, language-based instruction appears to greatly benefit oral production of young learners in relation to the accuracy of target lexical items and also seems to have a certain effect on their oral production in relation to syntactic acceptability of target structures, even though this last assumption should be further researched with a greater number of participants. As for semantic-pragmatic appropriateness, additional written input and output does not seem to affect young learner's production of target structures. In relation to L1 translation, the data of the present study reveals that integrated language-based instruction results in better scores. Whilst the participants in the experimental group were generally able to appropriately translate the sentences in Task 3 according to the defined criteria, the ones in the control group did not give correct L1 translations on the whole.

It must be acknowledged that the differences between the two groups could have been of a higher attestable and evident character had the number of participants been larger, the instructional period longer and the variety of structures greater. Further research should incorporate a wider range of participants, cover a wider age range and be carried out during a longer period of time. The effects of integrated language-based instruction should be explored at different stages of language development and should also consider more in depth requiring written output from the students in order to examine whether it bears any effects on assimilation of structures. It must be recognised that the test was not completely adequate, especially as far as Task 2 and Category B (i.e. semantic-pragmatic appropriateness) are concerned. However, the choice of items and target structures

is justified by the fact that the researcher had to comply with the obligations of the school syllabus and was limited by time and programme restrictions. An additional limitation might be that some cognitively advanced students may be able to understand, retain and produce structures satisfactorily by having been exposed to oral input only, without the need of additional orthographic input. Further research could take this into account and separate individuals according to their intellectual and cognitive capacities and explore the outcomes.

All in all, the oral area of language is the one that receives the most prominence in EFL instruction (Cameron, 2001). Thus, the instructional setting provided to the control group is the one adopted in the majority of schools and the one to which young language learners are used to. The results of the present study suggest that teaching English as a foreign language to young language learners in a minimal input situation could be more effective if literacy skills were integrated in the EFL class as soon as children begin to read and write in their L1.

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APPENDIX A

Accepted answers and number of correct words in Test A and Test B.

Test A	
Task 1 – Questions and Answers	
Accepted answers	Number of correct target words
(1) At the greengrocer's I can buy _____.	7
(2) At the clothes shop I can buy _____.	7
(3) What can you buy at the café?	7
(4) What can you buy at the petrol station?	7
(5) Yes, I can.	3
(6) No, I can't.	3
(7) Can you buy sweets at the butcher's?	7
(8) Can you buy a newspaper at the shoe shop?	8
Can you buy newspapers at the shoe shop?	7
(9) Yes, I have.	3
(10) No, I haven't.	3
(11) Have you got one eye?	5
(12) Have you got one nose?	5
Task 2 – Picture Description	
Accepted answers	Number of correct target words
(1) At the café I can't buy bananas.	7
At the café I can't buy a banana.	8
(2) At the toyshop I can buy a ball.	8
At the toyshop I can buy balls.	7
(3) At the fishmonger's I can buy fish.	7
(4) At the newsagent's I can't buy cereal.	7
(5) At the clothes shop I can buy a jacket.	8
At the clothes shop I can buy jackets.	7

Task 3 – L1 Translation	
Accepted answers	
(1) A la carnisseria (jo) puc comprar salsitxes. A la carnisseria (jo) hi puc comprar salsitxes. A la carnisseria (jo) puc comprar-hi salsitxes. A la carnisseria es poden comprar salsitxes. A la carnisseria s'hi poden comprar salsitxes.	
(2) Al supermercat (jo) no puc comprar crusans. Al supermercat (jo) no hi puc comprar crusans. Al supermercat (jo) no puc comprar-hi crusans. Al supermercat no es poden comprar crusans. Al supermercat no s'hi poden comprar crusans.	
(3) Què pots/puc comprar a la peixateria? Què hi pots/puc comprar a la peixateria? Què pots/puc comprar-hi a la peixateria? Què es pot comprar a la peixateria? Què s'hi pot comprar a la peixateria?	
(4) Tens dos llibres? Tu tens dos llibres?	

Test B	
Task 1 – Questions and Answers	
Accepted answers	Number of correct target words
(1) At the toyshop I can buy _____.	7
(2) At the fishmonger's I can buy _____.	7
(3) What can you buy at the supermarket?	7
(4) What can you buy at the bakery?	7
(5) Yes, I can.	3
(6) No, I can't.	3
(7) Can you buy fish at the petrol station?	7
(8) Can you buy sausages at the greengrocer's?	7
(9) Yes, I have.	3
(10) No, I haven't.	3
(11) Have you got three eyes?	5
(12) Have you got five mouths?	5
Task 2 – Picture Description	
Accepted answers	Number of correct target words
(1) At the shoe shop I can't buy sweets.	7
(2) At the supermarket I can buy milk.	7
(3) At the bakery I can buy croissants.	7
(4) At the greengrocer's I can't buy shoes.	7
At the greengrocer's I can't buy boots.	7
(5) At the petrol station I can buy petrol.	7
Task 3 – L1 Translation	
Accepted answers	
(1) A la peixateria (jo) puc comprar peix/os. A la peixateria (jo) hi puc comprar peix/os. A la peixateria (jo) puc comprar-hi peix/os. A la peixateria es poden comprar peix/os. A la peixateria s'hi poden comprar peix/os.	

<p>(2) A la botiga de joguines/joguets (jo) no puc comprar pomes. A la botiga de joguines/joguets (jo) no hi puc comprar pomes. A la botiga de joguines/joguets (jo) no puc comprar-hi pomes. A la botiga de joguines/joguets no es poden comprar pomes. A la botiga de joguines/joguets no s'hi poden comprar pomes.</p>	
<p>(3) Què pots/puc comprar al supermercat? Què hi pots/puc comprar al supermercat? Què pots/puc comprar-hi al supermercat? Què es pot comprar al supermercat? Què s'hi pot comprar al supermercat?</p>	
<p>(4) Tens dos gossos?</p>	