

Spelling errors in L2 Russian: evidence from Spanish-speaking students*

Errores ortográficos en ruso como L2: evidencia de los estudiantes hispanohablantes

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Abstract: *The aim of this study is to analyse spelling errors in written academic works of Spanish-speaking students learning Russian as second language. For this purpose, 50 samples of written essays were collected at the Official School of Languages (Escuela Oficial de Idiomas) in La Coruña, Galicia for analysis. The results show that students predominantly make errors due to differences between the Spanish and Russian phonological systems. Other reasons for origins of errors are also discussed. In particular, certain sounds and letters were identified as being especially problematic for Spanish-speaking students, such as /ja/, /v/, /z/ and the uses of the soft sign letter.*

Keywords: error analysis, second language acquisition, Russian, writing

Resumen: *El objetivo de este estudio es analizar diferentes tipos de errores que aparecen en los trabajos académicos escritos por estudiantes hispanohablantes de ruso como segunda lengua. Para ello, se recogieron 50 muestras de redacciones escritas en la Escuela Oficial de Idiomas de La Coruña, Galicia. Los resultados obtenidos muestran que gran parte de los errores cometidos por los estudiantes se deben a las diferencias fonológicas existentes entre el español y el ruso. También se discuten otros posibles orígenes de los errores ortográficos. En particular, ciertos sonidos y letras son especialmente problemáticos para los estudiantes de habla hispana, por ejemplo /b/, /v/, /z/ y el signo suave.*

Palabras clave: análisis de errores, aprendizaje de lenguas extranjeras, ruso, escritura

1. Introduction

It is generally accepted that linguistic competence is highly relevant both for professional and personal purposes. One of the languages that drew the attention of Spanish-speaking people is Russian. Currently, the Russian language is spoken by approximately 265026130 people (*Ethnologue*, 2018) mainly in Russia and former Soviet Union Republics, making it the eighth most spoken language worldwide and the first Slavic language used in the world. In

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an academic context, not only is it important to speak correctly but also a foreign language student should be efficient in writing. Spelling is essential for proper communication; it is relevant then to know what kind of mistakes students tend to make in order to develop didactic methodology to prevent these errors. Previous studies have focused on the issue of first language (L1) transfer of Romance languages in Russian as second language (L2) (Bondareva and Loginova, 2014); other studies have compared phonological systems of Russian and Spanish (Klimova *et al.*, 2017). Quero Gervilla (2005) investigated the errors in the acquisition of declination (case) system in Russian. Golikov (2008), in turn, analysed difficulties experienced by Spanish-speaking students when acquiring vocabulary, grammar, writing and listening skills in Russian. Vinogradov and Miloslavskiy (1986) were the first scholars who compared the morphological systems in Russian and Spanish. They found out that number systems are relatively similar in both languages. However, it was noted that the Russian number system is more complex due to a quantity of endings used in forming plurals whereas in Spanish only the suffix *-s* is added. Bondareva and Loginova (2014) concluded that some Russian sounds are particularly difficult for Italian and Spanish-speaking students, among these are /i/ and soft sounds /ja/, /je/, /ju/, /jo/. Another complex aspect of Russian vocalism for Romance languages speakers is the stress change. In Spanish or in Italian the stress in a word is fixed whereas in Russian it could be changed as in *λόγκο*¹ /lofka/ 'skilfully' and *λογκά* /lafka/ 'agile'. Golikov (2008) in his investigation observed that the spelling of some letters is challenging for Spanish students as they have a similar form but a different sound correspondence (see Section 2.2), other letters are very similar in their spelling as *ш, щ, ч, ц* so they are frequently confused by learners.

This paper gives an overview of spelling errors made by Spanish-speaking students of Russian as L2. The findings will contribute to new didactic proposals which may help students to improve not only their writing skills but also their pronunciation, since both are interrelated. In Section 2, a brief overview of research on second language acquisition is given and a short outline of the orthography systems in Russian and Spanish is presented. In Section 3, I then explain the methodology and analysis of the data and give information of the data collected. Finally, I discuss the results divided in three parts in Section 4 before concluding the paper in Section 5.

2. Theoretical approach

2.1. Second language acquisition, transfer and error analysis

The term second language acquisition (SLA) refers to a process of learning a second language. An L2 does not necessarily have to be a second language of a student but it is any language studied after a first / native

¹Examples in Russian will be written in italics.

language (L1) (Ellis, 1997). Lado (1957) was the first to introduce the idea that differences between L1 and L2 structures cause problems in L2 acquisition whereas similarities help students to grasp the L2 concepts. Later, following Lado's theory, Weinrich added that "the greater the difference between the systems, i.e. the more numerous the mutually exclusive forms and patterns in each, the greater is the learning problem and the potential area of interference" (1968: 1). Both Weinrich and Lado consider that foreign language students tend to transfer some grammatical aspects and vocabulary from their L1 to their L2:

"[i]ndividuals tend to transfer the forms and meanings, and the distributions of forms and meanings of their native language and culture to the foreign language and culture, both productively when attempting to speak the language and to act in the culture, and receptively when attempting to grasp and understand the language and the culture as practiced by natives" (Lado, 1957: 2).

As mentioned by Bardovi-Harlig and Sprouse (2018), applied linguistics is more focused on 'negative transfer' or 'interference' rather than on 'positive transfer' since normally negative transfer presents difficulties in the learning and teaching of foreign languages. In Spanish linguistics, Payrató (1985) discussed some main aspects of language transfer between Spanish and Catalan, two related languages. He found out that in this case the transfer is mainly positive for students. Fernández Jódar (2006) carried out a contrastive analysis between Polish and Spanish languages and also analysed morphological, lexical and spelling errors of Polish-speaking students of Spanish as L2. His study reported that the majority of spelling mistakes resulted from language transfer between Spanish and Polish.

Positive and negative transfer can be manifested in all linguistic domains. Regarding phonetics, interference is probably responsible for typical foreign accents in L2. A sound or combination of sounds absent in the student's L1 can cause difficulties for them when learning L2. For example, English words beginning with *s-* are highly challenging for Spanish-speaking students as this is not a typical beginning in Spanish. Often a student will compensate this by adding an extra /e/ at the start of a word, as in /espein/ instead of /spein/. As for the morphosyntax, negative transfer is responsible for word order, inflection errors, verbal tenses use (Bardovi-Harlig and Sprouse, 2018). Russian-speaking students often find it difficult to distinguish between perfect and simple tenses as no differentiation is made in Russian. Continuous tenses also provoke problems due to the absence of this grammatical category in Russian, for example "I study now" instead of "I am studying now" or *escucho música ahora* instead of *estoy escuchando música ahora*. There can also be a certain amount of interference by the vocabulary of student's L1 where some words might be spelled or pronounced in a similar way to words in L2, but they may have

different meanings (English “become” and German “*bekommen*”, ‘to receive’ or Russian “*фамилия*” /*familia*/ ‘surname’ and Spanish “*familia*” ‘family’). Finally, negative transfer is also common within the domain of pragmatics where L1 and L2 could have different conditions for appropriate use of language in a particular situation.

Research approaches focused on identification of errors caused in L2 appeared in the 1970s. Corder (1967, 1973, 1977, 1981) initially formulated the definition of ‘error’, a fundamental concept of this theory. According to him, it is a systematic deviation in learner’s language resulting from the lack of knowledge of the correct rule and determining the linguistic system of a particular level of the student. According to Corder (1967: 167), the identification of errors is essential for teachers, researchers and students:

“First to the teacher, in that they tell him, if he undertakes a systematic analysis, how far towards the goal the learner has progressed and, consequently, what remains for him to learn. Second, they provide to the researcher evidence of how language is learned or acquired, what strategies or procedures the learner is employing [...]. Thirdly [...], they are indispensable to the learner himself, because we can regard the making of errors as a device the learner uses in order to learn [...]. The making of errors then is a strategy employed both by children acquiring their mother tongue and by those learning a second language”.

Corder (1971) also proposed a term ‘idiosyncratic dialect’ which was subsequently re-named to the better known ‘interlanguage’ by Selinker (1969). Interlanguage is a peculiar linguistic system of an L2 student, clearly different from both the learner’s L1 and the target language (TL) being learnt, but linked to both L1 and TL by interlanguage identifications in the perception of the learner (Selinker, 1972). Santos Gargallo (1993) points out that interlanguage system varies from both L1 and L2 linguistic systems. It is also changing through time, therefore, an interlanguage of the A2 level students is distinct to the one of the C1 level students. Following Grosjean (1982), there are three types of interlanguage errors: generalization, simplification and hypercorrection. The first type consists in creating false analogies between L1 and L2 grammatical or lexical aspects. Simplification errors occur when students want to express a difficult aspect but have not acquired it yet, so they make use of simpler structures. Finally, hypercorrection is presented when students consciously avoid specific grammatical or lexical aspects that seem difficult to them.

2.2. Russian and Spanish orthography systems

Russian is a Slavic language whose ancient Cyrillic alphabet dates back to the ninth or tenth centuries. The modern Russian alphabet uses a Cyrillic

version of Greek origins consisting of 33 letters. In turn, Latin alphabet is used in Spanish which is composed by 27 letters. Some of the letters are spelled equally in Spanish and in Russian, such as *A-a*, *O-o*, *E-e*. Other letters are the same in only upper case, e.g. *M* and *K* whereas they are not spelled similarly in lower case (*м* and *κ*). It is also important to highlight that handwriting or cursive is often used in Russian, making the spelling slightly different from computer typed letters. In Figure 1, I compare and summarize some differences between Russian and Spanish alphabets (Golikov, 2008; Klimova *et al.*, 2017). Interestingly, whereas in Castilian Spanish the sound /ʃ/ as in *shop* /ʃop/ is considered as non-native sound and is not used frequently, in Galician it is possible to find this sound in many words as *xente*, *xogar*, etc. Some letters and their correspondent sounds, for example, *я* /ja/ or *ч* /tɕ/ do not have a direct equivalent in Spanish. Nonetheless, there are similar to /ja/ and /tɕ/ sounds as in the words *yate* 'yacht' and *chico* 'boy' respectively.

Spanish letter	IPA ² Spanish	Russian letter	IPA Russian
Y/y	/i/	И/и	/i/
U/u	/u/	У/у	/u/
-	-	Я/я	/ja/
-	-	Ю/ю	/ju/
-	-	Е/е	/je/
-	-	Ё/ё	/jo/
E/e	/e/	Э/э	/e/
T/t	/t/	Т/т (in cursive <i>m</i>)	/t/
M/m	/m/	М/м	/m/
N/n	/n/	Н/н	/n/
H/h	/- ³	-	-
X/x	/ks/	Х/х	/x/
R/r	/r/	Р/р	/r/
L/l	/l/	Л/л	/l/ or /li/
P/p	/p/	П/п	/p/
-	-	Ж/ж	/z/
-	-	Ш/ш	/ʃ/ or /ɕ/
-	-	Щ/щ	/ɕɕ/
-	-	Ц/ц	/tɕ/
-	-	Ч/ч	/tɕ/

Fig. 1: Some differences in Spanish and Russian orthography systems

²International Phonetic Alphabet.

³Spanish letter H is not pronounced.

3. Data and procedures

Due to a scarce amount of previous research on the acquisition of Russian as a second language, the aim of this paper is to outline the main difficulties in writing at the A2 level. In particular, using error analysis, I wanted to give answers to the following questions: 1) what kind of errors are the most frequent in Spanish-speaking students' writing?, 2) what is a possible root of these problems?

For this purpose, 50 samples of writing were collected from the Official School of Languages (*Escuela Oficial de Idiomas*, EOI) in La Coruña. EOI is a publicly funded institution dedicated to teaching foreign languages. At EOI of La Coruña, Russian language courses are offered in three different levels: basic level (equivalent to A2 of the CEFR⁴), intermediate (equivalent to B1 of the CEFR), and advanced (equivalent to B2 of the CEFR). The written works were final exam essays and various types of tasks carried out throughout the academic year. Learners had studied two years and successfully received the A2 level of Russian. Since I wanted the data to be representative, I obtained samples from both male and female adult students, ranging between the ages of 30 and 65 years old. The learners had different backgrounds in learning foreign languages, distinct education levels and various professions. Through a personal interview, I also obtained information about their motivations for studying Russian. For the sake of confidentiality, no names were used in this paper.

In order to organise this information a database was created, manually analysing the errors made by students and classifying them in five categories: letter insertion, letter omission, use of Latin letters, letter transportation, and letter substitution. This classification system was adopted from Cook (1997). Letter insertion and letter omission errors will be discussed in Section 4.2., use of Latin letter, letter transposition and use of capital letters will be presented in Section 4.3., and finally, letter substitution errors will be described in Section 4.4.

4. Results and discussion

4.1. Frequencies

The manual analysis of 50 writing samples revealed a total of 294 errors, a mean of 5.8 per work of 120 words, as summarised in Table 2 below. This shows that spelling errors are distributed unequally across five categories: more than a half (72.45%) refers to letter substitution errors, whereas the rest is distributed as follows: 12.59% omission errors, 10.88% letter insertion errors, 2.04% use of Latin letters, and letter transportation and capital letters use both 1.02%.

⁴The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages.

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Type of error	Number	%
Letter insertion	32	10.88%
Letter omission	37	12.59%
Latin letters	6	2.04%
Letter transposition	3	1.02%
Capital letters	3	1.02%
Letter substitution	213	72.45%
Total	294	100.00%

Fig. 2: Frequencies of spelling errors

Within the category of letter substitution, I distinguished between errors in consonants, vowels and palatalization. Almost a half (49.77%) corresponds to errors in consonants substitution, another half is distributed unequally with 35.21% in vowels substitution and 15.02% in palatalization. Frequencies of letter substitution errors are summarised in the Table 3.

Consonants	106	49,77%
Vowels	75	35,21%
Palatalization with the soft sign <i>Ь</i> (/j/)	32	15,02%
Total	213	100,00%

Fig. 3: Frequencies of letter substitution subtype

4.2. Letter insertion and letter omission errors

These subtypes of spelling mistakes represent a large margin in the corpus, constituting 10.88% and 12.59% respectively. Letter insertion errors are frequently related to phonology, as exemplified in (1), (2), and (3). Spanish-speaking students exhibit problems with *e* letter which is pronounced as /je/, so when writing, an extra letter *u* /i/ is added.

- (1) *Квартиера /kvatrijera/⁵ [T9]. Correct: Квартира /kvartira/⁶ 'flat'.
 (2) *Интериесный /intirijesnij/ [T12]. Correct: Интересный

⁵All examples will be presented in Russian and transcribed with International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA).

⁶As is conventional, incorrect words are preceded by an asterisk. Coding system in square brackets indicates number of the text where this example was extracted from. Translation is also provided where needed.

/intirjesnij/ 'interesting'.

- (3) **В морие* /v morije/ [T31]. Correct: *В море* /v morje/ 'in the sea'.

Another remarkable error is the addition of an extra consonant, as shown in (4), (5), (6) and (7). Errors in (4) and (5) are examples of interlanguage mistakes. Some words in Russian, mainly the ones formed from nouns, as *Россия* /rasija/ 'Russia' and *русский* /ruskij/ 'Russian', have double *с* /s/. It is possible that learners might have overgeneralized this rule with other similar nouns.

- (4) **В Париссе* /v parissje/ [T5]. Correct: *В Париже* /v parize/ 'in Paris'.

- (5) **Руссы* /russi/ [T8]. Correct: *Русые* /rusije/ 'blond'.

The errors (6) and (7) might be explained by the fact that many adjectives in Russian which are formed from verbs have a double *н* /n/ at the end, as in *образованный* /obrazovannij/ 'educated', *сделанный* /zdelannij/ 'done'.

- (6) **Зеленные* /zeljonije/ [T10]. Correct: *Зеленые* /zeljonije/ 'green'.

- (7) **В Корунне* /v Korunnje/ [T44]. Correct: *В Корунье* /v Korunje/ 'in Coruña'.

Regarding letter omission errors, many of them are also phonologically related. Consonants are often omitted since they are not pronounced, as shown in (8), (9) and (10) below. In other cases, due to a difficulty in perception of some vowels absent in Spanish, they are also omitted in Russian as illustrated in (11) and (12).

- (8) **Руская* /ruskaja/ [T7]. Correct: *Русская* /ruskaja/ 'Russian'.

- (9) **Француский* /frantsuzkij/ [T8]. Correct: *Французский* /frantsuzkij/ 'French'.

- (10) **Англиский* /angliskij/ [T3]. Correct: *Английский* /angliskij/ 'English'.

- (11) **Прятный* /prjatnij/ [T10]. Correct: *Приятный* /prijatnij/ 'lovely'.

- (12) **Целю* /tselju/ [T2]. Correct: *Целую* /tseluju/ 'kisses'.

4.3. Use of Latin letters, letter transposition and capital letters

Errors related to use of Latin letters are mostly present in Spanish names. They represent only 2.04% of the whole number of errors. This can be explained by the fact that students are accustomed to writing these names only in Spanish, and transcribing them into another language using different orthographic signs is especially difficult, as shown in examples from (13) to (19).

- (13) **Ла Корунья* [T16]. Correct: *Ла-Корунья* 'La Coruña'.
- (14) **Ла Коруня* [T37]. Correct: *Ла-Корунья* 'La Coruña'.
- (15) **Даниел* [T16]. Correct: *Даниель* 'Daniel'.
- (16) **Виго* [T16]. Correct: *Виго* 'Vigo'.
- (17) **Ирина*. Correct: *Ирина* 'Irina'.
- (18) **Футбол*. Correct: *Футбол* 'football'.
- (19) **Барселона* [T30]. Correct: *Барселона* 'Barcelona'.

Letter transposition errors and misuse of capital letters are the least frequent, representing only 1.02% each. Capital letter use is explained by transfer from English, as shown in (20), (21) and (22). In Russian, *я* /ja/ 'I' and the names of the months are only spelled with a capital letter when positioned at the beginning of a sentence.

- (20) **Мне 25 лет и Я работаю* /mnje 25 ljet i Ja robotaju/ [T28]. Correct: *мне 25 лет и я работаю* 'I am 25 and I work'.
- (21) **когда Я была в детстве* /kagda Ja bila v detstvje/ [T33]. Correct: *когда я была в детстве* 'when I was a child'.
- (22) **у меня есть отпуск, в Августе* /u mjenja jest' otpusk, v Avgustje/ [T13]. Correct: *у меня есть отпуск, в августе* 'I have holidays in August'.

Letter transposition errors were usually singular occurrences, presented in (23), (24) and (25), probably representing misspelling mistakes, as no repetition was found.

- (23) **приянтый* /prjaitnij/. [T10] Correct: *приятный* /priɕajtnij/ 'pleasant'.
- (24) **друзья* /druzja/. [T32] Correct: *друзья* /druzja/ 'friends'.
- (25) **малший* /malšij/. [T9] Correct: *младший* /mlatšij/ 'younger'.

4.4. Letter substitution errors

Through the error analysis there have been identified three types of letter substitution errors: consonant substitution, vowel substitution and palatalization substitution. Regarding the first type, there are 15 types of errors, with 106 cases of errors corresponding to 49.77% of the total. Vowel substitution, represented by 12 types, correspond to 35.21% and 75 cases. Finally, palatalization substitution build up 15.02% of the errors, represented by 32 cases. Frequencies of letter substitution errors are summarised in Figure 4. I will discuss only the most frequent errors of each category.

Consonants	106	49.77%
б/в; /b/, /v/	44	20.66%
в/г; /v/, /g/	1	0.47%
д/г; /d/, /g/	4	1.88%
п/р; /p/, /r/	2	0.94%
х/к; /x/, /k/	1	0.47%
с/к; /s/, /k/	2	0.94%
ж/ш; /z/, /ʒ/	4	1.88%
ж/с; /z/, /s/	2	0.94%
ж/х; /z/, /x/	1	0.47%
ж/з; /z/, /z/	3	1.41%
ж/ч; /z/, /tʃ/	1	0.47%
з/с; /z/, /s/	7	3.29%
ч/с; /tʃ/, /s/	1	0.47%
ц/с; /ts/, /s/	1	0.47%
ч/ц; /tʃ/, /ts/	1	0.47%
Vowels	75	35.21%
а/я; /a/, /ja/	13	6.10%
а/о; /a/, /o/	19	8.92%
а/е; /a/, /je/	3	1.41%
а/ы; /a/, /i/	1	0.47%
и/ы; /i/, /i/	25	11.74%
и/е; /i/, /je/	16	7.51%
и/у; /i/, /u/	15	7.04%
и/ю; /i/, /ju/	1	0.47%
ю/у; /ju/, /u/	4	1.88%
е/о; /je/, /o/	7	3.29%
е/я; /je/, /ja/	1	0.47%
е/ы; /je/, /i/	1	0.47%
Palatalization with the soft sign <i>ь</i> (/ʲ/)	32	15.02%
Total	213	100.00%

Fig 4: Frequencies of letter substitution errors

4.4.1. Consonants

The majority of letter substitution errors are phonologically related. One of the most frequent errors in consonant letter substitution is interchanging *б* (/b/) and *в* /v/ letters (44 cases corresponding to 20.66%) and *з* (/z/) and *с* (/s/) (7 cases, 3.29%). These results indicate a high level of difficulty in differentiating these sounds and letters. In Spanish, no distinction is made between *b* and *v*, both are pronounced as /b/ (see examples 26-32). As for *з* (/z/) and *с* (/s/), sounds with similar articulation, both sounds are pronounced as /s/ in Spanish. Some examples are displayed below.

- (26) **Брач* /bratɕ/ [T28, T32, T35]. Correct: *врач* /vratɕ/ 'doctor'.
- (27) **Вассейн* /vassjejn/ [T9, T22]. Correct: *бассейн* /bassjejn/ 'pool'.
- (28) **Учева* /utɕjova/ [T9]. Correct: *учеба* /utɕjoba/ 'studies'.
- (29) **Бысокая* /bisokaja/ [T7, T15]. Correct: *высокая* /visokaja/ 'tall'.
- (30) **Болосы* [T8, T10, T12, T15, T20]. Correct: *волосы* 'hair'.
- (31) **Болейбол* /bolejbol/ [T33, T42]. Correct: *волейбол* /volejbol/ 'volleyball'.
- (32) **Фисиком* /fisikom/ [T1, T32]. Correct: *физиком* /fizikom/ 'physics'.
- (33) **Сдес* /sdjes/ [T7]. Correct: *здесь* /zdjesi/ 'here'.
- (34) **Муסיку* /musiku/ [T30]. Correct: *музыка* /muziku/ 'music'.
- (35) **Телевисор* /tjeljevisor/ [T30]. Correct: *телевизор* /tjeljevizor/ 'television'.

4.4.2. Vowel substitution

With regard to vowel substitution, the largest amount of errors correspond to an interchange of *и* /i/ and *ы* /ɨ/, with 25 cases representing 11.74%. Whilst the letter *ы* and its corresponding sound /ɨ/ are quite common in Russian, the sound is absent in Spanish. This provokes confusion and students often substitute *ы* for *и*, the most similar sound in its articulation.

- (36) **Муסיка* /musika/ [T14, T27, T30]. Correct: *музыка* /muzika/ 'music'.
- (37) **Язиков* /jazikof/ [T16, T34]. Correct: *языков* /jazikof/ 'languages'.
- (38) **Русие* /rusije/ [T8]. Correct: *русые* /rusije/ 'blond'.
- (39) **Високая* /visokaja/ [T21]. Correct: *высокая* /visokaja/ 'tall'.
- (40) **Фильми* /filjmi/ [T15]. Correct: *фильмы* /filjmi/ 'films'.

Another phonologically related problem is the substitution of *я* /ja/ for *а* /a/. Although, there is a Spanish sound similar to the Russian /ja/ (/j/ as in *playa* 'beach'), Spanish-speaking students seem to have a limitation in its use.

- (41) **Наста* /nasta/ [T3]. Correct: *Настя* /nastja/ proper name,

Anastasia.

- (42) *Пляж /plaz/ [T15]. Correct: пляж /pljaz/ 'beach'.
(43) *Домохозяйка /damaxazajka/ [T29]. Correct: домохозяйка /damaxazajka/ 'housewife'.

A phonological process called vowel reduction is responsible for the substitution of *o* /o/ for *a* /a/, which was detected in 19 samples corresponding to 8.92% and for the substitution of *u* /i/ and *e* /je/, found in 16 cases, corresponding to 7.51%. Non-stressed *o* /o/ is pronounced like /a/ or an unclear schwa /ə/, as illustrated in the examples 41-44. Similarly, unstressed /je/ sometimes is reduced to /i/ which created a confusion when it comes to writing (examples 45-48). I intentionally put the stress sign in the words.

- (44) *Завут /zavut/ [T10]. Correct: зовут /zavut/ 'called'.
(45) *Гаварим /gavarim/ [T11]. Correct: говорим /gavarim 'we speak'.
(46) *В России /v Rassii/ [T17]. Correct: в России /v Rassii/ 'in Russia'.
(47) *Помогаю /pamagaju/ [T8]. Correct: помогаю /pamagaju/ 'I help'.
(48) *Очин /otĭin/ [T7]. Correct: очень /otĭjen/ 'very'.
(49) *Малинкий /malinkij/ [T25]. Correct: маленький /maljenkij/ 'small'.
(50) *Вечиринку /vjetĭrinku/ [T12]. Correct: вечеринку /vjetĭerinku/ 'party'.

Errors in *u* /i/ and *y* /u/ pair were found in 15 cases forming 7.04%. These errors are explained by the fact that the handwritten letter *u* /i/ in Russian is similar to the Spanish letter *u* /u/ whereas the Russian letter *y* /u/ is similar to the Spanish *y* /i/ in its spelling. Thus, these two letters are frequently confused. I illustrate this phenomenon in the following examples.

- (51) *Друз /drik/ [T8]. Correct: друг /druk/ 'friend'.
(52) *Подруга /padriga/ [T25]. Correct: подруга /padruga/ 'girl friend'.
(53) *Факултет /fakiltjet/ [T29]. Correct: факультет /fakultje/ 'faculty'.
(54) *Руский /riskij/ [T17]. Correct: русский /ruskij/ 'Russian'.

4.4.3. Palatalization

Palatalization is a phonological process which requires a change in articulation of a sound, pronouncing it closer to the hard palate. In Russian, this phenomenon is presented in the written language with the letter *ь*, soft sign (/j/). Sometimes absence or presence of the soft sign can change the word meaning, *весь* (/vjes/ 'all') and *вес* (/vjes/ 'weight'), *пыль* (/pil/ 'dust') and *пыл* (/pil/

'ardor'). 32 errors (15.02%) were related to palatalization process which makes it a challenging issue for L2 students.

In Russian, a distinction between /t/ and /tʲ/ is made. /t/ is a so-called hard consonant whereas /tʲ/ is a soft one. In Spanish, no distinction is observed, /l/ sound is always palatalized. As a consequence of this language transfer, Spanish-speaking students often omitted *ь* which is needed in writing as illustrated in (55), (56), (57) and (58).

(55) *Факултет /fakultjet/ [T23]. Correct: факультет /fakultʲet/ 'faculty'.

(56) *Результат /rʲezultat/ [T30]. Correct: результат /rʲezultʲat/ 'result'.

(57) *Небольшой /njebolʂoj/ [T14]. Correct: небольшой /njebolʂoj/ 'not big'.

(58) *Идеальный /idjealnij/ [T38]. Correct: идеальный /idjealʲnij/ 'perfect',

5. Conclusion

This paper has investigated common errors made by Spanish-speaking students while writing in Russian as L2 by analysing samples collected at the Official School of Languages in La Coruña. My aim was to find out what errors are the most frequent in Spanish-speaking students' writing and what the possible root of such problems may be.

The most frequent errors found in the analysed data were consonant and vowel substitution. Palatalization errors, letter omission and letter insertion were not as common but still occurred often. The most problematic consonants for Spanish-speaking students in Russian were *б* /b/ and *в* /v/. The absence of palatalization of /l/ was also quite frequent. Regarding vowels, the results of this study are consistent with the outcomes of previous investigations. Letter *ы* /i/ showed the largest percentage of errors, frequently changed by *и* and in some cases by *а* /a/ and *е* /je/. Contrary to Golikov (2008), I have not found any error related to the interchange of similarly spelled consonants. Nonetheless, the vowels *и* /i/ and *у* /u/ were interchanged in many cases. Mainly, spelling errors are caused by phonological differences between students' L1 Spanish and L2 Russian. Subsequently, these differences affect students' pronunciation and spelling. Some errors were caused by the fact that students had not yet become comfortable to using certain letters correctly. A small number of errors may be caused by transfer from English. Finally, letter transposition errors represent occasional misspellings. I summarise the possible reasons of spelling errors analysed in this paper in Figure 5.

Type of error	Number	%	Possible origin
Letter insertion	32	10.88%	Phonological differences between L1 Spanish and L2 Russian.
Letter omission	37	12.59%	Inner interlanguage errors.
Latin letters	6	2.04%	Inner interlanguage errors.
Letter transposition	3	1.02%	No evident explanation.
Capital letters	3	1.02%	Transfer from English.
Letter substitution	213	72.45%	Phonological differences between L1 Spanish and L2 Russian; inner interlanguage errors.
Consonants	106	36.05%	Phonological differences between L1 Spanish and L2 Russian.
Vowels	75	25.51%	Phonological differences between L1 Spanish and L2 Russian; inner interlanguage errors.
Palatalization with the soft sign <i>Ь</i> (/ʲ/)	32	10.88%	Phonological differences between L1 Spanish and L2 Russian.

Fig. 5: Types of errors and their possible origins

Due to the fact that only a relatively small amount of data was analysed and the general language level of the students was low, future research is necessary to confirm the results obtained in this paper, especially with B and C level learners. Nonetheless, these preliminary findings and conclusions may already be used for didactic implications in lower stage learning of Russian as L2. Teaching materials may include tasks which would focus on phonetic distinction between palatalized and non-palatalized sounds, /b/ - /v/ and /s/ - /z/ pronunciation differences. Special emphasis should be made on vowels that are non-existent in Spanish such as *ы* /ɨ/, *ю* /ju/, *я* /ja/, *ë* /jo/. The deeper understanding of the Russian phonetic system would help Spanish-speaking students to be more efficient in both speaking and writing in Russian.

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