

A comparison between bilingual and plurilingual EFL learners' language learning strategies

Comparación de las estrategias de aprendizaje entre alumnos bilingües y plurilingües aprendices de inglés como lengua extranjera

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Abstract: *The present study compares the language learning strategies used by bilingual and plurilingual English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners, and ascertains whether there are any statistically significant differences between them. Scholars have made comparisons on secondary (Vossoughi and Ebrahimi, 2003; Mitits, 2016), and university bilingual and plurilingual learners (Hong-Nam and Leavell, 2007; Sholah, 2019). However, to our knowledge, there is a lack of research with regard to second year of non-compulsory Secondary Education (equivalent to 12th grade) EFL students in Spain. The sample consisted of 51 English language learners at 12th grade. The Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) questionnaire (Oxford, 1990) was employed to measure informants' use of language learning strategies while learning English. Afterwards, students' answers were processed electronically and analyzed quantitatively. Results showed that bilinguals and plurilinguals differ in their least used learning strategies. Moreover, no statistically significant differences were found between both groups.*

Keywords: language learning strategies, bilinguals, plurilinguals, EFL, learners, second year of Spanish non-compulsory Secondary Education

Resumen: *El presente estudio tiene como objetivo comparar las estrategias de aprendizaje que los alumnos bilingües y plurilingües aprendices de inglés como lengua extranjera utilizan y determinar si hay diferencias estadísticamente significativas entre ambos grupos. Los investigadores las han comparado en alumnos bilingües y plurilingües de educación secundaria (Vossoughi and Ebrahimi, 2003; Mitits, 2016) y universitaria (Hong-Nam and Leavell, 2007; Sholah, 2019). Sin embargo, hemos constatado la carencia de investigaciones con alumnos de segundo de Bachillerato en España. La muestra se compone de 51 alumnos de segundo de Bachillerato. Se utilizó el cuestionario Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) (Oxford, 1990) para medir el uso de las estrategias de aprendizaje en inglés. A continuación, las respuestas fueron procesadas electrónicamente y sometidas a análisis cuantitativos. Los resultados muestran que los alumnos bilingües y plurilingües difieren en las estrategias de aprendizaje que menos utilizan. Además, no se encontraron diferencias estadísticamente significativas entre ambos.*

Palabras clave: estrategias de aprendizaje, bilingües, plurilingües, aprendices de inglés como lengua extranjera, segundo de Bachillerato

1. Introduction

Since the 1970's, researchers have focused on how languages are learned and what makes learners be more successful at learning either a second or foreign language. Research conducted reveals that learners' individual differences (learning

styles, learning strategies, learning aptitude, age, gender, culture, and the affective domain) play an essential role in learning a language (Oxford, 1989). As a result, language learning strategies have received great prominence in the process of learning or acquiring a second or foreign language (Wenden and Rubin, 1987; O'Malley and Chamot, 1990; Dörnyei and Skehan, 2003; Oxford, 2011; Pawlak and Oxford, 2018). However, few studies have compared the language learning strategies used by a group of bilingual and a group of plurilingual EFL learners. Therefore, further exploration is needed to account for the differences between bilinguals and plurilinguals in their use of learning strategies in English as a Foreign Language.

The purpose of this research is to make a comparison between the language learning strategies that 12th grade bilingual and plurilingual EFL learners employ. This paper first gives an overview on language learning strategies, provides several definitions, illustrates their principal taxonomy, and reviews the studies undertaken on bilinguals and plurilinguals. Then, the study conducted with its methodology, main results found, and interpretation of those findings follows. It concludes by recognizing the main limitations of this investigation, some lines for further research and some educational implications.

2. Review of literature

2.1. Language learning strategies: an overview

This section analyzes the background of language learning strategies, and it addresses their several definitions.

Research on language learning strategies dates back to the mid 1970's with the work conducted by Rubin (1975). He suggested that learners employed these strategies while learning, and they called attention to the "good language learner" to ascertain the characteristics of successful second language learners (O'Malley and Chamot, 1990: 3). On account of this issue, learning strategies became increasingly popular in the 1980's and 1990's. In the 1980's, Cohen and Aphek (1981) discussed the strategies learners used when learning vocabulary, whilst Wenden and Rubin (1987) focused on the significance of these strategies in SLA. In the 1990's, O'Malley and Chamot (1990), Oxford (1990) and Wenden (1991) asserted that learning strategies improved learning efficiently and were significant in the field of SLA. Not only do learning strategies facilitate learning, but they also make learning "deeper, more productive, and more lasting" (Oxford, 2011: 13).

Several definitions of language learning strategies have been proposed during the 1980's and 1990's. Some scholars (O'Malley *et al.*, 1985; Chamot, 1987; Rubin, 1987; Cohen, 1998) consider the mental component of these strategies. For example, O'Malley *et al.* (1985: 23) claim that learning strategies are "operations or steps used by a learner that will facilitate the acquisition, storage, retrieval or use of information". A further definition of learning strategies is given by Oxford who interprets them as "behaviors or actions which learners use to make language learning more successful, self-directed and enjoyable" (1989: 235). Thus, taking only behavior into consideration.

In contrast, other authors (Weinstein and Mayer, 1986; O'Malley and Chamot, 1990; Oxford, 1990) coincide with the behavioral and mental nature of learning strategies. For O'Malley and Chamot (1990), they are the thoughts or behaviors that learners apply so as to understand, learn, and retain new information. However, the

above-mentioned set of definitions do not seem to be complete. A concise definition could be that language learning strategies are both mental and behavioral processes, although other variables ought to be taken into consideration, such as age, gender, proficiency, personality, context, and purpose of learning. Learners' choice of strategies will be influenced by these factors, and so, this would allow researchers and teachers to acknowledge their way of learning.

There is not a clear-cut definition of learning strategies since authors do not agree whether they are mental, behavioral, or both. Indeed, scholars consider learning strategies a “fuzzy” term (Ellis, 1994: 529) and their definitions have been “ad hoc and atheoretical” (Ellis, 1994: 531).

Having analyzed what a learning strategy is and its background, the main aim now is to consider the most used taxonomy in language learning strategies.

2.2. Taxonomy of language learning strategies

This section addresses the explanation of the six most frequent classes of language learning strategies: metacognitive, cognitive, social, affective, memory, and compensation.

Language learning strategies are generally classified into six types: metacognitive, cognitive, social, affective, memory, and compensation. Metacognitive strategies “make use of knowledge about cognitive processes” (Ellis, 1994: 538). They include the processes of thinking, planning, monitoring, and self-evaluation (Chamot, 1988), so learners are able to take control of their learning. Cognitive strategies are defined as “the steps or operations used in learning or problem-solving that require direct analysis, transformation, or synthesis of learning materials” (Wenden and Rubin, 1987: 23). Therefore, learners apply the second language knowledge they have acquired.

Social strategies allude to the way learners use language to communicate and interact with other people, thus they include cooperation. Affective strategies involve positive emotions and attitudes that learners produce towards the learning process. Memory strategies help learners “store and retrieve new information” (Oxford, 1990: 37), whilst compensation strategies “enable learners to use the new language for either comprehension or production despite limitations in knowledge” (47).

Oxford (2011) designed the Strategic Self-Regulation (S2R) Model of language learning, in which learners employ strategies to control their learning. This model involves both strategies and metastrategies. She divides strategies into three categories: cognitive, affective and sociocultural-interactive (SI). The only ones which differ from her taxonomy in 1990 are sociocultural-interactive (SI) strategies, which “help the learner with communication, sociocultural contexts and identity” (14-16).

Furthermore, she includes metastrategies, which “help the learner control and manage the use of strategies,” and can be divided into three sub-groups: metacognitive, meta-affective and meta-sociocultural-interactive strategies. Metacognitive strategies refer to “cognitive strategy use”, meta-affective strategies “facilitate learner control of affective strategy use”, and meta-SI strategies “enable the learner to control SI strategy use” (15-16).

In the light of previous research conducted on this topic (Vossoughi and Ebrahimi, 2003; Hong-Nam and Leavell, 2007; Tuncer, 2009; Qasimnejad and Hemmati,

2014; Mitits, 2016; Saud, 2019), these studies have employed the strategies above proposed by Oxford in 1990. Accordingly, these are the learning strategies that are going to be used throughout this study.

Having explained the six most frequent categories of language learning strategies, the focus now is to describe some studies conducted.

2.3. Studies on bilinguals and plurilinguals' language learning strategies

There are a few studies which have compared a group of bilinguals to a group of plurilinguals to determine whether there are any differences between them in terms of their usage of language learning strategies (see Figure 1). Therefore, this section will account for the most and least learning strategy employed by both groups, and ascertain which group utilizes them more often.

As can be observed in Figure 1, most investigations (Vossoughi and Ebrahimi, 2003; Hong, 2006; Hong-Nam and Leavell, 2007; Seifi and Rokni, 2013; Qasimnejad and Hemmati, 2014; Mitits, 2016; Yayla *et al.*, 2016; Saud, 2019) agreed with metacognitive strategies as being the ones most used by both bilinguals and plurilinguals. The differences in these studies were informants' course level and the country where the research was conducted. Nearly all focused on university students, except Vossoughi and Ebrahimi (2003) and Mitits (2016), whose samples were composed of high school students. In addition, these investigations were conducted in Asia, but for Mitits' (2016) which was undertaken in Europe, more specifically, in Greece.

As for the least employed language learning strategies, in this case, bilinguals and plurilinguals did not coincide. As displayed in Figure 1, concerning bilinguals, most studies (Vossoughi and Ebrahimi, 2003; Hong, 2006; Hong-Nam and Leavell, 2007; Shabani and Sarem, 2009; Kostić-Bobanović and Bobanović, 2011; Yayla *et al.*, 2016) purported that affective strategies were the ones that bilinguals used less frequently. As it happened before, these studies were all conducted in Asia, except for Kostić-Bobanović and Bobanović's (2011), which was undertaken in Croatia, Europe. The other divergence was the participants' course level, since they all accounted for university students, with the exception of Vossoughi and Ebrahimi (2003) who concentrated on high school learners. On the contrary, research (Hong, 2006; Seifi and Rokni, 2013; Qasimnejad and Hemmati, 2014; Mitits, 2016; Yayla *et al.*, 2016; Saud, 2019) demonstrated that memory strategies were the least used by plurilinguals. They investigated university students in Asia, apart from Mitits (2016), whose sample was constituted by Greek high school informants.

Regarding which group made more use of learning strategies, most studies (Vossoughi and Ebrahimi, 2003; Hong, 2006; Hong-Nam and Leavell, 2007; Psaltou-Joycey and Kantaridou, 2009; Tuncer, 2009; Hayati and Nejad, 2010; Kostić-Bobanović and Bobanović, 2011; Seifi and Rokni, 2013; Qasimnejad and Hemmati, 2014; Yayla *et al.*, 2016; Sholah, 2019) coincided with plurilinguals as the ones utilizing more learning strategies. However, as Figure 1 shows, other investigations (Shabani and Sarem, 2009; Mitits, 2016; Othman, 2017; Saud, 2019) reported that there were no significant differences between bilinguals and plurilinguals in their usage of learning strategies.

A comparison between bilingual and plurilingual EFL learners' language learning strategies

Study	Participants' background	Languages	Most-least used	Bilinguals or plurilinguals
Vossoughi and Ebrahimi (2003)	High school students Iran	B: L1: Persian EFL: English P: L1: Armenian L2: Persian EFL: English	B: metacognitive-affective P: metacognitive-affective	Plurilinguals
Hong (2006)	University students China and Korea	B: L1: Korean EFL: English P: L1: Korean L2: Chinese EFL: English	B: compensation-affective P: metacognitive-memory	Plurilinguals
Hong-Nam and Leavell (2007)	University students Korea	B: L1: Korean EFL: English P: L1: Korean L2: Chinese EFL: English	B: compensation-affective P: metacognitive-memory	Plurilinguals
Psaltou-Joycey and Kantaridou (2009)	University students Greece	L1: Greek Not reported	Not reported	Plurilinguals
Shabani and Sarem (2009)	University students Iran	B: L1: Persian EFL: English P: L1: Kurdish L2: Persian EFL: English B: L1: Turkish EFL: English.	B: cognitive-affective P: cognitive-social	No significant difference
Tuncer (2009)	University students Turkey	P: L1: Turkish L2: not reported EFL: English	Not reported	Plurilinguals
Hayati and Nejad (2010)	High school students Iran	B: L1: Persian EFL: English P: L1: Arabic L2: Persian EFL: English	B: social-cognitive P: social-affective	Plurilinguals
Kostić-Bobanović and Bobanović (2011)	University students Croatia	B: L1: Croatian EFL: English P: L1: Croatian L2: Albanian/ German/ Italian/Slovenian EFL: English	B: memory-affective P: memory/compensation-affective	Plurilinguals
Seifi and Rokni (2013)	University students Iran	B: L1: Persian EFL: English P: L1: Turkmen L2: Persian EFL: English	B: metacognitive-memory P: metacognitive-memory	Plurilinguals
Qasimnejad and Hemmati (2014)	University students Iran	B: L1: Persian EFL: English P: L1: Persian L2: Turkish EFL: English	B: not reported P: metacognitive-memory	Plurilinguals
Mitits (2016)	High school students Greece	B: L1: Greek EFL: English P: L1: a language	B: affective-memory P: affective/metacognitive-	No significant difference

		other than Greek L2: Greek EFL: English	memory	
Yayla <i>et al.</i> (2016)	University students Turkey	Not reported	B: metacognitive- affective P: metacognitive- memory	Plurilingu- als
Othman (2017)	University students Iraq	B: L1: Kurdish EFL: English P: L1: Kurdish L2: Arabic EFL: English	B: cognitive- compensation P: cognitive- compensation	No significant difference
Saud (2019)	University students Malaysia and Saudi Arabia	B: L1: Arabic EFL: English P: L1: Bahasa Malaysia L2: English L3: Dialects	B: metacognitive- memory P: metacognitive- memory	No significant difference
Sholah (2019)	University students Indonesia	B: L1: Javanese EFL: English P: L1: Madurish L2: Javanese EFL: English	B: determination- cognitive P: social-determination	Plurilingu- als

*Fig. 1: Studies on bilinguals and plurilingu-
als' learning strategies (B: bilinguals; P: plurilingu-
als)*

On the whole, this review of studies on bilinguals and plurilingu-
als' usage of language learning strategies revealed three main findings: (1) metacognitive strategies were the ones more commonly employed by both bilinguals and plurilingu-
als; (2) affective and memory strategies were the least used respectively; (3) plurilingu-
als made more use of learning strategies.

The purpose of this investigation was to make a comparison between bilingual and plurilingu-
al EFL learners' language learning strategies and determine whether any statistically significant differences arose. Based on the aforementioned findings, three research questions were posed:

1. What are the most used language learning strategies by bilingual and plurilingu-
al EFL learners?
2. What are the least used language learning strategies by bilingual and plurilingu-
al EFL learners?
3. Are there any statistically significant differences between bilingual and plurilingu-
al EFL learners in their use of language learning strategies?

Considering these research questions, the following hypotheses were formulated:

H (0)₁ Metacognitive strategies are the most used by bilinguals and plurilingu-
als.

H (0)₂ Affective strategies are the least used by bilinguals, whilst memory strategies are the least used by plurilingu-
als.

H (0)₃ There are statistically significant differences in favor of plurilingu-
als in the use of language learning strategies.

3. Methodology

3.1. Informants

A total of 51 EFL learners participated in the study. This group comprised 41 bilingual students who learned English as an L2, and 10 plurilingual learners of English as an L3, and their mean age was 17.43. They were enrolled in the last course of Spanish post-secondary education (equivalent to 12th grade) in a state school in La Rioja (Spain), where they learnt English as a curricular subject.

Students did not all share their first language. Most of them, specifically 82.35%, had Spanish as their L1, but 17.65% of informants had other languages as their mother tongue, such as Afrikaans, Albanian, Arabic, Basque, Berber, Chinese, and Romanian (see Figure 2).

N	Percentage	L1	L2	L3
1	1.96%	Albanian	Spanish	English
1	1.96%	Basque	Spanish	English
1	1.96%	Afrikaans	Spanish	English
1	1.96%	Romanian	Spanish	English
4	7.84%	Arabic	Spanish	English
1	1.96%	Chinese	Spanish	English
1	1.96%	Berber	Spanish	English

Fig. 2: Plurilinguals' languages

3.2. Instruments, data collection and procedures

The *Strategy Inventory for Language Learning* (SILL) questionnaire was devised by Rebecca L. Oxford in 1990. This instrument measures the usage of language learning strategies by learners of English as a second or foreign language. It is composed of 50 items in a 5-point Likert scale: never or almost never true of me, usually not true of me, somewhat true of me, usually true of me, and always or almost always true of me. It reports the use of memory strategies (nine items), cognitive strategies (fourteen items), compensation strategies (six items), metacognitive strategies (9 items), affective strategies (6 items), and social strategies (six items).

Data was collected in one session during school time. The time allotted to complete the task was 20 minutes. At the beginning of the questionnaire, clear instructions were given orally in Spanish to clarify what students were being asked to do. After the data collection, informants' responses were coded into a Microsoft Excel file. To rate the learning strategies, the items were summed and the mean average of use was calculated. RStudio version 1.2.5019 was used to perform descriptive and inferential statistics, and the effect size was calculated using Becker's (1998) Effect Size Calculators.

4. Results

As to the first research question, we examined the most used language learning strategies by bilingual and plurilingual EFL learners. Figure 3 shows that bilingual and plurilingual learners' application of language learning strategies was very similar. Both groups agree with social strategies as the ones that they most employ, followed by metacognitive, compensation and cognitive strategies.

Bilinguals				Plurilinguals			
Learning strategies	Mean	SD	Rank	Learning strategies	Mean	SD	Rank
Memory	2.76	.570	6	Memory	3	.828	5
Cognitive	2.89	.377	4	Cognitive	3.08	.538	4
Compensation	3.11	.532	3	Compensation	3.53	.557	3
Metacognitive	3.31	.439	2	Metacognitive	3.66	.586	2
Affective	2.78	.916	5	Affective	2.6	.912	6
Social	3.49	.246	1	Social	3.9	.283	1

Fig. 3: Bilinguals and plurilinguals' classification of language learning strategies

Our second research question aimed at ascertaining the least used language learning strategy by bilinguals and plurilinguals. Regarding bilinguals, Figure 3 shows that memory strategies are the ones they employ less frequently. On the other hand, affective strategies are reported to be the least used by plurilingual EFL learners.

We now move to our third research question in which we aimed to identify whether there were any statistically significant differences between bilinguals and plurilinguals in their usage of learning strategies. As can be observed in Figure 4, plurilinguals seem to use learning strategies a little bit more than bilinguals, being the difference in mean values of 0.24.

	N	Mean	SD	Min.	Max.
Bilinguals	41	3.057	.299	1	5
Plurilinguals	10	3.295	.4484	1	5

Fig. 4: Descriptive statistics for bilinguals and plurilinguals in language learning strategies

Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was applied to determine if our sample met the normality assumption. Figure 5 displays that the bilingual group did not meet normality, whilst the plurilingual one did. Therefore, an independent samples test of means comparison was implemented. The independent samples T-test was conducted to test whether statistically significant differences arose between bilinguals and plurilinguals. As shown in Figure 6, the p-value does not reveal statistically significant differences between bilinguals and plurilinguals.

	D	p-value
Bilinguals	.14202	.03666
Plurilinguals	.12017	.9501

Fig. 5: Kolmogorov-Smirnov test

Independent Samples T-Test		
t	df	p-value
-1.516	17.212	.1478

Fig. 6: Independent samples T-test

Concerning the effect size for the comparison between two means, results reveal that Cohen's d was .50, which means that there was a medium effect size (see Figure 7). Moreover, the strength of association was small, since it is between .1 and .3 ($r=.24$).

Cohen's d	Effect-size r
.50	.24

Fig. 7: Effect size

All in all, bilingual and plurilingual EFL learners employed social strategies more often, whilst their least utilized strategies varied (memory and affective, respectively). In fact, no statistically significant differences were found between both groups. Although no statistically significant differences were obtained, there was a medium effect-size and a small strength of association.

5. Discussion

The first research question aimed to ascertain the most used learning strategy by bilingual and plurilingual EFL learners. The results of the present research purported that social strategies were the most employed by bilinguals and plurilinguals. Therefore, our first hypothesis was refuted because metacognitive strategies seemed to be the most used by both groups, as commented in the review above (see Figure 1). Our finding corroborates the results obtained by Hayati and Nejad (2010), who focused on high school students between 14 and 16 years old. The educational level in this case is somehow alike, since our sample was constituted by students with a mean age of 17.43. However, the cultural context was not similar. In Iran, English as a Foreign Language begins to be taught from 7th grade onwards (Rassouli and Osam, 2019), whereas in Spain it is taught since kindergarten. Both bilingual and plurilingual EFL learners in Iran and Spain perhaps favor this strategy over the others because they are used to communicating and interacting with their classmates in their English course, since textbooks usually include some exercises on role plays and discussions.

By contrast, as Figure 1 displays, several research (Vossoughi and Ebrahimi, 2003; Seifi and Rokni, 2013; Yayla *et al.*, 2016; Saud, 2019) illustrated that metacognitive strategies were the first employed. Our educational level coincided with the investigation conducted by Vossoughi and Ebrahimi (2003) in Iran, whilst the other informants were university students. Indeed, our study proved that metacognitive strategies were the second strategy that both bilingual and plurilingual EFL learners used. The difference between social and metacognitive strategies in bilinguals and plurilinguals was 0.18 and 0.24, respectively. This might be because this strategy enables them to take control of their own learning, and so, they may feel more independent and autonomous with regard to the English language.

The second research question dealt with the least language learning strategy used by bilinguals and plurilinguals. Data showed that bilingual EFL learners utilized memory strategies less frequently than any other, whereas for plurilinguals affective strategies seemed to be the least used. Our second hypothesis was then rejected, since it was the other way around in the above review of studies: affective strategies were the least employed by bilinguals, and memory strategies were the least used by plurilinguals.

Regarding bilinguals, this finding concords with the outcomes obtained in previous studies (Seifi and Rokni, 2013; Mitits, 2016; Saud, 2019). The educational level in our research is in between these studies because Mitits' (2016) sample was constituted by high school students between 12 and 15 years old, whilst Seifi and Rokni (2013) and Saud (2019) investigated university informants. By contrast, the countries where learners were instructed differ, and so, their sociocultural context varies. Seifi and Rokni's (2013) research was conducted in Iran where EFL learning

begins from 7th grade onwards, whilst in Saudi Arabia, as is the case in Saud's (2019) bilingual group, it is introduced at 4th grade (Barnawi and Al-Hawsawi, 2016; Rassouli and Osam, 2019). However, the situation is quite different in Europe, specifically in Greece and Spain, where Mitits (2016) and our investigation were undertaken. EFL starts in kindergarten, and the number of hours of exposure significantly increases in primary, secondary, and baccalaureate (post-secondary) education (Alexiou and Mattheoudakis, 2013). As for Saud's (2019) plurilingual group, English is learnt as an L2 in Malaysia. Choosing memory strategies as the least used might be because all these students are exposed to the learning of many subjects since they are children. Accordingly, they have to resort to their memory frequently, and perhaps this is why they dislike this type of strategy.

On the contrary, most investigations (Vossoughi and Ebrahimi, 2003; Hong, 2006; Hong-Nam and Leavell, 2007; Shabani and Sarem, 2009; Kostić-Bobanović and Bobanović, 2011; Yayla *et al.*, 2016) indicated that affective strategies were the least used by bilinguals (see Figure 1). All of them accounted for university students, except for Vossoughi and Ebrahimi (2003), whose informants were 12th graders, as in our study. In fact, in our research, affective strategies were ranked right before memory strategies with no considerable difference (0.02).

As for plurilinguals, the present study corroborates the findings by Vossoughi and Ebrahimi (2003), Hayati and Nejad (2010), and Kostić-Bobanović and Bobanović (2011). Our informants coincided with the ones in Vossoughi and Ebrahimi's (2003) research (12th graders), while Hayati and Nejad (2010) and Kostić-Bobanović and Bobanović (2011) focused on high school and university learners, respectively. As stated earlier, EFL learning in Iran begins at 7th grade (Rassouli and Osam, 2019), where Vossoughi and Ebrahimi (2003), and Hayati and Nejad's (2010) studies were conducted. The cultural context in Kostić-Bobanović and Bobanović's (2011) research in Croatia is similar to ours in Spain. EFL is introduced in kindergarten, increasing the instruction gradually in subsequent education (Slovaček *et al.*, 2015). All these students may coincide with affective strategies as the least employed because at that age adolescents do not tend to express their emotions. They are inclined to avoid those questions that have to do with their feelings towards either others or a language, in this case, English (Oxford, 1994).

Conversely, as observed in Figure 1, several investigations (Hong, 2006; Hong-Nam and Leavell, 2007; Seifi and Rokni, 2013; Qasimnejad and Hemmati, 2014; Mitits, 2016; Yayla *et al.*, 2016; Saud, 2019) revealed that memory strategies were the least used by plurilinguals. Our 12th grade sample was in between these studies because most of them accounted for university students, but for Mitits' (2016) whose informants were high school students. Actually, our study confirms that memory strategies were ranked the fifth by plurilinguals, being the mean difference between affective and memory of 0.4.

The third research question aimed to explore whether there were statistically significant differences between bilinguals and plurilinguals in their use of learning strategies. Findings reveal that there were no statistically significant differences between both groups. Therefore, our third hypothesis was also refuted because it stated that plurilinguals made more use of learning strategies. Our result is in line with previous studies (Shabani and Sarem, 2009; Mitits, 2016; Othman, 2017; Saud, 2019). Our educational level is also in between them because some researched university

students (Shabani and Sarem, 2009; Othman, 2017; Saud, 2019), and Mitits (2016) focused on high school students. As explained above, English is an L2 in Malaysia, and EFL learning begins in Spain and Greece in kindergarten, in Saudi Arabia at 4th grade and in Iran at 7th grade. However, it begins at 1st grade in Iraq (Amin, 2017), as is the case in Othman's (2017) investigation. Perhaps no statistically significant differences were found between bilinguals and plurilinguals' learning strategies because both groups began to learn English at an early age, noting that it is an L2 in Malaysia. Therefore, they might be following similar or even the same approach in the instruction of English, what in turn arises no significant differences in their learning of English.

On the other hand, Figure 1 reveals that most investigations (Vossoughi and Ebrahimi, 2003; Hong, 2006; Hong-Nam and Leavell, 2007; Psaltou-Joycey and Kantaridou, 2009; Tuncer, 2009; Hayati and Nejad, 2010; Kostić-Bobanović and Bobanović, 2011; Seifi and Rokni, 2013; Qasimnejad and Hemmati, 2014; Yayla *et al.*, 2016; Sholah, 2019) claimed that plurilinguals used more learning strategies. Our sample of informants was alike Vossoughi and Ebrahimi's (2003) (12th graders). The other studies dealt with university students, but for Hayati and Nejad (2010) who focused on 14-16-year-old learners. In fact, in our study, although no statistically significant differences arose, plurilinguals' mean of use was a little bit higher than bilinguals' (0.24). This might be because plurilinguals are used to employing learning strategies as they have already learnt one language apart from their mother tongue (Mitits, 2016).

6. Conclusion

The present study made a comparison between bilingual and plurilingual EFL learners' language learning strategies in the last course of Spanish non-compulsory secondary education. Our results revealed three main findings. Social strategies were the most used by both bilingual and plurilingual EFL learners. Nevertheless, both groups differed in the least utilized. Memory strategies were the least employed by bilinguals, whereas affective strategies were used with less frequency by plurilinguals. Finally, no statistically significant differences arose from the use of language learning strategies between bilingual and plurilingual EFL learners. However, these outcomes should be taken with caution due to the number of students who participated in this research. Indeed, the sample was constituted by only 10 plurilinguals, what does not provide representative findings of this group. Another limitation is that the present investigation was only conducted in one state school of the autonomous community of La Rioja, so results are not representative of that community either. Therefore, further research is needed to explore whether the same findings are provided with larger samples of both bilinguals and plurilinguals. With a bigger sample, we would be able to compare plurilinguals' learning strategies divided in groups of the same mother tongue to determine whether depending on the L1 some strategies are used more than others. Future studies could also expand this investigation and conduct research in more schools of the autonomous community of La Rioja to get representative findings.

As for the educational implications, the present research contributes to foreign language education because it reveals the existence of several learning strategies in the EFL classroom and the differences in their usage between bilinguals and plurilinguals.

Therefore, the instruction on language learning strategies at an early age could make bilinguals and plurilinguals aware of how to use them, find out the ones they like more, and so, become more efficient in EFL learning. Moreover, after knowing the most used learning strategies in their classrooms, teachers could develop teaching materials and activities, and organize their classes according to their learners' different strategies so that language learning could be improved.

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