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**The effect of the interlocutor variable
on oral interaction in EFL Secondary
School students**

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Abstract

The aim of the present study is to explore the effects of the interlocutor variable in the interaction of Secondary School students learning English as a foreign language (EFL) in Spain and derive pedagogical implications. Most of the studies on interaction focus on adults and more recently also on children, but there is a scarcity of studies on teenagers' oral interaction, what makes it a relatively unexplored research niche. The current study was carried out with five 14-15-year-old, L1-Spanish students with a comparable level of proficiency, who performed three spot-the-difference tasks paired with three different interlocutors, two expert adult speakers of the target language (TL), the researcher and their English teacher, and same-level peers. The results indicate that the interlocutor variable exerts an influence on the students' performance and affects their negotiation of meaning (NoM). The students produced more NoM strategies, more L1 use and more language when they were in dyads in peer interaction. Findings shed light on the beneficial role of oral interaction through information gap-tasks for teenagers.

Key words: Interaction, Negotiation of meaning, Interlocutor variable, Task, English as a foreign language, Second language acquisition.

1. Introduction

Interaction is beneficial for second language acquisition (SLA). Through negotiation of meaning (NoM), interlocutors modify their language in order to make the input and the output comprehensible, by using different strategies (Long, 1983b).

A significant body of research affirms that interaction exerts a facilitative effect on SLA (Gass & Mackey, 2007; Long, 1996; McDonough, 2006; McDonough & Mackey, 2006), and a solid body of research has confirmed this theory (Azkarai & Imaz, 2016; García Mayo & Lázaro-Ibarrola, 2015; Lázaro-Ibarrola & Azpilicueta-Martínez, 2015; to name but some). Teenagers learning English as a foreign language (EFL) still remain relatively under-researched when compared with adults and children.

Likewise, it is important to delve into the effects of the interlocutor variable in relation to NoM because it has been hypothesized to facilitate second language learning (SLL) (Long, 1996).

The goal of the present study is to explore the effects of such variable in the interaction of EFL Secondary School students in Spain and derive pedagogical implications.

In the present study five L1-Spanish EFL students of the same age (14-15 year-old) and a similar level of proficiency performed three spot-the-difference tasks with three different interlocutors, two expert adult speakers of the target language (TL), the researcher and their English teacher, and same-level peers.

All 15 oral interactions were transcribed verbatim and coded following Oliver's classification of NoM strategies (1998), i.e., comprising conversational adjustments (CAs) and repetitions. As other recent interaction-based studies, L1 use was also considered (Azkarai & García Mayo, 2015; De la Colina & García Mayo, 2009; García Mayo & Hidalgo, 2017). The aim is to explore the effects of the interlocutor variable in the interaction of Secondary School students and derive pedagogical implications. A stimulated recall was used to supplement the results with students' perceptions and insights on the tasks they performed.

2. Literature review

This section is divided into three subsections. The first one covers the concept of interaction and NoM, the second one discusses the interlocutor variable and the third one provides a succinct context on tasks, given its relevance to the present study.

2.1. Interaction and Negotiation of Meaning (NoM)

A myriad of studies have shown that interaction is beneficial for SLA (e.g., Azkarai & Imaz, 2016; García Mayo & Lázaro-Ibarrola, 2015; Gass & Mackey, 2007; Lázaro-Ibarrola & Azpilicueta-Martínez, 2015; Long, 1996; McDonough, 2006; McDonough & Mackey, 2006). All of them originated in the Interaction Hypothesis (IH) developed by Long (1981, 1983a, 1983b), which stated that comprehensible input was considered necessary for SLA. When communication breakdowns take place, speakers modify their speech and features of the interactional structure of the conversation in order to clarify it. This was, in turn, related to the Input Hypothesis (Krashen, 1977), which states that the input needs to be understood in order to lead to SLA.

Further research highlighted how comprehensible output is also necessary for SLA (Swain, 1985). The Comprehensible Output Hypothesis highlights that when learners encounter a gap or a fissure in their linguistic knowledge of second language (SL), they become aware and modify their output. This process of modification facilitates SLA.

What is more, not only comprehensible input and comprehensible output are fundamental for SLA, but also negative feedback facilitates it (Long, 1996).

During oral interaction, breakdowns in communication are originated, and those are solved by NoM, which is “the process whereby interactions are modified between or amongst conversational partners to help overcome communication breakdowns” (Oliver, 1998: 373).

The level of proficiency exerts a great influence on the production of NoM strategies. More proficient learners tend to negotiate less on the grounds that they come across fewer communication breakdowns. On the contrary, less proficient users may need to negotiate more as a consequence of the obstacles they find in order to understand each other (Gass & Varonis, 1985; Oliver, 2002).

In particular, Oliver (2002) elaborated the followed classification in order to demonstrate that the higher is the level of the interlocutors, the lower are the NoM strategies:

L-L >H-L>H-H>L-NS>H-NS>NS-NS

(L = Low, H = High, NS =Native speaker, NNS = Non-native speaker)

Lázaro-Ibarrola & Azpilicueta-Martínez (2015) added to Oliver’s classification the category of VL = very low.

L-L >H-L>H-H>L-NS>H-NS>NS-NS > VL-VL.

This means that only a minimum threshold of proficiency is needed in order to produce NoM. Below this level, no negotiation is possible.

The first studies on interaction and NoM focused on adults learners (Gass & Varonis, 1985; Pica & Doughty, 1985; Porter, 1986; Yule & Macdonald, 1990), then also included children learning English as a second language (ESL) (Mackey & Oliver, 2002; Mackey, Oliver, & Leeman, 2003; Oliver, 1995, 1998, 2000, 2002, 2009; Oliver & Mackey, 2003; Philp, Oliver, & Mackey, 2008) and only then did it reach EFL children (Azkarai & Imaz Agirre, 2016; García Mayo & Lázaro-Ibarrola, 2015; Lázaro-Ibarrola & Azpilicueta-Martínez, 2015; Lázaro-Ibarrola & Hidalgo, 2017; Philp & Tognini, 2009; Tognini, 2008; Tognini & Oliver, 2012).

Following the four stages model proposed by Hidalgo (2019) about NoM strategies acquisition, negotiation skills improve progressively, in accordance with learners' maturity and improvement in the command of the TL.

Although new NoM elements have been included in recent categorizations (Lázaro-Ibarrola & Hidalgo, 2017), in this study Oliver's classification of NoM strategies are used, which comprises both CAs and different forms of repetitions (Oliver, 1998).

Following Oliver's classification, the main features in the category of the CAs are clarification requests, confirmation checks, and comprehension checks. Examples below (with the exception of example 3, "Comprehension check") have been borrowed from our data.

A clarification request is an utterance made by the listener to ask for clarification about what the speaker had previously said (Oliver, 1998) and includes statements such as Wh-questions ("What?", "A what?", "What is that?"), "I don't know what you said", "The?".

Example 1:

Student H: There are trees behind the houses?

Student C: **What?**

(Clarification request)

A confirmation check is an utterance made by the listener to show the speaker that the previous message has been heard and understood. It comprises repetition of all or part of the utterances accompanied by rising intonation (Oliver, 1998).

Example 2:

Teacher: Green, ok, the same. In front of the boy I see a book, a brown book.

Student B: ... **In front of the boy?**

(Confirmation check)

A comprehension check is an utterance made by the speaker to check whether a preceding utterance had been correctly understood by the listener. It can consist of questions, either tag questions, repetition with rising intonation or questions such "Do you understand?", "Do you see it?" (Oliver, 1998).

Example 3:

NNS: **You know what, you know?**

(Comprehension check, example from Oliver, 1998: 375)

Partial, exact, expanded self-repetitions include “the speaker’s partial and exact repetitions of lexical items from their own preceding utterances within five speaking turns” (Oliver, 1998: 375).

Example 4:

Student E: In the middle of the picture I can see a yellow fence.

Student J: Fence, yes.

Student E: And it has a **picture** of a film.

(Self-repetition: partial)

Example 5:

Student D: They have a green backpack.

Researcher: Excuse me, can you repeat please?

Student D: **They have a green backpack.**

(Self-repetition: exact)

Example 6:

Student C: Red?

Student H: Yes. What colour has the houses?

Student C: **Red and white.**

(Self-repetition: expanded)

Partial, exact, expanded other-repetitions include “partial and exact repetitions of lexical items from an interlocutor’s preceding utterances within five turns (Oliver, 1998: 375).

Example 7:

Teacher: Can you see an animal, a person?

Student D: **An animal.**

(Other-repetition: partial)

Example 8:

Researcher: Then, what about butterflies? Do you have two butterflies or just one butterfly?

Student C: **One butterfly.**

(Other-repetition: exact)

Example 9:

Student H: So? There is one left?

Student C: **There is one left or two?**

(Other-repetition: expanded)

EFL children tend to produce more self-repetitions when they interact with peers and more other-repetitions in learner-researcher interaction; this suggests that they perceive the researcher as a “source of knowledge” (Lázaro-Ibarrola & Azpilicueta-Martínez, 2018).

In this study also L1 and code-switching were considered, because low proficiency EFL learners use L1 to manage the task and to discuss grammar and vocabulary. The L1 helps learners to understand the meaning and it is useful for establishing fruitful interaction and collaboration between learners in order to achieve a common goal (De la Colina & García Mayo, 2009). In peer interaction students use L1 to scaffold other’s production and to solve problems with L2 form (Tognini & Oliver, 2012). L1 use is a strategy to make difficult tasks more manageable (Azkarai & García Mayo, 2015).

Example 10:

Student C: Ok. Umm... The girl has got a... **cuerta?**

(L1 use)

There are several definitions of the term “code-switching”. It is “the juxtaposition within the same speech exchange of passages of speech belonging to two different grammatical systems or subsystems” (Gumperz, 1982: 59).

Example 11:

Student F: Yes... The person who is riding the bike has... yellow... shoes?

Student A: **Mmm... green... pero... bueno, más o menos... está entre verde y amarillo.**

(Code-switching)

Moreover, acknowledgements were also coded. Acknowledgements are a strategy in which the interlocutor confirms that the previous message has been understood (Lázaro-Ibarrola & Hidalgo, 2017).

Example 12:

Teacher: Like a shoe? I don't have anything.

Student A: **So, that's another difference.**

(Acknowledgement)

To the author's best knowledge there is a scarcity of interaction- studies on L1-Spanish EFL teenagers, what renders this a research niche of considerable interest.

2.2. The interlocutor variable

The interlocutor variable has been credited as one of the factors influencing oral interaction. McNamara & Lumley (1997) found out that the candidate's ability is just one of several variables impinging on the candidate's score or performance during oral performance tasks.

In particular, "the age, sex, educational level, proficiency or native speaker status and personal qualities of the interlocutor relative to the same qualities in the candidate are all likely to be significant in influencing the candidate's performance" (McNamara, 1997: 86).

The present study will focus on the variable of the level of proficiency and also the acquaintance with the interlocutor.

As mentioned above, more proficient learners tend to negotiate less on the grounds that they come across fewer communication breakdowns.

By contrast, there is little research focused on how learners with different proficiency levels interact with one another (Watanabe & Swain, 2007) and the studies that have been carried out show divergent results.

Results have, nevertheless, been far from conclusive. A study by Iwashita (1996) found out differences in both scores and language production in oral speaking tests when different level proficiency learners were paired, while Nakatsuhara (2006) appreciated no relevant differences.

What is more, a study involving Korean L2 learners outlined that they were more successful in solving and overcome their linguistic problems when they collaborated with more advanced interlocutor (Kim & McDonough, 2008).

Also Davis (2009) found out that learners of a lower-level produced more language (measured by the number of words) when they were paired with a higher-level partner. Therefore, when a learner was paired with a significantly more proficient one, the interaction was imbalanced, in the sense that one speaker was more active and was directing the conversation, assuming a leading role in it.

Acquaintance with the interlocutor is another variable which can exert an effect on oral interaction, since familiarity with one's partner tends to affect performance in pair-work during a language elicitation task. Some studies have outlined how learners vary their language depending on the familiarity or unfamiliarity with the interlocutor (e.g., O'Sullivan, 2002).

However, there are other studies suggesting the opposite, such as that by Amjadian & Ebadi (2011), which in turn confirmed findings in a previous study by Porter (1991) when they found no significant correlation between the acquaintanceship of the interviewees and the candidate's oral performance. Consequently, the influence familiarity with the interviewer might have on interaction is not a clear-cut issue which requires further research. The present study will attempt to shed some light.

By analysing the interaction of five age-and-level-matched teenagers (ages 14-15) interacting with two expert adult speakers of the TL (the researcher and their English teacher) and with same-level peers. The subjects of the study are already acquainted with both the peers and the teacher, while the researcher is a stranger to them.

2.3. Tasks in interaction

A task is “an activity which requires learners to use language with emphasis on meaning and to attain an objective” (Bygate, Skehan, & Swain, 2001: 11). A task involves “bounded classroom activities in which learners use language communicatively to achieve an outcome, with the overall purpose of learning language” (Bygate, 1999a: 186). The use of tasks is often related to two main implications: it involves the use of language for any communicative purpose and it contributes to language learning. Tasks also allow learners to give and receive feedback (García Mayo, 2007).

In particular, a task needs to meet four criteria (Skehan, 1998):

- The meaning is primary.
- There is a goal that needs to be worked towards.
- The activity is outcome-evaluated.
- There is a real-world relationship.

Ellis (2009) focusses on the importance of the task as a way to involve learners in processing both semantic and pragmatic meaning. This author highlights the importance of the existence of a 'gap', something that is missing and learners have to obtain, which motivates them to the goal of a task. A task also increases learners' use of their own linguistic resources in order to fulfil the activity.

The most productive tasks for SLA are those in which the learners have to achieve a specific goal or outcome and to do so, they need to communicate and to interact (Pica, Kang, & Sauro, 2006).

Information gap-tasks are the task-modality which helps to generate more NoM, since learners are engaged in functional, meaning-focussed SL use and gain access to input for learning (Pica, Kang, & Sauro, 2006). Information-gap tasks are also believed to draw learners more towards meaning and lexis (Pica, Kanagy, & Falodun, 1993; Pica, Kang & Sauro, 2006).

Among tasks with a single convergent outcome, two-way information gap tasks are broadly considered to stimulate NoM (Doughty & Pica, 1986; Long, 1980; Pica, Kanagy, & Falodun, 1993; Varonis & Gass, 1985). Two-way information-gap tasks are task which imply the reciprocal exchange of information among all participants, since all of them hold some pieces of information which are needed in order to solve the issue and successfully perform the task, to overcome the problem (Doughty & Pica following Long, 1986).

Those tasks are broadly used in recent interaction-based studies (e.g. Azkarai & García Mayo, 2017, García Mayo & Lázaro-Ibarrola, 2015; Hidalgo, 2019; Pinter, 2006, 2007).

In particular, spot-the-difference tasks are categorized as problem-solving task. This type of task requires a single convergent goal and outcome. Such tasks have been found to generate more opportunities for the interlocutors to negotiate than others which do not require a convergent outcome, such as opinion exchange and free conversation (Pica, 2005).

It is believed that the familiarity with the task is beneficial for the learner's ability to focus on form and consequently it produces a positive effect on SLA. Learners' linguistic performance is improved thanks to the repetition of a task (Bygate, 1999b). In particular, the familiarity with the task produces more feedback and unfamiliarity more negotiation of meaning (Mackey, Kangaras & Oliver, 2007).

3. Research questions and hypotheses

On the basis of the theoretical background presented above, the following research questions were asked:

- **RQ1: What are the effects of the interlocutor variable in the NoM among Secondary School learners of English as a Foreign Language?**

This question was answered using a combination of interlocutors (students-researcher, students-students and students-teacher) and analysing the different amount of NoM strategies generated in each of the 15 dyads.

- **RQ2: What are the students' perceptions of their own performance according to their interlocutor?**

This question was answered using a stimulated recall with both multiple choice questions and open questions, once all the oral interactions had taken place.

In order to answer to the previous questions, the following hypotheses were advanced:

- **H1: The higher the competence of the interlocutors, the lower the amount of NoM (Gass & Varonis, 1985; Oliver, 2002).**

In children's interaction, in order to be able to negotiate, a minimum or threshold level of proficiency is required; below that level, hardly any NoM takes place (Lázaro-Ibarrola & Azpilicueta-Martínez, 2015).

It was predicted that the subjects involved in the study, teenagers instead of children, were above that minimum level which was required to produce NoM, given their older age. Following the four stages model proposed by Hidalgo (2019), as learners mature and their command of the TL increases, their negotiation skills improve.

Provided this, it was expected to find more NoM in the peer-to-peer interaction, since the level of proficiency of the interlocutor was lower than the researcher's and the teacher's.

- **H2: The students perform better, i.e., produce more language, when they are in peer-peer interaction than when they interact with a stranger or their teacher. The interlocutor variable exerts an influence on students' performances.**

It was expected that students found themselves more at ease when paired with other students with similar age and level of proficiency and with whom they were already acquainted.

4. Method

4.1. Participants

The participants were five L1-Spanish students (three female and two male) on their 3rd year of Spanish Secondary Education ESO (14-15 years old) enrolled in a mainstream EFL instructional setting.

They received three hours classes of English per week. They had started learning English during Pre-school Education and Primary School, i.e., between nine and 12 years. Only one student was taking English lessons outside school at the time of the study.

The researcher is an L1-Italian with high level of English, a C1 level in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), certified by the C1 Cambridge English: Advanced (CAE). The researcher was a stranger to the students.

The teacher is an L1-Spanish with high level of English, a C2 level in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), certified by the Cambridge English Proficiency (CPE). The five students were acquainted to the teacher's accent and discourse.

4.2. Data collection and procedure

Data were collected in three days (during the first, second and third days), along one week.

Prior to that, students from two groups of 3rd year of ESO performed a placement test, the “*Cambridge’s Test your English for School*”, in order to assess their level of English. Accordingly, students were classified into the corresponded level, from “Young Learners” (corresponding to an A1 level from the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages) to “B2 “First for School” level (which corresponds to a B2 level).

In order to select the participants with a similar level of proficiency in English, students from the most clearly-defined group level (A2-KET and in between A2-KET and B1) were chosen and were given a letter where all the procedure was explained and a letter of consent from their parents duly granting authorisation for the present study was provided.

All subjects of the present study were then chosen randomly by the teacher. Those five students performed each of the three information gap tasks, which consisted in a spot-the difference task.

After that, the data collection procedure started and was carried out on three different days. 15 oral interactions, organised as follows (Table 1), took place. On day one, the five subjects of the study (Students A, B, C, D and E) performed the task with the researcher as the interlocutor, forming five different dyads. This was done in order to guarantee a certain degree of guidance by the researcher and ensure familiarity with the task.

On day two, they fulfilled the task with other five students (Students F, G, H, I and J) with a similar level (peer-peer interaction) in five randomly organized dyads. Finally, on day three, the five students completed the task with their teacher as the interlocutor, in five dyads.

Table 1. Procedure

CAMBRIDGE PLACEMENT TEST	DAY 1: TASK 1	DAY 2: TASK 2	DAY 3: TASK 3	STIMULATED RECALL
Students from two different classes of 3rd ESO.	Student A – Researcher.	Student A – Student F.	Student A – Teacher.	Student A; Student B; Student C; Student D; Student E.
	Student B – Researcher.	Student B – Student G.	Student B – Teacher.	
	Student C – Researcher.	Student C – Student H.	Student C – Teacher.	
	Student D – Researcher.	Student D – Student I.	Student D – Teacher.	
	Student E – Researcher.	Student E – Student J.	Student E – Teacher.	

The study took place in a separate room from their regular class. Before starting the activity, participants were informed that there were a number of differences, which varied depending on the task (from seven to nine). The mechanics of the task also involved one subject holding picture A and their partner doing so with picture B. They were not allowed to look at each other's pictures, since they were sitting back to back in order to boost verbal interaction.

The researcher participated as an interlocutor in Task 1, and, she was present in the room in the other two tasks, counting the differences the participants managed to spot. The researcher intervened only to encourage participants when they got stuck and also to answer questions related to the differences they found, providing confirmation when necessary.

All 15 oral interactions were audio recorded and later transcribed verbatim.

After data collection ended, a stimulated recall was carried out, with the aim of getting insight into the participants' perspectives and feelings about the task and their performance, and also to provide qualitative supplement information on the extent to which the interlocutor factor had impinged on their production. A survey with both multiple choice questions and open questions was created and were fulfilled by all five participants (see Appendix 5).

4.3. The tasks

The tasks employed were interactive tasks with a single-convergent outcome; in particular they were two-way spot-the-difference tasks (information-gap tasks), where each participant in the dyads had to ask for and receive information, since both of them held pieces of information.

The three different tasks were created borrowing pictures from a web page for learning English and adapted for the specific tasks¹.

The goal was to spot all the differences between the two similar pictures.

4.4. Coding section

All 15 oral interactions were transcribed verbatim by the researcher. A total of 1 hour, 54 minutes and 2 seconds was transcribed.

Once the data were transcribed, the coding process was carried out employing the different NoM strategies categorized by Oliver (1998), both CAs and repetitions, as explained in the literature. Also L1 use and code-switching were considered. Overall production (number of words produced) was also analysed.

An independent researcher, the supervisor of this Master's dissertation, analysed 33% of the whole dataset. Inter-rater reliability was set at 98%, and any remaining discrepancies were solved individually on a case-by-case basis.

The CAs coded included clarification requests, confirmation checks and comprehension checks. What follows are actual examples found in the present study:

Example 13:

Student H: Ok. Ummm... The hat if the biker is orange?

Student C: **The?**

(Clarification request)

Example 14:

Teacher: Mmm... I don't have shoes. I have a boat.

Student B: **Boat?**

(Confirmation check)

¹ <https://bogglesworldesl.com/spotthedifferences.htm>

Example 15:

Student B: I see a fizzy drink next to the rat. **Do you see a rat?**

(Comprehension check)

We now provide instances from repetitions in the present work, self-repetitions (partial, exact and expanded) and other-repetitions (partial, exact and expanded):

Example 16:

Student A: Is there a branch in the bottom part?

Teacher: What?

Student A: **A branch.**

(Self-repetitions: partial)

Example 17:

Student C: The cat...

Student H: There is no car in the picture.

Student C: **The cat.**

(Self-repetitions: exact)

Example 18:

Student C: Erm... He... **He** has a frog in her hands.

(Self-repetitions: expanded)

Example 19:

Student H: It's white?

Student C: Yes, you can say **white.**

(Other-repetition: partial)

Example 20:

Student H: White.

Student C: **White....**

(Other-repetition: exact)

Example 21:

Student H: The child that is taking the apple, his T-shirt is blue?

Student C: **Blue and green.**

(Other-repetition: expanded)

What follows now are actual examples of L1 use and code-switching:

Example 22:

Student C: And next of the rat erm... can you see a...**lata**?

(L1 use)

Example 23:

Student I: Erm... in my photo there isn't smoke.

Student D: **Entonces ya tenemos una no?**

(Code-switching)

Single words “yes”, “no” and “ok” were not considered utterances, because they do not comply with the conditions set by Crookes and Rulon (1985) in order to constitute an utterance.

In the case of a term being repeated within five speaking terms (as in Oliver, 1998), the one closest to the utterance in question was coded, as illustrated in the following example:

Example 24:

Student B: Erm... you see the skeleton of the fish?

Student G: No, only the... the... it's the fish with the meat.

Student B: But this one is different. **The fish** I see only has the skeleton...

(Other-repetition instead of self-repetition: partial)

In line with other studies (e.g., Lázaro-Ibarrola & Azpilicueta-Martínez, 2018), when a CA coincided with an instance of repetition, it was coded as a CA rather than repetition.

Example 25:

Student G: So, it's another one. A book.

Student B: Where?

Student G: In front of the house that... it's near, near the girl.

Student B: **A book?**

(Confirmation check instead of other-repetition: exact)

Non-canonical acknowledgements confirming understanding were also coded (see 6: Discussion and Conclusion). When students were using expression like “that’s another difference” or “we have another” or “we have one left”, they wanted to say “I understood what you said”.

Example 26:

Teacher: Like a shoe? I don't have anything.

Student A: **So, that's another difference.**

(Acknowledgement)

The overall performance of the interaction, understood as average duration of the different tasks, the total number of words and the total numbers of turn-takes and utterances, was also coded.

5. Results

In this section the results from this study will be presented. Firstly, the results regarding NoM will be explained (CAs, repetitions and L1 use), then findings about the overall performance described in terms of production (number of words, duration and turn-takes) will be provided and finally the learners' perceptions resulting from the stimulated recall will be analysed.

5.1. NoM strategies and L1 use

In this subsection the results of the total number of NoM strategies, such as CAs (clarification requests, clarification checks and confirmation checks) and repetitions (both self-repetition

and other-repetition) are provided. Also findings regarding L1 use and code-switching are displayed.

Table 2. Results of NoM and L1 use

	Task 1: Students – Researcher interaction	Task 2: Students – Students interaction	Task 3: Students – Teacher interaction
Conversational Adjustments (CAs)			
- Clarification requests	3	6	1
- Confirmation checks	2	1	2
- Comprehension checks	0	2	0
Total number of CAs	5	9	3
Self-repetition:			
- Partial	50	53	26
- Exact	4	5	0
- Expanded	1	1	1
Total number of self-repetitions	55	59	27
Other-repetition			
- Partial	38	31	53
- Exact	0	2	0
- Expanded	0	2	0
Total number of other-repetitions	38	35	53
Total number of repetitions	93	94	80
Total number of NoM strategies	98	103	83
Total number of L1 use	14	32	9
Total number of code-switching	0	9	0
Total number of acknowledgements	0	7	2

Regarding the NoM strategies, CAs (clarification requests, confirmation checks and comprehension checks) and repetitions (both self-repetitions and other-repetitions), the highest number was produced during the peer-peer interaction. Rates in NoM strategies produced during peer-peer interaction (103) and in the interaction with the researcher (98) were strikingly similar, while the interaction with the teacher (83) provided substantially lower NoM rates.

Interestingly, although still low, the CAs produced in peer-peer interaction (9) outnumbered the results of the other two types of interactions. It almost doubled the number

of CAs in the interaction with the researcher (5) and tripled the number produced during the interaction with the teacher (3).

Consistent with the CAs, the highest number of acknowledgments was produced during the peer-to-peer interaction (7), followed by the interaction with the teacher (2). No acknowledgments were produced in the interaction with the researcher.

Again, the overall number of repetitions produced during the peer-peer interaction (94) virtually mirrors the one produced during the interaction with the researcher (93), while a marked difference is produced when the interaction takes place with the teacher, where the number is clearly lower (80).

L1 use was substantially more frequent in peer-to-peer interaction (32) than in oral interaction with the researcher (14) and with the teacher (9). Code-switching appeared only in peer-to-peer interaction (9) and was not produced in either of the other types of interactions.

5.2. Overall performance

In this subsection the results concerning the overall performance, including the average duration of the different tasks, the total number of words and the total number of turn-takes and utterances are provided.

Table 3. Results for production

	Task 1: Students – Researcher interaction	Task 2: Students – Students interaction	Task 3: Students – Teacher interaction
Total amount of time	35'13"	54'19"	24'30"
Average amount of time	7'03"	10'52"	4'54"
Total number of words	1.046	1.679	932
Average number of words	209	335	186
Total number of turn-takes	175	268	190
Average of words in each turn-take	5,98	6,26	4,91

In order to perform the different tasks, different duration of time was needed. In the interaction with the researcher, the tasks took 7 minutes and 3 seconds on average, with a maximum duration of 8 minutes and 50 seconds by one of the dyads and a shortest of 4 minutes and 50 seconds by another.

In peer-peer interaction the average time needed to complete the task was longer, 10 minutes and 52 seconds on average, with a variation within 4 minutes and 50 minutes and 15 minutes and 23 seconds. In the interaction with the teacher, the average time was shortest, namely 4 minutes and 52 seconds, with a variation spanning between 3 minutes and 40 seconds for the longest and 5 minutes and 53 seconds for the shortest.

Coherent with duration was the amount of language generated, expressed in the total number of words. When participants interacted with other students (peer-peer interaction), an average number of 335 words was produced. They produced an average number of 209 words with the researcher, and, again, the lowest number of words was produced with the teacher (186 words on average). The highest number of speaking turn-takes was in the peer-peer interaction (268) and the difference is relevant when compared to the number of the researcher (175) and teacher interaction (190).

Interestingly, the average number of words for each speaking turn-take is higher in peer-peer interaction (6,26) and is lower in the interaction with the teacher (4,91). In the middle stands the data referring to the interaction with the researcher (5,98).

5.3. Learners' perceptions

The learners' perceptions were elicited in a stimulated recall, which contained both multiple choice questions and open questions. On some occasions, students chose more than one answer.

Most of the students (three out of five) found themselves more at ease during the peer-peer interaction, since they were already acquainted with the other student and felt confident with them, but some of them (two out of five) reported feeling better when performing the task with the teacher.

During the performance of the task with the researcher, they all reported feeling nervous, and one participant also stated having felt "intimidated". In one case this did this sensation of nervousness disappear when the task had already started and such nervousness vanished. The

reasons were different: some students did not know what to say, others did not know the researcher, others were afraid of making mistakes, others claimed that they had never done this kind of activities before, and also because the level of the researcher was higher than theirs and they were not used to speaking in English.

The majority of the students had the perception that they produced more language with the researcher (three out of five), followed by the teacher (two out of five) and by other student (one subject out of five).

It has to be highlighted that all of them reported feeling some pressure, and this factor might have possibly had an effect on their English production according to four of them. Four students out of five affirmed that this pressure exerted both a positive and negative influence on their oral production. What is more, there was unanimous agreement that both pressure and stress management were the most challenging aspects of the task.

Considering the performance of the task, when they could not find the proper or exact word in English, the majority felt nervous (three out of five) and frustrated (two out of five), but also worried and put to the test (one student each answer).

In the case students could not find a suitable word to express an idea, they had the perception of having employed two strategies. On one hand, they had tried to express the idea or the concept in English using other words (three students), but on the other hand, they had also used their L1 (three students). One student did claim having employed both strategies.

The majority of the students considered that it was easier for them to perform the task with another student (peer-peer interaction) for different reasons, namely because they understood each other better, there was less pressure, they felt more at ease and less nervous and also they were less ashamed of making mistakes. Two of them reported that performing the task was easier with the teacher, since the interaction was very quick, fluent and directed by the teacher, who went straight for the differences.

Students unanimously claimed that they considered this kind of activities to be very useful for their learning process in English. All of them agreed that their vocabulary could improve, but also their fluency (two students) and grammar and self-confidence, since the undertaking of the task proved to themselves they could handle a complete conversation in English (one student).

All the students stated that they would like to perform more activities of this kind in class and the repetition of the task was considered to be very beneficial for the future improvement of their own performances.

6. Discussion and conclusion

The first research question focused on the effects of the interlocutor variable in the NoM among Secondary School EFL learners. In order to answer to the question, a combination of interlocutors (students-researcher, students-students and students-teacher) and an analysis of the different number of NoM strategies generated in each of the 15 dyads were used. It was hypothesised that the higher the competence, the lower the amount of NoM.

As had been predicted, all the participants were above the threshold level of proficiency which is required in children's interaction for the interlocutor to be able to negotiate (Lázaro-Ibarrola & Azpilicueta-Martínez, 2015), due to the fact that they all were teenagers with a higher level of the TL. Consistent with the four stages model proposed by Hidalgo (2019), as learners mature and their command of the TL increases, their negotiation skills improve.

Moreover, more NoM was produced when students were in peer-peer interaction. The highest number of NoM strategies, both CAs and repetitions, were found during the peer-peer interaction, while the lowest number was produced during the interaction with the teacher. This seems to confirm the notion that less proficient interlocutors need to negotiate more, because they face more conversational breakdowns and they need to implement strategies to be able to overcome them and follow the conversation (Gass & Varonis, 1985; Oliver, 2002). On the contrary, since the teacher was a high proficient speaker (C2 at the CEFR), there was less space for conversational breakdowns and less NoM strategies were originated.

This first hypothesis was not confirmed in the case of the interaction with the researcher, who was also a high level proficient speaker (C1 at the CEFR). This might be partly caused by the fact that students did not perceived the researcher as a proficient speaker or maybe her accent, L1-Italian, was different from the one of their teacher, a L1-Spanish which they are used to hear and made the conversation more challenging for them.

Regarding the number of CAs, clarification requests are the most resorted to NoM strategy and this showed how students tried to receive comprehensible input (Long, 1996). Comprehension checks were barely produced, and this can be linked to the fact that teenagers

resemble children in the sense that they are still egocentric, being more focussed on what they produce than on the other's production (Oliver, 2009). Due to their egocentric nature, children use strategies more concerned with "self", such as clarification requests and less strategies related to "other", such as comprehension checks and "other-repetition". The data collected seem to confirm this theory, since the number of comprehension checks was very low and "other-repetitions" were also low in the interaction with the researcher and in peer-peer interaction. But taking into consideration repetitions, participants produced more "other-repetitions" when they were with the teacher than with the researcher or the peer-peer interaction. This might imply that they relied on their teacher's proficiency (Scarcella & Higa, 1981) and they tend to repeat more what she was saying, confirming the fact that EFL children perceive the researcher as a "source of knowledge" (Lázaro-Ibarrola & Azpilicueta-Martínez, 2018). Likewise, it could be hypothesised that students did not rely too much on the researcher, and this can be the reason why they did not reproduce what she had previously said.

Regarding the fact that students employed L1 use and code-switching more in peer-peer interaction, this may be due to the fact that they felt freer to speak in their L1, since this is the language they share and they are used to speaking at school with their classmates outside their EFL classes. It might also be perceived as awkward to speak in English for such a long time with their peers with whom they usually speak in Spanish. It was also possible that students were feeling freer to use their L1 or code-switching in order to overcome some conversational troubles, without feeling ashamed for it or being judged. During the interaction with the teacher L1 use was produced only in few occasions and no code-switching appeared.

The second research question inquired about the students' perceptions of their own performance according to their interlocutor. This question was answered using a stimulated recall with both multiple choice questions and open questions, once all the oral interactions had taken place.

It was predicted that the students would have performed better in peer-peer interaction than when they interacted with a stranger or their teacher. The interlocutor variable was expected to exert an influence on students' performances.

This second hypothesis was confirmed and substantial differences were spotted; participants produced more language when they were interacting with peers. On average, the

task performance with those interlocutors and students also needed more words and more turn taking fulfil the task and spot all the differences.

As a consequence, in peer-peer interaction more time was needed to perform the task than in the interaction with both the researcher and the teacher. This might have been caused by the fact that they both were proficient interlocutors which were directing the task and the conversation, stimulating the students to spot the differences.

The interlocutor variable, thus, seems to have exerted an influence, and the stimulated recall supports the notion that students were more at ease with their peers, with whom they were already acquainted and with whom were not feeling ashamed of making mistakes.

It can be speculated that students were intimidated by the researcher, since she was a stranger to them and had a different accent when speaking in English than theirs or their teacher's.

Regarding the task, students were very eager to perform the task and all of them warmly welcomed the possibility of performing this kind of tasks in class. They considered it to be very highly beneficial for their process of English learning. As a whole, peer-peer interaction provided a more effective framework than teacher-student or researcher-student interaction, since higher rates of NoM and overall language took place, although we should also warn about the higher rates of L1 deployed in the peer-peer layout.

7. Implications, limitations and future research

The aim of the study was to shed light on the interlocutor effect on the oral interactions of L1-Spanish EFL teenage learners.

It is expected that the results obtained will be valuable for pedagogical practice and will stimulate teachers to implement activities that involve oral interaction in the FL classroom, since interaction is beneficial for SLA. The present study contributes to support the notion that the peer-peer format and the use of communicative information-gap tasks facilitates the learning of the TL via NoM, while students also reported enjoying it, finding it interesting and enjoyable, and deemed it useful for their language improvement.

Some limitations of the present study must be outlined, too. First of all, the low number of students involved in the experiment, only five, implied that the study had a limited scope and findings should be taken with caution.

Secondly, familiarity with the task might have constituted another limitation. It is necessary to take into account that students become acquainted with the task after they had already performed it once.

In this sense, both the researcher and the teacher performed the same task five times each, in five dyads with the five subjects of the study. After the first paired interaction, they both became familiar with their pictures and the existing differences with the other picture held by the students. Therefore, from the second interaction on, they were not on an equal footing compared with the students.

Future research on teenagers' oral interaction is strongly needed, since they constitute a different group of population from both children and adults, with their own characteristics.

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Appendix 1 – Task 1

Sheet A



Sheet B



Appendix 2 – Task 2

Sheet A

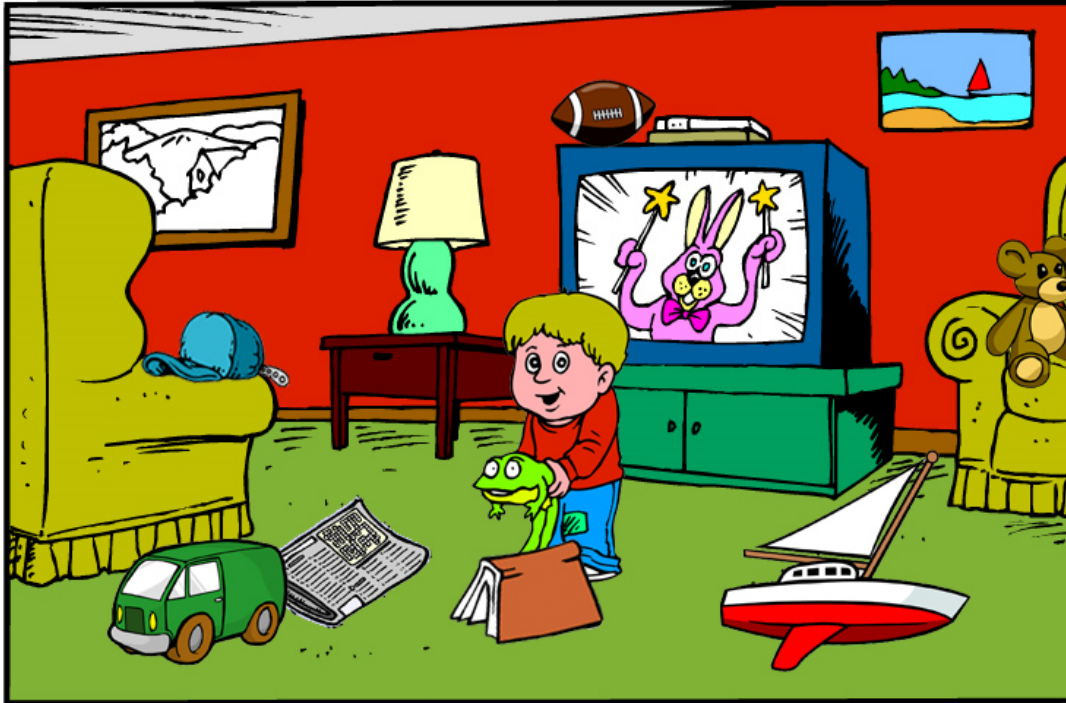


Sheet B

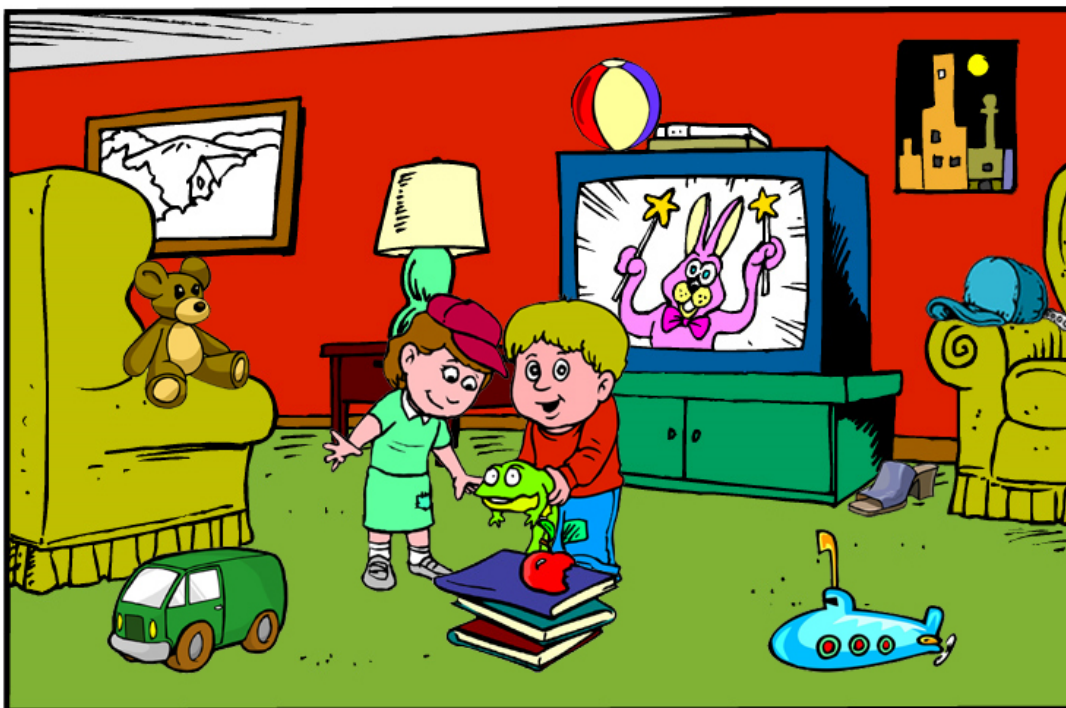


Appendix 3 – Task 3

Sheet A



Sheet B



Appendix 4 – Questionnaire

1. ¿Cuántos años (cumplidos) tienes?
2. ¿Cuándo empezaste a estudiar inglés?
3. ¿Cuántos años llevas estudiando inglés?
4. ¿Asistes a clases de inglés fuera del horario escolar?

Appendix 5 – Stimulated recall

CUESTIONARIO

1. ¿Con quiénes te has sentido más cómodo/a realizando la tarea?

- a) Con la investigadora.
- b) Con otro/a estudiante.
- c) Con tu profesora.

¿Por qué?

2. ¿Cuándo has realizado la tarea con la investigadora, cómo te has sentido?

- a) Incómodo/a.
- b) Cómodo/a.
- c) Nervioso/a.
- d) Intimidado/a.
- e) Especialmente motivado/a.

¿Por qué?

3. ¿Con cuál de las tres personas con las que has interactuado crees que has producido más lenguaje?

- a) Con la investigadora.
- b) Con otro/a estudiante.
- c) Con tu profesora.

4. ¿Crees que realizar este tipo de actividades puede ser útil para tu aprendizaje del inglés?
- a) Mucho.
 - b) Poco.
 - c) Nada.
5. ¿Te gustaría que en clase se realizaran más actividades de este tipo?
- a) Totalmente de acuerdo.
 - b) De acuerdo.
 - c) Poco de acuerdo.
 - d) Nada de acuerdo.
6. ¿Crees que la presión ha podido influenciar tu producción de inglés?
- a) Totalmente de acuerdo.
 - b) De acuerdo.
 - c) Poco de acuerdo.
 - d) Nada de acuerdo.
7. ¿Crees que esa presión te ha influido positivamente o negativamente?
- a) Positivamente.
 - b) Negativamente.
 - c) Ambas.
8. Cuando no te salía una palabra o una expresión en inglés, ¿cómo te has sentido?
- a) Juzgado/a.
 - b) Frustrado/a.
 - c) Nervioso/a.
 - d) Preocupado/a.
 - e) Ninguna de las respuestas anteriores.
 - f) Otras:

9. Cuando no te salía una palabra o una expresión en inglés, ¿qué estrategia has utilizado?

- a) He intentado encontrar otra manera de expresarlo en inglés.
- b) He utilizado la palabra en castellano.
- c) Me he bloqueado.

10. ¿Qué consideras que ha sido lo más difícil de esta tarea?

- a) Tener que utilizar el inglés.
- b) Encontrar las diferencias.
- c) Gestionar la tensión y la presión.

11. ¿Con quién te he resultado más fácil realizar la tarea y encontrar las diferencias?

- a) Con la investigadora.
- b) Con otro/a estudiante.
- c) Con tu profesora.

¿Por qué?

12. ¿En qué crees que te ayuda esta actividad?

- a) En mi fluidez.
- b) En mi vocabulario.
- c) En mi gramática.
- d) En nada.
- e) Otros:

13. ¿Crees que repetir esta actividad te haría mejorar mucho en ella?

- a) Sí.
- b) No.
- c) No lo sé.

Muchas gracias por tomarte tu tiempo en responder a esta encuesta, con la que complemento la investigación.

Abbreviations

CAs: Conversational Adjustments.

EFL: English as a Foreign Language.

ESL: English as a Second Language.

IH: Interaction Hypothesis.

L1: A speaker's first language.

L2: A speaker's second language.

NoM: Negotiation of Meaning.

SL: Second Language.

SLA: Second Language Acquisition.

SLL: Second Language Learning.

TL: Target Language.