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Negotiation of Meaning in Digital L2 Learning Interaction: Task Design Versus Task Performance

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In this microanalytical study, designed as part of an interdisciplinary and intercultural virtual exchange project for undergraduate students, the authors investigate the correlation between task design on the one hand and participant interaction during task performance on the other. The task created for this study consisted of 12 low-frequency vocabulary terms nonnative speakers (NNS) were expected to negotiate with their native speaker (NS) counterparts in order to reach mutual understanding and to complete the task successfully. Six NS-NNS dyads ($N = 12$) carried out the task, each using both videoconferencing (Skype) and text-based real-time chat during the same session in a counterbalanced design. It was found that (a) if a task consists of multiple items to be exchanged, with multiple triggers of potential nonunderstanding, the NNS response gradually moves from task-appropriate response to face-appropriate response during the course of an ongoing task session; (b) in order to ensure successful task completion, the NS tends to respond to NNS face-appropriate behaviour with responses that are both face- and task-appropriate; and (c) NNS nonunderstanding of a particular target item shapes the expectations of both NS and NNS concerning the next task item.

The affordances digital technology in the second language (L2) class offers to both educators and researchers have generally been hailed as excellent gateways for learning (Hampshire & Aguareles Anoro, 2004; O'Dowd & Waire, 2009) and have led to widespread academic interest in the use and effectiveness of technology-enhanced communication in task-based language teaching (TBLT; Blake, 2000; Chapelle, 2001; Collentine, 2010; Gonzalez-Lloret, 2003; Hauck, 2010; Lee, 2002; O'Dowd & Waire, 2009; Peterson,

2010; Skehan, 2003; Thomas, 2015; Thomas & Reinders, 2010). Many of the research projects in the field focus on *negotiation of meaning* (NoM) in interactions during digital task performance, either through video call (e.g., Lee, 2001; Monteiro, 2014; Wang, 2006; Yanguas, 2010) or written chat (e.g., Fernández-García & Martínez-Arbelaiz, 2002; Kitade, 2000; Kost, 2008; Lee, 2009; O'Rourke, 2005; Smith, 2003a, 2003b).

The act and process of NoM, by asking for elucidation, modifying speech acts, improving message comprehensibility, or cooperating to solve a communicative breakdown, is widely claimed to be beneficial for L2 learning (e.g., Long, 1983; Pica, 1994; Poulisse, 1990; Rost & Ross, 1991; Spada & Lightbown, 1993; Varonis & Gass, 1985). A recurrent model to identify and assess negotiation of meaning has been developed by Varonis and Gass (1985). They define NoM as a series of conversational turns in which one of the participants, usually the learner, stops the conversational flow due to nonunderstanding and negotiates for meaning in order to solve the breakdown in communication. More specifically, Varonis and Gass propose a two-part structure for NoM: a *trigger*, the source of the nonunderstanding, and a *resolution* episode, which consists of an indicator of nonunderstanding by the hearer, followed by a clarification of the trouble source by the speaker.

The notion of negotiation of meaning plays a central role in the TBLT paradigm that was introduced in the 1980s and that has inspired a considerable body of research (e.g., Bygate, Skehan, & Swain, 2001; Chapelle, 2001; Ellis, 2003, 2009; Long, 2015; Nunan, 2004; Samuda & Bygate, 2008). TBLT is presumed to promote communication that is authentic and meaningful to language learners and to ultimately enhance motivation and students' willingness to communicate (Adams, 2009; Eckerth 2008, 2009). Or, as Howatt and Widdowson (1984) define task-based learning in the English classroom, rather than "learning to use English, [students] use English to learn it" (p. 279). In other words, while working on a task, language learners should be so focused on its outcome that they are hardly aware of the fact that they are doing so using a foreign language. As such, if learners are engaged in what they feel is a *meaningful* task, their motivation and readiness to communicate is argued to be boosted (Eckerth, 2008). Ellis (2009) suggests four criteria that tasks should meet: meaning is primary; there needs to be some kind of *gap* (i.e., a need to convey information, to express an opinion or to infer meaning); learners should have to rely largely on their own resources to complete the activity; and the task has a clearly defined outcome beyond the use of language. Similarly, Samuda and Bygate (2008), stress that a task is "a

holistic activity which engages language use in order to achieve some non-linguistic outcome while meeting a linguistic challenge with the overall aim of promoting language learning, through process or product or both" (p. 69).

Researchers critical of negotiation of meaning have pointed out that relying on learners to consistently negotiate for meaning when working on a task, nondigital and digital, even if the criteria mentioned above are met, is a theoretical expectation rather than an empirical finding. They argue that in L2 settings participants, instead of initiating NoM, will often simply gloss over triggers or abandon the topic under discussion for social reasons such as issues of face (Eckerth, 2009; Foster, 1998; Van der Zwaard & Bannink, 2016). Along the same lines Breen (1989) proposed a distinction between *task-as-workplan* and *task-in-process*: Task-as-workplan constitutes the task as planned, developed, and intended by the researcher or educator, whereas task-in-process refers to the task as the operationalized activity by the learners. Task-as-workplan is the context-free model as designed on the drawing table, with the task-in-process as its activated version in a context-sensitive environment (Coughlan & Duff, 1994; Seedhouse, 2005). The inherent supposition that the pedagogical intention of a task does not always correspond to what happens once learners carry out the task is confirmed by task designers and researchers in the field (Ellis, 2003; Foster, 1998; Mondada & Pekarek Doehler, 2004; Ohta, 2001; Ross & Kasper, 2013; Seedhouse, 2005). As Breen (1989, p. 23) notes, "Learners are capable of playing havoc with even the most carefully designed and much-used task" (see also Markee, 2005; Mori, 2002). Ellis (2003) refers to the same observation when he distinguishes between the *aim* and the *outcome* of a task.

Discrepancies between task design and execution are in line with recent insights in human communication. In their book-length study into the complex systems in applied linguistics, Larsen-Freeman and Cameron (2008) draw on complexity or chaos theory to explain the intermittence of human interaction. They define interactivity as complex and adaptive (Larsen-Freeman & Cameron, 2008; Seedhouse, 2010): Even interaction in institutionalized or task-based L2 learning settings is inherently nonlinear and emergent, which makes it challenging to enhance or prompt intended patterns of discourse, such as negotiation of meaning. Seedhouse (2010) concludes that issues such as the social dynamics that participants bring into the discourse can drastically change the nature and focus of the interaction: "Participants are involved in organizing the interaction and adapting themselves to others' contributions on a turn-by-turn basis" (p. 15). This means that researchers are challenged into

investigating the correlation between the task (i.e., task-as-workplan) on the one hand and the discourse that language learners produce during task performance (i.e., task-in-process) on the other (Collentine, 2010; Samuda & Bygate, 2008; Seedhouse, 2005; Seedhouse & Almutairi, 2009).

In this article we explore the theoretical assumptions of the non-linear and emergent nature of human interaction in relation to the notions of task-as-workplan and task-in-process in the context of synchronous computer-mediated communication between native speakers (NSs) and nonnative speakers (NNSs). Our hypothesis is that the linear pattern of negotiation of meaning fits the notion of task-as-workplan, but that it does not necessarily comply with the unpredictability and local, turn-by-turn organization of emerging discourse, despite task criteria such as focus on meaning. Task-as-workplan primarily assumes that the participants consistently produce *task-appropriate responses* (cf. Smith, 2003a), but we expect the task-in-process to also include *face-appropriate responses* (cf. Van der Zwaard & Bannink, 2014, 2016, in press), triggered by social issues such as fear of losing face. Erving Goffman (1967, p. 5) defined "face" as "an image of self, delineated in terms of approved social attributes." All interpersonal interaction—conversational, institutional, task-based, digital, and so on—is *situated*; that is, it takes place in a particular sociocultural setting and therefore inherently involves issues of face. As Scollon and Scollon (1995, p. 38) observe, "There is no faceless communication." The wish to guard both their own and their counterpart's face by not having to admit nonunderstanding and initiate repair repeatedly during the same task session could be an important motivation for L2 learners to not consistently negotiate for meaning throughout task performance. Indeed, as we reported in an earlier article (Van der Zwaard & Bannink, 2016), participants of our project indicated during the stimulated recall sessions we conducted with them after task performance that fear of loss of face was the most important motivation for absence of negotiation of meaning.

Our key objective for this article, then, is to gain more insight in the interrelatedness of L2 learning and teaching processes and social constraints and affordances during digital task-based communication. We address the following research questions:

-Do NNSs consistently initiate repair during task performance in case of nonunderstanding? If not, why not?
-What is the relation between NNS and NS interactional behaviour?
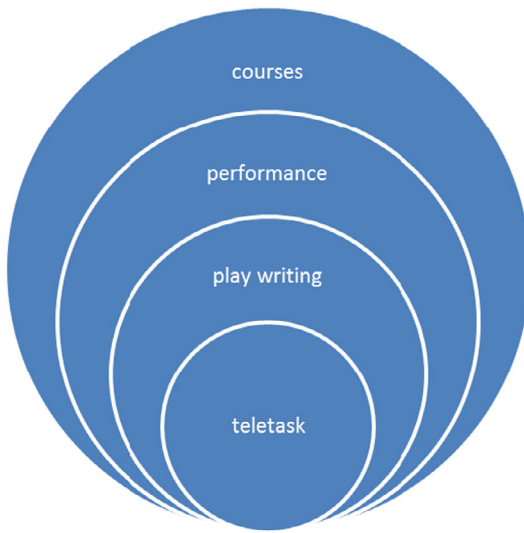
FIGURE 1. The telecollaboration project. [Color figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

THE STUDY

The data for this study derive from a telecollaboration project for university students (see also Van der Zwaard & Bannink, 2014, 2016, 2018, in press). The project was set up as an interdisciplinary cultural exchange between Dutch undergraduate students majoring in European studies in Amsterdam and Australian students of theatre and education in Melbourne. For a period of 6 weeks, the students collaborated through dyadic and group-to-group videoconferencing, email, Facebook, and written chat. The telecollaboration project was multilayered, with each component slotting into the next. The end product—the task in which the subtask under investigation was embedded—was a jointly performed, co-constructed digital theatre play (see Figure 1).

Participants

The participants in this study consisted of six NNS-NS dyads (N = 12). The NNS participants were Dutch undergraduate university students taking an elective module in advanced English language proficiency. They were paired up digitally with Australian undergraduate university students of theatre and education, all native speakers of English. The L2 level of the NNS participants was high intermediate/

advanced, level high B2/C1 according to the Common European Framework of Reference.[1]

Data

The data were collected in approximately 12 hours of videoconferencing recordings and printouts of the written chat sessions. The videoconferencing sessions were split-screen recorded with Video Call recorder for Skype. Observations of prosodic, paralinguistic, and non-verbal features of the interactions, such as body language, facial expressions, intonation, and pauses, were added to the transcripts wherever relevant. The chat script logs (as saved automatically on Skype), include time between turns and the emoticons that were used by the participants.

Task Design

For the task investigated in this study, we drew on a classic unfocussed information-gap task, *things-in-pocket*, that can be applied to a wide range of levels of L2 learning and that is referred to in multiple studies of both digital and nondigital interaction (Adams, 2009; Batstone & Ellis, 2009; Ellis, 2009, 2014; Sadlier, Riggenbach, Samuda, & Larsen-Freeman, 2000; Samuda & Bygate, 2008; Smith, 2003a, 2003b). The Appendix shows the instructions the students were given.

The NS and NNS participants were given two different wish lists with six items each as compiled by fictional characters; the first six items were to be exchanged through dyadic videoconferencing, and the second through written chat, or vice versa, in a counterbalanced design.[2] In other words, three of the dyads started the task with video and switched to written chat after the first half of the task; the other three dyads started the task with written chat and switched to video. The participants had to exchange their items, reach a consensus on one item for each character, and come up with a characterization of their fictional persons based on the wish list. The NNSs were only given pictures of the items on the wish lists; the NSs received both the images and the target words. It was entirely up to the participants how and in which order they would exchange the items, as long as they did

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[1] According to this framework, a learner at high B2/C1 level is expected to be able to "interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible without strain for either party" (Council of Europe, 2001, p. 23).

[2] For a cross-media comparative analysis, see Van der Zwaard and Bannink (2014).

not show their counterpart the item pictures. The time on task was flexible: There were no strict time constraints for the execution of the task. Only the data from the first part of the task—the exchange of items—have been considered for this study.[3] To make the exchange more symmetrical, the NNSs were also given items to exchange with the NSs. However, because this is a study into NNS responses after potential nonunderstanding, these data have not been included in this article.

The items that were selected for the task were all common, everyday objects familiar to the NSs, but the NNSs, although all advanced and confident L2 speakers, were not expected to know the exact terms in English. The items were braces, laurel wreath, wrench, tongs, turtleneck sweater with honeycomb stitch, hamper, whisk, tassel, tweezers, javelin, pruning shears, and bobby pin. Because the primary aim of the task was meaningful interaction (see task criteria above), the NSs were not informed that the NNSs would probably be unfamiliar with the English names of the task items, nor were they instructed to act as expert speakers of the target language. The NNSs in their turn were not instructed to initiate repair if they did not understand a task item. Instead, both NSs and NNSs were simply invited to exchange the items and to agree on one item for each of their fictional characters. The duration of each session was approximately one hour, but the students could take longer if they wanted to. The Dutch students performed the task from a university computer; the Australians from their home computers. The researcher was only present at the beginning of the task session to check the digital devices and give instructions.

To triangulate our interpretation of the data, three types of metadata were collected:

- *Control group.* Seventy-seven NNS students who did not take part in the project anonymously filled out a questionnaire to indicate their (non)understanding of the target lexical items.
- *Posttask questionnaire.* All NNS participants in the study anonymously filled out a posttask questionnaire in which they were asked questions such as *Did you know the items you were presented with? If not, what did you do?*
- *Stimulated recall.* If, after close scrutiny of the data, there was still any doubt about whether mutual understanding had been reached, the researchers queried the NNS participant through stimulated recall.

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[3] Mean time on task for the first part was 13.7 minutes (range 11.23–17.45 minutes).

Procedures

To address our research questions, both NS and NNS responses were classified into four categories, and all NS and NNS responses were coded accordingly.

NNS responses.

1. Explicit indicator or display of understanding (Koole, 2010; Van der Zwaard & Bannink, 2016): The NNS shows understanding so there is no need to negotiate for meaning. There is no trouble source, so there is no indicator (of nonunderstanding).
2. Explicit indicator of nonunderstanding: a direct verbal appeal for assistance (e.g., *What do you mean?; I don't understand; Please explain; I've never heard of that word;* cf. Varonis & Gass, 1985).
3. Implicit indicator of non-understanding: non-verbal cues, e.g. minimal response, paralinguistic cues (laughter) and/or non-verbal moves (e.g. shaking head, raising eyebrows, blank face [4]) that trigger a resolution episode.
4. Implicit indicator or claim of understanding (Koole, 2010; Van der Zwaard & Bannink, 2016), for example, minimal response (*okay, yeah*), paralinguistic cues (e.g., laughter)—usually faking understanding—that do not result in a resolution episode.

During task performance, if NNSs start up a negotiation of meaning sequence in an effort to reach mutual understanding (2), their interactive behaviour can be marked as a *task-appropriate response* (cf. Smith, 2003a): They participate actively in the interest of the task by unambiguously indicating nonunderstanding, if need be several times, and by inviting their NS interlocutor to respond and explain in order to reach common ground. A task-appropriate response, then, is an explicit statement of nonunderstanding, uttered in the interest of mutual understanding and usually resulting in successful completion of the task. If, however, during task performance speakers give off implicit signals of nonunderstanding (3 and 4), these will be marked as face-appropriate response (Van der Zwaard & Bannink, 2014, 2016). Those will be investigated in detail in this study.

NS responses. After an explicit display of NNS understanding (1) or an NNS explicit indicator of nonunderstanding (2), the NS

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[4] Similar to what Drew labels as *open class repair initiators* (1997).

response is usually according to the Varonis and Gass (1985) model: In case of the former, the NS moves on to the next object; in case of the latter, the NS generally reacts by explaining, elaborating, and so forth. After an NNS implicit signal of nonunderstanding (3), where the NNS neither explicitly negotiates for meaning, nor expresses a display of understanding, the NS essentially has three choices:

1. to ignore implicit signals of nonunderstanding (e.g., by moving on to the next task item)
2. domprehension check (cf. Long, 1983): the speaker checks to see if the hearer has understood (e.g., *Do you know what a javelin is?*)
3. comprehensible input (cf. Long, 1983): the speaker presents the hearer with enough information so that she or he can figure out the meaning (e.g., a tassel: *it's like a string you hang around your curtains to hold them back*)

Apart from these, our data also showed another type of NS communicative behaviour:

4. Same turn/message comprehensible input: speaker volunteers additional information in the same turn/message; hearer does not have the opportunity to indicate understanding or nonunderstanding before speaker provides extra input

RESULTS

In this section, data from all six dyads in the study are investigated and the (in)consistencies of NNS responses to the string of 12 task items are analysed. The data for each dyad are presented schematically in a table displaying the initial NNS response to the 12 triggers, and the NS response in the following turn—the foci of our analyses. We discuss the data for all items for dyad A; for reasons of space we present only a representative selection of the data for the other dyads.

Dyad A

Excerpt 1: Dyad A (videoconferencing items I–VI; written chat items VII–XII)

Item	Speaker	Written chat script[5]
I	NS	[10.33.10] Xmas basket of assorted red and white wines. With olive oil (love it with balsamic) and biscuits
	NNS	[10.33.25] yeah
II	NS	[10.33.47] secondly on his wish list is a whisk … making this list a whisk list (see what I did there)
	NNS	[10.34.05] okay [writes down the word in Dutch on her task sheet]
III	NS	[10.34.53] Javelin
	NNS	[10.35.01] What's that?
	NS	[10.33.30] A spear in athletics
	NNS	[10.35.55] oh okay
IV	NS	[10:36:44] Tongs
		[10:36:53] do you know what that is?
		[10:37:07] for picking up meant and salad
	NNS	[10:37:12] uhmmmmm no *sorry*[6]
V	NS	[10:38:08] next is a pair of secateurs
	NNS	[10:38:11] What's that? *[negotiates for meaning]*
	NS	[10:38:17] For trimming roses
	NNS	[10:38:19] ohh *Sorry*[7]
VI	NS	10:39:03] and finally on his list of hard things to get is black sweater with
	NS	[10:39:17] turtle neck and a honey come patter
	NS	[10:39:23] pattern*
	NNS	yeah
		Video transcripts and researcher observations
VII	NS	Alright … the first item is … a tassel!
	NNS	*[no response—blank face]*
	NS	Do you know what a tassel is?
	NNS	*[shakes head]*
VIII	NS	Uhh … her next item is uhhh … bobby pin
	NNS	Yeah … I do know what that is … hold on … bobby pin. Yes. For your hair
IX	NS	Then she has a wrench
	NNS	*[2 sec. silence—blank face]*
	NS	You know wrench?
X	NS	And then her next item is … a pair of like …. suspenders *[moves both hands up and down his shoulder]*
	NNS	*yes*
XI	NS	And then she's got a laurel wreath
	NNS	*[2 sec. silence—then bursts out laughing]*
	NS	You know what that is?
XII	NS	A pair of tweezers
	NNS	*[3 sec. silence—then bursts out laughing]*
	NS	What do you think her character is like?

The NS in dyad A begins the task not by using the target item as written on her task sheet but by paraphrasing the word (*hamper*). The reason could be that she anticipates a potential breakdown of communication—and rightly so it turns out: during post-task stimulated recall

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TABLE 1
Dyad A

Items	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII	VIII	IX	X	XI	XII
Medium	C	C	C	C	C	C	V	V	V	V	V	V
NNS	X	claim	NoM	0	NoM	claim	0	claim	0	claim	0	0
NS	X			ComCh			ComCh		ComCh		ComCh	

In Tables 1–6, C = written chat, V = videoconferencing, NS = native speaker, NNS = nonnative speaker, NoM = negotiation of meaning, Claim = NNS claim or display of understanding, 0 = NNS implicit signal of understanding, – = no turn transition space, ComCh = NS comprehension check, ComIn = NS comprehensible input, STCI = NS same turn comprehensible input.
Task items on NS task sheet: I Christmas hampers; II whisk; III javelin; IV tongs; V pruning shears; VI turtleneck sweater with honeycomb stitch; VII tassel; VIII Kirby grips/bobby pins; IX wrench; X braces; XI laurel wreath; XII tweezers.

the NNS indicated not knowing the word *hamper*. The NS move is a typical example of what Long (1983) has coined *modified input*, or *simplification*, as an NS interactional strategy to avoid conversational trouble. As a consequence, the task effectively starts with item II (*whisk*), which the NNS claims to understand (*<okay>*). He writes down the Dutch translation of the lexical item on his task sheet—unequivocal proof that he has indeed understood. With the next item (III, *javelin*), the NNS explicitly negotiates for meaning by appealing for assistance. What follows is a "classic" case of negotiation of meaning where the NS explains and elucidates, ending with the NNS indicating to have understood as shown by his use of the update marker *oh* (Heritage & Atkinson, 1984). When the NS sends item IV (*tongs*), she immediately follows up with a comprehension check *< do your know what that is?>* in her next message. And, before the NNS has had the chance to react to this message, she precipitately sends off a description of *tongs*. Due to the nonadjacent discourse pattern that is inherent in written chat—the participants can type simultaneously so messages can cross—the NNS answer to the comprehension check is sent after the NS has explained the item. He writes *<uhmmmmm no sorry>*, admitting and apologizing for his nonunderstanding. With the next item (*pruning shears*) the NS, again, modifies her input: This time she does not provide a definition of the target item but replaces the word on her task sheet with a synonym (*secateurs*), which can be regarded as another attempt at avoiding conversational trouble (Long, 1983). The NNS, however, does not know the synonym either and initiates repair, albeit disconcertingly by apologizing again for not understanding *<what's that? Sorry>*.

The explicit apologies of the NNS to his NS counterpart for not knowing items IV and V could be marked as an illustration of the paradox of an authentic task-based interaction environment: The interaction takes place in the context of an institutional L2 course, where, according to negotiation of meaning theories, it is perfectly natural for an NNS apprentice to be unfamiliar with certain words of the target language. Therefore, task-appropriately asking for assistance from the NS expert should not be experienced as particularly face-threatening by the NNS and not warrant apologies. However, at the same time, social variables, such as embarrassment and feelings of incompetence about not knowing certain target items in interaction with a peer, appear to be in force simultaneously, possibly enhanced by the informal nature of the interaction environment (cf. Van der Zwaard & Bannink, 2016).

In the second (videoconferencing) part of the task (items VII to XII), the NNS no longer explicitly negotiates for meaning. Instead, he either claims understanding (VIII and X) or gives off implicit

indicators of nonunderstanding. For these items (VII, IX, XI, and XII), successful task completion now firmly lies in the hands the NS: She needs to boost the interaction with comprehensible input or a comprehension check. If she does not comply (for instance, by ignoring the NNS's nonverbal responses), the first two parts of the task—which feed into the third part—run the risk of not being completed successfully. She delivers in all but one instance: She follows the NNS's ambiguous response to item XII with a rather abrupt change of subject and continues with the next part of the task. Table 1 gives a schematic representation of the data as discussed above.

Dyad B

As we can see in Table 2, the interactions of dyad B resemble the pattern found in dyad A: During the first eight items, the NNS negotiates for meaning five times (items I, II, V, VII, VIII). After item VIII the NNS ceases to initiate negotiate for meaning; instead, she only transmits implicit signals of nonunderstanding.

In our analysis, we focus on the interaction during the final four items (excerpt 2).

Excerpt 2: Dyad B (videoconferencing items IX–XII)

Item	Speaker	Video transcript and researcher observations
IX	NS	All right. Next one is a wrench
	NNS	*[Raises eyebrows and smiles but does not say anything]*
	NS	So uhhh, when you're trying to fix stuff around your house, like screwing in bolts and that kind of stuff?
	NNS	Yeah?
	NS	Yeah. It's that one. It's like this long thing that's used, also in murder mysteries to kill people …
X	NS	The next one is suspenders
	NNS	*[Silence—moves head backwards]*
	NNS	Huh?
	NS	You know when you're trying to keep your pants up, like older people do? *[gestures]*
XI	NS	Next one is a laurel wreath
	NNS	*[Silence—looks down and away from the camera]*
	NS	So, you know when people win at the Olympics and (points to her head with both hands) and they get that weird kind of crown (draws the image of a crown with her hands around her forehead) around their head with the laurel leaves?
XII	NS	The last one is tweezers
	NNS	*[Hesitates, then points at her eyebrow with one hand]*
	NS	Yeah, when you have a splinter or something …
	NNS	Yeah
	NS	And you get that little thing

TABLE 2
Dyad B

Items	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII	VIII	IX	X	XI	XII
Medium	C	C	C	C	C	C	V	V	V	V	V	V
NNS	NoM	NoM	0	claim	NoM	claim	NoM	NoM	0	0	0	0
NS									ComIn	ComIn	ComIn	ComIn

By the time this dyad has reached item IX the NNS no longer explicitly indicates nonunderstanding, nor does she explicitly ask for assistance. Rather, her responses are ambiguous: protracted silence followed by raising eyebrows (item IX) and protracted silence followed by *huh?* (item X). When item XI is communicated, there is only protracted silence, combined with a shift in gaze, away from the webcam. After the last item—*tweezers*—the NNS hesitantly points towards her eyebrows. The NS acknowledges this gesture, but still provides extra input even after the NNS has tentatively indicated to have understood.

The NNS hearer responses in this data seem to move from the direct, explicit indicator of nonunderstanding as expected and described in negotiation studies to implicit, nonverbal responses (items IX–XII). Although the nonverbal and paralinguistic signals the NNS transmits after items IX, X, and XI can be categorized as (implicit) indicators of nonunderstanding (Varonis & Gass, 1985), the consequence of the NNS not explicitly appealing for assistance is that the responsibility of successful task completion now depends on the initiative and proactivity of the NS. The NNS response during item XII is particularly interesting: Although during stimulated recall the NNS admitted that she was familiar with the word (*tweezers*), her expectations seem to have been shaped by her nonunderstanding of the previous items in that she seems to doubt herself: She does not display understanding in a confident way but only tentatively points towards her eyebrow.

In sum, as in dyad A, the NNS responses of nonunderstanding become increasingly implicit while her NS counterpart in his turn displays more task-appropriate behaviour by providing unsolicited comprehensible input so that mutual understanding is still reached.

Dyad C

The NNS from dyad C explicitly initiates negotiation of meaning only three times (items I, III, and VI); during the other nine items, the NS seems to be doing all the work (see Table 3).

Excerpt 3: Dyad C (videoconferencing items VII–XII)

TABLE 3
Dyad C

Items	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII	VIII	IX	X	XI	XII
Medium	C	C	C	C	C	C	V	V	V	V	V	V
NNS	NoM	0	NoM	0	0	NoM	0	0	–	–	–	–
NS		ComIn		ComIn	ComIn		ComIn	STCI	STCI	STCI	STCI	STCI

Item	Speaker	Video transcript and researcher observations
VII	NS	Tassel
	NNS	*[no response—blank face]*
	NS	It's like a string you hang around your curtains to hold them back, and it's got like . . . . . . stringy bits on it
VIII	NS	Kirby grips like bobby pins. You know like pins that little girls put in their hair *[gestures putting a pin in her hair]* . . . these little
IX	NS	A wrench, like the things you use to . . . *[makes a tightening with wrench-type movement with her hand]* to screw bolts in
X	NS	Braces. You know the *[clutches her shoulders with both hands]* things that guys use to keep their pants up that go over their shoulders.
XI	NS	A laurel wreath, which . . . how do I even begin to describe this. You know like the Greek, the ancient Greek pictures you see and they've got the thing *[makes circular gestures around her head]*, like with the golden leaves in their hair?
XII	NS	Tweezers. You know, the things that you pluck your eyebrows with

It is striking that after item VII, the NS exerts herself by giving comprehensible input for each of the items without having been asked for it, sparing the NNS the effort of overt negotiation while simultaneously ensuring successful task completion. After items VII and IX, the NS still leaves a short pause, which gives the NNS the opportunity to react, but when he fails to do so, the NS no longer waits for an indication of nonunderstanding; instead, she instantly adds an explanation (items X, XI, and XII). In fact, even if the NNS had wanted to initiate repair, or to signal understanding, he would not have had the chance to do so. Again, in the final stage of the task, the NS is doing all the work, and the NNS seems to have retreated into unresponsiveness.

Dyad D

The responses of the NNS from dyad D to the first four items (video) are an exemplary illustration of task-appropriate behaviour: The NNS negotiates for meaning by explicitly asking for assistance. However, for the following eight items the NNS negotiates for meaning only twice (items VII and XI), although she claims understanding only once (item VI). Again, this behaviour prompts her NS counterpart into ensuring successful task completion by providing unsolicited comprehensible input (see Table 4).

Excerpt 4: Dyad D (written chat items VII–XII)

TABLE 4
Dyad D

Items	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII	VIII	IX	X	XI	XII
Medium	V	V	V	V	V	V	C	C	C	C	C	C
NNS	NoM	NoM	NoM	NoM	0	claim	NoM	0	0	–	NoM	–
NS					ComIn		ComIn	ComIn	ComIn	UnComIn		UnComIn

Item	Messenger	Chat script
VII	NS	[12:07:05] a tassle
	NNS	[12:07:19] Ohhh noooo! I don't know what that is!
VIII	NS	[12:09:37] kirby gripps
	NNS	[12:08:41] ……..
	NS	[12:08:42] or bobby pins
IX	NS	[12:09:41] Wrench
		[12:09:56] so it looks like a spanner but is on both ends
X	NS	[12:12:03] okay so braces
		[12:12:13] they thing guys put over their pants
		[12:12:18] when they are trying to be fancy
		[12:12:24] mostly on a tuxedo
		[12:12:38] lots of women wore them in the 80s
XI	NS	[12:14:19] now this ones really hard: laurel wreath
	NNS	*[negotiates for meaning]*
XII	NS	[12:20:25] tweezers
		[12:20:37] you can use them to pluck eyebrows with

The NNS initiates negotiation of meaning five times during the first seven items, but she moves into non-task-appropriate behaviour after item VII during the written chat part of the task. For item VIII she sends a paralinguistic response (a series of dots), as an implicit rather than explicit signal of nonunderstanding. Interestingly, the only other item the NNS actively negotiates is item XI, possibly because the NS has introduced the item with the presequence (Levinson, 1983) <*now this ones really hard*>, making it less disconcerting to admit nonunderstanding (cf. Van der Zwaard & Bannink, 2014). For the other three items (IX, X, and XII) the NS's expectations of the NNS's understanding seem have been shaped by her previous responses: He decides to provide so much comprehensible input that the NNS no longer needs to negotiate or be confronted with (the embarrassment of) yet another instance of nonunderstanding.

Dyad E

As Table 5 shows, the NNS in dyad E explicitly negotiates for meaning four times (items III, IV, VI, and VII). For the other items (save item I), the NS is more proactive than his NNS counterpart: He seems to take over the interaction entirely during the last four items, turning the task performance into an NS performance, rather than co-constructed NS–NNS communication. For unknown reasons the NS decides to change the order of the items on the worksheet.

Excerpt 5: Dyad E (videoconferencing items I–III; written chat items IX–XII)

TABLE 5
Dyad E

Items	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII	VIII	IX	X	XI	XII
Medium	V	V	V	V	V	V	C	C	C	C	C	C
NNS	0	0			0		0		–	–	–	–
NS		ComIn	NoM	NoM	ComIn	NoM	ComIn	NoM	STCI	STCI	STCI	STCI

Item	Speaker/ messenger	Video transcript and researcher observations
I	NS	There's a whisk
	NNS	*[echoes]* a whisk[8]
II	NS	Tongs
	NNS	*[echoes]* tongs
	NS	Like cooking tongs … to turn meat
III	NS	Hedge clippers
	NNS	[negotiates for meaning]
		Written chat
IX	NS	Pant suspenders—like straps that clip to your pants to hold them up with
X	NS	Then there's a symbol that looks like a wreath—like Xmas wreaths that go on the door, theyre made of leaves
XI	NS	Next we have a snapper or a wrench, it's a tool to fix the car
XII	NS	And lastly we have … a tassle—it's a rope that you can use to tie up curtains and make them look nice when they're open

When the NS has communicated *whisk* in turn 1, the NNS echoes the word while looking down at her task sheet without an explicit appeal for assistance, which may be why the NS proceeds to the next item [item II; *tongs*]. However, when the NNS echoes the second target item as well, the NS seems to sense the NNS's possible nonunderstanding and provides comprehensible input without having been asked for it: <*Like cooking tongs … to turn meat*>. Having now firmly caught on that his NNS counterpart might not understand the items, the NS changes tactics: He replaces the word *pruning shears* (on his task sheet) with the easier and more common *hedge clippers*—without, however, any noticeable effect since it still prompts an explicit indicator of nonunderstanding. Having caught on that his NNS counterpart is not familiar with most of his items and to avoid any more conversational trouble, for the last four items (items IX–XII) the NS takes the lead by modifying and elaborating on his items without waiting for an NNS response, in a sense pushing the NNS out of the interaction.

Dyad F

The NNS in this dyad explicitly negotiates for meaning only twice (items I and IV). And again, the more the NNS withdraws, the more task-appropriately the NS responds (see Table 6).

Excerpt 6a: Dyad F (videoconferencing items I–VI)

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[8]Stimulated recall: NNS does not know what whisk is

TABLE 6
Dyad F

Items	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII	VIII	IX	X	XI	XII
Medium	V	V	V	V	V	V	C	C	C	C	C	C
NNS	NoM	0	0	NoM	0	0	–	–	–	–	–	–
NS		ComC			ComIn	ComIn	STCI	STCI	STCI	STCI	STCI	STCI

Item	Speaker	Video transcript and researcher observations
I	NS	Christmas hampers
	NNS	*[negotiates for meaning]*
II	NS	A whisk
	NNS	Whisk *[echoes the word while looking down at the task sheet]*
	NS	Do you know what a whisk is?
III	NS	A javelin. Surely you guys know what a javelin is
	NNS	*[silence—frowns]*
IV	NS	Tongs
	NNS	*[negotiates for meaning]*
V	NS	Pruning shears
	NNS	*[shakes head]* No
VI	NS	Turtleneck sweater with honeycomb stitch
	NNS	*[silence—blank face]*

The NNS starts out by negotiating for meaning (item I). With the next item (*whisk*), however, the NNS does not explicitly appeal for assistance again; instead, she echoes the word while looking down at her task sheet. The NS interprets this fuzzy response as an indicator of nonunderstanding and follows up with a comprehension check <*do you know what a whisk is?*>, leading to a negotiation of meaning sequence (not included in the excerpt). Now that it has become clear that the NNS was not familiar with the first two items, the NS seems to express a certain expectation (or hope) about the NNS's understanding of item III <*Surely you guys know what a javelin is*>, a comment that makes it all the more uncomfortable for his counterpart to explicitly admit nonunderstanding. Instead, she frowns and does not say anything, again leaving the floor for the NS to step in and explain. With the next item, the NNS explicitly initiates repair for the second and, as it turns out, last time during their session. After item V, she shakes her head and utters <*No*>; after item VI she only draws a blank face.

Excerpt 6b: Dyad F (written chat items VII–VIII)

VII	NS	[11:17:37] Ok so the first thing is kind of hard
	NS	[11:17:49] but you know like, old-fashioned cushions and curtains?
	NS	[11:17:59] how they have the pieces of material that hangs off the corners?
	NS	[11:18:14] like, it comes together in a clump and it has a fringed end usually
	NS	[11:18:21] ugh I'm so bad at explaining this!
VIII	NS	[11:20:56] ok these are small brown clips
	NS	[11:21:02] well, not clips
	NS	[11:21:12] they are used when you're putting your hair up
	NS	[11:21:24] they're small and brown and have one rigged side, and they slide into your hair and stop it from falling out

When they switch to written chat after item VI (excerpt 6b), the NS seems to have appropriated the discourse based on the expectations of his counterpart's nonunderstanding in the videoconferencing part of

the task. He bombards his counterpart with so much comprehensible input for items VII to XII that the NNS is no longer even given the chance to indicate understanding or to initiate negotiation. As a matter of fact, possibly to accommodate his counterpart and spare her the potential embarrassment of not recognizing the target word, the NS has even ceased to name the target items; instead, he just sends multiple messages with elaborate descriptions of each item.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The data set we draw on in this article is, of course, too small to warrant more than tentative conclusions. Given this limitation, however, microanalysis of the data still yields valuable insights into the behaviour of the NNS and NS participants during the dyadic telecollaboration task. As such, our data show a certain negotiation trend or pattern that needs further investigation, particularly for a task type with a string of triggers, such as the things-in-pocket task.

According to the Varonis and Gass (1985) model of negotiation of meaning, L2 learners are expected to consistently act in the interest of the task. The data in this article, however, confirm the findings from a number of studies that have shown that NNS participants do not always (solely) act in the interest of the task, but also in the interest of face (Aston, 1986; Foster, 1998, 2009; Long & Porter, 1985; Tudini, 2007, 2010; Van der Zwaard & Bannink, 2014, 2016). During posttask stimulated recall, the NNS participants in our study reported that they sometimes felt "uneasy" and "ignorant" when they had to admit failure to understand a number of times in a row. In order to protect their counterpart's and their own face, the NSs, in their turn, did their utmost to avoid conversational trouble. As a result our task-in-process data show a surprisingly consistent pattern: The NNSs mainly initiated repair during the exchange of the first six items and gradually moved into implicit, *face-appropriate responses* (cf. Van der Zwaard & Bannink, 2014, 2016) in the second half of the exchange, during both videoconferencing and written chat, independently of the sequential order of the respective media. Rather than explicitly and directly appealing for assistance in the interest of the task, the NNS would give off implicit signals of possible nonunderstanding without articulating as such, or not respond at all. As can be seen in Figure 2, there is a fairly steep decline in negotiation of meaning sequences between item I and item XII. It seems, then, that in the case of a series of triggers the social dimensions of the interaction urge the NNS participants into responses that are increasingly face-appropriate rather than task-appropriate.
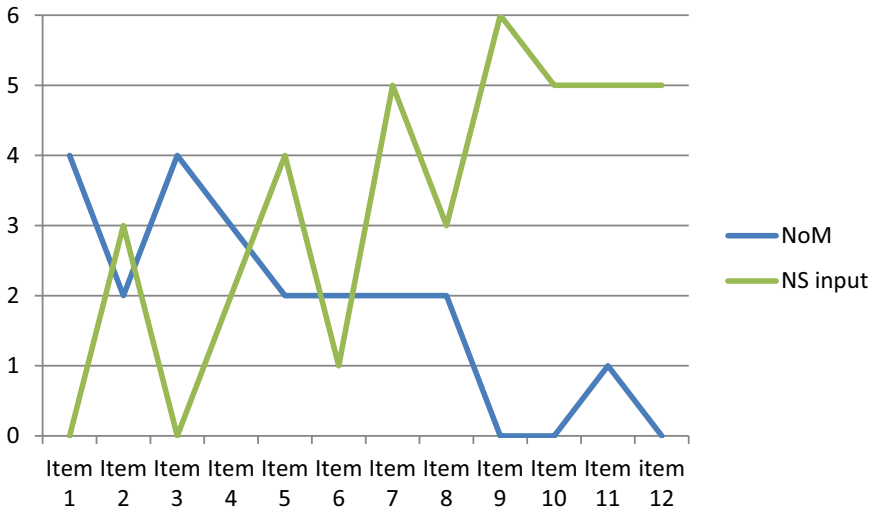
FIGURE 2. Negotiation patterns in relation to NS input.
Note. NoM = NNS-initiated negotiation of meaning; NS input = unsolicited NS input. [Color figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

The NSs' response to the interactional behaviour of the NNSs varied. Sometimes they ignored implicit signals of nonunderstanding altogether (e.g., excerpts 1 and 6a). In other instances they explicitly checked for NNS understanding (e.g., excerpt 1), but this happened only occasionally. Mostly, the NS counterbalanced NNS face-appropriate behaviour by presenting comprehensible input, either in response to implicit signals of nonunderstanding (e.g., excerpts 2 and 3) or in the same turn/message before the NNS had even had a chance to respond to the trigger (e.g., excerpts 4, 5, and 6b). The NS preference for comprehensible input to comprehension checks can be explained from a social perspective. Comprehension checks count as other-initiated corrections, and they are therefore dispreferred in informal conversations (Sacks, Schegloff, & Jefferson, 1978) as well as in institutional L2 learning situations (Tudini, 2010; Van Dam [van Isselt], 1993). So, although explicitly asking NNS participants to confirm nonunderstanding is in the interest of the task, it is inherently face-threatening. Comprehensible input, on the other hand, is in the interest of both face (saving the NNS from having to indicate nonunderstanding) and task (enhancing chances of successful task completion).

The overall pattern in our data shows that, as the task progressed, NS expectations frequently seemed to predetermine the interaction: The NS no longer expected the NNS to understand and therefore

shaped their contributions in such a way that (more) communication breakdowns were avoided. On a number of occasions they even supplied contingent spontaneous comprehensible input; that is, they opted for explaining before the NNS had had the chance to ask to explain in order to scaffold the NNS response. As a consequence the NNS partially withdrew as an actively negotiating participant (cf. Yule & Macdonald, 1990).

We do not know the impact of the interactional configuration on actual NNS L2 learning. The additional comprehensible input the NNS received is likely to have enhanced their learning experience, but we had hoped for extended NNS output through elaborate NoM episodes, which, unfortunately, did not occur because NNS verbal participation was restricted to the first half of the task. What the data do show, however, is that the relationship between task-as-workplan and task-in-process is, indeed, nonlinear. The interactional pattern was emergent, discursively constructed by the participants on a turn-by-turn basis (cf. Seedhouse, 2010).

We concur with researchers who argue that learners should not be thought of as simple task executioners who always react to stimuli in a predictable way (Eckerth, 2009; Slimani-Rolls, 2005; cf. also "task-transacting language machines," Foster, 2009, p. 251). This view is reductionist in the sense that it can lead us into thinking that task design (in nondigital as well as digital L2 learning environments) is about providing and negotiating as much L2 input as possible. Instead, we propose that tasks should be approached as practices that create the affordances for participants to engage in meaningful interactions on different levels rather than as opportunities for linear L2 uptake.

We end this article with a short reflection on task design. The data discussed in this article derive from the first exchange-of-items part of our version of the things-in-pocket task that was designed to feed into the discussion part of the task (see the Appendix). The goal of the exchange of items was not vocabulary learning but rather to provide input for the discussion that was to follow. In that sense the NNSs' not knowing the meaning of the items did not stand in the way of successful task completion (e.g., see excerpt 1, item I, where the word *hamper* is avoided by the NS). However, much depends on the definition of "success." As mentioned earlier, Ellis (2003), for instance, distinguishes between the *outcome* and *aim* of a task: The outcome is what a task requires the learners to do (e.g., exchanging and identifying things-in-pocket items such as in our study); the aim of a task, on the other hand, is its pedagogical purpose, such as active interaction and collaboration with an NS in the L2. Outcome and aim are separate variables. So when an NS takes over the discourse and sends so much comprehensible input for each item that the NNS can sit back and watch the

NS do all the work, strictly speaking, the outcome of the task is suc-
cessful—all the items have been communicated and clarified—but the
aim has not been reached: The NNS received input but was not an
active participant in the interaction. It could be argued, therefore, that
NNS face-appropriate responses were detrimental to the outcome of
the task. On the other hand it could also be argued that this part of
the task still had a valid result given that the NNS used communica-
tion strategies to compensate for breakdowns in the communication.
Indeed, guarding one's own face or that of one's counterpart while
maintaining meaningful interaction can be said to require highly
advanced communication and social skills. As such, face-appropriate
responses and behaviour are an inherent part of the genuine commu-
nicative needs of the learners during task performance. Still, we do
not think this outweighs the feelings of embarrassment and inade-
quacy during this stage of the task that some of the participants
reported and the possible impact on their motivation. Were we to set
the task again, we would include a balanced number of known and
unknown lexical items in this stage of the task. In TBLT task design—
as elsewhere—less is sometimes more.

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APPENDIX

THINGS IN POCKET (AUSTRALIAN VERSION: CHAT—VIDEO CALL)

- In today's session you are going to telecollaborate with your Dutch counterpart.
- Together you exchange and discuss a number of items on the wish lists of four fictional characters.

- Based on these wish lists you will create character profiles and discuss if and how they could be incorporated in the play.
- The first half of the task will be done through Skype written chat, the second half through Skype video call. The Skype video call session will be recorded and anonymised for research purposes.

BEGINNING

- Your Dutch counterpart will contact you through Skype written chat.

PART 1

- Below are the wish lists of two fictional characters (Mr. and Mrs. Adams), each with six items (Figures A1 and A2). Your Dutch counterpart has the wish lists of two Dutch fictional characters, also

Mr Adams' wish list:

Turtleneck sweater with honeycomb stitch

Pruning shears

Tongs

Christmas hampers

Whisk

Javelin

including six items each (Mr. and Mrs. de Vries). Exchange the items of Mr. Adams (you) and Mr. de Vries (your counterpart).

- NOTE: it is entirely up to you to decide in which order or who goes first as long as you **do not show** your counterpart the pictures.
- Briefly discuss Mr. Adams's and Mr. de Vries's characters/life-styles, based on their wish lists.
- Decide if and how Mr. Adams and Mr. de Vries could be characters in the play.

PART 2

- Sign off on chat and make sure your webcam and microphone are turned on. Your Dutch counterpart will call you for the second half of the assignment.
- Repeat the assignment with the wish lists of Mrs. de Vries and Mrs. Adams.

Mrs. Adams' wish list:

Kirby gripps/bobby pins

Braces

Laurel wreath

Tassle

Wrench
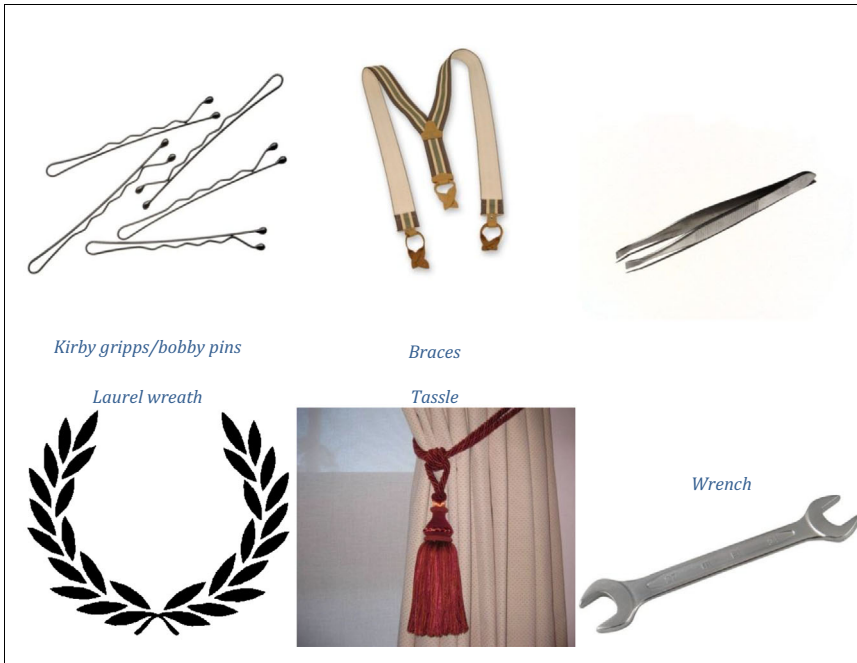
PART 3

- Decide if and how Mrs. Adams and Mrs. de Vries could be a characters in the play.
- Briefly discuss Mrs. Adams's and Mrs. de Vries's characters/life-styles, based on their wish lists.
- Decide if and how Mrs. Adams and Mrs. de Vries could be characters in the play.
- Say goodbye and sign off.