

## **Negotiation of Meaning Strategies in Child EFL Mainstream and CLIL Settings**

### **Abstract**

Research on child English as a second language (ESL) learners has shown the benefits of task-based interaction for the use of different negotiation of meaning (NoM) strategies, which have been claimed to lead to second language learning. However, research on child interaction in foreign language settings is scarce, specifically research on a new prevalent methodology in Europe, content and language integrated learning (CLIL). The present study focuses on mainstream and CLIL English as a foreign language (EFL) learners' oral interaction while they completed a guessing game and a picture placement task. The researchers analysed the oral production of seventy-two 9-to 12-year-old children (in age- and proficiency-matched dyads) to examine the conversational strategies that were employed in both tasks. Findings indicated that younger learners negotiated for meaning more, and mainstream learners resorted to more conversational strategies than CLIL learners. Furthermore, task-based differences in the NoM strategies seemed to depend on age and instructional setting. The results seem to indicate that age, instructional setting, and the tasks in which these EFL learners were engaged had an impact on the NoM strategies they employed in task-based interaction.

Task-based interaction has been claimed to benefit second language (L2) learning because learners receive many opportunities to negotiate for meaning (Long, 1996). During this process, learners receive and provide feedback on their production and modify their output, which leads to subsequent learning (Mackey, 2012). However, the majority of the studies that have focused on negotiation of meaning (NoM) have considered only adult populations, with little attention paid to children.

Oliver's (1998, 2000, 2002) work in an English as a second language (ESL) setting has shed some light on the process of NoM among children, but in English as a foreign language (EFL) settings, where access to the target language is clearly limited, research in child interaction is scarce. Due to EFL children's limited access to the target language, their conversational skills might be lower than those of their ESL counterparts, and therefore they might fall back on NoM strategies, such as clarification requests, confirmation checks, comprehension checks and repetitions, more often than ESL learners. Clearly, more research on this topic needs to be done in this context (García Mayo & García Lecumberri, 2003). Therefore the main aim of this study is to examine the NoM strategies that EFL primary grade students of different ages use in communicative tasks and in different instructional settings, namely mainstream settings and content and language integrated learning (CLIL) settings.

### **Children's Negotiation of Meaning: What Role Does Age Play?**

Research on child task-based interaction has shown that in ESL settings the NoM that occurs among children also leads to language learning (Oliver, 1998, 2000, 2002), but differences exist between children and adults. Oliver (1998) found that ESL children usually employ fewer NoM strategies than adults and that during interaction adults receive more negative feedback than children (Oliver, 2000). Mackey, Oliver, and Leeman (2003) also found that the feedback provided in adult nonnative speaker (NNS) dyads led to more opportunities for modified output, but that children, also in NNS dyads, took more advantage of these opportunities. In an EFL setting, Pinter (2006) analysed the performance and use of different strategies of 20 Hungarian 10- to 11-year-old children and 10 college students with similar beginner levels in English when they completed a spot-the-differences task. Following Oxford (1990), Pinter considered four main strategies: cognitive, metacognitive, compensatory, and social (for more details see Table 2 in Pinter, 2006, p. 625). Her findings revealed that children experienced more difficulties than adults in finding differences and that the use of these strategies varied between children and adults. She concluded that the differences between adults and children could be due to their interpretation of the task or to individual differences.

The studies mentioned above suggest that adults negotiate for meaning more and perform better than children in interaction, but not many studies have considered the differences that might exist between older and younger children in interaction. Pinter (2007) suggested that 10-year-old learners belong to a special group because they seem to possess the same ability as adults to communicate (Lloyd, 1990), although research has shown that at this age children also share some characteristics with younger children (Garbarino & Scott, 1992). For example, some learners around age 10 might be reluctant to clarify certain messages if they encounter ambiguity (see Cameron, 2001, p. 52; Patterson & Kister, 1981; Pinter, 2007, p. 191). Thus, children above or below this age could negotiate for meaning in a different way.

In an ESL setting in Australia, Oliver (2002) analysed NoM during interactions of 96 pairs, who were between 8 and 13 years old, working on a one-way and a two-way task. Regarding age, she did not find any significant variation in the NoM between younger and older learners. However, in EFL settings, other findings have been reported. For example, Butler and Zeng (2014) explored possible differences between fourth- and sixth-grade EFL Chinese pairs on an information gap task (picture placement) and a decision-making task. They focused on possible age-related differences on (a) the patterns of interaction; (b) interactional discourse characteristics, such as mutual topic development, turn-taking, and communicative functions; and (c) partners' perspectives on the task, such as, in the case of the picture placement task,

referring to the location of the objects. Their findings revealed that the patterns of interaction of fourth-grade learners were less stable across the tasks; that these learners also showed less mutual topic development and used turn taking more frequently. They also showed more difficulties in considering their partners' perspectives, providing their partners with sufficient information to complete the tasks, and raising more questions when they had doubts about the task.

More recently, García Mayo and Lázaro Ibarrola (2015) explored the use of different NoM strategies (i.e., conversational adjustments, repetitions, and first language [L1] use) of 80 Spanish EFL beginner learners in CLIL and mainstream settings and in two primary grades (third and fifth grade; 8–9 and 10–11 years old, respectively) in which the children completed a picture placement task in pairs. The researchers focused specifically on possible differences on the basis of age and instructional setting. Their findings showed that both instructional setting and age had an impact on the NoM strategies they analysed. CLIL learners in both grades initiated more conversational adjustments and repetitions but used their L1 less than mainstream learners did. Regarding age, García Mayo and Lázaro Ibarrola found that in both settings older learners employed their L1 more than third-grade children, but they also negotiated less than younger learners. The results of García Mayo and Lázaro Ibarrola's study are important because the authors claimed that the instructional setting seemed to have an impact on the NoM strategies that EFL children employed. However, the authors call for the need for more research on the topic, using other tasks to determine whether task type might be a variable that could affect NoM.

On the basis of the few studies briefly reviewed above, it could be that depending on the cultural context (Australia, China, and Spain) or the instructional setting of the participants (ESL and EFL), age may play a role in interaction. However, in order to reach that conclusion more research on the topic is needed. That is precisely the aim of this study, in which we analyse an EFL group of Spanish children and the potential age effects on the NoM strategies they employed.

### **EFL Learning in Mainstream and CLIL Settings**

EFL teachers (or foreign language teachers in general) do not benefit from as much class contact with their students as do teachers in ESL settings. In addition, the opportunities to receive input in the target foreign language inside and outside the classroom are scarce (García Mayo & García Lecumberri, 2003; Muñoz, 2007). For this reason, it is important to assess which method is most appropriate for EFL learners to develop their target language skills. This has been a

concern for many European schools since the early 1990s as they implement CLIL programs in their curricula.

In CLIL programs students learn a subject (e.g., maths, science, history) using the target language, usually English (Eurydice European Unit, 2006; Lasagabaster & Sierra, 2010). The way in which they develop their language ability is more natural because the target language is used as a medium of instruction (García Mayo & Lázaro Ibarrola, 2015). In CLIL programs the learning of language and content occurs simultaneously (Coyle, 2007). This methodological approach was implemented as a way to improve foreign language teaching in schools around Europe because teaching foreign languages only as a subject did not yield the expected results (Lasagabaster & Sierra, 2010). Some have seen CLIL as “an alternative that could overcome the deficiencies in previous language models” (Muñoz, 2007, p. 17). Furthermore, CLIL has been shown to provide learners with real and meaningful input that raises their overall target language proficiency (Coyle, 2007, p. 548). In CLIL programs learners receive more hours of exposure to the target language than mainstream learners (around 7 hours per week, instead of 3 hours per week, on average). Thus, CLIL learners have a time advantage over mainstream learners and therefore would most likely surpass mainstream learners in foreign language test scores (Dalton-Puffer, 2011, p. 186).

This is supported by the research, which has shown that CLIL learners exhibit greater fluency and speaking confidence (Dalton-Puffer, Hüttner, Jexenflicker, Schindelegger, & Smit, 2008) and a greater vocabulary than mainstream learners (Jexenflicker & Dalton-Puffer, 2010; Lo & Murphy, 2010; Ruiz de Zarobe, 2010; Zydatiņ, 2007). This is further supported by the results of a longitudinal study conducted by Badertscher and Bieri (2009) in Switzerland, where they compared 10 CLIL lessons to 10 mainstream L1 lessons and the NoM that occurred. It should be noted that this is one of the few studies that did not use English as the CLIL language; the target languages were German and French. Similar to García Mayo and Lázaro Ibarrola (2015), they observed more negotiation in CLIL lessons than in the mainstream lessons. Furthermore, they found that this negotiation increased over time. Thus, it appears that CLIL learners benefit more from the interaction process than do learners in mainstream classes. Hence, a further aim of the present study is to explore the impact that these two methodological programs may have on the NoM strategies children use in different tasks.

### **Tasks and Their Role in L2 Interaction**

Tasks have been widely employed as methodological tools in interactionist research because they have shown to be beneficial for L2 learning (García Mayo, 2007). When carrying out tasks,

L2 learners need to exchange the information they hold in order to complete the activity. They pool together their ideas, reach common decisions, and solve problems together to accomplish the goal of the task (Pica, Kang, & Sauro, 2006). Tasks have been defined in a variety of ways (Ellis, 2009). For example, Samuda and Bygate (2008, p. 13) defined tasks as holistic activities that require “learners to decide on potential relevant meanings, and make use of the phonology, grammar, vocabulary and discourse structures of language to convey these in order to carry out the task.” Ellis (2009, p. 227) also argued that “all tasks are designed to instigate the same kind of interactional processes (such as the NoM, scaffolding, inferring, and monitoring) that arise in naturally occurring language use.”

However, research has shown that not all tasks provide L2 learners with the same language learning opportunities. Pica, Kanagy, and Falodun (1993) categorized tasks on the basis of different features, such as the flow of information or the outcome they require. For example, in two-way tasks the information flows both ways because both participants hold part of the information necessary to complete the task. These tasks provide learners with more opportunities to improve their language skills because both learners need to pool together their ideas and exchange the information they hold in order to reach a consensus. However, in one-way tasks the information flows one way because only one learner holds the information necessary to complete the task, and the other has to seek that information. Thus, the person that seeks the information would negotiate for meaning more than the information holder (Gass & Varonis, 1985).

Pica et al. (1993) also stated that tasks with a closed outcome might benefit L2 learners more than open tasks would because learners are forced to reach one possible solution. Information gap tasks have been extensively used in L2 interaction studies and have been shown to generate a great amount of language learning opportunities (Pica et al., 2006). These tasks, which also require a closed outcome, can be two-way or one-way repeated, when the learners change roles and both act as information seekers and/or holders.

Research on tasks has been carried out mainly with adult populations (Gass & Varonis, 1985; Pica et al., 1993, 2006), and research with children, especially in EFL settings, is scarce. The present study sheds more light on whether different tasks (one-way vs. two-way) have an impact on the NoM in EFL child task-based interaction.

### **The Present Study**

This study focuses on the NoM strategies, operationalized as clarification requests, confirmation checks, comprehension checks and repetitions, that EFL learners in two different

instructional settings, namely mainstream and CLIL, and in two different age groups employ in a one-way repeated task (guessing game) and a two-way task (picture placement). The study is a follow-up of García Mayo and Lázaro Ibarrola (2015) and includes the same participants, only now a year older (i.e., fourth and sixth primary grades).

As in García Mayo and Lázaro Ibarrola (2015), we also consider possible differences on the basis of these learners' age and instructional setting, but focusing on the two tasks as outlined above. The research questions we seek to answer are as follows:

1. Do younger (9–10 years old) and older (11–12 years old) EFL learners differ in the amount of different NoM strategies they employ in one-way and/or two-way tasks?
2. Do mainstream and CLIL learners differ in the amount of different NoM strategies they employ in the one-way and/or the two-way tasks?
3. Are there differences in the number of distinct NoM strategies that these children employ between the one-way and the two way tasks?

## **METHOD**

### **Hypotheses**

**Hypothesis 1.** Following previous studies in EFL settings (see Butler & Zeng, 2014; García Mayo & Lázaro Ibarrola, 2015), we expect age-related differences in the NoM strategies that these learners employ. Overall, we expect that younger learners will employ more NoM strategies than older learners in the two tasks.

**Hypothesis 2.** Considering previous findings in CLIL versus mainstream settings (see García Mayo & Lázaro Ibarrola, 2015), we expect that CLIL learners will negotiate for meaning more than mainstream learners. Because CLIL learners are more fluent and have more confidence in the target language than mainstream learners (Dalton-Puffer et al., 2008), they are expected to have less difficulty in formulating questions about language, or negotiating for meaning, during L2 task based interaction.

**Hypothesis 3.** Although both one-way repeated and two-way tasks have been claimed to provide L2 learners with many opportunities to interact, two-way tasks have been claimed to provide L2 learners with more opportunities to negotiate for meaning and interact than one-way tasks (Pica et al., 1993, 2006). For this reason, we expect that these learners will also employ more NoM strategies in the picture placement task than in the guessing game task.

## **Participants**

The participants in this study were those included in García Mayo and Lázaro Ibarrola (2015), but data collection took place one year later. We considered 43 pairs (86 learners) for the analysis. These learners were all students of two large schools in a major Spanish city. One school followed the CLIL methodology, and the other school followed a mainstream program. Participants were divided into four groups on the basis of their grade, namely fourth (9–10 years old) or sixth primary grade (11–12 years old), and their instructional setting, CLIL or mainstream. Thus, there were two groups in the mainstream setting and two groups in the CLIL setting. All participants had started learning English in first grade, when they were 6 years old. Their English proficiency level was assessed using school-internal assessments tests, which revealed that these participants were all beginners, in both the CLIL and mainstream groups. Participants in the CLIL program received 12 hours of exposure to English per week, while learners in the mainstream program received 5 hours per week.

The researchers submitted all data to a variance analysis in order to determine whether the interactions in all the pairs were uniform and comparable. This test discarded 7 pairs (14 learners) from the whole data set, because their interactions were not uniform compared to the rest. For example, some of these pairs produced on average much more NoM strategies than most pairs, while other pairs did not employ any strategy and therefore were considered outliers. We considered that these pairs could bias the findings and excluded them for this reason. However, we still think that these pairs deserve a qualitative analysis, which we will consider in the near future. The final analysis was based on the conversational interactions of 36 pairs (72 learners), 9 pairs per group.

## **Materials**

All learners completed two different but familiar information gap tasks that were designed in collaboration with the classroom teachers: a guessing game (GG) and a picture placement task (PP). These tasks were selected based on input from the teachers and their assessment of the suitability of the tasks. Participants in the GG had to guess the element in a picture (a pig and a daisy). This task is one-way because only one member of the pair held the necessary information to complete the task. The other member had to ask his or her partner questions in order to guess the element that appeared in the picture. In order for the two members of the pair to have the same opportunities to give and receive information, they carried out the GG twice, for this reason two different pictures were selected. The information holder became the

information seeker the second time and vice versa. The information seeker received some cards with a variety of question prompts such as do you?, are you?, what?, why?, who?, how?, can?, how many?, and where? These question cards were selected because the learners had been working with them in the classroom for some time before the data collection took place and were already familiar with them.

Even if the learners knew the picture, the researcher asked them to try to use all the question tags, or at least most of them. In these cases, the questions they formulated after knowing the item to be guessed were much more specific and directly related to the item. Consider Example 1. These fourth-grade mainstream students work together in the GG. Student A already knows that the item is a pig (turn 3), but the researcher suggests that he continue to ask more questions (4 and 5). The questions that follow (6 and 8) are directly related to the specific item, a pig.

#### *Example 1*

1 Student A: who . . . is . . . er . . . how do you say *gordo* [fat]?

2 Student B: yes, it is.

3 Student A: how do you say *cerdo* [pig]?

4 Researcher: you have to ask all the questions.

5               you have to finish all the questions.

6 Student A: where sleeping?

7 Student B: every morning.

8 Student A: he is pink and black?

9 Student B: yes it is.

We acknowledge that this procedure might interfere with learners' performance in English because they already knew the item. However, we were interested in analysing how the students formulated English questions and answers, and in the character of their language practice, rather than in the resolution of the task. Even if they knew the item, they still had to continue formulating questions, and on some occasions they encountered language problems. These problems would lead them to negotiate for meaning, the main aim of the study.

The PP task was the same used by García Mayo and Lázaro Ibarrola (2015). This task has also been widely used in L2 task-based interaction, and, as the GG task, it provides many opportunities to negotiate for meaning (Pica et al., 1993). During this task learners helped each other place the missing objects in their pictures in order to obtain a similar picture. This task is



a two-way task because both members of the pair held part of the information necessary to finish it, and they needed to exchange ideas and ask questions. Unlike the GG, both participants in this task acted as information seekers and holders at the same time; for this reason, there was no need to repeat this task. Participants exchanged the information they held in their pictures and gave instructions to their partners on where to place the different characters in order to obtain a similar picture. Then they sat together and checked whether the two pictures were identical. Finally, the researcher checked the two pictures, and if there were any differences, learners were asked to replace the characters.

### **Methodology and Data Codification**

Participants worked in pairs and completed the two tasks in different classrooms in their school in one day. They completed the GG first and then the PP. The tasks were not counterbalanced, which we acknowledge as a weakness. The participants sat next to each other but could not see each other because a folding screen placed between them hid them and their pictures/cards. The researcher was seated in front of the children with a video camera, and if they remained silent for a while (around 30 seconds), the researcher made suggestions for moving the task along, by giving a clue, but never by providing them with any vocabulary or grammar feedback. Example 2 shows students in mainstream sixth grade working together on the GG. Student B remains silent for a while (/ . . . / in 4), so the researcher intervenes (5), and the two of them continue asking questions to guess the item.

#### *Example 2*

1 Student A: what you look in the picture?

2 Student B: is a . . . is the *color rosa* [pink], has got a . . . the big mouth, is . . . there is  
*un poquito gordo* [a bit fat].

3 Student A: is the fantastic or really?

4 Student B: really / . . . /

5 Researcher: you can try more questions.

6 Student A: how the four legs no?

7 Student B: yes, four legs.

8 Student A: what having?

All interactions were audio-recorded and around 11 hours of conversational interaction were transcribed verbatim (11 hours 6 minutes). We have analysed around 9 hours of conversational

interaction (8 hours 44 minutes) from the whole data set, because, as mentioned above, we excluded outliers. Once all the data were transcribed, we codified the conversational interactions on the basis of different NoM strategies, such as clarification requests, confirmation checks, comprehension checks and repetitions (including self- and other-repetitions). These strategies are explained below with corresponding examples from our current database.

*Clarification requests* are expressions initiated by one partner of the dyad to ask for a clarification on a topic that has been discussed. These expressions might include questions or statements such as *I don't understand* (Oliver, 2002, p. 103). In Example 3 fourth-grade CLIL students work together on the GG, and Student A partially repeats what Student B has said in the previous turn as a clarification request in turn 2. In this case, the clarification request in turn 2 also acts as other-repetition. On those occasions when two NoM strategies were involved at the same time, we coded those strategies as independent.

#### *Example 3*

- 1 Student B: how many branches more or less it have?
- 2 Student A: how many?
- 3 Student B: branches.

*Confirmation checks* are expressions initiated by a learner to make sure that he or she has properly understood or heard what the partner has said. In some occasions, they might include a repetition (Oliver, 2002, p. 103). Consider Example 4, in which two fourth-grade mainstream learners work together on the PP task. Student A wants to confirm what Student B has said about the jumper and initiates a confirmation check in turn 6. This confirmation check also serves as other-repetition because Student A has exactly repeated what his or her partner has said.

#### *Example 4*

- 1 Student B: he is after to the bank and the girl has got one sandwich.
- 2 Student A: is a long hair and a fair hair?
- 3 Student B: yes.
- 4 Student A: and is jumper the flowers?
- 5 Student B: no, he is red.
- 6 Student A: he is red?
- 7 Student B: yes.

*Comprehension checks* are expressions initiated by one learner to make sure that his or her partner has properly understood what has already been mentioned (Oliver, 2002, p. 103). Example 5 shows that in the PP task, fourth-grade CLIL Student B is giving instructions to Student A on where to place an item in the picture. Student A seems to be thinking about what Student B has said, and Student B wants to make sure Student A has understood by asking “ok?” Student A answers in turn 5 and goes on with the task.

*Example 5*

- 1 Student B: [ . . . ] is in . . . in your right of the blackboard.
- 2                    in the classroom between the the table and the blackboard.
- 3 Student A: hmm . . .
- 4 Student B: ok?
- 5 Student A: ok.
- 6                    next photo.

*Self-repetitions* are “the speaker’s partial, exact, and expanded repetitions of lexical items from his or her own preceding utterances within five speaking turns” (Oliver, 2002, p. 103). Example 6 shows that in the PP, sixth-grade CLIL Student B asks Student A to repeat the location of the girl that is eating a sandwich. Student A indicates that the girl is near the bench, and, later in turn 5, repeats again the location of the girl with more details.

*Example 6*

- 1 Student B: can you repeat the other?
- 2                    the girl is-that is eating a *bocata* [sandwich]?
- 3 Student A: near the bench.
- 4 Student B: oh!
- 5 Student A: near the bench . . . the . . . at the right.

*Other-repetitions* are “partial, exact, and expanded repetitions of lexical items from an interlocutor’s preceding utterances within five speaking turns” (Oliver, 2002, p. 103). In Example 7, fourth-grade CLIL Student B in the PP indicates Student A where to locate an item in the picture. Student B says that it is between the tree, and in turn 3 Student A repeats the same.

*Example 7*

- 1 Student A: where?
- 2 Student B: between the tree.
- 3 Student A: the-between the tree.
- 4 Student B: of the park.

All the NoM strategies were independently codified and then compared. Inter-rater reliability was 96%. All utterances containing any strategy mentioned above were analysed considering their proportion to the total number of utterances spoken by each pair when completing the task. Utterances here are considered c-units (see Foster, Tonkyn, & Wigglesworth, 2000; Loban, 1966), which are

grammatical independent predication(s) or . . . answers to questions which lack only the repetition of the question elements to satisfy the criterion of independent predication . . . . “Yes” can be admitted as a whole unit of communication when it is an answer to a question such as “have you ever been sick?” (Loban, 1966, pp. 5–6)

We conducted a bilateral two-sample binomial test for independent samples ( $\alpha = 0.05$ ) to analyse possible age- and instructional setting–based differences between the two tasks.

**RESULTS**

This section presents the main findings of the study on the basis of the research questions posited earlier. Overall 2,947 utterances were produced in the GG and 2,093 utterances in the PP. Table 1 shows the amount of clarification requests, confirmation checks, comprehension checks and repetitions (self- and other-repetitions) produced in each group and in each task. Comprehension checks were found only in the PP and were produced only by fourth-grade learners in both instructional settings and sixth-grade CLIL learners.

The findings are now presented on the basis of the three research questions stated earlier. For the reader’s convenience, the figures presented in this section summarize the significant findings.

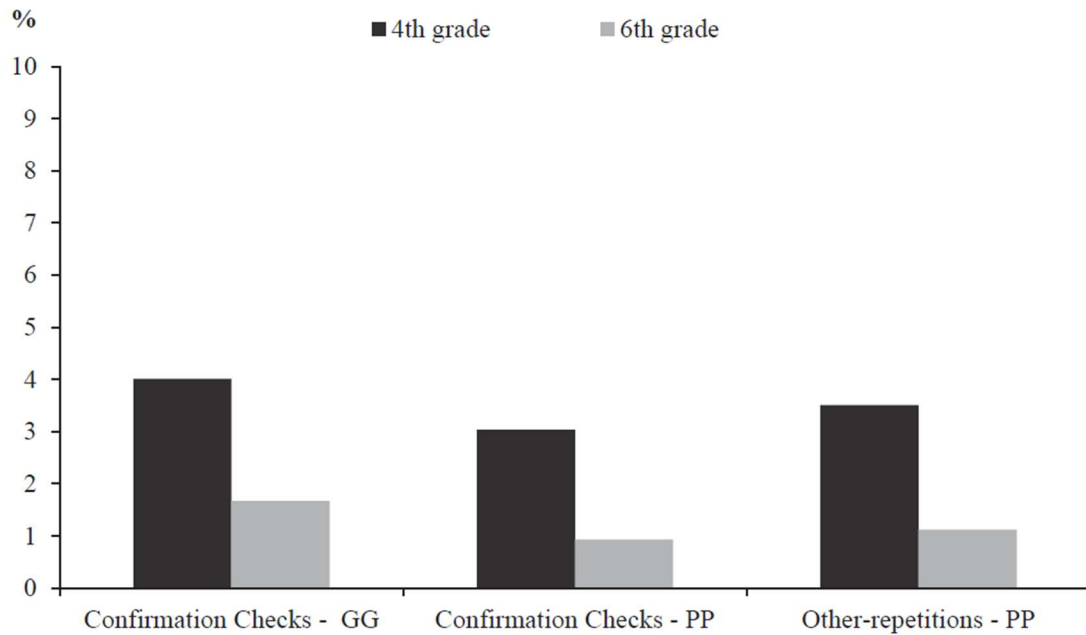
<b>Table 1.</b> Production of NoM strategies in each group in the two tasks					
	Task	Fourth-grade CLIL	Fourth-grade mainstream	Sixth-grade CLIL	Sixth-grade mainstream

Utterances	GG	761	449	1137	600
	PP	623	427	506	537
Clarification requests	GG	22 (2.89%)	25 (5.57%)	13 (1.14%)	21 (3.5%)
	PP	13 (2.09%)	9 (2.11%)	5 (0.99%)	12 (2.23%)
Confirmation checks	GG	13 (1.71%)	18 (4.01%)	11 (0.97%)	10 (1.67%)
	PP	6 (0.96%)	13 (3.04%)	14 (2.77%)	5 (0.93%)
Comprehension checks	GG	—	—	—	—
	PP	1 (0.16%)	1 (0.23%)	2 (0.39%)	—
Self-repetitions	GG	16 (2.10%)	22 (4.9%)	11 (0.97%)	17 (2.83%)
	PP	8 (1.28%)	8 (1.87%)	11 (2.17%)	5 (0.93%)
Other-repetitions	GG	17 (2.23%)	12 (2.67%)	8 (0.70%)	10 (1.67%)
	PP	12 (1.93%)	15 (3.51%)	11 (2.17%)	6 (1.12%)

### Age Differences Between Fourth- and Sixth-Grade Learners

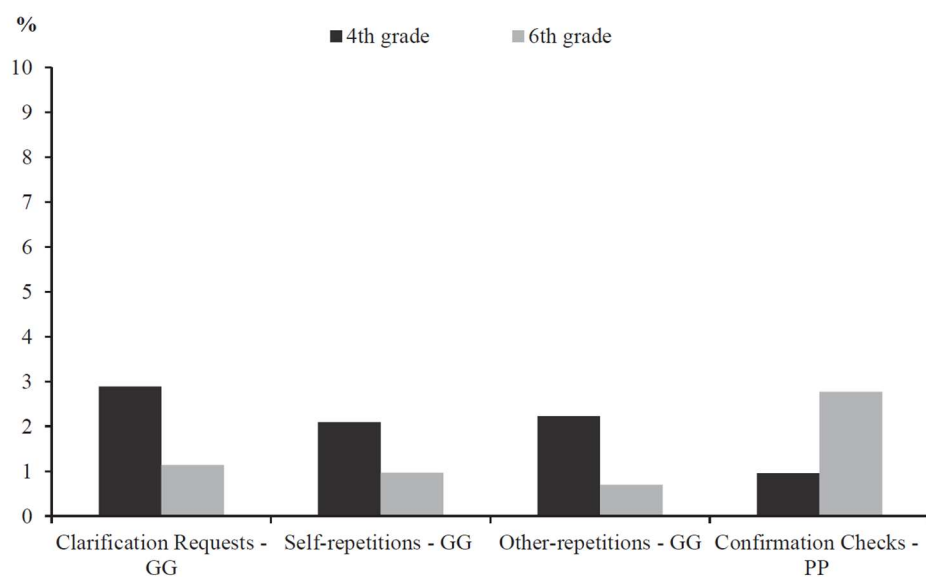
The first research question focused on the possible differences in the NoM strategies employed by younger and older EFL CLIL and mainstream learners during task-based interaction. Our findings point to a clear impact of age on the NoM strategies produced between fourth- and sixth-grade students in both instructional settings and tasks.

Fourth-grade mainstream learners initiated significantly more confirmation checks in both tasks than sixth-grade mainstream learners (in the GG:  $z = 2.328$ ,  $p = 0.019$ ; in the PP:  $z = 2.407$ ,  $p = 0.016$ ). In the PP fourth-grade mainstream learners also initiated more other-repetitions than sixth-grade mainstream learners ( $z = 2.530$ ,  $p = 0.011$ ). In the rest of the cases, no significant differences were found. Figure 1 summarizes the findings.



**Figure 1.** Age-related differences in the NoM strategies employed by mainstream learners

Fourth-grade CLIL learners initiated significantly more clarification requests ( $z = 2.773$ ,  $p = 0.005$ ), self-repetitions ( $z = 2.046$ ,  $p = 0.040$ ), and other-repetitions ( $z = 2.865$ ,  $p = 0.004$ ) than sixth-grade CLIL learners in the GG. In contrast, sixth-grade CLIL learners initiated significantly more confirmation checks than fourth-grade CLIL learners in the PP ( $z = 2.284$ ,  $p = 0.022$ ). No other significant differences were found between these two groups. Figure 2 summarizes these findings.

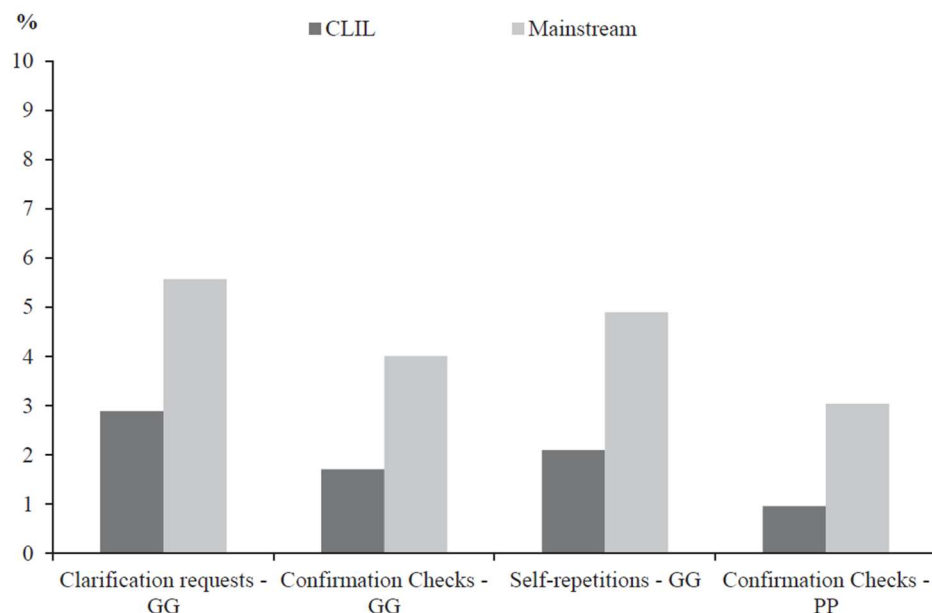


**Figure 2.** Age-related differences in the NoM strategies employed by CLIL learners

### Instructional Setting Differences Between Mainstream and CLIL Learners

The second research question focused on the possible impact of the instructional setting on the NoM strategies employed by EFL young learners during oral task-based interaction. Our findings show differences in the amount of NoM strategies on the basis of these learners' instructional setting in both grades and tasks.

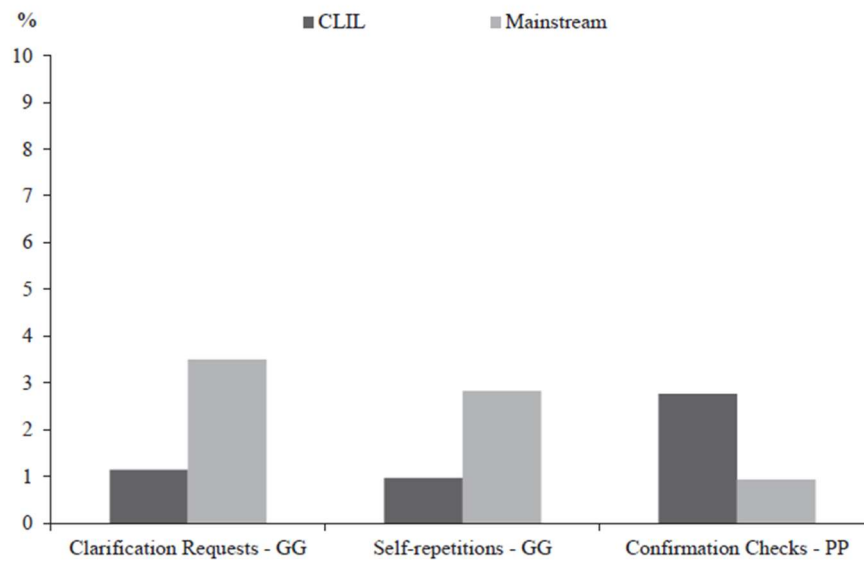
Fourth-grade mainstream learners initiated significantly more clarification requests ( $z = 2.328$ ,  $p = 0.019$ ), confirmation checks ( $z = 2.446$ ,  $p = 0.014$ ), and self-repetitions ( $z = 2.695$ ,  $p = 0.007$ ) than fourth-grade CLIL learners in the GG. In the PP, differences were found only in the number of confirmation checks, which were more common among fourth-grade mainstream learners than among fourth-grade CLIL learners ( $z = 2.485$ ,  $p = 0.012$ ). Figure 3 displays these findings.



**Figure 3.** Instructional setting-related differences in the NoM strategies employed by fourth-grade learners

Sixth-grade mainstream learners initiated significantly more clarification requests ( $z = 3.371$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ) and self-repetitions ( $z = 2.936$ ,  $p = 0.003$ ) than sixth-grade CLIL learners in the GG. In the case of the number of other-repetitions produced, although the findings did not show significant differences between these two groups, there was a trend for sixth-grade mainstream learners to initiate more other repetitions than sixth-grade CLIL learners ( $z = 1.884$ ,  $p = 0.059$ ). In the PP, the results show that sixth-grade CLIL learners initiated significantly

more confirmation checks than sixth-grade mainstream learners ( $z = 2.215, p = 0.026$ ). The significant findings are summarized in Figure 4.

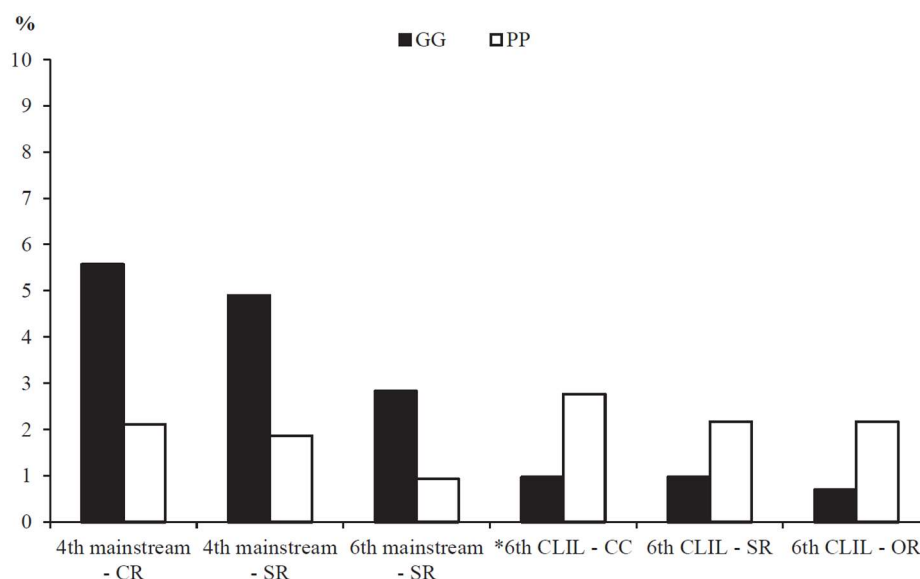


**Figure 4.** Instructional setting-related differences in the NoM strategies employed by sixth-grade learners

### Differences Between the One-Way and the Two-Way Task

The third and last research question focused on possible differences on the NoM strategies employed by the participants between the one-way and the two-way tasks. The findings reveal differences in both courses between tasks. Fourth-grade mainstream learners initiated significantly more clarification requests and self-repetitions in the GG than in the PP ( $z = 2.65, p = 0.008$ ;  $z = 2.46, p = 0.01$ , respectively). Sixth-grade mainstream learners also initiated significantly more self repetitions in the GG than in the PP ( $z = 2.32, p = 0.02$ ). Finally, sixth-grade CLIL learners initiated significantly more confirmation checks, self-repetitions, and other-repetitions in the PP than in the GG ( $z = 2.75, p = 0.005$ ;  $z = 1.96, p = 0.04$ ;  $z = 2.57, p = 0.01$ , respectively). No differences were found between the two tasks in fourth-grade CLIL. The findings are summarized in Figure 5.





**FIGURE 5.** Task-related differences in the NoM strategies employed by the learners.

*Note.* CR = clarification request; SR = self-repetition; CC = confirmation check; OR = other repetition. \*Sixth-grade CLIL learners also initiated significantly more comprehension checks in the PP than in the GG, but the number of comprehension checks in this case was too small (2 in the PP and 0 in the GG) to provide a significant comparison between the two tasks.

## DISCUSSION

The findings reported above show that these EFL learners also negotiated for meaning during L2 task-based interaction and employed a variety of strategies, similar to those found in other studies that have focused on child populations (Butler & Zeng, 2014; García Mayo & Lázaro Ibarrola, 2015; Oliver, 1998, 2000, 2002; Pinter, 2006). Participants employed mainly clarification requests, confirmation checks, and repetitions to overcome the communication breakdowns that arose during L2 communication; however, in line with Oliver (1998), they barely employed any comprehension checks. Children are claimed to have an egocentric nature, and strategies such as clarification requests or confirmation checks are directly related to clarifying or confirming meaning for themselves, rather than assisting their partners in the process of NoM, as is achieved through comprehension checks (Oliver, 1998, p. 377). It appears that children in this study focused on their needs and seemed unconcerned with whether their partners had properly understood what they had intended to say. Moreover, some learners did not seem willing to reveal that they had not understood what their partners had said. This is an obstacle for L2 learning because if the learners do not openly express that they have not understood something, teachers or other learner pairs might take for granted that the subject of discussion is clear. Take Example 8, for instance, in which two fourth-grade mainstream

students work together on the GG. At the beginning Student A asks for the number of eyes in the guessing game and Student B responds (in 2); however, later (in 13), Student A again asks the same question, because it is not clear.

*Example 8*

- 1 Student A: how many eye have?
- 2 Student B: how many?
- 3 two.
- 4 Student A: how many . . .
- 5 Student B: eyes or legs?
- 6 Student A: animals.
- 7 Student B: how many animals?
- 8 Student A: yes one, two, three, four.
- 9 Student B: animals?
- 10 Student A: yes.
- 11 Student B: one.
- 12 animals.
- 13 Student A: how many eyes?
- 14 Student B: two.

These learners initiated clarification requests following “chunks” that they had previously learnt in the classroom, such as *how do you . . . ? or do you know . . . ?* Children were already familiar with these prompts, and they felt free to employ them whenever they needed them. For this reason they could have employed this type of strategy more often than comprehension checks or any other strategy. Table 2 summarizes the main findings of the different NoM strategies in each group and task. These findings are discussed below on the basis of the research questions posited above.

<b>Table 2.</b> Summary of significant findings				
Age differences (fourth vs. sixth grade)				
	CLIL		Mainstream	
GG	Fourth > sixth	Clarification requests	Fourth > sixth	Confirmation checks

		Self- and other repetitions		
PP	Sixth > fourth	Confirmation checks	Fourth > sixth	Confirmation checks Other repetitions
Instructional setting differences (CLIL vs. mainstream)				
	Fourth grade		Sixth grade	
GG	Mainstream > CLIL	Clarification requests Confirmation checks Self-repetitions	Mainstream > CLIL	Clarification requests Self-repetitions
PP	Mainstream > CLIL	Confirmation checks	CLIL > Mainstream	Confirmation checks
Task-based differences (GG vs. PP)				
	CLIL		Mainstream	
4th	--		GG > PP	Clarification requests Self-repetitions
6th	PP > GG	Confirmation checks Self- and other-repetitions	GG > PP	Self-repetitions

### Age Differences Between Fourth- and Sixth-Grade EFL Learners

Our first research question focused on the possible impact of age on the NoM strategies employed by CLIL and mainstream learners during oral interaction in both tasks. In line with our first hypothesis

and previous research on EFL child task-based interaction (Butler & Zeng, 2014; García Mayo & Lázaro Ibarrola, 2015), differences were found between younger and older learners. Fourth-grade learners in both instructional settings employed certain NoM strategies significantly more than sixth-grade learners. This may be because they had more difficulties completing the task than older learners and these strategies helped them overcome the linguistic breakdowns that arose during interaction.

Younger mainstream learners initiated more confirmation checks in the GG and more other-repetitions in the PP than older learners. These two strategies helped them ensure that they had

understood what their partners had said (Oliver, 2002); therefore, it could be the case that younger mainstream learners were more concerned about this than older learners, although this is merely speculative, and more research would be needed in order to confirm this.

Younger CLIL learners fell back on clarification requests and other and self-repetitions more frequently during the GG than older CLIL learners. Similar to mainstream learners, fourth-grade CLIL learners may have had more difficulties carrying out the task and needed to fall back on more NoM strategies than older CLIL learners because these strategies helped them clarify the doubts they had during the communication process in the target language. Also, sixth-grade CLIL learners' English skills could have been more developed than fourth-grade learners' and they did not need such strategies as much as their younger counterparts did (see also García Mayo & Lázaro Ibarrola, 2015).

Some of the self-repetitions performed similar functions to comprehension checks. That is, on some occasions speakers initiated them to make sure that their own message was clear for the partner and that their partners had understand their own speech. Example 9 shows fourth-grade CLIL students working together during the GG. Student B repeats the utterance to convey the message and make sure that Student A has understood the question (in 4).

*Example 9*

- 1 Student B: why he is stop.
- 2 Student A: because is in the floor. It's not move.
- 3 Student B: how many cristals [glass] has?
- 4 Student B: how many cristals [glass]?
- 5 Student A: cristals [glass]?
- 6 Student B: it doesn't have cristals [glass]?

However, the findings reveal that sixth-grade CLIL learners initiated more confirmation checks than younger CLIL learners in the PP. Butler and Zeng (2014) found that fourth-grade learners in their study had more difficulties considering their partners' perspective on the picture placement task than sixth-grade learners. It might be the case that sixth grade CLIL learners tried to avoid this problem and initiated more confirmation checks in order to make sure that their partners had properly understood the meaning. Consider Example 10, in which sixth-grade CLIL learners work together on the PP task and Student A initiates a confirmation check in turn 3 to place the sticker in the correct place.

### *Example 10*

- 1 Student A: in a park.
- 2 Student B: next to the tree?
- 3 Student A: next?
- 4 Student B: next to the tree?
- 5 Student A: no.

Differences also appear to exist between younger and older child learners in mainstream and CLIL settings, and these differences seem to depend on the task learners are engaged in. Given that research has shown that NoM leads to language learning, including among children (Oliver, 1998), we could assume that younger learners could have benefited more from these tasks than older learners. Older learners could have found these tasks easier to carry out than younger learners and for this reason would not need to employ so many NoM strategies.

Another possible explanation for our findings might be related to Pinter's (2007) findings. She suggested that 10-year-old children might have the same ability as adults to communicate, but that they still share plenty in common with younger learners. The age of the participants of this study was around 10 years old, so the findings might be related to the intrinsic age characteristics described by Pinter (2007). Moreover, the differences might also be due to the attributes of the instructional setting. The next section considers this issue.

### Differences Between CLIL and Mainstream Learners

The second research question focused on the possible impact of the instructional setting (CLIL vs. mainstream) on learners' use of NoM strategies. The findings reveal that, overall, mainstream learners in both grades employed certain NoM strategies significantly more than CLIL learners, specifically in the GG task. This finding does not support our second hypothesis and differs from Badertscher and Bieri (2009) and García Mayo and Lázaro Ibarrola (2015), who found more NoM among CLIL learners than mainstream learners.

Mainstream learners could have resorted to NoM strategies more often than CLIL learners because they found more difficulties in completing the task. Research has shown that CLIL learners have more time advantage and a greater vocabulary in the target language than mainstream learners (Dalton-Puffer, 2011; Dalton-Puffer et al., 2008). Furthermore, CLIL programs help learners raise overall target language proficiency (Coyle, 2007, p. 548), which leads to more advanced language skills. García Mayo and Lázaro Ibarrola (2015) argued that, precisely because of these advanced skills, CLIL learners in their study were able to produce

more conversational adjustments in English than mainstream learners, which would help them completing the task. This was not the case in our study, possibly because CLIL learners had already gained the necessary language skills to complete the tasks, whereas mainstream learners still needed more practice with them.

Another possible reason for this finding could be that some of the NoM strategies employed by mainstream learners were expressed in their shared L1. On some occasions mainstream learners were not capable of expressing their doubts in English, probably because, as previously mentioned, their skills were not as advanced as CLIL learners' (see García Mayo & Lázaro Ibarrola, 2015). Therefore they fell back on their L1, which was tallied as a separate NoM strategy; however, we do not discuss this issue here as the purposes for which the L1 was used are beyond the scope of the present study. Moreover, García Mayo and Lázaro Ibarrola (2015) found that mainstream learners employed their L1 significantly more than CLIL learners. Consider Example 11 in which fourth-grade mainstream students work on the GG. Apart from employing different NoM strategies, such as clarification requests (turns 1, 2, 3, 5 and 6), confirmation checks (turn 4), or repetitions (turn 3) to solve their doubts, they also use their L1 (in italics) when they are not able to refer to some things in English.

#### Example 11

- 1 Student A: does you . . . does the animal . . . what *significate* [mean] when?
- 2 Student B: *¿qué?* [what]
- 3 Student A: what *signific* [mean] when?
- 4 Student B: when?
- 5 *¿quién o qué?* [who or what?]
- 6 Student A: no, what is *qué* [what].

However, in line with our prediction and the findings of García Mayo and Lázaro Ibarrola (2015), our results show that sixth-grade CLIL learners employed more confirmation checks than sixth-grade mainstream learners in the PP. As mentioned above, this group also initiated more confirmation checks than the younger CLIL group; thus it is clear that in this case not only age but also the instructional setting had an impact on the number of confirmation checks sixth-grade CLIL learners employed. Altogether this group had received more hours of exposure to English than the rest of the groups. They may have already developed the vocabulary necessary to complete the tasks, unlike the rest of the groups, and were more concerned in making their message clear to

their partners, such as in Example 10.

Mainstream learners initiated more NoM strategies than CLIL learners, which contrasts with previous research comparing CLIL and mainstream settings (Badertscher & Bieri, 2009; García Mayo & Lázaro Ibarrola, 2015). Moreover, although the sample used in this study is the same as that in García Mayo and Lázaro Ibarrola (2015), it has to be taken into account that those researchers considered only the findings of the PP task, whereas this study also examined learners' performance in the GG task. Thus, the findings suggest that in addition to the instructional setting, the type of task learners engage in might play an important role in the NoM in EFL child task-based interaction. This is discussed in the following section.

#### Task-Related Differences in the Use of Negotiation of Meaning Strategies

The third research question focused on possible task-related differences between the NoM strategies employed by these EFL children during interaction. Our third hypothesis was partially supported. The findings reveal that the most common strategy in both tasks was the clarification request, which assisted learners when they encountered problems in the task completion process (consider Example 3 above). However, in the PP, the fourth-grade mainstream group and the sixth grade CLIL group resorted to other-repetitions and confirmation checks, respectively, more often than to clarification requests. This task required learners to be specific about the location of the objects they held. Sixth grade CLIL learners could have resorted to confirmation checks more than clarification requests because they wanted to make sure about the location of a specific item mentioned by their partners. In the case of fourth-grade mainstream learners, other-repetitions could have also helped them internalize the message of their partners.

Moreover, in the one-way task, only one participant acted as the information seeker, and when he or she asked a question, interruptions were non-existent and the information holder merely had to answer. In the two-way task (PP) both learners had part of the information necessary to complete the task, and both participants were information seekers. In this case, they interrupted each other more often to resolve their doubts.

Our findings also reveal that the number of certain strategies used in both tasks varied depending on learners' age and instructional setting. Contrary to previous research on tasks (Pica et al., 1993, 2006), most learners (mainstream learners) had more opportunities to negotiate for meaning in the one-way repeated task than in the two-way task. However, the number of some strategies initiated by sixth-grade CLIL learners was higher in the PP task than in the GG task.

It seems that the one-way repeated task led mainstream learners to more language learning opportunities than the two-way task, whereas the two-way task provided more opportunities to negotiate for meaning to sixth-grade CLIL learners. In addition, as mentioned above, although the different groups resorted mainly to clarification requests in the one-way task, fourth-grade mainstream and sixth-grade CLIL

learners utilized a wider array of strategies in the two-way task.

In the PP, participants held a picture with many objects and, if they had difficulties with any of the objects that appeared in the picture, they could simply refer to another one without asking for clarification. This was not the case in the GG, in which only one participant held the information necessary to complete the task. If the participant who asked the question was not able to use a specific word in English, he or she inevitably had to use a clarification and ask his or her partner for assistance. Sixth-grade CLIL learners could have been more familiar with the semantic field related to the items in the GG task and did not use as many clarifications as the rest of groups.

Thus, it seems that not only age or instructional setting but also task type might influence NoM during child EFL task-based interaction. This study supports Butler and Zeng (2014) and García Mayo and Lázaro Ibarrola (2015) in that younger learners might have also found more difficulties in the task completion process than older learners and they negotiated more. In contrast, only the results found in the sixth-grade CLIL group are in line with previous studies comparing CLIL and mainstream settings, in which CLIL learners seemed to negotiate for meaning more than mainstream learners during EFL task-based interaction (García Mayo & Lázaro Ibarrola, 2015). This discrepancy is most likely due to the fact that the current study analysed data from two tasks, whereas García Mayo and Lázaro Ibarrola (2015) considered only the PP task.

### **Conclusions and limitations**

This study has shown that, similar to ESL learners, EFL learners negotiate for meaning during L2 task-based interaction and employ a variety of NoM strategies, which help them in the task completion process. Moreover, age, instructional setting, and task type have been shown to play significant roles in the NoM strategies that these children employed in L2 interaction. It is still difficult to draw robust conclusions regarding how EFL children in different grades and instructional settings interact in the L2 while completing communicative tasks. However, we believe this study has provided more evidence on the topic and will hopefully encourage other researchers to explore more child populations in various foreign language settings.



The findings reported here might also help EFL primary school teachers understand the conversational strategies children use while completing a communicative task and how they move the task along thanks to those strategies. For example, it seems that one-way repeated tasks might provide mainstream learners with more opportunities to negotiate for meaning, which has been claimed to lead to language learning. Thus, this type of task might bear more adequate choice than others for primary EFL learners. However, this suggestion needs to be supported by more research on tasks that are appropriate for different populations. So far, research on children in interaction has mainly focused on oral tasks. Further studies should consider tasks that also include a writing component (dictogloss) to see whether task modality affects NoM strategies. Furthermore, this study did not consider the extent to which children employed their L1 and why they did so. Research on adult EFL interaction has shown the benefits of a balanced use of the L1 for subsequent learning (e.g., Azkarai & García Mayo, 2015; Storch & Aldosari, 2010); thus, children might also benefit from moderate L1 use.

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