

## **Negative Feedback on task repetition: ESL vs. EFL child settings**

Research on task repetition in second language (L2) learning has shown the benefits of this practice for subsequent L2 learning. However, as with much L2 research, most studies on task repetition have focused on adults and there is a dearth of research in this area involving young children. This study examines the effect of task repetition on two forms of negative feedback (NF), recasts and negotiation of meaning (NoM) strategies, available to children in an English as a second language (ESL) setting (Australia) and in an English as a foreign language (EFL) setting (Spain). Participants were 7-8 years old and worked in pairs on a spot-the-differences (StD) task at two testing times (time 1 [T1], time [T2]). Differences were reported in the provision and use of NF from T1 to T2, and between the ESL and EFL group: feedback was provided and used significantly more at T2, and especially by the ESL group, but EFL learners made more errors and used different NoM strategies than ESL learners. The results are discussed in light of recent research on task repetition.

Keywords: task repetition; young learners; task based interaction; ESL; EFL; negative feedback; recasts; negotiation of meaning

### **Introduction**

Within the field of second language learning the utility of tasks and task-based language teaching (TBLT) has resulted in a considerable body of research into the nature of tasks and factors that enhance or inhibit language learning. One of the key aspects to TBLT is that it provides an environment for a focus on form (see Ellis, 2016 for a recent review). The benefit of this is that it “draws students’ attention to linguistic elements as they arise incidentally in lessons whose overriding focus is on meaning or communication” (Long, 1991: 45-46). Ellis (2016) presents a variety of ways in which a focus on form can be promoted (see Figure 1 on Ellis, 2016: 7), however, this study focuses on two, namely through negative feedback (NF) (and specifically negotiation and recasts) and through task repetition.

NF is a mechanism that helps L2 learners notice when they have produced the target language incorrectly (Lightbown & White, 1987; Long, 1996; Author 2, 1995; White, 1990). Negotiation of meaning (NoM) which occurs during interaction is one form of NF. It is reported that it can push learners to modify their output towards a more target language form (Long, 1996; Author 2, 1995). NoM may include strategies such as clarification requests, comprehension checks, confirmation checks, and repetitions. The latter two strategies also may be produced in the form of recasts, another type of NF (Long, 1996; Author 2, 1995). NoM draws learner attention to the problematic aspects of their production, without necessarily providing correction. In contrast recasts involve the repetition of a learner's utterance, but with any errors reformulated into a target-like form.

On the other hand task repetition is a pedagogic strategy that has been shown to promote complexity, accuracy and fluency in different language settings, such as English as a foreign language (EFL) and English as a second language (ESL) contexts (ESL: Bygate, 1996, 2001; Bygate & Samuda, 2005. EFL: Ahmadian, 2011, 2012; Ahmadian & Tavakoli, 2011; Fukuta, 2015; Patanasorn, 2010). It has been proposed that repetition is beneficial because when learners are familiar with what they have to do "they have more processing space available for formulating the language needed to express their ideas." (Ellis, 2003: 246). It is proposed that task repetition helps learners conceptualize what they aim to say, and choose the appropriate language needed in order to say it (Ellis, 2016). Studies on task repetition, both in ESL and EFL settings have shown that it leads L2 learners to focus their attention on more elaborated grammar and vocabulary, and to better organise and use their linguistic resources (ESL: Bygate, 1996, 2001). To date research on task repetition has primarily focussed on adults or adolescents, and little research has been undertaken with children (Pinter,

2007; Shintani, 2012). The few studies that have considered task repetition in child interactional studies have reported mixed findings, perhaps because they were undertaken in different instructional settings - ESL (e.g., Co-author, Co-Author & Author2, 2007) and EFL (e.g., Pinter, 2007). It is possible that the different outcomes might be due to the amount of input received in the target language, which is generally higher in ESL than EFL settings (García Mayo & García Lecumberri, 2003). However, this needs to be tested empirically, which is the aim of the current exploratory study. Therefore this research seeks to examine the effect of task repetition on the provision of, and response to negative feedback (NF), in the form of NoM and recasts, by EFL and ESL children.

### **Task-based studies in child settings**

As indicated tasks have been found to provide learners with opportunities to engage in the type of interaction facilitative of acquisition, for instance, they promote the provision and use of NF (e.g., NoM strategies, recasts, explicit corrections). In addition, differences have been reported between the frequency of NF in the linguistic data available to adults and children. For example, previous studies have found that adults use more and different NoM strategies, receive more NF than children and usually carry out tasks more easily (see Author 2, 1998, 2000 in an ESL setting, and Pinter, 2006 in an EFL setting). Even so, research does suggest that tasks are beneficial for child learners (Author 2, 1998, 2000; Pinter, 2006, 2007) and on this basis they are being increasingly used in school-based classroom practice.

Although research has been undertaken on tasks with younger (i.e., not adult) learners comparison is difficult between the different contexts in which it has taken place. For instance, in the case of adolescents (age 12-14), most research has been done in EFL settings. Hawkes (2012) found that task repetition with adolescent learners did

heighten their attention to form resulting in corrections to previous mistakes. On the other hand, Kim (2013) and Kim and Tracy-Ventura (2013) found that the adolescent learners in their studies benefited more from the task-procedural repetition condition (same task procedure, different task content), as measured by an increase in language-related episodes (LREs – Swain, 1998) and NoM, and an improvement on syntactic complexity, than when both the task content and procedure were repeated.

Research on task repetition with children is scarce (Shintani, 2012), and mixed findings have been reported. Co-author et al. (2007) explored the impact of task familiarity with 40 ESL children (7-8 years old) who completed communicative tasks in pairs. The research was conducted so that the participants' familiarity with the content and procedure of the task were manipulated in a counter balanced design. The findings showed that children who were familiar with the task-procedure expressed their ideas more fluently and had more opportunities to use feedback. Learners who were unfamiliar with the task procedure, but familiar with the content, were more likely to express doubts on how to proceed, produced more lexical errors, but also negotiated for meaning more - a result similar to Kim (2013).

In an EFL setting Pinter (2007) examined the interactions of a pair of 10 year-old EFL Hungarian learners who repeated different versions of a spot-the-differences (StD) task over a period of three weeks. Similar to Bygate (1996, 2001), her findings support the purported benefits of task repetition. For this pair of children they developed more effective ways to manage the task and their fluency when completing the task also increased. Furthermore, task repetition led these learners to pay more attention to each other's utterances and to other task-demands.

Also in an EFL setting, Shintani (2012, 2014) explored the interactions between a teacher and EFL Japanese learners (6 years old) when they performed an input-based

task nine times during five weeks. When learners repeated the task they carried it out more easily, negotiated more, and their comprehension of the task improved.

However, more recently, García Mayo and Imaz Agirre (2015) explored the effects of task repetition (same content, same procedure) and procedural-repetition (different content, same procedure) on the use of NoM strategies by 120 EFL Spanish children (8-10 years old) while performing StD tasks at two different testing times (T1 and T2). Although their findings showed no differences in the use of NoM strategies from T1 to T2, the results suggested that collaboration increased at T2 and this was measured by LREs.

Together these studies suggest both similarities and differences in the impact of task repetition, particularly in relation to NF, for adults and children, and also according to different instructional settings (ESL/EFL). However, it remains difficult to make strong claims about these aspects in child settings, due to the dearth of research. Therefore, the current study attempts to address this gap and shed more light on child-interaction, especially with task repetition, in ESL and EFL contexts.

### **Research Questions**

This study explores the impact of task repetition on NF and, in particular, the frequency and use of recasts and NoM strategies (i.e. clarification requests, confirmation checks, comprehension checks, repetitions) for child ESL and EFL learners. It also examines whether differences exist in task-based interaction in two instructional settings (i.e., ESL and EFL). As such it addresses the following research question:

- Are there differences in the provision and use of NF used by ESL and EFL child learners when task repetition occurs?

## **Method**

### ***Participants***

The participants in this study were 24 ESL and EFL learners. The ESL group was composed of 12 learners with different first languages (L1s) (Arabic, Cantonese, Chin, Dari, Farsi, Filipino, Karen, Vietnamese) who studied at an Intensive English Centre in a major Australian city, and had been living in the country for two years at the time of the data collection. They were aged between 7-8 years old (mean age 7.5) and started learning English immediately after they arrived in Australia (mean age 5.2). At school their instruction was wholly in English, and their English level was considered intermediate according to internal school assessment tests.

The EFL group was composed of 12 Spanish children who attended a mainstream school in a major Spanish city. They were 7-8 years old (mean age 7.8) and started learning English when they were around 4 years old (mean age 4.5). They received 5 hours of instruction in English per week, and according to internal school assessment tests their English level was considered beginner.

Due to time restrictions we could not conduct any placement tests to assess learners' proficiency in English, and we acknowledge this as a limitation. However, we considered the schools' internal placement tests as a basis to establish learners' English proficiency level.

Before the data collection took place, we gathered written consent from the participants, parents and the head of the school in each instructional setting. As an initial step, the first author informed the heads of the schools about the purpose of the study and provided them with an information sheet detailing the main aim of the research. Consent forms were also distributed at this time. Once the principal agreed to participate in the research, parents and children were also given information sheets and

consent forms. When both parents and children agreed to take part in the study, they were asked to return the signed consent forms to the schools and these forms were returned to us. Only those children who gave assent and whose parents had signed the consent forms, were recruited for this study.

### ***Procedure***

Both groups worked in pairs on a StD task at two different testing times (T1 and T2), with the same partner. These tasks were selected based on input from the teachers and their assessment of the suitability of the tasks and the items that appeared in them. They were also chosen because they have been shown to facilitate L2 learning (Pica, Kang & Falodun, 1993). To undertake such a task the learners need to exchange the information they hold in order to guess the differences between their two pictures, and by doing so, they practice the target language and receive feedback on their attempts (Author 2, 2002). As the learner setting for the two groups (i.e., ESL and EFL) differed, the tasks employed had to be contextualized (e.g., the items chosen for the tasks were familiar for the students in each setting) and therefore were slightly different. For the ESL group, the StD task was taken from the book *Developing oral language with barrier games* (Jarred & Roelofs, 2003) and it contained the picture of a small lake with different animals (e.g. kangaroos, crocodiles, bees) and plants nearby. The StD task that EFL learners completed was a parallel purpose-developed drawing using content more familiar to the participants (i.e. a desert landscape with plants, a cowboy, a snake and a vulture). Although this presents a limitation in terms of comparison, ecologically it was a vital step in the procedure.

Further, although the learners came from different settings, and had different L1 backgrounds, we took their similar age of exposure to English as a basis for comparison. Furthermore, we based the research on previous research with children

which also undertook comparisons with different populations (see Author 2, 1998; Lázaro & Azpilicueta, 2015); thus we considered that comparing these two samples would provide us with useful information on how task repetition might affect learners in different instructional child settings.

### *Analysis*

The learner interactions were recorded using a digital voice recorder (Sony ICD-PX440) and they were then transcribed verbatim using CHILDES (around 2 hours and 45 minutes) (MacWhinney, 2000). The data were coded firstly for eight error types, which were related to the misuse of adverbs/prepositions (adv/prep), articles (art), auxiliary/copula (aux/cop), pronouns (pron), syntax (syn), singular/plural (sing/plur), subject-verb agreement (SVA), and vocabulary (voc). Then data were analysed for feedback and learner response to this feedback.

First we focussed on the provision of recasts and then whether the recasts were incorporated (successfully or not) by the learners (Long, 1996; Author2, 1995). In some instances (n = 3) recasts were shown to include both a NoM strategy, such as repetition (n = 2) and a confirmation check (n = 1). Because of this low number we did not include them in a separate category. For example, in the following it can be seen how Chloe –in the ESL group- corrects Sue using a recast that also serves as a confirmation check. Sue incorporates this recast producing the word correctly in her next turn (NB: names employed in the examples are pseudonyms).

(1) Sue: do you have grass all over the pool?

Chloe: pond?

Sue: pond.



Next the interactions were examined to determine whether, when communication breakdown occurred, NoM strategies were employed. Following Author2 (1998), we analysed the data for: clarification requests, confirmation checks, comprehension checks, self-repetitions, other-repetitions and, after close scrutiny of the data two additional strategies were included, namely information requests and lexical searches. Information requests were those interactions when meaning was unclear and learners required more specific information about an item in the task. Lexical searches are very similar to clarification requests, but are only used in relation to the unclear meaning about a particular word.

Once the data were coded the results were tallied for analysis. In order to compare the amount of talk of the two groups (ESL vs. EFL) we submitted the total amount of utterances (c-units, see Foster, Tonkyn & Wigglesworth, 2000; Loban, 1966) produced in each group to standard t-tests for independent samples. Next the total number of errors, the responses to each error and the use of feedback (i.e. recasts, NoM strategies) were compared as a proportion to the total number of utterances produced by each group at T1 and T2 by means of a bilateral two sample binomial test for independent samples (significance level:  $\alpha = 0.05$ ). This analysis was selected as proportional analyses provide a fairer comparison between groups.

## **Findings and Discussion**

This section describes and discusses the main findings with regard to NF available to these learners and in doing so answers the research question presented above. Firstly, however, to provide a basis for comparison, the amount of talk (c-units) produced by the two groups is considered.

When comparing the total number of utterances produced by each group at the two testing times, the results show that at T1 the ESL learners produced 530 c-units (*M*

= 88.33,  $SD = 37.52$ ), and EFL learners produced 277 c-units ( $M = 46.17$ ,  $SD = 15.92$ ). At T2 the ESL group produced 526 c-units ( $M = 87.67$ ,  $SD = 36.82$ ) and the EFL group 331 c-units ( $M = 55.17$ ,  $SD = 15.2$ ). When comparing these numbers of c-units between groups, the findings revealed that ESL learners produced significantly more utterances at both testing times than EFL learners (T1:  $t(10) = 3.25$ ,  $p = 0.009$ ; T2:  $t(10) = 2.72$ ,  $p = 0.02$ ). Further, whilst the amount of talk (c-units) did not vary a great deal between T1 and T2 for the ESL group, the EFL group's production did increase at T2, although this change was not significant.

These findings might be related to learners' level of proficiency in English. Research on child task-based interaction has shown that learners who have more exposure to the target language usually develop more skills (see García Mayo & Lázaro Ibarrola, 2015) translating in this study to a greater level of output. This would be the case of the ESL group. Although these learners started learning English a little bit later than the EFL group, their English level is higher, they receive more hours of instruction in English and are exposed to the target language on a daily basis. As a consequence, their ability to communicate and to produce more in English appears to be better developed than that of the EFL learners. Of particular pertinence to the current study is the result showing that, although there was a slight increase in the EFL learners' production, task repetition did not affect the amount of talk produced by either group. Therefore, while task repetition has been shown to provide learners with more time to conceptualize and articulate what they want to express, once they are familiar with a task (see Ellis, 2003, 2016) this had no impact on quantity of output.

However, with respect to learner error it does seem that repeating a task led to learner improvement from T1 to T2 as shown in Table 1 below with the general pattern

being fewer errors produced at T2 (perhaps also reflecting changes in the provision and use of NF as described below).

Table 1. *Errors produced by ESL and EFL learners at T1 and T2*

	Time	ESL group		EFL group	
		<i>n (%)</i>	<i>mean (SD)</i>	<i>n (%)</i>	<i>mean (SD)</i>
Adv/Prep	T1	-	-	7 (2.53%)	1.17 (1.94)
	T2	3 (0.57%)	0.5 (0.55)	-	-
Art	T1	6 (1.13%)	1 (1.09)	10 (3.61%)	1.67 (1.21)
	T2	14 (2.66%)	2.33 (2.5)	7 (2.11%)	1.17 (1.47)
Aux/cop	T1	22 (4.15%)	3.67 (4.32)	27 (9.75%)	4.5 (5.43)
	T2	27 (5.13%)	4.5 (3.21)	19 (5.74%)	3.17 (3.82)
Pron	T1	3 (0.57%)	0.5 (0.84)	8 (2.89%)	1.33 (1.5)
	T2	2 (0.38%)	0.33 (0.82)	1 (0.3%)	0.17 (0.41)
Syntax	T1	4 (0.75%)	0.67 (0.82)	8 (2.89%)	1.33 (1.75)
	T2	5 (0.95%)	0.83 (1.33)	9 (2.72%)	1.5 (1.64)
Sing/Plur	T1	18 (3.39%)	3 (2.53)	2 (0.72%)	0.33 (0.52)
	T2	13 (2.47%)	2.17 (2.64)	-	-
SVA	T1	45 (8.49%)	7.5 (6.72)	12 (4.33%)	2 (3.52)
	T2	17 (3.23%)	2.83 (2.71)	3 (0.91%)	0.5 (1.22)
Voc	T1	5 (0.94%)	0.83 (1.17)	4 (1.44%)	0.67 (1.21)
	T2	1 (0.19%)	0.17 (0.41)	6 (1.81%)	1 (0.89)
TOTAL	T1	103 (19.34%)	12.87 (15.08)	78 (28.06%)	9.75 (7.65)
	T2	82 (15.59%)	10.25 (9.11)	45 (13.59%)	5.62 (6.37)

For the ESL group there was not a significant difference between the number of errors at T1 and T2, with the only exception being SVA ( $z = 3.63$ ,  $p = 0.0003$ ) and in fact this was the most common error for the ESL group at T1 (8.49%), whereas at T2 it was aux/cop (5.13%). In the current data most SVA errors were related to the misuse of the third singular person. Consider (2) below, Jack and John are reviewing the differences they found and Jack says “he have”. John provides a recast saying “he has three flies”, but Jack does not use it and continues producing the same SVA error.

- (2) 1 Jack: he have two frogs in his picture.  
 2 I've only one.  
 3 John: I have three flies.  
 4 he has three flies.  
 5 Jack: [...] he have two spiders.

The aux/cop errors mainly resulted in an answer to the prompt “have you got...?” and on these occasions learners used the auxiliary incorrectly, or omitted it altogether. Consider (3) below, where Marcos reformulates the question incorrectly about whether the item appearing in the task has gloves. Rebeca does not provide Marcos with any feedback on his error.

- (3) 1 Marcos: yes.  
 2 the person is got gloves?  
 3 Rebeca: gloves?

Furthermore, at both testing times, ESL learners made significantly more errors on sing/plur (T1:  $z = 2.32$ ,  $p = 0.02$ ; T2:  $z = 2.88$ ,  $p = 0.004$ ) and SVA (T1:  $z = 2.18$ ,  $p = 0.02$ ; T2:  $z = 2.19$ ,  $p = 0.02$ ) than EFL learners. In the case of EFL learners, the most common error they made was aux/cop at both testing times (T1: 9.75%, T2: 5.74%), and overall they made significantly more errors than ESL learners, but only at T1 ( $z = 2.82$ ,  $p = 0.004$ ); and more specifically on adv/prep ( $z = 3.67$ ,  $p = 0.0002$ ), articles ( $z = 2.39$ ,  $p = 0.01$ ), aux/cop ( $z = 3.16$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ), pronouns ( $z = 2.70$ ,  $p = 0.006$ ) and syntax ( $z = 2.37$ ,  $p = 0.01$ ). At T2 fewer differences were found, and they only made

significantly more errors on syntax ( $z = 1.98, p = 0.04$ ) and vocabulary ( $z = 3.09, p = 0.001$ ) than their ESL counterparts.

In response to learner erroneous utterances (see table 2), in most cases the errors were ignored by both groups and at both testing times, although there were differences between the two groups. At T1 the EFL group ignored significantly more errors than the ESL group ( $z = 4.72, p < 0.00001$ ), and overall (i.e., combining T1 and T2) the EFL learners provided significantly less NF than did the ESL group (T1:  $z = 2.55, p = 0.01$ , T2:  $z = 2.98, p = 0.002$ ).

Despite the differences between the groups the overall proportion of ignored errors decreased at T2 (ESL group T1: 13.01%, T2: 10.46%; EFL group T1: 26.26%, T2: 12.39%) and for the EFL group this difference was significant ( $z = 4.39, p < 0.00001$ ). That is, the learners were more likely to provide feedback at T2 than they did at T1. Thus it seems that task repetition enabled learners to respond to errors more effectively and overcome communication breakdown as it arose during interaction. This finding is similar to Hawkes (2012) where he found that learners provided more feedback upon task repetition; thus, this practice seems to have a positive effect enabling learners, especially EFL learners to provide more feedback to their interlocutors.

Table 2. Provision of NF to errors made by the ESL and EFL groups at T1 and T2

	Time	ESL group		EFL group	
		<i>n (%)</i>	<i>mean (SD)</i>	<i>n (%)</i>	<i>mean (SD)</i>
Recast Incorporated	T1	3 (0.57%)	0.37 (0.52)	2 (0.72%)	0.28 (0.49)
	T2	6 (1.14%)	0.75 (1.75)	1 (0.3%)	0.12 (0.35)
Recast Not Incorporated	T1	27 (5.09%)	3.37 (6.37)	3 (1.08%)	0.37 (0.52)
	T2	15 (2.85%)	1.87 (4.15)	1 (0.3%)	0.12 (0.35)
Self-repair	T1	4 (0.75%)	0.6 (0.76)	-	-
	T2	6 (1.14%)	0.4 (0.7)	2 (0.6%)	0.33 (0.52)
Ignored	T1	69 (13.01%)	8.63 (9.55)	73 (26.26%)	41 (12.39%)
	T2	55 (10.46%)	6.87 (5.46)	9.12 (7.41)	5.12 (5.82)
TOTAL	T1	103 (19.34%)	12.87 (15.08)	78 (28.06%)	9.75 (7.65)
	T2	82 (15.59%)	10.25 (9.11)	45 (13.59%)	5.62 (6.37)

With regard to use of feedback, and specifically the incorporation of recasts, learners did so (i.e. incorporating the target like form into their output) only on a few occasions, and in most cases recasts were ignored by the learner making the error, as shown in (2) above. However, there were instances when task repetition seemed to enhance learners' attention to formal aspects of the target language, especially for the ESL group (Ellis, 2003, 2016). This is illustrated in (4) below where an ESL pair is working on the task at T2. Laura initially does not incorporate "have" at the beginning, but after Jen's recast, Laura is able to produce a more target-like utterance.

- (4) 1 Laura: I got one spider.  
 2 Jen: I've got two spiders.  
 3 Laura: I have got two fish.

The analysis of NoM strategies shows differences in the type of NoM used at T1 and T2 and between the two different groups of learners (see table 3).

Table 3. *NoM strategies employed by ESL and EFL learners at T1 and T2*

	Time	ESL group		EFL group	
		n (%)	mean (SD)	n (%)	mean (SD)
Clarification Request	T1	4 (0.75%)	0.67 (1.21)	8 (2.89%)	1.33 (1.5)
	T2	15 (2.85%)	2.5 (2.88)	4 (1.21%)	0.67 (1.03)
Confirmation Check	T1	11 (2.07%)	1.83 (1.94)	9 (3.25%)	1.5 (1.05)
	T2	10 (1.9%)	1.67 (2.25)	8 (2.42%)	1.33 (2.34)
Comprehension Check	T1	-	-	-	-
	T2	2 (0.38%)	0.33 (0.82)	-	-
Self-repetition	T1	6 (1.13%)	1 (1.09)	8 (2.89%)	1.33 (1.21)
	T2	16 (3.04%)	2.67 (3.26)	8 (2.42%)	1.33 (1.75)
Other-repetition	T1	-	-	1 (0.36%)	0.17 (0.41)
	T2	3 (0.57%)	0.5 (0.54)	1 (0.3%)	0.17 (0.41)
Information Request	T1	12 (2.26%)	2 (1.55)	7 (2.53%)	1.17 (1.6)
	T2	14 (2.66%)	2.33 (3.01)	2 (0.6%)	0.33 (0.82)
Lexical Search	T1	11 (2.07%)	1.83 (2.79)	14 (5.05%)	2.33 (2.5)
	T2	8 (1.52%)	1.33 (1.86)	19 (5.74%)	3.17 (2.32)

At T1 the most common strategy employed by ESL learners was requesting information (2.26%), and, although at T2 the amount of information requests increased (2.66%), and this amount was significantly higher than in the EFL group ( $z = 2.16, p = 0.03$ ); self-repetitions were more common (3.04%). Information requests were made when learners wanted to seek further information about a specific item included in the task, thus it seems that ESL learners' engagement in the task might have increased with task repetition. For example, consider (5) below. Sarah asks Gary whether he has three bugs in his picture. Instead of Gary just answering "yes/no" he instead asks her about the appearance of the bugs, showing interest in what Sarah has asked and in the task. In other words, as part of the negotiation process it appears that the learners are demonstrating a level of engagement with the task and they appeared to work together towards completion.

(5) 1 Sarah: do you have three bugs snoring?

2 Gary: what does it look like?

3 Sarah: brown.

4 Gary: brown.

Regarding the increase of self-repetitions, it is possible that the learners could have simply remembered all the details of the items that appeared in their pictures and for this reason repetition was a more useful strategy for clarifying what had already been said. Furthermore, in most cases when learners used negotiation strategies, their interlocutor assisted them in overcoming the communication breakdown as shown in example (6) below, taken from an ESL pair at T2. Jack asks John about the number of teeth the monster has in their pictures. John requests clarification from Jack about what

he has already asked, and Jack partially repeats what he has said (self-repetition). John then repeats what Jack has just said in order to confirm that he has understood (confirmation check).

- (6) 1 John: is green.  
2 Jack: you have seven teeth in yours?  
3 John: what?  
4 Jack: seven teeth?  
5 John: seven teeth?  
6 Jack: you only have two teeth.  
7 you only have two.  
8 John: two!

Other differences found for the ESL group between T1 to T2 included significantly more (as a proportion of the total) clarification requests and self-repetitions at T2 than at T1 ( $z = 2.56, p = 0.01$ ;  $z = 2.17, p = 0.02$ , respectively). Clarification requests are usually employed to clarify meaning to oneself, rather than assisting an interlocutor in the process of negotiation (Author2, 1998). In the case of self-repetitions, as mentioned above, they were usually followed by a clarification request, and appeared to serve as a way to clarify what had already been said. From these results it appears that task repetition may have assisted the ESL learners to better at dealing with communication breakdowns.

In contrast to the ESL learners, no significant differences were found in the NoM strategies used at T1 and T2 for the EFL learners. However, this group was found to use a different profile of strategies than did the ESL group, for example they relied on



significantly more lexical searches than the ESL group and at both testing times (T1: 5.05%,  $z = 2.31$ ,  $p = 0.02$ ; T2: 5.74%,  $z = 3.44$ ,  $p = 0.0006$ ). At T1 clarification requests were also significantly higher in the EFL group than the ESL group ( $z = 2.37$ ,  $p = 0.01$ ). For the EFL learners lexical searches were usually employed when a learner did not know how to refer to a specific item in English; however, in most occasions, these instances were often not resolved – see example (7) below. In this example Luis, does not know how to say “cloud” in English and asks Cristina, but Cristina is not able to assist him and instead continues with the task.

- (7) 1 Cristina: do you have a cactus?  
2 Luis: no.  
3 *no sé cómo se dice nube* [I don't know how to say cloud].  
4 do you have a *nube* [cloud]?  
5 *puedo decir nub, pero* [I can say *nub*, but].  
6 Cristina: yes.  
7 do you have a boot?

In addition, most instances lexical searches were produced in Spanish as shown in (7) above. In fact, using their L1 as a strategy to help overcome communication breakdowns was not uncommon in the EFL task-based interactions both at T1 (75 c-units containing L1: 27.08%) and T2 (104 c-units containing L1: 31.42%), perhaps reflecting the fact that for this group, unlike the ESL group the dyads did share their L1. Although there was a slightly higher use of the L1 at T2, this difference was not significant suggesting that task repetition does not affect L1 use. Similar to recent studies on L1 use (Alegría de la Colina & García Mayo, 2009; Author1 & Co-author,

2015), the use of Spanish by the EFL learners in this study appeared to serve positive cognitive and social functions for learner interaction.

Research on task-based interaction has suggested that less proficient learners negotiate more than higher proficient learners because they encounter more difficulties in the process of communication (Gass & Varonis, 1985). Strategies such as clarification requests and lexical searches helped learners clarify different aspects of the task and the vocabulary that they were not able to understand. The EFL learners in this study appeared to rely on these strategies because their English skills were not as developed as the ESL learners. This is demonstrated in the way that the EFL learners left significantly more lexical searches unresolved than did the ESL group. However, although the EFL learners were still struggling with some lexical issues at T2, they also seemed to engage with the tasks and with each other (as demonstrated by their overall interaction and use of NoM strategies). Clearly the difference between the English proficiency levels of ESL and EFL children had an impact on our results. Despite these differences these findings do provide further support to Author2's (1998) claims that children can and successfully do negotiate in task-based interaction.

## **Conclusion**

This study focuses on two activities within the SLA area that promote focus on form, namely task repetition and NF –including recasts and NoM (Ellis, 2016), in an EFL and ESL child interactional context. The findings of this study showed that learners in both settings seemed to provide and use more feedback at T2 than at T1, and this finding is in line with previous research carried out in ESL and EFL contexts with younger learners (Co-author et al., 2007; Pinter, 2007; Shintani, 2012, 2014). However, EFL learners made more English production errors and provided less NF to their partners, probably due to their lower English proficiency level (see (3) above). Task repetition

resulted in a decrease in the number of errors for the EFL group, but not for the ESL group. Previous research with adults and adolescents in EFL settings have reported that task repetition leads to more accuracy, fewer errors and more corrections on errors (see Ahmadian & Tavakoli, 2011; Fukuta, 2015; Hawkes, 2012), therefore it seems that the finding for the EFL group follows this same trend and helps to confirm the benefits of task repetition on L2 errors. On the other hand, the ESL group employed significantly more recasts and some NoM strategies at T2 than T1, but this was not the case in the EFL group. This finding suggests that ESL learners may become more aware of language form when repeating a task (Bygate, 1996; Ellis, 2016).

In the case of NoM strategies, while no variation was found in EFL learners (a finding similar to García Mayo & Imaz Agirre, 2015), task repetition increased ESL learners' opportunities to interact and negotiate for meaning. Furthermore, the finding on information requests, which showed learners' commitment with the task, suggests that ESL learners may be more engaged in the task than EFL learners. This finding is also in line with that of García Mayo and Imaz Agirre (2015) who despite not finding significant differences in NoM strategies upon task repetition for their EFL learners, did find more commitment with the task once the EFL learners in their study repeated the task.

Overall the ESL and EFL learners in our study appeared to benefit from task repetition, and this finding supports previous research carried out on the topic with adults and younger learners in different instructional settings (Ahmadian, 2011, 2012; Ahmadian & Tavakoli, 2011; Bygate, 1996, 2001; Co-author et al., 2007; Fukuta, 2015; Hawkes, 2012; Pinter, 2007; Shintani, 2012, 2014). Findings for the provision and use of feedback showed that once learners were familiar with the task, they were better able to overcome the errors and communication breakdowns that occurred. Furthermore, and

particularly in the case of ESL learners, their increase in negotiation and discussion more generally suggested that they were more engaged the second time they completed the task.

This study also considered potential differences between young ESL and EFL learners. Not surprisingly given their lower proficiency levels (potentially a research design limitation), the findings showed that the EFL learners made more errors at both testing times. In terms of feedback, the ESL learners talked more and provided more recasts to each other than did the EFL learners. However, the EFL learners used more NoM strategies than the ESL learners and, further, the negotiation did seem to help them overcome the problems that they encountered during task-based interaction. The differences existing between the ESL and the EFL groups may be due to the amount of input received in the target language and learners' exposure to English. Research carried out in other instructional settings, such as Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), has shown that more exposure to a target language might lead to better results and more improvement (see Dalton-Puffer, 2011). Although EFL learners started learning English earlier than the ESL group, their lower level of exposure to English meant that they had not attained the same English proficiency level as the ESL group. Furthermore, the differences in the amount of negotiation between the ESL and the EFL group, more specifically at T1, support previous research that has claimed that lower proficient learners usually negotiate more than more proficient learners due to the difficulties in understanding each other (Ellis, 1985; Gass & Varonis, 1985; Author2, 2002).

Future research should consider comparing the provision and use of NF, including NoM strategies by EFL and ESL learners of similar proficiency levels. From this study it does seem that task repetition is beneficial for children in both ESL and

EFL settings, and teachers could use this practice in order to increase learners' opportunity to provide, receive and use feedback, but also to engage both with the task and with the language. Also, further studies could also consider using different tasks, such as writing tasks, in order to see whether a similar pattern occurs. Research using different task-modalities has shown that writing tasks provide learners with more opportunities to focus on form and meaning (Adams, 2006; Co-author & Author1, in press), but most of this research has only considered adults, and research with children is still needed.

Despite the potential contribution of the current research to available database on task-based interaction, further limitations must be acknowledged. First we only had access to a certain number of learners, and for a limited time. Ideally, further studies would include a larger sample of participants, who would carry more and different tasks, at more than two testing times, and in classroom settings. Furthermore, due to ethical reasons the tasks chosen for the present study were carefully scrutinized and selected for being adequate for each instructional setting. Research comparing two different instructional settings should consider an identical task that would suit the two populations, and not necessarily a StD.

Research on child task-based interaction, and especially on task repetition in different settings is scarce, and much more research needs to be done on the topic in order to better understand the best methods for children in different settings to acquire another language. If as suggested in this study task repetition benefits children in ESL and EFL settings, research needs also to be undertaken in naturalistic settings.

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