

AN ANALYSIS OF NEGOTIATION SEQUENCES IN A HIGHER EDUCATION EFL CONTEXT

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Abstract: *This study adopted a descriptive design to explore the interaction sequences of 77 undergraduate-level English as a Foreign Language learners using discourse analysis. The foreign language (L2) interactions were coded according to theories of negotiation. The results indicated that negotiation strategies were frequently employed in L2 classroom interactions among peers. This study analyzed the use of negotiation strategies and the specific types of triggers prompting language learners to negotiate for meaning in interactions with adult English as foreign language learners. It was found that these learners adopted a variety of negotiation strategies, including clarification requests, confirmation checks, repetitions, and appeals for help. The findings also showed a predominance of lexical triggers causing interactional breakdowns. The results suggested that negotiation in L2 classes generated a significant amount of linguistic output through various interactional moves, thus providing opportunities for language learners to receive meaningful L2 input. Furthermore, as the interactions occurred among non-native speaker pairs, a tranquil learning environment was established, which may indicate the alleviation of the fear of losing face in L2 interaction.*

Keywords: *Classroom discourse, communication strategies, English as a foreign language, L2 speaking skills, negotiation strategies*

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Introduction

Pragmatic competence is defined as the capability to interact and infer meaning in social exchanges (Taguchi, 2011). As a component of Bachman's (1990) communicative competence model, pragmatic competence refers to the knowledge of speech acts and functions and the ability to use language in social contexts. Pragmatic awareness, in turn, entails the process of pragmatic knowledge attainment and the use of strategies (Takahashi, 2012). Schmidt's noticing hypothesis (1995, 2001), as a framework for linguistic skills development, provides a basis for pragmatic skills growth. According to this hypothesis, noticing target language input through conscious awareness of foreign language (L2) helps to gain competence in the foreign language. In interactional settings, pragmatic competence is crucial to the negotiation of meaning (NoM), as L2 learners must recognize implicit meanings in interactions, repair conversational breakdowns, and respond with particular speech acts.

In English as a foreign language (EFL) classes, language learners attend to L2 forms by paying attention to linguistic elements in negotiation sequences with non-native peers in the L2 classroom. In those instances, negotiation encompasses strategies employed by the users of a second or foreign language to avoid or deal with breakdowns in interaction. It compels L2 speakers to use conversational adjustment strategies and, thus, improves language acquisition through unifying "input" and "internal learner capacities" such as "selective attention" and "output" in an effective way. L2 learners unconsciously focus more on forming and attaining linguistic structures using internal learning mechanisms. Negative feedback given during the negotiation sequences might lead to language acquisition (Long, 1996, pp. 451-452). The interlocutors negotiate for meaning to repair communication when they face a communication breakdown due to factors such as task complexity or low proficiency in a second language (Doughty, 2000). The adoption of negotiation strategies allows language users to realize the disparities between their interlanguage and L2 forms, transform the input into a more comprehensible form, elicit output modification, internalize L2 forms, and ultimately support L2 attainment (Long, 1996; Varonis & Gass, 1985).

In interactional research, studies on the speech of non-native speakers of languages have focused on linguistic input with an emphasis on how language input is made comprehensible to listeners in L2 acquisition through the interactional strategies such as negotiation of meaning strategy use among L2 learners (Aubrey & Philpott, 2023; Saito & Akiyama, 2017; Wang, 2019; Xu & Shu, 2020). Some focus areas in these studies were the effects of type and complexity of tasks on negotiation strategy use (Doughty & Pica, 1986; Loewen & Sato, 2018; Qiu & Cheng, 2022; Robinson, 2001). For instance, in a study in Hong Kong exploring the experiences of young English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners, Yan and

Goh (2024) discovered that information gap tasks and cognitively demanding and complex tasks elicited more negotiation strategy use.

Studies also documented the positive effect of negotiation strategy use on L2 acquisition and development (Azkarai et al., 2022; Bitchener, 2004; Mackey et al., 2013; Newton, 2013; Parlak & Ziegler, 2016; Saito & Akiyama, 2017). In Bitchener (2004), negotiation moves and trigger types by pre-intermediate ESL learners were analyzed. These tasks were performed at one-week and twelve-week intervals to specify whether the knowledge gained by the negotiation sequences would be retained over time. According to the results, vocabulary in the information task triggered more negotiation, and most of these items were retained at the end of the twelve weeks. Researchers also discovered a relation between proficiency in a language and the adoption of strategies for dealing with issues in L2 speaking. For instance, language learners with higher proficiency levels in Gökğöz (2008) employed more fluency-directed approaches and a variety of negotiation strategies.

Using the categorization for L2 negotiation discourse, this study focuses on the instances of negotiations during speaking classes, unlike other studies that concentrate on general language teaching activities. Conducted with intermediate-level EFL learners, it provides insight into how learners at this level negotiate meaning through specific strategies. This research aims to uncover the prevalence and quality of negotiated communication in a dynamic interaction environment within an EFL classroom. Previous research has highlighted the need for further studies to explore what triggers negotiation sequences, how these are responded to, the reactions of L2 listeners to modifications in output, and the success rates of negotiations (Xu & Shu, 2020, 2024). Studies also highlighted a need to carry out observational studies aimed at capturing L2 teaching practices of speech acts and pragmatic awareness (Zughaibi, 2023). Thus, this research investigates the NoM strategies adopted by EFL speakers, primarily focusing on particular types of triggers that initiate negotiation sequences, various signals that aim to prevent or repair communication breakdowns, and instances of output modification among language learners with their peers in an instructional context. It aims to illuminate L2 learners' pragmatic awareness states through analysis of the distinctions of learner production and the target language forms and meaning via their realization of speech acts. In line with this aim, the following research questions were generated:

1. How often do EFL learners negotiate in peer-to-peer L2 conversations in naturalistic classroom environments?
2. What are the characteristics of L2 negotiation among EFL learners?

Literature Review

Negotiation Types and Strategies

Negotiation of meaning extends beyond comprehending single lexical items or grammatical structures; rather, it concerns the interpretation of intended meanings. Speech act theory explains how interlocutors negotiate those meanings through speech acts like clarifications, requests, and appeals for help (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969). According to Doughty's (2000) NoM model, the NoM sequence comprises the components of trigger, signal, response, and reaction. A "trigger" is a whole bulk or a part of a speech that is incomprehensible to listeners. Smith (2003) defines four types of triggers: (1) lexical, (2) structural/morphological/ syntactic, (3) content, and (4) discourse. Lexical triggers are vocabulary items that cause a non- or partial understanding in a NoM sequence. Structural triggers refer to grammatical or structural patterns that lead to incomprehensibility in meaning. Discourse triggers are linked with coherence in discourse, such as when a speaker cannot relate an antecedent to a pronoun during a communication act. A content trigger is like a lexical trigger; however, it differs from a lexical trigger in that it requires clarification of ambiguous sentences beyond a single lexical item. For example, global indicators such as "I do not understand" and "What do you mean?" can signal a content trigger (Zhao, 2010). Besides lexical, structural, content, and discourse triggers, Nakahama et al. (2001) add pronunciation triggers to the categorization scheme and define pronunciation triggers as utterances leading to NoM when the speaker already knows a word but has a problem conveying the meaning to the listener because of the incomprehensible pronunciation of a word.

The second constituent of the NoM model is the signal. The response from a listener indicating that she or he has not understood a specific part of an utterance refers to a "signal." Long (1983) defines four types of signals in the NoM sequences: (1) requests for clarification, (2) confirmation checks, (3) comprehension checks, and (4) repetition. The first concept, a clarification request, is used to ask for help to simplify an interlocutor's previous sentence. These may consist of wh- or yes/no, tag questions, and phrases such as "I do not follow you", "What did you say?" to show a lack of understanding (Long, 1983). The second kind of signal, a confirmation check, is used by the listeners to check if they have heard or understood what a speaker has said accurately (Doughty, 2000). It can be realized by using a rising intonation, repeating a part of or the whole sentences with or without adopting question tags like "The woman, right? or "The woman?". The speakers can respond with a simple confirmation like "Yes, Mhm" to interlocutors, and it is not necessary to add further new knowledge (Doughty & Pica, 1986; Rulon & McCreary, 1986). The third signal type is a comprehension check, which interlocutors adopt to check if listeners have understood their utterances correctly (Long, 1983). The fourth

type, repetition, is categorized as a NoM communicative device in the form of whole or partial repetitions. These are used to overcome obstacles in interaction and set up arguments (e.g., Did you mean bamboo? Yes, bamboo) (Doughty & Pica, 1986).

In addition to the NoM sequences, negotiation of form (NoF) occurs when interlocutors pay attention to form to solve a linguistic problem. According to Lyster and Ranta (1997), appeals for assistance as a negotiation of form (NoF) refer to assistance demanded by L2 speakers who need support in forming accurate L2 forms. In explicit appeals for help, the L2 speaker forms wh-questions to initiate subjects in conversation, thus leading to further interactional moves in the exchange of meanings (Long, 1981). Conversely, implicit appeals for assistance motivate L2 speakers to repair incomplete messages in interaction through strategies such as pauses, which compel the listener to carry on with the ongoing interaction by interactional moves in the L2 interaction (Xu & Shu, 2020).

In line with the literature and theories so far, this study aims to contribute to the line of research in foreign language learning and communication through an analysis of the instances of negotiation sequences as pragmatic engagement cases, in which speech acts such as triggers and signals of NoM function as mediators for negotiation of meaning and form. An appreciation of how EFL learners conduct negotiation in L2 may assist language teachers in guiding them in overcoming challenges their learners might face in interactional exchanges. Analyzing the types of triggers will demonstrate the sources of interactional breakdowns that compel L2 speakers to negotiate for meaning. A corpus of EFL classroom interaction could help explore negotiation strategies in this particular L2 learning environment and suggest a broader array of implementation in other settings.

Methodology

Research population

The participants of this study were 77 B1 to B2 level first-year students at a department of English Language Teaching in Türkiye. Two intact classes were observed in the scope of this study. Forty-five of the participants were female, and thirty-two of them were male. The participants were selected based on criterion sampling among university students, considering predetermined criteria (Dörnyei, 2007). The participants were at least at the B1 proficiency level, which might be a possible threshold proficiency level necessary to conduct L2 speaking tasks for the aims of this study. This group of participants was selected because they were believed to possess pragmatic awareness of speech elements in the language, turn-taking skills in L2, and communicative competence to interact about various subjects in the English language.

Data collection

Two researchers gathered data through classroom observations of Oral Communication I-II courses. This study's scope included thirteen lessons lasting approximately 50 minutes each and interactions during the implementation of tasks. The researchers listened to students' conversations with peers during group work and various tasks and took observer notes to analyze these interactions. One researcher was the course lecturer, while the other was an MA student acting as an outsider. During the data collection phase, the instructor employed information gap tasks and optional exchange activities, such as free group discussions. The tasks included meeting new people, addressing false first assumptions, and discussing music, styles, and celebrities. Activities consisted of role plays, pair dialogues, solving logic puzzles, debates, and picture difference tasks. The course focused on language structures such as expressing disagreement politely, making excuses, using compensation strategies, and clarifying expressions. The tasks conducted in these L2 speaking classes were communicative, promoting interaction among L2 learners through dyads, group work, and information gap tasks. These activities were designed to enhance L2 speaking skills by fostering interaction, negotiation, and L2 communicative competence.

Coding procedures

Speech Act Theory was adopted to specify the pragmatic functions of L2 learners' interaction moves, such as confirmation, requests, and clarifications, in the classroom interaction data (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969). These acts demonstrate L2 learners' pragmatic competence in dealing with interactional breakdowns and reaching a shared understanding. Using discourse analysis, the instances of NoM and NoF strategy use were analyzed in line with the categorizations and conceptual arguments in the literature. Discourse analysis was employed to examine the relation between the language and contextual factors through the analysis of spoken discourse. The analysis was conducted through the interpretation of utterances rather than the declarations themselves within a pragmatics framework (Obeyd, 2021).

In decoding the researchers' observation notes, all transcriptions were explored to identify NoM and NoF cases and categorize potential triggers. To specify learners' use of NoM and NoF, we followed previous literature (e.g., Doughty, 2000; Long, 1983; Lyster & Ranta, 1997; Nakahama et al., 2001; Smith, 2003) and considered NoM or NoF as signals of unintended interactional breakdowns that incite interaction partners to use NoM or NoF strategies to deal with the breakdowns and continue the interaction flow. The interaction among the language learners was analyzed to observe whether there were any incomprehensible or unclear utterances to the listeners. These utterances were then coded as an indicator of possible NoM or NoF sequences. For quantitative data analysis, we

first specified the signal that is the origin of the negotiation sequence, which is like a clarification request. We looked back at the previous utterances from the signal and coded a previous segment of the data as a trigger. The data were first coded in cases when the L2 speakers tried to prevent communication breakdowns through strategies like comprehension checks. Second, the data were coded when L2 speakers used strategies to repair conversational breakdown through requests for clarification, confirmation checks, and other repetitions. After coding the data, the trigger and signal type frequencies were calculated for a descriptive analysis of the occurrences of negotiations of meaning and form. The two researchers independently coded the data, and discrepancies regarding any ambiguities in the coding of the extracts were resolved.

Coding of triggers

The researchers coded the segments of speech that had an erroneous form in linguistic structure or content. The coding demonstrated that there were five main categories of learner errors: lexical, structural, content, discourse, and phonetic errors. Lexical errors concerned problems with word knowledge, collocation, or morphology. Here in this extract from our data, one interlocutor indicates that “It turns out he was bubbly.” In response to this statement, the listener inquires about the word by repetition of the word incomprehensible in meaning: “Bubbly?”. Thus, as the second speaker cannot comprehend the meaning of the word “bubbly,” the speaker tries to comprehend its meaning by expecting an expansion of the word’s definition.

The data in this study were also coded for structural triggers, which concerned grammatical, syntactical, or morphological patterns in a linguistic structure that result in negotiation moves among the interlocutors. The next case illustrates an instance of a breakdown indicated through a structural trigger between two speakers. “Mika: One, two five paper. Donna: Pieces of paper?” (Nakahama et al., 2001, p. 385). In this example, Donna paid attention to form, telling Mika that the correct form was “pieces of paper” rather than “five paper.” The two speakers negotiate the correct grammatical form of countable and uncountable nouns and pluralization.

The data were also coded for the cases of discourse triggers. Discourse triggers initiate negotiation when listeners in a conversation cannot make sense of a piece of information in a text because of issues such as the inability to relate a reference word to a previously mentioned part of speech. In the following case, the listener cannot grasp the meaning of the reference word “first” in the utterance “Is it the first one?” Thus, a lack of understanding of a reference word in discourse triggers a clarification request: “What do you mean by first?”.

Furthermore, the related parts of the data were coded as content triggers because a segment of a text, rather than a single lexical item, caused ambiguity

in speech. Furthermore, conversation sequences were coded as pronunciation triggers when the mispronunciation of a word caused difficulty in conveying the meaning among the speakers. To illustrate, we see an example of how pronunciation caused L2 speakers to negotiate for meaning in the following case: “Sumiko: Preschool ..? [prEskul] [‘prɛ.sku:l] Rita: Pre-school ..? [priskul] [‘prisku:l] Sumiko: Pre-school. [priskul]” (Nakahama et al., 2001, p. 385). When Sumiko mispronounced the word “preschool” because of the pronunciation of the vowel in the first syllable, Rita asked for clarification by pointing out the correct pronunciation. Thus, this section demonstrated how triggers were coded in the data. The next part illustrates extracts from the data in the coding of signals of negotiation.

Coding of signals

The speech data were also analyzed to specify cases demonstrating a breakdown in communication between interlocutors. The conversational data regarding the kinds of L2 negotiation strategies and communicative functions were coded. The following excerpts demonstrate some extracts for particular types of negotiation acts found in the data and the coding procedure for each. In the first excerpt, the first speaker points out, “Is this the vegetable’s name or the name of the dish?” The second speaker replies by saying that “It is the name of the dish.” By asking for clarification, the first speaker prompts the second speaker to rephrase the sentence to achieve a mutual understanding. This example illustrates the coding of a NoM process that consists of a clarification request strategy followed by the speaker’s modification of their output through repetition of the message upon the listener’s request.

The subsequent cases demonstrate the coding of the data regarding confirmation check signals. Here, a speaker does not comprehend the other speaker’s sentence that is “He’s a football player.” So, a confirmation check speech act through an increasing intonation and the partial repetition of the phrase “football player?” is used to guard against misunderstanding. A confirmation check can be seen when a speaker partially repeats the first speaker’s previous sentence as ‘other repetition’ to assert the accurate comprehension of the message.

On the other hand, when speakers made statements to verify if listeners heard or understood what was said correctly, the data were coded as comprehension checks. In the following case, the first speaker seeks to assure that the listener comprehends what they have said correctly by asking “He’s a football player. Does it make sense?” This example illustrates a comprehension check through the global indicator ‘Does it make sense?’ by the L2 speaker to confirm that the listener has accurately comprehended the message.

There were also cases when L2 listeners did not understand a sentence and asked for the repetition of the phrase. These incidents took place when interlocutors might

not have heard it at all or have misunderstood some parts, as in the next extract: Speaker 1: “I don’t like that.” Speaker 2: “What?” Speaker 1: “I don’t like that.” L2 learners asked for repetition to repair a communication breakdown by using the Wh-question marker, “i.e., What?”. Thus, these cases are coded as “asking for repetition” as a signal of incomprehensibility of messages in the data.

Another negotiation strategy, appealing for help, is used by the pairs to get help in the case of an inability to carry on with the interaction due to issues such as a lack of knowledge in grammar, vocabulary, etc., during peer or group work activities in the conversation. The dyad in the following conversation engages in NoM through an appeal for help by asking for the correct form of the word pronounced. Speaker 1: “It is metal /’metəl/. Medal? /’mɛdəl/?” Speaker 2: “Metal /’metəl/” (i.e., using correct pronunciation). In the example taken from our data, Speaker 1 is unsure if the correct word is “medal” /’mɛdəl/ or “metal” /’metəl/.

Findings and Discussion

The incidence of NoM sequences

In this section, data from pair and group activities are explored, and the parts of interaction displaying the instances of strategies used to avoid communication breakdowns or repair the incomprehensibility of the messages by the interlocutors are analyzed. The extracts from the data for pairs or groups show the particular types of triggers initiating negotiation and the L2 learner responses to the triggers, the focal point of our inquiries. Among the signals for negotiation for meaning in this study, clarification requests were used the most (n=47), followed by repetition requests (n=42), confirmation checks (n=39), appealing for help (n=5), and comprehension checks (n=4). The common use of clarification requests demonstrates L2 learners’ awareness of interactional breakdowns, willingness to sustain the interaction, and capability to use contextually suitable directive acts to maintain conversation flow. As directive illocutionary acts, clarification requests accomplish both an interpersonal and linguistic function. Therefore, L2 learners in this study use clarification requests to maintain conversational flow and clarify the intended meaning. The high frequency of repetition and confirmation checks in this study may also show learners’ preference for linguistic verification besides interaction clarity. The relative infrequency of appeals for help and comprehension checks may also show L2 learners’ concerns for face threats and tendency to rely on self-initiated repair strategies (Brown & Levinson, 1987).

According to the findings, there were several instances of NoM, which supported the arguments that NoM takes place in non-native speaker communication (Varonis & Gass, 1985), peer interaction (Ellis, 2012), and information exchange tasks (Foster, 1998). These findings are echoed in previous literature as well, in

which NoM took place in many instances in peer-to-peer conversations working on their interlanguage forms for reaching a more target-like proficiency (Foster & Ohta, 2005; García Mayo & Pica, 2000).

It is possible that the task design in this study contributed to the relatively frequent use of negotiation strategies by L2 learners. Especially in information gap tasks, non-native speakers are more likely to negotiate for meaning when implementing classroom tasks (Doughty & Pica, 1986). It could be possible that as language learners worked in groups, it also became more likely for our learners to construct more comprehensible input and output while negotiating for meaning (Foster, 1998). It could also be the case that when communication occurs between non-native groups of learners, NoM is more frequent than in teacher-led classes (Doughty & Pica, 1986; Rulon & McCreary, 1986). Furthermore, learners' frequent use of negotiation strategies could be understood as illustrations of pragmatic competence, reflecting their capability to adopt suitable speech acts to resolve interactional breakdowns. The frequent use of reformulations in the form of clarification requests and confirmation checks to repair or elaborate on the preceding concepts may proliferate our beliefs about the function of language awareness in the way of reaching a shared understanding in interlanguage interaction.

However, the instances of NoM and the resulting negative evidence indicating negotiation among L2 learners could still be more prevalent in the data, considering the number of students and the weeks observed. This might suggest that the L2 learners in this study needed more opportunities to negotiate meaning, give and take negative evidence, and engage in output modification to acquire and develop L2 skills. These findings highlight the conversational constraints of EFL classes, which are the primary source of interactional practice.

The nature of NoM sequences

The second question referred to the nature of NoM instances in the data. The findings in this study demonstrated that instances of NoM and NoF consisted of clarification requests, confirmation checks, comprehension checks, appeals for help, and repetition. Among these strategies, clarification requests had more common use than the other strategies in line with the previous literature (Azkarai & Imaz Agirre, 2016; Azpilicueta-Martínez & Lázaro-Ibarrola, 2022; Foster & Ohta, 2005; Lázaro Ibarrola & Hidalgo, 2017; Mackey et al., 2007). When faced with incomprehensible situations, L2 learners may indicate non-understanding and compel their peers to make output modifications in their interlanguage (Nakahama et al., 2001).

More particularly, lexical triggers initiated the most requests for clarification in this study (n=30), followed by structural (n=10), content (n=3), discourse (n=3), and phonetic errors (n=1). Regarding vocabulary leading to interactional

problems, we discovered unknown L2 words such as “landfill” and “dustbins,” eventually leading to miscommunication and meaning negotiations among our L2 learners. As lexical items are more noticeable and disruptive of intended meaning, their dominance in triggers may demonstrate their essentiality to maintaining meaning negotiation over structural or phonetic issues. The predominance of lexical triggers might show that meaning negotiation was semantically-oriented, which focused on conveying correct meaning.

Apart from lexis, structural issues such as grammar led to cases of interactional breakdowns and, thus, requests for clarification. The subsequent excerpts illustrate instances of structural triggers causing communication problems among L2 learners. In the first case, the first speaker says that “There is no such word as borned /bɔ:rnɪd/. It is born /bɔ:rn/.” The other speaker responds by emphasizing the correct pronunciation of the word, repeating, “Born?” “/bɔ:rn/”. The first speaker then reinforces the message once more by indicating the intended meaning with the correct pronunciation of the word: “Yes, born. /bɔ:rn/ (I was born..)”. Here, the listener corrects the interlocutors’ speech in response to incorrect grammatical use of the word “born.” There is an instance of other-reformulation by the second speaker, which clearly demonstrates awareness of an ambiguity in speech. On the other hand, the lower frequency of structural triggers may imply that L2 learners were more tolerant of grammar and sentence structure deviations. The next case demonstrates an instance of a content trigger that compels the L2 speaker to ask for further information from the other speaker in the form of a clarification request. Speaker 1: “They bring it.” Speaker 2: “How do they bring it?” Speaker 1: “They get it from the ocean and bring it to the factory.” Here, the listener would like to make sure that they understand how raw material is brought to the factory and asks the other speaker to add more content to the message.

The inability to relate a concept in discourse to an antecedent in speech also led to clarification requests during a conversation. Here in the first case, “What is its name?” the speaker uses the reference word “its” and the listener responds, “The music’s name?” to clarify what concept is intended by the reference “its” before moving on to responding, and until they reach a common understanding. The infrequency of content and discourse triggers showed that L2 learners had, in rare cases, difficulties in coherence. This might show that language learners in this study had reasonably well discourse-level pragmatic awareness, namely, demonstrating an ability to follow topic flow and turn-taking.

In the data, there were also requests for clarification led by the incorrect pronunciation of the target language items. The following extracts demonstrate phonetic errors in the pronunciation of L2 speakers, leading to sequences of negotiations: Speaker 1: “Silver?” “/’sɪlvər/” Speaker 2: “Cider” “/’saɪ.dər/”. Speaker 1: “Cider” “/’saɪ.dər/”. Here, in this case, the listener checks whether the

word is correctly pronounced, repeating the word “silver”, “/’sɪlvər/”, and asking if this is the word intended. However, the other L2 speaker replies that the word is indeed “cider” “/’saɪ.d əɪ/” The interaction comes to a successful end when the listener finally accepts that “cider” “/’saɪ.d əɪ/” is the correct pronunciation. Consequently, these types of phonetic errors were found to trigger negotiation of meaning in the data. Conversely, the rare occurrence of phonetic triggers may suggest that even when interlocutors had accented speech, they could ensure mutual intelligibility. This finding could also show L2 learners’ lack of metapragmatic awareness in identifying phonetic errors.

The next part of the findings and discussion focuses on the confirmation check signals and trigger types under this category. A deeper analysis of the nature of requests for confirmation showed that confirmation check signals of meaning negotiation were initiated mainly by lexical triggers (n=29), followed by content (n=5), structural (n=2), phonetic errors (n=2), and discourse triggers (n=1). Using a relatively high proportion of confirmation checks by L2 speakers reveals that learners attempted to reconstruct the incomprehensible messages more, which might indicate the development of higher-order cognitive processing skills (Hidalgo, 2021; Xu & Shu, 2024). The use of a relatively high proportion of confirmation check strategy by L2 learners to prevent any communication breakdown, thus might suggest that these learners’ capability to pay attention to the needs of their interlocutors, which develops over time, especially in adult learners (Hidalgo, 2021).

The following extract illustrates a lexical trigger initiating a confirmation check in the data. In this case, the listener inquires about the material being discussed by stating, “It is a form of leather?” and the first speaker confirms the message by giving an affirmative answer, “Yes, leather”. All in all, the requests for confirmation were conducted either by partially repeating the incomprehensible part of the message by L2 speakers or by using signal words. Here, this case demonstrates that a confirmation check was used to verify the meaning of a particular word. L2 learners sought assurance in cases when they guessed a potential mismatch between intended and perceived meaning. This demonstrates learners’ metapragmatic awareness, as learners could identify possible ambivalence in lexis and check comprehension without overtly disrupting the conversation flow.

Demonstrating instances of content triggers initiating negotiation; in the following example, the interlocutor says, “I’d like to book your flight two days later.” As the listener is unable to understand the content, they ask “Two days later?” using a question mark and rising intonation. Therefore, the content of a message functions as a trigger for negotiation of meaning in the form of confirmation requests. In the following case, an example of a confirmation request triggered by a phonetic error is illustrated. The first interlocutor states that “He is holding

a thing that looks like a towel, /'taʊ.əl/." The listener replies by articulating the word "Bubble?"; "/bʌb.əl/", with a rising intonation. The interlocutor repeats the word "towel", "/taʊ.əl/", to reach a common understanding. Here, the listener cannot understand the pronunciation of the word "towel" and mistakes it for the word "bubble" because of the incorrect articulation of the word.

The last part of the results section focuses on the cases of comprehension checks used by language learners. Three out of four comprehension checks regarded lexical items, and there was also one case of a content trigger causing the use of a comprehension check by an L2 speaker. The following is a case of a lexical item triggering a signal of comprehension check. In this instance, when students talk about unusual food from all over the world, one of the students names a type of food "Döğmeç", "/døw'metʃ/", which is a local type of food from Türkiye. However, as the student is unsure if the other students are familiar with this food, the student states that "Döğmeç, "/døw'metʃ/" Have you heard it?" The listener replies by stating, "No, what is it?" and the first student goes on explaining it further.

The scarcity of comprehension checks in this study corroborated the low frequency of these strategies in previous studies (Azkarai & Imaz Agirre, 2016). The low number of comprehension checks may suggest that L2 learners could be ignoring the listeners' implicit signals of non-understanding of the meaning as a face-saving strategy in the interaction. It could also be argued that comprehension checks are other-initiated repairs, which may not occur frequently in informal and classroom L2 learning settings (Sacks et al., 1978; Tudini, 2010; Van Dam [van Isselt], 1993). The face-to-face nature of the communicative environment may reduce the probability of using comprehension checks, as it can be possible to comprehend messages through gestures (Lee et al., 2019; Xu & Shu, 2024). Moreover, the rare occurrence of comprehension checks in interaction can also point to the self-centered disposition of L2 learners, as they may choose to concentrate merely on their learning (Oliver, 1998; 2002; Yan & Goh, 2024).

Aside from NoM sequences, instances of NoF as explicit appeals for help have also been discovered in our classroom interaction data. In the following case, a student appeals for help with a language structure to describe a song to their partner in a conversation activity. In response to the first speaker's sentence "There were very old songs there (in that album,)" the second speaker responds by stating, "How can I describe the song?" (Looks at the partner, laughs, and waits for help.) In the second case, the student appeals for help from his peer with correctly pronouncing the word "tomb." The student again gives alternative forms like "Tomb /tu:m/ or thumb /θʌm/?" to learn the correct pronunciation of the word. Thus, in line with Nakatani (2005), the help-seeking strategies of asking for help and requesting repetition were found to be used by the L2 learners in this study. L2 learners employed the first strategy when they required

assistance from other interlocutors due to their L2 knowledge deficiency. The second strategy was used by L2 learners when they could not hear or understand a prior utterance. Learners applied these strategies in their L2 without reverting to their native language. However, overall, the data in the current study showed fewer instances of appeals for assistance compared to other strategies, as noted by Xu and Shu (2024). The limited occurrences of appeals for explicit help in this study's data may suggest that the L2 learners could be displaying implicit signals of message incomprehensibility.

According to the findings, overall, this study included cases of lexical items, phonetic errors, language structures, discourse, and content triggers initiating negotiation. In line with the previous literature, vocabulary items triggered various instances of negotiation for meaning compared to other triggers (Bitchener, 2004; Nakahama et al., 2001; Yi & Sun, 2013). As this study demonstrated a frequent negotiation around vocabulary items, and thus, this EFL setting provided L2 learners with opportunities to attain new vocabulary knowledge. Consequently, NoM equipped language learners with more favorable circumstances for L2 learning through constant interactional adjustments by the interlocutors to deal with incomprehensible input (Foster & Ohta, 2005). The rare occurrence of grammatical errors as a source of incomprehensibility in meaning in this study also echoed the findings of the previous studies in the field (Lee, 2002; Moradi & Farvardin, 2020; Toyoda & Harrison, 2002). It is argued that, as learners are not usually worried about grammar errors in speech, they do not usually consciously pay attention to form when carrying out speaking tasks (Pica, 1996; Pica et al., 1989).

There were also a few cases of pronunciation triggers initiating negotiations in this study. This finding could imply that language learners do not respond to pronunciation triggers often, as they do not lead to many cases of lack of understanding in conversation, especially when speakers share the same native language (Varonis & Gass, 1985). On the contrary, vocabulary triggers are considered more crucial for understanding meanings in conversation, and the lack of them causes a lack of understanding of messages (Bitchener, 2004), which may explain the dominance of lexical triggers in interactions in our data. Thus, vocabulary difficulties are more likely to cause communication breakdown than morphosyntax ones, as it is harder to comprehend a message when there is a missing, incorrect, or unfamiliar word (Foster & Ohta, 2005). Consequently, the B1-level Turkish EFL learners in this study rely more on putting their meaning across to their peers instead of forming grammatically correct utterances in spontaneous conversations in class.

Conclusion

A picture of how NoM is conducted in EFL classes could provide language teachers, researchers, and education policy developers with classroom data on how L2 speaking classes could be designed using particular teaching techniques and supported with more suitable materials for efficient language skills practice. NoM is crucial in L2 interaction because if negotiation of meaning strategies is not implemented when breakdowns occur in communication, this could form a barrier to second language learning. For instance, if learners do not show that they have not understood some parts of a communicative exchange, teachers and peers might think that the conversation is clear to everyone (Azkarai & Imaz Agirre, 2016). To cope with breakdowns in communication, conversation partners can consider the sequence of utterances triggering the non-understanding, the utterances acting as a signal for the incomprehensibility of the message, and the response to signals (Bitchener, 2004).

NoM is helpful in second language acquisition because learners take feedback when listeners signal the incomprehensibility of messages. The speakers could adjust their speech to make it comprehensible through feedback on all or some parts of messages using strategies such as repetition and rising intonation (Bitchener, 2004). Through NoM, input is made comprehensible to learners, improving language acquisition (Long, 1983). The use of NoM and NoF strategies among L2 learners has the potential to assist the progress of L2 knowledge construction through social interaction and mediation. Furthermore, explicit forms of negotiation for meaning, such as clarification requests, elicitations, etc., may be more influential in aiding second language acquisition than implicit forms of meaning, such as recasts (Suzuki, 2018).

Contrarily, it is also argued that NoM could be demotivating because language learners might think that, because of negotiation during the conversation, they can demonstrate a lack of skill to use the target language successfully (Aston, 1986). According to the findings of previous studies, interlocutors in L2 environments may refrain from initiating NoM by ignoring triggers or leaving the subject ambiguous because of the fear of losing face (Van der Zwaard & Bannink, 2016, 2020). The social factors, such as shame and perceptions of inability to accomplish desired outcomes through showing non-comprehension of specific lexis in L2 during an informal interaction with peers, for instance, might lead to a face-threatening space for the L2 learners (Van der Zwaard & Bannink, 2016, 2020).

However, communication among non-native speakers allowed L2 learners in this study to practice language skills in a relaxed environment. This allowed language learners to be exposed to L2 input through NoM, which contributed to developing their L2 skills (Varonis & Gass, 1985). However, as Pica et al. (1989) put forward, negotiation activities might not promote the expected interlanguage

ramifications at all times, and learners might not always utilize the learning opportunities arising due to negative feedback. For instance, the response to a confirmation check may come in the form of a denial or confirmation; thus, it may not always lead a speaker to reformulate their sentences, as does a clarification request. All the same, several negotiation sequences were observed in this study. When the interaction between a listener and a speaker broke down, the language was adapted linguistically through negotiation to deal with the message's incomprehensibility. Using negotiation for meaning, learners in this study worked on their interlanguage forms and paid more attention to phonology, lexis, and syntax. Thus, they had opportunities to learn these language forms better, and language acquisition could be facilitated (Suzuki, 2018).

In a traditional teacher-fronted language classroom, learners might not have many opportunities to practice their language skills due to limited chances for participating in turn-taking in speech. This study provided proof reinforcing the adoption of interactive tasks, as learners engaged in information gap and opinion tasks, nearly all interacted using the target language. Despite not having very native-like communication capabilities in English, L2 learners accomplished tasks autonomously, took part in conversations over the weeks during the two semesters, and realized their roles as interlocutors. The tasks used in this study have been validated as a crucial means to help L2 learners in language learning by constructing a meaningful context to practice L2 speaking, especially in EFL contexts where language learners have limited opportunities to practice English outside the classroom.

Taking the findings of this study into consideration, the NoM framework has the potential to supply learners with standardized strategies that could guide them in dealing with issues regarding the language structure and the content of messages (Xu & Shu, 2024). On the other hand, this study implies that there is still a necessity for helping L2 learners acquire pragmatic competence. Thus, integrating pragmatics courses into pre-service language teacher education curriculum could be one essential practice (Ivanova, 2018). It is recommended that further studies explore the impact of providing training to language learners on how to implement negotiation strategies on their linguistic skills development. The strategies for negotiation could also be included in textbooks for speaking, and negotiation strategies could be explicitly taught to English language learners.

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