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Language Learning in Formal Instruction Contexts: The Effect of (A)Symmetrical Peer Interaction on Language Related Episodes



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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to examine the differences that arise across matching and mixed proficiency dyads in terms of meta-linguistic discourse, also referred to as language-related episodes (LREs). Most specifically, the present study bases its analysis on native speakers of Catalan in their process of learning English as a foreign language (FLA). This piece of research attempts to show how previously established theories on LREs conform to speakers of Catalan as a first language (L1). Results reveal that matching-proficiency dyads and mixed-proficiency dyads perform in a very similar way except for some minor differences. These results do not seem to entirely equal the previously established claims on the matter. Researchers on the field explicitly state that both types of dyads perform differently. However, it is worth noting how variation obtained from the data, although small, is in line with some of the expectations drawn from the existing literature. A possible interpretation for results could be that the sample was too limited. In further research, there would be need of a larger sample so as to examine in depth the effects the variable of proficiency has on the topic of current interest.

Key Words: peer interaction, matching-proficiency dyads, mixed-proficiency dyads, language-related episodes.

1. INTRODUCTION

The emergence of peer interaction as a relevant component on the field of foreign language acquisition (FLA) can be said to be quite recent. In fact, most traditional views on language learning have focused on the “transmission of knowledge from teacher to student” (Philip et al., 2014: 3). This particular approach posits the figure of the learner in a passive rank, considering it a mere recipient of the information. Contrastingly, the current view offers a new perspective on language learning which emphasizes and reinforces the positive effects students’ active attitude can have on the mastery of a foreign language (Philip et al., 2014).

Many studies have focused on the effects proficiency may have on the interaction between peers (Gass & Varonis, 1985; Yule & MacDonald, 1990; Kowal & Swain, 1994; Ohta, 2000b; Iwashita, 2001). More specifically, there has been growing interest in how interactions between “mixed-proficiency dyads” differ from interactions between “matching-proficiency dyads” (Philip et al., 2014: 71, 75). Gass and Varonis (1985) can be said to be amongst the first researchers to have studied this phenomenon in depth. Throughout their work, they support the claim that both types of dyads present cross differences. In particular, their observations suggest that in mixed-proficiency dyads participants tend to have more difficulties in communicating ideas successfully and in solving the instances of miscommunication.

Further research on the field has been conducted thereafter Gass and Varonis’ work, which has evolved into the analysis of other specific spheres of interaction between dyads. One of the objects of study in the field has been the analysis of language-related episodes (LREs). As Swain and Lapkin state in their study, LREs occur whenever peers “talk about the language they are producing, question their

language use, or correct themselves or others” (Swain & Lapkin, 1998: 326). Research on the area can be said to have started with Williams’ (1999) work, which provides an analysis of the quantity and quality of LREs in interactions between four dyads, each dyad belonging to a different proficiency level in the target language. Results suggest that the higher the proficiency, the more speakers focus on form. Similar results were achieved by Leaser (2004), whose data suggests that dyads with a higher proficiency tend to present more concern for form and for grammar.

Interfacing the binary typology of dyads presented above with the notion of language-related episodes (LREs) Kim and McDonough’s (2008) study emerges. The authors claim that LREs are solved with a higher frequency in “mixed-proficiency dyads” rather than in “matching-proficiency” (Philip et al., 2014: 72) ones. Moreover, the study goes beyond by suggesting that when paired with learners of a higher proficiency, students tend to focus more on form than when paired with matching proficiency interlocutors.

Partially mirroring Kim and McDonough’s (2008) design, the present study aims at examining how language-related episodes (LREs) differ across both types of dyads. In order to do so, the whole study and analysis will respond to the following research questions:

- (1) Does the type of dyad (i.e. matching proficiency dyad versus mixed proficiency dyad) influence the quantity of language-related episodes (LREs)?
- (2) Does the type of dyad (i.e. matching proficiency dyad versus mixed proficiency dyad) have an effect on the typology of language-related episodes (LREs)?

In order to give an answer to these research questions, the methodology and procedure applied will revolve around recorded oral production, which will enable to

detect the amount and type of LREs that occur in students' speech. The numerical data extracted from speakers' interactions will reveal the potential differences or similarities that may arise between both groups of dyads.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Peer interaction is becoming a field of growing interest especially in the world of second and foreign language acquisition (SLA, FLA). Interaction amongst peers constitutes one of the basic strategies used in the contemporary classroom setting to encourage students to undertake an active role in the learning process (Philip et al., 2014). So as to tackle the issue more exhaustively, the first step will be to frame peer interaction within a theoretical framework of the existent literature which has explored the phenomenon in depth so far. Secondly, a new section will be devoted to considering the role proficiency has shown to play on communication between peers. Finally, the variable just mentioned will also be considered in relation to the effects it seems to have on the way in which learners discuss meta-linguistic issues, i. e. language-related episodes (LREs).

2.1 PEER INTERACTION

In general terms, peer interaction has been considered to be one of the most prosperous contexts for language learning in which students are not only able to work and collaborate with others but also socialize and establish an identity of their own in the foreign language (Philip et al., 2014). More specifically, peer interaction has been identified as those acts of communication which take place almost exclusively between learners. As Philip et al. (2014) state, these instances of interaction involve “minimal or no participation from the teacher” (Philip et al., 2014: 3). Thus, it is important to

highlight how the figure of the instructor, to a large extent, seems to be lacking relevance in the field of current interest.

Devoting particular attention to the interaction between peers, as Blum-Kulka and Snow (2009) observed in their work, speakers construct a “collaborative, multiparty, symmetrical participation structure” (Blum-Kulka & Snow, 2009: 301) in which they simultaneously help one another. Taking the terms just mentioned on a deeper stance, the term “collaborative” would appeal to the cooperative attitude speakers undertake during the conversation. The concept of “multiparty” captures the collective quality of the task, as it involves two or more speakers. Finally, it is “symmetrical” due to the fact that it takes place primarily between students, who are regarded to be on the same level as opposed to communication between a teacher and (a) learner/s.

Peer interaction becomes relevant in the field of second and foreign language acquisition (SLA, FLA) in the moment in which its value as “a prime context for language acquisition and development” (Philip et al., 2014: 7) is appreciated by major researchers on the field. Taking a cognitive viewpoint on the first place, peer interaction has been considered to be a context in which students achieve mutual understanding through negotiation. Additionally, it enables learners to be exposed to the target language and simultaneously experiment with it (Pica: 1992, 2013).

From a sociocultural approach, interaction in the foreign language classroom setting seems to play an essential role. For students to learn, they need to work together to overcome the difficulties they may encounter. Thus, sociocultural views on the matter attribute a collective quality to the process of learning. This ideology is clearly

reflected on Swain's work (2000) in which the author refers to this phenomenon as "co-construction" (Swain, 2000: 101).

Other studies which have contributed to the domain of peer interaction and L2 acquisition are related to the field of language socialization and language identity. The current approach sees interaction as a context of negotiation of one's own identity. Peers evaluate each other's identities and discourses and attribute qualities to them. Being socially accepted or not will have an effect on how immigrant individuals succeed in L2 learning (Miller, 2003; Pavlenko, 2002; Swain & Deters, 2007).

Finally, existing literature on the field differs depending on the age range in which research is focused on (Duchesne, McMaugh, Bochner, & Krause, 2012; Muñoz, 2007). As children grow up, they develop different ways of thinking, behaving and socializing. This process of maturity clearly shows an effect on peer interaction and foreign language learning (Philip et al., 2014).

2.2 THE EFFECT OF PROFICIENCY ON PEER INTERACTION

Directing the field of current interest specifically to participants which undertake interaction, it has to be appreciated that differences between peers may result on varied effects on the way in which interaction unfolds and, eventually, on foreign language development (Philip et al., 2014). As it has been stated a few lines above, communication between learners of a foreign language is considered to be equal as opposed to teacher-student communication. Nevertheless, differences in terms of proficiency among peers may also create some effects on the way in which speakers perform when interacting with others (Philip et al., 2014).

Grouping peers of the same proficiency may be beneficiary in ways in which including one member of a higher proficiency in the group may not be, and vice versa. The first type of interaction is commonly known as “matching-proficiency dyad” whereas the latter, is widely known “mixed-proficiency dyad” (Philip et al., 2014: 71) due to the “mixing” of different levels in one single pair of speakers. There has been considerable debate on this issue while trying to determine which of the two types of dyads seems to be more beneficiary for foreign language learning (Gass & Varonis, 1985; Yule & MacDonald, 1990; Kowal & Swain, 1994; Ohta, 2000b; Iwashita, 2001; Philip et al., 2014). However, it is important to note that mixed-proficiency dyads have been the main focus of the major studies on the field. In most cases matching-proficiency dyads are just taken as a control group to appreciate the effects mixing levels in a single dyad may have.

Considering mixed-proficiency dyads in the first place, the asymmetry between peers is said to moderate interactions and language learning (Philip et al., 2014). It is important to note how, in this specific kind of dyad speakers seem to present more difficulties in communicating ideas successfully and in solving the instances of miscommunication (Gass & Varonis, 1985). Following this reasoning, it is implied that communication should be achieved much more easily when speakers are enabled to work with an equal peer in terms of proficiency. Nevertheless, it needs to be added that it is in the former kind of dyad when speakers have the tendency to produce more modified output and more instances of negotiation (Iwashita, 2001).

Other effects mixing peers in one dyad may have is that the speaker with a higher level may adopt a leading role throughout the interaction (Yule & MacDonald, 1990). Moreover, in some cases, the asymmetry between dyads may eventually result on the exclusion of the speaker who has a lower proficiency (Kowal & Swain, 1994). In

other words, in this type of peer interaction the less competent student may be prevented from performing comfortably or even from participating at all (Kowal & Swain, 1994). Hence, working with someone of a higher proficiency may negatively condition one's role on the interaction (Philip et al., 2014).

Having considered some of the main findings on asymmetrical dyads, it is important to note how those considerations already define the opposite counterpart, i. e. matching-proficiency dyads. Pairing two speakers of an equal level seems to result on a much more aligned interaction between peers. Firstly, students with the same level seem to communicate easier and more effectively (Gass & Varonis, 1985). Secondly, speakers are less probable to perform a dominating role over their interlocutor (Yule & MacDonald, 1990). Thus, working with a peer who is equally proficient to the other seems to result into a more comfortable interaction where both participants seem to participate equally (Kowal & Swain, 1994). As a contrast, one of the disadvantages of matching-proficiency dyads appears to be the lack of modified output with respect to mixed-proficiency dyads (Iwashita, 2001). As seen in Iwashita's study (2001), working with a student of the same level may cause many instances of grammatical or lexical errors left unsolved, as none of the speakers may have the tools to provide a correct answer.

Research on the field does not seem to reach a common agreement on which of the two dyads seem to be more effective in terms of foreign language learning. Thus, it has to be said that some studies have approached the issue in almost the opposite perspective. In some cases, the speaker with a higher level seems to be encouraging his/her peer to participate and helping him/ her when encountering difficulties of a linguistic kind (Ohta, 2000b). Thus, it needs to be emphasized that the effects

proficiency may have on peer interaction are not easy to predict and different pieces of research may present different results on the very same phenomenon.

2.2.1 LANGUAGE-RELATED EPISODES (LREs) IN PEER INTERACTION

Divergences amongst dyads in terms of proficiency seem to lead to differences in the meta-linguistic discourse of learners (Philip et al., 2014). In other words, both types of dyads present cross-differences while negotiating aspects of the language per se. This phenomenon is referred to as language-related episodes (LREs). More specifically, they have been defined as those instances in communication between peers in which they “talk about the language they are producing, question their language use, or correct themselves or others” (Swain & Lapkin, 1998: 326). It is worth noting how research has established a distinction between those LREs which are centred on the discussion of a particular lexical item or those which deal with formal aspects of the target language, i. e. morphology and syntax (Storch, 2008). Additionally, further distinctions concern the extent to which the language-related episode has been solved or not (Kim & McDonough, 2008) and whether it is explicit or implicit (Williams, 1999).

(1) Learner 1: Hmm. ¿Cómo se dice bird?
[How do you say bird?]

Learner 2: Pájaro
[Bird]

Learner 1: Oh! That’s what I was trying to say. ¿Cuántos pájaros?
[How many birds?]

(Gass et al., 2005, pp. 598-599)

(1) is a clear instance of a lexical LRE. Learner 1 explicitly asks for help when not being able to find the word he/she is looking for. The fact that Learner 2 provides a correct answer to the question asked by Learner 1 makes it a solved LRE. In other words, the LRE above has been solved because both speakers manage to resolve

successfully the difficulties they encountered. Moreover, the fact that both speakers are explicitly negotiating about an aspect of the language in itself makes it an explicit LRE (Williams, 1999).

(2) B: Puis, le cloche a sonné.
[Then the bell rang]

A: LA cloche ?
[The bell? (emphasis on feminine form of article)]

B: La cloche, le cloche, je pense c'est LA.
[Alternating masculine and feminine forms of article]

A: Oui
[Yes]

B: La cloche a sonné.
[The bell rang]

(Swain & Lapkin, 2001, p. 109)

Example (2) converges with Example (1) in the sense that both of them include an explicit debate on specific aspects of the language and the LRE is solved. Nevertheless, in (2) peers are not discussing a feature of a lexical kind. Instead, they are clearly approaching the discussion in morphological terms, as they are trying to decide whether “cloche” is a masculine or a feminine word to use the article which agrees with it in terms of gender.

(3) Learner 1: Disappointed she is crying

Learner 2: She cried

Learner 1: She cried and on she call him, she calls him and decides to

(Adams, Nuevo & Egi, 2011, p. 51)

As the authors describe in their paper, in (3) the verb *cry* is set in a past tense context. Thus, Learner 1 should be using the past form of the verb instead of the present one.

When Learner 2 becomes aware of the mistake, he/she corrects Learner 1's turn by reformulating the verb without directly indicating that *is crying* is not correct. Hence, Example (3) differs from the rest in the sense that there is not an explicit negotiation of how the verb should be conjugated, as there is not even a clear suggestion that an error is being made. Learner 2 just corrects Learner 1's turn without establishing a debate on which construction is the best one. It is for these reasons that this example is a case of an implicit LRE (Williams, 1999).

(4) 1 S1: 연구하기로 해서 일본에서, 맞아요?

(Yun-goo ha-gi-ro hae-suh, Il-bon-eh-suh, Ma-ja-yo?)

[decided to research (about butterflies) in Japan, Is it correct?]

2 S2: 일본에서? 음, 마음대로 쓰세요.

(Il-bon-eh-suh? Umm, Ma-um-dai-ro ssu-sae-yo.)

[In Japan? Umm, write whatever you want.]

3 S1: 나도 몰라.

(Na-do Mo-la.)

[I do not know either.]

(Kim & McDonough, 2008, pp. 218-219)

(4) is a clear representative of a non-solved LRE. Speaker 1 tries to establish a debate with Speaker 2 so as to determine whether the construction that has been used in line 1 is correct or not. However, Speaker 2 does not know the answer either. Thus, speakers are not able to resolve their doubt and find the correct linguistic form in the target language. As a consequence, the LRE is left uncertain and unresolved.

Considering the existing research on the field, one of the earliest studies supports the idea that focus on form is affected by the level of proficiency of the learner and the type of activity they are being exposed to (Williams, 1999). Having a close look exclusively on the variable of proficiency, focus on form seems to increase as the proficiency increases too. Instances of LREs tend to be mainly revolving around lexical

items in all proficiency levels whereas LREs focusing on morpho-syntactic aspects of the language seem to be more common in students of a higher proficiency. At the same time, proficient learners in the target language tend to engage into explicit negotiations of the language per se (Swain & Lapkin, 1998; Leeser 2004). However, some studies conducted in the classroom setting suggest that students present overall fewer instances of metalinguistic negotiation than in laboratory studies (Williams, 1999; Philip et al., 2010).

Other studies have focused on exactly the same phenomenon taking into account not only matching-proficiency dyads, but also mixed-proficiency ones (Leeser, 2004). Considering the results obtained in their research, data suggests that including one member of a higher proficiency in the dyad results in more focus on the formal aspects of the language. At the same time, speakers in mixed-proficiency dyads tend to solve LREs with a higher frequency than when paired with an equal peer in terms of proficiency. However, as Leeser (2004) points out, it is important to note how paying greater attention to form when paired with a more proficient peer does not imply that learning is more effective, as the less competent learner may not have enough level to master all the linguistic aspects which are being discussed in the course of the interaction.

Finally, current research on the field has confirmed several claims made by previous contributions, some of which have just been presented above. In general terms, more contemporary accounts seem to suggest that focus on form does increase as proficiency increases too. Thus, there is clearly a point of convergence between the three pieces of research on this particular issue. At the same time, Leeser's account (2004) seems to be particularly in line with later claims in that dyads of a symmetrical

proficiency are considered to benefit themselves much more from meta-linguistic practices than asymmetrical ones (Philip et al., 2014).

3. METHODOLOGY

The present study was based on data from 20 subjects who were learning English as a foreign language and had Catalan as their L1. The level of these speakers in the target language was B2 and C1 and their age ranged from 17 to 21.

The task selected for the study was part of *Cambridge English: FIRST (FCE) 2*, which is used to train students for Cambridge exams. The activity was about discussing a given topic in which both speakers had to express their opinions and reach a common conclusion. What was essentially crucial about it was that it was an activity which students had never done before. In the process of data collection, students' interactions in pairs were recorded in the classroom setting and transcribed.

The transcription conventions that were used, as shown in the Appendix, were following K. Richards and P. Seedhouse's criterion presented in their work *Applying Conversation Analysis* (2007). In turn, data was analysed devoting particular attention to language-related episodes which were to be encountered throughout transcriptions. It is worth specifying that the current approach was not only considering the phenomenon on quantifiable terms but also qualitatively.

Firstly, the method involved in the present study considered the amount of LREs that occurred in both groups, being irrespective of whether they occurred at an individual level or at a dyad level. The numerical data was displayed by means of percentages which served as the basis to establish between-groups differences and similarities.

Finally, LREs were distinguished by means of classifications provided by the major researchers on the field. Following Williams' (1999) together with Storch's (2008) account, LREs were classified as explicit or implicit and lexical or formal. Moreover, in line with Kim and McDonough's account (2008) LREs were further distinguished in terms of resolution (solved or non-solved). Lastly, as shown in the Appendix, the coding of the present qualitative distinctions followed the criterion presented in Pladevall and Capdevila's (2016) study.

4. RESULTS

As mentioned in the Methodology section, the present study was designed with the aim of establishing a between-groups comparison (mixed dyads vs. matching dyads) in terms of LREs. In order to do so, a total of 91 LREs have been considered, classified and analysed according to the group in which they appear and the typology to which they belong.

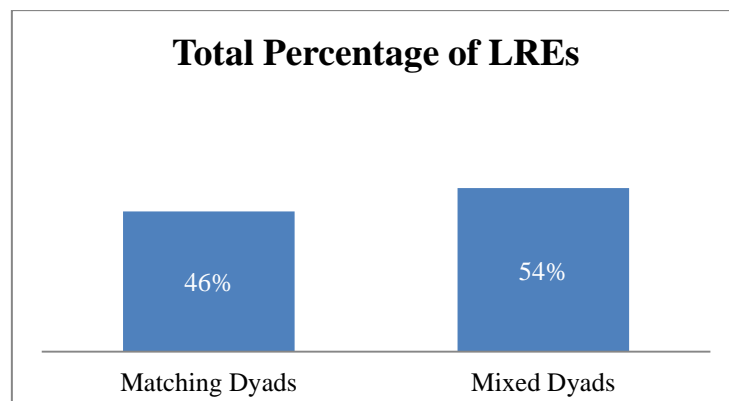


Figure 1. Total percentage of LREs across dyads

Figure 1 provides a global picture of the total percentage of LREs and the way in which they are distributed into both groups. As it can be observed, there is a quantitative difference of an 8% which posits mixed dyads as the group which produces more LREs (54% vs. 46%).

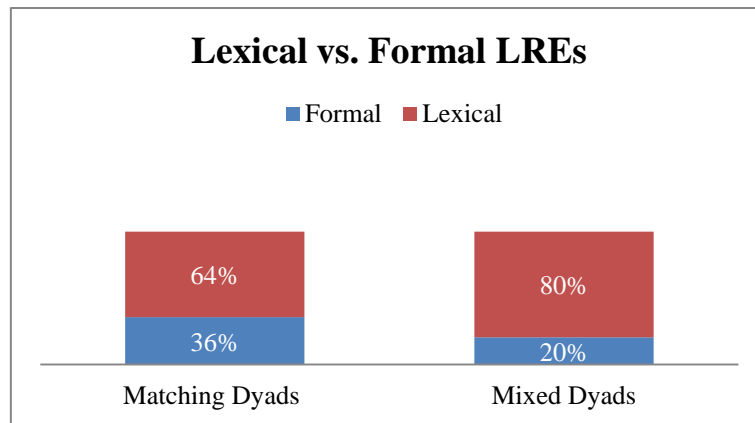


Figure 2. Formal vs. lexical LREs across dyads

Figure 2 shows the first distinction to be made in qualitative terms between LREs used as data for the present study: formal vs. lexical LREs. On the one hand, Figure 2 provides percentages for each typology to be found in matching dyads. As it can be observed, lexical LREs seem to prevail over formal ones (64% vs. 36%). More specifically, there is a difference of a 28% between the two.

On the other hand, it offers the results obtained from mixed dyads, which seem to account for an even greater difference between both types of LREs. This divergence seems to be on the line of what has just been seen in the case of matching dyads, as lexical LREs appear in greater amounts than formal ones (80% vs. 20%). However, in that specific case, it is worth pointing out that the difference between the two is even more prominent (60%).

Having considered the distinction between lexical and formal LREs, the next step is to take into account the contrast between explicit and implicit LREs. In order to examine that specific sphere at a deeper stance, let us take into consideration the following sets of data:

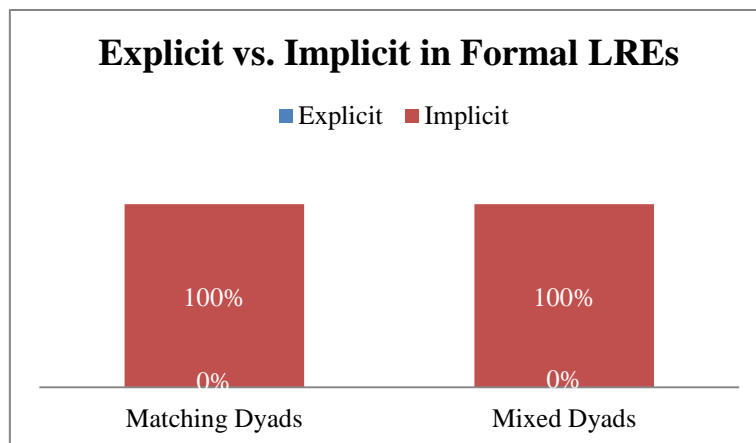


Figure 3. Explicit vs. implicit in formal LREs across dyads

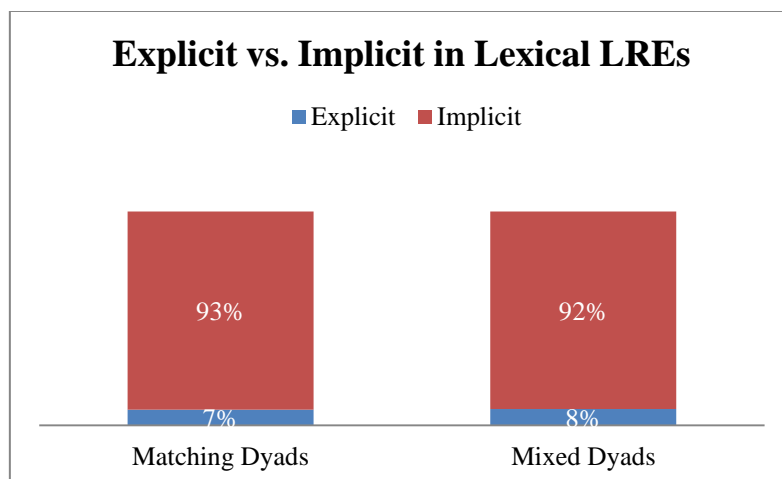


Figure 4. Explicit vs. implicit in lexical LREs across dyads

Figure 3 is exclusively focused on formal LREs and distinguishes them between those which are explicit and those which are implicit. Figure 4 presents the same contrast with respect to lexical LREs. The data which has just been displayed shows how all formal LREs in matching dyads happen to be implicit. In contrast, in terms of lexical LREs, explicitness seems to be gaining ground, moving from 0% in formal LREs to 7% in lexical ones.

In line with the classification provided for LREs in matching dyads, a distinction has also been made in terms of formal/ lexical and explicit/ implicit for those LREs which arise on mixed-proficiency dyads. As seen in Figures 3 and 4, formal LREs in

mixed dyads are implicit in the 100% of the cases. In contrast, an 8% of lexical LREs are explicit, reducing in this way the percentage of implicit ones to a 92%. The results just obtained could be said to be quite parallel to the ones in matching dyads. The results for formal LREs seem to be exactly the same in both cases (100% implicit). In what concerns lexical LREs, there is a difference of a 1% between both groups.

Finally, the last distinction to be made in terms of LREs across matching and mixed dyads is in terms of resolution, i. e. whether LREs are solved or not. It is worth pointing out that the classification that follows does not exclude the ones just provided. Instead, the present concern is just a further specification of the typologies considered till the moment. Thus, the data that follows is organized in terms of the type of dyad (i. e. matching vs. mixed), the type of LRE (i. e. lexical vs. formal), its explicitness (i. e. implicit vs. explicit) and finally, the extent to which it has been solved or not (i. e. solved vs. non-solved).

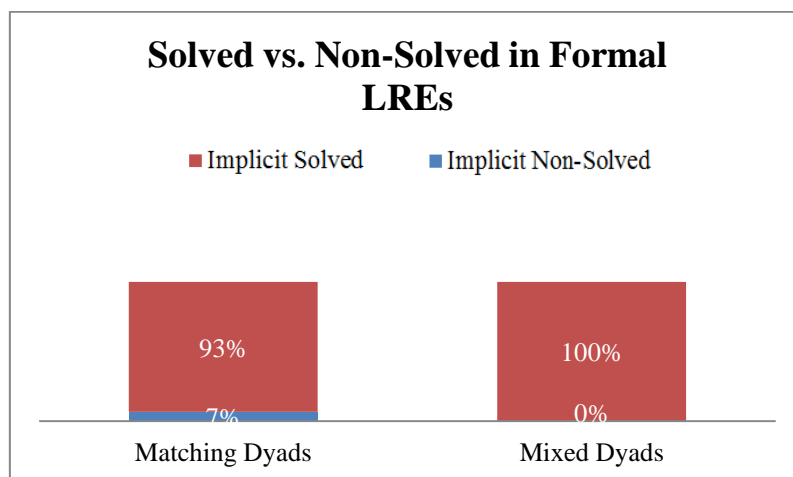


Figure 5. Solved vs. non-solved in formal LREs across dyads

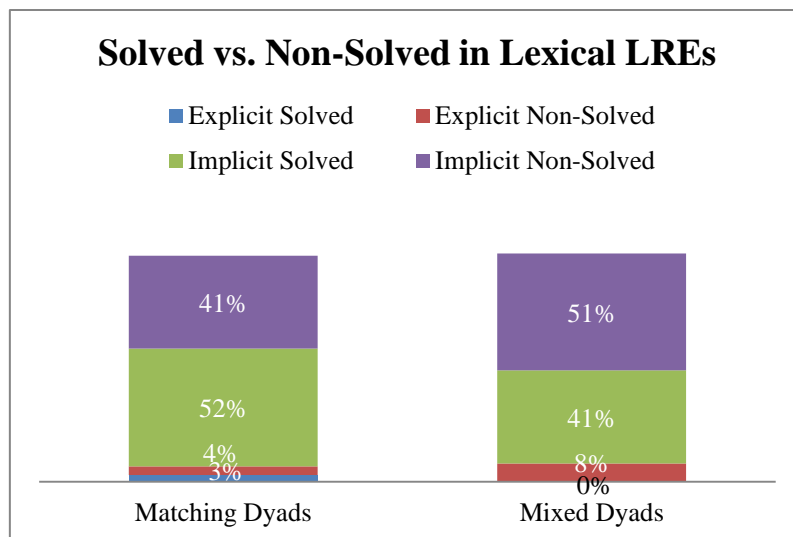


Figure 6. Solved vs. non-solved in lexical LREs across dyads

Figures 5 and 6 consider the variables just mentioned on matching and mixed proficiency dyads. More specifically, Figure 5 presents the percentages which belong to the following two categories: implicit solved and implicit non-solved. The first category contains the 7% of formal LREs in matching dyads. Contrastively, the second one contains the 93% of LREs, thus being the prevailing category. In the case of mixed-proficiency dyads the 100% of formal LREs happen to be implicit and solved. It is worth noting how there is no consideration of formal and explicit LREs, as there is no data which conforms to this class.

Figure 6 differs from Figure 5 in that the former takes into consideration lexical LREs. Considering matching dyads in the first place, implicitness includes a 52% of the LREs solved and 41% of them non-solved. When it comes to explicit LREs, there is no great distinction to be drawn in terms of resolution. The solved 3% stand at a slightly lower position with respect to the 4% of them, which are non-solved. Thus, in general terms, the 55% of lexical LREs seem to be solved as opposed to the remaining 45%.

In the case of mixed-proficiency dyads the great majority of lexical LREs in that kind of dyad are implicit and non-solved (51%). The second most frequent category

seems to be lexical LREs which are implicit and solved (41%). Finally, the 8% left belongs to the explicit and non-solved LREs leaving those which are explicit and solved at a 0%.

To conclude, results obtained from both dyads in terms of resolution seem to be quite similar. The percentages provided show how there is a difference of a 7% across both groups in formal LREs. With regards to Figure 6, they also appear similar except for some specific dissimilarities. Results obtained from implicit solved and implicit non-solved LREs seem to stand as mirror images of each other (41% and 52% vs. 51% and 41%). In terms of explicit LREs Figure 6 provides almost an equal distribution of those elements between solved and non-solved in matching dyads (3% and 4%). Finally, it can be observed how in mixed dyads all explicit LREs are left unsolved (8%).

5. DISCUSSION

Research Question (1): Does the type of dyad (i.e. matching proficiency dyad versus mixed proficiency dyad) influence the quantity of language-related episodes (*LREs*)?

With regards to the first research question, expectations for the present study were that both dyads presented cross differences. Having previous literature on the field as reference, it was particularly expected that in mixed proficiency dyads more metalinguistic negotiation would be found (Iwashita, 2001).

As shown in the Results section, from the sample selected for this study the type of dyad does not seem to have a strong effect on the quantity of LREs. However, there is a difference of an 8% between both groups. Thus, although evidence is not strong enough to establish a solid claim, results present some variation across dyads. Moreover, although having obtained low percentages, results suggest that the tendency

is for mixed dyads to show more instances of LREs. Thus, although there would be need of more research, results point out towards the direction established by the seminal works on the field of current interest.

Research Question (2): Does the type of dyad (i.e. matching proficiency dyad versus mixed proficiency dyad) have an effect on the typology of language-related episodes (*LREs*)?

As stated in the Methodology section, the present study accounts for the following typologies of LREs: lexical versus formal, explicit versus implicit and solved versus non-solved. Considering the distinction between lexical and formal LREs in the first place, expectations for the outcome of the study were that mixed-proficiency dyads presented more formal LREs than matching ones. Researchers on the field have suggested so far that the higher the proficiency, the more speakers are capable of focusing on form (Williams, 1999). Thus, it should be in mixed-proficiency dyads where most formal LREs take place, as there is one counterpart in the dyad which has a higher level in the target language (Leeser, 2004).

It is important to point out that results for the present study, in both cases, suggest that speakers produce overall more lexical LREs than formal ones. However, while in matching dyads the distribution of both types seems to be more balanced (the difference between lexical and formal is of a 28%), in mixed dyads there is undoubtedly a preference for lexical LREs, which represent an 80% out of the total of LREs produced in the group. Thus, taking into account this first distinction it could be said that the type of dyad does not determine a preference for a given LRE or another. Instead, both groups seem to point out towards the same direction. Some of the clearest examples for

each typology found in the data are displayed below. Example (5) is an instance of lexical LRE, whereas (6) is a formal one.

(5) ...and be healthy and **I think it's a...moda?**

(6) K: **=some persons=**
L: **=some people yes=**

In terms of explicitness, it was expected that mixed dyads presented more instances of explicit metalinguistic negotiation (Swain & Lapkin, 1998; Leeson 2004). Considering results obtained, formal LREs in both groups were implicit in the 100% of the cases. Thus, speakers seem to show preference for self-correcting or correcting others without explicitly pointing out that an error has been made. Such is the case of Examples (7) and (8), both of them being formal and implicit.

(7) they can teach you **lesson lives. life lessons.**

(8) ...or if you **got, get** something in one way and your friend with another way...

Contrastively, lexical LREs seem to be the ones which encourage speakers to explicitly entail linguistic negotiation the most. Most specifically, explicitness occupies a 7% in matching dyads and an 8% in mixed dyads. Although being a difference of a 1%, results from lexical LREs comply with the expectations from previous research. (5) would be one of the clearest instances of lexical and explicit LREs together with Examples (9) and (10).

(9) P: ...programmes that don't...emh...don't emh...**aportar?**

Q: **emh...**

P: **don't help you to...I don't know to...don't help to you because is a... I think a rubbish emh...television,=**

Q: **=yes.=**

(10) B: ...other leisure activities I don't really know what it means so... what do you think?

A: I don't know too (laughs) but bueno maybe it refers like to another activities that there are not in the television but I don't know.

The last distinction to be considered is concerned with the contrast between solved and non-solved LREs. Previous claims on the matter establish that including a member in the dyad which is more competent than the other seems to lead to a higher resolution of LREs (Leeser, 2004). Contrasting these assertions with the results obtained, both types of dyads present cross-differences. Focusing on formal LREs in the first place, while in matching dyads there is only a 7% of them left unsolved, in mixed dyads the 100% of them were solved. Thus, there is a difference of a 7% between both groups which posits mixed dyads as the group which is able to solve formal LREs with the highest frequency. While Example (11) is an instance of a formal and solved LRE, Example (12) illustrates a case of a formal LRE which has not been solved.

(11) ...maybe you...won, win less money but you have a good job=

(12) what do you think about the influence on of emh television about in young people's lives?

Secondly, lexical LREs in matching dyads were solved in the 55% of the cases whereas in mixed dyads they were solved in the 41% (a difference of a 14%). In that specific case, matching dyads seem to be the group which presents more skills in solving lexical LREs. Thus, results do not seem to mirror previously established claims on the matter. Examples (13) and (14) illustrate the difference between solved (13) and non-solved (14) lexical LREs.

(13) P: =and then we have to...to know how communicate with other people and how to...

O: behave

P: yes, I I want to say it=

(14) ...I don't know need to...to be healthy and emh do exercise to...I don't know

6. CONCLUSIONS

In this research an analysis of language-related episodes (LREs) across matching and mixed proficiency dyads has been provided. The main goal of the present study was to examine the differences that were expected to arise between both types of dyads according to the previous literature on the field. Data was gathered from students of English as a foreign language (FLA). Having previously distributed them in equal groups of matching and mixed proficiency dyads, their interactions were recorded and transcribed so as to be analysed in full detail.

Philip et al. (2014), has been the main reference so as to establish the theoretical background for the present study. Additionally, Williams' (1999), Storch's (2008), Kim and McDonough's (2008) and Pladevall and Capdevila's (2016) criterion has inspired the classification and coding of the data obtained from the recordings.

As shown in Sections 4 and 5, results do not seem to entirely match with the previously established expectations for this study. However, percentages obtained from both groups present differences which seem to corroborate some theories developed in the existing research. First of all, mixed dyads were found to be the group which presented the higher percentage of production of LREs. Secondly, in terms of explicitness, the tendency was for matching-proficiency dyads to be more implicit. Finally, although results for lexical LREs showed some variation, formal LREs were solved with a higher frequency in mixed-proficiency dyads.

In line with the results obtained from this research, it is crucial to establish the limitations of this study and suggestions for further research. First of all, it is important to highlight that the sample which has been taken into consideration is a small scale sample. Having a limited sample has led to limited results for this study. In further research, a larger sample would be needed so as to obtain more considerable amounts of data, which might show a greater difference in the results. Additionally, it is important to mention that there are some intervening variables which have not been considered and may have an important role in peer interaction: interpersonal relationships and the roles each speaker undertakes. An interesting variable to shed light on would certainly be in connection with how speakers relate to one another and how being more proficient or not determines the way in which the speaker performs.

The last but most important limitation for this study has clearly been time. With more time the sample for the present research could have been selected more carefully. Additionally, time also determined the number of participants selected for the study, as with a bigger sample it would have been tough to analyse data obtained properly. Lastly, a longer duration project would have enabled to have an in-depth look at more variables than the ones considered in the present study. One of these, as a final suggestion for further research, would clearly be the study of the role of the L1 in language-related episodes (LREs).

Finally, the present research has aimed at contributing to the world of foreign language acquisition (FLA) and especially to the field of peer interaction. Although not having obtained entirely the expected results, data for the present study seems to be in line with some of the established knowledge on the matter. With clear suggestions for further research, more variables could be further investigated and tested, which might

lead to stronger claims and suggestions for that specific area of foreign language acquisition (FLA).

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8. APPENDICES

APPENDIX A. Samples of Consent Forms According to Age Range

Informació pels participants i consentiment informat

Com a part del meu Treball de Fi de Grau estic duent a terme una investigació sobre la manera en què estudiants d'anglès com a segona/tercera llengua interactuen entre si en una tasca oral o *speaking*.

L'estudi inclourà un anàlisi detallat d'un total de deu diàlegs els quals seran gravats acústicament. Cinc d'aquestes converses seran dutes a terme entre parelles d'estudiants del mateix nivell d'anglès. Les cinc restants, seran el resultat de la interacció entre parelles d'estudiants de nivells diferents.

Els resultats d'aquesta investigació ens permetran analitzar com el fet de fer treballar conjuntament alumnes d'un mateix nivell o de diferent nivell té un efecte en la manera en què la conversa es desenvolupa en ambdós casos.

Ens posem a la seva disposició per resoldre qualsevol dubte que puguin tenir.

Jo, _____ declaro que he rebut informació sobre aquest estudi que es realitzarà a RMR Acadèmia d'Idiomes. Amb aquest consentiment declaro que la meua col·laboració és totalment voluntària i tinc dret a retirar la meua col·laboració en l'estudi en qualsevol moment revocant el consentiment atorgat.

_____, ____ de _____ de 2017

Signatura

Per més informació contacteu:

Judit Casany Muñoz

Judit.Casany@e-campus.uab.cat

648 509 340

Informació pels participants i consentiment informat

Com a part del meu Treball de Fi de Grau estic duent a terme una investigació sobre la manera en què estudiants d'anglès com a segona/tercera llengua interactuen entre si en una tasca oral o *speaking*.

L'estudi inclourà un anàlisi detallat d'un total de deu diàlegs els quals seran gravats acústicament. Cinc d'aquestes converses seran dutes a terme entre parelles d'estudiants del mateix nivell d'anglès. Les cinc restants, seran el resultat de la interacció entre parelles d'estudiants de nivells diferents.

Els resultats d'aquesta investigació ens permetran analitzar com el fet de fer treballar conjuntament alumnes d'un mateix nivell o de diferent nivell té un efecte en la manera en què la conversa es desenvolupa en ambdós casos.

Ens posem a la seva disposició per resoldre qualsevol dubte que puguin tenir.

Jo, _____ pare/mare/tutor de _____ declaro que he rebut informació sobre aquest estudi que es realitzarà a RMR Acadèmia d'Idiomes i dono el meu consentiment per tal que el meu fill/filla hi participi. Amb aquest consentiment declaro que la meva col·laboració és totalment voluntària i tinc dret a retirar la meva col·laboració en l'estudi en qualsevol moment revocant el consentiment atorgat.

_____, ____ de _____ de 2017

Signatura

Per més informació contacteu:

Judit Casany Muñoz

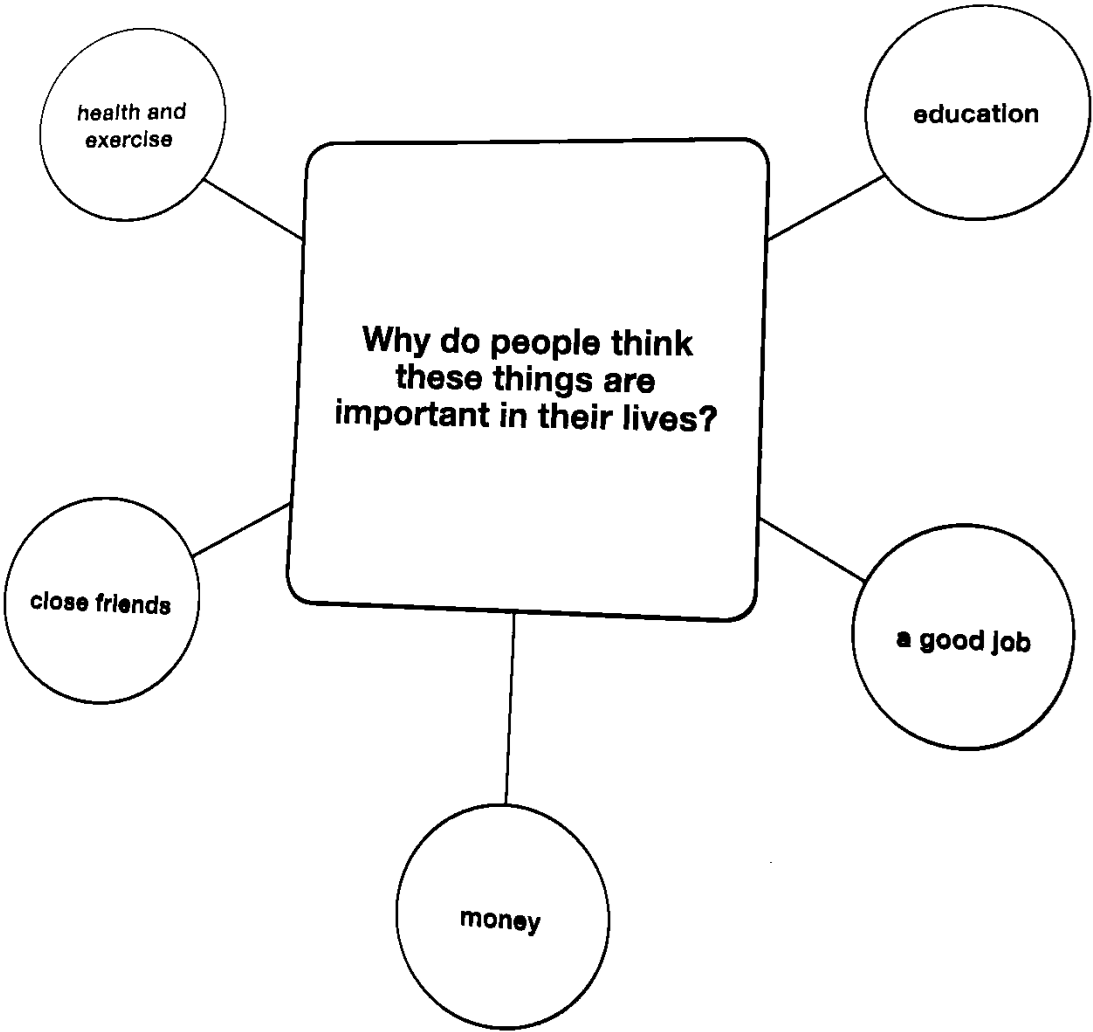
Judith.Casany@e-campus.uab.cat

648 509 340

APPENDIX B. Samples of the Tasks Distributed to Participants

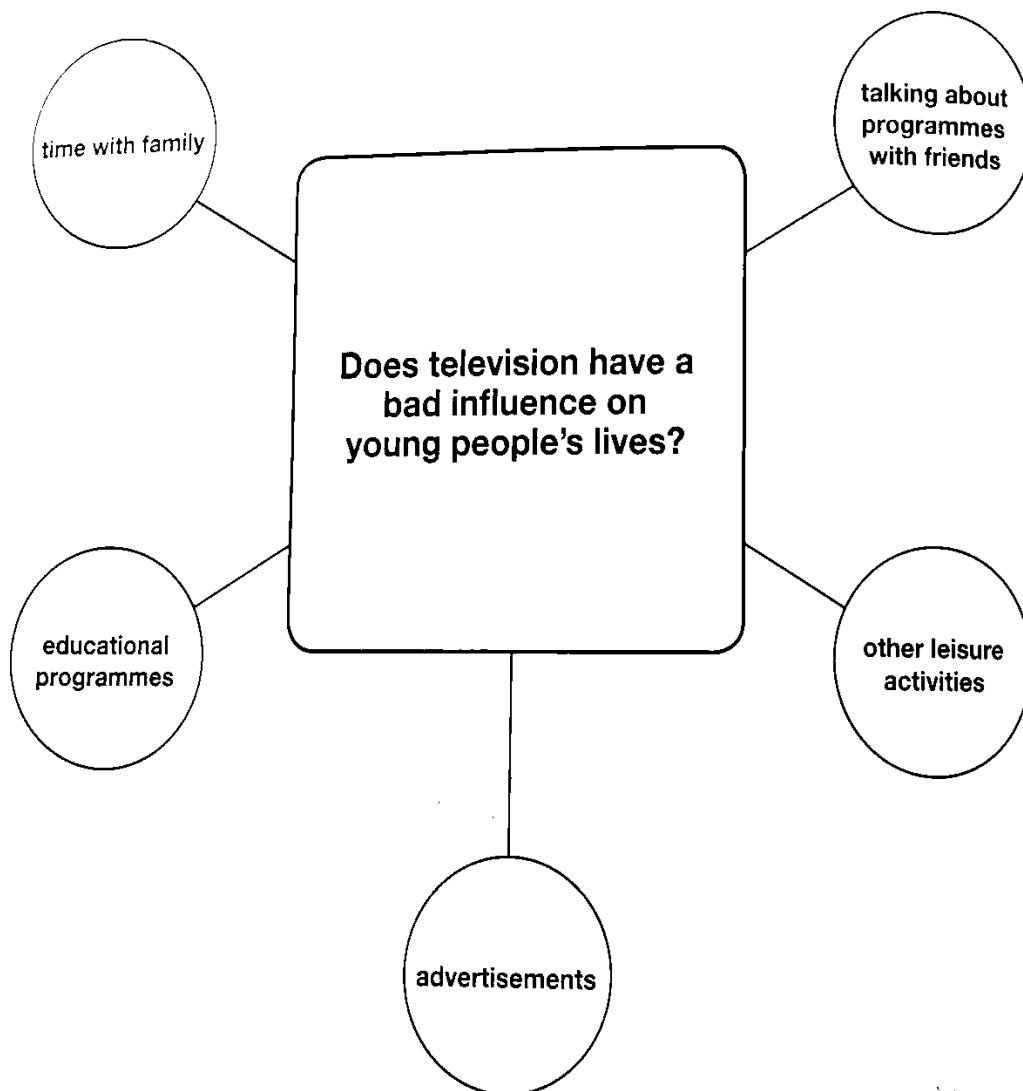
4E

Important things in life



2E

Television



APPENDIX C. Transcription Sample

- 1 S: do you want to start?
2 T: (laughs) yes. so, I think that television can be a bad influence for young people because
3 emh some programmes like **reality shows may be, teach them** things that are not good

LEXICAL, IMPLICIT, SOLVED LRE.

- 4 or they emh...teach them bad words but in the other hand I think that if they watch tv
5 with their family or some educational programmes emh...can be good for them or can
6 just entertain themselves. and what about you what do you think?
7 S: well, ah okey, emh...I think emh...television emh...programmes are a bad influence
8 because emh...people waste a lot of time emh...watching tv and emh...they could do
9 things more interesting like playing with their friends in the...in the street and emh...
10 reading books and I think emh...tv is not necessary.
11 T: okay so you are agree of other leisure activities like what you said, like spend more
12 time outdoors and (laughs) something like this. and what do you think about ads?
13 do you think that are a bad influence?
14 S: yes, because emh...emh...ad-advertisements emh...emh...can emh...influence emh
15 young people and emh...**make him do, believe things** that are not important like the...

LEXICAL, IMPLICIT, SOLVED LRE.

- 16 if a...a thin...a thin girl is beautiful and the fat girl isn't.
17 T: okay, yeah yeah I understand it. and otherwise that maybe some ads like...yeah some
18 food if the... if they adve-advertise food they show like this product is perfect emh...buy
19 it you can it and maybe it's not good for them and they may believe that this is good.
20 okay...do you want to add something else?
21 S: no. I think emh...television is a bad influence. no no.
22 T: okay (laughs) second one. [do you] want to start?
23 S: [do you]
24 no. you start.
25 T: okay. so I think that for exemple close friends are...are important for people because if
26 you are sad or you want to speak with someone they always be there and...**for other**
27 **emh...on the other hand** education is also important because if you have studies you

LEXICAL, IMPLICIT, SOLVED LRE.

- 28 can be critical and have an opinion about things and it helps you to get a better job to
29 earn money and to buy more things.
30 S: okay,
31 T: what do you think?
32 S: I think emh...one of the mos-most important things emh...for people is emh...health and
33 exercise because emh...one people emh...do exercise emh...they feel better with
34 themselves **they are more emh...they have more emh...hòstia puta emh...**
35 T: **what do you want to say?**
36 S: **they emh...emh...they want to do more things**, to go out, to...to meet emh...new people

LEXICAL, IMPLICIT, SOLVED LRE.

- 37 and I think emh...it's very important. **do you agree with...?**
LEXICAL, IMPLICIT, NON-SOLVED LRE.

- 38 T: ésque personally I think health it's important but for me exercise is not so important
 39 because I hardly ever do anything of sport and I feel better and I like to go out and meet
 40 with my friends so for me it's not really important.
 41 S: okay. emh...I think that emh...people usually say money isn't important, you you must
 42 be happy but I think money is very important emh...personally I'm happy when I'm
 43 travelling wi-when I'm doing activity with my friends with my family and emh...
 44 with my girlfriend Emma and (laughs) emh...for all the activities emh...I need money
 45 and **if I...I hadn't money I...**
 46 T: **you couldn't do that.**
 47 S: **yes=**

LEXICAL, IMPLICIT, NON-SOLVED LRE.

- 48 T: =yeah, that it's true. money doesn't bring happiness but it helps you to...do things and I
 49 think that money is essential in the times we live because everything you you want to
 50 do you need money for so...
 51 S: and I think another thing emh...
 52 T: you think another thing,
 53 S: I think that what is important is emh...the...**have, having** a girlfriend or boyfriend

FORMAL, IMPLICIT, SOLVED LRE.

- 54 because emh...
 55 T: merci (laughs)
 56 S: emh....a good girlfriend and and...she makes me emh...happy and I really love her.
 57 T: oh...thank you. emh...
 58 S: I I...I haven't said you...you are my girlfriend. (laughs)
 59 T: ah okay. and bueno, well, I think that's all, thank you Judit.