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**DEPARTAMENT DE FILOGIA ANGLESA I DE GERMANÍSTICA**

**English as a Foreign Language:  
Vocabulary Acquisition in Very Young Learners**

Treball de Fi de Grau/ BA dissertation

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## **Abstract**

Vocabulary is one of the areas of language learning that is first addressed in early Language Learning contexts. The purpose of this study is to examine how young learners (YLS) between the ages of 5 and 6 acquire a set of specific English as Foreign Language (EFL) vocabulary, and how much are they able to retain over a period of two months without any class exposure to the vocabulary. A group of young Catalan/Spanish bilinguals in their first stages of learning English as a foreign language (FL) were tested through two vocabulary tests, namely a picture naming task and a picture selection task on clothes and colours after a 5-week lesson (i.e. 12.5 hours) and were tested again after two months. The tests aimed to analyse the children's levels of production and comprehension of the studied vocabulary. Results confirm that comprehension develops much before production and that the former is retained over time and therefore receptive knowledge of the taught vocabulary seems to have consolidated much more than productive knowledge. Percentages obtained also suggest the need to incorporate more tasks focused on production and more meaning-focused tasks in class.

**Keywords:** vocabulary acquisition, young learners, English as a foreign language, English vocabulary learning

## **1. Introduction**

The emergence of Foreign Language Teaching (FLT) during the earliest stages of schooling has notoriously increased over the last few years (Bland, 2015; García Mayo, 2017; Garton & Copland, 2019; Nikolov & Djigunovic, 2011; Rokita-Jaśkow & Ellis, 2019, among others). Within this trend, English appears to be the most widely taught language among young children due to its great influence all over the world. Yet, this tendency is still in experimentation and in need of improvement.

As mentioned by Philp, Oliver and Mackey (2008), most of the studies on Second Language Acquisition (SLA) are more focused on adults than on children. Within the different children groups, young children could be considered an under-researched area. Data and studies about teaching strategies and the outcomes of their hypothetical early immersion on a foreign language (FL) are still very scarce.

It is necessary to analyse and understand what the best way to teach EFL to young children is, and what specific content they acquire in comparison to adults. Moreover, there are indications of age differences in the way they acquire this second language within the children's age range. SLA conditions differ depending on the ages of the learners (Nicholas and Lightbown, 2008) and there seems to be an important distinction between very young children (2-7) and older children (more than 7). A clear example exposed by Philp et al. (2008) is how the learning process varies depending on your age. In early stages of life, children learn terms and vocabulary symbolically and use the language mainly to be able to represent simple objects. However, they cannot apply their SL to logical situations or to the understanding of other people's opinions. The present study aims to examine how young learners between the ages of 5 and 6, acquire a set of specific EFL vocabulary, and how much they retain over a period of two months. In order

to do so, the whole study and analysis will be aimed to responding the following research questions:

(1) To what extent are pre-school EFL learners able to comprehend and produce a set of vocabulary items after a 5-week lesson (i.e. 12.5 hours)?

(2) To what extent are pre-school EFL learners able to retain the comprehension and production of a set of vocabulary items after a two-month period without in-class exposure to the relevant items?

(3) Are there any differences between pre-school EFL learners' comprehension and production of the set of vocabulary items at the two data collection times?

(4) Are there any differences between the pre-school EFL learners' scores in the two subsections of the vocabulary tasks (i.e. clothes items (CI) and colour and clothes (CCI) at the two data collection times?

In order to answer to these research questions, the methodology and procedure applied will contemplate a picture naming task and a picture selection task to measure the acquired vocabulary. The tasks were prepared by the research group EFLIC (English as a Foreign Language in Instructed Contexts – 2017SGR752) within a larger study in a primary and secondary school. The lesson on which the tasks were based was designed by the teacher in the school where the study was carried out and was designed around the topic of clothes. The data obtained from the speakers' recordings will reveal the levels of production, comprehension and retention of these children's acquisition of the vocabulary taught and learned in class. The results of the study might give insights into effective vocabulary teaching strategies that can enhance early language learning.



## **2. Literature Review**

The study of second and foreign language acquisition (SLA, FLA) is turning its attention to young learners (YL). However, the still scarce knowledge of this population leads to an insufficient and limited progress in the achievements of early language teaching in school contexts (Bland, 2015). The study of YLs is needed in order to foster positive progress in their teaching, and to understand how they acquire languages. In order to delve into this issue more deeply, a general and historical overview of young learners' SLA and FLA will be provided. Secondly, another section will offer a more focused view of SLA and FLA in relation to very YLs (3 to 7 years old) taken from different authors and studies. Finally, the last section will focus on YLs' vocabulary acquisition.

### **2.1 General Background**

The study of second or foreign languages in school contexts has lately become more and more common among young children. Over the past fifty years, the introduction of additional languages in very early phases of obligatory schooling—English becoming the priority language in most cases—has become a trend worldwide. It is interesting to see that this tendency has not only affected elementary school, but it has also influenced changes in preschool where younger children are involved (Enever, 2015). This now widespread teaching development began in the 1960s with small projects carried out in certain schools, and the publication of a report which featured a pilot study made in the UK. Burstall, Jamieson, Cohen and Hargreaves, gathered data in 1974 to study the learning outcomes of early L2 instruction in schools. In the same year, Dulay and Burt's used seminal work by Brown's (1973), which predicted the order of morpheme acquisition from data gathered from children under three years old, to compare these

findings to child SLA. But it was only after the publication of some more contemporary policy documents that the implementation of this early SL teaching began to spread worldwide. These documents include *the Conclusions of the Barcelona Presidency* (2002), the reports from *the Commission of the European Communities* (2003) and the consecutive *Eurydice reports* (Eurydice, 2006, 2012, 2017). The latter provided high-quality data concerning EU Member States' development of the new addition of SLA in European schools, with English as the central language taught. All the reports mentioned were necessary to understand and highlight how important it is to be fluent in English in order to fit in with our globalized socioeconomic world. Until then, the essential role of languages when competing for a job and the urgency to begin its study at early stages of schooling had not yet been explored (Enever & Moon, 2009).

## **2.2 Very Young Learners SLA and FLA**

Research on SLA has always been more focused on adults than on children. Moreover, within the different children age-groups, very young children are found to comprise a very under-researched area in comparison to teenagers (Philp, Mackey and Oliver, 2008). Data and studies on teaching strategies and the outcomes of children's hypothetical early immersion in an L2 are still very scarce but yet necessary. It is essential to understand how very YL acquire a FL, to find what the best way to teach English as a FL is, and what specific content they need to be acquainted with in comparison to older children and adults.

Furthermore, indicators of the existence of different cognitive and social levels among children in comparison to adults have been reported, as well as different levels of acquisition depending on the learners' age. According to Nicholas and Lightbown (2008),

an important distinction between very young children (2 to 7 years old) and older children (more than 7 years old) needs to be made. Philp et al. (2008) offer us a clear example of how the learning process varies depending on one's age. While during early stages of life children learn terms and vocabulary symbolically and use the language mainly to represent simple objects that are essential in their basic communication, they cannot apply the FL to logical situations or to understand other people's opinions. This adds to the disparity between different children age-ranges, which calls for educators and researchers to try and find the most suitable strategies when teaching them an L2. It is also important to work on this topic in order to find the answer to the mystery of how very young children acquire a FL. Although the efforts for the research on this area have been modest, they have been enough for a hypothesis to be crafted: children tend to have fewer difficulties when learning an L2 in comparison to adults. This idea is embraced by "The Critical Period Hypothesis" (Lenneberg, 1967), which was posited for L1A and has been partially applied to L2A, comprising the idea that learning an L2 is easier if acquired before puberty, as the brains use some of the mechanisms that helped them when learning their mother tongue (Cameron, 2001). This theory concludes that only children who are exposed to great amounts of L2 from early stages of their learning can get higher levels of proficiency in that foreign language, especially in regard to accent.

As Cameron (2001) also points out, children that are exposed to an FL from a very young age might only have to deal with oral language for some years. This means that their initial FL learning will be based on oral speech. As a consequence, it is recommended to focus this early language teaching on *words* and *interaction*. Eventually, due to their high exposure to the teacher's speech, *grammar* might emerge naturally. However, this might only happen in very specific immersion contexts where language

does not need to be taught explicitly. As stated by Clark and Hecht (1983), the coordination of language production and comprehension is essential for children to fully acquire an L2. It is necessary to coordinate what is perceived with what is produced to learn a language. In fact, they discuss the idea of comprehension being systematically ahead of production. Many studies agree with this idea as consistencies in children understanding first and producing the words later have been found (Winitz et al 1981, Clark & Hecht 1982). However, although in most cases comprehension occurs in first position, there seems to be cases where it is production that goes first. Chunks, which will be dealt with deeply in the following sub-section, are a clear example of this phenomenon. Children might rely on routine utterances in L2 production, and they will apparently be producing perfect sentences. Yet, this *artificial* production does not necessarily indicate that the child has fully acquired the knowledge of the structure he or she is producing. This relation between what the child produces, and their comprehension of the item produced is difficult to assess, but the use of chunks as learned routines show that production being ahead of comprehension does not necessarily signal a fully appropriate comprehension of the item itself.

### **2.3 Vocabulary and Young Learners**

Finally, the last section of the literature review will focus on vocabulary acquisition and on the way in which YLs acquire FL words. According to Hestetræet (2019), in the last decades, the age to start learning English as an L2 has decreased at the same time as studies on vocabulary acquisition have been on the rise. Norbert Schmitt has been one of the most important figures in relation to this specific area and has pioneered many of the studies concerning L2 vocabulary acquisition. However, this L2

research is mostly concerned with adults, or older children, where very young learners tend to be excluded. Many studies applied to adults may also be interesting when applied to children, which is why Paul Nation's study (2013) providing four strands for teaching and learning vocabulary should be considered. These strands are the following: meaning-focused input, which boils down to the exposure of children into language; meaning-focused output, which deals with encouraging the children into participating by using the words they have already learned; language-focused learning, which includes learning words that may not be as used as others but that are still part of the vocabulary; and fluency development, which consists in consolidating all the knowledge already acquired (Nation, 2013). The strands introduced by Nation should be contemplated when trying to conclude what specific vocabulary YLs need to learn.

Much research has been done in an attempt to conclude which are the best techniques to follow when teaching an L2 to young children. Following Orosz' (2009) indication that children are expected to explicitly learn 300 SL words per year, many outlines and lists of essential words have been made. It is important, however, to note that these lists are made up of words considered to be high-frequency vocabulary, in order to help children in undertaking the final goal, which is being able to communicate and understand L2 input. It is also necessary to consider that young children enjoy learning words that are essential when expressing their thoughts. Therefore, when deciding which vocabulary is better to teach them, the ideal content would be basic level concepts first, which are appropriate to their age and cognitively interpretable by them (Cameron 1994; Cameron 2001). As they learn new concepts, the level of the vocabulary acquired can be increased until reaching higher-level concepts which are needed to master the language. Moreover, these last concepts will be acquired gradually through their interactions with

the teacher, families or even with other students as they grow up. That is to say, children need to feel that the words they are learning are meaningful and useful in their daily life. If this is accomplished by the teacher, they will be more involved in the learning process. Dam (2011) even suggested the possibility of children self-selecting the relevant and meaningful vocabulary they want to learn, in order to make them feel motivated when studying it and make them become more involved and autonomous in the acquisition of L2 vocabulary. As reported by Brewster, Ellis and Girard (1991), it is highly recommended to present this new vocabulary along with visual support to help the children in the task of memorizing and conveying the meaning of these new words. This idea is followed by Laufer (2005) adding a remark about there being a need for learners to have repetitive encounters with vocabulary items in order to enter them into their long-term memory system. However, a massive exposure to language needs to be avoided as it guarantees incidental vocabulary acquisition (Kersten, 2010). Memorizing needs to occur in learning contexts in which different appealing techniques need to be combined in order to teach children, always trying to avoid unique attention to the explicit form of the vocabulary and incorporate more meaning-focused tasks.

In regard to this need to make the learning process more suitable and likeable to children, there are some mechanisms that might help in making it easier. Some of the main techniques used are the introduction of new terms through songs, games or stories, which make their learning more interactive and enjoyable. All these situations can be, in turn, combined with interaction. The latter might help children completely acquire the vocabulary of the lesson. One more specific mechanism is the use of *chunks* in the vocabulary learning process. Chunks are seen as a very effective tool to help children memorize useful phrases that will help them when wanting to communicate using an L2.

As mentioned by Hestetræet (2019), chunks can benefit children's fluency and make it easier for them to express themselves in a language that is not their mother tongue. At the same time, Wray (2002) agreed with that view and highlighted the high utility this may have when learning a language. According to her, *socio-interactional purposes* take place when children use chunks. After gathering data from other studies, Wray (2002) found out some of the situations where children used chunks for profit:

These functions (Wray 2002, pp. 161–169) include to get things done, such as in *Milk, please and Can I play with this?*; to demonstrate group membership, e.g., *How are you? Have a nice day! See you tomorrow and I'm sorry*; and demonstrate individuality, e.g., *I can do this, I know this*. Another function included using chunks to gain control of their language learning development, such as in *What's that?; I don't understand*. (Hestetræet 2018: 224-225).

All these functions are indispensable when growing as a person, and essential to learn L2 vocabulary. This reaffirms the idea of how important it is to connect the teaching of vocabulary with the learning of chunks, to foster their usage and make communication in the L2 feel easier and more natural for children. Repetition drills could also be considered a viable option when trying to get children familiarized with certain words or expressions. Yet, chunks and repetition drills should always be combined with the other techniques mentioned throughout this section in order to obtain more effective results in YLs' vocabulary acquisition. In a qualitative study carried out with 4 and 5-year old EFL learners from different kindergartens from Hong Kong, Lau and Rao (2013) found evidence to support the claim that a balanced vocabulary teaching strategy including “contextualized vocabulary, such as in storytelling and reading and meaning-focused output, such as in spontaneous interaction” (Hestetræet, 2019: 226) is needed to get a proper evolution in the children's vocabulary acquisition. Lau and Rao attended 23

sessions and gathered enough data and field notes to identify the method and strategies followed by the teachers to teach the vocabulary. They also interviewed the latter, asking questions in relation to their backgrounds and beliefs and the practices they used to teach English to their students. In the interviews, teachers confirmed the importance of oral language in the teaching of EFL, but they continued using strategies that were mainly focused in the recognition and memorization of vocabulary, leaving aside the understanding and application of those words in real-life contexts. This study suggests and emphasizes the need for including contextualized vocabulary together with more meaning-focused output, in order to teach children not only the form of the terms, but also their meaning and use.

A popular method to vocabulary teaching—and language teaching in general—mentioned by many authors, such as Harmer (1993) or Badger (2018), is the Presentation-Practice-Production (PPP) approach. This process is divided in three different sections. First, vocabulary needs to be introduced by the teacher. This stage is called *Presentation*, and its development may vary depending on the teacher and the number of learners attending the lesson. Some of the most recommended options for introducing new terms to children are the use of realia, flashcards or pictures. Secondly, this vocabulary needs to be *practiced* by the students. This stage has to be promoted by the teacher. Some activities that could be used to help children in acquiring these items are memory games, drills, or guessing games with the use of flashcards. The last stage of this approach is called *Production*. It consists in the consolidation of the vocabulary taught by its application in certain activities or games. As Badger (2018) puts it, this stage needs to seek a more spontaneous use of language from the children. Some options he offers to accomplish this goal are role-play games or simulation. Although PPP has been criticized



for not being a good method to help students acquire L2 communication skills, it has been proven to be one of the best methods when introducing new vocabulary to children, which is exactly what young learners need before being able to combine lexical items into utterances to be able to interact.

### **3. The study**

#### **3.1 Research Questions and Aim**

The present study aims to examine how YLs between the ages of 5 and 6 acquire a set of specific EFL vocabulary, and how much they are able to retain over a period of two months. Also, a comparison between the levels of language production and language comprehension of the same vocabulary will be studied on the basis of the results. The specific research questions that guide the present study are the following:

- (1) To what extent are pre-school EFL learners able to comprehend and produce a set of vocabulary items after a 5-week lesson (i.e. 12.5 hours)?
- (2) To what extent are pre-school EFL learners able to retain the comprehension and production of a set of vocabulary items after a two-month period without in-class exposure to the relevant items?
- (3) Are there any differences between pre-school EFL learners' comprehension and production of the set of vocabulary items at the two data collection times?
- (4) Are there any differences between the pre-school EFL learners' scores in the two subsections of the vocabulary tasks (i.e. clothes items (CI) and colour and clothes items (CCI) at the two data collection times?

## **3.2 Methods**

### **3.2.1 Participants**

This study was carried out in *Paidos Cooperativa*, a semiprivate Catalan school established in *Sant Fruitós de Bages* in 1971. It offers education from very early years (0-3 years old) to Secondary education (12-15 years of age). English is used in the English as a Foreign Language lessons and as vehicular language in some curricular subjects to help children acquire a proficient level of English before they finish their obligatory education. The data of this study was gathered from this school as I had the opportunity to be part of EFLIC (English as a Foreign Language in Instruction Contexts) during an internship at the UAB. EFLIC is currently holding a study in Paidos school concerning the analysis and evaluation of the acquisition of EFL in instruction contexts at the two educational stages offered at the school, primary and secondary.

The present study was based on data from 26 children aged between 5 and 6 (50% girls and 50% boys) who were Catalan/Spanish bilinguals. All the children had been introduced to English for the first time in pre-primary 3 (i.e. two years before the study) and they all attended same class group, pre-primary 5 at the start of the study. Their English in-class accumulated exposure was 155 hours. At pre-primary 3 and 4, these children attended EFL classes twice a week in two 1-hour sessions. At the time of the study, the children were receiving half-an-hour of English sessions every day (2.5 hours a week).

### **3.2.2 Instruments and Procedures**

The specific topic of vocabulary to be examined was clothes. The children were first exposed to the topic for 5 weeks, 5 half-an-hour sessions per week, and then, they

were tested twice, namely right after the unit was covered in order to analyse of their comprehension and production of the vocabulary items and two months later to test their levels of retention. The content of the lesson was selected by their teacher and it was taught following a sequence of different teaching strategies for five weeks. During week 1, the vocabulary was introduced through stories; then, it was practiced and consolidated through the use of songs (week 2), games (week 3) and worksheets (week 4). Week 5 was a wrap-up week where revision activities, games and a final party were carried out. In addition, a puppet was also used to motivate the children and make them participate in the activities proposed by the teacher. Figure 1 illustrates the timeline of the study:

NOVEMBER				DECEMBER		FEBRUARY
04-11-2019	11-11-2019	18-11-2019	25-11-2019	04-12-2019	13-12-2019	28-02-2020
SESSION 1: Story	SESSION 2: Songs	SESSION 3: Games	SESSION 4: Worksheet	SESSION 5: Closure	Test 1	Test 2

Figure 1. Methodology structure used during data collection

The specific lexical items selected and taught in the unit included pieces of clothes, colours and numbers. Children were already familiar with colours and numbers, but it was the first time they encountered the clothes vocabulary items in a class environment. They were presented in isolation and together with the colours and the numbers, in order to practice them while acquiring the brand-new vocabulary. The words chosen for this unit are specified below:

**Clothes:** pyjamas, jacket, shoes, smock, socks, sunglasses, sandals, boots, shirt, dress, jeans, trousers, t-shirt, hat gloves.

**Colours:** blue, red, yellow, green, orange, brown, black, white, pink and purple.

**Numbers:** from 1 to 10.

Two vocabulary oral tasks, a production task and a picture selection task, were designed and carried out twice, after the unit and two months later. Each task included 25 items to be produced and recognized and it was divided in two further sections: the first 15 items from each dealt only with vocabulary items, while the 10 last items also included colours and pieces of clothes so as to test their knowledge on that area. A Power Point was designed where children would see pieces of clothing and their colours, which had to be recognized and named orally. In the second part of the Power Point, children could see slides with four pictures (i.e. three clothes items and a distractor) and would hear the researcher say *Can you show me the trousers?* And they would have to point at the relevant item or item and colour (see Appendix A). The two tasks were piloted with a number of children of the same age and same school (i.e. the other pre-primary 5 class).

The children were taken individually to a different classroom in order to be tested. Instructions were given in Catalan, but children were prompted to use English on the trial slides. If the child did not know the answer, s/he was prompted to use Catalan/Spanish in order to keep the task going. The average time spent of the two tasks was around 10 minutes. The data was recorded on data sheets by a second researcher and transcribed using Excel for further analysis (see Appendix B).

#### **4. Results**

We explored the extent to which child learners were able to comprehend and produce the specific EFL vocabulary taught over the period of 5 weeks, and to what extent they were able to retain it after two months. The tests were analysed according to their accuracy scores after the 5-week lesson, their levels of retention and the difference between their levels of comprehension and production.

TEST 1	
Production	Comprehension
5.96/25	18.76/25
23.85%	75.08%

Table 2. Test 1 results

Table 2 provides the mean raw scores and percentages of Test 1 production and comprehension. The table considers as a single group the two subtests carried out, namely the 15 clothes items (CI) (i.e. boots) and the 10 colour and clothes items (CCI) (i.e. yellow boots) making a total of 25 items in each subset. As can be observed, production results are very low: only 23.85% of the items were produced correctly by the children. This shows low levels of production after the 5-week lesson. On the other hand, comprehension results reach 75.08% of accuracy with an average of 18.76 correct responses out of a total of 25 items.

TEST 2	
Production	Comprehension
3.19/25	17.04/25
12.77%	68.15%

Table 3. Test 2 results

Table 3 presents the results of Test 2, conducted two months after Test 1. These results also account for the total of the 15 items entirely based on clothes (CI) and the 10 items in which clothes were combined with colours (CCI), that is a total of 25 items. In this case, children's correct answers were lower than in Test 1 both in production and comprehension. Production results remain low (12.77%), decreasing by 11.08% in

relation to the ones scored in Test 1. This posits a deterioration of the production of the EFL vocabulary over the existing period of two months between both tests. Comprehension results also appear to be lower than in Test 1 (75.08% vs 68.15%), but with only a 6.93% of difference between them.

Having considered the two Tests separately, the next step is to compare and contrast comprehension versus production more specifically in the two tests.

Production		Comprehension	
Test 1	Test 2	Test 1	Test 2
5.96/25	3.19/25	18.76/25	17.04/25
23.85%	12.77%	75.08%	68.15%

Table 4. Total percentages of production and comprehension

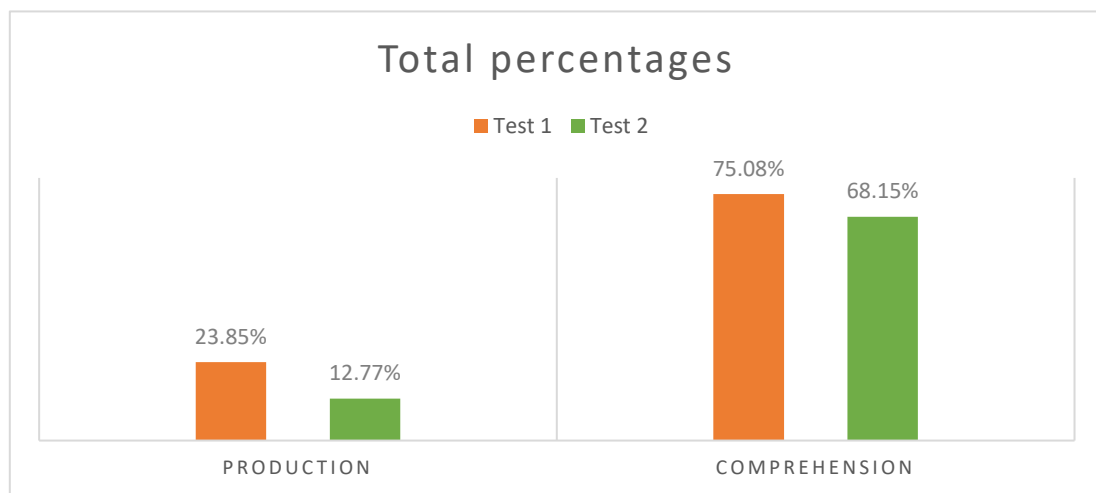


Figure 1. Total percentages of production and comprehension

The differences between comprehension and production are remarkable, as is shown in Table 4 and Figure 1. While the production results are below 50% in all cases (23.85% vs 12.77%), both percentages in comprehension exceed the aforementioned limit

that production was not able to reach in any of its tests (75.08% vs 68.15%). Despite this notable difference, the number of correct answers still remains higher in Test 1 than in Test 2, being the difference of the two scores in comprehension (6.93%) smaller than the ones in production (11.08%). It can then be inferred from these results that children performed satisfactorily in the comprehension section from both Test 1 and Test 2—as they managed to surpass 60% of correct answers—, but showed a low capacity of production as the results in that area did not surpass 30% of accurate responses in any of the two tests. The high difference between production and comprehension (of 51.23% in Test 1, and of 55.38% in Test 2) will be discussed in the following section.

Let us now analyse potential differences between the two subsections of each test, namely clothes items (CI) versus colour and clothes items (CCI) in the production and comprehension parts of each test.

Test 1			
Production CI	Production CCI	Comprehension CI	Comprehension CCI
3.81/15	2.15/10	10.92/15	7.85/10
25.38%	21.54%	72.82%	78.46%

Table 5. Test 1 results divided into two sections: clothes items (CI) vs colour and clothes items (CCI)

Table 5 shows quite similar percentages of correct answers in the production section of Test 1, although it can be noticed that children performed better when asked to produce CI alone (25.38%) than when asked to produce CCI (21.54%). On the contrary, comprehension results showed the opposite: children performed better when asked to identify CCI (78.46%) than when they faced CI on their own (72.82%). Yet, the

difference between CI and CCI remains low in both production and comprehension: 3.84% difference in production vs 5.64% difference in comprehension.

Test 2			
Production CI	Production CCI	Comprehension CI	Comprehension CCI
2.75/15	0.71/10	10.38/15	8.08/10
18.33%	7.08%	69.17%	80.83%

Table 6. Test 2 results divided into two sections: clothes items (CI) vs color and clothes items (CCI)

Table 6 provides information about the results in Test 2. After the 2-month period, children continued to perform much better when asked to produce CI (18.33%), than when they had to produce CCI (7.08%). It is interesting to point out that the decrease in correct answers between the two tests concerning CCI production is sharper than that of the CI alone, moving from 21.54% in Test 1 to 7.08% in Test 2. In line of this observation, there was also a larger difference between CI and CCI in production when comparing Test 2 (11.25%) to Test 1 (3.84%). In relation to comprehension, there are some key differences that are worth closer consideration. First, all the results are above 60%, which shows good performance in the two tests concerning this section. Moreover, the difference between the two tests is small in both cases: 3.65% in CI, and 2.37% in CCI. Lastly, although there is an expected decrease of percentages in the CI section (from 72.82% in Test 1 to 69.17% in Test 2), we find an interesting change in the CCI section, where it is Test 2 the one that poses higher positive results: 80.83% vs. 78.46%. Figure 2 illustrates all the observations made above.



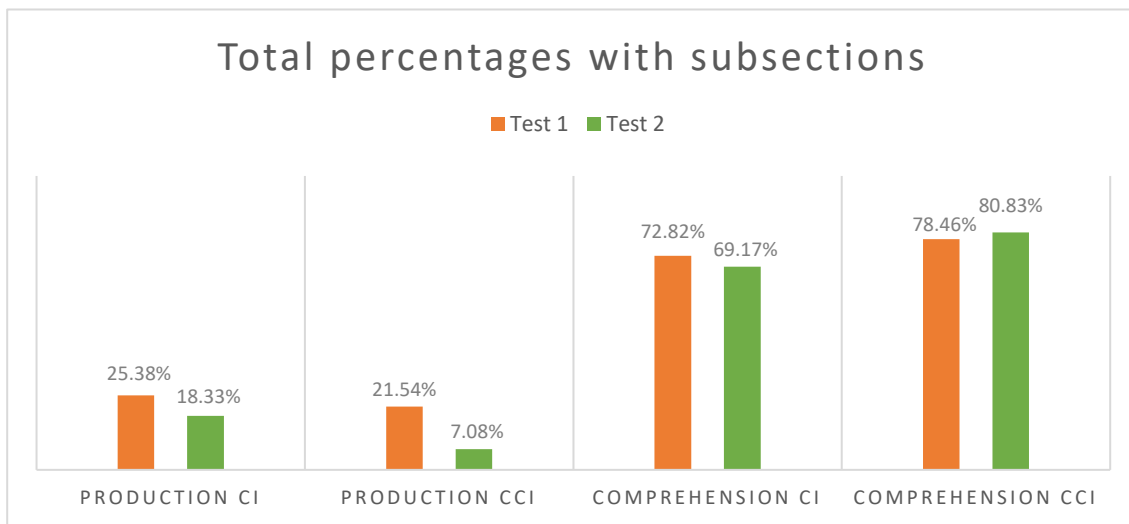


Figure 2. Total percentages with subsections CI and CCI included.

## 5. Discussion

Our first research question examined to what extent pre-school EFL learners were able to comprehend and produce a set of vocabulary items after a 5-week lesson (i.e. 12.5 hours). The results of Test 1 indicate low levels of production after the 5-week lesson. The average of 5.96 correct responses out of a total of 25 suggests the need for more than 12.5 hours for children to be able to produce the vocabulary items readily. Considering Hestetræet's (2019) thoughts in EFL vocabulary teaching, the lessons lacked meaning-focused output activities, which would have helped in enhancing the children's production levels of the vocabulary learned. However, these low results could also be related to the scant time available to teach them the brand-new terms, which might not be sufficient to combine all the activities that are necessary to accomplish a complete acquisition of the content. In contrast, an average of 18.76 correct responses out of a total of 25 is found in the comprehension section. These results indicate that the tendency is for learners to understand the notions first, and then to produce them. Comprehension levels after this 5-week input are higher than 75% showing a noticeable difference of an 51.23% in relation to production levels. Thus, the results of Test 1 point out the need for more than 12.5 hours when following the PPP approach in order to reach the latest stage

of the method with positive results. In contrast with this assertion, comprehension levels after this 5-week input are fairly high but could also be improved by the addition of some more hours of practice and vocabulary assimilation.

The second research question was aimed to discovering the extent to which the pre-school EFL learners were able to retain the comprehension and production of a set of vocabulary items after a two-month period without in-class exposure to the relevant items. As for this research question, results in Test 2 need to be examined and compared to Test 1 in order to discern the levels of retention of the vocabulary acquired during those 5 weeks. Children were not exposed to the brand-new items acquired for a period of 2 months, avoiding their practice and in-class assimilation. Considering the results in Test 1, it was expected that comprehension results would still remain higher in comparison to the ones in production. The results obtained in Test 2 validated this idea as the contrast between the individual results of production and comprehension remained very much alike to the ones in Test 1. These results emphasize the idea of production being in need of longer exposure to achieve assimilation than comprehension. Another distinction to be considered is concerned with the decrease of the accuracy levels in both sections, suggesting that the total retention of the vocabulary was not fully accomplished after those 2 months. Thus, these results posit a deterioration not only of productive knowledge but also of the comprehension of the EFL vocabulary. The need for more hours and continuous in-class exposure to the specific vocabulary could be contemplated in order to favour the YLs' acquisition and, more importantly, facilitate the vocabulary production of those items. In addition, considering the vocabulary practised during the 5-weeks lesson was not explicitly present in class for the following two months, the levels of retention accomplished were very high, especially from the comprehension section. This

is related to the diverse types of input used by the teacher to introduce and practice the new items. It is necessary to highlight the importance of avoiding plenary classes where the teacher introduces the vocabulary orally and explicitly without any kind of activity involving children in more active ways. Hence, the method used by the teacher during the 5-week lesson, which included stories, songs, games, and worksheets, proves to have had positive effects on the children's acquisition and retention of receptive vocabulary.

The third research question was related to the potential differences between pre-school EFL learners' comprehension and production of the set of vocabulary items at the two data collection times. As stated in the Results section, the differences between EFL learner's production and comprehension are noteworthy. Production results do not surpass the 50% of correct answers in any case, upholding the low levels of production before and after the two-month period of non-exposure. Contrastively, comprehension results reach and surpass the 60% in both tests, presenting a better reaction from the children to the 12.5 hours devoted to that specific set of vocabulary in terms of comprehension. Hence, the necessity of devoting more hours to succeed in the teaching of vocabulary and improve the children's ability to produce the words learned is once more discernible from the results. It is important to highlight the salient disparity between production and comprehension from Test 1 to Test 2. This is one more indication of the predominance of comprehension over production and proves the inadequacy of the methods used over the production levels of the children. The main complication lies in the hours devoted to the lesson, as they were enough for comprehension, but not for production. Moreover, as discussed in the Literature Review, many studies, such as the one from Clark and Hecht (1983), discussed the idea of comprehension being ahead of

production, maintaining the distribution presented in the PPP method, and insisting in production being later acquired in the process of learning a second language.

The last research question deals with the differences between the pre-school EFL learners' answers in CI (clothes items) and CCI (colour and clothes items) of the specific set of vocabulary at the two data collection times. Test 1 production results show that children performed better when asked to produce CI alone than when they had to produce CCI. It is interesting to notice how these results are completely turned around in comprehension, being the CCI the ones who scored higher and the CI the ones who scored lower. The same happens in Test 2, where the general scores are found lower, but most of these tendencies are kept. Yet, we find an interesting change in the comprehension of CCI, as the results in Test 2 surpass the ones in Test 1, showing extremely good levels of retention in relation to comprehension of CI. The high comprehension scores could be related to the high amount of visual materials and realia used in the classroom, which fostered the children's ability to identify these items through pictures. The low production scores in Test 1 and Test 2 could be again related to the time devoted to the teaching of this vocabulary. They could also be connected to the need of using more repetition drills and chunks in class, which would help in fostering the children's production, especially in CCI, where chunks are easier to appear due to the combination of clothes items with colours. However, after accumulating the results in Test 2—notably the 80.83% scored in CCI of Test 2 production section—it could be argued that enough chunks were used by the teacher, but time was not enough for children to get to the point of producing them freely. It is interesting to see how these results prove to be contradictory with the statements previously commented on in relation to chunks. According to Clark and Hecht (1983), chunks are normally related to the idea of production appearing before than

comprehension. However, in this specific case, it is the comprehension of the items the one enhanced by these routines of repetition. Some of the chunks that scored higher in the results are the following: “yellow boots” (11/26 in Test 1; 6/26 in Test 2) and “blue jacket” (11/26 in Test 1; 4/26 in Test 2) in production; and “red pyjamas” (23/25 in Test 1; 24/25 in Test 2) in comprehension. In this case, chunks are not *artificial* productions, but helpful items that sound familiar to children due to their high repetition in class and the fact that they prove to be easily associated with images.

## **6. Conclusion**

The present study aimed at exploring how a group of YLs between the ages of 5 and 6 acquired a set of specific EFL vocabulary. More specifically, the study has attempted to determine their levels of production and comprehension, and whether they were able to retain the vocabulary learned over a period of two months without any class exposure to the vocabulary. Data was gathered from Catalan/Spanish bilinguals, and their responses were recorded on data sheets and transcribed using Excel so as to be analysed. Results seem to confirm the need for more tasks focused on production and reinforce the importance of including contextualized vocabulary tasks in class as they culminate in high levels of comprehension.

The most relevant limitation of this study is the limited amount of data analysed. In further research, it would be interesting to test children from different schools so as to compare the different methods used for teaching and obtain more considerable results to compare and analyse. Not only would a larger amount of data be necessary to obtain greater variety of results, but more tests would be needed to examine the children’s evolution and reactions to the different methods used by the teacher. This could be

significant to follow their progress closely. Finally, it would be interesting to study deeply the notions *production* and *comprehension* on YLs, to find new ways to enhance their use and understanding of language.

This study has aimed at contributing to the field of YLs' acquisition of vocabulary and to the levels of production and comprehension of children when learning from specific methods. It has corroborated the need to incorporate more production tasks in the classroom in order to foster this ability in children and it has confirmed some of the established previous research.

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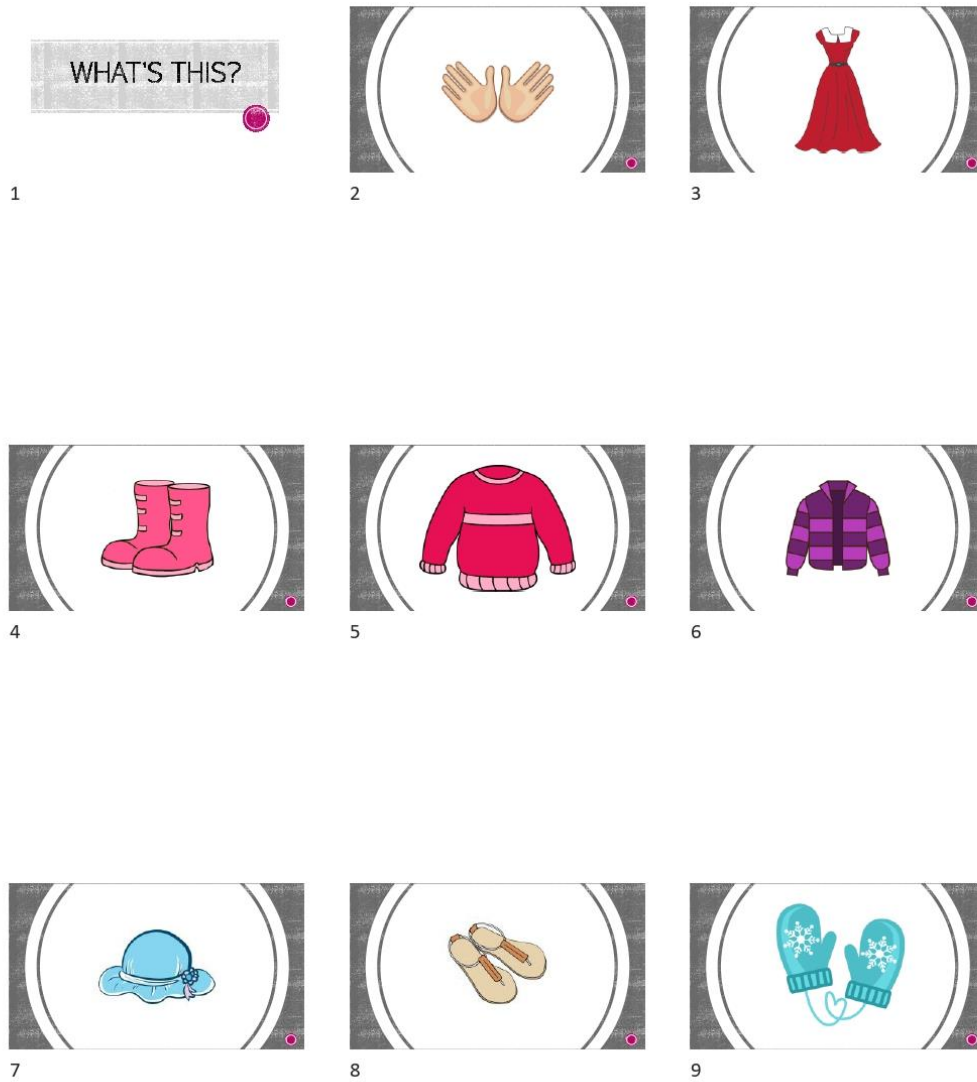
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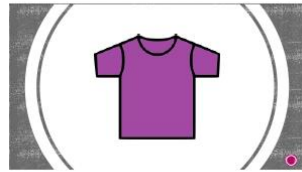
## Appendices

### Appendix A: Power Point used for data collection





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WHAT'S THIS?

CLOTHES + COLOURS



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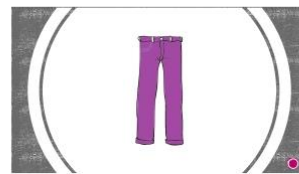
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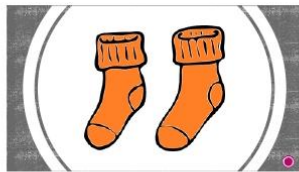
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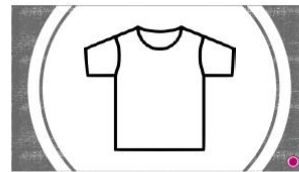
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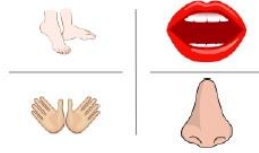


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CAN YOU SHOW ME...?



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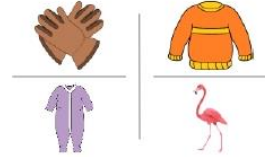
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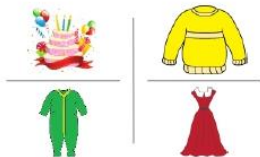
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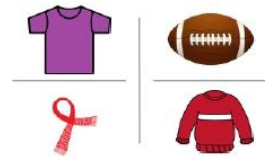
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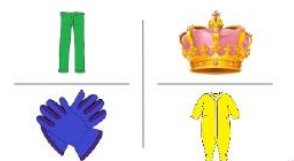
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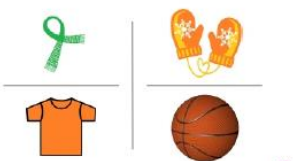
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# CAN YOU SHOW ME...?

CLOTHES • COLOURS



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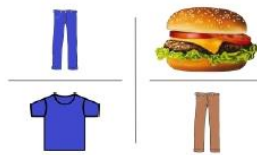
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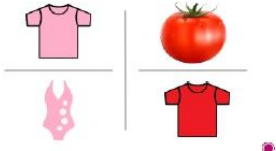
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## Appendix B: Data sheets used for data collection

Nom: \_\_\_\_\_

Data: \_\_\_\_\_

Codi: \_\_\_\_\_

Items de <b>PRODUCCIÓ</b>		✓	✗	Item chosen
1	Dress			
2	Boots			
3	Jumper			
4	Jacket			
5	Hat			
6	Sandals			
7	Mittens			
8	Pyjamas			
9	T-shirt			
10	Trousers			
11	Socks			
12	Scarf			
13	Underwear			
14	Swimming suit			
15	Sunglasses			

16	Yellow boots			
17	Green jumper			
18	Red scarf			
19	Purple trousers			
20	Orange socks			
21	Black sandals			
22	White t-shirt			
23	Brown pyjamas			
24	Pink mittens			
25	Blue jacket			



Items de <b>COMPRESIÓ</b>		✓	✗	Item chosen
26	The mittens			
27	The jacket			
28	The hat			
29	The pyjamas			
30	The dress			
31	The boots			
32	The t-shirt			
33	The socks			
34	The underwear			
35	The sunglasses			
36	The jumper			
37	The swimming suit			
38	The trousers			
39	The scarf			
40	The sandals			

41	The yellow jumper			
42	The black boots			
43	The green scarf			
44	The red pyjamas			
45	The purple jacket			
46	The white socks			
47	The blue trousers			
48	The orange hat			
49	The pink t-shirt			
50	The brown mittens			