

THE USE OF PREVIOUSLY KNOWN LANGUAGES AMONG EFL LEARNERS: A REVIEW

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Abstract

When in classroom contexts, learners tend to experience communication breakdowns which apart from making them believe that they are not making any progress in their Target Language (TL), they lead them to get stuck at some point in their production. In order to cope with these situations, learners usually resort to their Previously Known Languages (PKL). In recent years, the use of these PKL has been studied from two different perspectives, a cognitive and a sociocultural perspective. The cognitive perspective deals with both learning and communication strategies, and the sociocultural perspective is more aimed at exploring the First Language (L1) as a useful tool to assist during collaborative dialogue, which has been demonstrated to mediate Second Language (L2) acquisition (Swain & Lapkin, 2000). This paper provides a review of investigations framed within sociocultural perspectives carried out on different factors that constrain PKL use: task-modality, task repetition, age and proficiency, instructional context and gender.

Differences between adults and children have been found in some variables. Regarding task-modality, children seem to resort to their PKL to a higher extent. Furthermore, with respect to PKL functions, whereas adult learners resorted to their PKL to discuss grammar issues in the speaking + writing tasks, grammar talk was not frequent in young learners. In speaking tasks, whereas adults made a greater use of PKL for vocabulary, children resorted to their PKL for this function in equal proportions in both tasks. As for proficiency and age, in general terms, in the case of adults, their need to use their PKL decreases as their proficiency increases. In addition, in the case of children, not only the variable proficiency might affect their use of PKL, but also age. Concerning gender, while investigations targeting adults have found that females make greater use of their PKL, studies dealing with young learners have indicated that males use their PKL to a higher extent. This dissertation finishes with a set of pedagogical implications and identifies where more research should be done.

Keywords: Sociocultural approach, PKL, EFL, task-modality, task repetition, age and proficiency, the impact of the instructional context, gender.

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1. Introduction

Previously Known Languages (PKL) are regarded as useful tools that assist Second Language (L2) learners facing communication problems, as in (1), which illustrates how learner one does not remember how to say the word 'hanging' and decides to ask for help.

(1) L1: [...] The towel is eh ... ¿*Colgado?* [Hanging?]

(Azkarai & García Mayo, 2015, p. 558)

This topic has attracted the attention of both researchers in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) and English as a Second Language (ESL) settings, adults being the focus of the vast majority of investigations. However, studies in EFL contexts are prevalent. Due to the existence of more limited research in ESL settings, this paper aims to offer a review of investigations framed within a sociocultural perspective on the use of PKL targeting both EFL adults and children. To this end, this paper is organised as follows. First, section 2 will provide a brief description of cognitive and sociocultural approaches, paying special attention to the sociocultural perspective. Then, section 3 will be devoted to the presentation of several factors that account for the differences regarding the use of PKL among children and adults studying in an EFL setting. Lastly, section 4 will conclude the paper by summarizing the main ideas and providing several pedagogical implications.

2. Theoretical approaches to the investigation of the use of PKL

This section will provide an overview of the theoretical framework underlying the investigation of PKL.

The investigation of the use of PKL has been approached from a cognitive perspective (Poulisse, 1993, as cited in Martínez-Adrián, 2020a) and a sociocultural perspective (Antón & DiCamilla, 1998; Swain & Lapkin, 2000, as cited in Martínez-

Adrián, 2020a). These two different approaches differ both quantitatively and qualitatively: cognitive accounts focus on objective quantitative investigation techniques paying special attention to the amount/frequency of use of Learning Strategies (LS) and Communication Strategies (CS); conversely, sociocultural perspectives are based on the social context, and thus, perceived in a more qualitative way (Hulstijn et al., 2014).

Regarding the cognitive perspective, as stated in Martínez-Adrián (2020a), crosslinguistic influence plays an important role, both as a LS and as a CS. As for the use of PKL as a LS, students make use of their First Language (L1) to be able to construct hypotheses in the language they are trying to acquire (Schachter, 1983, as cited in Martínez-Adrián, 2020a). Concerning the use of PKL as CS, students find themselves in the need to use PKL-based strategies to compensate for that lack of knowledge (Dörnyei & Scott, 1997, as cited in Martínez-Adrián, 2020a). Such CS are frequently depicted as “ [...] strategies used to overcome problems resulting from an inadequate knowledge of the second language (L2) lexicon” (Poullisse, 1993). As regards taxonomies of CS, as cited in Martínez-Adrián, Gallardo-del-Puerto and Basterrechea (2019), Dörnyei and Scott (1997) found nine taxonomies of CS, even though only three have been the most prevalent: Tarone’s taxonomy (1977), Færch and Kasper’s taxonomy (1983) and the Nijmegen group’s taxonomy (Poullisse, 1990). Among the strategies considered by these taxonomies, we find L1-based strategies such as borrowings, foreignizings and calques, as well as conceptual strategies such as paraphrasing.

From a sociocultural perspective, the L1 is a helpful tool that assists learners during collaborative dialogue (Swain & Lapkin, 2000). Taking into account a Vygotskian theoretical framework, Antón and DiCamilla (1998) argued that students' L1 is employed both at the interpsychological level and intrapsychological level: interpsychologically, learners make use of their L1 to interact with other learners; and intrapsychologically, the L1 is used when individuals speak to themselves. Namely, at the interpsychological level, PKL can be used as a tool to mediate scaffolding (Wood et al., 1976, as cited in Antón & DiCamilla, 1998). On the other hand, at the

intrapyschological level (Vygotsky, 1986, as cited in Antón & DiCamilla, 1998), the L1 is used for private speech.

Researchers analysing PKL use within the sociocultural perspective have classified different functions that PKL serve. Below, I will provide a classification of PKL functions based on the categorization depicted in Azkarai and García Mayo (2015): off-task, metacognitive talk, grammar talk, vocabulary and phatics.

A- *Off-task*: Learners use their PKL to discuss issues not related to the task (Azkarai & García Mayo, 2015). As shown in extract (2), learner one recalls a person called Paloma and asks learner two if she/he knows something about her.

- (2) L1: [...] And can make sharing a house either, either, either a great experience or a nightmare. *¿Qué sabes de Paloma?*
[Have you heard from Paloma recently?]
L2: *Pues la vi hace poco.* [I saw her recently.]

(Azkarai & García Mayo, 2015, p. 557)

B- *Metacognitive talk*: The use of PKL to discuss issues regarding the task (Azkarai & García Mayo, 2015). “This function involved planning, organizing and monitoring the activity, as well as setting goals or checking comprehension” (Azkarai & García Mayo, as cited in Alegría de la Colina & García Mayo, 2009, p. 330). Example (3) illustrates how learner one feels in the need to reveal that he/she cannot remember something related to the task.

- (3) L1: *No em surt.* [It doesn't come to my mind.]

(Vraciu & Pladevall-Ballester, 2020, p. 7)

C- *Grammar talk*: Students make use of their PKL to talk about grammatical issues (Azkarai & García Mayo, 2015). For instance, in (4) both learners discuss how they should conjugate the verb 'to go' when it appears at the beginning of the sentence. They both finish accepting that the most appropriate form would be 'going', as it is the subject

of the sentence.

- (4) L1: I think it's going.
L2: Going, going! *Porque es su ... sujeto de la oración.*
[Because it is ... the subject of the sentence.]

(Azkarai & García Mayo, 2015, p. 557)

D- *Vocabulary*: Students employ their PKL for deliberations over word/sentence meaning, word searches and word choice (Azkarai & García Mayo, 2015, p. 558, as cited in Storch & Aldosari, 2010). For instance, in (5) learner one does not know how to say 'cookie' in English and decides to ask for help.

- (5) L1: ¿Cómo se dice galleta? [How do you say cookie?]

(García Mayo & Hidalgo, 2017, p. 137)

E- *Phatics*: These are expressions with no meaning mostly used to establish social contact and sociability (Azkarai & García Mayo, 2015). In (6) learner one uses the Spanish expression 'bueno', even though it has no meaning. In fact, this expression is a discourse marker to gain fluency while speaking.

- (6) L1: *Bueno, princesa, eso es una princesa?*
[Well, princess, that is a princess.]

(Martínez-Adrián, 2020b, p. 65)

In general, investigations framed within a sociocultural perspective consider PKL as cognitive tools that mediate learning. Besides, most of these studies have mainly focused on adults, rather than children (Shintani, 2012). Nonetheless, in recent years, a growing body of research exists with child learners. The next section offers a review of studies on the use of PKL in relation to a set of variables: task-modality, task repetition, proficiency and age, the instructional context and gender.

3. Factors affecting PKL use

Investigations conducted in EFL settings outnumber those in ESL settings with both children and adults. This might be due to some differences that might arise when comparing the PKL of the participants of the studies. On the one hand, learners in an EFL setting usually share the L1, which makes it more straightforward for the researchers to come up with precise results and conclusions. On the other hand, students in ESL contexts frequently come from different backgrounds and have different languages as their L1, which makes the interpretation of results more difficult. As a consequence, this dissertation aims to offer an overview of research concerning the use of PKL among both EFL adults and children. In particular, several factors have been found to have an impact on PKL use: task-modality (e.g. Martínez-Adrián & Arratibel-Irazusta, 2020), task repetition (e.g. Pinter, 2007), proficiency and age (e.g. Martínez-Adrián, 2020b), the impact of the instructional context (e.g. García Mayo & Lázaro Ibarrola, 2015) and gender (e.g. Azkarai & Imaz Agirre, 2017). For each factor reviewed, studies that have examined adults will be presented first, followed by research targeting young learners.

3.1 Task-modality

This section will present research concerning the impact of task-modality on the use of PKL both in adults (Azkarai & García Mayo, 2015) and children (Martínez-Adrián & Arratibel-Irazusta, 2020).

Studies dealing with task-modality have found that different task-modality provides learners with diverse learning opportunities (Azkarai & García Mayo, 2015). As a matter of fact, while learners involved in speaking tasks draw their attention to meaning, students involved in speaking + writing tasks tend to focus on more formal linguistic aspects (Martínez-Adrián & Arratibel-Irazusta, 2020).

In the case of adults, Azkarai and García Mayo (2015) collected data from 44 EFL

Spanish university learners while performing four tasks in same-proficiency dyads: two speaking tasks (a picture placement and picture differences tasks), and two speaking + writing tasks (a dictogloss and text editing tasks). Five different categories were codified to classify the L1 functions: off-task, metacognitive talk, grammar talk, vocabulary and phatics. Results demonstrated that participants did not make a high use of the L1, but they resorted to it to a limited extent. In addition, students produced more L1 turns in speaking + writing tasks rather than in speaking tasks. In general, the most common functions were phatics, followed by vocabulary and grammar talk. Specifically, in the speaking + writing tasks, the most frequent functions were off-task talk, metacognitive talk, grammar talk and phatics; and in the speaking task, vocabulary searches.

In a study conducted with L3 French learners, Payant and Kim (2019) looked into the impact of task-modality on learners' use of the L1 during the production of LREs. Learners were requested to perform two decision-making tasks in which oral and written components were included. Form- and lexis-based LREs were codified for each language and modality. In general, L1 use was more common in the LREs produced in the written modality, which seems to be in line with the findings obtained in Azkarai and García Mayo (2015). This pattern was also observed when taking into account types of LREs.

In the case of children, Martínez-Adrián and Arratibel-Irazusta (2020) gathered data from 50 EFL children whose PKL were Basque and Spanish. Participants were asked to perform two collaborative tasks in matched-proficiency dyads: a speaking task and a speaking + writing task. Data were codified according to six different functions: off-task, metacognitive talk, grammar talk, vocabulary, phatics and mechanics. The analysis of the data indicated that learners were extensive users of their PKL. Moreover, they produced more PKL turns and words in the speaking + writing task than in the speaking task. In the case of PKL functions, participants were found to make a higher use of metacognitive talk and mechanics in the speaking + writing task, whereas the other functions showed no differences between tasks. When both tasks were analysed in terms of the most common functions, in the speaking + writing activity, metacognitive talk

followed by vocabulary and mechanics were the most common manifestations of the use of PKL. On the other hand, in the speaking task, vocabulary and metacognitive talk were the most employed functions, followed by phatics.

After analysing the impact of task-modality on the use of PKL, some differences between adults (Azkarai & García Mayo, 2015) and children (Martínez-Adrián & Arratibel-Irazusta, 2020) may be identified. Regarding the overall use of PKL, adults showed a limited use, while children were considered “extensive users of their PKL” (Martínez-Adrián & Arratibel-Irazusta, 2020, p. 489). Concerning functions of PKL use, whereas adults made a greater use of PKL to discuss grammar issues in the speaking + writing tasks, grammar talk was not common in children. Likewise, while adult learners resorted to their PKL for vocabulary in speaking tasks, younger learners made use of their PKL for this function in equal proportions in both tasks.

In conclusion, task-modality seem to have an impact on both adults and young learners' use of PKL in terms of amount and functions. The following section will review research concerning task repetition.

3.2 Task repetition

This section will deal with the effect of Task Repetition (TR) on the use of PKL. In this case, little research has been conducted concerning the impact of TR on the use of PKL in adults. Therefore, the following lines will only be devoted to research conducted with children (Azkarai & García Mayo, 2017; Pinter, 2007; Shintani, 2012; Shintani, 2014).

TR implies “asking language learners to repeat the same or slightly altered tasks at intervals of, for example, one or two weeks” (Bygate & Samuda, 2005, p. 43; as cited in Ahmadian, 2012). Consequently, TR could be a useful tool for language learning since familiarity with the activity helps to focus on some aspects of language (Azkarai & García Mayo, 2017). Specifically, it is quite advantageous for students since thanks to

the repetition of an activity they can draw their attention to some important aspects such as complex grammar, suitable vocabulary, among others (Bygate, 2001). According to Bygate (2001), as cited in Azkarai and García Mayo (2017), TR allows learners to focus both on meaning, the first time they perform the task, and on form, the second time they go through it. In terms of PKL use, repeating a task helps to build confidence and this can result in less use of the L1 (Pinter, 2007).

In a study conducted by Azkarai and García Mayo (2017), the effects of TR were analysed. The subjects of this investigation were 42 9-10-year-old Spanish EFL students who were in the 4th year of primary education. All of them were familiar with the spot-the-difference activity they had to perform in pairs. This activity aimed to explore to what extent TR influenced these participants' use of PKL. To this end, participants were assigned to two groups. One of the groups followed Exact TR (ETR). In this case, learners went through two tasks that were exactly the same: two activities that shared the same content and procedure. The other group followed Procedural TR (PTR). In this respect, students went through two tasks that shared the same procedure, but which differed in terms of content. Data were codified according to eight categories: clarification request, confirmation check, lack of knowledge, phatics, repetition, metacognitive talk, appeal for help and borrowing. Results showed that these children were not extensive users of the L1. Regarding the effects of TR on the use of PKL, both groups made greater use of their PKL at T1 than at T2, which seems to confirm that repeating a task helps to decrease the percentage of PKL use. Furthermore, students in the ETR group employed their L1 more than those in the PTR group at both data collection times. In terms of PKL functions, appeals, borrowings and metacognitive use were the most common ones. All in all, “repeating a task, whether in an ETR or a PTR condition, decreased L1 use and seemed to increase the children’s engagement [...]” (Azkarai & García Mayo, 2017, p. 13).

Similarly, Pinter (2007) also considered the effect of TR on the use of PKL in a spot-the-difference task. This study examined two 10-year-old children in an EFL setting in Hungary. The purpose of the task was to explore whether repeating an activity could bring benefits, as well as to consider if the participants were able to become aware

of these profits. To this end, they performed the same task four times: the first time they went through it in their L1 Hungarian, and during the following three weeks, they had to perform the activity in English. Results proved that while these learners confidence and fluency increased, their need to employ their PKL decreased. This confirms that TR does affect these participants' use of their PKL. Additionally, once they had performed the task four times, they became aware of the development they had made and they also realised that they had reduced their L1 use to a great extent.

In the same vein, Shintani (2012) carried out an analysis which consisted of researching the use of input-based tasks, an activity which “aims to promote interlanguage development by directing learners’ attention to L2 input through listening or reading without requiring them to produce the L2” (p. 254). The objective of this research was to explore the L1 and L2 interactions between the teacher and the participants during three listen-and-do tasks, which were repeated nine times during five weeks. The selected subjects were 30 EFL Japanese children who were divided into two groups: the first one was the input-based group, which was taught the lessons by the researcher, and the second one was the control group, which received no preparation before completing the tasks. Results indicated that even though these students were not banned to use their PKL, they tried to avoid employing their L1 and they made a big effort to produce L2 forms. Moreover, the findings are in line with those in Pinter (2007), since the students' need to use their PKL decreases with the repetition of the activities. This might be an indication that TR helps students to become familiar with the task, make them feel more confident and make them decrease their need to employ their PKL to a great extent.

Lastly, input-based tasks were also investigated by Shintani (2014). As in the previous study (Shintani, 2012), since learners were not obliged to use their Target Language (TL), they were the ones who could decide whether they preferred adopting either the L1 or the L2. Furthermore, as in Shintani (2012), the first class was devoted to the introduction of the lesson. Then, this same lesson was repeated nine times during five weeks. This piece of research analysed students' employment of their L1 and L2 and “the effect of repeating a task on the task outcome” (pp. 282-283). Consequently, 15

young EFL children went through a listen-and-do exercise in which they were provided with 30 flashcards without prior instruction of the lexical items. Results showed that participants employed their L1 mainly whenever it came to within-task talk and meta-talk. On the one hand, as for within-task talk, it was used to talk about issues related to the task, as in (7):

(7) L1: *omoi tte koto?* [Does that mean ‘heavy?]

(Shintani, 2012, p. 286)

On the other hand, meta-talk was employed to explain and give procedures about the activity, as in (8):

(8) L1: *gomibako ni ireru* [Put it into the rubbish box]

(Shintani, 2012, p.285)

In addition, in the first lesson, within-task talk was especially applied to confirm that they understood or not what their teacher was saying and to negotiate the meaning of a specific lexical item. “Meta-talk” was also uttered in lesson 1 when one of the students did not comprehend the task procedures. In contrast, in the last lesson, whereas there was no evidence of meta-talk as they had already become familiar with the exercise, within task-talk was still evident, although it was relatively low. Lastly, the use of the L2 was also taken into consideration. According to Shintani (2014), even if they were not obliged to use the TL, they made use of English for several purposes such as repeating a specific part of the teacher's utterance, asking a question or making playful L2 use.

After having examined the effects of TR on the use of PKL, outcomes indicate positive trends as for the impact of the repetition of a task. Moreover, all these studies (Azkarai & García Mayo, 2017; Pinter, 2007; Shintani, 2012; Shintani, 2014) have concluded that repeating an already performed activity helps learners to reduce the amount of PKL use. This decrease in PKL use might have been influenced by various factors such as the increase of children's engagement in the task (Azkarai & García

Mayo, 2017), the building of confidence and gaining of fluency (Pinter, 2007), as well as the familiarity with the task (Shintani, 2012, 2014), among others.

In short, TR seems to influence learners' use of PKL since they tend to reduce its employment once they go several times through the same task. In the next section, a review of age and proficiency effects will be offered.

3.3 Proficiency and age

This section will present research concerning the effect of proficiency and age on the use of PKL. First, investigations conducted with adults will be presented (DiCamilla & Antón, 2012; Swain & Lapkin, 2000; Storch & Aldosari, 2010), followed by research that have tested children (Martínez-Adrián, 2020b; Pladevall-Ballester & Vraciu, 2017; Vraciu & Pladevall-Ballester, 2020).

Proficiency has been found to affect PKL use as low proficient learners seem to make greater use of PKL than high proficient students. In other words, whenever learners are expected to use their TL, many of them, mainly those who are less proficient, tend to resort to their PKL (Vraciu & Pladevall-Ballester, 2020). Additionally, not only proficiency might affect participants' use of PKL, but also age, as will be presented below in the case of children and adolescents.

When it comes to examine adults in terms of proficiency, it is noteworthy to bear in mind that very few studies have been conducted in ESL contexts. Certainly, there have been some investigations that have taken into consideration categorizations from a sociocultural perspective, but the participants were not L2 English learners. For instance, DiCamilla and Antón (2012) conducted a study with L1 English learners of L2 Spanish at a university in the United States. In this investigation, those who were more advanced pupils made greater use of the L2 and those who were beginners relied mainly upon their L1. Besides, Swain and Lapkin (2000) also explored the use of the L1 in the case of L2 French learners. Participants worked in pairs in a dictogloss and a jigsaw

task. In this case, in line with DiCamilla and Antón (2012), those who were lower proficient were the ones who made a higher use of the L1. Nonetheless, these researchers also highlighted the fact that the use of the L1 may also be constrained by task-type. As in jigsaw tasks, beginner learners seem to make a lower use of the L1, while in dictogloss, advanced learners used the L1 to a higher extent.

With respect to adults in EFL settings, Storch and Aldosari (2010) examined L1 Arabic participants who were paired according to three proficiency dyads: (L-L), two low proficient students; (H-L), one high and one low proficient learner; and (H-H), two high proficient students. They went through three types of tasks: a jigsaw, a composition and a text-editing task. Data were analysed according to five functions: task management, discussing and generating ideas, grammar deliberations, vocabulary deliberations and mechanics deliberations. Pairs formed by two low proficient students (L-L) were found to resort to L1 to a higher extent than those pairs made up of H-L or H-H proficient learners. In general, the most prevalent functions were task management and vocabulary deliberations. Across pairs, in L-L pairs task management, vocabulary and negotiating of grammar were more common; in H-L groups task management was more frequent; while in the H-H pairs the L1 was mainly used for generating and discussing ideas.

In the case of children, as Martínez-Adrián (2020a) points out, many studies have demonstrated that proficiency and age variables interact with each other when the subjects of the study are young learners and adolescents. Specifically, beginner teenagers seem to rely on their L1, especially for metacomments, private speech and discourse markers. Martínez-Adrián (2020b) conducted an investigation in which 90 EFL Spanish and Basque young learners were involved. Since these students belonged to a Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) group, they had more hours of exposure to their TL than those children in EFL settings. Hence, they were more likely to become proficient in a shorter time. The purpose of the study was to explore the use of PKL and the TL in two different proficiency age groups, 5th and 6th year of primary education, respectively. To this end, data were gathered through five different functions: appeals for assistance, clarification requests, metacomments, discourse markers and

private speech. Participants were asked to order some pictures depicting a story. Then, they had to tell the story in turns. The intergroup examination of the results indicated that older students relied on their PKL more than the younger ones, especially in metacomments, discourse markers and private speech. In other words, in less cooperative and more external to the task categories. As for the categories served by Basque/Spanish, among 5th-year students, the most commonly served function was metacomments, followed by appeals and discourse markers. In the case of 6th-year students, the most frequent function was also metacomments, followed by discourse markers and appeals. With respect to the use of L3 English, there were no statistically significant differences between the two groups, except for metacomments, which were mostly employed by students from the 5th grade. In addition, the use of L3 English was prevalent in metacomments and scarce in the rest of the categories.

Moreover, Pladevall-Ballester and Vraciu (2017) also considered proficiency and age among EFL child learners. In this paper, the purpose was to explore the students' L1 use patterns and the way that they resort to their PKL “to cope with the linguistic and cognitive demands” (p. 125). In general terms, it investigated the use of the L1 in oral production and learners' increase of L2 proficiency over a period of two academic years in 72 primary school bilingual learners who spoke Catalan and Spanish. Data were codified according to four subcategories: metacognitive, meta-talk, task-related and private speech. Among the participants, 32 learners belonged to an EFL setting and the remaining 42 were immersed in a CLIL context. Also, both groups had been exposed to the same hours of instruction when the experiment took place. Results revealed that both EFL and CLIL groups made a low use of the L1 at both data collection times. At T1, it was the EFL group that made greater use of the L1 in meta-talk. At T2, the CLIL group employed a significantly greater use of the L1 in private-speech than the EFL group. At T3, it was again the CLIL group that resorted to the L1 in task-related strategies. As for the intragroup evolution, in the case of the EFL group, the amount of metacognitive, meta-talk and task-related strategies dropped, whereas private speech exhibited no statistically significant differences from T1 to T3. In the case of the CLIL group, concerning the overall amount of L1 strategies, no statistically significant variations were found. Nevertheless, in general, there is an overall decrease of PKL

employment in both groups.

The effect of proficiency and age on children's use of PKL has also been investigated from a more collaborative perspective. For instance, Vraciu and Pladevall-Ballester (2020) examined the impact of pairing method at two testing times, when children were in the 4th and in the 6th grade of primary education. These participants were forty Spanish-Catalan bilingual EFL young learners assigned to mixed- and matched-proficiency dyads. To carry out the analysis, L1 instances were classified into five different categories: self-directed lexical scaffolding, private speech, metacognitive use, task-related L1 use and communicative scaffolding. The results of their performance in a spot-the-difference task indicated that, in general terms, the L1 was more common at T1 and that its use was reduced at T2. In terms of pairing method, mixed-dyads made greater use of the L1 than matched-dyads at T2. They were able to negotiate more in the L1 at the end of the study when they showed more analytical abilities in language learning.

In the light of the results presented in the aforementioned studies, the relationship between proficiency/age and the use of PKL is, to some extent, linked. In general terms, in the case of adults, while lower proficient learners made use of the L1 to a greater extent, higher proficient students tend to rely more upon their L2 (DiCamilla & Antón, 2012; Swain & Lapkin, 2000; Storch & Aldosari, 2010). This confirms that as participants' proficiency increases, their need to use PKL decreases. Additionally, in the case of children, mixed results were found in terms of the interaction between proficiency and age. On the one hand, Martínez-Adrián (2020b) revealed that older students relied more upon their PKL than younger students, especially in less cooperative and external to the task strategies. On the other hand, Pladevall-Ballester and Vraciu (2017) found that both EFL and CLIL groups made a low use of their PKL at both data collection times, and also, that both groups decreased their L1 use as L2 proficiency increased. Lastly, in terms of proficiency pairing, Vraciu and Pladevall-Ballester (2020) observed that mixed-proficiency dyads negotiate for meaning more than matched-proficiency dyads. This might indicate that when a student is paired with someone with the same proficiency level, they do not need to adjust their output so

much.

In conclusion, proficiency seems to affect the use of PKL, as the need to employ PKL decreases as L2 proficiency increases. Moreover, the variable age might also be influential when it comes to the use of PKL among young learners. The following section will be devoted to the effects of the impact of the instructional context on L1 use.

3.4 The impact of the instructional context

In this section, the impact of instructional settings will be discussed. Here, investigations targeting children will be reviewed (García Mayo & Lázaro Ibarrola, 2015; García Mayo & Hidalgo Gordo, 2017; Martínez-Adrián, 2020c), since there is a big scarcity of studies investigating adults and the effect of the instructional setting.

Before analysing the impact of different instructional contexts on the use of PKL, it should be pointed out that “in CLIL programmes, more intense and natural input is provided to students as, in addition to English as a school subject, they receive content lessons through the foreign language” (Coyle, 2007; Dalton-Puffer, 2011, as cited in Martínez-Adrián, 2020b, p. 60). In this regard, according to Lázaro Ibarrola (2016), thanks to the exposure to more intense and natural input, CLIL learners have been found to get better results in terms of proficiency than those learners who only received EFL lessons.

García Mayo and Lázaro Ibarrola (2015) examined eighty 8-11-year-old children while completing a jigsaw task. Participants were in the 3rd and 5th year of primary education and they belonged to two different schools; one following a CLIL programme and the other one offering just EFL instruction. Results indicated that CLIL learners negotiated more and resorted to the L1 less frequently. Furthermore, older learners were found to make a greater use of the L1 both in EFL and CLIL contexts.

In a subsequent study, with the same sample, García Mayo and Hidalgo (2017) explored participants' PKL use and the functions served. A CLIL group was compared to a NON-CLIL group at T1, when they were in the 3rd year of primary education, and at T2, when they were in the 4th year. Participants were asked to perform a jigsaw task which was subsequently analysed in terms of metacognitive talk, vocabulary and discourse markers. Results revealed that the total amount of L1 use was limited at both testing times. Both groups made greater L1 use at T2 than at T1, even though this increase was only significant in the NON-CLIL group. Vocabulary was the most frequent function in both groups. Regarding the impact of the instructional setting, results indicated that the NON-CLIL group made greater use of PKL than the CLIL group. As for the effects of context on L1 functions, no significant differences emerged with respect to the impact of the setting on metacognitive use and discourse markers. Concerning the effects of time, the only significant difference was found in metacognitive use, as it increases in the case of the NON-CLIL group.

In another study, Martínez-Adrián (2020c) investigated the impact of the instructional context by comparing two groups of CLIL learners to two groups of NON-CLIL learners from the 4th and 6th year. It intended to explore children's PKL use in interactional strategies by examining to which extent they used their PKL in three categories: appeals for assistance, clarification requests and metacomments. The analysis of the storytelling task administered indicated that CLIL learners made lower use of PKL than NON-CLIL students. Moreover, greater differences emerged as age increased, which might be ascribed to the higher amount of hours to which CLIL learners were exposed in grade 6. Concerning the distribution of PKL and the TL across categories, as for students in the 4th year, in the case of appeals and clarification requests, “there were some differences between the CLIL and the NON-CLIL groups in their preference for either the L1 or the TL“ (p. 21). Nonetheless, both groups produced metacomments in their L1. Regarding students in the 6th grade, both the CLIL and the NON-CLIL group employed the L1 to produce clarification requests and metacomments. In contrast, it was not possible to analyse the use of PKL in appeals for assistance because no instances were obtained in this respect.

Together these studies offer several insights into the relationship between the impact of the instructional context and the reported use of PKL. In general terms, those who study in a CLIL context seem to employ PKL less than those in an EFL setting (García Mayo & Lázaro Ibarrola, 2015; García Mayo & Hidalgo, 2017; Martínez-Adrián, 2020c). This overall outcome might be due to the greater exposure in CLIL settings which leads to a higher command of the TL. Additionally, the most common PKL functions in both instructional contexts were found to be metacomments, appeals for assistance and discourse markers (García Mayo & Hidalgo, 2017; Martínez-Adrián, 2020c). The next section provides a summary of research that has looked into the impact of gender.

3.5 Gender

This section will present research regarding the impact of gender on PKL use, starting with adults (Azkarai, 2015), followed by children (Azkarai & Imaz Agirre, 2017).

As Shehadeh (1999) states, many times, when in L2 contexts, females and males communicate with each other for different purposes: while males try to improve their production skills, females attempt to get better comprehension skills. These various objectives might also influence their PKL use, as learners will have to choose between their PKL or the TL in order to engage in conversation. In addition, gender effects seem to emerge when it comes to the overall number of PKL employed and the different PKL functions used by each group.

In the case of adults, Azkarai (2015) explored the use of L1 and its functions among university learners. Participants were asked to complete four tasks in matched and mixed-gender dyads: dictogloss, text editing, picture placement and spot-the-difference task. Data were codified according to five functions: off-task, task management, grammar-talk, vocabulary and phatics. Females were reported to resort to their PKL to a higher extent than males, particularly in phatics. In contrast, males were found to

employ their PKL mainly for vocabulary and off-task talk. Furthermore, while no statistically significant differences were obtained in females as regards the use of the L1 when working in mixed or matched-gender dyads, males produced more PKL instances when paired up with females in mixed-gender dyads. In other words, in this respect, participants' PKL use seem to depend on whether they work in mixed- or matched-gender-dyads. Lastly, it was also proved that no matter if they were paired up as female-male or female-female, whenever there is a girl involved in interaction the overall use of the L1 increases.

In the case of children, the impact of gender on PKL use among young learners has been scarcely looked into. Azkarai and Imaz Agirre (2017) gathered data from 24 Spanish EFL participants who were in the 3rd and 4th grade of primary education. This study aimed to analyse the impact of both gender and age on their use of L1 and Negotiation of Meaning (NoM). Participants were asked to work in pairs in a spot-the-difference task. With respect to PKL use, males resorted to their PKL more than females, especially those in 4th grade and in matched-gender dyads, which seems not to be in line with the results obtained in Azkarai (2015) for adult learners. Females, on the other hand, only resorted to their PKL when they really felt it was necessary.

All in all, different trends can be observed in both studies. Concerning amount of PKL use, while some investigations have found that females make greater use of their PKL (Azkarai, 2015), others have revealed that males employ their PKL to a greater extent (Azkarai & Imaz Agirre, 2017), confirming that gender does have an impact on the use of PKL. Moreover, as for the effect of gender-pairing, mixed results have been found. On the one hand, Azkarai and Imaz Agirre (2017) found that boys in matched dyads were the ones who resorted to their PKL to a greater extent. On the other hand, Azkarai (2015) pointed out that boys in her study tended to resort to their L1 especially when paired up in mixed-gender dyads (Azkarai & Imaz Agirre, 2017).

In short, gender seems to have an impact on PKL use, although mixed results have been found when examining adults and children. The following section will offer the main conclusions of the paper.

4. Conclusion

All in all, research investigating the use of PKL support the claim that these languages serve as cognitive tools that assist students in language learning. In fact, with respect to the use of PKL in sociocultural accounts, they are used both when learners interact with other learners, as a tool to mediate scaffolding, and when learners speak to themselves, as in private speech (Wood et al., 1976, as cited in Antón & DiCamilla, 1998). In sum, the goal of this review was to explore the main trends observed in research regarding the effects of factors such as task-modality, TR, proficiency and age, the impact of the instructional context and gender in EFL adults and children.

Concerning research outcomes on the effect of task-modality, there seem to be differences between adults (Azkarai & García Mayo, 2015) and children (Martínez-Adrián & Arratibel-Irazusta, 2020). Regarding the overall use of PKL, children seem to resort to their PKL more than adults. With respect to PKL use in each task, children and adults were found to use PKL in speaking + writing tasks to a higher extent, confirming the impact of task-modality on PKL use. As for the most common PKL functions in the two modalities, mixed outcomes were obtained. On the one hand, while adults resorted to their PKL to discuss grammar issues in the speaking + writing tasks, grammar talk was not common in children. On the other hand, whereas adults made a greater use of PKL for vocabulary in speaking tasks, young learners employed their PKL in equal proportions in both tasks.

The review of the effect of TR presented positive trends as for the impact of TR on PKL use. As a matter of fact, researchers (Azkarai & García Mayo, 2017; Pinter, 2007; Shintani, 2012; Shintani, 2014) seem to indicate that TR does affect the use of PKL since the repetition of a task can help learners to reduce the amount of PKL use.

Regarding findings related to proficiency and age, in general terms, researchers (DiCamilla & Antón, 2012; Swain & Lapkin, 2000; Storch & Aldosari, 2010) indicate that as participants' proficiency increases, their need to employ their PKL decreases. In other words, there is a positive correlation between proficiency and the use of PKL.

Moreover, mixed results were perceived regarding the interaction between age and the use of PKL in children. While Martínez-Adrián (2020b) revealed that older students made greater use of PKL than younger students, the study conducted by Pladevall-Ballester and Vraciu (2017) indicated that there were no differences between the two data collection times in both EFL and CLIL groups.

As for findings related to the effect of the impact of the instructional context, overall, students in CLIL contexts seem to use their PKL to a lesser extent than those in EFL settings (García Mayo & Lázaro Ibarrola, 2015; García Mayo & Hidalgo, 2017; Martínez-Adrián, 2020c). This confirms that different instructional settings do affect PKL use as those who receive greater exposure to the TL, as is the case of CLIL learners, make less use of PKL. Furthermore, metacomments, appeals for assistance and discourse markers were found to be the most frequent functions in both settings (García Mayo & Hidalgo, 2017; Martínez-Adrián, 2020c).

Lastly, gender was also reviewed. In terms of amount, mixed outcomes were found since whereas Azkarai (2015) revealed that females used their PKL more than males, Azkarai and Imaz Agirre (2017) indicated that males made a higher use of PKL than females. This seems to point out that gender does affect the use of PKL. Regarding gender pairing, mixed results were obtained. Whereas in the case of young learners, boys resort the most to their PKL in matched-gender dyads (Azkarai & Imaz Agirre, 2017), in the case of adults, males employ the L1 to a higher extent in mixed-gender dyads (Azkarai, 2015).

In the light of the studies reviewed in this paper, little research has been conducted on the impact of task-modality and gender on the use of PKL in both adults and children. Consequently, future research should be considered in those two areas. Additionally, investigations framed within sociocultural approaches examining the use of PKL with children in EFL contexts outnumber those with adults. This is evident in this review particularly in the case of TR and the impact of the instructional context where just children were the target of those investigations. Therefore, it would be interesting to be able to compare both children and adults in terms of both TR and the

impact of the instructional context on the use of PKL. This would give us a broader picture of how different age learners employ their PKL when they repeat a task or when they belong to different instructional settings.

Finally, some pedagogical implications may be drawn. As aforementioned, learners resort to their PKL in order to solve difficulties during task-based interaction. In this respect, it would be relevant to make both teachers and learners understand that the use of PKL not only facilitates the acquisition of the TL, but also provides students with sufficient confidence to make progress and produce output without getting stuck at any point in their production (Pinter, 2007). In other words, resorting to PKL might help learners avoid communication breakdowns. In addition, this PKL use would also allow students to focus on form and to notice their errors while writing or speaking in the TL (Azkarai & García Mayo, 2017). This is mainly prevalent while collaborating with other learners, since they might discuss language-related issues which would simplify their performance in the tasks and provide them with more opportunities to progress in their TL proficiency (Azkarai, 2015). Moreover, research reviewed above agrees on the fact that as TR helps students become familiar with the task, their need to use PKL will decrease the second time they go through it (e.g. Pinter, 2007). Consequently, TR activities should be encouraged in L2 classrooms.

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