L1 use in EFL task-based interaction: a matter of gender?

Agurtzane Azkarai

Abstract

This study analyzes the impact of gender on first language (L1) use and the functions it served during English as foreign language (EFL) task-based interaction. Participants were all Spanish EFL learners who worked in matched (male-male, female-female) and mixed (female-male) gender dyads on four communicative tasks: dictogloss, text editing, picture placement and picture differences task. The findings reported differences between females and males in L1 use and the functions it served during interaction: females employed their L1 more than males and the functions it served also varied in males and females. Moreover, differences were also found depending on the gender of the interlocutor, as males employed their L1 more when working with females, and the amount of some L1 functions differed when females worked with females or with males. This study supports a balanced use of the L1, as it helped these learners overcome their communication problems during their EFL task-based interaction.

Keywords: L1 use/functions, Gender, Task-based interaction, EFL, collaborative work

1 Introduction

Research on second language (L2) acquisition has shown differences between females and males during the L2 learning process; however, the role that gender plays in interaction has not been explored in depth (Azkarai 2015; Gass and Varonis 1985, 1986; Ross-Feldman 2005, 2007). Interaction has been claimed to provide L2 learners with opportunities to

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facilitate the L2 learning process (Long 1996). If some variables such as gender may affect interaction, it is important to establish the extent to which this might happen, so that teachers and researchers are able to develop techniques and strategies that benefit L2 learners similarly, regardless of their gender.

Although interaction and collaborative work have been shown to be beneficial for L2 learning (Gass and Mackey 2007; Storch 2007), some teachers consider this practice harmful as they feel their students will use their shared first language (L1) (Brooks and Donato 1994; Carless 2008). However, research on L1 use and functions has shown that a balanced use of the L1 might be beneficial for L2 learning, as it might help L2 learners overcome communication breakdowns (Alegría de la Colina and García Mayo 2009; DiCamilla and Antón 2012; Swain and Lapkin 2000). Research has focused on the impact that different factors might play in L1 use, such as L2 proficiency (Lázaro Ibarrola and García Mayo 2012; Storch and Aldosari 2010), or tasks (Alegría de la Colina and García Mayo 2009; Azkarai and García Mayo forthcoming; Storch and Wigglesworth 2003), but the role of gender in L1 use and the functions it serves has been under-researched (Ross-Feldman 2005). This study aims to shed more light on this topic and examine the role of gender in L1 the use and functions it serves during L2 task-based interaction.

2 Gender in L2 interaction

A number of studies have shown the benefits of interaction for L2 learning (see García Mayo and Alcón Soler 2013 for a review; Keck, Iberri-Shea, Tracy-Ventura and Wa-Mbaleka 2006; Mackey and Goo 2007 for meta-analyses). Interaction facilitates L2 learning because learners receive comprehensible input and interactional feedback from their interlocutors (Gass 1997, 2003; Long 1996; Pica 1994). However some individual variables, such as

gender, might affect the language learning opportunities available to L2 learners during interaction (Azkarai 2015; Azkarai and García Mayo 2012; Ross-Feldman 2005, 2007).

Studies focusing on gender in L1 settings have shown different communicative patterns for females and males (Tannen 1990). These differences seem to originate during childhood as children usually play with same-gender friends and, as a consequence, they develop different ways to communicate (Maltz and Borker 1982; Tannen 1994). As in L1 settings, the differences between females and males might also be present in L2 settings. However, the role that gender plays in L2 interactional settings has not been explored in depth. The few studies that have considered gender differences in L2 interaction have been mainly carried out in ESL settings (Gass and Varonis 1985, 1986; Oliver 2002; Pica, Holliday, Lewis and Morgenthaler 1989; Pica, Holliday, Lewis, Berducci and Newman 1991; Ross-Feldman 2005, 2007) and only a few have been carried out in English as foreign language (EFL) settings (Azkarai 2015; Alcón and Codina 1996; Azkarai and García Mayo 2012; Kasanga 1996). In foreign language settings, such as EFL, learners usually have an average of 3-4 hours of weekly exposure to the target language in the classroom. Moreover, EFL learners do not have many opportunities to practice the target language outside the classroom. However, ESL learners not only receive the whole instruction in English (in mainstream schools), but they also have many chances to practice their target language outside the classroom (García Mayo and García Lecumberri 2003; Muñoz 2006; Philp and Tognini 2009). Moreover, the studies mentioned above have reported mixed results and no robust conclusion can be reached about the impact of gender in L2 interaction yet.

For example, in ESL settings some studies have found differences between females and males. Males seem to initiate more conversational turns and be addressed more than females (Aries 1976), to dominate the amount of talk (Gass and Varonis 1985, 1986) and to speak more than females (Aries 1976), but they also show more non-understanding than

females occasionally (Gass and Varonis 1985, 1986). Females seem to be more sensitive to the influence of gender than males, since they may alter their conversation on the basis of their interlocutor (Pica et al. 1991), and when they work with same-gender friends, they speak more than males working with same-gender friends (Shehadeh 1994). However, while Aries (1976) found that males and females spoke more with males, Shehadeh (1994) and Ross-Feldman (2005, 2007) found that males and females had more language learning opportunities, operationalized as language-related episodes (LREs) (Swain and Lapkin 1998), when they were paired up with females.

Other ESL studies have not found any impact of gender. For example, Pica et al (1989) did not find any difference in the incidence of negotiation between learners and native speakers of English working in different dyad types and Oliver (2002), in a study carried out with ESL 8-13 year old children working with same-gender friends, did not find any difference between boys and girls in the negotiation for meaning they engaged in.

In EFL settings studies on gender in L2 interaction are scarce (Alcón and Codina 1996; Azkarai 2015; Azkarai and García Mayo 2012). These studies reported basically no difference between females and males when they negotiated for meaning in L2 interaction: however, they suggested that tasks were performed differently on the basis of gender. Moreover, Azkarai (2015) and Azkarai and García Mayo (2012) also showed that the gender of the interlocutor had an impact on the negotiation of meaning in interaction.

The studies mentioned above suggest that gender might play a role in L2 interaction; however much more research needs to be done on the topic in order to reach a conclusion. Moreover, despite possible gender differences, these studies all support the benefits of interaction and collaborative work. However, there is still a number of L2 teachers that see this practice as harmful for L2 learners, as learners might make use of their L1 (Brooks and Donato 1994; Carless 2008). The balanced use of the L1 in L2 task-based interaction has

gained importance over the last two decades. Studies that have dealt with this topic are reviewed in the following section.

3 L1 use in L2 task-based interaction

Studies carried out in interactional settings have shown the benefits of the use of the L1 and the different functions that it serves. These studies have shown that L2 learners do not make an excessive use of their L1 (Azkarai and García Mayo forthcoming; Storch and Aldosari 2010; Swain and Lapkin 2000) and that a balanced use of the L1 might be beneficial for L2 learning (Alegría de la Colina and García Mayo 2009; Antón and DiCamilla 1998; Brooks and Donato 1994; DiCamilla and Antón 2012; Swain and Lapkin 2000). The L1 (a) helps L2 learners maintain interest in the task and develop new strategies to make a difficult task more dynamic, (b) serves to comment on participants' L2 use, (c) establishes a joint understanding of the task or (d) formulates learner's goals (Antón and DiCamilla 1998; Brooks and Donato 1994). Other functions that the L1 serves are: discussing vocabulary and grammatical items (Azkarai and García Mayo forthcoming; DiCamilla and Antón 2012; Storch and Aldosari 2010; Storch and Wigglesworth 2003; Swain and Lapkin 2000), enhancing students' interpersonal interaction (DiCamilla and Antón 2012; Swain and Lapkin 2000), as metatalk (Alegría de la Colina and García Mayo 2009; Alley 2005), to move the task along (Swain and Lapkin 2000), as off-task talk (Alley 2005; Azkarai and García Mayo forthcoming), as metacognitive talk (Alegría de la Colina and García Mayo 2009) or to manage the task (Alley 2005; Azkarai and García Mayo forthcoming; DiCamilla and Antón 2012; Storch and Aldosari 2010; Storch and Wigglesworth 2003). Some examples of these functions will be provided below.

The use of the L1 has been shown to depend on several factors, such as L2 proficiency (DiCamilla and Antón 2012; Lázaro and García Mayo 2012; Storch and Aldosari 2010; Swain and Lapkin 2000) or type of task (Alegría de la Colina and García Mayo 2009; Azkarai and García Mayo forthcoming; Storch and Aldosari 2010; Storch and Wigglesworth 2003). Regarding L2 proficiency the main findings have shown that high-proficient L2 learners do not make use of their L1 as much as low-proficient L2 learners (EFL settings: DiCamilla and Antón 2012; Storch and Aldosari 2010; Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) settings: Lázaro and García Mayo 2012; immersion setting: Swain and Lapkin 2000). Regarding tasks, research has shown that learners' L1 use and functions vary depending on the task modality (Azkarai and García Mayo forthcoming; Alegría de la Colina and García Mayo 2009; Ross-Feldman 2005; Storch and Aldosari 2010; Storch and Wigglesworth 2003).

As well as learners' L2 proficiency and task modality, gender might also influence learners' use of their shared L1 during L2 task-based interaction. Ross-Feldman (2005) considered this issue, but her findings did not show any difference in the amount of L1 employed by females and males during L2 interaction. However, she did not analyze the functions the L1 served and whether differences would exist in the L1 functions on the basis of gender. Furthermore, her study was carried out in an ESL setting and, and to the best of my knowledge, research on the topic in EFL settings is inexistent. This study tries to fill this gap in order to shed more light on both the role of gender and L1 use and functions in EFL task-based interaction.

4 The Study

Based on previous research on gender and L1 use in EFL settings, the present study explores the impact of gender and the gender of the interlocutor on the use and functions the

L1 serves when L2 learners work in pairs on specific tasks. The following research questions are entertained:

a. Are there differences between males and females regarding L1 use and L1 functions while they complete communicative tasks in the L2?

b. If so, do these differences also depend on the gender of their interlocutor, that is, when they work in mixed and/or in matched gender dyads?

Following Ross-Feldman (2005), the only study that has focused on gender differences on L1 use so far, no differences are expected between females and males on the L1 use and functions it serves. Also, no differences are expected on the L1 use and functions on the basis of the gender of these participants' interlocutors.

4.1 Participants

Forty four (44) Spanish EFL learners, 22 females and 22 males, took part in this study. Participants were all enrolled in different degree courses at a major Spanish university. Some of the participants knew each other because they found out about the study and came to take part into it together in groups. Specifically 20 participants knew each other (10 females and 10 males), as they belonged to the same degree course in the University. This group of learners was paired up together in mixed and matched gender dyads. Their level of English was assessed on the basis of the Quick Oxford Placement Test (OPT) (Syndicate U.C.L.E., 2001). Table 1 provides more details about the age and English proficiency level of the participants.

Table 1

Participants' Profile

	Females	Males
Years: average (mean)	23 (23.27)	25 (25.18)
Years: range	20 - 26	20 – 31
Years studying English: average (mean)	11 (11.91)	11 (11.27)
Years studying English: range	8 - 15	8 – 15
Elementary English Proficiency level	3	3
Lower Intermediate English Proficiency level	13	13
Upper Intermediate English Proficiency level	6	6

4.2 Procedure and materials

Participants worked first in matched (female-female, male-male) and then in mixed (female-male) gender dyads in a laboratory setting at the university on four communicative tasks: a dictogloss (Wajnryb, 1990), a text editing, a picture placement and a picture differences task. These tasks were chosen because they are common tasks that appear in standard ESL/EFL textbooks and have been widely used in L2 interaction as they have shown to provide L2 learners with many opportunities to develop their L2 (García Mayo, 2007; Pica, Kanagy and Falodun, 1993). As this study was part of a larger one, these tasks were chosen in order to analyze other variables, such as task modality (see Azkarai and García Mayo forthcoming). The tasks were not counterbalanced, which is acknowledged as a weakness; however, in order to avoid a task repetition effect, different versions of the four tasks were prepared for matched and mixed gender dyads.

The dictogloss and the text editing were taken from commercial ESL/EFL textbooks (Oxenden, Latham-Koenig and Seligson, 1997a, 1997b, 1997c). Dictogloss has been claimed

to favor collaborative work and draw learners' attention to form (Kowal and Swain 1994). Participants have to reconstruct a written text on the basis of a text that they have previously heard. By working on the text learners refine their understanding of the language in use (García Mayo, 2002a, 2002b) and notice their grammatical strengths and weaknesses (Nassaji, 2000: 247). Text editing also favors collaborative work and draws learners' attention to meaning and form (Storch, 2007). In this task learners have to reconstruct a final written text that had been previously manipulated by the researcher (i.e. omitted subjects, changes in subject-verb agreements, vocabulary or prepositions). The picture placement and picture differences tasks are information-gap tasks (Pica et al., 1993; Pica, Kang and Sauro, 2006). Learners have to exchange the information they hold about different items that appear in their pictures in order to complete the tasks.

The instructions were given in Spanish so that learners could properly understand the goal of each task. They were also asked to carry out the tasks in English, as the exercises consisted in practicing their target language (English); however they were not told that they could not employ their L1.

4.3 Data codification and analysis

Once the participants completed the experiment the author transcribed all the conversational interactions of each dyad verbatim (approximately 17 hours and 16 minutes) using the VLC media player and Excel (one row for each turn in all the dyads). All the turns containing L1 were identified and considered for data analysis. An independent rater coded twelve task-based interactions, which were about 28% of the total database. Inter-rater reliability was 95%.

This study considered Alegría de la Colina and García Mayo (2009) and Storch and Aldosari (2010) for the categorization of the functions the L1 served. The reason for this was

because these two studies were carried out in EFL settings, and the functions the L1 served in this study were also very similar to those presented in the two referred to above. However, this study did not consider exactly the same functions as in Alegría de la Colina and García Mayo (2009) and Storch and Aldosari (2010) because some of them were not found in our database and L1 use varies depending on variables such as task-type and learning context. Altogether, five functions were considered for this study. These functions are illustrated below with examples from the current database:

(i)   Off-task: the L1 was used by the students as casual talk that was not related to the task (Alegría de la Colina and García Mayo, 2009). For example, example 1 below shows Ruth and Mateo working in the dictogloss. They had recently finished the task and they started talking about how they carried out the previous tasks when they were working in matched gender dyads:

(1)   1. Ruth: *O sea, a mí antes no me ha dado tiempo a terminar ni la mitad.*

          [I mean, I had no time to even finish half of it before.]

          2. Mateo: *¿Con quién hacías?* [Who did you do it with?]

          3. Ruth: *No sé. Una chica. No la conocía.*

          [I don't know. A girl. I didn't know her.]

          4. Mateo: *¿Una chica? Nosotros parecido. Nosotros en el del baño ha sido…*

          [A girl? The same here. When we were doing the one about the

          bathroom it was like...]

(ii)   Task management: the L1 was used to clarify instructions, recruit attention, comment on the quality of the work produced, choose the topic and negotiate or direct the writing and the pictures activities (Storch and Aldosari, 2010). Example 2 below

shows María and Juan working in the picture placement task. María resorts to her L1 to tell Juan that he needs to point where she has to place the next object.

(2)   1. María: In the floor.

       2. Juan: Yes.

       3. María: *A ver... Ah. Te toca.* [Let's see... It is your turn.]

       4. Juan: Yes. [...]

(iii)   Grammar-talk: the L1 was used to discuss issues that arose during task completion, such as generate ideas, comment on ideas already generated (Storch and Aldosari, 2010) and to discuss form (Alegría de la Colina and García Mayo, 2009). Example 3 below shows Alvaro and Pedro working together in the text editing task. Pedro employs his L1 to refer to a term he does not know how to express in English. This term is related to the form of the word.

(3)   1. Alvaro: Eh... Concordance or...

       2. Pedro: I know it's *genitivo* [genitive] in Spanish but... It's just the mark of
                    possession, that's the...

       3. Álvaro: I don't know, mark of possession or...

(iv)   Vocabulary: the L1 was used in deliberations over word/sentence meaning, word searches and word choice (Storch and Aldosari, 2010). Example 4 below shows Javier and Jaime working in the picture differences task. They fall back on their L1 to handle an issue related to vocabulary: they do not know how to say the word "hairpin" in English.

(4)   1. Javier: But in the hair?

       2. Jaime: Eh, one, eh, one red *horquilla* [hairpin]

3. Javier: Red *horquilla* [hairpin]. Have one-have one red eh... Hair articule.

(v)   Phatics: phatics are expressions to establish social contact and to express sociability rather than specific meaning. Some examples are expressions such as 'ok', 'well' or 'right'. Consider example 5, when Rebeca and Susana carry out a picture placement task:

(5)   1. Rebeca: ...there is a... Oh! How do you say? Where you cook the beans and those things.

2. Susana: Yes. I don't know.

3. Rebeca: *Bueno* [Well], the utensil you use as a caldron.

Once all the turns containing L1 were identified and categorized on the basis of the functions they served, the corresponding statistical analysis (a two sample binomial bilateral test for independent samples [$\alpha = 0.05$]) was conducted. The analysis of L1 use was carried out considering the proportions of turns containing L1 to the total amount of turns initiated by each female and male in mixed and matched gender dyads and in each task. Regarding the functions the L1 served, the total number of turns containing L1 initiated by each female and male in mixed and matched gender dyads and in each task was considered for the data analysis. The results are shown and discussed in the following section.

5 Results and discussion

This section presents and discusses the main findings of the study. Overall these participants employed their L1 in 1937 turns, which corresponded to 15.41% of the whole data set (consider Table 2 below for more details).

Table 2

Females' and Males' Use of L1 and Functions of L1

Gender	Females	Males	Total
Turns	5809	6761	12570
Mean/SD	132.02/52.58	153.56/47.44	142.84/50.96
L1 turns	1006 (17.32%)	931 (13.77%)	1937 (15.41%)
Mean/SD	45.72/30.80	42.31/34.08	44.02/32.15
Off-task function	49 (4.87%)	68 (7.30%)	117 (6.05%)
Mean/SD	2.22/4.36	3.09/5.73	2.65/5.05
Task Management function	83 (8.25%)	67 (7.20%)	150 (7.74%)
Mean/SD	3.77/5.12	3.04/4.90	3.40/4.97
Grammar talk function	142 (14.11%)	118 (12.67%)	260 (13.42%)
Mean/SD	6.45/8.01	5.36/8.34	5.90/8.10
Vocabulary function	190 (18.89%)	260 (27.93%)	450 (23.23%)
Mean/SD	8.63/7.56	11.81/9.79	10.22/8.79
Phatics function	542 (53.88%)	418 (44.90%)	960 (49.56%)
Mean/SD	24.63/17.90	19/12.84	21.81/15.66

Note. The percentages of the functions of LREs are calculated considering the total amount of turns containing L1 initiated by females and males.

In line with previous studies (Swain and Lapkin, 2000; Storch and Aldosari, 2010), the results of the present study indicate that these learners used their L1 for a variety of purposes (i.e. managing the task, talking about grammar or vocabulary issues, etc). The main function the L1 served both for females and males was phatics. When using their L2, these females and

males might have found it difficult to avoid some of those expressions and for this reason it was the most common function of the L1 during task-based interaction in this study. In what follows, the findings will be presented and discussed on the basis of the two research questions posited above.

5.1 Differences in L1 use and functions: females vs. males

The first research question focused on possible differences between females and males in L1 use and the functions it served. Contrary to previous research (Ross-Feldman 2005), the findings indicated differences between males and females in L1 use and the functions it served.

Females fell back on their L1 significantly more than males ($z = 5.49$, $p < 0.0001$), which at first sight suggests that females resorted to their L1 without a doubt to overcome communicative breakdowns during L2 task-based interaction (see Table 2 above for details). On the contrary males might have seen the task completion process as an opportunity to practice their English and for this reason they tried to employ the target language as example 6 below shows. Luis and Carlos work together in the text editing task and Carlos in turn 2 resorts to his L1 to discuss the meaning of the sentence that Luis says in turn 1. Luis seems to be upset with Carlos as he speaks in Spanish and tells him to speak English (turn 3).

(6) 1. Luis: And she was pregnant for three months? No.

2. Carlos: *No, no, no. Quiere decir que se quedó embarazada. Me imagino…*

[No, no, no. It means that she got pregnant. I guess…

3. Luis: Speak in English, *¿vale?* [will you?]

4. Carlos: She get pregnant at the first three months. I think.

Regarding L1 functions, females employed their L1 significantly more for phatics than males ($z = 3.94$, $p < 0.0001$) and males employed their L1 significantly more than females for off-task talk purposes ($z = 2.24$, $p = 0.025$) and vocabulary issues ($z = 4.70$, $p < 0.0001$). No differences were found in the rest of cases.

It is true that females resorted to their L1 significantly more than males, but this finding was only due to the larger amount of phatics employed by females over males. Phatics in this study are considered as spontaneous expressions in the L1 that usually do not involve much content. Although participants were not banned from using their L1, females could have felt that it was not proper to use it and tried to overcome communicative breakdowns mainly in English (consider example 5 above). On the contrary males, although apparently engaged in using their target language as example (6) above has shown, could have seen Spanish as a resource, especially when they had problems with vocabulary or when they just felt like talking about something unrelated to the task. Also, as mentioned above, some of the participants in the present study knew each other and in some occasions both, females and males were paired up with someone they knew. When two friends work together in any task, this might lead them to talk about private issues, such as weekend plans, while carrying out the task. In this case, males who were paired up with a friend/someone they knew seemed more willing to talk about issues unrelated to the task than females. Consider example 7 below. It shows how Rafael and Santiago start talking about an issue unrelated to the task they are carrying out (dictogloss). These two participants knew each other.

(7)   1. Rafael: *¿Te vienes a comprar las cacerolas? Esto ya lo hemos acabado.*

                    [Are you coming to buy some pans? We have finished with this]

    2. Santiago: *¿El qué?*

                    [What?]

3. Rafael: *Que si vienes a comprar las cacerolas. Sí, has sido tú. ¿No tienes que comprar una sartén, o cacerola?*

[I was asking whether you are coming to buy some pans. Yes, it was you. Don't you have to buy a frying pan, or a pan?]

4. Santiago: *Sí, ¿cómo lo sabes?*

[Yes, how did you know that?]

5. Rafael: *Porque me lo dijiste hace tiempo y porque me acuerdo.*

[Because you told me some time ago and I remember it] […]

Females and males seem to differ in the use of their L1 during EFL task-based interaction as well as on the functions that the L1 served. Although females in this study employed their L1 significantly more than males, it has to be considered that it was specifically for phatics, that is, expressions in their L1 that do not involve much content. On the contrary males employed their L1 to talk about issues unrelated to the task and dealt with vocabulary issues more than females. The next section will analyze whether these differences are also present depending on whether these females and males worked in matched or mixed gender dyads.

5.2 Gender of the interlocutor

The second research question focused on the possible impact of the gender of these participants' interlocutors on the L1 use and the functions it served during EFL task-based interaction. The gender of the interlocutor seemed to have an impact on the use and functions it served. Consider Table 3 for details.

Table 3

Females' and Males' Use and Functions of L1 in Mixed and Matched Gender Dyads

Gender	Females		Males	
Dyad type	Mixed	Matched	Mixed	Matched
Turns	3153	2656	3151	3610
Mean/SD	143.31/50.12	120.72/53.67	143.22/49.48	164.09/43.95
L1 turns	507 (50.40%)	499 (49.60%)	519 (55.75%)	412 (44.25%)
Mean/SD	23.04/18.49	22.68/15.42	23.59/19.32	18.72/17.82
Off-task function	36 (7.1%)	13 (2.61%)	42 (8.09%)	26 (6.31%)
Mean/SD	1.63/3.98	0.59/1.29	1.90/4.57	1.18/2.32
Task Management function	44 (8.68%)	39 (7.82%)	41 (7.9%)	26 (6.31%)
Mean/SD	2/3.89	1.77/2.79	1.86/2.81	1.18/2.48
Grammar talk function	54 (10.65%)	88 (17.63%)	66 (12.72%)	52 (12.62%)
Mean/SD	2.45/4.23	4/6.08	3/5.44	2.36/4.32
Vocabulary function	109 (21.5%)	81 (16.23%)	146 (28.13%)	114 (27.67%)
Mean/SD	4.95/5.10	3.68/3.88	6.63/5.89	5.18/5.17
Phatics function	264 (52.07%)	278 (55.71%)	224 (43.16%)	194 (47.09%)
Mean/SD	12/10.38	12.63/9.15	10.18/7.63	8.81/2.48

Note. The percentages of the functions of LREs are calculated considering the total amount of turns containing L1 initiated by females and males in mixed and matched gender dyads (per subject).

With regard to L1 use, no differences were found in the case of females. That is, the use of their L1 was similar regardless of whether they worked with females (in matched gender dyads) or males (in mixed gender dyads). However males fell back on their L1

significantly more when they worked with females in mixed gender dyads ($z = 4.9588$, p <0.0001). This might be due to the fact that females employed their L1 more and, as a consequence, females could have made males resort to their L1 more easily in mixed gender dyads. It seems that when a female is involved in the interaction the possibilities to employ the L1 increase, although further research should be carried out to back up this conclusion.

The analysis of the functions the L1 served in mixed and matched gender dyads showed that, in this case, females were more affected by the gender of their interlocutors than males. Females employed their L1 significantly more as off-task talk ($z = 3.31$, $p = 0.001$) and vocabulary issues ($z = 2.13$, $p = 0.033$) in mixed gender dyads and for grammar talk in matched gender dyads ($z = 3.18$, $p = 0.001$). In the case of males, no differences were found in the functions the L1 served when they worked in mixed or matched gender dyads.

The previous section showed that males employed their L1 for off-task talk and vocabulary purposes significantly more than females. This section has shown that females fell back on their L1 significantly more in mixed gender dyads, that is, when working with males to discuss precisely issues unrelated to the talk (consider example 1 above) or vocabulary issues, as example 8 below shows. Mateo and Ruth are working on the text editing task and, in turn 1, Mateo uses the L1 to ask Ruth the meaning of "house" in the original text in Spanish. In turn 2 Ruth employs her L1 to explain what it means and Mateo seems to understand the meaning of the word (turn 5).

(8)   1. Mateo: Eh… the city is house. *¿Cómo que house?* [What do you mean by house?]

2. Ruth: Uh? Oh! The-the city… *o sea, es como-es la casa de… A ver…* [I mean, it is-is the house of… let's see…]

3. Mateo: *Vale.* [Ok.]

4. Ruth: *O sea, de…* [I mean, of…]

5. Mateo: *Ya. Es reune, ¿no? Bueno…* [I see. It is it congregates, isn't it? Well…]

6. Ruth: *Sí, pero…* [Yes, but…]

7. Mateo: City is house of. No?

This finding suggests that females might have felt more influenced by the gender of their interlocutor than males, as they employed their L1 for similar purposes males did overall when they worked with them. On the contrary males did not seem to be influenced by the gender of their interlocutor regarding the functions of the L1.

The analysis of the functions the L1 served in mixed and matched gender dyads also showed that females resorted to their L1 to deal with grammatical issues significantly more when they were paired up with females. This finding suggests that females might have felt more comfortable with females to deal with grammar issues. Example 9 shows that in the text editing task, Cristina and Virginia have some doubts about the correct tense of the verb "suggest". They fall back on their L1 to discuss this doubt and obtain the final answer. In turn 1 Cristina suggests that the correct form of the verb could be the past tense "suggested". Virginia in turn 4 proposes the present tense "suggests" adding the correct –s corresponding to the third person. In the end, they decide to use the present form adding the –s.

(9)   1. Cristina: Suggested. No? A real women Shakespeare was in love with.

      2. Virginia: With

      3. Cristina: *Sí* [Yes]. We can imagine that he…

      4. Virginia: *Igual está bien.* [Maybe it is correct.] Suggests.

      5. Cristina: *O* suggests *o* suggested, *pero* suggest *no. No sé, como estaba todo en pasado…* [Suggests or suggested, but not suggest. I don't know, as everything was written in the past…]

      6. Virginia: *No sé.* [I don't know.]

      7. Cristina: *Sí, así también está bien. No sé.*

[Yes, that way is fine too. I don't know]

8. Virginia: *No se puede poner una, ¿no? Bueno, pues dejamos así.*

[We cannot put just one, can we? Well, then we leave it like this.]

Overall the present study has shown that gender and the gender of the interlocutor has a clear impact on L1 use and the functions that the L1 served. Females employed their L1 more than males, and differences were also found in the amount of different functions the L1 served: males employed their L1 for vocabulary issues or to talk about issues unrelated to the task more than females did, while females employed it for phatics more than males. It seems that the higher amount of L1 produced by females might be due to the large amount of phatics employed by females.

The gender of the interlocutor has also a clear impact on L1 use and the functions it served to these females and males. With regard to L1 use it seems that the gender of the interlocutor might affect males more than females, as males fell back on their L1 more when they are paired up with females than with males. In the case of the functions the L1 served, the gender of the interlocutor seems to affect females more than males, as they employed their L1 for off-task talk and vocabulary issues more in mixed gender dyads than in matched gender dyads.

6 Conclusion

This study has explored the impact of gender on the use and functions of participants' L1 during EFL task-based interaction. The findings showed that, in line with previous studies (Storch and Aldosari 2010; Swain and Lapkin 2000), these learners did not make an excessive use of their shared L1 (only around 15%). Furthermore, the findings reported differences in

the use and functions of the L1 between females and males, and on the basis of the gender of the interlocutor. Overall females employed their L1 more than males, and males employed their L1 more when they worked with females. Regarding the functions the L1 served the findings showed that females employed their L1 as phatics more than males, but males employed their L1 as off-task talk and for vocabulary issues more than females. Finally, the findings also showed that females employed their L1 as off-task talk and for vocabulary issues more when they worked with males, but for grammar issues in matched gender dyads.

The L1 has helped these EFL learners to complete the tasks successfully; although the findings have shown that learners' gender and the gender of their interlocutors have an impact on the extent to which the L1 is used, and the purposes for which it is used. EFL teachers and/or researchers should consider potential gender-based differences in L2 task-based interaction, as these differences might affect the L2 learning process of EFL learners. For example, males might employ their L1 more if they work with females, and females might vary the purposes for which they employ their L1 depending on the gender of their interlocutor.

This study should serve to encourage other researchers to focus on the relationship between L1 use/functions and gender. Further studies should consider larger samples of participants and classroom settings in order to reach a more robust conclusion about the impact that gender might play on L1 use during L2 interaction. This study only considered the different functions the L1 served, but it would also be interesting to analyze the different functions that the L2 served and compare them to the L1 functions. In this way, we will be able to assess which functions are more common in females' and males' L1 and L2, and explore the factors involving the decisions to use one or another. Another suggestion for further research would be to consider the impact of L2 proficiency on L1 use, specifically whether high- or low-proficient L2 learners make more use of their shared L1 on the basis of

their gender. Moreover, as mentioned above, the tasks employed in this study were not counter-balanced, which can be seen as a limitation. Further studies should consider counter-balanced tasks in order to obtain more robust data about the impact of L1 use and functions in L2 task-based interaction.

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Appendix

Examples of some of the tasks employed in the present study:

Dictogloss (lower-intermediate level version):

I was very optimistic when I went to meet Claire. My first impression was that she was very friendly and very extrovert. Physically she was my type: she was quite slim and not very tall with long dark hair, very pretty! And she was very funny too! She had a great sense of humor, we laughed a lot. But the only problem was that Claire was very talkative.

Text Editing (upper-intermediate level version)

Original Text:

Louise Woodward was the 18-year old nanny convicted in 1998 by a court in the United States of murdering the infant Matthew Eappen. Recently she spoke about her experience of a televised court case at the Edinburg Television Festival.

Louise criticized the televising of trials. 'It should never be the case of looking into a defendant's eyes and making a decision on their guilt or innocence', she told the Edinburg Television Festival. 'It should be the law that decides on a person's guilt, but television, with its human and emotional interest, takes the attention away from this.'

Although she thought it was an inevitable development, she added: 'Television turns everything into entertainment. We should remember that in the end courtrooms are serious places. It is people's lives and future lives that you are dealing with. It is not a soap opera and people should not see it like that. Serious issues should not be trivialized.' [...]

Modified Text:

Louise Woodward was the 18-year nanny convicted in 1998 by a court in the United States of murder the infant Matthew Eappen. Recently she speak her experience of a televised court case the Edinburg Television Festival.

Louise criticize the televising of trials. 'It should never be the case of looking into a defendant's eyes and making a decision their guilt or innocence', she told the Edinburg Television Festival. 'It should be the law decides on a person's guilt, but television, with its human and emotional interest, takes the attention from this.'

Although she thought it was an inevitable development, she add: 'Television turn everything in entertainment. We should remember that in end courtrooms are serious places. It is people lives and future lives you are dealing with. It is not a soap opera and people should not see it like that. Serious things should not be trivialized.' [...]

Picture Placement (in color in the original task)

Figure 1: Version A

Figure 1: Version B

Picture Differences (in color in the original task)

Figure 2: Version A

Figure 2: Version B

From: http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Spot_the_difference.png
(retrieved on July 2014)