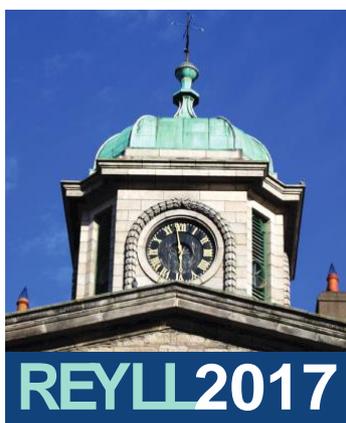


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# Picturebooks: an effective tool to encourage children's English L2 oral production

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## **Abstract**

The purpose of this research-to-practice paper is to delve deeper into the rich potential of picturebooks<sup>1</sup> for eliciting children's spontaneous speech production during face-to-face conversational interaction. Specifically, it analyses how children apply their existing communicative skills during exposure to the non-textual elements of picturebooks. This in turn enables to get wider understanding of how children learn and use English L2 at an early bilingual immersion school. The study examines the oral narrative production of Spanish-speaking English learners in an early bilingual immersion school. The analytical framework of the study is influenced by studies in the field of child language acquisition. The data are drawn from a 2.5 years longitudinal study of four children (aged 4-5 years at the first recording) from four different classrooms. The conversational interactions created by looking and talking about picturebook illustrations were audio-recorded and the utterances obtained through spontaneous elicitation were transcribed and analysed for emerging syntactic production and for communication strategies. Data analysis provides information on spontaneous oral created language which reflects children's underlying linguistic competence influenced partly by the learning setting, by the type of input and by the amount of exposure time. Research findings reveal how children use illustrations as a language scaffold and how the English oral language skills develop over time for syntactic development. These findings suggest that picturebooks and even more, picturebook illustrations are ideal tools to elicit oral language from children as well as to support natural acquisition of language. Based on the research findings of this study and on observation of how picturebooks lend themselves to build

children's existing communicative skills, the paper provides several hints to maximize communicative interaction in the young learner's classroom.

**Keywords:** *picturebooks, illustrations, language acquisition, discourse skills, meaning making.*

## **1. Introduction**

In Spain, many schools have developed bilingual programmes from preschool level since 1996, most of them adopting CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) as an approach to teach cross-curricular subjects through the medium of an L2. The bilingual programmes have been influenced by a European language education policy which stresses the importance of “teaching at least two foreign languages from a very early age” (European Commission 2002, p. 44). In Spanish bilingual schools, the foreign language, usually English, is taught indirectly through its use as a medium of instruction of different subject matters. These bilingual programmes differ in aspects related to the content which is taught in the L2, the language level required for the teachers, and the evaluation methods.

Despite the early work on children's morpho-syntactic development in naturalistic settings (Brown 1973; Radford 1990; Tabors 2008), further research remains sparse on the first stages of language acquisition by very young learners in instructed bilingual settings. This could be attributed to the difficulty of assessing language developmental processes in very young learners' classrooms; or it may also be due to the rapid lowering of age of L2 teaching (Eurydice 2012; Rixon 2013). This study, however, aims to fill the gap and discuss this issue by exploring narratives as a context to investigate language development in children at the early stages of English L2 acquisition; after all, “Narratives are found across different contexts, cultures, and times” (Reilly et al. 2004, p. 229).

The paper examines how children respond to sequences of picturebook illustrations and how they talk about what they see. The first part of the paper presents theoretical underpinnings for integrating interactive picturebook conversations into the young learner's classroom. In order to further illustrate how preliterate young learners use their L2 existing communicative skills, the second part of the paper presents a study that focuses on two relevant aspects of this enterprise: 1) children's English L2 development; and 2) the discourse skills used during the conversations. Finally, grounded in teaching practice in an early bilingual immersion school,

the text bridges research to practice by proposing a range of key points for teachers to consider when presenting picturebooks to children.

## **2. Theoretical grounds**

The purpose of this section is to prove the potential of picturebooks as a tool for developing young learners' language learning and comprehension skills. The current research study on children responding to picturebooks is framed against the backdrop of the language acquisition theories that hold that at an early age, languages are learnt implicitly and indirectly through their use in a discourse context (Cameron 2001; Gass & Selinker 2008; Lightbown & Spada 2013).

One key factor related to language acquisition is the role that age plays in language learning. In this respect, there seem to be close links between acquiring the mother tongue at home (L1) and learning an L2 at an early age in a bilingual immersion school, because as Cameron (2001) reminds us the "new language is largely introduced orally, understood orally and aurally, practiced and automatized orally".

Another key factor influencing language learning is the setting in which children obtain information about the target language by simply "watching, listening and speculating (Machado 2015, p.109). As far as the acquisition of the first language is concerned, the amount of time that children are exposed to their L1 before attending school is approximately 20,000 hours (Lightbown & Spada 2013, p. 13). By contrast, the amount of exposure time to an L2 varies from setting to setting. This implies that having a smaller amount of contact hours to the L2 equals less exposure to input data, and hence, the quality and intensity of instruction in these settings should be higher (Lightbown and Spada 2013, p. 93).

Furthermore, classroom talk is different from talk at home because "Classroom conversations must create the conditions that will foster language development" (Gibbons 2015, p. 24). In this regard, the nature of communicative interaction in bilingual schools is different from the communication in naturalistic settings in many respects, "Unlike first language children, foreign language learners are not immersed in a continual stream of spoken discourse..." (Cameron 2001, p. 60). In addition, the conversational discourse between teachers and children in the classrooms is pedagogically oriented and for that reason, content and language should be integrated and balanced in order to facilitate the learners' learning (Lyster 2007).

Picturebooks are powerful teaching and learning tools. One of the major affordances of picturebooks is that they rely on the verbal and the visual narratives to convey meaning, "... a

combination of illustrations and narrative, with both being integral to the complete work” (Machado 2015, p. 283). Hence, listening to the verbal narrative and looking at the illustrations become both active skills of the meaning making process (Sipe 1998; Kress 2003; Kress & van Leeuwen 2006). In this regard, having conversations around picturebooks stories and illustrations with learners of different ages and levels has proven to be a prominent practice in all languages. Book sharing has always been one well-loved strategy used by parents and teachers of any language to entertain, educate, and teach children of all ages and all competence levels (Cameron 2001; Ghosn 2013; Ellis & Brewster 2014). Listening to stories, looking at picturebook illustrations and talking about them is among the most effective awareness-raising practices to teach communication skills, as they all provide opportunities for conversational interaction with teachers and with other children (Mourão 2012; Fleta 2015, 2018). On this point, Cameron (2001) explains that when young, foreign language learners are read stories in class, they construct the meaning of the story in their minds from the pictures through a mental process that is not necessarily specific for foreign language learning, but “may be carried out in the first language or in some language-independent way, using what psychologists call ‘mentalese’” (p. 40). During shared book reading sessions, adults and children look at picturebooks and talk since, “Learning to ‘read’ and interpret the images in picturebooks is part of visual literacy” (Yokota & Teale 2011, p. 70).

It is well known from previous research that picture storybooks have proven to be an exceptionally useful tool to fuel research (Berman & Slobin 1994); particularly oral narratives elicited by the picture storybook created for children by Mayer (1969), *Frog, where are you?* (information and a full bibliography of frog story studies can be found in Strömquist & Verhoeven 2004). As suggested by scholars, picturebooks offer rich potential for meaning making and play a role in children’s spontaneous speech production during spoken face-to-face conversational interaction. Overall, studies focus on children’s response to picturebooks (Nikolajeva & Scott 2001; Kress & van Leeuwen 2006; Sipe 2008; Lambert 2015; Arizpe & Styles 2016; Kümmerling-Meibauer & Meibauer 2017), but little research has been undertaken in relation to child English L2 learners’ response to picturebook illustrations in early immersion bilingual settings.

To get wider understanding of how children learn and use English L2 and how they apply their existing communication skills, this study raises the following questions about the developmental stages of the children's emerging grammars and discourse strategies:

- Does the emerging grammar of children who learn English L2 at an early bilingual immersion Spanish display developmental stages?
- Is it possible to observe teachers' and children's discourse strategies that help children to scaffold English L2 grammar in pre-primary classrooms?
- What role do picturebooks play in English L2 learning development?

To answer these questions, empirical evidence on the processing of language development by child English L2 learners will be presented based on data collected in 1999 and on subsequent studies carried out by Fleta (2001, 2003, 2018). Research findings will be of interest to pre-service and in-service teachers of young learners as well as to teacher trainers seeking to support early language acquisition and development within multilingual context.

### **3. Methodological considerations**

#### *3.1. Research context and participants*

The research context was the British Council School of Madrid, a private bilingual immersion school that takes students from 3 to 18 years of age, the majority monolingual speakers of Spanish (96%) and which provides its students with a bilingual and bicultural education English/Spanish. In this facilitative bilingual language learning environment, English is both the medium and the object of instruction for learning non-language subject-matters. From age 3, the languages of instruction are Spanish and English and children learn English embedded in meaningful communication as 90% of the instruction is provided in this L2. Language and Literacy education in Spanish represents 10% of the tuition.

The main aim of the four-year longitudinal study of four children was to track English language development over time (Duff 2014). The four children in the sample, whose real names are not given, were monolingual Spanish and it was assumed that at the time of entering school, they had no English input from home. They were first exposed to English when they entered the preschool years and they had just started to learn how to read in Spanish independently, but they were struggling with print in English. As Table 1 shows, the participants' age ranged from 4 years 8 months to 5 years 10 months at the first recording.

Andrés and Diana were absolute beginners, while Beatriz and Carlos had already been exposed to English for one year when they were 3 and 4 years of age.

|  | Andrés | Beatriz | Carlos | Diana |
|--|--------|---------|--------|-------|
| Age at the onset of study (years and months) | 4;8    | 4;9     | 5;3    | 5;10  |
| Length of exposure to English                | 0      | 1       | 1      | 0     |
| Number of recordings                         | 21     | 20      | 26     | 21    |
| School years covering recordings             | 2.5    | 2.5     | 2.4    | 2.4   |

*Table 1: Information about participants in the longitudinal study*

### *3.2. Procedure*

The children interacting with picturebooks were interviewed individually every fortnight and each recording lasted approximately 20 to 30 minutes. The conversations were carried out without questionnaires or formal structured tasks. Given the children's early age, their little knowledge of the world and their little knowledge of the L2, the eliciting production method was flexible and informal. For these reasons, it was difficult to plan questionnaires in advance.

During the picturebook sharing sessions, the children were presented with picturebooks to encourage them to think and talk in the L2. Discussions took place before, while and after presenting a selected picturebook. As highlighted by Salysbury & Styles, (2012, p.80) "we can never know all the subtle effects picturebooks have on children because a child doesn't have the language skills to convey them and, indeed, some aspects of a visual experience cannot be conveyed verbally".

Since the research aim was not getting correct sentences from children, but spontaneous created language which reflected the underlying linguistic competence, the conversations consisted of spontaneous interaction between the researcher and the children. For eliciting language production, children were simply shown a picturebook and asked open-ended and closed questions such as: 'What's this?', 'What colour is it?', 'What's happening?', 'What's Ernie doing?', 'What happened to the ball?', or 'What's happening with the ball?', 'What did you have for breakfast?', 'Which is your favourite sport?'. Free-rolling discussion was about

the school and home routines, likes and dislikes, sports, games, school activities, cinema, pets, camps and plans for the Easter, summer and Christmas holidays.

The whole idea was not to read picturebooks to the children. What is more, they were never asked to read because they were at a pre-literary stage. Sometimes, children were presented with picturebooks that the teachers had already read to them in class; by perusing the same picturebook multiple times, this allows teachers to push-in vocabulary, concepts and to model critical thinking for children. Other times, children were asked to choose books from the classroom book-rack. As time passed, children were beginning to learn how to read in English, and they were willing to read picturebooks during the conversation sessions. In addition to picturebooks, games, cards and toys were used for role-play. During conversational interactions, the interviewer always followed the principle one person-one language, addressing pupils in English at all times.

### *3.3. Instruments*

In this narrative task, the four children were presented with a total of seventy-five picturebooks. The criteria for selecting picturebooks was based upon, 1) type (non-fiction, fairy tales, animal tales, nursery rhymes, readers); 2) topics (friendship, fear, humour, sports, Christmas, numbers, colours, animal names, items of clothing, high frequency words, sight words, repeated words, short sentences, alliteration, onomatopoeia); and 3) illustrations (appealing, informative, fun, to aid comprehension, to reinforce the story, to encourage communicative interaction). The children were given the opportunity to look at the same book and also to different versions of the same story in different sessions so that they were exposed to words that transfer from book to book. In this way, they had the opportunity to be presented with the words many times in a variety of situations.

### *3.4. Analysis*

As a way to assess and to analyse the syntactical development, the theoretical framework and analysis of children's oral production focused firstly, on child English L2 emerging syntactic production at different points in time (Brown 1973); and secondly, on the use of communicative strategies during conversations. In this manner, the longitudinal corpus allowed the possibility to observe language development over time. For the qualitative and quantitative analysis, the children's spontaneous speech production was transcribed and the field notes written during conversational interactions were incorporated to the transcription.

Each transcript of the 88 recordings introduces the interviewer-child oral interactions (utterances). In addition, field notes information describing the research instruments and practices that were being carried out during the data collection as well as interviewer-child non-verbal behaviour were included. Only the interviewer's speech production which was relevant for the present study was incorporated in the transcription.

Taking Brown's (1973), Radford's (1990) and Tabors' (2008) studies as models for analysis, the whole corpus was firstly coded in terms of language production by categorizing and counting the utterances. Secondly, the conversational interaction excerpts were examined under the lens of the adjusted categories of discourse analysis studies proposed by Lyster (2007) and Mackey (2012).

#### **4. Main findings and discussion**

##### *4.1. Emerging grammar*

In the research study discussed below there is ample evidence that children formulated responses in English L2 according to the verbal skills that allowed them to communicate and express meaning orally. As Lightbown & Spada (2013, p.40) stress, "Knowing more about the development of learner language helps teachers to access teaching procedure in the light of what they can reasonably expect to accomplish in the classroom".

Findings of an in-depth analysis of children's speech emissions during conversational interactions show that the learning of English L2 in this early education setting is a slow process. As far as grammatical development is concerned, child L2 learners are progressing through a series of stages which resemble those of monolingual children acquiring English (Brown 1973; Radford 1990). One of the characteristics of children's interlanguage is the length and type of utterances. The study reveals that at the beginning, children's oral production had not developed beyond the one- and two-word phase. Subsequently, and before becoming productive users of the new language, children provided isolated words and simple phrases in the L2. This telegraphic speech stage is not only idiosyncratic of the earliest stages of L2 acquisition but "... also used by children learning their first language" (Tabors 2008, p. 60). Excerpt 1 below presents the production of single word utterances by Andres while looking at the picturebook *Spot Goes to the Circus* (Eric Hill 1982). As Galda et al. (2015) highlight "Pop-up picturebooks are interactive and engaging to children par excellence" (p. 136). Excerpt 1 shows evidence of Andrés' understanding in spite of the fact that in some

instances he responds to the interviewer's questions in Spanish (4, 6, 10). According to Tabors (2008, p. 39), there is a specific developmental phase for L2 acquisition in early childhood settings during which children continue using their mother tongue. These responses in Andrés' L1 Spanish show understanding of the interviewer's questions. In Gibbons (2015, p. 43) words, children's comprehension is directly related "with what they already know in the mother-tongue/other languages". Example in line 10 shows that it may be the case that Andrés encounters the word 'kangaroo' for the first time and he uses Spanish as he still needs to learn how to label this term in English. It should also be noted that Andrés gets confused with the picture of a tiger in line 8.

Excerpt 1: Andrés (age: 4;10; after five months exposure)

1. Interviewer: Have you seen this book before?
2. Andrés: *Yes*
3. Interviewer: It's about an animal. What animal is this?
4. Andrés: *Un perro* (English=a dog)
5. Interviewer: Do you know the name of this dog?
6. Andrés: *¿Cómo se llama? Spot* (English=what's its name?)
7. Interviewer: What is there behind that door? Open it. What animal is that?
8. Andrés: *Cat* (meaning tiger)
9. Interviewer: What animal is hiding behind that curtain?
10. Andrés: *Canguro* (English=kangaroo)

(Looking at *Spot Goes to the Circus* by Eric Hill 1982)

In a similar vein, Excerpt 2 below shows that Carlos also produces one-word utterances (lines 20, 22, 24). Furthermore, it has been observed instances of cross-language transfer of morpho-syntax. Children mix languages in two directions, Spanish into English and English into Spanish. Carlos produces mixed-code utterances (line 28). As suggested by some authors, this feature may be closely related with the learners' L2 degree of language development when "learners are faced with the need to express a concept or an idea in the second language but find themselves without the linguistic resources to do so" (Gass & Selinker 2008, p. 285). It could also be the case that knowing more vocabulary and more grammatical structures in English puts children in the position of mixing languages. These language switches may be explained by the fact that Carlos has a wider and richer linguistic repertoire from which he

selects strategically features from both languages to be able to communicate more effectively in a more spontaneous and more creative L2 (García & Wei 2014).

Excerpt 2: Carlos (Recording 3 age 5;4 after 12 months of exposure)

19. Interviewer:       And what animal is this?  
20. Carlos:             *Elephant*  
21. Interviewer:       What are these here with so many colours?  
22. Carlos:             *Balloons*  
23. Interviewer:       What is there behind that door? Open to see. What animal is this?  
24. Carlos:             *Tiger*  
25. Interviewer:       Let's see if it is here, is it here?  
26. Carlos:             *No*  
27. Interviewer:       Do you think the lion is going to eat Spot?  
28. Carlos:             *No, is ...le da un culetazo a la pelota (English=he is kicking the ball)*  
                              *and another animal*

(Looking at *Spot Goes to the Circus* by Eric Hill 1982)

To assess children's grammatical L2 production, all simple and complex sentences as well as all morphological errors of commission and omission were analysed and categorized. As can be inferred from Excerpt 3, data indicate that the use of English becomes more habitual with children who have been immersed longer in English. After 14 months of exposure, Carlos' narrative exhibits complex syntax with coordinate sentences (line 40) and reported speech (line 38). Additionally, it presents errors of commission and omission in pronouns (lines 36, 42), verb tense (line 38) and number marking (line 46). The data analysis reveals that the four children use the copula and auxiliary *Be* productively very early on. Even though the 3rd person *is* is the form most often used by the children in this study, it never occurs in the contracted form. Moreover, it is attested in the recordings of the four children that none of them is sensitive to the phoneme /m/ of the contraction of the 1st person singular 'I'm', maybe due to the fact this sound is not included in word final position in the Spanish phonological system.

Data reveal an idiosyncratic feature of children's interlanguage. For a period of time, Carlos and the other child learners of this study often produced sequences in which they omitted the verbal inflection, and in which instead, they inserted *is*. Data under study show evidence of

the use of the dummy auxiliary *is* (*Is sit in my chair*) co-existing with copula/auxiliary *Be* constructions (*it is in my bed, is sleeping in my...*). The overuse of the *is* pattern is evident in declarative, negative and interrogative sentences before English verbal morphology [-s, -ed], *do*-support and subject-*Aux* inversion were accurate. Later, the use of the dummy auxiliary *is* gradually decreases in favour of the correct grammatical structures (Fleta, 2003). This issue of a 'common grammar' in English acquisition has been identified by many scholars, who propose different possible solutions for the dummy insertion phenomenon (Fleta 2003; Blom et al. 2013; Van de Craats & Van Hout 2010). All in all, it seems that what motivates child learners to create these constructions in the absence of their presence in the input from the teacher is that child learners formulate certain types of hypotheses about English guided by language learning mechanisms. These mechanisms let the children work within the target language and construct a possible "grammar" which helps them to learn English specific rules independently of the rules they know for their L1. In sum, the use of dummy auxiliaries may be explained as a developmental form in the constructions of child grammars of English, as a step forward between developmental stages (Fleta 2003).

Excerpt 3: Carlos (Recording 5. Age 5;6 after 14 months of exposure)

35. Interviewer: What do you think this picturebook is about?

36. Carlos: *The Teddy Bears, the Teddy Bears go to the house and said: "one has eat my soup", and said the Father: "I eat my soup". Said the Mother: "I eat my... all my soup" (changing his voice for each character)*

37. Interviewer: ...said the little bear, and then, what happened to the chairs?

38. Carlos: *"Is sit in my chair", said the Daddy Teddy Bear. Is said the mummy: "Is sit in my chair", said the Mummy Teddy Bear. "Is sit in my chair" (changing his voice for each character).*

39. Interviewer: ...said the little bear so...

40. Carlos: *They go up the stairs and look the bears and said a Bear: "is one person, it is in my bed"*

41. Interviewer: ...said the Mother...

42. Carlos: *Said: "is sit in my bed", said the little one Teddy Bear... "is sleeping in my ..."*

43. Interviewer: ...in my bed, there's a girl sleeping in my bed, and then the girl opened her eyes and said:

44. Carlos: *Aaaaaaaaaah!*

45. Interviewer: She screamed and...

46. Carlos: *Go out, go out, go out of the house and said the Teddy Bears: "no, no".*

(Looking at *Goldilocks and the Three Bears* by James Marshal, 1988)

James Marshall's comical retelling of *Goldilocks and the Three Bears* story is full of humorous jolly details and pictures that burst with colour. The illustrations encourage children to think and talk about what they see. They are ideal resources to negotiate for understanding and for search of meaning (Bland 2013, p. 32). As pointed out by Nespeca & Reeve (2003, p.1) "... one of the first steps in learning to read text is to read pictures". Through interviewer-child interaction, children have the opportunity to develop new vocabulary words and at the same time expand new conceptual knowledge (Nespeca & Reeve 2003; Pollard-Durodola et al. 2015). This means that educators can help to develop children's language and content knowledge by exposing them to picturebooks. Excerpt 4, which is the continuation of the dialogue in Excerpt 3, evidences that in order to scaffold Carlos' language, the interviewer raises awareness of the artistic choices present in the visual elements of Marshall's picturebook by focusing specifically on pictures of animals, clothes, photographs and other objects.

Excerpt 4: Carlos (Recording 5. Age 5;6 after 14 months of exposure)

59. Interviewer: And what is this other bird doing?

60. Carlos: *Look what happen in....downstairs*

61. Interviewer: Look, they have three...plates

62. Carlos: *Plates (rep)*

63. Interviewer: And they have three...

64. Carlos: *Coat, one is red, one is blue, and one is yellow*

65. Interviewer: And they have a little...

66. Carlos: *Cat*

79. Interviewer: And they have a photograph of a...

80. Carlos: *Cow...with grass and with...*

81. Interviewer: ...blue sky

82 Carlos: *Yes*

83. Interviewer: And they have another picture here, don't they?...

(Looking at *Goldilocks and the Three Bears* by James Marshal 1988)

At first glance, children's grammatical development and length of narratives vary according to children's exposure time to the L2. During the first recordings, the interviewer intervention is high (Excerpts 1, 2 and 3) whereas in subsequent recordings (Excerpts 4 and 5) children produce longer narratives. Excerpt 5 reveals that with more extended exposure to the L2, the frequency of morphological errors decreases and that the length and complexity of sentences increases.

Excerpt 5: Andrés Recording 16 /22/3/96

91. Interviewer: Once upon a time....

92. Andrés: *Three little pigs and a mummy pig. Said the mummy: "go to the, go to the country to make the house". The three little pigs run, run, run and said: "good bye mummy" and the first, and the first, and the first pig is sticks*

93. Interviewer: He builds the house of sticks

94. Andrés: *And the other make a house of wood and the other make a house of...*

95. Interviewer: ...Bricks

96. Andrés: *Brick (rep), and the three lives in the house and, and the wolf blows the house of the first pig, the little. Go round and round and go to the house of wood, and go round and blows the other, and the other go round the two to the house of the of the brick and said the wolf: "I go to blow off the house", "no because this is have cemento (English=cement) and blow, blow, blow, blow and he no can and go to a tree to the, to the...*

97. Interviewer: To go up the chimney...

98. Andrés: *To the chimney, and the three little pigs got fire in the chimney and go round, round and...*

99. Interviewer: The wolf got burnt

(Looking at *The Three Pigs* by Tony Ross 1988)

To conclude this section, data analysis indicates that children's emissions of one, two or three words seem to be enough to be able communicate at the earliest stages of English L2 acquisition. All in all, it seems that English grammar is emerging gradually and that children are in the earliest stages of the acquisition process, learning English syntax in a piecemeal fashion – step by step much the same as English L1 developmental stages (Brown 1973; Radford 1990).

#### *4.2. Discourse skills*

One of the aims of the present section is to explore what communication strategies are utilised during conversations. For this purpose, data were analysed inductively by detecting patterns within the categories of strategies identified in various discourse analysis studies during teacher-child communicative interactions in classrooms (Lyster 2007; Södergård 2008 and Mackey 2012). To prompt discussion, the following communicative language strategies were observed: yes/no questions, open-ended questions, repetition, expansion, reformulation, recasting, translanguaging, prompting, and wait time. Examples of communication strategies used by the interviewer and child learners to maintain communication in English L2 is presented below.

At the outset of the data collection children used a higher proportion of repetitions. The spontaneous repetition of the term *plates* and *brick* (line 62 and 96) illustrate that Carlos and Andres repeat these words to familiarize with them. Machado (2015, p. 179) highlights the importance of children's repetitions as a resource in interaction between adults and children, "teachers often hear children repeating a new word trying to become familiar with it".

At later stages, children "favour reformulation as a repair strategy over repetition, suggesting that they understood that the form of their utterance was a possible cause of breakdowns (Genesee 2008, p. 21). Examples of implicit reformulations or recasting of children's utterance involving syntactical and semantic information can be found in lines 37, 39, 41, 43, 45 and 93. Given the child's level of English and also the complexity of the English structure, the interviewer is merely reformulating the utterance, but not expecting uptake from the child.

Examples of open-ended questions seeking for information from children can be found in lines 3, 7, 9, 19, 21, 23, 29; while examples of yes/no questions in lines 5, 25 and 27. Lightbown & Spada (2013, p.145) point out that teacher's questions, "...engage students in interaction and in exploring how much they understand". In lines 63, 65, 79, 80, 83, the interviewer seeks the completion of children's utterances by delaying speech, by pausing, and by giving children time to think of an answer. According to (Gibbons 2015, p.27), elicitation skills: "allow time for (students) to attempt to self-correct what they say, or to reword an idea...".

In lines 28 and 96, there are three clear examples of translanguaging, by which emergent bilingual children perform bilingually (Garcia & Wei 2013, p. 5). The child's need to fill in a lexical gap in English results in these cases in the equivalent word in Spanish, "Such switching between languages may sometimes reflect the absence of a particular vocabulary word or expression" (Lightbown & Spada 2013, p. 31). In spite of the fact that children mix English and Spanish in the same sentence, they do not seem to get confused when combining both languages, "just because children mix up their languages in their speech does not necessarily mean that they mix up their languages in their mind" (Rowland 2014, p. 178). The translanguaging phase is linguistically related to specific aspects of the vocabulary and grammar and, given an adequate amount of input, they are likely to be short term.

Lines 95, 97 and 99 show that after prompting information from Andrés, who is not familiar with the words, the interviewer provides him with the key terms. Therefore, the conceptual meaning of child's utterance is expanded. The interviewer scaffolds the language in a way that helps to develop understanding of key concepts. In Stilwell (2006, p. 112) words, expansions "provide mini-learning lessons for the child".

### **5. Implications for practice**

Taking as a springboard picturebooks as method for interacting with children, the overall aim of this study was to explore the developmental process of four Spanish-speaking English learners in an early bilingual immersion school. One of the aims was to show that successful L2 learning in instructed bilingual settings at an early age is built upon listening and speaking skills; hence, the applicability of interactive conversations around picturebooks. With regard to early-instructed settings, communicative teacher-learner interaction sets the basis for a language-rich foundation. This implies that teachers should not only help children by pushing-in language; namely, modelling vocabulary and complex sentences, but also by pulling-out language, providing them with opportunities to use the language on their own. Moreover, by increasing awareness of the parts of oral language (vocabulary and sentences) through picturebook sharing, teachers are not only addressing linguistic issues, but also undertaking academic needs. Focusing on the grammatical structures, the findings of this study suggest that children do not build the grammar of English by learning words in isolation, but by interacting orally with their teachers, namely, by listening to the teachers' talk, comprehending the messages and speaking; much in the same manner as monolingual English children do.

Picturebooks of all kinds were very attractive resources to elicit language from child L2 learners. Particularly, pop-up and other novelty picturebooks proved to be very beneficial during the first stages of language learning, as the flaps and what there is behind them are the visual representation of the words. This type of books brought the element of surprise to the sessions, increased the conversations and kept children more interested and more interactive orally and kinaesthetically. Child L2 learners participated actively lifting the flaps during the first data collection sessions when they still did not know the interviewer.

On the whole, picturebooks which are dependent upon illustrations provide embedded instructional scaffolding. Hence, teachers should take time to point out the "architecture" of

picturebooks during book sharing sessions and use think-alouds to help children understand the story better. By encouraging learners to predict and hypothesize about the story, teachers are reinforcing skills that children should use when they start reading for themselves. Moreover, during shared book sessions, teachers can lift children's language by modelling vocabulary and well-formed sentences as well as by providing different forms of feedback using discourse strategies. Likewise, to increase the applicability of picturebooks, teachers should encourage children to speak more by prompting open-ended questions and by expanding on children's verbalizations.

To conclude, picturebooks are an effective tool to push-in and pull-out oral language and to expand all children's learning. Lifting language through picturebook sharing sessions helps expand children's oral language first, and it increases their reading comprehension later. One of the practitioners' priorities to support the oral language growth and to deepen children's understanding of concepts should be to plan appropriate conversational practices for picturebook sharing sessions.

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<sup>1</sup> 'Picturebook' is used to show the integrated nature of illustrations and narrative, both being integral to the complete work (Machado 2015, p. 283).