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Negotiation in Chinese as a foreign language: Italian learners' signal strategies in a tandem-learning context

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Abstract:

Negotiation of meaning, the process through which the speakers go to clearly comprehend one another, is believed to facilitate acquisition as it provides learners with situated comprehensible input as well as opportunities to produce pushed output. Nevertheless, negotiation is still an under-researched area in Chinese as a second or foreign language. This study analysed the strategies used by learners to signal non-understanding and the linguistic resources they exploit to achieve this goal. The participants were 13 Italian learners who took part in a three-month face-to-face tandem language learning program with 6 native speakers of Chinese. The interactions were recorded and transcribed, and the produced signals were classified according to strategy, form, and language type. The sequential position of strategies in the negotiation routines was also annotated. Empirical evidence shows a strong preference for repetitions and a frequent code-switching to Italian. A clear preference in the sequential distribution of clarification requests and confirmation checks also emerged, the former being mainly used to initiate negotiations routines, and the latter mostly occurring in routine reiterations.

Keywords: *Chinese a Foreign Language, Clarification Requests, Comprehension Checks, Negotiation of Meaning, Tandem Language Learning*

1. Introduction

According to Long's (1985, 1996) Interaction Hypothesis, negotiation of meaning (NoM) in conversational interaction provides the optimal conditions for input to become comprehensible. Interactionally-motivated modifications of the input facilitate language acquisition as learners' attentional resources are oriented to the mismatches between what they know and what emerges from interaction, as well as areas of the L2 about which they have little or no information. In addition, NoM also promotes the production of pushed output, in that, after

receiving negative feedback, learners are encouraged to reformulate their message by trying out new structures (Swain 1985, 2000). In sum, NoM has the twofold potential of assisting comprehension and providing opportunities to test L2 hypotheses.

Due to these reasons, NoM has received a fair amount of attention in Second Language Acquisition. Researchers have explored various aspects of NoM, including its effects on comprehension and production (e.g., Gass and Varonis 1994) and the interplay of factors such as gender (e.g., Pica *et al.* 1991), age (e.g., Oliver 2002) task type (e.g., Pica and Doughty 1985; Nakahama, Tyler, and van Lier 2001), and learning context (e.g., Fernández-García and Martínez-Arbelaiz 2002; Gass, Mackey, and Ross-Feldman 2005; O'Rourke 2005). Overall, research has convincingly demonstrated a relationship between NoM and L2 learning (see Pica 1994). Yet, NoM in Chinese as a second (CSL) or foreign language (CFL) is still an under-researched area.

In order to fill this gap, this study will investigate how Italian CFL learners engage in negotiation during the interactions with native peers in a face-to-face tandem-learning context. In particular, the analysis will focus on the pragmatic strategies used by learners to signal comprehension problems and the linguistic resources they exploit to achieve this goal.

2. Literature review

2.1 Negotiation of meaning: A model

NoM refers to the work that speakers do to avoid and repair impasses in their conversational discourse (Long 1983). It consists in interactional modifications resulting from communication breakdowns, aimed to achieve mutual understanding (Nakahama, Tyler, and van Lier 2001: 378). In this sense, NoM is a kind of linguistic problem-solving for learners, in that, "[t]o repair the breakdown, the interlocutors must somehow negotiate the disparity between their L2 abilities and the target language" (Doughty 2000: 48).

Note that NoM is not limited to the interactions involving second language learners. Indeed, this process is much more general in the normal use of language, as it reflects an essential property of natural languages and their use, i.e. the vagueness of meaning and in referring to the world, as well as the linguistic differences between speakers. Bazzanella and Damiano (1997), for instance, distinguished five levels of misunderstanding in a corpus of everyday conversations between native speakers of Italian. These levels correspond to the five levels of linguistic analysis – phonetics, syntax, lexis, semantics, and pragmatics. In a subsequent study (Bazzanella and Damiano 1998), the authors further analysed the phases of the negotiations and the collocations of the repairs, and concluded that comprehension should be interpreted as a *continuum* rather than a polar process (comprehension/non-comprehension). Another study is that by Comeau, Genesee, and Mendelson (2010), who compared the repair skills of bilingual and monolingual children. The authors found no differences between the two samples, which led to the conclusion that "the acquisition of this communication skill is fundamentally unperturbed by the simultaneous acquisition of two languages in the first years of life" (*ibidem*, 371).

Going back to second language interactions, the pivotal work by Varonis and Gass (1985) proposed a model for NoM that described negotiation routines as consisting of two parts and four functional primes. The first part of the routine is the trigger (T), which entails one prime with the same name. It consists in the utterance or portion of the utterance that causes non-understanding and can initiate from any aspect of discourse. The trigger is only recognised in retrospect, that is, if it has been reacted to by the hearer.

The second part of the sequence, the resolution, entails three primes, an indicator or signal, a response, and a reaction to the response. The signal (S) refers to the hearer's observable (verbal or non-verbal) reaction to the trigger, which prompts the speaker to repair the problematic utterance. The speaker's response (R) to the signal can then be followed by an optional reaction (RR), which ties up the routine before returning to the main flow of conversation.

This analytical model was applied in numerous studies, including those on CFL/CSL (e.g., Wang 2006; Wang and Li 2015; see § 2.2). Nakahama, Tyler, and van Lier (2001), for instance, investigated how meaning is negotiated in two different types of task, unstructured conversations and a two-way information-gap task, and analysed the NoM routines in terms of type of trigger, length of turns, complexity of utterances, and discourse strategies. According to the results, unstructured conversations "provided the NNS interlocutors with more opportunities to hear more complex input from the NS interlocutors and with more opportunities to produce syntactically complex output" (*ibidem*, 391). NNS utterances in unstructured conversations were also longer and more complex, and the discourse strategies adopted were extremely various, including hedges, reformulations, and demonstrations of understanding. Lastly, the information-gap task was characterised by chained NoM sequences, with NoM only occurring locally; in conversations, on the other hand, NSs and NNSs were found to negotiate meaning in order to achieve coherence in the entire interaction.

More recently, Van der Zwaard and Bannink (2019) analysed NoM following a microanalytical approach. They examined the online interactions between six NS-NNS dyads and found that, in tasks with multiple triggers of potential misunderstanding, NS tended to use responses to signals that were both task- and face-appropriate, whereas the NNS gradually moved from task- to face-appropriate responses.

Lastly, the study by Lee, Hampel, and Kukulska-Hulme (2019) applied the NoM model to examine the role of gestures during videoconferencing. According to their analysis, iconic and deictic gestures were used to establish mutual understanding and negotiate vocabulary, operating in conjunction with speech to trigger NoM and serving as a resource with which to scaffold peers and indicate appeals for assistance. However, gestures were also a possible source for confusion, contributing to further incidents of non-understanding.

What is more relevant for the present study is the second prime of Varonis and Gass's sequence (1985), i.e., the indicator or signal. A first formal taxonomy was proposed by Varonis and Gass (*ibidem*), who distinguished between explicit indications of non-understanding (mostly *wh-* questions and statements such as 'I don't understand'), echoes (repetitions), nonverbal responses, and inappropriate responses.

Other studies identified the pragmatic strategies used to indicate non-understanding. These strategies have to do with the signaler's utterance planning and intentionality (Pica 1994: 497), and the most common types are clarification requests (CRs) and confirmation checks (CCs).

CRs are used to elicit clarification of the preceding utterance (Long 1980). They occur when one speaker does not understand one or more words being articulated by the interlocutor and thus needs re-explaining, reuttering, or rephrasing (Masrizal 2014). They typically consist in *yes-no* or *wh-* questions (e.g., 'What do you mean?'), statements inviting the interlocutor to repeat, or explicit statements of misunderstanding. By contrast, CCs are defined as "[e]licitations immediately following the previous speaker's utterance to confirm that the utterance has been understood or heard correctly" (Chen 2016: 6; see also Long 1980). Typical manifestations of CCs are summaries or reformulations (e.g., 'Do you mean he has something on his head?') and full or partial repetitions of the preceding utterance (Chen 2016: 7).

These labels have been applied extensively in the literature (e.g., Masrizal 2014). Lee (2001), for instance, investigated the strategies employed by 40 learners of Spanish to facilitate

negotiation during online discussions. She analyzed 289 signals, observing a predominance of CRs (19%), requests (20%), and self-corrections (16%). Gass, Mackey, and Ross-Feldman's (2005) study involved 74 learners of Spanish. The authors compared interactions in classrooms and laboratories, finding that both conditions triggered a similar amount of CRs and CCs. A significant difference for both strategies was observed among different tasks. Chen (2016) examined the strategies used by 9 adult learners of English during task-based interactions in Second Life and found a prevalence of CCs (41%) over CRs (33%).

A very fine-grained description of signals is that conducted by O'Rourke (2005) in a study on NoM in computer-mediated tandem learning. The participants in the study were Irish and German learners of German and English, respectively. The author described both the pragmatic strategies adopted by the participants and the form in which these strategies manifested themselves. He identified a total of 95 signals and found that many consisted in hybrid forms, carrying the illocutionary forms of both CRs and CCs. An example is the signal *Wie du bist positiv. HIV-positiv?* 'How do you mean you're positive. HIV-positive?' (*ibidem*, 445), a combination of a *wh-* question (CR) and a summary/reformulation (CC).

2.2 Negotiation in Chinese

According to Su and Hu (2017: 75-76), Chinese researchers have started to devote attention to negotiation only recently, and the limited number of contributions often failed to bring out CFL/CSL specificities (e.g., Qian 2010).

The study by Wang and Li (2015) constitutes an exception. The authors explored the turn-taking structure of negotiation routines in naturalistic interactions between a native (NS) and a non-native speaker (NNS) of Chinese, finding a series of statistically significant differences between the two. The NS, for instance, produced 76 signals, while the NNS only produced 25. The main strategy to indicate non-understanding consisted of CCs, with the NS showing a strong preference for reformulations of the trigger embedded in conversational chunks (e.g., *nǐ shì xiǎng shuō* 你是想说…… 'you mean…'). By contrast, the NNS tended to produce simple repetitions in a rising intonation (e.g., *cóng* 丛？ 'clump?'). As for CRs, the NS often resorted to *wh-* questions, while the NNS mostly used the interrogative marker *á* 啊？ 'uh?' with little variation. For both speakers, the majority of signals consisted of simple forms, with hybrid forms only playing a marginal role.

The authors also analyzed the form of the responses and reactions. The responses provided by the NNS mostly consisted of expansions, acknowledgements (e.g., *duì* 对 'right'), or negations, while the NS's responses mainly consisted of repetitions. Lastly, both the NS and the NNS's reactions were produced in the form of response markers (e.g., *hǎo* 好 'good') or topic expansions.

A second example is the study by Zhao (2015), who analyzed 30 intermediate-level learners' negotiation routines in two different tasks, an information gap task and an opinion gap task. The author found that the two tasks led to the same amount of negotiation routines but differed in the type of strategy used to signal non-understanding. In the information gap tasks, the participants produced a higher percentage of CCs, while in the opinion gap task they showed a clear preference for CRs. The author also observed that requests for help were the only strategy used to negotiate form in opinion gap tasks. According to Zhao, these results partially contradict previous studies, but this might depend on factors such as the design and requirements of the tasks and the proficiency level of the participants.

Another group of studies focused on the interactions in a virtual environment. Wang (2006), for instance, documented NoM in computer-mediated interactions between 8 CFL

learners and their teacher. The author found instances of all four kinds of indicators described by Varonis and Gass (1985), with explicit statements of non-understanding being the majority. Cappellini and Zhang (2013) adopted a multimodal approach to describe NoM routines in teletandem interactions between a French learner of Mandarin and a Chinese peer. According to their analysis, the signals produced by the French learner mainly consisted of CCs (39.6%) and requests for help (32.1%), whereas triggers were mostly involved vocabulary. Overall, the authors observed that teletandem favored the diversification of NoM modalities (e.g., written and spoken), and that the number of NoM routines was higher than other studies set in different interactional environments.

Given the paucity of contributions on NoM in CFL, this study aims to shed more light on this issue by describing negotiation routines in NS-NNS interactions, with particular focus on the pragmatic strategies used by the NNS to signal comprehension problems.

The interactions took place during a face-to-face tandem language-learning program. Tandem is a method of language learning in which speakers of different first languages (L1) communicate regularly with one another, each wishing to learn the interlocutor's L1. It is based on the two principles of autonomy and reciprocity, as participants are at the same time responsible for their own as well as their partner's learning (Brammerts 2003). Thus, tandem promotes authentic, culturally grounded interaction, while also combining explicit form-focused learning and meaningful communication. Crucially, discourse in a tandem-learning context is highly naturalistic, offering fertile ground for NoM. In addition, tandem partners are free to choose between conversational and pedagogical topics according to their needs; therefore, meta-linguistic information is highly targeted. This provides optimal conditions to exploit the benefits of comprehensible input and pushed output as theorised by the Interaction Hypothesis.

Based on these premises, the research questions (RQs) of this study are the following:

1. What are the pragmatic strategies adopted by CFL learners to signal comprehension problems and start negotiation routines in a tandem-learning context?

2. What is the form of the signal, i.e., what linguistic resources do learners exploit to indicate non-understanding?

3. What is the role of the participants' L1?

3. Method

3.1 Participants

The participants were 13 Italian second-year CFL learners who voluntarily joined the Italian-Chinese tandem program at the Roma Tre University Linguistic Centre (CLA). The native partners were 6 Chinese learners of Italian, who were part of the Marco Polo/Turandot program at CLA.[1] Although not measured, it is safe to assume that the competence level of the two groups of participants in their respective L2 was roughly equivalent. In fact, Marco Polo/

[1] The Marco Polo/Turandot program aims at providing Chinese students with proficiency in Italian language and culture and preparing them for enrolment at Italian Universities, Academics of Fine Arts, and Conservatories.

Turandot students are required to obtain a certification of Italian language proficiency corresponding to level B1 of the Common European Framework for Languages (CEFR). Similarly, the target level for second year at Roma Tre University corresponds to level 3 of the Chinese Proficiency Test (*Hanyu Shuiping Kaoshi* 汉语水平考试), which corresponds to level B1 in the CEFR (but see Lu 2017). All the Italian participants were females, whereas the Chinese participants were one male and five females. All the participants signed an informed consent for participation in the study.

3.2 Data collection

The data were collected throughout a three-month timespan, during which the participants met at CLA once a week. Due to the numerical disparity of the two groups, each Chinese speaker was grouped with one or two Italian partners. The duration of each encounter was about 1 hour. A moderator signaled the switch from Italian to Chinese and vice versa at regular intervals of about 5-10 minutes.

The data were collected during six encounters, equally distributed throughout the three months of observation. The interactions in Chinese were recorded using a mobile device connected to a unidirectional noise-cancelling microphone with -46 ± 2 dB sensitivity and 50-16,000 Hz frequency band. The wire connecting the microphone to the device was 3 m long, and this minimized the possibility of the researchers' presence inhibiting the participants. Due to technical constraints, it was only possible to record one group at the time. The total length of the recordings was approximately 2h50', with a mean length of 24' per encounter and 6'22" per recording. The audio data were transcribed by trained transcribers and then revised by the researcher. The transcriptions follow the Jeffersonian conventions for Conversation Analysis (see Jefferson 2004; Hepburn and Bolden 2013), adapted to Chinese following Lu, Lee, and Tao (2014) and Lee, Tao, and Lu's (2017) suggestions.

3.3 Analysis

Negotiation routines were identified in the transcripts and coded according to language (Italian or Chinese), strategy type, routine type, and the sequential position of strategies.

Firstly, signals were coded as "Italian" or "Chinese" according to the language of the utterance. Some signal forms were necessarily in Italian (e.g., translations) or Chinese (e.g., repetitions), while other signals occurred in both languages (e.g., explicit statements of non-understanding). Note that the annotation is based on the predominant language of the utterance, even if elements in the other language are also present. An example is the CC 'simile a *yìdiǎnr* 一点儿' (similar to *yidianr*). In this case, the NS proposed a reformulation (*yìdiǎnr*一点儿 'a little') to the trigger *bù zěnme* 不怎么 'not that much', but the utterance in which it was embedded was clearly Italian. Lastly, signals that did not display a clear preference for any of the two languages, including silent signals, were all labelled as "unclear".

Secondly, the classification of strategy types followed a data-driven approach. In other terms, it was not determined a priori based on formal features associated to pre-existing categories. Instead, it was contextually determined, allowing for features of interaction to describe themselves. To do so, the Conversation Analytic technique of the next turn-proof procedure was used. According to this technique, the interlocutor's response to an utterance displays their understanding of the prior turns' talk and can be taken as evidence for what action was accomplished in conversation (Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson 1974). Following this procedure, the reaction to the signal was used to determine the category in which the strategy was classified.

Repetitions of the trigger constitute a particularly explicative case. Previous studies (e.g., Chen 2016: 7) considered repetitions as one of the typical realizations of CCs; however, this categorization disregards the way in which interlocutors co-construct meaning during interaction. To clarify this point, compare the examples reported in Excerpts 1-2.[2]

(1) Day2_#02

37	CH2:	e	什么类型	(1.0)	>类型<		
		e	*shénme*	*lèixíng*	*(1.0)*	*>lèixíng<*	
		PRT	what	kind		kind	
		‘Uh what kind (1.0) >kind<’					
38 →	IT5:	l- lei sing?					
39	CH2:	m tippo: (.) tippo in cinese:^ è 类 [型.					
		m	*tippo: (.)*	*tippo*	*in*	*cinese:^ è*	*lèi [xíng.*
		PRT	kind	kind	in	Chinese is	kind
		‘Mh %ki:nd% (.) %kind in Chine:se^ is% *lei [xing.*’					

(2) Day2_#05

71	CH4:	… 所以我必须每天都要做饭.							
		… suǒyǐ	*wǒ*	*bìxū*	*měi*	*tiān*	*dōu*	*yào*	*zuòfàn.*
		so	1sg	must	every	day	all	must	cook
		‘… so I must cook every day.’							
72 →	IT10:	做饭.							
		zuòfàn.							
		cook							
		‘*Zuofan*’							
73	CH4:	就是.							
		jiù	*shì.*						
		just	be						
		‘That’s right.’							

In Excerpt 1, IT5 attempted the inaccurate question *shénme yàngzi* 什么样子 ‘what model?’ to ask CH2 what kind of music they liked. CH2 provided corrective feedback by saying that the appropriate term was *lèixíng* 类型 ‘kind’. Clearly, IT5 did not know this word, as suggested by her attempts to mimic its pronunciation (line 38). The evident hesitations and rising intonation suggest that the underlying illocutionary force of the utterance was asking for clarification. This is confirmed by CH2’s prompt explanation in line 39. Following the next-turn proof procedure, CH2’s response can be used as evidence for interpreting IT5’s signal as a CR.

[2] In the excerpts, ‘#’ indicates the progressive number of the recording in that specific day. Italian participants are indicated through the notation ‘IT’ followed by an identification number from 1 to 13. Similarly, Chinese participants are indicated through the notation ‘CH’ followed by an identification number going from 1 to 6. Interlinear glosses follow the Leipzig Glossing Rules (<https://www.eva.mpg.de/lingua/resources/glossing-rules.php>(06/2021), adapted to Chinese based on Li and Thompson’s (1981) notation. The abbreviations ACT and PRT are not included in the cited references: the former stands for ‘actualising *ci*’ (‘*ci* attualizzante’), a particular use of the Italian locative pronoun ‘ci/ce’ (see Sabatini 1985: 160); the latter stands for ‘particles’ and refers to various types of non-lexical vocalisations, including exclamations, interjections, backchannels, hesitations, etc. (e.g., see Wu 2016). These particles were all transcribed in Latin letters, as most of them cannot be written in conventionalised Chinese characters (Lee, Tao, and Lu 2017: 792).

In Excerpt 2, CH4 told IT10 that she had to cook for her boyfriend every day, using the word *zuòfàn* 做饭 'to cook'. This was probably unknown to IT10; nonetheless, it was easily inferable. In fact, *zuò* 做 'to make' is a very common verb, and *fàn* 饭 'cooked rice' is the general term to express 'meal', as in the compound *chīfàn* 吃饭 [eat-rice] 'to eat'. Contrarily to Excerpt 1, the repetition in line 72 is uttered in a falling intonation and without hesitations. This suggests that IT10 repeated the word to confirm her inference, and this is consistent with CH4's acknowledgement in line 73 ('that's right'). Thus, the repetition here can be interpreted as a CC.

In summary, the two excerpts show that two apparently identical strategies are in fact different in nature, as suggested by the NSs' reactions. Additional interpretive evidence is provided by features of the speaker's vocal conduct such as intonation, hesitations, phonetic accuracy, etc.

Once pragmatic strategies were identified, sub-categories were created according to the form of the signal, i.e., the linguistic resources the participants exploited to perform such strategies.

A further distinction was made between simple and embedded routines. Simple routines are those following the typical T-S-R-RR sequence, whereas embedded or 'nested' routines occur when the incomprehension persists after the R (Varonis and Gass 1985: 78; Doughty 2000: 48). In the latter case, the NS's response is followed by a new signal instead of the reaction. This reiterates the routine until comprehension is reached or negotiation is abandoned.

Lastly, NNS's strategies to signal non-understanding were classified at the sequential level, distinguishing between those occurring in routine initiation and those occurring in subsequent reiterations after the R.

3.4 Results

A total number of 78 NS-triggered negotiation routines were identified in the transcripts. Of these, 46 (58.97%) were simple routines and 32 (41.03%) were embedded or "nested" routines.

As noted by Varonis and Gass (1985: 78-81), embedded routines can display multiple layers and entail more than one trigger. In Excerpt 3, CH6's attempts to clarify the word *Wànshénmiào* 万神殿 'Pantheon', a famous monument in Rome, generated new understanding problems (lines 11, 16, and 24). The original problem was only resolved in turn 33, after CH6 tried to translate the word into Italian.

(3) Day3_#06

7	CH6	… 在: (.) 万神殿附近.
		… *zà:i (.)* *Wànshénmiào* *fùjìn.*
		be.at Pantheon nearby
		'… It's: (.) near the Pantheon.'
8 →	IT11	uan shi?
9	CH6	万神殿 °附近° (1.0) e:: 一个 (0.5) <圆顶> (.) (这边) 有一个洞子.
		Wànshénmiào °fùjìn° (1.0) *e::* *yī-gè (0.5)* *<yuándǐng> (.)*
		Pantheon nearby VCL one-CLF round-top
		(zhèbiān) *yǒu* *yī-gè* *dòngzi.*
		here have one-CLF hole
		'°Near° the Pantheon (1.0) uhm:: one ((with a)) (0.5) <round top> (.) (here) has a hole.'
10	IT11	=AH era grande (0.2) 大的:: (0.7) 很大.
		=AH *era* *grande (0.2)* *dà-de:: (0.7)* *hěn* *dà.*
		PRT was.2sg big big-DET very big
		'=%AH it was big% (0.2) bi::g (0.7) very big.'

11 CH6 (not clear) >很大一个< (.) 圆的: (.) 房顶.
(not clear) >hěn dà yí-gè< (.) yuán-de: (.) fángdǐng.
very big one-CLF round-DET house-top
'(not clear) >a very big one< (.) ((with a)) round: (.) roof.'
((omitted))
16 → IT12 fanding?

17 IT11 la coppetta?
the ice-cream.cup
'%The ice-cream cup?%'
18 CH6 =等一下>在万神殿附近是一个< (.) 经典 monumendo (1.0) eh: vicino a un mo-
=děng yíxià >zài Wànshénmiào fùjìn shì yī-gè< (.)
wait one-moment be.at Pantheon nearby be one-CLF
jīngdiǎn monumendo (1.0) e:h vicino a un mo-
classic monument PRT nearby at a mo(nument)
'=Wait >near the Pantheon it's a< (.) classic %monument (1.0) e:h near a mo-%'
19 IT11 [AH VICINO A UN MONUMENTO hhh.h
PRT near at a monument
'[%AH NEAR A MONUMENT hhh.h%'
((omitted))
21 CH6 然后这个 (.) e monumento 是一个 (.) 圆顶的,
ránhòu zhè-ge (.) e monumento shì yī-ge (.)
then this-CFL PRT monument be one-CFL
yuándǐng-de,
round-top-NOM
'Then this (.) uh %monument% has a round top,'
((omitted))
24 → IT12 [yuanding che cos'è?
yuanding what thing-be
'[What's *yuanding*?'
((omitted))
29 CH6 Ah 这个°pa-° (1.0) °pa-° (0.7) <passone?> pansone?
ah zhè-ge °pa-° (1.0) °pa-° (0.7) <passone?> pansone?
PRT this-CLF
'Ah this °pa-° (1.0) °°pa-°° (0.7) <passone?>pansone?'
((omitted))
33 IT12 Pia- ah ^Pantheo:n:?

Overall, 154 pragmatic strategies were used by the non-native participants to signal communication breakdown. Table 1 summarizes the overall frequency and percentage of each type of pragmatic strategies that occurred in the data. In addition, Table 1 also illustrates the sequential organization of strategy use, by reporting the percentage of occurrence of each strategy type in routine-initiating position and in subsequent reiterations.[3]

[3] In Table 1, the number of routine initiations (83) is superior to the total number of negotiation routines (78) because in five cases, the routine was initiated by both Italian participants in the same tandem group.

			Initiations		Reiterations	
Strategy type	**N**	**%**	**N**	**%**	**N**	**%**
Clarification requests	66	42.86%	42	50.60%	24	33.80%
Confirmation checks	61	39.61%	22	26.51%	39	54.93%
Implicit signals	14	9.09%	13	15.66%	1	1.41%
Other strategies	13	8.44%	6	7.22%	7	9.86%
Total	154	100%	83	100%	71	100%

Table 1. Frequency and percentage of strategy use

Empirical observation shows that the great majority of the strategies used by the NNS participants to initiate negotiation routines consisted of CRs and CCs. Due to their overall predominance, these two categories will be discussed more extensively in Section 3.5.

A considerably smaller percentage (9.09%) consisted of implicit signals (IS), which include silence and a variety of pragmatic markers. Examples of IS are reported in Excerpts 4-6. Excerpt 4 is an example of silent signal. CH2 asked IT3 if she had a boyfriend before, but IT3 remained silent. Note that the response to the signal was provided by the other NNS (line 127). In Excerpt 5, the NNS's hesitation served as an IS that initiated the routine. Again, the response was provided by the other non-native interlocutor. In Excerpt 6, the NNS used the backchannel 'mhmh' (line 2), which prompted the NS to produce the subsequent comprehension check (line 25). Backchannels are signals that indicate that the interlocutor can continue talking and are often used to elicit more conversation or elucidation (De Bartolo 2014: 458). In Excerpt 6, it appears that the NNS's backchannel was interpreted by the NS as an incomprehension signal. Seemingly, this interpretation was correct, as suggested by the NNS's reactions to the NS's responses (lines 26, 28).

(4) Day2_#02

125 CH2: … 以前^ (0.5) 以前有吗？
… yǐqián^ (0.5) yǐqián yǒu ma?
before before have Q
'… Before^ (0.5) Did ((you)) have ((one)) before?'

126 → IT3: (0.7)

127 IT5: Prima ce l' avevi?
Before ACT 3sg.OBJ had-2sg.
'Did you have one before?'

((omitted))

129 IT3: 一定.
Yídìng.
Surely
'Sure.'

(5) Day3_#01

16 CH1: 所以你是在 (0.2) 九七年 (.) 出生的.
suǒyǐ nǐ shì zài (0.2) jiǔqī nián (.) chūshēng-de.
so 2sg be in nine-seven year be.born-MOD

'So you were born in ((nineteen)) ninety seven?'

17 → IT3: E::

18 (1.0)

19 IT6: °Novantasette.°
Ninety-seven
'%°Ninety-seven.°%'
20 IT3: =Ah sì.
PRT yes
'=%Oh yeah.%'

(6) Day1_#02
23 CH4: 我妹妹已经工作了 (.) 她是一名 (.) 服装设计师.
wǒ mèimei yǐjīng gōngzuò le (.)
1sg little.sister already work CRS
tā shì yī míng (.) fúzhuāng shèjìshī.
2sg.F be a CL dress designer
'My little sister already works (.) She's a (.) dress designer.'
24 → IT3: Mhmh^
25 CH4: 你知道什么是服装设计师吗？ E:: (.) visto (.) °visto°?
nǐ zhīdào shénme shì fúzhuāng shèjìshī ma?
2sg know what be dress designer Q
e:: (.) visto (.) °visto°?
PRT dress dress
'Do you know what a *fuzhuang shejishi* is? U::h (.) visto (.) °visto°?'
26 IT3: aha^
27 CH4: de- (.) desi:gn.
28 IT3: ok.

Lastly, a heterogeneous variety of strategies that did not fall into any of the previous categories was grouped under the label "other strategies" (OS). In Excerpt 7, for instance, the NNS used a meta-cognitive strategy, consisting in the speakers' verbalization of her thinking process (Chen 2016: 11). Due to the exiguous number of occurrences, this category will not be discussed further.

(7) Day2_#04
3 CH1: [HH 没准备好.
[HH *méi zhǔnbèi-hǎo.*
PRT NEG prepare-well
'Ahah (you're) not ready.'
4 IT7: °spe che ha chiesto che (sta a di)°?
wait what has asked what (is PROG say)
'°Wait what has he asked what (is he saying)°?'
5 → IT8: =e:: 准备 è::: [siete preparati forse]
PRT prepare is are.2pl ready maybe
'= %e:: *zhunbei* is::: [are you ready maybe]%'

The data in Table 1 also suggest that the preferred strategy type for routine initiation was CRs, whereas CCs were more frequently used in subsequent reiterations. This sequence is very well exemplified in Excerpt 8. In line 61, IT3 produced a partial repetition of the trigger: in Section 3.5.1, this strategy will be interpreted as a CR for the elements of the word that were not grasped. After CH2's response, IT5 apparently understood what the intended word was, and repeated it for confirmation (line 65).

(8) Day4_#01

58	CH2:	[e	scrivania	è (0.2)	[桌-	写- =	
					[zh-	*x-*	
		[and	writing.desk	is	table	write	
		‘%and writing desk is%			[*zh- x-* =’		
59	IT3:				[°桌-		桌子°
					[°zhuō-	*zhuōzi°*	
					table-	table	
					‘[°tab-	table-°	
60	CH2:	=写字桌_					
		Xiězìzhuō					
		Write-character-table					
		‘=*Xiezizhuo_*’					
61 →	IT3:	写-					
		Xiě-					
		Write					
		‘*Xie-*’					
62	CH2:	scrive	è	[写 =			
				Xiě			
		write	is	write			
		‘%to write is%		[*xie* =’			
63	IT3:			[写			
				[xiě			
				write			
				‘[*Xie*’			
64	CH2:	= e	s- scri-	scrivania	写字桌_		
		= *e*	*s- scri-*	*scrivania*	*Xiězìzhuō_*		
		and		writing.table	write-character-table		
		‘= %and w- wr- writing table% *xiezizhuo_*’					
65 →	IT5:	°写字桌°					
		°*xiězìzhuō*°					
		write-character-table					
		‘°Writing table°’					

The overall distribution of each strategy type across the six days of observation is reported in Table 2 and Figure 1. As shown, CRs and CCs follow similar distributional patterns, and so do the other categories. In particular, the mean number and standard deviation of the CRs and CCs produced each day are very close, suggesting that the participants’ production of these two types of pragmatic strategies was relatively uniform. The data also show that the participants’ preference for CRs and CCs remained constant, with ISs and OSs only playing a marginal role.

Strategy type	**D1**	**D2**	**D3**	**D4**	**D5**	**D6**	**M (SD)**
Clarification requests	4	15	11	10	8	18	11.00 (4.98)
Confirmation checks	1	13	9	15	7	16	10.17 (5.67)
Implicit signals	2	4	5	2	1	0	2.33 (1.86)
Other strategies	1	6	2	1	0	3	2.17 (2.14)
Total	8	38	27	28	16	37	25.67 (11.78)

Table 2. Strategy use across days of observation

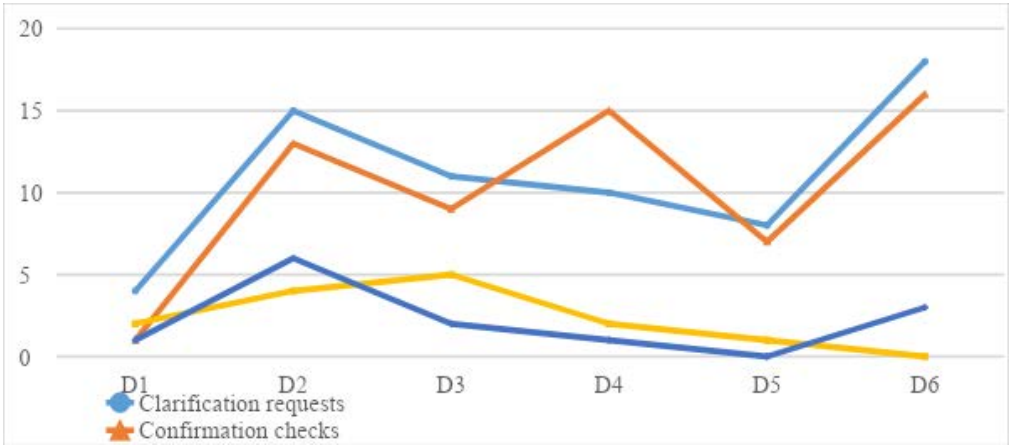

Figure 1. Strategy use across days of observation

Recall that in tandem language learning, each participant is a learner of their partners' L1. Therefore, code-switching is likely to occur, especially when non-understanding arises. As shown in Figure 2, this was indeed the case, with 45.45% (N = 70, M = 11.67, SD = 5.01) of the signals being uttered in Italian and 44.81% (N = 69, M = 11.50, SD = 6.44) in Chinese.

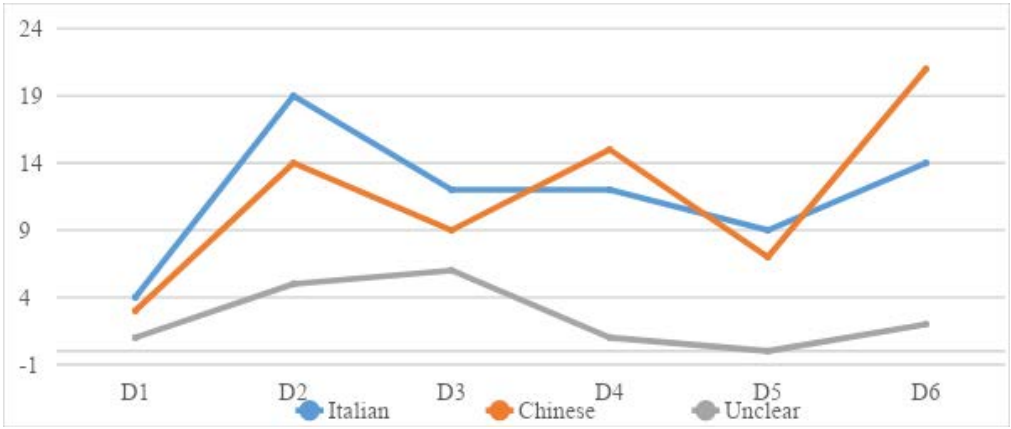

Figure 2. Use of Italian and Chinese

3.5 Clarification requests and confirmation checks

Considered the participants' preference for CRs and CCs, this Section will describe these two categories in more detail. In particular, it will focus on the form of the signal, that is, the linguistic and communicative resources the NNSs used to draw attention to a comprehension problem.

The data partially confirmed the realizations identified in previous studies (e.g., O'Rourke, 2005; Chen 2016). However, instances of Chinese-specific realizations also emerged.

3.5.1 Clarification requests

The CR forms observed in the data are reported in Table 3, together with an explanation and an example. The overall and day-by-day frequency of each form type is reported in Table 4.

Type	**Explanation**	**Example**
Explicit statement	The NNS explicitly indicates that non-understanding has occurred	*Méi tīngdǒng*没听懂 'I didn't understand'
Full repetition	The NNS repeats the entire trigger in a rising intonation, often with hesitations, mispronunciations etc.	*L- lei sing?*
Pragmatic marker	The non-understanding is signaled by means of a pragmatic marker, uttered with rising intonation	*Scusami?* 'Excuse me?'
Partial repetition	The NNS repeats part of the trigger (word, phrase, or utterance)	*Liú-* 流 'spread' (T: *liúxíng* 流行 'popular')
Question	The NNS asks explicit questions requiring clarifications	*Non è al contrario* 'isn't it the opposite'
Wh- pronoun	The NNS signals non-understanding using *wh-* pronouns in isolation	*Shénme*什么? 'What?'
'What is (T)?'	The NNS does not understand the trigger 'T' and explicitly asks what it is	*Xíngzhuàng* 形状*che cos'è?* 'What is *xingzhuang*?'
Others	• The NNS asks the other NNS for clarification	• *Spe che ha chiesto che* 'Wait what did they ask what'
	• Pragmatic marker + partial repetition	• *E::h rú-* 如-'U::h *ru-*?' (T: *rúguǒ* 如果 'if')

Table 3. CR forms

Type	**D1**	**D2**	**D3**	**D4**	**D5**	**D6**	**Total**		
							N	**M (SD)**	**%**
Explicit statement	1	4	1	4	1	1	12	2.00 (1.55)	18.18
Full repetition	0	2	4	2	1	0	9	1.50 (1.52)	13.64
Pragmatic marker	2	2	0	0	2	2	8	1.33 (1.03)	12.12
Partial repetition	1	3	2	4	0	10	20	3.33 (3.56)	30.30
Question	0	0	0	0	3	4	7	1.17 (1.83)	10.61
Wh- pronoun	0	2	0	0	0	0	2	0.33 (0.81)	3.03
'What is (T)?'	0	1	4	0	1	0	6	1.00 (1.55)	9.09
Others	0	1	0	0	0	1	2	0.33 (0.52)	3.03

Table 4. Frequency of CR forms

Tables 4-5 show that the informants employed a variety of linguistics and communicative resources to signal non-understanding and request for clarification. The most frequent are partial repetition of the trigger and explicit statements of non-understanding, respectively. Other three relatively frequent forms are full repetitions, pragmatic markers (e.g., 'mh?', 'sorry?', 'uh?') and the use of the pattern 'what is T?', 'T' being the trigger and the question occurring both in Chinese ('T *shì shénme* 是什么?') and Italian ('T che cos'è?'). Explicit statements of non-understanding ('I didn't understand') also occurred in fixed forms, either Chinese ('*méi tīngdǒng* 没听懂') or Italian ('non ho capito').

Partial repetition of the trigger represents by far the most recurrent realization of CRs, its frequency almost doubling that of the next category, i.e., explicit statements. The repeated element can be a single morpheme in a compound, part of a phrase, or a segment of the entire utterance (Excerpts 9-11).

(9) Day4_#1

94	CH2:	…	questo (0.5)	鼠标垫.	
		…	*questo (0.5)*	*shǔbiāodiàn*	
			This	mouse.pad	
		'… %this% (0.5) mouse pad.'			
95 →	IT3:	dien?			
96	CH2:	垫 (.) 垫- 垫在下面.			
		diàn (.) diàn- diànzài xiàmian.			
		pad	pad	pad-at	underneath
		'Pad (.) pad- pad underneath'			

(10) Day6_#1

167	CH1:	>或者我等你的消息<=					
		>huòzhě	*wǒ*	*děng*	*nǐ*	*de*	*xiāoxi<*
		or	1sg	wait	2sg	GEN	news
		'>Or ((you can say)) I'll wait for your news<'					
((omitted))							
170 →	IT3:	你的?					
		nǐ	*de?*				
		2sg	GEN				
		'Your?'					
171	CH1:	消息 ((omitted))					
		xiāoxi ((omitted))					
		news					
		'News'					

(11) Day2_#1

5	CH3:	哦(.) 你们学汉语多久了?				
		ò (.)	*nǐmen*	*xué*	*hànyǔ*	*duōjiǔ-le?*
		PRT	2pl	study	Chinese	how-long-CRS?
		'How long have you been studying Chinese?'				
6 →	IT4:	e:: 你们?				
		e::	*nǐmen?*			
		PRT	2pl			
		'U::hm you?'				
7	CH3:	en:: 学汉语: (.) >学中文多久了 cinese<?				
		en::	*xué*	*hànyǔ: (.)*	*xué*	*zhōngwén duōjiǔ-le cinese*
		PRT	study	Chinese study	Chinese	how-long-CRS Chinese
		'En:: have studied Chine:se (.) >studied Chinese for how long %Chinese%<?'				

In Excerpt 9, the participants were engaged in a vocabulary task. In turns, they had to discuss the Italian or Chinese names of a series of objects in a picture. In the excerpt, negotiation was triggered by the word *shǔbiāodiàn* 鼠标垫 'mouse pad'. The component *shǔbiāo* 鼠标 'mouse' was already active in the previous context, as this word was discussed immediately before *shǔbiāodiàn* 鼠标垫. *Diàn* 垫 'pad', on the contrary, was completely novel: by repeating it, IT3 narrowed CH2's focus on the part of the word that required clarification. This example is opposite to Excerpt 8, line 61: in that case, IT3 repeated the only element that she comprehended (*xiě* 写 'to write'), and by doing so prompted CH2 to provide clarification to the novel ones.

Excerpt 10 is an example of a partially repeated phrase. Again, the repetition involved the elements which were familiar to the NNS (*nǐ de* 你的 [2sg-GEN] 'your'). As a confirmation that this strategy was indeed a CR and was interpreted as such by the interlocutors, in line 169 CH1 responded to the signal by supplying the segment of the trigger that IT3 failed to comprehend (*xiāoxi* 消息 'news').

Lastly, Excerpt 11 is an example of what Nakahama, Tyler, and van Lier (2001: 384-385) call a global trigger, that is, a trigger that involves the entire utterance rather than isolated lexical items or local morphosyntactic elements. In the excerpt, communication breakdown occurred as IT4 failed to understand CH3's question. Her partial repetition in line 6 suggests that she only understood the subject *nǐmen* 你们 'you'. CH3's subsequent response served as a clarification, as they provided a reformulation of their previous utterance, followed by the Italian translation of the words *hànyǔ* 汉语 and *zhōngwén* 中文 'Chinese language'.

In summary, in partial repetitions the repeated element is usually the one that the NNS understood, while the element that requires clarification is omitted (Excerpts 8, 10, and 11). However, the reverse is also possible (Excerpt 9). In this case, the repeated segment is the one that requires clarification.

As for code-switching, Figure 3 shows a preference for Chinese, which accounts for 57.58% of the occurrences (N = 38, M = 6.33, SD = 3.93). In comparison, Italian only accounts for 39.40% (N = 26, M = 4.33, SD = 1.86). However, if repetitions are excluded, the result is opposite, with a strong predominance of Italian (26 cases) over Chinese (9). Clearly, when adopting strategies other than repetitions, the participants are likely to code-switch to Italian.

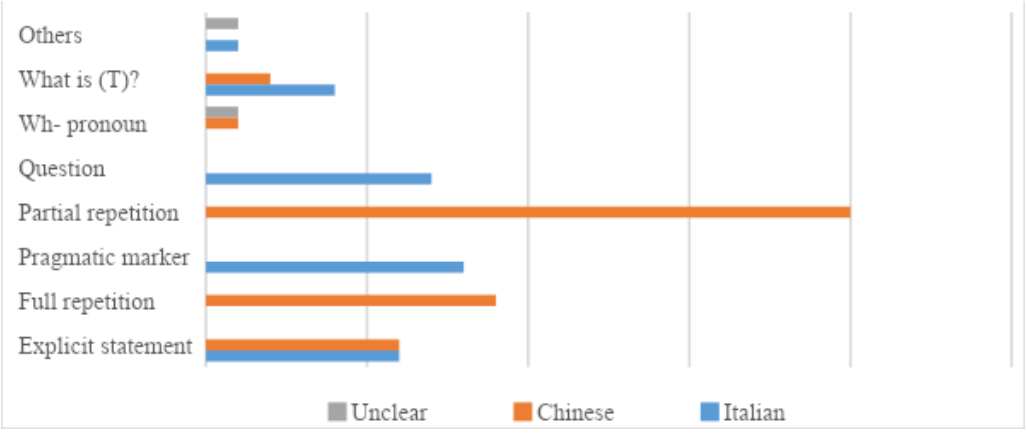

Figure 3. Code-switching in CRs

3.5.2 Comprehension checks

The complete list of the observed CC forms is reported in Table 5, whereas Table 6 shows the frequency of each form type.

Type	**Explanation**	**Example**
Confirmation question	The NNS explicitly asks for confirmation	*Nǐ bù xǐhuan* 你不喜欢? '(you mean) you don't like it?'
Full repetition	The NNS repeats the entire trigger	*Zuòfàn*做饭 'To cook'
Repetition + translation	The NNS repeats the trigger and provides a translation in Italian	*Dài* 带*come portare* '*Dai* as to bring'
Synonym	The NNS provides a Chinese synonym of the trigger	*Ah nánpéngyou* '男朋友 'Oh (the same as) boyfriend'
Translation	The NNS provides the Italian translation of the trigger, often with rising intonation	*Anello?* 'Ring?'
'(T) as in [compound]?'	The NNS asks if the trigger 'T' is part of a familiar compound word	*Kǎo (.) kǎoshì* 考 (.) 考试? '*Kao* (as in) *kaoshi* (do an exam)?'
Others	• Partial repetition	• *Dà* 大*?* 'Big?' (T: *dàmǐ* 大米 'rice')
	• Expansion	• *Ah era grande (.) dà de* 大的 (.) *hěn dà* 很大 'Oh (I get it) it was big… big… very big'
	• Word invention	• *Shǒujīdiàn* 手机垫? 'Mobile pad?'

Table 5. CC forms

Type	**D1**	**D2**	**D3**	**D4**	**D5**	**D6**	**Total**		
							N	**M (SD)**	**%**
Confirmation question	0	2	0	1	1	0	4	0.67 (0.82)	6.56
Full repetition	1	4	0	4	4	5	18	3.00 (2.00)	29.51
Repetition + translation	0	0	1	1	0	6	8	1.33 (2.34)	13.11
Synonym	0	0	1	0	1	1	3	0.50 (0.55)	4.92
Translation	0	6	5	3	0	0	14	2.33 (2.73)	22.95
'(T) as in compound?'	0	0	0	5	1	4	10	1.67 (2.25)	16.39
Others	0	1	2	1	0	0	4	0.67 (0.82)	6.56

Table 6. Frequency of CC forms

Differently from CRs, CCs show two strongly predominant types, namely, full repetitions and translations. The frequency percentages of the two strategy types are very close; however, full repetitions are more uniformly distributed over the period of observation, while translations are more concentrated in the first four days.

An example of full repetition is that reported in Excerpt 2. Note that the NNS's inference is not necessarily accurate: in Excerpt 12, for instance, IT10 misinterpreted the NS's utterance *xǐ wǎn* 洗碗 'do the dishes' with the quasi-homophonous and assumedly more familiar *xīwàng* 希望 'to hope'.

(12) Day2_#5
115 IT9: … 你在家做饭 (.) 他做: (0.5) >什么<? =
… *nǐ* *zài* *jiā* *zuò-fàn (.)* *tā* *zuò:* *(0.5)*
… 2sg at home cook-rice 3sg.M do
>shénme<?
what
'… you cook at home (.) he do:es (0.5) >what<?'
116 CH4: [洗碗
[*xǐ* *wǎn*
wash bowl
'[he does the dishes'
((omitted))
120 → IT10: °°希望°°
Xīwàng
Hope
'°°To hope°°'

The other predominant CC type is translation. NNSs' translations can also be accompanied by pragmatic markers, as in Excerpt 13, or tag questions (e.g., *tipo hip-hop no?* 'like hip-hop, isn't it?'). These adjunct elements reinforce the illocutionary force of the utterance, suggesting that the NNS is trying to corroborate a hypothesis.

(13) Day3_#6
1 CH6: … 这个里面有 (.) 一百五十种 (.) 不同的: (.) 口味.
… *zhè* *ge* *lǐmiàn* *yǒu (.)* *yìbǎiwǔshí* *zhǒng (.)*
this CLF inside have one-hundred-fifty type
bùtóng *de (.)* *kǒuwèi.*
different DET taste
'… inside this ((place)) there are (.) one hundred and fifty types (.) of: different (.) flavours.'
2 → IT11: ah gusti.
PRT flavours
'Ah %flavours%.'

Interestingly, a relatively frequent strategy consisted in a combination of both repetition and translation. This hybrid form can also be followed by tag questions, as shown in Excerpt 14.

(14) Day6_#2
58 CH4: °很久°
°*hěn* *jiǔ*°
very long.time
'°A very long time°'

59 → IT4: ha 很旧- 旧 è: 旧 di: vecchio giusto?
ha hěn jiù- jiù è: jiù di: vecchio giusto?
PRT very old old is old of old right
'Ah, very old, %*jiu* i:s *jiu* li:ke old right%?'

60 CH4: e::n 很长的时间.
e::n hěn cháng-de shíjiān.
PRT vey long-DET time
'E::hm a very long time.'

A particularly interesting CC form consisted in proposing a familiar compound word or phrase which comprised the elements that caused the comprehension problem. In Excerpt 15, IT5 was trying to reconstruct the word *gǎnjué* 感觉 'to feel'. To do so, she suggested possible compounds or phrases in which the morphemes *gǎn* 感 'to feel' and *jué* 觉 'to sense' might occur.

(15) Day6_#1

87 CH1: 我感觉 (1.5) 我,
wǒ gǎnjué (1.5) wǒ,
1sg feel 1sg
'I feel (1.5) I,'

((omitted))

90 IT5: 感 [di:=
gǎn [di:=
feel of
'*Gan* [%as i:n%='

((omitted))

93 → IT5: =[感兴趣?
=[*gǎn xìngqu?*
feel interest
'=be interested?'

94 CH1: Sì (.) [quello 感.
Sì (.) [quello gǎn.
Yes that feel
'%Yes% (.) [%that% *gan*.'

95 IT3: [ok (1.0) 感-
[ok (1.0) *gǎn-*
ok feel
'[ok (1.0) *gan*-'

96 CH1: 觉.
jué
sense
'*jue*.'

97 → IT3: 觉得?
juéde.
sense-gain
'((As in)) to think?'

98 CH1: sì ((omitted))
yes
'%Yes% ((omitted))'

Lastly, a slight preference for Italian was observed (Figure 4). Italian CCs were 31 (50.82%, M = 5.17, SD = 3.49), while Chinese CCs were 27 (44.26). These data are confirmed if translation and repetitions – which are necessarily in Italian and Chinese, respectively – are not considered. In this case, CCs in Italian are 11, while CCs in Chinese are 8.

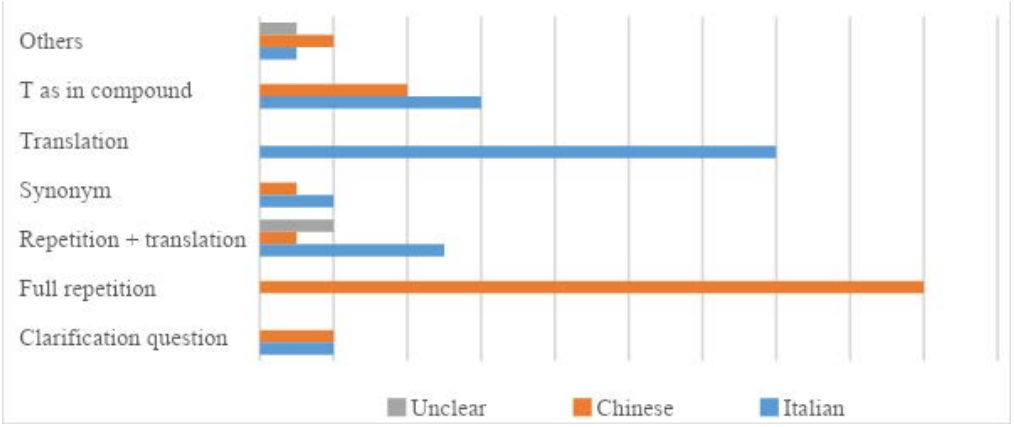

Figure 4. Code-switching in CCs

4. Discussion

The analysis of CFL learners' strategies to signal non-comprehension revealed a series of regularities, some confirming and some contradicting previous studies on NoM. Additionally, patterns emerged that are clearly target-language specific or related to the interactional context.

Firstly, the Italian participants recurred to both CRs and CCs. The frequency of occurrence of these two strategies is very close, suggesting that they were equally employed when dealing with comprehension problems (RQ1). This is in contradiction with Wang and Li (2015), who observed a predominance of CCs in NNS's signals. This discrepancy probably depends on classification criteria, particularly for what concerns repetitions. As reported in Section 3.3, repetitions are traditionally classified as CCs. Wang and Li (*ibidem*, 385) also adhered to this criterion, while in the present study repetitions were considered either CRs or CCs depending on speakers' co-constructed meaning as emerged from the interaction.

Despite their similar frequency, a difference between CRs and CCs can be observed if their sequential distribution in negotiation routines is considered. As shown, CRs tend to occur in routine-initiation position, whereas CCs are more likely to be used in routine reiterations, when the NS's response is not sufficient to solve the communication problem. It appears that miscommunications initially cause confusion to the NNSs, who choose to resort to CRs to explicitly signal incomprehension. After the NSs' response, the NNSs are able to make hypotheses on the interlocutor's intended meaning and use CCs to corroborate them. This pattern emerged very clearly from the data and provides an interesting starting point for future research on NoM.

Secondly, the participants employed a variety of linguistic resources to signal non-understanding, including pragmatic markers, *wh-* pronouns, reformulations, expansions, synonyms, etc. Yet, some resources – partial repetitions for CRs, full repetitions and translations for CCs – are unequivocally predominant (RQ2). These results resemble those of previous studies (e.g.,

O'Rourke 2005; Wang and Li 2015) and suggest that learners tend to adhere to a limited set of few, communicatively effective strategies.

Another point worth discussing is that concerning repetitions. As seen, repetitions reproduce the trigger either partially or in its entirety. In this regard, a clear difference was observed between repetitions serving as CRs and those serving as CCs. In CRs, the participants mostly used partial repetitions. The repeated part was the element of the word, phrase, or sentence that caused the incomprehension or, more typically, the only element that the NNS could grasp. In CCs, on the contrary, full repetitions were used almost exclusively. Note that full repetitions are also used as CRs, even though in this case they are simple phonetic imitations of the trigger. In other terms, they do not carry meaning. By contrast, when checking for confirmation the NNS has a clear hypothesis of what the problematic part might be. The repetition, therefore, is not aimed at requesting clarification; rather, it is aimed at receiving confirmation or rejection of such a hypothesis.

In sum, when asking for clarification, the NNSs tend to repeat the meaningful segment of the trigger, leaving the task of providing the opaque part to the NSs. On the contrary, when checking for confirmation, the NNSs tend to repeat the entire trigger, as they already have a clear representation of what the NSs' intended meaning might be.

Partial repetitions and the CC type that was labeled as "(T) as in compound" are highly Chinese-specific and show the NNS participants' awareness of Chinese word-building properties. Words in Modern Chinese can be analyzed as strings of monosyllabic morphemes (Norman 1988: 178). By repeating the meaningful morphemes of the trigger or suggesting possible compound words that contain the morpheme that requires disambiguation, learners demonstrate orientation towards the target language and its combinatory mechanisms. By contrast, strategies like translation are more L1-oriented, while other strategies (e.g., *wh-* questions) are not L1/L2 related. As such, they were produced both in Italian and Chinese, and even in English in one case ('what?').

This leads to another characteristic of the participants' signals, that is, the frequent code-switching and general preference for Italian (RQ3). Notably, the NSs also resorted to Italian in their responses to NNSs' signals, as shown in many of the excerpts in Section 3. Similar findings also emerged from O'Rourke's (2005) analysis of Irish and German NoM in computer-mediated tandem. In that study, English was the dominant language, and four out of five cases of explicit suggestions for repair consisted of German learners' call for translations into English. Following O'Rourke, it can be concluded that Italian assumed the status of a lingua franca, a safe solution to most communication problems. This might be due to the proficiency imbalance between the two groups of learners, even though they assumedly had a similar L2 level. Another reason may depend on the fact that Italian was the dominant language in the learning environment, as all the interactions took place in an Italian university. Either way, without drawing hasty conclusions on the amount of L2 acquisition, it is reasonable to assume that Chinese learners presumably benefited more from the volume of L2 input and output, thus altering the linguistic, pedagogical, and affective nature of a tandem exchange (*ibidem*, 458).

As a last remark, learners' signal strategies, though showing a clear perlocutionary effect, were particularly error-prone or syntactically incomplete. An example is shown in Excerpt 15, line 97: a more accurate way to ask if a morpheme is part of a compound would be using the "compound – DET – morpheme" construction, in that case *juéde de jué* 觉得的觉 [think – DET – sense] '*jue* as in *juede* [to think]'. IT3, however, only conveyed the compound (*juéde* 觉得? 'to think?'), whereas the other elements of the construction were omitted. CH1's acknowledgment in line 98 suggests that they understood IT3's intention; still, the illocutionary force of IT3's

utterance was not explicit, and the burden of its interpretation was entirely on the NS's part. Following Taguchi and Roever (2017: 120), it appears that low-ability learners seem to rely on their interlocutors' cooperation and use them as a "resource to accomplish social actions by proxy". This strategy does not necessarily lead to pragmatic failure, but it highlights NNSs' overreliance on the NSs' ability to simplify and facilitate the interaction. Such inaccuracies were never addressed by the NSs. This is in line with previous research on corrective feedback in tandem learning, during which "students are more concerned with communication than with correction. In other words, structural features are treated mainly when incorrect usage causes a problem in communication" (Cappellini 2016: 14; see also Cappellini and Zhang 2013). In fact, one of the drawbacks of tandem is its tolerance to errors, particularly syntactical ones (Little 2003). This diminished the chances for the Italian participants to receive negative feedback and become more efficient negotiators.

5. Conclusions

This study analyzed Italian and Chinese learners' interactions in a tandem learning context and classified Italian CFL learners' pragmatic strategies to signal non-understanding. The data showed the participants' tendency to use a limited set of linguistic resources, mostly consisting of full or partial repetitions of the trigger, as well as a general preference for Italian, used as a lingua franca to interrupt the flow of the conversation and focus on the problem-solving activity. Empirical evidence also suggested a sequential preference for CRs and CCs, which tend to occur in different positions of the negotiation routine (initiation and reiterations, respectively).

According to Varonis and Gass (1985), NoM is more frequent among NNS-NNS than NS-NNS pairs, as NNSs' "shared incompetence" (*ibidem*, 84) allows them to put the conversation on hold without fear of losing face. The results of the present study suggest a more encouraging scenario. Indeed, the participants engaged frequently and very deeply into NoM, and even though it is impossible to ascertain whether the Italian learners signalled each and every instance of non-comprehension, cases of abandoned negotiations were not attested. Assumedly, in a tandem context "partners' awareness of the learning purpose of the exchange and their shared status as learners, leads them to use direct failure signals that would in nonpedagogical situations be regarded as face-threatening" (O'Rourke 2005: 449). Therefore, tandem exchanges are likely to encourage NoM, even though little attention is paid to the linguistic accuracy of the signals themselves.

These results may be particularly relevant in terms of pedagogical implications. According to McKay (2010: 239), negotiation practices should be introduced in the language classrooms. In order to increase linguistic accuracy and enhance communicative efficiency, learners should be given samples of authentic interactions and then asked to identify those strategies that help the meaning-construction process (De Bartolo 2014: 460). In CFL, Wang and Li (2015: 389) suggest focusing learners' attention on the fixed or semi-fixed chunks that NSs use as signals. Regular patterns for signaling non-understanding are reported in Jin (2011: 86). According to the author, typical Chinese CRs consist of questions (… *shì shénme yìsi* 是什么意思 'what does … mean?'), imperatives (*qǐng nǐ màn yìdiǎn* 请你慢一点 'a bit slower, please'), or a combination of statements and imperatives (*wǒ méi tīng dǒng, qǐng zài shuō yí cì* 我没听懂，请再说一次 'I didn't understand, please repeat'); as for CCs, frequently recurring formulae are *nǐ de yìsi shì bu shì* 你的意思是不是… or *nǐ shì bu shì shuō* 你是不是说… 'Do you mean…'. These and other forms may be introduced to and practiced by learners as effective strategies to overcome communication problems, while at the same time sounding more nativelike.

Due to the small sample size, the results of this study cannot be used to draw general conclusions on CFL learners' practices during NoM. Still, they provide valuable insight into such practices, hopefully inspiring future research on negotiation in CFL/CSL.

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