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Technology-Based Task

In his article, "Computer Mediated Communication: A Window on L2 Spanish Interlanguage," Robert Blake investigates the use of an online chat program in second language acquisition. He uses the chat program to give students additional tasks in the target language outside of the classroom, and also to record their interactions as they negotiate to complete the given tasks. The data he collected shows that jigsaw-type tasks were the most effective in forcing students to negotiate meaning in the target language, especially when it comes to lexical accuracy (as opposed to syntactic). The specific chat program he utilized in this study, furthermore, allowed him to record the students' interactions so that he could track the development of their L2inter-language. I designed a task similar to one that Blake describes in his article, in which students must work together to find an apartment in Madrid that suits each of their sets of ideal living conditions. In this task, students will use an on-line social magazine from Madrid, *La guía del ocio*, to plan a weekend for a celebrity couple.

Pre-task priming activities:

1. In class, we begin by brainstorming things that the students do in New Haven on the weekend, and what places they like to go for dinner dates, parties, etc. We then look at the magazine's web page, and I ask the students to deduce what tabs correspond to some of the activities they mentioned (for example, "Where do I go to find a review of a good restaurant?). This encourages them to deduce vocabulary based on what they see on the webpage.

Task: Students will work in pairs, via an online chat program such as Skype or GChat, to design an ideal weekend itinerary for a celebrity couple, basing their plans on what is available in the *Guia del ocio*.

Pre-task:

1. Each student chooses a separate celebrity and generates a list of what their celebrity likes to do on the weekend and what they would most like to see/do during a weekend in Madrid.

2. Then students join up in pairs, and set a time to meet online later that night, to finish the task via Skype or GChat.

Task:

1. Online, students take turns suggesting activities from the *Guía del ocio* and giving a reason for their selection. They respond to each other by either agreeing to the proposed activity or rejecting it, explaining why.
2. Students must negotiate, debate, and compromise to generate a list of activities that both of their celebrities agree to.

Planning a report:

1. Students write down the names, times, and costs of the activities they agree on.
2. They divide the list, so that each one will present a portion to the class the next day. Alternatively, they can prepare a narrative about what the couple did that weekend in Madrid, or they can present a skit.

Reporting:

1. Students present their celebrity couple and itineraries to the class.
2. Other students make recommendations for other possible activities (relaying other events that they saw in the *Guía del ocio*).

With this task, students will work with a more specific vocabulary related to social activities (words such as “seat number”, “lineup”, “cover charge”, “doors open”, “outdoor seating”, etc.). Ideally making these imaginary plans via an online chat will feel natural to them, i.e. the way they make plans in their own lives. Also, typing, as Blake notes, should make students more conscious of their language, as they can see what they are typing before they send it. Students may also copy the transcript of their chat and hand it in, so that later I can see where they struggled most in their negotiation. A problem with this task would be how to encourage students to elaborate their discussion as they work on the task, as typing in online chats does encourage more short responses. The preparation of a presentation to the class, however, will encourage longer and more elaborate sentence structure.