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Language learning effects through the integration of synchronous online communication: The case of video communication and Second Life

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Abstract: This article attempts to shed some light on the possible learning benefits for language acquisition and intercultural development of authentic social interaction with expert peers through computer mediated communication (CMC) tools. The environments used in this study are video communication and the 3D virtual world *Second Life*. For this research study 41 students of Spanish were randomly allocated to three conditions: (1) face-to-face control group, (2) experimental interaction group with video communication, and (3) experimental interaction group with *Second Life*. All students were following the same language course at B1 level and carried out 5 communication tasks. Different data sources were gathered to measure the impact that integration of CMC has on the development of the intercultural and communicative competence of L2 learners: (1) pre- and post-oral tests to measure the communicative growth of L2 learners; (2) surveys to gather participants' experiences; and (3) recordings of communication sessions for qualitative in- depth analysis of interaction. Significant differences in the development of communicative competence were found, with experimental groups scoring significantly higher than the face-to-face control group.

Keywords: video communication, virtual worlds, intercultural development, interaction, communicative competence

1 Introduction

Synchronous Computer Mediated Communication (SCMC) tools are being used by educators as a way to innovate and enrich education in general and stimulate intercultural communication competences and skills of L2 learners in particular. In the last decades researchers have tried to show the relevance of Computer

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Mediated Communication (CMC) in promoting second language acquisition and intercultural awareness. However, results are controversial: they refer to small studies which normally run for very short periods of time, the majority involve text chat, they tend to be only descriptive and exploratory, and they often lack a control group. This article presents the results of a research study that attempts to investigate the benefits for language acquisition and intercultural development that may be gained from authentic social interaction with expert peers through CMC. Previous studies show that written (mostly asynchronous) CMC, in addition to breaking down the barriers and inhibitions for target language (TL) use, helps the L2 learner to become more confident about his/her language, and to produce not only more talk (Kern 1996), but more coherent (Felix and Lawson 1996) and lexically and syntactically more complex discourse (Warschauer 1996). Text chat logs have been analysed as being effective to enhance language learning at grammatical (Pellettieri 2000), lexical (Smith 2004), syntactic (Sotillo 2000), discourse (Warschauer 1996) and intercultural levels (Belz and Thorne 2006; Toyoda and Harrison 2002; Tudini 2007). However, Ortega (2009) reported that a closer look at text-based SCMC research reveals mixed findings and insufficient evidence.

In addition to text-chat sessions exploratory studies have been conducted in SCMC using different audio(visual) synchronous tools, such as audiographic conferencing (Ciekanski and Chanier 2008; Hampel et al. 2005), VOiP systems like Skype and voice chats (Develotte et al. 2010; Guth and Maio 2010; Wang 2006, 2007; Bueno Alastuey 2011), videoconferencing (O'Dowd 2007) or video communication (Guichon 2010; Jauregi and Bañados 2008, 2010; Jauregi 2015; Jauregi and Melchor-Couto 2014). Most of these studies are exploratory and describe experiences as being motivating and contributing to communicative or intercultural development, but do not offer substantial evidence for it (Belz 2006; Guth and Helm 2010; Müller-Hartmann 2000; O'Dowd 2011; O'Dowd and Ritter 2006; Ware and Kramsch 2005).

Teaching experiences in 3D virtual worlds such as *Second Life* have been described (Molka-Danielsen and Deutschmann 2009; Deutschmann et al. 2009), showing that foreign language learners can engage in interaction (Deutschmann et al. 2009; Peterson 2010), meet native speakers of the target language (Kuriscak and Luke 2009) and engage in meaningful communicative and social spontaneous interaction (Jauregi et al. 2011) while undertaking joint action.

Virtual Worlds have been assessed as beneficial for language learning (Bryant 2006; Thorne 2008) and as a space where users can experiment and interact with a variety of norms of social interaction (Steinkuehler 2006). The realistic nature of the environment provides authentic learning conditions that are otherwise difficult to recreate in traditional classroom settings (Dieterle and Clarke 2008) and, in conjunction with appropriate tasks, elicits collaborative interaction, such as peer-scaffolding focusing on repair and lexis, hypothesized to be beneficial to language

development (Peterson 2012). However, research on virtual worlds remains largely exploratory in nature and is subject to significant limitations (Peterson 2011; González-Lloret and Ortega 2014).

Recent meta-analyses and syntheses, like those of Zhao (2003), Sauro (2011), Lin (2014) and Ziegler (2015) suggest that SCMC has a positive effect on language learning and provides optimal opportunities for language acquisition. The results of Lin's (2015) analysis, based on the Interaction Hypothesis (Long 1996), suggests that online interactions mediated by technology can generate similar or even superior opportunities for foreign language learning than are found in face-to-face settings.

The literature in SLA indicates that when language learners are exposed to communication contexts where beneficial types of collaborative interaction are encouraged (via tasks based on learner needs), their language learning may be facilitated (Pica et al. 1993). When working together to solve communication tasks, the participants of an interaction may experience problems in understanding or breakdowns in communication and to remedy them they often engage in negotiation of meaning, interactional modifications that aim at ensuring shared understanding. According to a growing body of research (Lee 2001; Fernández-García and Martínez-Arbelaiz 2002; Kötter 2003; Smith 2003, 2005; Wang 2006; Clavel-Arroitia and Pennock-Speck 2015), the type of interaction that has been identified as "negotiation of meaning" is the one that provides optimal conditions for language acquisition since it offers opportunities to generate both comprehensible input and modified output.

We also take the development of intercultural communicative competence as a key goal of foreign language education. Following Byram (1997), one of our objectives is to turn foreign language learners into intercultural speakers, by developing intercultural understanding through different social and cognitive activities involving analysis, reflection, and interaction.

As the previously cited research has identified interaction as a key issue in learning and acquisition processes we need to explore how networked tools favour or impede these processes. Synchronous technologies, as well as promoting collaborative skills linked to their affordances, enable opportunities for social interaction where learners can experiment. This seems to make them potential platforms where learning and acquisition could take place.

2 Research questions

The present research aims to study the impact of video-mediated or virtual world-mediated intercultural encounters with expert peers on the intercultural

communicative competence of language learners. In using a face-to-face control group comparison, it seeks to address the deficiency alluded to above (Peterson 2011), that research on virtual worlds remains largely exploratory and is subject to significant limitations. Concretely, the present research study addresses the following questions:

RQ1: Do opportunities to engage in social interaction with expert peers (native speakers) through SCMC tools contribute more to enhancing oral communicative competence as compared to a face-to-face control group?

RQ2: What learning opportunities emerge in interactions conducted by native and non-native speakers through video communication and/or virtual worlds as compared to a face-to-face control group?

RQ3: What are participants' learning experiences?

3 Methodology

3.1 Participants

Forty-one language students of Spanish from Utrecht University (The Netherlands) and fourteen native Spanish speakers from the university of Valencia (Spain) participated in the present study. The language learners were first year Spanish students from Utrecht University, while the students from Valencia were following a pre-service teacher education programme. The language proficiency level of the Spanish course was B1 of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (Council of Europe 2001).

3.2 Procedures

In the present research study two environments were chosen to experiment with and compare with a face-to-face control group: video communication and 3D virtual worlds. The research team had worked with both in previous pilots and wanted to further investigate their effect on language learning, encouraged by Zhao's (2003) narrative review which concluded that technology was useful not only for foreign language development, but also specifically for the enhancement of input, the provision of feedback, and for supporting authentic communication. In the first environment, video communication, participants can engage in multimodal communication, talking, chatting, sharing pictures, documents and sound files, taking part in collaborative writing processes while seeing each other through the webcam (Jauregi and Bañados 2008, 2010; Jauregi et al. 2012),

while in the second one, the 3D virtual world of *Second Life*, participants represented by a virtual avatar can engage in action learning while communicating through voice and/or text chat with each other without seeing the real person behind the avatar (Jauregi et al. 2011). Both tools, although technically different, facilitate interaction with expert peers that otherwise might be difficult to organize in educational institutions; and according to Lin's (2014) meta-analysis, both provide learners with similar learning opportunities regardless of the mode of communication (video communication or 3D virtual worlds). Furthermore, Plonsky and Ziegler's (2016) meta-analysis points towards a significant difference in learning outcomes when learners participate in CALL vs traditional educational contexts: foreign language learning in contexts that use some form of technology provides a considerable advantage over traditional, non-technology based contexts in facilitating learning outcomes.

In this study, language students (n = 41) were randomly assigned to one of three research conditions: Video Communication (VC; n = 13), *Second Life* (SL; n = 14) or face-to-face Control (C; n = 14), and pre-service teachers (n = 14) were assigned to one of the two online conditions according to their personal preferences, video communication or *Second Life*. During the period of observation the participants carried out five tasks, one per week. Before the task sessions, language learners and pre-service teachers participated in VC and SL tutorials to become familiar with the tools.

The course for both VC and SL groups was blended learning. Each group met twice a week face-to-face with their teacher (a native speaker, the same one for all three groups) for two-hour lessons, while a third meeting was a computer-mediated one with the pre-service, native speaker teacher. Participants in these experimental groups communicated in triads (two language students, one native speaker) to carry out five tasks.

In the case of the face-to-face control group, where no native speakers were involved, the difference was the way tasks were performed: they worked in groups of four language learners in the language classroom.

3.3 Tasks

The tasks (see Table 1) were designed following the task-based language learning approach used in the course. They were based on studies which indicate that for learning tasks to be (a) successful, that is, to reach a prescribed goal, they need to be authentic, meet learner needs and provide opportunities for active use of the target language (Chapelle 2001); and to be (b) effective they need to make use of the specific affordances provided by these environments (Hampel 2006; Jauregi et al. 2011). The specific affordances of each tool could be summarized as follows.

Table 1: Description of tasks developed.

Tasks	Description
Session 1: *Cool People*	Students: (a) visit an apartment they are meant to share (b) talk about themselves and exchange cultural information triggered by pictures (c) choose an outing option (go to the cinema, to a museum or to walk in the city).
Session 2: *People & adventures*	Participants plan a holiday and reflect on past holiday experiences.
Session 3: *Movie celebrity people*	Participants have to play different roles given the indications of a brief script.
Session 4: *People with heart*	Participants impersonate different characters and experience the reactions of others.
Session 5: *People & cultures*	Students participate in a cultural television game style context between a Dutch and a Spanish team.

Second Life not only provides opportunities for social interaction, but also for immersion in a 3D environment, creating a sense of co-presence and facilitating contextualization. It simulates an environment that otherwise would be difficult to reproduce in real life and allows users to engage in action through the movements of the avatars. The representation of the participants as graphic avatars can lead to individual and collective identity play. The environments in this type of world are persistent – they do not disappear – and mediated: information can be included or excluded as needed, and extensive modes of communication can be used (audio, video, text, etc.). As well as these technical affordances, where perhaps the most unusual would be the opportunity to cross physical, geographical and temporal boundaries, Warburton and Pérez-García (2009) pointed out other educational affordances for these 3D virtual worlds such as learner experimentation, dynamic feedback, exploration and creativity. They remarked that these worlds help to facilitate collaboration, dissolve social boundaries, enhance student motivation and reduce anxiety.

Video communication, on the other hand, permits not only video and audio but also public and private text messaging. The tool used in this study (*Adobe Acrobat Connect Pro*) also has an interactive whiteboard and allows guided web browsing and desktop sharing. Users were also able to record their sessions. Video communication also offers file transfer and manipulation of documents, allowing the user to generate content (Nielson and González-Lloret 2010). Video communication tools permit naturalistic oral conversations; complement verbal

modes; can act as stimuli for interaction; support socio-affective interaction; and permit the use of gesture in communication (Lamy and Hampel 2007).

The tasks in this study were scheduled weekly after their two classes with their teacher and were the same for all three groups, only adapted in order to take advantage of the specific affordances of the VC or SL medium and of the classroom. For example, in task 1 students were meant to share a house and comment on the things they needed. The *Second Life* experimental group was able to walk around a house created for them, being able to see the characteristics of the objects and interact with them, whereas the video comunication and experimental groups were provided with a Power Point presentation with photographs that depicted what was supposed to be in their house. All tasks had a preparatory and performance phase with support materials in the form of documents to guide them through the tasks. Although *Second Life* and video communication allow text messaging, the interactions analysed in this studyconcern voice chat only. We are aware that text messaging was used during collaboration as auxiliary tool (when sound problems occurred, to write unknown words to the interlocutor, to copy a landmark for teleporting, etc.) but the focus of the study was oral production.

3.3.1 Sessions 2 and 5: *People and adventure* and *People and cultures*

The qualitative analysis of interactions across conditions comes particularly from the second and fifth tasks, *People and adventure* and *People and cultures*, of which we provide further details below.

Task 2, *People and adventure*, was divided in two parts: the preparation of a holiday together and the holiday itself. Participants had to discuss their preferences and reach an agreement on the destination. During the process they were encouraged to talk about their last holiday, any negative experiences with accommodation they might have had previously, make a list of things they might need for their chosen destination, and talk about the activities they could undertake upon arrival.

For the SL group, the interactions took place in an area within *Second Life* designated for the NIFLAR

project,[1] but it also made use of readily available locations as well as venues specially designed for particular tasks.

1 NIFLAR: Networked Interaction in Foreign Language Acquisition and Research (www.niflar.eu).

At the beginning of the task, the SL group was teleported to a pizzeria holodeck[2] where they discussed their preferences and reached an agreement on their destination. Here they had the opportunity to talk about their previous holidays and make the preparations. They were then teleported to their hotel and in a role-play manner they had to sort out any problems they might encounter (leaking shower, unmade bed, dirty floors, etc.). Finally, they headed to their destination where they could, for example, go sailing, surfing, horse riding, skiing or ice skating. They were provided with a taskHUD[3] with additional objects (ski outfits, receptionist uniform, bikini, etc.) that could be used during task performance.

The VC group was able to contextualize the task via images uploaded onto the video communication environment, *Adobe Acrobat Connect Pro*. The participants themselves uploaded their own in order to talk about past holidays and the researchers placed images that depicted possible bad accommodation experiences (dirty floors, broken windows, noisy hotel guests, etc.) and various types of sports that could be practiced during both types of holidays.

As for the face-to-face control group, each member was asked to bring photographs from a past holiday to the lesson.The rest of the visual material (accommodation problems and activity possibilities) was provided by the teacher during task peformance. The same non-personal pictures were used in the VC and face-to-face control groups, and an attempt was made to make them as similar as possible to the scenarios in *Second Life*.

Task 5, *People and Cultures*, was organised as a cultural quiz in the style of a television game-show. Dutch and Spanish teams would compete in terms of cultural knowledge of the other country. Questions for which the teams could score points were displayed on a screen and the opponents had to judge the adequacy of the answers. The face-to-face control group, where students were paired to compete against each other, used only the images of the SL and VC group related to the target culture, and the instructor, in an expert role, acted as adjudicator.

3.4 Instruments

Data were collected from three sources: (1) oral tests taken before and after the interaction sessions to measure communicative growth; (2) analysis of interaction

2 A holodeck stores *Second Life* scenarios and lets the user load them whenever wanted in a limited space. They are used to save content (furniture settings or even entire environments).
3 A taskHUD is a control panel with different buttons you can click on to do context-specific actions.

sessions in the three research conditions; and (3) post-questionnaires. Additionally, informal debriefing interviews were held, but they are not reported in this article.

3.4.1 Oral tests

The pre- and post-test were the same for the three research conditions and administered via a computer in a language lab. The questions had been video recorded by a native speaker and students had to record (voice only) their answers after each question. The test consisted of 11 open-ended questions comprising personal information and course of study (3 items), previous experiences in Spanish-speaking countries (1 item), student life (3 items), weather and gastronomy (2 items), economy (1 item) and recommendations for foreigners visiting their country (1 item). Although the topics that came up in the oral tests were dealt with in one way or another during the tasks, the oral tests did not have the same structure as the task sessions.

Language learners were assessed on measures of communicative language competence based on descriptors that were inspired by the scales proposed by the Common European Framework of Reference for languages (CEFR). Five measures were assessed on a ten-point scale: (a) range of language, (b) grammatical accuracy, (c) fluency, (d) thematic development and (e) coherence (see Appendix). Two native speakers of Spanish separately rated the tests and since there was a high correlation between all five indicators ($.89 \leq r \leq .98$), they were collapsed into one measure of oral skill. An estimate of inter-rater agreement between both raters was calculated and proved to be high ($\alpha = 0.91$).

3.4.2 Surveys

After the conclusion of the project a final survey was digitally distributed to all three groups of learners and native student teachers in order to evaluate participants' experiences. The survey for VC and SL groups had 29 items with open and closed questions concerning the virtual environment, tasks, speech partner, learning potential of the sessions, organization, and global project evaluation. For the face-to-face control group, questions related to the usability of the networking tools and the interaction with native speakers were eliminated from the survey since these elements were not present during task performance. In all three surveys for the closed items a five-point Likert scale was used.

3.4.3 Interaction analysis

Three factors were taken into account regarding the selection of recordings for this study: (a) accessibility of the recordings, (b) representativeness, and (c) previous use in earlier analysis. The recordings database was sometimes difficult to navigate, since participants themselves were in charge of the recording process and file names were not always clear. Easily identifiable files and quality of the recording were primary selection criteria. Once the file had been selected we looked for representativeness of B1 language level. The recordings in *Second Life* were made by one participating student per group with the help of the screencasting and video editing software *Screen Flow* under the supervision of a university technician. For video communication, *Adobe Acrobat Connect Pro* had a recording feature and one student per group was in charge of recording each session. In the face-to-face control group, a camera on a tripod was set in the classroom to film the sessions.

In order to analyze the interactions from all groups we used the following categories: (1) negotiation of formal meaning (Pica 1994; Long 1985; Gass 1997); (2) negotiation of cultural meaning; (3) interactional features; and (4) task engagement and involvement.

(1) The negotiations examined here tend to follow Varonis and Gass's (1985) model of negotiation of meaning. This model presents a set of primes that occur in negotiation of meaning sequences: a trigger utterance (T) that causes a comprehension problem and starts the negotiation sequence, an indicator (I) that signals the misunderstanding, a response (R) to address the misunderstanding and an optional reaction to that response (RR). The nature of the triggers can vary, from lexical and morphosyntactic items to sociocultural issues; and the indicators of misunderstandings can manifest themselves in the form of echos (rising or falling intonation), explicit statements of non-understanding, silence, inappropriate responses, summaries and surprised reactions. The response from the interlocutor can take the form of repetitions, expansions, rephrasings, acknowledgements or reductions (Varonis and Gass 1985; Fernández-García and Martínez-Arbelaiz 2002). Once the negotiations were identified, they were sorted according to Toyoda and Harrison's (2002) trigger categories: word level (recognition of a new word, misuse/misunderstanding of a word, pronunciation); sentence level (grammatical errors); discourse level (sudden topic change, slow response). The negotiation strategies to bridge the communication breakdown were categorized according to those identified by Lee (2001): comprehension checks, clarification requests, confirmation checks, use of English to translate unknown meanings in Spanish, word invention, requests and use of approximation.

(2) The tasks designed for the study were seeded with cultural information gaps from the L1 and L2 cultures that were likely to result in negotiation of intercultural content. These tasks, designed with an intercultural focus, offered opportunities for interaction that would elicit information on everyday cultural customs and provide opportunities for contrasting and comparing beliefs and habits in order to elicit awareness and reflections on both cultures. In order to see if there was a difference in the negotiation of cultural meaning between the three groups we measured the negotiations not triggered at word level but by a cultural information gap that occurred in task 5, *People and cultures*.

(3) In order to establish other differences between tasks performed via networked interaction and those carried out in the classroom setting, we observed the interactional features that allowed learners to share their feelings and to demonstrate a sense of sociability (Chun 1994; Darhower 2002). These features included greetings and leave takings, assistance requests, use of humour and use of L1 or English.

(4) We considered task engagement to comprise learners' efforts, participation, involvement and positive conduct during the execution of the learning activities. We broadly observed Littlewood's (2004) definition of engagement as the learners' active personal involvement with the task and viewed engagement as student motivated behavior, but task engagement was not operationalized as number of turns or number of words learners produced while engaged in the tasks. Instead, observation notes were used to spot learners' attitudes towards the language learning situations and tasks.

4 Results

4.1 Quantitative data: pre- and post-tests

Comparing scores in pre and post-tests across research conditions allows us to establish in which of the three groups the greatest amount of learning occurred. The results of the analysis of the oral tests (see Figure 1) indicate that there was communicative proficiency growth in both experimental (VC and SL) and face-to-face control groups ($F(1, 34) = 147.7$; $p < 0.001$) but that in the face-to-face control condition the increase in students' oral skills is significantly less than in either the VC or SL condition ($F(2, 34) = 5.01$; $p = 0.012$) (see Canto et al. 2013).

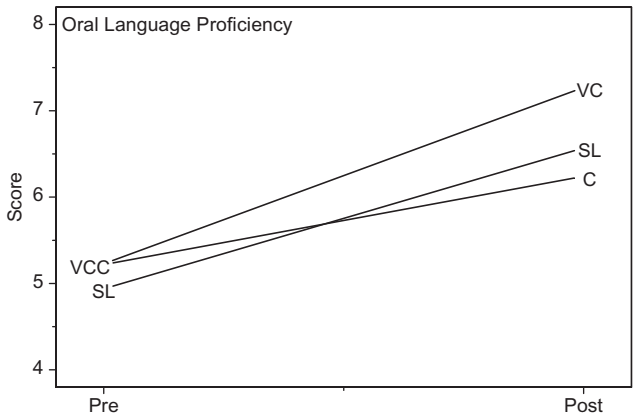

Figure 1: Mean scores for pre- and post-oral tests of experimental and face-to-face control groups. (VC: video communication; SL: Second Life; C: face-to-face control).

4.2 Qualitative data: Interaction analysis

We analysed interaction in the three groups with particular attention to the following categories: (1) negotiation of formal meaning; (2) negotiation of cultural meaning; (3) interactional features; and (4) task engagement and involvement.

4.2.1 Negotiation of meaning

As Table 2 shows, in the analysis of the three recordings observed (task 2 – VC group; SL group, face-to-face control group), we found instances of negotiation in all groups, although there was a substantial difference between the number of negotiations encountered when the task was performed by the experimental groups (VC and SL) and those found in the same task by the face-to-face control group: SL and VC groups accounted for 27 and 23 negotiations respectively and the face-to-face control group for 2.

Table 2: Number of negotiations per group – task 2.

Group	Task duration	Negotiations	Negotiations per 10 min
Second Life (SL)	01:15:01	27	3,6
Video communication (VC)	01:20:04	23	2,9
Face-to-face control (C)	00:41:00	2	0,5

Analysis of the recordings reveals that lexical difficulties appear to be the principal triggers as described in previous literature (Blake 2000; Smith 2003) as most of the negotiations between the participants are triggered by lexical confusions. Table 3 summarizes negotiation instances and since all triggers found in task 2 were at word level, they were first categorized following Toyoda and Harrison's (2002) classification of this type of trigger: recognition of a new word, misuse/misunderstanding of a word and pronunciation. The indicators of these negotiations are then sorted according to the strategies used by the participants (Lee 2001): comprehension checks, clarification requests, confirmation checks, use of English, word invention, requests and use of approximation. Table 3 shows only the categories most used during the negotiation routines.

Table 3: Summary of negotiations with classification of triggers, indicators and responses.

	SL	VC	C
Negotiations	27	23	2
Trigger (word)	27	23	2
– word recognition	16	17	
– misuse/misunderstanding	10	2	2
– pronunciation	1	1	
Indicator			
– confirmation checks	7	8	
– clarification requests	14	12	2
– comprehension checks	6	3	
– use of English	5	13	2
– invention of words	1	2	1
Response			
– minimal	11	7	2
– modification	9	9	
– elaborative	7	4	

Note: SL – Second Life group; VC – Video Communication group; C – face-to-face control group.

4.2.2 Negotiation of cultural meaning

Further observation of the recordings confirmed that negotiations occurred in all tasks but that they were not always triggered at word level and instead the trigger depended on the type of task they were assigned. Task 5 (*People and cultures*) was a clear example of this. The task had been seeded with multiple information gaps involving culture-specific situations from the L1 and L2 cultures that would call for intercultural negotiation and it is no surprise then that

the majority of the triggers for negotiation routines were at a sociocultural level where the intercultural communication gap became apparent (see Table 4).

Table 4: Number of negotiations per group – task 5.

Group	Task duration	Negotiations	Negotiations per 10 min
Second Life (SL)	01:46:08	26	2,5
Video communication (VC)	01:05:33	24	3,7
Face-to-face control (C)	00:41:00	12	2,9

The task generated in the experimental groups a high level of curiosity towards the other culture and participants engaged in rich exchanges as example 1 (VC group) shows. This example had as trigger a photograph of a rucksack hanging from a Dutch flag, and the Spanish team had to guess its meaning. Having provided the wrong answer the Dutch team proceeds with the explanation: in The Netherlands it indicates that someone has graduated from secondary education. The native speaker signals her surprised reaction not only with an indicator of meaning recognition *(¡Ah!)* but also followed by a clarification request *(¡Ah! ¿y entonces se quedan ahí las mochilas?/Ah! and do the rucksacks stay there?)*. The response of the language learner is an acknowledgement with an expansion (*sí/fuera/por dos semanas o así – yes/outside/for two weeks or so*) by the student, followed by another indicator of confirmation of understanding by the native speaker which triggers another expansion response (*porque es la idea que nunca tenemos que usar la mochila – because it is the idea that you don't have to use the rucksack/backpack anymore*). The sequence is rounded off by the native speaker with a reaction to the response *(¡Ah! ¡qué originales! – Ah! how original!)*.

Picture 1: Photograph of a schoolbag hanging from a Dutch flag outside someone's house. Source: https://www.flickr.com/photos/dennism2/27301406864/in/photolist-6DXDmo-HAwR6s/

Example 1 – VC task 5

NNS1: cuando has terminado el instituto/¿sí? hay una fiesta y ponemos nuestras mochilas fuera/con la bandera de Holanda y /y es como una fiesta que todo el mundo sabe que has hmm terminado el instituto bien	*NNS1: when you have finished your secondary education /yes? there is a party and we put our rucksacks outside/with the Dutch flag and /and it is like a party that everybody knows that you have hmm finished your secondary education well*
NS: ¡Ah! ¿y entonces se quedan ahí las mochilas?	*NS: Ah! and then the rucksacks/backpacks stay there?*
NNS1 : sí/fuera/por dos semanas o así (risas)	*NNS1: yes/outside/for two weeks or so (laughter)*
NS: ¡Ah!	*NS: Ah!*
NNS1: porque es la idea que nunca tenemos que usar la mochila (risas)	*NNS1: because the idea is that we don't have to use the rucksack anymore (laughter)*
NS: ¡Ah! ¡qué originales!	*NS: Ah! how original!*

NS: Native Speaker; NNS: Non-Native Speaker

In example 2 (SL group) the Dutch team had to explain what "un botellón" is, depicted in a photograph. Once the question had been answered both teams proceed to contrast information on this social activity popular among some young people. The example below also shows how the language learner shares understanding (contributing a remark about bottles of wine and beer to the native speaker's explanation of the fact that they bring alcohol) and participates actively in meaning creation.

Example 2 –SL task 5

NNS1: yyy, [¿quién] organiza la fiesta?	*NNS1: aand, [who] organises the party?*
NS: [exacto] hmm, hmm. Vale, pues normalmente se organiza entre pequeños grupos de amigos que se concentran en un mismo lugar con lo cual al final hay mucha gente	*NS: [exactly] hmm, hmm. Ok, normally it's organised between small groups of friends and they meet up in the same place and therefore they end up with lots of people*
NNS2: mmm, sí	*NNS2: mmm, yes*
NNS1: ¡ah!	*NNS1: ah!*
NNS2: grupos [diferentes] pero juntos	*NNS2: [different] groups but together*
NS: [ehh], grupos diferentes, exactamente, pero juntos… y consiste, eh, en tomar alcohol en la calle	*NS: [ehh], different groups, exactly, but together… and you basically, eh, just drink alcohol in the street*
NNS1: [y] todas las personas eh traer eh unas botellas de vino o [algunas cervezas]	*NNS1: [and] everybody eh bring eh a few bottles of wine or [some beers]*
NNS2: [mmm]	*NNS2: [mmm]*

(*continued*)

(*continued*)

NS: exacto [hmm], exacto, sí	*NS: exactly [hmm], exactly, yes*
NNS1: [¿y no está prohibido?]	*NNS1: [and, isn't that forbidden?]*
NS: [todo el mundo trae alguna cosa], eh, sí, eso es lo que iba a comentaros (risas)	*NS: [everybody brings something], eh, yes, that's what I was going to tell you (laughs)*
NNS2: Sí, en Holanda también es prohibido	*NNS2: Yes, in Holland it's also forbidden*

In the face-to-face control group the dynamics were different: there was no comparing of opinions between the members of the team to reach an agreement over the correct answer, and even when their answers were wrong there was little evidence of curiosity to find out more about the topic. In this case, the teacher was the expert and she was the one that provided the right answers, giving the language learners the opportunity to ask questions if they wanted. The impoverished exchange process can be seen in example 3 (C, SL and VC groups), where the language learners had to guess the process to apply for a job in the public sector (teacher, doctor, secretary, etc.) in Spain.

Example 3 – task 5
Face-to-face control group

NNS: creo que es la (opción) b	*NNS: I think it's (option) b*
NS: no/no es la b	*NS: no/it's not b*
NNS: vale	*NNS: OK*

Second Life

NNS1: en Holanda se hace a, pero no creo que es lo mismo en España.	*NNS1: in Holland you do a, but I don't think it's the same in Spain.*
NS: pero…¿allí hay oposiciones? […] oposiciones hay que hacer un examen, es la b	*NS: but…¿do you have "oposiciones" there? […] "oposiciones" you have to do an exam, it's b.*
NNS2: ¿sí?	*NNS2: really?*
NS: sí, y quien saca la mejor nota consigue la plaza	*NS: yes, and the one that scores highest gets the job*
NNS2: ¿sí?¿es siempre o solamente para trabajos especiales?	*NNS2: really? Is it always like that or just for special jobs?*
NS: por ejemplo cuando yo termine la carrera puedo hacer unas oposiciones para ser profesora	*NS: for example, when I finnish my degree I can do "oposiciones" to be a teacher*
NNS1: ¿es un tiempo para probar si estés adecuado?	*NNS1: is it a time to test if you are right for the job?*

Video communication

NS: es que es la b	*NS: well, it's b*
[todos – risas]	*[all – laughter]*
NNS1: ¿en serio?	*NNS1: really?*
NS: oposiciones es un examen que tienes que hacer para conseguir el trabajo	*NS: "oposiciones" is an exam that you have to do to get the job*
NNS2: ¡ah, OK!	*NNS2: ah, OK!*
NS: la persona que tenga mejor nota se queda con el trabajo	*NS: the person that scores highest gets the job*
NNS2: ¡guau, qué raro!	*NNS2: wow, how strange!*
NS: tienes que estudiar unos libros super gordos	*NS: you have to study really thick books*
NNS1: ya, ¿y qué pasa si después no te dan el trabajo?	*NNS1: ok, and what happens if you don't get the job?*
NS: imagínate que haces el examen y hay 35 plazas y tú te quedas la 36, pues tienes que esperar y volver a hacer el examen	*NS: imagine you do the exam and there are 35 jobs and you end up being 36, well then you have to wait and do the exam again*
NNS1: ¡qué horror!	*NNS1: how horrible!*

4.2.3 Interactional features

The interactional speech acts of interest that emerged from the data were greetings and leave-takings, assistance requests, the use of polite formulas, and humour. Observation confirmed that both experimental groups spent time greeting each other and talking about their current activities outside the task before beginning with task performance and that leave-takings were generally used to arrange the next task and review the task just performed. Example 4 (VC group) below was taken from the VC group during the first few minutes of the interaction.

Example 4 – VC task 2

NS: la próxima tarea no la voy a poder hacer desde aquí/es que voy a estar en Japón	*NS: I am not going to be able to do the next task from here/I am going to be in Japan*
NNS1: ¿en Japón?	*NNS1: in Japan?*
NS: sí	*NS: yes*
NNS2: ¿y por qué?	*NNS2: and why?*

The recording of the SL group starts with "*¿estáis listas?/are you ready?*". When the participants arrive at the first destination, the pizzeria holodeck, and upon seeing

the food on the tables, one of the language learners asks her partner *"Fleur, ¿aún tienes hambre?/Fleur, are you still hungry?"* which seems to indicate that in the minutes prior to activating the recording and the beginning sentence, an exchange had taken place around the topic of food.

The face-to-face control group on the other hand started the task very abruptly and lacking spontaneity, with one of the language learners stating *"Me gustaría ir de vacaciones /I would like to go on holidays"*. Closure was also abrupt.

From the interactional speech act types observed there was one in particular that appeared to register more instances in the SL group than in the other two: the use of humour. In the episode where the participants are getting ready to go to the beach it becomes apparent that the native speaker cannot make her avatar put a bikini on: all she manages to put on is the box containing the items. The situation prompts funny comments like: *"así no puedes nadar /you can't swim like that; con la caja tú no estás a la moda /with the box you are not fashionable; si bajamos a la playa con estas cajas vamos a causar sensación en la gente /if we go down to the beach with these boxes we are going to cause a sensation among the people"*. Example 5 (SL group) draws on the reactions caused in the language learners when they encountered a hotel room they were not expecting (dirty and untidy).

Example 5 – SL

NS: ¿qué pasó con el espejo?	*NS: what happened to the mirror?*
NNS1: no sé /a lo mejor alguien estaba muy feo /y se ha roto	*NNS1: I don't know /maybe there was somebody very ugly /and it broke*

Within the same situation, complaining about the hotel room, sarcasm also occurred (example 6 – SL group). One of the language learners, playing the role of hotel guest, and seeing the state of the room, questions herself whether they would have to pay for it, to which the receptionist (native speaker) responds with surprise.

Example 6 – SL

NNS1: ¿no es gratis? ¿pagamos por esto?	*NNS1: isn't this free? do we have to pay for this?*
NS: pero /¿no era esto lo que habían reservado?	*NS: but /is this not what you had booked?*

Observation reveals that also in the VC group a friendly atmosphere prevailed with constant laughter, allowing learners to share their feelings and demonstrate a sense of sociability (Chun 1994; Darhower 2002).

The supportive nature of a substantial part of the interaction was also observed when in the VC and SL experimental groups participants helped each other with technical issues when assistance was requested. Example 7 (SL group) is only one of the many instances where a language learner is explaining how the environment works when another interlocutor runs into problems. The avatars are getting their attire ready for their holiday, although some of them seem to be having difficulties performing the correct action with the desired effect.

Example 7 – SL

NS: ¿cómo te has conseguido poner el bikini?	*NS: how did you manage to put your bikini on?*
NNS1: tienes que ir a tu inventario y hacer click /y luego seleccionar	*NNS1: you have to go to your inventory and click /and then select*

These instances where assistance was requested were not part of the task itself, they were environment triggered exchanges. This seems to contrast with similar situations observed in the face-to-face control group, where on occasion requests for language help went unanswered. Example 8 (C group) shows how a language learner was trying to find the word for 'hat' in order to describe her picture. She made gestures referring to the object and specifically asked for the word but received no response. Surprisingly enough, minutes later, one of the other language learners used that same word in her speech.

Example 8 – C

NNS1: el hombre con la con la (gestos para indicar "gorra") ¿cómo se llama?	*NNS1: the man with the with the (gestures to indicate "hat") how do you say it?*

The video recording of this scene seemed to show that her interlocutors were concerned with their own interventions and once the learner requesting assistance received no apparent help, she decided to leave her sentence unfinished and carry on.

4.2.4 Task engagement

The high levels of task engagement reported in other studies (Deutschmann et al. 2009; Gardner 2010; Gámen-Gutiérrez 2014) were also noted in both experimental groups. When discussing their previous holidays participants would seek engagement and personal involvement with their interlocutors for example by asking them if they had been to that place themselves: *"¿conocéis Bodrum? /have you been to Bodrum?"* (VC). The language learners from the face-to-face control group, however, proceeded to talk about their holidays one by one, with no interruptions from their interlocutors and with only a couple of questions at the end of each other's turns, questions that seemed to be prepared beforehand and did not appear to be spontaneous. When the same topic was being handled by VC and SL, participants engaged in frequent turn overlaps, which shows involvement with the task topic and which is characteristic for pragmatic interaction style in Spanish (Escandell Vidal 2004). In example 9 (VC group) two of the VC participants are showing some photographs of their holidays and the others engage in the interaction immediately showing their interest by asking questions.

Example 9 – VC

NNS1: y aquí la tienda de campaña/¿está una palabra?	*NNS1: and here the tent/is it a word?*
NNS2: ¿estabas con tus padres?	*NNS2: were you with your parents?*
NNS1: sí/y mi hermano y hermana	*NNS1: yes/and my brother and my sister*
NS: ¿cuándo hiciste ese viaje? ¿cuándo fue?	*NS: when did you go on that trip? When was it?*
[…]	*[…]*
NS: aquí estoy yo con mi hijo	*NS: here I am with my son*
NNS2: ¿cuántos años tiene?	*NNS2: how old is he?*

This involvement, with the task and its participants, not only manifested itself in the form of questions, but also participants often volunteered comments on each other's interventions, showing a positive attitude towards their interlocutors. In example 10 from the SL group one of the language learners is talking about the things she always takes on holidays with her. The list of items (compass, walking boots, bikini, towel, thick jacket) is probably not what the other language learner was expecting and she does not let the opportunity go to show her surprise.

Example 10 – SL

NNS1: ¡qué completa!	*NNS1: how complete!*
NNS2: sí/muy completa	*NNS2: yes/very complete*
NNS1: entonces no hay no hay sitio en la maleta para comprar cosas más	*NNS1: the there is no there is no room in the suitcase to buy more things*
NS: no	*NS: no*
NNS1: ya está lleno	*NNS1: it is already full*
NNS2: sí	*NNS2: yes*
[risas]	*[laughter]*
NNS2: sí/yo tengo pero//eh/eh/es posible eh comprar eh espacio	*NNS2: yes/I have but//eh/eh/it's possible eh to buy eh room*
NS: sí/otra maleta	*NS: yes/another suitcase*
NNS1: ah/sí sí	*NNS1: ah/yes yes*

The environments appeared to elicit a high degree of rich participation that led to personal involvement. We observed that in *Second Life* elements of the virtual world generated a variety of conversations. For example, in the pizzeria they chatted about the movies displayed in wall posters; being able to drive a boat once they had reached their holiday destination prompted conversations about seatbelts and drivers' licenses (*"ponte el cinturón que vamos muy rápido - ¿tú tienes el carné de conducir? /wear your seatbelt we're going very fast – do you have a driver's licence?"*); and visiting the hotel where they were meant to be staying made possible the transaction of booking the room. The interactions from the VC group and face-to-face control group were characterized by a more descriptive language limited by the photographs being used. In *Second Life* actions triggered conversations and there was more topic switching and engagement opportunities enabled by in-world elements.

4.3 Survey results

The post-questionnaires of the experimental groups yielded largely positive responses. Learners identified a number of benefits of SCMC sessions such as being more aware of cultural contrasts and similarities, becoming more confident, talking more fluently, and taking more initiatives (see Table 5). When participants in the face-to-face control group were asked if they thought that given the opportunity to interact with a native speaker they would improve their confidence, fluency, knowledge about the target culture, they would learn to speak better, more vocabulary and understand more, answers pointed towards an affirmative score (see Table 6).

Table 5: Experimental groups language learners' responses about learning potential.

What have you learned during the sessions?	Mean	SD
To be aware of cultural contrasts and similarities	3.85	0.82
To talk more fluently	3.89	0.70
To become confident talking in the target language	3.85	0.72
To talk more	3.48	0.85
To take more initiative in the conversation	3.33	1.00
To be more motivated to talk	3.26	0.98
To use new words	4.26	0.71
To use idioms/expressions	3.93	0.68
To use grammar more accurately/correctly	3.96	0.65

Note: 1 = Strongly disagree, 5 = Strongly agree, (N = 27).

Table 6: Face-to-face control group language learners' evaluation responses.

Do you think that by having the opportunity to conduct interaction tasks with native speakers	Mean	SD
You learn to understand better the target language	4.14	0.770
You learn to speak better	3.93	0.730
You learn to speak more fluently	3.93	0.917
You learn more vocabulary	3.86	0.663
You learn to become more confident talking to native speakers	4.21	0.802

Note: 1 = Strongly disagree, 5 = Strongly agree, (N = 14).

The experiences revealed that the tasks used were perceived as motivating and useful and that the interactions with the pre-service native teachers contributed to enhancing learning processes and motivation.

Tasks were found useful and motivating by both language learners and pre-service teachers alike in the VC and SL experimental groups. Students' learning improvements were perceived not only by the students themselves, they were also noticed by the pre-service teachers when asked to compare the first and last interaction sessions (Table 7). Among other things, the pre-service teachers found that their language learner interlocutors had become more aware of cultural contrasts and similarities.

These results, reflecting the participants' impressions, seem to be in line with other studies (Peterson 2010; Jauregi 2015) where the majority of participants appreciated the opportunities provided to practise the target language with a native speaker and identified the SCMC environment as purveying a low stress atmosphere that reduced communication anxiety compared to their classroom setting (Gámen-Gutiérrez 2014).

Table 7: Pre-service teachers' responses about language learning learners' improvement.

Comparing the first and the last session…	Mean	SD
I noticed an overall improvement in the communicative competence of my foreign language learner comparing session 1 to the last session.	4.57	0.65
They talked more in the last session	4.14	0.95
They were able to talk more fluently in the last session	4.36	0.84
They took more initiative during the last session	4.07	1.07
They asked more questions during the last session	3.64	1.01
They became more confident talking in the target language	4.50	0.94
They became more aware of cultural contrasts and similarities	4.64	0.50
They enlarged their lexicon and used more adequate words	4.43	0.65
They have learned to talk more accurately in terms of grammatical constructions.	4.00	0.55
They were more motivated to talk in the last session	4.21	1.19

Note: 1 = Strongly disagree, 5 = Strongly agree, (N = 14).

5 Discussion

The results obtained within our research show that the communicative opportunities offered by VC and SL have a positive impact on learners' communicative competence. A comparison between scores in pre- and post-tests across research conditions indicates that in the face-to-face control condition the increase in students' oral skills is significantly less than in either the VC, or SL condition (RQ1), making these opportunities to engage in social interaction with expert peers (native speakers) a valuable aspect in foreign language courses. Notwithstanding the fact that the expert peers in this case are trainee teachers, their expertise is based on their linguistic and cultural experience as native speakers. We believe that these networked interactions have potential for language learning: they offer language learners opportunities for rich linguistic exposure and communicative practice close to real-life experiences (Coleman 2002; Crookall 2002; Purushotma 2005), particularly when experts are engaged in task interaction.

The analysis of the interactions also revealed that the video communication and *Second Life* environments created more opportunities for negotiation of meaning. If negotiation of meaning provides optimal conditions for language acquisition as has been argued (Pica et al. 1993), the opportunities offered by these tools should be appreciated. Other learning opportunities observed are: the fact that the realistic nature of the environments provided authentic learning conditions that are otherwise difficult to recreate in traditional classroom settings (Dieterle and Clarke 2008), for example, the supportive nature of interaction triggered by help

needed from the interlocutors due to the characteristics of the setting; that users can experiment and interact with a wider variety of norms of social interaction (Steinkuehler 2006), for example, the greater spontaneity and humour in the SL and VC groups compared to the face-to-face control group; and that they stimulate intercultural communication competences (RQ2). These types of platforms may help bridge the distance between students and the target-language culture, providing realistic sociocultural contexts for language learning (Schwienhorst 2002; Zheng et al. 2009) with the presence of native speakers. Participants from the experimental SL and VC groups showed a higher level of curiosity towards the other culture than the face-to-face control group, together with a more personal involvement with their interlocutors. Our results also show that these types of interaction sessions have a positive impact on language learners' subjective learning experiences, since they have the impression that they learn from them and this perception is mirrored by feedback from the pre-service teachers (RQ3). The surveys also pointed towards a more confident attitude while talking in the target language and to being more motivated to talk, this being in line with other studies that believe that these types of platform can help motivate learners who would normally be shy in face-to-face interaction to take part more actively (Freiermuth 2002; Zheng et al. 2009). These findings build on previous studies that report satisfaction, feelings of improvement and decreased speaking anxiety on participants who took part in voice chats (Bueno Alastuey 2011; Author et al. 2011). Our intention, in accordance with Sykes et al. (2008), is that language learners will start to integrate the pragmatic skills acquired in these platforms into their repertoire for use in non-mediated interaction contexts.

The design of the study reflected also some of the basic characteristics for successful language learning in these environments: students worked in small groups to foster collaborative learning and to enhance opportunities for language use (Coleman 2002) and tasks were learner-centered, providing the students the opportunity to resolve problems without the 'authoritative persuasion' of a teacher (Freiermuth 2002: 187). Participants' interviews held at the end of our study (but not reported here) revealed the emotional connections created during the project, and these may motivate learners to continue practising and successfully cultivate their relationships with others, either collaboratively in the virtual space or in other contexts (Sykes et al. 2008).

6 Conclusions

In both experimental groups (VC and SL), learners displayed a higher degree of interest and engagement than the face-to-face control group while working together

collaboratively (see Tables 2 and 3 on negotiation). This allowed them to gain valuable practice in managing their target language discourse in authentic settings.

Learner experiences were largely positive and participation appeared to create high levels of motivation and interest. This seems to be in line with previous studies (Jauregi et al. 2011; Hull et al. 2010) which found that implementing networked interaction sessions with native speakers had an impact on the motivation of foreign language learners, particularly for learners with a lower proficiency level.

This study complements existing findings that suggested that participation in these types of environment not only provides access to a wide range of interlocutors but that it may also enhance cross-cultural understanding and knowledge of the target language culture (Tudini 2003, 2007; Von Der Emde et al. 2001); that the electronic medium seems to afford more opportunities for active participation (Kern 1996) and that it also provides a forum where participants can engage in negotiation of meaning at their own pace (Fernández-García and Martínez-Arbelaiz 2002). Participation in task-based VC and SL interactions made these learners and their interlocutors more aware of intercultural differences and similarities, as virtual worlds and video communication tasks were developed in such a way that both language learners and pre-service teachers had to reflect on their interlocutors' and their own culture by discussing, explaining and understanding contrasts, similarities and misunderstandings. Therefore, the tasks carried out in these CMC environments enhanced collaborative intercultural communicative development, since successful task completion required participants to work together and share the necessary cultural information, views, and perceptions .

Although the positive results obtained in our study are encouraging, we are aware of some limitations that might be worth taking into account when considering future studies. Firstly, our sample size was limited and although some data refers to all groups involved in the study, the negotiation analysis explores only two out of the five tasks performed by language learners. Future research should try to contribute working with bigger sample sizes and over longer periods of time whenever possible. Secondly, task completion for the VC and SL groups took between 60 and 90 minutes while the face-to-face control group spent only 30 minutes in task performance. This time limitation was due to timetabling restrictions and room and teacher's availability. The fact that the face-to-face control group's interaction sessions were shorter might have influenced the results, but reflects classroom limitations. Thirdly, there is a need for additional research that investigates the long-term effects. The effects measured in this study were short-term, further research would need to look into effects over the long term and perhaps observe any improvements across tasks. Fourthly, we do not know whether the results are due to the presence/absence

of the native speaker in the different conditions (the fact that they were trainee teachers might have played a role too), to the influence of the SCMC versus traditional face-to-face classroom encounters, or to both. Future research should separate out these variables. In addition, further research could operationalize engagement and compare quantitative results in order to analyse its relation to the specific platforms. The present results have to be interpreted cautiously since more research is needed to better understand the potential contributions of SCMC interactions in foreign language development. We suggest that future studies examine additional variables that might impact the results, such as the age of the learners, the target language, the type of interlocutor, educational setting and modality, the way interaction is supported.

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Appendix. Assessment grid for pre- and post-tests

	Range	Accuracy	Fluency	Thematic development	Coherence
1	Has a very basic repertoire of words and simple phrases related to personal details and particular concrete situations.	Shows only limited control of a few simple grammatical structures and sentence patterns in a memorised repertoire.	Can manage very short, isolated, mainly pre-packaged utterances, with much pausing to search for expressions, to articulate less familiar words, and to repair communication.		Can link words or groups of words with very basic linear connectors like “and” or “then”.
3	Uses basic sentence patterns with memorised phrases, groups of a few words and formulae in order to communicate limited information in simple everyday situations.	Uses some simple structures correctly, but still systematically makes basic mistakes.	Can make him/herself understood in very short utterances, even though pauses, false starts and reformulation are very evident.	Can tell a story or describe something in a simple list of points.	Can link groups of words with simple connectors like “and”, “but” and “because”. Can use the most frequently occurring connectors to link simple sentences in order to tell a story or describe something as a simple list of points.
5	Has enough language to get by, with sufficient vocabulary to express him /herself with some hesitation and circum locutions on topics such as family, hobbies and interests, work, travel, and current events.	Uses reasonably accurately a repertoire of frequently used “routines” and patterns associated with more predictable situations.	Can keep going comprehensibly, even though pausing for grammatical and lexical planning and repair is very evident, especially in longer stretches of free production.	Can reasonably fluently relate a straightforward narrative or description as a linear sequence of points.	Can link a series of shorter, discrete simple elements into a connected, linear sequence of points.

(*continued*)

(*continued*)

	Range	Accuracy	Fluency	Thematic development	Coherence
7	Has a sufficient range of language to be able to give clear descriptions, express viewpoints on most general topics, without much conspicuous searching for words, using some complex sentence forms to do so.	Shows a relatively high degree of grammatical control. Does not make errors which cause misunderstanding, and can correct most of his/her mistakes.	Can produce stretches of language with a fairly even tempo; although he/she can be hesitant as he or she searches for patterns and expressions, there are few noticeably long pauses.	Can develop a clear description or narrative, expanding and supporting his/her main points with relevant supporting detail and examples.	Can use a limited number of cohesive devices to link his/her utterances into clear, coherent discourse, though there may be some "jumpiness" in a long contribution. Can use a variety of linking words efficiently to mark clearly the relationships between ideas.
10	Has a good command of a broad range of language allowing him/her to select a formulation to express him/herself clearly in an appropriate style on a wide range of general, academic, professional or leisure topics without having to restrict what he/she wants to say.	Consistently maintains a high degree of grammatical accuracy; errors are rare, difficult to spot and generally corrected when they do occur.	Can express him/herself fluently and spontaneously, almost effortlessly. Only a conceptually difficult subject can hinder a natural, smooth flow of language.	Can give elaborate descriptions and narratives, integrating sub-themes, developing particular points and rounding off with an appropriate conclusion.	Can produce clear, smoothly-flowing, well- structured speech, showing controlled use of organisational patterns,connectors and cohesive devices.

Bionotes

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