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Second Language Teaching
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Reflection 2: "Ordering Coffee" Reading Activity

The following activity was prepared based on the desire my tutees expressed to practice interactional communicative situations related to purchasing food and drink; my understanding had been that ordering coffee would be a practical topic that they could all relate to. From the outset, this activity did not go exactly to plan. One of my tutees, Lala, was absent that day due to illness, so only A-chan and Bogota were present. Ordinarily this would not have posed a major issue, but A-chan revealed at the start of the lesson that she hardly ever went out for coffee or tea and rarely drank either of them at all. This presented the immediate difficulty of having to find a way to keep A-chan engaged by the content, knowing that she would likely not find herself in the exact scenario presented by this activity (reading a *coffee shop* menu and talking about her experiences with *ordering coffee*).

Although A-chan still participated actively, my impression was that a more general menu (one for a restaurant, maybe) would have proven more engaging for her individual needs. If I were to use the same type of activity again, I would plan to use a menu with more variety beyond just beverages. Even sticking to the coffee shop theme, I could still include sandwiches, pastries, and the like in case a student like A-chan did not partake of coffee or tea. Bogota, conversely, is an avid coffee drinker, and engaged enthusiastically with the activity, noting that "[she had] always wondered what *con panna* meant, because I've seen it before," as well as a number of the other non-English terms, but had been too embarrassed to ask for clarification in situ. To her, "*con panna*" seemed to indicate "with bread, or a small pastry or cookie or something," since in Spanish (her L1), *pan* is bread; in the original Italian, *panna* means 'cream,' as in *panna cotta* ('baked cream').

When approaching the first question "What is this? How is it organized? What are the parts that make up this text?", both A-chan and Bogota faced difficulties in interpreting the various categories and

types of information presented in the material. It took more prompting than anticipated to get them to realize that “tall” was code for “small,” “grande” for “medium,” and “venti” for “large” in Starbucks terminology. I was able to get them to come to this conclusion on their own by pointing out that the prices increased as the categories moved to the right, and the number of calories often did, too. At that point, I saw the metaphorical lightbulb lighting up over A-chan’s head and she responded by asking “why do they need to make the sizes so complicated?” to which we all shared a laugh. The initial confusion did lead to a good discussion of how Starbucks and other contemporary restaurants in the US sometimes try to use trendy, unique language in order to develop an attractive “brand” that will appeal to young people. Suffice to say the activity wasn’t a complete loss, despite the initial hurdles.

We moved on to the first part of the next question, “What is missing from this text?”, and both tutees provided responses that were logical conclusions to come to. For this part, they both seemed capable of pointing out shortcomings in the information conveyed by the text, noting that it didn’t provide much information as to the variety of ways that a drink could be prepared (add-ins or substitutions like types of milk), or any indication of what types of tea were available. For A-chan, even as a non-tea drinker, this was surprising; in Japan, the type of tea is usually made very clear in the menu because it’s common to have many different types at one location. Moving on to the second part of the question, “What makes it difficult to order a coffee in the US? What’re some problems you’ve experienced that don’t come from the menu?”, I broadened the scope to include any restaurant to accommodate A-chan’s experiences. This alteration allowed A-chan to participate, focusing her answers entirely on difficulties encountered when ordering food at “sit-down restaurants” on campus. Both A-chan and Bogota cited unexpected phonemic processes (namely, massive reduction) as their greatest barrier in successfully interacting with servers without needing to ask for repetition, so for the rest of the lesson after this activity concluded, we focused on ways to ask for food, ask for clarification, and some language they might expect to hear from servers in response.