

**DCCD 2020****Dialogue of Cultures - Culture of Dialogue: from Conflicting to Understanding****TEACHING AND LEARNING IN TANDEM: THE DIALOGUE OF CULTURES IN PRACTICE**

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***Abstract***

In the educational and vocational paradigm of the 21st century intercultural communication plays a significant role. The idea of effective teaching has led teachers of foreign languages and teachers of foreign languages for specific purposes of the Faculty of Translation and Interpreting of Linguistics University of Nizhny Novgorod (Russia) and its partners to study the process of teaching foreign languages together with invited foreign professors more closely. After about 10 years of experience of such collaboration the teachers' tandem has been recognized as one of the most effective methods to integrate foreign teachers in the process of professional training of future linguists. Moreover, the students' mobility has added more efficiency in tandem method. Such a project, teachers' tandem and students' tandem under the tutor's supervision is made to combine an intercultural approach and the elements of cognitive, interactional and contextual approaches. The both tandems encourage teachers and students to share knowledge of professional and intercultural communication strategies and different visions of the world. In this article the authors will contextualize the usage of these types of tandems, describe their basic methodological principles, identify the role of all members of the project and give examples of lessons based on this strategy. The article will conclude with the advantages of the tandem's work and at the same time will point out some obstacles that could be faced by both teachers and students while realising the project.

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**Keywords:** Teachers' and students' tandem, intercultural approach.



## 1. Introduction

The educational and vocational paradigm of the 21st century demands an adequate response from the specialists whose purpose is didactics of foreign languages to identify the place of intercultural communication in teaching process. The interest of university professors and teachers of foreign languages in intercultural communication all over the world is growing and making create new methods as well as courses and textbooks (Tareva, 2011, Tareva et al., 2017).

## 2. Problem Statement

In some countries the problem of absence of intercultural context has been resolved by facilitating the mobility of students which is often mandatory for future specialists in linguistics and interpreting but in some countries, for example, Russia this issue has not been solved yet. The experience proves that to get the learners of any foreign language to become aware of the way native speakers think and communicate in only a traditional Russian mono-cultural context taught by local teachers is not sufficient to urge a professional dialogue of cultures especially nowadays.

To achieve the awareness of cultural communication is the main aim of linguists, mostly translators and interpreters, that's why, the intercultural approach is one of the most important in training process. The teachers of the Faculty of Translation and Interpreting (FTI) of Linguistics University of Nizhny Novgorod (LUNN) has its own experience in integration of this approach into the system of professional language training of their students to avoid domination of mono-cultural context.

Initially, the decision was to invite native-speaking teachers. But being non-Russian-speakers, they encountered incomprehensible linguistic mistakes, difficulties while preparing student texts, procedural lapses connected with differences in teaching processes in different countries. Also, their assessment methods were incomprehensible and even demotivating for Russian students. That's why, Russian teachers and their foreign partners-professors decided to try tandem method, which was developed in an innovative way and later proved its effectiveness.

Some years later teachers' tandem was completed by the practice of students' tandem assisted by local tutors – specialist in intercultural communication.

## 3. Research Questions

Tandem is one of the ways to learn a foreign language in a real intercultural communication situation. It appeared and was developed in the 1960-1970s (Eschenauer, 2013). The principles of tandem allow participants to organize exchanging and sharing their communicative experience, their knowledge and their strategies based on the knowledge of the partner's mother tongue and culture.

Nowadays, tandem practice is analysed under different aspects: the role of tandem in intercultural communication (Woodin, 2018), teletandem (Telles, 2015), e-tandem (Pomino & Gil-Salom, 2016), maintenance of tandem learning activities (Wakisaka, 2019; Stepanova, 2015) and others.

In this article we consider tandem as a face-to-face method of co-teaching and co-learning. Using tandem method in face-to-face communication contributes to increase in forming potential of studying by taking the most of its advantages – mutual help and support, cooperation, exchange, spontaneous reaction.

Face-to-face tandem is indeed very efficient, because it encourages students to use the language more consciously while teachers are becoming more aware of organising the teaching process more effectively. (Porshneva & Abdulmianova, 2017). Moreover, tandem is considered rather important because it provides professional language training with more sense and meaning. In this case, the skill of intercultural communication is acquired and developed by students naturally and at the same time it is based on the context of professional training. The perspective of discovering the partner's culture is doubled by the fact that students discover their own culture. This method helps acquire one of the most crucial pre-professional skills for linguists and especially for translators and interpreters, as they have to learn to work at the border of two cultures. As the exchange of cultures takes place in real time, the partners do not have much time to think, to consult dictionaries. They are forced to mobilize all their skills (knowledge, know-how, abilities, aptitudes, qualities, attitudes) to solve communicative tasks. In addition, this type of tandem practice encourages the use of interactional strategies in natural conditions of an authentic situation of communication which, therefore, have meaning for them. The main thing is that this situation starts from the experience of learners and is not imposed by the teacher. By communicating students learn to ask for help, to introduce their ideas, to ask to re-formulate, in other words, to apply meta-communicative strategies.

At FTI, we have tried to expand the possibilities of tandem method by developing the teachers' tandem and the tridem. The article under consideration is a brief report which describes methodological principles of both the tandems.

#### **4. Purpose of the Study**

This article aims to describe our experience of organising two different types of tandem practice – teachers' and students' tandems – like a process of teaching and learning languages in an intercultural dialogue and to prove its effectiveness on the example of teaching future translators and interpreters as specialists who will take part in this dialogue.

#### **5. Research Methods**

To achieve these goals we use such qualitative and quantitative research methods as interviews of the participants of focus groups, longitudinal observations, document analysis, questionnaires.

#### **6. Findings**

##### **6.1. The context of teachers' tandem**

Teachers' tandem is made up of two teachers with (partially) different cultural identity but sharing the target language of the learners.

The *guest professor* introduces foreign cultural identities through the presentation of everyday / cultural communication situations and / or in a professional environment. His comments make the simplest concepts of daily life or the most complex problems of professional context which are subjected to

intercultural comparison. This work reveals unexpected aspects of the concepts and qualifies the problems differently. So, the guest professor contributes to the optimization of intercultural communication.

The contribution of the *local teacher*, mediator between the two cultures, Russian-speaking and the foreign one, is to arouse an exploratory interest of the learners, to supervise the class and to neutralize noted misunderstanding. It also helps to optimize communication process by bringing out and explaining “stealthy” intercultural difficulties, which could go unnoticed by learners and the native-speaking teacher.

As for *learners*, first they become actors in this intercultural context; they observe, act and react. But later they become witnesses - in the broadest sense of the term - of several worldviews that sometimes struggle to find common ground.

## 6.2. Course organization

The course planning takes place according to the following strict scheme:

- setting objectives by the teachers’ tandem as well as by learners;
- content selection: professional and everyday facts experienced differently and concepts important from a linguistic and cultural point of view;
- selection of educational methods;
- learners’ reasoned statement in L1 of studied concepts (linguistic, professional, everyday, cultural);
- learners’ reasoned statement in L2 of studied concepts (linguistic, professional, everyday, cultural) and the presentation of their vision to the guest professor;
- comparative analysis and awareness-raising of similarities and differences of the concepts presented by the local mediating teacher;
- construction of concepts, creation and attribution of associative networks in a foreign language and ability to present them in the mother tongue;
- assessment of the learners’ textual production.

*Setting objectives by the teachers’ tandem.* One of the main objectives of the language teaching process of future translators and interpreters is to acquire pre-professional skills or sub-skills by learners (Beacco et al., 2016) which are preparatory professional skills for translation. Although they form the basis of the process of training of future translators, they still remain little studied in scientific works devoted to professional skills in translation and interpreting (Gavrilenko, 2016; Gouadec & Collombat, 2000; Hurtado Albir, 2008).

Summaries and synthesis of texts, as well as distinct forms of text reduction constitute basic elements of translational intelligence. By learning to summarize and synthesize in the mother tongue and in a foreign language, students develop pre-professional skills, focus on the meaning of the text and learn to manage the form of the expression (linguistic competence) in particular.

As an example, we have decided to select the theme “Trade and consumption in France” and the sub-theme “Sales”. This content is discussed by language teachers in L2 just before participation of the guest professor. In this perspective, our objectives in terms of intercultural competence useful for the teacher of translation / interpreting are the following:

- discovery of a general aspect of the market economy in France and in Russia: the distribution network;
- discovery of a specific and punctual aspect of French and Russian commerce: winter sales and related stereotypes;
- discovery of surprising aspects (for Russian learners in particular) of a market economy society: overconsumption, low quality of mass goods, poverty, alternatives to sales;
- discovery of French press and comparison with Russian press: the sources from which the texts studied are drawn, their quality and reliability.

By targeting these intercultural objectives, we want to (1) engage learners in a nuanced and precise manner and train them to make comments, and, thus, (2) lead them to make an objective summary. As a result, we urge them to understand their own social identity as learners, they are simultaneously *homines aeconomici* in the Russian market economy and often unaware of its socio-economic implications.

*Setting objectives by the learner.* We recognize that the autonomy of learners is a fundamental principle mostly for teaching in students' tandem when learners should define their goals themselves and be able to become responsive of their own learning process. But in fact, as the experience shows, our students set goals at the stage of the project implementation but not during its planning. That's why, we consider the autonomy as a changeable objective depending on the level of the language of our learners as well the level of their individual maturity and their socio-cultural competence. Our 2<sup>nd</sup> year students who are 18-19 years old operate in a small group of 12 people manifest some aspects of Russian identity. We refer to three particular dimensions of the 6-D model of Hofstede et al. (2010), which, in our opinion, prevent Russian learners from taking the initiative while setting learning objectives:

- *attitude towards power:* Russian score is 93 (Hofstede et al., 2010, p. 57; Hofstede, 2017): It is an education system that is largely teacher-oriented, in general, the learner has absolute respect for the teacher (69-71) and, therefore, firmly believes that only the teacher has to set the objectives;
- *attitude towards uncertainty:* Russian score is 95 (192): the learner is threatened by uncertainty; the teacher is the expert for him who has the answer to any question (205-206); he is anxious when faces something unknown (participation in the course), is afraid of expressing himself freely and, without external stimulus, is limited to reproduce stereotypes which he is sure about in his native culture (those of his teachers);
- *attitude towards individualism:* Russian score is very low, only 39 (96): the learner works in a group and it does not always come out easily; if he speaks, he seeks approval of his peers (117-119). However, groups of 2<sup>th</sup> year students of FTI LUNN are based on the identity of their members and do not usually express themselves spontaneously.

In other words, after gaining the learners' trust, the teachers' tandem can encourage them to set objectives that are often haphazard and which can be formulated more clearly after the assessment of the tasks. The objectives can be the following, to broaden knowledge of the semantic field studied, to make texts more objective, to avoid making similar mistakes made by the peers.

*Content selection: professional and cultural facts experienced differently.* Starting from the objectives previously set by the teachers' tandem, the selection of content can be the following:

- professional and cultural facts: “sales” “skidki” *versus* regulated sales in France and Belgium; types and periods; the size of the discount; the attitude of French, Belgian and Russian consumers towards sales / skidki; ways of purchasing (in store, online, from home, etc.);
- linguistic concepts: synonymy; false cognates; acronyms and abbreviations; a journalistic text such as a news article (objective) and an opinion article (subjective);
- cultural concepts: sales seen as pilgrimage, in every sense of the word; visit to the store with the intention of “paying a tribute” to the discounts; *must* or irresistible attraction of shopping together with an artificial impulse to buy.

*Selection of educational tools.* Following the described point above, teachers choose together texts, magazines, websites and other materials related to the theme according to their journalistic and linguistic reliability, their educational value and level of learners (level B1.1 of the CEFR). They determine the tools that stimulate cognitive interest (paper and online version; quality bilingual dictionaries; encyclopaedias; grammar textbooks; reliable text correctors).

*The learners' reasoned statement in L1 of studied concepts (linguistic, professional, everyday, and cultural).* Individually and in pairs, learners discover the tools selected for them (types of texts; background and form of texts) through brief discussions in Russian, it also leads to expanding language skills in the mother tongue, which is essential for a future translator / interpreter. This choice is deliberated; the mediating professor encourages and supervises the discussions.

*Then learners report in L2 their understanding and analysis.* The guest professor makes corrections of mistakes if necessary. He stimulates the learners to paraphrase and determines if they are successful in creating meaning or not.

The Russian-speaking professor is involved in the process of controlling the students' speech, how correct their utterances are. Besides, quite often the teacher has to dissipate the learners' vision (often idealized) of France and Belgium (or other European countries whose languages the students try to master), for example, how their shops work.

*Construction and attribution of concepts.* In the end, the learners move on to the progressive development of the summary by going through the stages and training provided by the SOCCER method, developed by Dominique Markey et al. (2014, pp. 16-75) at the University of Antwerp and refined with Elena Porshneva according to the target formulated at FTI LUNN.

*Assessment of learners' text production.* The teachers' tandem assessment stage deals with checking homework after classes and then in class using a special evaluation grid taking into account both interdisciplinary skills and professional and intercultural skills set for the production of the summary.

This step is followed by a *new individual self-assessment*: the learners draw up a list of some strong points of their work and weak points to optimize. They write their text and the teachers' tandem *follows up*.

So, the teachers' tandem is aimed to help the learners build critical view on the studied foreign language and culture in comparison with their own.

### **6.3. The context of students' tandem**

Since 2014 students from European Universities whose major is translation and interpreting have come to the FTI LUNN to perfect their skills in Russian. To integrate them to the educational process local

professors decided to practise collaborative learning in tandem and bring together Russian and incoming students at special language courses. As the teacher plays an important role in this process and the participants do not learn in total autonomy, we call such a tandem with three members, a tridem.

Now we will describe the role of every participant and organization of LE lessons in tridem, paying attention to the principles of the choice of selected situations, some activities and the stages that the students go through.

### **6.3.1. The roles of all parties in the tandem**

*Russian learners and incoming students.* The specificity of the method practised by FTI LUNN is that students do not work in permanent pairs. Firstly, there is no special organized course for learning in tandem, the method is realized during language classes provided by the curriculum. Secondly, there are two or three incoming students from one country and 10 or 12 Russian students working together in one group. It is important to note that at the beginning of joint work the presence of representatives of different countries is avoided, because it can complicate the process. In addition to the roles assigned local students become linguistic mediators, in the sense specified by the CEFR (2018).

*The local LE teacher.* The experience shows that the student' tandem method becomes effective if the professor knows how to make all participants involved in the learning process in an appropriate manner. As for the teachers' tandem, it plays the role of an essential mediator between the two cultures.

## **6.4. Course organization**

### **6.4.1. General principles**

Usually, incoming students are invited to participate in general language classes of second-year students. On this stage the curriculum is focused on improving linguistic knowledge and developing pre-professional skills acquired in 1<sup>st</sup> year. Learners are already able to formulate basic ideas in the foreign language and their linguistic background is already sufficient to interact with foreign learners. The topics covered on this stage include everyday (simple) social interactions, for example, going to a restaurant, a store, a doctor, etc. Tandem helps to engage students in a variety of authentic, personal and spontaneous talks. In the presence of foreign students this type of communication even in the mother tongue becomes stressful for some students.

The teacher plans several activities that allow participants to get to know each other in order to communicate more easily.

We consider, such methods are the most suitable for joint study of “contrastive grammar” and “intercultural interaction”.

### **6.4.2. The contrastive grammar course**

The implementation of contrastive grammar makes learners master two grammatical systems in situational contexts more consciously encouraging them to reflect on the difference in their functioning. The co-presence of two languages becomes a tool for contrasting grammar (Beacco et al., 2015) making the students capable of using related grammatical elements. Tandem, in this case, is to favour the

construction of contrastive knowledge engaging the learners to help themselves become aware of the relationships between forms, values and meaning.

In practical terms, contrastive grammar lessons have three aspects:

- discussion / questioning of the linguistic models treating the grammatical phenomenon in comparative perspective;
- comparative analysis of how patterns in texts in Russian and FL discounting grammatical phenomena studied, awareness of semantic nuances expressed;
- verification of hypotheses on the effects of meaning produced by these phenomena in both languages.

The teacher's task is to emphasize the polysemy and poly-functionality of grammatical phenomena and to give systematic analogies with the mother tongue (Lebedeva & Porshneva, 2019). The pedagogical strategies applied aim at engaging the learners to look for analogies and oppositions in the expression of a grammatical concept (grammatical category) in both languages. We create exercises to help transfer conceptual knowledge to operational knowledge. The set of exercises is presented in the form of tasks where students are asked to analyse a grammatical phenomenon in the corpus of authentic texts in the foreign language and in the mother tongue in order to find similarities and differences in its use. Then, the students proceed to identify the equivalents in the sentences taken from the analysed texts.

As an example, we present two types of exercises that we offer during the course of contrastive grammar and which are created on the basis of the novel by Anna Gavalda, *Je l'aimais*.

**Task. Restore the articles in the following sentences. Choose the appropriate Russian equivalent for each item. Say these sentences in Russian.**

- As-tu .....meilleurs amis (несколько/ какие-то/ какие-нибудь/ любые)?

- Prenez trois carottes. Coupez ..... carottes (несколько/ какие-нибудь/ эти/ любые) en rondelles.

Faites revenir ..... carottes (несколько/ какие-нибудь/ эти/ любые) dans .....cocotte (одной/ какой-то/ любой/ этой/ какой-нибудь)...

**Task. a) Among the sentences in Russian below cross out those that seem incorrect to you. Why are they incorrect? b) Find the correct equivalents for French sentences. Say how to express "a limited quantity" in Russian.**

a)

- Я съел супа.

- Я съел суп.

- Я поел супа.

- Я поел суп.

- Я ем суп.

- Я ем супа.

- Я наелся суп.

- Я наелся супа.

b)

*J'ai mangé/ fini ma soupe.*

*J'ai mangé de la soupe.*

*Je mange de la soupe*

*Je mange ma soupe.*

*J'ai assez mangé de la soupe.*

*J'ai mangé de la soupe à ma faim.*

These types of exercises urge students to analyse the semantic details expressed by a grammatical category, to work out explanatory scheme, to develop many competences. In fact, it is always difficult for a native speaker to explain the choice of a certain grammar form. However, awareness of grammatical concepts in the mother tongue makes the process of developing foreign-language grammar competence easier. In terms of cognitive development, grammatical awareness activities push students to learn to generalize and systematize information received. They create professional context of language training in translation and identify practical and formative objectives to be achieved.

#### **6.4.3. The intercultural interaction course**

This course is dedicated to the development of learners' interactional skills. Starting from the idea that real intercultural interaction is possible only in situations of real exchange between representatives of different cultures (Abdulmianova, 2016), this course is based on authentic situations existed in two cultures. Interaction takes place around a reference document: a text, a video, an idea put forward by the professor, a presentation prepared by one of the students. The presence of foreign students enriches the lessons significantly, as they represent the culture which is studied at foreign language classes. However, the professor must know how to take advantage of this and make this presence beneficial for all participants, Russian-speaking ones as well as foreigners. It certainly stimulates interaction and ensures that everyone participates in the exchange.

Any activity proposed by the professor is based on case study (Tareva et al., 2018) and analysed from the point of view of its professional utility. At every point the teacher ensures that students understand the purpose of any proposed activity and strategies to develop. Take the example of a situation.

***When accompanying your friend to a doctor, what socio-cultural information should you take into account? A medical consultation in France and Russia includes the same steps (entering, greeting, explaining the problem, describing the symptoms ...)? What are the possible differences? What lexical units and collocations will you need to be able to communicate?***

The professor divides the group into sub-groups whose workforce is mono-cultural. Each sub-group answers the questions by imagining that the situation takes place in their own country. After a few minutes of discussing, the sub-groups present their responses in mother tongue L1. The other sub-groups are invited to add details, to ask questions. The discussion is done in the language of the sub-group which is holding the presentation.

It should be noted that the use of L1 at this stage is justified by the peculiarities of human cognition. Acquiring new knowledge is more effective if it is based on existing knowledge. This activity is therefore centred on the activation of cognitive baggage, its mobilization in maternal culture and its systematization. In addition, the use of L1 does not limit production, the learner does not risk that the idea will not be understood because of the lack of vocabulary in L2. This will be updated during the collective analysis of the presentation of the foreign sub-groups where the partners will ask for clarifications and explanations.

The presentation stage is very important and requires great involvement of all the participants. Those who present their answers must adapt them to the cognitive and linguistic background of the foreign interlocutors. Adaptation in this case does not mean simplification. This explanatory speech in Tandem has an additional objective: the presenter teaches his partner his mother tongue. And there it turns out that explaining something to a stranger, even in his mother tongue, is a rather complicated task. Explanation of the strategies of “translation intralingual” (reformulation, compression and enlargement of the statement in the same language), “intersemiotic translation” (Dragović, 2019; Jakobson, 1959) therefore obtain a new practical value in language courses, which contributes to the development of knowledge and skills. The results of the survey that was organised at the end of each practice show that all the students both Russian-speaking ones as well as foreign ones, admit that thanks to such situations, they have built a new image of their mother tongue and that they have started to consider it as an essential professional tool. It is the idea that is stressed by professors from the beginning of the studying process, but it is fully realized by students only during such projects.

At the stage of the analysis of the presentations, the students, guided by the professor, learn to discover the similarities and differences at the cultural, behavioural and linguistic level. They try to find ways to achieve a real interaction of representatives of the two cultures while showing respect to the cultural and behavioural particularities of the partner.

The last step involves a role play simulating the described situation, taking into account the results of the analysis. Immersed in a bicultural environment from the start, the students learn to analyse the language of the native speaker, to adopt the attitude that suits the situation.

The strategies and skills acquired through this Tandem learning stimulate active participation of learners in intercultural events organized at the faculty and in the city. These intercultural activities engage students in interactional discursive practices and encourage student to continue their communication after classes but principles they learned during these classes will help them to be more attentive to intercultural elements of this communication.

## **7. Conclusion**

FTI LUNN practises specific forms of Tandem: the teachers’ and the students’ tandems in the presence of the teacher because the role of the teacher proves to be essential at the beginning of the teaching process. The tutor teaches students to work in intercultural collaboration so that it becomes conducive to their self-training. In case of tandem the teacher becomes mediator, organizer, communicator, animator and his role becomes more complex in relation to the Russian pedagogical tradition. He also ensures didactic and procedural coordination of the courses; selection of subjects relevant to the audience in accordance with their level and cognitive background; the use of both languages in a beneficial way for all the participants, etc. He guides the students to the discovery of the asymmetry of the linguistic forms of the two languages, the behavioural peculiarities of the maternal culture revealed by the representatives of the other culture. He runs the course and can stop the discussion at any time to draw attention to a detail that may go unnoticed, and ask to explain or paraphrase the concept or idea that is not understood or understood in a wrong way. It is he who assesses the contribution of each participant in the exchange and makes corrections if it is necessary. Little by little he minimizes his participation by giving more autonomy to the

students but he does so only after making sure that they have understood the rules of efficient functioning of the Tandem.

No doubt, tandems stimulate awareness of the basic concepts of maternal culture, in specific cases which are rather important, for example, culinary traditions, traditions of leisure, vocational training, consumer society, etc.

In our opinion, our versions of the Tandem are quite resourceful and relevant for all parties. They allow in particular to confront educational choices, to question them and to optimize them. By analysing the performance of Russian learners and comparing it to the performance of foreign students taking the same module, the teachers' tandem succeeds in meeting optimization challenge. Our experience also shows that the student's tandem method is more effective if the studying period lasts more than one semester. The best results are obtained by students and trainees who have been able to attend all the LE sessions planned for the students' tandem (4 hours per week maximum).

In the courses presented in this article, we combine the intercultural approach with convincing elements of the cognitive, interactional and contextual approaches. Our teachers' tandem and students' tandem thus concretize sharing of knowledge, professional and intercultural communicative strategies, and different visions of the world. The students learn to interpret the behaviour of foreigners and the values of their culture. Thus, teaching in tandem allows students to be immersed without their knowledge in an intercultural context, which leads them, according to Galisson (2002), to pool the similarities, the differences, the antagonisms of the two cultures to break the barrier of the foreigner, but also to recognize themselves in and through the other, to enrich and appropriate each other.

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