From Teaching to Learning: Challenging Assumptions in Intercultural Communication with Face-to-face Tandem Language Learning

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European Language Label Award 2008
Aims

• To provide evidence of mediation, reciprocity and autonomy in face-to-face tandem language learning

• To establish the value of IC instruction in face-to-face tandem collaboration
Challenges ....

Students
Integration of Erasmus and Irish students
Promotion of Erasmus placement
Autonomy

Language
Learning
A culture of languages at WIT
Positive attitudes to language learning
Plurilingualism

Intercultural Communication

Meaningful IC dialogue
Context of the research

• Number of students
• Intercultural communication
• Language combinations
• Introduction to principles of tandem language learning
Methodology

• Analysis of 66 individual student reports
• Qualitative: identification of common patterns in reports in order to establish categories (15)
• Content-based: selection of statements made by students as evidence
Culture 1 (Objective)
- Food and drink culture
- Dress codes
- Christmas celebrations
- Cost of living

Culture 2 (Subjective)
- Personal values
- Attitude to time
- Humour
- Relationships
- Religion

- Sport
- Night-life
- Education systems
- Cars and driving
- Smoking in public places

- Dreams for the future
- Abortion
- Gay partnerships
- Attitudes to queuing
- Drink culture
Affective Factors (1)

Worried,
apprehensive,
il at ease,
daunted,
Uncertain
Excited, more confident
Affective Factors (2)

• I was really excited and impatient to meet Caroline and to talk with her (Pamela, F)

• Initially, I was a bit apprehensive about the whole situation, so I decided for our first meeting, some of girls from my French class would meet their tandem partners with me (Caroline, Irl)
Autonomy and Strategies

- We used our first meeting to get to know each other, finding out details about each others family, studies and way of life. We did this so as it would be easier later on in time, to discuss other topics on a more familiar basis (Mags, Irl)

- I presumed it would be awkward so I prepared some general questions about France and French culture. (Caroline, Irl)

- This time I prepared a lot of sentences before the meeting so that the part when we spoke in French was more fluently than before. (Axel, D)
Influence of IC instruction (1)

- .. in France when you ask “How are you” the most of the answer is “I am fine”, whereas in Ireland, most of people say “Not so bad” or “It could be worse”. They are more pessimistic in their answer. Actually, such answer in France will be followed by “Really? What’s wrong? What’s happened?” (Aurelie, F)

- sometimes the prejudices aren’t funded!! (Pauline, F)

- .. symbols to share realities and to communicate. ... beliefs and values of a culture ...(Andrea, D)

- Relationships between members of the Irish family are not as close as in Spanish families. We agree that it is because the Irish culture is colder than the Spanish one (Natalia, Es)
Influence of IC instruction (2)

- And there it was! My first intercultural misunderstanding (Christian, D)

- Body language …. different communication styles … conversation is more direct and in Ireland more indirect. (Manuel, D)

- It was also interesting to learn about a culture with the background knowledge from the lessons. (Manuel, D)
Positive Experience (1)

- “.. doing intercultural tandem is really a good idea and a very relevant experience. It is a real exchange, and this course is the only one who gave us the opportunity to live this great experience. (James, F)

- Irish students and Erasmus students have difficulties to mix together…… a really good idea. (Elodie, F)

- … we have exchanged gifts….I don't regret anything in this experience. We have exchanged our emails in order to give news regularly. (Pauline, F)

- I really appreciate have time with Ciara. I noticed when I talk with her my English is better than when I talk with Erasmus students. (Elodie, F)

- we both had our fun in the lessons and so it was very positive for him as well. (Axel, D)
Mediation

My tandem partner got “shining” eyes while she told me all about hurling. (Andrea, D)

I was allowed to ask a lot of questions (Natalia, Es)

We used pictures and diagrams a lot to explain what we meant. (Carol, IRL)

For me it will be necessary to deal with Irish companies and business people from Ireland in the future. Therefore I hope from this meeting to get also information about business manners in Ireland. Because of the special topic of this meeting I prepared some vocabulary in advance. (Manuel, D)

The way she corrected me was very nice and of course very useful. (Aisling, IRL)

I also met other ERASMUS students through Franzi whom I probably wouldn’t have otherwise met (Aoife, IRL)

We both found each other’s accents and in my partner’s case, my use of slang difficult to understand, so it helped us both to realise what each of us could understand. (Garry, IRL)

She made the effort to talk in French and I am here to help her if she had some difficulties with a word or an expression (Pauline, F)
Awareness

• I was surprised... I was shocked... I was ashamed....
• I come to understand...
• This brought to my attention...
• This is very strange for me!
• We realised...
• I found it unusual...
• But what surprised me most...
• I think the tandem program is a good thing to become aware of things you would never recognize
• I noticed when I talk with her [Ciara] my English is better than when I talk with Erasmus students.

Individual consciousness is built from outside through relations with others.
Language Awareness

- We exchanged stories about how figures of speech are completely different when directly translated. (Caroline, IRL)

- When we spoke English I had to speak a lot slower and made myself as clear as possible. (Carol, IRL)

- I found myself explaining things in as many different ways as I could. (Carol, IRL)

- So studying a language in another language than my mother tongue is very good for my skills. (Maries, B)

- French find it easier to find expressions and words to describe their feelings. They are not being vulgar at all. Young Irish people swear a lot and I find that very often they can not find appropriate words to express their emotions. (Joanna, Poland)
Cultural awareness

• I enjoyed having the perspective of a French person on French topics, Anne Mallory’s views on the riots were very interesting! and I got an insight into the French political system. This was a very different experience (John, IRL)

• Another important point for doing business in Ireland is to reach the trust of the business partner. Trust is in Germany not so much important as in Ireland but also a component of business. (Manuel, D)

• The tandem exchange was for me a personal experience as I learned much about myself and I recognized that I’m a typical German person. Despite several stays abroad, my cultural background is really deep and I like plans which go up, punctual people and my private sphere. But the stays abroad helps me to became more and more tolerant with other cultures and understand their patterns, like time comprehension, appearance in the environment and in particular the behaviour against others and the comprehension of the own cultural background. (Anne, F)
Zone of Proximal Development

When faced with the task of meeting a French student and speaking French with them, I was a bit daunted. The fact that someone would be able to pick out my flaws when speaking in French was something that I felt very nervous about...Because of the Tandem Language Learning Programme, I now feel more confident about my Erasmus year next year in France. (Mags, IRL)

All in all I think I learned a lot from Kate and her culture here. I will bring her after Christmas a lot of teas for her because she never tried other sorts of tea only black tea. We will see if she likes it too or not. (Annemarie, D)

I learnt more about Irish culture, traditions and communication. Indeed I learnt to understand Irish humour and different Irish accents, even if it was really difficult at the beginning (Elodie, F)
• The tandem partnership was definitely a good experience. The tandem sessions offered us a good opportunity to ask questions that we never knew who and when we could ask them about the country and culture of the other. We improved our language skills, as well as the knowledge of each others culture. Comparing how things are in Germany with how they are in Ireland also offered a reflection on my own culture. When I will be back in Germany, I will definitely perceive some things in another way than I did before my stay in Ireland. The tandem partnership also added its share to this change of perception, which I believe is less biased and culturally influenced than before. (Vincent, D)
Motivation

• I was eager to learn...
• Pauline, my French partner, has motivated me to spend more time on my French (Michelle, IRL)
• I want to be able to talk to Pauline about my friends as they mean a lot to me (Michelle, IRL)
• I hope to be able to speak about my job after todays chat, because it would be very beneficial to me, if I get a part time job when I go to France next year (Michelle, IRL)
• From Pauline speaking to me about her country, she has made me very excited about going to study in France for the flexible semester (Michelle, IRL)
Conclusion

The greatest challenge the world faces is not a clash of civilisations but a clash of ignorance. (Edward Said)