

Creating and Developing a Student Worksheet for In-Tandem Activity

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Abstract

Tandem activities entail communication between two partners of different cultures and mother tongues in order to use and improve their linguistic knowledge, to exchange information and to facilitate socio-cultural integration. In this respect, a set of educational materials has been created by the team of the «Tandem, bilinguisme et construction des savoirs disciplinaires: une approche du FLE/FOS en contact avec les langues de l'ECO» project. Nevertheless, all teaching material goes through successive stages, various approaches and can be improved. This study suggests an analysis of a student worksheet, *Education*, whose main objective is to know the educational system of the two cultures. This research mirrors two versions of the same worksheet (conventionally marked V1 and V2) in order to present the manner in which this teaching material developed. We used a comparative approach. Our points of interest were: the linguistic level of the target group, general/specific objectives, the set place and time, and the structure of the activities. The study's conclusions entailed two aspects: methodological and cultural. Thus, as far as the material's future users, we believe that it is preferable that all the students be at the threshold level of the foreign language. The activities suggested by the worksheet must make use of the participant's linguistic resources in an active process. To know the tandem partner's educational system, in order to be integrated in it, it is necessary for the general objectives to be aimed at identifying cultural similarities and differences.

Keywords: Educational system; Language level; Learning objectives; Personal experience

Introduction

Linguistic tandem or *the tandem self-conducted learning of languages in secondary contexts* is a form of open learning, complementary to the « classical » language courses, in which people of different mother tongues work in a tandem [1]. Within these interactive activities, the two users of the language play the role of speaker and addressee alternatively, in order to create a conversational speech [2]. It is necessary to conceive teaching materials to guide this entire reciprocal exchange, envisaged for socio-cultural acquisition. Our research analyses one such worksheet for students: *Education*.

Material and Method

The worksheet *Education* contains activities based on cooperation and reciprocal exchange of opinions on the educational system of each culture. Nevertheless, before being published in print in the volume “Tandem linguistique et immersion réciproque”, [3] it had a preliminary version. Therefore, the study was based on a comparative analysis of the two versions from the perspective of the didactic scenario. The analysis tackled: the language level of the target group, the general and specific objectives, the set time and place, and, the structure of the activities. We used a comparative approach because we believed that it might aid us in observing the similarities and differences and, in the end, in emphasising the didactic activities which: involve linguistic competencies, facilitate integration, favour intercultural exchange, and contour the defining of identity. The comparative approach was not intended to make judgements, but rather to analyse, in an objective manner, teaching material destined for tandem learning. On the other hand, the study also proposed a diachronic view: the route taken in order to create a certain teaching material. In order to enhance the clarity of the analysis, we shall present the two worksheets in parallel and shall use the following marking system: V1 = the analysed version, V2 = version published in print. (see Annex 1 and 2)

Conceptual Framework

Education - The word is of Latin origin and has three primary significations: a. *educatio*: nurturing, nourishing, forming; b. *educo-educare*: to nurture, to nourish, to instruct, to form; c. *educo-educere*: to take out of..., to rise, to build [4]. Education represents a psychosocial activity designed at the level of teaching outcomes that are aimed at a harmonious formation and development of human personality. The main roles of education are: selecting values from society and transmitting them to the individual; consciously developing the human beings’ biopsychic potential; preparing them for an active integration in social life [4].

Learning system - The learning system is part of the educational system which comprises all the institutions that are specialised in designing and putting into practice the functions of education through specific content and methodologies, and which is organised both in a formal and a non-formal manner [4].

Language Level

According to the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages*, there are three general levels of reference: A (elementary users), B (independent users), C (advanced users) [2]. The V1 worksheet is addressed to a linguistically heterogeneous audience: A1/A2 and B1/B2 levels.

According to the assessment chart for the person who is going to study a foreign language, someone at the A1 (breakthrough) level is able to understand and use familiar expressions, to introduce themselves or to introduce someone else, and to communicate in a simple manner [2]. Someone who has reached the A2 (way stage) level has the ability to understand isolated sentences and to communicate in simple and common situations and can refer to topics that correspond to the speaker’s immediate needs. [2]

A decision to homogenise the levels was taken when the worksheet *Education* was published in print [3], *i.e.* B1 for both Romanian and French. In this respect, we shall briefly present some aspects of the general framework of the B1 level and the principles it is based on, in close connection to the material we have analysed.

The B1 level starts with the presumption that the learner has previously acquired some lexical, grammatical, and socio-cultural information that allows him to lead an independent life in a new linguistic environment, to understand the spoken and written language and to handle most of the day-to-day situations of using the language in speech or writing [5]. B1 is based on the following principles:

- a. it is centred on the learner [5];
- b. it is a system of quantifiable units [5];
- c. the communicative competency is integrated in the teaching-learning process [5];

Thus, the worksheet *Education* – V2 must offer the learner a series of activities that activate - knowledge and skills that can be used in day-to-day life. On the other hand, the suggested teaching construct must relate to the participants' needs and horizon of expectations, considering the fact that its main objective is the communicational one. The emphasis is on the receptive skills, not so much on the productive ones [5].

The Worksheet's Objectives and Skills

The general objective of V1 is to familiarise the participants with the differences between the two school systems (Romanian and French). Taking into account the fact that we express our own vision of the world through language and that discovering the culture of the "other" is one of the aspects of knowing the world [2], the discourse towards which the participants are guided aims at defining individuality from the perspective of alterity. Identifying and systematizing the differences between the two systems (see the Annexes) has an integrative multicultural purpose. Familiarising oneself with the educational system of the other culture (the general objective of V2 – see Annex 1) requires an entire range of the participant's abilities: openness, cooperation, acceptance, etc. *The specific objectives* (organised in linguistic and socio-cultural competences) are structured and communicated to the students (only in V2) so that they engage their individual relation to their own culture and define themselves in relation to the other. Several observations are necessary before presenting a synthetic table with the competences entailed by the worksheets (the linguistic competences presented in the table were established by the authors of *Tandem linguistique et immersion réciproque* [3]). The V1 worksheet represents a first variant destined to be restructured and improved based on the students' feedback in order to be published in print. On the other hand, we can state that the objective written under the worksheet's title "se familiariser avec les différences entre systemes scolaires"¹ is brief and synthetic. This is due to the fact that the students who work autonomously, without a teacher present, do not have the pedagogical training, nor the patience to decipher detailed objectives. However, in the printed volume, which is meant for students and teachers alike, the objectives are detailed in another manner.

At the end of the worksheet, we inserted a self-evaluation form entitled *Synopsis of an in tandem activity*. It was kept unchanged in V2 and inserted in the volume *Tandem linguistique et immersion réciproque* [3]. This document is useful to teachers and students alike.

The open and closed questions in the questionnaire propose creating an overall view of every person's work, as well as of the entire activity [3]. In order to be concise and clear, we felt it was necessary to offer a comparative view of the objectives for V1 and V2. Thus, in order to set the objectives (V1), we used the deductive method. We established the objectives of V1 based on the format and objectives of V2 (structured according to socio-cultural, linguistic competences: understanding an oral and written text and producing an oral and written text) and the documents offered by the participants (portfolios, audio and video recordings, the *Synopsis of an in tandem activity*).

Time and Meeting Place

It is worth mentioning that a speech act is directly influenced by the context in which it is produced [2]. Thus, a series of internal factors (the individual's personality which influences the degree of openness towards the "other") and external ones (the time, place, suggested material, etc.) facilitate or hinder linguistic and intercultural communication. On the other hand, these conditions impose various constraints manifested through some material elements [2], such as when and where communication takes place. In this respect, V1 suggests a two-hour interval for five tasks, while V2 suggests one hour and a half for four tasks. The external frame (the place), with its implicit constraints [2] (noise, excessive obscurity/luminosity, a lack of useful objects: desk, dictionary, chair, laptop, etc.), has direct consequences on the functionality of communication. The ability to communicate efficiently and reliably in places where communication is made difficult is another aspect which, we believe, needs to be taken into consideration. The attempt to diminish or

¹ "Getting to know the differences between the educational systems."

eliminate possible disruptive factors and to offer the « perfect » material framework for a tandem session is justifiable if we take into consideration the fact that V1 represented an intermediate stage for the publication of V2. With this in mind, the university was chosen as the working environment for V2. However, considering the fact that tandem learning is a complementary activity to the process of teaching-learning a foreign language, the freedom of choice when it comes to the meeting place represents an act of making the partners of the tandem responsible for their own actions, offering them comfort, thus granting the students a higher degree of autonomy.

Table 1. Targeted Competencies

<i>Education Worksheet</i>	Socio-cultural	Understanding		Speaking	Writing
	<i>Discovering the country of the tandem partner</i>	<i>Listening</i>	<i>Reading</i>		
V1	I can find out information on my own about my partner's educational system.	I can understand a story on a particular theme.	I can understand texts that contain official terms.	I can briefly present an educational system.	I can synthesize the acquired information.
V2	Educational system	I can understand a story on a particular theme.	–	I can briefly present an educational system.	–

V1= Initial version of the worksheet *Education*;

V2= Version published in « Tandem... » [3]

The Analysis of the Teaching Scenario

We analyzed the activities suggested by V1 and V2 from a double perspective: adapting the tasks to the language level and the actions aimed at a particular purpose (the tasks themselves).

The activities suggested by the worksheet *Education* (V1, V2) direct the participants towards acquiring lexical knowledge with the purpose of a better understanding of the target educational system. The first two activities have as a main objective stimulating the so-called “intercultural awareness” [2]: the two partners are invited to observe and synthesize the main similarities and differences between the culture of origin and the culture of the “other”. The types of activities include: comparisons (e.g. “Compare the structure of the two educational systems.” / “Compare the two university systems.”), narration (e.g. “Present your schooling system in your mother tongue.”), analysis and synthesis (e.g. “Compare the two school systems by filling in the table below.”), synthesizing (e.g. “State the age at which you began each stage of education, their names, and the type of teachers you had.”). (See Annexes 1 and 2) V1 and V2, through the types of activities they contain, address their target audience in an explicit manner, either by specifying French/Romanian (V1), or by wordings such as “Present your educational background in your mother tongue.”, “Tell your partner (in the foreign language) how you prepared and passed your Baccalaureate” (V2). In tandem learning, as a linguistic practice complementing the classical language course, involves a type of direct communication in which the two partners interact and within this interaction “strategies of producing and understanding the [written and spoken] message” [2] are constantly established. Thus, the targeted linguistic competences are: oral and written comprehension, and oral and written production. Therefore, the first task of V1 and V2 is oriented towards verbal interaction, based on spoken text production and comprehension (e.g. V2: “Present your educational background in your mother tongue. State the age at which you began each stage of education, their names, and the type of teachers you had.”). This activity involves a series of competences and abilities of both the speaker (the ability to transmit information [2], the ability to synthesize, to “render rather fluently a narration or a simple description in the form of a

succession of points" [2], the ability to hold a conversation [2], etc.), and the receiver (the ability to understand [2], to offer feedback in conversation [2], to establish the main points, the ability to hold a conversation [2], etc.). As far as written production is concerned, the activities which students have to perform are: taking notes, writing by dictation, filling in tables (see Task 2 – V1 and V2 in Annex). Their purpose is to help students imprint, compare and become familiar with "the differences between the educational systems/with the educational system of the other culture" – the general objective of V1 and V2. We can state that the first two tasks move in both V1 and V2 from the general towards the specific, from one's culture to that of the other. On the other hand, the two tasks were created having in mind the purpose of the tandem, which is to emphasize communication based on areas of immediate interest.

Since the discovery and knowledge of a group's culture is mediated by language [6], V2 suggests an activity involving personal narration: "Tell your partner (in the foreign language) how you prepared and passed your Baccalaureate". This "means of inter-human communication" [7] – narration – fulfils an essential role: a thorough self-knowledge by discovering new meaning; a mediation of reality through cognitive processes such as sensations, perceptions, representation, and memory. Without venturing into the field of cognitive psychology, we believe that it is important to mention the fact that a narration abundant in significations for both parties involved is created through the processes of reflection and oral expression of events. On the one hand, it concerns self-knowledge and a re-evaluation of one's own educational system by remembering and verbalising. On the other, it involves the contouring of a picture in which a life experience (of an actor with similar traits: age, sex, schooling background, etc.) is circumscribed to a different environment (France/Romania). Thus, presenting the individual experience serves the following purposes: self-reflection, organising reality, intercultural exchange, building meaning in speech, etc. (sender); drawing a new reality, redefining one's identity through alterity, etc. (receiver). As far as the code or language is concerned, V2 opts for "the foreign language". However, when remembering and expressing feelings and sensations ("state of mind" - V2), we believe that the target language represents a reductionist element.

In the last tasks (the third, fourth, fifth), V1 proposes an "approach of learning a foreign language through action" – a paramount principle stipulated in the *Common European Framework of Reference* [2]. The user of a language (Romanian and French in our case) is viewed as a social actor who has to fulfil certain tasks (e.g. "get information from the secretary's office" / "get information on requirements for obtaining an Erasmus scholarship") in a series of given circumstances (e.g. "admission requirements"), in a specific environment, within a particular area of interest (e.g. "choose a programme [...] of the Iuliu Hatieganu University."). The *Common European Framework of Reference* defines the task as "any action oriented towards a particular purpose" [2]. Thus, the actions undertaken by the students are based on competences aimed at obtaining a result, which is informing oneself. V1 proposes making a summary of the information and presenting it to the tandem partner and, subsequently, to the coordinating professor in the form of a portfolio or a folder [8]. We believe that these tasks require the activation and usage of the participants' linguistic resources and offer the necessary time and consideration to reuse them.

Conclusions

Through the activities it includes, the worksheet *Education* (V1 and V2) suggests an internal and external reflection on the part of the two partners of the tandem. On the one hand, it stimulates the individual's retrospection on their own educational system (its role in the development of one's personality). On the other hand, it develops certain intercultural attitudes and habits (the ability to acknowledge the similarities and differences between the culture of origin and the foreign one [2], between the "world you come from" and the world of the "target community" [2]). We believe that the activities which involve remembering, in the form of a personal narration, each of the two partners' school background are extremely useful. This subjectivity-laden task enhances the degree of openness and mutual understanding of the participants. We consider that the language in which the participants must present their experience must be their mother tongue and not the foreign one.

Viewing it from the perspective of adapting to the participants' language level, the teaching scenario stimulates, first and foremost, communicative competence for making proper use of the intercultural dialogue. The general and specific objectives involve openness, cooperation and acceptance from the participants. We also believe that the participants should be given the freedom of choice of the place and time of the tandem sessions, which allows every tandem pair to approach the topics discussed in a personal way. This would help in distinguishing the tandem pairs from one another and would also stimulate dynamics and diversity. The analysed material (V1, V2), seen from a comparative perspective, is both homogenous and heterogeneous. The tasks of the worksheets favour intercultural exchange, stimulate alterity, and facilitate integration in the academic/university environment. All this is realised by means of two types of activities which entail: *a.* synthetizing, summarising, presenting accurately and *b.* presenting one's own culture from a subjective perspective (personal experience). This presentation of reality mediated by a subjective perspective is useful for quantifying cultural differences and similarities. We argue that the actual tasks of the worksheet engage the participants' capacity and abilities, thus certifying that "action" takes a central position in the process of learning a foreign language.

Consequently, the activities suggested by V1 and V2 are complementary. Combining the tasks represents an efficient means of engaging the participants' linguistic, cognitive and volitive resources.

List of abbreviations

- V1 – Initial version of the worksheet Education
- V2 – Version published in "Tandem..." [3]

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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Annex 1

V1²

PARCOURS EN TANDEM/N° 10 THÈME: Éducation Niveaux : ROUMAIN A1/A2 ; FRANÇAIS: B1/B2 DURÉE: 2 heures
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/À l'université /

- **Se familiariser avec des différences entre systèmes scolaires**

→ Comparaison des deux systèmes et de leurs structures (nombres d'années, d'études obligatoires, diplômes, organisation des cours, matières, horaires ...) pour l'enseignement primaire, secondaire, supérieur (langue: fr.)

→ Comparaison des systèmes universitaires des deux pays (coût, durée, formations et spécificités, bourses, stages, perspectives professionnelles ... (langue: ro.)

→ Étudiant/e francophone: se renseigner auprès d'un secrétariat administratif de l'université sur les conditions des admission pour une inscription en première année de Licence (spécialité et faculté aux choix parmi l'offre de l'UMF)./ récapituler des informations obtenues dans un tableau (langue: ro.)

→ Étudiant/e roumain: se renseigner sur les conditions d'admission pour un séjour Erasmus dans un pays francophone./ récapituler des informations obtenues dans un tableau (langue: fr.)

→ Portofolio: documentations éventuellement reçues lors des demandes de renseignement.

² IN TANDEM LEARNING / WORKSHEET 10

TOPIC: Education

LEVEL: ROMANIAN: A1/A2; FRENCH: B1/B2

DURATION: 2 hours

/At university/

- **Familiarising yourself with the differences between educational systems**

→ Comparing the two systems and their structure (number of years of mandatory schooling, degrees, how classes are organised, subjects, schedules) for primary, secondary school, university studies (language: Fr)

→ Comparing the university systems of the two countries (cost, duration, training and particularities, scholarships, stages, professional perspectives...) (language: Ro)

→ French speaking student: get information from the secretary's office on admission requirements for the Bachelor programme (choose a programme offered by any of the faculties of the the Iuliu Hatieganu University)./Review the information you obtain in a table. (language: Ro)

→ Romanian student: get information on requirements for obtaining an Erasmus scholarship in a French speaking country./Review the information you obtain in a table. (language: Fr)

→Portfolio: any documents you obtain while gathering information

Annex 2

V2³

PARCOURS EN TANDEM

■ **THÈME :**

Éducation


■ **NIVEAUX :** ROUMAIN : B1 ; FRANÇAIS : B1

■ **DURÉE :** 1h30

/ Lieu de rencontre libre/

FICHE

N°4



Se familiariser avec le système d'enseignement de l'autre culture

➤ Présenter son parcours scolaire en langue maternelle. Préciser l'âge de début de chaque niveau d'études, la dénomination du niveau et des types d'enseignants correspondants.

➤ Comparer les deux systèmes d'enseignement en complétant le tableau suivant (chacun/e complète les informations données par le/la partenaire).

	România	Pays francophone
Tipul de cadru didactic pentru fiecare categorie de vârstă, de la 3 la 18 ani. Types d'établissements fréquentés par un élève de 3 à 18 ans		
Examene și diplome Examens et diplômes		
Orar Horaires		

➤ Racontez à votre partenaire (dans la langue que vous apprenez) la préparation et la passation de votre examen du baccalauréat (matières, organisation du travail, déroulement des épreuves, état d'esprit, enjeu...).

➤ Portfolio : enregistrement de la conversation (puis écoute et commentaires).

³ IN TANDEM LEARNING / WORKSHEET 4

TOPIC: Education

LEVEL: ROMANIAN: B1; FRENCH: B1

DURATION: 1h30

Meeting place: anywhere

- Familiarising yourself with the educational system of the other culture

→ Present your educational background in your mother tongue. State the age at which you began each stage of education, their names, and the type of teachers you had.

→ Compare the two schooling systems by filling in the table below (each partner will write the information given by their partner)

	Romania	French-speaking country
Types of instructors/stages of education for students from the age of 3 to 18.		
Exams and diplomas		
Schedule		

→ Tell your partner (in the foreign language) how you prepared and passed your Baccalaureate (subjects, organising your work, the exams, state of mind, stakes...).

→ Portfolio: a recording of the conversation (then listen to the recording and make comments).

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