

Language Tandems. Intercomprehension and Language Alternation

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Abstract

The present study analyzed the discourse in three recordings made by two students who participated in the project *Tandem, bilinguisme et construction des savoirs disciplinaires: une approche du FLE/FOS en contact avec les langues de l'ECO* (2012-2014), coordinated by Lecturer Aurora Băgiag, PhD at the Iuliu Hațieganu University of Medicine and Pharmacy, Cluj-Napoca. The discourse analysis looked at the manner in which the interlocutors alternated their mother tongue with the target language when learning a foreign language within a tandem. The analytical approach inventoried the dialogue contexts that determined the sudden shift in the language of communication, or the use of intercomprehension. The strategies of language alternation or the use of intercomprehension were related to the implicit or explicit objectives of the dialogue lines, to the speakers' language proficiency and to the interest they showed in the topic of the dialogue. The study shows that the speaker who speaks mostly in their own language is placed in a more secure space and therefore can exercise a certain authority in relation to their dialogue partner. The analysis also points out that language alternation no longer functions when the level of language proficiency of the proposed teaching activity is considerably higher than the speakers' language proficiency. Thus, the speakers intuitively turn to intercomprehension, a form of communication that enables them to have a more nuanced and developed speech, and provides them the opportunity for intercultural education.

Keywords: Intercomprehension; Language alternation; Language negotiation; Language tandem

Introduction

The study examined the manner in which the tandem partners alternated their mother tongue with the target language when learning a foreign language in tandem. We looked at the dialogue contexts that determined the sudden shift in the language of communication or the use of intercomprehension. We also analyzed the strategies of language alternation in relation to the implicit or explicit objectives of the dialogue lines.

We selected three audio recordings made by the same tandem partners: a native speaker of Romanian and a native speaker of French. Students had 30 worksheets to choose from for their tandem sessions. The recordings made by the above-mentioned students responded to the instructions of the worksheets entitled: *Objets de la vie quotidienne* (Everyday-life objects) (level B1), *L'homme face à la mort* (People facing death) (level B2) and *Maladies, superstitions et croyances* (Diseases, superstitions and beliefs) (level B2). Their duration is 17'26", 36'43" and 33'26" respectively. The

purpose of the analysis was to observe how students chose the language of communication and how they alternated languages depending on the topic of discussion, the communication purpose, the level of language proficiency required by the worksheet and that of the participants in the dialogue (A2, B1, B2).

According to Peter Doyé, *intercomprehension* is one of the most remarkable and productive ideas in the field of multilingual education [1]. The concept has been developed in teaching research since the early 1990s. The definition that most experts accept is the following: intercomprehension is a form of communication in which each partner speaks in their own language and understands the language of the other speaker [1]. According to Doyé, this definition clarifies two aspects: 1. most communicative situations in which intercomprehension is used are characterized by the fact that oral and not written communication is dominant; 2. communication through intercomprehension does not require the dialogue partners to be able to speak in a foreign language.

The advantages of this form of communication are as follows:

- it adheres to the EU policies. The Council of Europe and the European Commission established that multilingualism, diversity and flexibility are fundamental principles in education;
- it is well founded psychologically – it is based on the interaction between human language skills and our ability to exploit previous cognitive acquisitions;
- it is judicious in terms of teaching (it stimulates motivation and learner autonomy and offers interesting possibilities for intercultural education) [1].

Unlike other forms of communication, intercomprehension involves the following: metalinguistic competence (making comparisons and transfers between languages, returning to one's native language; learning by integrating and not separating the languages); cognitive competence (integrating languages and disciplines, studying a discipline in a different language); competence of communication through intercomprehension (adapting the discourse to the interlocutor, verifying that the message was understood) [2]. In the dialogues selected for this study, intercomprehension was a form of communication that students used intuitively. We identified the communication situations in which language alternation no longer worked and in which intercomprehension was the solution that the dialogue partners came up with.

Negotiation of meaning is a concept that has been discussed in the literature since the 1980s: Day (1986) [3], Gass & Veronis (1985 [4], 1989 [5]), Long (1983 [6]), Pica (1992 [7], 1994 [8]). Negotiation of meaning occurs when verbal interaction is not progressing, because there is a situation of incomprehension. It is a lateral dialogue sequence which solves the problem of incomprehension before continuing the discussion [9]. We identified the types of situations where meaning was negotiated and the communication solutions that the students produced.

Discourse analysis

We reviewed the dialogue sequences in the selected recordings and structured the analysis according to the titles of the worksheets used in the three tandem sessions. The purpose of our analysis was to identify recurrences in the linguistic behavior¹ of the tandem partners. We explored the communication contexts in which the dialogue partners changed the language of expression or resorted to intercomprehension.

1. *Objets de la vie quotidienne (level B1)*

The worksheet *Objets de la vie quotidienne* proposes the following activities: each partner presents the contents of their bag or backpack, in their mother tongue, and mentions the utility of each object; each student says, in the foreign language, what they would do if they lost their bag or backpack; the partners list three items they consider indispensable and justify their choice; students criticize in the foreign language the arguments their partner presented in support of their choices in

¹ Linguistic behavior – the actions that speakers take through language: initiating a discussion, ending a dialogue sequence, interrupting their dialogue partner, continuing an idea that was expressed by the other speaker, but in their own language.

the previous task; finally, they look for an object which they consider to be completely useless and take a picture of it.

We identified two types of interventions in the lines of each dialogue partner: the ones that completed the task strictly (which we call *primary* lines) and those behind the former and generated by them (*secondary* lines): explanations, translations, jokes. In this tandem session, the Romanian speaker (RS) used French for the primary lines (when the rubric stated it explicitly) and Romanian for the secondary lines (jokes, initiating a dialogue, concluding the dialogue). The French speaker (FS) also used Romanian at the beginning, for the secondary lines: to ask for explanations - ce este [...]↑², or to make jokes - aveți un chuing gum vă rog↑³ [laughter](The students laughed at how the English term 'chewing gum' was adopted in French; FS used this structure in a reply in Romanian). Then, gradually, FS alternated the Romanian language with her mother tongue in the primary lines as well. We refer here to teaching activities requiring expressing one's ideas in French. Thus, FS fluctuated constantly between her mother tongue and the foreign language. The gradual transition towards the foreign language was probably due to the interventions in Romanian of the dialogue partner. The fact that the Romanian language was used predominantly granted RS a privileged position during the dialogue and required the other speaker (FS) to adapt to the communication context:

FS: și am.⁴ j'ai des feuilles.. j'ai aussi mon.. porte-feuille.. portofel.. cu... pașaport.. carnet de student și..⁵ cartes bancaires

RS: ă.. carduri bancare⁶

FS: *carduri bancare*⁷

RS: sau card. simplu⁸ [...]

FS: *am*⁹.. j'ai un deodorant [...] j'ai des mouchoires.. *batiste nazale*¹⁰[...] (The translation into Romanian was done so that RS understood the term; perhaps FS noticed, from the non-verbal language, that the term *mouchoire* was not understood.)

FS: j'ai [laughs] un tampon

RS: oui. pour les filles. oui

FS: oui [laughs] *cum se spune*¹¹

RS: tampon. sau absorbant¹² [...]

FS: *am un*¹³.. elastique

RS: elastic de par¹⁴

FS: pour les cheveux

RS: elastic de păr.. scrie tu că eu nu am¹⁵ [laughs] [...]

FS: *ată*¹⁶ [laughs]

RS: pour aujourd'hui *ată*¹⁶ [laughs]

FS: pour aujourd'hui *ată*¹⁶↓¹⁷

² What is ... ?

³ Have you got a chewing gum, please?

⁴ And I've got ...

⁵ my wallet with a passport, a student ID and ...

⁶ Uh ... bank cards or ...

⁷ Bank cards.

⁸ Simply card.

⁹ I've got...

¹⁰ nose tissues

¹¹ What's the Romanian for that?

¹² Sanitary pad or absorbent pad.

¹³ I have an

¹⁴ hairband

¹⁵ Hair tie. You should write this down, I don't have one.

¹⁶ That's all.

¹⁷ When we transcribed the dialogue lines, we wrote in italics the words or phrases which constituted the subject of discussion. Also, in one of the transcripts, we used italics to highlight the parts where the speakers alternated languages. We used square brackets to present para- or non-verbal elements of communication that could not be grasped from the transcript.

The second activity in the worksheet requires students to say, in the foreign language, what they would do if they lost their bag or backpack. RS was reluctant to speak in the foreign language, both when he was first challenged and when FS did it again:

FS: chaque partenaire répond dans la langue qu'il apprend. à la question↓ que feriez-vous si vous perdez votre sac à main ou votre sac à dos↑ donc. tu me dis en français↓

RS: ă..¹⁸ que feriez-vous si.. en roumain ou en français↑

FS: tu as tu.. devrais dire en français

RS: en français. que feriez-vous si vous perdez votre sac à main ou sac à dos↑

FS: OK.. a toi↓.. [a moi de répondre?] OK

The strategies for avoiding the use of the foreign language were as follows: RS postponed the response and reread the rubric; when encouraged to reply in French, he asked whether he was supposed to speak in Romanian or in French. On the other hand, FS was waiting for his answer, and repeated to him that he was supposed to speak in French. Then RS read the rubric again and, in a non-verbal manner, invited his dialogue partner to reply to the question. Finally, FS answered the question in Romanian, as the rubric suggested.

RS corrected FS frequently when she spoke Romanian; he provided Romanian terms for her in advance, and asked her to repeat after him complete utterances in Romanian. The message was predictable for the listener: the person who lost his/her bag would go to the police and would declare having lost his/her identification papers. This fact allowed the listener to pay attention to form – grammar constructions and vocabulary. Consequently, FS was corrected constantly. In contrast, when RS spoke French, he was not interrupted for corrections. Even if he made mistakes in pronunciation or grammar, and even if the message was predictable, FS intervened very little, and only when the word or phrase RS used did not exist in French (*carnet de conduit*), or when he did not know the term (*carte d'identité*). We noticed a difference in language behavior between the two speakers: RS adopted an authoritative attitude, linguistically speaking, compared with FS. We believe that this privileged position was due to the fact that his language was used more in the dialogue. The predominance of Romanian language offered RS greater safety, more possibilities of expression, and the position of being an expert in the language of communication.

Although the next rubric did not indicate the language of communication, RS imposed the foreign language at the beginning: he opened the dialogue in French, and when FS wanted to continue in French, RS said: în română↓¹⁹ Thus, RS asserted his authority, given by the privileged position that he had gained in the previous dialogue sequences. Eventually, however, he opted for his own language (Romanian) in order to illustrate and argue his point.

The task was understood differently by the two dialogue partners, which led to an exchange in which, for the first time in this dialogue, the speakers negotiated the meaning. RS began to enumerate the indispensable objects in his backpack and FS expanded the field of reference and asked RS to express an opinion:

FS: et.. dans la vie.. dans la maison.. qu'est-ce que tu pense↑ les trois objets indispensables

RS: [...] la salle de bain↑ [they both laugh]

The answer led to a new renegotiation of the meaning of the rubric. FS reiterated that the instructions referred to objects. Next, RS listed, in French, the items he considered to be indispensable, but did not justify his answer. FS's discourse in Romanian was formulated in the same manner, but unlike RS, FS explained her choices:

FS: calculator meu cu.. internet²⁰ [laughs]

RS: a↓ internet↓ fără internet..²¹

FS: da↓ pentru familia mea și.. muzica²²

¹⁸ Um ...

¹⁹ In Romanian!

²⁰ My computer with ... Internet.

²¹ Ah! Internet! Without Internet ...

RS: muzica²³

FS: da. ă.. ă.. telefon meu²⁴

RS: telefonul tău²⁵

FS: da²⁶ [...]

FS: calculator și.. perna și.. telefon²⁷

RS: [...] calculatorul da↓ când ești acasă.. în ziua de azi.. de fapt poți să ai calculatorul da' dacă nu ai internetu' cred că te plictisești și nu.. atunci n-o să fie chiar indispensabil. pentru că.. poți să te uiți și la TV la filme nu numai pe calculator deci fără internet.. fără calculator.. și fără internet.. nu se poate²⁸

FS: [approves everything RS says, by saying "da" (yes) repeatedly]

We noted that negotiation of meaning also occurred in this dialogue sequence, emphasizing what had previously been said. When speaking in the foreign language, RS listed the indispensable items, but did not justify his choices. On the other hand, FS explained why the computer connected to the Internet was indispensable and then, RS developed this idea in his mother tongue. In fact, he expanded on what he had said before – calculatorul este indispensabil²⁹ –, but he did this in his mother tongue and not in the foreign language, because communicating in Romanian allowed him greater freedom of expression. Therefore, RS maintained his privileged position in the dialogue by expressing his ideas in his own language. This aspect determined the linguistic behavior of RS: he interrupted his dialogue partner and continued her idea, developing in Romanian the thoughts he had expressed in French.

In the last teaching sequence, each speaker presented counterarguments to what their dialogue partner had said in the previous dialogue sequence:

FS: cred că.. televizor este..³⁰

RS: nu mai este ceva indispensabil³¹

FS: da³²

RS: pentru că.. toate programele.. tot ce este pe televizor poți să vezi.. pe calculator³³

FS: da. pe calculator și.. putem să fac.. altceva³⁴

RS: putem să facem altceva. într-adevăr. nici eu. aici în Cluj nici nu am televizor. pentru că nu mă uit. nu am timp. când vin acasă. doar îmi aprind calculatorul și tot ce vreau.. găsesc pe internet³⁵

In this exchange, it is obvious that RS interrupted FS and developed the idea that FS had produced in her first reply. He took over the hypothesis (televizorul nu este indispensabil³⁶) and developed it by providing arguments. Thus, FS could no longer develop an argumentative discourse, but made short statements confirming what RS had stated in his mother tongue. The second initiative to develop the arguments – da. pe calculator și.. putem să fac.. altceva³⁴ – was again interrupted by RS, who repeated the message, correcting the verb form (plural instead of

²² Yes! For my family and the music.

²³ Music!

²⁴ Yes! Um ... My phone ...

²⁵ Your phone.

²⁶ Yes ...

²⁷ My computer, pillow and phone.

²⁸ The computer, yes! When you're home today ... In fact you can have the computer, but if you don't have Internet, I think you get bored and ... then it wouldn't be indispensable. Because ... you can watch movies on TV, not only on the computer, so without Internet, one cannot do without computer and Internet.

²⁹ the computer is indispensable

³⁰ I think television is ...

³¹ It's not something indispensable anymore.

³² Right.

³³ Because ... you can see on the computer all programs, everything you see on TV.

³⁴ Yes, on the computer, or I can do something else.

³⁵ We can do something else. Indeed, here in Cluj I don't have a TV set, because I don't watch TV, I don't have the time; when I go home, I just turn on the computer and I find everything I want on the Internet.

³⁶ the TV is not indispensable

singular): putem să *facem* altceva³⁷, and then continued with his own arguments. We believe that the Romanian speaker used certain dialogue strategies which reshaped his position as shown above.

RS then advanced counterarguments to his own statement. This was the second form of negotiation of meaning, by remoulding the initial opinion following the dialogue with the partner, and by changing one's message and one's own view. Therefore, we can state that the implicit didactic objective of the last teaching activities in the worksheet (remoulding one's opinion, based on the counterarguments put forward by the dialogue partner) was fulfilled. But how this negotiation of meaning was conducted is to be noted: RS offered his own counterarguments in his mother tongue, and did not allow his dialogue partner to finish the argumentative sequence she had initiated in the foreign language. Once again, we observed that placing the speaker in his own linguistic universe offered the Romanian speaker several possibilities: refining the message, and using dialogue strategies for managing various communication situations.

The worksheet *Objets de la vie quotidienne* was created for level B1. We assessed students' proficiency in oral communication as being close to B1 (FS - B1; RS - A2+). The two speakers alternated languages a lot and used this method widely to make themselves understood, in order to make communication effective. On the other hand, level B2 worksheets do not allow such alternation of languages and thus students resorted to intercomprehension more frequently.

2. *L'homme face à la mort* (level B2)

The worksheet *L'homme face à la mort* proposes four dialogue sequences: 1. each student explains, in their own language, expressions related to death; 2. students arrange these expressions on a line in decreasing order according to the frequency of their use; 3. the speakers argue, in French, in favor of their view in relation to the statement: "the physician needs to give the patient the diagnosis directly, in the case of a serious illness"; 4. the dialogue partners describe symbols and artistic representations of death, in Romanian.

In the first activity, RS and FS alternated languages a lot, although the rubric proposed their mother tongue as language of communication. RS mentioned expressions in Romanian, but explained them in French. However, FS asked her questions in Romanian: ce este³⁸ When encountering difficulties in explaining the word 'ortul'³⁹ (FS: a da ortul. ce e ortul⁴⁰), RS abruptly changes the language of communication and provides explanations in Romanian:

RS: este o locuțiune.. a da ortul popii. înseamnă același lucru cu a muri. ă... se ia împreună deci nu are.. o.. semnificație⁴¹

FS: da da. da. OK⁴²

FS listed and explained the expressions in French. She used Romanian only to translate some terms. RS provided the equivalent expressions and the Romanian terms (*rendre son âme*, *casser*, *pipe*). Interestingly, the bilingual list of expressions was built in a dialogue, according to the principle of equivalence or similarities. When one partner mentioned an expression, the other one recalled an equivalent or similar expression. The expressions in the two languages, which are lexically related to one another, are listed in order: *rendre son âme*, *a-și da dubu*⁴³, *a-și da ultima suflare*⁴⁴, *rendre son dernier souffle*. Each partner adapted their speech to what the other had said, so we can say that language alternation worked very well as a form of communication. The dialogue partners made themselves understood; moreover, through dialogue, they compiled a list of expressions that refer to death. RS maintained his privileged position, being the one who explained or translated the words or phrases, and FS acted as recipient of his explanations.

FS initiated a discussion that related to the nuances that different expressions have: *finir ses pieds*

³⁷ we can do something else

³⁸ What's that?

³⁹ chips (rough translation)

⁴⁰ To cash in ... What is "cash in"? (rough translation)

⁴¹ It's a phrase ... to cash in one's chips means to die. Uh ... they are taken together, so it doesn't have ... a ... meaning ...

⁴² Yes, yes, ok.

⁴³ to pass away

⁴⁴ to breathe one's last breath

sous terre c'est.. un peu méchant. RS listened and then changed the subject by providing another expression in Romanian. This time, he used Romanian to introduce the phrase. Until then, he used French, and only the expression was spoken in Romanian:

- RS: în română.. mai este a trece la cele veșnice⁴⁵ [...]
RS: il existe en français.. un correspondance↑ ou pas↓
FS: non.. je connais pas. nu cred. [laughter] dar este un pic.. trist. cum se spune triste↑⁴⁶
RS: ăă.. trist⁴⁷
FS: trist. este un pic trist nu↑ cele veș..⁴⁸
RS: veșnice.. da. da.. de fapt tot ce are legătură cu.. moartea e ceva trist așa că..⁴⁹
FS: da dar.. [...] finir ses pieds sous terre este.. fără.. sentiment [...] dar.. când spunem.. rendre son âme. este..⁵⁰
RS: ceva mai sentimental⁵¹
FS: da. mai sentimental și care este o altă viața in.. paradise [English]⁵²
RS: o altă viață.. diferită⁵³
FS: da. diferită și.. fericit⁵⁴
RS: da. fericită. o viață fericită⁵⁵
FS: da. dar când spunem a trece la cele veșnice este... care.. nu este o viață fericită⁵⁶
RS: da. putem spune așa↓ [FS laughs] depinde și cine o spune. la personne. persoana care o spune⁵⁷

RS did not encourage the continuation of this discussion; he partly agreed with what his dialogue partner said, but did not refine or negotiate the sense too much, and when he did it, he used short statements aimed at closing the dialogue sequence: *de fapt tot ce are legătură cu.. moartea e ceva trist așa că..*⁵⁸; *da. putem spune așa↓ depinde și cine o spune. la personne. persoana care o spune*⁵⁹ Once more, Romanian was the language of communication and the Romanian speaker was the one who had the authority to conclude the discussion.

In the next activity, where the students are asked to order the expressions, RS started in French and gradually shifted to Romanian. FS spoke in French in this dialogue sequence. However, in the exchange of replies where the meaning was negotiated, she adapted to the conversational context: when RS switched suddenly to his mother tongue, FS replied in the language of the dialogue partner, i.e. the language in which her partner initiated the discussion:

- FS: [...] il a claqué
RS: il a claqué. a clacat. în română. mais..en.. în română. a clacat. putem să spunem că.. nu a mai rezistat⁶⁰
FS: a↓da↓⁶¹
RS: sau a clacat. nu mai poate de obosit⁶²

⁴⁵ In Romanian there is also ... to buy a one-way ticket (rough translation).

⁴⁶ But it is a little ... sad. How do you say that?

⁴⁷ Um... sad.

⁴⁸ Sad. It's a bit sad, isn't it? The e...

⁴⁹ The eternal ... Yes, yes ... In fact, everything that has to do with death is sad, so ...

⁵⁰ Yes, but ... finir ses pieds sous terre is without feeling, but when we say rendre son âme it is ...

⁵¹ A bit more sentimental.

⁵² Yes, more sentimental and that is another life, in ... paradise.

⁵³ Another life, a different one.

⁵⁴ Yes, different and ... happy.

⁵⁵ Yes, happy, a happy life.

⁵⁶ Yes. But when we say *to buy a one-way ticket* [rough translation]... it isn't a happy life.

⁵⁷ Yes, we can say that. It also depends on who's saying it, la personne, the person who says it.

⁵⁸ In fact, everything that has to do with death is sad, so ...

⁵⁹ Yes, we can say that. It also depends on who's saying it, la personne, the person who says it.

⁶⁰ He broke down. In Romanian we can say that ... he broke down, he could no longer resist.

⁶¹ Oh, yes!

⁶² Or, he broke down. He is dead tired.

FS: da. da. OK. [...] este un pic la fel în francez. a claquer este când.. facem multe sport sau.. și..⁶³ ⊥

RS: da. ai clacat. nu mai poți. că ești foarte obosit⁶⁴

FS: il a disparu. aussi.

RS: mais.. on dispa.. a dispărea are două sensuri⁶⁵

FS: da. da⁶⁶

RS: da da' poți să spui la un sens figurat⁶⁷

FS: oui. on dit pas trop. mais.. on comprends que XXX il est mort. il est disparu

This time, FS concluded the discussion by returning to her own language, and adopted a less defensive attitude. She mentioned another expression and immediately concluded the dialogue sequence by reading the next instructions. Thus, FS also used a withdrawal dialogue strategy when RS made a statement which was in opposition with what FS had just said (she used the adversative coordinating conjunction 'mais' (but)). However, in the same manner as RS, FS chose to express herself in her own language in this communication context. The strategy of managing a situation in which a speaker was contradicted was the immediate shift to one's own language. The speakers' linguistic behavior illustrates the fact that one's own linguistic universe was a secure space for each of them. As their own level of proficiency in the target language did not offer them many possibilities for negotiation of meaning, the speakers intuitively reverted to their own language, in order to be able to manage difficult communication situations.

In the third dialogue sequence, the students had to build an argumentative discourse in French. RS was invited to speak, but hesitated, so his dialogue partner offered to begin the dialogue. FS spoke in French, but provided the Romanian equivalent of the terms RS did not understand (e.g. mensonge). When it was RS's turn to speak, he began in Romanian:

RS: trebuie să respectăm și etica. ăă..⁶⁸ [repeats the question] on dit en français ou en roumain↑

FS: comme tu veux. tu peux parler en français. XXX l'exercice avec ⊥

RS: et pour toi aussi

FS: oui

RS : [continues in Romanian] ăă.. trebuie să... depinde de.. cât este de gravă.. boala. uneori trebuie să.. îi spunem ăă.. pacientului sau nu trebuie că.. sunt pacienți.. care sunt foarte.. fricoși. avoir peur. frică. avoir peur ăă.. și suferă o.. intră în depresie și atunci nu se mai gândesc decât la ziua de mâine. că mâine o să moară și.. atunci nu mai răspund la niciun tratament. nu mai vor să vorbească cu nimeni.. ai înțeles↑⁶⁹

FS: da. am înțeles⁷⁰

RS: și.. pe de altă parte sunt cazuri în care se anunță doar rudele. ca să știe.. ce va urma. la ce să se aștepte⁷¹

FS: ce va urma↑⁷²

RS: ce qu'il vient. ăă.. la ce să se aștepte. ăă.. dacă moare mâine să poată pregăti.. toate

⁶³ Yes, yes, it's a bit the same in French. *Clacuer* is when you do many (sic!) sport or ... and ...

⁶⁴ Yes, you broke down, you can't do it anymore, 'cause you're very tired.

⁶⁵ ... to disappear has two meanings.

⁶⁶ Yes, yes.

⁶⁷ Yes, but you can say it figuratively.

⁶⁸ We must consider the ethics as well. Um ...

⁶⁹ Um... one has to... It depends on how serious the disease is. Sometimes we have to tell the patient or not; there are patients who are very fearful, avoir peur, fear, avoir peur, and then they suffer, fall into depression and think only about the next day, that tomorrow they will die, so they fail to respond to any treatment, they don't want to talk to anyone anymore and ... did you understand?

⁷⁰ Yes, I understood.

⁷¹ On the other hand, there are cases where they only give the diagnosis to the relatives so that they know what will happen, what to expect.

⁷² What will happen?

chestiile pentru înmormântare. înmormântare. tu știi.. ce înseamnă⁷³

RS did not wait for questions, but predicted and explained the difficulties without being asked to. Next, he explained the term funeral, but used French at first and then switched back to Romanian. RS tried to continue the argumentation in French, but changed his mind and opted for Romanian:

RS: si la personne sait. sait qu'elle.. ea poate să.. profite de timpul.. dacă i se spune că mai are de trăit trei luni.. poate se gândește că în astea trei luni. vreau să îndeplinesc anumite dorințe. vreau să fac asta. dar.. dacă nu-i spui și.. s-ar putea mâine să moară. s-ar putea să nu-i respecti dorința lui de a face anumite chestii.⁷⁴

Thus, he spoke in his own language, but used dialogue techniques to make himself understood by his partner: he spoke more slowly, translated words, stopped to ask his partner: *înțelegi ai înțeles*⁷⁵ ce nu înțelegi mă oprești și îți spun în franceză⁷⁵, or asked whether or not his partner knew a certain word, like 'înmormântare' (funeral). RS opted for his native language, which offered him greater possibilities to express his opinions, to give arguments and refine his ideas. He adjusted his speech and constantly checked if his partner understood him. To verify her comprehension, FS said in French what she understood. Therefore, we can say that in this dialogue sequence the dialogue partners resorted to intercomprehension.

They each spoke their own language and used strategies to adapt their speech to the dialogue partner and to verify the comprehension of the message. They used intercomprehension intuitively in order to facilitate the exchange of ideas. The factors favoring the recourse to intercomprehension are the following: the question was exciting and the students strongly desired to express their views; the type of discourse – argumentative – required multiple linguistic resources, which the speakers accessed with difficulty in the target language; the level of language proficiency of the participants in the dialogue was below B2; they became emotionally involved as well, and therefore the message was more important than how it was conveyed. Consequently, intercomprehension was the solution the dialogue partners arrived at. Although the speakers were not familiar with this theoretical concept, they resorted to it intuitively.

3. *Maladies, superstitions et croyances (level B2)*

The worksheet *Maladies, superstitions et croyances* proposes three activities: the dialogue partners explain, in their own language, five disease-related superstitions; the students list and write down in a table some alternative forms of treatment and care (the language of communication is not specified); the students watch the film *După dealuri* (Beyond the Hills) (Cristian Mungiu, Romania, 2012) together.

The dialogue partners resorted to intercomprehension constantly in order to complete the tasks in this worksheet. The activities had been designed for the B2 level of language proficiency, which was higher than the actual students' level of proficiency. The discourse was more complex in terms of vocabulary, grammar structures, and the information it contained. The students needed prior preparation before the tandem session; some information which they could obtain through reading or life experience was required. In this case, they needed to compile an inventory of disease-related superstitions and alternative medicine practices.

The second rubric does not specify the language of communication. RS opted for expressing himself in his mother tongue, while FS spoke in Romanian, and when she did not know a term in Romanian, she named it in French; then RS provided her the Romanian equivalent of the term. When FS explained in Romanian, with great difficulty, the concept *coupeur de feu* and realized that RS did not understand, she suddenly shifted to French and thus communication was reestablished;

⁷³ What to expect. If he dies tomorrow, to know what to expect, so that they can prepare all the stuff for the funeral. Funeral, do you know what it means?

⁷⁴ And [...] he can seize the time ... If he is told that he has three months to live, maybe he thinks that in these three months he wants to fulfil some wishes, he wants to do this. But ... if you don't tell him, he might die tomorrow, you might not respect his desire to do certain things.

⁷⁵ Do you understand? Did you understand? If you don't understand something, stop me and I will tell you in French.

RS confirmed: da, am înțeles⁷⁶ In the last exchanges the speakers resorted to intercomprehension again: FS spoke in French and RS said what he understood in Romanian. However, when the topic was exciting but the speakers did not have the necessary language competence required to express their message clearly, they made use of intercomprehension intuitively.

In this analytical approach we covered the three recordings linearly. We found that the speakers faced different difficulties during the dialogue and needed to use their cognitive and linguistic resources to overcome those problems. Students intuitively identified solutions to manage the difficult communication situations and to maintain a balance in the interpersonal interaction.

Results and Discussion

In our study we analyzed the linguistic behavior of each speaker in relation to the communication purpose. We selected communication situations where the dialogue partners alternated languages or resorted to intercomprehension. The dialogue sequences which were the most relevant to our analysis were the ones in which the dialogue partners encountered difficulties. We identified three types of difficulties in the dialogues between the two speakers:

1) the speaker could not express the message in the foreign language and resorted to strategies of avoidance of the foreign language and return to their own language;

2) the message was not understood by the dialogue partner, so the speaker shifted to their own language or the foreign language;

3) the speakers negotiated meaning: one of them presented an idea (calculatorul este indispensabil⁷⁷); a speaker initiated a discussion on a topic which was related to the main subject (the phrase 'a trece la cele veșnice'⁷⁸ has a tinge of sadness); a speaker offered counter-arguments to their partner programmatically – the rubric suggested that – (the TV is not indispensable); a speaker was contradicted by their partner in a non-programmatic manner (the verb *to disappear* in the phrase 'îl a disparu' had two meanings).

We focused our attention on how the students overcame those difficulties. Alternating languages and especially switching back to their own language were solutions that speakers resorted to in order to place themselves in the secure space of their own linguistic universe. We noted that the Romanian speaker was the one that made use of this communication strategy constantly. His level of proficiency in the foreign language was slightly below the level of his dialogue partner. Therefore, his language resources in the target language did not allow him to maintain his position of authority throughout the dialogue. The Romanian speaker's authority manifested itself in different ways, which will be discussed further on.

In the three recordings selected for our analytical approach, we identified four recurring situations where the speakers alternated languages: 1) they spoke in their mother tongue and translated the terms which their partner did not understand; 2) they spoke in the foreign language and received from their partner terms or phrasing models in the same language; 3) they spoke in the foreign language and switched to the native language when encountering difficulties; 4) they spoke in their mother tongue and switched to the foreign language when the structures used were familiar and recurrent. The communication contexts that determined the alternation of languages of communication were as follows: the partners had difficulty in explaining a term; one of the partners wanted to persuade the other, to express their view through arguments; one of the partners wished to conclude the dialogue sequence (because it was difficult for them to continue the dialogue, or because the dialogue partner adopted an adversarial position); the partners renegotiated the meaning.

The strategies of language alternation were related to the implicit or explicit functions of the dialogue lines: the speakers translated words or phrases to facilitate comprehension; the dialogue partners used statements or simple questions in the foreign language recurrently, even when the

⁷⁶ Yes, I understood.

⁷⁷ the computer is indispensable

⁷⁸ to pass away/give up the ghost (rough translation)

conversation took place in their own language, in order to compensate for avoiding the use of the foreign language in other situations; students returned to their own language in order to exert or maintain authority in the communication context; the interlocutors opted for the language in which their partner spoke so as to adapt to the communication context.

Intercomprehension is a form of communication that students turned to in the following contexts: the level of language proficiency necessary to express complex messages was higher than the one that the students had, and therefore communication in the foreign language required too much effort; the emotional involvement due to the interest in the topic made communication or transmitting the message – and not the language used – paramount. Intercomprehension and language alternation are ways of communication that students who worked in tandem turned to intuitively. The rubrics of the worksheets do not indicate these modes of communication explicitly. Instead, they propose a language of communication for each activity.

We believe that the situation where each dialogue partner speaks exclusively in the language suggested in the rubric is utopian and that language alternation is inevitable during tandem sessions. When placed in difficult communication situations, students accessed these dialogue resources intuitively, and thus managed to complete the tasks and make communication functional: all worksheets were fully covered. We refer here to the dialogue sequences that could be recorded and not to watching a film or photographing an object considered to be completely useless. Intercomprehension and language alternation offered the students numerous possibilities for expressing the message, adjusting it to the listener and managing various communication situations.

The language behavior differences between the two dialogue partners were as follows: RS avoided expressing himself in the foreign language and, using his own language, developed the ideas he expressed in the foreign language, and intervened in his partner's replies in order to correct, to help, to repeat, or to continue the idea she had just expressed. Comprehension was not affected at all, because RS's discourse was tailored to the dialogue partner, and FS understood him. RS employed different strategies: taking the lead in the dialogue, choosing to express himself in his own language, interrupting the dialogue partner in order to correct her, continuing an idea expressed by the dialogue partner. Using his native language as the language of communication, and various dialogue strategies helped him impose and maintain his authority in the dialogue exchange.

The language behavior indicating the privileged position of the Romanian speaker included the following: interrupting his partner frequently in order to correct her and to offer lexical or grammatical solutions, providing explanations even when they were not required, ending the dialogue that his partner had begun, by returning to the initial tone, after his partner made a joke or after a reply which stirred laughter. For example, in the worksheet *Objets de la vie quotidienne*, the tasks are ordered according to the complexity of discourse they aim to generate. RS tended to avoid the use of the foreign language starting with the second activity, where the discourse the rubric suggested needed to be more complex. Expressing oneself in one's own language has certain advantages in a dialogue: the possibility of developing the message, maintaining a comfortable position in the dialogue, fluidization of the speech pace, and increasing the effectiveness of communication.

Our study shows that the use of intercomprehension and language alternation is directly related to the speakers' level of language proficiency. Students with an A2+/B1 level use language alternation in activities proposed for the B1 level. On the other hand, intercomprehension appears to be used more frequently in the teaching activities on the B2-level worksheets. The analytical approach emphasizes that language alternation in communication is a stage that precedes intercomprehension: it is a strategy in which the discourse is tailored to the listener; the speaker finds resources to express the message; the dialogue partners succeed in managing various communication situations that could threaten their interpersonal relationship. When language alternation is no longer sufficient to facilitate communication, the dialogue partners resort to intercomprehension.

Conclusions

The study proposes an analysis of the dialogue between the two partners during activities of learning a foreign language in tandem. We carried out an analysis of the dialogue sequences, in chronological order. The inventory and the study of the communication situations in which the speakers resorted to language alternation or intercomprehension highlight the relationship between the form of communication and its purpose. Speakers alternated languages in situations of incomprehension in order to facilitate communication, but also in order to manage the power relation in regard to the dialogue partner. One's native language provides a secure space in which the speaker may display a certain authority in relation to his/her interlocutor. When the level of proficiency of the proposed teaching activity is considerably higher than the speakers' proficiency level, alternating languages no longer works and they intuitively resort to intercomprehension, a form of communication that enables them to employ more developed speech structures, and offers them the opportunity for intercultural education.

List of abbreviations

RS – Romanian speaker
FS – French speaker

Transcription conventions

. . . = pauses of different lengths
↑↓ = rising and falling intonation
[house?] = uncertain transcription
XXX = incomprehensible utterance
⊥ = unfinished or interrupted utterance
[laughter] = non-verbal utterances (e.g. gestures, laughter).
[...] = missing utterances

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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