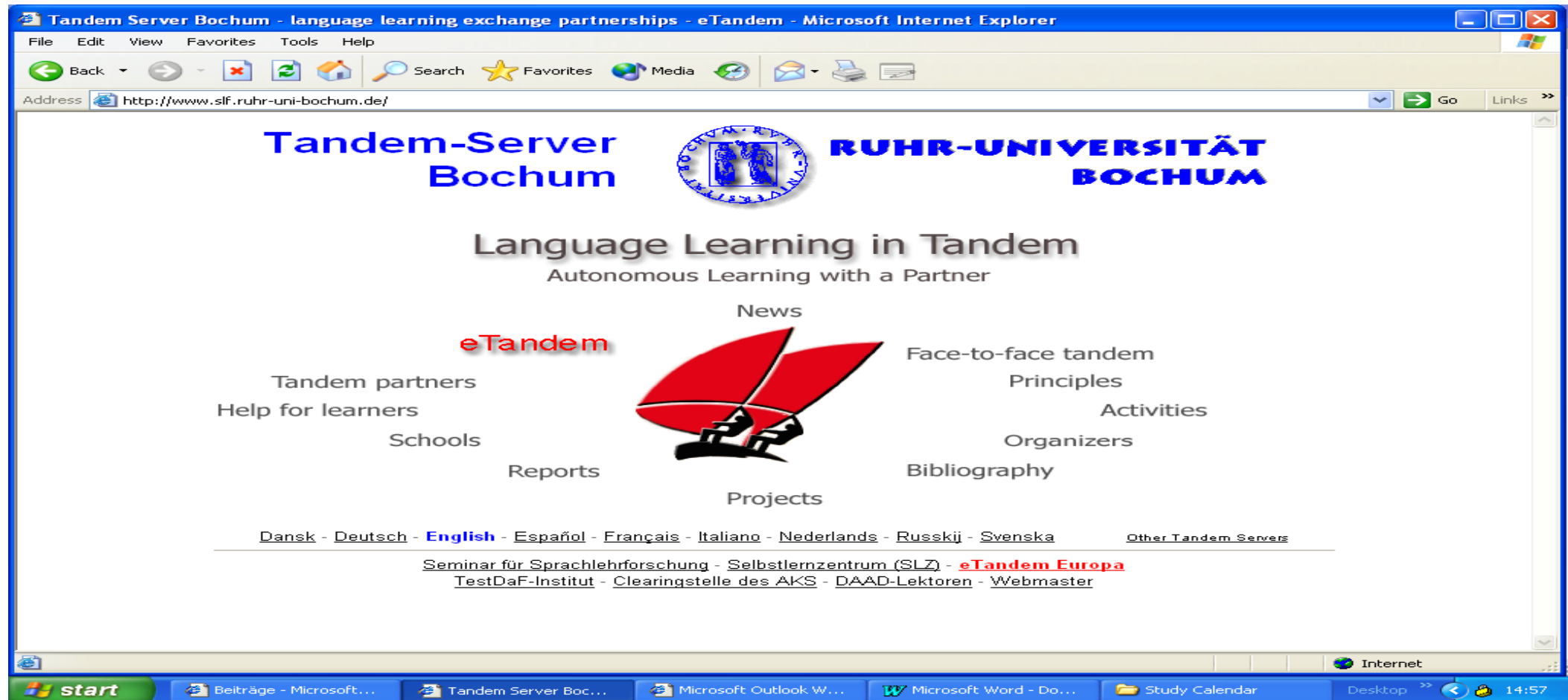# How foreign language learning occurs in e-Tandem Learning

for Helmut Brammerts

Tim Lewis
The Open University

International Email Tandem Network

E-Tandem environments … and affordances

Text

- Email
- MOOs
- Text chat
- Bulletin boards
- Online discussion forums
- Wikis

Voice and Vision (and Text)

- Audiographic conferencing (Lyceum)
- Webconferencing (AdobeConnect, Blackboard Collaborate)
- VOIP telephony: audio & video (Skype, Oovoo)

Tandem: **Principles and Claims**

Autonomy – Reciprocity - Authenticity

The Madras School: tuition by scholars

This system rests on the simple principle of tuition by the scholars themselves. It is its distinguishing characteristic that the school, how numerous soever, is taught solely by the pupils of the institution under a single master, who, if able and diligent, could, without difficulty, conduct ten contiguous schools, each consisting of a thousand scholars.

Bell (1808), p. 2.

Learner Autonomy (Holec, 1979/1981)

Holec 1981 (p. 3)

Setting objectives

Defining contents and progressions

Selecting methods and techniques

Monitoring the learning process (rhythm, time, place)

Evaluating outcomes

Learner Autonomy (in Tandem Learning)

- Taking *responsibility* for one's own learning
- Deciding *what, how* and *when* you want to learn
- *Identifying what sort of help is required* from your partner   (Brammerts, 1996)
- *Respecting* the autonomy of your partner (Kant)
- *Contributing* to the autonomy of the group (Castoriadis)   (Lewis, 2014)

Support for Learner Autonomy (University of Sheffield)

- Initial meeting with Learning Advisor - Orientation and goal setting
- Learning Diary – record of learning, reflection, planning
- Mid-semester meeting with Learning Advisor - Partnership issues
- Self- and Peer-Assessment
- Tutor Assessment: (portfolio of e-interactions; learner diary)

Reciprocity

- Both partners should contribute equally to their work together and benefit to the same extent.

- Learners should be prepared and able to do as much for their partner as they themselves expect from their partner.

(Brammerts, 1996, p.11)

- A tandem partnership … will only last if both partners benefit from it (preferably both to the same extent).

- The provision of support for the partner is a prerequisite for being able to expect support from them.
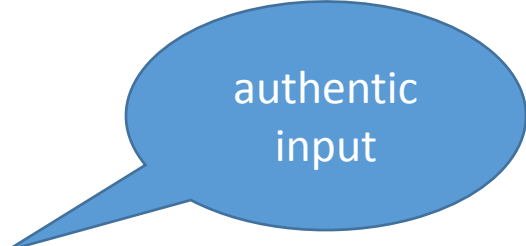
(Brammerts, 2003, p. 31)

Mutual Support

- Within a tandem partnership, **partners support each other in their learning**, i.e. they will offer the assistance they have been asked for to the best of their ability. Both **correct each other, suggest alternative formulations, help with the understanding of texts, translate, explain meanings**, etc.

- Tandem partners **never teach**, they **help each other to learn**.

- In their role as helpers, **good tandem partners recognize their partner's autonomy and are prepared to support it** – even if the partner's method of learning is not their own and even if they think it inefficient. (Brammerts 2003, pp. 32-33)

Modelling, scaffolding, error correction

authentic input

- **Learning from the partner's model**

    You can learn how one expresses oneself in the foreign language from what you partner writes.

scaffolding

- **Learning through your partner's help in formulating**

    Your partner can always help you to say what you want to say in the foreign language. … All you have to do is ask him/her.

- **Learning through your partner's corrections**

    Your partner can correct what you have written in the foreign language. You just need to come to an agreement about how such corrections should be made.   (Brammerts, 1996, p. 62)

tailored feedback

Authenticity

- Tandem language learning takes place through authentic communication with a native speaker, who can correct the learner and also support him in his attempt to express himself' (Brammerts 1996, p.10)

- 'Language learning in tandem is **learning through authentic communication**. … The authentic communicative situation helps particularly in shifting the focus towards elements of communicative skills, which are frequently missing from simulated situations (such as in the language classroom)' (Brammerts 2003, p.30)

Dilemmas

Authentic? Communicative? Beginners? Balance?
Error correction? Matching partners and levels?
Measuring learning gain?

L2 Learning in Tandem – hypotheses

Negotiation for meaning – the Interaction Hypothesis (Long 1996, p. 314)

Negative feedback – Focus on Form (Oliver 1995, pp.459-481)

Language related episodes – Pushed Output (Swain and Lapkin, 1998, p. 326)

Collaborative dialogue/LREs – (Swain, Brooks, Tocalli-Beller, 2002, pp. 171-185)

See Lewis and Walker, eds, 2003. *Autonomous Language Learning in Tandem*, pp. 13-16

What's wrong with oral grammar correction
(Truscott, 1999)

- <u>Teacher problems</u>:
- Identifying the error and understanding its source
- Dealing with context: the stream of speech; extraneous noise
- Risk of correcting a non-error
- Inconsistency/Failure to notice errors
- Maintaining communicative flow (>recasts and repetitions)
- Tailoring correction to learners' affective and cognitive needs
- Peer corrections are erroneous 1/6th of the time

What's wrong with oral grammar correction (Truscott , 1999)

- <u>Learner problems</u>:

- Noticing/recognizing (indirect) error correction
- Understanding the correction; taking it seriously
- Oral corrections are fleeting; no written record
- Accepting the correction
- Incorporating the correction into output (uptake)
- Developmental readiness for the correction

What's wrong with oral grammar correction (Truscott, 1999)

- <u>Truscott's conclusion</u>:
- Oral correction poses overwhelming problems for teachers and for students; research evidence suggests that it is not effective ; and no good reasons have been offered for continuing the practice. The natural conclusion is that oral grammar correction should be abandoned.

Error Correction in e-Tandem – issues

- **Cultural differences** in error correction style (Stickler, 2004)

- Error correction can be **inaccurate** and **vague** (O'Rourke, 2007)

- Low rates of correction in **synchronous** sessions (4.1% L2 Japanese: 0.8 % L2 English) (Bower and Kawaguchi, 2011)

- **Lexical** errors are corrected much more frequently than grammatical errors (Blake, 2000; Pellettieri, 2000; Tudini, 2003; Smith, 2003; Lee, 2006; Bower and Kawaguchi, 2011)

Metalinguistic feedback – variation

- `The rate of **metalinguistic explanation** was about 5% of total corrective feedback for learners of English and 10% of total corrective feedback for learners of Japanese' (Bower and Kawaguchi, 2011)

- **Metalinguistic explanation** accompanied 60.1% of error corrections by Spanish partners, but only 5.5% of error corrections by American partners (Ware and O'Dowd, 2008)

Error Correction – native speaker expertise

- 'Native speaker "expertise" is just the implicit competence of someone who normally speaks their language unreflectingly; it is not the analytical expertise of the language teacher or linguist' (O'Rourke, 2007, p.48)

Error correction – the role of training
(Akiyama 2017)

- <u>Context</u>:
- 14 wk Japanese/English e-Tandem exchange (12 prs; 6 prs analysed)
- Intervention: 1hr workshop on error correction + 1 hr webinar
- 6 methods: explicit correction; metalinguistic explanation; elicitation, repetition, recast, clarification request (adapted Lyster and Ranta, 1997)

Findings (Akiyama 2017)

- <u>Participants</u> …
- Used only three error correction and feedback methods: recasts, explicit error correction; clarification requests
- Avoided correction methods which involved repeating partners' erroneous utterances
- Provided little or no metalinguistic explanation
- Focused on communication over form

Of Japanese participants, only 1 out of 6 gave error correction feedback

The limits of native-speaker knowledge (Akiyama, 2017)

- Sometimes I know the correct form and know that my partner's form is wrong, but I don't know why it is technically wrong and therefore was unable to give you a technical explanation of why it is wrong (Learner of Japanese in the USA)

The e-Tandem Paradox

(Akiyama 2017)

- Participants in educational telecollaboration projects are in a paradoxical situation, as they ==long for focus on form==, but need to carry out communicative tasks in a limited amount of time
- Even when feedback training was provided, establishing … a reciprocal relationship of teaching and learning was challenging
- Providing feedback is [an] intricate matter that involves factors such as types of error, face negotiation, and identity construction
- 'Learner Beliefs and Practices of Corrective Feedback' *System*, vol.64.

An Alternative View

of L2 acquisition in e-Tandem

Authenticity

- `An *authentic* text is a stretch of real language, produced by a real speaker or writer for a real audience and designed to convey a real message of some sort' (Morrow, 1997, cited in Gilmore, 2007)

- `By defining authenticity in this way, we are able to begin identifying the surface features of authentic discourse and evaluating to what extent … learner output resemble[s] it.'

(Gilmore, 2007)

Authenticity : Syntactic Accuracy or Discourse Competence?

- For students to learn how to manage conversation effectively in the target language, they need to have realistic models of proficient users doing the same thing … . In terms of **conversation management** the kind of talk requiring the most work by participants, and therefore also providing the best model to develop this aspect of **discourse competence** is casual conversation but this is largely ignored by textbooks, perhaps because it is seen as unstructured and, as a result, unteachable.

(Eggins and Slade, 1997, cited in Gilmore, 2007)

Error Correction in Tandem Learning 1 (lexis & formulas)

The two photos above ~~ware~~ _were_ taken in Wulanbutong glasslands of Inner Mongolia. In this summer, we traveled by train which departed from Beijing in the evening.

In the photo on the left, the weather is quite wet, so ~~scenery~~ _the view. This sounds better than scenery. Scenery is a more general term where as View is for a specific piece of the scenery._ is not very good. The girl on the left is me. I

Comment [TS1]: If this was Summer 2011 we would say Last summer.... We would use This summer to mean the summer coming up.

Error Correction in Tandem Learning 2 (vagueness)

- Corrective feedback:

- IR4 Is the way I corrected your (very few) mistakes alright with you? The only general comment I can make is that your tenses are a bit mixed up.

  - (O'Rourke, 2007, p. 48)

3 Lexical Features of Authentic Discourse

- Relexicalisation
- Vagueness
- Formulaic Sequences

Relexicalisation and Cohesion

- The taking up of one's own and others' lexis is the very stuff of conversational progression; it is one of the principal ways in which topics shade almost imperceptibly into one another, while interpersonal bonds are simultaneously created and reinforced by the 'sharing' of words (Halliday and Hasan, 1976, p. 292)

Relexicalisation and Interaction

- In casual conversation, speakers regularly and systematically vary their vocabulary choice and do not simply repeat items; they vary items in their own turns and offer variations on items from other speakers' turns and these variations set up patterned relations between items. (McCarthy, 1988, p. 199)

Relexicalisation and vocabulary learning

- Face-to-face interaction is a more vivid context in which to witness the interpersonal aspects of lexis at work, and a more rewarding place to begin such a quest, … the resultant insights are of relevance to vocabulary pedagogy.
- Part of spoken vocabulary skill involves the ability quickly to access alternative words and expressions for one's desired meaning, and … a definition of an adequate communicative vocabulary would include synonyms and antonyms of everyday words. (Schmidt and McCarthy, 1997, p. 36)

Vagueness – the ubiquity of

- 'Lack of precision is one of the most important features of the vocabulary of informal conversation.' (Crystal and Davy, 1975, p. 111)

- 'Vagueness in communication is part of our taken-for-granted world, … normally we do not notice it unless it appears inappropriate – for example, when someone seems to be deliberately withholding information.' (Channell, 1994, p.4)

Vagueness

Vague additives:

She's got the flu or **something like that.**

Vague words:

Thingummy; 'whatdoyoumecallit', 'whatsit'.

Vagueness by implicature:

Sam must be **six foot tall**

(Channell, 1994, pp. 18-19)

Vagueness – the necessity of

- 'The competent L2 user of English must acquire an awareness of how to understand vague expressions and how, when, and why to use them. It is often noticed by teachers that the English of advanced students, while grammatically, phonologically, and lexically correct, may sound rather bookish and pedantic to a native speaker.' (Channell, 1994, p. 21)

Purposeful vagueness: hedging

1.   Introduces 'fuzziness with respect to the speaker's commitment to the truth of the proposition being conveyed'.

   As far as I aware, we're expected to work seven days a week.

2.   Introduces 'fuzziness within the proposition' (Channell, 1994, pp. 16-17)

   You **possibly** have a **somewhat** low anger threshold.

Purposeful vagueness: politeness

- The speaker's deliberate use of vague vocabulary is best seen as addressing the needs of face-to-face communication in terms of interpersonal features, such as informality and the need to avoid threats to face that over-directness might create. ... The speaker who says 'see you at six o' clock or thereabouts' is softening a potential imposition or discoursal dominance. (McCarthy and Carter, 1997, pp. 36-7)

Formulaic sequences

- 'One important component of successful language learning is the mastery of idiomatic forms of expression, including idioms, collocations and sentence frames (collectively referred to here as formulaic sequences)'. (Wray, 2000, p. 463)

- `Combinations of at least two words favoured by native speakers in preference to an alternative combination which could have been equivalent had there been no conventionalization.' (Meunier 2012, p. 111).

Advantages of learning formulaic sequences

- Many ... multiword expressions are predictable neither by 'grammar rules' nor by the properties of the individual words of which they are composed. ... They reflect Sinclair's (1991) 'idiom principle'.

- Since formulaic sequences are believed to be retrieved from memory holistically, ... they are believed to facilitate fluent language production under real-time conditions.

- Formulaic sequences may help ... speakers reach a degree of linguistic accuracy, because these prefabricated chunks constitute 'zones of safety'.

Boers *et al.*, 2006,

Explicit instruction in formulaic sequences and L2 proficiency

- Increased use of formulaic sequences was a help in increasing fluency of expression … A clear fluency gain was seen in the measures of speech rate and mean length of runs. (Wood, 2009, p.53)

- Formulaic sequences increase L2 learners' writing proficiency because they function as frames to which L2 learners might resort when approaching a writing task (AlHassan and Wood, 2015, p.1)

Some Conclusions

Train learners to deliver **corrective feedback**, if your aim is L2 **syntactic development**. But will it work?

Prioritize **discourse competence** over syntactic accuracy (especially in spoken Tandem exchanges).

Combine online Tandem exchanges with **offline reflection** and analysis and instruction, to develop pragmatic awareness (Morollón Marti and Fernandez, 2016).

What can Tandem do?
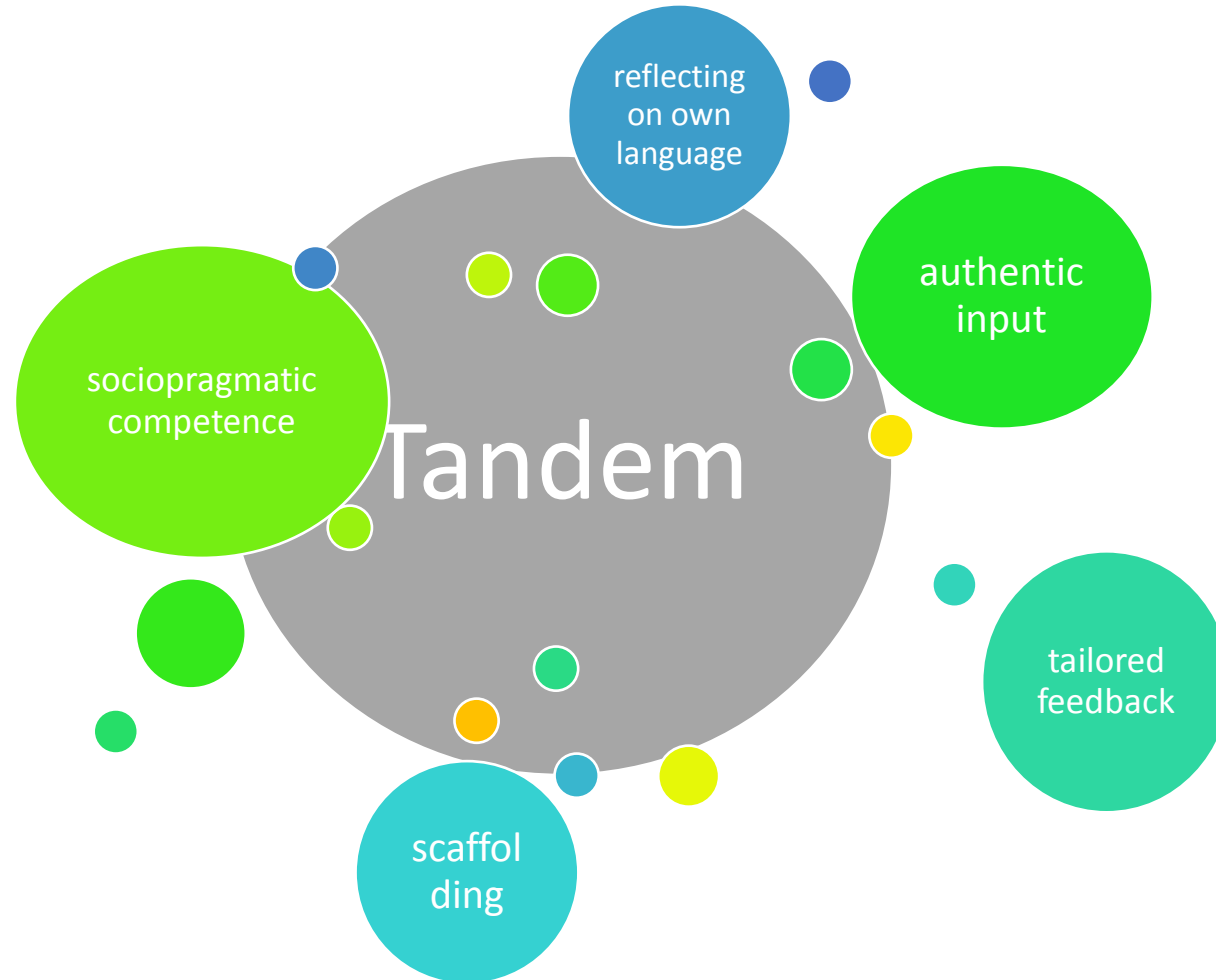
The Changing Face of Tandem Learning

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