



Working Paper 26

Self-Directed Elements in the Learning Journal of Teletandem

by

Kazuko Nagao

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Author: Kasuko Nagao

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Calle de Filosofía y Letras 88

04360, Copilco Universidad

Coyoacán, Ciudad de México

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Made in Mexico / Hecho en México

Abstract

Since 2015, University of Tokyo and National School of Languages, Linguistics and Translation from National Autonomous University of Mexico have organized activities and projects related to it such as self-directed learning, programmed and independent TeleTandem, language exchange and several academic activities between both universities. These activities have given an important impact to the academic and professional attitude and concerns of the students and teachers who are engaged in. In 2020's COVID 19 situation, in the online synchronic and non-synchronic classes, students are expected to be more self-directed somehow than ever. This study examines the self-directed elements about co-evaluation and self-evaluation that have been manifested in the learning journals of TeleTandem as basic COIL (Collaborative Online International Course) to know how the students used the Zone of proximal development in Vigotsky sense with their TeleTandem partners.

Resumen

Desde 2015, la Universidad de Tokio y la Escuela Nacional de Lenguas, Lingüística y Traducción de la Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México han organizado actividades y proyectos relacionados con el aprendizaje de lenguas. Entre estas actividades se encuentra el aprendizaje autodidacta mediante teletándem, que es programado e independiente; así como el intercambio de idiomas y la organización de diversas actividades académicas entre ambas universidades. Estas actividades han tenido un impacto importante en la actitud e inquietudes académicas y profesionales de los estudiantes y profesores que participan en ellas. Durante la pandemia por COVID 19 en 2020, con clases impartidas en línea de forma sincrónica y asincrónica, se esperaba que los estudiantes fueran más autodidactas que nunca. Este estudio examina los elementos autodidactas de co-evaluación y auto-evaluación que se han manifestado en los diarios de aprendizaje de TeleTandem, como el COIL básico (Collaborative Online International Course), para así saber cómo los estudiantes utilizaron la Zona de desarrollo próximo bajo la premisa de Vigotsky con sus compañeros de TeleTandem.

Self-Directed Elements in the Learning Journal of Teletandem

Kazuko Nagao

Introduction

Since 2015 University of Tokyo and National School of Languages, Linguistics and Translation (ENALLT) and the National Autonomous University of Mexico have organized activities and projects related to self-directed learning, programmed and independent TeleTandem: a language exchange and several academic activities between both universities. These activities have given an important impact to the academic and professional attitude and concerns of the students and teachers or advisors who are engaged in.

In 2020's COVID 19 situation, in the online synchronic and non-synchronic classes the students are expected to be more self-directed somehow than ever. This study explores how the Japanese UT Spanish language students and UNAM Mexican Japanese language students reflected on their own performance through TeleTandem, language exchange sessions. Also, the paper examines some self-directed elements about self-evaluation that have been manifested in the TeleTandem learning journals.

TeleTandem and autonomous elements

Tandem methodology arose in Germany in the mid-sixties with Helmut Brammerts (1996), the expression "tandem" means a bicycle for

two people. The practice consisted of contacting people from different mother tongues, interested in learning independently and simultaneously. As many scholars have mentioned, to be a TeleTandem partner, the following principles are important: reciprocity, autonomy, collaboration, responsibility and the coexistence of two languages (Brammerts, 1996; Schwienhorst, 2003; Telles and Vassallo, 2009; Guedes Evangelista, and Salomão, 2019).

Kato and Mynard, (2015), suggest three elements in autonomous language learning:

- Awareness of self
- Awareness of facilities, resources and roles
- Awareness of approaches to learning

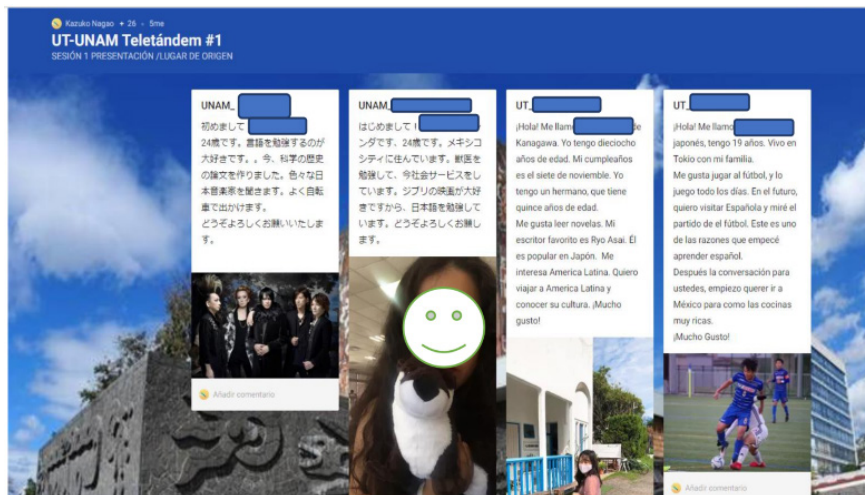
We define “self-directed elements in TeleTandem” as strategies to deliver effective performance to communicate with their partner: speaking and listening, communicative language use strategies, awareness of affective factors and social strategies with their partners.

In this sense, this study is also based on the strategies mentioned by Oxford (2017) in the Strategic Self-Regulation Model of Learning Languages (S2R Model): Cognitive, Affective and Sociocultural-interactive strategies. Cognitive strategies help the learners construct, transform and apply L2; Affective strategies let the learner create positive emotions and attitude and stay motivated; and Sociocultural-interactive strategies help the learner with communication, socio-cultural contexts and identity (Oxford, 2017, p. 32). Also, she added the three types of Meta Strategies: cognitive metastrategy, affective metastrategy and socio-cultural metastrategy.

Oxford (2017, p. 37) shows how the metastrategies control the strategies in their dynamic relation of the S2R Model of language learning. Also, Oxford used a metaphor of Orchestra and conductor. The conductor is an autonomous language learner who controls and uses three types of strategies (Cognitive, Affective, and Sociocultural-Interactive) through Metacognitive, Meta-affective and Meta-Sociocultural-Interactive Strategies.

In our UT-UNAM TeleTandem these were the pre established topics for the first six sessions, with materials for each different topic; and for the last two sessions, the students could speak freely about a topic of their interest and they should organize time and date by themselves. For each session, we used Padlet for sharing some information of the topics or result of the conversation. Finally, the Japanese students and three Mexican students made videos and shared them in Padlet. Some of them commented about their videos.

Figure 1. Padlet Session 1



Source: Credit given to the author.

Also, to maintain the principle of reciprocity, the time given for the activity is important: the participants are giving and receiving the same amount of practice. For that purpose, students divide their time in two parts. One half is devoted to talk in their mother tongue and the second half in the target language. They also must leave 10 minutes for giving feedback. This feedback should be about their performance in each language.

Learning Journal

After each session, we had a short feedback session and distributed a learning diary in Japanese and Spanish to the students of both universities. The structure of the journal was as follows.

- General info
- General comments
- Evaluation of self and of their partner
 - » Self-evaluation
 - » Co-evaluation
- Reflection
 - » your performance
 - » your partner
- Self-assessment (about the vocabulary, grammar difficulties, new knowledge about the language and cultural aspects, gained during the session).
 - » suggestions for your partner
 - » time management
 - » the most fluent moment in the conversation
 - » difficulties during the conversation

For each session, there are slightly different questions. Here are the questions for Session 1 as an example.

- ¿Cuál es tu nombre? (What is your name?)
- ¿Cuál es tu carrera o trabajo? (What is your major or job?)
- ¿Cuál es el tema de interés para conversar? (What is the topic of your interest to talk about?)
- ¿Cuáles son tus actividades favoritas para realizar en tus tiempos libres? (What are your favorite activities to do in your free time?)
- Describe cómo te sentiste en la sesión. (Describe how you felt in the session.)
- Escribe acerca de tu(s) compañero(a)s con quienes conversaste. (Write about your partner with whom you talked.)
- ¿Qué es lo que hablaste sobre tí? (What did you talk about yourself?)
- Después de la presentación de tu compañero, ¿pudiste preguntar las dudas que tenías y realizar comentarios sobre su presentación? (After the presentation of your pair, could you ask questions and comments about it?)
- ¿Tuviste algún aspecto lingüístico que te impidió la comunicación? Detalla el aspecto de manera concreta. (Por ejemplo, “Me surgió la duda cómo se dice apodo en japonés”.)
- (Did you have any linguistic aspect that prevented you from communicating? Detail in a concrete way, for example, I had a doubt how to say nicknames in Japanese.)
- Especifica el objetivo para mejorar tu desempeño para la siguiente sesión “mi comida favorita, platillo típico, y receta”

(Specify the goal to improve your performance for the next session, my favorite dish, typical dish and recipe.)

- Si tienes algún comentario, anota en este espacio. (If you have any comments, write in this space.)

Method of Analysis

The analysis was based on the journal entries of each session.

- Describe how you felt in this session.
- Specify the objective to improve your performance for the next session.
- If you have any other comments, please write them down in this space.
- About Fifth and two independent sessions
- During the 5 sessions how has your Spanish/Japanese ability changed from the beginning?
- Write about the moment in which you had difficulty to communicate. Why did it happen? What caused it?

The data of the questions of the journal was divided into positive and negative perspectives about their performance, feelings, influence of the partner and planning for the next sessions. The comments were coded with oral production(P), listening(L), communication(C), friendship/collaboration(F), and organization(O). In the next section, minus (-) marks negative comments and with plus (+) marks positive comments of each code above mentioned.

Results

Comments about their performance

As we can see in the Table 1 below, more UT Japanese students responded to the Learning Journal than UNAM students did. It could be because for UT students TeleTandem it was an elective subject with credit and for UNAM students it was an activity organized by ENALLT SALC, Self-Access Learning Center.

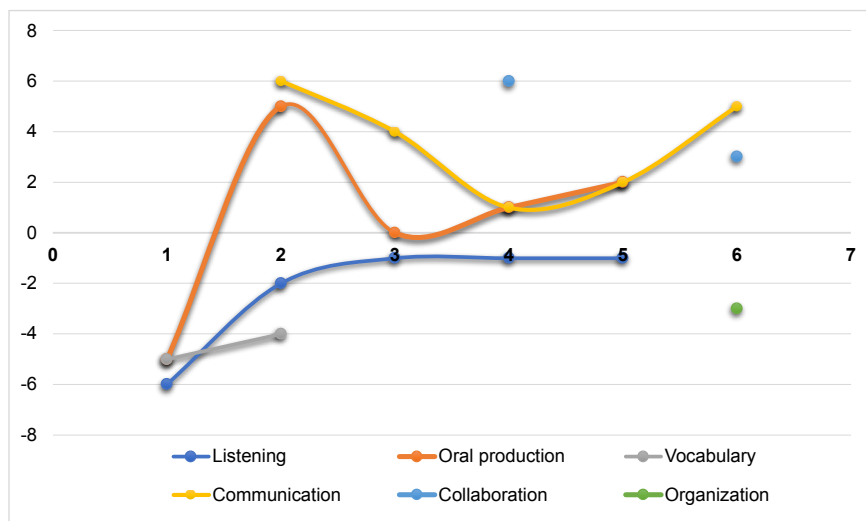
Table 1. Number of participants of TeleTandem and journal responses

Sessions	Topics	UT	UNAM
1	Self introduction	18/19	8/11
2	Favorite foods, typical food and recipe	15/18	11/13
3	Hobbies	14/17	8/14
4	Major	11/16	6/13
5	Current topics and exchanging opinions	13/17	3/10
6 and 7	Christmas & New Year free talk	12/20	8/20

Number of response/Number of the participants

Source: Own elaboration.

Chart 1. Self-directed elements: performance



Source: Own elaboration

Chart 1 shows that in the beginning students mentioned their own listening, oral production and vocabulary performance, but after several sessions, they were concerned about communication, collaboration and organization in relation to their partner. As we can see in Table 2, in the first session, students reported difficulties about listening, oral production, and keeping conversation because of a lack of vocabulary and oral practice.

The main strategies used consisted on restarting by other easier words and code switching to English. Through the sessions, the UT students often mentioned verbal tense as progress: present, past and future. From the second session, communication and collaborative elements were increasing. Also, different types of difficulty were mentioned depending on the topic as major and news.

In the fifth session, Japanese students felt that the session was more enjoyable because of their better ability to communicate than before. Though, five of them reported that they had improved their communication ability and could interact or discuss the topic, though they were afraid about the difficulty of the topic or fear to talk.

Finally, in the last two independent sessions, we could see the concerns about organizing by themselves. Before or in the beginning of the sessions they were afraid about the organization or time management of the sessions; however, most of them enjoyed their freedom or autonomy for choosing topics and organization with the TeleTandem partner and could talk about several topics beside the principal suggested topic, Christmas and New Year's customs. Also, one of the pairs made their video together as a common final task. (See Table 2.)

Table 2. Progress of performance of students

	Listening	Conversation	Reason	Strategies
1	-L6 33.3% 6/18	-P5 27.7% 5/18	Lack of vocabulary 27.7% 5/18 and practice	Restating by other easier words and code switching to English
2	-L2 6.66% 1/15	-P2 13.3% 2/15	Lack of vocabulary -V4 26.6% 4/15 Past tense	code switching to English, questions and gestures.
		+P7 46.6% 7/15 +C6 40% 6/15		Better than the first session (7/15).
3	-L1 7.14% 1/14	- P4 28.5% 4/14		Code switching to English
	+L2 14.28 2/14	+P4 28.5% 4/14 +C4 28.5% 4/14		Prepare for this session with their teacher but talk without notes during the session.

4	-L1 9% 1/11	-P1 9% 1/11	Elevated level topic: difficult and satisfied. Vagueness on the future planning (-3)	With restating by other easier words Ask about what they did not understand.
		+F6, 54.5% 6/11 +P2, 18% 2/11 +C1 9% 1/11	Satisfaction Help from the partners, help each other	Smile and synthesis
5	-L1 7.69% 1/13	-P2 15.3% 2/13 -C4 30.7% 4/13	Difficulty of the topic of the news	
		+C6 46.1% 6/13	Better ability than before communicate and discuss	
6-7		-O3 25% 3/12	Time management Organize, e-mails	
		+C5 41.6% 5/12 +F3 25% 3/12	Partner's help and strategies	Restate each other. Slow down the speed. Repeat. Rapport.

Source: Own elaboration.

We could also see planning strategies as follows.

- *Planning strategies*
- *Linguistic based strategies*
 - » Prepare the topic related vocabulary, translation.
 - » Better structure and check grammar
- *Communication based strategies*
 - » Informal style of talk
 - » Make premade questions.
- *Contents based strategies*
 - » Contents itself (typical food, system of major)

Self-directed elements

As self-directed elements by Japanese Students we can count these awarenesses:

Awareness of self

- Think by themselves
- Unsuccessful impression / afraid about next sessions (awareness of negative feelings)

Awareness of resource

- Prepare and show PPT as Mexican partner does
- Introduce their favorite music could be nice

Awareness of approaches to learning

- Effort to transmit their message with the learned grammar
- Not just grammar is needed to practice conversation
- Needs of vocabulary building

On the other hand, we can count self-directed elements of Mexican students as follows:

Awareness of self

- The Mexican students enjoyed and felt wonderful, calm and confident.

Awareness of resource and approach to learning

- Before the session
 - » **Noted down** what they would like to say
 - » Making a vocabulary list of topic specific vocabulary
 - » **Taking a note about basic outline** or what they would like to say
 - » contents based preparation
 - » Think about their personal goal to share on the topic about academic major or future vision.

Awareness to approach to learning

- During the session
 - » Review before or during the session the outline
 - » **Monitored** their errors and corrected them by themselves the session

How has your Spanish ability changed from the beginning?

All twelve Japanese students who responded to the journal noticed their language improvement, especially the ability to access common useful phrases. They mentioned strategies, tried to communicate through lack of vocabulary, asked their partner about unfamiliar words and confirmed their understanding.

Affective elements

Awareness about their own feelings during the TeleTandem session is a crucial part to manage the learning as Oxford (1990) 's indirect and affective strategies, also, Affective strategies and Meta-Affective strategies of Oxford (2017). They are related to grasp their own feelings. Also, Kato and Mynard, (2015) 's concept Awareness of self was present.

In the first session Mexican students reported that they were nervous (4/8 50%) in the beginning but as the session was going on, they got confidence and relaxed. They thought that the session was interesting and exciting. They felt comfortable and very well talking with Japanese partners because of their help. They felt happy because they could communicate and let them understand in Japanese.

Table 3. Affective elements of Mexican students

	Positive connotation	Negative connotation
1	After, relaxed, interesting, exciting, comfortable, very well, happy	In the beginning nervous (4/8 50%)
2	Very good (2), nice (2), happy, comfortable, calm and moved	very or a little bit nervous (4) not so comfortable because of the internet problem
3	Well (1), very well (2), entertaining, interested, moved, calm, trusting, very comfortable, very happy, fun/enjoyable (2)	A little bit limited because of difficulty of topic, Sad because of a change of partner during the session.
4		Afraid about the difficulty of topic or fear to talk
5	Enjoyed, comfortable, cheerful,	nervous (first time joined)
6 & 7	I love, excited, very pleasant, I feel happy, fun, enjoyable, I enjoyed, I loved about Teletandem	nervous (first time joined) nervous because of the freedom of topics difficult because of the partner's shy personality.

Source: Own elaboration.

One of the Mexican students expressed his motivation to keep learning Japanese and the other was pleased to have the opportunity to talk because he believed that he was not good at speaking Japanese.

The Japanese students reported:

- Pleasant feeling and the difficulty or fear and anxiety at that time.
- More variety of negative connotation adjectives than Mexican students.
- In the fifth session, 5 Js reported that they have improved their communication ability and could interact or discuss the topic,

though they were afraid about the difficulty of the topic or fear to talk.

- During the last two sessions, they felt free to talk with their partner, though it was the beginning of their organization about the topic and time management.

Table 4. Affective elements of Japanese students

	Positive connotation	Negative connotation
1	enjoyable (5), helpful, thankful, stimulative	difficult (6), fearful, anxious
2	enjoyable (5), interesting, great,	anxious (2. hasty), shameful, difficult
3	enjoyable (4), substantial, relaxed	flinched, regrettable, difficult
4	enjoyable (3), great (2), interesting	difficult (4), regrettable, at a loss of complicated vocabulary
5	enjoyable (3), valuable (2), great, safe, admire	difficult (4)
6 & 7	felt well with feeling free to talk	In the beginning worried if they could talk well because of their independence and the topic and time management

Source: Own elaboration.

Collaborative elements

During the sessions, the Japanese participants appreciated the Mexican partners' support and cheerful feeling to talk about themselves as Table 4 shows.

In the last two sessions, Mexicans talked about their partner's help to talk fluently and the support of vocabulary. They commented that Js were shy but finally relaxed and enjoyed the session.

J: “It has improved my ability to close the gap with people from different cultural backgrounds and how to communicate.”

This comment is related with the concept of Intercultural Communicative Competence of Byram (1997, 2020). Byram argues that attitudes (*savoir être*), knowledge (*savoirs*), and skills (*savoir comprendre*, *savoir apprendre/faire*) are necessary to do critical cultural awareness (*savoir s’engager*) about one’s culture and reconsider about the other culture. This process is resocialization. It means to know that what is normal in one’s culture is not necessarily normal or principal [in other cultures]. What we can perceive from the comment in the daily about the change in how to communicate with the partner with attitudes of relativizing self and valuing others, reflects about the knowledge, interpretation and relation, discovery and interaction through the TeleTandem activities.

Findings

Despite responding to the same question, the Japanese and Mexican students focused on different perspectives in the Learning Journal: Japanese students talked more about their detailed performance achievement than Mexican students.

Especially the collaborative elements showed how the participants formed the Zone of proximal development with their TeleTandem partners in Vygotsky sense (2015).

A carefully designed Learning Journal about the session of TeleTandem showed us how the students reflect their progress of performance, strategies used, and collaboration to deliver effective communication with their partner.

We could observe that they monitored their feelings and emotions and used different indirect strategies. The affective element had an important role to monitor and control their feelings as affective strategies as Oxford (1990, 2017) mentioned.

Due to the TeleTandem theoretical principles (Brammerts, 1996): autonomy and collaboration, the Learning Journal is a useful tool to reflect their own or partners performance and their strategies and plan for the next session, as an active use of Meta-strategies, because they are conscious about their strategies.

Final considerations

Percentage of participation to write the Questionnaire Journal was not so high. The 3-8 Mexican students and 12-15 Japanese students. To the same question, “Describe how you felt in this session”, Japanese students (Js) and Mexican students (Ms) focused on different perspectives. It could be because of a variable: for UT students this activity was a selective subject with credit and for UNAM SALC students it was a voluntary activity.

We also should know if there are cultural biases to respond to a Questionnaire Journal. Mexican students used more positive connotation words than Japanese students who also mentioned negative connotation words or self-control strategies.

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