



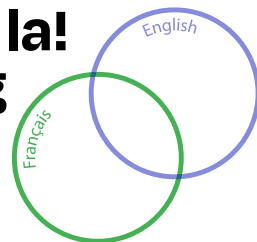
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French in the ESL class? Ooh la la! The Tandem Language Learning Perspective

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In Tandem Language Learning (TLL), students who are learning English (or Spanish) are paired up with target language speakers who are learning French. From a pedagogical perspective, TLL is characterized by three principles:

Bilingualism

Partners communicate in both the L2 and the L1 equally (e.g. by having separate topics each dedicated to one of the languages).

Reciprocity

Partners devote equal amounts of time to both languages and are mutually engaged in helping each other learn their respective target languages.

Autonomy

Partners take responsibility for the exchange although in school contexts guidance by the teacher is crucial.

For the past three years, we have been collaborating with ESL and Spanish teachers to explore the potential of TLL in Quebec schools. Although not the case of all, we have found that certain teachers both in Quebec as well as elsewhere in English Canada or the US are not at ease with the bilingual principle. As one secondary ESL teacher who was aware of this principle pointed out, asking students to communicate in their L1 was first and foremost not supported by the Quebec Ministry ESL curriculum.

In line with a general tenet in L2 teaching, the curriculum emphasizes maximizing the L2 while keeping L1 use to a minimum. Thus, for this teacher, and in his opinion his FSL colleague in Ontario, asking their students to communicate in the L1 in their L2 classes flew against the grain – a “slippery slope” – to the point that the viability of doing so was not even discussed. For this teacher, L1 avoidance was also bound up with his professional identity and a “fear of being judged” if colleagues became aware of French usage in his class.

Within L2 pedagogy, this stance is reflective of a long-standing debate regarding the role of the L1,

a position, which in reference to the teaching of English and French within Canada, Cummins (2007) referred to as the “two solitudes”. More recently, proponents of translanguaging have also criticized the widely advocated use of separate spaces for each language of instruction as a “monolingual ethos”. In view of this critique, however, Lyster (2019) argues that such a pedagogy does not favor language acquisition of the minority language (which within in Quebec would be the case for English).

Rather, what he and others advocate is the use of activities aimed at promoting cross-linguistic awareness while maintaining *separate spaces* for each language of instruction.

The TLL bilingual principle appears aligned with this recommendation as the two languages are kept separate but used in equal proportion to further the goals of language acquisition by both partners. So how exactly does the TLL bilingual principle contribute to language acquisition?

Rich native-speaker input. Two conditions essential for language acquisition are *pushed output* and *comprehensible input*. When students strive to express their thoughts in the L2, they engage in output which can push their language development forward. However, when students’ tandem partners communicate with them in English (or Spanish), they provide rich input in the form of new words, expressions or grammatical structures. To foster *noticing*, teachers should encourage students to revisit the exchanges (normally recorded). Reflections (e.g., in a journal) can focus students on taking notes on content – what they found out about their partners – and relevant language. Reinvestment tasks can further this exploration (e.g., presentations in pairs or groups, written assignments, multimodal tasks such as Canva posters or ebooks). To acquire language and develop fluency requires repeated practice.

Corrective feedback. In addition to rich native-speaker input, students give each other feedback on

errors mainly by drawing on the intuitive grasp of their L1 as native/ fluent speakers (reciprocity principle). Even students in Grade 6 intensive classes can give some feedback when guided (Giguère & Parks, 2018).

Fostering positive images of students' emerging bilingual selves. In contrast to certain teachers, students are generally at ease communicating part of the time in French. First and foremost, they recognize the fairness as reflected in these comments by a Grade 6 student (E):

E: On se donnait des corrections, on s'aidait, moi je l'aidais en français comme elle m'aidait en anglais, j'trouvais ça super intéressant de faire ça avec elle. (...)

Interviewer: Donc, ça t'a permis d'apprendre l'anglais un peu, beaucoup, assez?

E: Quand même, beaucoup. (...) je trouvais ça bien de pouvoir lire qu'est-ce que les autres qu'ils faisaient, de pouvoir leur donner des corrections, pouvoir les aider. Je trouvais ça cool de pouvoir faire ça. (...)

Interviewer: Comment tu te sens quand tu aides une autre personne à apprendre le français?

E: Ben je suis contente d'aider quelqu'un d'autre à apprendre le français parce que je trouve que c'est quand-même une belle langue aussi.

Attitudes such as this are in line with studies which show that use of the L1 (or additional languages) helps create positive learner identities.

The pull of authentic audiences. Although in L2 teaching, much is said about the importance of authentic communication, many students have little or no opportunity to communicate with target language speakers, especially peers their age. However, the motivational value of such contact is an important factor both in terms of students' willingness to communicate and the seriousness with which they engage in the tasks. As one example, during interviews, students of Spanish recounted how in anticipation of a videoconferencing exchange with Spanish speakers they made an effort to note ideas and look up new words. Students in an intensive Grade 6 class enjoyed exchanging with their Australian partners and some even prepared videos to showcase their school.

For those of us in language teaching, it seems that using technology to connect with native (competent) speakers of the target language community should be a priority. In the era of 21st language teacher education, a new role for teachers has emerged: that

of a mediator whose mission is to scaffold learners' entry into the target language community.

To find out more about TLL and our Community of Practice meetings for teachers, [click here](#)

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