

<論文>

信州大学教育学部・北コロラド大学日本語クラス間の オンラインタンデムプロジェクトの成果報告

山本大貴 信州大学学術研究院教育学系
大内瑠寧 石巻市立蛇田中学校
土橋祐太 サスカチュワン大学大学院
清水かおり 北コロラド大学外国語・外国文化学部
福多文子 ウィスコンシン大学オシュコシュ校名誉教授

Participants' Perceptions of an Online Tandem Learning Project between Education Majors at Shinshu University and Japanese Language Learners at the University of Northern Colorado

YAMAMOTO Hiroki: Institute of Education, Shinshu University

OUCHI Rune: Hebita Junior High School, Ishinomaki City

DOBASHI Yuta: Graduate School, University of Saskatchewan

SHIMIZU Kaori: Department of World Languages and Cultures,
University of Northern Colorado

FUKUTA Fumiko: Professor Emeritus, University of Wisconsin Oshkosh

母語の異なる2人の第二言語学習者が互いに言語・文化などを教え合う「タンデム・ラーニング (TL)」は、ビデオ会議システムの普及に伴い、身近な学習形態となりつつある。本研究は、日本・米国の大学間で実施された TL プロジェクトの成果を調査した。質問紙調査の結果、多くの参加者が TL を楽しいと感じ、さらに第二言語能力向上や文化の学びに役立つと考えていたが、使用言語の不均衡などの課題があることも示唆された。

【キーワード】 タンデム・ラーニング 英語学習 日本語学習 異文化間教育 国際交流

1. Introduction

In second language (L2) education, it is essential to enhance learners' L2 communication skills, intercultural understanding, and motivation. Giving the learners opportunities to speak with (near-) native speakers of the target language can be an effective way of achieving this. However, in countries like Japan where language diversity is not high, it is extremely difficult to find target language speakers (e.g., native English speakers in Japan) who are willing to converse regularly with learners.

One possible solution to this problem is to provide the learners with *tandem learning (TL)* opportunities. TL is a method of language learning in which two learners with different native (or fluent) languages are paired up so that they may learn their partner's language and background (Brammerts, 1996). An example would be if a native Japanese speaker studying English and a native English speaker studying Japanese work together to help each other learn target languages and cultures.

TL is based on two underlying principles: *autonomy* and *reciprocity* (Cziko, 2004). Autonomy means that the learners participating in TL are responsible for their own learning. For example, they are expected to identify their own needs, set their own goals, and find the means to achieve them autonomously (Woodin, 2018). Reciprocity means that learners must help their partners equally so that both of them can enjoy the benefits of the exchange. Thus, TL participants are expected to be responsible for both their own and their partner's learning.

Originally, TL involved pairing two L2 learners living in the same region and let them have meetings in person. Currently, due to the development of video-synchronous computer-mediated communication tools (e.g., Zoom, Skype), online face-to-face communication with a long distance partner has become common.

Previous studies have shown some positive effects of TL. First, TL can develop learners' L2 proficiency (e.g., Kato et al., 2016; Tian & Wang, 2010). Kato et al. (2016) indicated that Japanese university students who participated in a TL project via Skype experienced improvement in their English speaking and listening abilities. There are several possible explanations for the efficacy of TL in L2 development. Talking with a target language speaker privately enables learners to have plenty of input and output opportunities. In addition, Yamamoto (2016) claimed that participants may receive more corrective feedback (CF) in TL conversations than in their usual conversations, because they recognize that TL sessions are for L2 learning as well as for enjoying the conversation. Thus, they could interpret the flow of conversation and provide explicit CF without concerning their partner's face. In fact, Akiyama (2017) observed TL conversations and found that the participants who had taken CF training provided CF for their partners, though the frequency of CF provision varied among pairs.

Second, TL could enhance learners' intercultural understanding (e.g., Konishi, 2017; Tian & Wang, 2010; Woodin, 2018) and foster their interest in the foreign culture (Kobayashi et al., 2022). For instance, in Tian and Wang's (2010) TL program with English and Chinese language learners, many participants felt that it had improved their understanding of their partner's as well as their own culture. It was also found that English language learners, who had relatively high English proficiency, were

more likely to gain intercultural benefits than Chinese language learners, who had limited Chinese proficiency.

Third, TL is essentially a type of learning that participants can enjoy (Kato et al., 2016; Konishi, 2017, 2021). Konishi (2017, 2021) reported that in her survey, all participants answered that they had been enjoying her TL project. Furthermore, Konishi (2017) claimed that TL can increase learners' motivation because it affords them the opportunity to enjoy conversations with their overseas friends more, and conversing with a partner with high L2 proficiency is inspiring.

As discussed above, existing studies generally support TL's effectiveness. Nevertheless, although online TL is gaining popularity, there have been only a few studies of it (Konishi, 2017). Therefore, it seems valuable to introduce examples of TL projects and confirm whether the above-mentioned positive effects appear in various contexts. Moreover, there are several aspects that TL research should investigate further. For instance, examining how participants perceive the opportunity of teaching their partners language and culture should be important because playing the roles of a teacher as well as a learner is one of the most notable characteristics of TL. In addition, the issue of what the coordinators or teachers of TL programs can do to support the learners has been rarely considered in previous studies. For these reasons, it was decided that our online TL project and survey results about participants' perceptions toward it would be introduced in this study.

2. Introduction to the Tandem Learning Project

2.1 Participants in the Project

The participants in our TL project were students of Shinshu University (SU) and the University of Northern Colorado (UNC). As of December 2021, the project had a total of 61 participants, though some of them already quit contacting their partners.

SU is a national university in Japan. The participants from SU were English language learners whose L1 is Japanese. They majored in education and were trying to obtain secondary school English teachers' certificates. Thus, they were relatively highly-skilled English language learners among the Japanese university students.

UNC is a public university in the US. The participants from UNC were (near-) native English speakers who were taking Japanese classes. Most of them had started to study Japanese at university, so their Japanese proficiency was generally not high. Nevertheless, there were a few participants with relatively high Japanese proficiency.

Moreover, one English teacher from SU (first author) and two Japanese teachers from UNC (fourth and fifth authors) participated in this project as coordinators.

2.2 Procedure of the Project

The TL project was launched in September 2020. The announcement of the launch was made in the Septembers of 2020 and 2021, which were when most of the participants started their TL.

After receiving the application forms from the participants, a coordinator formed the TL pairs. Thereafter, he sent each Japanese participant the name and email address of their partner. The Japanese participants emailed their partners and discussed when the first meeting would take place and which online communication tools (e.g., Zoom, Skype) would be used for it. Considering the importance of reciprocity in TL, the participants were requested to spend half of the meeting hours on “Japanese time” (e.g., talking in Japanese and about Japanese culture) and the other half on “English time” (e.g., talking in English, error correction of the Japanese participants’ English essays). However, apart from this intervention, each pair was allowed to freely make decisions about the online meetings to respect their autonomy. These include the topics, duration, and frequency of the discussions.

2.3 Roles of the Coordinators

In order to increase the effectiveness of the TL project, the coordinators offered the following support.

First, a coordinator shared with the Japanese participants some tips on teaching beginner-level Japanese language learners and examples of L2 learning activities. He noted these down in a document file, which he sent by e-mail.

Second, the coordinators held two special online meetings. The first meeting was only for the Japanese participants. It was held in September 2021, right after the 2021 TL project had started. 13 participants, including both the 2020 and 2021 participants, attended it. The meeting lasted for about 90 minutes. Its main purpose was to provide tips on TL for the 2021 participants. After, a coordinator had given an overview of the program, groups of three to four people, including at least one 2020 participant and one 2021 participant, were formed. The 2020 participants advised the 2021 participants.

The second meeting was for both SU and UNC participants. Its purpose was to establish rapport among the participants and allow them to exchange information about TL among each other. A few active participants were asked to plan and proceed with this meeting, which was held in October 2021 and lasted for about 100 minutes. 13 participants and the three coordinators attended it. In this meeting, they participated in several fun activities and talked with each other freely in small groups.

3. Method

3.1 Respondents to the Survey

The participants of the project were asked to cooperate with an online survey and 27 of them (16 students from SU and 11 students from UNC; hereafter referred to as “SU participants” and “UNC participants”) answered it. The purpose of the survey was clearly stated at the top of the form. They were also informed that participation in the survey was not mandatory, the collected data would be used only for educational and research purposes, their personal information would not be disclosed when the research is presented, and the teachers would not check the answers of any respondent.

3.2 Data Collection and Analysis

The survey for SU participants consisted of 34 question items, of which 31 were multiple-choice questions, including 27 five-point Likert scale questions (5: *I strongly agree*, 1: *I strongly disagree*), and three open-ended questions. All of them were written in Japanese. The survey mainly investigated the intensity of participation, balance of language use, reciprocity, autonomy, enjoyment, perceived L2 proficiency development, motivation and confidence, perceived value of teaching, special online meetings (see 2.3), and strengths and weaknesses of the project. The content of the survey for the UNC participants was almost the same, except that it was written in English. Also, the question regarding the meeting meant solely for the Japanese participants was not included.

For the Likert scale questions, the mean and *SD* values were calculated. In the analysis of these questions, except for the items related to the special meetings (Q9.1, Q9.2), only data from the 2021 participants ($n = 19$) were used. This is because there were many 2020 participants who had already quit contacting their partners. Such participants were unlikely to cooperate with the survey. In other words, presumably, most respondents of the 2020 participants were those who had positive experiences on the project and were still in touch with their partners. Thus, if the answers of the 2020 participants were included, the results could have been overly favorable and less reliable.

The responses for Q4.2 and Q11.2, which are open-ended questions, were categorized and labelled. The first author made this analysis, after which the other authors checked the results and gave suggestions, and the results were modified. In this analysis, all responses including 2020 participants' were used. This analysis was not conducted for Q11.3, because very few participants gave answers to it.

4. Results and Discussion

Q1.1 asked, “How many online meetings did you have with your current partner?” Among the 19 2021 participants, two participants answered “4 times,” nine answered 5–9 times, and eight answered 10–15 times. Among the 2020 participants, two participants answered “30 times,” and one answered “45 times.”

Q1.2 asked how often they had online meetings. Among 2021 participants, one chose “about twice a week,” 14 chose “about once a week,” and four chose “about once every two weeks.” These results show that there were many participants who participated in TL regularly.

Q1.3 asked, “How long is each online meeting on average?” Among 2021 participants, 15 chose “about one hour,” two chose “one and a half hour,” one chose “two hours,” and one chose “two and a half hours.” This result implies that the meetings were usually at least one hour long.

Q2.1–Q2.4 examined reciprocity. Q2.1 inquired into the ratio of language use. Seven participants answered that Japanese was used for 40-60% of their meeting time (i.e., English was used for 60-40% of the time), which indicates reciprocity. However, the other 12 participants answered that English was used for more than 60% of the time. Three of them wrote that they used Japanese only 10% of the time or less. In fact, the mean values of Q2.2 and UNC participants’ mean value of Q2.3 were relatively low (see Appendix for Likert scale questions’ results). Though most participants seemed to have worked hard for their partners’ learning (Q2.4), there were several pairs whose relationship was not reciprocal, at least in terms of language use.

Q3.1–Q3.5 examined autonomy. The mean values of all the questions were higher than 4.00. This shows that the participants’ autonomy was respected in the TL project.

The results of Q4.1 indicate that most of the participants enjoyed the communication with their partners. Q4.2 asked about the moments they felt so. The most common category formed was “when I felt that my partner and I had similar interests or senses” ($n = 10$: e.g., “My partner and I talked about skiing, which we both really like.”). Many participants might be excited about finding something in common with their foreign friends. Other common categories were “when communication was successful” ($n = 7$: e.g., “It was so cool just being able to understand someone speaking in another language.”) and “when I learned something interesting and new” ($n = 6$: e.g., “We learn common phrases not taught in textbooks very often.”).

Q5.1–Q5.5 asked whether the participants thought their target language skills had improved through the TL project. Many of the participants from both SU and UNC gave positive responses. However, it should be noted that the mean values of the

responses by the UNC participants were lower than those of the SU participants. Presumably, this is mainly because some of the pairs did not use Japanese sufficiently.

Q6.1–Q6.3 concerned motivation and confidence. The results indicate that, overall, the TL project increased the participants' motivation, interest in foreign culture, and confidence in communicating with foreigners. However, the mean value of the UNC participants' answers for Q6.3 was relatively low. Insufficient opportunities to practice Japanese may have made it difficult for them to increase their confidence.

The mean values of Q7, Q8.1, Q8.2, and Q8.4 were high. The participants, including the UNC students who did not major in education, seemed to perceive teaching their own language and culture as rewarding. This practice helped them develop their knowledge about their own country and community (Q7), improve their teaching skills (Q8.1), and introduce culture in L1 (Q8.2); however, learning to introduce culture in L2 was difficult (Q8.3). When discussing the impact of TL, a matter of concern is usually whether learners learned their partners' L1 and culture. However, teaching their own language and culture can also be a valuable experience.

Q9.1 and Q9.2 asked about the online meetings (see 2.3). According to the responses to Q9.1 ($n = 8$), some participants did not find the online meeting for Japanese participants very helpful. Having a meeting just once might not be sufficient for them. On the other hand, the high mean values of responses to Q9.2 (SU: $n = 6$; UNC: $n = 4$) imply that the online meeting in October was meaningful.

Q10.1 asked whether the participants could develop friendship with their partners. Though the mean score of the SU participants was very high, some UNC participants might not be able to establish friendship. The responses to Q10.2 indicate that not only SU but also UNC participants hoped to continue TL with their partners.

Q11.1 surveyed the participants' satisfaction level. The results indicate that most participants in both universities were highly satisfied with the TL project. Q11.2 asked them to write about its strengths. Two common categories were "My language skills improved." ($n = 8$; e.g., "We corrected each other's essays and taught difficult grammar to each other, so both of us enjoyed benefits.") and "I learned about culture." ($n = 5$; e.g., "My partner also introduced me to many cultural topics and ideas I was not aware of before."). These results indicate that the TL project was beneficial for both L2 learning and intercultural understanding. Other common categories were "The TL project gave me an opportunity to meet a friend in a foreign country." ($n = 7$; e.g., "I am able to meet new foreign people."), "I got a partner with common points." ($n = 4$; e.g., "The language exchange project makes it easy to connect students with similar interests."), "An autonomy-supportive environment was provided." ($n = 4$; e.g., "I did like how

independent we could be.”), and “The TL project had positive psychological effects in language learning and communication” ($n = 4$; e.g., “increasing my confidence in both studying and communication”). Q11.3 asked about the weaknesses of the TL projects. Some of the responses were “We can only do this special meeting once, I wish we could’ve done more so I could’ve interacted with more American and Japanese students.” “I feel like it is bad for people who are just starting out learning either of the languages because without a grasp of some of the basic functions of the language, it is hard to communicate in it and learn it from them.” and “Maybe suggested ways of communication and teaching rather than leaving students to organize on their own.”

5. Conclusion

The survey results suggest that our TL project was generally successful. It was especially significant that the participants’ positive perspectives toward teaching their own language and culture, and the special online meeting for SU and UNC students were found. These are aspects that have not been sufficiently pointed out in previous TL studies. However, it should be noted that the number of participants was small. Moreover, the results of the survey may not reflect the opinions of all the participants in the project because those who found it meaningful and continued TL could have been more willing to cooperate with the survey. Nevertheless, it can be claimed that at least some participants had valuable experiences in the course of the project.

The most serious problem about our TL project was that some pairs did not use Japanese sufficiently, presumably because the SU participants’ English language proficiency was generally much higher than the UNC participants’ Japanese language proficiency. In order to address this problem, it can be meaningful to hold special meetings for participants from Japan several times and let them practice communicating with beginner-level learners using easy Japanese in those meetings.

References

- Akiyama, Y., 2017, Learner beliefs and corrective feedback in telecollaboration: A longitudinal investigation. *System*, 64, pp.58-73.
- Brammerts, H., 1996, Language learning in tandem using the Internet. In M. Warschauer (Ed.), *Telecollaboration in foreign language learning: Proceedings of the Hawai‘i symposium* (pp.121-130). University of Hawai‘i Press.
- Cziko, G. A., 2004, Electronic tandem language learning (eTandem): A third approach to second language learning for the 21st century. *CALICO Journal*, 22, pp.25-39.
- Kato, F., Spring, R., & Mori, C., 2016, Mutually beneficial foreign language learning:

- Creating meaningful interactions through video-synchronous computer-mediated communication. *Foreign Language Annals*, 49, pp.355-366.
- Kobayashi, S., Nakagawa, Y., & Chino, J., 2022, Examining the affective impact of the e-tandem program on English language learners from the perspective of anxiety and international posture. *CELES Journal*, 51, pp.211-218.
- Konishi, M., 2017, Effects of international online video talk in a language exchange situation on Japanese EFL college students taking a teacher training program. *Language Education & Technology*, 54, pp.113-133.
- Konishi, M., 2021, The gap between enjoyment as EFL learners and anxiety as pre-service teachers with eTandem online international video chat exchanges. *JACET Journal*, 65, pp.89-106.
- Tian, J., & Wang, Y., 2010, Taking language learning outside the classroom: Learners' perspectives of eTandem learning via Skype. *Innovation in Language Learning and Teaching*, 4, pp.181-197.
- Woodin, J., 2018, *Interculturality, interaction and language learning: Insights from tandem partnerships*. Routledge.
- Yamamoto, H., 2016, Form-focused interaction in oral tandem learning: Investigating learners' perceptions toward the context. *Journal of Teaching English*, 25, pp.139-152.

Appendix: Likert Scale Questions in the Survey

Question items	SU participants		UNC participants	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
2.2 The amount of time I learn and time my partner learns were equally spent in the meetings.	3.50	0.65	3.29	1.03
2.3 I was able to learn my partner's language, culture and society sufficiently.	4.17	0.55	3.57	0.90
2.4 Both my partner and I worked hard for each other's learning.	4.17	0.90	4.14	1.36
3.1 During the time when I learn, I was able to talk about topics that I wanted to talk about.	4.33	0.62	4.29	0.70
3.2 During the time when I learn, I was able to do activities that I wanted to do.	4.33	0.62	4.29	0.70
3.3 I was able to communicate with my partner in ways that I hoped (e.g., Zoom, text chat).	4.83	0.37	4.57	0.73
3.4 Length and frequency of online meetings met my expectations.	4.67	0.62	4.29	1.03

3.5 I was able to schedule our meetings to fit my calendar.	4.67	0.47	4.43	1.05
3.6 I was able to receive support that I wanted to receive from my partner.	4.50	0.65	4.29	1.16
4.1 I enjoyed communication with my partner.	4.67	0.85	4.86	0.35
5.1 The LEP improved my English / Japanese speaking ability.	4.25	0.60	3.86	1.25
5.2 The LEP improved my English / Japanese listening ability.	4.25	0.60	3.43	1.29
5.3 In the LEP, I learned about English / Japanese pronunciation.	3.92	0.86	3.71	1.39
5.4 The LEP developed my English / Japanese vocabulary.	4.17	0.80	4.00	1.31
6.1 The LEP increased my motivation for English / Japanese language learning.	4.42	0.64	4.57	0.73
6.2 The LEP stimulated my interests in foreign cultures.	4.50	0.65	4.71	0.45
6.3 The LEP increased my confidence in communicating with foreign people.	4.42	0.64	3.86	0.99
7 Through the LEP, I discovered some things about my own country/ community.	4.33	0.75	3.86	0.99
8.1 Through teaching my own language, culture, and society, my teaching skills improved.	4.00	0.91	4.14	0.83
8.2 Through teaching my own language, culture, and society, my skills to introduce them in Japanese / English improved.	4.00	0.71	4.00	0.76
8.3 Through teaching my own language, culture, and society, my skills to introduce them in English / Japanese improved.	3.42	1.11	3.14	1.25
8.4 Teaching my own language, culture, and society to my partner was meaningful for me.	4.42	0.64	4.43	0.73
9.1 The special online meeting for the Japanese participants in September was helpful for doing TL with my partner.	3.75	1.09	—	—
9.2 The special online meeting for the LEP participants in October was meaningful for me.	4.17	0.90	4.25	0.83
10.1 I was able to develop friendship with my partner.	4.67	0.85	3.86	0.83
10.2 I hope to keep doing language exchange with my current partner.	4.42	0.95	4.43	0.73
11.1 It was good that I joined the LEP.	4.67	0.62	4.86	0.35

Note. LEP stands for “the Language Exchange Program,” which is the official name of our TL project.

(2022年9月26日 受付)