Chapter 10

Issues on integrating etandem learning in foreign language curriculum

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1 Introduction

Today's language learning and teaching is different from that of twenty years ago. Information and communication technologies (ICT) like Web 2.0, blog, forums, social networks and new pedagogical practices are now more and more integrated in language education, for example, computer-assisted language learning, virtual learning, online collaborative learning, multimodality, online language and culture communication. However, should these practices be labelled as pedagogical revolution just because they are accompanied by these fancy technologies and surf on the waves of the latest digital revolution? Or should they merely be categorized as an evolution of the traditional practices with some new technologies as renovated teaching tools?

Second language teaching methodology has gone through a revolution turning from grammatical or grammar-based approaches to communicative or communication-based approaches. Grammatical approaches help the learner to grasp the syntactical and morphological structure of the target language whereas communicative approaches are organized on the basis of communicative functions that a given or group of learners needs to know. The fact that the ultimate goal is to communicate brings the tenants of this approach to emphasize the ways in which particular grammatical forms permit the expression of these functions. For a traditional language teacher who adopts a grammatical approach, grammar instruction stands alone as an autonomous system to be learned for its own sake. However, in the eyes of a language teacher who adopts a communicative approach, grammatical competence is merely one component of communicative competence, and grammar interacts with meaning, social function, or discourse or a combination of these. Hence, grammar instruction should be integrated into a communicative curriculum with a reformulation of the role of grammar. Communicative language teaching has been hailed as a revolution, whereas there is an enormous gulf between the way that we are designed as human beings to learn to

communicate through language, and the way in which it is formally taught. Consequently, teaching with a communication-based textbook but adopting a grammatical approach would be a disaster to teachers and students, the same being true for using ICT in language teaching without taking into account pedagogical considerations.

The Intercultural Communicative Competences (ICC) (Byram, 1997; 2000) have become the main concern of language teaching and learning in the 21st century. The ICC are considered to be the necessary ability to communicate effectively (using linguistic and non-linguistic resources) and appropriately with people in various cultural contexts. These competences, according to Byram, are composed of attitudes, knowledge, skills of interpreting and relating, skills of discovering and interaction, and critical awareness, etc., which can be developed through various experiential learning and reflective practices (O'Dowd, 2011). The five C's standard —namely, Communication, Culture, Connections, Comparison and Communities— set by the National Standards in Foreign Language Education (NSFLEP, 2015) of the United States stress the use of language for communication in "real life" situations. The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) (Council of Europe, 2001) defines communicative proficiency first of all in terms of what the learner-user can do in a second language. As a reference tool, the CEFR proposes the "action-oriented" approach as its core in that language be learnt for a social purpose, thus the set of communicative language activities and strategies becomes vital in language teaching.

It is widely accepted that the constant exposure to the target language and culture added to a direct contact with people who speak the target language can help learners not only to experience languages, cultures and societies very different from their own, but also to develop their communicative competences. This direct contact and communication can be realized in a Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) where individuals or groups of foreign language learners are engaged in virtual interaction and exchange with their partners in geographically distant locations. No matter what terms or forms they bear, Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC), Telecollaboration, or Online Intercultural Exchange (OIE) are innovative tools that help to develop linguistic competence (Belz, 2003) and learner autonomy (Little, 2007; Jin, 2008; Lewis, 2014), and that increase intercultural communicative competences (Belz, 2007; Thorne, 2003; Chung *et al.*, 2005, Develotte *et al.*, 2007; Hauck, 2010; Kabata & Edasawa, 2011; Lewis *et al.*, 2011; Santos, 2012).

eTandem, language learning based on mutual online language exchange between language partners, is considered as one of the important modes of online language and intercultural exchange (O'Rourke, 2007). Numerous projects and researches on eTandem language learning, such as LINGUA, ODL, LINGUA-D (Bower & Kawaguchi, 2011 Schwienhorst, 2006; Sigley & Zhang, 2014; Tian & Wang, 2010; Wang *et al.*, 2012) have proved its advantages as helping to practise language skills in a semi-authentic conversational situation, to develop learner autonomy (Little, 2001; 2007) and particularly to foster the ICC. However, the high demand of computer competence and technological support as well as the need for a careful instructional design prevent many teachers from adopting it appropriately in their teaching practice. They

are faced with a lot of challenges: how can they design action-based communicative tasks? Whether and how can they get necessary technological support from where they work? How can they collaborate with teachers from other cultures? What could be the status of this innovative pedagogical practice?

Besides, most of the above-mentioned projects are practised in the field of applied linguistics; few of them have involved students or teachers from the domain of philosophy or humanities, such as Chinese studies, or more generally Asian studies. Is it possible to have telecollaboration between institutions and disciplines across borders, for example, between applied linguistics and philosophy?

Traditionally, for a student in Chinese studies, a good knowledge of the Chinese culture involving its history, philosophy, literature, classics, etc. is thought to be more important than a good mastering of the Chinese language. Even though reading and understanding original texts are at the core of a great part of the teaching, very little attention is paid to listening and speaking skills. Moreover, as Chinese is one of the most difficult languages to learn in the world, and due to the formidable language barrier, many of these courses are taught in students' native languages with translated readings. However, one should notice that Fung and Bodde (1960) have pointed out that the suggestiveness of the sayings and writing of the Chinese philosophers is something that can hardly be translated. When one reads the classics in translation, one misses the suggestiveness and much of the richness of the original. Kumarajiva, one of the greatest translators of the Buddhist texts into Chinese in the 5th century AD, added that reading the translated works is like taking chewed food from others. If that is so, then is it possible that students from Chinese Studies can have a good knowledge of Chinese history, Chinese philosophy, and Chinese literature without having a good mastery of the Chinese language? In fact, for these great scholars, language skills and cultural knowledge are of equal importance. As the Chinese saying goes, 讀萬卷書不如行萬裡路 (*dú wàn juǎn shū bùrú xíng wànlǐ lù*) [it is better to travel ten thousand miles than to read ten thousand books]. The best way to have a profound knowledge and understanding of a culture is by immersing oneself in this culture, by learning people's stories and by getting past the stereotypes and misconceptions. The pedagogical application of Web 2.0 in language and culture education provides the cultural exposure that is much needed for students from different domains and makes it possible for the telecollaboration between institutions and disciplines across borders to take place.

The eTandem Chinese-French project presented hereafter explores the potential of eTandem as a form of online language and cultural exchange in the development of intercultural communicative competences for French-speaking students majoring in Chinese Studies and Chinese-speaking students majoring in French language and culture. In considering the set-up of such exchanges, we have tried answering the following questions:

(1) What are the important factors in designing an online language and culture exchange practical course so as to help develop students' communicative competence and raise their cultural consciences?

(2) As the target learners are intermediate students, how we balance the need to develop linguistic skills and intercultural awareness is of great importance in the course design?

2 Presentation of the project

The eTandem Chinese-French course was promoted by the Unit of Chinese Studies of the University of Geneva, Switzerland, in collaboration with the French Department of Hubei University, Wuhan, China. It was developed from the idea of both Claudia Berger (senior lecturer of the Unit of Chinese Studies of the University of Geneva) and Jue Wang-Szilas (scientific collaborator of the Faculty of Humanities of the University of Geneva) in 2008. In 2009, a pilot project (Wang, Berger et Szilas, 2012) was initiated, inspired by previous research on the subject (Belz, 2003; Thorne, 2003; O'Dowd & Ritter, 2006). Analysis of the data from this pilot project allowed us to redesign the course and implement it to a larger scale for the students of the academic year 2010–2011. Since then, it has been going on, and the 2014–2015 curriculum offers the course for the 5th time to the second-year students.

The main purpose for setting up such a course was to meet the students' needs to communicate as much as possible with native speakers. However, our intentions went far beyond that. Based on the guided tandem learning activities, the "live" environment provided by the course to practise the target language with native speakers of the same generation offers a sturdy way to raise their intercultural awareness as well as to promote their autonomy, rather than simply the means to develop the participants' language communicative *competences*—this latter term, as defined by the CEFR, is divided into general competences (knowledge, know-how and learn to learn) and communicative competences with linguistic, sociolinguistic and pragmatic components. "All human competences contribute in one way or another to the language user's ability to communicate and may be regarded as aspects of communicative competence." (CEFR, 2001, p. 101.)

Since 2010, the one-year course has involved second-year French-speaking Chinese major students and second-year Chinese-speaking French major students, all of whom are at the A2-B1 level within the CEFR framework. From the academic year 2012–2013, students from the Chinese Department of the National Institute of Oriental Languages and Civilizations (INALCO), Paris, joined the course.

Today, the course is obligatory and credited for students from the University of Geneva and part of the participants from the INALCO, while it is optional and strongly recommended —that is practically obligatory— for the students from Hubei University and some volunteers from the INALCO. Between 2010 and 2013, the course was implemented as an academic yearly course, but since the fall of 2013, due to practical considerations of the curriculum in both Geneva and Wuhan, it has been reduced to one and a half semester.

2.1 Institutional context

The exchange course is a university-level international telecollaboration project between the French speaking part of Switzerland, Paris (France), and Wuhan (China).

The course partly owes its creation and continued existence to the technical and financial institutional support from the University of Geneva. A technical group, the Information and Communication Technologies and Systems (ICTS) Unit of the Faculty of Sciences of the University of Geneva has ensured the maintenance of the Moodle platform, technical backing and training for the teachers. The easy access to the Internet, privately or publicly, as well as the language laboratories in the three institutions have provided the preliminary guarantee for the students' participation. The Community Interested in Online Teaching (CIEL) has also published blogs and literature reviews on the use of ICT in teaching and learning, and through this channel the innovative pedagogical projects are made known within the University of Geneva. Last but not least, the sustainability of this project has been dependent on two grants: a long-term financial support from the Continuing Education Service on one hand, and a grant from the IT Commission (COINF), the presidential advisory board on digital services and its associated institutional policy at the University of Geneva, whose role is to guide the evolution of the informational system within the institution according to the needs of education, research and administration. The latter not only promotes a broad faculty participation in its composition and its relationship with the faculty computer commission, but also provides financial support for technological or pedagogical innovation projects each year.

At the level of the Unit of Chinese Studies, the eTandem course is an important part of the ChineWeb program launched by Claudia Berger in 2008. As a blended learning program, ChineWeb promotes a combination of face-to-face instruction as well as online self-learning and language-culture exchange in teaching Chinese language and culture around three axes. The first axis was designed based on behaviourist and cognitivist theories, which provides students with various online documents (handouts, audios, videos, etc.), drilling exercises and mock tests similar to the official HSK Chinese Proficiency Tests. The second axis, the eTandem online language and culture exchange, which is the subject of this article, takes its root in fulfilling intercultural communication tasks (CEFR, 2001). The third axis is a renewed face-to-face classroom instruction that includes the tuning of aural and oral competences, handwriting production (essential to learn the Chinese writing system), and translation exercises based partly on the authentic texts from the eTandem course. The opportunity to practise in class what they have done in eTandem helps the students to become more self-confident in understanding and using the language.

2.2 Pedagogical design references

The CEFR (2001) has been used as a fundamental reference in the theme selection, oral communication task design as well as self-report questionnaire. Chinese is among the languages that are considered to be exceptionally difficult to learn for many. An English native speaker needs almost four times more the class hours to attain the same goal in learning Chinese than in learning French (Jackson & Kaplan, 2001, p.78). Given the fact that Chinese is classified as a "distant" language with regard to French speaking students, and vice-versa, the language exchange activities needed to be carefully designed. The specificities of each language (Xie & Yao, 2009),

as well as learners' educational cultures, have been reflected upon in designing the communication tasks, tutoring and metalinguistic-oriented activities.

However, the biggest challenge was in dealing with the different disciplinary requirements between the "Arts" or the "Humanities" (in French: *les lettres*) of the University of Geneva and the "Applied Linguistics" (in French: *les langues appliquées*) of Hubei University. The Chinese Studies Unit of the University of Geneva adopts a vertical diachronic depth formula that focuses on the fostering of humanistic ways of thinking through a profound understanding of Chinese history, modern and classical literature, and philosophy. The emphasis of teaching is put more on reading comprehension than on oral communicative skills. The French Department of Hubei University, on the contrary adopts a horizontal synchronic formula that focuses on the fostering of communicative skills. It was of vital importance to be aware of these requirements and to balance them in designing tasks.

2.3 The design-based and iterative nature of the course

The eTandem Chinese-French course is design-based and iterative. Originally set up in 2010, it has been repeated every year since then. The course design follows the three main phases proposed by Cobb *et al.* (2003): (1) "Preparing for a Design Experiment"; (2) "Conducting a Design Experiment"; and (3) "Conducting Retrospective Analysis".

The instructional design has followed an ameliorated ADDIE model (Branson, 1975) that was formulated at the Centre for Educational Technology department of Florida State University. In this model, each design cycle follows the five steps: analysis, design or redesign, development, implementation and evaluation, and the five steps repeated as a new design cycle began (See Fig. 1).

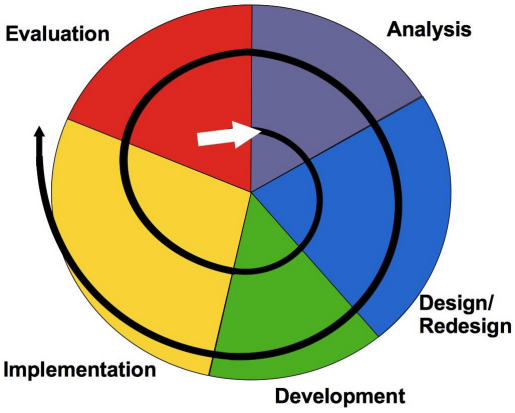


Figure 1: The improved ADDIE instructional design model (adapted from the original figure in Wang, Berger & Szilas, 2012)

The course design has gone through four complete design cycles until now. Each design cycle is improved according to the analysis of the learning outcomes of the previous one:

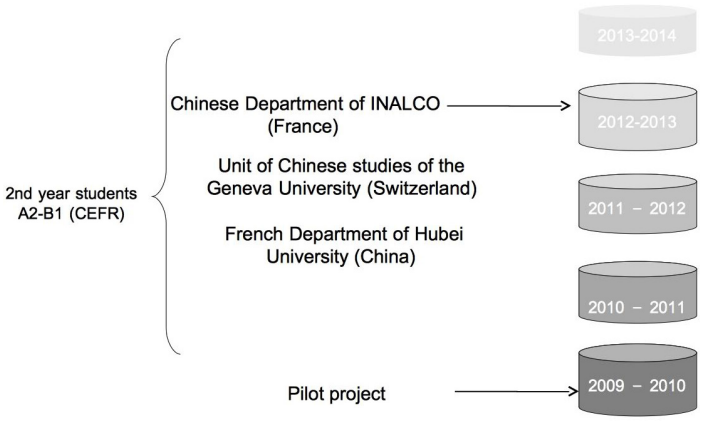


Figure 2: The design cycles of the eTandem Chinese-French course

2.4 Course organisation

Pre-course training

A face-to-face training session is organised by each university beforehand to get students to be familiar with Moodle platform and Skype as well as eTandem learning principles and strategies. A video clip and some photos of real eTandem exchanges are shown and explained to give students some tips on how to benefit from tandem language learning.

Tandem matching

Once registered, students are requested to post a detailed self-introduction in the "tandem-matching" forum to find their language partners (mostly one-to-one, several one-to-two if the numbers of the students are not equal on both sides). They exchange information and make requests in the forum so as to find a partner. Teachers from either university encourage them to contact potential partners by any means, email, forum posts, SMS, etc. Once a tandem is formed, they are required to announce it in the forum.

Learning activities for each theme-based session

The learning activities for each theme-based session consists of pre-communication, online communication and post-communication tasks, as summarized below:

- *Pre-communication task*

  The registered students logged into Moodle to do theme-based exercises (not obligatory for every student) and got oral task instructions to prepare for the exchange (see Appendix).

- *Online communication tasks*

  The students met once a week (about 60 minutes) online to fulfil the communicative tasks indicated on the task instructions for each theme. They are required to use one language for 20–25 minutes and then switch to the other language.

  - *Individual oral presentation* (exchange information):
    Each student gives a theme-based description or narration in target language; the other listens and gives his/her opinion when finished.
  - *Pair work* (compare and analyse information):
    Each pair works together to ask and answer the listed questions on the task instruction document, only one language can be used.
  - *Interactions and exchange* (compare and analyse information):
    Each pair has a free discussion according to the proposed open questions, either in mother tongue or target language.

- *Post-communication task*

  - *Summary in native language (exchange feedback based on the principle of reciprocity):*
    After the online communication, students write in their mother language a brief summary of what their partners have said and post it in the Moodle forum allocated to each theme.
  - *Self-report:*
    Students are required to fill in an online self-report form right after the real time exchange.

Course coordinating and tutoring

A course coordinator (also the tutor) coordinated the course between / among the two / three universities and accompanied students synchronically (*via* Skype) and asynchronically (*via* Moodle forum, email, etc.) throughout the academic year. The tutoring involved solving technical problems, managing language partners as well as animating online learning "atmosphere".

Assessment and the accreditation

The credit of the course was generally composed of three parts according to each university's proper situation:

- Course participation: Moodle forum posts and online self-report questionnaire.
- Oral test as reference: An oral test at the end of each semester is conducted at each university according to its own requirement.

3 Data collection and analysis

3.1 Data collection

- *The pre-course questionnaire*

  All the participants were required to fill in a questionnaire before they were registered in the course. The questionnaire contained 38 questions in 6 categories that included personal language profile, tandem experience, course expectations, ICT skills, confirmation of course participation and support of the research project. With these data, we analysed the students' language learning difficulties, their needs as well as their expectations, the help that they might get from their partners. Moreover, in the research support part, we got some students' consent to be filmed during the online exchange.

- *The self-report questionnaire*

  All the participants were required to fill in this questionnaire after each online exchange. It contains 20 questions, most of which are QCM questions. The self-report served a double function in that it proved the students' course attendance and that it collected the students' feedback and comments on each theme.

- *Oral test (only for the University of Geneva)*

  Except for the academic year 2011–2012, an oral test was organised for the students of the University of Geneva each academic year. The test consisted of three parts: reading aloud a text selected from their textbook, answering questions that the teacher asked and a free topic-based discussion. The evaluation criteria were adopted from the CEFRL grids for speaking tests (Council of Europe 2001, p. 21).

- *Institutional course evaluation*

  The University of Geneva evaluated the course from 2011 through the ADEVEN system (*i.e.* a set of teaching evaluation questionnaires issued by the University of Geneva for different types of courses taught in the university (Université de Genève, 2011). The evaluation form was then translated into Chinese and was sent it to Hubei University where the teachers there arranged the evaluation session and documented the original data.

- *Class interview*

  The University of Geneva and Hubei University organized an interview at the end of each academic year with structured open-ended questions. The objective of the interview was to get students' comments and suggestions to improve the course.

- *Teachers interview*

  Several interviews with the teachers from either university were conducted on an informal basis. The purpose of the interviews was to collect teachers' feelings, opinions and comments on the course experience.

- *Video clips of online exchange*

  From the year 2011–2012, we started to record the students' live exchange. It was difficult at the beginning since very few software was available to record the whole exchange procedure *via* Skype (audio, video and chat). From the year 2013–2014, thanks to some new good video recording software, we have collected about 30 complete videos that helped and will help us to understand what has been going during the online communication between the tandems.

3.2 Feedback based on the data analysis

Students' feedback

Almost all the students (more than 90% in each year's statistics) reported in the interviews that they have benefitted from this course, both linguistically and culturally. They enjoyed the learning procedure and were satisfied with the learning result. The students' perceived benefits included improving their speaking skills and understanding the cultures better. A lot of students noted the increased confidence in their use of the target language, as they were not afraid anymore of speaking Chinese / French. The practice in the authentic target language with native Chinese / French speakers helped them to better know the target language as they were really linguistically and culturally immersed during the exchange. They also emphasized the precious experience of learning about the target culture through exchanging with people of their own age.

Most admitted having obtained the expected help from their tandems in extending their vocabulary, learning how to speak French / Chinese in a more authentic way, having someone on site to correct their pronunciation (especially the tones for Chinese learning students).

The students were encouraged to compare French and Chinese cultures during the discussion. Some reported interesting findings and reflections in their self-report:

> **Extract 1: Environment**
>
> *J'étais surpris par le fait que les Chinois n'ont même pas de poubelles de tri. Je pensais qu'ils n'étaient pas soucieux de l'environnement, mais pas à ce point. J'ai été déçu de voir qu'ils ne font pas d'efforts.*
>
> [I was surprised by the fact that the Chinese do not even have recycling bins. I thought that they were not concerned about the environment but not at this point. I was disappointed to see that they do not make efforts.]

In fact, the example shows also that the discussion did not go to the end, because in fact the recycling is done in China in a different way.

Extract 2: Environment

Ce thème n'est pas vraiment bien pour les étudiants chinois car on leur parle de chez nous où il fait bon vivre et eux de chez eux où la pollution est omniprésente.

[This theme is not really good for Chinese students because we talk about our homes where it is nice to live, whereas they were talking about their home where pollution is everywhere.]

Extract 3: Health and medicine

J'étais surpris par le fait que les Chinois n'ont que très peu de connaissance sur la médecine occidentale alors que j'en connais un rayon sur la leur.

[I was surprised by the fact that the Chinese have very little knowledge about Western medicine whereas I know a lot about theirs.]

Extract 4: Health and medicine

Son remède contre le rhume est de faire bouillir de l'écorce d'orange dans de l'eau et de la boire. Je vais tester.

[His remedy against colds is to boil orange peel in water and drink it. I'll test it.]

Extract 5: Health and medicine

法國醫生分為 "*généraliste*" 和 "*spécialiste*", 法國都是有家庭醫生的，醫療費會由政府補助或是自己購買的醫療保險來支付一部分.

[French doctors are categorized as generalist and specialist, and every family has a family doctor. Medical expenses will be subsidized partly by the government and partly by their own supplementary health insurance.]

Extract 6: Leisure time activities

La question des jeux vidéo chez les étudiants chinois. Elle m'a semblé finalement assez désabusée et avec un regard un peu critique sur les étudiants chinois.

[The issue of video games among Chinese students. She seemed actually quite disillusioned and with a somewhat critical eye on Chinese students.]

Extract 7: Food

Elle a déjà mangé du chien (ça ne me choque pas mais ça m'a surpris) et elle ne mange pratiquement que du riz et des légumes sans viande ni poisson parce qu'elle n'aime pas ça.

[She has already eaten dog meat (it does not shock me but it surprised me) and she eats only rice and vegetables without meat or fish because she doesn't like them.]

Most students stressed the multimodal characteristic of the online communication and exchange as they could use different channels to communicate with each other.

Extract 8: Multimodal communication

J'ai vraiment eu le sentiment d'avoir tous les outils à ma disposition et de pouvoir exprimer clairement tout ce que je souhaitais.

[I really had the feeling of having all the tools at my disposal and being able to clearly express what I wanted.]

The importance of using Webcam was especially pointed out in that it helped to create a quasi-authentic interaction with people from the other culture.

Extract 9: Multimodal communication

Ça fait que l'échange est presque comme si on était ensemble en personne!

[It seems that the exchange is almost face-to-face!]

Furthermore, the mimics and gestures could help learning new words:

Extract 10: Multimodal communication

... car ça permet d'être plus à l'aise et mieux concentré. On peut également faire des mimes si on n'est pas compris par notre tandem.

[... because it allows you to be more comfortable and better focused. We can do mimes if we are not understood.]

Most of them have talked more than one hour during the exchange and they often extended the course hours.

Extract 11: Duration of exchange

... qu'une heure ne suffit jamais, prendre deux heures est bien meilleur car nous avons le temps de parler de tout.

[... an hour is never enough; two hours is much better because we have time to talk about everything.]

Some would like that the course last longer.

Extract 12: Duration of exchange

J'aimerais que les cours soient plus longs, mais qu'on ait plus de questions et de ressources pour nous aider à parler plus longtemps.

[I would like the course to last longer, but we need more issues and resources to help us talk longer.]

The topics were interesting though two of them, environment and health, were thought to be difficult and "technical" concerning the vocabulary that they had to prepare. Some suggested that more topics concerning news and recent events should be added for supplementary exchanges and communications.

Extract 13: Suggestions for additional topics

除去課内的八個主題之外，可以另外多提供一些課題供同學們選擇，在課外之餘可以和搭檔多交流一些，話題也可以更貼近一些時事新聞.

[Other than the eight topics provided in the course, there could some more topics for students to choose from, allowing more interaction with the partner, and topics can include current news and events.]

They also gave suggestions on discussion questions for certain topics. In one topic, "Students' Life", we have designed questions about daily expenses in the hope that they could help to practise numbers, which were thought to be difficult in learning both languages. The discussions about money were thought to be taboo and caused a kind of uneasiness in several students.

The obstacles that hindered the exchange during the first academic year became less evident during the recent academic year:

- *Technical problems*

  The unstable Internet access (especially on the Chinese side) and other technical problems.

- *The lack of compliance with the principle of reciprocity*

  The French-speaking students complained that most of the conversations were dominated by the Chinese-speaking students since they spoke better French than the Swiss students. We thus made it clear in the training session that reciprocity was important, and that both sides had to respect the L2 language conversation duration.

- *The organisation and communication between partners*

  For example, several Chinese students answered by e-mail their tandems' messages sent from Moodle platform directly and the e-mails did not reach the partners).

- *The extra workload*

  Some Swiss students reported having spent too much time preparing for the exchange.

The various suggestions that the students have given to improve the course showed that they not only participated the course, but also began to be involved in the "design" of the course. In fact, during each year's class interview, they were very active to speak out their opinions on every aspect of the course. Here are some examples:

- *Teachers' help*

  Teachers should clarify the grammatical points and vocabulary that they should master in each theme. Some also gave specific words that they thought indispensable for certain topics, for example, the names of some popular Chinese traditional food 包子 (*bāozi*) [buns], 饅頭 (*mántou*) [bread] and 油條 (*yóutiáo*) [fritters].

- *How to help tandems*

  > *Pour chaque thème, ça pourrait être utile de donner des consignes pour corriger notre tandem. Par exemple, pour les étudiants français / suisses, ce serait bien d'avoir une liste du vocabulaire et de la grammaire que doit maîtriser notre tandem pour qu'on puisse mieux l'aider.*
  >
  > [For each topic, it might be useful to give instructions to correct our tandem. For example, for the French / Swiss students, it would be nice to have a list of vocabulary and grammatical points that our Chinese tandems should master so that we can help them better.]

- *More flexibility on the content*

  > *Donner moins de consignes pour les thèmes. Le chemin peut paraître un peu trop balisé quand on veut respecter à la lettre celles-là.*
  >
  > [Give less guidance for topics. The path may seem a little too marked when one wants to follow them strictly.]

- *The sustainability of the course to help to consolidate learning*

  > *Pour nous permettre d'avoir un semestre de conversation entière au premier et de mieux préparer ces échanges.*
  >
  > [To enable us to have one whole semester's oral practice in class to be better prepared for these exchanges.]

- *The way to learn better*

  > *Travailler l'oral en classe avant l'échange, expliquer mieux aux tandems comment corriger et parler à des locuteurs ne parlant pas leur langue.*
  >
  > [Do some oral work in class before the exchange; explain how to correct tandems and how to talk to those who do not speak their native language.]

- *The course ergonomic*

  > *J'ai beaucoup aimé participer à e-Tandem, la seule chose qui soit peut-être à améliorer, c'est de ne demander qu'un résumé après chaque échange, pour prouver notre présence, mais pas le questionnaire B. Il serait mieux de ne poser les questions du questionnaire B qu'au mois de janvier, après la fin des échanges.*
  >
  > [I enjoyed participating in eTandem, the only thing that might improve is to write a summary after each exchange to prove our presence, but not the questionnaire B. It would be better not to ask questions of the questionnaire B until January after the course finished.]

In order to comply with their syllabus, the students from Inalco were distributed different communication tasks from those from the University of Geneva and Hubei University. Some found that there was a gap in the Inalco's course syllabus and that of the University of Geneva, which made the preparation more difficult and complicated for them. One of the students said that "... *ce décalage m'a souvent déstabilisée lors de la préparation des échanges e-tandem hebdomadaires.*" ["... this shift often destabilized me when I prepared weekly eTandem exchanges."]

They insisted that the Inalco's program be in accordance with that of the course eTandem.

> *Cela deviendrait alors vraiment cohérent, productif, efficace et stimulant.*
>
> [This would then become really consistent, productive, efficient and stimulating].

Teachers' feedback

Most teachers involved in the project were impressed by the motivation and the enthusiasm that the students participating in the course have shown. It was enjoyable for them to read the summaries and the comments that the students wrote for their partners, and it arose in them a strong curiosity to know what had been happening during the online exchange.

Though they found the idea attractive in that it helped the students to practise the target language with native speakers, several teachers doubted the practice for several

reasons: the extra work that the project brought, the reliability of the Internet access and the willingness to collaborate with other teachers, which explained why they just "wait and see".

As the project went on, year after year, we found out that Telecollaboration provided a platform for the encounter of not only students but also teachers from different cultural backgrounds. An example came from the different interpretation of "autonomy", one of the two key principles in tandem language learning. In the context of eTandem, autonomy means that partners are encouraged to take responsibility —individually and collectively— for their learning. It is interesting to notice that both teachers interpret "autonomy" in the sense "individual autonomy". The teachers from Chinese educational culture take it as a new capacity to be developed step by step and insist that the developing procedure should be under teacher's control, which is totally in contrast with the idea of individual autonomy, but is consistent with the idea of collective autonomy. The teacher from the Swiss educational culture takes individual autonomy as an acquired capacity to which should not be given too much attention, while entirely ignoring collective autonomy. Taking a close look at Chinese secondary education, we know that teachers have absolute authority and that students depend a lot on teachers, which is very different from the situation in Europe where the development of individual autonomy begins at an early age. The gap between the interpretations of autonomy and of developing autonomy influence more or less the transition from individual autonomy to collective autonomy (Puren, 2009; Lewis, 2014) that are considered to be indispensable capacities in today's globalized working situation.

Another example came from the conflict among the teachers from the Chinese Unit of the University of Geneva. The Chinese teacher and the Swiss teacher did not share the same pedagogical ideas on how to locate the situation of this OIE activity and to what extent it could be integrated in the curriculum. Thus, the collaboration was not as satisfactory as what the course designers had anticipated.

However, the conflict and misunderstanding that arose from the interaction among teachers cannot be seen as only negative. They inspired researchers like O'Dowd to reflect on the question: "What are the skills, attitudes and knowledge which a foreign language teacher needs to establish and successfully carry out an online intercultural exchange with their learners?" (O'Dowd, 2015.)

Course designers' reflection: Challenges and difficulties

The course design follows an iterative procedure, which assured the regular improvement of the course. The participation rate was satisfactory. The course instructions for each exchange session and the related course materials were adapted to students' level and in accordance with their current syllabus. The physical and psychological support of the coordinator assured the online exchange.

From the instructional design perspective, we have explored some possible course modules to integrate eTandem as an important practice and support for classroom teaching. As each institution involved in the course has its own requirements, it would be interesting to develop an adapted course module so that each can benefit the most

from this type of OIE activities. The question was how to balance language learning and the fostering of cultural awareness in the design.

In the module of the University of Geneva (see Fig. 3), the eTandem was integrated in the Blended-learning Chinese Language Learning program as *travaux pratiques* (practical work) that aimed to consolidate classroom teaching and learning. The strong link between the face-to-face classroom teaching and the online self-learning and eTandem activities were to be assured by teacher collaboration.

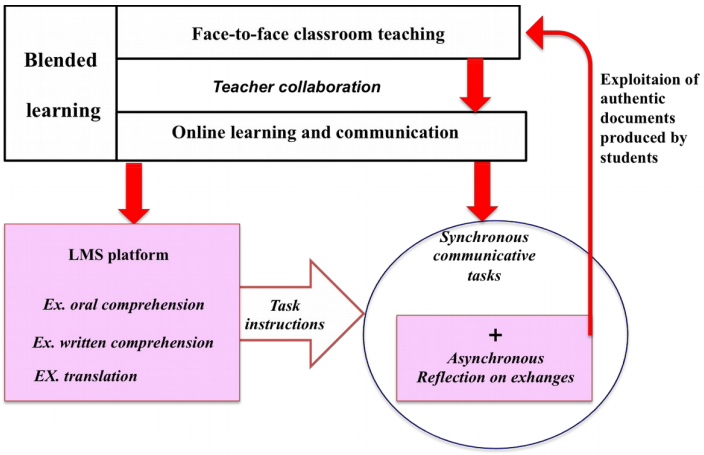


Figure 3: The eTandem Chinese-French Course module of the University of Geneva

The proposed module presented a combination of teacher-centred classroom instruction (*cours magistral*) and various student-centred asynchronous online exercises as well as action-based synchronous peer interaction and communication. We have tested the potential of using the authentic documents produced by the students summarizing each exchange, in classroom oral practice during the academic year 2013–2014. It was appreciated and warmly welcomed by almost all students.

However, the lack of institutional support at faculty level discouraged the participation of other colleagues. Moreover, the different pedagogical conceptions among the local colleagues prevented the course from being really integrated into the on-going syllabus. The unwillingness to cooperate directly affected the learning outcomes when students complained that the proposed online task instructions did not match with the other courses, and that they spent much more time preparing for the exchange, a problem which was not at all foreseen in the initial planning.

The challenges and difficulties presented such as keeping a solid long-term collaborative relationship, balancing the participants in the exchange, as well as deciding course content with teachers from both sides, should not be ignored as they add an enormous workload for teachers, and especially course designers. It is vital that all the teachers concerned should be somewhat involved in the project. The learning outcomes anticipated in our project lie in that the participants develop lexical, gram-

matical competences *via* multimodal communicative activities (speaking, chatting, writing, non-verbal communication modes, etc.)

4 Current contribution and future study

The eTandem Chinese-French course has been going on for more than four years and it has been improved each year. The status of the course has gone from being a supplementary learning activity to becoming a full-fledged credited course in each institution. Since the 2012–2013 academic year, more than 90 students from three universities have benefitted from online tandem language learning each year. It has started to serve as a platform to help students enter into direct contact with native speakers of their own age and to have a more profound understanding of each other's language and culture. The semi-authentic learning environment has made it possible for language learning and cultural exchange to be achieved without physical mobility.

Based on the continuous research work, some important factors that influence the success of such an OIE project can be outlined. First of all, the institutional and technological supports are fundamental for the realization of the project. The institutional recognition of the course helps not only to raise the students' motivation, but also to facilitate teacher collaboration, in what is emphasized as "normalization" by Chambers and Bax (2006), and O'Dowd (2011). On the other hand, technical support is indispensable to maintain the platform and provide timely necessary help. Secondly, a course coordinator is needed to ensure the collaboration and communication within and among the pedagogical groups from different cultural backgrounds. To a certain extent, and this is pedagogically very interesting as the teachers involved in such project work in tandem too. Thirdly, as a course with two distant languages and cultures, the task design should be based on a very careful consideration of the specialities of either language.

How we maintain a solid partnership among the three institutions (Hubei University, The University of Geneva, and INALCO) will be an important on-going question for the sake of the sustainability of the course. The recognition of the coordinator's position and work should not be ignored, either.

Unlike other telecollaboration research projects between European and Asian languages and cultures, the eTandem Chinese-French course did not take the Cultura model (see more in Chun, 2014) as its design model. We started with a basic instructional design model ADDIE (Branson, 1975) and we adjusted it according to the analytical result of each design circle. In our design, the specific institutional requirements, the pedagogical conceptions between and among teachers from different teaching cultures, as well as the students' learning cultures have been taken into great consideration, as we believe that the success of such an international intercultural collaborative project depends not only on seeking common ground, but also on maintaining differences. For intermediate language learners, especially French-speaking Chinese learners, it would be a bit too early to involve them in class-to-class collaborative learning activities as suggested by the Cultura model for they lack the linguistic level required. The eTandem model might be the first step before engaging

them in more sophisticated projects. We would have tested the Cultura model with the third-year students if we had had the opportunity.

The exchange tasks and the curricular integration model are transferable to other language programs. However, from a pedagogical perspective, the following issues will be interesting research questions that are worthy of further study:

- how to achieve a spiral development of communicative proficiency *via* different learning activities;
- how to transfer from pair work to group work, from task-based exchange to project-based collaborative learning, from cultural awareness to intercultural competences;
- and how to promote a dynamic co-cultural learning community that can help to balance individual autonomy and collective autonomy.

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Appendix – An example of task instructions for the topic "*Voyage*"

第四單元任務說明 • Consignes pour le thème 04 • 第四单元任务说明

同學們好！ • Bonjour à tous • 同学们好！

本單元有三個任務要完成 • Voici les trois tâches à réaliser pour ce thème • 本单元有三个任务要完成:

一· 請大家根據下面的問題互相描述自己的一次旅行經歷 • Veuillez décrire un voyage que vous avez fait en vous inspirant des questions ci-dessous • 请大家根据下面的问题互相描述自己的一次旅行经历

1. 你為甚麼要進行這次旅行？ Quelles étaient les raisons de ce voyage? • 你为什么要进行这次旅行?
2. 你這次旅行是甚麼時候進行的？ Quand ce voyage a-t-il eu lieu? • 你这次旅行是什么时候进行的?
3. 你是怎麼樣準備這次旅行的？ Comment aviez-vous préparé le voyage? • 你是怎么样准备这次旅行的?
4. 你是一個人去旅行的嗎？如果不是，那你和誰一起去的？ Avez-vous voyagé seul(e)? Si non, avec qui étiez-vous? • 你是一个人去旅行的吗? 如果不是，那你和谁一起去的?
5. 你使用了甚麼樣的交通工具？ Quels moyens de transport avez-vous utilisés? • 你使用了什么样的交通工具?
6. 你在旅行中遇到了誰？ Qui avez-vous rencontré durant votre voyage? • 你在旅行中遇到了谁?
7. 你住在哪裡？ Où avez-vous séjourné? • 你住在哪里?
8. 你在旅行中吃了當地的特色小吃嗎？是甚麼？ Avez-vous mangé des spécialités culinaires des endroits où vous vous êtes rendu(e)? Si oui, qu'avez-vous dégusté? • 你在旅行中吃了当地的特色小吃吗? 是什么?
9. 你看到了甚麼？ Qu'avez-vous pu admirer? • 你看到了什么?
10. 你在旅行中遇到了甚麼困難？ Quels imprévus ou difficultés avez-vous rencontrés? • 你在旅行中遇到了什么困难?
11. 你怎麼解決這些問題的？ Comment avez-vous résolu ces difficultés? • 你怎么解决这些问题的?
12. 讓你印象最深刻的是甚麼？ Qu'est-ce qui vous a le plus impressionné? • 让你印象最深刻的是什么?
13. 這次旅行你開心嗎？為甚麼？ Ce voyage vous a-t-il plu? Pourquoi? • 这次旅行你开心吗? 为什么?

二· 請根據下面的問題互相提問並討論 • Veuillez vous inspirer des questions ci-dessous pour discuter avec votre partenaire • 请根据下面的问题互相提问并讨论:

1. 旅行要注意甚麼？ À quoi faut-il faire attention lorsqu'on voyage? •旅行要注意什么?
2. 旅行給我帶來了甚麼? • Que nous apportent les voyages? • 旅行给我带来了什么?

三. 請大家根據交流中得到的信息，為自己的搭檔做個小結，然後帖到第一單元論壇裏。請註意：湖北大學的同學用中文寫，日內瓦大學的同學用法文寫。請盡量用正確，地道，簡單的漢語或者法語。• Après l'échange, veuillez résumer par écrit les informations échangées durant la conversation. Mettez cette présentation dans le forum du thème en cours. Attention: les Genevois et les Parisiens écrivent en français et les Wuhanais écrivent en chinois, en phrases simples et authentiques! • 请大家根据交流中得到的信息，为自己的搭档做个小结，然后帖到第一单元论坛里。请注意：湖北大学的同学用中文写，日内瓦大学的同学用法文写。请尽量用正确，地道，简单的汉语或者法语。

⋆

本單元需要練習的重要詞匯如下 • Vocabulaire à maîtriser pour ce thème • 本单元需要练习的重要词汇如下:

- UniGe–INALCO:
  - 從...出發,先到...,再到...,然後去了...,接著...,最後... 乘飛機,坐火車,坐汽車,步行訂票,定旅館,辦簽證,旅行指南,遊記是...(時候)去的, 是和...一起去的

  - ...出,先到...,再到...,然后去了...,接...,最后... 乘机,坐火,坐汽,步行票,定旅,,旅行指南,游是...(候)去的, 是和...一起去的

- HuDa : prendre l'avion, prendre le train, prendre l'autobus, à pied, à vélo, le centre ville, prendre un taxi, réserver des tickets, réserver une chambre à l'hôtel, demander le visa, le guide du voyage, journal du voyage

本單元需要練習的語法如下 • Points de grammaire et idiomes à maîtriser pour ce thème • 本单元需要练习的语法如下:

- UniGe–INALCO:
  - manières du verbe (過；了；是.....的); verbe avancé / préposition (坐飛機=>坐飛機去.....); idiomes: 從...出發, 先到..., 再到..., 然後去了..., 接著..., 最後...,是...(時候)去的, 是和...一起去的，既...又...，采用...方法，比方説
  - manières du verbe (o过; o了; 是.....的); verbe avancé / préposition (坐飞机=>坐飞机去...); idiomes: 从...出发, 先到..., 再到..., 然后去了..., 接着..., 最后...,是...(时候)去的, 是和...一起去的, 既...又..., 采用...方法, 比方说

- HuDa: « le temps passé » partir de, arriver à, ensuite, à la fin, c'est l'heure de..., aller avec..., à la fois, prendre le moyen de, par exemple.

祝大家本週愉快，交流順利！• On vous souhaite une très bonne semaine et un bon échange! • 祝大家本周愉快，交流顺利!