Chapter 55

Mexican Heritage ELL and Native English Speaker Interaction:
A Case Study of Tandem Language Learning Strategies

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ABSTRACT

This case study explores 1) the potential of a dual language program that provides an English Language Learner (ELL) and a Spanish Learner (SL) with opportunities to engage in authentic as well as mutual language exchange; and, 2) the multiple types of language strategies employed by adolescents to teach and learn language from one another in tandem learning situations. Findings from a transcription analysis of 12 English and Spanish videotaped sessions of one dyad reveal novel and in depth information about strategies utilized in compensatory, administrative, and social ways to extend the flow of communication in tandem learning. Findings indicate that tandem language learning not only provides a space for language learners to engage in plural strategies to promote teaching and learning, but also learner metacognition when peer learners employ interlingual and plurilingual measures to compensate for language gaps. Implications for the study of online tandem language learning are also highlighted.

TANDEM/DUAL LANGUAGE LEARNING: ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

Education in the 21st century includes goals of promoting global awareness and communicative competence (Hymes, 1974; Savignon & Sysoyev, 2005). This awareness is necessary because children from diverse backgrounds should have equitable access to educational resources and language study that contributes to their global communicative awareness. Moreover, minority and plurilingual children have a right to sustain and maintain competence in their primary language. While face-to-face dual language learning is possible, some students may not have access to plurilingual learning opportunities.

Dual immersion and bilingual programs allow immigrant children to interact face-to-face equally with content in two languages and have found to been effective in helping EL students achieve high scores on state tests (Thomas & Collier, 2002). English Learners need to be presented with opportunities to learn language in an authentic setting "where they must use that language, and preferably in a friendly and relaxed context" (Brisk & Harrington, 2002, p. 104). Schools that value the bilingual and bicultural capital of immigrants can act as an inclusive bridge to promote participation as well as linguistic and cultural exchange within the classroom.

While face-to-face dual language learning is possible in dual immersion programs in which the status of both the heritage and primary language are valued, limited access and demand for these programs can prevent access to these interactions. Win-win opportunities can emerge for both foreign language and second language learners should EL students, such as Mexicans who speak Spanish, are seen as resources for mutual and temporal language practice. After school or during school language programs can provide a space for this type of learning. Moreover, opportunities for mutual informal language peer language practice is more readily accessible through tandem learning by means of tellecollaboration.

Tandem refers to language exchange between two learners who desire to learn the other's language (Appel & Mullen, 2000). Tandem online exchange provides learners with opportunities to connect with learners from different linguistic backgrounds who might otherwise be separated by borders and oceans. Schools that value the bilingual and bicultural capital of immigrants have the potential to promote linguistic, cultural-exchange, and language-status parity through multiple communicative face-to-face as well as online interactions.

This chapter provides an overview of the challenges (such as restrictive English-only language policies) and benefits for dual language exchange and language parity, including opportunities for win-win tandem learning situations that promote parity and value the cultural and linguistic expertise of heritage language learners as language resources, as well as the implications of computer-mediated tandem language learning in the digital age.

Promoting Parity for Language Minorities

Tandem online learning has often been studied within the realm of foreign language learning; however, it can also play a role in second language and dual language education in ways that meet 21st century goals. Peer face-to-face and tandem online language learning can also be utilized as a way to promote pride in those who teach peers their heritage language. The tandem sharing of language between L1 Spanish heritage language speakers and L1 English speakers can be utilized to foster greater cultural and linguistic sharing among children in schools. Furthermore, tandem language learning between heritage speakers and mainstream students promotes second language proficiency through authentic language practice with native speakers.

Dual language programs provide a space within which to promote equal language status (Winstead, 2013). Promotion of language equality matters because first-world languages in major countries are still considered to be the dominant languages and carry greater status than minority languages, e.g., English over Spanish in the United States, French over Arabic in France (Beardsmore, 2008; Helot, 2003; Winstead, 2013). This is especially the case with transnationals.

Transnationals generally refer to immigrant labor workforces hired in first-world countries (Darder & Uriarte, 2013; Vertovec, 2001). Transnationals maintain their ties to the homeland as they work in the host country (Vertovec, 2004). These workers bring family members who contribute to the plurilingual

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