Teaching Turkish through Teletandem

Nalan Kiziltan a, *

a Ondokuz Mayis University, Samsun 55139, Turkey
b University of Salento, Lecce 73100, Italy

Abstract

This study aims at teaching Turkish through teletandem. The Italian learners of Turkish have been given a chance to learn Turkish language, culture and paralanguage through competent native speakers who used free instructional resource, Skype. It has been seen that Teletandem Turkish has developed autonomous learners who have experienced language development in learning and in turn proficient teachers in one of the languages involved in the study. Turkish through teletandem may be suggested for those learning Turkish as a foreign language abroad.

Keywords: teaching Turkish as a Foreign Language, Teletandem Turkish, teletandem, autonomous learning;

1. Introduction

At foreign universities, students are willing to learn Turkish as a foreign language because of the following reasons: to travel to Turkey, to know Turkish people who are lively, joyful and vivacious, their love for Turkey, to study something new, to do something different for CV, curiosity, to experience Turkish culture, Turkish is useful in modern world for their career, job opportunities, to learn how to cook Turkish food, to know a foreign culture, tradition, customs, habits, way of life and religion, to study a foreign language abroad, to widen their horizons, to find a better job, to have a new experience, and for them, Turkey is an economically developed country.

As is seen above because of economical and intercultural relations with Turkey, students are apt to learn Turkish. Teaching Turkish as a foreign language is not so easy as it is taught in Turkey. It is because foreign language learners do not have an opportunity to communicate with the Turkish native speakers in their environment. Therefore, teaching Turkish abroad requires some other methods which let learners use Turkish communicatively. Through blended learning, “which refers to a language course which combines a face to face classroom component with an appropriate use of technology,” (Sharma and Barrett 2011:7) the learners of Turkish have an opportunity to talk to native students of Turkish. Teletandem Brazil is a good example for this type of learning. Telles (2006:1) gives one of the aims of this project as “to promote the contact of Brazilian university students with the peoples of the international community and the exchange of their respective languages and cultures.” The components of this project are autonomy, reflection and reciprocity in learning. As Telles (2006). points out, this computer mediated foreign language learning, ( ‘synchronous’ and ‘asynchronous’ ) fosters the intercultural context of young university undergraduates and future language teachers with the peoples, cultures and languages of the world, at simply no
cost. Besides, as Canale (1983) points out the main goal of interactions is communication, and grammar is seen as one of the aspects of communicative competence.

In that sense, teletandem learning may be useful for foreign language learners. Besides, language learning in tandem involves pairs of native or non-native speakers of different languages working collaboratively to learn each other's language. (Brammerts, 1996; Brammerts, 2003; Telles, 2006). In order to communicate, they use free instructional resource, such as the MSN Messenger or Skype (Vassallo, M. L., Telles, J. A, 2006) through which they can see each other and hear voices. With tandem language learning, each partner is a student for one hour, learning and practising a language from the other partner. Then they switch roles and switch languages.

2. The Aim of This Study

This study aims at teaching Turkish through teletandem. The Italian learners of Turkish have been given a chance to learn Turkish language, culture and paralanguage through competent native speakers and to learn and use Turkish autonomously separated by time, distance or both. Besides, this study will try to answer the following questions:

1. How does the Skype function as a tool and a multimedia context of distance foreign language learning?

2. What are the topics that the Italian language learners of Turkish want to learn?

3. What are the features of teletandem Turkish pair interaction and learning?

4. What kind of problems do Italian learners have in learning Turkish?

3. Method

Some volunteer beginner Italian learners of Turkish, who are the students of Turkish language at the University of Salento in Lecce, have been given Skype addresses of volunteer undergraduate students in the Department of English Language Education at Hacettepe University in Turkey. The students have been asked to communicate on Skype at least 60 minutes for Turkish for each session The languages have been switched after at least 60 minutes of conversation. They have not been given any learning topics. They have been asked to learn Turkish as they wish, registering their conversation through the following program: http://www.techsmith.com/camtasia/. Therefore, their both oral and written discourse have been automatically registered. In this study, only the Turkish corpus of interaction was analyzed so as to detect and discuss the occurrences of difficulties the Italian interlocutors had while using Turkish language. Teletandem sessions consisting of regular sessions of conversation were mingled by correction that focus on pronunciation, vocabulary and grammar according to the regulations of Teletandem Brazil. The students were free to learn whatever they wanted to. Shared reflections on content and on form of language and conversation process took place at the end of each session in the Turkish lessons at university.

4. Discussion of the Data

The Italian University students have given the following reasons for teletandem Turkish:

1. It would be a good idea for me to learn Turkish at home without going abroad, i.e. to Turkey,
2. I can polish my Turkish by the help of native speakers at my age in Turkey,
3. I can have a better Turkish pronunciation practicing Turkish with native speakers,
4. I can learn a foreign language autonomously,
5. I can develop self confidence better,
6. I can learn Turkish culture, tradition, customs, way of life without going to Turkey.
The Turkish students who acted as teachers were students in the Department of English Language Education seem to accomplish their roles in explaining grammatical rules and giving more examples. It has been seen that the undergraduate Turkish university students’ teaching occurred from the difficulties and needs of the Italian learners of Turkish. They have chosen almost the same topics essential for beginners to learn Turkish. The topics they have chosen are “greeting, exchanging greetings and farewells, introducing themselves, giving personal details, addressing people, saying what is happening, talking about their daily routine, saying what belongs to whom, requesting, asking simple questions and making simple statements. In terms of vocabulary, they have learned the related common vocabulary items of the topics above.

It has been detected that they have developed autonomous language learning skills in learning Turkish through teletandem, which has been applied for the first time. Learners were both speakers and listeners in teletandem conversations. As Reactive Tokens (RT), Italian learners used backchannels, such as “hm.huh.oh”; reactive expressions, such as “oh really / really, yeah, exactly, wow, good; collaborative finishes; repetitions and resumptive openers.

During teletandem Turkish, it has been observed that the Italian learners had some pronunciation problems because of some missing sounds in Italian. They generally had problems in uttering the following individual sounds, such as /l/, /l/, /l/, /l/, /l/, /l/. The Italian learners uttered [Kiz] for [Kız] (Girl); [ud] for [ü]; [genellikle] (three), [orne:in] for [örne:in]; (for example), [anlıs] for [yanlıs] (false); [meraba] for [merhaba] (hi), [d3]enlikle] for [genellikle] (generally); [kalıf:yorum] for [kalıf:yorum] (I am studying); [kad3] for [kat] (how much); [kavalt] for[kavalt] (breakfast); [ifik] for [ifik] (light); [muvtak] for [muvtak] (kitchen), [lüvten] for [lütfen] (please) etc.

Consonant addition and deletion have also been detected: [teffekür] or [tefekür] for [tefekkür] (Thanks); [atmadan] " [yatmadan]" (before I go to bed) ; [föye böyle] for [föye böyle] (so-so); [bəshim aşrıyor] for [bəshim aşrıyor] (I have a headache), etc.

Besides, some morphophonemic problems have been also detected: [tfalsh:yorum] for [tfalsh:yorum], (I am not studying) [oynuruz] for [oynuruz]( we are playing); The major vowel harmony seems problematic for them:

Some stop sounds used finally, such as /m/, /l/, /l/ seemed to be problematic: “adan” for adam (My name’s), “Benin” for “Benim” (My), “Semptikim” for “Semptikim” (I am charming, sympathetic), “gidiyorum” for “gidiyorum”(I am going), “dörtüncü” for “dörtüncü” (the fourth), “etiyorum” for “etiyorum” (I am doing), etc.

In terms of syntax, some basic general errors have been detected. The learners of Turkish confused the locative existential sentences with the possessive existential sentences. The cases of nouns put them in difficulty, since in Italian language the construction is different from that of Turkish.

“Benim sözlüğüm içi” for “Benim sözlüğüm içinde” (…is in my dictionary) (genitive-possessive and locative case markers); “Türkçe hoşlanıyorum.” for “Türkçe den hoşlanıyorum.” (I like Turkish) (Ablative case marker); “Evde çıkıyorum.” for “evden çıkyorum.” (I go out ) (Ablative case marker); “Kütüphaneye gidiyorum.” (I am going to the library) (Dative case marker)

Postpositions taking dative complements seem problematic as in “saat bir kadar” “saat bire kadar” (until one o’clock); “sen göre” for “sana göre” (According to you)

“Ben Italian” for “ben Italian” (I am Italian), (Subject complement)
Besides, since the use of optative case is different in Italian language, some more sessions have been devoted to Optative Case.

From Pragmatic point of view, since in Italian language, there are not formulaic statements for emotive expressions, the Italian learners have failed asking such constructions due to lack of schemata. Turkish culture seems to have appealed to them for their immediate interest. Only some basic formulaic statements they needed during their tandem sessions have been learned: “Geçmiş olsun!” (May you recover soon!); “Afiyet olsun!” (I hope you enjoy your food!); “Güle güle giy” (good luck!); Gözün aydın! (Thank God/goodness/heavens; Congratulations!); “Aman Allahum/Tanrımu!” (Oh my god!).

5. Conclusion

The results of this experiment were exciting, successful, practical and, above all, at very low cost. These experiments made us realize that the Skype and Messenger tools could work towards the benefit of our Italian foreign language students’ online practice of reading, writing, speaking and listening skills, with the privilege of having visual, face-to-face contact with their Turkish partners.

Intercultural contact has been realized at A1 and A2 levels, since all the Italian learners are beginners. For the medium of instruction tandem pairs have used English. In Turkish communication they used very simple language. In order not to break the communication, the Italian learners used code switching, such as some English words, when they did not know or did not remember the exact Turkish words.

In this study, Teletandem pairs of the Italian and the Turkish University students used their roles appropriately. It has been seen that free instructional resource has facilitated instructional communication, fostering the intercultural context of the young university undergraduates and future foreign language teachers with the peoples, cultures and languages.

Besides, this study seems to have offered an adequate virtual and situational context for the distance learning of Turkish language through Skype or MSN. The Italian undergraduate students seem to have used Turkish communicatively. Having chosen the learning points themselves, their intrinsic motivation has raised their both communicative competence and performative competence. It has been also observed that the Italian learners of Turkish have used learning strategies, such as self-monitoring, self-evaluation, repetition, translation, grouping, note-taking, recombination, auditory representation, key words, contextualization, elaboration, transfer, inferencing, cooperation and questions for clarification. Since the learners of Turkish have been exposed to authentic Turkish language by competent native speakers, they have learned how to pronounce Turkish sounds. Teletandem Turkish have developed autonomous learners who have experienced language development in learning and in turn proficient teachers in one of the languages involved in the study.

During the teletandem Turkish sessions, the Italian learners of Turkish and their Turkish tandems have had the following problems: Late internet connection,, delays in recording audio-visuals, scheduling and language of instruction.

6. Recommendations

This programme may be used in all foreign language teaching programmes to develop autonomous learners in language learning and research teaching. In teletandem studies competent native speakers who know a common foreign language should be chosen. Last but not least, teletandem may be used in learner-centered curriculum development.
References