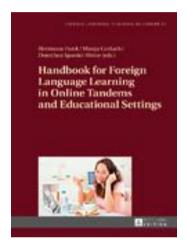**BOOK REVIEW**

HERMANN FUNK / MANJA GERLACH / DOROTHEA SPANIEL-WEISE (Editors) HANDBOOK FOR FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING IN ONLINE TANDEMS AND EDUCATIONAL SETTINGS

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Reviewed work:

Handbook for Foreign Language Learning in Online Tandems and Educational Settings

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Handbook of Foreign Language Learning in Online Tandems and Educational Settings is a 2017 publication of Peter Lang Publishing House from the series *Foreign Language Teaching in Europe*, volume 15, having the length of 324 pages, with special focus at this time not on teaching methods, but on ways of acquiring foreign languages, like the relatively new method of learning languages in pairs and combining formal and non-formal settings. The handbook presents the findings of several researchers of different mother tongues within a 3-year project called L3TASK initiated by the European Commission in the frame of the Lifelong Learning Programme for promoting the acquisition of two additional foreign languages beside one's native language and consists of three large parts – section 1 *Pedagogical Guidelines and Principles for Setting Up and Organising Online Tandems*, section 2 *Components of Interactions in Online Tandems* and section 3 *E-Tandems in the Institutional Context of Universities: Experiences and Recommendations* – accompanied by seven appendices. Being a handbook, this material offers valuable insight into and a full step-by-step instruction-like description of the progress of an innovational language learning project conducted at six universities in Germany (Friedrich-Schiller-University of Jena), Austria (University of Vienna and, respectively, Business University of Vienna), Spain

(University of Alicante, Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia Madrid, University of Barcelona) and partner entities in China.

Although the authors of the handbook use the same terminology, the editors Hermann Funk, Manja Gerlach and Dorothea Spaniel-Weise have found it necessary to analyze closer, in the introductory chapter, some basic terms like *learning, acquisition, communication, communicative competence, task, interaction, implicit learning, awareness*, concepts these authors operate with, and people tend to consider as obvious. Looking at different and often one-sided definitions of learning and acquisition, like that of Stephen Krashen – Input-Hypothesis – or of Merrill Swain – Output-Hypothesis – and taking into consideration the findings of neuroscientific research, it has become evident that learning is a more diverse process, chaotic and even unpredictable, automatic, associative, both intentional and incidental, appearing sometimes as a by-product of other intellectual activities "Language learning, (…) may happen while we are concentrating on a game, listening to a song or reading a novel." (Funk, Gerlach, Spaniel-Weise, p. 22). Therefore no linguistic model or school of thought can embrace all the aspects and influence factors of such a many-faceted domain like language learning is. They might only point at one or another aspect of it. Although language competence keeps on being one of the European Commission's priorities since the 1990s, there has not yet been invented any wonder-recipe for its achieving and, according to the results of the Eurostat survey from 2011 regarding linguistic competence, the outcomes are also behind the expectations. In introducing face-to-face and online tandems as a possible but not widely applied, however in many respects efficient way of language learning, the editors highlight the differences between formal, informal and non-formal learning, pointing out that Tandem learning relies on all three.

After these preliminary, mostly theoretical considerations, section 1 goes on with presenting the way online tandems are set up dealing with all of its pragmatic aspects, like: recruitment of the participants with language learning experience, advertisement for the advantages Tandem learning offers, acquisition and development of necessary digital instruments – an e-mail account and documentation and storage platform for the project (Dropbox). It also deals with training of the staff recruited for tutoring in all languages tandems were offered in (here: German, Spanish, Chinese) and of the participants as well, regarding the principles of Tandem learning, features of e-learning, various possibilities for feedback, etc. Moreover, the section further presents ways of designing didactic materials for learning in formal settings, of determining tandem pairs and conveying a right attitude towards linguistic mistakes by underlining the importance of correction, that of raising awareness for mutual responsibility for each other's learning, ways of creating learning situations supporting incidental learning, of formulating appropriate tasks for enhancing oral communication (task-based language learning – TBLL – and task-supported language learning – TSLL). In addition, this part discusses also the assistance given during Tandem learning including ways of maintaining participants' motivational level (posting to the Facebook group of the project news, info related to the target-cultures, language, respectively cultural knowledge quizzes, etc.), of planning quality management, necessary even with respect to such a highly individualized learning process like Tandem learning, and evaluation.

The initiators of the project organized workshops for associated partners, participants, stakeholders interested in the topic, giving thus excellent support for all persons implied or tempting to initiate identical activities at their home institutions or with particular groups of language learners or just on one's own account. For this reason it would have been useful to provide the translation of all demo materials (posters, various worksheets, questionnaires at different stages of the project, etc.) into English as well, so that everybody reading the handbook can have access to them, or at least give explanations, briefs to the content of reproduced materials like in Josy-Ann Lätsch's contribution (see Fig. 3, p. 61 – L3TASK learning material *Schulkleidung* or Fig. 4, p. 62 – L3TASK learning material *Eine Firma vorstellen*). Readers with no command of German or Spanish will face the same problem later on, in different contributions of section 2 dealing with materials, conversation samples and fragments in other languages than English. Further on, for a better understanding and more fluent reading the exaggerated and compact use of acronyms in one single sentence like in the passage:

> "Taking into account the advances achieved in CA-for-SLA[1] (…), in CA for conversation-for-learning (…), in CA for learning in text-based online Tandems (…) and in CA-for-CBL (…), it is time to apply and re-define it for learning Third Languages in synchronous voice-based non-formal online Tandem exchanges." (p. 217)

should have been avoided. These are only meant as hints for improvement for a possible second edition of the handbook.

The following section, entitled *Components of Interactions in Online Tandems,* brings up considerations of Susanne Lesk, Martin Stegu (Vienna University of Economics and Business) with respect to Tandem learning and the language needs in professional communication, of Lennart T. Koch (University of Oviedo) upon one of the principles this type of learning is based on, namely reciprocity, of Eva Vetter (University of Vienna) upon language use and communication partners involved, of Yasmin El-Hariri, Julia Renner (University of Vienna) regarding strategies used when encountering non-understanding in online tandem conversations. Germán Ruipérez and José Carlos García-Cabrero (Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia) deal in their study furthermore with technological, IT-based aspects of Tandem learning, like video conferencing applications or cloud data storage for the sake of analysis and evaluation. Claudia Grümpel, Analía Cuadrado Rey and Pamela Stoll (University of Alicante) present experiences of Spanish and Austrian students with collaborative learning of German and, respectively, Spanish, at a basic level, and overcoming communication obstacles by means of a common language, English. In their contribution, *Enhanced Language Learning in Non-Formal Tandems,* Mireia Calvet Creizet and Javier Orduña (University of Barcelona) highlight the supremacy of communication results and interaction skills over language proficiency and in the closing article of section 2, *Interactional Practices of Third Language Learners: Principles and Documentation,* the same authors set up a documentation material for interactional practices used. According to Lesk and Stegu, when speaking about linguistic competence, in this respect not only needs of learners as present or potential employees should be taken into consideration, but also those of their employers as 'domain experts' for a pertinent reflection of workplace

communicational needs. In achieving these communication skills in different languages, organizing and facilitating e-tandems at workplaces could be one alternative.

Section 3, *E-Tandems in the Institutional Context of Universities. Experiences and Recommendations,* is dedicated to the analysis of formal, institutionalized settings of online tandems sharing experiences and pertinent remarks. In their contribution, *Integration of Electronic Tandems into Classroom Instruction*, the authors Carmen Gierden Vega (University of Valladolid) and Patricia Manjavacas Sneesby (Friedrich Schiller University Jena) militate for the introduction of e-tandems into classroom activities and teaching curricula of L3 teaching and learning, analyze implications of it and give some recommendations based on personal experience with this alternative method of language acquisition in the academic year 2015/2016. The study highlights several benefits of teacher-led tandems versus self-directed ones, lying in overtaking from students the effort of organizing the whole process, maintaining the activity and extrinsic motivation during the entire period scheduled, offering better feedback on learning and development in language acquisition, guidance and support.

Kateryna Kremenchuk and Yan Li from the University of Vienna, authors of the second study in this section, *The Role of Guidance as a Factor for Tandem Organisation*, share also the opinion that e-tandems should not only be an additional, but a curriculum-integrated part of foreign language teaching and as such they should be rewarded with ECTS credit points. However, they argue, it is not the linguistic accuracy of oral and written communication, but the accomplishment of tasks given by the teacher that should be taken into account as assessment criteria. Still major pronunciation and grammar mistakes need to be noticed by the teacher after having listened to the audio-recordings of the students and should then be corrected in face-to-face meetings.

The practical applicability of the handbook is enhanced by a set of appendices in different languages (German, Spanish, English, Chinese), though with the shortcoming that not all of them are available in English. It contains documents used in the preparatory and running stages of the project, like: flyer, registration form, a list of FAQs, different worksheets, questionnaires and transcripts of the tandem sessions.

Readers keen on accuracy might feel disturbed by typing errors, confusions like in Table 1 page 48 – where the columns describing the features of self-referential and interaction promoting exercises have the wrong title –, the lack of correspondence between the number of footnotes in the footer section and the text corpus like on pages 225 or 232, resulting probably from inserting tables from another source into the text. After all, as long as they do not affect too much the reading comprehension, these small typos cannot diminish the overall scientific, conceptual and, above all, pragmatic value of the book.