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## **2.2 The Tandempartner-Intermediation (Cocktail)**

### *Preliminary considerations*

How many tandem pairs can be intermediated in your organisation per year?

Is the procedure described in the previous paragraph feasible with a greater number of participants?

Is it not enough to simply bring the people together and let them do the rest themselves?

### *Learning aims*

In this paragraph you will come to understand answers to the following questions:

What possibilities exist when a large number of intermediations makes the application of the questionnaires method impossible?

How does a practical introduction, sensible for both small and large number of Tandem pairs, look like?

Whould the Cocktail produce more negative results than the questionnaires?

What forms are preferred by the participants ?

### **2.2.1 Why was it developed ?**

The experience of intermediation shows that the selected, intermediated, and supervised tandem pairs are more successful than ‘the blackboard acquaintances.’ The ‘craft’ of intermediation (see paragraph 2.1) is, indeed, very time consuming. Thus some alternative forms of intermediation, which would be cheaper, but would also maintain the pedagogical quality standard, are sought. One such alternative method is the ‘Tandem-Cocktail’ which guarantees the same successful results in the field of learning languages as intermediation. This has been proven by the investigations carried out in Sevilla (The University Institute of Languages, the results taken from the courses conducted by Carmen Symalla in 2004).

### **2.2.2 What is the procedure?**

0- Invitations to Cocktail are distributed among the locals and the native speakers of a language (posters, leaflets, advertisements in the courses and websites);

1- All interested in the chosen language combination (e.g. Spaniards who learn German and the German Erasmus students) meet in a bar, refectory, etc.;

2a – All participants should wear a singular A4-sized sheet of paper on the their chests with the following information: name/ foreign language proficiency level/ hobbies/available free time/motto *or*;

2b – The native speakers of one of the languages sit at tables in groups of 5-10 and are divided according to their foreign language proficiency levels. Native speakers of the other language sit or stand in a separate group which is not divided according to the foreign language proficiency levels;

3 – The intermediators make a short introduction in both languages regarding the criteria for beneficial partnerships and they ensure that the persons who do not find partners will have the possibility to fill in a questionnaire (this should be mentioned at the beginning of the meeting in order to lower the levels of feelings of stress and exclusion);

4 – Both language groups mix and the search for partners begins - in the case of 2a, by running around and speaking with each other. In the case of 2b, by interviews at the tables where people with the suitable language proficiency level sit. A change follows after a given time ('Powerdate');

5 – The so-created pairs sit together, the others sit scattered, everybody listens further;

6 – The intermediators make a practical introduction to inform all present of the most important rules ( see the table in 2.2.2.1);

7 – The pairs arrange their first meeting and are supplied with material outlining the most important tips regarding their endeavours. Those who are left without a partner hand their questionnaires in.

*Exercise*

How many people can be paired simultaneously?

Why are the people sitting at the tables divided into groups according to their language proficiency levels?

How should the participants be informed about the eventual possibility of handing in the questionnaires?

**2.2.2.1 What are the contents?** *(with the ideas of the alphabeta-Intermediators-Team)*

It is assumed that the pairs created before the practical introduction in the abovementioned 6<sup>th</sup> point will become tandem partners.

The opening

In order to create a relaxed atmosphere, 5-10 minute long interviews in both languages without an intermediary are sufficient. It is adequate if the intermediators go to the other side of the room during the interviews.

Intermediators undertake the explanation of the meaning of the 'fifty-fifty' rule of fairness and elucidate the tendency to simplify the language and explain through translation.

Advanced students learn more in this case, hence:

The emphasis is placed on being monolingual (except for translation training or preparation for bilingual examinations, etc.)

In order to make it possible to maintain being monolingual, the explanation techniques are practiced. The procedure is always the same:

- 1- Assigning an exercise in one language. From experience, this will be carried out spontaneously and predominantly through a specific technique (e.g. most people would explain the word 'big' by spreading their arms wide apart and the word 'small' by making a movement with a thumb and a forefinger);
- 2- Listing and outlining what technique was used;
- 3- Providing a similar task for the other language with the use of the same explanation technique.

Technique	Example in English	Example in other language
Facial Expression	big	
Contrast	big <-> small	
Synonym	speak = chat	
Subordination	a bird > a parrot	
In ascending order	an apple < a fruit	
A list	orange - mandarin	
Derivation	air > airport	
Decomposition	mailbox = mail + box	
Showing/Drawing	cage	
Personal reference	laughter	

A short introduction follows:

Error correction techniques:

A short sketch: intermediary A corrects what intermediary B says lock, stock and barrel, B jumps out of the window crying;

Conclusion: it is all about reasonable correction without hindering the fluency which is the main objective of a tandem. Grammar - why? - questions should be eliminated. The main aims are: vocabulary + fluency + intercultural experience;

The following techniques are recommended: recording with a small walkman/ producing a list of mistakes that the learners should write down and repeat (Rost- Roth)/ subliminal input which means the use of the correct form in the answer without disturbing the stream of thoughts. Afterwards, some advice about the tandem-tips or tandem-diary follows (see material for Tandem Foundation members) and a 'find-it-yourself' game concerning one part so that the partners can start practicing them.

### 2.2.2.2 Other hints

Below are some other handy tips on organising one of the possible kinds of 'Tandem-Cocktail in Bars' supplied by Carmen Symalla. This variant is particularly suitable for the exchange partners with some previous experience since there is less information about the way of carrying out a tandem.

About two or three weeks after the beginning of the courses in October, as soon as the approximate number of students is known, start looking for a suitable *meeting point*. A non-binding survey in the courses can give some clues for the possible number of participants so that enough space is available in any case. An ideal meeting would take place in the early afternoon (after the classes) in a students' bar near the language institute. Another important requirement is a lot of standing space around the bar to enable the students to make acquaintances freely.

Factors such as intimacy of the meeting place, e.g., subdued light, not too loud background music, and a possibility of holding a glass of beer or a cigarette (however objectionable this might be) contribute to keeping the *level of inhibition* low during the first meeting.

The *date* has to be agreed on with the owner of the premise, who usually shows readiness for collaboration because of the expected sales. There should not be a large audience, the noise level should enable a pleasant talk, and the bar service should be prepared for the expected liveliness at a certain point.

About two weeks before the meeting, posters in the language classrooms, on the information board, in the refectory and cafeteria of the university should be made visible. It is also useful to remind students about the meeting in class one or two days earlier.

On the evening of the meeting at least two of the organisers should act as intermediators. The only necessary things to be deposited at the entrance to the bar are the badges by means of which the participants will be identified as the native speakers of German or Spanish. 2-3 rolls of sellotape on a firm holder should also be present in order to fix the badges comfortably and fast them to participants' chests. The people looking for an exchange partner can be recognised relatively easily by their confused look; they have to be intuitively and directly approached by the organisers. Later the badges and sellotape can be deposited behind the bar and the bar service often takes the role of the advisors.

Simultaneously with attaching the badges, organisers invite the participants to establish contact with the maximum number of people whose language they learn and to determine in open and personal discussions if someone is a suitable exchange partner. It requires self-initiative which surely gives advantage to those who are determined or have previous experience.

By their discreet presence, the organisers can only try to diplomatically and empathetically introduce the uncertain and active participants to each other and withdraw discreetly as soon as the talk comes about.

#### *Exercise*

How long does the practical introduction last?

How many pairs can be made?

How high is the expenditure per pair?

Are the explanation techniques different from those used by the teachers?

Why should the first meeting be arranged before leaving the room?

### 2.2.3 Comparison of advantages and disadvantages of 'craft intermediation' and Cocktail party

Some considerations of Carmen Symalla will be presented regarding the advantages and the disadvantages of different intermediation forms based on the situation in the University Language Institute in Sevilla where each term 50-80 Spaniards interested in language exchange are matched with vast numbers of 80-150 German Erasmus students.

<b>Model I: Controlled intermediation with questionnaires for big groups (&gt;Standard)</b>	
<i>Advantages:</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- All the participants (including the shy and introvert) certainly become partnered with at least one of the desired characteristics;</li> <li>- Guaranteed common free time for the exchange by matching the timetables/schedules;</li> <li>- Partners can also be contacted outside the meeting due to the available phone numbers list.</li> </ul>
<i>Disadvantages:</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. A great amount of work for the intermediary/s; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Rigorous matching of the partners 'on paper', personal preferences at first sight are not considered, there is no chance for a change;</li> <li>- Uncertainty in what way the most suitable person of the great number of possibilities will be found;</li> <li>- There can always be some questionnaires left that haven't been matched clearly: either no or deficient matching.</li> </ul> </li> <li>2. Uneven number of Spaniards and Germans thus often matching in a proportion of 1:2 .</li> <li>3. Irregular participation in meetings (problems with time, forgetting); spontaneous participation of students without questionnaires (i.e. persons not on the list). Consequence: a large number of participants without partners; spontaneous matching of 'alternative' partners, who are not always suitable, is necessary; Lack of order and silence during the meetings.</li> </ol>
<b>Model II: Free intermediation by "Cocktail- Party"</b>	
<i>Advantages:</i>	<p>Small amount of work Autonomous choice of a partner by liking and first impression. Possibility of a greater choice and/or finding more partners.</p>
<i>Disadvantages:</i>	<p>The number of participants cannot be foreseen and controlled; a risk of having a disproportion between the numbers of Germans and Spaniards. Discrimination against less outgoing, shy and introvert participants. Dissatisfaction and frustration of the participants who are left 'free' at the end.</p>

## 2.2.4 Are there any other possibilities ?

<p><i>Exercise</i> What models have you learned about so far: Standard intermediation with questionnaires Standard intermediation with questionnaires for big groups Cocktail in a bar Cocktail at a table Cocktail on a terrace ?</p>
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Given the role of the intermediators as something between a 'party organiser' and an

‘intermediation organisation’, Carmen Symalla asked herself: “Does an optimal solution exist that is somewhere between quasi-matchmaking and a far too open relaxed and easy-going party?” This is how the idea of a *half-controlled meeting ( III)* was born: as an attempt in mixing the positive aspects of *model I* and *model II*. But what should still be made clear is what happens if the preliminary choice is not made on the basis of the schedule and the decisions about what time is left to the small groups.

### Model III: The half-controlled intermediation in small groups

#### *Preliminary considerations:*

1. Spanish and German students fill in questionnaires with information concerning their interests and hobbies as well as indicating their preferences with alluding to age/sex/common interests.
2. The intermediary forms small tandem groups of approximately 4-7 people after having taken into consideration the following criteria: the same age group (maximum 12 years of difference in age), the preferences indicated in the questionnaire, same-sex or mixed participants with the greatest possible variety of interests and hobbies.
3. All the participants meet at a given time in front of the entrance to a room. At the entranceway are the lists of the small groups with their descriptions and names of their members. Each group is given its own number.
4. The tables in the room are numbered; all the participants take a seat with the other members of the group at the tables corresponding to the group number. Displayed on the table are characteristics of the group (age, interests, etc.).
5. All participants receive a sheet of paper with terms of reference for interviews; each person partakes in a short interview with other members of their group, whereby the number of possible partners becomes limited due to their unsuitable schedules.

*An important hint:* A partner should not be sought only within the small groups, but among all the participants and thus permanent small tandem groups of 3-4 can be created. After a short introduction to the function of a tandem, the small tandem groups begin their first trial: in two 20 minute phases all the group members get to know each other in pair or group discussions in both languages. They make the first appointment and plan their first undertakings.

The students appear to be exceptionally grateful for the simulation of the language exchange with given topics in both languages offered in 2.2.2. For most, this is their first experience with an exchange partner, hence all the theoretical explanations, instructions and possible problems can be experienced and understood in a compressed form. The trial run is a point of reference for the later meetings and saves the participants from a great deal of uncertainty during the first meeting.

At the exit there are take-away information materials about tandem activities and leaflets with consultation time, etc. In Sevilla they are called “*10 Rules of a Successful Language Exchange*” and tips on “*Choosing Topics*” and “*Correcting Errors*”.

*Time:* Up to 1-2 weeks before the deadline for interview sheets and the group meeting (in that way the questionnaires that were given back later can be taken into consideration). Anticipated considerably small expenditure on classifying the questionnaires, like in Model I, because only creating small groups is necessary and the time planning factor doesn’t apply- Duration of the meeting: 1.5h

*Premises:* A big room with flexible, island-like arranged seating arrangements for small groups. A possibility to eat and drink encourages a relaxed atmosphere.

*Advantages:* In small groups the participants have a chance to find at least one partner in their age group who suits their interests. In small groups the participants can decide for themselves to make one or more contacts according to their preferences during or, eventually, after the meeting. Small groups can easily make up for those who did not come to the event or integrate with participants who appear spontaneously. The lists of small groups’ participants with the specific group characteristics on the tables enable fast and smooth integration and if necessary even a possibility of changing the group.

*Disadvantages:* There could be some discrimination against the less outgoing and less integrative participants.

Exercise

What is an important difference between Model III and Cocktail in 2.2.2 ?  
How does your model look like:  
assignment / looking on one's own  
with/without practical exercises

### Blackboard

In the case of this approach everything is left to the potential tandem partners. To increase the quality of creating pairs and team work, tandem tips should be outlined on the blackboard. These should also be prepared in the form of leaflets that can be provided for at the event.

### Database

The databases on the Internet are a time-saver in regards to both searching for an e-mail tandem partner in a different country (e.g. Bochum which, however, doesn't consider any criteria) and a tandem partner for face-to-face meetings in the same city (e.g. Romance Studies in Munich). A link to websites that delineate the criteria for choosing a partner and forms of common work should be given.

## **2.2.5 Some results of an accompanying research**

Participants' opinions about different forms were revealed by a long-term survey among tandem pairs looked after by alpha-beta in Alto Adige/ South Tyrol 2004. The following comments are some of the results of a written poll (each letter stands for a person, two letters for a tandem pair):

A: she would choose intermediation because it's more comfortable

B+C: searching on one's own is risky because one decides on the basis of superficial impulses;

it is more serious with a structure also for participants

the rules given by a third party are more easily obeyed

E: the intermediary knew one personally and the other through questionnaire, it was OK;

he cannot judge other forms;

in case of the Internet survey doubt about the truthfulness of information, Cocktail is interesting for the extroverts but the questionnaires should be sustained for the others

F: because of the time imbalance fast intermediation is important which gives the craft intermediation advantage over Cocktails

Internet database isn't a problem, in case of blackboard there were certain discretion problems and a tendency to give similar information;

anyway more tries have to be possible

G: intermediation was OK, it should stay like that

Cocktail: OK, a possibility to find common ground with somebody quickly;

Blackboard/the Internet: prefers not to know anything, it is better if somebody else makes the choice and then people get to know each other

H: in this organisation the intermediation was ideal, they meet in bars, in the Italian phase people often join in ( tridems), they do the German phase alone

Cocktail: it's good to be able to choose from many people, for the older it is energy overexpenditure;

The Internet: rather for the young who use computers more

I: the intermediators knew both partners so it went fast; if the partners are matched well, everything is easy;

Cocktail: it reminds of matchmaking, no

Blackboard/ the Internet: OK;

in case of a bad choice an 'exchange' should be possible

J: everything was OK;

intermediation is more serious also for the pair work, a contract gives a mutual promise and a guarantee;

he knows blackboard from Vienna, it functions well at big universities

K: intermediation is very good;

Cocktail: it gives more choice, rather for universities;

Internet: too strange, impersonal

L: Cocktail interesting because of the possibility of looking on one's own;

Blackboard: it is found similar to a 'blind date', rather to be rejected;

Internet database: good because it is possible to make acquaintance by email

M+N: in small towns women have to be matched with other women due to social control;

Cocktail: wide choice was good but in small towns there are too few native speakers of other languages which may lead to long time of waiting;

The Internet: too impersonal

O: current method is good for a small number of people who are known personally;

Cocktail: ideal for students or people of the same age;

Blackboard/the Internet: assumes it functions only if there are enough participants

The following opinions were expressed in the accompanying oral survey :

### Intermediation as so far

It was generally seen as more serious because a 'mutual promise' is made and rules imposed by a third party are more willingly obeyed. Besides that, it is faster if there are inequalities in number of the language groups or smaller numbers of people.

### Individual search

Some participants described individual search as 'risky' because one follows their impulses, while others preferred to know nothing and leave the choice to somebody else.

## Cocktail

In the case of this method the following advantages were mentioned:

A good way of finding a common ground with somebody quickly, more choice, a possibility to choose on one's own;

However there are also some limitations and disadvantages:

Only for the extroverts; too exhausting for older participants; rather for the universities and people of the same age; not suitable for small towns due to long waiting time; "matchmaking-no"

## Blackboard

Is partly accepted, especially in regards for universities; some doubts concerning discretion, comparisons to a 'blind date'; a presumption it functions only if there are enough participants.

## Internet-Database

Is partly accepted, especially for the young using computers and because of a chance to communicate via email before the first meeting. Others find it impersonal and there also is a presumption it functions only if there are enough participants.

Many participants agree that multiple choice or an 'exchange' must be possible in the case of all the models.

### *Exercise*

What were your answers?

The research in Sevilla concerned mostly students. What age group do you think was concerned in South Tyrol?

How will the preferences shift in the next years?

In another research experiment, the intermediated pairs in Gießen and the German and Spanish Cocktail-pairs from Sevilla were compared in order to estimate the effectiveness of tandems based on the self-evaluation of the achieved goals. The results were as follows:

<i>Aim achievement of objectives</i>	<b>Cocktail-Ger</b>	<b>Cocktail-Sp</b>	<b>Intermed. Gießen</b>	<b>without anything- Ger</b>	<b>without anything -Sp</b>
<i>Linguistic</i>	67,5	63,6	66	58,3	35
<i>Cultural</i>	78,3	61,1	55	80	70

All in all, the intermediation supported by looking on one's own was assessed equally effective in the linguistic field as with the intermediation with questionnaires and an introduction.

Achieving cultural aims seems to be strongly dependent on other factors, it reaches equally high results with people who were not intermediated.

The low results in Giessen can be explained by the fact that the Germans in a German environment learn less about culture than the Germans abroad.

The results of people without any support are worse in terms of language achievement. This coincides with what the intermediation experience shows. It is, however, to be rated carefully since the number of statements in these language groups was only 2-3 people.

In terms of the course of tandem work if a partner was found on one's own, from one-third to one-half of the members of each group supposed that tandem would be the same regardless of intermediation. However, a certain difference is seen when it comes to looking for a partner: though they do not perceive intermediation/introduction as a guarantee of success, they find it as a helpful factor in finding a partner.

In a nutshell, it can be said that questionnaire-intermediation is more suitable for small organisations with constantly small numbers of intermediation, whereas other forms are advisable for e.g. universities with an accumulation of people at certain times. Regardless of the intermediation form, the possibility of having a 'second or third chance' has to be maintained and moreover, in case of finding a partner on one's own a form with binding rules/ personal commitment made in the presence of a witness/ third party should be available.

'Cocktail' is considered to be better for big groups of people of the same age, blackboard-intermediation awakes some reservations and the Internet database, with an email preliminary phase, is advised more for young people who use computers.

Considering different target groups it seems to be the best combine various intermediation forms, e.g. questionnaire-intermediation as a standard and 'Cocktail' at the beginning of big projects or in case of big number of participants applying different models one after another.

To compare intermediated and not intermediated tandems another research with a greater number of participants should be conducted to provide stronger statistical basis for the hypothesis that learning languages in coincidentally matched tandem pairs brings worse

results.

*Exercise*

What changes would you implement in your organisation after reading this article?

For corrections of the exercises or information about the other chapters, please address questions to [formacio@tandem-f.org](mailto:formacio@tandem-f.org)