Università degli Studi di Padova

Dipartimento di Studi Linguistici e Letterari

Corso di Laurea Magistrale in
Lingue Moderne per la Comunicazione e la Cooperazione Internazionale
Classe LM-38

Tesi di Laurea

Autonomy and technology in language learning: opportunities and limitations of online language exchanges

Relatrice
Prof.ssa Fiona Clare Dalziel

Laureanda
Andra-Gabriela Nastase
n° matr. 1179850 / LMLCC

Anno Accademico 2019 / 2020

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

Learner autonomy in the field of language learning has long been a subject of research. Over the past four decades, a great number of studies have investigated this concept, exploring its relevance both in adult education and in the school sector (Little 1991). As will be explained in the first chapter, learner autonomy is a complex notion and cannot be simply described as self-instruction. With the constant progress of technology, learner autonomy has become more and more connected with computer-assisted language learning (CALL), which involves the use of computers and new technologies in general to assist language learning. CALL is believed to offer unparalleled advantages to both language learners and teachers and to support learner autonomy. A practical example of how learner autonomy and technology can be combined in a fruitful process consists in online language exchanges, which have become widely popular and accessible thanks to recent advances in technology. Authentic contact with speakers of one's target language is generally considered as a valuable practice for improving language skills, and technology can facilitate and promote the process. In order for the interaction to be productive, however, a certain degree of autonomy is required. The way learner autonomy is related to specific aspects of online language exchanges, such as learners' motivation and the way learning partners perceive their relationship, is the subject of my study. The above-mentioned concepts and my study will be examined in detail in the following chapters, which I will introduce below.

The first chapter is concerned with learner autonomy in language learning. As mentioned above, defining it is not as straightforward as it may seem, and this may lead to misconceptions. Through a review of the literature I will provide an overview about what learner autonomy is believed to be and what it is not. Generally, learner autonomy can be defined as learners' ability to take control of their own learning (Holec 1981). This can happen at various levels depending on how many choices learners decide to make autonomously. Learners need, therefore, to be aware of their role as autonomous

learners and to act accordingly. In order to do that, it is believed that they should possess certain attributes which can enable them to take charge of their learning. In this process motivation is considered to be a relevant factor as it helps learners stay committed to their learning. Since learner autonomy does not necessarily imply that learners learn completely on their own, teachers are believed to have an important role in promoting it. They can do so by implementing the three pedagogical principles proposed by Little (2002), i.e., learner involvement, learner reflection and appropriate target language use.

Furthermore, it is argued that in order to foster learner autonomy, teachers need to be autonomous too. This means that, just like learners, autonomous teachers have specific qualities which enable them to support autonomous behavior in their students. They need, moreover, to teach the latter strategies designed to develop their autonomy. Based on Oxford's (1990) and O'Malley and Chamot's (1990) distinctions, four types of learner strategies will be analyzed, i.e., cognitive, metacognitive, social and affective strategies. A relevant tool for applying these strategies and developing learners' language skills and autonomy is the European Language Portfolio (ELP). As will be explained in the chapter, the ELP is particularly useful for the development of learner reflection, which is an essential element of learner autonomy. However, becoming autonomous in one's language learning may be a complex process and language learners and teachers can encounter several obstacles. It may be difficult, indeed, for both learners and teachers to go beyond the traditional model in which the teacher is in control of all aspects of learning. On one hand, teachers may feel reluctant to embrace the role of facilitators, and on the other, learners may lack the confidence and skills needed to take charge of their learning process.

The second chapter explores the role of technology in language learning and learner autonomy. The use of technology in this field can be described using various terms. However, the one which gathers general consensus is computer-assisted language learning (CALL). Considering that technology is in constant evolution, different phases of CALL have been distinguished over the years. From being mainly a dispenser of materials and drill and practice exercises, computers have gradually evolved to support

multimedia, access to the internet, and to provide authentic discourse. In its more recent phases, indeed, CALL is perceived as an essential tool for authentic communication and resources for language learners. This is possible thanks to the opportunities provided by the Web of the 21st century, or Web 2.0 as it is usually called, which is an important element of computer-mediated communication (CMC). As will be discussed in the chapter, CMC is a subset of CALL and offers learners the opportunity to communicate easily with each other through the internet. It can be synchronous and asynchronous depending on the modality and time of the interaction. Another subset of CALL that will be introduced in the chapter regards mobile-assisted language learning (MALL), which is becoming increasingly popular and relevant for language learning. As well as language learning and teaching, technology can also have an impact on learner autonomy, which can be increased or reduced depending on the ability of learners and teachers to use it adequately. Language learners in the 21st century are, indeed, likely to need specific skills and strategies in order to make good use of technology and to enhance their autonomy. Teachers too are believed to have a role in this process, as will be explained in the last section of this chapter.

As mentioned above, a relevant tool for combining the benefits of CALL with learner autonomy consists in online language exchanges or online tandem learning, which will be described in the third chapter. Considering that online tandem is based on face-to-face tandem learning, the characteristics and benefits of the latter will be examined first. Tandem learning can be defined as collaboration between two learners with different native languages, who commit to learning together about each other's language and culture (Brammerts 1996). In order for their interaction to be successful, tandem learners need specific skills and are required to accept the principles of reciprocity and learner autonomy, which are at the basis of any tandem partnership. Online tandem learning has, indeed, similar features and abides by the same principles, but it is carried out on the internet. This makes it easier and cheaper for language learners to find and collaborate with tandem learners directly in their own countries. However, the distance between learning partners and the fact that their collaboration is usually carried out exclusively online can give rise to various issues. Therefore, learners who decide to engage in online tandem learning need specific skills and strategies connected to the

CMC tools employed in order to benefit from their language exchange and to overcome potential problems.

Considering the two roles played in a tandem partnership, that is expert speaker and learner, one of the problems that tandem learners may face can regard the way the expert speaker is perceived by the learner. Learners may associate the role of expert speaker with that of a teacher, assuming that their learning partners should be able to provide them with the guidance that would be expected of a teacher (Little 2001). It can be argued that this may lead learners to develop a sort of dependency on their tandem partners, which may in turn diminish their autonomy. However, tandem partners are usually not teachers and, therefore, their contribution to the language exchange may be flawed or incomplete. The relationship between learner autonomy and the way online tandem learners perceive their partnership is investigated in the fourth chapter, where my study is presented and discussed. The study consists in a survey designed for foreign language learners who use language exchange apps to learn or practice their target language(s). It aims at investigating whether learners using these apps consider their learning partners as a kind of substitute teacher or just peers with whom they communicate in their target language. Based on this distinction, the degree of dependency on their learning partners and, therefore, their degree of proactivity, are analyzed with reference to their type of motivation. As will be discussed in the chapter, online tandem learning can offer important benefits and opportunities to language learners, but since it is based on collaboration, the quality of the exchange mainly depends on the dynamics that are created between the learning partners.

CHAPTER 1. AUTONOMY IN LANGUAGE LEARNING

This chapter aims to introduce the concept of learner autonomy in language learning through a review of the literature. The first two sections will present an overview of the main definitions of and possible misconceptions about learner autonomy. Furthermore, various levels of autonomy and the attributes of autonomous language learners will be examined with a focus on the relevance of motivation. A further section will analyze the teacher's role in fostering learner autonomy with reference to the three pedagogical principles of autonomy in language learning proposed by Little (2002), that is learner involvement, learner reflection and appropriate target language use, and to teacher autonomy. The learners' role will be then examined with regard to the strategies used by language learners to develop their autonomy, in particular, cognitive, metacognitive, social and affective strategies. In addition, the relationship between learner autonomy and the European Language Portfolio (ELP) will be analyzed. The last section will present the main obstacles and issues learners and teachers may face during the process of fostering learner autonomy.

1.1 Definitions

Learner autonomy is considered to be a wide and complex concept as it can be understood and manifested at various levels and can assume diverse forms (Pawlak 2017). It is believed indeed that learner autonomy is not a behavior that can be described easily (Little 1991); as a matter of fact, it has been provided with several different definitions over time. A broad and widely employed definition is the one proposed by Holec (1981: 3), who states that autonomy is "the ability to take charge of one's own learning". An almost identical definition is suggested by Benson, who defines learner autonomy as "the capacity to take charge of one's own learning" (2001: 8). As can be observed, both definitions imply the concept of control. Benson (2001)

explains that control over one's learning can be considered at three interdependent levels, that is control over learning management, control over cognitive processes and control over learning content. In other words, as Dam (1990) puts it, learners can be considered autonomous when they are able to set their goals, select meaningful resources and methods, and decide how to evaluate their work. These features are also taken into consideration by Little (1991: 4), who believes that autonomy is a matter of "detachment, critical reflection, decision-making, and independent action".

However, as Benson and Voller (1997) point out, in the field of language learning, autonomy can be intended in a number of different ways. According to the authors, autonomy can be found when learners study completely on their own. It can also be considered as a set of skills or an innate ability that learners use in order to learn a language autonomously. Furthermore, it can express both learners' responsibility and the right to direct their learning process independently. Littlewood (1997) identifies three types of autonomy in language learning: autonomy as a communicator, which involves the capacity to use the target language autonomously to communicate in real life situations; autonomy as a learner, which enables learners "to take responsibility for their own learning and to apply active, personally relevant strategies" (Littlewood 1997: 81); and autonomy as a person, which is related to the broader perspective of acting independently as an individual. However, it is generally agreed that autonomy helps learners learn a language "in an active, self-directed way and take responsibility for this process" (Schormová 2017: 46).

1.2 Possible misconceptions

As can be observed, responsibility is a concept common to all the definitions mentioned so far. Holec (1981), indeed, explains that autonomous learners take responsibility for everything that concerns their learning. Little (2007) too claims that learners can become autonomous when they acknowledge that they are fully responsible for their learning process. Nevertheless, the concept of full responsibility may erroneously involve the idea that learners do not need a teacher. According to Little, Dam and Legenhausen (2017), this is the most common misconception connected to learner

autonomy, as not every learner achieves the same degree of autonomy by simply deciding to learn on their own. Little (1991) states, indeed, that learners need encouragement from their teachers in order to become autonomous. Furthermore, it cannot be assumed that learners know how to learn a language in the most efficient way, and therefore a self-directed learning process might be counterproductive (Nunan 1997). In addition, Pennycook (1997) claims that if the term "autonomy" were exclusively used to refer to independence from teachers' instructions, those learners who decide autonomously to learn with the assistance of a teacher could not be defined as "autonomous learners" in any case.

This misconception is believed to be promoted by a new idea of freedom, created in part by the diffusion of new technologies, which may have left learners under the impression that they can learn a language in an isolated environment (Esch 1997). Autonomous learning does not, however, mean learning in isolation. Palfreyman (2018) argues that learner autonomy has traditionally been linked with the notion of independence, for instance independence from teachers and classrooms, but the role of social practices and collaboration in the actual achievement of autonomy has to be taken into consideration more. Indeed, Little (2009) explains that, since humans are social beings, their independence always depends on a condition of interdependence. According to the author, this can also be applied to the field of language learning, meaning that interacting with others is essential for the development of learner autonomy.

Another possible misconception about learner autonomy regards the assumption that learners have complete freedom in all aspects of their learning. Little (2009) affirms that being autonomous does not mean being completely free. Trebbi (2008) notices, indeed, that freedom intended as the state of being completely free from constraints cannot be included in the definition of learner autonomy. Furthermore, as Benson (2001) puts it, autonomy does not "imply freedom of action on any given occasion". In a more recent definition, he specifies that language learner autonomy is "a capacity to control important aspects of one's language learning" (Benson 2011: 58), and therefore not all of them. In fact, there are different degrees of autonomy and learners can be more autonomous in one area rather than in others (Little 1991).

1.3 Levels of autonomy

The existence of various levels of autonomy is also recognized by Nunan (1997). He explains that they are based on the number of choices that the learners make autonomously. In this regard, he identifies five degrees of learner autonomy: awareness, involvement, intervention, creation and transcendence. While the first level implies a minimum amount of decision-making, the last one means that the learners become teachers and researchers themselves, and, therefore, make all the choices connected to the learning process autonomously. Littlewood (1999), furthermore, explores the idea of different levels of autonomy by proposing two ways of understanding learner autonomy, that is as proactive autonomy and reactive autonomy. The former involves learners having full independence and, therefore, creating and directing the learning process at the same time. The latter, instead, implies that learners organize the materials autonomously while following directions that have not been created by them. Simplifying this concept, Benson (2001) suggests that in the case of proactive autonomy, learners have control over both the methods and contents of their learning, while in the case of reactive autonomy, they only control the methods. He names these levels of autonomy as learning management, cognitive processing and content of learning.

Benson (2006) explains that these models indicate that learners have the chance to advance from a low level to a higher one in order to become more autonomous. Referring to his own proposition of degrees of autonomy, Nunan (1997), however, claims that these levels are not completely separate, as they may overlap and reflect situations in which even learners at the first level are able to make some choices related to the higher levels independently. This may depend on the learners' own abilities and attitude towards learning and being autonomous. Similarly, Little, Dam and Legenhausen (2017) propose three interdependent roles that autonomous learners can have in the classroom. They can be: communicators, that is learners who use the target language to communicate; experimenters with language, that is learners who gain knowledge about the target language structure and its constraints; and intentional learners, that is learners who develop an awareness of the affective use of the target

language. In this case as well, these levels may overlap and reflect different degrees of the learners' proficiency.

1.4 Attributes of autonomous learners

As Little (2003: 1) claims, it is generally agreed that learner autonomy requires "insight, a positive attitude, a capacity for reflection, and a readiness to be proactive in self-management and in interaction with others". Autonomous learners are, therefore, required to have certain qualities which enable them to take control of their learning. They are indeed believed to be able to act independently, to create strategies, to reflect on their work, to make decisions and to be motivated (Palfreyman 2018). Similarly, as Klimas (2017) puts it, autonomous learners are responsible for selecting their goals, finding resources and techniques, creating tasks and determining criteria to assess their learning. Breen and Mann (1997) furthermore, propose eight qualities that characterize learner autonomy. They claim that, generally, autonomous learners see their relationship to learning as one in which they are in control; they have the desire to learn; they have a robust sense of self; they are able to reflect critically upon their decisions; they can change what does not work in their learning process; they are independent from educational processes; they can choose the right strategies; and they have the capacity to interact and negotiate with other people in order to make the best use of their resources.

Littlewood (1996), however, gathers these qualities into two main characteristics of learner autonomy: willingness and ability to act independently. He specifies that learners' willingness to be autonomous is based on their motivation and confidence, whereas their ability in this regard depends on their knowledge and skills. These attributes are also considered by Nunan (1997), who claims that autonomous learners must be willing and able to make a great number of choices regarding their learning process. Although both willingness and ability are required in order for a learner to be considered autonomous, there may be different degrees of autonomy, as mentioned above. As Sheerin (1997) points out, learners might be willing and able to work independently, but need a teacher to guide their actions. Furthermore, other learners might feel confident and motivated to learn a language autonomously, but lack the skills

needed to learn it effectively (Littlewood 1996). Therefore, it is important for learners to develop both the qualities connected to the willingness and those related to the ability in order to become fully autonomous.

1.4.1 Motivation

As far as the characteristic of willingness is concerned, it can be argued that motivation is an important factor contributing to the development of learner autonomy (Little 2007). As Dörnyei and Skehan (2005) put it, autonomous learners need to find ways not only of applying their skills to the process of learning, but also of staying committed to their learning. It can be claimed, indeed, that learners may be able to learn a language autonomously but may not necessarily manifest the desire to do so (Littlewood 1996). For example, a language learner who has the opportunity to learn how to plan and organize their learning could perceive this as their teacher's role, and not their own responsibility.

According to Deci and Ryan (2000: 54), motivation involves being "moved to do something", in this case to learn a language autonomously. Motivation can be described as an affective factor of the language learning process, that is a factor which involves learners' perceptions and behaviors toward learning (Ushioda 1996). Moreover, it can be assumed that motivation is mainly defined by the goals set by learners to organize and give orientation to their language learning experience. The importance of goals is also stressed in Gardner's (1985) definition of language learning motivation, which includes three fundamental elements related to the goal factor: "effort expended to achieve the goal, desire to achieve the goal and attitudes toward the activity involved in achieving the goal" (Gardner 1985: 51).

Motivated learners are believed to be more successful in their language learning process (Ushioda 1996). Considering then that motivation is intimately connected to autonomy, as they are both necessary in creating effective learning, it can be claimed that motivated learners are more likely to develop autonomous behaviors (Dörnyei and Skehan 2005). The relationship between motivation and autonomy can also be

considered in terms of interdependency. Dickinson (1995: 165), indeed, claims that learner autonomy "increases motivation to learn and consequently increases learning effectiveness". Furthermore, Deci and Ryan (1985) explain that there are mainly two types of motivation, that is intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation. While intrinsically motivated learners are moved by pure interest in an action that is seen as enjoyable and fun, extrinsically motivated learners are pushed by the perspective of an external outcome or by an external pressure.

These two types of motivation can lead to different kinds of experiences and results. As the authors notice (Deci and Ryan 1985), intrinsic motivation is believed to be promoted and enhanced by autonomous behaviors and to lead to a more effective learning than extrinsic motivation. As a matter of fact, learners who feel in control of their own learning tend to be more motivated and willing to learn. However, there are situations in which intrinsic motivation has to be developed through extrinsic incentives, for instance in the case of children starting to learn a foreign language for the first time. Considering, then, that motivation and autonomy are interconnected, fostering learners' intrinsic motivation also leads to greater learner autonomy (Dickinson 1995). Moreover, according to Little, Dam and Legenhausen (2017), learners need to be able to combine their intrinsic motivation with the extrinsic motivation needed to meet external requirements in order for their learning to be more successful. The coexistence of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation is also contemplated by Ryan and Deci's self-determination theory, which states that there are different degrees of extrinsic motivation based on the level of internalization of the learner's extrinsic goals (Ryan and Deci's 2000). For example, as Dörnyei and Ushioda (2011) observe, a learner may recognize the importance of being able to speak a foreign language (extrinsic goal) while still enjoying the process of learning it (intrinsic motivation).

1.5 The teacher's role in fostering learner autonomy

Considering that language learning is a process that usually begins in the classroom and may continue later in life outside the classroom (Reinders and Benson 2017), it can be claimed that the development of autonomy in language learning involves both

experiences. Little (1991), indeed, argues that learner autonomy is a capacity which can be developed in the classroom as well as in non-institutional contexts. As far as the teacher's role is concerned, learner autonomy is usually associated with the erroneous idea that autonomous learners do not need teachers, as discussed above (Section 1.2). However, the role of the latter is fundamental in the development of autonomy. It is indeed usually agreed that, although autonomy is not something that teachers simply hand over to their students, "learners need to be taught to be autonomous" (Voller 1997: 107). Nunan (1997) also states that learners should be encouraged and given the tools to become autonomous in the classroom, as most of them do not have the knowledge and skills to effectively learn a language autonomously. This means that, instead of transferring information about the target language, teachers have the role of transferring information about how to learn a language efficiently (Voller 1997).

Generally, it is believed that teachers have the significant role of raising the consciousness of their students in the process of autonomous language learning (Trebbi 2008), or, as Voller (1997) puts it, of raising their awareness in terms of independent learning. More specifically, Wright (1987 in Voller 1997) claims that teachers have two important functions: a management function, which is mainly connected to learners' motivation, and an instructional function, which is concerned with the development of skills. As can be observed, teachers have the important task of helping their students develop the two attributes of learner autonomy proposed by Littlewood (1997), that is willingness and ability to be autonomous.

Considering that students do not always know how to learn a language autonomously, as mentioned earlier (Section 1.2), teachers should make use of tools and strategies meant to raise their awareness and skills. According to Little (2007), the actions of the teachers who want to promote autonomy in their students should be guided by three pedagogical principles. In previous publications (Little 2002, 2004), the author explains that learner autonomy can be developed through the principles of learner involvement, learner reflection and appropriate target language use. The author states that these principles are interconnected, as language learners need all of them in order to develop autonomy. According to these principles, teachers should involve their learners in the

process of selecting the learning activities and their own goals. Furthermore, teachers should ask their students to evaluate their progress and to reflect on their learning through written records. Finally, teachers should encourage the use of the target language in all learning contexts.

Similarly, O'Rourke and Carson (2010) explain that the principles of learner involvement, learner reflection and appropriate target language use can be implemented in a classroom environment where the teacher shares the process of planning and assessment with their students, gives the latter the chance to reflect upon their learning, and promotes the use of the target language on all learning occasions. These tasks are also considered by Dam (2003), who claims that teachers should give students the chance to organize their own work and assist them through specific tools meant to help them assess themselves.

1.5.1 Learner involvement

The first principle analyzed here is learner involvement, also referred to as learner empowerment. It is a method which enhances the role of the learner in the learning process by focusing the attention on learning rather than on teaching (Dam 1995). This is achieved when the responsibility of the learning process is transferred from the teacher to the learners, who are freer to make decisions on their own (Wawrzyniak-Śliwska 2017). Learner involvement can be, therefore, understood in terms of a greater freedom of choice given to the learners by the teacher. This means that the latter should ask their students to set their own learning goals and choose the appropriate learning activities and materials for their learning (Little, Ridley and Ushioda 2002).

This definition may, however, give rise to some problems, as Pennycook (1997) points out. The most important one, according to the author, consists in the idea that empowerment is a gift that can be simply handed over to students. This implies a teacher-learner relationship in which learners are merely receivers and do not get actively involved in the process of becoming autonomous (Freire 1970 in Pennycook 1997). Nevertheless, according to Agustín-Llach and Alonso (2017), the principle of

learner empowerment suggests that learners have an active role in the creation of their learning plan, which is, furthermore, negotiated with the teacher. Additionally, Sheerin (1997) notices that this proactive attitude enables learners to be more effective and learn more than learners who wait passively for teachers' instructions. According to the author, moreover, learner involvement is a process which involves the idea that teachers do not actually develop learners' autonomy. On the contrary, even though teachers may have a role in helping and encouraging learners, the latter are the final responsible for the development of their autonomy.

According to this principle, learners need to be given choice and control over their learning in the language classroom in order for them to become more independent. However, it is believed that learners may be frightened by the idea of being responsible for their learning (Little, Ridley and Ushioda 2002). Teachers have, therefore, the important task of supporting and encouraging their students to practice responsibility in order for them to feel more confident and motivated. According to Little (1991), the first step in this regard consists in giving learners the chance to participate in the creation of the syllabus by asking them to talk about what they expect from the language lessons and how they can contribute to the learning process. Before letting them choose their own activities, however, teachers are expected to make learners aware of what they are required to learn (Little, Dam and Legenhausen 2017). Consequently, they should give the students the possibility of choosing their learning activities on the basis of their curriculum requirements. Teachers, indeed, should provide learners with a range of activities from which to choose, depending on their proficiency and curriculum (Little, Ridley and Ushioda 2002). Furthermore, they should keep in mind that learners are not necessarily fully capable of managing their learning by themselves and that teachers are still expected to have some degree of control in the classroom.

According to Klimas' study (2017), one effective method in helping students organize their own learning consists in asking them to create and set goals in their logbooks. Little, Dam and Legenhausen (2017) explain that logbooks are journals where learners record their learning process, including what they did during the lessons, their own learning activities and their own assessment of their improvement. Wawrzyniak-

Śliwska (2017) underlines that logbooks are not like regular notebooks in which students take notes during the lesson and do their homework. Learners have instead complete freedom as to the content of the entries in their logbooks. In this way, they are motivated to keep track of their progress and understand that they have an active role in their own learning (Klimas 2017). Han (2011: 197), furthermore, refers to this kind of tool as to learner diaries, where students "self-assess, record their progress and reflect on their skills". However, she claims that the students' diary entries should be guided by the teacher's instructions, considering that complete autonomy could be counterproductive to learning (Trebbi 2008). In her study, Han (2011) provided her students with a clear structure of what their entries should contain, presenting them with the idea of the "3Rs": Record, wRite and Reflect. She also gave clear instructions about the minimum length and ideal frequency of the entries. In this way, students could learn how to plan, organize and reflect on their learning, and use this knowledge further in their language learning process. Furthermore, the diary entries were posted online and were visible to the teacher and the other peers. It is argued that this may create an interaction and collaboration among students and between the teacher and the students, which can then raise learners' awareness (Dam 1995).

Another powerful strategy that can be used by teachers who want to foster their students' independence consists in training students to find the resources needed for learning on their own and to use them effectively (Ryan 1997). In the author's study, the results showed that most of the students interviewed were not aware of the resources available for learning autonomously, and therefore the teacher's intervention in this sense may be essential. With this regard, Little, Ridley and Ushioda (2002) introduced the idea that teachers should use more kinds of resources and materials in the classroom in addition to the textbook. While the decision of which textbook to use is teachers' responsibility, as learners are not experienced enough to make such a choice, all the other relevant learning materials can be negotiated between the teacher and the learners (Little 1991). In this way, students can become aware of the range of opportunities they have to improve their language skills independently.

1.5.2 Learner reflection

The second principle proposed by Little, that is learner reflection, consists in "helping learners to think critically when they plan, monitor and evaluate their learning" (2007: 2). Furthermore, reflection is that part of the learning process which helps the learner understand the experience of learning and consequently act on their own learning (Kolb 1984). Reflection on the learning process is, indeed, essential in order for learners to create and develop their own plans and strategies effectively (Agustín-Llach and Alonso 2017). In addition, Benson (2001: 93) claims that reflection is a key element in the "development of control over learning". As seen above, learners who feel that are in control of their own learning tend to be more motivated. In this sense, Little, Ridley and Ushioda (2002) stress that reflection helps learners become aware of their capacities, and fosters their intrinsic motivation.

According to Klimas (2017), the most important component of learner reflection is the ability of learners to assess themselves, as this helps them to better understand their weaknesses and strengths. In order to be able to evaluate their work, learners should be "encouraged to observe themselves as they use the target language, noting the circumstances in which they succeed and those in which they have difficulties, and exploring why the difficulties arise" (Little 1991: 53). In educational contexts, autonomy and reflection can be researched through tools such as questionnaire instruments and I-statement analysis (Ushioda 2010). While Dam (1995) indicates the former as a useful tool for reflection on students' learning process, Ushioda (2010) recommends the use of the latter, as it can be considered more personal and motivating. It can be used, indeed, to express in first person the learners' abilities, plans, actions and goals in terms of language learning. Another important tool for reflection is students' logbooks, in which, as seen above (Section 1.5.1), learners can not only write their goals and activities, but also their reflections on their learning process (Little, Dam and Legenhausen 2017). Logbooks or learner diaries are believed to be important because they make learning more tangible and give students the possibility of evoking their experiences as a point for further learning (Little 1991). According to Han (2011), writing learner diaries can also be considered as a cyclical process, which enables

students to return to their initial plans, to monitor their progress and to decide whether they need to change something in order to achieve their learning goals.

According to Little, Ridley and Ushioda (2002), the reflection principle is connected with the learner involvement principle, considering that learners can accept responsibility for learning and engage actively in the learning process only if they reflect critically on what they are doing. Furthermore, the authors stress that the process of reflection must be supported by the teacher, who is expected to help their students understand where they are in relationship to the curriculum requirements. This is important in order for both learners and teachers to have a realistic idea about the students' progress. What is more, as the process of learning also depends on teaching, it can be claimed that teachers have the responsibility of being aware of their own growth as well (Kohonen 1992) in order to create a coherent learning environment for their students. Therefore, they are supposed not only to encourage learners to reflect on their learning, but also to reflect on their own teaching. The importance of keeping written records of such reflections is stressed, as it facilitates the process (Little, Ridley and Ushioda 2002) and provides a consistent documentation of teachers' thoughts (Kohonen and Kaikkonen 1996). These aspects will be analyzed in greater detail in Section 1.6., where teacher autonomy is to be discussed.

1.5.3 Appropriate target language use

As far as the third principle is concerned, it is believed that autonomy can be developed through an appropriate use of the target language during the learning process (Little 2007). In a previous publication, the author together with his associates (Little, Ridley and Ushioda 2002) explains that language learners are required to use the target language as the main channel of communication. Therefore, learners should use it to communicate in the classroom, to direct their learning and to reflect on it in order for them to foster their autonomy. Comparing language learners to children who acquire their mother tongue autonomously, Little, Ridley and Ushioda (2002: 19) state that "proficiency in a foreign language can develop only to the extent that learners use whatever proficiency they have for genuine communicative purposes". Dam (1995) also

believes that using the target language as the preferred language during the whole learning process can help learners become more autonomous.

The importance of this principle is also stressed by Little, Dam and Legenhausen (2017), who suggest that teachers should communicate with their students in the target language and require them to write everything concerned with their learning in the target language. In this regard, they believe that learning tools, such as logbooks, are more effective if the students write them in the language they need to learn. Furthermore, the authors point out that the application of this principle fosters incidental learning as opposed to intentional learning. In the field of language learning, intentional learning involves conscious acts aimed at learning the target language, such as memorization of vocabulary and grammar rules, while incidental learning occurs as the acquisition of aspects of the target language during activities in which the learners focus on the content rather than the form (Hulstijn 2003).

The above-mentioned activities can be part of situations where learners communicate, read and write in the target language during their classes (Little, Dam and Legenhausen 2017). They can also consist in real-life experiences where the target language is used as the main channel of communication, such as interactions with native speakers, but should be fostered primarily inside the classroom, as Ushioda (1996) explains. She specifies that teachers should not take it for granted that their students have the willingness or the ability to find opportunities to practice the target language outside the classroom. They should instead encourage their students to use the language during their lessons, so that they can start understanding the importance of communication and feel motivated to use it outside the classroom as well. A useful tool is believed to be the use of simulation, as Schormová (2017) argues. She explains that simulation of real social situations can introduce the aspect of authentic interpersonal interaction into the classroom by creating settings and conditions as close as possible to those in the real world. In this way, students can have the opportunity to develop their communicative skills by making use of "their learning strategies, language skills, experience, creativity, social skills and cultural knowledge in a safe and purposeful manner" (Schormová 2017: 36). She also claims that the use of simulation has a role in supporting learner

autonomy, as it requires learners to take responsibility for its organization and completion, and it shifts the focus from the teacher to the learner. In simulations learners are, indeed, expected to decide the content of learning and to interact on the basis of their roles (Little 1991) and, thus, to make autonomous decisions.

Nevertheless, as Little, Ridley and Ushioda (2002) point out, there are some guidelines related to the use of the target language in the classroom. First, they claim that teachers should make the communication simple and easy for their students to understand, on the basis of their proficiency. Furthermore, learners should be encouraged to use the target language to interact as much as possible and should be supported by the teacher through "scaffolding", that is suggesting the words they need in a specific communicative situation and giving them constructive feedback. The last advice offered by the authors consists in asking students to reflect on their learning by using the target language. This relates to the interdependency of the three principles. As mentioned above (Section 1.5), the three principles of learner autonomy have to be developed together. Learners must, therefore, be able to reflect critically and deeply on what they do in order to take responsibility for their learning. Furthermore, they are more motivated, and their autonomy grows if they use the target language as the main means of communication during their learning. In addition, using the target language for reflection on the learning process can be another way of practicing it (Wawrzyniak-Śliwska 2017).

As far as the target language use is concerned, however, McMillan and Rivers (2011) argue that learners' first language (L1) use has a relevant role in the process of target language learning. Contrary to the generally negative attitude towards codeswitching in the language classroom, i.e., the "process of shifting from one linguistic code (a language or dialect) to another, depending on the social context or conversational setting"[1], Macaro (2005: 80) claims that "learners deprived of codeswitching in the discourse cannot develop an important communication strategy". He explains that both teachers and learners have the innate ability to understand when the use of L1 is more appropriate during the lesson in order to achieve a particular goal, for example when the teacher needs to give complex instructions or to control the students' behavior (Macaro

---

[1] Definition of code-switching: https://www.britannica.com/topic/code-switching

2000). Moreover, in a previous study, it was found that there is no correlation between the exclusive use of the target language by the teacher and an increase in the students' use of the target language (Macaro 2001). Therefore, it can be argued that, although target language use in the learning process can benefit learners by promoting learner autonomy, L1 use in the language classroom does not necessarily have a negative impact on the use of the target language.

1.5.4 Developing learners' motivation

As explained earlier (Section 1.5), teachers should aim at developing both ability and willingness in their students in order for the latter to become autonomous. Considering that motivated learners tend to be proactive and to commit to their own learning program (Little 2007), it is important for the teacher to promote and strengthen students' motivation to be autonomous in the classroom. Referring to the distinction suggested by Deci and Ryan (1985) in terms of motivation, it can be argued that teachers who want to support autonomy in their students should aim at developing their intrinsic motivation. Intrinsically motivated students do not need external rewards to feel motivated to learn but rely entirely on their internal satisfaction (Ushioda 1996).

According to Deci and Ryan (2000), however, the activities proposed by the education system are usually not inherently interesting for the students, therefore teachers can use extrinsic regulations, such as rewards, to help the students change the way they perceive their learning. In this connection, Dörnyei and Ushioda (2011) claim that internalized extrinsic goals should complement intrinsic motivation through adequate rewards to make it stronger. These rewards can consist in positive feedback and should not appear as a tool used by the teacher to control students' behavior (Ushioda 1996). The shift in learners' perception is possible, however, if they feel respected and supported by the teacher (Deci and Ryan 2000). The latter should also provide relevant challenges in order to help their students internalize the process of learning, that is to consider it as their own.

Furthermore, as mentioned earlier (Section 1.4.1), it is believed that motivation is directed by goals, as these are what determines people's willingness to learn (Klimas 2017). Considering that autonomous students are supposed to set their own goals, it can be claimed that they guide their actions in relation to those goals. Ushioda (1996) observes that learners who have a clear idea about their long-term goals and assign them special value are found to be more successful. At the same time, she points out that the motivation derived from the perspective of achieving these long-term goals must be supported by meaningful short-term goals. Since learner involvement is believed to increase motivation (Dam 1995), Ushioda (2011) proposes that teachers should encourage learners to make decisions in the classroom and set goals on their own, as this helps them become more aware of their identity and their actions. Klimas (2017), moreover, specifies that these goals should not be too difficult to achieve as this could weaken students' intrinsic motivation. Moreover, the resulting feeling of control over their learning can make them feel more motivated (Schormová 2017).

However, in the language classroom context, other types of goals, such as social goals, might affect students' individual goals related to learning (Wentzel 2000). For instance, secondary school students may have the desire to learn, but at the same time they may consider maintaining good relationships with their classmates a priority. Learners' motivation can be, indeed, influenced by group dynamics in the classroom, as Little, Ridley and Ushioda (2002) noticed in their study. They found that learners who are not motivated enough to carry out a task in the classroom can demotivate their more diligent peers. It is the teacher's job then to provide learners with interesting activities in order to increase their intrinsic motivation. Dörnyei and Ushioda (2011) suggest that teachers should include in their syllabus activities related to the students' goals and the topics they are most interested in. In this way, students can perceive their learning experience as more valuable and stay, thus, more motivated.

As can be seen, implementing the principles of autonomy can foster motivation in the classroom, but it has to be done effectively. In this regard, Wawrzyniak-Śliwska (2017) found that, although reflection is believed to be an essential tool for promoting autonomy, it does not always foster learners' intrinsic motivation. On the contrary, she

discovered that the regular reflection sessions proposed in the classroom decreased her students' motivation to learn English, as the latter found the questions asked boring and "always the same". Moreover, as stated by Dörnyei and Ushioda (2011), teachers also need to pay attention to the role that their own expectations about the students can have on the students' actual behaviors. The authors explain that, according to the Pygmalion effect, learners tend to behave accordingly to their teachers' expectations, so much so that if the teacher has a poor opinion about their students' potential, they can lower their self-confidence, motivation and, therefore, overall performance. Subsequently, it can be argued that this may have a negative effect on learner autonomy as well, assuming that, if learners are not motivated to learn a language in the classroom, they are also not motivated to learn it autonomously.

1.6 Teacher autonomy

As Lamb and Reinders (2008) point out, it is generally agreed that learner autonomy and teacher autonomy are closely linked. According to Benson (2001), teacher autonomy is mainly concerned with the idea that teachers have a relevant role in the process of fostering learner autonomy. It is indeed believed that teachers who were not autonomous during their learning tend to be less aware of what is needed for their students to increase autonomy and less prepared for helping them become autonomous (Lamb and Reinders 2008). Therefore, it can be argued that, in order to develop autonomy in their students, teachers must be autonomous too.

Breen and Mann (1997) describe the possible attributes of teachers who want to promote learner autonomy. They claim that such teachers need to be first of all aware of themselves as learners. As Sinclair (2008: 243) puts it, "the teacher remains a learner". In this sense, teachers should be able to understand when they can be autonomous and when not, what they believe about the process of teaching and learning, and how these beliefs can influence their roles in the classroom. Moreover, they should be able to reflect on these issues and their actions inside the classroom. Another important attribute consists in their trust in learners' ability to develop and express autonomous behaviors. This characteristic is also mentioned by Little (1991), who believes that

autonomous teachers should trust their students, with whom they decide to share the efforts of the learning process. Furthermore, just like learners have to be willing to become autonomous in their learning process (Section 1.4), teachers too need to express the desire to develop autonomy in their students (Breen and Mann 1997).

These traits are also taken into account by Little (1995: 179), who describes autonomous teachers as "having a strong sense of personal responsibility for their teaching, exercising via continuous reflection and analysis the highest possible degree of affective and cognitive control of the teaching process, and exploring the freedom that this confers". Similarly, in her study, Gabryś-Barker (2017) found that autonomous teachers are considered to be independent, responsible for their actions, flexible in managing their classroom practices and aware of the learners' needs. They are also described as self-confident, motivated and having a positive attitude to their students.

As far as motivation is concerned, it has been discussed that learner motivation is an essential factor in developing autonomy in language learning (Section 1.4.1). Similarly, teacher motivation is believed to have an important role in fostering learners' interest in learning (Dörnyei and Ushioda 2011). In this sense, intrinsic motivation is to be taken into consideration, as teaching is usually linked to an inherent willingness to educate and convey values. Motivated teachers are, therefore, more likely to develop autonomous behaviors. Since motivation and autonomy are considered as interdependent (Dickinson 1995), it can be also claimed that being able to express autonomy is a crucial factor in keeping teachers motivated.

In order to stress these characteristics and their different roles as opposed to those of traditional teachers, teachers who aim at developing autonomy in language learners can be referred to in various ways, such as counsellors, helpers, facilitators, mentors, advisers and so forth (Riley 1997). It can be argued that language teachers are expected to cover all these roles inside the classroom in order to promote autonomy in their students (Gao 2018). The choice of terminology in this regard is not straightforward. It can be based on the place where the "teaching" happens, as suggested by Voller (1997), who claims that the teacher can be seen as a facilitator, a counsellor or resource. A

facilitator is a person who helps students in their self-directed learning inside the language classroom. A counsellor is a helper who assists language learners in a more individualized context. Teacher as resource refers to someone who provides information on a particular subject. Riley (1997) instead uses the term "counsellor" to refer to the person who helps learners take decisions on their own. He explains that the counsellor's role consists in three steps: helping the learner to learn; helping them to learn a specific language; and helping them to learn a specific language on their own. In figure 1.1 the roles of the teacher compared to those of the counsellor are illustrated (Riley 1997: 122). As can be observed, some of the teachers' roles in learner autonomy that have been discussed in the previous section (1.5) are summarized here.

TEACHING	COUNSELLING
1. Setting objectives	1. Eliciting information about aims, needs and wishes
2. Determining course content	2. Why, what for, how, how long: giving information, clarifying
3. Selecting materials	3. Suggesting materials, suggesting other sources
4. Deciding on time, place, pace	4. Suggesting organization procedures
5. Deciding on learning tasks	5. Suggesting methodology
6. Managing classroom interaction, initiating	6. Listening, responding
7. Monitoring the learning situation	7. Interpreting information
8. Keeping records, setting homework	8. Suggesting record-keeping and planning procedures
9. Presenting vocabulary and grammar	9. Presenting materials
10. Explaining	10. Analysing techniques
11. Answering questions	11. Offering alternative procedures
12. Marking, grading	12. Suggesting self-assessment tools and techniques
13. Testing	13. Giving feedback on self-assessment
14. Motivating	14. Being positive
15. Rewarding, punishing	15. Supporting

Table 1.1 A comparison between the roles of teachers and counsellors (Riley 1997: 122)

1.7 The role of learners

Although teachers have a vital role in developing students' autonomy, it can be argued that all learners naturally express a certain degree of autonomy outside the classroom (Little, Dam and Legenhausen 2017), which they can deploy towards language learning. According to the action-oriented approach of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) (Council of Europe 2001), which will be analyzed in greater detail in Section 1.8, learners and users of a language are seen "primarily as 'social agents', i.e. members of society who have tasks (not exclusively language-related) to accomplish in a given set of circumstances, in a specific environment and within a particular field of action" (Council of Europe 2001). The concept of learner agency implies that "learning involves the activity and the initiative of the learner, more than the inputs that are transmitted to the learner from the teacher, from the curriculum, the resources and so forth"[2]. In the field of language learning, this view can be understood in terms of those actions that learners perform during their learning process in order to develop effective language skills.

Nunan (1997: 202), furthermore, states that autonomy is "a fact of life, for in the final analysis, if any learning is to take place, the learners must do it for themselves". Rüschoff (2010) too recognizes the dynamic role that learners play in their process of acquiring new knowledge and skills as opposed to the limiting belief that these are to be conveyed by a teacher. Generally speaking, Dam (1995) explains that, in the process of developing autonomy, learners are above all expected to participate actively in the process of learning and to be willing to take responsibility for their own learning. They also need to make use of their background knowledge in order to interpret new information according to their own purposes.

The process of learning is, moreover, believed to take place through learners' own experiences. According to Kolb (1984), learning can be seen as a cycle that begins with a concrete experience, which is then transformed into a concept as a result of reflection. Kohonen (2010: 4) refers to this process as to experiential learning, that is "the process

---

[2] Article on learner agency: https://core-ed.org/research-and-innovation/ten-trends/2014/learner-agency/

of extracting personal meanings from experience through reflection". He claims that experiential learning emancipates the learner as it helps them feel in control of their own learning. An important factor in this process is critical reflection, which enables learners to increase their level of understanding, to act on their experiences (Kolb 1984) and to be, therefore, autonomous. One efficient way of understanding how learners learn a foreign language through their experiences is the method of Critical Incident Analysis (Reinders and Benson 2017). This method consists of keeping track of and analyzing the experiences that have an impact on the learning process. In this way, the learner can reflect on both their skills and knowledge and their confidence and motivation.

As Kohonen (2010) points out, experiential learning can take place through interactive practices, such as journals, personal stories and group discussions, where learners can interact with each other and learn from their experiences. Autonomous learners, furthermore, are expected to be able to find ways of having experiences that are relevant to their learning purposes (Benson 2001). Considering that they are supposed to have control over the methods and techniques to be used during their learning process (Holec 1981), it can be assumed that they should employ adequate strategies meant to support them in their learning.

1.7.1 Learner strategies

Generally, a strategy can be described as "any organised, purposeful and regulated line of action chosen by an individual to carry out a task which he or she sets for himself or herself or with which he or she is confronted" (Council of Europe 2001: 10). As far as learning strategies are concerned, they can be referred to as "specific actions taken by the learner to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective, and more transferrable to new situations" (Oxford 1990: 8). Oxford distinguishes between six categories of learning strategies: cognitive, memory, metacognitive, compensation, affective and social strategies. O'Malley and Chamot (1990) instead propose three main categories: cognitive, metacognitive and social/affective strategies. Analyzing these distinctions, Dörnyei and Skehan (2005) regard the compensation strategies as related to communication, which is mainly

concerned with language use and not language learning, and the memory strategies as a sub-class of cognitive strategies. Furthermore, they divide O'Malley and Chamot's (1990) social/affective strategies into two distinct categories. Therefore, they propose a slightly altered taxonomy composed of four main categories of learning strategies: cognitive, metacognitive, social and affective strategies, which are also believed to be the most commonly used when referring to learner autonomy. Cognitive strategies regard the management of the learning materials aimed at the memorization of elements of the target language (Agustín-Llach and Alonso 2017). Metacognitive strategies involve the processes of planning, organizing and assessing of one's learning. Social strategies deal with learners' actions aimed at communicating with peers or expert speakers. Affective strategies include the ability of learners to control the emotions and affective behaviors involved in their learning.

Cognitive strategies are commonly believed to involve those cognitive processes that occur mostly at a conscious level (Ridley 1997). They include inferencing, that is the action of guessing the meaning of unknown words and structures in the target language; strategic transfer, that is the use of background knowledge as a learning resource; hypothesis-testing, that is the use of mental schemes about the target language; and monitoring, that is the action of constantly checking what the learner understands when using the target language. Cognitive strategies thus enable the learner to analyze and process their knowledge in order for them to engage actively in their own learning (Schormová 2017) and cope with problems related to using the target language (Ridley 1997). Acting directly on one's learning cannot happen, however, without a certain degree of reflective abilities. As Ridley (1997: 13) explains, learners need to make use of metacognitive strategies as well, that is to be able to plan and evaluate their work. In this regard, she states that "autonomous learners are able to reflect on their own learning experiences".

According to O'Malley and Chamot (1990: 137), metacognitive strategies involve "thinking about the learning process, planning for learning, monitoring the learning task, and evaluating how well one has learned". As discussed earlier in the chapter, learner diaries or logbooks are an efficient tool that enables learners to think about their

learning process by writing down their reflections. As regards planning, Oxford (2008) suggests that the autonomous learner should, for example, set realistic short-term goals in view of deadlines or exams. Monitoring can regard, for instance, the action of controlling the learner's own level of energy and concentration during their learning time. An example of self-evaluation can consist in the comparison of the learner's current proficiency with the performance of the previous month. As far as this latter strategy is concerned, one important tool that language learners can use to assess themselves and develop their reflective skills consists in the use of the "I can" descriptors provided by the CEFR, which are designed to help learners self-assess their language skills on the basis of their competences (Council of Europe 2018). These descriptors refer to the six CEFR common reference levels, which "can be grouped into three broad categories: Basic user (A1 & A2), Independent user (B1 & B2) and Proficient user (C1 & C2)" (Council of Europe 2018: 34). Moreover, these levels can be used to describe learners' proficiency in different communicative activities, such as listening, reading, written interaction and production, and spoken interaction and production. By selecting the "I can" descriptors that define a certain level in a certain activity, learners reflect on their abilities and have the chance to assess their own progress. The CEFR descriptors are furthermore part of a relevant tool that can be used by learners to reflect on their learning, that is the European Language Portfolio, which will be examined in the section below.

With respect to social and affective strategies, it is believed that these are more relevant than cognitive and metacognitive strategies in terms of what learners can do outside the classroom to enhance their language learning, as they help learners regulate their interactions and motivation throughout their learning process (Edwards and Roger 2015). Autonomous learners are, indeed, believed to look actively for opportunities which help them improve their language skills and keep their motivation high at the same time (Benson 2001). This means that learners might decide, for example, to interact with people who can help them with their language learning and share their interests. This may require that they employ social strategies, which can consist, for example, in asking questions and paying attention to the answers, collaborating with peers in discussion forums, and noticing sociocultural behaviors in virtual settings

(Oxford 2008). Little (1991) sees learning as an interactive and social process, which depends on the learner's relationship with other people. Autonomy is also believed to be developed thanks to interaction. He states that "the most successful learners are likely to be those who are constantly interacting with and through the target language, receiving and expressing meanings that are important to them" (Little 1991: 42). The importance of interaction in the target language is also stressed in Little, Dam and Legenhausen's (2017) work, where the authors notice that in the classroom the acquisition of the target language tends to be fragmentary and must be, therefore, enhanced later in life through authentic contact with native speakers. Among the social strategies used to enhance learning and autonomy simultaneously, the participants in Klimas' (2017) study on learner strategies also mentioned the importance of revising the learning content with friends or family members and using the target language as much as possible outside the classroom.

As far as affective strategies are concerned, Little, Ridley and Ushioda's study (2002) found that learners tend to feel motivated when involved in interesting and challenging activities inside the classroom. Similarly, it can be argued that autonomous learners should engage in such activities also outside the classroom in order to increase their motivation. Another study (Ushioda 1998 in Dörnyei and Ushioda 2011) revealed that autonomous language learners tend to keep themselves motivated through setting learning goals, talking to themselves in a positive manner and engaging in intrinsically rewarding activities that can also enhance their language learning. Referring to the latter aspect, it can be argued that a crucial element in autonomous learners' motivation is their perception of the learning experience (Ushioda 1996). Intrinsically motivated learners tend to sustain their motivation through enjoyable and rewarding experiences, which contribute to increasing their autonomy. Moreover, they usually take responsibility for both positive and negative outcomes related to language learning. They associate positive results with their own abilities and personal factors, such as determination. Correspondingly, they believe that their negative results mirror lacks in their approach to the learning process instead of blaming external factors. In addition, an effective strategy for dealing with negative emotions can consist in lowering "any

unhelpful anxiety by deep breathing, music, humour, relaxation, meditation, or a short break" (Oxford 2008: 53).

Autonomous learners are, furthermore, expected to be aware of the learning strategies that suit their learning style the best and help them to achieve their learning goals (Schormová 2017). However, it can be argued that choosing the right strategies and creating a good initial learning plan is not enough for the autonomous learner to learn effectively and maintain their autonomy. As found in Snow's (2010) study, learning strategies are not fixed. Learners have to experiment and consider the possibility of modifying their initial set of strategies on a regular basis in order to have an effective learning experience.

1.8 Autonomy in language learning and the ELP

The concept of autonomy in language learning is at the basics of the European Language Portfolio (ELP), as argued by Little (2009). The ELP is "a document in which those who are learning or have learned one or more languages can record and reflect on their language learning and intercultural experiences"[3]. According to the Council of Europe's website, the ELP is furthermore connected to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) in terms of the proficiency levels used by learners for their self-assessment. The CEFR "provides a common basis for the elaboration of language syllabuses, curriculum guidelines, examinations, textbooks, etc. across Europe" (Council of Europe 2001: 1). Beside this function, it fosters learner involvement and autonomy by proposing a new perspective of the language learner and user, who is seen as having an active role in their learning process (Council of Europe 2018). The Framework has an action-oriented approach which focuses on tasks based on real-life needs rather than on fixed syllabuses. In this sense, it uses "I can" descriptors, which describe what the learner is able to do with the target language. As seen in the section above, these descriptors are then used to define proficiency levels, which go from A1 to C2.

---

[3] Council of Europe: European Language Portfolio (https://www.coe.int/en/web/portfolio/introduction)

The CEFR provides language teachers with tools and techniques which they can employ in the language classroom in order to teach their students how to communicate effectively using a foreign language. It also provides the description of the levels of proficiency needed to measure learners' progress. The Council of Europe conceived the ELP as a tool to be used together with the Framework in order for language learners to develop their language skills and autonomy (Little 2009). According to the principles approved by the Council of Europe (2000), he ELP has three components:

- The Language Passport consists in a summary of the learner's linguistic skills and learning experience with reference to the proficiency levels provided by the CEFR. It enables the learner to keep track of their progress though self-assessment and other types of assessment, such as teacher and educational assessment.
- The Language Biography supports the learner's process of planning and reflecting on their own learning. It provides the learner with "I can" descriptors which help them identify their skills in terms of how they can use their target language/s. It also encourages the learner to reflect on their learning strategies and cultural experiences.
- The Dossier is a space where the learner can gather materials connected to their learning process, their accomplishments and experiences.

Little and Perclová (2001) explain that the ELP has two main functions: a reporting and a pedagogical function. In the first case, the ELP gives the learner a tool to report and present information about the "experience and concrete evidence of his or her foreign language achievements" (Little and Perclová 2001: 3). The pedagogical function is instead concerned with fostering learners' ability to reflect and assess themselves in order for them to take control over their own learning. As can be observed, this function relates closely to the development of learner autonomy. The ELP can be used in the language classroom too, as argued by Little (2009). He proposes three ways in which the ELP can help learners become more autonomous in the classroom. First, it provides checklists through "I can" descriptors which can be used to organize their learning process according to the official syllabus. Furthermore, it promotes reflection, self-

evaluation and goal-setting, which are all important elements of learner autonomy, as discussed earlier in the chapter. Finally, it can be another opportunity for learners to practice their target language if it is proposed and used in the target language.

Nevertheless, Little and Perclová (2001) point out that, when promoting these uses of the ELP, the learners' proficiency levels should be taken into account. They argue that, as far as the ELP's biography section is concerned, reflection can be carried out in the learners' mother tongue if their proficiency level is too low. It is indeed claimed that reflecting in the mother tongue is still better than not reflecting at all. However, in this case teachers should also provide students with a summary of the reflections in the target language in order to encourage and support further reflections in this language. Furthermore, it can be argued that the reference levels should not be interpreted as completely linear and describing the exact language skills that a learner has, as "the process of language learning is continuous and individual" and "no two users of a language, whether native speakers or foreign learners, have exactly the same competences or develop them in the same way" (Council of Europe 2001: 17).

1.9 Issues and obstacles

As can be seen, the autonomous learning of a foreign language is not a straightforward matter, as it involves a series of processes and efforts which have to be carried out both by the learners and the teachers. This may give rise to problems which can impede or slow down the development of autonomy in language learning. With regard to teachers' perspectives, Little (1991) refers to the expository mode of teaching as the main issue connected with promoting autonomy in the classroom. He explains that the way teachers were taught and used to think during their learning process can have a great influence on the way they teach their students. It is believed, indeed, that teachers who were taught in the traditional way, that is to say in the expository manner, may have some difficulties in shifting their perspective and embracing the role of counsellors and facilitators. Similarly, it can be difficult for such teachers to let the students solve their learning problems on their own if they had always been used to the idea that the teacher should provide both the problem and the answer. As the author claims, it is the very

effort of exploring and looking for solutions that gives the learner the opportunity to learn and become autonomous. If the teacher intervenes without letting the students go through the effort, they might deprive them from this opportunity. According to Dam (1995), teachers should, indeed, respect learners' right to make mistakes and learn from them.

However, even when teachers are no longer influenced by the traditional way of teaching and commit to developing learners' autonomy in the classroom, they can encounter several obstacles. In this regard, Dam's (1995) study revealed that the most problematic aspect can be convincing students to make decisions on their own and take responsibility for these decisions. As argued earlier (Section 1.4.1), students are not necessarily willing to be autonomous in the language classroom and, therefore, teachers should aim at increasing their motivation in this sense. It is also believed that students may not eager be eager to take responsibility for their learning because they lack training in terms of learning strategies and, therefore, cannot perceive the value of learner autonomy (Klimas 2017). Furthermore, teachers should be aware that there are a number of different ways to support learner autonomy depending on students' proficiency, experiences and beliefs (Dam 1995).

As far as the latter are concerned, beliefs are generally thought to be obstacles to the development of learner autonomy (Martinez 2008). As discussed in Section 1.5.4, teachers' beliefs can play an important role in how students perform during their language lessons, as learners unconsciously tend to meet teachers' expectations. Therefore, learners' own beliefs about their abilities can be altered and produce negative outcomes. In this sense, learners who lack self-confidence and have negative perceptions about themselves tend to perform poorer and to be less motivated than their more self-confident peers (Ridley 1997). As a consequence, they also tend to express less autonomy in their learning process. Moreover, the way learners have been used to thinking of their role and teacher's role in their learning can affect their autonomy as well. Little (1991) claims that at some point of their traditional education, learners may perceive grades as rewards for their effort and believe that the teacher should take care of every aspect of their learning in order to provide them with the level of preparation

needed to pass exams. This perspective makes learners less likely to accept responsibility for their learning, as they are used to being dependent on the teacher.

Another important obstacle in developing learner autonomy can regard learners' metacognitive knowledge, that is what learners know about the actions of monitoring, evaluating and reflecting on their performance in order to find the strategies which enhance their learning (Ridley 1997). It is believed that critical reflection on one's learning process requires effort, and effective strategies are not always easy to identify (Little 1991). Therefore, when learners use diaries or logbooks to reflect on what they have learned, they tend to be quite general in their statements and, thus, fail to assess their progress effectively. Han (2011) found that the students' level of proficiency can influence their ability to assess themselves. In her study, she observed that "advanced students were more apt to make observations, whereas intermediate and pre-intermediate students were less successful" (Han 2011: 205). Additionally, in Cotterall and Crabbe's (2008) study, it was found that learners often have problems with identifying their mistakes and thus require feedback from the teacher. Reflectivity appears to be a problem that teachers can encounter as well, as Hacker and Barkhuizen (2008) explain. In their study, they present both the advantages and difficulties mentioned by the teachers interviewed, who recognize the importance and benefits of writing reflections on their teaching in a journal, but claim that it often takes too much time and it is challenging for them to be truly critical in their reflections.

CHAPTER 2. TECHNOLOGY AND LANGUAGE LEARNING AUTONOMY

In this chapter the role of technology in the process of language learning will be explored with reference to learner autonomy. First, the relationship between technology and language learning in general is introduced with a focus on the terminology used in the literature. The concept of computer-assisted language learning (CALL) is then analyzed together with its phases, subsets, related technologies and advantages. In particular, the role of the Web in the 21st century and of computer-mediated communication (CMC) in the field of language learning is considered. Mobile-assisted language learning (MALL) is also introduced briefly. Furthermore, the relationship between technology and learner autonomy will be discussed with reference to the characteristics of the language learner in the 21st century, the strategies employed and the role of the teacher in this process.

2.1 Technology and language learning: overview of the terminology

The role of technology in the acquisition of foreign languages is a topic that has engaged language teachers and learners since the second half of the 20th century (Bush 1997). Starting with the first language laboratories of the 1950s and the use of microcomputers in the 1970s, technology has provided many useful tools for language learning. It is believed indeed that technology "has always played a fundamental and inseparable role in the development of languages and how they are taught and learnt" and facilitated the process of language learning (Levy and Hubbard 2007: 145). However, the relationship between technology and language learning is a matter that has been investigated more thoroughly over the past thirty years (Levy 2016). With the rapid progress of new technologies, the quantity of research in this field has increased exponentially and has focused on different features, such as the context of learning, the number of technologies used and the language to be learned.

When describing new technologies, the most commonly used term is Information and Communications Technology (ICT) (Davies and Hewer 2012). In relation to language learning, ICT comprises various software applications, which can be generic or specific and can also include the use of the internet. ICT is believed to support language learning by motivating learners and teachers and making the process of learning and teaching more enjoyable. The use of technology in language learning can be described using several terms, such as computer-assisted language learning (CALL), computer-enhanced language learning (CELL) and technology-enhanced language learning (TELL) (Egbert 2005). To be precise, when the use of mobile devices is to be considered, the term mobile-assisted language learning (MALL) has emerged (Healey 2016). However, as not all language learners necessarily use mobile devices in their learning process, this term would not define the whole reality of language learning through technology.

Generally, when referring to this concept, CALL is the preferred term, as it "has the strength of being one of the earliest terms employed, […] is established and has some stability" (Levy and Hubbard 2005: 148). Moreover, it is the most widely used (Healey 2016). In addition, the supremacy of the term "CALL" can be also deduced from the diffusion of international English-language journals in the field of technology in language learning that embed this term in their names, such as CALICO Journal in the US, ReCALL in Europe and CALL-EJ in Asia, and many publications in other languages (Stockwell 2012).

2.2 Computer-assisted language learning

As can be inferred from the meaning of the term, computer-assisted language learning or CALL involves the use of computers "to support language teaching and learning in some way" (Egbert 2005: 3). Levy and Hubbard (2005) explain that a broad view of CALL sees computers as a mediator between language learners, teachers and materials in the perspective of fostering effective language learning. Stockwell (2012) too believes that when referring to CALL, the aspects of language learning and interaction between the learner and the technology employed to learn have to be taken into account.

Generally, the progress of technology over the years has improved the way people communicate with each other, introducing the ability to communicate at a distance and in non-simultaneous ways (Levy and Stockwell 2006). However, CALL is not only concerned with communication, as it first of all helps learners practice their language skills through generic tools, such as word processors, online dictionaries and MP3 players.

An important element connected to the use of CALL tools in general is the internet. The internet is "a system of data communication links around the world […] and the related electronics and software protocols that allow someone at one computer connected to the Internet to exchange files and data with another computer connected to the Internet" (Lafford and Lafford 1997: 218). A relevant advantage of the internet and, more specifically of the Web, consists in the wide range of authentic resources that it provides. According to the authors, authentic materials can be accessed through two types of Internet technologies: non-interactive and interactive technologies. While the former type includes tools that provide input in the target language, the latter involves interaction through both input and output in the target language. Examples of non-interactive internet technologies include online newspapers, websites and databases. Interactive technologies instead can involve the use of chats, e-mails and other tools that allow the learner to interact with other speakers.

Considering that the concept of CALL emerged in the 1980s (Davies, Walker, Rendall and Hewer 2012), the tools used in CALL have changed throughout the years. As Egbert (2005) points out, at first, CALL only consisted in software run on mainframe computers designed to enable learners to practice languages. With advances in technology, CALL started to include new technologies and devices, such as laptops and personal digital assistants, and the use of the internet to promote interaction with speakers of the target language. On the basis of these technological differences, different phases of CALL have been identified over the years. These are called technological phases and are described in the section below.

2.2.1 Technological phases of CALL

One of the earliest and most famous distinctions related to the use of technology in language learning was introduced by Warschauer and Healey (1998), who identified three phases of CALL: behaviouristic, communicative and integrative CALL. The first phase goes from 1950 to 1970 and is characterized by the perception of computers as tutors which give instructions and materials to the language learner. The second phase, covering the 1970s and the 1980s, introduces the elements of control and choice of the learner, who can also use the computer for communicative purposes, for instance for writing and using simulations. The third phase is defined by the advent of multimedia and the internet, which have had a relevant impact on the way CALL is perceived nowadays. A few years later, Warschauer (2000) made some changes in the names and dates of these phases, as can be seen in the table below, which also summarizes the three phases of CALL analyzed above.

Stage	1970s-1980s: Structural CALL	1980s-1990s: Communicative CALL	21st Century: Integrative CALL
Technology	Mainframe	PCs	Multimedia and Internet
View of language	Structural (a formal structural system)	Cognitive (a mentally-constructed system)	Socio-cognitive (developed in social interaction)
Principle use of computers	Drill and practice	Communicative exercises	Authentic discourse
Principle objective	Accuracy	And fluency	And agency

Table 2.1 Technological phases of CALL (adapted from Warschauer 2000)

Bax (2003: 16) provided a critical analysis of these phases and claimed that the behaviouristic CALL is "the most plausible and would attract most agreement", whereas the other two categories are "far less satisfactory". He explained that

communication is an essential element in the field of language teaching in general, and therefore cannot stop at the start of the phase of communicative CALL. Furthermore, he described the three categories suggested by Warschauer and Healey as approaches and not phases, calling them restricted, open and integrated CALL. The first approach is similar to the behaviouristic CALL, but the term "restricted" includes other dimensions considered in that period of time, such as the teachers' role and their feedback to the students, which were all restricted but not necessarily behaviourist. The second approach sees these dimensions in a more open and flexible perspective, as technology was advancing and providing language teachers and learners with more opportunities, such as games and simulations. The third approach involves the normalization of technology in the field of language learning and teaching, that is when it becomes invisible and fully integrated into everyday practice. According to the author, when he proposed these three approaches, integrated CALL did not exist, as technology was not normalized yet and there was still a certain degree of fear and awe toward the use of technology.

More recently, Davies, Walker, Rendall and Hewer (2012) proposed a new distinction of the technological phases of CALL: dumb, multimedia and Web CALL. The first phase covers the 1970s and the 1980s and it is called "dumb" because the features of sound and video were absent from the computers used in that period of time. Technological limitations were also the reason why the main type of activities offered for language learning were drill-and-practice exercises, which were similar to the ones offered by the behaviourist approach. However, in the 1980s simulation programs using text and primitive images appeared and started to set the scene for the following phase. Multimedia CALL goes from 1990s to present day and is characterized by the appearance of multimedia computers, which could deliver sound and video and images of better quality than the ones in the previous phase. Although technology had improved considerably, drill-and-practice activities were still a consistent part of many CALL programs.

With the launch of the Web in 1993, the Web CALL phase began, but because of the fact that "traffic was mainly one-way, from the Web to the user, and it was often slow

due to the fact that broadband Internet access was not widely available" (Davies, Walker, Rendall and Hewer 2012), behaviourist CALL "re-emerged, resulting in a plethora of drill-and-practice and point-and-click exercises on the Web" (Davies, Walker, Rendall and Hewer 2012). However, with the consequent advance of technology, the features related to the use of the Web have improved and made the process of learning languages through technology faster and more enjoyable than ever. In the 21st century indeed, the emergence of Web 2.0 and mobile learning has started to play a relevant part in this field, as will be introduced in the following sections.

2.2.2 Web 2.0

The term Web 2.0 was proposed by O'Reilly (2005) during a series of conferences in 2004. Although the term may give the impression that it refers to a new version of the Web, it refers in fact to a concept that aims at integrating new technologies and the emergence of new perceptions about how the Web is used (Walker, Davies and Hewer 2012). In particular, it introduces the use of more recent tools such as blogs, wikis, social networks and virtual worlds, which are based on collaboration and interaction among their users. This collaborative approach is one of the main characteristics of Web 2.0, which appears as a more democratic version of the Web as it was initially intended. Furthermore, O'Reilly (2005) emphasizes the importance of the concept "Web as platform", where users can create, modify and share content through new types of networks (for example wireless) and devices (for example mobile devices).

In Table 2.2 the main features of Web 2.0 and Web 1.0 (i.e. what the Web before Web 2.0 is commonly called) are presented and compared. As can be seen, the concept of user participation and collaboration is present in many characteristics of Web 2.0, such as the perspective of the Web as a platform, as content, as a place for anyone willing to try, as conversation and the shift from Web as read-only to Web as read-write. In addition, the concept of openness is highlighted when terms such as "copyleft" and "commons" are mentioned, which refer to cases in which "authors agree to reciprocal forms of ownership and licensing for creative work in the public domain" (Guth and Thomas 2010: 42). The appearance of blogs and social networks can be furthermore

considered a relevant tool for a decentralized dissemination of information and interaction among users. Therefore, it can be argued that Web 2.0 offers a wider range of opportunities than Web 1.0, which can also benefit language learners.

Web 1.0	Web 2.0
Web as Read-only	Web as Read-Write
Web as Medium: where content is transmitted from a webmaster or company to an audience.	Web as Platform: where content can be stored, created, shared, remixed and commented by users.
Web of large documents.	Web of small pieces of data.
Web of Software: If a user buys and downloads a piece of software but doesn't use it, the company still makes a profit.	Web of Content: If people do not use the Web-based application, the application does not exist (nor the company or start-up behind it).
Web of geeks and techies: HTML knowledge needed.	Web of anyone willing to try: Web-based publishing platforms (e.g. blogs, wikis), no need of technological language.
Web as Broadcast: One to many.	Web as Conversation: Many to many.
Web of Search Engines: You go to the Web to find what's out there.	Web of RSS: Content and data can be subscribed to and "delivered" to the user.
Web of Copyrighted Content	Web of Copyleft and Commons: Content can be licensed for re-use and derivative works.
Web of Forums	Web of Blogs and Social Networks

Table 2.2 Web 1.0 vs. Web 2.0 (adapted from Guth and Thomas 2010: 43)

As can be seen, Web 2.0 offers faster internet connections and a number of online tools that enable users to create documents, communicate with each other, work away from home (Walker, Davies and Hewer 2012) and, in general, to engage in a variety of

activities which can be useful to the purpose of language learning. Peachy (2009: 3) specifies that Web 2.0 can help learners use their language skills "to build networks and develop relationships with real people", collaborate with others, create products, share their knowledge, engage in motivating activities and learn from each other.

2.2.3 Mobile-assisted language learning

The role of mobile devices in language learning has started to attract more and more attention over the past few years (Stockwell 2016). This is believed to be due to the constant technological progress and the increasing use of mobile devices, which are commonly considered to have great potential in language learning. Learning languages through mobile devices is generally referred to as mobile-assisted language learning (MALL), which is a subset of CALL and indicates that language learning is "based upon the use of mobile devices"[4], such as smartphones, MP3 players and tablets. Among these, mobile phones are the kind of technology that has received most attention from educators mostly because they cost less than computers but still have a number of useful functions, such as access to the internet and internet browsers (Stockwell 2010).

It is believed that "MALL differs from computer-assisted language learning in its use of personal, portable devices that enable new ways of learning emphasizing continuity or spontaneity of access and interaction across different contexts of use" (Kukulska-Hulme and Shield 2008: 3). Generally, it is argued that MALL presents two main advantages in comparison to learning through traditional computers: portability and the capacity to interact with the surroundings (Stockwell 2016). Mobile devices "can be carried around at any time of the day, including to nonlearning locations, meaning that they can be used at any time", and they enable their users to interact with the surroundings thanks to the global positioning systems often incorporated in them (Stockwell 2016: 299). With reference to language learning, MALL gives learners the chance to access authentic learning materials from any place and at any time, and to use the target language in authentic situations, for example checking the menu on a restaurant website in the target

---

[4] EUROCALL article on MALL: https://www.eurocall-languages.org/sigs/mobile-assisted-language-learning-mall-sig-homepage

language. Access to online content can also take place through mobile applications (apps) designed to help learners practice their language skills. For example, Bàrcena et al. (2015) carried out research showing the potential of language-learning apps for both students and teachers.

Furthermore, Stockwell and Hubbard (2013: 4) suggest that the greatest difference between mobile devices and desktop computers consists in the fact that "the primary function of mobile devices has been for personal and/or social purposes, as opposed to work or study purposes". Therefore, the presence of personal and social apps on mobile devices, such as apps for communicating with others (for example, Facebook and Twitter), may give learners the impression that such devices are not suitable for learning. Furthermore, the limited screen size of mobile phones and the distracting environments where they are commonly used may deteriorate the learning experience (Reinders and Hubbard 2013). However, it can be claimed that the social feature of mobile phones can also benefit language learning. Considering that MALL enables learners to communicate with other people anywhere and at any time (Walker and Davies 2012), it can be argued that interaction with speakers of the target language through mobile devices is more straightforward and has the potential of enhancing language learning.

2.2.4 Computer-mediated communication

As mentioned earlier, the advent of the Web gave rise to a number of new opportunities for the field of language learning. One of these consists in the possibility of interacting directly and inexpensively with other people who learn or speak the target language. This is commonly referred to as computer-mediated communication (CMC), which is considered a subcategory of CALL, "with its emphasis on learners communicating with each other using the Internet" (Healey 2016: 11). CMC has existed since the 1960s but started to become more common in the 1990s (Warschauer 1996) as a result of the diffusion of the Web. Since then, and with increasing ease thanks to the constant advances of technology, learners have had the chance to improve their language skills through communication mediated by computers and, more recently, mobile devices. In

particular, research has shown that CMC aimed at promoting interaction between people with different mother tongues and cultures has linguistic and affective benefits (Abrams 2006). It is indeed reported to improve attitudes toward the target language and to help learners develop fluency in the target language.

As indicated by Warschauer (1996), this type of communication can be divided into two categories: asynchronous and synchronous. While the former is a form of non-simultaneous communication and can be carried out through tools such as e-mail, the latter is simultaneous and consists in real-time chat sessions between two or more people. Another classification of CMC regards the number of people that take part in the communication (Levy and Stockwell 2006). The interaction can be from one individual to another individual (one-to-one communication) or from one individual to multiple recipients. While in the former case the communication tends to be more private and therefore can lead to a more open interaction, in the latter participants are exposed to the input of more than one person and are expected to show more caution as to their messages, considering that their communication is no longer private and that the participants in such chats do not usually know each other well.

As far as asynchronous CMC is concerned, it is generally argued that e-mail is the most popular tool. E-mail can be defined as "an asynchronous text-based medium which enables anybody with an Internet connection to send messages to one or more people similarly connected" (Walker, Davies and Hewer 2012). The advantage of e-mail and asynchronous communication in general is that the participants involved in the communication do not have to be online at the same time in order to communicate. When using it to interact with speakers of the target language from different cultural backgrounds, it is argued that it promotes personal connections and enables the participants to learn about each other and also about themselves (Lomicka 2006). Moreover, e-mail has recently become a tool that can also be used on mobile devices, such as smartphones. This is believed to enable learners to be more flexible and freer when they use e-mail to communicate in their target language (Levy and Stockwell 2006).

As regards synchronous CMC, the relevance of chat and other synchronous tools in language learning has been widely investigated. It is claimed that simultaneous communication has a number of advantages, such as the rapidity of the interaction and the fact that is takes place in real time (Lomicka 2006). Furthermore, most of CMC nowadays provides users with the possibility to exchange not only text message but also audio and video files (Godwin-Jones 2011). In addition, the conversations tend to be more spontaneous than in e-mail. This can lead to misunderstandings but can also foster negotiation, which is more likely to occur when the interaction is simultaneous (Levy and Stockwell 2006). Negotiation of meaning occurs when the participants cooperate in order to correct possible misinterpretations in their interaction (Abrams 2006). Levy and Stockwell (2006) claim that synchronicity encourages the learners involved in the conversation to ask each other for information instead of checking other resources.

In particular, chat rooms can be either open or closed, as the authors point out. Open chat rooms give learners the chance to communicate with any speaker of the target language that is willing to use this tool. It can be argued that this is helpful as learners are exposed to authentic communication, but in this case, they can also come into contact with inappropriate language or distractions. In closed chat rooms instead, the participants are usually only learners, for example learners of a class, or the learners and the teacher. This kind of environment is more controlled but also more limited than open chat rooms. As opposed to asynchronous CMC, where users have time to edit their messages before sending them to their partners, it is claimed that the use of chat can put language learners under pressure as they have to read the messages and provide an answer quickly "with little time to reflect on the quality of the language used" (Walker, Davies and Hewer 2012). However, chat rooms can also be asynchronous. These store the messages sent and enable the users to reply at any time.

Generally, when using the internet to communicate, users are expected to follow some rules in order to engage in respectful and profitable interactions. These rules are called netiquette and consist in general guidelines for communicating properly online (Shea 1994). For instance, according to the author, in online environments, users should follow the same standards of behavior they adopt in real life. Another example consists

in the limitation of "flaming", that is the expression of an opinion through emotionally driven and often offensive comments. "Flaming" is considered to be a negative side of anonymity, which is an option of online communication, especially of open chat sessions (Levy and Stockwell 2006). On the other hand, Shea (1994) suggests that users should take advantage of their anonymity and create a good image of themselves online. This involves paying attention to their spelling, grammar and the content to be shared. As far as the latter is concerned, when communicating online, users are also advised to share their knowledge in order to enrich the Web and its users. In this way, CMC can be a medium through which expert knowledge can be spread.

2.2.5 Advantages of CALL

Technology use in language learning is broadly acknowledged to be relevant today and the benefits that CALL can bring to the process of learning and teaching foreign languages are a significant subject of discussion in this field (Li Li 2016). Teachers and learners can decide to use technology to support their language practices for a number of reasons. It can be argued that one of the main motivations in this regard consists in the opportunity of using authentic linguistic resources, which make it easier for learners to interact with the speakers and cultures of the target language (Luke 2006). This possibility "can provide a realistic and even in-depth look at the target culture that is not possible through conventional means – teachers speaking to classrooms" (Bush 1997: 303). As Li Li (2016) points out, authentic materials give learners the chance to use language in real-life contexts and develop their communicative skills.

A further benefit of CALL is reported to be the immediate and individualized feedback that CALL programs can offer to its users. Considering that feedback is a relevant element of the language learning process (Li Li 2016), it can be argued that it should also be an integral part of computer-assisted learning. In an evaluation conducted by the TELL Consortium, University of Hull, it was reported that students consider immediate feedback to be the most important feature of CALL software (Davies and Hewer 2012). It was especially useful for improving their performance in grammar, as they could receive immediate feedback after completing their exercises on the computer. This is an

opportunity that conventional language instruction rarely provides, as corrections and feedback from the teacher usually require some time. Luke (2006) too stresses the importance of instantaneous feedback provided by many computer programs. For instance, he claims that learners who engage in online quizzes receive immediate corrections, suggestions and grades, which help them have a quick overview of their performance and progress. It can be argued that this can also support their motivation and engagement in their learning.

In this connection, it is commonly believed that the use of technology "is motivating both for students and for teachers" and "makes the learning process more enjoyable" (Davies and Hewer 2012). As discussed in the previous chapter, motivation is an essential factor in language learning. According to Luke (2006), language learners generally enjoy practicing their skills through the use of computers and online resources. This can make them feel more motivated and engaged in their own learning. As Egbert (2005) points out, both young and older language learners can benefit from the use of technology in terms of motivation. He explains that children usually feel motivated to do well when they are asked to complete tests online, such as fill-in-the-blank or multiple-choice exercises. Similarly, older students' motivation may increase when they use technologies which enable them to access the information they need easily and to interact with speakers of their target language immediately.

Another important advantage of using CALL consists in the possibility of individualizing the learning process. Li Li (2016) argues that each learner is an individual and, therefore, has different learning needs and uses different learning strategies. By means of CALL, learners can have access to an individualized learning program which helps them learn at their own pace and according to their own learning style. As Luke (2006: 29) puts it, CALL allows learners "to work on materials that are personally interesting and that are at their individual level of proficiency". For instance, many websites provide language materials according to proficiency levels or topics of interest. Therefore, learners can choose the resources that help them focus on what they might consider most important in their learning process at a certain time and give them the chance to learn more effectively. Considering that conventional education usually

treats students as a whole, the individual needs of the students tend to be neglected (Bush 1997). Therefore, the individualization offered by technology use in language learning can solve this problem. Learners have the chance to control their learning materials and, consequently, take control of their own learning process. As can be observed, the idea of control relates this advantage to the concept of learner autonomy, which is also another important advantage offered by CALL, as will be discussed in the following section.

2.3 Technology and learner autonomy

In the previous section it was claimed that CALL can increase learner motivation and engagement. Considering that these are essential elements of learner autonomy, as discussed in the first chapter, it can be argued that CALL can also promote learner autonomy. Technology started to have an impact on the field of learner autonomy in the mid-1990s, when the advent of the Web made it possible for its users to communicate and collaborate with each other online (Reinders and White 2016). Further technological developments and the increase in online resources and software have offered visibility and accessibility to technologies for learning and contributed to creating an increasing interest in the relationship between learner autonomy and technology in the field of language learning (Godwin-Jones 2011). It is claimed that there has been a convergence of the two concepts over the last two decades. Reinders and White (2016: 150) indeed explain that, while in the past the fields of learner autonomy and technology were completely separate, recently they "have moved together and started to exert mutual influences". Furthermore, the intertwining of these domains has led to less formality and more learner control on one hand and more locations for learning and pedagogies on the other hand.

The focus on learner autonomy in the field of technology in language learning is furthermore visible in the shift of perspective in the definitions of CALL proposed throughout the years. In 1997, Levy (1997: 1) defined CALL as "the search for and study of applications of computer in language teaching and learning", suggesting that technology was hardly involved in language learning. Later, as seen in Section 2.2,

Egbert (2005: 3), described CALL as the use of computers "to support language teaching and learning in some way", implying that computers were already being used in the process of language learning. As can be inferred, these two definitions mainly focus on the role of computers and on the concept of teaching rather than learning. More recently however, Beatty's (2010: 7) definition shifted the focus to the learner by defining CALL as "any process in which a learner uses a computer and, as a result, improves his or her language". This definition implies that it is learners, not teachers, who take the initiative of learning, expressing in this way a certain degree of autonomy (Chik 2018).

2.3.1 Benefits and limitations of technology for learner autonomy

The influence of technology on language learning is believed to change the perception of learner autonomy, which is now seen in terms of the ability to explore and take advantage of different learning contexts with technology as a facilitator (Reinders and White 2011). As pointed out by Warschauer, Turbee and Roberts (1996), an appropriate use of technology can enhance learner autonomy, as it can offer language learners a greater degree of control over their language learning process. In particular, learners can use computer networks to communicate with other students, with their teachers or with native speakers in order to practice their language skills. It is pointed out that thanks to asynchronous CMC, such as e-mail, they have more control over the time and place of their interactions and can therefore manage their learning process more freely. Ackerley (2003: 28) observes that CMC may also be beneficial for the less confident students who do not have the chance to participate in the traditional classroom hour, by allowing "all students equal opportunities to take part since contributions need not be made within a fixed time in class and the amount of time they spend producing a message is not limited by the presence or influence of other members of the class". Thanks to technology, students can indeed take their own time and use the resources they need in order to create and improve their language productions.

Benson (2001: 139), furthermore, argues that the Internet can provide language learners support in terms of autonomy, as it enables them to "study whenever they want using a

potentially unlimited range of authentic materials". Similarly, Reinders and Hubbard (2013) point out that technology enables learners to have access to and use authentic materials that are pertinent to their own interests. In this way, they can become less dependent on teachers and the materials provided by them and more responsible for their learning process. As argued above, the internet also offers learners the chance to interact with each other and with other target language users. This advantage is believed to be important when it comes to learner autonomy, considering that this kind of communication is difficult to promote in a conventional language class (Benson 2001). Reinders and White (2011) claim that technology has a role in supporting the learning process by increasing the opportunities for interaction and learning in less formal contexts. Thanks to CMC, learners can have access to virtual communities made up of speakers of the target language who are eager to interact with them (Ackerley 2003). In this way, the interdependence that develops among learners and their peers is believed to lead to an environment which focuses more on learners than on the teacher. Moreover, when learners have the chance to engage in authentic communication with other speakers of their target language, independent choices are fostered. In this way, they can increase their learning skills and develop a critical perspective of their learning process (Warschauer, Turbee and Roberts 1996).

Another important benefit of CALL for learner autonomy is believed to be the permanency of the written text (Ackerely 2003). The author explains that text permanency refers to the possibility of editing a text before sending it. This gives learners more control over their productions and may reduce the pression of more anxious students, who have the chance to review and possibly unsend their productions before allowing them to be read by the audience. This feature is also considered to support reflection, which is an important element in learner autonomy as discussed in the first chapter, by providing learners with tangible written recordings on which to reflect. In addition, technology makes it easier for learners to monitor and record their learning progress by providing them with tools such as electronic portfolios, which are "specifically designed to encourage reflection and to support informed decision making" (Reinders and Hubbard 2013: 9).

As far as the constraints of CALL for learner autonomy are concerned, the authors argue that learners cannot benefit from the advantages provided by technology if they do not have the knowledge and skills necessary for using it effectively for their learning goals. This means that having access to a fairly unlimited range of materials is not enough if learners are not able to select the ones that are relevant to their learning purposes. Furthermore, the authentic materials retrieved by learners could be inaccessible from a linguistic point of view. For example, a learner may find interesting authentic materials, but may not be proficient enough to understand and process them properly. This can demotivate learners and, therefore, reduce their autonomy. Another limitation pointed out by Reinders and Hubbard (2013) regards the use of multimedia. When combined with an appropriate learning plan, multimedia content can be useful as it provides learners with additional information in various forms, such as audio, images and video. However, multimedia can be a source of distraction for the learner, who may not be able to use it effectively for learning. As can be observed, the constraints relative to the use of technology for learner autonomy are mainly concerned with the capacities and knowledge of the learner, who is expected to be able to make effective use of the tools provided by technology. In the following section the attributes and competences of autonomous language learners who use technology for learning purposes are introduced.

2.3.2 Attributes and competences of the learner

As discussed in the first chapter, learner autonomy is generally described as "the ability to take charge of one's own learning" (Holec 1981: 3). When applying this definition to the process of learning languages with the aid of technology, two important considerations can be made (Chik 2018). First, learners are expected to take charge of their own learning through technological practices and in digital contexts. This means that they need to know how to find adequate language learning resources and materials online. Considering that the internet provides the user with a potentially unlimited number of materials as mentioned in the section above, language learners need to be able to distinguish quality materials and to select those which are most relevant for their learning purposes. The second consideration regards the learners' capacity to take charge of their own learning according to their language learning needs. The author

specifies indeed that learners are expected to be aware of aspects such as their proficiency, learning styles and preferences in terms of language practices so that they are able to select the most appropriate language tools and resources.

Nevertheless, in order to successfully retrieve these materials and resources and to use them effectively, it can be argued that learners need to be first of all familiar with and able to use technology for their learning purposes. Although in the 21st century new technologies tend to be an integral part of learners' lives as they have been normalized over the years (Section 2.2.1), it should not be taken for granted that learners know how to use these technologies for learning (Guerin et al. 2010). Healey et al. (2008) designed three main technology goals consisting in a total of eleven standards, which aim at describing the knowledge and skills language learners are expected to have, and the appropriate use of technology they are expected to make. These goals and standards are presented in Figure 2.3.

These issues are addressed by Guerin et al. (2010) too, who, however, created a different categorization of technology standards for language learners. The authors suggest that learners 2.0, that is learners in the 21st century, should develop a set of skills that enables them to learn effectively through the use of technology. They distinguish between two categories of skills: basic skills and high order skills. The basic skills consist in three categories: create, organize and share. They can be referred to as digital literacy, that is the "basic understanding of and ability with computer functions, including Internet use" (Healey et al. 2008: 43). The skill "create" refers to the learner's ability to edit, integrate, correlate digital information and to manage content and security issues, such as privacy and intellectual property rights. "Organize" involves the learner's capacity to search for, find, categorize and evaluate information online. The third category includes the ability to publish online, to master exchanges of knowledge and contacts, to communicate through new media, and to collaborate and relate with other people.

TESOL Technology standards for language learners

Goal 1: Language learners demonstrate foundational knowledge and skills in technology for a multilingual world.

- Standard 1: Language learners demonstrate basic operational skills in using various technology tools and internet browsers.
- Standard 2: Language learners are able to use available input and output devices (e.g., keyboard, mouse, printer, headset, microphone, media player, electronic whiteboard).
- Standard 3: Language learners exercise appropriate caution when using online sources and when engaging in electronic communication.
- Standard 4: Language learners demonstrate basic competence as users of technology.

Goal 2: Language learners use technology in socially and culturally appropriate, legal, and ethical ways.

- Standard 1: Language learners understand that communication conventions differ across cultures, communities, and contexts.
- Standard 2: Language learners demonstrate respect for others in their use of private and public information.

Goal 3: Language learners effectively use and critically evaluate technology-based tools as aids in the development of their language learning competence as part of formal instruction and for further learning.

- Standard 1: Language learners effectively use and evaluate available technology-based productivity tools.
- Standard 2: Language learners appropriately use and evaluate available technology-based language skill-building tools.
- Standard 3: Language learners appropriately use and evaluate available technology-based tools for communication and collaboration.
- Standard 4: Language learners use and evaluate available technology-based research tools appropriately.
- Standard 5: Language learners recognize the value of technology to support autonomy, lifelong learning, creativity, metacognition, collaboration, personal pursuits, and productivity.

Figure 2.3 TESOL Technology standards for language learners (Healey et al. 2008)

The higher order skills are competences based on the basic skills mentioned earlier, and are as follows: connectedness, ability to balance formal and informal contexts, critical ability and creativity. The first skill consists in the process of being connected and interacting with others through social-networks. The ability to balance formal and informal contexts refers to the capacity to manage time, relations and the problems which may arise. Critical ability includes the ability to reflect critically on the resources found online. In particular, learners who are critically aware are believed to be more flexible and to have a greater capacity for autonomous learning (Goodwin-Jones 2011). Finally, the fourth skill involves the development of a creative attitude which supports enduring learning. It can be claimed that these skills are essential in the process of technology-enhanced language learning, considering that learners are immersed in new technologies in their everyday lives.

2.3.3 Learner strategies and technology

The effectiveness of one's learning depends greatly on the strategies used, as discussed in the previous chapter. Therefore, it can be argued that learners are expected to combine their learning skills with appropriate learning strategies, which are to be changed and improved over time (Godwin-Jones 2011). In the previous chapter, four categories of learner strategies were analyzed: cognitive, metacognitive, affective and social strategies. As regards metacognitive strategies, which require learners to reflect on their learning, one of the most used tools may be the logbook (Section 1.7.1). The author suggests that the benefits of writing reflections on the learning process in a logbook can be obtained from online writing as well. This can refer to blogs or online editors such as Google Docs, which enable the user to create virtual learning journals. Learners can then decide either to keep them private or to share them with the others.

As pointed out by Edwards and Roger (2015), affective and social strategies can be considered the most relevant in terms of what learners can do outside the classroom to improve their language skills. Hauck and Hampel (2008) suggest CMC tools which learners can use to apply affective and social strategies. Considering the former category, learners can lower their anxiety by using functionalities such as emoticons,

photos and sound files, which are believed to enhance their learning experience thanks to the expression of their emotions. Furthermore, learners have the chance to engage in positive self-talk when using online environments where the other people involved in the communication cannot see them, for instance chats or email. As far as the social strategies are concerned, learners can ask questions and receive immediate or almost immediate feedback "in the form of repetition, clarification and other explanatory input from others" (Hauck and Hampel 2008: 287). Another example consists in the opportunity to empathize with expert speakers and develop cultural understanding through frequent interaction with others online.

However, it is claimed that learners need to be trained in order to be able to develop and use these strategies effectively (Kenning 1996). As mentioned earlier, the use of technology in language learning requires specific skills. Nevertheless, as the author points out, these skills do not necessarily come automatically for all learners, who need training in order to make the best use of the new technologies in their learning process. This is why it is believed that teachers have an important role in helping learners use technology effectively to support their autonomy.

2.3.4 Role of the teacher

In fostering learner autonomy, teachers are expected to be able to recommend and guide students in finding appropriate online tools and resources (Godwin-Jones 2011). In order to do this and train learners to use technology for language learning, it can be maintained that teachers themselves need to have certain skills and knowledge in this field. As well as providing technology standards for language learners, Healey et al. (2008) proposed technology standards for language teachers. These standards describe what teachers are expected to know about and to be able to do with technology in terms of language teaching. They can be used by teachers to prepare their language students to use technology effectively and to assess their knowledge and skills in this regard. The guidelines proposed by the authors include four main goals each consisting of three to four standards. They are presented in Figure 2.4.

TESOL technology standards for language teachers

Goal 1: Language teachers acquire and maintain foundational knowledge and skills in technology for professional purposes.

- Standard 1: Language teachers demonstrate knowledge and skills in basic technological concepts and operational competence, meeting or exceeding TESOL technology standards for students in whatever situation they teach.
- Standard 2: Language teachers demonstrate an understanding of a wide range of technology supports for language learning and options for using them in a given setting.
- Standard 3: Language teachers actively strive to expand their skill and knowledge base to evaluate, adopt, and adapt emerging technologies throughout their careers.
- Standard 4: Language teachers use technology in socially and culturally appropriate, legal, and ethical ways.

Goal 2: Language teachers integrate pedagogical knowledge and skills with technology to enhance language teaching and learning.

- Standard 1: Language teachers identify and evaluate technological resources and environments for suitability to their teaching context.
- Standard 2: Language teachers coherently integrate technology into their pedagogical approaches.
- Standard 3: Language teachers design and manage language learning activities and tasks using technology appropriately to meet curricular goals and objectives.
- Standard 4: Language teachers use relevant research findings to inform the planning of language learning activities and tasks that involve technology.

Goal 3: Language teachers apply technology in record-keeping, feedback, and assessment.

- Standard 1: Language teachers evaluate and implement relevant technology to aid in effective learner assessment.
- Standard 2: Language teachers use technological resources to collect and analyze information in order to enhance language instruction and learning.
- Standard 3: Language teachers evaluate the effectiveness of specific student uses of technology to enhance teaching and learning.

Goal 4: Language teachers use technology to improve communication, collaboration, and efficiency.

- Standard 1: Language teachers use communication technologies to maintain effective contact and collaboration with peers, students, administration, and other stakeholders.
- Standard 2: Language teachers regularly reflect on the intersection of professional practice and technological developments so that they can make informed decisions regarding the use of technology to support language learning and communication.
- Standard 3: Language teachers apply technology to improve efficiency in preparing for class, grading, and maintaining records.

Figure 2.4 TESOL technology standards for language teachers (Healey et al. 2008)

The notions of effectiveness and efficiency, which appear to be central issues in the standards presented above, are also considered by Egbert (2005). Summarizing the main guidelines retrieved from the educational technology literature, he specifies that language teachers should use technology effectively and efficiently. In the first case, technology should help students learn the target language better or faster than with ordinary tools. For example, the author explains that grammar software can be used to provide students with instant feedback after they complete a grammar exercise. In a traditional classroom where students are asked to complete a grammar exercise, the teacher can only give one feedback at a time as he or she cannot correct all students' answers simultaneously. Furthermore, "effectiveness" can also imply the fact that teachers need to be able to make students aware of the real potential of technology and to change the way they think of it (Dooly 2010).

In the second case, Egbert (2005) points out that teachers should use technology in a way that both teachers and learners achieve their teaching and learning goals with the least waste of effort and time. For instance, teachers could decide to practice listening skills in the classroom by using a listening program on the computer, which enables the user to replay the track instantly, instead of the CD player, which is an older and more limited technology. Moreover, similarly to Healey's et al. (2008) second goal, the author claims that teachers should integrate technology in the language classroom and

the curriculum in order to meet learning goals. The focus should not be therefore on the mere use of computers, but on learning through computers.

The role and attributes of the teachers who choose to integrate technology into the classroom are also discussed by Dooly (2010), who defines such educators as "teachers 2.0". Teacher 2.0 is expected to use Web 2.0 effectively in order to enhance language learning in the classroom. As explained above (Section 2.2.2), the main feature of Web 2.0 is the collaborative approach to learning. In connection to Healey's et al. (2008) fourth goal, teachers are expected to "create a community of learners that extends beyond the physical boundaries of the traditional classroom" (Dooly 2010: 294). They should therefore promote interaction and collaboration with online partners, design collaborative activities that enable students to think critically and express their creativity, and teach them how to evaluate their progress and face possible problems in their interaction. Additionally, among these skills, the author identifies some characteristics which can apply to the use of technology to support learner autonomy. She claims that teachers are expected to help students use technology, specifically Web 2.0 tools, so that learners can develop a sense of responsibility of their learning process, set their own learning goals and develop metacognitive strategies, such as the ability to think critically and monitor their performance. As examined in the first chapter, these attributes are relevant elements of the principles of learner involvement and learner reflection proposed by Little (2007).

According to Warschauer (2000), furthermore, language teachers should have another objective in mind when employing technology for pedagogical purposes, that is the promotion of agency. Agency is a concept connected to learner autonomy. As mentioned in Section 1.7 indeed, learners can be thought of as agents, that is individuals who have the power to act on their learning process. Agency can be therefore described as the process of learning through "the activity and the initiative of the learner"[5]. Warschauer (2000) argues that agency is what makes learners enthusiastic about using computers for learning. Thanks to it, they can feel that the use of technology is

---

[5] CORE Education article on learner agency: https://core-ed.org/research-and-innovation/ten-trends/2014/learner-agency/

meaningful for their purposes and can help them have an impact on the world. For example, the author claims that there is a difference between writing a text for a teacher and using the computer to create a multimedia document to be shared with a global audience. In the second case, the students have the chance to express their agency and to feel more involved as they are addressing a real audience. This concept can also be applied to the process of revising an electronic text. According to Ackerely (2003), learners tend to feel more motivated to revise their own work and, therefore, to improve it when it is to be read by a wider online audience. Furthermore, in line with the concept of agency, Song and Bonk's (2016) study found that learners who use online resources to learn languages in a self-directed way tend to be motivated by three important factors: freedom and choice; control; and interest and engagement. Specifically, it shows that engagement in informal online learning gives learners a feeling of freedom and control over their learning process. In addition, it is reported to have a positive impact on learners' perception of their lives, as it can help them feel better about themselves as learners and human beings.

CHAPTER 3. ONLINE TANDEM LEARNING

This chapter will examine online tandem learning, a relevant tool for the autonomous learner in terms of practicing and improving language skills through interaction with speakers of the target language. In the first section, the characteristics, principles and main benefits of face-to-face tandem learning are analyzed. Moreover, the skills needed by tandem learners in order to carry out successful tandem collaborations are considered. A further section will deal with tandem learning via the internet and its features. The online tools and strategies which can be used by tandem learners will then be presented with a focus on asynchronous and synchronous CMC. Finally, the potential advantages and difficulties of online tandem learning in relation to face-to-face tandem learning are discussed.

3.1 Tandem learning

In the first chapter it was claimed that developing autonomy in language learning is a matter of interdependence. In order to become autonomous, learners need meaningful and appropriate interaction with their teachers and other learners (Little 2001). Interaction is therefore a crucial element in developing learner autonomy and enhancing language skills, and can be carried out in face-to-face or online environments. A way of learning a language autonomously through interaction is considered to be tandem learning or language exchanges (from here on these two terms will be used interchangeably). This form of language learning began to be used as a formal pedagogical tool in the late 1960s (Stickler and Lewis 2008). Tandem learning can occur both in person and online. In the first case, it is called face-to-face tandem and the two learners meet in person in order for each to learn and practice the other's language through spoken interaction. In the second case, it is called online tandem or electronic tandem (often called eTandem), and the two learning partners collaborate through the

internet. Before describing the concept of online tandem learning, the characteristics and benefits of the traditional face-to-face tandem learning are considered.

Generally speaking, tandem can be described as "two people or pieces of equipment that work together to achieve a result"[6]. As regards language learning in particular, Brammerts (1996: 10) defines tandem learning as:

> a form of open learning, whereby two people with different native languages work together in pairs in order to learn more about one another's character and culture, to help one another improve their language skills, and often also to exchange additional knowledge for example, about their professional life.

In other words, tandem learning aims at helping learners learn each other's mother tongue, learn about each other and learn about each other's culture (Stickler and Lewis 2008). This can be achieved as language exchanges are believed to promote learner autonomy and reflection on the language and the learning process. The learners involved in a tandem exchange learn through authentic communication with each other and through corrections, explanations and support that they provide to each other during their learning (Brammerts 1996). Furthermore, O'Rourke (2005: 434) suggests that tandem learning combines this kind of explicit learning with a more genuine type of communication, which is likely to develop between tandem partners considering that they should be first of all "interested in one another as individuals and not just as sources of language input".

Brammerts (1996) explains, moreover, that language learning in tandem is based on two essential principles: reciprocity and learner autonomy. According to the principle of reciprocity, both partners should invest the same amount of work, time, interest and energy in their collaboration, making sure that the learning needs of each of them are met equally. This means that they should negotiate their goals, find ways to reach them, and monitor and assess each other's contributions (Schwienhorst 2003). This principle also includes a certain degree of reflectivity, as partners must be able to reflect on each other's production both as learners of their target language and as speakers of their

---

[6] Cambridge Dictionary, definition of "tandem":
https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/tandem

native language. The principle of learner autonomy requires that the tandem partners take responsibility for their own learning. This means that they are responsible for determining what and when to learn. In addition, it can be claimed that they are also responsible for their partner's learning, considering that tandem learning involves learning together interactively (Little 2001). Furthermore, the fact that their interaction takes place without the guidance of a teacher enables them to develop their capacity to act autonomously (Kötter 2003). A third principle, that is bilingualism, is proposed by Schwienhorst (2003), who suggests that the two languages should be used equally in order for both partners to gain equal benefits from their partnership.

It can be argued that tandem learning presents a number of advantages in comparison to regular interactions between native speakers and learners and to traditional language learning. Sasaki (2015) claims that one of the most important benefits of tandem learning consists in the reciprocity principle, which offers both the participants in the interaction the opportunity to learn. The latter are also less likely to be inhibited in expressing themselves in their target languages as they are both learners and can thus empathize with each other better (Brammerts 1996). Kötter (2003) indeed finds that this kind of collaborative learning enables learners to feel freer and more comfortable about discussing the problems related to their language learning process than they would feel in a traditional classroom context. As a result, learners' metacognitive skills can be enhanced as they gain insights into how a language works (O'Rourke 2007).

Another important benefit consists in the fact that tandem collaborations can be productive even when the partners' proficiency levels are not the same, as each of them is expert in their own language and culture (Brammerts 1996), and can therefore provide support at any level. Furthermore, Little (1996) points out that tandem partners can talk about topics which they are both genuinely interested in and engage thus in authentic communication, which is something that is less likely to occur in a language classroom. They can also define their own learning goals, study methods and organization individually or together with their partner. This benefit is closely related to learner autonomy and may contribute to increasing it. In addition, it is believed that language exchange is an effective way of learning about other cultures (Lomicka 2006) and of

developing and improving learners' oral skills and transferable skills, such as planning and interpersonal skills (Formentin et al. 2004).

As far as the organization of the tandem learning process is concerned, Little (2001) observes that there can be various ways in which this form of language learning can take place. Tandem learning can be, for instance, an integral part of a language course, an optional activity for a language course, or the main way of learning used by the partners. In the first case, the tandem partners are guided by their teachers, who are expected to have a role in defining the learning activities and to teach them how to benefit fully from their tandem collaboration. Indeed, they have to make sure that the tandem project is well incorporated into the classroom work, or otherwise students may not consider it as a priority and their tandem partnerships would not be, therefore, successful (O'Rourke 2007). In the second and third case, on the other hand, the partners need to select their own learning activities on the basis of their own learning goals. According to Little (2001), this situation involves a good level of learner autonomy and can only benefit advanced autonomous learners. Those instead who are not used to learning autonomously are believed to need an expert's support in order to make relevant progress in their tandem partnership. Similarly, Brammerts (1996) claims that since the learners engaged in tandem learning are not teachers, they need to be trained in recognizing their learning goals and using adequate learning strategies and learning materials. Learners are also advised to focus more on their collaboration than on their personal learning goals in order for their language exchange to work effectively (Schwienhorst 2003), considering that tandem learning is based on collaboration and not individualism (Stickler and Lewis 2008). Moreover, it can be argued that tandem partners cannot always distinguish between a systematic error and an accidental mistake (such as a slip of the tongue) and they are not always able to provide useful explanations and advice in relation to these (Kötter 2003).

Rather than teachers, each tandem partner is both a learner and an expert speaker during their tandem learning sessions, thanks to the principle of reciprocity (Sasaki 2015). The partner who plays the role of expert speaker of their own first language in the session is expected to help their partner by scaffolding, which is a method for promoting

appropriate target language use, as mentioned in Section 1.5.3. In order to obtain the maximum benefit from their collaboration, it is believed that the learner should always be the one who guides the interaction and takes initiative in order to keep the focus on their learning and not on the (presumably) untrained teaching of the other partner (Little 2001). This means that the learner should be free to ask for feedback that is based on what they consider relevant rather on what the native speaker thinks is important. It may seem that the partner who plays the role of the native speaker does not receive any benefit from that part of the session. However, the author points out that the native speaker has "an unparalleled opportunity to experience and reflect on his or her mother tongue through the prism of the target language and vice versa" (Little 2001: 33). In other words, by teaching their own language, the participants have the chance to discover and learn something new about it as well.

It is claimed that the roles that the tandem partners play in their collaboration can also depend on the way the learners were taught to think about the process of learning during their education. Little (2001) explains that in a traditional teacher-led pedagogy there are mainly two roles: the teacher and the learner. Therefore, there can be a tendency to assume that the partner who has the role of native speaker acts like a teacher. As discussed above, learners who engage in tandem learning are usually not teachers and need thus guidance, especially at the beginning of their partnership. In addition, they need to negotiate and explore together the roles and the structure of their collaboration, as seen above (Schwienhorst 2003). This reciprocal relationship in particular is considered to be the exclusive power of tandem learning.

3.2 Tandem learning skills

As far as the skills needed by tandem partners are concerned, Little (1996) explains that in order for the tandem partnership to be successful, learners should have first of all a minimum proficiency in their target language and should be able to learn autonomously, at least to a certain degree. They should also know how to distinguish between what they know about their target language and how they can use it to communicate. Moreover, it is important that they are able to "create communication situations which

provide good learning potential for themselves and their partner" (Little 1996: 30). This means that they should choose learning activities and materials which help them communicate about the interests of both of them and meet each other's learning needs. It also implies that they are expected to know how to motivate each other and provide appropriate feedback and corrections. This is possible if the tandem partners agree from the beginning on how to organize their collaboration and how they want their errors to be corrected. As discussed above, learning partners are not teachers, and therefore it should not be taken for granted that they can provide accurate explanations for their partner's errors. Furthermore, according to Formentin et al. (2004), tandem learning requires learning partners to be diligent, serious about their commitment, available and eager to participate in the learning sessions planned with their partners, and to be able to manage their time effectively.

Furthermore, considering that the learners engaged in a tandem partnership are likely to come from different countries and cultures, it can be argued that they need to be able to communicate in an appropriate way depending on the context. According to the CEFR (Council of Europe 2001: 9), this ability can be referred to as communicative language competence, that is the sum of competences which "empower a person to act using specifically linguistic means". Communicative language competence is considered to comprise three types of competences: linguistic, sociolinguistic and pragmatic competences. The first component is concerned with knowledge about the lexis, phonology and syntax of a language. The sociolinguistic component regards the way language is used to cope with different social realities and cultures, including the understanding of social conventions such as politeness. This competence is closely linked to intercultural competence, which can be defined as "the capacity to change one's attitudes, values, and behavior so as to be open and flexible with other cultures" (Davis, Cho and Hagenson 2005: 385). Furthermore, as Lomicka (2006) points out, knowing about the other's culture is in turn related to language competence. Finally, pragmatic competences refer to the functional use of language and issues such as the organization of the discourse, cohesion, coherence and irony, which are mainly built up through interaction. These components are essential for the creation of communicative competence in language learners who decide to engage in tandem partnerships.

As far as intercultural competence is concerned, it is believed that tandem learners should adopt strategies meant to help them learn how to learn about other cultures. Álvarez, Beaven and Garrido (2008: 183) claim that learners should keep in mind two essential aspects related to cultural learning: "on the one hand, the acceptance that there are different cultural realities and that one's background has a very important role to play in finding out about the 'other' culture; on the other, that cultural patterns evolve with the passage of time". In other words, in a tandem partnership, both cultures are equally important in the process of learning about the other, and cultural understanding is in constant evolution. Intercultural learning can be facilitated when learners are aware of the culture in question, discuss it and reflect on it (Lomicka 2006). Considering that, in this case, tandem learners learn about each other's language and culture through interaction, they are first of all required to employ appropriate interaction strategies. According to the CEFR (Council of Europe 2001), these consist mainly in cognitive and collaborative strategies which aim at organizing and evaluating the interaction, and dealing with possible communication problems. These are summarized in the table below.

Planning	identifying information/opinion gap
	judging what can be presupposed
	planning moves
Execution	taking the floor
	co-operating for keeping the conversation on course
	co-operating for mutual understanding
	dealing with the unexpected
	asking for help
Evaluation	monitoring what is happening in relation to the plan
	judging the effectiveness of the strategies used
Repair	asking for clarification
	giving clarification
	clearing up misunderstandings

Table 3.1 CEFR interaction strategies (Council of Europe 2001: 84-85)

3.3 Online tandem learning

As can be observed, face-to-face tandem learning can be a valuable resource for autonomous language learners. However, it has its limitations especially as regards the number and availability of tandem partners (Brammerts 1996). For this reason, in an age characterized by important technological developments, it may be more convenient to use technology in order to communicate with tandem partners directly in their own countries. It can also be argued that technology can make it faster and cheaper for learners to interact with each other for language learning purposes. Online tandem or eTandem can be defined as online language learning in which "two learners of different native languages work together to help each other learn the other language" (Cziko 2004: 25).

The first attempt to use the internet to develop tandem collaborations was made in 1992, which was the starting point for the development of international online tandem projects, such as the International E-Mail Tandem Network, which was founded in Bochum with the support of the European Commission (O'Rourke 2007). It can be argued that online tandem learning belongs to the category of telecollaboration but at an individual level. Telecollaboration can be defined as "the use of online communication tools to bring together language learners in different countries for the development of collaborative project work and intercultural exchange" (O'Dowd and Ritter 2006). While telecollaboration takes place in an institutional context and regards exchanges between groups of students (Guth and Helm 2010), tandem learning is mainly carried out individually and the participants are not necessarily students. Just like telecollaboration, it can be claimed that online tandem learning makes use of a variety of online communication tools such as e-mail, chat and videoconferencing. Similarly, as will be seen below, most of the advantages of telecollaboration can be applied to online tandem as well.

At the beginning of its history, when the internet had just started to be used for online collaboration, online tandem was a text-based form of learning and it consisted in language exchanges carried out through e-mail and chat facilities. In this respect, as

Little (2001) points out, online tandem is different from face-to-face tandem as the latter is based on oral communication, where the partners can give and receive immediate interactive support during their interaction, while the former is based on text messages, which are produced by each of the partners working separately. Therefore, no immediate interactive support is provided. It is claimed, therefore, that in this case tandem learning via the internet requires a greater degree of autonomy than face-to-face tandem learning, as learners receive no immediate support as to how to formulate their messages, at least at the start of their interaction. However, more recently, digital technologies have made it possible to combine traditional texts with voice, images, sound and video (Chun, Kern and Smith 2016). This can be referred to as multimedia, which is believed to enrich and to bring the online experience closer to face-to-face communication. In this case, the aforementioned support can be provided immediately by the tandem partner who plays the role of expert speaker, as the conversation occurs in real time and the two learning partners can see and hear each other. However, learners may need to adopt strategies in order to cope with a reduced audio and video quality, which could make it difficult for them to understand certain aspects of their speech properly, such as colloquialisms and accent.

3.3.1 Tools and strategies for online tandem learning

As discussed in Section 2.2.4, CMC is generally believed to provide two types of tools: asynchronous and synchronous communication. Since online tandem learning is based on online communication, tandem learners can make use of these tools to carry out their collaboration. Referring to text-based interaction, O'Rourke (2007) suggests that both asynchronous and synchronous communication have an important advantage, that is long-term availability. This means that learners can go back to their conversations at any time after the interaction is over and reflect on the language used. As regards the asynchronous mode, the author points out that e-mail enables users to send text messages in a relaxed environment as they can manage their time and use as many resources as they wish during the composition of their messages. Furthermore, learners can give detailed feedback to their partners since they are not pressured by time. As far as the synchronous mode is concerned, the author points out that the messages

exchanged are shorter than in e-mail and that the partners need to react very quickly in order to keep the interaction going. Moreover, feedback tends to be more sporadic and superficial. O'Dowd (2007) points out that synchronous environments are more likely to promote negotiation of meaning as learners engaged in a real-time interaction are expected to collaborate in order to understand and clarify each other's contributions. This can also apply to videoconferencing, which shares the real-time feature of synchronous CMC.

However, the line between asynchronous and synchronous communication may not always be easy to identify. Nowadays, online tandem learners can interact with each other through a great number of Web 2.0 tools, such as instant messaging and social media, which present features of both asynchronous and synchronous communication. Wang et al. (2016: 18) explain that these two phrases are "inadequate in describing the delayed transfer of real time audio and/or text exchanges facilitated by social media" since, in contrast to audio and video conferencing, "there is a longer time lag between sending and receiving text messages or audio files via the chat facility, although both parties are online at the same time". Therefore, they propose the term "semi-synchronous" to describe this kind of communication. In line with this concept, Chun, Kern and Smith (2016) point out that, despite the real-time feature of online synchronous environments, users can appear to be online even when they are not, for example because they did not log off before leaving. Similarly, some chat facilities enable users to appear offline to other users even when they are actually online. This may allow learners to benefit from the advantages of asynchronous communication in an online environment which can support real-time chat as well. However, it can also be challenging for online tandem learners, who need to be prepared for the difficulties connected with learning through electronic communication.

In connection to social media, social networks are believed to be another Web 2.0 tool which online tandem learners can use to interact with their learning partners (Guth and Thomas 2010). A social network can be defined as "a website or computer program that allows people to communicate and share information on the internet using a computer

or mobile phone"[7]. It is part of the social media category, which is more generally concerned with creating and conveying information online (Lomicka and Lord 2016). In spite of the increasing popularity of social networks as tools for personal interaction, their potential for language learning has not yet been recognized widely. However, one important benefit in this sense is believed to be learner motivation and gratification. By using social networks, learners can create a profile, connect with people with similar interests and be part of virtual communities (Guth and Thomas 2010). In addition, social networks often include other Web 2.0 tools, giving users the opportunity to share images, chat, connect to other websites and much more. Therefore, learners may feel motivated to interact with target language speakers on a social network.

In order for their language exchanges to be as profitable as possible, it can be claimed that tandem learners need to make use of appropriate strategies. In addition to the general strategies for online learning which were discussed in Section 2.3.3 and the strategies to develop intercultural competence analyzed in Section 2.4, online tandem-specific strategies are to be considered. In their study, Stickler and Lewis (2008) identified the most common strategies used by online tandem learners during their e-mail-based interaction. It can be argued that these can also be used in other kinds of CMC, such as videoconferencing. These strategies are summarized below:

- Offering or giving corrections.
- Evaluating partner: explicitly evaluating or grading partner's L2 performance.
- Encouraging partner: giving positive feedback to partner or explicitly suggesting positive attitude.
- Offering a fair deal exchange.
- Answering explicit questions: responding to partner's direct questions in previous emails or referring directly back to partner's statements.
- Planning face-to-face meeting: negotiating time and place for meeting partner face-to-face.
- Negotiating.

Figure 3.2 Tandem-specific strategies (adapted from Stickler and Lewis 2008)

---

[7] Cambridge Dictionary's definition of "social network":
https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/social-network

Similarly, Ware and O'Dowd's (2008) study shows analogous findings. Focusing on the importance of feedback strategies, it reveals a positive attitude toward praise and mitigation strategies which should accompany corrections. This means that, similarly to what found by Stickler and Lewis' (2008) study, learners should have a positive attitude toward their partners' production and should complement each other's corrections with positive statements in order to encourage and reassure each other. As regards feedback in particular, the authors propose specific strategies for giving feedback explicitly designed for online tandem learners. These strategies are as follows:

- Provide feedback: Look for patterns in the errors and provide feedback. Instead of simply writing in the correct answer for your partner, go back through their text and highlight with a different font all of the errors of a particular type.

- Selective correction: It is important to focus on just one or two types of errors per message (for example, focus on verb tenses or on comma usage but not on both at once).

- Reformulation: You can rewrite one or two sentences for your partners so they can compare the "native-sounding" version to their own. This is a useful technique!

- Give examples: When you explain a grammar rule or a vocabulary word, give multiple examples so your partner has a context for using the new expression.

- Ask clarification questions: If you do not understand a particular sentence or think there might be multiple meanings, ask your partner directly what they mean by such-and-such.

- Provide "mini-grammar lessons": If you feel comfortable explaining your native language, try giving your partner short lessons. Think of these mini-lessons as teaching patterns and reasons, not necessarily rules.

Figure 3.3 Feedback strategies (Ware and O'Dowd 2008: 58)

3.3.2 Potential benefits and difficulties of online tandem learning

As mentioned in the previous section, the internet enables any language learner who has an internet connection to have easier, faster and more inexpensive access to tandem learning. By removing the temporal and spatial barrier of communication, it makes it possible for people to communicate asynchronously and at a distance (Chun, Kern and

Smith 2016). Moreover, the contact with language learners from other countries and cultures can be a tool to build electronic learning communities, which are believed to have a role in facilitating not only language learning but also culture learning (Dubreil 2006). Kinginger (2016) points out that online language exchanges may be a great opportunity for learners living in isolated environments to come into contact with other cultures and speakers of their target language. By being exposed to different ways of thinking, they have the chance to negotiate stereotypes and shape their identities. Furthermore, they can engage in authentic communication, which provides them with real-life examples of how a language is used as opposed to the often artificial language proposed by textbooks.

In the case in which the online tandem collaboration is carried out primarily through text, one important benefit consists in the fact that writing is permanent, while speaking is transitory (Little 2001). The messages exchanged online are usually stored and can be retrieved at any time for the perspective of using them as a learning resource in the future. Indeed, learners "can refer to L2 structures and vocabulary that were used earlier by their partners and reuse them in other situations and contexts" (Ware and O'Dowd 2008: 45). In contrast, face-to-face meetings cannot be stored unless notes are taken, or the conversations are recorded. However, this requires additional time and effort. A further advantage connected to engaging in text-based language exchange regards the development of metalinguistic awareness, which language learners need in order to reflect on their learning process and thus, as seen in Chapter 1, to enhance their autonomy. According to O'Rourke (2005), simultaneous text-based CMC provides learners with the opportunity to engage in meaningful real-time communication and to reflect on the language used at the same time. Considering that reflection on form is usually associated with reading and writing situations, it is believed that CMC can promote a higher level of metalinguistic awareness than spoken interaction.

Nevertheless, when the communication between the learning partners is not based on text but on video calls, for example, it can be argued that it resembles face-to-face communication to a greater extent and lacks the advantages mentioned. However, in addition to the benefits of face-to-face tandem and with respect to text-based

communication, videoconferencing can present other types of benefits. First, it can be considered the most similar alternative to face-to-face communication, with the additional advantage of giving language learners access to speakers of their target language in their home countries (Mullen et al. 2009). Furthermore, it can be a useful tool to clear up potential misunderstandings provided that the immediate nature of simultaneous CMC, and in particular of videoconferencing, "may lead learners to engage more regularly in negotiation of meaning to resolve misunderstandings that arise in their interactions" (Ware and O'Dowd 2008: 56). In their study, Borup et al. (2014) show indeed that videos are a more affective environment than text-based facilities. This means that tandem learners can feel more open to express their emotions and communicate about potential problems in their interaction with their learning partners. However, when learners are shy or not confident enough in their linguistic abilities, video-based language exchange may be unproductive. Mullen et al. (2009) explain that such learners need to have appropriate and motivating conversation topics in order to avoid embarrassing silences and keep the communication flowing.

As can be observed, online tandem learning can also present challenges for language learners. As claimed above, the latter need to be able to act autonomously to a certain degree as most aspects of their learning process are to be defined and negotiated among themselves. Considering, furthermore, that their learning is based on collaboration, individual success will most likely depend on the quality of their partnership (Little 1996). In the case of online tandem learning, this collaboration also relies on the use of technology, which can have a strong impact on and generate difficulties in the exchange (O'Dowd and Ritter 2006). For instance, technical issues, such as the delay of the transmission in a video call, can reduce the spontaneity of the interaction and make learning partners feel less comfortable (Kern, 2014). Another challenge can regard the distance. Since online tandem partners often live far away from each other, scheduling a suitable time for both may be challenging (Mullen et al. 2009). Moreover, they may have different living situations, habits and opportunities. This can have an impact on their collaboration as one partner may have more favorable learning conditions than the other. For instance, "one partner may have easy and immediate access to the Internet, while the other has to share scarce resources with a large number of other students"

(Little 1996: 29). In order to overcome this kind of problem, tandem learners need to be highly motivated and determined. Furthermore, the distance issue can also be considered from a temporal point of view. Chun et al. (2016) reflect on the challenge of negotiating how quickly one should respond to messages. Apart from the possible time zone-related issues, tandem learners should negotiate this aspect among themselves as there is no universal convention in this sense.

When the tandem partners choose to communicate mainly through writing, they could feel the pressure to find the right words for their messages (Kötter 2003). This is less likely to happen in a face-to-face or spoken interaction where the communication is usually more spontaneous. A way of reducing this pressure can consist in using emoticons. Smileys or emoticons are "a group of keyboard characters (such as :-)) that typically represents a facial expression or suggests an attitude or emotion and that is used especially in computerized communications (such as e-mail)"[8]. By using these, the learner is able to communicate empathy in a text message and to give a sense of physicality to the interaction. More recently, through computer and smartphone keyboards, users can also send and receive stickers, which are "illustrations of characters, pictures, or animals, often animated, that are shared during online chats to show how one is feeling and to liven up the chats" (Wang et al. 2016). However, Kötter (2003) points out that using emoticons is a deliberate action, that is an action which must be thought upon. On the contrary, when people interact face to face, smiles, gestures and other signals often happen at a subconscious level.

Another way of reducing the pressure connected with text-based interaction may be employing online tools, such as translation tools. However, the simple access to online dictionaries and translation services does not necessarily ensure that learners are able to use them appropriately (Chun et al. 2016). As discussed in Section 2.3.3, it is believed that teachers have an important role in training students to use the tools at their disposal effectively. Teacher support is also particularly significant for the development of critical reflection (Schwienhorst 2003). Not all learners necessarily know how to reflect on their learning process and on the feedback they receive and give to their partners, as

---

[8] Merriam-Webster's definition of "emoticon": https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/emoticon

examined in Chapter 1. If they are not trained in this, they may be less likely to benefit fully from their tandem experience. Apart from being able to reflect on the feedback they receive, tandem learners are also expected to provide relevant feedback to their partners. However, this may not always be possible since tandem partners are usually not trained teachers. Ware and O'Dowd's (2008) study shows indeed that although peer feedback can be well intentioned, it is often incomplete and inaccurate. The authors suggest that instead of trying to provide accurate grammar explanations, it would be more effective for tandem learners to provide reformulations of their partners' production.

Furthermore, O'Rourke (2005) underlines another possible issue of online language exchanges: the "lingua-franca effect". This consists in the tendency to use the target language of the most proficient tandem partner as a lingua franca in the tandem interaction. This could also apply to the use of any other language in which the tandem partners are both proficient as a lingua franca, for example English. This strategy may be useful to solve short-term communicative difficulties or when the desire to have a meaningful conversation is stronger than the intention to practice the target language. It tends to be, moreover, specific to online environments, especially text-based, where there is little or no chance to use paralinguistic signs, i.e., "ways in which people show what they mean other than by the words they use, for example by their tone of voice, or by making sounds with the breath"[9]. However, it could be a problem when used habitually as it would break the principles of reciprocity and bilingualism. As the author points out, "only the most determined and autonomous learners are likely to resist these pressures" (O'Rourke 2005: 442). Furthermore, in synchronous communication it may be difficult to keep track of how much each language is actually used, as the interaction is mainly concerned with keeping the conversation going rather than with linguistic matters (O'Rourke 2007).

Considering online tandem learning as an intercultural exchange as well as a language exchange, problems may arise at an interactional level concerning cultural differences,

---

[9] Cambridge Dictionary's definition of "paralinguistic":
https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/paralinguistic

such as different communication styles and attitudes to irony, directness and so forth (O'Dowd and Ritter 2006). The authors explain that communication can fail when learners have low levels of intercultural communicative competence and bring stereotypes to their exchanges. As regards the former issue, when tandem learners lack factual knowledge about their partner's culture, they might not interpret their messages properly and, therefore, create misunderstandings. Stereotypes can also be a significant obstacle to a productive online language exchange as feelings of superiority or resentment may lead to a breakdown of the interaction. According to Helm and Guth (2016), this kind of issue can be avoided by devoting time to preparing for the interactions. This means that before the beginning of a tandem partnership, learners should take time to learn about the cultural background of their tandem partners. Communicating and trying to understand each other's learning needs is indeed believed to be essential in order for the exchange to be fruitful. In addition, learners are advised not to talk about sensitive issues with their learning partners, at least at the start, in order to avoid misunderstandings and tensions in their communication.

CHAPTER 4. ONLINE LANGUAGE EXCHANGES: A CASE STUDY

This chapter aims at presenting and discussing a study carried out to investigate how online language exchanges through apps affect language learners' autonomy in terms of the type of relationship that is created between the learning partners. In the first section, the format and goals of the study are introduced, and the research questions are presented. The following section deals with the description and characteristics of the language exchange apps which were most often mentioned by the participants in the survey, and an overview of the information provided by their websites. The third section contains the description of the questionnaire created to collect the data needed for the study. Furthermore, the findings of the questionnaire are presented and discussed with reference to the research questions. A final section is concerned with the difficulties and limitations encountered during the study.

4.1 Overview of the study

As discussed in the previous chapter, online tandem learning can benefit the language learner in terms of language practice and the promotion of learner autonomy. Since tandem learning is based on learner autonomy (Brammerts 1996), it can be claimed that in order to obtain the best out of a tandem partnership, learners must be autonomous, at least to a certain degree. However, considering that collaboration is at the basis of tandem learning, as discussed in the previous chapter, it can be argued that the nature of the relationship between tandem partners may have an impact on their autonomy and initiative. For instance, learners might lose interest in their initial goal of learning or practicing their target language and start focusing on other aspects related to their interaction, such as talking about common interests in a language they are both proficient in or becoming acquainted with their tandem partner in order to become friends with them. On the other hand, they might have too many expectations about the teaching skills of their learning partner and overestimate the help the latter can provide.

It is debatable, therefore, whether this form of language learning does foster learner autonomy. The study focuses on this issue by seeking the answers to the following research questions:

1. How does online interaction with native or expert speakers through language exchange apps affect learners' autonomy in terms of dependency on their learning partners?
2. How do learners using these apps see their learning partners: as a kind of substitute teacher or just helpful peers?
3. Based on this distinction, how proactive or dependent on their learning partners are they?
4. Is there any correlation between their degree of proactivity or dependency and their type of motivation (intrinsic, extrinsic, internalized extrinsic)?

The study aims, therefore, at investigating the relationship between online tandem learners in order to find out whether there is a correlation between how the they perceive their learning partners and how dependent or proactive they are in their interactions. Furthermore, I will examine to what extent the type of motivation of online tandem learners can affect their degree of dependency or proactivity. In order to answer the research questions, a questionnaire was created and sent to foreign language learners who make use of this kind of app. The study was conducted over a period of around one month and the questionnaire was filled out by 50 participants. Before analyzing the questionnaire and the answers of the participants, an overview of the apps most frequently mentioned in the survey is provided in the section below.

4.2 The apps

As will be explained in the following section, the participants in the survey were asked to indicate which apps they use to learn or practice languages with native or expert speakers. The online language exchange apps which were most frequently mentioned are Speaky and Tandem (with 55% and 22% respectively), as can be seen in Figure 4.1. They are both defined as virtual language exchange communities where language

learners can meet and learn languages together. According to their websites, Speaky is "a social network to learn languages and meet people around the world"[10], and Tandem aims at building "a global, mobile-first language learning community that empowers everyone, everywhere to speak any language"[11].

3. What app(s) do you use to learn and/or practice languages with native or expert speakers?
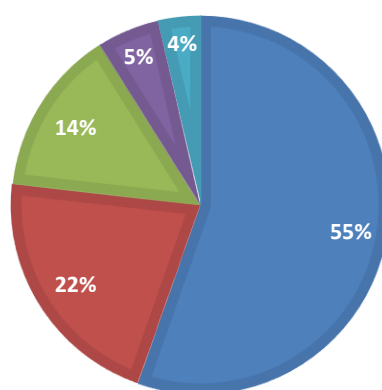
Figure 4.1 Answers to question n. 3

They are said to be developed by international teams of language specialists, who designed these apps with the mission to make language learning easier and accessible to everyone. Indeed, they enable users to come into contact with learners from over 180 countries, speaking more than 110 languages. In comparison with the earliest form of online tandem, that is the International E-Mail Tandem Network, which in 1996 allowed only 18 language combinations and the exclusive participation of students of the universities that were taking part in the network (Brammerts 1996), it can be supposed that these apps reflect not only the advance of technology but also the diffusion and normalization of the concept of tandem learning. Speaky and Tandem were created to be used mainly on smartphones, even though they can also be used on the browsers of computers, and require an internet connection and the creation of an account. They can be used for free, even though Tandem also offers its users the

---

[10] Speaky website: https://www.speaky.com/
[11] Tandem website: https://www.tandem.net/about-us

opportunity to upgrade their profile through a paid subscription in order to have access to a number of special features, such as the possibility of finding members nearby or by city. While the websites of the two apps tend to emphasize different aspects of their product, such as the social traits of Speaky and the versatility of Tandem, it can be argued that they share the same important function, that is the opportunity they offer language learners to interact with each other in order to learn and practice their target languages. On the following pages, the main characteristics of these apps will be presented with a focus on the functionalities they have in common. Considering that apps are usually updated often, it is worth noting that this description is based on the characteristics that these apps had at the moment of writing (January 2020).

As mentioned above, the apps require their users to create an account. During the creation of the account, users are asked to provide information regarding their name, age, native language(s), languages they want to learn and/or practice and their respective proficiency levels, country where they live and their interests. In figure 3.2, an example of how a profile can be edited on Speaky according to its website is shown. On Tandem, users also have the chance to write about their learning preferences including their learning goals, time commitment and how they would like their mistakes to be corrected. Furthermore, a picture is required in order to complete the profile. If the user is reluctant to share their picture online, they can use an avatar. It is important though that the chosen image inspires trust as it is one of the elements used by the other users to decide whether to interact with a particular learner or not. Another important part of the user profile is the description section, where users can briefly introduce themselves. For example, Speaky suggests that users write about the reason they are on the app or why they want to practice a particular language.

After completing the creation of the account, users are presented with a list of users with whom they can start chatting. This list is based on the languages which users have indicated as their native (or expert) and target languages. This means that, for example, an Italian expert speaker who wants to learn German can contact German expert speakers who want to learn Italian. The chat room in both apps has an interface that is typical of most chat facilities, that is two windows of different sizes: "the smaller

window at the bottom of the screen allows people to enter and edit their own messages, while the larger area at the top of the screen shows what is happening in the online world" (Kötter 2003: 148). In both apps the smaller window provides users with the possibility of sending voice recordings and pictures as well. Tandem in addition enables its users to make audio and video calls with their learning partners. Furthermore, the chat rooms of both apps give users the chance to correct and automatically translate their partners' messages through specific keys and frames. By dedicating a special feature to the correction of mistakes, the apps facilitate the process of giving and receiving feedback, which is crucial in a tandem partnership and learner autonomy in general, as seen in the previous chapters.
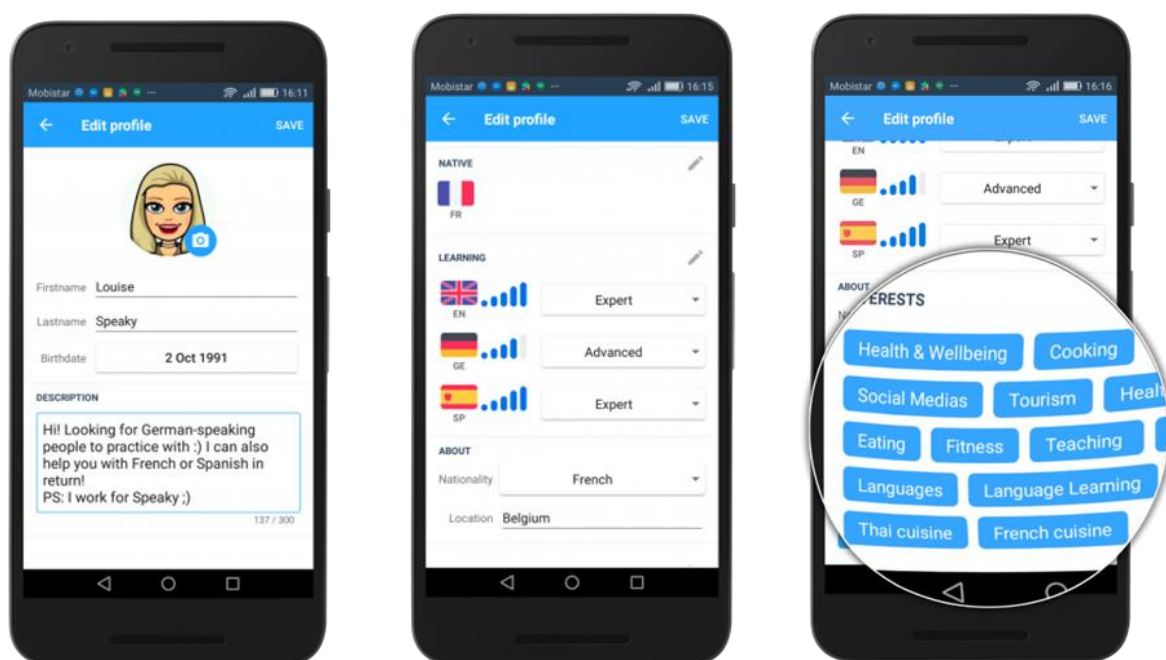

Figure 4.2 Screenshots of the profile editing section on Speaky (https://www.speaky.com/blog/?p=587)

Much of what these apps offer their users is described on their websites and blogs, which also provide useful information for language learners in general. For instance, in Speaky's blog the concept and benefits of language exchange (or tandem) are explained in dedicated articles. In line with Brammerts' (1996) definition (Section 2.4), the authors of the website define language exchange as a "mutually beneficial way of learning a language" which "usually happens between two people, who meet on a

regular basis in order to learn each other's native language"[12]. As far as the benefits are concerned, they emphasize the efficiency of learning a language together with an actual person as opposed to learning it in the "traditional" way, that is through grammar books, old audiotapes and out of context vocabulary lists. Similarly to what was discussed in Section 2.4 (Brammerts 1996 and Kötter 2003), they explain, moreover, that language exchanges are a good source of authentic language and a great opportunity to practice in a more relaxed environment than the traditional language classroom. In addition, it is argued that language learners who engage in language exchanges have the chance to discover their learning partners' culture, to make new friends and to broaden their horizons.

Furthermore, the websites of Speaky and Tandem provide their users with tips and recommendations for an ideal online tandem learning experience. Some of these can be considered general guidelines which can apply to online language exchanges on any other application, while others are more specific and relate to features of the particular app that is considered. As regards the former, users are advised on how to successfully start a conversation with another language learner and how to keep the interaction (and the learning) going for as long as possible. The developers of the apps suggest that users should avoid starting the conversation with simple greetings such as "Hi" or small talk as their learning partners may have the impression that they are not serious enough about their language exchange. On the contrary, users should start their conversations with a more personal message that should be friendly and respectful. As an additional help to language learners who may lack ideas, Tandem provides 10 examples of conversation starters, such as "What's your favorite time of year?" and "What makes you laugh out loud?", suggesting that they can be customized depending on the interests of both partners. Moreover, on both websites, users are advised to ask questions in order to show their partners that they are interested in the conversation and bring up new topics. They are also recommended to avoid "yes" or "no" questions, as they may lead the conversation to a quick end.

---

[12] Speaky article on language exchange: https://www.speaky.com/blog/?p=703

As mentioned above, the apps enable users to correct the mistakes in their partners' messages through a specific feature, which consists in selecting and replacing the mistakes in a message with the right form. As can be seen in figure 4.3, the parts of the message which are not correct will appear in red and crossed out, while the correction will be green. Both apps encourage users to provide feedback to their learning partners as their developers suggest that feedback is a relevant part of language exchanges. Learners are furthermore advised to share their correction preferences with each other in order for their feedback to be as relevant and useful as possible. This means that if one partner does not want to have every single mistake corrected, the other partner should focus on the most important ones. Tandem also suggests that users should consider the proficiency level of their partners when making corrections. For example, when correcting the mistakes of a beginner, the user should focus on mistakes related to basic grammar, spelling and pronunciation, rather than on the use of idioms and expressions that are more often used by more advanced learners.
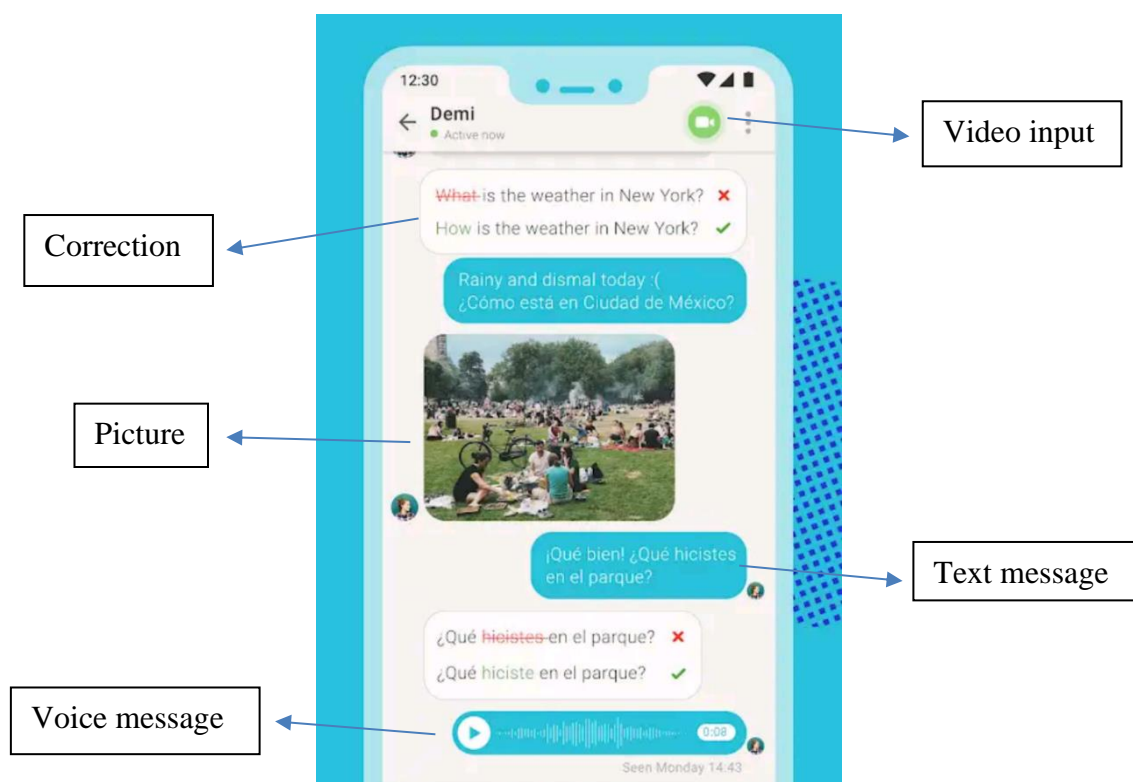

Figure 4.3 Example of a chat room in Tandem showing how a multimedia conversation and corrections to messages look like (https://apps.apple.com/app/id959001619?mt=8)

As far as the tips about specific features are concerned, the websites of both apps provide recommendations on how to find an ideal learning partner. They suggest using the filters provided in the apps to find potential learning partners who have similar interests, goals and language combinations. A filter can be defined as "a tool for selecting or removing a particular type of information"[13]. In this case, the information could regard the languages spoken, age, interests, location and so forth. In order to increase the chances to receive a message or an answer from potential learning partners, users should make sure that they have completed their own profile. Users are also offered advice in relation to two specific situations: they receive too many messages, or nobody contacts or answers them. In the first case, while Speaky suggests adjusting the filters in order to become invisible to more users, Tandem advises the users who receive too many messages to go offline in order to hide their profiles from other users. In the second case, Speaky users are advised to widen the filters which can be too restrictive, while Tandem users are asked to make sure that their profiles are fully filled out, that they have a friendly and clear profile picture, and that they use interesting conversation starters, as those suggested on the app's blog.

Among the other apps which were mentioned in the survey, it may be worth describing briefly HelloTalk, which was indicated by 14% of the respondents. This app is similar to the ones described above in a number of aspects. First, its developers define the app as a community and describe themselves as an international team who aim at using "technology to connect the world through language and culture"[14], which is similar to the social aspect promoted by Speaky and Tandem. Just like the latter, HelloTalk can be used both on a smartphone as an app and on the browser of the computer. Its website and blog provide too useful information about language exchanges and tips for people who want to engage in online tandem learning through this app. The interface of the chat room is similar to that of Speaky and Tandem as it enables users to chat, send audio files and pictures, translate and correct messages. Furthermore, just like Tandem, it allows free audio and video calls. What is different though is that HelloTalk also gives users the chance to join group chats in order for them to have a collaborative

---

[13] Cambridge Dictionary's definition of "filter": https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/filter
[14] HelloTalk website: https://www.hellotalk.com/about/?lang=en

learning experience. Another relevant difference consists in a specific social network feature that the other two apps lack, that is the possibility to post messages and pictures (called Moments) in a shared and public space, which other users can see and comment on. Furthermore, the HelloTalk blog has a longer section of the tips on how to interact with other users, providing many examples of what kind of difficulties users could encounter and how to overcome them. Nevertheless, it can be argued that all these apps have an important element in common: they all strive to offer language learners advantageous tools to learn effectively through online language exchanges.

4.3 Method and participants

The questionnaire consists in 13 questions divided into 4 sections and it takes around 5 minutes to complete. The title ("Survey on the use of language exchange apps in language learning") is followed by an overview of the survey and general instructions, as can be seen in the Appendix, where the full questionnaire is provided. The first section includes 5 questions aimed at providing general information about the participants and their language learning through language exchange apps. The second section consists in one question which explores the participants' motivation to learn their target language. The third section contains one question about the characteristics of the participants' ideal learning partner. The fourth section covers 5 questions designed to show how proactive or dependent on their learning partner the participants are. The final question is optional and asks participants to add personal comments on their experience with language exchange apps. In the questionnaire there are five open-ended questions: the first 4 questions, which require short answers, and the last question, which requires a longer answer. The remaining questions are multiple choice and checkbox questions. All questions, except the last one, require an answer.

The research is quantitative as it aims at collecting quantifiable data "to determine the relationship" between specific categories "and to test the research hypotheses" (Dörnyei 2010: 9). As explained above, these categories regard the way tandem learners perceive their learning partners, their motivation and their proactivity. The data is collected through close-ended questions, which have the advantage to be objective and easy to

code. The questionnaire also includes an open-ended question, which can provide qualitative data and further causes for reflection. However, this question is not strictly connected with the research questions, and therefore I chose to make it optional. The data was collected anonymously, and no questions related to the participants' identity were asked. This choice was meant to encourage respondents to provide honest answers even though no sensitive issues are treated in the survey.

The survey was created and sent with Google Forms, a survey administration app provided by Google. The same app was used to collect and analyze the participants' answers. The participants were sent a link generated through this app, which allowed them to have access to the questionnaire. As mentioned in Section 4.1, the survey was conducted over a period of approximately one month and reached a total of 50 participants. In order for the sample to be as varied as possible, the language learners asked to take part in the survey come from various age ranges (19-39) and have various native languages (Italian, Polish, Spanish, Hindi, Dutch, Hungarian, English, Persian, Romanian, German, French, Albanese, Turkish, Bengali, Russian, Urdu, Latvian, Serbian, Arabic, Indonesian, Portuguese), as found out from their answers. In the following sections, each part of the questionnaire will be analyzed, and the results of the survey will be discussed. The full questionnaire can be found in the Appendix.

4.4 Results

In the first section of the questionnaire, the participants were asked to indicate their age, native language(s), the language exchange apps they use, their main target language and whether they learn this language with the help of a teacher or without a teacher. The participants' age range, native languages and language exchange apps were presented in the previous sections. As regards the fourth question, Figure 4.4 shows the target languages which were indicated by the respondents as the ones they practice the most through these apps. As can be observed, English and Spanish are the languages most frequently mentioned (14 and 11 respondents respectively), followed by Italian (6 respondents) and German (4 respondents). The column called "other" represents the answers which did not indicate a specific target language. As far as the fifth question is

concerned, the majority of the participants claims that they learn their target language without a teacher, as can be seen in Figure 4.5.
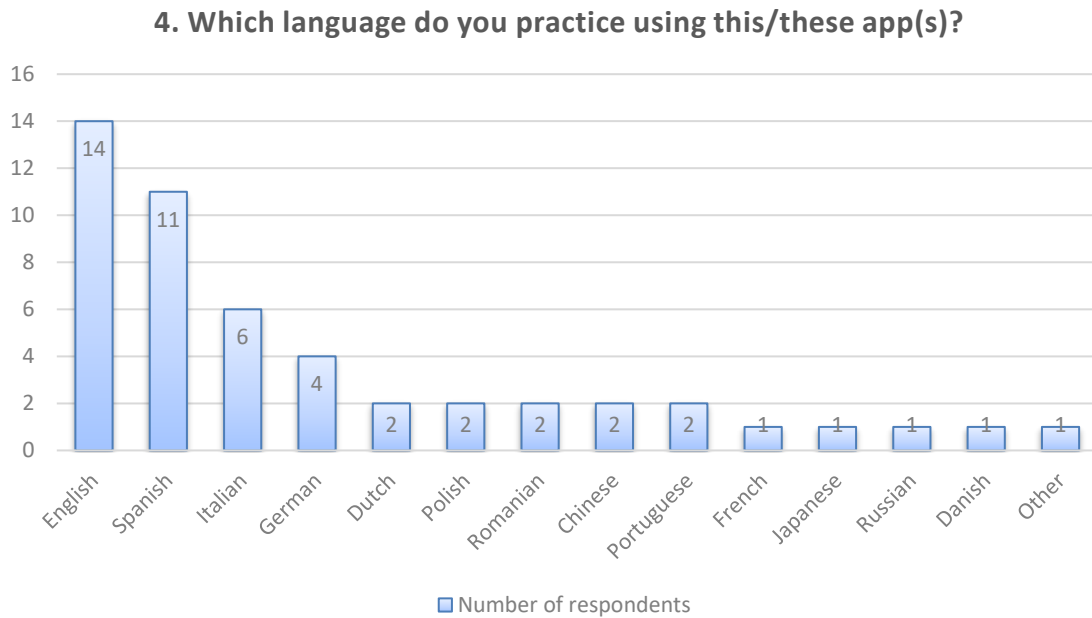
4. Which language do you practice using this/these app(s)?

Figure 4.4 Number of respondents per target language as indicated in the answers

5. As well as using the app, you are learning this language:
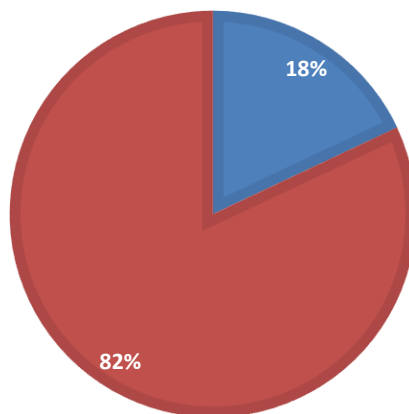

Figure 4.5 Answers to question n. 5

In the second section of the questionnaire, the respondents were asked to provide the main reason why they learn their target language by choosing one option from a range of 10 possible answers. As can be seen in the table below, the answers which gathered most preferences are "I enjoy learning languages in general" (20% of the respondents) and "I recognize the value of being able to speak a foreign language" (16% of the respondents). However, no strong preference for one specific answer was expressed.

6. What is the main reason why you are learning this language?	Respondents
I enjoy learning languages in general.	20%
I recognize the value of being able to speak a foreign language.	16%
I recognize the importance of learning this language.	14%
I need it so that i can communicate with people while i am abroad.	10%
I would like to move to a particular country.	10%
I enjoy learning this language.	8%
I would like to make friends from different countries.	8%
I am genuinely interested in a particular culture/country.	8%
I see it as a challenge.	4%
I need it for my job.	2%

Table 4.6 Answers to question n. 6

In the third section of the questionnaire, the participants were asked to indicate 3 essential qualities of their ideal learning partner from a range of 16 possible answers. Among the answers proposed, the trait which gathered most preferences is "be willing to correct you and give you feedback" (56% of the respondents) followed by "be interesting to talk to" (32% of the respondents), as can be observed in Table 4.7.

The fourth section of the questionnaire includes 5 multiple choice questions which aim at finding out whether the participants are proactive or dependent on their learning partners during their online language exchange. As can be seen in Figure 4.8, when asked if they would start a conversation with a learning partner or wait for them to write first, 78% of the respondents showed a proactive attitude claiming that they would start the conversation.

7. Your ideal learning partner on your language exchange app(s) should:	Respondents
be willing to correct you and give you feedback.	56%
be interesting to talk to.	32%
be willing to share their culture with you.	28%
be able to propose interesting topics for your conversations.	26%
be open to the possibility of becoming friends with you.	24%
be good at explaining grammar rules.	24%
be open-minded.	24%
have the same interests as you.	16%
give you tips on how to learn your target language more effectively.	16%
be a good listener.	12%
be willing to share their opinions and feelings with you.	12%
suggest learning materials and resources.	10%
be willing to meet your learning needs.	6%
encourage you to think about your progress.	6%
remind you to use your target language as much as possible.	4%
be interested in your culture.	4%

Table 4.7 Answers to question n. 7

8. When you find an interesting profile of a native/expert speaker on your language exchange app(s), you usually:
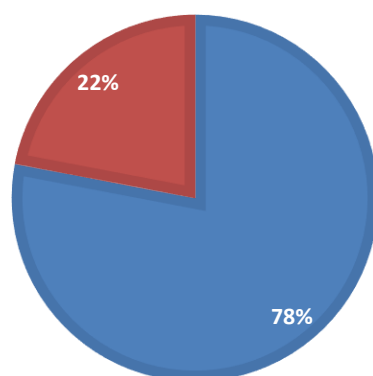

Figure 4.8 Answers to question n. 8

On the contrary, when asked to choose between proposing a learning plan for their language exchange and waiting for their learning partners to find interesting ideas for their interaction, the majority of the respondents chose the second option, showing a more dependent attitude, as can be seen in Figure 4.9.

9. When interacting with a native/expert speaker for the first time on your language exchange app(s), you usually:

■ propose a learning plan for your conversations.   ■ wait for them to come up with interesting ideas.
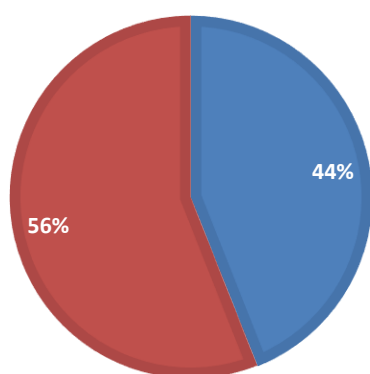

Figure 4.9 Answers to question n. 9

Question n. 10 asked the participants to think about what they would do if their learning partner suddenly stopped replying to their messages. Among the proposed answers, the one which received most preferences is "stop writing and look for another learning partner" (36% of the respondents). This answer together with "write a message and propose a new topic" can be considered as showing a proactive attitude since the actions are specifically focused on the learning process and not on the learning partner.

In question n. 11, the respondents were asked to indicate whether they are aware of what they want to learn from their conversations or let them flow naturally and wait to see where they lead. A solid majority chose the latter, thus showing a tendency for low proactivity in the organization of their interaction (Figure 4.11). Similarly, in the last question of this section, when asked if they would follow their learning partner and switch languages in the middle of an interesting conversation to make it more understandable or keep using the target language instead, 56% of the participants chose

the former, thus revealing a propensity to depend on their learning partners' decisions (Figure 4.12).

10. You have found a good learning partner on your language exchange app(s), but suddenly he/she stops replying to your messages. You would usually:

- ■ write a message and propose a new topic.
- ■ write a message and ask why he/she stopped answering.
- ■ stop writing and wait for an answer.
- ■ stop writing and look for another learning partner.
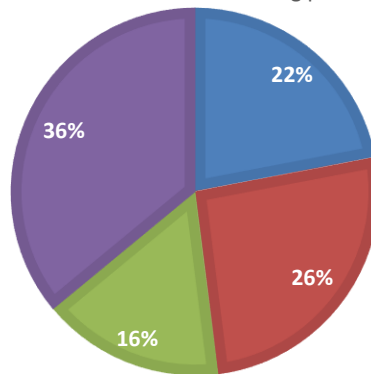

Figure 4.10 Answers to question n. 10

11. When interacting with your learning partner on your language exchange app(s), you usually:

- ■ have a clear idea about what you want to learn from that particular conversation.
- ■ chat spontaneously and wait to see where the conversations leads you.
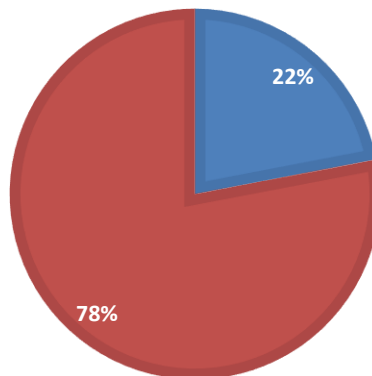

Figure 4.11 Answers to question n. 11

12. Your learning partner stops using the language that you agreed to use in that conversation and starts communicating with you in a language you are both proficient in, so that your interaction can be faster and more understandable. You:

■ kindly ask him/her to return to the language you were practicing.　　■ are fine with his/her decision and start using that language too.
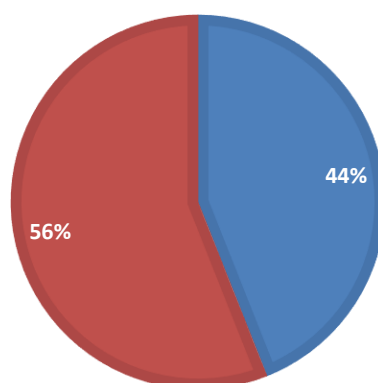

Figure 4.12 Answers to question n. 12

The last question of the questionnaire required the participants to provide additional comments about their online language exchange experience if they had any. Considering that this was an optional question, only 16 participants answered. The majority of them (11 out of 16 respondents) provided an overall positive feedback, while the remaining 5 comments focused on negative aspects and experiences related to the use of such apps. Among the former, two categories can be distinguished: 7 comments highlighted the usefulness and importance of language exchange apps for improving language skills and communicating with people from other countries and cultures; 4 comments focused on some difficulties and limitations of these apps, while still implying a positive experience. The negative comments instead emphasized negative features of such apps, such as the difficulty to find people interested in a language exchange rather than other kinds of interaction and the difficulty to go beyond the initial small talk. All the comments are presented in the tables below. I decided to paraphrase them in order to make the answers more homogeneous and to avoid reporting possible grammar mistakes.

POSITIVE COMMENTS	
Category	**Paraphrased comments**
Usefulness and importance of language exchange apps for improving language skills and communicating with people from other countries and cultures	*These apps are very useful for having everyday conversations with international people learning foreign languages.*
	I think these apps are the best way of learning a language. Of course, except living in the country and interacting with the people around.
	These apps are completely useful and good for improving your speaking skills through interacting with other people around the world.
	These apps are good for learning a language.
	I find these apps quite interesting when both users intend to learn a new language.
	I like interacting with my learning partner and I try my best to answer. Communicating with people from other countries is the best way to learn a new language, to know more about their culture and to share your own culture. I would like my partners to be active too because cooperation is really important in order to improve language skills.
	These apps are great to learn from different people and know about their culture. Learning new things and making new friends while learning the language is the best way to learn a language.
Difficulties and limitations of language exchange apps	*The main difficulty I encountered regards expert speakers' accent. For example, I find the British accent a little bit more difficult to understand than the American accent.*
	These apps help you improve certain language skills, such as reading and writing. However, if you want to improve your speaking skills you should use other apps or meet with someone in real life.
	Although I've met a few language partners thanks to those apps, we always stop using them at a certain moment. We still text each other on a daily basis but we prefer using WhatsApp for that. I think that's because the notifications work better, and you don't miss any messages.
	Maybe we need more free apps because most of them are not completely free.

Table 4.13 Positive comments to question n. 13

NEGATIVE COMMENTS
These apps didn't work for me. I couldn't use them consistently. People don't often answer. The main issue, however, is that you end up having the same conversation over and over again with every partner: "Where are you from, I love Italy, what time is it there, is the weather hot" etc.
As a girl, most of the times I receive messages from boys who want to flirt rather than help me with learning a language. I think it's a pity that they use the app that way.
On language exchange apps, most of the times people are not interested to learn as much they should be.
It is difficult to find people willing to talk.
People often answer in English instead of the language I want to practice.

Table 4.14 Negative comments to question n. 13

4.5 Discussion

In Section 4.1 the four research questions of this study were presented. It is worth noting that the answer to the main research question ("How does online interaction with native or expert speakers through language exchange apps affect learners' autonomy in terms of dependency on their learning partners?") is included in the answers to the other three research questions. In this section, the results of the questionnaire will be analyzed with reference to each research question. In other words, I will examine the collected data to find out: whether learners using online language exchange apps see their learning partners as teachers or as helpful peers; whether there is a correlation between this perception and how proactive or dependent on their learning partners they are; whether there is a correlation between their degree of proactivity or dependency and their type of motivation (intrinsic and extrinsic). This is done by allocating a specific category to each answer and counting the number of answers classified in this way. The number of answers will be then transformed into percentages which are expected to show general trends. Below I will explain the procedures which I employed to answer each research question.

Research question: How do learners using these apps see their learning partners: as a kind of substitute teacher or just helpful peers?

In order to answer this question, the third section of the questionnaire should be considered. In this section, the respondents were asked to choose exactly three traits of their ideal learning partner from the answers proposed. Based on what was discussed in the previous chapters, I assigned a predominant trait to each answer, calling these "teacher trait" and "peer trait", as suggested in Table 4.15. "Teacher traits" regard those characteristics which can be expected in a language teacher and, more specifically, an autonomous teacher (Section 1.6). "Peer traits" refer instead to those qualities which are more likely to be found in a peer who wants to help with one's language learning. Moreover, it can be argued that the former focus more on the content of the interaction, while the latter are more concerned with the enjoyability of the interaction. In this way, the number of "teacher traits" and "peer traits" chosen by each participant may reveal a general tendency.

Teacher traits	Peer traits
o be good at explaining grammar rules;	o be interesting to talk to;
o remind you to use your target language as much as possible;	o be open-minded;
o give you tips on how to learn your target language more effectively;	o be open to the possibility of becoming friends with you;
o be willing to correct you and give you feedback;	o have the same interests as you;
o be able to propose interesting topics for your conversations;	o be willing to share their opinions and feelings with you;
o be willing to meet your learning needs;	o be a good listener;
o encourage you to think about your progress;	o be interested in your culture.
o suggest learning materials and resources;	
o be willing to share their culture with you.	

Table 4.15 Teacher traits and peer traits

For example, if a participant chooses two answers characterized by the "teacher trait" and one answer characterized by the "peer trait", it can be assumed that this participant tends to perceive their learning partner more as a teacher rather than a helpful peer.

The results show that 66% of the participants expect their learning partners to be similar to teachers. This finding is in line with Little's (2001) assumption regarding the idea that the two roles which can be found in a traditional teacher-led pedagogy, i.e., the teacher and the learner, are also the ones which are often played in tandem collaborations (Section 3.1). This means that the expert speaker is often seen as a teacher even though they are not. It may be worth noting that of the respondents who claimed to learn their target language with the help of a teacher, 78% were found to perceive their tandem partners as teachers. This might confirm the hypothesis that learners tend to transfer the learner-teacher relationship typical of the language classroom to their interaction with tandem partners.

Furthermore, as seen in the previous section, the teacher trait which was most often indicated regards the willingness to correct and provide feedback. This is not surprising considering that tandem learning is based on reciprocal feedback, which is a relevant element in the process of language learning (Li Li 2016), as seen in Chapters 2 and 3. Asking for feedback is also an important social strategy which can be used by online tandem learners to enhance their learning (Section 2.3.3). This action is encouraged by the fact that technology can give learners the chance to receive immediate or almost immediate feedback (Hauck and Hampel 2008) depending on the CALL tool used and the availability of the learning partner. Combining the two findings, it appears that 58% of the respondents who perceive their learning partner as a teacher included the trait "be willing to correct you and give you feedback" among the traits of their ideal learning partner, which were asked in question n. 7. As discussed earlier, learning partners are usually not trained teachers and, although they may be well intentioned, it should not be taken for granted that their corrections and feedback are as complete and accurate as those of a teacher. Therefore, it can be argued that when tandem learners rely completely on their partners' feedback, which they expect to be like that of a teacher,

there is a risk that they may accept inaccurate corrections without double-checking them through other tools, and thus fail to express fully their autonomy.

On the other hand, 34% of the respondents expressed a tendency to perceive their learning partners as helpful peers. To be precise, as can be seen in Figure 4.7, the peer trait most often chosen is "be interesting to talk to". Considering that the enjoyability of the learning process is closely connected with the use of CALL in general (Section 2.2.5) and learners' motivation (Section 1.5.4), it can be easily understood why 32% of the respondents chose this trait. Indeed, as discussed in Chapter 1, learners' motivation is believed to increase when learners are involved in interesting activities (Little, Ridley and Ushioda 2002), and motivation is in turn an important factor both in the process of language learning and in the development of learner autonomy. Technology is relevant in this sense as it makes it easier for learners to choose learning materials and activities which are personally interesting and pertinent (Luke 2006) and which can help them keep their motivation high. In online tandem learning, this can happen, for example, when tandem learners choose interesting topics for their conversations or choose learning partners who are interesting to talk to. This can be one reason why the developers of language exchange apps encourage users to complete their profiles by providing information about their interests and goals, as seen in Section 4.2. In this way, learners have greater chances to engage in conversation with users who correspond to their ideal learning partners.

Research question: Based on this distinction, how proactive or dependent on their learning partners are they?

In order to answer to this question, the degree of proactivity of the participants should be analyzed. As explained above, the last section of the questionnaire aimed at finding if the respondents tend to be more proactive or more dependent on their learning partners. I assigned a value to each answer in this section, indicating either proactivity or dependency, as proposed in Table 4.16. In this way, the number of "proactive answers" and "dependent answers" chosen by each participant may reveal a general tendency. For example, if a participant chooses three answers characterized by proactivity and two

answers characterized by dependency, it can be assumed that this participant tends to be proactive in their interaction.

Question	"Proactive" answer	"Dependent" answer
8. When you find an interesting profile of a native/expert speaker on your language exchange app(s), you usually:	start the conversation.	wait for them to write to you.
9. When interacting with a native/expert speaker for the first time on your language exchange app(s), you usually:	propose a learning plan for your conversations.	wait for them to come up with interesting ideas.
10. You have found a good learning partner on your language exchange app(s), but suddenly he/she stops replying to your messages. You would usually:	o write a message and propose a new topic. o stop writing and look for another learning partner.	o write a message and ask why he/she stopped answering. o stop writing and wait for an answer.
11. When interacting with your learning partner on your language exchange app(s), you usually:	have a clear idea about what you want to learn from that particular conversation.	chat spontaneously and wait to see where the conversations leads you.
12. Imagine this situation: you and your learning partner are chatting about a very interesting topic. Suddenly, your learning partner stops using the language that you agreed to use in that conversation and starts communicating with you in a language you are both proficient in, so that your interaction can be faster and more understandable. You:	kindly ask him/her to return to the language you were practicing.	are fine with his/her decision and start using that language too.

Table 4.16 Questions and answers of the fourth section of the questionnaire

The results show that 54% of the participants tend to have a proactive attitude when interacting with their learning partners on language exchange apps. Furthermore, of the respondents who tend to see their learning partners as teachers, 52% are found proactive. Similarly, 59% of the respondents who perceive their learning partners as peers show a tendency for proactivity. Although there are no strong majorities, these figures may reflect the propensity and necessity for tandem learners to be autonomous (Section 3.2), considering that learner autonomy requires learners to be proactive in their interaction with others (Little 2003). Tandem learning is indeed believed to compel learners to act autonomously as it requires them to take more responsibility for their learning (Kötter 2003). Furthermore, in the case of online tandem learning, since the collaboration is based on electronic communication, tandem learners need to be prepared to overcome potential problems connected with learning through technology (Chun, Kern and Smith 2016), and this may require additional learner autonomy, as argued in Section 3.3.

Research question: Is there any correlation between their degree of proactivity or dependency and their type of motivation (intrinsic and extrinsic)?

This question takes into account the two types of motivation discussed in Section 1.4.1: intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Summarizing the concepts, while intrinsic motivation "refers to doing something because it is inherently interesting or enjoyable", extrinsic motivation "refers to doing something because it leads to a separable outcome" (Deci and Ryan 2000: 55). In the second section of the questionnaire, the participants' motivation is researched through a question which asks the participants to express the main reason why they learn their target language. Each of the answers proposed is related to one of the two types of motivation mentioned above, as suggested in Table 4.15.

On the basis of this classification, 40% of the respondents are found to be intrinsically motivated and 60% show extrinsic motivation. Among the first group, a slight majority (55% of the respondents) shows a tendency to be dependent on their learning partners. In the second group, instead, 60% of the participants tend to be proactive. Since

proactivity is closely related to learner autonomy, these findings appear to be in contradiction with what was discussed in Section 1.4.1, where it was pointed out that intrinsic motivation is considered as the one inherently connected with learner autonomy and able to foster it. In this case, instead, the results of the questionnaire show that the extrinsically motivated participants tend to be more proactive than those who are intrinsically motivated. This might be due to the fact that the former may have an external learning goal in mind and may have to create and follow a concrete plan in order to achieve it. On the contrary, intrinsically motivated learners might not have a specific learning objective since their main reason for learning does not involve an external goal. Therefore, they might feel free to enjoy their language exchange as they would do with a normal interaction.

However, it was also mentioned that extrinsic motivation can present various degrees of internalization, which can combine the benefits of the two types of motivation and lead to greater perseverance and engagement (Deci and Ryan 2000). This type of motivation is still extrinsic but involves a higher degree of personal choice as opposed to the external control that can characterize extrinsic behaviors, and can, thus, promote learner autonomy. It can be argued, therefore, that the extrinsic goals of the respondents who chose an extrinsic reason may be internalized to a certain degree. This would be in line with Little, Dam and Legenhausen's (2017) consideration, who claim that learners are more successful if they combine their intrinsic motivation with external goals. An example of internalized extrinsic motivation is provided by Dörnyei and Ushioda (2011), who suggest that this kind of motivation can be found in learners who recognize the importance of learning a foreign language while still enjoying the learning process. I reported this idea in two of the options provided for question n. 6, where the participants were asked to express their motivation. These options were: "I recognize the value of being able to speak a foreign language" and "I recognize the importance of learning this language". As can be seen in Table 4.6, these options gathered 16% and 14% of the respondents' answers respectively, thus gaining the second and third position respectively. This finding may explain why extrinsically motivated respondents were found generally more proactive.

6. What is the main reason why you are learning this language?	
Intrinsic	**Extrinsic**
o I enjoy learning languages in general. o I enjoy learning this language. o I am genuinely interested in a particular culture/country o I see it as a challenge.	o I would like to make friends from different countries. o I need it for my job. o I need it so that I can communicate with people while I am abroad. o I would like to move to a particular country. o I recognize the value of being able to speak a foreign language. o I recognize the importance of learning this language.

Table 4.17 Types of motivation in question n. 6

Summarizing the findings, it can be claimed that the participants' interaction with expert speakers on language exchange apps appears as a relationship between learner and teacher, where the expert speaker is expected to play the role of a teacher. As discussed in Section 3.1, the way tandem partners think of their learning partners can be influenced by the traditional roles of teacher and learner which were played in the classroom during their education. This may originate from the teachers' reluctance to let their students manage their learning process on their own, as argued in Section 1.9. In turn, learners may feel safe to rely completely on their teacher and reject the idea of taking responsibility for their own learning. However, tandem partners are usually not teachers and, therefore, their contribution to the tandem collaboration cannot be compared to the teaching of a trained teacher. It can be argued that the perception of the tandem partner as a teacher may lead to a greater dependency on the learning partner, as this can be perceived as a model to follow. The results partially confirm this hypothesis considering that the percentage of proactive participants is higher in the participants who see their learning partners as peers than in those who see them as teachers (59% and 52% of the respondents respectively). However, due to the small difference, this finding cannot be considered as a solid confirmation.

Furthermore, it was found that the level of proactivity of the participants may also depend on their type of motivation. As explained in Section 1.4.1, motivation is an important element in the development of learner autonomy. Furthermore, motivation is believed to be enhanced by technology, which can make the learning process more enjoyable (Section 2.2.5). Deci and Ryan (1985) distinguished between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation depending on whether learners are moved by the enjoyment of the process or by an external goal, and claimed that intrinsic motivation is generally associated with autonomous behaviors and a more successful learning with respect to extrinsic motivation. However, in my study, extrinsically motivated respondents were found more proactive than those moved by intrinsic motivation, who showed instead a greater degree of dependency on their learning partners. As explained above, this can be due to the fact that the participants' extrinsic motivation may be more or less internalized and can, therefore, lead to greater learner autonomy. In spite of these slight tendencies, the findings are not supported by solid majorities and cannot, therefore, be used to make general assumptions. In addition, I believe that the reliability of this study can be affected by a few factors, as argued in the section below.

4.6 Difficulties and limitations

The main difficulty which I encountered during the study regards the number of the participants, which I also believe to be one of the main limitations of the study. Considering the limited amount of time and the specific target of this study, that is foreign language learners who use online language exchange apps to learn or practice their target language, it was particularly difficult to find an appropriate number of people eager to take part in the survey. Another important limitation can consist in the social desirability bias, which could have a negative impact on the reliability of the results of the survey. According to this bias, participants in surveys tend to answer in a manner that is seen as favorable by the others and, therefore, to over-report desirable behavior (Dörnyei 2010). In this case, the participants might have been tempted to overestimate their proactive attitude in the last section of the questionnaire, where the nature of the options proposed could favor a classification into favorable and non-favorable answers. For example, in question n. 9, the participants could see the option

"propose a learning plan for your conversations" as a desirable answer as opposed to the option "wait for them to come up with interesting ideas".

Furthermore, since the questionnaire is written in English, the participants were required to be proficient in English to the degree that they could understand the questions and give appropriate answers. However, it cannot be assumed that all participants had the necessary proficiency to do so. This doubt is supported by the low quality of certain answers to the last open question. Another problem connected to the respondents' literacy consists in the difficulty to check the validity of the answers and to correct the erroneous ones. Respondents may have not understood fully the questions and could have, therefore, given inaccurate responses, which I could not correct in absence of a direct contact with the participants. A similar issue regards the fact that respondents might have read the instructions and the questions superficially. An example of this behavior can be found in some of the answers to question n. 4, where the respondents were asked to indicate the language they were currently practicing the most through their language exchange apps. Although they only had to indicate one language, 22 participants wrote more than one language in their answers, showing that they probably read the question superficially.

However, the questionnaire was constructed so that each question and answer was simple and straightforward and, hence, easy to be understood by all target participants. In addition, the amount of time required to complete the questionnaire was relatively short (around 5 minutes). This was supposed to encourage the participants to dedicate enough care to answering the questions accurately, considering that "the amount of time respondents are usually willing to spend working on a questionnaire is rather short" (Dörnyei 2010: 7). In conclusion, it can be argued that, in spite of these difficulties, the survey produced interesting results, which may have the potential to confirm some of the trends covered in the previous chapters and to provide cause for reflection as concerns the topic of online tandem learning.

CONCLUSION

In view of what has been discussed so far, it can be claimed that technology has the potential to enrich the language learning experience and promote learner autonomy when used appropriately. Learners need, however, to be helped both in becoming more autonomous and in using CALL tools in order to benefit fully from them. As explained in the first chapter, learner autonomy is important for language learners as it is believed to support and improve the process of language learning. This is possible if learners are motivated enough and their teachers are adequately trained to help them take control of their learning. The process can, however, be complex as learners may be reluctant to act autonomously and teachers may find it difficult to motivate them. Furthermore, the traditional model in which teachers manage every aspect of the learning process is likely to have a strong influence on the way teachers and learners perceive their roles in the autonomous language classroom. This issue can occur in more independent environments as well, such as online language exchanges, where learners usually need to manage their learning without an external guide and, thus, to act more autonomously.

Since tandem learners are usually not trained teachers, their contribution to the collaboration may not be flawless. Therefore, it can be argued that when tandem learners rely completely on their learning partners, the quality of their language learning can be hindered, and their autonomy decreases. In my study it was found that online tandem learners tend to perceive their learning partner more as a kind of substitute teacher than a helpful peer. This perception may lead learners to depend on their partners, who are seen as models to follow, and, therefore, to fail to develop their autonomy. Considering proactivity as a fundamental element of learner autonomy, this premise is partially confirmed by the results which show that the number of proactive respondents who perceive their tandem partners as peers is higher than the number of proactive respondents who expect their learning partners to be similar to teachers. As

argued above, this may be a result of how learners are used to thinking of the process of language learning during their education.

Furthermore, learner autonomy can also be affected by their type of motivation. Generally, intrinsic motivation is believed to foster learner autonomy and a more successful language learning than extrinsic motivation. This is in contrast with the results of the study, which show that extrinsically motivated respondents tend to be more proactive than intrinsically motivated respondents. However, the degree of internalization of extrinsic goals can play an important role in the effectiveness of the learning process and can promote autonomous behavior. As the level of internalization of extrinsic motivation cannot be measured easily through a questionnaire, it can be assumed that the motivation of the extrinsically moved respondents may have been internalized to a certain degree. The role of technology is likely to have a role in this process as it is generally believed to make one's learning more enjoyable and, therefore, to enhance intrinsic motivation. In this way, learners who have external goals related to their language learning may integrate them in the feeling of gratification of learning through the use of technology.

In conclusion, it can be claimed that although tandem learning is based on the principle of learner autonomy and the results of the study show a slight majority of learners who tend to be proactive in their online interaction, it should not be taken for granted that learners who decide to engage in online language exchanges are necessarily autonomous. The process of becoming autonomous can be complex as it involves both learners' willingness to take charge of their own learning and teachers' ability to guide them toward autonomy. Learners need to be adequately motivated and helped to make autonomous choices during their learning and to make good use of the technological tools which can help them in this process. In order to be able to provide this kind of support, teachers are required to be autonomous too and to be aware of the opportunities that CALL can offer in terms of promoting language learning and learner autonomy. It can be argued, therefore, that, just like tandem learning, the development of learner autonomy is a matter of collaboration and perseverance, and at the basis of this

collaboration is the awareness that being in control of one's learning can enrich the experience of language learning, empower the learner and be personally rewarding.

REFERENCES

Abrams, Zsuzsana Ittzes. 2006. From Theory to Practice: Intracultural CMC in the L2 Classroom. In Ducate, Lara & Nike Arnold (Eds.), *Calling on CALL: From Theory and Research to New Directions in Foreign Language Teaching*. San Marcos: CALICO, 181-210.

Ackerley, Katherine. 2003. *Using computer-mediated communication for autonomous and collaborative language learning*. Padova: CLEUP.

Agustín-Llach, Maria Pilar & Andrés Canga Alonso. 2017. Fostering Learner Autonomy Through Vocabulary Strategy Training. In Pawlak, Mirosław, Anna Mystkowska-Wiertelak & Jakub Bielak (Eds.), *Autonomy in Second Language Learning: Managing the Resources*. Cham: Springer, 141-160.

Álvarez, Inma, Tita Beaven & Cecilia Garrido. 2008. Strategies for Acquiring Intercultural Competence. In Hurd, Stella & Tim Lewis (Eds.), *Language Learning Strategies in Independent Settings*. Bristol: Multilingual Matters, 179-198.

Bárcena, Elena, T. Read, J. Underwood, H. Obari, D. Cojocnean, T. Koyama, A. Pareja-Lora, C. Calle, L. Pomposo, N. Talaván, J. Ávila-Cabrera, A. Ibañez, A. Vermeulen, M. Jordano, J. Arús-Hita, P. Rodríguez, M. D. Castrillo, A. Kétyi, J. Selwood, M. Gaved & A. Kukulska-Hulme. 2015. State of the art of language learning design using mobile technology: sample apps and some critical reflection. In Helm, Francesca, Linda Bradley, Marta Guarda & Sylvie Thouësny, *Critical CALL: Proceedings of the 2015 EUROCALL Conference, Padova, Italy*. Dublin: Research-publishing.net, 36-43.

Bax, Stephen. 2003. CALL – past, present and future. *System* 31, 13-28.

Beatty, Ken. 2010. *Teaching and researching computer-assisted language learning* (2nd ed.). London: Longman.

Benson, Phil. 2001. *Teaching and researching autonomy in language learning*. Edinburgh: Pearson Education Limited.

Benson, Phil. 2011. *Teaching and researching autonomy in language learning* (2nd ed.) New York: Routledge.

Benson, Phil & Peter Voller (Eds.). 1997. *Autonomy and independence in language learning*. London & New York: Longman.

Benson, Phil. 2006. Autonomy in language teaching and learning. *Language Teaching* 40 (1), 21-40.

Borup, Jered, R. E. West, R. Thomas & C. R. Graham. 2014. Examining the impact of video feedback on instructor social presence in blended courses. *The International Review of Research in Open and Distributed Learning*, 15 (3), 232-256.

Brammerts, Helmut. 1996. Tandem language learning via the Internet and the International E-mail Tandem Network. In Little, David & Helmut Brammerts (Eds.), *A guide to language learning in tandem via the Internet*. Dublin: Centre for Language and Communication Studies, (Occasional Paper No. 46), 9-22.

Breen, Michael P., Sarah J. Mann. 1997. Shooting arrows at the sun: perspectives on a pedagogy for autonomy. In Benson, Phil & Peter Voller, *Autonomy and independence in language learning*. London & New York: Longman, 132-149.

Bush, Michael D. 1997. Implementing Technology for Language Learning. In Bush, Michael D. & Robert M. Terry (Eds.), *Technology-Enhanced Language Learning*. Lincolnwood: National Textbook Company, 287-350.

Chik, Alice. 2018. Learner Autonomy and Digital Practices. In Chik Alice, Naoko Aoki & Richard Smith (Eds.), *Autonomy in Language Learning and Teaching*. London: Springer, 73-92.

Chun, Dorothy, Richard Kern & Bryan Smith. 2016. Technology in Language Use, Language Teaching, and Language Learning. *The Modern Language Journal*, 100, Supplement, 64-80.

Cotterall, Sara & David Crabbe. 2008. Learners talking: From problem to solution. In Lamb, Terry & Hayo Reinders (Eds.), *Learner and Teacher Autonomy: concepts, realities, and responses*. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 125-140.

Council of Europe. 2000. *European Language Portfolio (ELP): Principles and Guidelines*. Strasbourg: Council of Europe.

Council of Europe. 2001. *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, teaching, assessment (CEFR)*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Council of Europe. 2018. *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, teaching, assessment companion volume with new descriptors*. Strasbourg: Council of Europe.

Cziko, Gary A. 2004. Electronic tandem language learning (eTandem): A third approach to second language learning for the 21st century. *CALICO Journal*, 22 (1), 25-39.

Dam, Leni. 1990. Learner autonomy in practice. In Gathercole, Ian (Ed.), *Autonomy in language learning*. London: CILT, 16-37.

Dam, Leni. 1995. *Learner autonomy 3: From theory to classroom practice*. Dublin: Authentic.

Dam, Leni. 2003. Developing learner autonomy: The teacher's responsibility. In Little, David, Jennifer Ridley & Ema Ushioda (Eds.), *Learner autonomy in the foreign language classroom: Teacher, learner, curriculum and assessment*. Dublin: Authentic, 135-146.

Davies, Graham & Sue Hewer. 2012. Introduction to new technologies and how they can contribute to language learning and teaching. Module 1.1. In Davies, Graham (Ed.), *Information and Communications Technology for Language Teachers (ICT4LT), Slough, Thames Valley University* (Online). Available at: http://www.ict4lt.org/en/en_mod1-1.htm (last visited 11.12.2019).

Davies, Graham, Ros Walker, Heather Rendall & Sue Hewer. 2012. Introduction to Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL). Module 1.4. In Davies, Graham (Ed.), *Information and Communications Technology for Language Teachers (ICT4LT), Slough, Thames Valley University* (Online). Available at: http://www.ict4lt.org/en/en_mod1-4.htm (last visited 11.12.2019).

Davis, Niki, Mi Ok Cho & Lara Hagenson. 2005. Intercultural competence and the role of technology in teacher education. *Contemporary Issues in Technology and Teacher Education*, 5 (3), 384-394.

Deci, Edward L. & Richard M. Ryan. 1985. *Intrinsic Motivation and Self-Determination in Human Behavior*. New York: Plenum.

Deci, Edward L. & Richard M. Ryan. 2000. Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivations: Classic Definitions and New Directions. *Contemporary Educational Psychology* 25, 54-67.

Dickinson, Leslie. 1995. Autonomy and motivation: A literature review. *System*, 23 (2), 165-174.

Dooly, Melinda. 2010. Teacher 2.0. In Guth, Sarah & Francesca Helm (Eds.), *Telecollaboration 2.0: Language, Literacies and Intercultural Learning in the 21st Century*. Bern: Peter Lang, 277-304.

Dörnyei, Zoltán. 2010. *Questionnaires in Second Language Research: Construction, Administration, and Processing* (2nd edition). New York and London: Routledge.

Dörnyei, Zoltán & Ema Ushioda. 2011. *Teaching and Researching Motivation* (2nd edition). Harlow: Pearson Education Limited.

Dörnyei, Zoltán & Peter Skehan. 2005. Individual Differences in Second Language Learning. In Doughty, Catherine J. & Michael H. Long (Eds.), *The handbook of second language acquisition*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 439-461.

Dubreil, Sebastien. 2006. Gaining perspective on culture through CALL. In Ducate, Lara & Nike Arnold (Eds.), *Calling on CALL: From Theory and Research to New Directions in Foreign Language Teaching*. San Marcos: CALICO, 237-268.

Edwards, Emily & Peter Stewart Roger. 2015. Seeking out challenges to develop L2 self-confidence: A language learner's journey to proficiency. *TESL-EJ* 18 (1), 1-24.

Egbert, Joy. 2005. *CALL essentials: Principles and practice in CALL classrooms*. Alexandria, VA: TESOL.

Esch, Edith M. 1997. Learner training for autonomous language learning. In Benson, Phil & Peter Voller, *Autonomy and independence in language learning*. London & New York: Longman, 164-176.

Formentin, Roberto, Daniela Griggio & Charlotte Whigham. 2004. Face-To-Face Tandem Learning. In Torsello, Carol Taylor, Antonio Pasinato & Nicolette Whitteridge (Eds.), *Centro Linguistico di Ateneo di Padova: esperienze innovative e riflessioni per il futuro*. Padova: CLEUP, 43-56.

Gabryś-Barker, Danuta. 2017. Preservice Teachers' Perceptions of Teacher Autonomy. In Pawlak, Mirosław, Anna Mystkowska-Wiertelak & Jakub Bielak. *Autonomy in Second Language Learning: Managing the Resources*. Cham: Springer, 161-178.

Gao, Xuesong. 2018. Language Teacher Autonomy and Social Censure. In Chik, Alice, Naoko Aoki & Richard Smith (Eds.), *Autonomy in Language Learning and Teaching*. London: Springer, 29-50.

Gardner, Robert. 1985. *Social Psychology and Second Language Learning: The Role of Attitudes and Motivation*. London: Edward Arnold.

Godwin-Jones, Robert. 2011. Emerging technologies: Autonomous language learning. *Language Learning & Technology*, 15 (3), 4-11.

Guerin, Elizabeth M. C., Maria Elisabetta Cigognini & Maria Chiara Pettenati. 2010. Learner 2.0. In Guth, Sarah & Francesca Helm (Eds.), *Telecollaboration 2.0: Language, Literacies and Intercultural Learning in the 21st Century*. Bern: Peter Lang, 199-218.

Guth, Sarah & Michael Thomas. 2010. Telecollaboration with Web 2.0 Tools. In Guth, Sarah & Francesca Helm (Eds.). *Telecollaboration 2.0: Language, Literacies and Intercultural Learning in the 21st Century*. Bern: Peter Lang, 39-68.

Hacker, Penny, Gary Barkhuizen. 2008. Autonomous teachers, autonomous cognition: Developing personal theories through reflection in language teacher education. In Lamb, Terry & Hayo Reinders, *Learner and Teacher Autonomy: concepts, realities, and responses*. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 161-186.

Han, Amy. 2011. Gaining insights into student reflection from online learner diaries. In Fischer, Johann & David Little (Eds.), *Language Learning in Higher Education*. Journal of the European Confederation of Language Centres in Higher Education (CercleS), vol. 1, no. 1. Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter Mouton, 195-210.

Hauck, Mirjam & Regine Hampel. 2008. Strategies for Online Learning Environments. In Hurd, Stella & Tim Lewis (Eds.), *Language Learning Strategies in Independent Settings*. Bristol: Multilingual Matters, 283-302.

Healey, Deborah, V. Hegelheimer, P. Hubbard, S. Iannou-Georgiou, G. Kessler & P. Ware. 2008. *TESOL Technology Standards Framework*. Alexandria, VA: TESOL Publications.

Healey, Deborah. 2016. Language learning and technology: Past, present and future. In Farr, Fiona & Liam Murray (Eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of Language Learning and Technology*. London and New York: Routledge, 9-23.

Helm, Francesca & Sarah Guth. 2016. Telecollaboration and language learning. In Farr, Fiona & Liam Murray (Eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of Language Learning and Technology*. London and New York: Routledge, 241-254.

Holec, Henri. 1981. *Autonomy in foreign language learning*. Oxford, UK: Pergamon.

Hulstijn, Jan H. 2003. Incidental and Intentional Learning. In Doughty, Catherine J., Michael H. Long (Eds.), *The handbook of second language acquisition*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 265-282.

Kenning, Marie-Madeleine. 1996. IT and autonomy. In Broady, Elspeth & Marie-Madeleine Kenning (Eds.), *Promoting learner autonomy in university language teaching*. London: CILT, 43-62.

Kern, Richard. 2014. Technology as Pharmakon: The promise and perils of the Internet for foreign language education. *Modern Language Journal*, 98, 330-347.

Kinginger, Celeste. 2016. Telecollaboration and student mobility for language learning. In Jager, Sake, Malgorzata Kurek & Breffni O'Rourke (Eds.), *New directions in telecollaborative research and practice: selected papers from the second conference on telecollaboration in higher education*. Dublin: Research-publishing.net, 19-30.

Klimas, Anna. 2017. A Goal-Setting Logbook as an Instrument Fostering Learner Autonomy. In Pawlak, Mirosław, Anna Mystkowska-Wiertelak & Jakub Bielak (Eds.), *Autonomy in Second Language Learning: Managing the Resources*. Cham: Springer, 21-34.

Kohonen, Viljio & Pauli Kaikkonen. 1996. Exploring new ways of inservice teacher education: an action research project. *European Journal of Intercultural Studies* 7 (3), 42-59.

Kohonen, Viljio. 1992. Experiential language learning: second language learning as cooperative learner education. In Nunan, David (Ed.), *Collaborative language learning and teaching*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 14-39.

Kohonen, Viljo. 2010. Autonomy, Agency and Community in FL Education: Developing Site-based Understanding through a University and School Partnership. In O'Rourke, Breffni & Lorna Carson (Eds.), *Language learner autonomy: policy, curriculum, classroom*. Oxford: Peter Lang, 3-28.

Kolb, David. 1984. *Learning Style Inventory*. Boston, MA: McBer.

Kötter, Markus. 2003. Negotiation of meaning and codeswitching in online tandems. *Language Learning & Technology*, 7 (2), 145-172.

Kukulska-Hulme, Agnes & Lesley Shield. 2008. An overview of mobile assisted language learning: From content delivery to supported collaboration and interaction. *ReCALL*, 20 (3), 271-289.

Lafford, Peter A. & Barbara A. Lafford. 1997. Learning Language and Culture with Internet Technologies. In Bush, Michael D. & Robert M. Terry (Eds.), *Technology-Enhanced Language Learning*. Lincolnwood: National Textbook Company, 215-262.

Lamb, Terry & Hayo Reinders. 2008. *Learner and Teacher Autonomy: concepts, realities, and responses*. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company.

Levy, Mike. 1997. *Computer-assisted language learning: Context and conceptualization*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Levy, Mike & Glenn Stockwell. 2006. *CALL Dimensions: Options and Issues in Computer-Assisted Language Learning*. New York/London: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Levy, Mike & Philip Hubbard. 2005. Why call CALL "CALL"?. *Computer Assisted Language Learning*, 18 (3), 143-149.

Levy, Mike. 2016. Researching in language learning and technology. In Farr, Fiona & Liam Murray (Eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of Language Learning and Technology*. London and New York: Routledge, 101-114.

Li Li. 2016. CALL tools for lexico-grammatical acquisition. In Farr, Fiona & Liam Murray (Eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of Language Learning and Technology*. London and New York: Routledge, 461-477.

Little, David. 2004. Constructing a theory of learner autonomy: Some steps along the way. In Mäkinen, Katja, Pauli Kaikkonen & Viljo Kohonen (Eds.), *Future perspectives in foreign language education*. Oulu: Oulu University Press, 15-25.

Little, David. 2007. Learner autonomy: Drawing together the threads of self-assessment, goal-setting and reflection. Unknown source. Retrieved from: http://archive.ecml.at/mtp2/Elp_tt/Results/DM_layout/00_10/06/06%20Supplementary%20text.pdf (last visited: 10.02.2020).

Little, David. 1995. Learning as dialogue: The dependence of learner autonomy on teacher autonomy. *System* 23 (2), 175-182.

Little, David. 2009. Language learner autonomy and the European Language Portfolio: Two L2 English examples. *Language Teaching*, 42 (2), 222–233.

Little, David, Jennifer Ridley & Ema Ushioda. 2002. *Towards greater learner autonomy in the foreign language classroom*. Dublin: Authentik.

Little, David, Leni Dam & Lienhard Legenhausen. 2017. *Language learner autonomy: theory, practice, and research*. Bristol: Multilingual matters.

Little, David & Radka Perclová. 2001. *The European Language Portfolio: a guide for teachers and teacher trainers*. Strasbourg: Council of Europe.

Little, David. 1991. *Learner autonomy 1: Definitions, issues and problems*. Dublin: Authentik.

Little, David. 1996. Learner autonomy and learner counselling. In Little, David & Helmut Brammerts (Eds.), *A guide to language learning in tandem via the Internet*. Dublin: Centre for Language and Communication Studies, (Occasional Paper No. 46), 23-34.

Little, David. 2001. Learner autonomy and the challenge of tandem language learning via the Internet. In Chambers, Angela & Graham Davies (Eds.), *ICT and Language Learning: A European Perspective*. Amsterdam: Swets & Zeitlinger Publishers, 29-38.

Little, David. 2003. Learner autonomy and second/foreign language learning. Unknown source. Retrieved from: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/259874624_Learner_autonomy_and_secondforeign_language_learning (last visited: 13.02.2020).

Little, David. 2012. The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages and the European Language Portfolio: Some history, a view of language learner autonomy, and some implications for language learning in higher education. In Mansfield, Gillian & David Little (Eds.), *Language learning in higher education*. Journal of the European Confederation of Language Centres in Higher Education (CercleS), vol. 2, no. 1. Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter Mouton, 1-16.

Littlewood, William. 1996. "Autonomy": An Anatomy and a Framework. *System*. 24, (4), 427-435.

Littlewood, William. 1997. Self-access: why do we want it and what can it do? In Benson, Phil & Peter Voller (Eds.), *Autonomy and independence in language learning*. London & New York: Longman, 79-93.

Littlewood, William. 1999. Defining and developing autonomy in East Asian contexts. *Applied Linguistics*, 20, 71-94.

Lomicka, Lara & Gillian Lord. 2016. Social networking and language learning. In Farr, Fiona & Liam Murray (Eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of Language Learning and Technology*. London and New York: Routledge, 255-268.

Lomicka, Lara. 2006. Understanding the Other: Intercultural Exchange and CMC. In Ducate, Lara & Nike Arnold (Eds.), *Calling on CALL: From Theory and Research to New Directions in Foreign Language Teaching*. San Marcos: CALICO, 211-236.

Luke, Christopher L. 2006. Situating CALL in the Broader Methodological Context of Foreign Language Teaching and Learning: Promises and Possibilities. In Ducate, Lara & Nike Arnold (Eds.), *Calling on CALL: From Theory and Research to New Directions in Foreign Language Teaching*. San Marcos: CALICO, 21-42.

Macaro, Ernesto. 2000. Issues in target language teaching. In Field, Kit (Ed.), *Issues in modern foreign language teaching*. London: Routledge, 171-189.

Macaro, Ernesto. 2001. Analysing student teachers' codeswitching in foreign language classrooms: theories and decision making. *Modern Language Journal* 85 (4), 531-548.

Macaro, Ernesto. 2005. Codeswitching in the L2 Classroom: a Communication and Learning Strategy. In Llurda, Enric (Ed.), *Non-native Language Teachers: Perceptions, Challenges and Contributions to the Profession*. Springer: New York, 63-84.

Martinez, Hélène. 2008. The subjective theories of student teachers. Implications for teacher education and research on learner autonomy. In Lamb, Terry & Hayo Reinders (Eds.), *Learner and Teacher Autonomy: concepts, realities, and responses*. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 103-124.

McMillan, Brian A. & Damian J. Rivers. 2011. The practice of policy: Teacher attitudes toward "English only". *System*, 39, 251-263.

Nunan, David. 1997. Designing and adapting materials to encourage learner autonomy. In Benson, Phil & Peter Voller (Eds.), *Autonomy and independence in language learning*. London: Longman, 192-203.

O'Dowd, Robert & Markus Ritter. 2006. Understanding and working with 'failed communication' in telecollaborative exchanges. *CALICO Journal*, 61 (2), 623-642.

O'Dowd, Robert (Ed.). 2007. *Online Intercultural Exchange: An Introduction for Foreign Language Teachers*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.

O'Malley, J. Michael, Anna Uhl Chamot. 1990. *Learning Strategies in Second Language Acquisition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

O'Reilly, Tim. 2005. *What is Web 2.0? Design patterns and business models for the next generation of software*. Retrieved from: http://oreilly.com/web2/archive/what-is-web-20.html (last visited: 15.12.2019).

O'Rourke, Breffni & Lorna Carson. 2010. *Language learner autonomy: policy, curriculum, classroom*. Oxford: Peter Lang.

O'Rourke, Breffni. 2005. Form-focused Interaction in Online Tandem Learning. *CALICO Journal*, 22 (3), 433-466.

O'Rourke, Breffni. 2007. Models of Telecollaboration (1): eTandem. In O'Dowd, Robert (Ed.), *Online Intercultural Exchange: An Introduction for Foreign Language Teachers*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 41-61.

Oxford, Rebecca. 1990. *Language learning strategies. What every teacher should know*. Boston: Heinle & Heinle Publishers.

Palfreyman, David M. 2018. Learner Autonomy and Groups. In Chik Alice, Naoko Aoki & Richard Smith (Eds.), *Autonomy in Language Learning and Teaching*. London: Springer, 51-72.

Peachey, Nik. 2009. *Web 2.0 Tools for Teachers*. Retrieved from: https://it.scribd.com/doc/19576895/Web-2-0-Tools-for-Teachers (last visited: 15.12.2019).

Pennycook, Alastair. 1997. Cultural alternatives and autonomy. In Benson, Phil & Peter Voller (Eds.), *Autonomy and independence in language learning*. London & New York: Longman, 35-53.

Reinders, Hayo & Cynthia White. 2011. Learner autonomy and new learning environments. *Language Learning & Technology*, 15 (3), 1-3.

Reinders, Hayo & Cynthia White. 2016. 20 Years of autonomy and technology: How far have we come and where to next? *Language Learning & Technology*, 20 (2), 143-154.

Reinders, Hayo & Phil Benson. 2017. Research agenda: Language learning beyond the classroom. *Language Teaching*, 50 (4), 1-18.

Reinders, Hayo & Philip Hubbard. 2013. CALL and Learner Autonomy: Affordances and Constraints. In Thomas, Michael, Hayo Reinders & Mark Warschauer (Eds.), *Contemporary Computer-Assisted Language Learning*. New York: Continuum, 175-192.

Ridley, Jennifer. 1997. *Learner autonomy 6: Developing learners' thinking skills*. Dublin: Authentik.

Riley, Philip. 1997. The guru and the conjurer: aspects of counselling for self-access. In Benson, Phil & Peter Voller (Eds.), *Autonomy and independence in language learning*. London & New York: Longman, 114-131.

Rüschoff, Bernd. 2010. Authenticity in Language Learning Revisited: Materials, Processes, Aims. In O'Rourke, Breffni & Lorna Carson (Eds.), *Language learner autonomy: policy, curriculum, classroom*. Oxford: Peter Lang, 121-134.

Ryan, Stephen M. 1997. Preparing learners for independence: resources beyond the classroom. In Benson, Phil & Peter Voller (Eds.), *Autonomy and independence in language learning*. London & New York: Longman, 215-224.

Sasaki, Akihiko. 2015. E-mail tandem language learning. In Nunan, David & Jack C. Richards (Eds.), *Language learning beyond the classroom*. New York: Routledge, 77-92.

Schormová, Zdeňka. 2017. Simulation as a Strategy for Enhancing Learner Autonomy in Developing Communicative Competence in ESP. In Pawlak, Mirosław, Anna Mystkowska-Wiertelak & Jakub Bielak (Eds.), *Autonomy in Second Language Learning: Managing the Resources*. Cham: Springer, 35-50.

Schwienhorst, Klaus. 2003. Learner Autonomy and Tandem Learning: Putting Principles Into Practice in Synchronous and Asynchronous Telecommunications Environments. *Computer Assisted Language Learning*, 16 (5), 427-443.

Shea, Virginia. 1994. *Netiquette*. San Francisco: Albion Books.

Sheerin, Susan. 1997. An exploration of the relationship between self-access and independent learning. In Benson, Phil & Peter Voller. *Autonomy and independence in language learning*. London & New York: Longman, 54-65.

Sinclair, Barbara. 2008. Multiple voices: Negotiating pathways towards teacher and learner autonomy. In Lamb, Terry & Hayo Reinders (Eds.), *Learner and Teacher Autonomy: concepts, realities, and responses*. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 237-268.

Snow, Don. 2010. Autonomy and Strategizing in Self-directed Language Learning. *Asian Journal of English Language Teaching*, 27-46.

Song, Donggil & Curtis J. Bonk. 2016. Motivational factors in self-directed informal learning from online learning resources. *Cogent Education*, 3 (1), 1-11.

Stickler, Ursula & Tim Lewis. 2008. Collaborative Language Learning Strategies in an Email Tandem Exchange. In Hurd, Stella & Tim Lewis (Eds.), *Language Learning Strategies in Independent Settings*. Bristol: Multilingual Matters, 237-261.

Stockwell, Glenn & Philip Hubbard. 2013. *Some emerging principles for mobile-assisted language learning*. Monterey, CA: The International Research Foundation for English Language Education.

Stockwell, Glenn (Ed.). 2012. *Computer-Assisted Language Learning: Diversity in Research and Practice*. Cambridge: University Press.

Stockwell, Glenn. 2010. Using Mobile Phones for Vocabulary Activities: Examining the Effect of the Platform. *Language Learning & Technology*. 14 (2), 95-110.

Stockwell, Glenn. 2016. Mobile language learning. In Farr, Fiona & Liam Murray (Eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of Language Learning and Technology*. London and New York: Routledge, 296-307.

Trebbi, Turid. 2008. Freedom – a prerequisite for learner autonomy? Classroom innovation and language teacher education. In Lamb, Terry & Hayo Reinders (Eds.), *Learner and Teacher Autonomy: concepts, realities, and responses*. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 33-46.

Ushioda, Ema. 2011. Motivating Learners to Speak as Themselves. In Murray, Garold, Xuesong Gao & Terry Lamb (Eds.), *Identity, Motivation and Autonomy in Language Learning*. Bristol: Multilingual Matters, 11-24.

Ushioda, Ema. 1996. *Learner autonomy 5: The role of motivation*. Dublin: Authentik.

Ushioda, Ema. 2010. Researching Growth in Autonomy through I-Statement Analysis. In O'Rourke, Breffni & Lorna Carson (Eds.), *Language learner autonomy: policy, curriculum, classroom.* Oxford: Peter Lang, 45-62.

Voller, Peter. 1997. Does the teacher have a role in autonomous language learning? In Benson, Phil & Peter Voller (Eds.), *Autonomy and independence in language learning*. London & New York: Longman, 98-113.

Walker, Ros & Graham Davies. 2012. Exploiting World Wide Web resources online and offline. Module 2.3. In Davies, Graham (Ed.), *Information and Communications Technology for Language Teachers (ICT4LT), Slough, Thames Valley University* (Online). Available at: http://www.ict4lt.org/en/en_mod2-3.htm (last visited: 12.12.2019).

Walker, Ros, Graham Davies & Sue Hewer. 2012. Introduction to the Internet. Module 1.5. In Davies, Graham (Ed.), *Information and Communications Technology for Language Teachers (ICT4LT), Slough, Thames Valley University* (Online). Available at: http://www.ict4lt.org/en/en_mod1-5.htm (last visited 12.12.2019).

Wang, Yuping, Wei-Chieh Fang, Julia Han & Nian-Shing Chen. 2016. Exploring the affordances of WeChat for facilitating teaching, social and cognitive presence in semi-synchronous language exchange. *Australasian Journal of Educational Technology*, 32 (4), 18-37.

Ware, Paige D. & Robert O'Dowd. 2008. Peer feedback on language form in telecollaboration. *Language Learning & Technology*, 12 (1), 43-63.

Warschauer, Mark. 1996. Computer Assisted Language Learning: an Introduction. In Fotos, Sandra (Ed.), *Multimedia language teaching*. Tokyo: Logos International, 3-20.

Warschauer, Mark. 2000. The death of cyberspace and the rebirth of CALL. *English Teachers' Journal*, 61-67.

Warschauer, Mark & Deborah Healey. 1998. Computers and language learning: an overview. *Language Teaching*, 31, 57-71.

Warschauer, Mark, Lonnie Turbee & Bruce Roberts. 1996. Computer learning networks and student empowerment. *System*, 24 (1), 1-14.

Wawrzyniak-Śliwska, Magdalena. 2017. Educating Towards Learner Autonomy in Early Education. In Pawlak, Mirosław, Anna Mystkowska-Wiertelak & Jakub Bielak (Eds.), *Autonomy in Second Language Learning: Managing the Resources*. Cham: Springer, 67-84.

Wentzel, Kathryn R. 2000. What is it that I'm trying to achieve? Classroom goals from a content perspective. *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, 25, 105-115.

Survey on the use of language exchange apps in language learning

Welcome!

This questionnaire is aimed at foreign language learners who currently use language exchange apps to interact with native or expert speakers of the language(s) they want to improve.

The context is a study I am conducting about what learners think about the use of language exchange apps to learn and practice languages.

My name is Andra Gabriela Nastase and I am a student at the University of Padova, Italy. I am carrying out this survey as part of my research for my master's thesis.

There are 13 questions in this survey, which will take about 5 minutes to complete.

This survey is anonymous, and your survey responses will be used for academic purposes only.

If you have any questions, you can contact me at:
andragabriela.nastase@studenti.unipd.it

Thank you for your participation!
* Required

1. How old are you? *

_____

2. What is/are your native language(s)? *

_____

3. What app(s) do you use to learn and/or practice languages with native or expert speakers? *

_____

4. Which language do you practice using this/these app(s)? *

Write the language that you are currently practicing the most.

_____

5. As well as using the app, you are learning this language: *

Mark only one oval.

◯ with the help of a teacher.

◯ without a teacher.

6. What is the main reason why you are learning this language? *

Choose one.

Mark only one oval.

◯ I enjoy learning languages in general.

◯ I enjoy learning this language.

◯ I would like to make friends from different countries.

◯ I recognize the value of being able to speak a foreign language.

◯ I need it for my job.

◯ I am genuinely interested in a particular culture/country.

◯ I need it so that I can communicate with people while I am abroad.

◯ I recognize the importance of learning this language.

◯ I would like to move to a particular country.

◯ I see it as a challenge.

◯ Other: _____

7. Your ideal learning partner on your language exchange app(s) should: *
Choose 3 traits that your ideal learning partner should absolutely have.

Check all that apply.

- [ ] be good at explaining grammar rules.
- [ ] be interesting to talk to.
- [ ] remind you to use your target language as much as possible.
- [ ] be open-minded.
- [ ] have the same interests as you.
- [ ] give you tips on how to learn your target language more effectively.
- [ ] be willing to correct you and give you feedback.
- [ ] be open to the possibility of becoming friends with you.
- [ ] be able to propose interesting topics for your conversations.
- [ ] be a good listener.
- [ ] be willing to meet your learning needs.
- [ ] be willing to share their opinions and feelings with you.
- [ ] encourage you to think about your progress.
- [ ] suggest learning materials and resources.
- [ ] be interested in your culture.
- [ ] be willing to share their culture with you.

Other: [ ] _____

8. When you find an interesting profile of a native/expert speaker on your language exchange app(s), you usually: *

Mark only one oval.

- ( ) start the conversation.
- ( ) wait for them to write to you.

9. When interacting with a native/expert speaker for the first time on your language exchange app(s), you usually: *

Mark only one oval.

◯ propose a learning plan for your conversations.

◯ wait for them to come up with interesting ideas.

10. You have found a good learning partner on your language exchange app(s), but suddenly he/she stops replying to your messages. You would usually: *

Mark only one oval.

◯ write a message and propose a new topic.

◯ write a message and ask why he/she stopped answering.

◯ stop writing and wait for an answer.

◯ stop writing and look for another learning partner.

11. When interacting with your learning partner on your language exchange app(s), you usually: *

Mark only one oval.

◯ have a clear idea about what you want to learn from that particular conversation.

◯ chat spontaneously and wait to see where the conversations leads you.

12. Imagine this situation: you and your learning partner are chatting about a very interesting topic. Suddenly, your learning partner stops using the language that you agreed to use in that conversation and starts communicating with you in a language you are both proficient in, so that your interaction can be faster and more understandable. You: *

Mark only one oval.

( ) kindly ask him/her to return to the language you were practicing.

( ) are fine with his/her decision and start using that language too.

13. Is there anything else you would like to say about your experience on your language exchange app(s)? If yes, please write your comments below.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Google Forms

SUMMARY IN ITALIAN

Il presente elaborato tratta il concetto di autonomia nell'apprendimento delle lingue straniere, facendo riferimento a come questa possa essere sviluppata attraverso la tecnologia e, in particolare, tramite scambi linguistici online. L'autonomia nel campo dell'apprendimento linguistico è stata a lungo oggetto di ricerca. Negli ultimi quattro decenni, infatti, un gran numero di studi si è concentrato su questo concetto, esplorandone l'importanza sia nell'ambito dell'istruzione degli adulti che nel settore scolastico (Little 1991). Si ritiene che essa possa essere uno strumento rilevante per gli studenti di lingue in quanto supporta e ottimizza il processo di apprendimento delle lingue. Tuttavia, l'autonomia dello studente è una nozione complessa che non può essere semplicemente descritta come autoistruzione. Grazie al costante progresso della tecnologia, essa ha sviluppato sempre più connessioni con l'apprendimento linguistico assistito da computer (CALL), che prevede l'uso di computer e nuove tecnologie per facilitare l'apprendimento delle lingue. Si sostiene che il CALL offra sia agli studenti che agli insegnanti di lingue vantaggi ineguagliabili e che abbia la capacità di promuovere l'autonomia negli studenti.

Un esempio pratico di come quest'ultima possa essere abbinata in modo produttivo all'uso della tecnologia consiste negli scambi linguistici online, i quali sono diventati al giorno d'oggi popolari e ampiamente accessibili grazie ai recenti progressi della tecnologia. L'interazione con persone che parlano la lingua che si vuole apprendere è generalmente considerata una pratica molto utile al fine di migliorare le proprie competenze linguistiche. Inoltre, la tecnologia può facilitare e favorire questo processo. Affinché l'interazione sia produttiva, tuttavia, è necessario che lo studente sia dotato di un certo grado di autonomia. Nel mio studio ho approfondito questo argomento, focalizzandomi sul collegamento tra l'autonomia dello studente intesa in termini di proattività e determinati aspetti degli scambi linguistici online, come la motivazione e il modo in cui i partner linguistici percepiscono la loro collaborazione.

Come già accennato, il concetto di autonomia dello studente non è semplice da definire ed è, perciò, spesso oggetto di interpretazioni distorte. La letteratura in questo ambito fornisce definizioni e spiegazioni al riguardo. In generale, l'autonomia dello studente può essere definita come la capacità dello studente di assumere il controllo del proprio apprendimento (Holec 1981). Ciò implica che lo studente autonomo sia responsabile del proprio apprendimento. Tuttavia, il concetto di piena responsabilità può portare a pensare erroneamente che gli studenti non abbiano bisogno di un insegnante. Si ritiene che questo sia uno degli equivoci più comuni relativi all'autonomia dello studente. Non si dovrebbe, infatti, dare per scontato che tutti gli studenti siano in grado di raggiungere lo stesso grado di autonomia da soli. Gli studenti hanno invece bisogno di ricevere una formazione appropriata e incoraggiamento da parte dei loro insegnanti in modo da diventare autonomi. L'autonomia può verificarsi a vari livelli a seconda del numero di scelte che gli studenti decidono di fare autonomamente. Pertanto, essi devono essere consapevoli del loro ruolo di studenti autonomi e agire di conseguenza. Per fare ciò, si pensa che debbano possedere determinate qualità volte a consentire loro di farsi carico del loro apprendimento.

In questo processo la motivazione è considerata un fattore rilevante, in quanto aiuta gli studenti a rimanere concentrati sul proprio studio. Gli studenti motivati sono ritenuti infatti più efficaci e autonomi nel loro processo di apprendimento linguistico. Secondo Ryan e Deci (1985), esistono principalmente due tipi di motivazione, ovvero la motivazione intrinseca e la motivazione estrinseca. Mentre gli studenti motivati intrinsecamente sono mossi dal puro interesse per un'azione che essi considerano piacevole e divertente, gli studenti motivati estrinsecamente invece sono spinti dalla prospettiva di raggiungere un risultato esterno oppure da una pressione esterna. Questi due tipi di motivazione possono portare a tipi di esperienze e risultati diversi. Di solito, si ritiene che la motivazione intrinseca porti a comportamenti autonomi e a un apprendimento più efficace rispetto alla motivazione estrinseca. Tuttavia, esistono diversi gradi di motivazione estrinseca in base al livello di interiorizzazione degli obiettivi estrinseci da parte dello studente. Si pensa, infatti, che la motivazione estrinseca adeguatamente interiorizzata porti a ottimi risultati e contribuisca allo sviluppo di comportamenti autonomi.

Poiché essere autonomi non implica necessariamente che gli studenti apprendano completamente da soli, si considera che gli insegnanti abbiano un ruolo importante nell'aiutare i propri studenti a diventare autonomi. Questo risultato può essere raggiunto attraverso l'implementazione dei tre principi pedagogici proposti da Little (2002), ovvero il coinvolgimento dello studente, la riflessione e l'uso appropriato della seconda lingua. Il primo principio ha lo scopo di valorizzare il ruolo dello studente nel processo di apprendimento, spostando l'attenzione dall'insegnare all'apprendere (Dam 1995). Ciò si ottiene quando la responsabilità dell'apprendimento viene trasferita dall'insegnante agli studenti, i quali sono più liberi di prendere decisioni da soli (Wawrzyniak-Śliwska 2017). Il coinvolgimento dello studente può quindi essere compreso in termini di una maggiore libertà di scelta che l'insegnante conferisce ai suoi studenti. Il secondo principio consiste nel dare agli studenti gli strumenti necessari per pensare in modo critico durante la pianificazione, il monitoraggio e la valutazione del proprio percorso di apprendimento (Little 2007). Benson (2001) afferma che la riflessione è un elemento chiave nello sviluppo dell'autonomia. Considerando che gli studenti che sentono di avere il controllo del proprio apprendimento tendono ad essere più motivati, l'uso della riflessione può aiutarli a diventare consapevoli delle proprie capacità e aumentare la loro motivazione intrinseca (Little, Ridley e Ushioda 2002). Per quanto riguarda il terzo principio, si ritiene che l'autonomia possa essere sviluppata attraverso un uso appropriato della seconda lingua durante il processo di apprendimento (Little 2007). Secondo Little, Ridley e Ushioda (2002), gli studenti sono tenuti a utilizzare la seconda lingua come principale canale di comunicazione, ovvero per comunicare in classe, organizzare lo studio e riflettere su di esso al fine di incrementare la propria autonomia.

Inoltre, si sostiene che per favorire l'autonomia dello studente, gli insegnanti devono essere autonomi a loro volta. Ciò significa che, proprio come gli studenti, gli insegnanti autonomi sono dotati di qualità specifiche che consentono loro di aiutare i propri studenti ad essere autonomi. Per fare ciò, gli insegnanti devono prima di tutto essere consapevoli di se stessi come studenti (Breen e Mann 1997). Per di più, dovrebbero essere in grado di riflettere sulle loro azioni all'interno della classe e di fidarsi della capacità degli studenti di sviluppare ed esprimere comportamenti autonomi. Gli

insegnanti autonomi sono anche descritti come consapevoli delle esigenze dei loro studenti, sicuri di sé, motivati e con un atteggiamento positivo nei confronti dei loro studenti (Gabryś-Barker 2017). Devono, inoltre, insegnare a questi ultimi strategie e metodi per sviluppare la propria autonomia. Sulla base delle distinzioni fatte da Oxford (1990) e O'Malley e Chamot (1990), vengono analizzati quattro tipi di strategie, vale a dire strategie cognitive, metacognitive, sociali e affettive. Le strategie cognitive riguardano la gestione dei materiali didattici finalizzata alla memorizzazione di elementi della seconda lingua (Agustín-Llach e Alonso 2017). Le strategie metacognitive invece coinvolgono i processi di pianificazione, organizzazione e valutazione del proprio apprendimento. Le strategie sociali riguardano le azioni degli studenti volte a comunicare con compagni o parlanti della seconda lingua. Infine, le strategie affettive includono la capacità degli studenti di controllare le emozioni e i comportamenti affettivi coinvolti nel loro apprendimento.

Uno strumento valido che può essere utilizzato per applicare queste strategie in modo da sviluppare le competenze linguistiche e l'autonomia negli studenti è il Portfolio europeo delle lingue (ELP). L'ELP è un documento in cui gli studenti possono registrare e riflettere sul proprio percorso di apprendimento linguistico e sulle proprie esperienze interculturali. Questo strumento è particolarmente utile per sviluppare le abilità di riflessione, che, come si è visto, sono un elemento essenziale dell'autonomia dello studente. Little e Perclová (2001) spiegano che l'ELP ha due funzioni principali: una funzione descrittiva e una funzione pedagogica. Nel primo caso, il Portfolio fornisce allo studente gli strumenti per riferire e presentare le proprie esperienze e i propri risultati in lingua straniera. La funzione pedagogica si occupa invece di aumentare la capacità degli studenti di riflettere e valutare se stessi in modo che possano assumere il controllo del proprio apprendimento. Tuttavia, diventare autonomi può essere un processo complesso e gli studenti e gli insegnanti di lingue possono incontrare diversi ostacoli. Può essere difficile, infatti, sia per gli studenti che per gli insegnanti andare oltre il modello tradizionale in cui l'insegnante controlla tutti gli aspetti dell'apprendimento. Da un lato, gli insegnanti potrebbero sentirsi riluttanti ad accettare il ruolo di facilitatori, dall'altro agli studenti potrebbero mancare la fiducia in se stessi e le capacità necessarie per farsi carico del proprio percorso di studio.

La tecnologia può avere un ruolo importante nell'ambito dell'apprendimento delle lingue e dell'autonomia dello studente. L'impiego della tecnologia in questo campo può essere descritto attraverso vari termini. Tuttavia, il termine più comunemente utilizzato è apprendimento linguistico assistito da computer (CALL). Considerando che la tecnologia è in costante evoluzione, nel corso degli anni si sono distinte diverse fasi di CALL. Dall'essere principalmente un distributore di materiali ed esercizi, i computer si sono gradualmente evoluti per supportare file multimediali, l'accesso a internet e, di conseguenza, la comunicazione con parlanti di lingue straniere. Nelle sue fasi più recenti, infatti, il CALL viene percepito come uno strumento essenziale per gli studenti di lingue per quanto riguarda la comunicazione e il reperimento di risorse autentiche. Ciò è possibile grazie alle opportunità fornite dal Web del XXI secolo, o dal Web 2.0 come viene comunemente chiamato. Il Web 2.0 offre connessioni internet più veloci e una serie di strumenti online che consentono agli utenti di creare documenti, comunicare tra loro, lavorare lontano da casa (Walker, Davies e Hewer 2012) e in generale dedicarsi a una varietà di attività che possono essere utili ai fini dell'apprendimento linguistico. Peachy (2009) specifica che il Web 2.0 può aiutare gli studenti a usare le loro abilità linguistiche per costruire e sviluppare rapporti interpersonali. Come si può notare, il Web 2.0 facilita la comunicazione con altre persone, pertanto risulta un elemento importante nella comunicazione mediata dal computer (CMC), una sottocategoria di CALL.

La CMC offre agli studenti l'opportunità di comunicare facilmente tra loro attraverso internet. Questo tipo di comunicazione può essere sincrono e asincrono a seconda della modalità e del tempo dell'interazione. Mentre la CMC sincrona avviene in tempo reale e può consistere in sessioni di chat o videoconferenze tra due o più persone, la CMC asincrona non è simultanea e si può verificare tramite strumenti come la posta elettronica. Secondo numerosi studi, la CMC usata per favorire l'interazione tra persone con lingue e culture materne diverse può apportare benefici linguistici e aumentare la motivazione (Abrams 2006). Si ritiene, infatti, che questo tipo di interazione migliori l'atteggiamento degli studenti nei confronti della seconda lingua, aiutandoli allo stesso tempo a sviluppare le loro abilità linguistiche. Un'altra sottocategoria di CALL riguarda l'apprendimento delle lingue attraverso dispositivi mobili (MALL), che sta diventando

sempre più popolare e importante nell'ambito dell'apprendimento delle lingue. In generale, si sostiene che MALL presenti due vantaggi principali rispetto all'apprendimento assistito da computer: la portabilità e la capacità di interagire con l'ambiente circostante (Stockwell 2016). I dispositivi mobili, infatti, possono essere trasportati e utilizzati in qualsiasi momento della giornata, anche in luoghi non appositamente progettati per lo studio, e consentono ai loro utenti di interagire con l'ambiente circostante grazie ai sistemi di posizionamento globale che sono spesso incorporati in essi (Stockwell 2016).

Uno dei vantaggi più significativi apportati dalla tecnologia all'apprendimento linguistico consiste nelle opportunità che essa offre agli studenti per reperire e utilizzare risorse linguistiche autentiche che, a loro volta, facilitano l'interazione con i parlanti e la cultura della seconda lingua (Luke 2006). Inoltre, si ritiene comunemente che l'uso della tecnologia sia motivante sia per gli studenti che per gli insegnanti di lingue, rendendo più piacevole il processo di apprendimento (Davies e Hewer 2012). Pertanto, oltre all'apprendimento e all'insegnamento delle lingue, la tecnologia può avere un impatto anche sull'autonomia dello studente, la quale può essere aumentata o ridotta a seconda della capacità degli studenti e degli insegnanti di usarla adeguatamente. Infatti, è probabile che gli studenti di lingue del XXI secolo abbiano bisogno di competenze e strategie specifiche per fare buon uso della tecnologia e aumentare la propria autonomia. Si considera, inoltre, che anche gli insegnanti abbiano un ruolo in questo processo in quanto hanno il compito di guidare e aiutare gli studenti nel loro percorso di studio. Entrambe le parti devono, quindi, saper usare la tecnologia in modo da facilitare l'apprendimento e raggiungere gli obiettivi prefissati.

Come accennato in precedenza, uno strumento importante per combinare i vantaggi di CALL con il concetto di autonomia dello studente consiste negli scambi linguistici online, o l'eTandem. Considerando che l'eTandem si basa sul tandem faccia a faccia, è opportuno esaminare le caratteristiche e i vantaggi di quest'ultimo prima di analizzare la sua versione online. Il tandem linguistico può essere definito come una collaborazione tra due studenti aventi madrelingue diverse, che si impegnano a studiare insieme uno la lingua e la cultura dell'altro (Brammerts 1996). Affinché la loro interazione abbia

successo, gli studenti devono possedere competenze specifiche e sono tenuti ad accettare i principi di reciprocità e autonomia dello studente, che sono alla base di ogni collaborazione linguistica. Secondo il principio di reciprocità, entrambi i partner dovrebbero investire la stessa quantità di lavoro, tempo, interesse ed energia nella loro collaborazione, assicurandosi che le esigenze di apprendimento di ciascuno siano soddisfatte allo stesso modo. Ciò significa che gli studenti dovrebbero fissare i propri obiettivi, trovare modi per raggiungerli e valutare reciprocamente i propri contributi all'interazione (Schwienhorst 2003). Il principio dell'autonomia dello studente richiede invece che i partner si assumano la responsabilità del proprio apprendimento. Ciò significa che essi hanno la responsabilità di determinare cosa e quando imparare. Inoltre, si può affermare che ciascuno di loro è anche responsabile dell'apprendimento del proprio partner, considerando che il tandem linguistico implica che l'apprendimento sia interattivo (Little 2001).

Si può sostenere che apprendere o praticare una lingua tramite il tandem linguistico presenti una serie di vantaggi rispetto alla semplice interazione tra madrelingua e studenti e al sistema tradizionale di apprendimento linguistico. Sasaki (2015) afferma che uno dei vantaggi più importanti del tandem linguistico consiste nel principio di reciprocità, il quale offre a entrambi i partecipanti l'opportunità di apprendere in egual modo. Inoltre, il fatto che i partecipanti siano entrambi studenti può renderli meno inibiti nell'usare ed esprimersi nella lingua che stanno apprendendo (Brammerts 1996). Un altro importante vantaggio consiste nel fatto che gli scambi linguistici possono essere produttivi anche quando i partner hanno livelli di competenza diversi, considerando che ciascuno di essi è esperto nella propria lingua e cultura (Brammerts 1996) e può quindi fornire supporto a qualsiasi livello. Inoltre, Little (1996) sottolinea che, al contrario di quello che avviene solitamente durante una lezione di lingua, gli studenti sono liberi di dedicarsi ad argomenti ai quali sono entrambi interessati genuinamente e intrattenere così una comunicazione autentica.

Per quanto riguarda le competenze richieste agli studenti che decidono di usare il tandem linguistico, Little (1996) spiega che, affinché la collaborazione abbia successo, gli studenti dovrebbero prima di tutto conoscere almeno le basi della loro seconda

lingua ed essere in grado di apprendere autonomamente almeno in una certa misura. Dovrebbero anche saper distinguere tra ciò che sanno sulla loro seconda lingua e il modo concreto in cui possono usarla per comunicare. Inoltre, è importante che scelgano attività e materiali di apprendimento adatti a soddisfare le esigenze di entrambi (Little 1996). Questo implica anche che essi sappiano motivarsi a vicenda e fornire feedback e correzioni adeguati. Ciò è possibile se i partner concordano fin dall'inizio su come organizzare la loro collaborazione e su come vogliono che i loro errori vengano corretti. Inoltre, secondo Formentin et al. (2004), l'apprendimento tramite tandem richiede che gli studenti siano diligenti, seri, disponibili, desiderosi di partecipare alle lezioni pianificate insieme ai loro partner e in grado di gestire il proprio tempo in modo efficace.

Il tandem online ha caratteristiche simili al tandem faccia a faccia e rispetta gli stessi principi, ma lo scambio avviene su internet. Si avvale di una varietà di strumenti di comunicazione online come e-mail, chat e videoconferenza. Ciò rende più facile ed economico per gli studenti di lingue trovare e collaborare con altri studenti direttamente nei loro paesi. Tuttavia, la distanza tra i partner e il fatto che la loro collaborazione sia generalmente svolta esclusivamente online può creare vari problemi. Pertanto, gli studenti che decidono di impegnarsi in scambi linguistici online necessitano di competenze e strategie specifiche connesse agli strumenti di comunicazione mediata dal computer impiegati in modo da trarre il massimo beneficio dalla loro collaborazione e superare eventuali problemi. Oltre al saper usare internet per facilitare il proprio apprendimento linguistico, gli studenti hanno bisogno anche di conoscere strategie specifiche relative al tandem online. Queste ultime possono consistere nell'offrire correzioni al proprio partner, valutarne le prestazioni, incoraggiarlo/a e mantenere un atteggiamento positivo, rispondere alle sue domande e concordare insieme i tempi e le modalità in cui avviene lo scambio linguistico (Stickler e Lewis 2008).

Il tandem online può anche presentare sfide per gli studenti di lingue. Questi ultimi devono essere in grado di agire autonomamente poiché gran parte del loro processo di apprendimento deve essere definito e accordato tra loro. Considerando, inoltre, che il loro apprendimento si basa sulla cooperazione, è molto probabile che il successo

individuale dipenda dalla qualità della loro collaborazione (Little 1996). Nel caso del tandem online, questa collaborazione si basa anche sull'uso della tecnologia, che può avere un forte impatto sullo scambio e generare difficoltà (O'Dowd e Ritter 2006). Ad esempio, eventuali problemi tecnici, come il ritardo nella trasmissione di una videochiamata, possono ridurre la spontaneità dell'interazione e far sentire gli studenti meno a proprio agio (Kern 2014). Un'altra sfida può riguardare la distanza. Poiché gli studenti che usufruiscono del tandem online vivono spesso in luoghi molto distanti tra loro, può essere impegnativo per loro programmare un orario per le loro interazioni (Mullen et al. 2009). Inoltre, è possibile che essi abbiano stili di vita, abitudini e opportunità diverse. Per esempio, uno dei partner può avere condizioni di vita e di istruzione più favorevoli dell'altro e ciò può avere un impatto negativo sulla loro collaborazione. Per superare questo tipo di problema, si ritiene che gli studenti debbano essere fortemente motivati e determinati.

Come spiegato prima, la tecnologia ha il potenziale di arricchire l'esperienza di apprendimento linguistico e di promuovere l'autonomia negli studenti se utilizzata correttamente. Infatti, gli studenti devono essere aiutati sia a diventare autonomi sia a utilizzare gli strumenti CALL al fine di trarre il massimo beneficio da essi. Tuttavia, il processo può risultare complesso in quanto gli studenti possono dimostrarsi riluttanti ad agire autonomamente e gli insegnanti potrebbero avere difficoltà a motivarli. Inoltre, è probabile che il modello tradizionale in cui gli insegnanti gestiscono ogni aspetto del processo di apprendimento abbia una forte influenza sul modo in cui gli insegnanti e gli studenti percepiscono il proprio ruolo nel processo di apprendimento. Questo problema può verificarsi anche in ambienti più indipendenti, come gli scambi linguistici online, in cui gli studenti di solito devono gestire il proprio apprendimento senza l'aiuto di una guida esterna e si ritrovano quindi costretti ad agire in maniera più autonoma.

Considerati i due ruoli svolti in una collaborazione tandem, ovvero studente e parlante nativo, uno dei problemi che gli studenti possono affrontare può riguardare il modo in cui il madrelingua viene percepito dallo studente. Gli studenti possono associare il ruolo di parlante nativo a quello di un insegnante, pretendendo che i loro partner di apprendimento siano in grado di guidarli come farebbe un insegnante (Little 2001).

Tuttavia, coloro che usufruiscono degli scambi linguistici online solitamente non sono insegnanti e, pertanto, il loro contributo allo scambio potrebbe essere imperfetto o incompleto. Come accennato sopra, nel mio studio approfondisco la relazione tra l'autonomia dello studente e il modo in cui gli studenti che prendono parte in scambi linguistici online percepiscono la loro collaborazione. Lo studio consiste in un questionario destinato a studenti di lingue straniere che utilizzano app per scambi linguistici per apprendere o esercitarsi in una seconda lingua. Lo scopo è quello di verificare se gli studenti che utilizzano queste app considerano i loro partner di apprendimento come una sorta di insegnante sostitutivo o come semplici compagni con cui comunicare nella seconda lingua. Sulla base di questa distinzione, vengono analizzati il grado di dipendenza dai loro partner e, di conseguenza, il loro grado di proattività con riferimento al loro tipo di motivazione. L'apprendimento tramite il tandem online può offrire vantaggi e opportunità importanti agli studenti di lingue, ma, poiché si basa sulla collaborazione, la qualità dello scambio dipende principalmente dalle dinamiche che vengono a crearsi tra i partner di apprendimento.

Dal momento che questi ultimi solitamente non sono insegnanti, il loro contributo alla collaborazione potrebbe non essere impeccabile. Pertanto, si può sostenere che quando gli studenti si affidano completamente ai loro partner, la qualità dell'apprendimento può essere danneggiata e l'autonomia può diminuire. Nel mio studio è emerso che gli studenti che prendono parte in scambi linguistici online tendono a percepire i loro partner più come insegnanti sostitutivi che come partner di apprendimento. Questa percezione potrebbe portare gli studenti a sviluppare una sorta di dipendenza dai loro partner, che sono visti come modelli da seguire, riducendo in questo modo la loro autonomia. Considerando la proattività come un elemento fondamentale dell'autonomia dello studente, questa premessa è parzialmente confermata dai risultati che mostrano che il numero degli intervistati proattivi che percepiscono i loro partner come loro pari è superiore al numero di intervistati proattivi che si aspettano che i loro partner siano simili a degli insegnanti. Come affermato sopra, questo può essere il risultato del modo in cui gli studenti sono stati abituati a pensare al processo di apprendimento durante la loro istruzione.

Inoltre, l'autonomia può essere influenzata dal tipo di motivazione degli studenti. Generalmente, si ritiene che la motivazione intrinseca favorisca l'autonomia dello studente e un apprendimento linguistico più efficace rispetto alla motivazione estrinseca. Ciò è in contrasto con i risultati dello studio, che mostrano invece che i partecipanti motivati estrinsecamente tendono ad essere più proattivi dei partecipanti motivati intrinsecamente. Tuttavia, il grado di interiorizzazione degli obiettivi estrinseci può svolgere un ruolo importante nell'efficacia dell'apprendimento e può promuovere comportamenti autonomi. Dato che il livello di interiorizzazione della motivazione estrinseca non può essere facilmente misurato attraverso un questionario, si può presumere che la motivazione dei partecipanti possa essere stata interiorizzata in una certa misura. È probabile che il ruolo della tecnologia abbia un ruolo in questo processo in quanto, generalmente, si ritiene che l'uso della tecnologia renda l'apprendimento più piacevole, migliorando quindi la motivazione intrinseca degli studenti. In questo modo, gli studenti che hanno obiettivi esterni legati al loro apprendimento possono integrarli nell'eventuale gratificazione risultante dall'utilizzo della tecnologia.

In conclusione, si può affermare che sebbene il tandem linguistico si basi sul principio dell'autonomia dello studente e i risultati dello studio mostrino una lieve maggioranza di studenti che tendono ad essere proattivi nelle loro interazioni online, non dovrebbe essere dato per scontato che gli studenti che decidono di prendere parte in scambi linguistici online siano necessariamente autonomi. Diventare autonomi può essere un processo complesso in quanto coinvolge sia la volontà degli studenti di farsi carico del proprio apprendimento sia la capacità degli insegnanti di guidarli verso l'autonomia. Inoltre, gli studenti devono essere adeguatamente motivati per fare scelte autonome durante il loro apprendimento e fare buon uso degli strumenti tecnologici che possono aiutarli in questo processo. Per essere in grado di fornire questo tipo di supporto, si ritiene che anche gli insegnanti debbano essere autonomi e consapevoli delle opportunità che il CALL può offrire in termini di motivazione e autonomia. Si può quindi sostenere che, proprio come nel caso del tandem linguistico, lo sviluppo dell'autonomia dello studente sia una questione di collaborazione e perseveranza, e che alla base di questa collaborazione ci sia la consapevolezza che il controllo del proprio

apprendimento possa arricchire l'esperienza dell'apprendimento ed essere gratificante anche a livello personale.