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DRAMATIC TEXT IN TEACHING UKRAINIAN AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE: TANDEM WORK, READING, TRANSLATION, AND PERFORMATIVE EXPERIENCING OF THE TEXT

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Abstract. *This article develops a theoretical framework and pedagogical model for integrating dramatic texts into tandem learning of Ukrainian as a foreign language. The study emerged from an international educational collaboration between Ternopil Ivan Puluj National Technical University (Ukraine) and Dartmouth College (USA). It examines the integration of a performative approach to language teaching that emphasizes learning through action, interaction, and embodied engagement with dramatic texts. The theoretical framework draws on text-centered pedagogy, embodied cognition, and performative pedagogy. Dramatic texts are conceptualized as multidimensional pedagogical resources that enable learners to move beyond the analysis of linguistic forms toward the development of connected discourse in authentic and simulated communicative contexts. The article proposes an original pedagogical model for integrating dramatic texts into tandem learning, together with a structured instructional sequence comprising text reception, linguistic and cultural analysis, translation, interpretation, and staged reading. Particular attention is devoted to the challenges of translating culturally specific references, wartime discourse, colloquial language, surzhyk, and symbolic imagery. The findings demonstrate that combining tandem learning with dramatic texts promotes the development of connected discourse, reduces language anxiety, fosters intercultural competence, and deepens students' understanding of the contemporary Ukrainian experience of war through literary representation. Although developed within the context of teaching Ukrainian as a foreign language, the proposed model is readily adaptable to learners at different levels of proficiency.*

Key words: *communicative approach, tandem learning, connected discourse, dramatic texts, drama, Ukrainian as a foreign language; performative pedagogy, intercultural communication, translation.*

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ДРАМАТИЧНИЙ ТЕКСТ НА ЗАНЯТТЯХ З УКРАЇНСЬКОЇ МОВИ ЯК ІНОЗЕМНОЇ: РОБОТА В ТАНДЕМ-ПАРАХ, ЧИТАННЯ, ПЕРЕКЛАД І СЦЕНІЧНЕ ПРОЖИВАННЯ

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Анотація. *У статті здійснено теоретичне обґрунтування та практичну апробацію використання драматичного тексту в тандемному навчанні української мови як іноземної. Роботу виконано в межах міжнародного освітнього проєкту співпраці між Тернопільським національним технічним університетом імені Івана Пулюя та Дартмутським коледжем (США). Особливу увагу зосереджено на інтеграції перформативного підходу в навчальний процес, що передбачає засвоєння мовного матеріалу через дію, взаємодію та емоційне проживання тексту. Теоретичним підґрунтям дослідження є концепції текстоцентризму, втіленого пізнання (embodied cognition) та перформативної педагогіки. Драматичний текст розглядається як багаторівнева дидактична одиниця, що забезпечує перехід від аналізу мовних структур до формування зв'язного мовлення в умовах реальної або змодельованої комунікації. Представлено авторську модель роботи з драматичними текстами в тандем-парах й алгоритм організації навчальної діяльності, що включає етапи рецепції, лінгвокультурного аналізу, перекладу, інтерпретації та сценічного відтворення. Окрему увагу приділено труднощам перекладу, пов'язаним із передаванням культурно маркованих реалій, воєнного контексту, розмовної лексики, суржику та символічних елементів. Результати дослідження засвідчують, що поєднання тандем-навчання та драматичного тексту сприяє розвитку зв'язного мовлення, зниженню мовленнєвої тривожності, формуванню міжкультурної компетентності та глибшому осмисленню українського досвіду війни через художнє слово. Запропонований підхід може бути використаний у практиці викладання української мови як іноземної на різних рівнях підготовки.*

Ключові слова: *комунікативний підхід, тандем-навчання, зв'язне мовлення, драматичний текст, п'єса, українська мова як іноземна, перформативний підхід, міжкультурна комунікація, переклад.*

Introduction. Contemporary approaches to teaching Ukrainian as a foreign language seek to develop not only learners' linguistic competence but also their communicative, emotional, sociocultural, and intercultural competence. Although literary texts are widely used in language instruction, dramatic texts remain comparatively underutilized. At the same time, performative pedagogy creates a «multidimensional learning environment» in which language is acquired through action and emotional engagement [1], while process drama has been shown to foster communicative competence through role immersion [2]. The present study brings together dramatic texts and tandem learning within the framework of an international educational collaboration between Ternopil Ivan Puluj National Technical University (Ukraine) and Dartmouth College (USA). The project was initiated by Professor Viktoriia Somoff, with the Ukrainian component coordinated by Associate Professor Lesia Nazarevych. Within this collaborative framework, dramatic texts served as a means of engaging with the contemporary Ukrainian experience of war, while tandem learning created a space for authentic intercultural dialogue.

The proposed approach is grounded in the principle that language and culture should be learned simultaneously from the earliest stages

of instruction. In the context of Russia's ongoing war against Ukraine and the politicization of language, this integration assumes both pedagogical and broader societal significance. This study contributes to the field by providing the first systematic account of this instructional model.

Theoretical Framework. Performative pedagogy integrates the cognitive, emotional, and embodied dimensions of learning, putting into practice the principle of «learning through action» [3; 4]. Research has shown that performative approaches foster language development, creativity, critical thinking, and intercultural competence while helping learners overcome psychological barriers to communication [5; 6]. Within contemporary approaches to teaching Ukrainian as a foreign language (UFL), the text-centered approach occupies a central place, treating texts not merely as instructional materials but as the foundation of meaningful communication. Hanna Shvets conceptualizes the literary text as a multidimensional pedagogical resource that enables learners not only to acquire grammatical knowledge but also to experience language within its sociocultural context, integrating lexical and communicative skills into a coherent understanding of the world [7; 8]. In these studies, however, literary texts function primarily as objects of linguistic analysis and interpretation.

By contrast, recent international scholarship increasingly conceptualizes dramatic texts as performative media through which communicative competence develops in and through action. Schewe emphasizes the integrative potential of performative pedagogy [3], Piazzoli demonstrates the value of process drama in reducing language anxiety [4], while Rothwell [9] and Kao and O'Neill [10] highlight its capacity to foster communicative spontaneity and intercultural interaction. It is precisely this integration of linguistic, cognitive, emotional, and embodied learning that distinguishes dramatic texts from more traditional approaches to working with literary texts.

Bringing together the text-centered approach and performative pedagogy opens new possibilities for teaching Ukrainian as a foreign language. In the model proposed here, dramatic texts build upon the text-centered approach by moving beyond textual analysis toward collaborative interpretation within the context of tandem learning. The model builds on our previous research [11; 12; 17], in which we argued that the public dimension of pedagogical projects enhances students' sense of responsibility for their own learning [11, p. 111]. Staged readings and collaborative discussions of translation choices further transform textual interpretation into embodied engagement, requiring students to take responsibility not only for linguistic accuracy but also for the emotional and cultural realization of meaning. Dramatic texts thus represent the next stage in the development of our pedagogical model, guiding learners from individual words and phrases to communicative action, intercultural dialogue, and ultimately, staged performance.

Objectives. The objective of this study is to provide a theoretical rationale for and demonstrate the effectiveness of integrating dramatic texts into tandem learning of Ukrainian as a foreign language. Specifically, the study seeks to: (1) describe the methodological principles underlying the use of dramatic texts in teaching Ukrainian as a foreign language; (2) examine the role of the performative approach in language teaching; (3) present a pedagogical model for integrating dramatic texts into tandem learning; (4) investigate the contribution of dramatic texts to the development of connected discourse and intercultural competence; and (5) synthesize the findings of implementing this instructional model within the framework of an international educational collaboration (2024–2025).

The study examines the pedagogical use of two contemporary Ukrainian plays – Vertep: Chronicles of War by Artem Lebediev and Prayer for Elvis by Maryna Smilianets – as the principal instructional materials for tandem learning of Ukrainian as a foreign language.

The study makes three principal contributions. First, it conceptualizes dramatic texts as a medium for performative language learning. Second, it develops a pedagogical model for integrating dramatic texts into tandem learning. Third, it demonstrates the effectiveness of combining translation, staged reading, and intercultural dialogue within a unified instructional framework

Main Findings. The pedagogical model proposed in this study emerged through classroom-based implementation conducted within an instructional laboratory, where tandem

learning, translation, and staged reading were systematically integrated, evaluated, and refined. This iterative process enabled us to move beyond the intuitive use of dramatic texts toward the development of a coherent and replicable pedagogical model. Recent research in language pedagogy has increasingly embraced performative approaches, which conceptualize language learning as a process of learning through action. Our work with dramatic texts – particularly Vertep: Chronicles of War by Artem Lebediev [13] and Prayer for Elvis by Maryna Smilianets [14] – is grounded in the theory of embodied cognition, which understands language acquisition as the integration of cognitive, embodied, and emotional experience. This perspective is consistent with theories of performative pedagogy that conceive of learning as «entering the moment» [15], as well as with Manfred Schewe's model of the holistic learning environment [3]. Accordingly, our pedagogical model is organized around three interrelated principles: embodied learning, inquiry through action, and the creation of an emotionally safe learning environment that lowers the affective filter.

The principle of embodied learning differs from traditional language teaching by extending beyond the intellectual analysis of linguistic forms. Performative interaction engages learners' cognitive, physical, and emotional experience simultaneously. Lexical items such as freedom, war, occupier, pain, fear, basement shelter, and death are therefore acquired not as isolated vocabulary items but through their association with intonation, gesture, and the emotional perspective of dramatic characters.

The second principle – inquiry through action – conceives learning as a collaborative process of exploration rather than simple reproduction. Students do not merely recite dialogue; they investigate how intonation, gesture, and emotional stance shape meaning. Working with Prayer for Elvis and Vertep: Chronicles of War, tandem partners explored how irony and tragedy transform otherwise ordinary words into expressions of resilience, humor, or grief. This collaborative process also enabled students to decode the cultural meanings embedded in the texts, fostering a deeper understanding of both language and culture.

During classroom sessions involving American students and online meetings with their Ukrainian tandem partners, instructional priorities gradually shifted from grammatical accuracy toward authentic communication and the performative demands of dramatic interaction. We conceptualize this learning environment as a space of emotional safety that lowers the affective filter. According to Krashen's theory [16], anxiety inhibits language acquisition; dramatic performance therefore serves as an effective means of reducing psychological barriers to communication. Assuming a dramatic role functions as a protective frame in which students speak through fictional characters rather than in their own voices, allowing them to take linguistic risks without fear of failure. As a result, engagement with the language of war becomes an experience of empathy rather than one of secondary traumatization.

Translation constituted an equally important dimension of the project. Working with contemporary Ukrainian plays exposed students to a range of linguistic and cultural challenges, including surzhyk, military jargon, culturally specific references, and emotionally charged vocabulary for which English often offers no direct equivalents. Within the tandem partnerships, Ukrainian students served not only as language consultants but also as interpreters of cultural meaning. The project rested on three interconnected pedagogical components: collaborative translation in tandem pairs, direct conversations with the playwrights, and public staged readings. Tandem partnerships were jointly coordinated by Viktoriia Somoff and Lesia Nazarevych from the American and Ukrainian sides, respectively, through a six-stage pedagogical model in which each play was divided into pedagogically balanced segments.

Stage 1. Orientation and Contextualization. The first stage familiarized students with the overall structure of the plays and identified individual scenes for close analysis. It also established the historical framework necessary for interpreting the texts, including Russia's war against Ukraine since 2014, the occupation of Crimea and parts of the Donbas, the full-scale invasion of 2022, and the historical and cultural significance of the Donbas as an integral part of Ukraine. This contextual grounding enabled students to read the dialogue not merely as representations of everyday life or wartime experience but also as expressions of broader historical realities and symbolic meanings.

A distinctive feature of the project was the use of contemporary Ukrainian plays that, at the time of the study, had not yet been translated into English. Students therefore engaged in an authentic translation process, assuming the roles of both translators and interpreters as they collaboratively negotiated linguistic choices and cultural meaning rather than relying on established English translations. The two plays required different pedagogical strategies. Work on Prayer for Elvis by Maryna Smilianets centered on the emotionally charged dialogue between two brothers and the concluding image of the protagonist's death as a symbolic transfer of moral responsibility to the surviving brother. By contrast, Vertep: Chronicles of War by Artem Lebediev required extensive linguistic and cultural interpretation of Ukrainian Christmas traditions. In particular, the symbolism of the vertep and the Christmas carol Nova Radist Stala («A New Joy Has Come») functions as a marker of shared cultural identity that ultimately enables the characters to recognize survivors trapped beneath the rubble.

Stage 2. Linguistic and Cultural Interpretation. At this stage, students examined culturally specific linguistic features – including symbols, surzhyk, slang, and interjections – that required cultural explanation and contextual interpretation. Collaboration took place in a shared Google document, where tandem partners recorded not only English translations but also the contextual meaning and usage of at least ten new lexical items during each session. In doing so, they gradually developed a personalized lexical repertoire grounded in authentic communicative contexts.

Stage 3. Hermeneutic Interpretation and Empathic Engagement. The third stage focused on interpreting the characters' motivations and emotional worlds. Through collaborative discussion, students moved beyond textual comprehension to develop an empathetic understanding of the characters' experiences, fostering a meaningful psychological engagement with the realities of war represented in the plays.

Stage 4. Consolidation and Scaffolding. The fourth stage emphasized continuity in learning through systematic review and refinement. Linguistically challenging passages were highlighted using color-coded annotations, and each session began with a performative re-enactment of previously translated scenes. This cumulative approach reinforced earlier learning while integrating newly acquired linguistic and cultural knowledge.

Stage 5. Documentation and Reflection. Students' translations, annotations, and collaborative discussions were systematically documented in a shared digital workspace. This ongoing record made it possible to trace the development of both linguistic proficiency and intercultural competence throughout the project.

Stage 6. Public Staged Reading. The project culminated in a public staged reading at Dartmouth College. The staged reading represented not merely the final stage of language teaching but also an act of cultural advocacy. By combining staged readings in English with performances of the Ukrainian songs Nova Radist Stala («A New Joy Has Come») and Oi u luzi chervona kalyna («Oh, the Red Viburnum in the Meadow»), the event demonstrated that a performative approach enables learners not only to acquire Ukrainian as a foreign language but also to become informed interpreters and advocates of the contemporary Ukrainian experience. The six-stage model outlined above provided the pedagogical framework for students' work with the two plays. The following examples illustrate how this approach functioned in practice and the linguistic and cultural challenges it enabled students to address.

Analysis of the plays by Maryna Smilianets and Artem Lebediev demonstrates that the principal challenges of translation lie not in finding lexical equivalents but in conveying meanings rooted in the emotional and historical experience of contemporary Ukraine. For learners unfamiliar with the historical context, the dialogue between the two brothers in Prayer for Elvis concerning «peace» during wartime and responsibility toward their mother [14, p. 97] initially appears to present an abstract moral dilemma. Without an understanding of Russia's war against Ukraine since 2014, however, the deeper significance of references to «being an asshole» (mudatstvo) or to their mother's having «aged three years» remains inaccessible. Within the tandem partnership, the Ukrainian student explains not merely what

the characters say but why their words carry such emotional weight. As a result, the language of war ceases to function as isolated vocabulary and instead becomes embedded in lived historical experience.

This process is particularly evident in Yurii's reflection: «Remember how Dad used to say, '... go plant a tree.' No one but you will pick up this trash and throw it in the bin. I'm there so that life here can remain peaceful and safe. If you can live without feeling that the country is still at war, then it means that the boys and I are doing exactly what we should be doing» [14, p. 102]. For many learners, English words such as duty or obligation initially evoke the impersonal fulfillment of contractual responsibilities. In the play, however, responsibility is expressed through concrete moral action: «If you see litter, pick it up»; «If your home is attacked, defend it». As Ukrainian students explain that, for Ukrainians, war is understood not as a desire to fight but as the necessity of defending one's home, their tandem partners gradually come to recognize that responsibility is measured through actions rather than words. It is through this shared process of interpretation that empathy emerges.

Equally significant is the dramatic framing of the dialogue itself. The conversation takes place in a dream, after the elder brother has already been killed and returns to speak with his younger brother. Preserving the existential dimension of this encounter requires careful interpretation; if approached merely as a conventional conversation, the scene loses much of its emotional and philosophical depth. In Artem Lebediev's Vertep: Chronicles of War, translation presents both ideological and spiritual challenges. References by the occupying forces to a «single country» function as instruments of propaganda and, without appropriate historical context, may easily be misinterpreted by international students as politically neutral statements. The concept of the vertep likewise resists straightforward translation into English, as it encompasses a form of folk theatre, a religious tradition, a ritual performance, and a distinct cultural worldview.

The play's concluding scene offers perhaps the clearest illustration of these challenges. Beneath the rubble, the siblings are ultimately saved when the Christmas carol Nova Radist Stala («A New Joy Has Come») enables rescuers to locate them [13, p. 201]. For the characters, the carol is far more than a Christmas tradition: it functions as a marker of shared cultural identity, distinguishing friend from foe. Mykhas sings not simply to make himself heard but so that Ukrainian soldiers will recognize him as one of their own. Without an understanding of the carol's religious and cultural significance, much of the scene's emotional and symbolic meaning remains inaccessible to learners. Translation therefore becomes not merely a linguistic exercise but a process of cultural interpretation and meaning-making. Within the tandem-learning environment, this collaborative work of interpretation gradually replaced linguistic anxiety with confidence and mutual trust.

Conclusions. The findings of this study demonstrate the effectiveness of integrating dramatic texts into tandem learning of Ukrainian as a foreign language. By combining tandem learning with a performative approach, the proposed pedagogical model promotes deeper language acquisition while fostering communicative confidence and intercultural competence. More broadly, the study suggests that language, culture, and communication should be understood as mutually constitutive dimensions of language learning that develop simultaneously rather than sequentially. Whereas digital tools such as flashcards facilitate the transition from individual words to meaningful phrases, dramatic texts enable learners to move from isolated phrases to authentic communicative action. In this way, performative pedagogy extends language learning beyond linguistic accuracy toward embodied participation in culturally situated communication. Future research should expand the corpus of dramatic texts available for teaching Ukrainian as a foreign language, adapt the proposed pedagogical model to learners at different levels of proficiency, and further explore the integration of digital technologies into performative language pedagogy. Although developed within the context of Ukrainian as a foreign language, the model proposed here is sufficiently flexible to be adapted to a wide range of instructional contexts and proficiency levels.

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