

THE ROLE OF TASK-BASED LANGUAGE TEACHING IN EFL

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ABSTRACT

Teaching foreign languages complicated process in teaching. In this process educators should pay their attention for making teaching much easier by some methods, styles, strategies and technologies. The careful investigation of literature and materials on innovative and modern methods and technologies of teaching English with the help of TBLT, the researcher has decided to make a research effectively with the pupils of primary school. In order to learn English effectively and much quicker, the researcher analyze the appropriate the use of Task based learning.

Keywords: Language learning, TBL, TBLT, classroom investigation, SLA, L2, CLT;

INTRODUCTION

According to dictionary 'a task' is a piece of work to be done, one done regularly, unwillingly or with difficulty. In other dictionary the term task is 'a piece of work imposed, exacted, or undertaken as a duty or the like' or 'a portion of study imposed by a teacher'. At first sight 'task' seems an unlikely candidate to form the basis of a learner-centered pedagogy which aim to motivate lifelong learning. In current pedagogical discussions, however, it is as difficult to the term 'task' as it once was to avoid the term 'communicative'. Numerous definitions of "task" have been provided by different scholars, and each definition has its own focus. Nunan classifies "task" into pedagogical tasks (occur in classroom) and real-world tasks or target tasks (occur beyond the classroom). Some dominant characteristics of task are summarized as follows:

TBLT is meaning-focused; instead of repeating what other people say, learners are expected to produce language; has connection with real-world tasks; assessed in accordance with outcome. A large body of literature provides theoretical rationale for TBLT. TBLT by providing two primary reasons:

First, classroom task imitates and promotes performance in real world task. Second, drawing on SLA research, the issue of 'learnability', the developmental sequence for L2 acquisition, input and output hypothesis have provided implications and justification for TBLT. It is pointed out that as an approach to instruction, task-based teaching is theoretically justifiable and flexible in implementation. TBLT favors implicit instruction by the way of "learning through doing activities or tasks". It is contended that TBLT provides improved and supportive conditions for developing second language ability than other approaches which relies heavily on explicit teaching on language structure.

The task-based approach has achieved something of the status new orthodoxy: teachers in a wide range of settings are being told by curriculum leaders that this is how they should teach. TBL is a natural extension of communicative language teaching. In TBL, the emphasis is on the task rather than the language. For example, students perform real-life tasks such as getting information about bus timetables, or making a presentation on a certain topic. Later, after the task has been completed, they can look at the language they have used and work on any

imperfections that have arisen, correcting grammatical mistakes or thinking about aspects of style. In other words, instead of language study leading to a task, the task itself is the main focus and jumping-off point for subsequent study later. This approach puts communicative activities at the heart of learning, and as a result a TBL syllabus might well be a list of tasks and activities, not a list of language.

A typical TBL sequence starts with a pre-task (where students are introduced to the topic and told what the task will be). This is followed by a task cycle where the students plan the task, gathering language and information to do it, and then produce the piece of writing or oral performance that the task demands. In the final language focus phase, students analyze the language they used for the task, making improvements and practicing any language that needs repair or development.

TBL, like a communicative methodology, has allowed teachers and students to concentrate on how we achieve things with language, and how we can use language for certain tasks. It is a significant departure from the original PPP sequence, since it takes the third element (production) as the starting point, not the end-point of the procedure. [Jeremy Harmer]

Task-based language learning is an approach where the planning of learning materials and teaching sessions are based around doing a task. In education, a task refers to an activity where communication is necessary: for example; deciding something, solving a problem, designing or organizing something, or telling someone to do something.

Task-based learning is the approach that Net Languages applies to most of its material design. A different approach would be to design a course around a grammar syllabus and grammar practice activities, like practicing the past simple or conditional sentences, where the aim of each activity is just to practice one particular aspect of language. To understand this difference, we can use the analogy of learning to drive. Imagine if you just study the road rules and the instruction manual for the car. Would you then be able to drive? What about if you learnt to drive by actually driving? Well, in the same way, task-based learning is based on the idea that you learn a language by using it, rather than by studying its different components in isolation. Task-based learning offers an alternative for language teachers. In a task-based lesson the teacher doesn't pre-determine what language will be studied, the lesson is based around the completion of a central task and the language studied is determined by what happens as the students complete it. The lesson follows certain stages: pre-task, task, planning, report, analysis, practice.

Task-based language teaching (TBLT), also known as task-based instruction (TBI), focuses on the use of authentic language and on asking students to do meaningful tasks using the target language. Such tasks can include visiting a doctor, conducting an interview, or calling customer service for help. Assessment is primarily based on task outcome (in other words the appropriate completion of real-world tasks) rather than on accuracy of prescribed language forms. This makes TBLT especially popular for developing target language fluency and student confidence. As such, TBLT can be considered a branch of communicative language teaching (CLT).

BACKGROUND OF THE TBL

Task-based language learning has its origins in communicative language teaching, and is a subcategory of it. Educators adopted task-based language learning for a variety of reasons.

Some moved to task-based syllabus in an attempt to make language in the classroom truly communicative, rather than the pseudo-communication that results from classroom activities with no direct connection to real-life situations. Others, like Prabhu in the Bangalore Project, thought that tasks were a way of tapping into learners' natural mechanisms for second-language acquisition, and weren't concerned with real-life communication. [Leaver and Willis 2004]

TBL was popularized by N. S. Prabhu while working in Bangalore, India. Prabhu noticed that his students could learn language just as easily with a non-linguistic problem as when they were concentrating on linguistic questions. Major scholars who have done research in this area include Teresa P. Pica, Martin East, and Michael Long.

The core of the lesson or project is, as the name suggests, the task. Teachers and curriculum developers should bear in mind that any attention to form, for example: grammar or vocabulary, increases the likelihood that learners may be distracted from the task itself and become preoccupied with detecting and correcting errors or looking up language in dictionaries and grammar references. Although there may be several effective frameworks for creating a task-based learning lesson, here is a basic outline:

PRE-TASK

In the pre-task, the teacher will present what will be expected from the students in the task phase. Additionally, in the "weak" form of TBLT, the teacher may prime the students with key vocabulary or grammatical constructs, although this can mean that the activity is, in effect, more similar to the more traditional present-practice-produce (PPP) paradigm. In "strong" task-based learning lessons, learners are responsible for selecting the appropriate language for any given context themselves. The instructors may also present a model of the task by either doing it themselves or by presenting picture, audio, or video demonstrating the task.

TASK

During the task phase, the students perform the task, typically in small groups, although this depends on the type of activity. Unless the teacher plays a particular role in the task, the teacher's role is typically limited to one of an observer or counselor—thereby making it a more student-centered methodology.

REVIEW

If learners have created tangible linguistic products, e.g. text, montage, presentation, audio or video recording, learners can review each other's work and offer constructive feedback. If a task is set to extend over longer periods of time, e.g. weeks, and includes iterative cycles of constructive activity followed by review, TBLL can be seen as analogous to Project-based learning.

TYPES OF TASK

According to N. S. Prabhu, there are three main categories of task: information-gap, reasoning-gap, and opinion-gap.

Information-gap activity, which involves a transfer of given information from one person to another – or from one form to another, or from one place to another – generally calling for the decoding or encoding of information from or into language. One example is pair work in which each member of the pair has a part of the total information (for example an incomplete picture) and attempts to convey it verbally to the other. Another example is completing a tabular representation with information available in a given piece of text. The activity often involves selection of relevant information as well, and learners may have to meet criteria of completeness and correctness in making the transfer. Reasoning-gap activity, which involves deriving some new information from given information through processes of inference, deduction, practical reasoning, or a perception of relationships or patterns. One example is working out a teacher's timetable on the basis of given class timetables. Another is deciding what course of action is best (for example cheapest or quickest) for a given purpose and within given constraints. The activity necessarily involves comprehending and conveying information, as in information-gap activity, but the information to be conveyed is not identical with that initially comprehended. There is a piece of reasoning which connects the two.

Opinion-gap activity, which involves identifying and articulating a personal preference, feeling, or attitude in response to a given situation. One example is story completion; another is taking part in the discussion of a social issue. The activity may involve using factual information and formulating arguments to justify one's opinion, but there is no objective procedure for demonstrating outcomes as right or wrong, and no reason to expect the same outcome from different individuals or on different occasions. [Prabhu 1987]

In task-based teaching the focus is not on grammar you have already introduced your students to necessary constructions earlier in the chapter or unit, as well as to the vocabulary they will need to complete the task. But rather on helping students develop linguistic strategies for completing the assigned tasks within the constraints of what they know of the target language. Because the emphasis is on spontaneous, creative language use, whether spoken or written, rather than on absolute accuracy, assessment is based on task outcome.

In task-based teaching, the center of the learning process moves to the students themselves and allows them to come to the realization that language is a tool to tackle and (re)solve real-world problems. The process of task-based learning itself teaches important skills. Students learn how to ask questions, how to negotiate meaning and how to interact in and work within groups. Within this group work, they are able to observe different approaches to problem solving as well as to learn how others think and make decisions. These are all skills that our students will need in order to be successful in the real world, regardless of which language they use there. In addition, task-based teaching provides students with the linguistic components they will need to accomplish these real-world tasks. These include: How to introduce themselves, how to talk about themselves, their families, their interests, their likes and dislikes, their needs, etc. in the right socio-cultural context. By moving the focus away from mechanical drills—although such drills do still have their place even today in language teaching, especially when teaching highly inflected languages—task-based teaching focuses on communication and interaction, using appropriate language at the correct time.

In his book "Second Language Pedagogy," N. S. Prabhu counted three basic types of tasks: Information gap, reasoning gap and opinion gap.

Information gap activities are those that involve the transfer of information from one person to another, from one form to another or from one place to another. For example, two students might have different schedules, but they want to find time to get together to have tea. They need to get relevant information from each other to determine when they are both free, as well as when the available times coincide with when a tea house is open. This type of activity allows students to request information, ask for clarification and negotiate both meaning, particularly when misunderstandings occur, and appropriate conclusions to the task.

Reasoning gap activities are those in which you ask your students to derive some information from that which you give them. They are required to comprehend and convey information, much as in an information gap activity, but the information that they are asked to convey is not exactly the same that they comprehend. They are asked to use reason and logic to decide what information to convey and what resolution to make for the problem at hand. For example, you might ask your students to make a decision between speed and cost or cost and quality, given a certain situation and various constraints.

Opinion gap activities are those that ask students to convey their own personal preferences, feelings or ideas about a particular situation. On a higher level, you might ask them to take part in a discussion or debate about a political or social issue. On a lower level, you might ask them to complete a story. In these types of activities, there is no right or wrong answer, and, therefore, there is no objective means by which to judge outcomes, outside of whether what the students do or say addresses the task at hand. You might require them to speak or write for a certain amount (words or time) and you might ask them to use certain constructions. Otherwise, assessment is subjective rather than objective.

Before even stepping into the classroom and using a task-based activity, it is important to have a firm objective in mind: Why are you using this activity? What do you want your students to learn and accomplish through it? Is it designed so that they can meet those goals? If you can answer each of these questions logically or positively, then you are well on your way to success in the classroom! What steps do you need to take there in order for your students to succeed?

1. Start with a pre-task activity.

This stage starts with the instructor explaining to her students what will be expected in the task cycle and post-task review stages. In a lower-level class, it will likely include an introduction or review of key vocabulary or grammatical concepts the students will need to accomplish the assigned task.

This is very much in line with the PPP (presentation, practice, performance) approach to instructional design. In a higher-level class, where the grammar and vocabulary have already been introduced, the students might be asked to brainstorm as to what language and linguistic features they would expect to need in order to complete the task successfully.

2. Follow the actual task cycle.

In this stage, the students complete the task either in pairs or small groups. The instructor is generally reduced to the role of observer, stepping in only when the students seem to be going too far astray from the assignment at hand.

3. Classroom work ends with the post-task review.

This is where the students present their work in some fashion. They might report their findings to the class as a whole. They might perform a dialog or skit. They might share their written story or video or poster with their classmates.

Depending on your goals and the time available, you can ask your students to perform some type of peer assessment at this point. This also assures you that your students pay attention to the presentations of their classmates!

4. Give a relevant homework assignment.

Unless the activity is the culmination of a unit, chapter or class, you will likely need to come up with an appropriate homework assignment and a logical follow-up to the activity just completed in class. This too can take a number of forms.

You might want to ask your students to write an essay based on they're in-class work. They might write a reflective piece, a self-critique about what they accomplished and learned. They might write an assessment of the others in their group, of the other groups or of the project as a useful learning mechanism. They might turn in their own version of the project, as they would have done it if they could have worked independently, explaining why they would have done things differently had they had the opportunity.

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