18 Task-Based Language Teaching

Background

Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) refers to an approach based on the use of tasks as the core unit of planning and instruction in language teaching. Some of its proponents (e.g., Willis 1996) present it as a logical development of Communicative Language Teaching since it draws on several principles that formed part of the communicative language teaching movement from the 1980s. For example:

- Activities that involve real communication are essential for language learning.
- Activities in which language is used for carrying out meaningful tasks promote learning.
- Language that is meaningful to the learner supports the learning process.

Tasks are proposed as useful vehicles for applying these principles. Two early applications of a task-based approach within a communicative framework for language teaching were the Malaysian Communicational Syllabus (1975) and the Bangalore Project (Beretta and Davies 1985; Prabhu 1987; Beretta 1990) both of which were relatively short-lived.

The role of tasks has received further support from some researchers in second language acquisition, who are interested in developing pedagogical applications of second language acquisition theory (e.g., Long and Crookes 1993). An interest in tasks as potential building blocks of second language instruction emerged when researchers turned to tasks as SLA research tools in the mid-1980s. SLA research has focused on the strategies and cognitive processes employed by second language learners. This research has suggested a reassessment of the role of formal grammar instruction in language teaching. There is no evidence, it is argued, that the type of grammar-focused teaching activities used in many language classrooms reflects the cognitive learning processes employed in naturalistic language learning situations outside the classroom. Engaging learners in task work provides a better context for the activation of learning processes than form-focused activities, and hence ultimately provides better opportunities for language learning to take place. Language learning is believed to depend on immersing students not merely in

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"comprehensible input" but in tasks that require them to negotiate meaning and engage in naturalistic and meaningful communication.

The key assumptions of task-based instruction are summarized by Feez (1998: 17) as:

- The focus is on process rather than product.
- Basic elements are purposeful activities and tasks that emphasize communication and meaning.
- Learners learn language by interacting communicatively and purposefully while engaged in the activities and tasks.
- Activities and tasks can be either:
  those that learners might need to achieve in real life;
  those that have a pedagogical purpose specific to the classroom.
- Activities and tasks of a task-based syllabus are sequenced according to difficulty.
- The difficulty of a task depends on a range of factors including the previous experience of the learner, the complexity of the task, the language required to undertake the task, and the degree of support available.

Because of its links to Communicative Language Teaching methodology and support from some prominent SLA theorists, TBLT has gained considerable attention within applied linguistics, though there have been few large-scale practical applications of it and little documentation concerning its implications or effectiveness as a basis for syllabus design, materials development, and classroom teaching.

Task-Based Language Teaching proposes the notion of "task" as a central unit of planning and teaching. Although definitions of task vary in TBLT, there is a commonsensical understanding that a task is an activity or goal that is carried out using language, such as finding a solution to a puzzle, reading a map and giving directions, making a telephone call, writing a letter, or reading a set of instructions and assembling a toy:

Tasks . . . are activities which have meaning as their primary focus. Success in tasks is evaluated in terms of achievement of an outcome, and tasks generally bear some resemblance to real-life language use. So task-based instruction takes a fairly strong view of communicative language teaching. (Skehan 1996b: 20)

Nunan (1989: 10) offers this definition:

the communicative task [is] a piece of classroom work which involves learners in comprehending, manipulating, producing or interacting in the target language while their attention is principally focused on meaning rather than form. The task should also have a sense of completeness, being able to stand alone as a communicative act in its own right.

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Although advocates of TBLT have embraced the concept of task with enthusiasm and conviction, the use of tasks as a unit in curriculum planning has a much older history in education. It first appeared in the vocational training practices of the 1950s. Task focus here first derived from training design concerns of the military regarding new military technologies and occupational specialties of the period. *Task analysis* initially focused on solo psychomotor tasks for which little communication or collaboration was involved. In task analysis, on-the-job, largely manual tasks were translated into training tasks. The process is outlined by Smith:

The operational system is analyzed from the human factors point of view, and a mission profile or flow chart is prepared to provide a basis for developing the task inventory. The task inventory (an outline of the major duties in the job and the more specific job tasks associated with each duty) is prepared, using appropriate methods of job analysis. Decisions are made regarding tasks to be taught and the level of proficiency to be attained by the students. A detailed task description is prepared for those tasks to be taught. Each task is broken down into the specific acts required for its performance. The specific acts, or task elements, are reviewed to identify the knowledge and skill components involved in task performance. Finally, a hierarchy of objectives is organized. (Smith 1971: 584)

A similar process is at the heart of the curriculum approach known as Competency-Based Language Teaching (see Chapter 13). Task-based training identified several key areas of concern.

1. analysis of real-world task-use situations
2. the translation of these into teaching tasks descriptions
3. the detailed design of instructional tasks
4. the sequencing of instructional tasks in classroom training/teaching

These same issues remain central in current discussions of task-based instruction in language teaching. Although task analysis and instructional design initially dealt with solo job performance on manual tasks, attention then turned to team tasks, for which communication is required. Four major categories of team performance function were recognized:

1. *orientation functions* (processes for generating and distributing information necessary to task accomplishment to team members)
2. *organizational functions* (processes necessary for members to coordinate actions necessary for task performance)
3. *adaptation functions* (processes occurring as team members adapt their performance to each other to complete the task)

4. motivational functions (defining team objectives and "energizing the group" to complete the task)

> (Nieva, Fleishman, and Rieck [1978], cited in Crookes 1986)

Advocates of TBLT have made similar attempts to define and validate the nature and function of tasks in language teaching. Although studies of the kind just noted have focused on the nature of occupational tasks, academic tasks have also been the focus of considerable attention in general education since the early 1970s. Doyle noted that in elementary education, "the academic task is the mechanism through which the curriculum is enacted for students" (Doyle 1983: 161). Academic tasks are defined as having four important dimensions:

1. the products students are asked to produce
2. the operations they are required to use in order to produce these products
3. the cognitive operations required and the resources available
4. the accountability system involved

All of the questions (and many of the proposed answers) that were raised in these early investigations of tasks and their role in training and teaching mirror similar discussions in relation to Task-Based Language Teaching. In this chapter, we will outline the critical issues in Task-Based Language Teaching and provide examples of what task-based teaching is supposed to look like.

Approach

Theory of language

TBLT is motivated primarily by a theory of learning rather than a theory of language. However, several assumptions about the nature of language can be said to underlie current approaches to TBLT. These are:

LANGUAGE IS PRIMARILY A MEANS OF MAKING MEANING

In common with other realizations of communicative language teaching, TBLT emphasizes the central role of meaning in language use. Skehan notes that in task-based instruction (TBI), "meaning is primary . . . the assessment of the task is in terms of outcome" and that task-based instruction is *not* "concerned with language display" (Skehan 1998: 98).

MULTIPLE MODELS OF LANGUAGE INFORM TBI

Advocates of task-based instruction draw on structural, functional, and interactional models of language, as defined in Chapter 1. This seems to

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be more a matter of convenience than of ideology. For example, *structural* criteria are employed by Skehan in discussing the criteria for determining the linguistic complexity of tasks:

Language is simply seen as less-to-more complex in fairly traditional ways, since linguistic complexity is interpretable as constrained by structural syllabus considerations. (Skehan 1998: 99)

Other researchers have proposed *functional* classifications of task types. For example, Berwick uses "task goals" as one of two distinctions in classification of task types. He notes that task goals are principally "educational goals which have clear didactic function" and "social (phatic) goals which require the use of language simply because of the activity in which the participants are engaged." (Berwick 1988, cited in Skehan 1998: 101). Foster and Skehan (1996) propose a three-way functional distinction of tasks – personal, narrative, and decision-making tasks. These and other such classifications of task type borrow categories of language function from models proposed by Jakobson, Halliday, Wilkins, and others.

Finally, task classifications proposed by those coming from the SLA research tradition of interaction studies focus on *interactional* dimensions of tasks. For example, Pica (1994) distinguishes between interactional activity and communicative goal.

TBI is therefore not linked to a single model of language but rather draws on all three models of language theory.

LEXICAL UNITS ARE CENTRAL IN LANGUAGE USE AND LANGUAGE LEARNING

In recent years, vocabulary has been considered to play a more central role in second language learning than was traditionally assumed. Vocabulary is here used to include the consideration of lexical phrases, sentence stems, prefabricated routines, and collocations, and not only words as significant units of linguistic lexical analysis and language pedagogy. Many task-based proposals incorporate this perspective. Skehan, for example (1996b: 21–22), comments:

Although much of language teaching has operated under the assumption that language is essentially structural, with vocabulary elements slotting in to fill structural patterns, many linguists and psycholinguists have argued that native language speech processing is very frequently lexical in nature. This means that speech processing is based on the production and reception of whole phrase units larger than the word (although analyzable by linguists into words) which do not require any internal processing when they are 'reeled off'. . . . . Fluency concerns the learner's capacity to produce language in real time without undue pausing for hesitation. It is likely to rely upon more lex-

icalized modes of communication, as the pressures of real-time speech production met only by avoiding excessive rule-based computation.

"CONVERSATION" IS THE CENTRAL FOCUS OF LANGUAGE AND THE KEYSTONE OF LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

Speaking and trying to communicate with others through the spoken language drawing on the learner's available linguistic and communicative resources is considered the basis for second language acquisition in TBI; hence, the majority of tasks that are proposed within TBLT involve conversation. We will consider further the role of conversation later in this chapter.

Theory of learning

TBI shares the general assumptions about the nature of language learning underlying Communicative Language Teaching (see Chapter 14). However some additional learning principles play a central role in TBLT theory. These are:

TASKS PROVIDE BOTH THE INPUT AND OUTPUT PROCESSING NECESSARY FOR LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

Krashen has long insisted that comprehensible input is the one necessary (and sufficient) criterion for successful language acquisition (see Chapter 15). Others have argued, however, that productive output and not merely input is also critical for adequate second language development. For example, in language immersion classrooms in Canada, Swain (1985) showed that even after years of exposure to comprehensible input, the language ability of immersion students still lagged behind native-speaking peers. She claimed that adequate opportunities for productive use of language are critical for full language development. Tasks, it is said, provide full opportunities for both input and output requirements, which are believed to be key processes in language learning. Other researchers have looked at "negotiation of meaning" as the necessary element in second language acquisition. "It is meaning negotiation which focuses a learner's attention on some part of an [the learner's] utterance (pronunciation, grammar, lexicon, etc.) which requires modification. That is, negotiation can be viewed as the trigger for acquisition" (Plough and Gass 1993: 36).

Tasks are believed to foster processes of negotiation, modification, rephrasing, and experimentation that are at the heart of second language learning. This view is part of a more general focus on the critical importance of conversation in language acquisition (e.g., Sato 1988). Drawing on SLA research on negotiation and interaction, TBLT proposes that the

`task is the pivot point for stimulation of input–output practice, negotiation of meaning, and transactionally focused conversation.

TASK ACTIVITY AND ACHIEVEMENT ARE MOTIVATIONAL

Tasks are also said to improve learner motivation and therefore promote learning. This is because they require the learners to use authentic language, they have well-defined dimensions and closure, they are varied in format and operation, they typically include physical activity, they involve partnership and collaboration, they may call on the learner's past experience, and they tolerate and encourage a variety of communication styles. One teacher trainee, commenting on an experience involving listening tasks, noted that such tasks are "genuinely authentic, easy to understand because of natural repetition; students are motivated to listen because they have just done the same task and want to compare how they did it" (quoted in Willis 1996: 61–62). (Doubtless enthusiasts for other teaching methods could cite similar "evidence" for their effectiveness.)

LEARNING DIFFICULTY CAN BE NEGOTIATED AND FINE-TUNED FOR PARTICULAR PEDAGOGICAL PURPOSES

Another claim for tasks is that specific tasks can be designed to facilitate the use and learning of particular aspects of language. Long and Crookes (1991: 43) claim that tasks

provide a vehicle for the presentation of appropriate target language samples to learners – input which they will inevitably reshape via application of general cognitive processing capacities – and for the delivery of comprehension and production opportunities of negotiable difficulty.

In more detailed support of this claim, Skehan suggests that in selecting or designing tasks there is a trade-off between cognitive processing and focus on form. More difficult, cognitively demanding tasks reduce the amount of attention the learner can give to the formal features of messages, something that is thought to be necessary for accuracy and grammatical development. In other words if the task is too difficult, fluency may develop at the expense of accuracy. He suggests that tasks can be designed along a cline of difficulty so that learners can work on tasks that enable them to develop both fluency and an awareness of language form (Skehan 1998: 97). He also proposes that tasks can be used to "channel" learners toward particular aspects of language:

Such channeled use might be towards some aspect of the discourse, or accuracy, complexity, fluency in general, or even occasionally, the use of particular sets of structures in the language. (Skehan 1998: 97–98)

Design

Objectives

There are few published (or perhaps, fully implemented) examples of complete language programs that claim to be fully based on most recent formulations of TBLT. The literature contains mainly descriptions of examples of task-based activities. However, as with other communicative approaches, goals in TBLT are ideally to be determined by the specific needs of particular learners. Selection of tasks, according to Long and Crookes (1993), should be based on a careful analysis of the real-world needs of learners. An example of how this was done with a national English curriculum is the *English Language Syllabus in Schools Malaysian* (1975) – a national, task-based communicative syllabus. A very broad goal for English use was determined by the Ministry of Education at a time when Malay was systematically replacing English-medium instruction at all levels of education. An attempt to define the role of English, given the new role for national Malay language, led to the broad goal of giving all Malaysian secondary school leavers *the ability to communicate accurately and effectively in the most common English-language activities they may be involved in.* Following this broad statement, the syllabus development team identified a variety of work situations in which English use was likely. The anticipated vocational (and occasionally recreational) uses of English for nontertiary-bound, upper secondary school leavers were stated as a list of general English use objectives. The resulting twenty-four objectives then became the framework within which a variety of related activities were proposed. The components of these activities were defined in the syllabus under the headings of Situation, Stimulus, Product, Tasks, and Cognitive Process. An overview of the syllabus that resulted from this process is given in Chapter 14.

The syllabus

The differences between a conventional language syllabus and a task-based one are discussed below. A conventional syllabus typically specifies the content of a course from among these categories:

- language structures
- functions
- topics and themes
- macro-skills (reading, writing, listening, speaking)
- competencies
- text types
- vocabulary targets

The syllabus specifies content and learning outcomes and is a document that can be used as a basis for classroom teaching and the design of teaching materials. Although proponents of TBLT do not preclude an interest in learners' development of any of these categories, they are more concerned with the process dimensions of learning than with the specific content and skills that might be acquired through the use of these processes. A TBLT syllabus, therefore, specifies the tasks that should be carried out by learners within a program.

Nunan (1989) suggests that a syllabus might specify two types of tasks:

1. real-world tasks, which are designed to practice or rehearse those tasks that are found to be important in a needs analysis and turn out to be important and useful in the real world
2. pedagogical tasks, which have a psycholinguistic basis in SLA theory and research but do not necessarily reflect real-world tasks

Using the telephone would be an example of the former, and an information-gap task would be an example of the latter. (It should be noted that a focus on Type 1 tasks, their identification through needs analysis, and the use of such information as the basis for the planning and delivery of teaching are identical with procedures used in Competency-Based Instruction; see Chapter 13.)

In the Bangalore Project (a task-based design for primary age learners of English), both types of tasks were used, as is seen from the following list of the first ten task types:

Task type	*Example*
1. Diagrams and formations	Naming parts of a diagram with numbers and letters of the alphabet as instructed.
2. Drawing	Drawing geometrical figures/formations from sets of verbal instructions
3. Clock faces	Positioning hands on a clock to show a given time
4. Monthly calendar	Calculating duration in days and weeks in the context of travel, leave, and so on
5. Maps	Constructing a floor plan of a house from a description
6. School timetables	Constructing timetables for teachers of particular subjects
7. Programs and itineraries	Constructing itineraries from descriptions of travel

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8. Train timetables	Selecting trains appropriate to given needs
9. Age and year of birth	Working out year of birth from age
10. Money	Deciding on quantities to be bought given the money available

(Adapted from Prabhu and cited in Nunan 1989: 42–44)

Norris, Brown, Hudson, and Yoshioka (1998) provide examples of representative real-world tasks grouped according to themes. For example:

Theme: planning a vacation

Tasks
– decide where you can go based on the "advantage miles"
– booking a flight
– choosing a hotel
– booking a room

Theme: application to a university

Tasks
– applying to the university
– corresponding with the department chair
– inquiring about financial support
– selecting the courses you want and are eligible to take, using advice from your adviser
– registering by phone
– calculating and paying your fees

It is hard to see that this classification offers much beyond the intuitive impressions of the writers of Situational Language Teaching materials of the 1960s or the data-free taxonomies that are seen in Munby's *Communicative Syllabus Design* (1978). Nor have subsequent attempts at describing task dimensions and task difficulty gone much beyond speculation (see Skehan 1998: 98–99).

In addition to selecting tasks as the basis for a TBLT syllabus, the ordering of tasks also has to be determined. We saw that the intrinsic difficulty of tasks has been proposed as a basis for the sequencing of tasks, but task difficulty is itself a concept that is not easy to determine. Honeyfield (1993: 129) offers the following considerations:

1. Procedures, or what the learners have to do to derive output from input
2. Input text
3. Output required
   a) Language items: vocabulary, structures, discourse structures, processability, and so on

b) Skills, both macro-skills and subskills
c) World knowledge or "topic content"
d) Text handling or conversation strategies
4. Amount and type of help given
5. Role of teachers and learners
6. Time allowed
7. Motivation
8. Confidence
9. Learning styles

This list illustrates the difficulty of operationalizing the notion of task difficulty: One could add almost anything to it, such as time of day, room temperature, or the aftereffects of breakfast!

Types of learning and teaching activities

We have seen that there are many different views as to what constitutes a task. Consequently, there are many competing descriptions of basic task types in TBLT and of appropriate classroom activities. Breen gives a very broad description of a task (1987: 26):

A language learning task can be regarded as a springboard for learning work. In a broad sense, it is a structured plan for the provision of opportunities for the refinement of knowledge and capabilities entailed in a new language and its use during communication. Such a work plan will have its own particular objective, appropriate content which is to be worked upon, and a working procedure. . . . A simple and brief exercise is a task, and so also are more complex and comprehensive work plans which require spontaneous communication of meaning or the solving of problems in learning and communicating. Any language test can be included within this spectrum of tasks. All materials designed for language teaching – through their particular organization of content and the working procedures they assume or propose for the learning of content – can be seen as compendia of tasks.

For Prabhu, a task is "an activity which requires learners to arrive at an outcome from given information through some process of thought, and which allows teachers to control and regulate that process" (Prabhu 1987: 17). Reading train timetables and deciding which train one should take to get to a certain destination on a given day is an appropriate classroom task according to this definition. Crookes defines a task as "a piece of work or an activity, usually with a specified objective, undertaken as part of an educational course, at work, or used to elicit data for research" (Crookes 1986: 1). This definition would lead to a very different set of "tasks" from those identified by Prahbu, since it could include not only summaries, essays, and class notes, but presumably, in

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some language classrooms, drills, dialogue readings, and any of the other "tasks" that teachers use to attain their teaching objectives.

In the literature on TBLT, several attempts have been made to group tasks into categories, as a basis for task design and description. Willis (1996) proposes six task types built on more or less traditional knowledge hierarchies. She labels her task examples as follows:

1. listing
2. ordering and sorting
3. comparing
4. problem solving
5. sharing personal experiences
6. creative tasks

Pica, Kanagy, and Falodun (1993) classify tasks according to the type of interaction that occurs in task accomplishment and give the following classification:

1. *Jigsaw tasks:* These involve learners combining different pieces of information to form a whole (e.g., three individuals or groups may have three different parts of a story and have to piece the story together).
2. *Information-gap tasks:* One student or group of students has one set of information and another student or group has a complementary set of information. They must negotiate and find out what the other party's information is in order to complete an activity.
3. *Problem-solving tasks:* Students are given a problem and a set of information. They must arrive at a solution to the problem. There is generally a single resolution of the outcome.
4. *Decision-making tasks:* Students are given a problem for which there are a number of possible outcomes and they must choose one through negotiation and discussion.
5. *Opinion exchange tasks:* Learners engage in discussion and exchange of ideas. They do not need to reach agreement.

Other characteristics of tasks have also been described, such as the following:

1. one-way or two-way: whether the task involves a one-way exchange of information or a two-way exchange
2. convergent or divergent: whether the students achieve a common goal or several different goals
3. collaborative or competitive: whether the students collaborate to carry out a task or compete with each other on a task

4. single or multiple outcomes: whether there is a single outcome or many different outcomes are possible
5. concrete or abstract language: whether the task involves the use of concrete language or abstract language
6. simple or complex processing: whether the task requires relatively simple or complex cognitive processing
7. simple or complex language: whether the linguistic demands of the task are relatively simple or complex
8. reality-based or not reality-based: whether the task mirrors a real-world activity or is a pedagogical activity not found in the real world

Learner roles

A number of specific roles for learners are assumed in current proposals for TBI. Some of these overlap with the general roles assumed for learners in Communicative Language Teaching while others are created by the focus on task completion as a central learning activity. Primary roles that are implied by task work are:

GROUP PARTICIPANT

Many tasks will be done in pairs or small groups. For students more accustomed to whole-class and/or individual work, this may require some adaptation.

MONITOR

In TBLT, tasks are not employed for their own sake but as a means of facilitating learning. Class activities have to be designed so that students have the opportunity to notice how language is used in communication. Learners themselves need to "attend" not only to the message in task work, but also to the form in which such messages typically come packed. A number of learner-initiated techniques to support learner reflection on task characteristics, including language form, are proposed in Bell and Burnaby (1984).

RISK-TAKER AND INNOVATOR

Many tasks will require learners to create and interpret messages for which they lack full linguistic resources and prior experience. In fact, this is said to be the point of such tasks. Practice in restating, paraphrasing, using paralinguistic signals (where appropriate), and so on, will often be needed. The skills of guessing from linguistic and contextual clues, asking for clarification, and consulting with other learners may also need to be developed.

Teacher roles

Additional roles are also assumed for teachers in TBI, including:

SELECTOR AND SEQUENCER OF TASKS

A central role of the teacher is in selecting, adapting, and/or creating the tasks themselves and then forming these into an instructional sequence in keeping with learner needs, interests, and language skill level.

PREPARING LEARNERS FOR TASKS

Most TBLT proponents suggest that learners should not go into new tasks "cold" and that some sort of pretask preparation or cuing is important. Such activities might include topic introduction, clarifying task instructions, helping students learn or recall useful words and phrases to facilitate task accomplishment, and providing partial demonstration of task procedures. Such cuing may be inductive and implicit or deductive and explicit.

CONSCIOUSNESS-RAISING

Current views of TBLT hold that if learners are to acquire language through participating in tasks they need to attend to or notice critical features of the language they use and hear. This is referred to as "Focus on Form." TBLT proponents stress that this does not mean doing a grammar lesson before students take on a task. It does mean employing a variety of form-focusing techniques, including attention-focusing pretask activities, text exploration, guided exposure to parallel tasks, and use of highlighted material.

The role of instructional materials

PEDAGOGIC MATERIALS

Instructional materials play an important role in TBLT because it is dependent on a sufficient supply of appropriate classroom tasks, some of which may require considerable time, ingenuity, and resources to develop. Materials that can be exploited for instruction in TBLT are limited only by the imagination of the task designer. Many contemporary language teaching texts cite a "task focus" or "task-based activities" among their credentials, though most of the tasks that appear in such books are familiar classroom activities for teachers who employ collaborative learning, Communicative Language Teaching, or small-group activities. Several teacher resource books are available that contain representative sets of sample task activities (e.g., Willis 1996) that can be

adapted for a variety of situations. A number of task collections have also been put into textbook form for students use. Some of these are in more or less traditional text format (e.g., *Think Twice,* Hover 1986), some are multimedia (e.g., *Challenges,* Candlin and Edelhoff 1982), and some are published as task cards (e.g., Malaysian Upper Secondary Communicational Syllabus Resource Kit, 1979). A wide variety of realia can also be used as a resource for TBI.

REALIA

TBI proponents favor the use of authentic tasks supported by authentic materials wherever possible. Popular media obviously provide rich resources for such materials. The following are some of the task types that can be built around such media products.

Newspapers
– Students examine a newspaper, determine its sections, and suggest three new sections that might go in the newspaper.
– Students prepare a job-wanted ad using examples from the classified section.
– Students prepare their weekend entertainment plan using the entertainment section.

Television
– Students take notes during the weather report and prepare a map with weather symbols showing likely weather for the predicted period.
– In watching an infomercial, students identify and list "hype" words and then try to construct a parallel ad following the sequence of the hype words.
– After watching an episode of an unknown soap opera, students list the characters (with known or made-up names) and their possible relationship to other characters in the episode.

Internet
– Given a book title to be acquired, students conduct a comparative shopping analysis of three Internet booksellers, listing prices, mailing times, and shipping charges, and choose a vendor, justifying their choice.
– Seeking to find an inexpensive hotel in Tokyo, students search with three different search engines (e.g., Yahoo, Netscape, Snap), comparing search times and analyzing the first ten hits to determine most useful search engine for their purpose.
– Students initiate a "chat" in a chat room, indicating a current interest in their life and developing an answer to the first three people to respond. They then start a diary with these text-sets, ranking the responses.

Procedure

The way in which task activities are designed into an instructional bloc can be seen from the following example from Richards (1985). The example comes from a language program that contained a core component built around tasks. The program was an intensive conversation course for Japanese college students studying on a summer program in the United States. Needs analysis identified target tasks the students needed to be able to carry out in English, including:

– basic social survival transactions
– face-to-face informal conversations
– telephone conversations
– interviews on the campus
– service encounters

A set of role-play activities was then developed focusing on situations students would encounter in the community and transactions they would have to carry out in English. The following format was developed for each role-play task:

Pretask activities
1. Learners first take part in a preliminary activity that introduces the topic, the situation, and the "script" that will subsequently appear in the role-play task. Such activities are of various kinds, including brainstorming, ranking exercises, and problem-solving tasks. The focus is on thinking about a topic, generating vocabulary and related language, and developing expectations about the topic. This activity therefore prepares learners for the role-play task by establishing schemata of different kinds.
2. Learners then read a dialogue on a related topic. This serves both to model the kind of transaction the learner will have to perform in the role-play task and to provide examples of the kind of language that could be used to carry out such a transaction.

Task activity
3. Learners perform a role play. Students work in pairs with a task and cues needed to negotiate the task.

Posttask activities
4. Learners then listen to recordings of native speakers performing the same role-play task they have just practiced and compare differences between the way they expressed particular functions and meanings and the way native speakers performed.

Willis (1996: 56–57) recommends a similar sequence of activities:

Pretask

Introduction to topic and task
- T helps Ss to understand the theme and objectives of the task, for example, brainstorming ideas with the class, using pictures, mime, or personal experience to introduce the topic.
- Ss may do a pretask, for example, topic-based odd-word-out games.
- T may highlight useful words and phrases, but would not preteach new structures.
- Ss can be given preparation time to think about how to do the task.
- Ss can hear a recording of a parallel task being done (so long as this does not give away the solution to the problem).
- If the task is based on a text, Ss read part of it.

The task cycle

Task
- The task is done by Ss (in pairs or groups) and gives Ss a chance to use whatever language they already have to express themselves and say whatever they want to say. This may be in response,to reading a text or hearing a recording.
- T walks round and monitors, encouraging in a supportive way everyone's attempts at communication in the target language.
- T helps Ss to formulate what they want to say, but will not intervene to correct errors of form.
- The emphasis is on spontaneous, exploratory talk and confidence building, within the privacy of the small group.
- Success in achieving the goals of the task helps Ss' motivation.

Planning
- Planning prepares for the next stage, when Ss are asked to report briefly to the whole class how they did the task and what the outcome was.
- Ss draft and rehearse what they want to say or write.
- T goes round to advise students on language, suggesting phrases and helping Ss to polish and correct their language.
- If the reports are in writing, T can encourage peer editing and use of dictionaries.
- The emphasis is on clarity, organization, and accuracy, as appropriate for a public presentation.
- Individual students often take this chance to ask questions about specific language items.

Report
- T asks some pairs to report briefly to the whole class so everyone can compare findings, or begin a survey. (NB: There must be a purpose for

others to listen.) Sometimes only one or two groups report in full;
others comment and add extra points. The class may take notes.
- T chairs, comments on the content of their reports, rephrases perhaps,
but gives no overt public correction.

Posttask listening
- Ss listen to a recording of fluent speakers doing the same task, and
compare the ways in which they did the task themselves.

The language focus

Analysis
- T sets some language-focused tasks, based on the texts students have
read or on the transcripts of the recordings they have heard.
- Examples include the following:
Find words and phrases related to the title of the topic or text.
Read the transcript, find words ending in *s* or *'s*, and say what the *s*
means.
Find all the verbs in the simple past form. Say which refer to past time
and which do not.
Underline and classify the questions in the transcript.
- T starts Ss off, then Ss continue, often in pairs.
- T goes round to help; Ss can ask individual questions.
- In plenary, T then reviews the analysis, possibly writing relevant lan-
guage up on the board in list form; Ss may make notes.

Practice
- T conducts practice activities as needed, based on the language analysis
work already on the board, or using examples from the text or
transcript.
- Practice activities can include:
choral repetition of the phrases identified and classified
memory challenge games based on partially erased examples or using
lists already on blackboard for progressive deletion
sentence completion (set by one team for another)
matching the past-tense verbs (jumbled) with the subject or objects
they had in the text
Kim's game (in teams) with new words and phrases
dictionary reference words from text or transcript

Conclusion

Few would question the pedagogical value of employing tasks as a vehicle
for promoting communication and authentic language use in second lan-
guage classrooms, and depending on one's definition of a task, tasks have

long been part of the mainstream repertoire of language teaching techniques for teachers of many different methodological persuasions. TBLT, however, offers a different rationale for the use of tasks as well as different criteria for the design and use of tasks. It is the dependence on tasks as the primary source of pedagogical input in teaching and the absence of a systematic grammatical or other type of syllabus that characterizes current versions of TBLT, and that distinguishes it from the use of tasks in Competency-Based Language Teaching, another task-based approach but one that is not wedded to the theoretical framework and assumptions of TBLT. Many aspects of TBLT have yet to be justified, such as proposed schemes for task types, task sequencing, and evaluation of task performance. And the basic assumption of Task-Based Language Teaching – that it provides for a more effective basis for teaching than other language teaching approaches – remains in the domain of ideology rather than fact.

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