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In this special edition of OnTask, we are pleased to feature 20 articles from among the over 60 presenters who made our inaugural conference in May 2012 at Osaka Shoin Women's University such a success.

Yusa Koizumi investigates the amount and purpose of L1 used in task-based interaction by Japanese learners. Ayaka Hashinishi examines potential problems with task-based learning and reviews potential solutions to these problems in order to achieve a balance between accuracy and fluency development. Carla Bridge and Fiona Wiebusch review the successful implementation of a TBLT curriculum in an EAP context at an International University in Vietnam. Greg Dunne reports on the effectiveness of task telecollaboration projects as a means to increase authentic language use for beginner level students in the EFL classroom. Joshua Cohen, Mark Donnellan, and Jeff Crawford’s article provides a checklist for teachers to use when designing and assessing information gap tasks for lower-level learners. Gregory Birch analyses and discusses tasks that were designed by senior high school Japanese teachers of English at a training program with the aim of improving teachers’ abilities to cultivate students’ communication skills. Masaki Seo investigates Japanese language teachers’ perceptions of task-based language learning in Hong Kong by interviewing two native Japanese teachers. Colin Thompson discusses the effects of task complexity on Japanese upper-intermediate learners’ planning strategies and how they may change as learners attempt more complex oral tasks over time. Sean Toland and Jeff Crawford report on the use of carousel mini-presentations as opposed to class-fronted presentations that are often incorporated at the report stage of a TBL framework. Hui-Chun Teng and Chia-Ling Chang investigate the effects of advanced organizers for improving the reading comprehension skills of junior high school students in Taiwan. Bryan Gerard reviews possible reasons for the resistance towards TBL before discussing three principles that can encourage TBL in a team teaching environment. Yeo Leng Leng and Chen Seow Chin review a TBL teaching program for teaching Chinese language in a primary school classroom. Rieko Nishida discusses the design and implementation of TBL for low proficiency EFL learners at a Japanese University. The paper provides feedback from the learners who show changes in their attitudes regarding L2 learning after experiencing TBL. Fergus O’Dwyer reviews assessment practices in TBLT classrooms and discusses the important role that assessment plays in implementing task-based language learning and teaching. Robby Caughey and Gareth Eggie report on a pilot study of different task-types and conclude on the benefits of hybrid tasks that provide learners with a balanced diet of task types that lead to more fluent, accurate, and complex language development. Dan Lu takes a critical look at Hong Kong’s TBL language curriculum. Mutsumi Kawakami investigates vocabulary acquisition through text-based tasks where attention to form, meaning, and the function of words were required in order to complete the tasks. William Hogue discusses the notion of the whether TBL is suitable for the Asian context and how we can use TBL to fit our students’ needs and learning styles. Finally, Takaaki Goto outlines his blending of TBL and the Genre Approach in teaching writing to university students.

We hope you enjoy this special issue. Stay tuned for information about our second TBLT in Asia conference, coming up in 2014!

We would also like to thank the guest editors who helped us with the not insubstantial task of preparing this large edition of OnTask. For their hard work, we thank Andrew Atkins, Brent Cotsworth, Stuart Cunningham, Mark Donnellan, Paul Leeming, Theron Muller and Julian Pigott.

As always, OnTask welcomes contributions in the form of research papers, essays and lesson plans. If you are interested in contributing to OnTask, please contact Colin Thompson at tbltinasia@gmail.com
“L1 can also facilitate task management and rapport building, which are essential for successful task completion.”

Students’ L1 Use for Task Work

Yusa Koizumi
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Introduction

One issue that surfaces when task-based language teaching (TBLT) is applied to an EFL context is students’ use of their first language (L1). While TBLT and other communicative teaching approaches postulate that meaningful communication in the target language promotes learning, some experts claim that the shared L1 of EFL students has some positive roles in communicative classrooms. For example, L1 translation and L1 metalinguistic terminology might help students discuss vocabulary and grammar while working on tasks. L1 can also facilitate task management and rapport building, which are essential for successful task completion.

These positive views on students’ L1 use have motivated researchers to study this issue using tasks. For example, Swain and Lapkin (2000) investigated French immersion students in Canada, focusing primarily on the relationship between task type and the amount of L1 use. Although they did not find any significant difference between two types of tasks, they identified several common functions of L1, such as task understanding, task management, and vocabulary search. Scott and de la Fuente (2008) compared task-based interactions with two groups of L2 Spanish and L2 French students in the US. One group used the target language exclusively for completing the task while the other group used both L1 and the target language. The study revealed that the interactions by the latter group were more continuous, involved more balanced contribution, and provided more evidence of collaborative dialogue and metalinguistic terminology use. Finally, Storch and Aldosari (2010) studied EFL students in Saudi Arabia and concluded that task management and vocabulary deliberations were the most common purposes of L1 use during task work. In common with these studies, the present study investigated task-based interactions by Japanese students, focusing on the amount and purpose of L1 use. It aimed to answer the following questions:

1. To what extent do Japanese EFL students use their L1 while they work on a task?
2. How does the amount of L1 use change according to the teacher’s instruction?
3. For what purposes do students use their L1?


Method

Fifteen first-year students of an English writing class at a university in Tokyo participated in the study. Four were male, and eleven were female, and all students shared Japanese as their L1. They had been assigned to the intermediate class based on their scores on the reading section of the GTEC test, which ranged between 119 and 121 ($M = 120.27$). The data for the study were collected in the fifth week of the semester, during a regular lesson. The students worked in pairs to complete a picture story jigsaw task that consisted of two subtasks. In the first subtask, each of the two students held four pictures that depicted different scenes from a story, and by describing these pictures to each other, they found the correct order of the eight pictures. In the second subtask, the two students looked at all the pictures and wrote down the story together. For subtask 1, the teacher of the class told students to speak English only. For subtask 2, she told them to speak English as much as they could but said it was okay to speak Japanese when they found it to be necessary. Each pair’s interaction was audio-recorded, and the recordings were transcribed after the lesson. At this point, the data for five students were removed from the study because two of them who worked together rarely interacted during the second subtask, and the other three worked as a triad. The transcripts for the remaining five pairs were then segmented into sequences. The definition of a sequence by Ellis and Barkhuizen (2005), “a stretch of talk-in-interaction in which the participants orient to a specific topic and/or coherent arrangement of related actions” (p. 213), was referred to for this purpose. Next, the sequences were categorized into four types according to the topic or function: (1) discussing content, (2) discussing language, (3) managing the task, and (4) engaging in off-task talk. The sequences were also classified into those containing L1 and those not containing L1.1

Results and Discussion

Amount of L1 Use

The analysis revealed that the amount of L1 use during the entire task work (subtask 1 and subtask 2) varied widely among pairs (see Table 1). For pair 1 and pair 2, only 21 or 20% of the sequences they produced contained L1, while for the other three pairs, 65 to 67% of the sequences contained L1. This difference might be related to the proficiency levels of the students who composed the pairs. While the first two pairs consisted of two higher proficiency students, the other three pairs consisted of two lower proficiency students or one higher proficiency student and one lower proficiency student.2 However, the variation in proficiency was not substantial, and it is likely that other factors, such as motivation and gender combinations, were also involved. Further research will be needed to study the effect of these potential factors on the amount of L1 use during task work.

Change in the Amount of L1 Use

The amount of L1 use increased considerably from subtask 1 to subtask 2 for all pairs (see Table 1). The tendency mentioned above was detected again, with pairs 3, 4 and 5 showing greater increases than pairs 1 and 2. In fact, 82 to 95% of sequences these three pairs produced during subtask 2 contained L1. The result suggested that students generally followed the teacher’s instruction and restrained themselves from speaking L1 until

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1 Any sequence that included at least one Japanese word was coded as containing L1. Backchannels and other non-lexical vocalizations in Japanese, for example, un, a; e:to, were not considered as words.

2 The fifteen participants were divided into two proficiency groups of seven and eight according to their GTEC scores. Of the ten students whose data were used for the study, five belonged to the higher proficiency group, with GTEC scores ranging from 243 to 256. The other five belonged to the lower proficiency group, with GTEC scores ranging from 203 to 239.
they were allowed to. However, the rise in the amount of L1 use might not be attributed only to the instruction. Another important difference between the two subtasks was that subtask 2 required students to write together while subtask 1 did not. Theorists argue that collaborative writing helps students attend to form and encourages them to talk about their language use. This type of task is found particularly effective for promoting discussion of grammatical problems, which is unlikely to occur in speaking-only tasks because such problems do not normally disturb communication of meaning (e.g., Adams, 2006; Adams & Ross-Feldman, 2008; Swain & Lapkin, 2001). In EFL contexts, students’ L1 often plays essential roles in their L2 development, especially in the explicit learning of grammar. This is particularly the case in Japan, where grammar lessons center on analysis of sentence structure using Japanese metalinguistic terms. Thus, for students in this study, the teacher’s permission was probably not the only reason for speaking more L1 during subtask 2. It can be assumed that the additional writing requirement of the subtask drew students’ attention to grammatical problems, and they used L1 for discussing them.

### Purposes of L1 Use

The data indicated that the most common purpose of L1 use was discussing content during subtask 1 and discussing language during subtask 2 (see Table 2). Increase in the amount of L1 use from subtask 1 to subtask 2 varied slightly across different purposes, and discussing language was the purpose that marked the largest increase. For subtask 1, 21% of discussing language sequences contained L1, but the figure rose to 67% for subtask 2. This finding supports the view that

### Table 1. Amount of L1 use.

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<th>Subtasks 1 &amp; 2</th>
<th>Subtask 1</th>
<th>Subtask 2</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total sequences containing L1</td>
<td>Total sequences containing L1</td>
<td>Total sequences containing L1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pair 1</td>
<td>75 (21%)</td>
<td>26 (12%)</td>
<td>49 (27%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pair 2</td>
<td>83 (20%)</td>
<td>32 (6%)</td>
<td>51 (29%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pair 3</td>
<td>69 (66%)</td>
<td>20 (30%)</td>
<td>49 (82%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pair 4</td>
<td>74 (65%)</td>
<td>28 (29%)</td>
<td>46 (87%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pair 5</td>
<td>70 (67%)</td>
<td>28 (25%)</td>
<td>42 (95%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All pairs</td>
<td>371 (47%)</td>
<td>134 (19%)</td>
<td>237 (62%)</td>
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### Table 2. Purpose of L1 Use (All Pairs).

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<th>Subtask 1</th>
<th>Subtask 2</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total sequences</td>
<td>Total sequences containing L1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussing content</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>14 (17%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussing language</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>5 (21%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managing the task</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>7 (27%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Off-task talk</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
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subtask 2 provided students with more opportunities to talk about formal aspects of the target language, and L1 served as a useful tool for such discussions.

Limitations and Future Research
Although this study provided interesting findings relating to Japanese students’ use of L1 for task work, it was limited in several ways, and future research will benefit greatly from addressing these limitations. First, the variation in the amount of L1 use among the five pairs suggested a possible influence of proficiency levels, but nothing conclusive could be drawn from this small-scale study with participants whose placement scores showed limited variance. This topic should be explored further by comparing students who are clearly different in proficiency while similar in other aspects. Second, the study set out to investigate how students’ L1 use would change according to the teacher’s instruction but seemed to reveal the presence of another factor, task modality, which may have a stronger effect than the teacher’s instruction. As both variables are worth exploring, future studies should be designed so that they can isolate the effect of one by controlling the other. Third, the study did not analyze the compositions written by students and thus failed to provide any information about the effect of L1 use on the product of task work. Further research is needed to examine whether speaking in L1 while writing together can improve the quality of compositions, particularly in terms of accuracy. By overcoming these limitations, future research might provide clearer answers to the fundamental question: whether students’ L1 use is justifiable in TBLT and, if it is, with what kinds of students and on what kinds of tasks.

About the author
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References
Task-based Language Teaching And Learners’ Second Language Development

Ayaka Hashinishi
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Introduction
In recent years, there has been an increase of interest in the use of task-based language teaching (TBLT) because it is believed that it can help foster learners’ communicative ability and encourage learners to use the target language actively and meaningfully (Ellis, 2003). However, some critics of TBLT argue that there is a risk for learners to achieve fluency at the expense of accuracy. Skehan (1996) claims that there may be a minimal concern with accuracy and no incentive for learners to extend their existing language system. This paper will review recent research on TBLT, examine potential problems with this approach, and review proposals for solutions to these problems.

Potential problems of task-based language teaching
Even though TBLT has gained popularity in recent years, some researchers (Carless, 2007; Cuesta, 1995; Foster, 1999; Skehan, 1996; Willis, 1996) point out some potential problems of TBLT. This paper will concentrate on the problems that are related to learners’ second language development.

The first problem is the danger of achieving fluency at the expense of accuracy. An important feature of TBLT is that “learners are free to choose whatever language forms they wish to convey what they mean” (Willis, 1996, p. 24). Besides, since the primary focus of TBLT is on meaning, it is likely that learners will place great emphasis on communicating meaning, and not necessarily worry about form. Pica (2010) suggests that “teachers tend to focus on comprehension of meaning and classroom discourse maintenance, and to overlook about as many inaccurate utterances as they respond to” (p. 3). Cuesta (1995) points out that “learners are often encouraged to start using the language and concentrate on the communication of meanings, at the expense of accuracy” (p. 94), and as a result, “they may achieve fluency, but not accuracy” (p. 98). Foster (1999) argues that “learners might be encouraged to prioritize a focus on meaning over a focus on form, and thus be led to use fluent but unchallenging or inaccurate language” (p. 69).

Secondly, some learners tend to avoid engagement with the language system and instead use gesture, expression and movement when their attention is on completing the task. Cuesta (1995) claims that “learners tend to avoid any engagement with the language system when focusing on the negotiation of meaning” (p. 98). Foster (1999) suggests that “because language does not have to be well-formed in order to be meaningful…learners could successfully complete a task using ill-formed or undemanding language, supplemented by gesture and intonation” (p. 69). Skehan (1996) also claims that the widespread use of communication strategies help learners succeed with meaning while “bypassing
form cognitive and linguistic communication strategies” (p. 41).

Thirdly, some researchers point to the possibility that when completing a task, much of the communication may be lexical in nature. Cuesta (1995) asserts that learners seem to revert to lexis when they focus on the negotiation of meaning. Skehan (1992) states that “language users and learners bypass syntax and use lexical strategies to enable them to keep up with communication in real-time when constrained by a limited capacity information-processing system” (p. 205). Willis (1996) also suggests that “There is naturally more concern for use of lexis and lexical chunks than for grammar and grammatical accuracy” (p. 55).

Fourthly, Carless (2007) addresses the problem of students’ use of the mother tongue in the task-based classroom. He points out that students’ unwillingness to speak in English may be due to their lack of confidence or fear of making mistakes, or peer pressure and resistance to speaking in a foreign tongue. Carless suggests that there is a danger that students complete the task but make sub-optimal use of the target language.

As a result of all the above problems, some researchers claim that some learners may fail to improve their language proficiency and fossilization may occur. In Skehan’s (1996) words, TBLT may not be able to “automatically drive interlanguage forward” (p. 42), and it may “create pressure for immediate communication rather than interlanguage change and growth” (p. 58). Cuesta (1995) claims that many learners may “fail to reach target language competence and fossilization may occur. Learners stay at the lexical stage, and procedualize an extremely impoverished language system, which is grammatically fossilized” (p. 98).

The needs of the learners
Various studies have contributed important findings that point to the importance of emphasis on meaning as well as on form when adopting TBLT. Many researchers (Cuesta, 1995; Pica, 2010; Sanchez, 2004; Skehan, 1996; Swan, 2005) claim that learners need to be able to process language for both its meaning and its grammatical form.

Pica (2010) suggests that learners need “input that supplies positive evidence and negative evidence on L2 form, function, meaning relationships, especially with respect to low salience L2 form, function, meaning relationships such as those that are perceptually difficult to notice” (p. 3). Skehan (1996) claims that it is necessary to “devise methods of focusing on form … as opportunities to trigger acquisitional processes” (p. 42). Sanchez (2004) asserts that teachers should “integrate the necessary instruction within the set of activities derived from pedagogical tasks and centered on meaning” (p. 62).

Solutions to the problems
In order to solve the above problems, some researchers and linguists have proposed some solutions to achieve a balance between the competing requirements of accuracy and fluency.
Focus on form in TBLT

Nunan (2004) suggests the use of a focused task “in which a particular structure is required in order for a task to be completed” (p. 94). Ellis (2001) suggests using consciousness-raising (CR) tasks: “CR-tasks make language itself the content.....learners are required to talk meaningfully about a language point using their own linguistic resources”. The examples that he gives include classifying the uses of a verb plus –ing forms that appear in a reading text or identifying from a spoken transcript phrases containing the preposition in and putting them into three categories: time, location, other. He states that “CR tasks are designed to cater primarily to explicit learning - that is, they are intended to develop awareness at the level of understanding” (p. 162-3).

Pica (2010) proposes the implementation of form focusing tasks. She asserts that it is important to select content focused texts that contain the forms that learners need to notice. The examples that Pica gives are Spot the Difference, Jigsaw, and Grammar Communication tasks which require learners to compare different versions of the passage, to choose the better, or best sounding sentences across the different versions, justify their choices, and use them as a basis for text reconstruction. Pica asserts that form focussed tasks “activate processes of interaction and attention that are crucial for learning forms that are difficult to detect”, and that “awareness of form, function, and meaning connections tend to arise”. She concludes that “learners' discussions, arguments, and justifications of their form selections are important mechanisms for drawing their attention to form and meaning” (p. 7).

Pre-task and Post-task activities

Some researchers and educators propose the use of pre-task activities to help learners handle the tasks (Foster, 1999; Sanchez, 2004; Skehan, 1996; Willis, 1996). Skehan (1996) claims the pre-task activities can teach, mobilize or make salient language which will be relevant to task performance, and can “ease the processing load that learners will encounter when actually doing a task, releasing more attention for the actual language that is used” (p. 54). Teachers can ask learners to observe similar tasks being completed on video or listen to or read transcripts of similar tasks in order to induce the learners to recall schematic knowledge that will be relevant to the task. Further, teachers can ask learners to engage in pre-task planning, either of the language that they will need to use, or of the meanings that they want to express. Learners can thereby produce more accurate, complex and fluent language.

Skehan (1996) proposes three types of post-task activities: public performance, analysis and tests. Learners can be asked, after they have completed a task, to repeat their performance publicly in front of an audience. This will “cause learners to allocate attention to the goals of restructuring and accuracy where otherwise they would not” (p. 56). The second type is analyzing tasks which require learners to “examine task sequences, task progression, and generally how sets of task relate to one another” (p. 56). Learners will be reminded that restructuring and accuracy also have importance.

Conclusion

This paper has examined potential problems with the task-based approach and has reviewed proposals for solutions to the problems, such as adopting a focus-on-form approach and using pre-task and post-task activities, so that a balance between the competing requirements of accuracy and fluency can be achieved. We should bear in mind that both components, meaning and form, are important in language learning. Sanchez (2004) claims that emphasizing meaning and leaving form aside does not work properly. Therefore, a balance must be
found between meaning and form, and between accuracy and fluency. In Cuesta’s (1995) words, “Teachers can keep some control, while learners are using language in meaning-focused discourse. Learners are involved in tasks that direct them to negotiate meaning, that push them to create and take risks, while also encouraging them to work with grammar” (p. 99). To conclude, the key with task-based language teaching is how to achieve a balance between a controlled approach to learners’ second language development and learners’ involvement in the communication of meanings, and to ensure that the acquisition of fluency is not at the expense of accuracy.

About the author
Ayaka Hashinishi is a graduate student at Kobe City University of Foreign Studies. Her major is English Language Education and Research. Her research interests include task-based language teaching, content-based instruction, teaching methodology, second language acquisition, and learner motivation.
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References
Introduction

Asking EFL learners to engage in an EAP program devoid of real-world tasks is akin to asking someone to learn the piano without ever touching the keys. It is unlikely that ‘real’ learning will occur in either scenario. This notion that language is best learned in the context of real-world tasks in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) settings sparked a major renewal of our English for Academic Purposes (EAP) curriculum in 2008 to incorporate the principles of task-based learning and teaching (TBLT).

The challenge for many institutions teaching EAP in EFL settings is to create opportunities through curriculum to engage learners in real-world communicative acts (Nunan, 2006), simulating tasks learners may encounter in English-speaking higher educational settings. It has been suggested that a curriculum should incorporate authentic tasks that foster language learning for a real purpose and a real reason (Duthie, 2008). The question is, how can EAP practitioners ‘keep it real’ in the EFL classroom?

The answer may reside in the integration of TBLT into formal curriculum. The current paper provides a brief account of the key progenitors for curriculum renewal in a changing EAP context, followed by a discussion of the process of implementation. Rewards and challenges identified through teacher reflections are also highlighted along with key learnings and future directions for research into the efficacy of TBLT in our EFL context.

While studies have previously espoused the benefits of applying TBLT in EAP contexts (Alexander, Argent & Spencer, 2008; Ellis, 2006; Gillet & Wray, 2006; Willis, 1996), its application in EAP programs in Vietnam has not yet been explored. Thus, the following paper begins to redress this gap in the literature and proffer an example of successful implementation of a TBLT curriculum at an international university in Vietnam.

"I see and I forget. I hear and I remember. I do and I understand.”
-Confucius
Changing Contexts

As Vietnam joins other South East Asian nations in the race towards globalisation, English is fast becoming the language of work and study for many Vietnamese youth. Our EAP program (est. 1992), operates within an international university in Vietnam, which aims to prepare learners to undertake degree or diploma courses and ultimately join this globally mobile workforce in fields as diverse as Marketing, Accounting, Engineering, Professional Communications, Information Technology and Design. All degrees are conferred by an Australian tertiary provider and as such, the language of instruction is English. The student body is predominantly Vietnamese and has little opportunity for EFL application outside of the classroom.

Our EAP programs are offered in Australia and a number of contexts abroad, including Vietnam, Thailand and Saudi Arabia, so it is important that our curriculum is global in outlook. In order to prepare students for the learning realities of higher education in these contexts, curriculum renewal necessitated authentic contextualization so that “objectives are described in terms of communication and engagement in academic tasks and content that hooks the learner in” (Duthie, 2008, p. 2) and helps learners “to communicate effectively in the tasks prescribed by their study situation” (Dudley-Evans, 2004, p. 34). These include real-world academic tasks such as tutorial discussions, oral presentations and group researched-reports.

A growing body of literature promoting the benefits of task-based EAP programs elsewhere (Alexander et al., 2008, Dudley-Evans, 2004, Gillet & Wray, 2006), coupled with the need to respond to our multiple stakeholders abroad, led us to embark on a renewal project to integrate TBLT into our curriculum in 2008. However, as ‘tasks’ are not the only means of determining learner progress within our curriculum – we also have formalised skills-based assessment in order to maintain parity with IELTS - we feel it is apt to refer to our curriculum as ‘task-integrated’, rather than purely ‘task-based’ (as defined by Ellis, 2009).

Integrating TBLT

Over the course of 2009, a curriculum renewal framework was completed. Though the processes of this is beyond the scope of the current paper, fundamental to this process was the need to define our understanding of ‘tasks’ specific to our EAP context. Stemming from the extensive work of David Nunan (2008), we acknowledge that a ‘task’ involves students using, building and developing meaningful language in order to achieve a communicative goal.

Specifically, a ‘task’ in our EAP curriculum has three characteristics:

1. It is a piece of classroom work that requires communication
2. It requires a variety of language and skills to express meaning
3. It is a communicative act that has a potential beginning, middle and end

Each weekly unit of work in our curriculum involves at least one task. For example, a unit on ‘Gender Equality’ contains a task that asks learners to research and participate in a tutorial discussion (‘communicative act’) about the roles of men and women in society. Following the task criteria above, this task may ‘begin’ with learners acquiring content knowledge of contemporary gender roles by listening to lectures or reading news reports on the topic (‘multiple skills’) before writing anticipated questions that may arise (‘middle’) and finally taking part in a tutorial discussion (‘end’).
Opportunities for post-task reflection and focus on linguistic elements that may arise during the task are highlighted for teachers and learners in the curriculum.

**Implementing TBLT**

In mid-2009, a TBLT Taskforce was formed to lead teacher training initiatives during the curriculum roll out, which consisted of curriculum writers and experienced teachers from within the EAP program. A multi-staged approach to training was implemented: including planning, trialing and filming teachers teaching tasks and holding focused reflection sessions afterwards. These early findings informed ‘all in’ professional development workshops, whereby key aspects of TBLT were presented to the entire staff group, such as:

- staging of task-based instruction (Ellis, 2006; Nunan, 2006; Skehan, 1996; Willis, 1996).
- task-roles of learners and teachers (King, 1993; Richards & Rodgers, 2001; Scarcella & Oxford, 1992).
- the reflections from teachers involved in the task trialing process.

As “teachers are the executive decision makers” in any curriculum (Barnard & Nguyen, 2010, p. 78), ongoing ‘task reflections’ in workshops and weekly team meetings were held to encourage sharing of practical challenges and successes in facilitating TBLT lessons, to support continued uptake in 2010. Teachers who were early adopters of the TBLT approach helped compile inventories of ‘preferred’ or ‘problematic’ tasks, which also aided further teacher training and research in 2011. TBLT workshops continue to run regularly within our centre.

**Shifting Paradigms**

The process of implementing a task-integrated curriculum presented a paradigm shift for our institution. Given our learners traditional educational norms based on their Confucian Heritage Cultural (CHC) background (Carless, 2007, 2012), where the “delivery of knowledge rather than the development of skills” is common (Hu, 2005, p.597), and the difficulties posed in realizing task-based methodologies in Vietnamese high schools (Barnard & Nguyen, 2010), it is possible our learners were not only grappling with language learning but potentially a new approach to ‘learning’ too.

For many of our EAP teachers, integrating TBLT also meant reframing their approach to teaching. While they were highly-proficient in communicative approaches which traditionally employ a Present-Practice-Produce (PPP) model (Ellis, 2003), TBLT flips this model by requiring learners to produce freely using whatever language resources they have available to them, in order to achieve the ‘task’ (Nunan, 2006). Consequently, over the course of 2009-2011, through student and teacher feedback and reflection, rewards and challenges became apparent.

**Rewards & Challenges**

Teachers reported that learners in many cases responded positively to ‘tasks’ and relished the opportunity to ‘take charge’ in the classroom. This supports Ellis’ assertion (2006) that learner motivation is increased when awareness of the need for ‘real’ communication is evident to the learner. Learners were using multiple skills to achieve a task, possibly as the challenge of ‘tasks’ required them to utilize all their available language resources. Teachers also commented that learners were interacting in a more collaborative manner and were making use of other higher level thinking skills to achieve task goals. They acknowledged
the benefit of adding a new approach to their teaching repertoire or as one teacher described it, ‘adding another tool to their toolbox’. Importantly, the integration of ‘tasks’ into our weekly curriculum also provided avenues for formative assessment to occur more readily, as teachers naturally provided feedback on each task performance.

While rewards were clearly evident, the implementation of TBLT has not been without challenges. Most significantly, our teachers found the addition of tasks in a perceivably already ‘packed’ curriculum, difficult to manage. Suggested time frames for tasks were also much shorter than reality. As a result, teachers admitted that post-task reflection or time to ‘focus on form’ (Nunan, 2006), were sometimes omitted which limits the potential to draw learners attention to linguistic elements arising in the task (Doughty & Williams, 2009). Finally, some teachers expressed feelings of anxiety regarding the potential for learning points to emerge during tasks that were not anticipated. Consequently, reporting that they were ‘not doing their job if they were not in control’ of how learning unfolded.

**Key Learnings & Future Directions**

Based on our experience here in Vietnam, the following points may be of value to educators or institutions considering a task-integrated curriculum for their own contexts. Firstly, engaging teachers in the curriculum renewal process from beginning to end resulted in effective buy-in and awareness-raising of the principles of TBLT espoused in our curriculum. Secondly, providing regular opportunities to discuss challenges teachers encountered when implementing TBLT meant that teachers felt supported and continued to experiment with ‘the new tool in their teaching toolbox’. Finally, it is worth remembering that while any change in curriculum will bear challenges for educators and institutions, rewards can also inevitably be found. For us, sharing positive teacher experiences with TBLT in weekly team meetings was particularly powerful and demonstrated the growing confidence of our teachers and learners when utilizing tasks.

Overall, it is fair to say that the integration of TBLT into our EAP curriculum has yielded greater rewards than challenges. However, a larger scale study is now required to gauge teacher and student perceptions of the efficacy of TBLT in our multiple contextual environments, to further inform our curriculum and practice. Thus, the review and development of our curriculum is ongoing as we endeavor to ‘keep it real’ here in Vietnam.

**About the Authors**

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References


Introduction - Can We Increase Authenticity in EFL?

The learning environments of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) and English as a Second Language (ESL) students are clearly worlds apart. ESL students literally live out real world tasks in authentic situations, as they supplement their immersion with classroom rehearsal and teacher feedback. Perhaps no closer approximation to learning by doing is actually possible. In stark contrast, the typical learning environments of most EFL classrooms range from teacher-centered grammar lessons to task-based lessons that attempt to simulate real world communicative experiences as best their environments allow. In regard to task-based lessons in EFL classrooms, the most typical environment finds all students sharing a common first language (L1). Nonetheless, these students are required by their teacher to attempt the surreal act of meaningfully communicating with each other in an L2. At best, it is hoped that motivations underpinning such simulations will exploit what Dornyei and Ushioda (2011, p. 80) identify as the learners’ possible selves, whereby learners visualize themselves in desired or imagined future roles. At worst, the students may simply consider the situation to be bizarre. Either way, there would appear to be a need to increase the level of authenticity in task-based EFL classrooms. Whereas for decades this possibility had been significantly constrained, the Web 2.0 era conveniently offers telecollaboration as a potential means by which to do so.

What is Telecollaboration?

Declaring ‘telecollaboration’ and ‘online intercultural exchange’ to be synonymous terms, O’Dowd (2007, pg. 4) defines them as “the activity of engaging language learners in interaction and collaborative project work with partners from other cultures through the use of online communicative tools.” Such project work may involve synchronous (i.e. real-time) exchange or asynchronous (i.e. delayed) exchange.

Are Telecollaboration Tasks Suitable for Beginner-level EFL Learners?

Consider the following collaborative story task. The text of a story is printed and cut into ten sections, each a few sentences in length. The students on the left side of the classroom are provided with the odd-numbered sections, but not in correct chronological sequence. Through collaboration with their classmates, these students determine which section constitutes the beginning of the story. Similarly, the students on the right side of the classroom are provided with the even-numbered story sections. Once, the students on the left have communicated the beginning of the story to the students on the right, those on the right then
collaborate among themselves to determine which of their printed story sections constitutes the continuation of the story. By repeating these steps, the story is gradually unraveled. When implemented effectively by the classroom teacher, it is not difficult to see that this task has ample potential to promote the negotiation of meaning, prediction and peer correction. Furthermore, this task avails itself to an array of pre- and post-task opportunities, which could centre on irregular past verbs, conjunctions, quotations, too / either, or whichever grammatical and/or lexical items feature in the text. Teachers could if they so wish, omit the story’s ending and assign the students the additional task of composing original endings for it. All in all, it appears quite agreeable with the task-cycle framework developed by Jane Willis, (Willis, 1996).

Subsequently, if one deems this task to be suitable for performance by two groups in the same EFL classroom then what would preclude it from being performed between two EFL classes living on opposite sides of the world? This paper proposes that this, as well as many similar tasks regularly observable in beginner-level EFL classrooms, can be conducted across distant L1 environments and by doing so, increase the levels of purpose and authenticity that go with having to use English as a Lingua Franca (ELF), (Jenkins, 2009). One instance where this was attempted is outlined in the section which follows.

The Japan-Chile Telecollaboration Task Project

In spring 2011, a telecollaboration project was conducted between 36 first-year students from Osaka Shoin Women’s University in Japan and 36 first-year students from Universidad de Los Lagos in Chile. The Japanese students were enrolled in a Grammar-Writing class and their Chilean partners were enrolled in a Computer Mediated English Communication class. Needless to say, the two classes were not operating from the same curriculum. There are several related points of issue here, none more significant than the need for the teachers on both ends of the exchange to avoid impinging on their partner-class’ curriculum, (Dunne, 2012). On the other hand, it is pertinent that these teachers at least agree on the following elements of the task project:

- themes, objectives and task sequence,
- the choice of telecollaboration model (e.g. twinning, eTandem),
- the mode of communication (e.g. tasks, forums),
- the platform for communication (e.g. moodle, ePals),
- duration of the project,
- regularity of exchanges,
- protocol for teacher repair of student messages.

It was determined that the current project would draw its initial theme from the process writing textbook unit being studied by the Japanese class. Appropriately, this was a self-introduction unit. In accordance with a twinning model, the students exchanged weekly email on an asynchronous basis. The one-week turnaround was calculated to allow students to read their received mail and use the 90-minute lesson time to collaborate with their classmates before sending appropriate reply mail. The platform used for communication was the free email system provided on the ePals.com website, as it allows each teacher to monitor the incoming and outgoing mail of each student. Once these logistical issues had been resolved, at least two further project design elements needed to be incorporated, one integral to sustaining motivation and the other integral to learning through collaboration.

In regard to motivation, the teachers employed measures intended to prevent the demise of the self-introductions after a single ‘send & receive’ exchange, a highly probable result when dealing with beginner-level learners. In fact, the task project design necessitated all students to send at least three emails and receive at least three emails. The process began with each of the 72 students completing a cloze passage, (see appendix 1) and mailing it to the overseas student each had been paired with.
Attached to this mail was a photo of the sender with two classmates, yet none of the three were identified. Subsequently, the sender requested her partner to guess which of the three students she was. However, before she would entertain her partner’s guess, she first requested she be mailed five questions that would assist her partner to guess. Essentially, the cloze passage was intended to offer sufficient decision-making opportunity to require the writer to understand it before she would fill in the cloze options with her personal choices and retype the whole passage as an email. However, even if her cloze options were not interpretable, (Smith, 2009, pg. 17), her overall email would nonetheless remain comprehensible, (Smith, ibid). Guaranteeing the continuance of comprehensibility throughout the next phase, a cloze skeleton was again used to aid the first set of reply emails, (see appendix 2). Because this telecollaboration project attempts to accommodate the needs of beginner-level students, a relatively high degree of task structure, teacher control and lockstep procedure were adopted during these early exchanges. Yet as the project proceeded, structured writing gradually gave way to autonomously composed mail.

So, by this point of the email exchange all 72 students were preparing to compose their second email, an email that would answer the five questions they had received. The teachers had already considered the range of question possibilities and their effects. For instance, if in-class sessions had been focusing on prepositions of place there would be a high possibility of questions such as, ‘Are you the girl in the middle?’ If in-class sessions had been focusing on describing appearance then, ‘Are you the girl wearing a red sweater?’ might similarly end the intrigue prematurely. Consequently, the second mail of each student answered four questions truthfully, one untruthfully and advised the mail recipient that this was the case. The reasoning behind this was twofold. Firstly, this twist was intended to motivate the students into individually reading their received mail with more attention to meaning, as each sought contradictions and confirmations across the five statements. Secondly, it created more opportunity for students to learn through in-class collaboration and scaffolding.

On the Japanese end of the exchange, the 36 students had been sorted into 12 groups of three. Cumulatively, each group received 12 true statements and three untrue statements, allowing them to collaboratively formulate their third and final emails.

**Conclusion**

It remains debatable how much authenticity was involved in the telecollaboration task project outlined. The best indication comes from considering the likelihood of the students actually ever performing something similar during the remainder of their lives. In this regard I shall propose the terms authenticity of purpose and authenticity of partnership. Whereas the purpose for some of the emails may have been somewhat contrived, certainly the need to use English as a lingua franca for communication between partners was very real indeed.

**About the author**

Greg Dunne is an associate professor at Osaka Shoin Women’s University. Interested in a wide range of subfields within language learning and teaching, his publications include book chapters on both CALL and teacher development, as well as various other papers related to world englishes, TBLT and language testing.

**References**


Appendix 1

MAIN-TASK 1: Use this guide to type a letter to your epal.

Hello, _______. My name is ________. My (friends / classmates) just call me __________. I study _______ at ___________. It is (very / fairly) _______. I (want / plan / promise) to (write to you / mail you / send you mail) ________ this semester. I hope you will ________ too.

I am sending you a (photo / picture) with this (email / letter). There are three _______ in the picture, me and two _______. However, I am not going to tell you which _______ is me. I want you to guess. Please ask me five questions and I will give you five clues. So, please ask me one question about my face, one question about my hair, one question about my clothes, one question about my body and one question about my personality.

I am looking forward to your (mail / reply).

________

Appendix 2

MAIN-TASK 1: Use this guide to type a letter to your epal.

Hello __________,

Thank you for your ________. Everybody looks very _________ in the _________. I wrote five questions for you, one question about your face, one question about your hair, one question about your clothes, one question about your body and one question about your personality.

These are my questions.

1. Wh ...
2. Wh ...
3.
4.
5.

I am looking forward to your (mail / reply),

__________
Designing and Choosing Information Gap Tasks for the low-level classroom

Joshua Cohen - Kinki University
Mark Donnellan – Kinki University
Jeff Crawford - Osaka Shoin Women’s University

Introduction

One of the chief complaints with doing task-based language teaching is that it can be challenging to incorporate into lower-level classrooms (Bruton, 2002; Swan, 2005). The problem, more often than not, is with the task itself, not the learners engaged in it. To avoid frustration and the complications sometimes associated with using tasks in class the authors recommend that tasks be vetted before being introduced to learners. This paper lays out a checklist teachers can use when designing and assessing one kind of language task: information gap tasks.

Information gap tasks

Information gap tasks (IGTs) are activities in which learners are missing certain required information to successfully accomplish a particular task. To acquire the information they need, learners must communicate meaningfully with a partner or partners to negotiate a mutually satisfying outcome. IGTs can be very versatile, ranging from very open-ended to the more linguistically focused (Carless, 2012), and can be designed to enable learners with linguistic objectives to successfully negotiate an outcome to the task (Estaire & Zanon, 1994). Carless (2012) puts forward a strong case for the suitability of these focused tasks for a Japanese setting and states the goals of focused tasks are to stimulate communicative language use and to target the use of a particular predetermined target feature (p. 5). Here are two examples of IGTs:

1. Learner A has a movie timetable with some of the show times and venue information missing. Learner B has the same timetable, but with different information missing. Without looking at each other’s timetables the learners must fill in the missing information by asking each other appropriate questions. The form focus here could include, (but are not limited to) questions beginning with “When” and “At what time.” Answers would largely be expressions of time, such as “At 5:15” or “At 10:30 in the morning.”

2. Learner A has a city map with many of the landmarks and popular attractions removed; learners B and C have the same map with different landmarks and attractions missing. Working together they exchange information to reconstruct the city map by asking each other questions and providing meaningful replies.
Benefits of IGTs

IGTs provide low-level learners with opportunities for speaking practice and represent real, authentic language exchange. They also require sub-skills such as clarifying meaning, eliciting detail, and re-phrasing. These sub-skills compliment the linguistic and sociolinguistic demands associated with communicative language teaching and may help participants complete IGTs and reach the goal of exchanging information.

IGTs can also be useful for teachers because they form a kind of midway point between tasks that require truly communicative language use and more rigid, structured drill-type activities. Teachers who wish to incorporate more (or less) grammar-based instruction into their classes can adjust an information gap task’s focus to highlight and practice notable grammar points as the example above illustrates.

Popular variations of IGTs include: describe and draw, spot the difference, jigsaw readings or listening, and split dictations. Each of these tasks is distinctly different, yet they all share several important characteristics.

Good information gap tasks:

- **Facilitate output.** IGTs create recurring opportunities for learners to speak during the period of time allotted for the activity.
- **Balance participation between learners.** IGTs work because the flow of conversation is distributed between participants. Dominant learners must give way, just as shy or quiet learners must participate actively.
- **Motivate learners.** Most learners are eager to speak when the topic is relevant to them. Another reason IGTs are motivating is because learners can gauge their distance to the (task’s) objective.
- **Promote confidence.** IGTs can be made easy or challenging.

Regardless of the difficulty, learners must express themselves in utterances that are relevant and easily comprehensible to one other.

A Checklist for implementing IGTs

The following check list can aid teachers when selecting appropriate and useful IGTs for their classroom. The authors concede that there maybe limited referenced knowledge to this list, however, emphasize that this is an attempt to utilize what Carless (2007) calls “a situated task-based approach in which culture, setting and teachers’ existing beliefs and practices interact with the principles of TBLT” (p. 605). That is to say that this checklist is based on the authors’ combined teaching experience with low-level learners in Japan.

1. Encourages learners' active engagement and cognition.

   Key to the TBL process is negotiation of meaning. Hence, IGTs, although often designed as nonreciprocal activities, emphasize the cognitive processing of language and requires interaction in the target language. A possible drawback of IGTs is that, be the tasks reciprocal or non-reciprocal, learners can easily sabotage them by simply showing the pertinent information to their fellow learners rather than communicating via the target language. With this in mind, teachers will be best served by encouraging learners to be active.

2. The task is relevant to and engaging for learners.

   Rost (2002) summarizes the importance of relevance and heightened attention span stating “learning materials (topics, inputs, task) are relevant if they relate to learner goals and interests and involve self-selection and evaluation”. (p. 122)

3. Encourages use of clauses or extended answers (and discourages one-word answers).
Interlanguage (Selinker, 1972) development comes about by engaging with one’s mistakes and clarifying meaning. This can best occur if learners are discouraged from using simple “yes” and “no” answers to fulfill the task. IG Ts that require extended output and longer and more complex turns in the target language means learners maximize the opportunity to negotiate meaning, which pushes interlanguage development.

4. Encourages meaningful communicative exchanges.

Successfully designed and implemented IG Ts will encourage learners to go beyond their present interlanguage for the purpose of finding meaning and achieving a mutually desirable outcome. (Folse, 2006).

5. There are linguistic goals.

Although often difficult to realize and somewhat contrary to the basics of TBL, where meaning is the focus, IG Ts can afford learners an opportunity to acquire certain linguistic tools to enable them to accomplish larger or more complex tasks. Sato (2011) and Carless (2012) comment in more detail on how explicit linguistic focus has benefitted the implementation of TBL with low-level learners in Japan.

6. Sequences smoothly with prior and subsequent tasks.

A natural expectation of foreign language study is that learners gradually acquire the capacity to use the language. Success with short-term goals is a well-known motivator and by allowing learners’ to tap their present interlanguage and schemata to match an achievable but slightly more challenging outcome is a logically desirable pedagogy.

7. Makes the teacher confident he/she can set up the task successfully.

Setting up and implementing an information gap should be done clearly for learner comprehension and swiftly to maintain learner interest. Simplified teacher talk or simple modeling of a task allows learners’ to immediately engage with the task, as opposed to overly-detailed explanations where meaning can become vague or learners miss important details when the attention is distracted.

8. Encourages appropriate interaction.

For many of our classes, learners’ only source to authentic input is the teacher. Engaging IG Ts can often lead to teacher to learner interaction via modeling the task. Furthermore, they promote balanced participation so that a more advanced learner does not dominate a lower level learner.

9. Maximizes opportunity to use sub-skills.

As mentioned earlier, a very salient weakness of Japanese learners is the interest in making effort in the target language to ask for clarification, comprehension and or other techniques to satisfy whether or not the “gap” is truly being bridged. Well-designed and implemented IG Ts will frequently force learners to engage in the use of sub-skills to achieve the preferred outcome of the activity (Doughty & Pica, 1986).

10. The language level of the task is appropriate.

Speaking fluency will generally require the use of high frequency lexical items and syntactical patterns in an effort to focus on achieving an outcome. Teachers must be conscious of their learners’ proficiency and frequency of usage to design or select IG Ts that best meet the realities of their learning goals.
Conclusion
This paper began with an outline of information gap tasks, which are well-proven and versatile activities that are in use in a variety of education settings, including playing an important role in relation to the Japanese EFL setting. They can be designed to address a variety of issues such as proficiency or other specific needs of a classroom.

In the second part of the paper, a checklist, born out of the authors’ classroom experience, for the design of IGTs was presented. There are many ways in which an IGT can fail to reach the teacher’s desired outcome if the IGT is not carefully planned, it is hoped that the checklist offered above can help to avoid this and prove a useful and practical resource for teachers and syllabus planners.

About the authors
Joshua Cohen is an instructor of English as a foreign language in the Intensive International Program at Kinki University. His research interests include: Reading fluency development and task-based teaching and learning.

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Jeffrey Crawford considers himself to be a lifelong learner. Hailing from Canada, he is a long time resident of Kansai and a former president of the Nara JALT chapter. He has a BA in Japanese from the University of British Columbia and an MA in TESOL. Jeff has extensive teaching experience in the Japanese secondary school system and has been a university lecturer for the last seven years. His scholarly interests include task-based language learning, motivation, and collaborative learning.

References


Task-Based Learning and the 2003 Action Plan:
An analysis of tasks designed by senior high school
Japanese teachers of English.

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Introduction
Between 2003 and 2007, all Japanese teachers of English (JTEs) were to attend mandatory
in-service training as specified in the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and
Technology’s (MEXT) 2003 Action Plan (MEXT, 2003b). One of the stated goals for the
training was the improvement of English teachers’ ability to cultivate students’
communication abilities. This research focuses on the training program in a prefecture in
which the Action Plan’s goals were interpreted as teaching English through English (TETE)
and task-based learning (TBL). I explored the TETE component of the program in a previous
paper (Birch 2012); the focus of this paper is TBL. Specifically, I present an analysis of TBL
lesson plans designed by senior high school Japanese teachers of English (SHS JTEs) for the
training. The analysis shows i) how TBL was interpreted for the Japanese context by the
teacher trainers; and ii) the nature of understanding SHS JTEs have of TBL.

The 2003 Action Plan
The 2003 Action Plan focused primarily on the promotion of pedagogy through which “the
majority of an English class will be conducted in English and many activities where students
can communicate in English will be introduced” (MEXT, 2003b). These goals were to be
realized through intensive in-service training. MEXT training program guidelines (MEXT,
2003a) suggested tasks as one type of viable communicative activity, relying primarily on
Skehan (1996b) and Willis (1996) for defining, justifying and describing categories of tasks.

The Training Program: Overview
The training seminar in question consisted of a one-day orientation in May and a five-day
intensive seminar in August. The training seminar was designed by four university professors
in conjunction with a Board of Education teacher consultant, all of whom were Japanese.
In the orientation session, participants heard introductory lectures on TETE and TBL,
observed a demonstration lesson, and were assigned reading. The TBL element of the
reading was Shiokawa, Sakai, and Urano (2005). In preparation for August, participants
were expected to implement ideas from the orientation into their classes and prepare two
lesson plans, one for each focus: TETE and TBL. Day one of the intensive summer session was
devoted to TBL. It started with a description of the program goals and a 20-minute review of the May Orientation TBL lecture. In the next session, teachers in groups discussed and demonstrated the lesson plans they had prepared individually, and one member from each group introduced his/her plan in the afternoon. The teacher trainers did not see the lesson plans before the training, nor many of the demonstrations given in small groups. Day two concentrated on TETE, day three included demonstration lessons performed by past participants and day four was set aside for preparation of a demonstration lesson to be given on the last day. Participants also heard lectures on other topics, including CALL, during the training. For a detailed program description, see Birch (2012).

Task Definition

The task definition used in the training (Table 1) was primarily based on Nunan (1989) and Skehan (1996a).

Task completion was considered more important than accurate language use. For example, students can choose what language to use as “there is no target grammatical item in a task” (Shiokawa, Sakai, & Urano, 2005, p. 126). Furthermore, reference was made to monitoring learner language and addressing student errors in the post-task phase, reinforcing an incidental focus on form rather than a pre-determined one. In other words, only unfocused tasks (Ellis, 2009, p. 223) were introduced. Although participants observed a number of demonstrations, there was no discussion of, or reference to different task types.

Method

Data was collected in the final year of the program, in which the author served as a teacher trainer. 27 lesson plans containing tasks that SHS JTES prepared after the May input were analyzed. The tasks were analyzed according to the task criteria (Table 1) and implementation guidelines provided in the training and categorized according to the task types (Willis, 1996, p. 26-28) referred to in MEXT guidelines (2003a). The task categories were as follows: listing, ordering / sorting, comparing, problem solving, sharing personal experiences and other. The criteria, implementation guidelines and task types were interpreted and adapted by the Japanese teacher trainers and MEXT for use in Japan.

To ensure the accuracy of my analysis, the lesson plans and criteria were provided to a fellow teacher trainer and our results compared. Other areas examined include the amount of time devoted to a task (to determine how central tasks were to the lesson), whether the task was related to a textbook (to see if tasks were an integral part of the curriculum), the presence of an Assistant English Teacher (AET), the degree to which student performance was evaluated, and the inclusion of a worksheet which, while not a requirement, helped

Table 1. Task Criteria (Shiokawa, Sakai, & Urano, 2005)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task Criteria</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Focus is primarily on meaning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Clear goal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Comparable to real-life task</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Requires students to use English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Students can choose what language to use</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
clarify how a task was implemented.

An example analysis is presented here using the May orientation demonstration lesson. In this lesson, students considered how Ken can comfort his hospitalized mother. Participants observed how to provide students with rich input in the pre-task phase (another goal of the training), implement a ranking task and incorporate task repetition (see Bygate, 1996). In task 1, students rank five suggestions the JTE provides for comforting Ken’s mother, choose the best idea and add a suggestion. In task 2, students give their suggestion in written form. In the post-task phase, the JTE chooses the best suggestions and comments briefly. In terms of task characteristics, the task is meaning-focused, goal-oriented and comparable to a real-life task, but one could argue the degree of student control was limited. It is unlikely students could generate new ideas in their own words after hearing and ranking five suggestions. On the other hand, this may provide the necessary scaffolding for target language use, which was particularly important since junior high school teachers were also in attendance. Even though I observed the demonstration lesson, tried the lesson with my students, and discussed the results with another trainer, the analysis of the lesson plan was not straightforward. Analyzing the participants’ lesson plans was equally challenging.

Results

The analysis provided a picture of general tendencies and an understanding of the individual tasks, the contexts in which they were used and their implementation. Here, only the most salient results are presented.

• Limited target language use: Half of the tasks could be completed with little spoken target language use since the most common types, 11 out of 23 tasks, were receptive tasks requiring listing, ordering, and sorting. Some teachers did not limit themselves to one type. Some tasks fell into two categories. In one example, students had to categorize behavior as polite or impolite, and then compare their answers with the AET’s.

• Teachers relied heavily on examples from the training. Three ranking tasks and two categorizing tasks were similar to the May demo lesson and others showed similar implementation (e.g., task repetition). Furthermore, the most common problem-solving task was predicting a story’s ending (4), but three examples came from one school where it is possible that one teacher shared her idea.

"TBL was introduced as an activity to supplement a lesson, rather than as a methodology in which tasks serve as the central pedagogic unit"

Discussion

TBL was introduced as an activity to supplement a lesson, rather than as a methodology in which tasks serve as the central pedagogic unit. This focus may be appropriate given the amount of time devoted to TBL in the training. Fortunately,
participants were exposed to a number of good tasks and demonstrations. However, some participants received little feedback. For example, the trainers did not see many of the demonstrations given in small groups, nor did they see the lesson plans in advance of the training. If they had, they might have been able to introduce a wider range of tasks and note excellent examples, such as a sharing personal experiences task, which made excellent use of scaffolding (e.g., use of mind maps to exemplify the process), demonstrating that tasks can be used with students of low proficiency. With respect to task implementation, only half of the participants included a worksheet with their lesson plan. Perhaps teachers would have focused more on this important aspect if worksheets had been a requirement.

Conclusion

This research described how TBL was interpreted for the Japanese context through examination of a training program stemming from MEXT’s 2003 Action Plan. Based on an analysis of the lectures, demonstration lesson, assigned reading and lesson plans, it appears tasks were introduced as an activity to supplement a reading passage. While one focus of the training was to develop students’ communicative ability, many tasks could be completed with limited spoken target language use. With more input and feedback, this could have been addressed. On the other hand, it appears that a limited number of good examples were imitated successfully, indicating the training was beneficial.

About the author

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References


JFL teachers’ perceptions of task-based language teaching: A case study of Japanese language teachers in Hong Kong

Masaki Seo
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Introduction

Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) evolving from communicative language teaching (CLT) has drawn the attention of many researchers, but there have been few empirical studies on teachers’ perceptions in this area. To date, most of those studies were conducted in ESL/EFL contexts (e.g. Carless & Gordon, 1997; Jeon & Hahn, 2006; Tabatabaei & Hadi, 2011), and none of the studies were related to Japanese language teaching. Since Japanese language education, unlike English language education in Japan, is not influenced by the backwash effect from entrance examinations, the basic concepts of CLT were taken up widely among Japanese language teachers (Suzuki, 2007). However, Sato & Kleinsasser (1999) found that while Japanese language teachers understand some aspects of CLT, their understanding was superficial. As Richardson (1996) points out the “relationship between beliefs and action is interactive” (p. 104), by which he means that beliefs influence teaching practice more than knowledge does. Research and/or theories discussed by researchers may not be carried out by practitioners who actually teach in the classroom. Fenstermacher (1994) introduced two terms to describe teachers’ knowledge: formal knowledge and practical knowledge. Formal knowledge is a concept that refers to knowledge as something that should be justified by scientific theories. Practical knowledge, on the other hand, refers to knowledge as something that teachers gain from their experiences. Many studies have found that pre-service teachers enter teacher education programs with well-established beliefs about students and classrooms (see Book, Byers, & Freeman, 1983; Weinsterin, 1989), and they leave their teaching program with beliefs unchanged in spite of the course work and field experiences (e.g. Feiman-Nemser & Buchman, 1985; McLaughlin, 1991). In other words, teachers’ beliefs were strongly shaped by their practical knowledge that stems from previous experience as learners, and on positive and negative experiences that were modeled by their teachers. Since formal knowledge does not seem to affect teachers’ beliefs, it is important to see how language teachers understand some aspects of teaching and learning in the classroom by focusing on teachers’ beliefs and practices (Johnson, 1994; Richardson, 1994). This study investigates Japanese language teachers’ perceptions of TBLT in Hong Kong through semi-structured interviews with two native Japanese teachers.
Method

Participants
The participants in this study were two native Japanese teachers in Hong Kong. Their details are shown in Table 1. In order to protect their privacy, pseudonyms are used.

Table 1. Participants of the Study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Educational Background/Teaching Experience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Asano  | 30s | Male   | • Holds a BA degree in Japanese Literature obtained in Japan and an MA degree in Teaching Japanese as a Foreign Language obtained in Hong Kong  
• Taught Japanese at the university in the mainland China for three years and has been teaching at a community college in Hong Kong for five years |
| Fukano | 30s | Female | • Holds a BA degree in French obtained in Japan  
• Completed the 420 hours of the teaching Japanese language course offered by a private language school  
• Taught Japanese in a language school in Japan for three years and has been teaching at a language school in Hong Kong for five years |

Analysis
In order to investigate their perceptions of TBLT, the interview data were analyzed with Personal Attitude Construct Analysis (PAC Analysis) proposed by Naito (2002). The PAC Analysis is a qualitative research methodology using interviews, but it also incorporates quantitative research methodology by using Cluster Analysis, which assigns a set of free association into groups based on their similarities categorized by the research participants. A strength of this research methodology is that research participants can describe the images of a particular item (e.g. tasks) and can categorize them into groups through quantitative research methodology, which can help research participants to see what kind of images they might have. Then, by using interviews, research participants and researchers can find out why the participants have that kind of image with regards a theme or idea. For this reason, the PAC Analysis is now widely-used as a qualitative research analysis method in the field of Social Science including foreign language education.

Result and Analysis

Mr. Asano’s Understandings of the Tasks
From the Free Association that Mr. Asano mentioned, 14 images of tasks were mentioned and categorized into four groups using Cluster Analysis (Figure 1).
Table 2. Procedure for PAC Analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Steps</th>
<th>Steps in This Study</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Free Association—Ask participants their image of one particular item and let them list what kind of images they might have.</td>
<td>Asked participants &quot;what images do you have about the task?&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Analyze how each item mentioned in Step 1 is similar to each other by using Cluster Analysis.</td>
<td>Used the software developed by Tsuchida for the analysis (available at <a href="http://wwwr.kanazawa-it.ac.jp/~tsuchida/lecture/pac-assist.htm">http://wwwr.kanazawa-it.ac.jp/~tsuchida/lecture/pac-assist.htm</a>) and analyzed the data with Cluster Analysis.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Semi-structured interview</td>
<td>Asked participants how they interpret the result of the data and what images they have toward the &quot;tasks&quot; by looking at the cluster categorized with the Cluster Analysis in step 2.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Analysis</td>
<td>Analyzed the items obtained from the data with Cluster Analysis and the interview with the participants.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 1. Mr. Asano’s Cluster

Figure 2. Ms. Fukano’s Cluster
Similar to Mr. Asano, Ms. Fukano also thinks that tasks should be communicative. In the interview, she mentioned that:

My image of the task is communication. Students actively speak and ask each other for communicative practice.

Again supporting the views expressed by Mr. Asano, she also wants to make tasks that relate to her learners’ lives.

Hmmm, I want to make tasks that reflect what Japanese people actually do. Especially, in the tasks, I want to relate my students’ daily lives. Students can express their own ideas, which cannot be found in the textbook.

However, Ms. Fukano also mentioned her struggle when creating ideal tasks.

My pair work tasks often become simple and just drill practices. Also, in group work, students are just asking questions in a big group. Students are just doing pattern-practices in a group with their group mates.

Ms. Fumiko’s imagination toward the tasks is strongly influenced by the published material resource books.

I mainly use the tasks from the resource books. The task I did today was like, in a pair, students ask and answer questions to each other. For example, when students are practicing causative forms, students ask "大人がったら子どもにお皿を洗わせますか (When you become an adult, are you going to make your kids clean the dishes?)," "はい, 洗わせます [Yes, I will.]," "いいえ, 洗わせません [No, I won’t]."

Students continued to ask this kind of questions on and on, which I feel is very boring.

Ms. Fukano continued to explain why she adopts this task.

This kind of activities is very boring, but I guess it is necessary for acquiring the target grammar. Also, it is in the resource book.

Conclusion

From the study, it was noted that both Mr. Asano and Ms. Fukano were struggling to make interesting tasks. Both of them believed that tasks should be accomplished in a communicative way and relate to students’ real lives. Nevertheless, examples teachers share were heavily focused on pedagogical tasks (Nunan, 1989), but were not meaningful communication. The reason behind this is that both teachers follow the material resource books published by textbook companies; therefore, the content of the resource books clearly create their imagination of the tasks. However, most of teaching materials using tasks published in the field of the Japanese language education are based on narrowly-conceived, form-oriented pedagogical tasks. Thus, while Mr. Asano mentioned it is high-quality tasks in a sense of pictures and charts, they are very repetitive pattern-practice as Ms. Fukano stated. As Van den Branden (2009) points out, busy teachers often lack the time and space to develop materials that are consistent with their own innovative ideas. In that case, the publication of material resource books with meaningful and interesting tasks is necessary, so teachers can model those tasks for their own classrooms. In addition to publication, there is a necessity of teacher training that can help busy teachers develop their own meaningful and interesting tasks.

About the author

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interface between SLA research and JFL teaching (e.g. Task-Based Language Teaching and Content-Based Language Teaching), Computer-Assisted Language Learning, Action Research, Qualitative Research, and Critical Pedagogy.

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References


The effects of task complexity on Japanese learners’ planning strategies

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Shimonoseki City University

Introduction

The past twenty years has seen a significant amount of research into the role of task planning as a means for developing learners’ L2 oral skills. One type of planning, “strategic planning” (Ellis, 2005, p. 3) takes place before the performance of a task, when learners are given time to prepare. Mochizuki and Ortega (2008) investigated strategic planning that included grammar assistance, referred to as “guided planning” (p. 14) which allowed time for learners to focus on the language required to perform an oral narrative task. Guided planning led to improvements in learner accuracy and complexity of speech, such as the quality of relative clauses produced (Mochizuki & Ortega, 2008).

Despite the benefits of strategic planning, only a few studies have investigated the strategies learners use during planning (see for example Ortega, 2005; Sangarun, 2005). Ortega’s (2005) study showed that cultural and social factors influence how Spanish learners of English plan for oral tasks which in turn influence their oral performance in terms of fluency and accuracy. As a result, Ortega (2005) called for future studies to report the strategies learners use when planning in order to find out how those influence production. This is of particular importance with Japanese learners of English who may have had a lack of exposure to speaking tasks due to previous English language education practices that focused heavily on written grammar as opposed to oral communication (Thompson & Blake, 2010). Consequently, knowing how Japanese learners prepare for tasks could help English teachers understand the needs of Japanese learners and how to use tasks more effectively in the classroom.

The Present Study

This study investigates the strategies Japanese learners of English use when provided with guided and unguided planning for narratives over a three week period. It was hypothesized that learners who received guided planning would initially focus on grammar and accuracy during week one, but then gradually plan to speak more fluently as they complete more complex tasks during weeks two and three. The unguided planners however, would initially focus on fluency in week one, but then gradually attend more towards grammar and accuracy during weeks two and three.
Methodology

The Participants
Twelve Japanese University students of English participated in the study. Six students were enrolled in an intermediate level English course and the remaining six were all taking an advanced English course. The intermediate students averaged a TOEFL English score of 470, the learners taking the advanced program averaged 541. The learners were split into three groups per proficiency level; guided planning (GP), unguided planning (UP) and a control group (CP).

The Tasks
Six storytelling narratives were designed to elicit mental state verbs and English relative clauses based on the narrative used in Mochizuki and Ortega (2008). For example, in one picture, a girl is thinking of a dog which has long hair. The narratives were sequenced so that they increased in cognitive complexity by containing additional cases of mental state verbs and relative clauses, for example, in a subsequent task, a girl is thinking of a dog which has long hair and another dog which has big ears. Narratives one and two contained seven cases of relative clauses, narratives three and four contained nine cases, and narratives five and six contained ten cases (see Table 1). Sequencing tasks in this way, according to an increase in cognitive complexity, places a greater demand on learners’ use of the target language which can help facilitate L2 development (Robinson, 2005).

Procedure
The study involved a pre- and post-test design in which each group performed an oral narrative pre-test in week 1, an intermediate post-test narrative in week 5 and a delayed post-test narrative in week 7 with no-planning time. The post-tests were compared against the pre-test for improvements in learners’ fluency, accuracy and complexity of speech. During weeks two, three and four, the planning groups received 10 minutes planning time before each narrative. The GP group were provided with example sentences of mental state verbs and relative clauses (see Appendix A) whilst the UP group received no grammar guidance. As this paper is concerned only with planning strategies, a qualitative analysis was carried out in which the planning groups were interviewed about their planning strategies during weeks two, three and four (see Appendix B for the interview questions).

Analysis
Intermediate Guided Planners
The planning strategies for this group appeared to fluctuate over time (see Table 2). Initially, they appeared to focus on organization so they could communicate the

Table 1. Cases of English relative clauses per narrative

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cases of relative clause use</th>
<th>Pre-test Week 1</th>
<th>Strategic planning with narratives that increasing in complexity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Narrative 1 &amp; 2 Week 2</td>
<td>Narrative 3 &amp; 4 Week 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Intermediate Post-test Week 5
Delayed Post-test Week 7
main idea of the story. However, as the tasks increased in complexity in week three, the learners seemed to focus more on grammar and use of the target language. By week four, their attention appeared to shift towards fluency in order to describe the whole story whilst maintaining a focus on grammar.

**Advanced Guided Planners**

The strategies for this group appeared to stay more consistent over time (Table 3). They began planning by focusing on grammar, then as the weeks progressed, they maintained their attention on grammar to use forms accurately. They also seemed to focus attention on vocabulary during week four.

After reviewing the planning strategies of the intermediate and advanced guided learners, it appears hypothesis two has been partly confirmed. Initially, intermediate learners did not focus on form, however the advanced learners did. As the weeks progressed, both the intermediate and advanced learners attended to grammar whilst there is evidence in week four of planning towards fluency from the intermediate learners.

**Intermediate Unguided Planners**

The planning strategies of this group appeared to remain fairly constant over time (Table 4). They began by focusing on grammar to describe all the features of the characters in the pictures and organizing their stories. They then continued this planning strategy during weeks three and four.

**Advanced Unguided Planners**

This group also appeared to use similar planning strategies over time (Table 5). They began by planning to explain the details of the pictures then as the weeks progressed they appeared to focus their attention on explaining the story in more detail which involved attention to grammar and organization.

After reviewing the planning strategies of the intermediate and advanced unguided planners it appears that hypothesis two is not...
confirmed. The unguided learners tended to plan by explaining their stories in detail, focusing on grammar rather than fluency and these strategies remained largely unchanged in weeks three and four.

Findings and Conclusion

The findings of this paper suggest advanced learners who receive grammar guidance before performing a narrative will likely prepare by initially concentrating on grammar only and this behavior may remain unchanged as they attempt more complex tasks. Intermediate learners who receive guidance, may initially focus on grammar but attend more towards fluency when planning for more cognitively demanding tasks. Unguided learners of both proficiencies however, appeared to attend to grammar only when planning and continued to do so as they prepared for more complex tasks. Consequently, this sample of higher proficiency Japanese learners appears to show a general pattern of attention towards form over meaning during strategic planning which remains unchanged as they attempt more challenging tasks. The participants in this study prioritize accuracy over fluency when planning regardless of whether planning is guided or unguided. This provides an insight for teachers in understanding the L2 needs of learners and what aspects of speech may require more attention than others. This study also suggests Japanese learners may focus primarily on accuracy, perhaps as a result of their previous educational background, therefore justifying the need for task-based language teaching that promotes fluency to provide a balance for L2 oral development.

About the author

Colin Thompson is an English teacher at Shimonoseki City University, Japan. He has been teaching in Japan for seven years and his research interests include psycholinguistics and cognitive development. He is currently studying for a PhD at the University of Central Lancashire, UK.

Table 4. Intermediate unguided planners

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intermediate unguided planners</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Week 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 4</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Table 5. Advanced unguided planners

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Advanced unguided planners</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Week 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
References


Appendix A

Guided planning notes (adapted from Mochizuka and Ortega, 2008)

Think about grammar when preparing your story. For example:

She thinks that she likes the doll which looks friendly
She wants the doll which has black shoes
She believes that she likes the doll which has short hair
She wants the doll which the girl is watching

Appendix B

Interview Questions (adapted from Ortega 1999. Ellis and Yuan 2003)

How was that?
‘Did you plan before the start of the task?’
‘How did you plan for it?’
‘What was your focus when you were planning the story?’
‘Did you think about vocabulary, grammar, the story, or something else?’

Weeks 2 and 3:

How was that?
‘Did you plan before you started the task?’
‘How did you plan?’
‘Did you plan differently compared to last time?’ ‘In what way?’
‘Did you write a lot?’
‘What was your focus when you were planning the story?’
‘Did you think about vocabulary, grammar, the story or something else?’
Introduction

We are currently living in a technologically charged, rapidly changing world, and this fact has altered the dynamics of EFL classrooms throughout Japan. The realities of globalization have led a growing body of educators to believe that Japanese learners must be equipped with more than just nonverbal linguistic skills on their educational journey (Nakagawa & Kouritzin, 2011). Not surprisingly, communicative abilities and public speaking are an important part of the English language curriculum at many institutions. Nowadays, a significant number of Japanese university EFL programs require students to stand in front of their classmates and make an oral presentation as part of their final grade. These traditional class-fronted presentations by nature do not always provide EFL learners with an appropriate forum for student generated talk, audience participation, and meaningful use of language. In the worst-case scenario, this type of public speaking activity can often be nothing more than an anxiety-inducing, glorified reading or memorization exercise that fails to meet the intended objective of developing presentation skills.

This being the case, how can educators diminish the anxiety that accompanies an oral presentation and improve the overall quality of learning in their English language classrooms? This paper will address this challenging question by examining a practical and versatile communicative presentation model that is constructed on a task-based learning (TBL) foundation. It will argue that this TBL presentation model is a valuable instructional device that can reduce learner anxiety and encourage more competent L2 usage by creating various opportunities for learners to negotiate meaning via the use of sub-skills such as clarification and comprehension checks.

Presentation anxiety

Numerous researchers (e.g. Britton, 2007; Woodrow, 2007; Ortega, 2009) remind us that a high level of performance anxiety is a serious problem that can prevent individuals from effectively communicating their ideas. Educators must be conscious of this reality and create a classroom climate that helps to alleviate the stress students experience when they engage in a public speaking exercise. In addition to being cognizant of second language anxiety, EFL instructors must be aware of the cultural context in which they are teaching. According to Carless (2012), students in Confucian-influenced settings can be apprehensive when speaking a second language in front of their peers and the “fear of making mistakes
or losing face can impede Asian students from full participation in oral activities” (p.7). Carless contends that EFL educators should utilize a “situated task-based” approach that interweaves the localized cultural realities and the teachers’ practices with the principles of TBL (ibid.). The writers of this article believe that the typical report stage of the TBL framework has significant shortcomings as it fails to take into account a number of important factors such as: the cultural context; the realities of second language anxiety; and the lack of motivation that can be present in a Japanese university EFL classroom. Added to that, as there is often little at stake for learners when they listen to a class-fronted oral report, classroom management issues such as off-task behavior (e.g. texting, sleeping) can impede the smooth operation of the task cycle.

An alternative presentation format

One of the ways that the TBL report stage can be improved is with carousel mini-presentations. In essence, a typical carousel mini-presentation is a guided communication exercise that requires the class to be divided into two groups: A and B. These groups form A-B pairs (or teams of three or four) with student A presenting to student B (or team B). Therefore, in a class of 30 learners there could be 15 short interactive presentations going on simultaneously. Once the oral reports are completed, all the A students move in one direction to the next B student. This process is repeated several times and then reversed with the B learners presenting and the A learners listening as well as actively interacting with the presenter. Understandably, this communicative strategy is a highly versatile one as it allows L2 students of different abilities to engage in a wide range of topics. Additionally, the model provides learners with more speaking practice than a traditional class-fronted oral report. Since the students are repeating their presentations a number of times, there is usually a noticeable improvement when the first report is compared to the final one.

Furthermore, off-task behavior is discouraged as listeners are expected to engage in active listening and negotiation of meaning.

Language learning

Carousel mini-presentations can flow smoothly into the final stage of the TBL framework, the focus on form. During the presentation process, the instructor is free to engage directly and indirectly with the learners. While circulating around the classroom, the teacher can make suggestions to students such as encouraging them to confirm comprehension, clarify a point or recast a repeated error. Additionally, the instructor would be expected to make mental notes of the learners’ repeated mistakes. These errors can be addressed during the focus on form. This technique could be reactive, not predetermined. In the later case, the teacher would be required to guess potential problematic form issues and prepare an exercise prior to class that may or may not highlight the frequent errors that occurred during the carousel mini-presentations.

Carousel mini-presentations vs. traditional class-fronted presentations

After three years of informal classroom observations, discussions and critical feedback, the writers of this article launched an action research project that investigated the value of utilizing the carousel mini-presentation in a Japanese university EFL classroom. The research project data was collected from six lower intermediate level EFL classes at Osaka Prefecture University from April 2010 to February 2012. 159 male and female second year economics students participated in the study. The research questions guiding the design of the study were:

- Did the learners feel the carousel mini-presentations are more helpful for their English acquisition than class-fronted presentations?
• Does the carousel mini-presentation format help to reduce learners’ public speaking anxiety?

In order to adequately explore these research questions, the participants were required to complete a number of class-fronted and carousel mini-presentations over two semesters. Towards the end of the school year, questionnaires in Japanese were administered to each of the classes. The survey contained 16 different questions and provided the respondents with space for critical feedback. In order to triangulate (e.g. Farrell, 2006; Rosenstein, 2002) the student data, classroom observations were regularly notated. The research observations included a reflective journal as well as voluntary audio and video recordings.

Data analysis
It is beyond the parameters of this paper to provide an in-depth analysis of the action research project or the statistical data that emerged from the study. However, it is worth noting that the findings generally answered the researchers’ two main questions. Firstly, learners did indeed feel that carousel mini-presentations enhanced their speaking and listening abilities in comparison to class-fronted presentations (see Figure 1). As well, learners believed that they were more confident when presenting in a carousel mini-presentation format. Secondly, only a few of the respondents claimed that the carousel mini-presentations were a difficult and stressful undertaking. At the other end of the spectrum, slightly over half of the learners reported that speaking in front of their entire class was overly challenging and stressful. Having said that, this finding was not a major discovery, as most people would find talking in front of fewer and more attentive listeners to be a less stressful event than to a larger group.

Conclusions and future investigations
This paper began with a description of a versatile interactive classroom presentation style referred to as carousel mini-

Figure 1.
presentations. This model was used to replace class-fronted presentations that are often incorporated at the report stage of the typical TBL framework, as the writers felt among other things, that carousel mini-presentations encouraged active communication and reduced public speaking anxiety. Educators must be conscious of the negative impact anxiety has on second language learning and find techniques to reduce the stress students experience when they participate in a public speaking activity. A two-year action research project verified learner perceptions that carousel mini-presentations were less stressful and more helpful for their language learning in comparison to class-fronted presentations.

Although the action research findings demonstrate that the participants in this study preferred the carousel mini-presentation model to the traditional public speaking approach, it also verified that many of the students wanted to become competent at giving a presentation in front of a large group of people. It is the intention of the authors to continue this study to explore whether or not learners’ perceptions of improved acquisition are indeed measurable. In addition, and perhaps more importantly, is the examination of whether or not the increased frequency of carousel mini-presentations acts as a scaffold to improve overall presentation abilities and diminish public speaking anxiety. Teachers must continuously challenge themselves to go beyond typical pedagogical practices and find new ways to improve the overall quality of learning in their classrooms. The results of this action research project have led the writers to believe that the carousel mini-presentation model is a valuable tool that effective educators can utilize on their professional journey.

About the authors.

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Jeffrey Crawford considers himself to be a lifelong learner. Hailing from Canada, he is a long time resident of Kansai and a former president of the Nara JALT chapter. He has a BA in Japanese from the University of British Columbia and a MA in TESOL. Jeff has extensive teaching experience in the Japanese secondary school system and has been a university lecturer for the last seven years. His scholarly interests include task-based language learning, motivation, and collaborative learning. Email: jeffcrawfordlincs@gmail.com

References


A Study of Pre-reading Tasks for EFL Junior High School Students

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Introduction

Reading is a complex cognitive skill. Problems in comprehension can be multiplied when it comes to L2 reading, given that ESL/EFL learners may possess only ‘tentative control’ of many of the meaningful features of an L2 passage (Phillips, 1984). As a result, second language reading takes place at a more conscious level (ibid.) and requires more effort. L2 readers need to incorporate all available resources of their own, such as linguistic proficiencies, general topic knowledge, and culturally-specific knowledge, into the enterprise of successful meaning-making (Donin, Graves, & Goyette, 2004; Fulkink, Hulstijn, & Simis, 2005). In a top-down model of reading instruction, language teachers employ pre-reading activities to activate or provide the proper ‘schemata’ needed for processing the main reading materials. This way, teachers assist students’ understanding for the subsequent reading by relating existing knowledge to new information or by providing missing background knowledge on the reading topic. One way to promote students’ schemata is through the use of advance organizers (AO).

AOs are strategies designed to activate a reader’s background knowledge, proposed by Ausubel (1963, 1968). Ausubel (1968) suggests the intent of the advance organizer is “to bridge the gap between what the reader already knows and what the reader needs to know before he/she can meaningfully learn the task at hand” (p. 148).

According to Herron, Hanley, and Cole (1995), Ausubel in his subsumption theory proposed that learners subsume new data under general, more inclusive concepts and principles. Furthermore, he hypothesized that if new material is subsumable under the relevant existing concepts in learners’ cognitive structure, then appropriate and stable organizers should enhance the retention of new material. AOs are introduced prior to the learning passage itself to provide scaffolding or support for the new information (Woolfolk, 1993).

The current study aims to investigate the effects of utilizing video and English-Chinese summary passages as AOs in reading instruction on junior high school EFL learners’ reading comprehension. The study also intends to discover junior high school EFL learners’ perceptions about the use of two AOs in teaching reading.

Method

The participants were 95 seventh graders from three intact classes of a junior high school in northern Taiwan. All the recruited participants were from classes arranged based on normal distribution of students’ academic abilities. Among the three classes, two of them were the experimental groups, which received either video or English-Chinese summary passage
organizers on a random basis. The other group was the control group, which received no AO before taking the reading comprehension tests.

A quasi-experimental design was devised to examine the effects of AOs (video and English-Chinese summary passage) on EFL reading comprehension in a five-week English program at junior high school. In the first week, all participants took the reading section of STYLE (Saxoncourt Tests for Young Learners of English) to ensure the comparability of the participants in the three groups and to distinguish the proficient and less proficient readers in each group. In each of the following four weeks, the three groups read a passage and took the respective comprehension test. Moreover, participants in the experimental groups received the AO treatments for reading passages for all of the four weeks, and also completed a questionnaire in the fifth week. After that, twelve participants from the experimental groups were interviewed.

Results

Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics of the mean scores of the four reading comprehension tests of the three different AO groups. The AO video group (M=9.66) ranked first among the three, followed by English-Chinese summary passage group (M=8.94), and the control group was the third (M=6.10).

In addition, all of the participants were classified into two proficiency levels based on their scores on the reading section of STYLE. Table 2 displays the results of proficient and less proficient readers’ performance in the reading comprehension tests. On the whole, proficient readers performed better than less proficient readers in all of the three groups. Furthermore, a two-way ANOVA on

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AO Groups</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Min</th>
<th>Max</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Video</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>9.66</td>
<td>4.27</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary Passage</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>8.94</td>
<td>3.45</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>6.10</td>
<td>3.30</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>8.31</td>
<td>3.97</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>Video (n=32)</th>
<th>Summary Passage (n=33)</th>
<th>Control (n=30)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proficient</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>11.94</td>
<td>4.15</td>
<td>10.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less Proficient</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>7.38</td>
<td>3.05</td>
<td>7.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>9.66</td>
<td>4.27</td>
<td>8.94</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
participants' average scores of the four reading comprehension tests was employed to examine whether there were any significant differences between the three groups of AO treatments and between the two groups of reading proficiency. Result showed that there were significant main effects for both AO treatments, $F(2,92) = 9.15, p < .001$, and reading proficiency, $F(1,93) = 13.57, p < .001$. However, no significant interaction existed between AO treatments and reading proficiency, $F(2,89) = 1.97, p = .146$.

Since significant main effects were found for AO treatments and reading proficiency, a post-hoc test using the Bonferroni method was used to compare differences between the three groups. Findings indicated that video and control groups yielded a statistically significant difference ($p < .01$) as well as did English-Chinese summary passage group and control group ($p < .05$). That is, both the students in the video and the English-Chinese summary passage groups performed better than those in the control group on the reading comprehension tests. By contrast, no significant difference was detected between the video and the English-Chinese summary passage groups.

The 10-item questionnaire (see Appendix C) was designed to ask about participants' EFL reading experiences, investigate whether they thought that the AOs were effective in enhancing their textual comprehension, and in what ways they were facilitated by the AOs. In terms of reading training in class, Table 3 indicates that grammar and sentence pattern instruction ranked number one on the list, followed by vocabulary teaching. On the other hand, activities such as sharing personal experiences related to reading or conducting extensional activities, for example, replying to a letter, writing a card or doing a small drama, ranked number seven, which was at the bottom.

As for the perceived functions of advance organizers, 18% of the respondents regarded providing background knowledge, and 17% thought of providing direction for reading to be the main functions of AOs, making these functions the first two on the rank as displayed in Table 4. The last important function of the AOs to be perceived by the participants was arousing motivation.

**Discussion**

The main purpose of the study was to find out the effects of AOs on the reading comprehension of junior high school students. First, video as an AO medium has significant and positive effects on junior high school students’ EFL reading comprehension. Its effectiveness for EFL reading comprehension results bilaterally from functions of an AO and features of a video. Second, an English-Chinese summary passage as an advance organizer has significant effects on junior high school students’ EFL reading comprehension and is beneficial in enhancing reading comprehension. The study provided empirical evidence of the facilitating effect of written AOs on EFL reading comprehension. Third, there is no significant interaction between language proficiency levels and AO intervention; however, this finding suggests that proficient readers comprehend better than less proficient ones. Furthermore, regarding the use of AOs in EFL reading instruction, English-Chinese summary passages were not as accepted by the participants as video as an AO, although the participants in both AO groups liked AOs and agreed on the effectiveness of the AOs in facilitating reading comprehension.

The implications of the present study suggest that English teachers should use pre-reading activities and view them as good facilitators, and that junior high school EFL students should confidently embrace the notion of the facilitative role of background knowledge in reading comprehension. Moreover, material developers may want to consider incorporating AOs prior to main reading materials.
Table 3. Perceived reasons for Instructive Reading Activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Rank</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teaching new vocabulary</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching grammar points and sentence patterns</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asking pre-reading questions</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Translating English into Chinese word by word</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussing the main idea of reading passage</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharing personal experiences related to reading</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading and discussing articles related to reading</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussing illustrations before or while reading</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Answering post-reading questions</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conducting extensional activities</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4. Perceived Functions of Advance Organizers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Rank</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Providing background knowledge</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Providing keys words and phrases</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Providing grammar point and sentence structures</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introducing characters</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arousing motivation</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Providing direction for reading</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Providing linkage between the unknown and the known</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Conclusion

In conclusion, the study compares the effects of different AOs on EFL reading comprehension of junior high school students in Taiwan. The findings attempt to draw attention to the importance of pre-reading activities. Hopefully, there will be future research probing into the relationship between AOs and text types, and other measures besides multiple-choice questions, such as recall or summary, can be taken to examine the effects of AOs.

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References

Three principles for encouraging Task Based Learning (TBL) in the team teaching environment

Bryan Gerard
Osaka Shoin High School

Introduction

When a teacher walks into a classroom, many decisions regarding the materials, purposes and methods have been made by other interests in their particular educational system. The government and school district have most likely determined what curriculum and/or textbooks to use. Also, the culture of the school, its purposes for foreign language education and its evaluation techniques may make English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers feel restricted in their classroom decisions. Team teaching (TT), a Native English Teacher (NET) teamed with a Japanese teacher (JT), can create even more complications, especially when the NET wants to introduce approaches that are unfamiliar, such as Task Based Learning (TBL). The reasons for resistance to change are varied but can gradually be changed with the use of a few principles that address both student needs and institutional/JT misgivings to alternative approaches. This paper will look at three principles: (1) planning communication; (2) pacing; and (3) encouraging student motivation.

Principle 1: Planning Communication

Lesson plans are the core to every class. Lesson plans are the practical application of, “the theoretical rationale that underlies everything that happens in the classroom,” and as such are “subject to some ‘tinkering’ as a result of one’s observation and experience” (Brown, 2002, p. 11). This is also the place where the divide between the NET and JT begins. In TT, there are two dominant methods of lesson planning (1) NET plans the lesson and the JT fills the role assigned by the NET or is left to a nominal role as disciplinarian, (2) JT plans the lesson and NET fills their assigned role. These two planning methods result in one of part of the team dictating to the other what and when things happen in the classroom. The third planning approach is for the NET and JT to work together in designing their lesson. While the ideal for team planning may be for a NET and JT to create the plan together, this is not always a realistic possibility.

Principle 2: Pacing

The pace of a lesson has a great impact on the motivation and performance of students. Moving through too much material too quickly does not allow students enough time to absorb new information, leaving them confused and frustrated. Conversely, going too slowly is likely to bore students and lead them to become distracted and disinterested. The effectiveness of tasks or activities that are designed to create opportunities to practice and master the targeted speaking, listening, reading or writing skills relies on the pace of a lesson. Even the best methods of evaluating and grouping students by levels will leave a teacher facing a classroom with a variety of levels, so it is a good idea to prepare layers of activities that can be given simultaneously. Whether it be “tiered tasks”, providing different levels of difficulty to different skill levels, “bias tasks”, using complementary tasks to accommodate the different skill levels (Bowler
or additional tasks for groups or pairs that finish a task early, all of which accommodate the speed of higher level groups while providing lower level groups sufficient time to complete the primary task, a lesson plan’s pacing should consider the variety of levels within the class and across the four macro skills. Paying attention to pacing allows a teacher to maintain maximum efficiency in their classroom. For example by providing additional opportunities for learners with advanced skills to practice without applying additional stress to learners with lower skills in the same classroom. Without paying attention to the pace of one’s lesson, other goals and principles have no hope of having a beneficial effect in the classroom.

Uncertainty in communicative situations
It would be unreasonable to expect that three to four years of studying EFL with little input or experience outside of the classroom would provide a learner with sufficient knowledge to understand every single turn of phrase or expression that they may encounter. It would also be a false assertion to suggest that native speakers of any language do not encounter turns of phrases or expressions with which they are unfamiliar, on a daily basis. Native speakers of English, also, routinely experience turns of phrases or expressions with which they are unfamiliar and must use context, cultural knowledge and other extraneous sources to achieve valid interpretations. Whether it be listening or reading, (skills which the internet has increased the necessity of mastery), instilling in students a confidence to use skills from their first language (L1), such as inferring meaning from context or identifying body language (in oral communication situations), when using their second language (L2) is essential. Much of the reticence of L2 learners to use their L2 in the restricted setting of a classroom or the unexperienced situations beyond, comes from a disconnect between the confidence they feel in their L1 and the fear of being misunderstood in their L2. However, many L2 learners may never have been made aware that the strategies that they naturally employ in their L1 can also be utilized when interacting in their L2. In other words, L2 learners have a built in set of communicative strategies which can help them to deal with break downs in communication when they occur, if they are made aware of them and given the opportunity to practice the cross application of these strategies (Dornyei & Scott, 1997). Although, this consciousness raising does not contribute directly to acquisition, it could be argued that it has a similar facilitative effect to that which Ellis (2002) suggests raising grammatical awareness has, that is developing the knowledge necessary for communication. EFL learners may feel more comfortable in written exchanges because of the time allowed to discern meaning and craft responses; but, developing a comfort with uncertainty will help improve their ability in face-to-face or other oral situations as well as efficiency in reading and written interactions.

Principle 3: Encouraging student motivation
During class-time, teachers can employ many techniques and rely on their relationship with their students to create an external motivation that allows the teacher and students to maximize the effectiveness of their limited time together. However, without an internal motivation EFL students are unlikely to seek out opportunities to use their L2 beyond the classroom. ESL students lacking an internal motivation may also shrink from opportunities that arise outside of daily needs. Dornyei (as cited by Willis and Willis, 2011, p. 4) “suggests that motivation drops because learners simply do not develop a positive image of themselves as future successful users of [L2]”. In EFL countries, such as Japan, the pressures to pass demanding entrance examinations creates powerful external motivation that often focuses on listening, reading and grammar in the form of discrete logic testing over communication. This kind of external pressure contributes to EFL learners lacking a vision of themselves as multi-linguistic users in the future.

Fostering an internal motivation to acquire an L2 means changing the idea of what it means to learn an L2. Willis and Willis (2011) note that the traditional emphasis on accuracy and error avoidance results in a demotivating feeling of
failure. While such emphasis takes advantage of external influences such as the need to pass an entrance examination, it fails to address the kinds of concerns that would lead to internally generated motivation to acquire an L2. Willis and Willis (2011, p. 6) note, “we know that the real measure of our knowledge of a language is what we can do with it.” L2 learners who have lost motivation tend to have little exposure outside of the classroom to the L2, which means little opportunity to self-evaluate accomplishment in the L2. In the classroom, a variety of strategies that fall under the Task Based Learning (TBL) philosophy provide opportunities for students to envision the reading, writing, speaking, listening and speaking experiences that are possible beyond the classroom.

The internet among other technologies allows L2 opportunities to enter the consciousness of learners in mono-lingual or EFL situations. Reading can be practiced in the form of research for presentations or investigations into the pop-culture of other countries; e-mail buddies provide more immediate feedback than pen-pals for both reading and writing practice. Skype-pals provide the opportunity for authentic L2 interactions both orally and aurally. Youtube is a popular place to find many interesting videos in L1 as well as L2. These non-traditional opportunities to use the language provide L2 learners an opportunity to evaluate what they can actually do with the language that they are studying and will hopefully increase intrinsic motivation through recognition of forward progress. It would be wise for teachers who have the advantage of using the internet for L2 input and exposure to take the time to inform students of how to be safe and protect privacy while using the internet. Where access to the internet is not available, TBL activities may need to be designed by the teacher to fit their unique circumstances. However the extra time involved with such preparation will make classroom management, student motivation, and results easier and higher.

Conclusion

Institutional constraints and pedagogical differences between the NET and JT can lead to difficulties in lesson planning. The three principles outlined in this paper can help to avoid these difficulties. Teachers should carefully consider the planning and pace of lessons. In addition, they should consider ways to motivate students, including use of the internet and raising students’ awareness of ways to develop communicative strategies. It is hoped that these principles with serve as useful guidelines for NETs.

About the author

Bryan Gerard is a part-time teacher at Shoin Joshi Gakuen’s high school. He recently completed a Master of Education with a major in TESOL from the University of Southern Queensland. His current research focus is in developing student autonomy and pop-culture based tasks in the classroom.

References


A Focus on Meaning in Primary School Task-based Language Teaching (TBLT) in Chinese: A Case Analysis

Yeo Leng Leng and Chen Seow Chin
Singapore Centre for Chinese Language

Introduction

According to the 2010 Mother Tongue Languages Review Committee (MOE, p. 13), English is becoming a dominant language in Singapore homes and one of the broad objectives stated in the teaching of mother tongue languages is ‘communication’; that is to develop Singaporeans with the proficiency and ability to communicate in English.

Crabbe (2007) sees a task as “a unit of communicative activity designed to facilitate learning” (p.119). If a task-based approach is close to the orientation of communicative language teaching (CLT), we can say that it is meaning-focused due to its concern with providing learners the opportunity to communicate and to use language, even if they were to use it inaccurately. With a focus on meaning, and communication, this paper seeks to explore how task-based language teaching can be carried out in a Chinese language teaching classroom at primary level.

Theoretical Framework

A three-phase TBLT framework; a pre-task, task-cycle, post-task process, proposed by Willis and Willis (2007) was adopted and refined to suit the students’ level and classroom situation in teaching Chinese.

Li (2006) pointed out the difference between a “quasi-task” and a “task” (p.193). When a student observes a picture and describes it to another student, the nature of ‘interactional authenticity’ makes it a quasi-task. In contrast, a situation, for example visiting a friend’s house, requires a student to give directions to another student, creates a ‘situational authenticity’ that makes it a task.

In this study, the pre-task is used as a trigger to encourage students to use relevant words and phrases and emphasize more on listening. This is to encourage them to use Chinese and help the weaker students to listen and prepare them to speak during the lesson. The task-cycle highlights quasi-task and the post-task has a ‘follow-up’ activity that is equivalent to the task defined by Li (2006). It is meant to reinforce what the students had learnt and for interactive communication purpose.
Method

One intact class of primary third-year students participated in this study (n=19). 14 of the participants were Singaporeans and the remaining 5 were non-Singaporeans. School examination results showed that their performance in Chinese Language was mediocre. The section on ‘listening and speaking’ in the textbook (CPDD, 2008, p. 6) was chosen for the purpose of developing students’ ability in communication. Students are required to understand how to use interrogative sentences and declarative sentences. However, there was minimum language teaching instructions mentioned in the teaching guide (CPDD, 2008, p. 10), and the instructor was asked to design a lesson plan for the first lesson. A qualitative approach was adopted for this study and lessons were video recorded for analysis.

Findings

These findings report on one lesson designed and implemented by the instructor and another which was redesigned and implemented in the class.

As shown in figure 1, the instructor asked students to put a star beside an interrogative sentence and put a tick beside a declarative sentence. There was not much interaction among students in this activity. Also, the use of terms “interrogative” and “declarative” appear technical for the students at primary level to comprehend.

In figure 2, students are shown playing a spin the pencil game, however they did not engage much in asking questions to one another and the conversation was predominantly in English. After this listening and speaking activity, the lesson moved on to a reading activity. This was followed by another activity asking students to work in pairs to find the differences between two pictures. This task was an attempt to introduce the stronger version of CLT, however English was the dominant language in most group discussions. The transition between activities also seemed to disconnect students’ interest.

Due to the minimum use of Chinese and lack of interaction among students in the first lesson, the same lesson was redesigned. At the pre-task phase of the lesson, students named the objects in a big picture and learned the prepositions of place through Total Physical Response Method (see figure 3). From observation, it seemed that students who had stronger abilities in Chinese, showed a tendency to switch to English when performing the task even though they knew the necessary Chinese lexis. Thus, the pre-task phase aims to make them more conscious to use Chinese and also to help weaker students in learning the words and phrases.

Figure 1. Identifying interrogative and declarative sentences

Figure 2. Students playing a spin the pencil game
In the Task Cycle phase, students were asked to practice the interrogative and declarative sentences on Picture A. The teacher asked two students to demonstrate the task using word cards as follows:

**Student A:** 电话在哪里？ (Where is the telephone?)

**Student B:** 电话在桌子上。 (The telephone is on the table)

Then, one student was given Picture A and another student was given Picture B, they were asked to find the differences. In this phase, most students used Chinese in their conversation. The conversation generated at the time figure 4 was taken is shown as follows:

1. **Student B:** 电话在哪里？
   
   (Where is your phone?)

2. **Student A:** 我的电话在桌子。
   
   (My phone is on the table.)

   Student B nodded her head.

3. **Student A:** 你的呢?
   
   (What about yours?)

   Student B pointing to the table.

4. **Student A:** 冰箱上。
   
   (On the fridge.)

5. **Student B:** What?

6. **Student A:** *bin chu* (冰箱) is fridge. Refrigerator.

7. **Student A:** 你的电话在哪里？
   
   (Where is your phone?)

8. **Student A:** Faster lah, you. We only got two leh.

---

**Figure 3. Using Total Physical Response to learn prepositions of place**

**Figure 4. Students working in pairs to find the differences.**
Although English was used, it was used for clarification (Line 5) and explanation (Line 6). Line 8 apparently shows Student A’s frustration and her natural switch to English.

Before introducing a follow-up activity to reinforce what the students had learnt and to create a situation for them to use the language, a ‘form focus activity’ was introduced to reinforce the nature of the interrogative and declarative sentences (See Appendix). In slide three, students were shown two situations that they were likely to encounter and they were given a task to pair a word with its corresponding picture. In figure 5, a student was asked to give a demonstration. This student had difficulty expressing himself and had to refer to the PowerPoint several times in order to produce the correct form. As Baleghizadeh & Derakhshesh (2012) mentioned, the ‘textual input enhancement’ (also in Izumi 2002, Sharwood Smith 1993 and Wong 2004) is one of the ways to draw learners’ attention to form within a second/foreign language classroom context. Thus, the powerpoint slides used colours and graphics as ‘typographical cues’, a term borrowed from Wong (2004, p. 48), to draw students' attention to the grammatical from (in this case the interrogative and declarative sentences).

As shown in figure 6, the task creates a chance for students to move around in the classroom and use the language for interaction. ‘在我的书包’ (In my bag), “在那里” (Over there), “在桌子底下” (Under my table), were used by students during their interaction, although this was not the ‘form’ that was featured in the PowerPoint slides, they were able to get their meaning across to the other student and use Chinese in their interactions.

At the end of the lesson, students in pairs had a word card and a picture card that matched and the teacher concluded the lesson by asking several pairs of students what they had found.

Conclusion

Although this research aimed to implement and explore TBLT with a focus on meaning, which is a strong version of CLT, the dominant use and the natural switch to English in this Chinese language class made the implementation of a strong version of CLT rather difficult. Ellis (2003) draws the parallel distinction of a strong and a weak version of CLT to task-based language teaching and task-supported language teaching:

The weak version views tasks as a way of providing communicative practice for language items that have been introduced in a more traditional way. They constitute a necessary but not sufficient basis for a language curriculum. The strong version sees tasks as a means of enabling students to learn a language by experiencing how it is used in communication. In the strong version, tasks are both necessary and sufficient for learning. (p.28)
Based on the above distinction, this study reflected a weaker version of CLT. It would be regarded as task-supported language teaching rather than task-based language teaching. However, the objective to encourage students to use Chinese in communicative tasks was met although we acknowledge further work on designing task-based language teaching in Chinese still needs to be explored.

About the authors

Dr Yeo Leng Leng is currently a lecturer at the Singapore Centre for Chinese Language. She received a Postgraduate Diploma in Education (Distinction) from the Singapore National Institute of Education, specializing in teaching Chinese Language at Primary Level. She also received her PhD at the Graduate School of Language and Society, Hitotsubashi University in Japan. Her research interests are second language acquisition, sociolinguistics and education, language planning and policy.

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Chen Seow Chin received her Honors degree in Chinese studies from National University of Singapore. She was a Research Assistant at Singapore Centre for Chinese Language.

References


## Appendix. Form Focus Activity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Powerpoint slides</th>
<th>Translations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Slide One</td>
<td>My Things Are Lost.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| A: 我在找剪刀。你知道我的剪刀在哪里吗？
B: 你的剪刀在桌子上。 |
| Slide Two | A: I am looking for my scissors. Do you know where my Scissors are? B: Your scissors are on the table. |
| Slide Three | A: I am looking for my scissors. Do you know where my scissors are? B: Your scissors are on the table. |
| A: 我在找剪刀。你知道我的剪刀在哪里吗？
B: 你的剪刀在桌子上。 |
| A: 我在找剪刀。你知道我的剪刀在哪里吗？
B: 不知道。 | 
Introduction

This paper argues for the use of a Task-Based Approach (TBA) with Japanese University EFL learners whose language proficiency is not particularly high (approximate TOEIC level <300). A sequence of tasks was used in a comprehensive English class which focused on listening and speaking. The comments of low-proficiency students showed changes in their attitudes regarding L2 learning after experiencing TBA. The following sections include a brief overview of the use of tasks in language pedagogy, a review of the literature, an example of utilization and/or application of task design, and a consideration of the importance of pre-tasks.

Tasks in language pedagogy

Designing tasks is a central feature of language pedagogy practice, and the task is also a theoretical construct in need of investigation (e.g., Ellis, 2005; Seedhouse, 2005) which has attracted considerable attention in second language acquisition (SLA) research in the last few years. The design and implementation of task sequencing is considered central to enhancing learners’ motivation and sustaining their efforts to learn the L2. This is because tasks require students to work together to use language functionally to solve problems that relate to some degree to the tasks that students may need to accomplish using English skills in real-world situations (Lambert & Engler, 2007; see also, Long, 2000; Skehan, 1996).

Method

In order to promote a task framework in a language classroom, a sequence of pedagogic tasks were adopted, taking into consideration students’ language level and favorite activities. Students were organized into either a pair or a group to work on tasks in order to use English functionally and to solve problems. The tasks were mostly creative in nature, as many of the students were involved in art and design courses; other tasks, such as information gap tasks, compare-and-contrast tasks, including both non-fixed solution (open) and fixed solution (closed) types were also given in order to facilitate language performance and development. Jane Willis’s framework for task-based learning (1996) was used to categorize task types in English lessons, and the task cycles were applied as follows: pre-task, main-task, and post-task. In the pre-task, new vocabulary and grammar were introduced, as well as listening and conversation practices from a textbook. In the main-
task, students were asked to either pair up or make a group to do a task sheet. For example, in one of the creative tasks, students were asked to invite famous actors and actresses to a house party. First, individual students had to think by themselves in terms of what to bring, what to make, who to invite, and so on; then they discuss this party scenario with their partners, and make an invitation card. In the post-task, students have an opportunity to express their ideas and/or opinions in front of the class, and/or a writing task is given to assess students’ understanding.

**Students’ changes in attitude towards English lessons**

Changes were observed in students’ attitudes towards language learning. Many students showed a tendency toward higher enjoyment of English classes, and increased comprehension as shown in the following interview transcript excerpts.

(Student A)
April 11, 2011.
“I did not like and did not understand English at all up to now, so I was worried about the class. But the class was actually more enjoyable than I’d expected.”

June 13, 2011.
“I started to understand English better than before. Because I understood a bit, I was more enthusiastic in English class.”

July 25, 2011.
“We did a presentation. I was amused by my classmates as they did so well. I enjoyed it a lot” (Translations mine).

(Student B)
April 18, 2011.
“My partner asked me some questions, but it was difficult for me to answer. I also did not understand some vocabulary either.”

May 16, 2011.
“I think I am able to understand a bit more English compared to earlier in the semester.”

July 4, 2011.
“Now, I am able to read a bit more. I think I understand grammar more than before.” (Nishida, 2012, p.25).

Students seemed to show less confidence in themselves earlier in the semester, but toward the end of the semester, they slowly seemed to show more confidence in themselves, when they were more able to do tasks that were provided in class. This is because they started to understand English better than earlier in the semester which made them enjoy the classes. Confidence is known to be a vital factor for language learning (Nishida & Yashima, 2009).

“**TBA can be of great benefit to teaching practices, as it can promote balanced language development, particularly in terms of complexity of production**”

**The importance of the pre-task**

To foster students’ language development, especially students with low language proficiency levels, I believe it is necessary to re-familiarize them with basic grammar and vocabulary as well as to warm up their
listening and communication skills in the pre-task. Through reviewing and re-learning the basic grammar and vocabulary as well as activating the communication and listening skills that they will use in the main task, students are able to work comfortably on tasks with their partners. Thus, it can be said that a pre-task plays a vital role for students with lower language proficiency levels.

Secondly, tasks need to be created which are graded and sequenced according to the students’ level of understanding. For learners of lower proficiency levels, it may be better to integrate closed versions of tasks before providing open versions, as open versions can be more challenging for these students. The implementation and the timing of delivery of both the open and closed versions of tasks need to be used promoted accordingly. Lastly, as this paper describes, we saw changes in students’ own perception of their language learning as well as changes in language proficiency level. TBA can be of great benefit to teaching practices, as it can promote balanced language development, particularly in terms of complexity of production.

About the author

Rieko Nishida, Ph.D. is a lecturer at Osaka University. Her research interest has been social and educational psychology of second language learning. She is especially interested in the influence of motivation and other psychological factors in language learning among children and Japanese University EFL learners.

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References


Assessing Assessment Practices in TBLT Classrooms

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Introduction

The objective of this paper is to demonstrate that assessment plays a central role in the implementation of task-based language learning and teaching (TBLT). I will aim to provide specific examples from TBLT classrooms that illustrate the following three main points: Assessment can, and should, take on several roles and functions; assessment can play a role in linking learning cycles and wider pedagogical issues and it is of benefit for learners to be involved in assessment and other related pedagogical practices.

Theoretical Background: Learning-oriented Assessment

This section will first explore some TBLT theory, particularly the principles of learning-oriented assessment (LOA) before moving on to discuss the impact of assessment on practice in later sections. Carless (2009) describes LOA as being informed by three principles: assessment tasks should be designed to stimulate productive learning practices amongst students; assessment should involve students in actively engaging with criteria (e.g., what makes a good poster), quality (e.g., quality of eye contact in a presentation) and their own and/or peer performances and feedback should be timely and forward-looking so as to support current and future student learning. Carless provides a framework of LOA which encourages learning tasks as assessment tasks and feedback loops (Figure 1).

Other topics from Carless (2009) include tensions relating to classroom assessment such as “good assessment may be or appear time-consuming versus time is at a premium” (p. 79), or “a focus on technical [e.g., reliability and validity] issues versus the emotional impact of assessment on learner” (p. 80). As this paper is specifically focused on classroom practice, this section finishes with an outline of considerations to bear in mind when creating and implementing assessment tools; they should provide appropriate feedback to learners, be time-efficient, reliable and valid. Acknowledging that many tools can achieve these aims, this paper presents a poster presentation performance task coupled with a rubric (the rubric is reproduced in Figure 2) as an example.

The rubric is completed by teacher and students, with students self-assessing their performance. From personal experience, I find simple oral feedback to be most timely and forward-looking; more specifically the teacher and learner comparing their self-assessment and teacher assessment immediately after the presentation. This leads to closing feedback loops where learners develop an awareness of required standards and how they can close the gap between their current and the desired level of performance (Carless, 2009, p. 83). A possible criticism of the rubric could be that learners need fine grained definitions of score bands for the different levels of performance, such as a detailed description of what constitutes a poster that scores one versus two on a particular dimension. While I agree there should be guidelines, which are likely more
Figure 1. Framework for learning-oriented assessment (Carless, 2009, p. 82)

![Framework for learning-oriented assessment](image)

Figure 2. Poster Presentation Assessment Rubric

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>The <strong>poster</strong> was informative and visually impressive</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>The <strong>presentation style</strong> was effective</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>The presenters provided relevant information</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>The <strong>explanations</strong> were clear and easy to understand</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The presenters can give an effective poster presentation on opinions, decisions and ideas, providing relevant information and clear explanations

*(reasonably well) **(well) ***(very well)*

Total:  /20

Comments and advice: What was done well:

What can be improved:
important in the case of a standardised writing test, for example, in the case of assessment of a performance task in the classroom, I feel the focus should be on the process of assessment contributing to learning. Thus expectations regarding performance can be established and verified through teacher-learner, and learner-learner dialogue. Specifically, at the point of need, I would favour asking learners questions such as How can your poster be improved? to help them build a meaningful understanding of what the performance expectations are. Such reflective processes can contribute to learning and learning to learn.

Some Roles for Assessment

This section describes the different roles assessment can play in the classroom. While many roles are possible, three are focused on here: to establish whether the learning goal has been achieved or not, as a decision making tool that contributes to the task, and to inform the next learning stage or task. Assessment can also be used for grading purposes, but this won’t be discussed here.

To Establish Whether the Learning Goal has been Achieved

In line with LOA and the action-oriented approach of TBLT, one aspect of assessment of a poster presentation should be to ascertain if a learner can give an effective poster presentation on opinions, decisions and ideas, providing relevant information and clear explanations, involving a mention of what has been done well, and how it can be improved in the future. In order to address validity issues, I try to contextualise level-appropriate, relevant can do statements of the CEFR (Council of Europe, 2001) for goal-setting (the italicized text above is an example of such a contextualized can do statement).

Assessment as a Decision Making Tool which Contributes to the Task

This section discusses how assessment tasks can influence learning tasks. To illustrate, I use an example from a TBLT textbook (Benevides & Valvona, 2008), where students first create new product ideas (Task 1), then debate the pros and cons of various product ideas, agree on the best product, give a poster presentation explaining their decision (Task 2), then conduct market research on the best product, present their findings (Task 3), and finally create an infomercial (Task 4). The learner product ideas (Task 1) of one group can be transferred to another group to decide the best product and give a poster presentation (Task 2). A learning task of assessing the products fulfills the role of assessing Task 1 ideas, and facilitates the deciding on the best product. The learners can discuss the questions in Figure 3, which provides a means of assessing the ideas presented and arriving at a decision regarding which product is the best.

Assessment Informs the Next Learning Stage or Task

Continuing the example from Benevides & Valvona (2008), after learners decide the best product idea they prepare and give a poster presentation explaining their decision which can be assessed using the rubric in Figure 2, followed by consultation with the teacher to compare self and teacher assessments, and to receive feedback. Learners can then reflect on the poster presentation using questions such as: In a presentation, what is easy or interesting? What can I/we do well? What is challenging? In a presentation, what can I/we improve? How? The answers to the final two questions can then form goals for the next learning task (market research presentation). This simple example of one task informing the next learning stage can be extended to more involved processes such as a negotiated syllabus, which leads to next main point of this presentation summary.
Learning Stage Outline
(Definition of what the learning stage involves, the important skills associated with the learning stage and definition of a well-performed pedagogical task of the learning stage, and an outline of the relevant can do statements)

↓

Self-assessment  →  Goal-setting

↓

Learning Stage

↓

Reflection
(Reflection upon peer, teacher and self-assessment regarding performance of learning stage task with the aim of ascertaining if the learner has met the set goal and what was learned by working toward this goal. In this case, as the learning stages are connected, points raised in the reflection of task performance can also be integrated into the self-assessment and goal-setting procedures of the next learning stage.)
Assessment to Link Learning Cycles and Wider Pedagogical Issues

This section moves to discussing how assessment can be used to link learning cycles with wider pedagogical issues such as practices to develop learner autonomy. An example learning cycle is shared in Figure 4. Appendix A shares an example of an implementation of this cycle which encourages learners to reflect on previous learning (e.g., discussing their product ideas), and to clarify goals for the next learning stage (e.g., making a poster presentation). In Appendix A, Section A deals with the learning stage outline, Section B self-assessment and goal-setting, and Section C preliminary reflection. Reflection on how well the goal(s) of learning have been achieved can be further extended with questions such as: How well can I agree and disagree politely? How well can I exchange personal opinions, negotiate and present about decisions and ideas? How well can I provide explanations, arguments and comments? How well can I interact in extended discussion? What I am good at? What do I need to improve upon? The discussion of such reflective questions can then loop around to feed into the next learning cycle, the benefits of which are discussed in the final section of this paper.

Benefit of Learner Involvement in Assessment and Other Pedagogical Practices

An example of benefits from the poster presentation mentioned above involves learners answering the following questions (taken from the assessment rubric, Figure 2): What is a good poster? What is an effective presentation style? In a poster presentation, how can we provide relevant information? In a poster presentation, how can we provide relevant, clear, and easy to understand explanations? The answers to these questions can be compiled and fed into an extended rubric (see Appendix B) to be used with the final poster presentation. While this is a simple example of learner involvement, I feel learners can (and should) be involved in all elements of learning.

To summarize, I feel the practices outlined above harness synergy in combining an action oriented approach to TBLT, the connectedness of the learning cycle, and the forward-looking nature of the CEFR (Council of Europe, 2001). This forward-looking nature refers to the can do statements, along with the suggested principles and practices found there.

About the author

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References


Appendix A

My next language learning target.

Here you can write down your next learning target and record your progress in achieving it. When setting learning targets, you can use the goal setting and self-assessment checklists in the appendix to formulate your learning target.

| Language: English |
| Learning Target |
| (Use the Self-assessment grid in the Language Passport and the checklists in the appendix to formulate your next language learning target as precisely as possible) |

Section B:

**Spoken Interaction goal:** I can agree and disagree politely, exchange personal opinions, negotiate and present about decisions and ideas

{reasonably well → ** well} ** well → ***very well}

**Presentation Skills goal:** I can give an effective poster presentation on opinions, decisions and ideas, providing relevant information and clear explanations

{reasonably well → ** well} ** well → ***very well}

**How much time can I devote each day/week to achieving my target?**

目標達成のために1日または1週間でどのくらいの時間を費やすことができるか？

2 to (? ?) hours a week

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>When shall I begin? いつから始めるか？</th>
<th>When do I plan to finish? いつ終えるか？</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Today-May 12th</td>
<td>End of Stage 3/end of May</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**How do I intend to achieve my target?** 目標達成をどのようにめざすか？

For example, can I work alone or do I need to work with other people?

例えば、一人で学習するのか、他の人と一緒に学習するのか？

Section A:

**Complete stage 2 activities with my group:** - Think, discuss and present about the pros and cons of product ideas (from other teams) providing relevant explanations and arguments -Discuss and decide in groups the best idea -Remember to disagree politely -Prepare a poster presentation with all relevant information and arguments

**What learning materials do I need?** どのような教材が必要か？

Widgets Textbook, Language Portfolio & ---

**How shall I know whether or not I have achieved my target?** 目標に到達したか、あるいはしなかったかをどのように知るか？(For example, can I take a test or set and correct a test myself? Or shall I need to ask my teacher, another learner, or a native speaker to assess me? Or can I depend entirely on my own judgement?

例えば、テストを受けるのか、自分でテストを作って解答するのか？先生に聞くのか、他の学習者やネイティブに評価をしてもらうのか？完全に自分の判断に任せるのか？)

Refer to self-peer-teacher assessment of poster presentation and also think about the group discussions. If I have achieved this goal I can - Give relevant, clear, and easy to understand explanations with sufficient explanations and reasoning

**My own criteria:**

Review of learning progress on or near my target date 学習経過や直近の目標日程の振り返り

Have I achieved my target? In working toward my target have I learnt anything new about (i) the target language (ii) language learning? What am I going to do with what I have learned?

目標を達成したか？目標に向かう中で(i)目指す言語、(ii)言語学習について新しいことを学んだか？これまで学んだことを今後どうするのか？

Section C:
Appendix B
Poster Presentation Assessment

1 The poster was informative and visually impressive  
   [Attractive, colourful, clear, and easy to see/understand; makes an impact; has essential information but not too much information]

2 The presentation style was effective  
   [Loud and slow speech; clear, simple English; used pauses and repetition; used gestures and eye contact effectively; emphasized the important points; there was good combination between presenters]

3 The presenters provided relevant information  
   [The presenters knew the products well; they gave examples concerning the main points of the poster; they made sure audience understood; the presentation was logical; the presentation made the products appear attractive]

4 The explanations were clear and easy to understand  
   [The presenters used simple but relevant words; the presentation supplemented the poster with detailed information; the information was summarised well; important words or phrases were emphasized; body language was used well]

The presenters can give an effective poster presentation on opinions, decisions and ideas, providing relevant information and clear explanations

*(reasonably well) **(well) ***(very well)    Total: /20

Comments and advice: What was done well:

What can be improved:
Introduction

Research has shown that copious amounts of opportunities for learners to use their full linguistic resources in communication fosters acquisition (Swain, 1985), and one activity that provides learners with such opportunities is the task (Willis, 1996; Ellis, 2003). A task, as defined by Willis (1996, p. 23) is an activity in which the target language is used to achieve a non-linguistic outcome. However, there is a danger that tasks will develop learners’ fluency at the expense of accuracy and complexity (Skehan, 1998). Thus, before introducing tasks into our curriculum, we decided to conduct a pilot study of different task types.

Purpose of Study

This study has a dual purpose: to explore which types of task produce what types of language and to gain insights as to how task design can enhance learning.

Context and Participants

The study involved 40 students at a mid-sized private high school in Tokyo. Two pairs of students at the upper-beginning level were selected for recording and analysis.

Materials

The first task in this study, Picture Description (Appendix A), is an information gap task and, as such, involves only one of the participants being given all the information necessary to complete the task, in this case a picture, and the other student being given a worksheet with just the background of that picture. The student with the background-only sheet must ask for, and the other participant provide, a description of the target picture in order to complete a similar picture on the background sheet.

The second task, Shared Story, is a decision making activity, meaning that all participants engaged in the task have access to all the information required to complete that task, in this case a worksheet containing 4 illustrated picture frames. After students listen to a model story, each pair receives their worksheet and work together to create a story.

The final task, Student Exchange (Appendix B), is a jigsaw task. In jigsaw tasks, participants “hold portions of a totality of information which must be exchanged and manipulated, as they work convergently towards a single task goal” (Pica, Kanagy & Falodun, 1993). In Student Exchange, that totality of information consists of two profile sheets for two fictional characters. Each profile has missing information which is available on the other sheet. The students must exchange information to complete their sheet.
Study Findings

In order to compare learner language, task output was recorded and transcribed. Transcriptions were coded for the measures of accuracy, fluency, complexity, (Ellis & Barkhuizen, 2005) and negotiation of meaning (Pica, Kanagy & Falodun, 1993). Student Exchange had the benefit of prompting the fewest errors per 100 words. As learners do tasks, they will inevitably encounter communication difficulties, forcing negotiation of meaning (Long, 1996) to work toward mutual comprehension. The three types of negotiation of meaning analysed are, on the part of the listener, requests for clarification (e.g. “What did you say?”) and requests for confirmation (e.g. “Did you say school?”) and, on the part of the speaker, comprehension checks (e.g. “Do you understand?”). Our findings supported Pica et al.’s research (1993), with our jigsaw task prompting the most negotiation of meaning. Furthermore, as both participants are required to ask for and provide information, this two-way exchange of information prompts a feature of authentic conversation: students controlling turn taking as they exchange information. Negatives observed in student performance of Student Exchange were short utterance length and simple language.

Student language produced in Picture Description also had a significant amount of negotiation of meaning and, in terms of fluency, saw few pauses within student utterances. However, utterance length was short and language used was simple. Also, unlike Student Exchange, with all the information being with one participant, the flow of information was one-way and students were not required to negotiate conversational turn-taking.

Shared Story, as a decision making task, gives the participants equal access to the necessary information to complete the task. Shared access to the information removes the element of required interaction between the participants and in our study, prompted the least negotiation of meaning. However, in terms of complexity, Shared Story produced the longest mean turn length and gave students the most opportunity to produce creative language. For example, looking at a picture board of a cyclist having an accident, one participant offered “he hits the truck... after that... he looks like paper” (meaning he imagines the man will be flattened after the accident).

In summary, each task type has both strengths and weaknesses, as different task types promote different kinds of language. In order for students to enjoy the benefits of different task types, and as a way to compensate for various task type weaknesses, we propose the use of hybrid-tasks.

Hybrid-Tasks: Definition and Guidelines

Hybrid-Tasks are tasks with multiple components that incorporate two or more task-types.

For the first component of a hybrid-task, a body of information should be divided among participants who are then required to exchange information with one another. This requires participants to interact with each other, authentically controlling conversational turn-taking, and negotiating any misunderstandings that arise. Input can be picture based, necessitating students to generate their own language in order to exchange information, or text based, allowing teachers to provide exposure to target vocabulary or grammatical forms.

The next component of the task involves students working together with the information they have now successfully exchanged. This component may require students to make a decision, solve a problem, create a story or engage in a debate. The defining characteristic of this component is students have shared access to all task information. While the first component of the hybrid-task requires participants to successfully share set information provided in the materials, the
second component gives students shared access to all information and requires participants to do something with that information. Whether it is solving a problem or creating a story, students have to generate their own ideas beyond the information provided in the material. This promotes a focus on more creative and complex generation of language.

To illustrate the potential benefits of hybrid-tasks more clearly, we will now provide examples of three hybrid-tasks.

**Picture Profile.**
For Picture Profile (Appendix C), students are put into groups of four. Each student is given a different profile sheet and a blank worksheet. Students work in pairs to complete their blank worksheet with information from their partner’s profile sheet. Each profile sheet has three pictures. As we found in our pilot study, pictures are a useful way to have students generate and communicate their own language. Once this has been completed the profile sheets are taken away from the students, leaving them with only their completed worksheets.

For the second component, students work in pairs to create a presentation based upon their two characters. Students are encouraged to use their imagination to add to the information given in the profiles. Time is given for students to prepare and practice their presentations, then each pair of students will present to the other pair in their group.

**Dicto-story**
Our second hybrid task is Dicto-story (Appendix D), a combination of a jigsaw task and decision making task. It starts as a dicto-gloss (Wajnryb, 1990), a form focused task requiring students to use specific grammar and vocabulary. For example, the Dicto-story in Appendix E focuses on relative clauses. The teacher should prepare a 150-200 word story that includes target vocabulary and target grammatical structures and stops at a critical point from which the students can complete the story.

The dicto-gloss task starts with the teacher reading the passage at a normal rate of speech while students listen for the general idea. The teacher then repeats the dictation while the students take notes. Since the teacher is speaking at a normal rate of speech, the students cannot possibly write down every word. However, as a group they should be able to reconstruct the original passage. Finally, the original passage is passed out and students compare the original to their reconstructed version line by line.

In the second component of the Dicto-story, students work together to complete the story with their own creative ending. Whereas students had to use target language in the dicto-gloss, at this stage of the task, students use their imagination and full linguistic resources to finish the story.

**Who gets the heart?**
Who gets the heart? (Appendix E), our third hybrid task, is an adaptation of the classic task (Rooks, 1988) in which students are given the roles of hospital board members who decide who will be given a heart transplant. In the original task, all students have access to all patient information. However, to increase negotiation of meaning, we jig-sawed the first component of the task by giving each student a description of only one of the patients. Furthermore, target vocabulary was included and boldfaced in order to promote incidental acquisition of vocabulary. Students are given 5 minutes to read the description and take notes. Finally, the descriptions are taken away, and each student shares information about their patient.

In the second component of the task, all of the members of the board have a discussion to decide who gets the heart and why. All of the members must agree, and the board must be prepared to justify its decision. Next, students are given time to
prepare a report, explaining who should get the heart and why. Finally, the teacher chooses a member from each group to report their decision to the class.

Conclusion.

As different types of task promote different kinds of language – a hybrid-task can offer more varied and rich student output than any task-type alone. The initial component, as a jigsaw, promotes increased participant interaction, negotiation of meaning and encourages natural conversation turn-taking. The second component, with participants having shared access to information, provides a platform for more creative and complex language.

As well as creating and developing new materials, many existing communicative task materials can be modified and adapted for use as hybrid-tasks. It is our hope that hybrid tasks will provide learners with a balanced diet of task types that will lead to more fluent, accurate, and complex language development.

Note: All Appendices referred to in this paper can be found at http://goo.gl/ctCNi.

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References


Is it a Potential Panacea? 
Retrospection on Task-Based Learning and Teaching in Hong Kong

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Introduction

A large body of literature has accumulated on TBLT since the 1980s. Although other teaching methods like the grammar-translation method and the audio-lingual method cannot be said to have disappeared completely from the arena of L2 education they are now under the shadow of TBLT in Hong Kong. Since the 1990s, the language curriculum of Hong Kong has been filled with requirements and instructions based on the principles of TBLT (Hong Kong Curriculum Development Council, 1997, 1999). Schoolteachers have been asked to focus on task-based communicative activities in classroom teaching. As is stated in a document issued by the Education Department of Hong Kong, teachers need to attach importance to “organizing lively and diversified learning materials and activities” (Hong Kong Department of Education, 2002, p.19). All this can still be seen in the most recent version of the English examinations administered by the government examinations and assessment authority.

More than 20 years of implementation has yielded some unexpected effects on the overall situation of English teaching in Hong Kong. Nowadays it is commonly felt that Hong Kong students’ English proficiency is on the decline (Chau, Wu, Chen, & Lughmani, 2012; Littlewood & Liu, 1996; Lu, Li, & Huang, 2004; Mohan & Au-Yung, 1985). Although the issue has gained much attention in society and the government has invested a lot of resources in an attempt to stop or reverse the trend, there have not been any obvious signs of positive change (Nunan, 2003). All the measures taken thus far seem to have had little impact. In consideration of all this, one may ponder over a question: Among other factors that may have indirect impact, is one of the problems related to the dominant teaching approach which has been actively promoted and used over the past 30 years?

A comprehensive review of TBLT is much needed at this stage for the purpose of making changes in language education so as to adapt it to the newly implemented four-year university education system. This paper will discuss the problems of implementing TBLT in Hong Kong and possible remedies in the hope that a new, effective approach can be worked out to help L2 learners and enhance the quality of language education.

Conflicts between TBLT and reality in Hong Kong

Fluency-oriented TBLT vs. students’ form-focused learning

East-Asian students, including Hong Kong students, are noted for “classroom silence” (Harumi, 2010; Jones, 1999; Littlewood & Liu, 1996; Townsend & Fu 1998). One of the reasons for this is that they are afraid of making errors and do not want to lose face because of errors (Littlewood, Liu & Yu, 1996). Although TBLT allows for tolerance of students’ errors (Larsen-
On Task, Autumn 2012, Volume 2, Issue 2

It does not help to remove the students’ fear of making errors. On the contrary, it aggravates their hesitation and doubts because they are more concerned about what is correct, just as Littlewood and Liu (1996) found through a large-scale investigation among 2,156 students, who experienced a TBLT-based secondary school English education, regarding which they explain that "Many students have high performance expectations when they speak English and some are very afraid of making mistakes or being laughed at" (p. 82). In communication-oriented teaching activities, fluency is a main target and common concern (Larsen-Freeman, 2000). However this may not match the reality of Hong Kong. To Hong Kong students, English is learned not merely for verbal communication, but for academic purposes. Students need to read English textbooks and write assignments in English. Therefore, the ability to produce grammatically accurate English is important. As a result, they prefer to use their mother tongue Cantonese when doing tasks (Carless, 2004; Lee, 2005). Therefore it could be argued that TBLT does not always provide enough focus on learning the correct forms that these students desire. This is one of the reasons why they often use their mother tongue to avoid errors when making collective efforts to complete tasks. Moreover, in Hong Kong, students have a number of public examinations to sit for. Their performance in the exams will directly affect their chance of getting a place in a tertiary institution as well as a decent job in their future career. Language accuracy counts for a lot in one's exam score and its importance to Hong Kong students cannot be over-emphasized. This is also an obstacle to the implementation of TBLT in such contexts (Chow & Mok-Cheung, 2004).

**TBLT as policy vs. teachers’ acceptance**

As mentioned earlier, TBLT is implemented top-down by the Hong Kong government. However, for many teachers this policy was made without considering Chinese traditional educational values and the Chinese culture of learning as well as the reality of classroom size. First, in TBLT classrooms, students often carry out activities in small groups, which means the time allotted to each student for learning to negotiate meaning is maximized (Larsen-Freeman, 2000). In contrast to this, the class size in schools in Hong Kong is normally very large --- with over 40 students in one class. Supposing students are divided into groups of four to undertake a task, the whole class still comprises about 10 groups. With ten groups of students having discussions or doing other activities at the same time, a lot of noise will be produced, which is taken as a symbol of the teacher’s poor classroom management in Chinese educational culture. Even if students are cooperative in keeping the noise at a tolerable level, it is still questionable whether or not the teacher can take care of 10 groups of students simultaneously. If teachers do not offer timely assistance or guidance, it is also questionable whether or not the students will be able to complete the tasks smoothly. Moreover, English teachers in Hong Kong usually have a tightly scheduled lesson plan to follow. Doing a task often costs time. Too many tasks make it difficult for teachers to effectively manage class time.

Second, education in Chinese contexts is regarded as a process of accumulating knowledge and skills. To students the priority is to learn knowledge and skills for future use. Such a culture is highly supportive of teacher-centered classroom teaching. Hong Kong teachers are faced with large groups of students. On the one hand, they want to maximize the students' learning; on the other, they want to ensure completion of lessons without major classroom management problems. Therefore, it would be more efficient for teachers to explain the course materials and ask students to raise questions if they want to better understand the teachers' explanations and the course (Morris, 1996). Teachers choose a teaching method not simply because of its professional or theoretical worth but also because it allows them to cope efficiently with the reality of the classroom instruction. Because of worrying
about TBLT’s disruptive influence on long-established teaching practices, teachers often have defensive attitudes toward TBLT and they may be unwilling to actively respond to the government’s advocacy of TBLT in language education. As a result, TBLT may not be able to be implemented smoothly in language classrooms and achieve the positive effects expected.

**Conclusion**

In this paper, I argued that because of the influence of traditional Chinese educational values and practices, as well as a contextually-governed, exam-oriented, educational reality, there is still a long way to go before TBLT can be really accepted and successfully implemented in Hong Kong. Independently of the government policy regarding this popular teaching approach, many teachers and students have a number of practical concerns. They do not feel comfortable with the approach, largely because their culture of learning and the reality of education in their context are both different from western settings where TBLT was developed. In general, from the early stage of education, teachers and students in Hong Kong are accustomed to classroom roles and teaching/learning strategies, which conflict with a learner-centered methodology such as TBLT. In principle, TBLT will likely bring about benefits to students, just as Harumi (2010) suggests: “Activities [of TBLT] should build up learner confidence and facilitate learner autonomy” (p. 268). However, all this will not happen if no adequate prior preparation is made or if it is not fully adapted to the local contexts. That is because the change from a teacher-centered to a learner-centered classroom requires tremendous conscious efforts of all concerned. It would be impossible without the teachers’ genuine acceptance, support and participation. For this reason, the good intentions of the government in promoting TBLT may turn out to be in vain until teachers are technically ready to use it.

No single method or approach will be universally feasible and applicable. Likewise, there is room for improvement of traditional teaching practices of Hong Kong. It is hoped that while making their voices heard and maintaining the teacher-centered classroom instruction in examination-oriented settings, teachers and students in Hong Kong can gradually adapt to global trends and make good use of the ideas and experiences of others. It cannot be ignored that, in the Hong Kong context, TBLT has potential and it is another new approach to use in addressing the common need for learning a second language effectively, if adapted well to Hong Kong classrooms. Effective use of TBLT may be a fine addition to Hong Kong’s traditional culture of learning and may therefore contribute to the success of language education of Hong Kong.

Yet in view of the current situation and reality of the educational field, where some students are unable to communicate well in English even if they have passed the examinations and tests as required, the writer would like to call attention to two prerequisites; firstly, considerable efforts should be made to get the teachers of Hong Kong accustomed to the principles and operational procedures of TBLT through professional training, and secondly there is a need to reduce the wash-back effects of accuracy-oriented examinations. To this end, all concerned parties, including the Hong Kong government, school authorities, language teachers and researchers should work together and make concerted efforts to remove the currently existing obstacles and prove through a series of practical solutions that TBLT can help resolve the students’ problems in learning English and that it is a potentially effective method of language teaching.

**About the author**

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An Effect of Text-based Tasks on Incidental Vocabulary Acquisition

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Introduction

Traditionally, rote memorization of vocabulary using word cards or word lists is used in Japanese secondary schools because it is a convenient and efficient method for remembering a large number of word-meaning associations. While students have been expected to memorize word-meaning relationships out of class for vocabulary tests, teachers sometimes instruct students on some aspects of vocabulary knowledge but provide few opportunities to use the vocabulary in writing or speaking owing to the time limitations of lessons. With such few opportunities to have meaningful output in classes, learners have difficulty using words in context because they do not know when and how to use the words appropriately even though they know the meanings. Moreover, learners with lower proficiency of English, who are not intrinsically motivated to learn English and equipped with only surface learning strategies such as oral or visual repetition tend to have difficulty memorizing words in a word list and learning in written texts. A number of studies found that incidental vocabulary learning as a result of repeated exposure to vocabulary items in various contexts led to greater vocabulary growth than explicit vocabulary learning (Naggy, Herman & Anderson, 1985; Pigada & Schmitt, 2006; Warning & Takaki, 2003). However, other research has found the importance of cognitive demands for vocabulary acquisition. Many researchers argued that noticing, or attention to both meaning and form are required for vocabulary learning (Ellis, 1995; Robinson, 1995). Craik and Tulving (1975) suggested the importance of deep processing of vocabulary for learning and that elaboration would promote vocabulary retention. For example, recomposing a sentence in a learner's own words involves paying attention to a word's form, its meaning, and its associations with other words or contexts. Such deeper processing, known as the generative model of learning (Wittrock, 2010), requires learners to attend to words at the semantic level and integrate new information with their prior knowledge. Although decontextualized learning, or rote memorization of words often used by Japanese English learners enhances vocabulary acquisition (Elgort, 2011), its overuse can restrict learner's ability to use vocabulary in context. What makes vocabulary learning difficult is the fact that vocabulary knowledge involves not only the form-meaning relationship but also the appropriate usage of the words. Hence, it is desirable to have well designed tasks in order to facilitate learning in classrooms. Such tasks should require learners to direct attention to various aspects of vocabulary knowledge and provide them with opportunities to learn through plenty of contextualized input and output. The present study attempted to investigate vocabulary acquisition through text-based tasks where attention to the form, the meaning, and the function of words was drawn and generation of words was required in order to complete the tasks. The research questions were:
1. Do two types of tasks that demand learners to generate word knowledge and give attention to form, meaning, and functional relationship of words have a positive effect on vocabulary learning?

2. If there is a positive effect, which task is more effective in supporting learner retention of words?

**Method**

**Participants and syllabus of the class**
The current study was conducted with two intact classes composed of 27 participants in the experimental group and 23 participants in the control group. Their proficiency level was either pre-intermediate level or beginning level of proficiency, having an average TOEIC score of approximately 300 or below. They were second year university students majoring in science and engineering. All students had one 90-minute reading and writing class each week over two fifteen-week semesters. The students also studied listening and speaking in another class. The study was carried out in eight separate meetings of a reading and writing class with each group over a two-month period. Teachers were free to decide on their own teaching approach and to choose their own supplementary materials based on the syllabus provided by a textbook which the school provided. Participants in both classes took a 54-item multiple-choice test on vocabulary used in the textbook at the beginning of the semester as a pre-test. The experimental group scores ranged from 46 to 80 points out of 100 points. The average score was 65.2 points (SD 9.2). The control group scores ranged from 46 to 89. The average score was 68.0 points (SD 6.8). Additionally, two durational multiple-choice tests were administered: immediate post-tests containing ten items learned in each lesson that were given one week after the treatment and a delayed post-test that was given at the end of the semester, consisting of the same 54 items as the pre-test.

**Procedure**
The control group was given eight weeks of normal reading instruction focusing on grammar rules. The experimental group performed two types of vocabulary tasks: a Read and Retell task based on Joe (1998) and a Spot the Difference task based on Pica, Kang, and Sauro (2006). Before the treatment, participants in the experimental group were explicitly instructed on generative learning strategies to be exploited during the retelling of key concepts of original text.

**Task 1: Read and Retell task**
1) Pre-task: the participants were required to read a whole original expository text in their textbook and to answer comprehension questions, which sometimes contained target vocabulary. This was after being introduced to the topic and reviewing the meaning of target words and other relevant information through class discussion to set a scene and activate participants’ prior knowledge before completing the main reading task. As participants had already gotten the gist of a text, they could help each other reconstruct passages in the main task.

2) Main task: the participants were assigned to read either of two different parts of a text and were asked to reconstruct the story and write it in cooperation after recalling and retelling their part. Such written scaffolding helped their interlocutors understand what their partner said because participants in the current study were beginning level learners of English.

**Task 2: Spot the Difference task (Information gap task)**
1) Learners read an original text and answered comprehension questions. 2) After being grouped into pairs, each of them was asked to read a slightly modified version of original text without showing their respective versions to each other. The version each participant in a pair had was different in forms or phrases that had low salience in the original passage. 3) They were asked to
compare their versions of the passage aloud and chose which was the correct one and justified their choice. 4) Learners worked together and had to write their chosen forms in a single cloze version of the original passage without looking back at the choices they made in the previous step. 5) Learners read the original text again and compared it with the answer they wrote in their cloze version.

**Materials**
The textbook employed in the current study was an expository text, *Message from the Globe: National Geographic Multi-media Reading Course*. The topic was related to natural science derived from the magazine, *National Geographic* (Yamashina, Yokoyama, & Okino, 2011). Fifty-four target words were chosen from eight units in the textbook that contained approximately 200 unique words. They were presented as a list of new vocabulary in each unit and most of them were within the first 2,000-word level of the General Service List of English Words (GSL) (West, 1953) and the remaining words were within the first 1,000 word level of the Academic Word List (AWL) (Coxhead, 2000). Seven or eight target words were included in each text.

**Results and Discussion**
The first research question asked whether two types of tasks that demand learners to generate word knowledge and give attention to form, meaning, and functional relationship of words have a positive effect on vocabulary learning. Table 1 displays the mean score and standard deviation for the three tests separated by higher scoring participants and lower scoring participants for each class. A comparison within experimental group indicated that the attrition in post-test although both the higher and lower scoring participants obtained higher scores than in the pre-test. The lower scoring participants gained as much vocabulary as the higher scoring participants did in the immediate-post test. However, as can be seen in Figure 1, the attrition rate of the lower scoring participants was greater than that of the higher scoring participants. Higher scoring participants tended to spend more time learning vocabulary than lower students. The extent to which the higher scoring participants spent more time on individual vocabulary learning than the lower scoring participants could account for the better retention.

A comparison between the experimental and the control group revealed significant differences between pre-test and post-test. Mean differences in post-test scores between the two groups indicate that the experimental group increased more than the control group from the pre-test to post-test (mean difference for the higher scoring participants was 4.4 and lower scoring participants was 13.8). Additionally, a one-way ANOVA of the post-test scores revealed near statistically significant differences for lower scoring participants, $F(1,11) = 4.84, p = .08$, but not for the higher scoring participants, $F(1,13) = 4.67, p > .05$. However, means for increased scores obtained by lower scoring participants proved statistically significant, $F(1,9) = 5.12, p = .03$ as opposed to higher scoring participants, $F(1,12) = 4.75, p > .05$. These results implied that the tasks that required learners to go through deep processing of words might have controlled only the lower scoring participants’ learning. Thus, although other affective factors such as motivation and interest could affect their scores, the results may indicate that the tasks enhanced lower proficiency learners’ retention more than reading only, without generation of words and attention to word features.

The second research question asked which task is more effective in supporting learner retention of words. Table 2 shows frequency levels of vocabulary ranging from one and two corresponding to the first and second 1,000 words of the GSL (West, 1953) to three corresponding to the AWL (Coxhead, 2000). Task 1 contained less frequent vocabulary than Task 2. About 70% of the target words used in Task 2 belonged to the most frequent 2000 words, while Task 1 contained 53% of target words whose frequency level was below 2000.
Table 1. Mean scores and standard deviations for the three tests

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Background knowledge</th>
<th>Pre-test M</th>
<th>Pre-test SD</th>
<th>Immediate post-test M</th>
<th>Immediate post-test SD</th>
<th>Post-test M</th>
<th>Post-test SD</th>
<th>Increased score M</th>
<th>Increased score SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Experimental</td>
<td>Higher</td>
<td>75.3</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>92.8</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>89.4</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>13.9</td>
<td>5.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lower</td>
<td>53.7</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>89.1</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>79.9</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>26.2</td>
<td>5.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control</td>
<td>Higher</td>
<td>82.3</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>93.8</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>91.8</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lower</td>
<td>55.6</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>84.3</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>68.0</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>12.4</td>
<td>10.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Higher: higher scoring participants whose scores ranged from 72-80 (Experimental group) and 78-89 (Control group) in the pre-test. Lower: lower scoring participants whose scores ranged from 46-59 (both group) in the pre-test.

Figure 1. Experimental group Pre-test and Post-test scores

Figure 2. Control group Pre-test and Post-test scores
Table 3 presents the means and standard deviations for the pre-test and post-tests obtained for the two task types for those participants in the experimental group. There are statistically significant differences between two task types, $t(36) = 2.98, p < .01$. The mean score obtained by experimental group for Task 1 was 86.7 as opposed to 77.5 for Task 2. Although Task 1 seemed to contain greater amount of lower frequency words, participants learned more vocabulary through Task 1 than Task 2. Hence, the results indicate that the Read and Retell task in which learners were required to recall and generate words in context lead to more vocabulary retention than the Spot the Difference task in which learners’ attention was directly drawn to syntactic features of words.

**Conclusion**

Given the notion that productive mastery is considered to be a continuum (Schmitt, 2010), this study suggests that engagement in a task requiring deep processing of words and including noticing and generation of words can facilitate vocabulary acquisition of lower proficient students, however in most cases the results were not statistically significant. As Laufer and Hulstijn (2001) maintain in their Task Involvement Hypothesis, vocabulary learning involves a learner’s motivation, or necessity to learn a word. At the cognition level, deep processing of words seemed to enhance vocabulary learning and the task that required the participants to use a word provided instrumental necessity of the word for completion of the task. However, at the metacognitive level, higher scoring participants spent more time reviewing the vocabulary they learned in class than lower scoring participants. Additionally, as studies on the vocabulary learning strategies used by Chinese EFL learners in connection with English general proficiency (Gu, 1995; Gu & Johnson, 1996) suggests, higher scoring participants may have used deeper and more varied strategies for retention of vocabulary than

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task</th>
<th>Pre-M</th>
<th>Pre-SD</th>
<th>Post-M</th>
<th>Post-SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Task1</td>
<td>66.5</td>
<td>10.2</td>
<td>86.7</td>
<td>6.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Task2</td>
<td>62.0</td>
<td>10.5</td>
<td>77.5</td>
<td>14.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Pre=Pre-test; Post=Post-test. Figures indicate scores obtained in both tests.
lower scoring participants. Such a different metacognitive learning approach might have made more of a contrast of the retention between higher scoring participants and lower scoring participants.

The study however had a number of limitations. The sample size was very small and the number of meetings of target vocabulary through texts was not controlled. Some words appeared in numerous different contexts while others did not. A further problem was the testing instrument. The multiple-choice test was not sensitive to partial knowledge of words (Newton, 1995). Additionally, it was not likely to reflect productive knowledge. Hence, there is an obvious need for further research on productive mastery of vocabulary as well as metacognitive level of vocabulary learning that involves a variety of strategy use and motivation in vocabulary learning.

About the author

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References


“Is TBL right for Asia?” the wrong question?
William Hogue
Ritzumeikan University

Introduction
In this article, I present two reasons why I believe the question of the “suitability” of TBL (or Task-based Instruction - TBI) to the “Asian context” is less than helpful, and may in fact be the wrong question.

Action research project
The first reason is based on the outcome of an action research project with a very low level, four-skills university class that met three times per week for one semester. This co-ed class of 20 students constituted one half of the second lowest of six proficiency bands, with TOEIC Bridge scores in the 122 – 128 range. Typical outcomes for classes at this level were poor, with poor attendance, little improvement, many failures and few promotions to the next level. The assigned standard text was Interchange 3rd Edition Level 1A with Interchange Workbook 1 (Richards, Hull and Proctor, 2005a and 2005b).

The particular class under study showed three problematic behaviors:

- Little participation on non-structured tasks (that is, the TBL elements of the text),
- Workbook homework not being done,
- Much class time being lost when shifting to and between tasks.

The questions that I decided to answer were:

- Is there a more efficient organization process?
- Would additional speaking practice increase participation?

The approach that I tried was to re-sequence the textbook material to postpone all of the TBL elements to a single culminating session (one full class period) at the end of each textbook unit (a five day sequence). Doing this immediately freed class time for two entirely new class “days”: “Workbook Day” and “Lab Day”.

On “Workbook day”, students worked in 4 – 6 person groups to complete all tasks in the workbook unit. Using Japanese was permitted, with the provision that all members must work as a team and agree on all answers (for tasks with specific answers). For open ended writing tasks, the rule was that each member would write his or her own answer and then read it to the group. My role was simply to circulate between the groups and assist when any group got “stuck”.

On “Lab Day”, students used the Interchange Lab Program in a cassette-based language lab. They listened to individual tapes, recorded their answers to the program prompts and reviewed their answers by playing back their tapes privately. My role was to monitor and give one-on-one feedback (and encouragement), a role made easy by
the technical capabilities of the Sony LLC-9000 type lab equipment.

This led up to the fifth day in the sequence, which I called “Speaking Day”. This consisted of all of the short tasks that had been postponed from earlier in the chapter, plus the “Interchange” activity for the chapter, plus additional tasks that I was able to include in the schedule. My role was only to coordinate the activities. This was a true TBL day, with no instructions to use any specific language forms. After the re-sequencing, performance on speaking task activities improved dramatically. The level of reticence was greatly reduced and in general all of the students continued speaking for the entire 90-minute period.

Final grades for this class were in the 60-95 range, with an average of 79 and a standard deviation of 9.6. Overall attendance was 92.7%. Five students increased their TOEIC Bridge scores by more than the 8 point standard error of measurement. Eight students scored high enough to move up to the next level in the program.

The conclusion that I draw from this experience is that there is no over-arching Asian taboo on TBL. While it is not clear why the reorganization of this class “worked”, the key observation is that after the reorganization, the TBI aspects of the text were no longer problematical for the students, in spite of the fact that there were no activities directed at improving student attitudes toward TBI.

It is my belief that the discussions on “Workbook Day” activated students’ world knowledge that they later used in the open ended speaking tasks. I also feel that by listening to their own voices on tape, students heard themselves “speaking English”, and came to view themselves as “English speakers”. The privacy of the language lab system let students perform for themselves and the teacher only, without threat of loss of face.

It was not necessary to “sell” students on the idea of TBI. Rather, they were allowed to work in ways that were familiar to them, and in the end they chose to perform open ended tasks voluntarily. It would have been easy to explain the students’ initial resistance to TBL as culturally based. “Individual students or the community they come from may have a strong aversion to individualism and a preference for collectivism. They may not like any open-ended tasks, where there is no one correct answer” (Scharle, A. and Szabo, A., 2000). To jump to this conclusion would have been unwarranted, and the reality, at least for this class, seems more subtle. As Dörnyei (2001) as observed, when discussing the potential for cross-cultural misunderstanding it is important to view the classroom through the students’ eyes. Further research is needed to discover what differentiates successful TBI efforts from unsuccessful ones.

Teaching contexts

At the beginning of this article, I said that I would outline two reasons why I believe the question of the “suitability” of TBL to the “Asian context” is less than helpful. Since my initial presentation of this action research (Hogue, 2009) I have learned that TBL or similar approaches are used in Japan in several contexts. What follows are several examples of TBI or TBI-like procedures from LeTendre’s (1995) volume of case studies on education in Japan.

The first context for a TBI-like approach is a Zen monastery. Hori explains that “Much of a monk’s life consists of committing sutras and Zen texts to rote memory. However, in the Rinzai Zen monastery, Zen monks are expected to learn the ancient tradition without really being taught” (1995). Monks take on various jobs in the monastery, changing twice a year. Each new job is assigned without warning or prior training. The requirements for each job are strict, and the monk must find a solution on his own.
A second context is the Japanese elementary school. "Japanese [elementary school] teachers frequently tell their pupils something like this: 'There are many ways to solve a problem. Think of as many ways as you can. Don't worry about getting the correct answer...''" (Lee et al., 1995)

These brief excerpts suggest that students in Japan should be familiar with TBI, but in different contexts to those in which most English teachers operate. Rather than asking if TBL is “right for Asia”, we should be asking how we can help our students to be ready for TBL, or to put it another way, how we can use TBL in a way that fits our students’ needs and learning styles.

It has become clear to me that there is no over-arching Asian taboo on TBL. In fact, that TBL is part of the broader educational experience, at least in Japan, seems well documented. When teachers find resistance to TBL, they should look to their learners’ histories and to their own practice. It is in the details of either or both that the reason for the resistance is likely to be found.

About the author

William Hogue earned a bachelor’s in Classics from the University of Massachusetts (Amherst) and a master's in TESOL and Applied Linguistics from Indiana University (Bloomington). He has spent most of the last 16 years living and teaching in the Kansai area.

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References


Introduction

For this study, three report projects were conducted in 2011 with the objective of enhancing the English competence of students through the processes of reading, discussing, and then writing articles in different genres. Fourteen 90-minute general English reading and writing classes were conducted with 27 first-year engineering students, who need to acquire skills for reporting their future research in media such as academic journals. The projects included writing a feature article about the local community to publish in a magazine made by the students, aimed at a foreign audience. Although similar projects have been conducted at university level (Goto, 2011), they did not involve a specific pedagogical method.

Outline of the projects

Nearly all the students initially had little or no experience in writing newspaper articles. Therefore, the first two projects were designed for them to become accustomed to this process. The first project required each student to write a profile of another student, while the second was a group project that consisted of writing a feature article about their university. Finally, each student individually wrote a feature article about some aspect of the local community of Kumamoto. All projects were thus created with a focus on themes familiar to the students.

Teaching methods

For each project, several teaching methods were adopted in order to promote students’ language acquisition. A primary method utilized was the genre approach, which is defined as follows:

The genre approach to teaching writing focuses, as the term suggests, on teaching particular genres that students need control of in order to succeed in particular settings. This might include a focus on language and discourse features of the texts, as well as the context in which the text is produced (Paltridge, 2004a).

In this study, the students wrote in two genres: profile, an article describing a person for the purpose of introduction and feature article, an article focused on specific issues that are less timely and more personal than straight news (Harrower, 2007). Another method employed was task-based language teaching (TBLT), which provides students with purposeful and functional language use through their interactions. Almost all students had no or little experience in writing news articles, and needed to learn how to write them through in-class activities. Therefore several tasks, such as learning about leads,
quotations and layout, along with peer reading and review, were incorporated in the projects.

The relationship between a project and a task has been a little unclear. Tanaka (2010) proposed that a “Project is a comprehensive concept; a topic is individual, which draws on the idea that several tasks are implemented in a project” (p. 10).

Accordingly, in this study, the project is regarded as a comprehensive concept, consisting of the tasks which are activities undertaken to accomplish the projects.

**Setting tasks**

A variety of tasks were prepared to help the students complete their projects. Most tasks addressed representative samples of the target discourse to raise students’ awareness of the genres (Hyland, 2004, p. 132, p. 156). The tasks were generally implemented in the first half of each class, in which students engaged in various activities such as group discussion and quizzes, as well as peer reading and review. The second half of the class was devoted to individual or group work for each project. An outline of the projects and tasks is presented below (Table 1).

Table 1. Outline of the Projects and Tasks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project</th>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Primary Content of the Week</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First Project</td>
<td>Week 1</td>
<td>Explanation of the first project. Familiarizing with the features of profile-style articles.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Week 2</td>
<td>Introducing writing help tools. Interview with partners in English and Japanese. Individual work on the first project.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Week 3</td>
<td>Learning how to quote. Bringing drafts for peer review. Individual work on the first project.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Week 4</td>
<td>Performing peer reading. Acquiring good points from peers to use in own writing. Individual work on the first project.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second Project</td>
<td>Week 5</td>
<td>Brainstorming on the theme of Kumamoto. Grouping and deciding on a group topic.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Week 6</td>
<td>Noticing the differences between straight news and feature articles. Group work on the second project.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Week 7</td>
<td>Learning about leads. Group work on the second project.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Week 8</td>
<td>Learning the construction and design of articles. Group work on the second project.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Week 9</td>
<td>Presentation and evaluation by students of each group work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third Project</td>
<td>Week 10</td>
<td>Considering ethical issues. Reading the article on the needs of foreign visitors to Japan.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Week 11</td>
<td>How to write a headline. Individual work on the third project.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Week 12</td>
<td>Bringing drafts for peer review. Individual work on the third project.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Week 13</td>
<td>Bringing drafts for peer review. Individual work on the third project.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Week 14</td>
<td>Presentations. Answering the questionnaire.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
All tasks were carefully designed to link with the projects, and were expected to be motivating, enjoyable, and promote collaborative learning for students. For example, in Week 5, students participated in a brainstorming session about Kumamoto so that they could generate ideas for their specific topics in the second and third projects. In Week 6, they compared straight news with feature articles in order to differentiate the two styles and prepare for their feature writing projects.

The peer reading and review tasks were emphasized for every project, not only to enhance the overall quality of their work but also to develop skills that could help them recognize the strengths in others’ work and incorporate those ideas into their own writing.

By the end of the main project, 24 of 27 students wrote a feature article each on a variety of topics, including Suizenji Park, Roasso Kumamoto (a local soccer club), books and movies on Kumamoto, ground water, and Ikinari dango (local sweets). Following on from this, a magazine titled How to Walk in Kumamoto was published in 2011. It contained several articles by the students, distributed to Kumamoto station, the tourist information center and other places frequented by tourists.

**Questionnaire**

In the final session of the class, the following anonymous questionnaire survey comprising four questions was administered to students by the teacher in charge. The students replied in the form of closed questions based on a five-point Likert scale. In addition, open-ended questions were placed under each of the first three questions to examine the students’ reasons for their answers. The responses were examined for common themes.

1. Did you achieve the objective?
2. Did you find peer reading to be helpful?
3. Were you active in the peer review process?
4. Did you find peer review to be helpful?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of students</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slightly agree</td>
<td>8.3%</td>
<td>58.3%</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
<td>20.8%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: n=24; percentages are rounded to the nearest decimal place.

The course objective, which was written on the questionnaire, was to enhance the English competence of students through the processes of reading, discussing, and then writing articles in different genres. Regarding the first question, about 66.7% of the students indicated that they had achieved the objective, including those who slightly agreed (Table 2). According to the positive remarks based only on students’ self-reporting, they learned many things and focused on a variety of English styles. However, several students provided negative comments related to their uncertainty about grammar use and lack of confidence in English.
Table 3. Q2 Did you find peer reading to be helpful?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of students</td>
<td>Very helpful</td>
<td>A little helpful</td>
<td>Neither</td>
<td>Not very helpful</td>
<td>Not helpful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>13</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>54.2%</td>
<td>45.8%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: n=24; percentages are rounded to the nearest decimal place.

All students were in support of peer reading, including the students who found it “a little helpful” (Table 3). According to the open-ended question, several students found it meaningful to incorporate the strong aspects of their peers’ writing, learn different expressions and notice their errors.

Table 4. Q3 Were you active in the peer review process?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of students</td>
<td>Very active</td>
<td>A little active</td>
<td>Neither</td>
<td>Not very active</td>
<td>Not active</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
<td>45.8%</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
<td>20.8%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: n=24; percentages are rounded to the nearest decimal place.

Table 5. Q4 Did you find peer review to be helpful?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of students</td>
<td>Very helpful</td>
<td>A little helpful</td>
<td>Neither</td>
<td>Not very helpful</td>
<td>Not helpful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
<td>75.0%</td>
<td>8.3%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: n=24; percentages are rounded to the nearest decimal place.

The third and fourth questions concerned peer review (Tables 4, 5). According to the responses, about 62.5% of the students were actively involved in the peer review sessions, including those who were “a little active”. In regard to the peer review, several students stated that they could notice a difference in their writing, discover their own errors, and thus use the peer review as a reference. On the other hand, some students were not active in the peer review sessions because they found it difficult to talk about their errors or find mistakes in others’ work and were not confident of their English competence. However, the fourth question indicated that almost all students (about 91.7%) were in support of peer reviewing, including those who found it “a little helpful”, regardless of the fact that 37.5% of the students did not actively participate in the peer reviews (Table 4).

Discussion

While working on the three projects, approximately 66.7% of the students achieved the objective of enhancing their English competence through the processes of reading, discussing,
and then writing in different genres (Table 2). The specific tasks including learning about leads, quotation, layout, with emphasis on peer reading and review, thus appear to have functioned well and helped the students accomplish their individual projects. However, some of the answers also revealed the lack of self-confidence in English was one of the main causes for not achieving the objective. This aspect could have been covered in a task addressing the students' weakness of writing.

Overall, the projects emphasized peer reading and peer review in order to generate collaborative learning in the classroom. Students learned from each other through meaningful discussions and reflection. For example, they incorporated many techniques used by their peers into their own writing and noticed their own mistakes and differences through these activities. To sum up, specific tasks prepared for each project supported students' writing and promoted collaborative learning among them.

However, while most tasks were effective for students, some did not result in the desired outcome for some students. For example, in Week 10, students learned ethical issues such as copyright regulations, privacy, and plagiarism through group discussions based on case studies. However, some students did not use references for their work, and others even borrowed photos from websites without permission.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, a variety of individual and collaborative learning was achieved through specific tasks assigned for the three projects and it could be deemed a successful project overall. Therefore, language teachers considering a project should utilize tasks that correspond well to the project in order to enable students to achieve their overall objective.

**About the author**

Takaaki Goto is an English instructor at Kumamoto University and Kumamoto Health Science University. His research interests include writing, extensive reading, listening, TBL, PBL and developing community-based English programs.

**References**


OnTask welcomes submissions of articles concerning TBLT, particularly with reference to the Japanese context.

Contributors are asked to follow the guidelines set in the sixth edition of American Psychological Association (APA).

Research or theory-based articles should be 3000 words or less. Lesson/activity plans should be 1000 or less. The editors reserve the right to edit articles for length, style, and clarity.

Email submissions along with biodata (50 words or less) to: Colin Thompson at tbltinasia@gmail.com.

Deadlines for submission are as follows:


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