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本号の紹介

編集委員 ジャスティン・ハリス & コリン・トンプソン

OnTask 第 4 巻第 2 号には、2 本の論文全文と
3 つの授業プランを掲載しています。本文を紹介する前に、5 月に行われた TBL アジア学会
に参加された方々に対して、お礼を申し上げたいと思います。ボランティアやプレゼンター、出席者として参加された方々すべてに感謝する
とともに、学会を楽しんでいただければ幸いであったと思っています。リトルウッド・ウィリ
アム、パトラー後藤裕子、スキーアン・ビーター、ダルトン・スティーブンといった高名なプ
レナリースピーカーに加えて、プレゼンテーショ
ン、ポスタープレゼンテーションの発表者は
60 名を超え、当日は 2012 年の最初の学会を
上回る成功を収めた。2016 年の学会の準備はすでに始まっています！参加を希望される
方は、tbl@jalt.org までご連絡ください。

OnTask 本号では、2 本の特集論文に加えて非
常に実用的な授業プランを 3 つ、ご紹介して
います。最初の特集論文はヘンリー・トラビ
スによるものです。彼はベトナムの RMIT 大学
で教鞭をとており、TBLT in Asia 学会でもプ
レゼンテーションを行っています。トラビスの
論文は、RMIT 大学における「TBLT タスクフォ
ース」編成に関し、過去 5 年間の概要を述べる
ものです。これは、教師が TBLT アプローチを
スムーズに行い、「タスク」とは何かを学部レ
ベルで理解できるようになることを目指してい
ます。トラビスは、これが学部全体で真に理解
されるためには、関連分野の研究の検討と教師
の意見・経験組み込むこととの間のバランス
をとる必要があると主張しています。2 番目の
論文はディーター・ジェニファーによるもの
で、ライティングクラスで TBLT を活用すると
いう、研究があまり多く行われていない分野に
について述べています。ジェニファーは特に、日
本の学生にアブストラクトライティング（アカ
デミックな文章を書く際の第一関門を越えるた
めに不可欠なスキル）を教える際の TBLT アプ
ローチについて概説し、このアプローチの効果
について述べ、その後、そのプロセスに関して
て学生に対して行ったアンケートの結果を示
しています。

本号掲載の 3 つの授業プランの 1 つ目も、ラ
イティングに関するものです。パトコ・アグ
ネスの授業プランの概要では、生徒を怯えさせ
ることのない、楽しくて自由なライティングアクティビティが紹介されています。これ
は、前に習ったボキャブラリーの復習にも最適です。次の 2 つの授業プランには、共
通の特色があります。それは、CALL 環境での
使用に適しているという点です。2 番目の授
業プランはハリス・ジャスティンによるもの
ので、学生がオンラインのアンケートを作成
し、お互いを対象にアンケートを実施し、そ
の結果を発表するという TBLT の枠組みを使用
した複数回の授業にまたがるプロジェクトを
概説しています。3 番目の授業プランはフ
ォスター・ヘンリーによるものです。これ
は、2〜3 時限全体にわたるプロジェクトベー
スの授業プランで、学生はテクノロジーの助け
を借りて自伝を書き、その後それをクラ
スで発表するというものです。

TBL SIG 事務局役員一同より、この一年間の皆
様からのご支援にお礼を申し上げます。私た
ちは現在、この SIG の発展のため 協力して
くださるボランティア、および事務局のさまざまな役職の「シャドー」（役職に就く前段階
としての「見習い」ポジション）を引き受け
てくださるボランティアを募集中です。興味
をお持ちの方は、tbl@jalt.org までご連絡くだ
さい。

タスクベース学習に関する論文や授業プラン
の投稿をお考えの方は、刊行担当役員のトン
プソン・コリン（tbltinasia@gmail.com）ま
でご連絡ください。
Welcome to Volume 4, Issue 2 on OnTask, a very full issue of two articles and four lesson plans. Before giving a brief outline of what’s inside, we would like to express our gratitude to those of you involved with the TBL in Asia conference in May. Whether you came as a volunteer, presenter, or attendee, we thank you and hope that you enjoyed it. As might be expected when looking at the calibre of presenters, including our distinguished Plenary speakers, William Littlewood, Yuko Goto-Butler, Peter Skehan and Stephen Dalton, as well as the over 60 presenters and posters, the weekend was even more successful than our first conference in 2012. Planning has already begun for 2016! If you’d like to be involved with the conference, please contact us at tbl@jalt.org

This issue of OnTask contains two feature articles and three very practical lesson plans. The first feature is by Travis Henry, who is based in Vietnam at RMIT and has coincidentally presented at both TBLT in Asia events so far. Travis’ article outlines the creation of a “TBLT Taskforce” at RMIT over the last five years, which has involved teachers smoothly implementing a TBLT approach and coming to an understanding of what constitutes a ‘task’ at a department level. Travis argues that to create a truly departmental-wide understanding, there needs to be a balance between reviewing the relevant literature and incorporating teachers’ views and experiences. The second article by Jennifer Teeter addresses an area that is somewhat lacking in the literature, using TBLT in a writing class. In particular, Jennifer outlines a TBLT approach to teaching abstract writing to Japanese students, a vital skill for getting past the gatekeepers of academic literature, discusses the effects of the approach and then presents the results of a survey to students regarding the process.

The first of the three lesson plans in this issue also addresses writing. In her lesson plan outline, Agnes Patko introduces a fun, non-threatening free writing activity that can also be used as a great way to review previously learnt vocabulary. The next two lesson plans all share a common feature, that is they are situated within a CALL environment. The second lesson plan, by Justin Harris, outlines a multi-lesson project within a TBLT framework in which students create online questionnaires, survey each other, and then present the results. The last lesson plan, by Henry Foster introduces a Project-based lesson plan to be carried out across two or three full periods in which students use technology to create autobiographies, which they subsequently share during in-class presentations.

The TBL SIG officers would like to thank you for your support over the last year. We are presently looking for new volunteers to help us work to build the SIG, and to act in shadow positions for the various Officer positions. If you are interested in helping out, please contact us at tbl@jalt.org

To publish an article or lesson plan related to task-based learning, please contact our Publications Officer, Colin Thompson at tbltinasia@gmail.com
‘Getting it’ together: Creating a collective understanding of TBLT within departments

Travis Henry
RMIT

Introduction

In 2008, RMIT Vietnam’s English for Academic Purposes (EAP) department began a curriculum renewal process in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City, moving from a more PPP-oriented curriculum and methodology toward what came to be known as a ‘task-integrated’ curriculum. Key issues, opportunities and challenges arising from this curriculum change in RMIT Vietnam’s English Language department have been discussed in an earlier issue of OnTask (see Bridge & Wiebusch, 2012). Looking back over the last five years, one of the most important achievements was reaching a collective understanding of what teachers and managers meant by task-based language teaching (TBLT). This paper argues that in contexts in which a TBLT approach is used, a collective understanding of what tasks constitute will benefit learning and teaching. This paper identifies different ways to codify this understanding, gives background into how our department crafted collective understanding and highlights the benefits of reaching a collective understanding for teachers, students, managers and other stakeholders.

Creating understanding: Four different approaches

A department’s collective understanding could involve writing a specific definition of a task, but this understanding could also be much more general. Departments may want to reserve a higher amount of pedagogical freedom for their teachers and thus may want to define tasks more broadly. In fact, scholars themselves differ on the level of specificity they place on the meaning of tasks, and they express their meanings in different formats (Willis, 1996; Skehan, 1998; Ellis, 2003; Nunan, 2004).

One of the shortest and clearest methods of understanding tasks is to write a definition. Tasks are defined by Willis (1996, p. 23) as “…activities where the target language is used by the learner for a communicative purpose (goal) in order to achieve an outcome.” Breaking the definition into propositions we can see that “An activity is a task if and only if it has target language to be used by learners AND there is a communicative purpose/goal AND an outcome is achieved.” This definition applies to productive tasks that have a real-world result (outcome) appropriate to the level of the learners (achievable).

Writing a definition is the strictest form of clarifying meaning since, when applying a definition as a test, an activity ultimately either passes the test or it does not. The main benefits of such a test are that it is quicker to apply than other approaches. However, using a definition may result in teachers feeling restricted or confined in the crafting of activities which may fall outside this definition. Instead of using a definition, Skehan (1998, p. 268) uses a criterion system:

[A] task is regarded as an activity which satisfies the following criteria:
• Meaning is primary.
• There is a goal which needs to be worked towards.
• The activity is outcome-evaluated.
• There is a real-world relationship.

While similar to Willis’s definition regarding the concepts of goals and outcomes, a criterion system is less rigid than a definition because criteria introduce the question of degree of satisfaction. To what extent is meaning primary to this activity? To what extent is there outcome evaluation? Should the only evaluation be outcome-based or can there be other forms of evaluation along with outcome evaluation? A criterion system may result in greater pedagogical freedom because, while it allows departments to codify the essential characteristics of tasks, it also allows individual teachers as professionals to decide for themselves on the extent to which activities fit the criteria for tasks.

Ellis (2003, p. 9-10) created a list of what he called critical features with commentary on each:

1. A task is a workplan.
2. A task involves a primary focus on meaning.
3. A task involves real-world processes of language use.
4. A task can involve any of the four language skills.
5. A task engages cognitive processes.
6. A task has a clearly defined communicative outcome.

These critical features could serve as a checklist for tasks. This introduces the idea of a verification process for new lessons. If an activity satisfies all the criteria, then it can be legitimately considered a task. Checklists can provide a method of verifying activities and assessments in order to support the idea that a program’s activities are in fact part of a task-based curriculum.

A checklist would be more flexible than a definition but more rigid than a criterion system. Satisfaction of each feature on the list requires evidence of that feature. For example, in order to demonstrate the presence of a workplan, the task will need to have instructions learners can use to plan. No discussion is necessary on the extent to which instructions are present; either instructions for students are present or they are absent.

However, unlike a definition, not all the features need to fit together. For example, while both Willis’s (1996) definition and Ellis’s (2003) critical features specify processes of language use and the presence of an outcome, Willis’s definition requires that all elements fit together, and that the target language be used to achieve the outcome. Separating these elements in a checklist means that one does not have to rely on the other.

Checklists may be helpful for departments because they allow teachers to build tasks in parts. For example, a teacher may specify the communicative outcome, which then allows for verification of real-world process, skills and meaning, etc. The same checklist can be used by managers and departments to approve that task-based lessons have been built to appropriate departmental standards. Checklists could also be useful for teacher training in that they make it easy for new teachers to evaluate each critical feature independently.

Nunan (2004) gives his own definition but does not discount others. After citing all of the above scholars, Nunan states:

My own definition is that a pedagogical task is a piece of classroom work that involves learners in comprehending, manipulating, producing or interacting in the target language while their attention is focused on mobilizing their grammatical knowledge in order to express meaning, and in which the intention is to convey meaning rather than to manipulate form. The task should also have a sense of completeness, being able to stand alone as a communicative act in its own right with a beginning, a middle and an end. (p. 4).

Nunan seems to take an eclectic approach by crafting his own definition but also allowing and validating others. This approach is useful for departments that wish to maximize pedagogical freedom. Also, the use of the modal should draws a distinction between aspects which are necessary and those that are desirable.
Nunan’s definition can be seen in itself as a collaborative act in that he draws on others to create a definition that is at once both summary and commentary on previous scholarly work. In fact, after giving various scholars’ definitions and his own, Nunan encourages his readers to reflect in order to form their own meanings. “Drawing on the above discussion, come up with your own definition of a pedagogical ‘task’” (Nunan 2004, p. 4).

This present article suggests that departments do just this - come up with their own, mutually agreed upon meaning of TBLT. Eclecticism opens up the possibility for interested parties to collaborate on the road to understanding, increasing the likelihood of greater buy-in for department members. The description of how this meaning was crafted at RMIT Vietnam and how uptake was encouraged and evidenced is discussed next.

Collective understanding in our context

In 2009, a “TBLT Taskforce” was formed in the English Language department at RMIT Vietnam which included curriculum writers and experienced teachers. It was agreed that “fundamental to this process was the need to define our understanding of “tasks” specific to our EAP context” (Bridge & Wiebusch 2012, p. 12). However, members of the taskforce knew that if they tried to force their ideas of tasks onto other teachers, their efforts would not be well-received. Thus, rather than only communicating their understanding to staff, the taskforce preferred to ask and listen to teachers’ ideas and past experiences.

Firstly, the taskforce conducted a literature review which included all of the previously cited scholars, among others. When the literature review was completed and discussed at taskforce meetings, it clarified the collective understanding for the group, but more data were needed, not by examining the scholarly literature but to honor the experiences and to examine the opinions of the community of teachers at RMIT Vietnam. In order to do this, informal focus groups were conducted when members of the taskforce visited teachers’ meetings and asked teachers about their general understanding of TBLT. This further informed the taskforce in its attempt to craft a meaning that could be agreed on collectively.

Next, after more discussion in the taskforce, a three-pronged set of characteristics was proposed for our context. 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

(Bridge and Wiebusch 2012, p. 12)

These characteristics were then communicated to staff in “all-in” workshops, not in a prescriptive sense that the taskforce was demanding departmental obedience but as a community of peers within the department seeking confirmation from teachers. Teachers were encouraged to give feedback both during the workshop by writing on butcher paper as well as on anonymous post-workshop surveys. After collating and analysing the feedback, it was clear that a collective understanding had been reached.

To summarise, after the taskforce was formed, a literature review was conducted, then focus groups were conducted during regular teachers’ meetings to ascertain the level of familiarity and prior understanding of the teaching community. Taking both the literature and the feedback from focus groups into account, a set of characteristics were proposed. Lastly, workshops were facilitated. Teachers’ opinions and understanding were measured during the workshops and again afterward in order to confirm a departmental-wide understanding of TBLT.

Our department’s understanding is most similar to Nunan’s (2004), but from a departmental perspective, the exact words, the format, or the similarity to a notable scholar’s interpretation do not matter as much as the level of consensus - the extent to which teachers and managers understand and agree about the meaning of tasks in their
context. Consensus is important for ensuring teacher buy-in to curriculum change toward TBLT. A high degree of teacher buy-in results in various benefits which are described below.

The benefits of collective understanding

Confirming a collective understanding is advantageous both inside and outside the classroom. In the classroom, teachers are aided when outlining their expectations to students. One key concept of TBLT is the primacy of meaning or communicative purpose. During a task, students need to know that they are being evaluated on their ability to accomplish a goal first and foremost rather than on their linguistic accuracy. Department-wide understanding of this concept can result in greater uptake as students are reminded through each course of the task’s focus on meaning rather than accuracy.

Better student understanding of expectations underpins the idea that TBLT increases learner motivation (Willis & Willis, 2011). Clear goals are highly motivating to students as well as the freedom to achieve the goals using whatever lexical and grammatical resources they have at their disposal before there is any focus on accuracy (Ellis, 2003). After this procedure is made clear and practiced, students should become accustomed to tasks and teacher feedback on task achievement before feedback on accuracy, as learning does not only occur through teacher feedback. In tasks, learning also occurs through student-to-student planning, strategizing, and negotiation of meaning during the task (Skehan, 1998; Ellis, 2003). A teacher constantly returning to the departmental understanding of tasks helps students understand expectations within language courses. Ideally, students would eventually understand tasks in a similar way to their teachers and be able to demonstrate an understanding of the importance of this method of learning (clear goals, real-word use, student freedom, etc.) While more research is necessary for proper validation, anecdotal evidence suggests that, by the upper levels, several students understand that tasks require real language for a real purpose.

Collective understanding also allows teachers and managers to relate to one another concerning pedagogical goals at the course and program level. In order to set meaningful program and course goals, however, there must be agreement on learning outcomes. Lessons must build capabilities which can be observed through assessments (which may themselves also be task-based).

Another essential job for managers is to set up orientation and teacher training for new teachers arriving at the department. Despite being experienced and qualified teachers, many teachers may be unfamiliar with TBLT and there is still a need for teacher training on this approach. Indeed, many aspects of in-house professional development on TBLT hinge on a department’s ability to define a task. Of course, discussions and debate may still arise on aspects of how tasks can be best used in the classroom, which tasks to use and how task success can be measured. Disagreement on how to setup, manage and measure good teaching practice is healthy as long as it does not degenerate into disagreement into what good teaching practice is.

The last important benefit of a collective understanding of tasks is the increased
professionalism in interactions with other stakeholders, which may include faculty in other departments and/or parents. Having a shared understanding empowers teachers because it makes them better able to communicate to others about what they do in the classroom and why. It is important to note that although tasks are seen as motivating to students that is not the only reason why tasks should be done in the classroom.

As professionals, teachers should always be able to justify their selection of approaches and activities. This is particularly important for TBLT because, as a meaning-focused approach, TBLT involves less teacher control of language than a form-focused approach like PPP (Willis & Willis, 2007). During a task, the teacher monitors but does not direct learner output, allowing the learners to communicate with little or no feedback during the task itself. This is the most counterintuitive aspect of TBLT: language teachers allow students to make language errors. Why would a language teacher put language second? Is a teacher doing a good job if they allow students to make errors while they are working at a task? Having a pedagogical justification with departmental support helps teachers defeat the perception that they are choosing enjoyable activities only for the sake of enjoyment or not correcting errors during activities out of laziness or apathy. Instead, teachers are including tasks in their teaching because they wish to measure student performance against an authentic (real-world) outcome, not by tallying errors.

Conclusion

Scholars differ on their approaches to expressing the meaning of TBLT. It is recommended that departments survey both the literature and their teaching community in order to arrive at their own collective understanding of TBLT. This understanding can be flexible in terms of approach to understanding, how activities are classified as tasks and how similar or dissimilar this understanding is to those of notable scholars. Departments crafting their own meaning of TBLT increase teacher buy-in, resulting in a number of other benefits regarding the interactions between teachers, students, managers and other stakeholders.

References


Biodata

Travis Henry has been teaching EFL for eight years. He holds a CELTA, a Graduate Certificate in Tertiary Teaching and Learning and a Delta. He currently teaches at RMIT International University Vietnam in Ho Chi Minh City. His research interests include TBLT, student reflection, and the student’s process of journaling.

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Exploring the potential of TBLT for academic abstract writing

Jennifer Teeter
Kyoto University

Introduction

Given the decreasing global citation rates and impact factors of Japanese publications as well as the decline in overall number of academic publications (J. Adams, King, Miyairi, & Pendlebury, 2010), the Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (MEXT) has implemented measures to strengthen the university competencies of universities to produce academics who can compete globally (MEXT, 2014). While several factors may contribute to these low figures, one response increasingly being taken by Japanese universities is the integration of English academic writing classes into undergraduate curricula (Hyland, 2000; Lee & Tajino, 2008). Nonetheless, English language academic writing pedagogy in Japan is a relatively under-researched area (Matsuno, 2014). Furthermore, a key aspect of the writing process is often overlooked—the research abstract.

This paper will explore the potential of an approach grounded in the philosophies of task-based language teaching (TBLT) for teaching research abstract writing to undergraduates at a prestigious university in Japan. First, it will provide an overview of university-based academic writing education in Japan, and then turn to abstract writing. After a brief account of research on task-based academic writing pedagogy, it will describe how the abstract lessons were designed. Then, it will explain the procedures taken for an exploratory qualitative and quantitative survey, focusing on students abstract writing abilities, knowledge of abstracts, and perceptions of TBLT for learning about abstract writing, before finally turning to an explanation of results and future recommendations.

Undergraduate English Academic Writing Courses in Japan

Universities in Japan are increasingly implementing undergraduate English academic writing courses (Lee & Tajino, 2008). The program at the university where this study was conducted utilizes an English for General Academic Purposes (EGAP) approach that combines English for General Purposes (EGP) and English for Academic Purposes (EAP) to create a bridge to English for Specific Academic Purposes courses. This program attempts to address the conundrum in EGP where the English necessary for successful academic writing is commonly neglected (Tajino, 2004).

An important part of ESP, EAP, and EGAP is awareness of genre, which facilitates understanding of established practices and expectations of discourse communities (Swales, 2004). Although genre approaches are usually utilized at the graduate level, scholars have noted that the scaffolding inherent in these interventions greatly facilitates undergraduate-learning by assisting students in navigating the unfamiliar terrain of academic discourse while enhancing confidence
negates common assumptions that abstracts are simply mirrored summaries of original research articles (Lorés, 2004) or abbreviated introductions.

Nonetheless, research on pedagogical tools for developing student competence in abstract writing is limited, especially in the Japanese context. One study was conducted by Shi and Cross (2014) specific to conference abstracts at the graduate level. The pedagogical technique used consisted of genre analysis, cooperative learning, and peer evaluation through drafting and revising abstracts with a move (see Table 2) checklist. While the lesson procedures were not detailed, “motivated” students were found to make significant improvements in organizational structure. The authors suggest a “register and discourse approach” to address “grammatical problems” and “lack of clarity” in abstract drafts (Shi & Cross, 2014, p. 132). Another study by Lee and Tajino (2008) found that undergraduates consider abstracts one of the most difficult aspects of article writing.

In addition, research to date on abstract writing for students of English is also scant (Martin-Martín, 2003). Existing studies have analyzed student-composed abstracts to abstracts in international journals (see Cortes, 2004; Hyland & Tse, 2004; Upton & Connor, 2001). One important study has utilized comparative abstract analysis to develop teaching materials based on some components of task-based language practices (Hsieh & Liou, 2008).

Further studies of abstract writing pedagogy specific to Japan are essential due to misunderstandings of abstract definition and purposes compounded by a lack of research on abstract writing. While a plethora of manuals on how to write abstracts are available, several studies conclude that published abstract structure often does not match these manuals (Dos Santos, 1996; Hyland, 2000) and has shed light on tendencies for many published abstracts to be “misleading”, “uninformative”, and lacking in a well-organized structure (Salager-Meyer, 1990, p. 84).
Unfortunately, no comparative corpus studies exist to determine the abstract writing difficulties of Japanese students. Most research neglects to consider experiences of Japanese scholars (Matsuno, 2014). In an interview conducted by Gosden (1996, p. 126) a Japanese physicist expresses his regrets for not being in full control of the English abstract writing process:

‘the meaning was delicately different from the original Japanese, but I lost the courage to correct it, because everything was so well organized in English, but, bad in Physics.’

This anecdote points to a need for scholars to develop competencies in abstract writing in order to prevent misrepresentation.

Task based academic writing

Recently, TBLT has been garnering more attention from academic writing practitioners. TBLT has been lauded for allowing students to explore “dialogic opportunities for the writing process,” awareness of genre, and an enhancement of students ability to “notice language rather than copy it” (Molinari, 2012, p. 25). Marashi and Dadari (2012) concluded that TBLT enhances student creativity in writing and Esfandiari’s (2012) findings point to improvements in academic reading through a task based writing approach. Several recent studies evaluate the merits and demerits of incorporating integrated tasks in academic writing (see Cumming, 2013; Knoch & Sitajalabhorn, 2013; Yu, 2013). While TBLT is increasingly being utilized in the Japanese context for writing (e.g. Goto, 2012; Horiba & Fukaya, 2012), most studies focus on speaking proficiency development.

Therefore, this study explores the potential for TBLT to facilitate abstract writing pedagogy. The tasks will draw upon Willis’ (1996) framework for TBLT with a pre-task, task-cycle (task, planning, report), and language production (analysis and practice). Since academic writing requires significant dedication of time to structure familiarization, several task cycles were completed before moving to language production (see Figure 1). Understanding that fluency in academic
discourse is not possible over one semester (Warschauer, 2002), the focus of the tasks was more on move structure than grammar and discourse. Tasks created by Swales and Feak (2009) in their volume *Abstracts and the Writing of Abstracts* were adapted for the development of tasks in this study (herein “S&F”). The task design took into account Stroud’s (2013) advice for adapting TBLT to a Japanese context by adjusting power balances in the classroom (see Table 1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Desired Effect</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Changing task design</td>
<td>Give students control of their learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Altering learning environment</td>
<td>Enhance understanding and comfort with student and facilitator roles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clarifying roles</td>
<td>Clarify expectations of students prior to undertaking tasks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discourse strategies</td>
<td>Empower students to participate more and with more confidence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonverbal strategies</td>
<td>Show students nonverbally that they possess the power in the classroom</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Power sharing strategies (adapted from Stroud, 2013)

**Method**

**Participants**

Nine students participated in the study. The difficulty of entrance exams for acceptance into the department is comparatively high with a deviation of 7.5 compared to all universities nationwide ("Saishin ban" 2013, July 27). Average TOEFL-iBT scores at the university are unofficially calculated at 78 with an average writing score of 22 (Aotani, 2013). Most students in the department continue on to graduate studies and must write English academic papers for schoolwork.

Prior to the study, students signed consent forms written in English and Japanese, which are filed with the author. They were given a copy for their records and given a chance to opt out of the study with knowledge that a lack of participation would not impact their grade.

**Questionnaire**

The students answered a questionnaire adapted from Hsieh and Liou (2008) on their experience in writing abstracts. Students were asked to:

1. Write a definition of the academic abstract
2. State knowledge on abstract uses
3. List the type of information included in abstracts (i.e. moves- see Table 2)
4. Note the number of times they had written an English abstract
5. Rate the difficulty of writing an abstract
6. Provide reasons for this ranking
7. Write an abstract for an article extensively analysed? previously in the course (herein “Previous Article”)

**Pre-task and Task Cycles**

**Pre-task - Visiting previously written abstracts**

In order for students to familiarize themselves with the genre, students compiled a mini-corpus of 10 to 15 abstracts in their field as suggested by Swales and Feak (2009). I also compiled one, therefore I serve more as “facilitator” than a “teacher” (see Table 1).
Task Cycle 1 - Understanding abstract function

**Task:** Students discussed beliefs about abstract function in small groups. I asked them to think of five or more different functions. Students then ranked the importance of four functions found in the S&F—mini-texts, screening devices, previews, indexing help (see Huckin, 2001).

**Planning:** Within the groups, students broke into pairs to practice explaining their group’s reasons for assigning certain rankings to each function.

**Reporting:** One student wrote the rankings on the blackboard. Then, one student from each group reported on behalf of the group what was discussed. I also reported my rankings and gave general comments after each group report. We also discussed all of the reports.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Typical functions of discourse in a research abstract</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Move 1</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Move 2</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Move 3</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Move 4</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Move 5</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Terminology for moves found in abstracts (adapted from Swales and Feak, 2009, p. 5)

Task Cycle 2—Understanding Move function

**Task:** Students identified the location of the 5 moves (see table 2) in an abstract. I made sure the students knew that one sentence could potentially have multiple moves. Planning and reporting followed a similar structure to the task above.

Task Cycle 3—Noticing abstract format and discourse

**Task:** The task material originated from the S&F (p. 3–8) and was assigned as preparatory work. These pages include an analysis of an abstract based on key clause, length, common verb tense, inclusion of citations, use of first-person pronouns, use of metadiscourse, use of abbreviations, and move structure. It also includes a selection of abstracts that students can choose from to analyze in the same manner. Unlike the S&F, I asked students in each group to choose the same abstract to analyze. In the following class, students shared findings in groups. Planning and reporting followed a similar structure to the tasks above.

Task Cycle 4—Specific Analysis of Moves 1

**Task:** Students were given a list of the four types of opening sentences listed in the S&F (p. 10) starting with:

- real-world phenomenon
- objective
- introduction to author’s research
- problem/uncertainty

Four example sentences were given. Students identified opening sentence types in their mini-corpuses. Then students wrote each type of opening sentence as if they were writing an abstract as the author of the Previous Article.
Planning

Students shared which opening sentence types were most common in their mini-corporuses. Then they shared their sentences in groups, and debated which opening sentences were best. I also shared my findings.

Reporting

Students shared their group’s choices with the class by typing them into a shared Google drive document.

Non-TBLT activities

In order to assess how/whether a TBLT approach impacted learning, Moves 3 through 5 were approached in different ways. Move 3, while TBLT-based, was not broken into as many sub-tasks. Move 4 and 5 were covered strictly using exercises from the text assigned for homework in more of a Present Practice Produce (PPP) framework. I provided answers to the exercises in the following class and answered any questions students had. The only questions students raised were about problematizing in the academic abstract, which I answered at length and with many examples. One grammar exercise was also included for Move 3 covering the use of that clauses in abstracts.

Language focus

Analysis: In small groups, students analyzed a student-written abstract (S&F p. 25) for points of improvement. Students shared their ideas with the class, and then I shared my suggestions.

Practice: Students were asked to write an abstract for the “Previous article” during 40 minutes of class time.

Final Questionnaires

Following the final abstract writing, the students answered a questionnaire with two parts:

1. Open-ended questions about purpose, uses, and general abstract format,
2. A five-item Likert scale survey with 25 questions focusing on influence of the TBLT approach to students’ learning.

Results

This section will provide an analysis of student abstracts, explore student perceptions about abstracts, and discuss student attitudes towards the methods used.

Abstracts

The abstracts students wrote prior to the lessons exhibited similar deficiencies in structure and genre awareness. None included all five moves. The majority were written like chronological summaries of the article coming from the perspective of a student studying it, rather than the researcher writing it. None of the abstracts problematized. While two abstracts did have four moves, they both did not include move 5. These two abstracts were the only ones to include any meta-discourse. Finally, most abstracts did not include that clauses frequently used by researchers in reporting and emphasizing findings.

The final abstracts showed dramatic improvement. Only three were missing move 5 - the rest included all five. All but one abstract used that clauses. All included opening sentences that either indirectly or directly problematized, and all used metadiscourse. More details could have been given in move 2 for all abstracts.

Student perceptions about abstracts

This section will compare the results of the open-ended surveys completed prior to and after lessons (Inquiry 1 and Inquiry 2). A significant transformation could be seen in student perceptions of abstract purpose. In Inquiry 1, most indicated that the purpose was summarization of author’s work, while in Inquiry 2, the discourse shifted from author-
to reader-focus. Although I never explicitly taught this, all of the students stated that the purpose of an abstract is to help readers decide whether to read an article.

In terms of abstract content, the number of moves that students mentioned significantly increased. In Inquiry 1, the average number of moves included was 3, while in Inquiry 2, all but three noted five moves. In Inquiry 1, many students did not seem to have the capability to break down the abstract into different moves, and wrote phrases such as, “the main argument.” Most students did not include Move 1 or 2. In Inquiry 2, students were able to differentiate between different moves. The three students that left out moves, left out either Move 1 or 5.

Finally, students expressed greater confidence in their abstract writing ability. When rating difficulty from 1 (not difficult) to 5 (difficult), the average score was 4.33 out of 5. Reasons for this included lack of experience writing abstracts, or difficulties in summarizing. In Inquiry 2, the average rating was 3. Some stated they could write abstracts more easily because of the information gained through the lessons, but some expressed that difficulties in summarization still made abstract writing challenging.

Perceptions of the lessons

The scaled questions can be separated into two categories- method and skills gained. Responses for “Strongly Agree and Agree” and “Disagree and Strongly Disagree” were grouped together because the intervals between these categories may not be equidistant and vary depending on the person.

Questions 1 and 4 were used to gauge awareness of the differences between the TBLT approach and other teaching methods. Seven students agreed that the approach was unique, while six students were uncertain if the approach was similar to other methods. These responses imply that students felt that some aspects of the TBLT approach were unique but also that it shared qualities with other approaches that they had experienced in their studies.

Questions 2, 3 and 5 examined whether students enjoyed the TBLT tasks while questions 13, 14, 15, and 16 examined students’ penchant for peer collaboration. Results were generally positive. Students felt that TBLT created a relaxed learning environment and that peer collaboration enhanced learning.

Since several TBLT practitioners tend to advocate for avoiding a focus on grammar (for example Long, 2015; Skehan, 2014), I included grammar exercises to see how students perceived them. Most student indicated that they felt they had learned something valuable from these exercises, but there were mixed results regarding doing more exercises.

The set of questions in table five measured the extent students believe they learned about abstracts and method preference (TBLT with multiple task-cycles per move—questions 18, 19, 20; Move 3 with one task-cycles—23; and traditional textbook exercises—24, 25). Comparatively, students exhibited more confidence with the aspects of the abstract writing with multiple task-cycles.

Discussion

Preliminary results indicate that a TBLT approach can improve students’ abstract writing and positively enhance confidence in their capabilities. Students also found other approaches beneficial as well. Based on an analysis of the different techniques used for teaching abstract moves, no significant differences in performance could be seen in students’ final abstracts, with the exception of Move 5 which was taught only with textbook exercises. Nonetheless, problematizing in research abstracts was also taught only with textbook exercises. The difference is that students happened to ask many questions about problematizing, which helped them understand better.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statements</th>
<th>Number SA or A</th>
<th>Percent SA or A</th>
<th>Number U</th>
<th>Percent U</th>
<th>Number D or SD</th>
<th>Percent D or SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 I think this way of studying is very unique</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 I learned a lot with this method</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 I dislike this method of studying</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 This way of studying similar to other methods</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 This way of studying creates a relaxed learning environment</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 This way of studying took too much time</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 This way of studying too little time</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 I wanted to do more grammar exercises</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 Doing grammar exercises related to writing abstracts was useful to me</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 The tasks were too complicated</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 The tasks were too easy</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 There were too many tasks to do</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 Working with my classmates to do the tasks helped me</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 I enjoyed sharing my answers with my peers</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 I enjoyed changing groups when working on the tasks</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 I wanted to work on the tasks with the same group the entire time</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17 I wanted to do more tasks before writing the abstract</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4—Responses to questions regarding the method
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statements</th>
<th>Number SA or A</th>
<th>Percent SA or A</th>
<th>Number U</th>
<th>Percent U</th>
<th>Number D or SD</th>
<th>Percent D or SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18 I understand the purposes of an abstract well</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19 I understand the different ways to write an opening sentence for an abstract</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 I understand the different ways to transition to the second sentence</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21 I understand how to compress the method description in an abstract</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22 I preferred doing the textbook exercises without discussing the answers with my peers</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23 I understand how to write the main results effectively in an abstract</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24 I understand how to write a concluding sentence of an abstract</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 I understand why academic problematize in their abstracts</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5—Responses to questions regarding skills gained

The greater amount of interaction with peers regarding a move taught through multiple task cycles could explain students’ increased confidence. Students could build confidence in their ability to make decisions about abstract structure by sharing opinions and consensus-building with classmates, first in an intimate and more casual manner, and then more formally through sharing in front of the entire class. The small class size and high levels of rapport between students could have played a role in the effectiveness of peer collaboration.

Through the TBLT approach lessons, students switched their focus to the form of the language. Research on these language-related episodes (see Swain & Lapkin, 2011 for more on LRE) points to enhanced retention of language since students are forced to concentrate on language use (R. Adams, 2006; Alwi, Adams, & Newton, 2012; Leeser, 2004; Williams, 2001). Students showed more engagement in conversation about the purposes and meaning of language choices. This appears to have facilitated a deeper understanding of the abstract genre.

As exhibited with activities involving problematizing and grammar exercises, traditional methods proved effective, though a TBLT approach appears to allow more engagement. Survey results, however, indicate that some students thought that too much time was dedicated to doing the tasks, suggesting that tasks could be more efficiently designed. Nonetheless, Nation and Newton (2009) recommend that teachers not “ally themselves with a particular method [but]... be aware of important principles of teaching and learning” (p.13). Taking this advice into
consideration, other approaches besides TBLT could possibly prove effective.

Conclusion

This study has attempted to explore the possibilities of using different approaches to abstract writing, specifically focusing on the TBLT approach. The results highlight the potential for TBLT approaches to facilitate the teaching of abstract writing to second language learners, especially if there are multiple task cycles per move. With this approach, peer collaboration time is significantly increased, allowing students to build confidence. While traditional methods also proved effective in this study, their effectiveness is dependent on students taking initiative to ask questions for clarification. Although abstract writing is commonly reserved for the graduate-level, if covered at all, through a break down of each move into several tasks undergraduate students were able to efficiently become knowledgeable about the purposes, structure, and functions of academic abstracts. This lends support to the feasibility and benefit of teaching academic writing genres at earlier stages of students’ academic careers.

While TBLT proved effective in this study, more research needs to be conducted on effective task design for abstracts. While multiple task cycles were useful to students, most students expressed a dislike for the long completion time. Therefore, a focus on how to make the tasks detailed yet more efficient could prove fruitful. Research on other pedagogical tools that can be used in isolation or in combination with TBLT could be researched further. Finally, longitudinal studies of how TBLT influences language use in abstract, and academic writing in general, could provide insight into TBLT’s effectiveness for teaching writing.

About the author

Jennifer was born in a suburb of Chicago and has lived in Japan for 12 years. After working for Peace Boat for three years in Tokyo she started teaching at universities and presently works at Kyoto University. While working to build a small-scale solar sail cargo ship, she is actively involved in supporting Ainu language revitalization. She also interprets occasionally, and loves capoeira and studying languages.

References


Matsuno, M. (2014). The writing experiences of...


Introduction

The content which teachers cover in their lessons depends greatly on what they need to prepare their students for. In Japan, entrance examinations and language proficiency tests determine a great part of it (Hughes, Krug and Vye, 2011). However, these tests emphasise receptive skills (reading and listening) as opposed to communicative skills (speaking and writing) (Tanaka and Wake, 2012). As a result, communicative skills might stay in the background. As far as writing instruction in concerned, Kobayakawa (2011) points out that even though the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) emphasises communicative skills in the curriculum, textbooks authorised by MEXT focus on controlled writing tasks and are lacking in free-writing activities. Therefore, through these activities, the development of students’ writing skills is limited. Teachers need to supplement the textbooks and provide practice for free-writing.

In my experience, low level students often find it difficult and time-consuming to create a piece of writing. In-class writing tasks are useful for motivating students to write as there is instant help and feedback from the teacher, and learners also have the opportunity to collaborate and provide feedback to each other. I have used this task with success in my first and second year university classes. However, I believe that it could be adapted to all levels of education without much effort. I have seen my students form a more positive attitude to writing in general due to this story writing project.

Preparation (less than 20 minutes)

Think about vocabulary items that you want students to include in their stories and print or write them on small pieces of paper (see Appendix 1.). I usually choose words or phrases that I would like to revise. Create one set of these word cards for each group of students. Also, prepare blank sheets of paper (I usually use B5 size) to be used as the pages of the story book.
and make sure you have coloured pens or markers available for each group. At the end, use a stapler to compile the books.

**Task Cycle**

**Pre-task (15 minutes)**

Put students into groups of three or four depending on your class size. First, explain to the students what they will have to do. Before they start the pre-task, the teacher may want to demonstrate it to provide an example and ensure learners understand what to do.

**Step 1: Practice (7-8 minutes)**

Explain to the class that they will have to create a story using the vocabulary items on the pieces of paper provided. They will add the sentences to the story one by one. Hand out word cards to each group and place them facing down. As this step serves as practice for the main task, three to four word cards are enough to make sure students understand what to do. The first student pulls a card and says a sentence using the word on the card, then everyone in the group writes the sentence down. (For example, the word on the card is *morning*. The sentence may be, *I got up at 7 o’clock in the morning.* I encourage groups to correct each other’s mistakes or consult the teacher if needed before they put the sentence in writing. They may also think about the sentence in Japanese first.

The next student does the same as the first student; pulls a card, and says a sentence making sure that there is a logical connection between his/her sentence and the previous one. I suggest to learners to use conjunctions, such as *first, then, after that, next,* and write them on the board. (For example, the next word is *e-mail*. The sentence may be *After that, I checked my e-mails.* Then, the sentence is written down by everyone in the group. This procedure is repeated until all of the vocabulary cards are used. In this step you may use the same cards as in the main task, or different ones.

**Step 2: Making decisions on the settings and main characters (7-8 minutes)**

Make decisions about the background of the story, such as the protagonist, his/her age, etc. (See Appendix 2 for a list of questions the students will have to answer.) I do this step as a whole class activity. I ask the questions and elicit answers from the students. I accept the first idea that comes up and write the answers on the board (e.g. *Japanese boy/Taro/18 years old/pet gorilla* etc.). When the class have answered all the questions, write the introductory lines of the story together or give them a sample. (For example, *Once upon a time, there was a young Japanese boy called Taro. He lived in Tokyo with his family and his pet gorilla. He loved playing computer games. One day…etc.*). With intermediate level students and above, this step might be done in groups. In that case, hand out the questions and make learners answer them by themselves.

**Main task**

**Step 1: Story creation (approx. 30 minutes)**

Hand out approximately 10-15 word cards to each group. You may simply add new cards to the ones that were used in the pre-task, or collect those back and use other ones for the main task.

Having decided the background details, students now start creating their stories in groups. They follow the same pattern as in the pre-task; pull a card, say a sentence, and then everybody writes it down. The teacher moves around the classroom, monitors students’ work and provides help when needed. This stage is accomplished when all the word slips have
been used or the teacher decides that the students have spent enough time on the activity, or have made enough sentences.

**Step 2: Making amendments to the story (10-15 minutes)**

During this stage, students are asked to read the whole text they wrote and make any amendments necessary to create a smooth, coherent and grammatically correct piece. Students may write an ending or add conjunctions. The teacher may call students’ attention to check spelling, word order, verb tenses, as well as point to mistakes and elicit correction from the group or give corrective feedback. In addition, the teacher may write some of the errors on the board and correct them with the whole class.

A variation or addition might be to swap the stories between the groups to correct and improve each other’s pieces.

**Post task (20 minutes)**

In this phase, students recycle the vocabulary items in a new context. Stories are swapped between the groups (again). Each group reads the text that they got and divides it into six or eight parts, that is, double the number of members. This way every student then works with two parts - namely two pages - of the story. The teacher hands out two sheets of blank paper to each student. These are going to be the pages of the story book. Students number the pages and write each part of the story on a separate sheet. Then they draw a picture to depict the content of that page using the markers or coloured pens provided by the teacher. Encourage learners to use English when they communicate with each other while drawing. It is recommended to write some example sentences that they could use on the board, such as *Can I borrow your pencil?*, *Do you have a black marker?*, or *Can I have the red marker, please?*.

After this, they also have to create a title page as a group. At the end, the pages are stapled together to form a book.

Optional: Look over the class textbook with your students, find out what is on the cover page, details of publishing, etc. and have them incorporate that information when they are making their books.)

**Follow-up**

There are several ways to follow-up the task. Students may present their stories to the other groups. They may be asked to write comprehension questions that the listeners will answer. Another possible follow-up activity is to use the books as the text for reading comprehension. The story books might be handed around in the class or displayed using an overhead projector. In addition, they may be used as graded readers in other classes.

**About the author**

Agnes Patko has been teaching English for six years. Currently, she teaches at Meisei University, Tokyo. Her research interests include learner development, task-based learning and motivation.

**References**


Appendix 1:
Examples of vocabulary items

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>do the ironing</th>
<th>morning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>birthday</td>
<td>go jogging</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pretty</td>
<td>suddenly</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Appendix 2:
Pre-task: questions to help create the background of the story

- Who is the main character of the story?
- What is his/ her name?
- Where is he/ she from? Is he/ she Japanese?
- Where does he/ she live?
- How old is he/ she?
- What does he/ she do?
- What is his/ her hobby?
- Does he/ she have any brothers or sisters?
- Does he/she have a pet?
- Where does the story start?
- Where is he/ she now?
- What is he/ she doing at the moment?
Lesson Plan 2
Utilizing Online Surveys in the CALL Classroom

Justin Harris
Kinki University

• Key words: Presentations, interaction, four skills, CALL
• Level: Pre-intermediate and up
• Age: High school / University level
• Preparation: 30-60 minutes
• Activity time: Three class periods
• Materials: All online and software

Introduction
“I feel like at school I receive so much input that I’m almost bursting, but I have no product to show for all of that input”

A student at a language vocational school once told me this in relation to the school’s intensive language program. Through a rigid schedule which included 16 English classes a week, students were able to make major improvements in language tests such as TOEIC, but as the illuminating quote above suggests, some felt they would also like to have something concrete to show for their hard work.

Language students in Japan often have more than enough input in language classes, but little chance to use that knowledge as output. Indeed, some students thrive on this input as it is non-threatening. However, there are many ways to increase productive opportunities in class, and here I outline a potentially stimulating way that allows students to display their creativity, use all four language skills and develop skills with technology - an online survey task.

Student-made surveys are not new to the language learning classroom, and appear as common tasks in a number of textbooks. Likewise, many teachers will be very familiar with online survey sites and may have already used such sites to survey students for their own research projects.

Preparation
For those teachers who are accustomed to using CALL in the classroom, preparation should be easy. That is not to say it won’t be easy for other teachers, but knowledge of how to create online surveys using sites such as surveymonkey.com, surveygizmo.com or any of the many online survey websites presently available is necessary. While both of the above-mentioned sites are free (for the
purposes of what is necessary for this task), a user account needs to be created before beginning. Also, part of the pre-task requires that teachers set up a simple example survey themselves, and while not completely essential, it serves as a valuable introduction for students. For teachers unfamiliar with such sites, learning the basics and making an example survey should take around 60 minutes in preparation time (and once done, it can be used endlessly for future classes). While there are many free survey making sites available, for the purposes of this lesson plan, I will refer only to surveymonkey hereafter.

Regarding the task cycle

As a task that takes place over a number of classes, this project employs a weaker approach to TBLT in that it doesn’t necessarily conform exactly to the Willis framework (Willis & Willis, 2007), and could in fact be better termed PBL (Project-based learning). However, in line with the lesson plan format for OnTask, I have fitted the full process within the ‘pre-task’, ‘task cycle’ and ‘post-task’ structure. Alternatively, the whole project could be seen as a series of mini-task cycles. In general though, and in keeping with most of the central tenets of a task, the focus here is on a ‘student-centred’ activity which allows students to ‘engage cognitive processes’ to achieve a ‘clearly defined communicative outcome’ in a ‘meaningful’ way through ‘real world language use’ (Ellis 2003).

Pre-task

In most commercial textbooks for the EFL market in Japan there is some kind of survey task to be carried out between students. Usually the idea is to have them ask each other questions about a pre-determined topic and then for them to report the results to the class. The lesson plan outlined here is basically a more student-centred and more involved survey project using online surveys.

Step 1: Use the aforementioned textbook-based survey task as the ‘launching point’ for this project. After completing the textbook-based survey in-class, explain to students that in the next class, they will create their own survey to investigate a topic of their choosing. Teachers could make this a completely free choice, or limit the range of topics, for example something related only to their area(s) of study. Teachers could also assign the topics, but student choice may make it more interesting for them. I always tell students that everyone has to do a different topic, and I have them tell me on a ‘first in, first served’ basis. Topics may include shopping, clothes, music, campus cafes etc. In my experience, this task works well if done in pairs, but the teacher could alternatively choose to have students work as individuals or in groups.

Step 2: (The first 90 minute class) In a CALL classroom (or normal classroom if students have access to laptops), have the students complete a survey that you have already made on surveymonkey.com. There is not room here to explain this process, but the website has its own tutorials and even for the uninitiated, it should only take around an hour to become accustomed to the main features needed for the task. Place the link for this example survey on Moodle or a similar learning platform, or email it to the class. This initial survey, while primarily serving to show students what kinds of questions can be created with surveymonkey, is also a good opportunity to find out some useful information about your class. I often use this chance to find out what class activities students have liked most/least so far, which language areas they want to improve on most, and which books they have liked best in the school’s ER program.

Main task

Step 1: Explain how to create a survey with surveymonkey. I walk them through this process with a PowerPoint presentation featuring screenshots, showing them how to create a user account and
how to use the basic features - and this is easier recently as there is now a Japanese interface for surveymonkey, although depending on students' language ability you may wish to have them use the English interface. Students then create questions in English for their survey. The free version of surveymonkey allows up to ten questions, and it may be a good idea to set a minimum number of questions to avoid students creating only one or two. As they will subsequently be presenting the results of their survey to the class, I usually suggest at least six questions to give them enough material to report on.

**Step 2:** Have students place the link for their completed survey on the class Moodle page, or if you emailed the initial link to them, they can simply “reply to all”. In my experience, the pre-task, along with the first two steps in the main task, should take around 90 minutes. Therefore the completion of this step would constitute the end of the first 90-minute class.

**Step 3:** Students complete all of the surveys created by others. This step could either be assigned as homework for students to complete prior to the next class, or done in-class. Assigning as homework is recommended because that will allow them more time for presentation preparation in the second class.

**Step 4:** *(The second 90 minute class)* Do a short presentation in the class on the results of your initial example survey, using presentation software such as Powerpoint including charts and graphs for the data. An example presentation by the teacher also adds to teacher preparation time, however once done, this can be easily edited for future classes.

**Step 5:** Students then check the results from their own surveys. This is the point of the process that many students have mentioned as being the most memorable. In a follow-up survey to students after completion of the task, in answer to the question “What did you enjoy most about the project”, one of the most commonly mentioned points was about “knowing other students opinions” or “understanding that everyone has such different opinions”.

**Step 6:** Have students collate the results for their survey into a presentation platform such as Powerpoint or Prezi. While in past years in Japan, this may have entailed teaching university students to use such software, most students coming into universities these days have had the benefit of some IT preparation at high school and also in the first year or semester of most universities so it shouldn’t be necessary to go over this aspect of the task. In a worst case scenario, if one student doesn’t appear to know how to use Powerpoint or Excel, their partner probably will and can show them themselves. Alternatively you could have them write a written report on their findings. Steps 4 to 6 will probably take a full class, and especially so if Step 3 was not homework and instead done in this second class. Tell students that they should complete their presentation and practice it as homework.

**Step 7:** *(The third 90 minute class)* Students present their findings to the class. This can be in standard class fronted presentations or as a Carousel presentation *(Toland & Crawford, 2012)* in a computer room. The time allotted for the presentations depends on the students, but I have found five minutes is a reasonable goal to aim for with pre-intermediate/intermediate students. One way to make sure that the audience remains attentive is to have each pair provide two questions that the audience has to answer while listening (the answers for which are mentioned somewhere during the presentation). I usually have each pair provide these questions to me in the second class, and then I create a worksheet for all students, which includes all of the questions. The audience members have to answer each question while watching and then hand in this sheet at the end of the presentations.

**Post-task**

As this project could be considered ‘TBLT-informed’ rather than showing strict adherence to the
Willis model as explained above, teachers could consider the project completed at step 6. However, some potentially rewarding post-task activities could easily be extended into the second half of the 3rd lesson or a following lesson. For example, teachers could provide students with a transcript of their own example presentation used in step 4 of the main task. Students could then compare and contrast with their presentation transcript and try to improve theirs based on this ‘model presentation’. Teachers could extend this further by having students present this new, improved version to another pair.

**Issues and possible modifications**

A possible issue that may arise with this task is if students have a technical issue that the teacher is unable to address. Preparation and a good working knowledge of the survey making site being used as well as the presentation platforms, is therefore important.

While this lesson plan focussed on surveymonkey, there are many other survey websites available. The aforementioned surveygizmo.com is one option, along with poll daddy.com, while there are also dedicated Japanese sites such as enqmaker.com and enquete.ne.jp. For a shorter survey based on just one simple question, similar to a newspaper poll, try doodle.com.

**Conclusion**

In language education, one of the most common tools for research is that of the online survey. It would be a rare occurrence for a teacher not to have at least completed an online survey, and probably the same can be said of the language student in Japan. Turning this around so that students are the ones doing the surveying gives them the chance to use creativity and technology and to see very real results from their peers.

In end of academic year surveys that I give to students, the online survey task is very often mentioned as being the most useful and enjoyable task. This is probably because of the nature of the project, which combines all four skills in interlocking ways, puts the students interest at the centre, allows students to learn about what their peers think, and is unique and enjoyable.

**About the author**

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**Reference**


Lesson Plan 3
Autobiographical Presentation Project

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• Key words: Presentation, project-based, CALL
• Level: Pre-intermediate and up
• Age: Junior high school and up
• Preparation time: At least 2 hours
• Activity time: A minimum of three 90-min class periods
• Materials: Computers/mobile devices and digital photographs or alternatively, paper and print photographs

Introduction

A project in the language classroom can be seen as a meta-task that is composed of stages - planning, developing and presenting - and in which each stage is a task cycle unto itself.

This lesson is an individual project that can be accomplished within two to three 90-minute periods, but which can also easily be made longer and more complex. Simply put, the project involves students preparing an autobiographical presentation and then presenting for multiple partners. I have always done this project in a computer lab, but it can be adapted for use with mobile devices, or as a completely paper-based project in a standard classroom.

From my experience, students enjoy preparing and sharing something with a tangible product; and as this project is autobiographical in nature, it is an appropriate way to start a course. Students can learn something interesting about their classmates, and the teacher can get to know the students both in terms of language ability and as individuals.

Preparation

You will need to prepare:

1. An interview form or worksheet for the introduction stage of the project. In a computer lab, this could take the form of a Word file or online form. The complexity of the interview will depend on learner level and how much time you plan to spend on it. The interview could cover topics like place and date of birth, family composition, early childhood memories,
favorite subjects/sports/activities at each level of schooling, etc. The idea is to gather biographical information about a partner, and when covering this project in three 90-minute lessons, the interview task cycle should be simple enough to accomplish within about 45 minutes.

2. A model presentation with accompanying listening task materials. This will potentially be the most time-consuming part of preparation. The presentation you prepare should be autobiographical, but with a specific thematic focus. The two models I have prepared and used with my classes are ‘My Life in Four Chapters,’ which is organized in terms of the four places I have lived—Colorado, Minnesota, Connecticut, and Kyoto—and ‘My Life in Dogs,’ in which I describe my life in terms of the many dogs I have lived with. Ideally your presentation will use photographs from your personal collection. If you are going to present live (see Model Project below), you can prepare a Powerpoint or a poster-style presentation. An alternative format is to create a digital slideshow with audio. For example, you can record and embed audio tracks in a Powerpoint and then save it in movie format, or use an application like iMovie or Windows Live Movie Maker. The listening task that accompanies your presentation will need to be tailored to your students’ level. Ideally it will focus their attention on vocabulary or language forms that you think will be useful for them to incorporate into their own autobiographies. In my classes, I fashion the listening tasks as Moodle quizzes with embedded video. Students can work at their own pace and receive instantaneous feedback on their efforts.

“Pre-Task” Task Cycle

(First 90-minute class) This task cycle has two objectives: 1) to introduce the topic of the project and get students to begin thinking about (auto)biography; and 2) to present a model of the kind of product students will be creating.

Part 1: Interview

Pre-Task

Read through the interview items with the students, clarifying the meaning as necessary. Give example answers and encourage students to mentally prepare their own answers. See Appendix for example questions.

Main Task

Students interview each other in pairs and take notes about their partner’s answers. You can circulate and offer assistance or encourage students to avoid using their L1.

Report

When the interviews have finished, depending on the level of your students, either instruct the students to mentally prepare a summary of what they have learned about their partner, or have them actually compose a short paragraph about their partner. In either case, start by presenting a simple model of what you might expect them to come up with. When students are ready, have them report (or read their compositions to) another classmate. Finally, call on several students to report to the class. This is an opportunity to focus on any language issues that arise.
Part 2: Model Project

Pre-task

Explain to the students what “autobiography” means, and that they will be creating an autobiographical presentation. Tell them that they will start by watching your model presentation and completing a listening task. Go through the items on the listening task form or worksheet and clarify meanings as necessary.

Main Task

Depending on the format you have chosen for your presentation, students either watch you present live and complete the listening task, or watch a video or digital slideshow with accompanying audio track. The advantage of the former is that students can get a better idea of what they will actually be doing. The advantage of the latter is that students can work at their own pace, repeating the audio as often as necessary.

Post-task

Have students check their answers with a partner before going through the answers as a class, explaining or clarifying any unclear points in the process. Take this opportunity to draw students’ attention to the theme you used as an organizational device for your autobiography. In preparation for the next lesson, have students choose a theme by which they will organize their autobiography, and tell them to prepare photographs to use in assembling their presentations.

“Main Task” Task Cycle

(Second and possibly third 90-minute lessons, depending on the complexity and length of student presentations.) In this task cycle, students create and present their autobiographies.

Pre-task

As necessary, show students how to use the requisite software (e.g., Powerpoint). I instruct students to start by planning their sequence of slides first, to serve as a storyboard for their talk, and then prepare speaker notes to go with each slide.

Main Task 1

Students prepare their presentations. If you are in a CALL classroom and your model presentation is in video format, have students refer back to the model as necessary. Provide assistance when needed while students compose. If you are working in a computer lab, one alternative is to use Google Slides, which can be shared with students even if they do not have a Google account. This makes collaborative editing possible, so that as students work you can simultaneously add comments to their slides and scripts.

Main Task 2

When students are ready to present, the presentation round-robin begins. In terms of procedure, this resembles Toland and Crawford’s carousel mini-presentations (2012). The point is to have students present multiple times, each time for a different partner. At any one time, half of the class is simultaneously presenting for the other half. This maximizes task repetition, giving students lots of opportunity for practice. And because students present for an audience of one (or at most two, since a group of three may be necessary when working with an odd number of students), the
level of anxiety associated with presentation is greatly reduced. In addition, listeners naturally give much fuller attention to the presenter when the exchange is one-on-one, resulting in a more meaningful communicative exchange.

Logistically speaking, the actual round-robin procedure can be organized in various ways depending on class size and whether or not you are using computers. In a CALL classroom, you can have all student presentations saved in a local network drive, in cloud storage, or uploaded to a Moodle forum; i.e. any arrangement that will make it easy to open all presentations from any given computer. Students take turns presenting with a partner, and then form new pairings, and the process is repeated as many times as time permits. One easy way to orchestrate formation of pairings is to have half the class in stationary positions while the other half rotate from station to station.

As students present, you can circulate and take notes. Then, in the pause between rounds, you may want to offer some coaching tips to the class as a whole on how to present more effectively, based on what you have observed from the previous round. Encouraging students to rely less and less on their notes is always a good idea. Ideally, you should also incorporate a feedback system that allows students to give feedback to their partner after each round. This could be accomplished in any number of ways, such as a paper-based form, an online forum, blogs, online surveys and so on. A simple format I like to use is to require the students to comment on what they liked about the presentation, and to offer at least one piece of advice on how it could be improved.

Conclusion

As mentioned in the introduction, this project can be done to varying degrees of depth and complexity. To accomplish it in two 90-minute periods, student presentations would need to be very simple and short. To further extend the project and add another dimension of task repetition and recycling of the language, you can also have students record their talks and create narrated videos or slideshows. These can then be uploaded to a course page and viewed (and commented on) by students who have not seen them yet, as well as making it easy for the teacher to evaluate each student’s work.

About the Author

Henry Foster presently teaches at Kyoto Tachibana University. His research interests include CALL, vocabulary acquisition, project-based learning and TBLT.

References


Appendix: Example questions

• What is your name?
• When and where were you born?
• Tell me about your family. Who did you live with as a child? Did you have any pets?
• What do you remember about your early childhood?
• How did you spend your free time when you were in elementary school? How about in junior and senior high school?
• What subjects did you like in school? Why? What subjects did you dislike? Why?
• What sports or club activities, etc., have you done?
OnTask welcomes submissions of articles concerning TBLT, particularly with reference to the Japanese context.

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

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