Task-Based Language Teaching

Theory and Practice

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1 *The Pedagogic Background to Task-Based Language Teaching*

The overall purpose of the chapter is to introduce key issues in task-based language teaching (TBLT), which will be taken up in subsequent chapters. We first consider initial proposals for a task-based approach in the 1980s. We then examine how TBLT subsequently developed, focusing on the design of a task-based syllabus and the methodology for implementing tasks. We briefly consider how TBLT has been adapted to computer-mediated (CM) environments and also look at task-based assessment. We discuss what evaluation studies have shown about the effectiveness of TBLT and the problems that teachers face in implementing it. The chapter concludes with a brief discussion of the criticisms that have been levelled at TBLT.

Starting Points

The importance of including tasks in a language curriculum was established in the communicative language teaching (CLT) movement of the 1970s and 1980s. TBLT grew out of this movement, with further input from early research in second language acquisition (SLA), which led to a questioning of the structural approach to teaching languages where a language is broken down into bits to be taught sequentially one at a time.

CLT

CLT drew on theories of language that emphasized communicative competence (Hymes, 1971) and that viewed language as functional in nature (Halliday, 1973). These theories led to the recognition that 'there is more to the business of communicating than the ability to produce grammatically correct utterances' (Johnson, 1982) and to the idea of replacing a traditional structural syllabus with a notional syllabus (Wilkins, 1976). In other words, there was a move away from

c) Did they let you go on holiday on your own?
d) When you went out did you always have to tell them where you were going?
e) Did you always have to do your homework before supper?
f) Did your parents make you help about the house?
g) What jobs did they make you do?
h) Did you have to wash the car?

PREPARATION: Teacher makes sure that learners understand the questionnaire.

TASK: Learners work in groups to answer the questions.

PLANNING: Teacher tells learners that a spokesperson from each group will be asked to report the results of their discussion to the class as a whole. Learners are given time to help the spokesperson plan the report.

REPORT: Spokespersons for two or three of the groups deliver their reports. The other groups listen and make notes comparing the report with their own results. Teacher leads a round-up discussion which will include contributions from groups which did not report.

2 Discussion: *Whose parents were the strictest?*

TASK: Learners work in groups to decide which of them had the strictest parents.

PLANNING: Teacher tells learners that a spokesperson from each group will be asked to report the results of their discussion to the class as a whole. Learners are given time to help the spokesperson plan the report.

REPORT: Spokespersons for two or three of the groups deliver their reports. The other groups listen and decide which parents were the strictest. Teacher leads a round-up discussion which will include contributions from groups which did not report.

3 Listening: Tim made recordings of some of his friends talking about how strict their parents were. For example:

My Dad is a quiet man really, so he didn't really make me do much at home. He sometimes asked me to wash his car or cut the grass, but I was never forced to do it, and I could usually get some pocket money for it as well. I think my Mum was also pretty easy-going; she let me stay out late with my friends. As long as she knew where I was, she wouldn't mind so much what I did.

4 **Language practice:**

For the form-focused work, the final stage in a task-based cycle, activities focusing on expressions of permission and compulsion were devised.