

Volume-1, Issue-VI, Sept- 2017

Research maGma

An International Multidisciplinary Journal

CONFERENCE

of

**Thiruvalluvar University
College of Arts & Science, Arakkonam.**

on

**"EMERGING TRENDS IN ENGLISH
LANGUAGE & LITERATURE"**



Research maGma

An International Multidisciplinary Journal

ISSN NO- 2456-7078 IMPACT FACTOR- 4.520 VOLUME-1, ISSUE-7, SEPT-2017

TASK-BASED LANGUAGE TEACHING APPROACH AND ITS IMPLEMENTATION IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING SCENARIO IN INDIA

Bibha Devi

Research Scholar, Department of English Language Teaching, Gauhati University.

ABSTRACT

Task-Based Language Teaching has emerged as an effective approach towards teaching language to learners of any age. Unfortunately, it has been seen that the practice of lecture based method and teacher centered teaching of English still persists in the ELT scenario in India. This paper discusses various aspects of Task-Based Language Teaching such as, the principles on which this approach is based, its characteristics, its components, etc. Next, it illustrates the various stages of task design. Also, it analyses some effective tasks so that similar tasks can be designed. Besides, it critically analyses one activity which is very traditional in its approach and gives suggestions for its modification as a task. It is hoped that this paper will give some ideas about teaching English following TBLT and how tasks should be designed for efficient English language teaching.

INTRODUCTION

Learning emerges more easily and efficiently through active participation by the learners in the learning process and interaction among them. In the existing scenario of English language teaching in India, efforts to make the learners more involved in the learning process is emerging. Still, there is a lot of scope for improvement. It should be ensured that the teaching learning process is not passive. Recent studies have proved that Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT). Approach provides ample opportunities to the learners for learning the language by actively participating in the class. An attempt has been made in this paper to explore how effective tasks can be designed and TBLT can be implemented for effective teaching of English as a second language.

TASK-BASED LANGUAGE TEACHING (TBLT)

TBLT originates from Dewey's view about the importance of experience for effective learning (Ellis, 2009) and emphasizes purposeful and functional language use by using real-life tasks in classrooms for learners to experience learning. Central to this approach is the task. Richards and

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Rodgers define TBLT as “an approach based on the use of tasks as the core unit of planning and instruction in language teaching”. It is assumed that in TBLT, the focus is on the process of doing the task, the skills and techniques involved. Communication and meaning are emphasized in the accomplishment of a task goal. Activities of a task are sequenced in terms of their difficulty. This difficulty of tasks, further, depends on factors like the level of language, the cognitive complexity of the task, the degree of support available, learners’ exposure to the language, etc. Moreover, this approach is learner centred. Tasks are based on the needs of the language learners. Thus, TBLT attempts to provide learners with opportunities and target language required to communicate more effectively in real life. The tasks are based on „real world? situations that can prepare natural communication outside the classroom settings.

CHARACTERISTICS OF TBLT

The TBLT approach to language teaching is unique because of the following features:

i. Use of everyday language: TBLT engages learners with tasks that have everyday language as their focus. In this way, the learners get opportunities to use authentic language. It builds confidence in the learners to use the target language, eventually, outside the classroom. Thus, TBLT is very important in our situation where the learners get few opportunities to practice target language outside the classroom.

ii. Teacher as an observer: In TBLT, the role of the teacher during the execution of a task is that of an observer so that naturalistic language use is fostered. The learners get freedom in using the target language for communicating. The learners interact naturally.

iii. Meaning based: In a task, the focus is on meaning rather than on the form. Meaning is negotiated in order to attain the communicative purpose. This meaning negotiation provides opportunities for naturalistic language use. Jeon and Hahn emphasize that language learning, which is a developmental process, promotes communication and social interaction. According to them, learners learn the target language more effectively when they are naturally exposed to meaningful task-based activities. (Jeon and Hahn, 2006:125). It is believed that when learners are engaged in a task work, they get a better context for the activation of learning processes than form-focused activities, and hence provides better opportunities for language learning to take place. Tasks require the learners to negotiate meaning and engage in naturalistic and meaningful communication which, ultimately, results in language learning. However, some researchers, e.g. Ellis, emphasize that focus on form is also compatible with a primary focus on meaning

iv. Completion of a task is the goal: Successful accomplishment of the task is the ultimate goal of each task. This motivates the learners. In TBLT, learners actively participate in completing tasks and monitor their performance. Also, they take risks in performing tasks for which they may lack complete linguistic resources or they may not have familiarity but have to use reflection. Some tasks may allow them to be creative and innovative as TBLT is learner centred. Teachers also play a vital role in the process of successful task completion. They facilitate learning; they select and modify or design new tasks and give demonstrations of how to do them successfully. Moreover, teachers observe and analyse learners’

behaviour during task performance and give required advice.

ii. The role of instructional materials

iii. TBLT relies on an adequate supply of suitable classroom tasks. Such tasks may require considerable time, resources, imagination, etc. The following materials are very useful as resources for tasks

1. Pedagogic materials which include:

- ✦ texts containing task-based activities
- ✦ teacher resource books containing representative sample task activities
- ✦ task collections in the form of textbooks

2. **Realia** that can be used for presenting the input language for a task are authentic materials, such as, internet, newspapers, television, etc.

Task: The core element of Task-based language teaching (TBLT)

The notion of "Task" is the central unit of planning and teaching in Task-based language teaching. A task is an activity or goal that is carried out using the target language to negotiate meaning. It involves the learners in naturalistic and meaningful communication. Thus, meaning is the foci of a task. Tasks provide opportunities of authentic language use. Tasks can be classified into pedagogical tasks, e.g. information gap activities and non-pedagogical tasks, e.g. booking a hotel room, etc. *Common elements of tasks are: meaning, target language, and an outcome.*

Nunan (2004) defines a task as, "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." Further, he categorises tasks as two types - a) **real-world tasks, and b) pedagogical tasks.**

Ellis (2009) discusses four additional criteria that may distinguish a pedagogical task from a regular language-teaching activity. According to him, an activity in a pedagogical task should centre on meaning and there should be some kind of gap which make such a demand on the learners that they reflect on their own linguistic and non-linguistic resources and/or prior experience to complete the activity.

According to Skehan, "Tasks are activities which have meaning as their primary focus. Success in tasks is evaluated in terms of achievement of an outcome, and tasks generally bear some resemblance to real-life language use."

Based on the different views as to what constitutes a task many descriptions of basic task types in TBLT have been developed. Breen gives this description of a task, "A language learning task can be regarded as a springboard of learning work. In a broad sense, it is a structured plan for the provision of opportunities for the refinement of knowledge and capabilities entailed in a in a new language and its use during communication. Such a work plan will have its own particular objective, appropriate content which is to be worked upon, and a procedure...any language test can be seen within the spectrum of

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tasks. All materials designed for language teaching- through their particular organization of content and the working procedures they assume or propose for the learning of content – can be seen as compendia of tasks."

Willis proposes six task types. These task types are - listing, ordering and sorting, comparing, problem solving, sharing personal experiences, and creative tasks.

Pica, Kanagy, and Falodun (1993) classify tasks into the following five types. These types of tasks are according to how learners interact among themselves and with the text generated during the task accomplishment.

- ✦ Jigsaw tasks- Learners have to combine different pieces of information to form a whole.
- ✦ Information-gap tasks- one learner/ group of learners has one set of information and at the same time another learner/or group has a corresponding set of information. Each party has to negotiate and find out what the other party's information is in order to complete an activity.
- ✦ Problem-solving tasks- Learners are given a problem and a set of information. They must arrive at a solution to the problem.
- ✦ Decision-making tasks- Learners are presented with an issue and a number of possible outcomes. They must choose one solution through negotiation and discussion.
- ✦ Opinion exchange tasks- Learners discuss among themselves and exchange their views on a given topic. In such a task, learners are not always expected to reach an agreement.

STAGES OF A TASK BASED LESSON

In a task based lesson commonly three stages are found.

In TBLT each task consists of three main stages- one or more pre-task activity/ies, a task activity, and one or more post-task activity/ies. The first stage is known as "pre-task". At this stage, teachers and learners undertake activities that will lead to the actual task, e.g. the learners can plan the performance of the task. An activity similar to the task activity is done. This stage *prepares the learners to perform the task in such a way that facilitate language learning*. This stage is supposed to motivate the learners to perform the actual task. It should help in performing the task. The learners should be given an illustration of what the learners will be required to do and the nature of the outcome they will arrive at.

The second stage, "during task" focuses on the task itself. In doing a task the learners use whatever language they already have to express themselves. During the task time the teacher monitors the class encouraging in a supportive way every learner's attempts at communication in the target language. Though the teacher helps learners in formulating what they want to say, at this stage they will not intervene to correct errors of form. At this stage the *emphasis is on building confidence and developing fluency in using the second language*. The learners may have to work under time pressure. Various instructional techniques are employed at this stage.

Then, the learners prepare themselves for the next stage when they will have to report briefly to the whole class how they did the task and what the outcome was. For this every group/pair is given time to draft and rehearse what they want to write or say. The teacher helps them by advising them on language, correcting their errors, etc. At this stage, the *emphasis is on clarity, organization, and accuracy that is appropriate for public presentation*. Finally, some groups/pairs report briefly or in full to the class so that everyone can compare their outcomes. While the rest of the class comment and add extra points or take notes. The teacher comments on the content of the reports.

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Finally, the "post-task" stage involves strategies for *following up the task performance*. It can be done in three ways - by providing an opportunity to repeat the task performance, by reflecting on the task performance, and by reflecting on the forms that were problematic for the learner during the task performance.

However, only the "during-task" stage is obligatory in TBLT. The "pre-task" and "post-task" stages, nevertheless, help in ensuring the maximum efficacy of the task leading to language learning.

ILLUSTRATION OF A TASK

Following is a demonstration of a task from the book "Further Ahead- A communication skills course for Business English" by Sarah Jones- Macziola and Greg White. This book has been used as a textbook in the Five Year Integrated M.Com. course run by the Department of Commerce of Gauhati University.

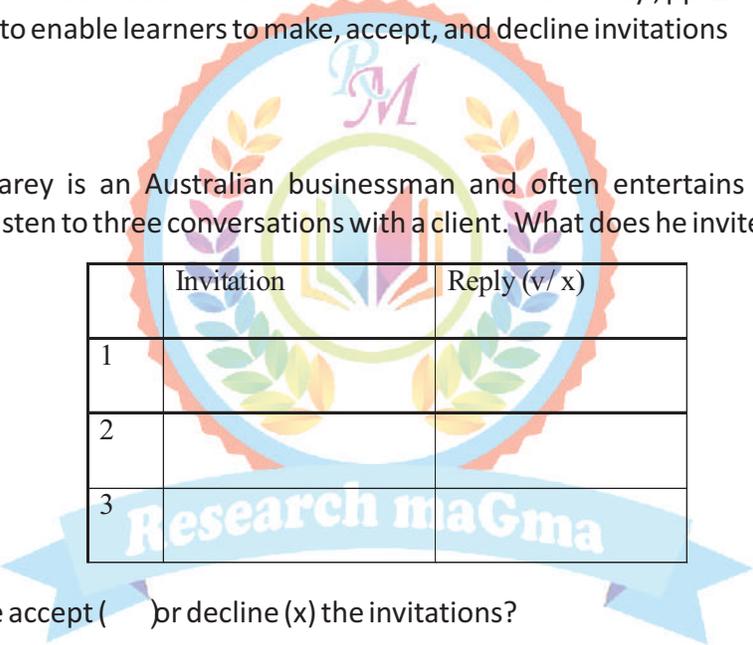
Description of a task: This task has been taken from Unit 4- 'Work and Play', pp. 23.

Objective of the task: to enable learners to make, accept, and decline invitations

PRE-TASK:

"Listening activity:

B. Malcom Carey is an Australian businessman and often entertains clients who visit his company in Sydney. Listen to three conversations with a client. What does he invite her to do?



	Invitation	Reply (v/ x)
1		
2		
3		

Listen again. Does she accept () or decline (x) the invitations?

E.g. Conversation one

Carey: *Would you like to have dinner with me tonight?*

Hawley: *That's very nice of you, but I'm afraid I am still a little jet lagged from my trip and I'd like to make it an early night.*

Carey: Perhaps sometime later in the week?

Hawley: Yes, that would be nice. Thank you.

DURING TASK:

C. Study these ways of making, accepting and declining invitations.

Inviting

Would you like to have dinner with me tonight?

How about taking a harbor cruise?

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ACCEPTING

I'd love to
That sounds nice.
That would be great.

DECLINING

I'm afraid
I'm leaving tomorrow.
I'm visiting a client.
I have a meeting.

Now practise making invitations with a partner like this

Make an Invitation .



Decline. Give a reason.



Make an alternative invitation.



Accept.

D. Practice making more invitations. Learner A looks at File 11 on page 116 and Learner B looks at File 12 on page 121.



You have now been in Sydney for one week and your business partner, Chris James, is coming to join you. You have a free weekend before you start a busy round of meetings on Monday. Tell your partner about some of the things you have done and seen and make suggestions for the weekend.

File 12

You are Chris James

You've just arrived in Sydney to join your business partner Pat Barton , who has already been there a week .You have a free weekend before you start a busy round of meetings on Monday. You have to see things, but you also need to recover from the flight and relax a little."

Author's comment: In the above task, the pre-task C motivates the learners to listen to a conversation and find out the correct answers.

These conversations, Conversation one, for example, also presents some phrases and sentences that would be required to perform the actual task. Such as, "Would you like to have dinner with me tonight?" (For making an invitation)

Next, in activity C, the learners have been provided with some phrases that can be used for making an invitation, accepting it or declining it, viz. "How about taking a harbor cruise?", for making,

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"That sounds nice" for accepting, "I'm afraid, I'm visiting a client" for declining an invitation. This language input helps the learners in doing the activity where they have been asked to make an invitation, decline it, then, again make an alternative invitation and finally to accept it. This activity requires the learners to work in pairs. This will generate interaction among the learners. Finally, in the activity given in D, the learners are asked to practise making more invitations. This is an information gap activity where the learners work in pairs. The situation is given to them. The teacher will clarify the instructions for the task and help the learners by providing partial demonstration of task procedures. If time pressure is given, then the task will be more effective.

BENEFITS AND CHALLENGES OF TASK-BASED LANGUAGE TEACHING

Task-based language teaching provides learners with authentic situations, authentic language forms, a meaningful purpose, and ample opportunities to interact with other learners. Some benefits of TBLT are, viz., it provides a context for "natural" learning within the classroom, it motivates the learners in learning the target language by actively engaging themselves in the task, successful accomplishment of tasks develops a feeling of confidence in the learners in using the target language, it focuses more on developing communicative competence of the learner than on accuracy. However, accuracy is not completely disregarded.

Although TBLT has many benefits, it is not free of challenges. Some common challenges that are faced in the implementation of TBLT are – it demands a high level of creativity, the teacher is deemed to be very dynamic, limited access to resources is a serious impediment, paucity of time is also a great challenge, and lack of proper training is another obstacle. Moreover, acceptability by the learners also affects the efficacy of the approach.

Learners may, at first, refuse or object to Task Based Language Learning as this type of instruction is not familiar to them.

THE EXISTING SITUATION

It is true that applying TBLT leads to effective language teaching. However, in reality, TBLT is practised only in very limited classroom situations. At this point, the author would like to cite an example from an existing textbook prescribed for the undergraduate level BBA course of Guru Gobind Singh Indraprastha University, New Delhi. The name of the textbook is *PERSONALITY DEVELOPMENT AND COMMUNICATION SKILLS*. It has been authored by C.B. Gupta.

Description of an activity: In Unit III, chapter 14, pp. 14.3, of this book hints for drafting a letter of enquiry and replies to enquiries have been discussed, e.g.,

"a. State the purpose of your letter, whether you need goods, services or information. (for drafting a letter of enquiry)

b. Thank the buyer for his letter and show appreciation for his interest in your firm, its product or services, etc. (for drafting a reply)

Then few samples are given in pages 14.4, 14.5, 14.6, 14.7, and 14.8. Then, in the exercise section the following questions are given on page no. 14.41 -

8. As a librarian of your college draft a letter of enquiry to a publisher asking for their latest catalogues and rates of discount offered to libraries.

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9. Draft a reply to the above enquiry."

Author's comment: This way of introducing a topic is very traditional. The topic is related to writing, that too, writing for business communication. It has a lot of scope for involving learners in the learning process through TBLT. In this case, even if the textbook does not provide the learners any opportunity of learning through TBLT, a teacher can make their teaching very effective if they are aware of the TBLT approach. (First, by providing some letters of enquiry as input and asking various reading comprehension questions like: what the purposes of each of these letters are, what are the specific thing that the writers have mentioned that will help the addressees in replying to them with proper information. Next, asking them to complete one or two incomplete letters of enquiry. Finally, they can be asked to draft a letter of enquiry. The learners can be asked to work in pairs or small groups.). So, teacher training is very crucial for developing such awareness.

Description of an activity: Let's look at another example from the book *First Steps in Academic Writing, Second Edition* by Ann Houge. In Chapter 5, *Stating Reasons and Using Examples, Part 1 Organization*, pp.124, a model paragraph is given and some questions are asked on the some aspects of writing based on that paragraph. Such as, "What is the title of the paragraph? How many reasons are given? What words introduce these reasons? How many examples are given for each reason? What words tell you that these are examples?" etc. Next, on pp 125, the author explains with examples from the model paragraph, why it was necessary to give reasons and support each reason by giving specific examples in this paragraph, how that was done in the paragraph. After this, in Practice 1, the following activities are given:

"A. Work with a partner. Think of two specific examples for each reason ...

First, a topic sentence is given-

Joe's Diner is the best restaurant in town.

Then two reasons are given-

1 st reason: A. The food is delicious

Example1: Joe's double cheeseburger is juicy and full of flavor

Example 2:

For the next activity B, only the topic sentence is given and the learners are asked to write both reasons and examples.

Author's comment: The above example is task based and involves the learners. First, they get an input in the form of the model paragraph. Next, in Practice 1, they are applying what they have learnt in the previous activity, i.e., while answering the questions about the model paragraph.

CONCLUSION

This paper has discussed various aspects of Task- Based Language Teaching approach, such as, the characteristics of this approach, various factors that influence TBLT, etc. The notion of a 'task' has been discussed in detail. The illustration of the activities for the various stages of a task is hoped to provide a better understanding and generate more ideas on how tasks can be designed for teaching the target language. TBLT promotes communication and authentic language use in second language classrooms. This feature of TBLT makes it more effective as a teaching approach in the Second Language

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Teaching context. Also, less teacher control boosts confidence in learners. Further, meaningful and authentic context provided as input and successful task performance results in motivation on the part of the learners in the learning process. All these, ultimately, result in better language learning. This paper attempted to emphasize this aspect of TBLT. However, there is a need to modify the existing language teaching scenario so that Task Based Language Teaching approach can be adopted to maximize language learning by the learners. Teacher training is very crucial so that the challenges which this approach poses can be overcome.

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