Task-Based Language Teaching in India by Mahar Attar and S.S.Chopra

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Abstract

The position of English in India is gaining more and more impetus, because Indians themselves felt the need of English for a variety of purposes such as education, business, and administration, hence the teaching and learning of English has increased phenomenally. But In order to teach a language more effectively, and towards the goals of proficiency, it is necessary for prospective teachers to be conversant with the theories, approaches and methods of teaching: i.e. what should be taught and how it should be taught.

The attitude that second and foreign language teachers had, towards teaching methods and classroom techniques varied, when the teacher-centered lecturing approaches gave way to the more student-centered ones. Task based approach as a practical and flexible approach is one of them. The purpose of this article is to explain task-based language teaching, which is one of the analytical approaches, popularized by N. Prabhu. It also explains principles of task based

teaching and how tasks are related to communicative language teaching. The paper also analyzes a framework for task based teaching.

Introduction

English, as one of the foremost languages in the world, is the medium of International communication. Although, it does not function as the mother tongue of any section of the population, there are small sections of population that speak it with native proficiency. English plays a very important role in education, business and administration. It is the medium of instruction for higher education. People have a great motivation to learn. In large cities, like Mumbai exposure to English is considerable-this becomes evident through English language newspapers, shop signs, street names, announcements at stations and other public places.

However, in order to teach English more effectively and towards the goals of proficiency, the teacher of English must know how to teach it more effectively, efficiently and economically, given the limited time and facilities available. The teacher must know the principles followed in drawing up the syllabus and should have an awareness of the grounds on which the preferred choice is made.

Task based teaching: Principles, definitions ….

In 1976, the British applied linguist David Willkins, made distinction in syllabus design, and bifurcated it as synthetic approaches and analytical approaches. In synthetic approaches, the language to be taught is first analyzed and broken down into its basic parts. Different parts of language are taught and introduced separately, step by step, so that acquisition takes place as a process of gradual accumulation of parts until the whole structure of language is built-up. Such approaches belong to the traditional way of organizing the syllabus. In analytical approaches units of language behavior are the starting point in syllabus and course design, because the learners analyze or breakdown the holistic 'chunks' of language which are presented to them. Task based language teaching and learning grew out of this alternative approach to language pedagogy. Task based teaching was popularized by N. Prabhu while working in Bangalore,

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India. Prabhu (1987), deserves credit for originating the task – based teaching and learning, based on the concept that effective learning occurs when students are fully engaged in language tasks , rather than just learning about language. Task based learning offers a holistic language experience. It can be traced back to Hymes(1972), who proposed that knowing a language involved more than knowing a set of grammatical, lexical, and phonological rules. In order to use the language effectively learners need to develop communicative competence—the ability to use the language they are learning, appropriately, in a given social encounter. Hymes' notion of communicative competence was elaborated by a number of practice-oriented language educators, most notably by Canale and Swain (1980) who contended that communicative competence comprises grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence, and strategic competence.

The notion of "task" (as Morley, 1991 noted), has developed out of communicative teaching and materials production. Task oriented teaching is defined as teaching which provides actual meaning. The overall goal in task based classes is to get the students to use the language. At first the students have to comprehend then produce some verbal or non-verbal responses by their understanding. In task based classes, syllabus content and instructional processes are selected and based on communicative tasks which learners will need outside the classroom. Nunan (1989: 10) defines "task" as: "a piece of classroom work which involves learners in comprehending, producing or interacting in the target language while their attention is principally focused on meaning rather than form." Willis, J. (1996: 53) gives the meaning of "task" as: "a goal-oriented activity in which learners use language to achieve a real outcome." So tasks are activities that require learners to arrive at an outcome from given information through some process of thought, and which allows teachers to control and regulate that process.

One of the most important roles that a task can play is providing comprehensible input and promoting communicative interaction among the learners. Interaction is a very effective way for learners to obtain data for language learning and interactive tasks can promote learners' negotiation of meaning and facilitate the development of language. (see Gass, 1997; Long, 1996).

Analyzing a framework for task-based teaching

There are several effective frameworks for creating a task-based lesson. In a comprehensive framework suggested by Jane Willis (1996), three stages were considered for each lesson. Firstly, **pre-task stage** which consists of an introduction to the topic and to the task. The teacher presents what is expected of the students in the task phase, and gives clear instruction on what they will have to do at the task stage.

The pre-task stage includes a model of the task. This can be done by presenting a picture or audio, video demonstrating the task. This stage results in partial, tenuous knowledge which trigger a reorganization of existing structures in the learners' inter language system. This stage can lead learners to interpret tasks in more fluent and accurate ways and increase elaboration of new lexical and grammatical structures. Secondly, **during the task phase**, in this stage, the students complete a task, depending on the type of activity. For example, the students get into groups, pretend order or role-play with each other, and use their language resources. The teacher is the observer or counselor in monitoring the tasks. So the methodology is more student-centered. Then the students prepare either a written or oral report to present to the class. They practice the report in their groups. The instructor takes equations and monitors the students. Finally, the students present their reports to the class and the teacher or the other students provide written or oral feedback. Thirdly, in the **language focus stage**, the teacher reviews what happened in the task, with regards to language and highlights relevant parts for the students to analyze. It may be language forms used by the students, problems that the students had, or forms that need to be covered more and were not used sufficiently. Then the teacher selects language areas to practice, based upon the needs of the students. Students do practice activities to increase their confidence and make a note of useful language. In this model the students are free of language control and they use their language resources to develop a natural context from their experiences with the language. They have more exposure to language, lexical phrases, collocations, patterns and language forms and can spend a lot of time communicating. They can adjust their language for the report stage. This approach is enjoyable and motivates students to use the target language as often as possible, in order to benefit from exposure and use.

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Conclusion

Task based teaching that combines the best insights from communicative language teaching, offers a change from the traditional method which learners may have failed to learn to communicate. It creates a real purpose for language use and provides a natural context for language study.

The aim of a task-based class is stimulating language use, activating whatever language the students have, and providing learning opportunities for students. The cycle of task-planning-report, can stimulate a natural desire in students to improve upon the language, and the language focus component can enable learners to systematize their knowledge of language structure.

This kind of teaching helps teachers to maximize opportunities for learners to put their limited language to genuine use and creates a more effective learning environment.

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