



Discuss the Theoretical Basis of Task Based Language Teaching Highlighting Its Connection with Communicative Language Teaching

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Abstract

The aim of this essay is to use the TBL teaching approach to teach speaking skills to Asian intermediate level students to improve their fluency and accuracy and to assess how the task could succeed. In this essay, three main parts will be introduced: TBLT, highlighting its connection with Communicative Language Teaching; Doing a Designed Task for intermediate Level Asian Students to teach speaking; and Assessing the Speaking Task.

Key words: Task based language teaching; Communicative language teaching; Connection; Role; Task; Process; Chinese learners

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INTRODUCTION

Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) is a teaching approach which focuses on offering learners tasks so that they can actively engage in using and practicing language in communicative situations, and on measuring the language outcomes that will arise from those tasks. For example, a speaking task can develop students' ability to speak fluently and accurately when communicating with their peers (Nunan, 2004). In other words, in TBLT, the basic aim of second language teaching is to enable learners to use the target language for social functional action or situation communication (Branden, Bygate

& Norris, 2009). According to the different levels of the students and the different target language items, the tasks can be adapted flexibly to authentic, practical and functional uses of language for meaning.

In the TBLT teaching plan that I am going to creating, the lesson will focus on developing students' speaking skills, such as improving their accuracy and influence. The students consist of 30 Chinese college students who have been learning English for over 9 years. The aim of this essay is to use the TBL teaching approach to teach speaking skills to Asian intermediate level students to improve their fluency and accuracy and to assess how the task could succeed. In this essay, three main parts will be introduced: TBLT, highlighting its connection with Communicative Language Teaching; Doing a Designed Task for intermediate Level Asian Students to teach speaking; and Assessing the Speaking Task.

• TBLT and Its Connection with CLT

• Definition of CLT and TBLT

The CLT approach began in the late 1970s and early 80s to contribute to English language learners' communicative competence (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2000). The aims of CLT are the pragmatic, authentic and functional use of language without just focusing on the grammatical aspects (Hammer, 1999). The significant characteristic of CLT is that almost everything is done with a communicative purpose. Language learners apply the language through communicative activities, such as an information gaps, games or problem-solving tasks (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2000). The activities are often carried out in small groups of students which can maximize the limited time allotted to each learner in order to communicate. Another characteristic of CLT is that the materials designed are considered desirable as they give learners opportunities to understand the language as it is actually used (Richards & Rodgers, 1986). Students use the language in rehearsed contexts with more spontaneity.

Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) is an educational framework for the theory of teaching foreign or second languages. In TBLT, the basic aim of second language teaching is to enable learners to use the target language for social functional action and situational communication (Branden, Bygate & Norris, 2009). Unlike the form-based teaching approach, TBLT is a meaning-based teaching approach that enables students to communicate in a meaningful way and the tasks employed in the lessons may be based on real life circumstances. One of the main features in TBLT is that the learners are free of language control rather than the language being decided by the teachers (Wills, 1996). The task meaning is like a language problem to solve in relation to real-world situations.

● **The Teacher's and Learners' Role in CLT and TBLT**

According to Breen and Candlin (1980), the teacher has three main roles in the communicative classroom. The first is to be a facilitator of the communicative process; the second role is that of a participant; and the last is that of a motivator or observer. The role of teachers in CLT is to facilitate communication and monitoring in the classroom rather than being a model for correct speech and writing (Richard, 1996). The important function is to be responsible for establishing situations that encourage the learners' communication. During these activities, the teachers act as advisers in answering the students' questions and as a monitor observing their performance. Following the activities, the teachers give the students feedback (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2000). The role of students in CLT is that of a communicator. They are engaged in classroom activities based on cooperative rather than individual work (Richard, 1996). The students feel comfortable about using the language to negotiate meaning even when their knowledge of the target language is incomplete (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2000).

The role of the teacher in TBLT shifts away from some traditional of the teacher roles in language teaching (Nunan, 1989). In TBLT, the teacher will decrease the proportion of the time spent on communicative processing. The main role of the teacher in TBLT is similar to CLT, such as monitoring and giving feedback. The teachers are responding not only to the students' fluency, but also their accuracy. Furthermore, for large parts of the actual task, the teachers spent more time on giving background information. TBLT is a learner-centered teaching approach (Wills, 1996). The learners' role is the main aspect during language processing. The main characteristics of the learners' role in TBLT are: the learner is a negotiator or interactor, capable of giving as well as taking; the learner is a performer and listener, with little control over the content of the learning; and the learners should take responsibility for their own learning.

● **The Approach of CLT and TBLT**

The theory language items used in CLT are tended to train the learners to use language forms appropriately in various contexts and for different purposes. For communicative competence and linguistic competence, the knowledge of forms and meanings form parts of the communicative purpose in CLT (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2000). Learners need to understand the forms, meanings and functions of language and take into consideration the social situation. However, CLT has sometimes been seen as sacrificing accuracy in the teaching of grammar in order to pursue fluency.

In TBLT, students develop a language system through attempting to use meaning-based language. The teacher designs opportunities for the students through meaningful, authentic and interesting activities (Eills, 2003). The students have a much more varied exposure to the language and the all of language issues that they need. Learners spend a lot of time communicating during the task (Hammer, 1999). In TBLT, specific language forms will never be considered; instead, the learners are allowed freely to make meaning in any way they like. The tasks provide learners' outcomes that can be assessed. Using tasks is based on building a syllabus design for to both sequence lessons and assessing the students' outcomes.

● **Characteristics of the Teaching/Learning Process in CLT and TBLT**

The main characteristic of CLT is that everything is aimed for communication. All activities are designed to enhance the learners' communicative competence. According to Morrow (1981), activities in CLT have three features: information gap, choice and feedback. The information gap is the precondition that the students have a desire to communicate with the content. During the communication, the students have opportunities to choose which language to use in the specific contents. After the communication, the learners get feedback from the teachers about their performance. Furthermore, there are three different distinctive types of practice in CLT: mechanical, meaningful and communicative. Mechanical practice is a language controlled activity whereby learners can successfully use language without necessarily understanding it. Meaningful practice is an activity where the language items are controlled but where the learners are required to understand the meaningful choices made when the language are used. Communicative practice refers to activities whereby the language is used not totally predictably and for real communicative purposes (Richard, 1996).

Long and Crookes (1992) have classified three different types of task-based approach. The first is the procedural task, whereby the teacher designs the procedure of the task and learners complete it. Designed tasks are more accessible for learners and more manageable by teachers than real-world tasks. The second is when the teachers and learners decide together what

task to do. It is project work but connects to the real-world and distinctive enough, with special consideration of the project's world. The third type of approach is when learners engage in TBLT drawing strong attention to the language as needed. These tasks can be adapted flexibly according to the different levels of the students and the different target language items.

● TBLT and its Connection With CLT

As mentioned above, TBLT and CLT have several differences and similarities. TBLT has theoretically grown out of CLT and improves several of its disadvantages which are unrelated to learners' language skills about negotiating meaning. CLT is directed at motivating students to negotiate meanings in a second language. Widdowson and Allwright (1984) stated that communicative classes are a theory use of communicative competence and draw a functional model for language. TBLT essentially develop from the communicative class teaching theory, and the aim is also to improve learners' communicative competence, focusing on students' language interaction. The principle of CLT is how learner best learn a language when there is an opportunity for students to focus on meaning rather than form. However, the problem of how to present opportunities for learners truly to communicate in the CLT classrooms is a controversial issue. Repeat dialogues or substitution drills are limited in terms of authentic negotiation of meaning. In addition, design a conversation for learners is often unclearly taught. Students will be what exactly to do while talking and the teacher is limited to evaluating the systematic instruction (Nunan, 2004). Another disadvantage of CLT is that the aims of language teaching sometimes favor fluency over accuracy. The TBLT approach overcomes many of the criticisms of CLT.

TBLT is a kind of "strong version" of CLT, whereby language is applied primarily by focusing on communicative meanings (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2000). In TBLT, students have a much more varied exposure to language and can use any of language forms. The learners are focus on the class and spend a lot of time communicating during the task (Hammer, 1999). Furthermore, in TBLT, the task meaning is like a language problem to solve in relation to real-world situations (Wills, 1996). The other advantage of TBLT is that, according to the level of difficulty for the students, it is classified in tasks in term of task type, theme or topic and sequencing criteria (Ellis, 2003). The task types, topics and sequencing criteria are flexible and can be changed depending on the level of the students and their interesting in the language items. The course design in TBLT is more flexible than in CLT classes. Tasks can be possible assessed based on the learners' outcomes. The purpose of the assessment is to provide data on the learners' strengths and weaknesses for task design purposes and encourage them to take responsibility for their language learning (Brindley, 1989).

In conclusion, on the one hand, TBLT has theoretically grown out of CLT. Their aim is to enable students to negotiate meaning in a second language and improve the learners' communicative competence. On the other hand, the TBLT approach overcomes much of the criticisms of CLT. Learners are free to use language forms, the task lesson is flexible and the task results can enable teacher to assess the learners' outcomes.

1. THE TASK FOR TEACHING UPPER LEVEL ASIAN STUDENTS TO SPEAK

1.1 Definition of Task

The definition of this task is very broad. A task is an activity in which students use their available language resources and complete a real outcome, or a piece of work or an activity, usually with a specified aim, under-taken as part of an educational course at work, or used to elicit data for research (Richards & Rodgers, 1986). Skehan concludes that there are four key features of a task: the task's meaning; there are some links between the real world and the task; the priority is to complete the task; the assessment of the task is based on the outcome (Skehan, 1996).

1.1.1 Criteria Features of a Task and Process

Ellis (2003) identified the criteria features of a task as follows: (1) a task is planned work which is designed using carrying teaching materials or ad hoc activities. However, tasks may not turn out as planned; (2) a task is designed to have a primary focus on meaning. A task develops to engage students in pragmatically using language rather than displaying language. Learners choose linguistic and nonlinguistic language to complete the task during the communication; (3) Tasks conclude real-world processes of language use. In TBLT, the task meaning is like a language problem to solve in relation to real-world situations (Wills, 1996). (4) A task involves any of the speaking, listening, writing and reading skills. During the task, learners should listen to or read the text and check their understanding of it; then create an oral or written text, and finally produce productive skills; (5) A task involves a cognitive process that learners employ, such as selecting, ordering and evaluating information to complete the task; (6) A task has a specific defined communicative outcome, that is stated as the goal of the activities for the students.

Lee suggests four criteria to guide the process: (1) design a desired informational outcome; (2) divided the topic into sub-topics; (3) create and sequence relevant tasks; and (4) create linguistic support, lexical or grammatical or both (Lee, 2000).

1.2 The Task to Teach Speaking to Upper Level Asia Students

The task is a speaking lesson on the topic of planning a day out in Beijing and uses a listening exercise to supply the language input.

Pre-task (15-20min)

Aim: To introduce the topic about how to spend a day out in Beijing with your partner to the class and to expose the students to the language related to it, focusing on words and phrases.

- Look at some pictures of Beijing's places, such as Tian'an Men, The Great Wall, Gugong and so on.
- Brainstorm alternative words/ phrases related to the topic using the board: nouns /verbs/ feelings etc.
- Introduce the listening of people mentioning interesting things in Beijing. Write different alternatives on the board to give them a reason for listening e.g. (a) place; (b) special performance; (c) snacks.
- Tell them that they are going to plan a day out in Beijing and give them a few minutes to think about it.

Task (10min)

- Students do the task in groups and make a plan for a day out in Beijing with a partner. They state their own plan and compare different ideas with their group partners.

Planning (10min)

Each group rehearses presenting their plan. The teacher walks around, helping if students have a problem and noting any language items or grammatical problems on which to give feedback later.

Report (15min)

- Each group selects a speaker to report their plan and give detailed reasons for it. Other students can choose the best one after the presentations.
- The teacher gives feedback on the content and reviews what was suggested.

Language Focus (20min)

- Write on the board any useful phrases and sentences used by the students during the tasks and correct the wrong grammatical or sentence structures used in the presentation. The students review the revised sentences.
- Hand out the typescript of the listening and ask the students to underline the useful sentences and phrases.
- The students note down any language items which they interest them.

Post-task

The teacher hands out the Fill in exercises and True or False questions for the students according to the listening in class. According to the group discussion, they write a 150 word assignment as homework. (This task is adapted by TE Editor's example of a task-based lesson plan)

2. HOW IT RELATES TO TBLT THEORY AND HOW THE TASK COULD BE ASSESSED

2.1 The Task Structure Is Based on Pre-task, Task/Language Focus

In the planning task stage, the typical task structure is: pre-task; task; language focus or analysis. The actual task

is divided into 3 stages: discussion; planning; presentation or reporting back to the class (Wills, 1996). In the pre-task step, the teachers set the task topic and situation for the learners. In this planning task, the teacher introduces the topic of how to spend a day out in Beijing with a group partner to the class students and asks them to design a plan for a day trip. In the task cycle, the aim of the task is to involve the learners in discussing the task in pairs or groups and to decide task content. In the task planning step, students discuss the outline and take notes for the presentation draft. They check and improve the draft and prepare to a presentation for the audience. In the report step, students give their presentation to the all class and sum up the purpose of the task. In this speaking task, the students are divided into group of five and make a plan for a day out in Beijing. During the discussion, each student state his/her own plan and compares different ideas with his/her group partners. Each group rehearses presenting their plan. A speaker from one group reports their plan and gives detailed reasons for it. Other students can choose the best one after the presentations. This speaking task structure is based on the typical task structure.

2.2 The Speaking Task Elements Are Based on the Theory of Task Elements

According to Nunan (1992), each learning task involves: Goals; Input data; Activities procedures Role; and Settings. Goals are related to particular areas of language use: academic, professional, social, and commercial skills. The goals have been settled for developing the skills necessary to take part in academic study and obtaining sufficient oral and written skills. Input is spoken or written instructions, diagrams or pictures which the learners are faced with at the beginning of the task. The activities or procedures are what are actually accomplished by the learner. However, there several important aspects should be considered here, such as: how many members of the group understand the crucial knowledge and how central is information exchange to the task? is the task focused on a professional interaction or on social interaction?; and the roles for teachers and learners, as the teacher will spent less time on communicative processing. For large parts of the actual task, the teachers operate in the background. According to Breen and Candlin (1980), the role of teachers should be classified into three main roles in the classroom. The first as a facilitator of the communicative process; the second is that of participant; and the last as motivator or observer. The learners' role is the main element during the language processing. The main characteristics of the learners' role are: as a negotiator or interactor who is capable of giving as well as taking; as a performer and listener, with little control over the content of their learning; and as being responsible for his/her own learning. The setting refers to the teachers and students' physical environment, such as how many students there are per group or whether the students do the task in small or large groups.

In this speaking task lesson, the goal is to highlight speaking fluency and plan a trip which can be used in real-world situation. The input data are a telephone conversation listening take of people describing the interesting things to do in Beijing. The activities procedure is that the students in groups plan a trip. The role of the teacher is to state the topic, monitor the whole discussion during the task, and then give feedback. The students are divided into small group to discuss how to design the plan and time. During the task, they must compare each idea, make a decision, and give a presentation to the whole class. The setting is that 30 students are divided into 6 groups according to their seating arrangement.

● Assessment of the Speaking Task for Chinese Learners

● The Definition of Assessment

Assessment means collecting data about what learners' do with the language rather than how they can manipulate it (Nunan, 2004). The purpose of assessment is to provide data on the learners' strengths and weaknesses for task design purposes and encourage them to take responsibility for their language learning (Brindley, 1989). The assessment measures need to consider three types of validity; content validity, criterion-related validity and construct validity (Gronlund, 1981). The content validity is how far the sample task represents the domain tasks. The criterion-related validity is how the test performs against other performance value measures. The construct validity tests factors about which factors will influence the scores on the test.

2.2.2 The Different Types of Assessment of the Test Tasks and Techniques for Collecting Data

There are several types of assessment of the test tasks. The theory of TBLT is most applicable for language testing. The task is the basic element in the design of most of the main language tests (Nunan, 2004). The important assessment criteria to apply to communicative assessment are: range, accuracy, fluency and achievement of outcome (Ellis, 2003). Based on the purpose of the assessment, it can be classified as formative assessment and summative assessment. The formative assessment is a developmental assessment, and can be carried out with aptitude, diagnostic and progress tests (Alenxander, Argent & Spencer, 2008). It is informally based on a homework task, the teacher's observation, and interactions with learners in class. Formative assessment is intended to give feedback to enhance the learners' understanding and performance. Summative assessment is judgmental and can be carried out with achievement, proficiency and placement (Alenxander, Argent & Spencer, 2008). Self-assessment has many practical and educational advantages for this speaking task assessment. It is less time consuming and also less expensive. It is also that it is useful to achieve educational goals in situations in which

learners develop the ability to control their own language (Ellis, 2003). However, self-assessment is a general rather than specific specification of the target performance (Sasaki, 2000).

Brindley (1989) lists many of the factors adapted for task-based assessment: observation followed by the recycling of work; informal discussion; teacher-constructed classroom tests; learner self-assessment; teacher/ learner journal; feedback from outside the classroom and so on.

● Assessment of the TBLT Speaking Lesson for Chinese Students

For this speaking task, it is possible to use formative assessment. The procedure for conducting a formative assessment is a multi-level approach involving self- and teacher-assessment (Spolsky, 1992). Self-assessment of this speaking task motivates the students' regarding their own English language learning. All of the students are given a chance before and after the units of instruction to assess their own performance, based on their understanding, speaking and writing (Council of Europe, 2001). Understanding includes the listening skills question about how much of the words, phrases and the main points of the listening material they can understand. Speaking includes spoken interaction and spoken production (Nunan, 2004). That is the question of how they can interact with the group members and how they can express their own ideas about the planned a day trip to Beijing. Writing includes how they can write a short conclusion about the discussion. The teacher assessment in this speaking task involves assessing the learners' performance in terms of range, accuracy, fluency, interaction and coherence (Council of Europe, 2001). Range includes whether students have a sufficient range of language to express their ideas on topic or a good broad range of language to enable them to give clear descriptions. Accuracy consists of grammar control, complex language, clause misunderstanding and so on. Fluency is the assessment aspect of fluent, natural colloquial or spontaneously expressed ideas. Interaction includes whether the learners' language enable them to interact with the discourse, and coherence is discourse coherence and cohesion (Nunan, 2004). Meanwhile, it is helpful for teachers to evaluate whether the task is of an appropriate level of difficulty for the learners.

CONCLUSION

TBLT is an educational framework for the theory and practice of teaching second or foreign languages. The ideas underlying the approach are based on the philosophy of education, theories of second language acquisition, and empirical findings on effective instructional techniques. In particular, TBLT essentially grew from the communicative class teaching theory that aims to

improve learners' communicative competence by focusing on students' language interaction. However, TBLT is considered the "strong version" of CLT, where language is applied by communicating meaning and the approach requires the learners' to communicate without focusing the language forms alone. According to the typical task structure and the theory of task elements, a speaking lesson plan is designed on the topic of planning a day out in Beijing with group partners. In this TBLT class, the aim of the lesson is to develop students' speaking skills in terms of accuracy and influence. In this speaking task, it is possible to use both formative assessment and self-assessment. The formative assessment is developmental assessment and intended to give feedback to enhance the learners understanding and performance by the teacher according to their range, accuracy, fluency, interaction and coherence. Self-assessment of this speaking task motivates the students' regarding on their language learning. Applying these two forms of assessments, by both the teacher and students, will help to successful assessment.

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