Task Based Approach- A New Dimension to Language: What, How and Why? An Innovative Strategy for the New Millennium

Ajitha S Pisharady[a], Dr. Ravi Kumar J G [b]

[a] Research Scholar, Presidency University, Bangalore
[b] Associate Professor, Department of English, Presidency University, Bangalore

Abstract

Noam Chomsky has described language as a process of free creation though bound by specific principles. He meant that any language is for communication that involves interpretation of ideas and use of words, creatively. English as second language has gained momentum with the whole world focusing on globalization. Meaningful, logical communication is the need of the hour and so, English language classes are expected to deal with real world communication. English Language Teaching has seen many methodologies that focus on the learners' aspirations and the new one is the Task Based Approach. Learning the language meaningfully is the main moto of this approach. Though initiated as a part of Communicative Approach, Task Based Language Teaching (TBLT) has its own position in ELT. The present paper explores the what, how and why of TBLT and also discusses about the advantages and disadvantages of TBLT which is an innovative way to teach the millennials.

Keywords: Activity, communication, Task Based Language Teaching, interaction, principles, pedagogy, strategy.

1. Introduction

English is taught as the Second language or as a Foreign Language in most of the countries. Teaching a second language has its own challenges. English Language Teaching has gone through all those challenges and has grown through many classroom methods and techniques. English language is taught in the class for communication in the real world. So, the learners must be supported with a method that serves that purpose. Language acquisition theories unanimously accept the fact that there is a difference between "acquiring" a language and "learning a language". Acquisition is an involuntary and natural process whereas learning happens consciously in a formal situation. From the Grammar Translation Method, we upgraded ourselves to the Direct Method, Audio Lingual Method, the Silent Way, Suggestopedia, Communicative Method, etc, taking into consideration the needs of the learners from time to time. Each method focused on how to make language classes more productive and active. Stephen Krashen is of the opinion that natural communication or meaningful interaction to communicate ideas in the target language is necessary for a second language acquisition. According to him, "comprehensible input" is the key to language acquisition and so, the best method for ESL classes would be those that reduce anxiety and supply understandable inputs that learners want to hear. The real-world conversations are the best to enhance the second language skills. In line with Krashen's

theory is the new approach, the Task Based Language Teaching. Let us try to explore what is Task Based Language Teaching and why it must be promoted.

Teaching second language communication involves the enhancement of the four language skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing. These skills are categorized as receptive and productive skills. None of the language skill can be taught independently. The English classroom becomes vibrant with the fusion of these skills. Task Based Language Teaching focuses on the enhancement of these skills in terms of real-world application. Learning language is made fun and interesting using Task Based Approach.

2.Significance of The Study

Learning English is of great importance in today's world that looks at globalization. There are different ways the language is imparted in the classroom where English is taught as second language. The approaches of teaching ranges from Grammar Translation method and the Direct Method to the present free learning and blended learning. When the language is for communication, students must be provided opportunities to interact with others. There must be exposure to authentic language discourse which is possible as per the theories of Task Based Approach. It is important to know how the task-based approach is different from other approaches and how to implement it in classroom to make the learning more effective. The study, looking at various theories by experts, aims at exploring the importance of task-based language teaching and the methods of implementing it in ESL classroom.

3.Review of Related Studies

What is Task Based Language Teaching?

Task Based Language teaching is a part of Communicative Language Teaching. It is a modern and innovative approach that makes the class more interactive and meaningful. N. S Prabhu the proponent of Task Based Language Teaching, first established this method in Bangalore, India. He believed that the learners would learn efficiently when their focus is on the task rather than on the language they are using. According to Prabhu, (1987) "Task Based Language Teaching taps the learners' natural mechanisms for the second language acquisition."

According to Ellis, (2018), Task Based Language Teaching is teaching and learning a language to complete open-ended tasks. He believed that Task Based Language Teaching is learner centred approach that offers content oriented meaningful activities.

Nunan, (1989) says that, Task Based Language Teaching is a teaching approach "which involves a piece of classroom work which helps learners comprehend, manipulate, produce or interact in the target language while their attention is principally focused on meaning rather than form."

Willis & Willis, (2007) support the idea that Task Based Language Teaching is a learner centred approach where the learners learn the target language through self-motivated, task- based and project-based group investigations.

Skehan, (2003) states that in Task Based Language Teaching, language learning turns into "a process that involves opportunities for learners to contribute in communication, where making meaning is primary." He quotes Breen and tells that Task Based Language Teaching could refer to any structured

language – teaching activity which has a specific objective, proper content and particular working procedure and a variety of outcome for the learners who carry out the task.

Task Based Teaching and Learning according to Ellis (2018), follow a learner centred philosophy and the learning happens by using the target language to complete "open- ended tasks".

We could conclude from all these explanations that Task Based Language Teaching is a learner-centred approach that involves teaching and learning of a target language through meaningful activities, with specific objective and outcome.

4.Objectives of The Study

- To understand the meaning of task
- To explore the ways to implement TBA in ESL classroom
- To suggest TBA as an alternate teaching pedagogy to impart language skills

5.Hypotheses of The Study

- TBA is a learner centered approach
- TBA helps in imparting language skills in the ESL Classroom
- There is a difference between the traditional approach to teaching English and TBA

6. What is a 'task' in language teaching?

The proponents of Task Based Language Teaching have given various definitions for "task". There are many technical and nontechnical definitions given for the same. But all agree on one point that TBLT is one of the best strategies to promote learner centred classroom. Let us look into the "task" from the pedagogical perspective.

Prabhu, (1987) has defined task as "an activity which needs learners to come to a conclusion from the given information through some process of thought and which allows teachers to handle and control that process"

Willis & Willis (2007) defines task as "an activity where the target language is used by the learner for a competitive purpose in order to achieve an outcome."

Long, (2012), also accepts the explanation of task as an activity related to real world with focus on goals and that require an active participation from the learners.

These definitions show that classroom tasks or pedagogic tasks aim at an outcome which will be used by the learners even in the real world. This is rightly what employability skill mean. In an English class, the focus of the tasks is on language skill development. The tasks cannot be very simple and easy. As per the level of the learners, the complexity of the tasks has to be increased. Tasks must be where the learners get to interact with the peer and also with the teacher. More complex the task, more interaction will be the result, leading to the success of the task.

6.1. Principles of Task Based Language Teaching

Principles of Task Based Language Teaching start with the note of freedom to the learners to learn at their pace and what they need to learn with very less intervention from the teacher. The teacher's role is primarily to design the instructional materials. David Nunan's list of seven principles sound very practical and applicable.

David Nunan (2007) has listed out seven principles for the Task Based Language Teaching: Scaffolding, task dependency, recycling, active learning, integration, creation and reflection. "Scaffolding" which ensures that the instructional materials and techniques lead the learners to expected out come and independence in learning. "Task dependency" is similar to Task Sequencing given by Prabhu and Ellis. Each task must be linked to the previous task. "Recycling" is more or less where students experience the use of language in various contexts. "Active learning" is where the real task happens. Here, the students learn by doing themselves. This could be any task like role play, discussion, debate, etc. "Integration" suggests that teacher integrates form, communication and meaning into the task assigned. The students use the language with an outcome in mind. The next step or principle is "creation". Nunan states that after reproducing the sounds and the language as said by the teacher, at this stage, the learner must become creative in the use of language. The final principle is that of "reflection". This is the time to recap and use the learnt language in different contexts creatively.

From this, we could conclude that task is the basic unit of task-based language teaching and this approach must involve learner centred activities that are designed with the focus on needs of the learners. As the learners learn by doing, errors must be permitted and motivation must be maximum. Though meaning is the main focus, form must not be neglected.

Task being described as the basic unit, let us try to understand what are the components of a task. A lesson plan will include a task sequence to bring out the expected result. Each task must be framed with an expected outcome. "A task" if conducted for no reason or with no learning intention, cannot be called a task. It will be only an activity which might lead to task. To design a structured pedagogic task, we must concentrate on the components of the task.

6.2. Components of a Classroom Task

Dave and Jane Willis (2007) say that to confirm whether the activity planned is a task, "the teacher must be confidently answering a "yes" to each of the following questions.

1. Does the activity engage the learners' interest?
2. Is there a primary focus on the meaning?
3. Is there an outcome?
4. Is success judged in terms of outcome?
5. Is completion a priority?
6. Does the activity relate to real world activities?"

From this, we could understand that, target, time, interest, settings and teacher support are parts of each task. David Nunan describes the different components of a task to be:

- Goals
- Input

- Activities
- Teacher role
- Learner role
- Settings

Each component becomes an integral part of a task. "Goals are the vague general intentions behind any given learning task", says Nunan. According to him, goals connect the task and the curriculum. In a language classroom, the goal of a task could be communicative, socio cultural, or linguistic in nature. Input could be anything that triggers the task. The pedagogic task starts from any instructional material provided by the teacher, like the photograph, newspaper extracts, etc. Activities are when the learners are actually using the inputs. While designing the task, the teacher has to clearly mention what must be the kind of activities the learners engage themselves with. It could be a discussion, prediction, debating, browsing etc. Teacher must be careful to note whether the learners get skill or use skill. N S Prabhu, in "Second Language Pedagogy" has mentioned about three activity types: Information gap, reasoning gap and opinion gap. He tells that "Information gap activity involves a transfer of given information from one person to the other. Reasoning gap activity helps the learners derive some new information from the given information through inference, deduction, reasoning and patterns. Opinion gap activities aid identifying and articulating a personal preference, feeling or attitude in response to a given situation."

Brown, (2018) also agrees with the confirmation about the fact that the tasks must have a gap- information, reasoning or opinion. He suggests that learners should engage themselves in problem solving, sharing opinions, search for information, listen or read, summarize and also be creative in their work.

David Nunan quotes Pattison (1987) who has proposed seven types of activities with a pedagogic focus. "They are:

- Questions and answers
- Dialogues and roleplays
- Matching
- Communication strategies like paraphrasing and simplifying
- Pictures and stories
- Puzzles and problems
- Discussions and decisions"

We could conclude that activities have to be framed by the teachers with the goal of the task in mind. The teachers must customize the tasks to the needs of the learners and the lesson. Here, we are discussing the role teacher plays in Task Based Classroom. Teacher's role in such classes are minimal but cannot be avoided. Teachers act as facilitator and the intervention will be required only when there's a confusion. This role of the teacher must also be thought of while designing the task.

According to Richards, (1976), while framing the teacher's role in a task the related issues will be to identify "the types of functions the teachers are expected to fulfil, the degree of control the teacher has

over the learning process, degree of responsibility to the content, degree of interaction between the teacher and the learners." Teacher must also make sure to integrate and sequence the tasks.

Learner role must also be mentioned while designing the task. Most of the tasks in the classroom expects learners to be adaptable, creative inventive and also independent as in the real world. So, learners' role must focus on finding their own way, organizing information, being creative, finding opportunities, experimenting, making errors, using forms or anything that leads to the ultimate goal.

The next important component is the setting or the classroom arrangement as per the specifications of the task. The group task, pair task, individual task demands freedom of movement in the class. This gives the learners the opportunity to interact freely and genuinely. This would certainly bring real world communication into the classroom.

7. Strengths and Weakness of Task Based Language Teaching

Every teaching approach has its own advantages and disadvantages. Task Based Language Teaching being a modern method, is accepted by the modern classrooms but it has its own problems. Let us try to find out the advantages and disadvantages of this approach.

The first strength that must be mentioned is that the approach is learner centred. According to Nunan, it offers a lot of advantages as "it is communication based and allows the learners to transfer previously acquired knowledge to new communicative contexts."

Tonia & Ganta, (2015) give an account of the strengths and weakness of the Task Based Approach. According to the research, the strengths of Task Based approach are:

- Helps learners interact spontaneously
- Automaticity in language learning
- Better vocabulary acquisition
- Provides conducive conditions for learning
- Promotes experiential learning
- Encourages communication

Kumaravadivelu (2013) has stated that "the same classroom event is often interpreted differently by the teachers and learners" due to cognitive demands, linguistic demand, task structure, etc. This shows the weakness of the task-based approach.

The weakness as stated by Tonia are:

- Task difficulty
- Difference in the perception of the task by teachers and learners
- Authenticity of the task
- Linguistic deficiency
- Neglection of learner needs
- Diverse and large class

8.Conclusion

The role of classroom tasks in enhancing the communication skills is enormous. The tasks that are chosen will surely have an impact in the skill enhancement of the learners. There are many studies conducted in the different methods and approaches in second language teaching. Each method, technique and approach have its own history, advantages and disadvantages. Learning, as per Wikipedia, "is a process that requires acquisition of knowledge or skills through experience" and Task Based Language Teaching proves it right. A lot of interaction is possible during TBLT that make the teaching-learning process successful. There might be a lot of problems the teachers encounter while implementing the tasks. That has to be studied through classroom observation. As Tonia points out, diverse and large class might be an impediment to successful task completion. When the teaching approach is Task Based, the assessment must also be Task Based and so more clarity and study on the Task Based Assessment is required to make the task-based classes more productive. The paper concludes by suggesting that Task Based Language Teaching is learner supporting and learning inducive. More research on the teachers' perspective on the approach will surely help to do the customization required in the approach to suit the learning needs.

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