

【研修報告】

A Report on TBLT2009: 3rd Biennial International Conference on Task Based Language Teaching Lancaster University, England 13th-16th September 2009

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Task Based Language Teaching (TBLT) is, according to the conference organizers, 'an educational framework for the theory and practice of teaching second or foreign languages. It is based on a constellation of ideas issuing from philosophy of education, theories of second language acquisition, empirical findings on effective instructional techniques, and the exigencies of language learning in contemporary society. Though there is broad interest in the potential value of TBLT to foster worthwhile language teaching and learning, there is also considerable diversity in the theoretical scope, applied practice, and research that corresponds with the TBLT name' (TBLT2009).

Defining Tasks

Tasks, evidently, are at the heart of TBLT. The most widely-accepted definition of a task is that of Skehan, (1998, p.95) who sees a task as an activity in which meaning is primary; there is some communication problem to solve; there is some sort of relationship to comparable real-world activities; task completion has some priority; and where assessment of the task is in terms of outcome.

Taking these characteristics as a starting point, in the opinion of this researcher, the design and development of any task based teaching material needs to be governed by at least seven further considerations, namely that materials should (1) not only be challenging and stimulating,

but also enjoyable; (2) build on and enhance learners' existing knowledge and abilities; (3) not conform slavishly to one pattern, but be flexible enough to reflect the objective; (4) require learners to think creatively in order to successfully engage in the task (avoiding becoming practise for its own sake); (5) use authentic or adapted authentic materials wherever possible (a bridge from classroom to real world); (6) feature grammar and vocabulary that would be easily understood and easily applied without becoming simple manipulation of form, and (7) offer a good return for students' investment of time and effort.

Crabbe: Adding Learning Value to Tasks Through Learning Opportunities

My own presentation drew its inspiration from TBLT research carried out by Crabbe, (2003, 2007) who claimed that teachers mainly focus on aspects of social organization (class management, giving instructions, ensuring good dynamics, monitoring procedures, providing support etc.) and often fail to nurture learning skills; teachers and students use tasks in class, then simply move on without exploiting the full range of possibilities that each task or activity offers. He proposed bridging the gap between these two problems by helping learners to add learning value to the tasks by treating them (the tasks) as 'prompts and models for managing further learning themselves' (Crabbe, 2007). "The professional task of language teachers is to manage the curriculum and, in

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particular, to mediate the access to language in use by organizing individual and collaborative learning activities, by scaffolding activities, by providing positive feedback and information about language and language learning, and by bridging the gap between public- and private-domain learning (Crabbe, 1993) so that the take-up of the opportunity can be maximized.” (Crabbe, 2003: pp. 18-19).

Crabbe (drawing on Kumaravadivelu, 1994) considers learning opportunities to be any activity requiring learners to engage in specific cognitive or meta-cognitive activities (not merely to perform the task) in a way that will lead to learning. In essence, though tasks and opportunities are different, they are close companions. Crabbe (Table 1. paraphrased) distinguishes them thus:

Crabbe (Table 2.) offers a framework of seven ‘opportunity categories’, areas proven to be effective for learning language, on which learners can structure their value-adding activities. (i) Input (ii) Output (iii) Interaction (iv) Feedback (v) Rehearsal (vi) Language understanding (vii) Learning understanding. In the current study, using Crabbe's framework of learning opportunities, Japanese learners of nursing English were encouraged to ‘add value’ and create new learning opportunities by reinterpreting existing tasks. By involving learners in the (re)design of materials, by changing their approach to task exploitation, and by explaining the underlying processes in the tasks, it was hoped that learners would become more effective, more motivated, and more prepared to take ownership of the language being studied.

Tasks	Learning opportunities
A unit of communicative activity designed to facilitate learning.	A unit of cognitive or meta-cognitive activity associated with learning.
A task is procedural, involving public (usually) teacher-led participation.	A learning opportunity is potential. This potential is only realized if the learning opportunity is take up <i>after</i> the completion of the task as a public act.
Tasks are generally classroom-based, and are usually teacher-directed.	Learning opportunities are available anywhere, anytime, but are usually self-directed, and so may require guidance and modeling.
Tasks usually only follow the pattern prescribed in the task instructions.	A wide variety of patterns may be used to exploit the task as a learning opportunity.

Table 1. Differences between tasks and learning opportunities

Category	Learning activity covered by the concept
Input	Listening to and reading monologue or dialogue that can be understood with limited difficulty.
Output	Producing meaningful utterances in written or spoken form, either as a monologue or in the context of interaction.
Interaction	Speaking and writing with one or more interlocutors in real or simulated communicative situations.
Feedback	Receiving information relating to one’s own performance as a second language user. This may include indirect feedback (for example, that one has not been understood) or direct feedback (for example, that one has made a specific error).
Rehearsal	Deliberately repeating specific aspects of performance, including experimentation with pronunciation, memorization of words or word patterns, and repeated role-play of a piece of communication.
Language understanding	Consciously attending to facts of language usage or use in order to be able to explain, describe, or gloss an aspect of grammar or sociolinguistic conventions.
Learning understanding	Consciously attending to the process of one’s own language learning in order to establish better meta-cognitive control over that learning. This would include a detailed representation of the overall task of language learning, an analysis of the specific difficulties encountered in performance and an awareness if strategies to overcome the difficulties.

Table 2. Categories of Learning Opportunities

Developing Learning Skills Through Task Reinterpretation

My own presentation at the conference sought to address two issues facing teachers and learners of nursing English, through a TBLT approach. These issues were:

- (i) learner failure to engage in active, reflective language learning behaviours outside class, and
- (ii) difficulties in designing tasks that adequately recycle and reinforce the large amounts of vocabulary facing learners in ESP (English for Specific Purposes).

Informal Survey and Preliminary Study

An informal survey was undertaken in May-July 2007 with a group of mixed proficiency second-year nursing students (n=46). It revealed that on completion of classroom-based tasks, 55% of students would simply chat or daydream, while only 2% will regularly revisit tasks to apply a different approach to that taken in class. The initial investigation also revealed a language barrier - 47% expressed a desire for more Japanese language support in the survey and in the explanation of task reinterpretation objectives. Bearing this in mind, extensive oral explanation in Japanese was carried out, and exemplifying pilot activities were undertaken. As a result, 53% of learners claimed that the activities would change the way they thought about exploiting tasks and 85% claimed that they would try to add value to tasks in the future.

This informal study clearly stimulated discussion and demonstrated that learners had a greater willingness to reflect on their learning (thinking about principles, rather than fixed routines). However ultimate success would depend on the long-term learner uptake. To this end, a formal investigation was instigated the following year, from April - July 2008, with a further class of mixed proficiency second year B.Sc. nursing majors (n=68).

Recycling Activities and Learning Opportunities

Students were given a written (English) and oral (Japanese and English) explanation of Crabbe's concepts. They were encouraged to pay

attention to the following seven areas, drawn from Crabbe's framework:

- (1) Input: for example, read or listen to the text again. (2) Output: for example, make a spoken or written summary. (3) Interaction: for example, discuss the task with a partner (or teacher), think of things you can do together to help your English to get better. (4) Feedback: for example, look at your own work, or ask a partner to help you find your weak points. Think about how to improve your weak points. (5) Rehearsal: for example, repeat the activity three times, with or without a partner. Practise weaker areas, (from 'Feedback'). Try to repeat the activity without looking at the text. (6) Understanding the language: for example, make a note of any unfamiliar language, and check the grammar. Compare the English with a natural Japanese version and note the differences. (7) Understand how you learn: for example, think about the problems you had with the activity. Think about how to make it easier next time.

Crabbe recommended modeling learning opportunities and maintaining a steady dialogue with learners to make them aware of the opportunities. The demands of our syllabus meant it was not possible to systematically integrate the 'training' into the course, however, 'task reinterpretation' was modeled in class on a regular basis.

Procedure & Materials

- Week 1. Preliminary learner questionnaire (in Japanese)
- Week 3. Oral (in English and Japanese) and written introduction (in English) to Crabbe's framework & concepts
- Weeks 4, 7 & 9 Small group value-adding practise
- Week 11 Follow-up questionnaire (Japanese)
- Week 15 Scheduled informal semi-structured interviews (in English and Japanese)

Learner-generated suggestions could be grouped into the following categories:

- (1) Keyword extension techniques; i.e. One partner paraphrases or defines the keyword (if necessary from a prepared worksheet), or makes a statement to elicit the keyword, for example: 'Hospital

departments & specializations' can be practiced like this: "Imagine you are in a photo with a group of doctors. Ask your partner about the doctors who appear in the photo."

A: What does this one do?

B: He's a doctor.

A: What kind of doctor?

B: He (looks after children).

A: Oh, he's (a pediatrician), how interesting!

(2) Read (or act) the dialogues (quietly or aloud, by yourself or with a partner, repeat reading). (3) Role-play (with friends, by yourself, with friends but change the contents, communicate the dialogue in English and Japanese, memorize short scripts). (4) Write key words (in sentences, on vocabulary cards, display around the house, writing and memorize example sentences). (5) Use image-training to visualize the activity. (6) Listen to a recording, (or partner), and shadow.

Key Questions & Results

- "Learning how to add value in class is time well spent".

Fewer than 3% of learners disagreed with this statement, suggesting that learners recognized the benefits of 'adding value'. Comments such as: "It's a good idea. I learnt how to study outside class and it was very useful" were very common. However, as the results below suggest, learning to add value did not seem to make a great difference to learners on a personal level.

- "Thinking about adding value has improved my approach to learning English".

Only 26% expressed clear agreement here, seeming to undermine the comments (above) that time spent on 'adding value' in class was time well spent. The findings suggest that learners recognized the value of adding value, but failed to translate this recognition into actual practice.

- "I have enough time to 'Add Value' outside class".

Availability of time was clearly a major influencing factor on learner uptake. Less than 12% of respondents clearly stated that they had enough time for language learning outside class. While not distinguishing between availability of time and willingness to actually spend it on

English, it is likely to be a good indicator of their progress. "I think it's a good idea, but I don't have enough time (or willpower) to do it outside class" was a sentiment echoed by approximately 20 students.

- "How often do you revisit the activities in the textbook after we finish them in class?"

Attempts to obtain a clearer picture of uptake revealed unexpectedly low levels. Time spent 'adding value' was little changed from pre-course levels. A related follow-up question, "How often do you reflect on your own language learning progress?" also revealed similarly unconvincing results. Later inspection revealed that a mis-translation in the Japanese version of the questionnaire had caused at least two questions to be ambiguous and therefore misleading, rendering the data related to practical take-up invalid.

Conclusions

Despite the disappointing conclusion to the study, points of hope remain. Crabbe (2007, p118) stated that "the success of the (learning) process should also be measured by the degree of awareness about learning that learners demonstrate and the degree of strategic behaviour that they consciously engage in to build vocabulary recognition, increase fluency (...) and so on." According to these criteria, the study revealed improved awareness of learning, but evidenced little by way of conscious engagement beyond the confines of the classroom. Two factors (the demands of the syllabus and the language barrier) suggest that a rigorous application of Crabbe's framework would offer only limited benefits for lower level learners. Time would arguably be better spent using materials that subtly inculcate these habits, rather than engaging learners in specific training (as attempted in this course). The earlier results, however, (with a smaller, arguably more motivated group) gave cause for optimism. While it may be ambitious to expect non-English majors to design or re-design (re-interpret) tasks, a simplified approach that encourages meta-cognitive awareness of language learning, particularly when delivered with L1 support, may yet be effective for such learners.

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