

Rationale and Evaluation of the Use of the Task-Based Language Teaching Approach in a Lesson Plan

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ABSTRACT. *In language teaching, it is important for the teacher to know exactly what language contents will be taught and what language skills will be practiced in the lesson. In this article, the author designs a lesson plan for an audio-visual class that featured in teaching English through films. This particular lesson designed to teach students how to find the theme of a literature by applying the video clips in the classroom. The study will firstly provide a rationale for the lesson plan by engaging in a critical discussion about the methods chosen and the reasons for the sequence of each stage made within the lesson plan. Secondly, the author will give an evaluation of the texts and activities, and of their appropriateness in the context in which they are used.*

KEYWORDS: *Task-based language teaching, Lesson plan, Rationale, Evaluation*

1. Introduction

It is commonly supposed that the shifts from communicative language teaching (CLT) to task-based language teaching (TBLT), and from method-based pedagogy to postmethod pedagogy constitute the major transition in TESOL methods. However, subsequent researches suggest that, CLT perhaps offers a traditional case of a centre-based pedagogy that fails to sync with linguistic, educational, social, cultural and political factors. Thus, the CLT have paved way for a renewed interest in task-based language teaching. TBLT is, in fact, a further development of CLT (Kumaravadivelu, 2006). It shares the same beliefs, as language should be learned as close as possible to how it is used in real life. However, it has stressed the importance to combine form-focused teaching with communication-focused teaching. If prepared with care, TBLT would be a very flexible form of teaching and learning. It can not only cater for different learning styles but also allow the teacher to focus on meaning as well as form. By discussing and evaluating research in the field the author will suggest that this paper aims to contextualize such views and to propose the rationale of the task-based approach that will function as the overall framework for this lesson and its subsequent evaluation. A sociocultural perspective which views language and knowledge as constructed socially rather than

intrinsically will also guide the discussion within this paper (Thorne, 2000).

2. Rationale

A task-based approach serves as the guiding framework for this lesson. TBLT stresses holistic and realistic input and output and the focus is on the students' learning, rather than on a set of discrete language knowledge, and the tasks can contribute to whole-person development. It involves the specification of a sequence of communicative tasks to be carried out in the target language (Willis and Willis, 2001). Thus, in a communicative task, language is regarded as bringing about an outcome through the exchange of meaning. All the tasks illustrated later will have a specific objective that needs to be achieved in a given time. As for the framework of TBLT, there have emerged some different teaching models in the field. Willis suggests a task-based approach consisting of three phases: pre-task, task cycle and language focus. Here the author has decided to apply Jane Willis's approach as it offers more flexible choice for lesson plan design. Moreover, it seems reasonable that the last stage in this framework, language focus, allows a closer study of some of the specific features naturally occurring in the language used during the task cycle.

This is an audio-visual class that featured in teaching English through films. This particular lesson aims to teach students how to find the theme of a literature by applying the video clips in the classroom. The researches on videos and multimedia learning have been proved to provide an empirical support for their use in an effective teaching tool (Gardner, 2000). Furthermore, most of the investigations support that the multimedia auditory and visual stimuli can increase learners' memory, comprehension, understanding, and deeper learning (Moreno and Valdez, 2007; Pryor and Bitter, 2008). The video clips chosen in this lesson is the trailer of *Frozen* and the video clip titled "theme" which is posted on the YouTube website (see appendix 2). The teaching application of these two video clips, which belong to authentic texts, reflected TBL's principles (Nunan, 2004). The two video clips selected also comply with Berk's (2009) three sets of criteria. In this case, the students' characteristic (i.e. age or grade level, gender, ethnicity, and language-dominance) relate to "socio-demographic" characteristics has been taken into consideration.

In language teaching, it is important for the teacher to know exactly what language contents will be taught and what language skills will be practiced in the lesson. This particular lesson will prepare students through listening and speaking tasks designed to enable comprehensive analysis of the movie and raise their awareness of the lexical chunks and new vocabulary related to the movies of this kind. Therefore, in this course, listening for meaning becomes the primary focus and finding relevant input for the students assumes greater importance. In terms of the speaking-skill development, the author plans to engage learners' fluent processing to begin with and subsequently leads them to integrate accurate language features into that fluent base, as the goal is to have students become communicatively competent.

2.1 Review/Homework Check and Pre-Task

According to Wang (2006), procedures are the detailed steps in each teaching stage, and for almost every lesson, a warm-up or a starter is necessary. In this lesson, before the pre-task phase, there is a quick homework review, which functions as the starter, and in particular, to make use of students' prior knowledge to introduce new topics. Regularly demonstrate progress through repeating activities or showing them what they did some time before has been found effective in ensuring that language moves into students' long-term memories (implicit memories)(Thornbury, 2002). The reviewing activities are also in accordance with Nunan's (2004) recycling and reflection principles that learners should be given opportunities to reflect on what they have learned and how well they are doing. The pre-task stage is designed for introducing the topic and task (Willis, 1996). Willis suggests that there should be three steps involved in this stage. Teacher explores the topic with the class for the first step; sometimes teacher needs to define the topic area (Willis and Willis, 2001). As for this lesson, the teacher helps students clarify the topic area-theme-by taking advantage of the metaphor "ripple effect"(see appendix2: lecture slides). After that, the teacher should provide the support that students may need to undertake the task (Beglar and Hunt, 2002), for instance, the teacher can help students recall and activate words that will be useful during the task. However, J. Willis (1996) notes that it is often difficult to gauge in advance how much topic-related language individual learners will know. Therefore, the author does not give the vocabulary checklist for students as the point of the introductory focus on topic and language to boost students' confidence in handling the task rather than to teach large amounts of new language (Larsen-Freeman, 1986). In this phase, task instructions (i.e. what its goals and what outcome is required) are given to students. In activity one, teacher asks students to watch a short video on topic of "theme" and encourage them try their best to understand the gist of the video. The rationale of this pre-task activity, which involves pre-viewing of fluent speakers doing the task and students' thinking of questions to ask, can be explained as activating students' schemata (Ellis, 2003). The video material chosen is according to the level and interests of our students. Just as Harmer claims that, if the video we chose is too easy or too difficult, the students will not be motivated; if the content is irrelevant to the students' interests, it may fail to engage them. However, some people think that video is less useful for teaching listening as it will distract students' attention to what they are actually listening. Taking this into consideration, in activity one, teacher plays the audio without the picture that provide students space for making prediction (i.e. where the speakers are, what they look like, what's going on, etc). During students' second listening, teacher plays the audio with pictures, which offers students sufficient exposure to the audio material since it is a little difficult for them. Having students work in small groups to answer questions cannot only acquaint students being able to figure out the speakers' intention, which is part of being communicatively competent, but also maximize the amount of communicative practice they receive (Szczepaniak, Pathan and Soomro, 2013). Compared with the listening activities in the previous procedure, activity three focuses on developing students' selective listening skills, which involves students' "attention to key words, discourse sequence cues or information

structures”(Rost, 1991,p.10). As for the activity of playing the trailer of *Frozen* and asking students to apply what they have just learned about theme into the film they saw in lesson one, this have been proved reasonable in Nunan’s (2004) task-dependency and recycling principles for TBLT.

2.2 Task Cycle

Three stages-task, planning, and report-are designed in the task cycle of this lesson. The students are asked to do a drama (role-play) for the final task. They are imagined to be the scriptwriter that they can either choose to create a new ending to the movie *Frozen*, changing the theme or to create a new story using a theme in *Frozen*. Designing this as the final task because it has been stated by Parrott (1993) that the social context of the communicative event is essential in giving meaning to the utterances. It also relates to the sociocultural theory, in which language learning is seen as socially mediated, that is to say, it is dependent on face-to-face interaction and shared processes, such as joint problem solving and discussion (Lantolf, 2000; Thorne, 2000). During the task cycle, students have the freedom to choose their teammates in order to carry out the main task before planning a report on the task (Willis, 1996). Carter and Nunan (2001), however, believe that varying groupings is probably a good idea as it stops students paired with slow learners becoming frustrated. Activity six requires students to discuss their understanding of the task instruction and grading criteria and considering which one to choose between two options. It is a vital opportunity for all learners to use whatever language they can master, working simultaneously, in pairs or small groups, to achieve the goals of the task. This process can be seen as the collaborative learning. Jane Willis (1996) indicates that teacher, in this stage, should play the role of monitor to stand back and let the learners get on with the task on their own. The guidance or comments, if it is necessary, should be briefly on content.

The domain where learning can most productively take place is called the Zone of Proximal Development, that is, the domain of knowledge or skill where the learner is not yet capable of independent functioning, but can achieve the desired outcome given relevant scaffolding help (Vygotsky, 1978; Lantolf, 2000). It is, therefore, in the planning stage, teacher acts as linguistic advisor to offer scaffolding, help learners shape their meanings and express more exactly what they want to say.

Following the discussions, there comes the group project presentation stage-the natural conclusion of the task cycle. Teacher selects some groups to present their report of the task (drama) to the whole class orally. The audience is asked to make comments on other group’s performance in the feedback activity. According to Hedge (2002), getting feedback from the teacher and from other students in the class enables learners to test hypotheses and refine their developing knowledge of the language system. When a group of learners do this task while talking together, it is called negotiation of meaning, which was conceptualized by Varonis and Gass (1985) and its aim is to make output more comprehensible. Based on Willis’s TBL framework, during this process, teacher takes the role of chairperson to undertake things like to introduce the presentations and to give a summary at the end. When

summing up after all the presentations, it seems reasonable that the teacher reacts first to the content of the reports. This is because that the positive and tactful feedback that the teacher gives on the content will be significant to increase students' confidence and enhance their motivation (Dörnyei, 2001). However, there is a controversial viewpoint about the question of language feedback. In some occasions, students will expect feedback on the quality of the language they have used, even though the teacher has commented on it at the planning stage. For this reason, teacher writes the private evaluation to each person as the informal feedback to encourage them to reflect on the success of the task and strategies used to overcome setbacks. According to Ellis (2003), this activity is designed to improve students' metacognitive abilities (Anderson, 2002), which is effective for learning.

2.3 Language Focus

Language focus-the last phase of TBL framework-adds an opportunity for explicit language instruction. In previous stages, students have been given a rich exposure to language and enough opportunities to use the language. The emphasis has been on the language meaning. This stage is similar to one of the Nunan's (2004) TBLT procedure, linguistic focus, to some extent. In the following two activities, students will benefit from instruction focused on language form (Eillis, 2003). Activity nine, the brainstorming game, entails an element of analysis. Consciousness-raising activities of this kind have been found to be an effective way of getting even shy learners involved in topics and promotes richer task interaction (Willis and Willis, 2004). As part of post-listening, teacher asks students to infer the meaning of new words from the contexts in which they appear. Teacher's drawing the mind-map and reviewing the vocabulary with the class are the opportunities they give for co-operative learning (Morgan and Rinvoluceri, 1986): sharing and discussing one's learning is far more motivating-and far more memorable-than working on one's own. This activity is followed by the vocabulary quiz, which entails an element of practice (Willis, 1996). It is designed to test learners' meaning-focused output of words, phrases and patterns from the analysis activities (Joe, Nation and Newton, 1996). Another effect for this procedure would be to offer students chance to self-check (this belongs to formative and classroom-based assessment)(Richards, 2001) and to raise learners' sense of accomplishments.

2.4 Evaluation

Ur (1996) says that it is important to think after teaching a lesson and ask "whether it was a good one or not, and why". This form of reflection is for teacher's self-development.

Authentic materials in this lesson are used as input of listening for the productive speaking. Taken in this sense, it can be evaluated by Krashen's (1985) input hypothesis. The authentic texts-the trailer of *Frozen* and a video titled *Theme*-are exploited based on this principle. Some scholars highlight the advantage of introducing learners to authentic texts (Guariento and Morley, 2001; Mishan,

2004). They believe that authentic texts are pedagogically appropriate and motivating for advanced learners. On this issue, intermediate learner competence in the target language may be a good reason for me to use authentic texts. We claim that the drawbacks mentioned above cannot be attributed to the presence of authentic materials, but to the inappropriate choices by teachers. The author agrees with Clavel-Arroitia and Fuster-Márquez (2014) that the introduction of authentic materials may arouse learners' interest, and be more motivating than ordinary non-authentic texts encountered in textbooks. What's more, during the selecting of the teaching material, we have taken the element of learner difference (Willi and Willis, 2001) and teaching objectives into consideration. In this case, learners' age is 18 years old or so, which belong to young adults. They often have a clear understanding of why they are learning things and can sustain their motivation by perceiving long-term learning goals. According to Wu (2010), the factor of "significance of the teaching materials" needs to be considered. That means the topics of the teaching materials should be relevant to learners' needs and interest (this belongs to needs analysis, proposed by Richards). Li (2013) agrees that materials should bear much relevance to the social environment and problems; in this lesson, maybe the genre of trailer cannot be directly related to the social issues. The movie *Frozen* is popular worldwide, thus it will be relevant to students, which is important for a text to be successful (Hedge, 2000).

Then, the method used and activity types will be evaluated together since they are interrelated in the lesson plan. The task-based approach exploited in this lesson has a number of advantages, even though some authors argue that the TBLT itself has problems. However, from my point of view, Willis's (1996) three-step TBLT framework can be effective for solving this problem. It offers a flexible framework into which the author can naturally foster combination of skills depending upon the task. The listening and speaking skills can be formed in an integral part of the process of achieving the task goals; they are not being practiced singly. In the investigation of Chinese university students' perceptions of communicative and noncommunicative activities in the EFL classroom, Rao (2002) found that most of the students favored a combination of communicative and direct teaching activities. Thus, the author has tried to integrate the communicative components with the components of the grammar translation method, even though it has been found not easy as it asks teacher must be organized and skillful.

Some of the most successful activities in the classroom involve a spontaneous exchange of meanings. This can be seen in the topic-introduction activity that the teacher starts the topic by telling a personal story that immediately engages the learners' interest. They respond with stories of their own. The teacher helps by providing the odd vocabulary item and by occasionally stepping in and rephrasing a learner's contribution. This is real personal involvement, with an accompanying increase in confidence and fluency. There are also questions to be raised about such spontaneous activities (Woodward, 2001), for example, how do we know that all of the class will be genuinely involved in discussion or story telling? Can we be sure what language will occur to provide opportunities for form-focused work? It is very difficult to provide language support on the spur of the moment.

It can be found that the class activities designed in this lesson vary in length and difficulty (Ur, 1996), especially in the task-cycle, the video clip has been played three times. The first listening to a text is often used just to give students an idea of what the speakers sound like, and what the general topic is so that the subsequent listening is easier for them. However, the author does not differentiate the post-listening activities for varying ability levels. This may lead lower-level students fail to engage in the class that they may not be motivated to learn (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011). Another weakness is the time limitation, which might not be enough for students to prepare their tasks-like the quiz game and the final drama presentation-that will indirectly influence students' performance. Estaire and Zanon (1994) recommends that learners who are given five to ten minutes just before the task to plan what to say tend to produce task interactions that are not only lengthier but linguistically richer, with a higher degree of fluency and clause complexity.

Additionally, the lesson ends up by closed tasks with specific goals (Willis, 1996) which is appropriate as Ellis's (2003) research has shown closed tasks may be more effective for the reason that they require greater negotiation of meaning. Whereas because of time limitation, there is no follow-up activities designed for knowledge recycling while this kind of practice plays key role in consolidating learning (Ur, 1996).

3. Conclusion

To conclude, in order to design a comprehensible lesson plan, the author has thought about the aims to be achieved, materials to be covered, activities to be organized, and techniques and resources to be used. Even though every lesson is unique (Robertson and Acklam, 2000), there are certain guidelines (i.e. Willis's TBLT framework, sociocultural theory) that we can follow and certain elements (i.e. learner difference, variety of skills, scaffolding, recycling) that we can incorporate into our plans to help us create a purposeful, interesting and motivating lessons for the students. In this case, not only the language objectives, but also the learning strategies (i.e. collaborative learning) and affective attitude that teacher has taken into consideration. It cannot be neglected that it may meet some problems in real practice.

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