

TESOL France Colloquium 2007

Speaking Spoken Language: a task-based approach

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Introduction - preliminary tasks and observations

A 'getting to know you' task (this was to illustrate the task cycle in 2 below)

Topic: Working days - a survey

Task: Talk - in English - to 2 or 3 people near you and find out:

- where they work

- which of you works the most hours in a typical working day. And week-ends?

One of you - make a quick note of the hours each person works in a typical week.

Put your hand up when you've done this. (Participants went on to report their findings).

Spontaneous spoken data – transcriptions of extracts from recordings

[Identify features of spoken language – how many 'proper sentences'?

what about utterances / message bearing units?]

Family survey - more boys than girls?

B: How about your father? Has he got any brothers or sisters?

D: Mm - got one brother, one sister.

B: And your mother?

D: Just one sister.

B: and .. your brother - one brother's married - your brother's married, so there are - the same with you, more girls than boys in your family.

D: Mhm. Mhm. [..]

D: So what about - let's go back to your family tree...

Working day survey – who works the longest hours per day / week?

Groups of four with a chairperson

M: Erm... what about erm ... you, Philip?

P: Well I usually start at about eight thirty -

M: Mhm.

P: - and go through till five thirty, with a break for lunch.

M: Eight thirty to five thirty, yes.

P: Mhm. And then, probably most evenings, a couple of hours as well.

M: That's quite a long working day isn't it actually. [...] What about weekends?

P: Erm. It varies. Erm... this past weekend I had a lot of, er - a lot of things to do, so I did quite a bit of work.

MESSAGE FOCUS V FORM FOCUS

A lot of text-book activities are form focused, and based on sentence grammar. But the mental process of speaking in order to practise language forms and enact dialogues is totally different from the process of composing spontaneous speech where you need to get your own meanings across in real time, as in the above data. Meanings are conveyed by lexical items, fine-tuned by grammar.

The big question is – how can we generate meaningful spoken interaction in class? A task-based approach is one answer. But what sometimes happens during a task when learners are

shy, worried or simply lacking in motivation? - minimal interaction! The rest of the workshop explores how a task-based framework can be exploited to offer multiple learning opportunities for a range of learners. So first of all we explored features of a ‘task’

1 Characteristics of a Task – how task-like is the activity?

‘We can determine how task-like a given activity is by asking the following questions. The more confidently we can answer *yes* to each of these questions the more task-like the activity.

- a) Does the activity engage learners’ interest?
- b) Is there a primary focus on meaning?
- c) Is there an outcome?
- d) Is success judged in terms of outcome? Is completion a priority?
- e) Does the activity relate to real world activities?

I have introduced as a) the notion of engagement. This is because without engagement, without genuine interest, there can be no focus on meaning or outcome. Learners have to want to achieve an outcome, they have to want to engage in meaning...’

[Dave Willis and Jane Willis 2006 *Doing Task-based Teaching*. Oxford University Press]

2 Sample Framework for a Task

exploring opportunities for listening and speaking generated by this cycle.

PRIMING & PREPARATION

Teacher introduces topic lexis, does a task briefing, learners prepare

TARGET TASK(S)

Cycle/s of Task > Planning > Reporting back

FORM FOCUS

Guided Analysis of written or spoken text,

Practice of specific forms / patterns; consolidation to aid recall

EVALUATION

3 Task data: Dinner Party Seating Plan

Data showing changes in lexical selection by learners in Japan (Craig Johnston, 2005)

Speaker	Language used during task stage	Language used for report stage
Kumiko	Koizumi and Tanaka must be sit at separate table. (Grammatically and semantically flawed; separate tables were not an option.)	...keep Koizumi and Tanaka and Tokugawa apart from each other.
Kumiko	Sanma-san is very good, uh, has a nice character.	He (Sanma) has a sense of humor and friendly.

Kumiko	Soseki is a famous nov, novel...	He (Soseki) is a famous novelist.
Hiroko	Quiet, quiet person is Tokugawa, Soseki, Buddha. And talkative is Koizumi, Tanaka, Sanma.	I separated to every second seat a talkative person and a calm person sit.

4 Variations in spoken language that can be achieved naturally within a TBL framework or task sequence

spontaneous / exploratory / unplanned	V	rehearsed / planned / repeated
private	V	public
ephemeral	V	permanent
dialogue	V	monologue
instrumental	V	informative
shared information source	V	different information source

5 Maximising learner participation – some advice from teachers

Ensure task engages learners; clear outcome; precise instructions, interim goals; visual impact (charts etc); preparation time; repeat activities, encourage, be positive! And finally: for a more rewarding experience, co-operate with colleagues on task design and implementation... (summarised from Willis & Willis 2006 pp217-219)

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