



Some Opinions About Task Based Language Teaching

Mamadaliyeva Khapira Abdukhalilova

English teacher of Fergana polytechnic institute

Nizomova Rano Akhmadjonovna

English teacher of Fergana polytechnic institute

Abstract: *In the article were analyzed some opinions about task based language teaching and its advantages.*

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INTRODUCTION

Task orientation (task based language teaching, TBLT) is considered an appropriate language learning approach for foreign language teaching, which starts from the interests of the learners and prepares them for successful communication in real life. For this purpose, complex tasks are used in class that enable the development of “communicative, methodological and intercultural skills based on relevant content” (Müller-Hartmann/ Schocker 2016, p. 325). The starting point is usually a (more or less) realistic scenario, as the following examples show.

However, there does not always have to be a scenario in the narrower sense. In this way, general or technical questions can also form the starting point for task-oriented lessons, such as: "How strict are your parents?", "Where is it colder: at the North Pole or at the South Pole?" (cf. Willis 2015). Based on the scenario or the question, the learners work on a series of tasks which, for example, deal with the understanding of authentic materials, oral or written exchange and the preparation of the materials in an oral or written presentation.¹⁶ The task-oriented approach is presented as an alternative model to the "often small-step, teacher-centred teaching discourse" (Portmann-Tselikas 2010, p. 1169).

MAIN PART

This is particularly evident in the changing role of teachers: while they are the focus of teacher-centred teaching as knowledge mediators, in task-oriented teaching they are primarily moderators and learning companions. The common focus in the lesson is established via the task, which forms the framework for the lesson. When working on the task, the learners can individually take different paths; however, the results are comparable. In the task-oriented approach, successful communication and thus meaning-related aspects have priority over language-form-related aspects (e.g. correct syntax). For example, in the model by Willis (1996ff.; see below), a focus on language-form-related aspects is provided only after the learners have presented the results – i.e. after the

actual learning task has been completed. Kumaravadivelu (2006, p. 129) rates the question of the relationship between form and meaning in the task-oriented approach as the most stubborn question - "the most stubborn of the questions"; he sees them as closely related to how learners allocate their attention to aspects related to meaning and form. The teacher should closely monitor the communication of the learners in order to identify linguistic phenomena that the learners pay too little attention to or cause difficulties. Suitable exercises and reflection tasks can then be developed on this basis (cf. Kumaravadivelu 2006, p. 138).¹⁷ This requires very good observation skills on the part of the teachers.

Phasing of task-oriented teaching Willis (1996ff.) proposes a three-step phasing of task-oriented teaching: Phase 1 introduces the topic and prepares the learners for the task. In phase 2, the actual task is processed, usually in partner or group work. The task cycle includes the execution of the task, the preparation of an oral or written presentation and the presentation of the results. In phase 3, there is an analysis of linguistic structures and exercises related to language forms. At the end of the task cycle there should be a phase of reflection or evaluation, in which the learners reflect on their learning process and give the teacher feedback (cf. Willis/ Willis 2007, p. 173f.). (1) Introduction to topic and task ("pre-task")

- The teacher helps the learners to understand the topic and the related learning objectives, e.g. through brainstorming activities, pictures, stories, pantomime.
- If necessary, the learners carry out an exercise for preliminary relief (e.g. on vocabulary).
- The teacher can point out relevant words and phrases but does not introduce new structures.
- The learners have time to think about the implementation of the task.

Execution - planning - presentation ("task-cycle") Execution:

- ✓ The learners work on the task (partner/group work).
- ✓ The teacher supports and encourages the learners to use the target language.
- ✓ Focus: spontaneous verbal exchange in a safe environment

Planning:

- The learners prepare the (oral or written) presentation of their results.
- The teacher supports and corrects the formulation; there is an opportunity for individual inquiries.
- If necessary, the learners mutually revise written drafts.
- Focus: Clarity and accuracy

Presentation:

- ✓ Some groups present their results, others compare and supplement them.
- ✓ The teacher comments on the content of the presentations; Linguistic errors are not explicitly addressed (but discussed afterwards in a non-public setting).

Analysis and exercise ("focus on form")

Analysis:

- The teacher sets tasks that focus on the language (based on the texts the learners have worked on).
- One of the aims is to promote language awareness.

- Focus: syntax, lexis, collocations => systematization of observed phenomena.

Exercise:

- Practical exercises based on the language analysis work Müller-Hartmann/ Schocker-von Ditfurth (2011) propose a variant for task-oriented teaching in the sense of Task Supported Language Teaching (TSLT). Here, the framework conditions of the lesson - e.g. homework, textbook - are explicitly taken into account.

backward planning

In order to be able to plan task-oriented lessons well, Legutke (2011) suggests starting with the target task and deriving the preceding exercises from it ("backward planning").

First of all, it is determined which target task/scenario the learners can carry out at the end of the lesson. Examples from textbooks:

- ✓ the trainees plan a "healthy nutrition" campaign day for a company
- ✓ the learners develop and present rules for a "happy city"
- ✓ the learners offer their own business idea.

In a next step, the requirements that the target task places on the learners are analyzed: what do the learners need to be able to do in order to master the task?

- ✓ What content/thematic requirements does the task have?
- ✓ which vocabulary is central?
- ✓ What means of speaking are necessary (for the presentation, the discussion...)?
- ✓ Which strategies do the learners need, e.g. summarizing a text, collecting key points and presenting them clearly, leading a discussion)?

This is compared with the requirements of the learners: Which of the requirements can the learners already cope with without help?

Where do you need support? On this basis, suitable learning tasks (e.g. from the textbook, but also other learning tasks and exercises that you may have developed yourself) are finally selected and support offers are planned.

In 2007, the linguist Paul Nation developed the principle of the "Four Strands", which was introduced in German-speaking countries as the "learning field matrix" (Funk 2010). 21 A well-balanced foreign language lesson should therefore treat four learning areas as evenly as possible over a longer period of time: (1) the presentation of "meaningful" content (meaningful/ meaning focused input²²); (2) active language behavior of the learners (meaningful/ meaning focused output); (3) language-focused instruction/learning; (4) Fluid training (fluency development).

According to Nation 2007, the four learning fields include the following teaching and learning activities:

(1) Presentation of "meaningful" content (meaningful input).

The focus of the first learning field is on learning through listening and reading, i.e. on the receptive use of language. Learners' attention is focused on understanding and appropriately processing what they hear or read. What is perceived as "meaningful" depends on the prerequisites of the learners (e.g. learning biography, motivation), but also on the materials used: "The probability of processing and transfer increases through the offer of linguistically and media-rich, yet understandable text offers. " (Funk 2010, p. 945f.). Nation (2007, p. 3) names extensive reading, shared reading,

listening to stories, watching films, and listening to a conversation as typical activities in this field of learning. The prerequisite is that the content of the reading and listening texts is largely familiar to the learners and of interest to them, the vocabulary is known to at least 95%, the learners can develop unfamiliar language resources and that large amounts of input are made available. (2) Active language behavior of learners (meaningful output).

This field of learning includes learning through speaking and writing, i.e. the productive use of language. The typical activities include the learners holding conversations, presenting, telling stories and writing texts of various kinds.²³ Nation (2007, p. 4) names similar prerequisites for success here as in learning area 1: the learners should write and talk about things that are largely familiar to them. The main goal is that the learners act communicatively successfully. Only a small percentage of the language used is new to learners. The learners have strategies to overcome gaps in their productive language activity. A variety of speaking and writing opportunities are offered. In this context, Funk (2010, p. 947) points out the importance of the principles of action orientation, individualization and personalization of the learning processes.

(3) Language form-related instruction (language focused instruction/learning) In language form-related instruction, the focus is on learning pronunciation, spelling, vocabulary or grammar. Even if language learning is ultimately about acquiring communicative ability to act, the short-term goal of this field of learning is to learn specific language elements. Activities include, for example, pronunciation practice, vocabulary learning, dictation, intensive reading, translation and working with dictionaries. The prerequisite is that the learners deal with the language consciously and intensively, that there is sufficient opportunity for repetition and that the language elements also occur regularly in the other three learning areas.

4) Fluency training.

This learning field is about developing fluency in the four skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing. The learners should be able to receive and produce meaningful content fluently. Typical activities include e.g. skimming reading, telling others multiple times (like in whisper mail) or 10-minute writing tasks. The prerequisite is that the learners are largely familiar with the required language and/or content. The focus is on capturing or conveying meaning (rather than linguistic correctness). Learners are encouraged to complete the tasks in less time than usual. Nation (2007, p. 7) is in favor of considering the four learning fields, each with 25% of the available time (in a lesson, as part of a course program), in order to promote receptive and productive competencies equally. The learning field matrix can be used to check lesson plans for their balance with regard to the teaching activities in the four learning fields or to formulate deliberate deviations.

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