Tasks for Effective Language Production among L2 Learners

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Abstract:

One of the recent approaches in English Language Teaching is the Task Based Approach and this is so unique because of the fact that it is learner focussed and learner centred. It has become so effective because it is less stressful and also makes the learners participate in real life activities which lead to language production in a more effective way. This paper will focus on the learner’s role and the teacher’s role in a TBLT classroom and also the important aspects of reading and writing which are known as the active skills in communication. The paper will also focus on the pitfalls in the writing and speaking skills of students and how they have to be addressed when designing suitable tasks for the learners.

English as a second language is undergoing rapid changes because of the changing trends and the introduction of new approaches to language teaching and also the changing needs of the students. Due to this it becomes essential for language teachers to constantly keep themselves abreast of all the changes and also to try the various approaches so as to see which is much appropriate for the learners. It is necessary for the teachers to evolve a model which are both interesting for students and which also ensures that adequate learning of the language takes place. There have been many language teaching methods which have been tested and tried on the learners, but there is no evidence to show that one model is better than the other because the response of students have been varying in each case. One such approach of language teaching is the Task Bases Language Teaching which has been gaining momentum in the recent past.
Task Based Language Teaching focuses on the usage of authentic language with the help of meaningful, goal oriented tasks like map reading and giving instructions to individuals who ask for directions to a new place. In this method a meaningful communication takes place which is more learner centred. The characteristics of a task are there is a creative use of language which comes spontaneously to students when placed in a real world situation and assessment is based on the outcome of the task. The pedagogical task administered to the student should be close to the real world so as to make it a meaningful exercise. It is essential for the teachers and the learners to be clear about their role in a TBLT classroom. The role of the teacher is as follows:

- Analyse the needs of the learners.
- Decide what tasks are to be administered to the students.
- Pre-test it to a small group to see its feasibility.
- Administer the task to the learners by giving an orientation about the task to them.
- Observe the course of the task and give feedback to the learners.
- Evaluate the task and improvise the task if needed.

The role of the learners in TBLT is as follows:

- Work individually or in groups for the task
- Learn the purpose of the task and participate actively
- Gather and organise information
- Present the results to the others
- Improvisation based on the feedback given by the teacher.

TBLT is a learner centred approach which provides a relaxed atmosphere for learning language. There is no need for the learners to be worried about the structure and the grammatical form. It also promotes integrated learning in an ESL classroom. The active skills like speaking and the receptive skills like reading and writing together with the cognitive skills are honed simultaneously in an effective manner.

Before implementing tasks Communicative samples of a learners’ language had to be sought on all four skills- LSRW and these samples are tested to find out how learners use specific linguistic features over time.

**Writing Tasks**

Writing is usually done as an individual work. It is a tiresome process not only for a student but also for a researcher. Learners might feel at a loss for vocabulary or the apt word...
in this process. It can be made interesting by giving it as a group work or as an extended
group work so that learners develop the listening skill and also develop the attitude of
incorporating the ideas of others. Widdowson (1978: 62) remarks about writing as ‘Writing
as an activity that I am indulging at the moment is not simply composing. What I am doing
(successfully or not) is developing a discussion and arranging point in such a way as to
persuade you, the reader that I have something worthwhile to say.

The pitfalls in a writing activity are usually with the very bad punctuation, not using
the appropriate tense, verb and articles, not being familiar with vocabulary, sometimes there
is a lot of influence from cyber language and social media wherein students coin a lot of short
forms which might not be intelligible for all, there is lack of coherence and innovation and
another major area of concern is the influence of the native language on the L2 learners. So
much care has to be taken when evaluation is done so as to make the learners rectify their
mistake.

Lynch (1996) brings out a diagrammatic form of the process and product of writing
and they are, “selecting, reading, planning, drafting, rewriting, proofreading, final draft”. This
process to writing logically sequences its activity so that the writing becomes more a
systematic and a standard form. Paying attention at every stage in this process may result in
better writing tasks.

**Speaking Tasks**

Tasks facilitate language production which includes both writing and speaking. Tasks
induce the performer to involve in speaking according to the context. Fluency, accuracy and
effective use of the language are the three criteria by which speaking can be assessed. Ellis
(2003) brings out the difference between implicit and explicit knowledge of language.
According to him “implicit knowledge refers to that knowledge of language that a speaker
manifests in performance but has no awareness of... explicit knowledge refers to knowledge
about language that speakers are aware of and if asked can verbalize.” At the initial stage of
speech production implicit knowledge of the language is acquired which later develops into
explicit language. Implicit language is acquired in a natural manner especially through
exposure of an individual whereas explicit language is what is taught in a classroom.

Levelet (1989) proposed the Information Processing model and according to him speech
production is a three stage process. The first stage is the Conceptualization stage where the
content, the aim and the semantics are conceived by the task performer. The second stage is
the Formulation stage where the grammatical and phonological features are formulated and the third stage is the Articulation stage where the speech which was conceptualized and formulated is articulated and converted into actual speech.

The pitfalls of an L2 Learner in a speaking are task grammatical errors while speaking, not being able to remember vocabulary, unnecessary pauses, hesitations, usage of substitution words for those that the speaker is not familiar with, pronunciation errors, much worried about making mistakes and also the problem of being misunderstood by others. This is also due to the influence of the native language upon the speaker. The task should be aimed at making the learner more comfortable with the task rather than creating a panic in him. Learner to learner interaction might minimise the level of stress involved in the speaking process. To facilitate this, pair work and small group tasks can be designed and the teacher has to monitor if interaction happens in all groups. Feedback should be given by the teacher as well as other members in the group so as to get a complete, objective evaluation of the task.

**Designing suitable tasks:**

Tasks can be classified as pedagogical tasks (tasks done in a classroom) and real world or target tasks (tasks done outside a classroom or in a real situation). When designing a task the role of a teacher is to cooperate, to listen and respond the needs of learners. They will have to decide what tasks to work on, decide when to try a new task, give feedback and monitor the students as they do the task. The role of the students is to work individually and in groups, gather and organize information and present results to the teachers and other learners.

Aim of a task is to explore experiential learning, to develop the received knowledge of language, to get awareness about the usage of language in a context, to increase the range of language usage options and to develop evaluative and cognitive skills. Focus of a task is to respond to the comments made by the teachers and co learners, for a teacher the focus should be to develop a lesson plan, a scheme of work, course materials, tasks prerequisites and designing appropriate assessment tools and feedback mechanisms.

**Activities**

Reading, listening, watching, speaking, matching, comparing, ordering, teaching, numbering, ticking, drawing, ranking, classifying, selecting, gathering data, retelling, recreating and other activities can be given to students. A lesson plan also had to be designed
by the course teacher so as to be more focused on the task and for the maximum usage of time and resources.

**Lesson plan for an hour**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pre task</th>
<th>Introducing the topic, planning a short video</th>
<th>5 minutes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Task</td>
<td>Doing it as a pair, individually or as a small group. Preparing a report for presentation.</td>
<td>35 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feedback</td>
<td>Feedback from teacher, other members in the group.</td>
<td>10 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflection</td>
<td>Identifying pitfalls and redesigning the next activity based on the need</td>
<td>10 minutes</td>
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