

Task Based Learning and Strategy Based Instruction in Teaching English as a Foreign Language

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Abstract

In the present paper the author discusses the innovative methodological approaches of the Task Based Learning (TBL) and the Strategy Based Instruction (SBI) in the field of teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL). Based on the relevant literature, after the author has identified the aims of a suggested Speaking lesson, he creates the original lesson as an example of implementing TBL and SBI and provides the tasks grading and sequencing criteria.

Keywords: TEFL, TBL, SBI, teaching methodology, speaking skill

1. Literature review

In this section the reader is given the opportunity to be informed about the main traits of the methodological approaches of TBL and SBI, according to the recent literature.

1.1 Task Based Learning (TBL)

The core of the TBL is the task, which has been defined by numerous scholars, such as, Dornyei (2002: 139), Ellis (2003: 9-10), Markee (1997: 35), Skehan (1998: 95) and Willis (1996a: 53), all of them cited in Manolopoulou-Sergi (2004: 165). The task involves the learners into a problem-solving activity during which they use any target language resource and aim at the completion of an outcome, according to which they are assessed. Consequently, the task is a stimulus for meaningful interaction among the classroom participants. To achieve this, the task designer correlates the task with the learners' needs, interests and individual differences in terms of aptitude, motivation and learning styles.

Within the framework of the TBL the learner is an active agent, who chooses to enter the learning process in case its content is meaningful to her/him and the incorporation of her/his personal needs, attributes and strategies is allowed. Moreover, as the use of the target language (TL) is mainly a social activity, interaction and the social context are the cornerstones of the learning process. In parallel, the teacher's role is fulfilled through facilitation, counseling, cooperation and resourcefulness.

According to Willis (1996a: 53, cited in Manolopoulou-Sergi, 2004: 171), the TBL instruction includes three phases. Firstly, in the *pre-task*, the topic and the task are introduced. The activation of the learners' cognitive and metacognitive schemata is achieved via brainstorming, matching and classification activities, which also empower affective factors, such as motivation and stress reduction. Secondly, the *task cycle* involves the task itself, implemented in pairs or groups, the planning, during which the learners prepare and rehearse their oral or written report of their task outcome and the report itself. Thirdly, the *language focus* phase includes the analysis of the task language features through consciousness-raising activities and the practice of features focusing on the TL form.

1.2 Strategy Based Instruction (SBI)

Within the TBL, the teacher could employ the Strategy Based Instruction (SBI) in a process syllabus in order to facilitate the TL learning. Language Learning Strategies (LLS) improve significantly the learner's performance and autonomy; both interlinked with her/his motivation and self-confidence in a causal spiral. Thus, the learning process obtains the traits of ease, entertainment, effectiveness and high speed.

Experts like, Cohen (1998, 2003), Dörnyei & Skehan (2003), Ehrman & Oxford (1996) and Oxford (2011), cited in Kantaridou (2015: 16-17), have contributed to the author's conclusion that a strategy is a purposeful activity that the learner uses consciously in the beginning and automatically in higher levels of proficiency in order to regulate the learning process. Strategy use effectiveness is augmented in case a strategy is combined with other strategies in a *strategy chain* so as the learner's personal characteristics and the demands of the task are met satisfactorily.

Specifically, Oxford (2011) makes the innovative suggestion of the *Strategic Self-Regulation Model*, cited in Kantaridou (2015: 20-23). As Dörnyei (2005: 191) pinpoints, cognitive, metacognitive, motivational, behavioural and environmental processes are involved in self-regulation. Oxford's model includes *strategies* and *metastrategies* in the *cognitive*, *affective* and *sociocultural-interactive* dimension. Cognitive strategies include the construction, the transformation and the implementation of the TL. Affective ones refer to feelings, attitudes and beliefs and the sociocultural-interactive strategies are preoccupied with context, culture and communication.

Finally, according to Vrettou (2015: 33-34), the explicit and integrated strategy instruction begins with the

teacher naming, demonstrating and explaining the usefulness of the strategy. Then, its practice, evaluation and expansion are sought on behalf of the student. A variety of classroom models (Oxford, 1990) describe these processes through five common steps of instruction: the *preparation*, the *presentation*, the *practice*, the *evaluation* and the *expansion* (Vrettou, 2015: 37). Once the learners gets used to being more experienced in strategy use, the teacher's scaffolding is reduced so as their responsibility for the strategy choice is taken up.

2. TBL and SBI into practice

In this section the author sets the aims, designs and suggests the Speaking lesson to the EFL teachers in order to integrate and apply the TBL and the SBI into practice. Moreover, the justification of the grading and sequencing of the tasks, included in the Speaking lesson, is mentioned as an integral part of the lesson design on the basis of particular criteria.

2.1 The aims of the speaking lesson

Drawing on the literature mentioned above, the author suggests the Speaking lesson, which is described in detail in Appendix I. To begin with, the first aim is the creation of the learning opportunities for authentic and meaningful interaction within the framework of the Communicative Language Teaching. Secondly, the implementation of the TBL and the SBI especially in the speaking skill and the consequent development of the learners' linguistic, semantic, socio-linguistic and *strategic competence* (Canale and Swain, 1980:25) are aims of equal importance. Last but not least, the lesson caters for the satisfaction of learners' needs.

2.2 Integrating the TBL and the SBI in a lesson

To fulfill the aims, the teacher creates an original lesson entitled "Talking about travelling" (Appendix I). The topic of travelling is chosen since it is familiar and popular among the majority of learners. Regarding the methodological approach the integration of the TBL and the SBI is implemented.

In the pre-task the introduction of the topic, the main task and the comprehension of the task instructions take place. Moreover, the topic vocabulary is brainstormed through vocabulary exercises. The SBI steps of preparation and presentation of the sociocultural-interactive strategy of overcoming knowledge gaps (Oxford, 2011, cited in Kantaridou, 2015: 22) are included in this stage, too. During preparation the teacher reminds the learners of the possibility to ask for clarification, verification or correction whether there is a communication gap among the interlocutors. Then, in the presentation phase s/he brainstorms phrases like, "Sorry, I don't understand you, What do you mean by...? Can you repeat that, please?, What's the English word for?, If you see what I mean", which are noted down by the learners, and models the strategy. Simultaneously, the sociocultural-interactive strategy of interacting to learn and communicate (ibid.) and the cognitive strategy of using the senses to comprehend and remember (ibid.) act in an ancillary way. Finally, the learners are exposed to the authentic listening input of the you tube video "Talking about travelling".

At the task cycle, firstly, the learners do the task using their notes of the first stage. In groups of three they are asked to discuss with two teenagers, who are tourists about their travel experience. While discussing, they take notes, which will be used at the language focus stage. The group work serves the learners' various learning styles, pace and different proficiency level and promotes the differentiated learning. In addition, their interaction enhances their *linguistic* (Chomsky, 1965), *semantic*, *sociocultural* and *strategic competence* (Canale & Swain, 1980:25). Their responsibility to participate and be actively involved and the strategy practice are implemented, too. Secondly, while planning the students prepare and rehearse their oral report to the class, which includes their discussion about travelling, the strategies use and their participation level in their group. Finally, they report the final outcome to the class. At this stage the teacher monitors, advises, encourages, organises and safeguards the lesson time.

The last stage of the language focus includes the analysis and the practice of the TL form. The students are asked to do a consciousness-raising activity to process the uses of the Present Perfect and the Past Simple tenses and then to evaluate the usefulness of the strategy of overcoming knowledge gaps. In this way, they simultaneously practice the metacognitive strategy of evaluating progress, performance and strategy use (Oxford, 2011, cited in Kantaridou, 2015: 22). Due to time limitation the teacher assigns the practice activities of the relevant tenses as homework and devotes the last minutes to the last step of the SBI, the expansion of strategies to new tasks. The students are given examples of speech characteristics and techniques of overcoming oral interaction gaps, such as fillers, hesitation devices, paraphrasing, circumlocution, word coining, self-repairing, appealing for help, going off the point (Dornyei & Thurrell, 1991:18-22) and they are asked in pairs to think of real life situations these examples are used.

2.3 Tasks grading and sequencing criteria

Generally, the tasks are sequenced step by step on the basis of the interdependence of their outcomes and they gradually become more complex as their difficulty increases smoothly, demanding the learners to produce from

short to longer and more detailed stretches of language.

Elaborating on Skehan's (1992) criteria, in terms of *code complexity*, the vocabulary load and variety are catered and redundancy is obvious since the learners are allowed to use any available language they have acquired along with the strategy they are expected to practice. Furthermore, the topics and the tasks are familiar, predictable and learner-friendly and relate to authentic situations in order to agree with the learners' perception of the world and relax the *cognitive complexity* (ibid.). This is also accomplished through the familiar discourse genre, in which the exchange of personal experience is involved. Besides, as Robinson (2011) states, interlanguage is expanded when a gradual increase of the cognitive load happens within a familiar situation in context. Lastly, the *communicative stress* (Skehan, 1992) in terms of the time limits and presentation speed is handled gently so that the learners are assisted in the learning process.

3. Conclusion

In the present paper a hopefully successful attempt has been made to refer to the teaching methodology of the TBL and the SBI in the context of EFL. For the purpose of thorough understanding the author makes the suggestion of the original Speaking lesson during which theory is put into practice. Its implementation remains to be seen.

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Appendix I

Speaking lesson plan

A. Description of the class

Language Level: B2

Learner profile: A class of twenty-four students, fifteen girls and nine boys, aged sixteen years old, multilingual (Greek, English, Russian, Albanian speaking).

Motivation levels/ Attitude: High level of extrinsic and intrinsic motivation and positive attitude towards the EFL.

Recent Work: In terms of grammar, they have been taught the Present Tenses. The teaching focus has been mainly on the receptive skills, reading and listening.

Class sessions: The class takes place two teaching hours of 45 minutes a week.

B. Overall aims of lesson

1. To teach the speaking skill.
2. To integrate the TBL and the SBI.
3. To enhance the Ss' linguistic, semantic, socio-linguistic and strategic competence.
4. To develop the Ss' communicative, strategic and cognitive strategies.

C. Objectives

1. To practice authentic and meaningful oral interaction.
2. To integrate listening and speaking.
3. To use any language they know.
4. To express themselves.
5. To cooperate in groups.
6. To develop discourse competence, turn taking.
7. To negotiate meaning.
8. To develop cognitive, metacognitive and sociocultural-interactive strategies.
9. To practice note-taking.
10. To practice presentation skills.

D. Procedure

Stage	Procedure	Objectives	Interaction	Materials	Time
Pre-task	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • T. introduces the topic and the main task. • T. brainstorms vocabulary about travelling. • T. introduces the strategy of overcoming knowledge and communication gaps. • T. brainstorms phrases relevant to the strategy and models it. • Ss. watch the you tube video "Talking about travelling" 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To activate the Ss. mental schemata. • To teach vocabulary related to travelling. • To raise Ss' strategy awareness. • To prepare, present and model the strategy of overcoming knowledge and communication gaps. • To integrate listening and speaking. 	<p>T-Ss</p> <p>T-S</p> <p>S-T</p>	<p>Ss' Study Pack,</p> <p>Ss' notebooks,</p> <p>Board</p> <p>OHP, laptop, Internet connection</p>	10min
Task Cycle: Task	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • T. separates the class into groups of 3 Ss. • The groups do the task. They discuss with two tourists about their travelling experience and they practice the strategy of overcoming knowledge and communication gaps. • Ss. take notes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To interact in authentic and meaningful context. • To use any language they know. • To express themselves. • To cooperate in groups. • To develop discourse competence, turn taking. • To negotiate meaning. • To develop cognitive, metacognitive and sociocultural-interactive strategies. • To practice note-taking. 	<p>Group work,</p> <p>T.-Groups,</p> <p>Groups-T.</p>	<p>Ss.' notebooks</p> <p>board</p>	6min.
Planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Groups prepare and rehearse their discussion. • Groups discuss the strategies use and their participation in the group work. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To interact in authentic and meaningful context. • To use any language they know. • To express themselves. • To cooperate in groups. • To develop discourse competence, turn taking. • To negotiate meaning. • To develop cognitive, metacognitive and sociocultural-interactive strategies. 	<p>Group work,</p> <p>T.-Groups,</p> <p>Groups-T.</p>		6min.
Report	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Groups report to the class their discussion and their comments about the strategy use and their participation in the group work. • T. provides feedback on content and form. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To practice presentation skills. 	<p>Groups-Class</p> <p>T.-Groups</p>		8min.
Language Focus: Analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • T. asks questions about the uses of the Present Perfect and the Past Simple tenses. • Ss. answer. • T. provides feedback. • T. asks Ss. questions about the usefulness of the strategy of overcoming knowledge and communication gaps. • Ss. answer. • T. provides feedback. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To develop linguistic competence. • To integrate listening and speaking. • To evaluate the strategy of overcoming knowledge and communication gaps. • To practice the metacognitive strategy of evaluating progress, performance and strategy use. 	<p>T.-Ss.</p> <p>Ss.-T.</p>	<p>Board,</p> <p>Ss.' notebooks</p>	8min.
Practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • T. writes some examples of fillers, hesitation devices, paraphrasing, circumlocution, word coining, self-repairing, appealing for help, going off the point on the board and asks the Ss. in pairs to note down in which real life situations all the above are used. • Ss. answer in pairs in their notebooks and report their answers to the class. • T. provides feedback. • T. assigns homework. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To expand on the strategy of overcoming knowledge and communication gaps. • To collaborate in pairs. • To practice the form and the uses of the Present Prefect and the Past Simple tenses. 	<p>T.-Ss.</p> <p>Pair work</p> <p>Ss.-T.</p>	<p>Board,</p> <p>Ss.' notebooks</p>	7min.