Invited Paper

From PPP and CALL/MALL to a Praxis of Task-Based Teaching and Mobile Assisted Language Use

May 2015 – Volume 19, Number 1

Huw Jarvis
University of Salford, UK
<h.a.jarvis@salford.ac.uk>

Introduction

Two of the most significant trends in TESOL over the last twenty years or so are the rise of task-based language teaching (TBLT) and the growth of technology. With TBLT we see a challenging of more traditional structure-based models of delivery, and the increased capacity and mobility of computer desktops, laptops, notebooks and other mobile devices have had an impact on how we work, rest and play–it is all done with and through language, and the language which dominates in a globalised interconnected digital era is English. Little wonder, then, that getting students to do things through language, at times with Computers and Other Mobile Devices (CaOMDs), is an area of ever-growing interest.

To date, a theory and practice narrative on TBLT and CaOMDs, despite some coverage (Thomas & Reinders, 2010), is in its infancy. Arguably, one reason for this is the still dominant methodology of Presentation, Practice and Production (PPP), to which Computer or Mobile Assisted Language Learning (CALL/MALL) has become firmly attached. In this discussion paper I begin by illustrating a PPP with CALL/MALL lesson and then go on to propose a TBLT lesson that I align to Mobile Assisted Language Use (MALU). My concern with "how to", or practice, is inextricably linked to "why": a rationale. The premise is that when teachers make choices about what to do in the language classroom it is good pedagogy to have a reason for such choices, be they explicit or implicit. In this sense there is a need to locate what we do in "praxis", which is defined as "the mutually constitutive roles of theory grounded in practice and practice grounded in theory. It is way of thinking about critical work that does not dichotomise theory and practice but rather sees them as always dependent on each other" (Pennycook, 1999, p. 342). The critique of PPP, CALL/MALL, identifies some limitations, and the proposed alternative is a praxis of TBLT and MALU.

PPP and the role of CALL/MALL

Since the mid-1960s, PPP has been the most widely implemented methodology (Cook, 2008; Harmer, 2010; Richards & Rogers, 2014) and typical resources have reflected this. Tomlinson (2011) notes that "the approach is still currently followed by most commercially produced coursebooks" (p. XV) and this observation can be extended to many CALL/MALL resources. With PPP teachers present a language item (usually a structure, function or notion, and a lexical set) that students then practise in a controlled way with language accuracy being the aim. In the final "P" students go on to produce the language in less controlled situations, and at this stage fluency is intended to replace accuracy as the primary aim. Although PPP does not always focus on listening and speaking, lessons typically involve dialogue-building and drilling at the accuracy stage, with more communicative fluency-based activities at the final stage. It could be argued that PPP is a compromise between two methodological traditions. The presentation and practice stages can be associated with audiolingualism, behaviourism, and a structure-based model of education, with learning assumed to occur through repetition of the correct model. In contrast, the production stage involves more communicative approaches, with freer activities including language games and pair work. The goal of this final stage is to complete "automatisation" (Ellis, 2005), or the spontaneous use of a language item. PPP is based on the assumption that what is taught is what is learned. Such an assumption has been challenged (see, for example, Nunan, 1988) and it is now widely recognised that teaching and learning does not necessarily follow such a narrow linear pattern.

The role of CALL/MALL within a PPP methodology is clear. Students are encouraged make use of CaOMDs in order to practise specified linguistic items. Such uses can be either incorporated in the classroom or applied to independent study outside class. The first two "Ps" have historically dominated CALL/MALL and are sometimes characterised as "tutorial CALL" (Taylor, 1980), or "structural CALL" (Warschauer & Kern, 2000). There are a large number of websites and apps that are now available for the presentation and practice of language. Grammar and vocabulary tend to dominate such materials, but reading and listening resources are also widely available. The productive skills of writing and speaking are less prevalent, for obvious reasons. Many of these resources are free to the user; however, some are saturated with pop-up ads, and a few require payment. Examples include the Learn English Grammar app produced by the British Council (http://learnenglish.britishcouncil.org/en/apps/learnenglish-grammar-uk-edition), Randall's ESL Cyber Listening Lab website (http://www.esl-lab.com/index.htm) and Free Rice (http://freerice.com/), which is not restricted to TESOL and is hosted by the UN World Food Programme; it includes an ethical motivation to use the materials–in order to help feed the hungry. Teachers can also produce their own simple exercises using a free authoring package such as Hot Potatoes (http://hotpot.uvic.ca).

As noted, the final "P" tends to adopt a more communicative approach, which in CALL/MALL has been characterised as a second "cognitive phase" (Warschauer & Kern, 2000) where the focus is on pair or group work activities with discussions, and followed by entering responses into the computer. It was during this phase, when text

reconstruction programmes such as Storyboard by Wida Software and Eclipse by John and Muriel Higgins were common. Students worked in pairs or groups to reconstruct a text in which some or all the words were missing. Brett (1994) discusses how such programmes can be usefully aligned to communicative language teaching. Text manipulation using the word processor also came of age during this phase; students could be set exercises that involved the manipulation and transformation of texts, which, once completed, could be compared to a model answer, which in turn was then transformed for "freer" writing. Jarvis (1997) has illustrated such possibilities with four examples of writing activities found in standard ELT course books. Arguably, these examples of a more communicative approach emerging in the final "P" are more aligned to further controlled practice than to a task, as defined below. However, it is in the third and final stage of CALL/MALL which has been identified as a "sociocognitive phase" (Warschauer & Kern, 2000) where synergies with TBLT and MALU become apparent, for it is here that students interact with each other via computers.

Towards a praxis of TBLT and MALU

TBLT developed out of the communicative approach, but Ellis (2003) has identified its point of departure as "teaching through communication rather than for communication" (p. 208). Ellis (2003, p. 4) identifies nine definitions of a task within the literature, with meaningful language use at the core of each. For the purposes of this discussion paper I take tasks as a work plan to include four key criteria (Ellis, 2012): the primary focus is on meaning; there is some kind of gap; learners need to use their own linguistic and non-linguistic recourses; there is an outcome other than a display of language (p. 198). Teaching through communication and meaningful use are also primary points of departure between CALL/MALL and that of the newly emerging construct of MALU which Jarvis and Achilleos (2013) define as:

[N]on-native speakers using of a variety of mobile devices in order to access and/or communicate information on an anywhere/anytime basis and for a range of social and/or academic purposes in an L2. Such a definition encompasses all the features of CALL and even MALL, in that it allows for conscious study purposes on desktops, laptops and Other Mobile Devices (OMDs), but is not constrained by the limitations and also recognises social uses in the L2 in both formal and less formal learning situations. It recognises that devices can be used not only as a means to an end, where the end is language learning, but also where the end is accessing and posting information as globally networked citizens with English (as the L2) as well as L1 being the means to do so. (p. 9)

Our mobile phones are no longer "just telephones". They are still cameras; video and audio recorders; maps and satellite navigators; Internet browsers; diaries; calculators; newspapers; alarm clocks; music players; TV and radio players; note pads; games; social media outlets; places to buy and sell; and much more besides. We need to develop pedagogies to harness the opportunities that such complex devices offer, and we need appropriate constructs to understand, describe, and investigate what this means for language education. It is no longer sufficient to exclusively focus on the mechanical PPP lessons, with CaOMDs playing a traditional CALL/MALL role; a praxis of TBLT and MALU offers us the opportunity to redefine our theory and practice.

The affordances of CaOMDs as a source for comprehensible input have been documented recently in this journal (Jarvis & Krashen, 2014) and a series of recent studies (Jarvis, 2013, 2014; Jarvis & Achilleos, 2013) suggest that many students use such devices in less controlled situations (outside the classroom, without set exercises or tasks) in order to interact with others in English as an L2, as digitally connected global citizens. Such practices were viewed by many students in these studies as being just as valuable in their learning of English as tutorial CALL/MALL materials. To date, however, what has been only partially articulated in the MALU discussion is its potential as a source for "comprehensible output" in a TBLT classroom. Comprehensible output, or language produced by learners that can be understood by other speakers, has been widely recognised (see, for example Swain, 1985) and when harnessed through TBLT with CaOMDs, the opportunities seem endless. Let us move to briefly provide a specific example lesson that compares a PPP with CALL/MALL lesson and that of a TBLT with MALU lesson, and to then briefly discuss more generally the affordances of CaOMDs as MALU in TBLT.

Illustration

The illustration is an "idealised PPP" lesson with a presentation stage that involves dialogue building and concept checking. In practice, PPP lessons often fall well short of this example with the first "P" comprising little more than explicit explanation of the target feature. Let us suppose that in this typical lower intermediate PPP lesson a teacher has as a primary lesson plan aim and objective to present and provide further practice on the use of the simple past tense to describe completed actions in the past. The teacher might achieve this using a number of steps within a PPP framework, and in this case a dialogue is built. He or she might begin by setting a context using a visual; here the teacher would ask questions to the whole class. For example:

> Q: Where are Peter (P) and Jane (J)?
> A: In the office

> Q: What day is it?
> A: It's Monday

> Q: What time is it?
> A: It's 9:00 AM

> Q: What are P and J talking about? (a thought bubble coming from each shows an action)
> A: Watching TV, Playing football

> Q: (concept checking) Are they talking about last weekend or next weekend?
> A: Last weekend

> Q: Are they talking about the past or the future?
> A: The past.

Once the scene has been set, with repetition of these questions to individual class members, as required, the teacher moves on to use a series of established presentation and practice techniques going from controlled to less controlled practice in order to build and drill a dialogue, and to then introduce a series of substitution elements, with

alternative action cues, which students practice in pairs. The dialogue would typically be as follows:

> "P: What did you do last weekend?
> J: Nothing much I <u>watched TV</u>. And you?
> P: I <u>played</u> football."

Substitution actions might include the three past tense endings of /t/, /d/ and /id/, as well as irregular verbs; the accurate pronunciation of which might be a secondary aim on the lesson plan, thus, <u>visited</u> my family; <u>cleaned</u> the house, I <u>washed</u> some clothes, <u>cooked</u> a nice curry, <u>made</u> a cake, <u>had</u>... <u>did</u>..., etc. In the final freer activity production stage students might be asked to walk around the class, finding out what their classmates really did over the weekend. Follow-up consolidation and further practice activities with CALL/MALL are numerous. These could be completed in class or in a self-study centre, or at home. Using the word processor, with supporting visuals as required, students might be asked to sequence a text about what Mike did last Sunday. *He had a shower and cooked some breakfast. He got home at about 23:00, had a wash and went to bed. At 13:00 he got the bus into Manchester and walked around the city centre for about three hours. Last Sunday Mike got up at 8:00 in the morning. In the evening he visited his friend who cooked a nice curry for both of them*. Once they have the correct order, the model text can then be used for students to write about what they did last Sunday. "Last Sunday I got up at...." Another possibility might involve working on a tutorial programme which provides information on the form of the simple past tense together with some practise exercises (see, for example, http://www.english-4u.de/past_tense.htm).

Lessons like this have a place; I am not arguing for an either/or choice. Furthermore, the definition of MALU allows for the possibility that one such use of technology may be to consciously focus on learning in this way. However, it is not the only approach, and we need to critically reflect on such lessons. The lesson presents a rigid dialogue with substitution elements of past tense verbs. Presentation and practice, together with the use of CALL/MALL, comprise controlled manipulation of language that may or may not be meaningful to the students. It is assumed that what is taught is learned, and that students will use the presented language in the final production stage of the lesson, and that CALL/MALL consolidates the aims and objectives of the lesson. None of the four features of task as a work plan have been met in the presentation and practise stages, and although there is an information gap in the production stage, the remaining three criteria are not in place.

An alternative TBLT with MALU lesson would look very different in a number of respects, particularly in terms of authenticity or real language and activities: a focus on that which is likely to occur outside the classroom. If a task-based syllabus were being followed, then the title of the lesson would shift from a specification of syllabus products, which in the PPP lesson is the form and function of the past simple tense, to a specification of task such as "talking about last weekend to decide who had the most exciting time." It is recognised, however, that in many contexts the syllabus is imposed on practitioners but this of itself does not prevent the possibilities and opportunities of TBLT and MALU, as is illustrated in the example which for arguments sake has the same

lesson plan aim and objective as in the PPP lesson. I concur with Breen and Littlejohn (2000), who provide a series of case studies which discuss, illustrate, and critique how TBLT can be achieved in a wide range of very differing teaching contexts, and argue that most teachers are empowered to make decisions about the delivery of specific lessons, even if the ministry of education or others impose a traditional structural syllabus.

TBLT typically involves three stages: pre-task, the task, and post-task (Ellis, 2003; Willis & Willis, 2007), but it should be noted that only the main stage is always essential. As a pre-task the teacher might ask the students on Friday to take some pictures on their phones of the things that they do over the weekend. The following week he or she may then briefly ask (brainstorm) what a few of the students did, also talking about his or her weekend and some of the activities (verbs) may be noted on the board. The teacher would then move on to set up the task and explain to students that they have to spend X amount of time going round the class and talking to Y number of students and finding out about some of the things that they did over the weekend in order to decide who had the most exciting time, they are tasked with getting as much interesting information as they can about each other's weekend. Students are asked to use their smart phone pictures to show each other and talk about some of the things that they did. Once the information gathering is complete, students are asked to report back on what they found out from some or all of their classmates and who they think had the most exciting time – this is the significant task outcome. During the task the teacher observes interactions, notes significant errors, and assists as required (particularly if there is a breakdown in communication), but it should also be noted that at this stage students may well be correcting each other either directly; "... oh you mean you visited your family", or indirectly for example by encouraging repetition or reformulation; "... explain again please". Focus on form is a significant feature of TBLT, and any post-task teacher feedback will differ depending on the learners, but with a class of Thai learners, for, example this has included work on question formation "What you do"; verb form with -*ing* "I go to shopping"; pronunciation of regular past tense ending "I sleep", "I watch TV", I visit my family", etc. When students start the task, their opening line could of course be any number of possibilities and not just one fixed sentence as in PPP; "how was your weekend?", "what did you get up to?" etcetera. Unlike in the PPP lesson, the arising dialogue could take any number of turns and students are more likely to talk about what was special or exciting to them; from "I visited my family", to "I went to watch Leeds United play Manchester U in the FA Cup", to "we went to China town for a meal", etc. In the classroom, as in real life, these events often prompt further discussion, and in many cases such discussions include getting out mobile phones and showing pictures, which in turn take the conversation in any number of directions; e.g., picture of a family gathering may take the conversation into family relations; a picture of a football match into star players, league tables; a picture of eating in China town into food, and restaurant locations and prices. The dialogues are not fixed and mobile devices are integrated or "normalised" (Bax, 2003) into everyday communicative activities. Lessons of this type meet the four criteria of TBLT: the primary focus is on meaning – students are exchanging information about what they really did; there is some kind of gap – students don't know what everyone in the class did; learners need to use their own linguistic and non-linguistic recourses – there is no fixed dialogue and the pictures are a

significant non-linguistic resource; there is an outcome other than a display of language – students found out about what their classmates did over their weekends, decided who had the most exciting time, and got lots of other information too (about family, football, food).

The example of MALU here is simple, effective, and it doesn't even require Wi-Fi, but possibilities for developing a range of TBLT with MALU are endless. Digital content comprising; text, graphics (e.g., charts, photos, videos) and audio are all available at the tap of a mobile or tablet screen, our students can not only access a vast amount of content, but, critically for TBLT, they can create it, share it, like or dislike it, comment upon it; in short: engage in it thorough language use. Digital outlets for doing so are numerous, but it is perhaps social media such as Facebook, You Tube, Twitter, WhatsApp, Skype, and Instagram that offer the most opportunities. With the example lesson, the teacher, and or students, may create a closed Facebook group with membership restricted to class members. Here "what's on your mind" posts, with picture and video uploads, would include weekend activities posts, other classmates can respond with a "like" click as well as using the "comments" tab, to comment or to ask questions. The classroom-based task ends up as an ongoing opportunity for meaningful language use in a digital environment beyond the class.

Conclusion

According to http://www.internetworldstats.com, as of June 2014, an estimated total of over 3 billion (3,035,749,340) of the world's population (over 42%) use the Internet, with the vast majority located in Asia (1,386.2 million), followed by Europe (582.4 million), Latin America/Caribbean (320.3 million), North America (310.3 million), Africa (297.9 million), Middle East (11.8 million) and Oceania/Australia (26.8 million). Significantly, the highest number of users are in regions where English is not the L1, and yet English is the most common language, with an estimated 800.6 million users (28.6%), followed by Chinese with 649.4 million (23.2%) and Spanish with 224.4 million (7.9%). All of the world's remaining languages account for 40.3% of languages used on the Internet. The same source identifies significant growth in mobile technology with 6.8 billion subscribers (approaching the world population of 7.1 billion, although clearly not all are on the Internet). Another source (http://www.statista.com/) reports that as of March 2015 there were 1.79 billion users of social media, with Facebook having the largest number of active accounts at 1.37 billion. Clearly, English is the L2 on the Internet for many users of CaOMDs, with social media being a significant channel for engagement. In this sense, MALU in English as an L2 is already a global reality, and if the profession is to live up to its remit of equipping students for the real world, then this cannot be ignored in our everyday practice. I argue here that TBLT, with its focus on procedural knowledge or learning through language, rather than declarative knowledge or learning about language, has to be at the forefront of our practice. I do not advocate an outright rejection of PPP and CALL/MALL, but the case for a praxis of TBLT and MALU eclipsing this is a compelling one.

About the Author

Huw Jarvis is a Senior Lecturer in TESOL at the University of Salford, UK. He has published widely in technology and language education and is the founder and editor of TESOLacademic.org, which disseminates open access TESOL-based research and keynote talks via YouTube.

Acknowledgement

References

Bax, S. (2003). CALL – Past, present and future. *System, 31*(1), 13-28.

Breen, M., & Littlejohn, A. (Eds.). (2000). *Classroom decision-making negotiation and process syllabus in practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Brett, P. (1994). Using text reconstruction software. *ELTJ, 48*(4), 329-336.

Cook, V. (2008). *Second language learning and language teaching* (4th ed.). London: Hodder Education.

Ellis, R. (2003). *Task-based language learning and teaching*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Ellis, R. (2005). *Instructed second language acquisition – A literature review: Report to the Ministry of Education*, Auckland: Auckland UniServices Limited.

Ellis, R. (2012). *Language teaching research and language pedagogy*. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell.

Harmer, J. (2010). *The practice of English language teaching* (4th ed.). Essex: Pearson Longman.

Jarvis, H. (1997). Word-processing and writing skills: Practical applications to language teaching text books. *British Journal of Education Technology, 28*(3), 165-175.

Jarvis, H. (2013). Computers and learner autonomy: Trends and issues. In S. Sheehan (Ed.), *British Council ELT Research Papers Volume 1*(pp. 387-409). London: The British Council.

Jarvis, H. (2014). Digital residents: Practices and perceptions of non native speakers. *Asian EFL Journal Teaching Articles, 75*, 21-35.

Jarvis, H., & Achilleos, M. (2013). From computer assisted language learning (CALL) to mobile assisted language use. *TESL-EJ, 16*(4), 1-18.

Jarvis, H., & Krashen, S. (2014). Is CALL obsolete? Language acquisition and language learning revisited in a digital age. *TESL-EJ, 17*(4), 1-6.

Nunan, D. (1988). *The learner-centred curriculum*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Pennycook, A. (1999). Introduction: Critical approaches to TESOL. *TESOL Quarterly 33*(3), 328-348.

Richards, J.C., & Rogers, T.S. (2014). *Approaches and methods in language teaching* (3rd ed.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Swain, M. (1985). Communicative competence: Some roles of comprehensible input and comprehensible output in its development. In S. Gass & C. G. Madden (Eds.), Input and second language acquisition (pp. 235-253). Rowley, MA: Newbury House.

Thomas, M., & Reinders, H. (Eds.). (2010). *Task-based language learning and teaching with technology*. London: Continuum.

Tomlinson, B. (2011). *Materials development in language teaching* (2nd ed.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Taylor, R.P. (Ed.). (1980). *The computer in the school: Tutor, tool, tutee.* New York: Teacher's College Press.

Warschauer, M., & Kern, R. (Eds.). (2000). *Network-based language teaching: Concepts and practice.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.