

# A FRAMEWORK FOR TASK-ORIENTED LANGUAGE INSTRUCTION

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## ABSTRACT

*Task-based teaching is an area which has emerged from the upsurge of interest in cognitive approaches to language learning and teaching of the mid 1980s. Being a current vogue in communicative language teaching, task-based language learning contains dangers if implemented without care. In particular, it is likely to create pressure for immediate communication rather than interlanguage change and growth. In this process, it may persuade learners to use lexical modes of communication excessively and prematurely, and to fossilize some way short of native-like second language competence. This paper takes a processing-pedagogic viewpoint to review what task-based instruction is, to identify its goals, and to warn EFL/ESL teachers about the potential pitfalls of task-based language teaching.*

*Keywords: Task; Task-Based Teaching; Second Language Acquisition; Interlanguage.*

## INTRODUCTION

Perhaps task-based instruction is one of the most important innovations of educationalists of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. Early on after its introduction, a number of researchers and syllabus designers called for a move towards task-based instruction in language teaching (Prabhu, 1987; Nunan, 1989; Long and Crookes, 1991; Gass and Crookes, 1993). Yet, later on a few people noticed that task-based instruction could be criticized on some grounds. Sheen (1994), for instance, noted that it was unclear how a task-based approach could be implemented. This paper will review the origins, current state, and potential problems of task-based teaching.

### 1. Background

Task-based language instruction has its roots in the cognitive approach to language learning and psycholinguistics. The cognitive approach to language learning is concerned with:

- the nature of what is learnt;
- the role of consciousness;
- the role of performance factors; and
- the impact of attention upon learning

The question of 'what is learnt' has been addressed through laboratory studies of artificial intelligence (IA) of late 20<sup>th</sup> century. Two patterns of learning have emerged from these studies: 1. restructuring of induced abstract rules (McLaughlin, 1990; Reber, 1989), and 2. Learning of

exemplars (Carr and Curren, 1994). In the former, progress consists of the induction of underlying abstract rules following a process of implicit restructuring. It regards development in terms of the growth and complexity of the underlying system. In the latter, however, specific contextually-coded items that may contain structure are learnt as multi-word lexical chunks (or exemplars) that can be used idiomatically in subsequent performance.

Extending this analogy to natural language development will imply that interlanguage (IL) development has a dual nature: 1. exemplar-based, and 2. rule-based. The rule-based interpretation of interlanguage development indicates that L2 acquisition would be the result of the continued operation of a Universal Grammar (UG) or other cognitive processes that mobilize IL through successive phases of restructuring towards the final acquisition of the target language. The exemplar-based perspective, on the other hand, maintains that IL development is the result of the accumulation of useful chunks of language or formulaic linguistic items. Carr and Curren (1994), following Mathews, Buss, Stanley, Blachard-Fields, Cho, and Druhan (1989), noted that this dual system operates in a cyclical manner to yield the best result.

A second question addressed in the cognitive approach to language learning has to do with the role of consciousness. 'Consciousness' has been used in IL literature with several senses including awareness, control/fluency, and attention (Schmidt, 1990; 1994). In

this connection, Carr and Curren (1994) noted the superiority of explicit learning of structured material over implicit learning. This suggests that awareness of the learning itself and of what is to be learnt is not without advantages. For example, awareness enables learners to notice the gap between their current IL system and the language they encounter (Klein, 1986) with the result that efficient solutions to this matching problem will ensue (Schmidt, 1994). Awareness also persuades learners to appreciate better the instruction that they receive in general, and the corrections that are given in specific. It may also make restructuring easier (Karmiloff-Smith, 1986). It may also enable IL speakers to combine and operate the dual system outlined above; this final possibility may happen when awareness to the implementation of the rule-based system in IL communication renders these rules as exemplars which can subsequently be used in the exemplar-based system when the need to communicate in real time arises (Peters, 1985).

Interested readers may see Schmidt (1992) for an extensive review of psychological mechanisms that underlie fluency in foreign language performance. A short summary of Schmidt's discussion yields three ways of accounting for the development of fluency:

(a) accelerating models: Initial declarative knowledge becomes proceduralized or automatized; in other words, conscious knowledge gradually becomes subconscious (cf., Anderson, 1989; Schiffrin and Schnieder, 1977);

(b) restructuring models: IL speakers gradually access and use better algorithms for organizing their performance (cf., Cheng, 1985; McLaughlin, 1990);

(c) instance models: Performance is based on contextually-coded exemplars that function as units in speech; these multi-word units are the end product of previous applications of rules. Learning happens when instances or exemplars are created, and fluency ensues when they are used (cf., Logan, 1988; Peters, 1985; Robinson and Ha, 1993; Schmidt, 1992).

Skehan (1996) took sides with the last model. He argued that this model would fit the process of language

acquisition more easily than the other two. There is one point of caution: if the underlying syntactic rule has not evolved fully when it is changed into an exemplar, that exemplar will become a syntactic fossil.

The final meaning of consciousness is attention. Attention is selective in that the individual selects to attend to some parts of processing. In foreign language learning and performance, as Skehan (1994) noted, attention may be directed towards input, or central processing, or output. In the case of input, attention is first given to meaning, and if there is spare attentional resources, also to form (Van Patten, 1990; 1994). When attention is directed to central processing, input finds the opportunity to change into intake (Schmidt, 1994); this is much similar to a kind of self-awareness about the task of learning which is being faced (Skehan, 1996). Finally, attention can be directed to output; this is much similar to the analogy of learning a backhand in tennis by giving one's full attention to the backhand when one is playing (Van Patten, 1994), and not to the explanations of the rules of backhand. In much the same way, language learning can result from an attention to output rather than an attention to a detailed explanation of rules. More information on the background of task-based language instruction can be referred from Ellis (2003), Ellis and Barkhuizen (2005), Lantolf (2000), Lantolf and Thorne (2006), Rose and Kasper (2001), and Widdowson (2003).

## 2. Approaches to task-based teaching

Task-based instruction was the result of cognitive approaches to language learning and psycholinguistics. An overview of the literature on task-based instruction reveals that two perspectives on 'task' have been in vogue ever since its inception: (a) a macroscopic perspective, and (b) a microscopic perspective. The difference between the two lies in the number of characteristics one assumes for an activity to be called as a task. Proponents of the microscopic perspective, in general, and Skehan (1996), in specific, hold that a task is taken to be an activity in which :

Meaning is primary;

- there is some sort of relationship to the real world;

- task completion has some priority; and
- task outcomes are the clue to the assessment of task performance.

Proponents of the macroscopic perspective, on the other hand, do not see these four characteristics enough for an activity to be called a task. Long and Crookes (1991), for example, discuss a further quality of tasks:

- tasks have a clear pedagogic relationship to out-of-class language use.

This means that task development should be based on needs analysis which seeks to clarify how students will need to use language in real life; it further suggests that task design should ensure that classroom tasks bear a developmental relationship to such non-classroom activity.

Skehan (1996, p. 39) prefers to use the term "strong and weak forms of the task-based approach" to refer to these perspectives:

A strong form would argue that tasks should be the *unit* of language teaching, and that everything else should be subsidiary. In this view, the need to transact tasks is seen as adequate to drive forward language development, as though second language acquisition is the result of the same process of interaction as first language acquisition (Wells, 1985). A weak form of task-based instruction would claim that tasks are a vital part of language instruction, but that they are embedded in a more complex pedagogic context. They are necessary, but may be preceded by focused instruction which is contingent on task performance. This version of task-based instruction is clearly very close to general communicative language teaching. It could also be compatible with a traditional presentation, practice, production sequence, only with production based on tasks . . . rather than more stilted and guided production activities (Littlewood, 1981).

Other less important classifications of tasks also exist. Duff (1986) contrasts divergent and convergent tasks; in that the latter engage acquisitional processes more effectively. Berwick (1993) distinguishes between experiential-expository tasks and didactic-collaborative ones. Brown, Anderson, Shilcock, and Yule (1984)

proposed that static tasks (e.g., description) are easier than dynamic tasks (e.g., narration), and dynamic tasks, in turn, are easier than abstract ones (e.g., Argumentation).

### 3. Goals in task-based teaching

Like any other approach to language teaching, the first goal of task-based learning is that of becoming more native-like in one's performance in a second/foreign language. As intriguing as this goal may seem, it is challengable on a number of grounds. First, there is the issue of what 'native-like' means. Second, many language learners may have other models of competence that they aspire to, rather than a particular native speaker version. Moreover, there are L2 learners who reject a native-speaker model completely or partially. It is, therefore, necessary to separate learner goals from this general goal into the three main areas of (a) accuracy, (b) complexity/restructuring, and (c) fluency. Accuracy is concerned with interlanguage speakers' ability to handle whatever level of complexity they have achieved; complexity relates to the stage and elaboration of the underlying interlanguage system; and fluency has to do with interlanguage speakers' ability to communicate meaning in real time (Skehan, 1996).

Accuracy relates (a) to interlanguage speakers' belief in target language norms, and (b) to native-like performance based on target language rules. A tendency on the part of L2 learners to be accurate in their interlanguage communication, as Schachter (1974) noted, will often foster in their overuse of conservative communicative strategies, in which what is well-known is used, and what is not is avoided (Skehan, 1996). What motivates the interlanguage speaker to strive for accuracy is not fully understood yet. There are, however, a few probable causes:

- learner's wish to be correct in language use;
- learner's attempt to conform to target language norms; and
- learner's wish to value target language forms as important.

There is, of course, a potential threat to this adherence to

target language forms: when there is the pressure to communicate in real time, interlanguage speakers may fail to conform to target language norms. As Van Patten (1990) and Van Patten and Cadierno (1993) emphasized, the more attention is diverted elsewhere, the less attention is available for form and accuracy.

A second goal for language learning in general, and task-based language learning in particular, is complexity or restructuring. The interlanguage systems get gradually more complex as the learner moves away from the mother tongue towards the target language. McLaughlin (1990) refers to this as the process whereby the interlanguage system becomes more complex, elaborate, and structured. The more complex the interlanguage system gets, the more efficient and less circumlocutious it becomes in communication (Cheng, 1985). In other words, it becomes more consistent with input data, and more native-like (Cook, 1994). Complexity is a goal of task-based learning since it reflects the ongoing and growing process of L2 acquisition. In this connection, Swain (1985) noted that more complex interlanguage (IL) systems are desirable for language learners since they result in greater precision in communication; that is, they lead to more effective communicative efficiency in difficult performance circumstances.

Very often, however, the L2 learner fails to achieve a more complex and elaborate IL system. One reason for this can be the learner's lack of interest in becoming more native-like or lack of motivation in undertaking the effort to restructure and reorganize an interlanguage system. Another reason may come from the nature of input. Language taught by non-native teachers or in non-native environments may be impoverished, such that necessary conditions for restructuring are impaired (Skehan, 1996). Avoidance and communication strategies often employed and practiced by less proficient L2 learners in communication help the already partially-efficient interlanguage system to bypass the pressure for change (Schachter, 1974). This will promote accuracy but will, in return, cripple complexity and restructuring. Still another reason for this is the pressure to communicate which does

not allow enough time and resources for restructuring to occur. As Schmidt (1983; 1992) noted, such a pressure for communication in real time often results in an attempt on the part of the interlanguage speaker to find 'solutions' to communicative problems; the repeated use of such solutions results in their becoming proceduralized. Skehan (1996) refers to this as exemplar-based learning. These points have some connotations for setting goals in task-based instruction. Task-based learning, if it is supposed to move interlanguage forward, should proceed in such a way as to motivate IL speakers to restructure their IL systems by helping them (a) to avoid proceduralizing communicative solutions, and (b) to keep native-like language as their destination; as such, tasks should avoid unnecessary time pressure, and should integrate precision of expression to their completion. At the same time, teachers should provide the learners with quality target-language input.

A third goal of task-based instruction is fluency. By definition, fluency refers to the language user's ability to communicate in real time to produce and perceive language at relatively normal rates, similar to one's own native-language performance rates. Fluency is also expected to embrace features of native speakers' performance (e.g., redundancy, pausing, reformulation, hesitation, etc.). As Larsen-Freeman and Long (1991) noted, poor fluency leads to difficult and less frequent patterns of interaction and opportunities for learning. An influent IL speaker fails to orchestrate the phases of conceptualization, speech planning, and speech execution (Levitt, 1989). However, fluency is sometimes undesirable; if it results in the proceduralization and/or lexicalization of incorrect transitional IL forms (i.e., fossilization), it may compromise future development.

Depending on the nature of the instruction they receive and their own values and motivations, IL speakers may face one of the three destinies: (a) lack of fluency, (b) undesirable fluency, or (c) effective fluency. Lack of fluency is often promoted when the IL speaker values goals other than fluency (e.g., accuracy, precision, and complexity). Lack of fluency may also emerge from insufficient opportunity for automaticity for the

proceduralization of language and the development of an adequate repertoire of exemplars or formulaic units that can sustain the pressures natural to real-time communication. Undesirable fluency, by way of contrast, may be the result of a cancerous strategic competence; excessive proceduralization stimulated by excessive pressure to communicate in real time is at the heart of undesirable fluency; through this process of proceduralization, transitional IL forms fossilize as accessible exemplars that are easy to use and communicatively effective, but at the same time incorrect (Skehan, 1996). Finally, effective fluency is the product of correct proceduralization when previous restructuring becomes automatized or changes into a correct exemplar. Such exemplars stem from the correct timing of the pressure for fluency. If IL speakers are expected to communicate in real time only after they have completed the restructuring phase, they will develop effective fluency. In other words, they have already developed a repertoire of correct exemplars in the restructuring process (i.e., in the process of analysis), and can now use it for the development of effective fluency (i.e., synthesis) (Klein, 1986; Skehan, 1992). This implies that effective IL speakers will have a dual communication system at their disposal: (a) an exemplar-based/lexicalized system used in real-time communication, and (b) a rule-based system used when precision or creativity is of prime importance (Carr and Curren, 1994; Widdowson, 1989). Sinclair (1991) referred to such a dual system as 'idiom principle' (i.e., exemplar-based system) and 'open-choice principle' (i.e., rule-based system). The points discussed hitherto connote that the goal of task-based instruction should be the development in IL speakers of effective fluency.

This implies that in task-based instruction, there should be intermittent phases of focus on form and focus on communication. As Van Patten (1990) and Skehan (1992) noted, cycles of focus on form and focus on communication should be organized in such a way as to create and sustain a balance between them. In the focus-on-form phase, IL speakers will find the opportunity to move their IL forward; in the focus-on-communication

phase, on the other hand, they will be expected to communicate in real time whereby they can use their newly-acquired exemplars to achieve effective fluency.

Naïve teachers may fall into the trap of assuming that task-based instruction is simply another name for the '3Ps' (i.e., Presentation, Practice, Production) approach of the early 1980s (Rivers, 1981; Stern, 1983). A point of caution, however, is that the 'cyclical' nature of this approach is different from the 'linear' nature of the 3Ps approach. Whereas the materials already learnt in task-based instruction are repeatedly revisited and extended in a cyclical spiral fashion, those of the 3Ps approach are not revisited once they have been learnt. Therefore, it is extreme 'naïveté' to assume that the three terms of restructuring, accuracy, and fluency are the task-based counterparts of presentation, practice, and production of the 3Ps approach (Skehan, 1996).

#### 4. Problems in task-based teaching

The strong version of task-based teaching implies that this teaching practice has a job to do: to help interlanguage develop in much the same way as L1 did. It was also noted that task-based instruction relies heavily on meaning by making it primary. This emphasis on meaning brings about some consequences for form.

Kess (1992) noted that, as a result of an upsurge of interest in task-based teaching, learners will seek to place great emphasis on the communication of meaning; this implies that L2 learners will often rely heavily on meaning to make sure that communication happens correctly. In other words, L2 learners will not worry that much about the exact form that they use.

Is this what native speakers do in conversation? Perhaps Grice (1975) was a pioneer in noticing the true nature of adult native-speaker conversation; maxims for conversation, Grice (1975) noticed, make for a considerable processing burden because of what is not said. The interlanguage speaker who, as a result of task-based instruction, tries to spell everything out in complete and well-formed sentences will often be considered a boring pedant (Skehan, 1996). As Wilson (1994) rightly noticed, much adult conversation is (a) elliptical and



incomplete in surface form, but (b) heavy in the assumptions it makes about background knowledge and speaker's attitudes.

In addition to turning interlanguage users to boring pedants, the heavy emphasis on meaning nurtured by task-based instruction has another side effect for the poor interlanguage (IL) speaker. Clark and Clark (1977) argued in favor of strategies of comprehension which they see as natural and unavoidable. According to Clark and Clark (1977), listeners often use non-deterministic and non-exhaustive methods to recover speaker's intended meanings; Anderson and Lynch (1987) noticed that such strategies of comprehension are often successful even if language forms are used partially (i.e., partial use of form as a clue to meaning). A heavy emphasis on meaning in task-based teaching encourages IL speakers to draw heavily on comprehension strategies. Still another important aspect of L2 acquisition is that L2 learners can often use communication strategies to compensate for faulty use of form. In other words, communication strategies help the learners to succeed with meaning while having the consequence of sometimes bypassing form (Kellerman, 1991).

This reliance on comprehension and communication strategies has a sad consequence for the IL speaker. The natural route of L2 development starts from L1, passes through IL, and finally ends in L2. L2 learners are normally required to constantly stretch their interlanguage with the hope that one day they will become native-like L2 speakers. A heavy reliance on comprehension and communication strategies, however, will mean that IL speakers will fossilize some way short. Comprehension and communication strategies are temporary solutions to the problem of the communication of meaning (which is a major goal in task-based teaching). The pressure on IL learners to involve in the communication of meaning will result in their overuse of such temporary solutions. As Skehan (1996) rightly noted, such an overuse of strategies will, after some time, become proceduralized and re-used on other occasions. This often hinders further development of IL towards native-like L2, a condition which is often called fossilization.

An even more deep-seated problem arises from the very fact that native speaker communication is lexical in nature. Bates, Bretherton, and Snyder (1988), Nelson (1981), Peters (1983; 1985), and Skehan (1992; 1996) all noted that the initial progress in L1 is lexical in nature, but that the initial stock of lexical items become gradually syntactized; further L1 development results in the resurgence of the lexical nature and the syntactic units become relexicalized. In other words, syntactic units are stored as a repertoire of lexical items with the reservation that the units of storage are now no longer the word, but rather multi-word units which are processed as a single item when used in communication. The problem with such a system is that multiple storage is required; the gain, however, is that during ongoing language processing such a larger unit can release resources for other aspects of speech planning and execution (Bygate, 1988). Other proponents of such a lexical interpretation of language performance are Bolinger (1975), Nattinger and DeCarrico (1992), Pawley and Syder (1983), and Skehan (1996). Widdowson (1989), adopting such a perspective, tacitly argued that language users have available dual modes of processing: (a) a lexical mode, which draws on a capacious, well-organized, and very rapid memory system; and (b) a syntactic mode, which relies on analyzability and a concern for syntax, for form, and for planning (See also Sinclair, 1991). This implies that accessibility and time pressure will force language users to rely on the lexical mode; the syntactic mode is preferred when exactness and creativity matter. This dual mode is a relief for language users who can switch between the two modes to overcome the pressure of communication when the need arises, and this is what Widdowson (1983) had referred to as ability for use.

### 5. Syllabus and methodology considerations

A task-based approach to language instruction, seen in the light of cognitive approaches to language pedagogy and psycholinguistics will have to entail the following characteristics:

- a) it should involve a constant cycle of analysis and synthesis achieved through the manipulation of learners' foci of attention; and

b) it should keep a balance between restructuring, accuracy, and fluency.

This, in practical terms, implies that task-based instruction should be based on a task-based syllabus (which sheds light on task sequencing), and a task-based methodology (which highlights how the chosen tasks should be implemented).

### 5.1 Task sequencing or syllabus

Van Patten (1990; 1994) noticed an inherent problem in Communicative Language Teaching (CLA): since learners are expected in CLA to have something worthwhile to say, content or meaning gains priority over form and, therefore, attentional resources are consumed. This implies that a task-based syllabus should practice with extreme care in task-sequencing.

Skehan (1996), drawing on previous work by Candlin (1987) and Nunan (1989), proposed three features for task sequencing in a task-based syllabus: (a) code complexity, (b) cognitive complexity, and (c) communicative stress (see Figure.1). Code complexity refers to syntactic and lexical range and difficulty in tasks; it is concerned with the complexity of linguistic forms found in tasks. Cognitive complexity is concerned with meaning or content in terms of 1. the amount of processing required and 2. the familiarity of the task. Processing is concerned with the amount of speech planning (i.e., computations) that should be done prior to speech execution; it emphasizes the extent of learners' active involvement with task content. Familiarity, on the other hand, refers to learners' access to prefabricated material and solutions (e.g., exemplars, schemas, metalinguistic knowledge, etc.) that mobilize task completion. Finally, communicative stress concerns factors that are mainly external to the task, and often of a personal, psychological, social, or other nature (e.g., locus of control, extroversion, field-independence, etc.). From various studies have emerged categories of such factors that include (a) time pressure (Bygate, 1987); (b) modality (Ellis, 1987); (c) scale (Brown, Anderson, Shilcock, and Yule, 1984); (d) stakes (Willis, 1993); and (e) control (Pica, Kanagy, and Falodun, 1993).

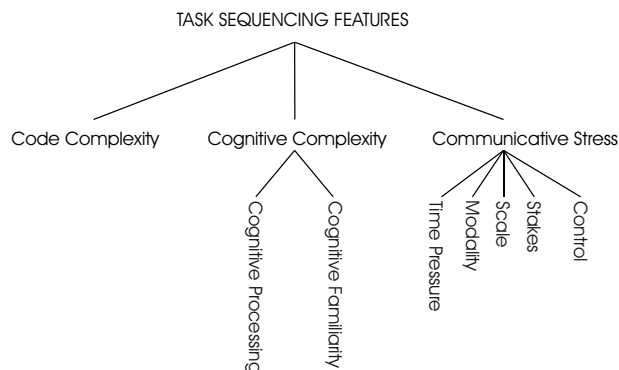


Figure 1. Features of Task Sequencing in Task-based Syllabus

First, time pressure concerns the speed with which a task should be completed. Some tasks have a time limit while others can be done at learners' speed of performance. Second, modality is synonymous to the traditional distinction between language skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing); different modalities impose different levels of communicative stress on the learners. Moreover, scale has to do with such task-related factors as the number of participants in the task, the number of relationships involved, and the like. 'Stakes', on the other hand, depends on the importance of the task in terms of completeness and precision of task completion; stakes are low if the task allows mistakes to be made, but high if it disallows them. Control refers to the extent to which the participants within a task can manipulate the way that task is done.

Skehan (1996) claimed that a task-based syllabus, if it assumes this kind of task sequencing, is rewarding in that 1. an effective balance between fluency and accuracy will be sustained, and 2. previous restructuring will find the opportunity to be applied. In connection to the former reward, Skehan (1996) noticed that if fluency receives priority as a goal in task selection, it will entail three dangers: (a) lexicalized language production will be emphasized, (b) language will be used strategically, and (c) meaning will become primary; if, however, accuracy gains prominence, task completion will require analysis, rule-focus, and attention to computation/processing. Tasks tailored in such a way as to keep a balance between fluency and accuracy will direct learners' attention to the right path (Schmidt, 1990), and will develop a dual-mode system in them (Carr and Curren,

1994). In connection to the latter reward, on the other hand, Skehan (1996) noticed that an attentional spare capacity will ensue which stimulates the application of previous restructuring and supports a wider repertoire of language (Crookes, 1989; Foster and Skehan, 1994).

Poor task choice, resulting from premature sequencing of difficult tasks, will lead to opposite outcomes; tasks of this type will exhaust learners attentional capacity, and will therefore motivate learners to resort to production strategies (Faerch and Kasper, 1983), and lexicalized language use (Bygate, 1988). By making meaning primary, they will make accuracy less feasible or less important (Ellis, 1987). By way of contrast, extremely easy tasks will present no challenge for the learner. They will not motivate the learner to undertake further restructuring, or to strive for accuracy and fluency.

### **5.2 Task implementation or methodology**

Once chosen, tasks should be implemented; this is where methodology comes to the scene. Foster and Skehan (1994) distinguished three stages for a task-based methodology: (a) pre-emptive or pre-task phase, (b) through-task phase, and (c) post-task phase.

The major aim of the pre-emptive phase is to stimulate restructuring either through the introduction of new elements or through the rearrangement of already existing ones (i.e., consciousness-raising or practice). This can be ascertained in either of the two ways: (a) setting up the relevant target language for the task, by giving the learners a pre-task to perform and simultaneously providing them with the language they need for it (Prabhu, 1987; Willis and Willis, 1988); or (b) easing the processing load that learners will encounter when actually doing a task, by enhancing task familiarity or reducing task complexity (Van Patten, 1994). A number of techniques have been proposed for the pre-task phase. Chief among them are:

- observation of tasks being completed on video; listening to or reading transcripts of comparable tasks (Willis and Willis, 1988);
- doing pre-tasks (e.g., conventional or parallel tasks) to activate relevant schemas before attempting the

real tasks (Prabhu, 1987); or

- engaging learners in pre-task planning by asking them to choose the language they will need for task completion (e.g., rehearsal of elements) or the meaning they will need to express (Foster and Skehan, 1994).

The second phase of task implementation (i.e., the through-task phase) aims at mediating accuracy and fluency through the selection of the right kind of tasks. This implies that tasks should be of the right level of difficulty/complexity; in other words, task selection should proceed in such a way as to minimize learners' reliance on ellipsis, context, and/or lexicalization. Nor should the tasks be too easy to demand any processing. Right before the task, teachers can be explicit as to what they consider most important in the task and what is to be stressed by learners. As far as code complexity is concerned, this might mean that teachers should tell learners whether they value accuracy or conformity in structure choice (Willis, 1993); as far as cognitive complexity is concerned, teachers should use scaffolding techniques to tailor the task to the right level of complexity. Such support techniques may, for example, include:

- using visual support (e.g., charts, graphs, tables, etc.) To make the task easier; or
- using surprise elements that run counter to learners' expectations to make the task more difficult (e.g., conflicting/additional evidence in a 'judge' task).

Through-task phase should also aim at adjusting the communicative pressure (or stress) created by the task. The teacher can adjust such gyroscopic task features as task timing, task modality, task scale, task stakes, and task control to the right amount of communicative pressure that the task should bear.

The last phase of task implementation is the post-task phase. The assumption made in this phase is that learners will be able to manage their attention during an actual task if they can anticipate what is to come later (much like an expectancy grammar). The dilemma here is that, if the teacher withdraws to allow natural acquisitional



language processes to operate, communication goals will become so important that learners may resort to lexicalized language use at the cost of restructuring; if, on the other hand, the teacher decides to mediate, the natural acquisitional processes will be impaired (Brumfit, 1984; Skehan, 1992). Teachers can reach a solution by reminding learners that fluency is not the only goal, and that they should also value accuracy and restructuring (Tarone, 1983; Willis and Willis, 1988).

Skehan (1996) suggested two sub-phases for the post-task phase. In the first sub-phases, public performance, analysis, and testing can occur to increase accuracy, to encourage restructuring, and to discourage synthesis. Learners can be asked to repeat privately-completed tasks in the presence of some sort of human or mechanical audience (e.g., teacher, peers, video cameras, etc.). If learners know that they will be asked to re-perform the task, they will move towards restructuring in the absence of teacher intervention. By way of contrast, the second post-task sub-phase aims at creating a cycle of synthesis and analysis. Skehan (1996) suggested that tasks be analyzed in this sub-phase to see how different tasks relate to each other and to the underlying goals of accuracy, fluency, and restructuring. Learners may need to repeat some tasks or to complete parallel tasks in this sub-phase (Plough and Gass, 1993). Along the same lines, Candlin (1987) noted the importance of task families that resemble each other in terms of the language or the cognitive demands they require for completion. Such grouping of tasks into task families may help learners to free some attentional resources, and may therefore provide enough processing resources for restructuring.

The implication of the discussion presented hitherto is that, although Nunan (1993) did not accept it, the syllabus-methodology distinction is still valid for task-based instruction. Nunan (1993) based his claim on the observation that: in CLT we learn to communicate by communicating, so we cannot separate the target from the means of achieving it. Skehan (1996), however, rejected Nunan's claim on the ground that viewing task-based instruction as a sequence of activities starting with

the pre-emptive phase and ending in the post-task phase lends support to claims about the syllabus-methodology distinction in task-based instruction.

### Conclusion

The discrepancy in the task-based approach to language teaching is that it runs against the normal route of language development. The very nature of tasks (captured in the defining properties of 'task' listed above) predisposes students involved in task completion to engage in "a mode of communication which does not prioritize a focus on form, either in terms of using linguistic elements to achieve precision or to achieve accuracy" (Skehan, 1996, p. 42). The natural outcome of this is that a task-based approach will not automatically drive interlanguage forward. Rather, it will teach learners how:

- to do tasks better;
- to proceduralize strategic solutions to problems; and
- to engage in lexicalized communication.

In other words, instead of developing native-like communicative competence, task-based teaching may result in the development of some sort of non-native competency which is fraught with communication strategies that make communicative task completion possible. If task-based teaching is to be viable, methods of focusing on form should be devised that draw on tasks (a) as realistic communicative motivators, and (b) as opportunities to trigger acquisitional processes to help interlanguage move forward.

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