TASK-BASED LANGUAGE TEACHING

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Abstract

Artikel ini menelaah teori-teori yang berkaitan dengan pengajaran bahasa berbasis tugas. Melalui studi literatur, artikel ini menjabarkan tentang konsep, karakteristik, tipe dan kriteria tugas pedagogik, tujuan maupun prinsip-prinsip pengajaran bahasa berbasis tugas. Di samping itu, dalam merancang pengajaran berbasis tugas ini semestinya mempertimbangkan berbagai faktor yang mempengaruhi kelancaran proses belajar-mengajar.

Kata kunci: *task-based language teaching, pedagogic task, communicative goal, second language learners*

INTRODUCTION

The teaching of language in the classrooms, particularly second or foreign language, aims to achieve the language fluently. This aim signifies that learners of the language can perform the language communicatively; not only displaying the language. The learners are supposed to be able to use it in real-world conditions. Thus, learners are given one or more teaching approaches offered by their teachers or instructors.

Every language teaching approach offers particular focus on attaining the language. Some emphasizes on the mastery of the language forms, meanwhile some others focuses on achieving the communicative goals (focus on meaning). This different emphasis offers advantages as well as drawbacks on the learners' language achievement. Hence, language teachers or instructors should consider them when applying particular approach in their teaching.

When the teachers expect the learners achieving the language pragmatically (communicatively), they should design the teaching which implement focus-on-meaning approach. One of the approaches which emphasizes on meaning attainment is Task-Based Language Teaching. This approach promotes communicative language achievement through the use of task. To have further description about this approach and how it is applied in language classroom, this article discusses the nature of this approach and the use of it in L2 teaching in the next sections.

The Nature of Task-Based Language Teaching

Task-based approach began to be popular when N. Prabhu applied this approach within a communicative framework in the Bangalore Project at schools in Southern India from 1979 to 1984 (Harmer, 2001: 86; Sánchez, 2004; & Hatip, 2005). However, since the approach implemented is inextricably interwoven with communicative language teaching methodology, this project ended shortly. Nevertheless, Ellis (2000) claims that there was a growing interest in reviewing this approach as language teaching method as well as language learning approach. In order to establish clear concept of the approach, some language experts provide definition of this approach and/or clarify the tasks used in this approach.

Richards and Rodgers (2001: 223) define Task-Based Language Teaching as an approach which bases on the use of tasks as the core unit for planning and managing instruction in teaching the target language. It is clear that the primary point of language teaching is the use of task as a means of attaining the teaching objectives. In addition, Nunan (2004: 1) distinguishes two kinds of tasks, namely; target task and pedagogical task. The former kind refers to use of language in the activities in the real world outside school setting, meanwhile the latter refers to the use of language during the classroom activities or in piece of classroom works. Thus, it is emphasized in this context, that task-based language teaching uses pedagogical task as the primary basis of teaching-learning.

To have a clear concept of task in Task-based approach, some researchers offer the definition of pedagogical task. Bygate, Skehan, and Swain (2001) in Skehan (2003) explain that a task in pedagogical setting is essentially defined as an activity in which learners are insisted on using the language, with emphasis on meaning, in order to gain the learning objective. In addition, Ellis (2003; 16) defines a pedagogical task as "a *task is a workplan that requires learners to process language pragmatically in order to achieve an* outcome *that can be evaluated in terms of whether the correct or appropriated propositional content has been conveyed. To this end, it requires them to give primary attention to meaning and to make use of their own linguistic resources, although the design of the task may predispose them to choose particular forms. A task is intended to result in language use that bears a resemblance, direct or indirect, to the way language is used in the real world. Like other language activities, a task can engage productive or receptive, and oral or written skills and also various cognitive processes.*" Meanwhile, Nunan (2004: 4) describes pedagogical task as a classroom work in which the learners uses the target language with the focus on mobilizing grammatical knowledge in order to put meaning as priority rather than form.

Based on the definitions above, some researchers explain what a task as a workplan is. To begin with, Chandlin (1987) in Cuesta (1995)

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claims that a "good" task should (1) promote attention to meaning, purpose, and negotiation; (2) draw objectives from the communicative needs of learners; (3) involve language use in the solving of the task; (4) allow for co-evaluation by learner and teacher of the task and of the performance of the task; and (5) promote a critical awareness about data and the processes of language learning. Meanwhile, Skehan (1998) in Ellis (2000) offers five core characteristics of a task as the workplan. The characteristics involve (1) meaning is essential and prioritized; (2) there is a goal which needs to be attained; (3) the activity designed should be outcome-evaluated; and (4) the activities designed should be related to real-world activities. Those characteristics clearly put the emphasis on the acquisition of meaning from the target language in natural contexts (real world relationship).

In addition, Ellis (2000) asserts that a task as a workplan comprises: (1) some input or information in which learners are demanded to work on; and (2) some instructions which describe the outcome to be attained by the learners. Therefore, Ellis (2003: 9 – 10) summarizes six core criteria of task. First, a task is a work plan. It requires systematic plans of teaching activities even though the communicative behaviour may not always gained through those plans. Second, a task involves a primary focus on meaning. This means that a task expects learners able to use language pragmatically rather then displaying the language. It aims to develop learners' language proficiency. Third, a task involves real-world processes of language use. It requires the learners to get involved in language activity that reflecting activities occurred in real life. Fourth, a task can involve any of the four language skills. As a work plan, a task may compel learners to employ skills of listening, reading, writing, and speaking in using the language. Fifth, a task engages cognitive processes. Through the task, the learners are expected to employ cognitive processes such as classifying, ordering, selecting, and evaluating information. Sixth, a task has a clearly defined communicative outcome. A task should have clear learning objectives which intend to be resulted in non-linguistic outcome as the learners' goal of accomplishing the task.

However, at school level there is an ambiguity to distinguish "task" and "exercise" because those terms seem to be interchangable. Therefore, Skehan (1998) in Ellis (2000) sums up the differences between "task" and "exercise". The summary is presented in the Table 1 below.

Table 1. The differences between 'exercise' and 'task'

	Exercise	Task
Orientation	Linguistics skills viewed as prerequisite for learning communicative abilities	Linguistics skills are developed through engaging in communicative activity
Focus	Linguistic form and semantic meaning ("focus on form")	Propositional content and pragmatic communicative meaning ("focus on meaning")
Goal	Manifestation of code knowledge	Achievement of a communicative goal
Outcome-evaluation	Performance evaluated in terms of conformity to the code	Performance evaluated in terms of whether the communicative goal has been achieved
Real-world relationship	Internalization of linguistic skills serves as an investment for future use	There is a direct and obvious relationship between the activity that arises from the task and natural communicative activity

Source: Ellis, 2000: 197

Reviewing the table, it is clear that task is distinguishable from exercise. It has some characteristics. First of all, it puts meaning before form. It means that the acquisition of meaning of the target language is emphasized more than the acquisition of language form (rules). Second, it requires learners to attain communicative ability as learning goal as well as learning outcomes. Third, it enhances linguistic skills through natural communicative context. Fourth, it is designed to be classroom activities which are related to activities occurred in real life.

To sum up, the task-based language teaching is classified as an approach which uses pedagogical tasks as the basis to frame teaching-learning objectives, instruction as well as outcomes of the language teaching, prioritizes meaning rather than form, focuses on achieving communicative goal, and constructs real-world-like activities. Thus, the application of this approach in the classroom should portray its characteristics. How this approach is implemented in classroom teaching, particularly the teaching of second language is further reviewed in the next section.

Task-based in Second Language Teaching

As discussed in previous section, tasks used in language teaching are aimed to attain communicative ability through communicative activities in the classroom. In other words, tasks are designed to embody the goal of communicative language teaching and make the teaching-learning of the language in the classroom more natural. As Ellis (2003: 27) asserts that the use of tasks are expected to help teacher in teaching communicatively and enable students to develop their ability of using language naturally. Hence, it is necessary to elucidate perspectives and types of tasks which support second language teaching.

Considering that target task is different from pedagogic task – a kind of task used in task-based approach, Oxford (2006) emphasizes three perspectives of pedagogic task in L2 teaching-learning process. First, a task functions as a general activity or exercise of L2. In this perspective, teacher uses and discusses exercises or activities available in textbooks as classroom task without emphasis on outcome. Second, a task signifies an outcome-oriented L2 instruction. This perspective focuses on imposing learners to accomplish the content of language curriculum through particular teacher's instruction or teaching procedures. Third, a task constitutes a behavioural framework for classroom learning. This perspective considers tasks as

planned activities for learners to elicit learning and perform the language. Even though, these perspectives seem to support the use of language, tasks are still connotatively assumed to be externally imposed on learners in developing their second language.

Nevertheless, tasks are worthwhile to facilitate learners to learn particular aspects of language, enhance their motivation to use the language, and promote their ability to negotiate meaning in communication and also work in partnership or collaboration (Hatip, 2005). Thus, there are six types of task activities which are considered to support the success of language learning (Willis 2000: 26 – 28; & Hatip: 2005). First, listing. In this type, learners engage in the process of brainstorming and fact-finding. Second, ordering and sorting. At this type of task, the learners are involved in the processes of sequencing, ranking, categorising, and classifying items in different ways. Third, comparing. The learners learn to identify the common points of particular information from different sources by activating the processes of matching, finding similarities and/or differences. Next, problem solving. In this task, learners are engaged in the processes of analyzing real or hypothetical situations, reasoning, and making decision. Another type is sharing personal experiences. In this task, learners are required to activate their ability of narrating, describing, explaining attitudes and opinions as well as reacting over opinions. Finally, creative tasks. This type of task can involve the combinations of listing, ordering and sorting, comparing, and problem solving. In this type of task, learners learn to perform their ability through varieties of tasks.

Furthermore, Willis (1996) in Rahman (2010) identifies that there are eight purposes of Task-based language teaching. The purposes are to: (1) give confidence in trying out the language; (2) give experience of spontaneous interaction; (3) offer the chance to take advantage of noticing how others express similar meaning; (4) give chances of negotiating turns to speak; (5) engage learners to use the language purposefully and cooperatively; (6) make learners participate in a complete interaction, not just one-off sentences; (7) give chances to try out communication strategies; and (8) develop confidence that learners can achieve communicative goals. It is clear that these purposes portray communicative effectiveness and second language acquisition.

In order to have clear description of task-based language teaching, it is necessary to explore its characteristics which distinguish it from traditional form-focused language teaching. Ellis (2006) point out that in task-based language teaching the language is treated as a means of communication. Thus, teacher and students are considered as 'language users'. Meanwhile, traditional form-focused language teaching treats the language as the object of learning. Thus, students are considered as 'language learners'. A more detailed difference between task-based and traditional form-focused language teaching is presented in the Table 2.

Referring to the differences between traditional form-focused pedagogy and task-based pedagogy, Ellis (2005) highlights about how the principles of task-based instruction can be directed to learners' language-learning-related-interests. First, instruction has to be considerable and reasonable for learners to develop their expressions and linguistic competence. Second, instruction has to guide learners to focus on meaning. Third, it is also important that the instruction ensures the learners to focus on form. Fourth, instruction focuses on developing implicit and explicit knowledge of second language acquisition. Fifth, instruction should involve the learner's 'built-in syllabus.' Sixth, instructed language learning should involve extensive L2 input. Seventh, Instructed language learning needs chance for learning outcome. Eighth, interaction in L2 is crucial for increasing learners' second language proficiency. Ninth, instruction has to consider individual differences in learners. Tenth, the assessment for learners' L2 proficiency should be based on free and controlled production.

Table 2. The differences between Traditional Form-focused pedagogy and Task-Based Pedagogy

Traditional Form-Focused Pedagogy	Task-Based Pedagogy
Rigid discourse structure consisting of IRF (initiate-respond-feedback) exchanges	Loose discourse structure consisting of adjacency pairs
Teacher controls topic development	Students able to control topic development
Turn-taking is regulated by the teacher	Turn-taking is regulated by the same rules that govern everyday conversation (i.e. speakers can self select)
Display questions (i.e. questions that the questioner already knows the answer)	Use of referential questions (i.e. questions that the questioner does not know the answer)
Students are placed in a responding role and cosequently perform a limited range of language functions.	Students function in both initiating and responding roles and thus perform a wide range of language functions (e.g. asking and giving information, agreeing and disagreeing, instructing)
Little need or opportunity to negotiate meaning.	Opportunities to negotiate meaning when communication problems arise.
Scaffolding directed primarily at enabling students to produce correct sentences	Scaffolding directed primarily at enabling students to say what they want to say.
Form-focused feedback (i.e. the teacher responds implicitly or explicitly to the correctness of students' utterances)	Content-focused feedback (i.e. the teacher responds to the message content of the students' utterances)
Echoing (i.e. the teacher repeats what a student has said for the benefit of the whole class)	Repetition (i.e. a student elects to repeat something another student or the teacher has said as private speech or to establish intersubjectivity)

(source: Ellis; 2006)

In other words, the teaching of second language in task-based pedagogy is worthwhile as far as the teaching-learning process considers the characteristics, types, purposes, and principles of tasks to be used. In addition, task-based language teaching offers advantages on learners' L2 development. First, learners are not restricted to the choice of language forms because the primary emphasis is they gain the meaning

on what they have spoken or written. This will enhance students' motivation to use the language verbally or in written form because they are not afraid of language errors. Second, real-world related activities can help learners to develop their L2 because the natural context used, which is related to their common activities, can ease them in using or practicing the language they have learnt.

However, in designing task-based language courses, we need to consider some factors that may influence the smoothness of teaching-learning process. The factors include input-related factors, task conditions-related factors, task performing process-related factor, and task outcomes-related factors (Ellis, 2003: 222 – 227). Input-related factors comprise:

1. Input medium
   Input which is presented in written or pictorial form tends to have more powerful effect on students' acquisition than input provided orally
2. Code complexity
   The complexity of the input given is likely to influence the learners' ability to comprehend the input
3. Cognitive complexity
   Types of information input, the amount of information processed, and degree of structure may influence the cognitive processing of the input material
4. Context dependency
   The context dependency of the input may have an impact on complexity
5. Familiarity of information
   It concerns the relationship between the theme of task and the individual learner's world knowledge

Furthermore, task conditions-related factors involve (1) conditions influencing the negotiation of meaning; (2) task demands; and (3) discourse mode. Conditions influencing the negotiation of meaning may influence the complexity of task in which negotiation increases the amount of time learners use to accomplish a task. Task demands, either single or dual task, may affect learner's ability of doing the task. In comparing discourse mode, Skehan (2001) in Ellis (2003: 225) proposes that dialogic tasks promote greater accuracy and complexity meanwhile monologic tasks promote greater fluency.

Meanwhile, factor relating to the process of performing a task includes the need of reasoning. Reasoning needed to complete a task plays a role as a key factor determining complexity of the task. In addition, task outcomes-related factors consist of four factors. First, the outcome medium. This factor is potential in affecting task complexity. Different medium contributes different influence on task accomplishment. Second, the outcome scope. Closed outcomes will be easier than open outcomes because in that outcomes, the learners idenfity the correct answers as they complete the tasks. Third, the outcome discourse domain. The degree of complexity of discourse domains will depend on the level of detail required in the task product. Fourth, the outcome complexity. The nature of the outcome impacts on the task performance.

Conclusion

Task-based language teaching is an approach which takes advantage of pedagogical tasks as the foundation of language teaching-learning objectives, instruction, and outcomes. This approach puts a priority on meaning and communicative goals through real-world-like activities. Therefore, the implementation of this approach should portray its characteristics, types and criteria of task as well as its principles.

In addition, implementing Task-based approach in teaching second language should consider some factors which may affect the success of implementation. Those factors comprise factors relating to input, factors relating to task conditions, factors relating to the process of performing task, and factors relating to task outcomes. By paying more concern on those factors, it is hoped that task-based approach give greater improvement on students' second language.

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