TEFL: A Task-based Approach: All the Students Learning All the Time

Andrew Finch, Ph.D.
Kyungpook National University, Republic of Korea

Introduction

Current Teaching as a Foreign Language (TEFL) theory and practice recognises that:

i. individual student beliefs and perceptions determine what is learnt in the language classroom; and
ii. students need to be fully involved in what happens there (so that beliefs and perceptions can be positively modified by experience).

Task-Based Language Learning (TBLL) has grown out of a need to address these two facts, and aims to involve the learners at every level of the educational process, as they pass through comprehension, decision-making, implementation, preparation, rehearsal, performance and reflection. If carried out in the target language (English), these stages have the advantage of promoting authenticity and meaning, as students ‘use the language to learn the language.’ But even when students use the L1 (mother tongue), TBLL can be beneficial in encouraging learners to examine their learning needs, assess themselves, and become self-directed (autonomous). Through fostering confidence, motivation, and independence, TBLL offers a suitable format for the promotion of life-long learning skills.

As Willis (2004) points out, a number of crucial research findings changed the course of EFL language teaching pedagogy in the 20th century. These can be summarized as follows:

i. language learning, even in a classroom setting, seems to develop independently of instruction;
ii. learners acquire language according to their own inbuilt internal syllabus, regardless of the order in which they are exposed to particular structures and regardless of mother tongue influences;
iii. teaching does not and cannot determine the way that the learner’s language will develop (Skehan 1996);
iv. learners do not necessarily learn what teachers teach (Allwright, 1984); and
v. learners do not first acquire language as a structural system and then learn how to use this system in communication, but rather actually discover the system itself in the process of learning how to communicate. (Ellis, 2003, p. 14) (Willis, 2004, pp. 5, 7)

The implications of such findings for the traditional teacher-centred classroom are no less than revolutionary, since they undermine the assumptions upon which the traditional “PPP”1 linear paradigm is based (c.f. Haberman, 2005, p. 50). In addition to these findings, psycho-linguistic and socio-linguistic research has shown that:

---

1 PPP: Presentation, Practice, Performance.
i. “motivation is one of the key issues in language learning and that skills to motivate learners are crucial for language teachers” (Dörnyei, 2001, p. 1);

ii. collaboration is more effective than competition as a means of promoting effective learning (Kohn, 1992); and

iii. learners learn more in groups than individually, since cooperative social interaction “produces new, elaborate, advanced psychological processes that are unavailable to the organism working in isolation” (Vygotsky, 1989, p. 61).

These and other related findings gave rise, in the latter half of the 20th century, to the learner-centred approach to learning, in which (in its strong form) students discover the target language through self-directed, project-based group investigations. According to this perspective, language learning is “a process that requires opportunities for learners to participate in communication, where making meaning is primary. ‘Task’ is a tool for engaging learning in meaning-making and thereby for creating the conditions for language acquisition” (Ellis, 2003, p. 319).

Task-based learning
The task-based approach, cannot be used in a traditional, teacher-fronted context. Task-based learning is student centred, and has certain assumptions about teaching. These have been summarized by Williams & Burden (1997):

1. There is a difference between learning and education.
2. Learners learn what is meaningful to them.
3. Learners learn in ways that are meaningful to them.
4. Learners learn better if they feel in control of what they are learning.
5. Learning is closely linked to how people feel about themselves.
6. Learning takes place in a social context through interactions with other people.
7. What teachers do in the classroom will reflect their own beliefs and attitudes.
8. There is a significant role for the teacher as mediator in the language classroom.
9. Learning tasks represent an interface between teachers and learners.
10. Learning is influenced by the situation in which it occurs.

Characteristics of tasks
1. **Meaning:** When tasks are the means of learning, the target language takes on meaning. Students can see that the new language is a means of communication, and that they need to be able to transfer information and opinions in that language (teaching through communication: rather than for communication [c.f Prabhu, 1980, p. 164]).

2. **Ownership:** If students are allowed to see the task through all of its stages (task completion), without the teacher playing an interventionist role (explaining instructions that students can read for themselves and focusing on discrete learning points) they can achieve a valuable and motivating sense of fulfilment and heightened self-confidence that comes from understanding, performing, and reflecting on the activity by themselves.

3. **Learning levels:** Learners take in content matter (input) that is appropriate to their current stage. If everyone is taught the same thing at the same time, this content will usually be suitable for only a minority of students. If they are allowed to progress through tasks at their own rate, however, students can concentrate on aspects that are suitable for their learning level.
4. **Assessment**: Evaluation usually helps the teacher to give grades. Assessment should tell the students how they are progressing, so that their learning be informed by feedback. Tasks give students such information, focusing on outcome, showing them their learning needs, and helping them to evaluate their communicative competence.

5. **Error-correction**: Teacher-based error-correction can be harmful to motivation and self confidence, and ineffective for the whole class of students. If students are problem-solving in groups, however, errors in communication become evident to the whole group (peer-correction), and the teacher (functioning as a language resource) can be asked to supply the necessary language, giving “the right information to the right people at the right time.”

**How can we use tasks?**
A number of writers (e.g. Skehan 1998; Skehan and Foster 1997); have commented on the need for a structured sequence of tasks in the classroom. Candlin (1987) offers a checklist of considerations:

- One-way tasks should come before two-way tasks;
- Static tasks should come before dynamic ones;
- “Present time” tasks should come before ones using the past or the future;
- Easy tasks should come before difficult tasks;
- Simple tasks (only one step) should come before complex tasks (many steps).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1: Task-types and activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Task Types</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discovery tasks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experience tasks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guided tasks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shared tasks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent tasks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Using tasks in the lesson

Willis (1996) offers five principles for the implementation of a task-based approach. These provide input, use, and reflection on the input and use:

1. There should be exposure to worthwhile and authentic language.
2. There should be use of language.
3. Tasks should motivate learners to engage in language use.
4. There should be a focus on language at some points in a task cycle.
5. The focus on language should be more and less prominent at different times.

Skehan (1996, p. 38) also proposes five principles for task-based instruction:

1. Choose a range of target structures;
2. Choose tasks which create appropriate conditions for learning;
3. Select and sequence tasks to achieve balanced development. (i at an appropriate level of difficulty”; ii focused between fluency, accuracy, and complexity”;
4. Maximise the chances of a focus on form in the context of meaningful language use.

Method

The rest of the presentation will examine how a series of tasks can be constructed for use in the EFL classroom, using the criteria we have seen so far. These tasks will be structured in a given manner (in terms of difficulty), and will focus on form in addition to interaction.

The sequence of tasks shown in the presentation can be viewed (and downloaded) from: http://www.finchpark.com/books/. The videos shown in this presentation can be viewed at: http://www.finchpark.com/videos/.

Reflection

It is important to remember that TBLT is an approach rather than a method. It assumes that the teacher respects the students as individuals and wants them to succeed. It also acknowledges that motivation, attitudes to learning, student beliefs, language anxiety, and preferred learning styles, have more effect on learning than materials, or methods. We therefore need to take these into account in our classrooms, taking advantage of the opportunity TBLT gives us to promote a student-centred learning environment. Teacher-centred controls, threats, rewards and restrictions are not an effective means of stimulating learning, since no-one can be forced to learn.

If we can stimulate a need to learn, and a desire to learn, based on unconditional respect and mutual trust, and if we can make a facilitative learning environment, learning will take place in an enjoyable and motivational way.
Chapter 1

Hi there!

Keywords for this Unit:

Good morning.
Good afternoon.
How do you do?
How are you?
Nice to meet you.
Glad to meet you.
What's your name?
What's your address?
What's your phone number?
What’s your email address?
How old are you?
Where do you live?
What do you do?
What are your hobbies?

Excuse me?
How do you say it?
How do you spell it?
I don't know.
I don't understand.
One more time, please.
Pardon me?
What did you say?
What does it mean?
**My Address Book**

1) Ask your partner for his/her name.  
2) Ask your partner for his/her address.  
3) Ask your partner for his/her phone number.  
4) Ask your partner for his/her Email address.  
5) Ask eleven other people

**Sample language:** What's your name? What’s your address? Where do you live? What’s your phone number? What’s your Email address? How do you spell it?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name:</th>
<th>Name:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Address:</td>
<td>Address:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tel:</td>
<td>Tel:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Email:</td>
<td>Email:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name:</td>
<td>Name:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Address:</td>
<td>Address:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tel:</td>
<td>Tel:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Email:</td>
<td>Email:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name:</td>
<td>Name:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Address:</td>
<td>Address:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tel:</td>
<td>Tel:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Email:</td>
<td>Email:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name:</td>
<td>Name:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Address:</td>
<td>Address:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tel:</td>
<td>Tel:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Email:</td>
<td>Email:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name:</td>
<td>Name:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Address:</td>
<td>Address:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tel:</td>
<td>Tel:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Email:</td>
<td>Email:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
* Ask your partner the questions on this page.
  If s/he says: *Yes, I do.* - Write his/her name.
  If s/he says: *Yes, I have.* - Write his/her name.
  If s/he says: *Yes, I can.* - Write his/her name.
  If s/he says: *No, I don’t.* - Don't write anything! Ask the next question.
  If s/he says: *No, I haven’t.* - Don't write anything! Ask the next question.
  If s/he says: *No, I can’t.* - Don't write anything! Ask the next question.
* Ask other people the questions on this page.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>Yes names</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do you walk to school each day?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you come to school by bus?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you live in an apartment?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you come from Busan?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you .............................?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you like Chinese food?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you like Hong Kong movies?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you like pop music?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you like ballads?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you like reading?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you like mountain hiking?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you like love songs?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you like .........................?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have you been to Beijing?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have you been abroad?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have you been on a boat?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have you seen a UFO?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have you ...........................?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can you play the piano?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can you swim?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can you drive a car?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can you cook anything?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can you ............................?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can you ............................?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The teacher will give you a role card. Memorize the words on it!!!! Give it back to the teacher!!! Talk to people in the class. Who are they? Can you find their names?

What do you do? Where do you live? How old are you? What is your hobby? Are you married? Do you have any children?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Who are these people?</th>
<th>Name</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a mailman with no children:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a 32-year-old divorcee:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>an engineer who likes hiking:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a rugby player who is married:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a singer who lives in Athens:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a dancer who will marry soon:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a grandmother who likes walking:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a 32 year-old stamp-collector:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a married waitress:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a divorced manager:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a pilot with two daughters:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a 35 year-old man with no daughters:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a policewoman with two daughters:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a 20 year-old skier:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a doctor who does Tai Chi:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a singer who lives in Oslo:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
My name is Jack.
I am a mailman.
I live in New York.
I am 25 years old.
My hobby is oil-painting.
I am not married.
I don't have any children.

My name is Jill.
I am a shop-assistant.
I live in Amsterdam.
I am 32 years old.
My hobby is horse-riding.
I am divorced.
I have one child.

My name is Tim.
I am an engineer.
I live in Seoul.
I am 28 years old.
My hobby is hiking.
I am single.
I have no children.

My name is Pat.
I am a taxi-driver.
I live in Sydney.
I am 40 years old.
My hobby is playing rugby.
I am married.
I have two children.

My name is Mark.
I am a singer.
I live in Athens.
I am 21 years old.
My hobby is swimming.
I am married.
I have one son.

My name is Michelle.
I am a dancer.
I live in Paris.
I am 20 years old.
My hobby is reading.
I am engaged to be married.
I have no children.

My name is Grace.
I am retired.
I live in Dallas.
I am 67 years old.
My hobby is walking.
I am a widow.
I have three grandchildren.

My name is Will.
I am an electrician.
I live in Bangkok.
I am 32 years old.
My hobby is stamp-collecting.
I am married.
I have a daughter.
1. Ask the teacher for a dice.
2. Ask the teacher for the *Can You* cards.
3. Make a counter for each player.
4. Put the counters on *Shake Again*.
5. **Player 1**: Roll the dice. Move your counter.
6. **Player 1**: Pick up a card.
7. **Player 2**: Look at the card.
   - Look at player 1’s verb.
   - Ask a CAN YOU question to player 1.
   - e.g. *Can you CUT a CHAIR?*
   - If player 1 says “Yes, I can,” he/she can keep the card and roll the die again.
   - If player 1 says “No, I can’t,” put the card at the bottom of the pack.

Put the **Can You** cards here (face down).
✓ Ask the teacher for dice.
✓ Ask the teacher for the cards.
✓ Put the cards on the next page, face down.
✓ Read the instructions on the previous page.

**Landmarks**

![Game board diagram]

- **Start**
- **Miss one turn**
- **Shake again**

**Shake again**
- Go back to the start
- Singing
- Pick up a card
- Name three cities in China
- Name three Chinese National Parks
- Go forward two spaces
- Pick up a card
- Name three mountains in China
- Pick up a card

**Pick up a card**
- Go back three spaces
- Go back to the start
- Pick up a card
- Name three foods
- Go forward two spaces
- Pick up a card
- Name three landmarks
- Pick up a card

**Pick up a card**
- Go forward two spaces
- Name three festivals in China
- Name three rivers in China
- Go back six spaces
- Pick up a card
- Go forward two spaces
- Name three Chinese folk tales
- Pick up a card
- Name three cities in China
- Name three provinces in China

**Shake again**
There is a Korean proverb that if you throw a stone, it will hit a Kim, a Park, or a Lee. This is because Koreans have in general a small set of family names: Kim, Yi (or Lee), Park, Choi, Jeong, Jang, Han, Lim, etc. A Korean name consists of a family name (one syllable) plus a given name (usually two syllables), and the family name comes first. One syllable of the given name is chosen by the clan and is used by all members of the same generation.

Most families have family tree books tracing their ancestry back to the first father. It is called a Jokbo. Korean women do not take the husband’s family name, but their children take the father’s family name.

Given names are used in the family, between classmates, or between very close friends. Terms of kinship (for example the Korean equivalents of older brother, older sister, uncle, aunt, grandfather and grandmother), are used instead of names when addressing or referring to older people. A person not in the family is addressed by his or her title, position, scholastic rank, or by an honorific.

Pairs:
- Write your name here.
- Explain the meaning of the letters to your partner.

李舜臣
References:


Free Download of Task-based books:
http://www.finchpark.com/books
Tell Me More!
Now you’re talking!
The Way Ahead
It’s Up to You

14