



NEGOTIATING ACTIVITY: LEARNING BY DOING NUANCES IN TASK BASED LEARNING

M. Elizabeth Rani* & M. Deepalakshmi**

Assistant Professor of English, SRM TRP Engineering College,
Irungalur, Trichy, Tamilnadu

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English has scaled unimaginable heights and has attained unspeakable importance around the world. It is because; the world has become a more global village, and therefore communications, both for business or otherwise have become an integral component of English language. Historically, the premise of the need to speak English gained momentum during the World War II. The British found the need to communicate with the countries around the world in a common language to facilitate the war strategy for its allies. Subsequently, a lot of war Camps became more training centers which pruned the instructions for armaments and communication as well. Since then, the growth, importance and the necessity of English has reached far and wide across the lengths and breadths of the world around. Paul Verghese in his work, "Teaching English as a Second Language" observes on the need to learn English as:

Most of the countries cannot give up the use of English for more than one reason. English education helped them get their ideas on freedom and self government and enabled them to fight for independence of their countries. In the multi-lingual context of these countries, English became a unifying force and helped the freedom fighters propagate the idea of nationalism and self –rule. In these countries, English still remains a cementing force. (2)

Many theories and various theorists have framed, formulated, tried, tested and evaluated language instructions to help the non native speakers attain a sense of acclimatization with the target language. It was later discovered that no single theory for language learning would hold good for mastery over the language. Various methods have been into practice and each method has its own pros and cons. Of all methods, Task Based Learning called TBL in short comes close to attaining language proficiency and considered ideal for large sized ESL classrooms. The method scientifically proves that the volume of work done by the members of a group is more than the work volume done by an individual language learner. The method involves giving specific communicative tasks to the learners who are to complete the same within a limited framework. These tasks indirectly and invariably help in imbibing the target language. The advantage of this method is that, the learners do not make a conscious effort to learn English but rather acquire the language through experiential learning. The primary purpose of the method is to establish the factual idea that, language is situational. Fictional scenarios are created to help the learner get accustomed to the learning of language. These situations include, deciding something to be done during a given task, it could also be on taking charge in organizing an event, making a directional situation where someone can be asked to do something or making need based decisions to resolve a problem.

The method works for beginners, intermediate and advanced level of language learners where the task at hand aims at using the various primary or even the secondary skills such as Listening, Speaking, Reading or Writing. Through these tasks, the group dynamics and togetherness collectively contribute towards the mutual level of learning. These tasks do not involve the teaching of language through grammar but rather involve making necessary real time scenarios like giving a group presentation, conducting a team interview, a mock interactive meeting and so on and so forth. When these live situations are brought into the classrooms, the learners get enthusiastic and can relate themselves with these real time situations and get to learn the language in the context of the situations at hand. Task Based Learning created a more hype then ESP and was found to be more advantageous. David Nunan in his book, "Task Based Language Teaching" observes on the differences between the approaches of ESP and TBL as:

While ESP? LSP movement initially focused on the end product of the instructional program, CLT also forced a reevaluation of learning processes. This created a dilemma for syllabus designers whose job was to produce ordered list of items graded according to the difficulty, frequency or pedagogical convenience...when we place communication at the centre of the curriculum, the goal of that curriculum and the means begin to merge. Learners learn to communicate by communicating, the ends and the means, become one and the same. (8)

The paper intends to demonstrate a learning outcome based on tasks which could be given in a class for ESL students, thereby allowing them to think and work the task out for themselves so that an effective learning atmosphere of knowledge and language transfer takes place. The example explicated in the paper is a tried and tested first hand experiential learning felt by the language instructor to the students of engineering as a part of their task given to help come out with various insights during a random winter break. The task involves various stages before one actually ends up in reaching the stage where the learner comes to the point of learning. The

first stage is the preparatory stage, during this stage, the teacher asks the students to form their own groups. In case the students, do not form their groups. The teacher can help them form groups and start with the activity to practice.

The instructor works with the students in making them understand the expected learning outcomes during the task and would ask the students to record the necessary grammar and vocabulary which are needed to be used during the task. The students are briefed about the task and then, they are given the necessary instructions which are required to help them prepare for the task. The teacher can also ask the students to come up with ideas which could be used as a review after the task has been completed.

The second stage is the preparatory stage where the students are given necessary time to prepare the task as a group. They are instructed to jot down notes and frame sentences which are required to be made for the completion of the task. The third is the actual stage of presenting or working the task at hand out. The teacher plays the role of an observer and only intervenes when the students sway away from the topic or the task. The teacher must also make sure that the others pay attention to the presentation of the other groups and come up with feedback on their presentations. The last stage is the stage of the review where the students can come up with their problems in doing the activity or come up with better ideas to prune the presentation. Finally, the students can be given a writing task by asking them to write an essay on the task they were given by explaining the stages of learning as a follow up to the classes handled. The writing could be introspection on their learning or a self review on the paths of learning by giving their reflections on the difficulties encountered during the learning of the task.

For Example, the teacher can form a group of six by asking students to plan a road trip, by car for the teacher by choosing places for him/her to drive in order to spend a specific vacation. The students would be asked to choose a random place suitable for the teacher to drive. They must be given small maps or given an orientation about the place and its people. Once they are done choosing the place, they can present the same comprising ideas on the number of days for the tour, number of places to visit, food, stay, culture of the place and so on. Finally, they can ask for a follow up on the pace of visit by the teacher and the hurdles he found on executing the plan of the students. The follow up activity can be made by using the trip and the experiences of the teacher in reaching out to the students post trip.

The activity given above will help the students learn about new places, new cultures help them plan a trip for a couple of days and also give them glimpses of speaking and writing on the trip suggested by them to their teacher. Jonathan Ludwig in his on line blog titled Task Based Learning observes on the activities given to students as, “in task based learning, the centre of the learning process moves the students themselves and allows them to come to the realization that language is a tool to tackle and resolve real –world problems”(Ludwig). The task makes students self reliant and will in turn help them make their own decisions and solve the problems in formulating a tour for their instructor.

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