

An Application of Task-based Language Teaching Method for Preschool-age Children's English Learning in China

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Abstract

The Task-Based Language Teaching also known task-based instruction, focuses on the use of authentic language and on asking children to do meaningful tasks using the targeted language. [1] The Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) attaches importance to learn by doing and pays attention to children's experience instead of learn by rote. The core of TBLT is to enrich the input, output and to improve children's recognition for targeted language by kinds of communication tasks. Therefore, this article will discuss how to apply the task-based language teaching method into children's English learning in china.

Keywords

Task-based language teaching, task, children's English learning.

1. Introduction

According to the New Basic English Course Standard of China, a new English teaching method is proposed, Task-based Language Teaching Method. Compared with traditional English teaching method 3P (Presentation, Practice, Production), the Task-based Language Teaching Method considers student-centered as their education idea, focuses on the design of language tasks, and children can acquire targeted language by completing the communication tasks independently or cooperatively. [2] It is believed that children's language learning is a developmental process, which can enhance their communication ability, rather than just practicing the language items. Therefore, the importance of Task-based Language Teaching for children's English learning is how to design the communication tasks and apply them into the teaching process.

2. Theory of Task-Based Language Teaching and Learning

2.1. Theory of TBLT Language Teaching

Firstly, TBLT concerns with the outcome of language tasks, for instance, language use and language learning. It takes vocabulary items into consideration not only words but also phrases, sentence, collocations and prefabricated routines.[3] Secondly, "conversation" is also the central focus of language and keystone of language acquisition, learners are required to produce and understand communicative messages in the teaching process.[4] Therefore, exchanging information is crucial to Task-based Language Teaching.

2.2. Theory of TBLT Language Learning

TBLT advocates have argued that comprehensible output is also of equal importance. Tasks activity and achievement are motivational: Tasks appeal to learners' learning styles and may

involve physical activity, collaboration, and partnership. Learning difficulty can be negotiated and fine-tuned for a particular pedagogical purpose. Therefore, tasks may be designed in such a way that they meet learners' level of proficiency. That is, providing the appropriate target input, which is crucial to facilitate language acquisition.

3. Three types of Task-based Teaching Syllabuses

Table 1 summarizes three types of task-based teaching syllabuses as discussed by Long, Crookes, Prabhu and Breen. (see Table 1)

Table 1. Three types of Task-based Teaching syllabuses

syllabus	Procedural	Process TBLT syllabus	TBLT
Type of task	Language-learning centered. Information gap, opinion gap, and reasoning gap activities.	Learner-centered Social & problem-solving orientation.	Language-learn centered; Target tasks.
Main features	Priority is given to task completion; teacher speech resembles "caretaker talk"; no systematic correction of learner errors, which has been subjected to rigorous testing.	Takes' roots in general educational theory; centered on the learner and learning as opposed to language learner and learning; learning is a negotiated process.	Based on SLA and L2 classroom research; it makes use of course design for LSP; focus on the form.
Potential problem areas	No prior needs analysis, no criteria/rationale for task selection; arbitrary grading and sequencing selection of tasks; lack of regard for a focus on form as suggested by SLA research.	No criteria/rationale for task selection; the problem of grading and sequencing of tasks is not resolved; no explicit provision is made for a focus on form.	Limited research base; the problem of tasks is not resolved; lesser learner autonomy, which has not been subjected to rigorous testing.

4. The Procedure of TBLT teaching

4.1. Pre-task: Introduction to the Topic and Tasks

In the stage of pre-task, the topic of a lesson is introduced by the teacher to help children to familiarize with their tasks. In this stage, activities are suggested for teachers' use and adaptation to review previous lessons, set the scene, or introduce the new language.[5] Therefore, teaching principle in this stage is interaction driven. Interaction means the activity of two or more children to exchange idea and the interaction is not only for idea exchange, but also for promotion for reviewing the previous lessons. Through the stage of pre-task, the teacher introduces the topic of lesson by putting forward the language tasks and engages the children in reviewing relative knowledge, children were inspired to ponder over questions and their interest was stimulated in the process of learning.

4.2. Task cycle: Task → Planning → Report

Task cycle is composed of three steps: task, planning and report. In this stage, children were inspired to complete targeted language tasks individually or in groups. In this process, the teacher plays the role as a supervisor, rather than an instructor and puts the emphasis on the language meaning and fluency by providing the available tasks with children. [6] For instance,

the teacher wrote new words and the corresponding Chinese meaning on the blackboard right next to them and led the reading. After reading the vocabulary out loud in front of children, children were asked to open the book. They were able to find their spelling mistakes and marking them mistakes in the text with a color pen. Finally, after listening to a tape, they were encouraged to learn sentences and texts by heart with the usage of new vocabulary. Using new words in sentences contributes greatly to a better understanding.

Planning stage is the time for children to prepare for the report and the accuracy. The teacher planned three programs to test the function of planning: zero-minute program, three-minute program and five-minute program. (see Table 2)

Table 2. Three programs for testing

Program	0-min	3-min	5-min
Mistakes	121	69	27
Accuracy	55.76%	31.68%	12.44%

The teacher recorded the mistakes in children's report under 0-min, 3-min, and 5-min program. The results proved that the planning time plays a key role in accuracy. Therefore, the teacher always gives enough time for children to communicate during planning stage. However, the teacher feared that the children may use their native language excessively during the communication in planning stage. To prevent that, the teacher walked around the classroom to guarantee the use of English among children.

Therefore, report is necessary for children to further learn through practice and for teachers to know their speaking ability. In this process, the teacher recorded children's errors and mistakes, but he did not correct them all at once. He puts the emphasis on general mistakes, mistakes made by most of the children. In this process, task-based activities sometimes gave rise to loss of control, such as discipline problems and noises. Therefore, the teacher advises that it is important to keep good classroom discipline while keeping an active task-based atmosphere.

4.3. Language focus: Analysis and Practice

The objectives of this stage are to analyze new language forms, to correct mistakes, and to consolidate key language points. In order to avoid misunderstandings, all the explanations and instructions were provided in children's native language. First, after starting a new lesson, the teacher wrote new goals – new words to learn, with an illustrative sentence on the blackboard. The task was to analyze it in Chinese and then he asked children to make a sentence after his model; Second, the teacher inspired children to find their own mistakes with comparative analysis; Third, the teacher engaged children in doing some additional practice with textbook. [7]

Language focus is the last stage of TBLT, but the teacher believed that some assignments are still necessary for the sake of consolidating words, phrases, and specific language rules.[8] Some researchers called it "reasoning gap activity", and the famous experiment was that the children were asked to design a method to survey other children's favorite subjects in accordance with the given class timetable. The teacher asked children to complete a survey task related to fruits among family members and to make use of what they learnt as much as possible, such as how to buy fruit, how to express the ideas about fruits, etc. The teacher believes that the assignment could make children experience the task in a real context, and their comprehension could be further deepened.

5. Conclusion

TBLT is very suitable for early children's English teaching and learning, and it emphasizes the cultivation of children's interest and motivation for language learning. To sum up, compared with traditional teaching method, TBLT not only comprehensively promotes children's learning ability, but also establish children's confidence for communication. As a guide, the teacher prepared tasks for every lesson, guide children to know topics and elaborately design context for children to practice pragmatic English, enlighten them to explore language forms and systematically instruct the language forms at language focus stage. The whole teaching and learning process is in order and be full of harmony.

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