



DEVELOPING COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE THROUGH TASK BASED LANGUAGE LEARNING- AN EXPERIMENT

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Tasks hold a central place both in current second language acquisition research and in language pedagogy (Ellis, 2003). Nunan (2004), defines task as ‘ a piece of classroom work which involves learners in comprehending, manipulating, producing, or interacting in the target language while their attention is focused on mobilizing their grammatical knowledge in order to express meaning, and in which the intention is to convey meaning rather than to manipulate form. The task should also have a sense of completeness, being able to stand along as a communicative act in its own right. Skehan (1996) points that ‘a task is an activity in which meaning is primary; there is some sort of relationship to the real world; task completion has some priority; and the assessment of task performance is in terms of outcome’.

According to Long, (1985) ‘A task is a piece of work undertaken for oneself or for others, freely or for some reward. Thus, examples of tasks include painting a fence, dressing a child, filling out a form, buying a pair of shoes, making an airline reservation, borrowing a library book, taking a driving test, typing a letter, weighing a patient, sorting letters, taking a hotel reservation, writing a check, finding a street destination, and helping someone across a road. In other words, by “task” is meant the hundred and one things people do in everyday life, at work, at play, and in between. “Tasks” are the things people will tell you they do if you ask them and they are not applied linguists.’

Task-based language learning was defined by Breen (1987) as ‘any structured language learning endeavour which has a particular objective, appropriate content, a specified working procedure,

and a range of outcomes for those who undertake the task.’ In this view, ‘task’ is assumed to refer to all kinds of work plans that have the overall purpose of facilitating language learning, from the simple and brief exercise type to more complex and lengthy activities such as group problem solving or simulations and decision making (Wesche and Skehan, 2002). According to Ellis (2003), there are two ways of using tasks in language teaching, they are task-supported language teaching (tasks are incorporated into traditional language-based approaches to teaching) and task-based language teaching (tasks have been treated as units of teaching in their own right and whole courses are designed around them). In both cases, tasks have been employed to make language teaching more communicative. Tasks, therefore, are an important feature of communicative language teaching.

The researcher has successfully completed 2 task-based learning initiatives on undergraduate students in a rural government college. These tasks involved 1) Translating English short stories into Kannada-writing dialogues to convert the story into a short play- translating the play to English –enacting the play. 3short stories were used Stephen Leacock’s ‘With the Photographer’, R K Laxman’s ‘The Gold Frame’ and R K Narayan’s ‘The Snake in the Grass’. - To improve student’s English vocabulary, their writing skills and to provide opportunities to speak in English.2) While teaching dialogue writing, students in groups were assigned tasks to interview a well-known personality in the locality in Kannada, translate the interview to English. 8 interviews were conducted and translated. These tasks not only improved their confidence with regard to English vocabulary and usage but in the long run also helped them perform better in their semester exams.

The following task based activity was conducted in an urban government college.

Statement of the Problem:

Teaching English Language and Literature to students who have completed most of their studies in Kannada medium schools and who write all papers except English in Kannada is indeed an arduous task. The pressure of completing the syllabus in time, the enormity of the syllabus and the bigger question of ‘where do I start?’ makes a conscientious English teacher’s life complex. The silver lining in this otherwise cloudy situation is that the students are interested and willing to work hard to improve their level of competency in English. The modern student knows that communicative competence in the English Language is necessary to successfully get through job interviews and group discussions and that success in life is no longer confined to a high first class or a distinction. Therefore, the teacher is always on the lookout for methods, supplements

and alternatives to make the students not only write well for the exam but also and more importantly speak good English.

Objectives of the study:

To ascertain if changing the teaching method would help to hone the communication skills of students.

Importance of the study:

Task-based learning is student-centred and therefore makes possible more meaningful communication and practical extra-linguistic skill building. As the tasks are likely to be familiar, students are more likely to be involved in the task which may further motivate them in their language learning. According to Jon Larsson the advantage of task-based learning is that it encourages students to gain a deeper sense of understanding. Superficial learning is often a problem in language education. However, in a task-based learning classroom this is combated by always introducing the vocabulary in a real-world situation, rather than as words on a list, and by activating the student; students are not passive receivers of knowledge, but are instead required to actively acquire the knowledge. The feeling of being an integral part of their group also motivates students to learn in a way that the prospect of a final examination rarely manages to do.

Task-based learning has some clear advantages. Firstly, the students are free of language control. In all the stages they must use all their language resources rather than just practising one pre-selected item. Secondly, a natural context is developed from the students' experiences with the language that is personalised and relevant to them. Thirdly, the students will have a much more varied exposure to language with Task based learning. Fourthly, they will be exposed to a whole range of lexical phrases, collocations and patterns as well as language forms. Fifthly, the language explored arises from the students' needs. This need dictates what will be covered in the lesson rather than a decision made by the teacher or the course book. Sixthly, it is a strong communicative approach where students spend a lot of time communicating and finally, it is enjoyable and motivating.

THE TASK:

The researcher gave a Kannada poem written by G. S. Shivarudrappa and asked the students of I B.Com to translate this poem to English. 20 groups were formed.

THE PURPOSE:

1. To improve vocabulary (Kannada to English).
2. To actively involve students in a task where they are required to read, listen, record, write, speak and translate.
3. To boost confidence level and improve fluency in English.
4. To enhance interest in using and working with English Language related activities.
5. To foster sense of fulfilment of having accomplished a task successfully.
6. To promote group sharing and team work.

TEACHER ROLE:

1. To divide the students into groups.
2. To educate students on how to carry out the task of translation.
3. To evaluate the final translated poems/ stories submitted in English.

LEARNER ROLE:

1. The Learners as a group are required to first read the poem and understand it.
2. The group then look for English equivalents in Kannada-English dictionary or online translator and translate the poem. If a word has more than one meaning then they choose the most appropriate word in the context.
3. The group read their translated poem and then check if the original idea of the Kannada poem and the words used are successfully translated.
4. The group as a whole write down their feedback on this task.
5. Finally, the English version of the poem is submitted.

OUTCOME:

This activity was assigned to the B.Com Students (II SEM). The involvement of the students in the groups was total. This task excited them because for the first time in their lives they were translating and creating a poem. In fact, the feedback received shows that the students enjoyed the act of translating, they learnt new English words for Kannada words, they realised that there weren't equivalents for all Kannada words in English. Moreover, throughout this translation task they spoke in English with each other. Though their English was not always grammatically right, their struggle to find words to make meaningful sentences in English was in itself a satisfactory experience for both the teacher and the students. In addition, the students emerged out of this task with the satisfaction that they *can* speak, write and create in English.

THE POEM IN KANNADA	ONE OF THE TRANSLATIONS
<p>ಎಲ್ಲೋ ಹುಡುಕಿದೆ ಇಲ್ಲದ ದೇವರ ಎಲ್ಲೋ ಹುಡುಕಿದೆ ಇಲ್ಲದ ದೇವರ ಕಲ್ಲು ಮಣ್ಣುಗಳ ಗುಡಿಯೊಳಗೆ ಇಲ್ಲೇ ಇರುವ ಪ್ರೀತಿ ಸ್ನೇಹಗಳ ಗುರುತಿಸದಾದನು ನಿಮ್ಮೊಳಗೆ </p> <p>ಎಲ್ಲಿದೆ ನಂದನ, ಎಲ್ಲಿದೆ ಬಂಧನ ಎಲ್ಲಾ ಇದೆ ಈ ನಮ್ಮೊಳಗೆ ಒಳಗಿನ ತಿಳಿಯನು ಕಲಕದೆ ಇದ್ದರೆ ಅಮೃತದ ಸವಿಯಿದೆ ನಾಲಿಗೆಗೆ </p> <p>ಹತ್ತಿರವಿದ್ದೂ ದೂರ ನಿಲ್ಲುವೆವು ನಮ್ಮ ಅಹಮ್ಮಿನ ಕೋಟಿಯಲಿ ಎಷ್ಟು ಕಷ್ಟವೋ ಹೊಂದಿಕೆಯೆಂಬುದು ನಾಲ್ಕುದಿನದ ಈ ಬದುಕಿನಲಿ </p> <p>- ಜಿ. ಎನ್. ಶಿವರುದ್ರಪ್ಪ</p>	<p>Far and wide I searched for the non-existent God In temples of mud and stone Failed to recognise love and friendship That existed around me</p> <p>Where's heaven? Where are the shackles? All are within us Leave the inner peace and tranquillity unruffled And you will taste the elixir</p> <p>Though near we are, we stand afar in the forts of our Ego How tough is it to adjust and live This temporary life of four days</p>

CONCLUSION:

This task may be considered as successfully accomplished as the goals assigned were fulfilled successfully. The presenter of this paper feels that the success achieved here will motivate the students to continue conversing in English and in the long run achieve success in their lives.

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