

Examining the Applicability of a Task-Based Teaching Framework to the Japanese Teaching Context: A Proposal for a Lesson Plan for Elderly Japanese Learners at an Elementary Level

WAKAARI Yasuhiko

Akita University

1 Introduction

In recent years, a considerable amount of research has been conducted on teaching frameworks. The traditionally used framework, ‘PPP’ (Presentation, Practice, Production), has been criticised by a number of critics (e.g., Scrivener, 1994; Skehan, 1998), and such criticisms of PPP have led to suggestions for alternative frameworks from several authors (e.g., Harmer, 1998; McCarthy & Carter, 1995). The newly suggested frameworks claim to offer students far richer opportunities for improving their communication skills (e.g., Willis, 1994); yet, as Doi (1995) indicates, they have seldom been tried and assessed in the Japanese teaching context. In this paper, therefore, I would like to take up one of these alternative frameworks, TBL (Task-Based Learning) by Willis (1996) in particular, and consider its applicability to the teaching context in Japan.

The paper begins with a review of literature on tasks and task-based teaching frameworks, and tries to identify some key factors for adopting them in Japanese teaching contexts. Then, I describe my teaching context, a class for elderly Japanese learners at an elementary level, and discuss some problems with the current framework for teaching these learners and possible solutions for the problems. Finally, a lesson plan is suggested on the basis of the TBL framework, with justification of and rationalization for the new design.

2 Literature review on teaching frameworks

2.1 General description of tasks and task-based teaching frameworks

The concept of tasks was originally developed as part of vocational training practices in the 1950s (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). Soon tasks came to be applied to language teaching, in such as Ministry of Education (1975), known as the Malaysian Communicational Syllabus, and Prabhu (1987), known as the Bangalore Project.

In language learning, the term ‘task’ has been discussed in a considerable amount of literature with broad interpretations (e.g., Crooks & Gass, 1993; Legutke & Thomas, 1991). Nunan (1989) and Ritchie (2003:118), for instance, describe it as a ‘meaning-focused’ activity, while others (e.g., Prabhu, 1987; Willis, 1994:18) view it as ‘a goal-oriented activity in which learners use language to achieve a real outcome’. In general, a task can be defined as an activity in which: (1) meaning is primary; (2) there is some communication problem to solve; (3) there is some sort of relationship to real-world activities; (4) task completion has some priority; and (5) the

assessment of tasks is in terms of outcome (Skehan, 1998:95).

The concept of tasks has impacts not only on syllabuses or classroom activities, but also on teaching frameworks. As mentioned earlier, several teaching frameworks, which have been developed out of criticisms of PPP, adopt the concept of tasks, as seen in 'ARC' (Authentic use, Restricted use, Clarification & focus) (Scrivener, 1994), 'III' (Illustration, Interaction, Induction) (McCarthy & Carter, 1995), 'ESA' (Engage, Study, Activate) (Harmer, 1998), and 'TBL' (Task-Based Learning) (Willis, 1994, 1996). Most of these frameworks place language-use activities before language-focus activities. For example, Willis's TBL (1996) consists of the following three main stages: (1) pre-task stage; (2) task cycle stage; and (3) language focus stage, with each of the stages having its own purposes. The pre-task stage introduces the topic, together with related vocabulary items or expressions, which will help students understand the task instructions and prepare for the next stage. In the task cycle stage, students firstly conduct the task in pairs or groups by communicating with each other, using the language they have acquired. This is followed by the students discussing with their partner to prepare for a report which will be presented orally to the rest of the class. At this stage students experience using the language, which will help them develop fluency. Finally, in the language focus stage, students focus on certain language items, and analyse and practise them. These activities aim to improve students' accuracy.

2.2 Characteristics and assumptions of task-based teaching frameworks

In comparison with PPP, task-based frameworks such as Willis's TBL (1996) are considered to have some characteristic features. First, they provide students with more opportunities to get exposed to the target language (Ritchie, 2003), as seen in TBL, which has the 'task cycle' stage for these opportunities, whereas PPP does not help them use the language in real life (Willis, 1996). Second, unlike PPP, they do not inhibit students from setting up their own hypotheses and taking risks to test them out, since they are based on a more 'learner-centered' framework (Willis, 1994). Furthermore, task-based teaching frameworks allow more flexibility for teachers than PPP (Willis, 1996). In other words, they offer the teacher more options and create more dynamism in the classroom. Also, it can be said that using tasks leads to motivating students (Shirahata, Tomita, Muranoi, & Wakabayashi, 1999), which may not be easily achieved with PPP.

In terms of the theory underpinning teaching frameworks, frameworks such as TBL can be said to be on sound theoretical principles (Corder, 1986), whereas the language and language-learning theories underlying PPP are questionable (Scrivener, 1994). Unlike PPP, frameworks such as TBL do not assume that a language-learning process is simplistic and that language is acquired by simply taking small steps consisting of various language items (Ritchie, 2003; Willis, 1994). On the contrary, they assume that learning language is more complex (Richards & Rodgers, 2001) and is achieved 'by interacting communicatively and purposefully' through various tasks (Feez, 1998:17). Furthermore, they are not based on the assumption that fluency is

acquired after accuracy, but are instead based on the assumption that accuracy is acquired after fluency—in other words, after successful communication (Willis, 1996).

As regards differences from other task-based teaching frameworks such as those used in Prabhu (1987), who focused on tasks instead of language structure when teaching in south India (Harmer, 2001), it can be said that primary differences lie in the way tasks are selected and whether there is a stage for language focus. Willis (1994) claims that the teaching framework used in Prabhu (1987) is more teacher-centred, since, in Prabhu (1987) teachers determine educational needs on the basis of their experiences, without actually conducting learners' needs analysis (Long & Crooks, 1992). Willis (1994) also criticises Prabhu (1987) for his approach to make learners acquire language only through using it, saying that it keeps students from paying sufficient attention to forms of language (Imura, Kimura, & Kiduka, 2001). Willis (1994) claims that stages such as the 'language-focus' in TBL offer learners more time to reflect on their communication in the stage of the 'task cycle'.

2.3 Criticisms and possible problems of TBLT and task-based teaching frameworks

As with other teaching approaches or frameworks, however, Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) or teaching frameworks such as Willis's TBL are not free from criticisms. One fundamental criticism of TBLT is of the assumptions underlying tasks. TBLT seems to assume that using tasks makes teaching more effective, yet this assumption is not supported by clear evidence (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). Similarly, Doi (1995) points out that Interactional Hypotheses (Long, 1983) are not empirically verified in research, though Ellis (1992) insists that various researches make it clear that negotiation of meaning does promote learners' understanding.

In addition, as mentioned earlier, task-based teaching frameworks such as TBL are more 'learner-centred' than PPP (Willis, 1994), yet this may bring about a situation in which the teacher loses control of his/her class, especially when teaching a large class. As Willis (1996) admits, this problem still remains, although some possible solutions may be available.

These frameworks may also place difficult demands on teachers, especially on those who are not native speakers of English or who have little experience and confidence in task-based teaching frameworks. Willis (1994) insists that her framework requires 'no radical new techniques' (p.20), yet in reality teachers are expected to be able to give students spontaneous feedback during the lesson. This does not seem to be easy for non-native teachers of English, as they do not have the so-called 'native intuition' and, therefore, cannot tell their students with confidence whether their utterances are appropriate or not. It may also be difficult for inexperienced teachers to provide students with spontaneous and appropriate feedback.

More importantly, these frameworks do not seem to fit every single teaching context, as Cadorath and Harris (1998) indicate. They are obviously based on the assumption that all learners are ready to express their opinions and thoughts in front of their classmates. However, this assumption does not apply to the Japanese teaching

context, for example, as Gray and Leather (1999) describe: ‘while in the West we put a high cultural value on standing out from the crowd and saying “I think...”, this is not so in Japan, where it is more likely to be seen as immodest, even selfish’(p.7). My experience as a teacher in Japan supports this view, since most students tend to behave so as not to be different from others. In a context such as this, imposing certain types of task on students may result in ‘confusion and inadequate learning’ (Gray & Leather, 1999:7).

Finally, these frameworks are based on the assumption that students are learning language to develop their communication skills. However, there are some contexts, such as Japanese secondary schools, where the urgent needs of most learners are not to develop their communication skills, but to pass exams for entrance to higher schools. In such a situation tasks may not be a motivating factor, and so task-based teaching frameworks may not have as much effect on students’ learning as they have in other contexts. These criticisms imply that the frameworks may not apply to all teaching contexts, which fact Willis (1994) or other framework inventors do not seem to consider as their primary concern.

2.4 Issues in implementing task-based teaching frameworks in the Japanese teaching context

The discussions above indicate that, in theory, task-based teaching frameworks have several advantages over the PPP framework, yet there are certain issues to consider in adopting TBLT or teaching frameworks based on it. This raises a question as to what needs to be taken into account in implementing them.

With regard to this question, what Thornbury (1999:26) calls the ‘appropriacy’ factor may be useful. According to him, the following ten points are important to consider in implementing any activity: (1) the age of learners; (2) their level; (3) the size of the group; (4) the constitution of the group (e.g., monolingual or multilingual); (5) what their needs are (e.g., to pass a public examination); (6) the learners’ interests; (7) the available materials and resources; (8) the learners’ previous learning experience and hence their present expectations; (9) any cultural factors that might affect their attitudes (e.g., their perception of the role and status of the teacher); and (10) the educational context (e.g., private school or state school, at home or abroad) (Thornbury, 1999:27). If the criticisms of TBLT or task-based language teaching frameworks discussed in 2.3 are taken into account, the points (3), (5), and (9) seem to be particularly important for examining their applicability. This implies that it is preferable if, for example, the class size is small, learners’ needs are to develop their communication skills, and they are not afraid of making mistakes or expressing their thoughts in front of others.

Judging from these points, it does not seem so easy to implement TBLT or teaching frameworks based on it in the secondary school contexts in Japan, where a number of limitations lie: many classes in Japanese secondary schools normally accommodate more than 30 students in each; for many students, their primary needs are to pass entrance exams for higher schools; students do not like to be seen different from others in expressing their thoughts; and they are afraid to lose face by making mistakes in front of others (Gray & Leather, 1999). This is

demonstrated by the fact that in Japan TBLT has been adopted only in the form of classroom activities for the purpose of promoting acquisition of grammar rules, on conventional syllabuses (e.g., the structural syllabus) (Doi, 1995). However, it may well become less difficult to implement them in teaching contexts where some of the conditions are reasonably met, such as the one which I take up in this paper.

3 Description of the Teaching Context

3.1 General description of class and learner

The elementary-level English language class described in this paper is a study-group class conducted on a voluntary basis. It was formed by some Japanese elderly learners who had completed an English language programme for elementary-level learners run by Nishi-Tokyo City. This study-group consists of 10-12 members and the class is held twice a month for 60 minutes each.

All the learners are native speakers of Japanese and are over 60 years old. They are mostly female, with just a few male learners. Most learners are highly motivated and are studying English through radio or TV programmes at home. Nevertheless, the majority of them tend to think that they are too old to learn a language and lack confidence in learning, which is typical of elderly learners (Sidwell, 1992).

Since most learners have already attended the initial programme, they are acquainted with each other, which helps create a positive and enjoyable atmosphere for learning. The fact that they feel no or little peer pressure allows them to take risks without being afraid of making mistakes. Notwithstanding, they tend to refrain from expressing their thoughts freely, even when encouraged. This is partly because they are not accustomed to expressing themselves in the classroom, and partly because Japanese culture, which values silence rather than eloquence, affects them (Gray & Leather, 1999). This makes some interactive tasks difficult to conduct.

As for their needs, an informal interview was held in the first lesson, which generally identified learners' needs and reasons for learning as follows: (1) to communicate with foreign people when traveling abroad; (2) to improve their pronunciation for successful communication; (3) to interact with their grandchildren who are learning English; (4) to get together with other elderly members in their community through the lessons; (5) to exercise their brain power. The interview also indicated that almost all learners have needs or wishes to learn oral skills used in 'daily conversation'. On the basis of these needs, the main goals of the lessons are decided as follows: (1) to develop learners' communication skills; (2) to improve their pronunciation.

3.2 Current teaching framework and teaching materials

The class adopts the following teaching framework: (1) Warm-Up; (2) Review ((2a) Review Reading, (2b) Story Reproduction through Q&A); (3) Presentation of new material ((3a) Oral Introduction, (3b) Explanation, (3c) Reading Aloud, (3d) Consolidation). This framework basically follows Kumabe (2001), which indicates

that the lessons adopt the PPP framework. This framework was originally adopted in the earlier programme, in which the teacher took extra care to provide learners with equal opportunities for speaking, because in the past a few ‘overly enthusiastic’ learners took all the time at the expense of other learners, who were overwhelmed by such learners and were discouraged from speaking. This framework has been maintained in the new study-group class, as continuity in learning is valued.

As for teaching materials, the study-group class has continued to use *The NHK Radio New Basic English 3* (NHK Press, 2002), which was also used in the city’s earlier programme. This provides learners with listening materials, which allow them to review and practice listening at home. This has proved of vital importance, because the lessons are conducted only every two weeks.

3.3 Evaluating the lessons

An informal meeting with the learners revealed that most learners were enjoying the lessons. Most of the learners stated that the lessons were easy to follow and they felt comfortable in the classroom.

Nevertheless, the lessons did not completely meet the learners’ needs. While accepting the current teaching, some learners expressed their interest in learning set expressions used in daily conversation. This indicates that, after learning some grammar and practising speaking, they have gained some confidence and have come to have a wish to use English in a less controlled situation. In other words, they want to take the next step and are ready for change. Under the present PPP framework, however, they do not have sufficient opportunities to use learnt language items freely (Willis, 1994). In addition, the textbook does not deal with ‘useful’ expressions of daily life. In order to solve these problems, adopting a task-based teaching framework in the study-group classes together with some change in the teaching materials seemed essential, as an appropriate way to help improve the learners’ communication skills (Willis, 1996) as well as to meet their expectations.

Judging from the ‘appropriacy’ factors discussed in 2.4, it can be said that this teaching context has more ‘appropriacy’ for task-based teaching frameworks than the regular Japanese school education contexts; despite the fact that the learners still show hesitation in expressing their thoughts, the size of the class is small enough, the learners’ needs are certainly to develop communication skills, and they are not afraid of making mistakes. Hence the adoption of a task-based teaching framework in the class, for which I will suggest a new lesson plan based on it in the following section.

4 A suggested lesson plan based on the TBL framework

The lesson plan suggested in this paper is based on one of task-based teaching frameworks, Willis’s TBL (1996) in particular, the descriptions of which, among others, seem to be more detailed and clearer for the teacher on what to do in each stage of the framework, and thus makes it easier for the teacher to plan each lesson based on

it. The lessons are designed for the first time based on TBL, and, taking into account the fact that the learners are not accustomed to the new framework, I have designed them to make the learners feel that they can cope with TBL. In other words, I have tried to reduce their worries with the new framework and develop their confidence in communication in a less-controlled situation.

4.1 Lesson aims and teaching procedures

The suggested lesson plan mainly aims to develop learners' oral communication skills by having the learners find out and describe some animals hidden in pictures. It also aims to exercise their brain power, since finding hidden animals in pictures may well be considered a cognitive exercise, if judged from Williams and Burden (1997).

With regard to the task of describing hidden animals in pictures, one may wonder whether it has a relationship to real-world activities for elderly learners, as prescribed by Skehan (1998) presented in 2.1. As a matter of fact, however, the task comes to have a relationship to real-world activities, if the learners review what they have learnt in the lesson by playing with their grandchildren who are also learning English, thus satisfying one of their stated needs (i.e., to interact with their grandchildren). Though this may not apply to those learners who do not have such needs, learners are very likely to keep up their motivation for doing such activities, simply because they are new and exciting to them in themselves. Moreover, since the primary aim of the first lesson is to get the learners accustomed to TBL, such game-like activities will help them feel relaxed and enjoy the lesson, which is, in this situation, considered more important than the authenticity of tasks.

The lesson has the following five stages (see also Table 1): (1) Introduction; (2) Pre-task Stage; (3) Task-cycle Stage; (4) Language Focus Stage; (5) Extra task. For each stage, I provide a detailed description and justification.

4.2 Introduction

At the start of the lesson, the teacher informs learners that from this lesson on the teacher would like to introduce a new way of teaching and presents a justification for this (e.g., it helps them develop their communication skills in a less controlled situation), asking for their opinions on this proposal. If they agree on the proposal, then the teacher explains that the new way of teaching will involve a change in the teaching framework, and that, during their main activities, their utterances do not need to be complete sentences. The teacher also informs them that their mistakes will not be corrected while conducting the activities, but that they will be dealt with at a later stage.

Justification and rationalization

According to Harmer (2001), since adult learners have rich learning experiences and therefore can be 'critical of

	Stage (mins)	Teacher	Learners
1	Introduction (5mins)	1. discusses a change in teaching with learners 2. explains how the lesson will be conducted	1. discusses a change in teaching with teachers 2. listen to the teacher's explanation
2	Pre-task (6-8mins)	1. demonstrates an example task with the whole class 2. explains the main task	1. conduct an example task 2. listen to the teacher's explanation
3	Task cycle [task] (2-3mins)	1. presents the main task	1. conduct the main task
	[planning] (10-12mins)	1. gives learners worksheets 2. discusses with learners about the reporting activity 3. observes the class	1. write about their findings in the worksheet 2. discusses with the teacher about the reporting activity 3. prepare for the reporting activity
	[reporting] (13-15mins)	1. organizes the reporting activity and record learners 2. gives learners a listening activity	1. speakers deliver reporting and listeners fill in the worksheet 2. listen to the tape and fill in the worksheet
4	Language focus (10-12mins)	1. plays learners' recordings 2. gives learners positive feedback	1. listen to their recordings and reflect on them 2. receive positive feedback from the teacher
5	Extra task (7-10mins)	1. presents extra tasks to the whole class 2. organizes a reporting activity 3. gives learners positive feedback	1. conduct the extra tasks 2. conduct a reporting activity 3. receive positive feedback from the teacher

Table 1. A Suggested Lesson Plan

their teacher's teaching methods' (p.40), it is important for the teacher to ask them about their opinions and listen to their concerns. In many adult education contexts in Japan, however, this does not seem to be commonly practised, because the learners seldom express their feelings in the classroom in the first place and thus the time for such discussion is considered as a waste. Behind this mentality may well lie Japanese culture such that teachers are afraid to run the risk of losing face by being criticised by learners, who are usually younger, and that learners do not dare to make an attempt to threaten their teacher's face. This is because, given that age is a key factor in Japanese culture, such attempt may affect their relationship with their teachers, which may end up with a negative evaluation from their teachers.

However, given the fact that, in our particular context, the learners are all older than the teacher and they are not going to be formally evaluated in terms of grades, for example, it is easier for them to express their feelings to the teacher and thus possible to have a discussion on the lesson. More importantly, this kind of discussion will wake up their sense of belonging and tend to encourage their active involvement in the lesson (Breen & Littlejohn, 2000).

4.3 Pre-task stage

The teacher explains that in this lesson somewhat tricky pictures are used. Then, in order to illustrate the main task, the whole class conducts very simple tasks as examples: the teacher shows a picture (see Appendix 1) and asks the learners to put their hands up when they find some animals in it. After that, the teacher asks a

volunteer learner who has found the answer to explain it. This is followed by the same activity with a different picture (see Appendix 2). Next, the teacher asks the learners to form pairs and explains the main task: *You'll be given a picture (see Appendix 3) and have to find animals hidden in the picture. When you find an animal, circle it on the picture. You have only one minute and must speak in English to each other.*

Justification and rationalization

Regarding how to start the pre-task stage, Willis (1996:28-30) suggests the following five possible starting points: (1) personal knowledge and experience; (2) problems; (3) visual stimuli; (4) spoken and written texts; and (5) children's activities. In this lesson, choosing (3) 'visual stimuli' seems to be appropriate as the starting point. As Ellis (2003) maintains, using pictures as a medium is less difficult for learners than using other media. In addition, it will help lessen learners' concern and anxiety about the new way of learning, since previous lessons usually involved pictures presented in the textbook.

Wakabayashi (1983) suggests that demonstration of a simpler task is effective to facilitate learners' understanding. In the tasks used in the lesson the teacher works with the whole class, which, as Willis (1996) notes, requires minimal response by most learners. Given the learners' level, using this way of working enables learners to feel secure, and therefore is more appropriate.

Using tricky pictures seems to have various advantages. First, it involves the learners' cognitive ability, and thus meets one of their needs (i.e., to exercise their brain power). Second, learners can enjoy the task, which helps facilitate their learning (Williams & Burden, 1997). Third, it easily and naturally creates an information gap between learners, which is a crucial factor for meaningful communication (Pica et al., 1993; Richards, 1990). This gap could be created by using two pictures, yet this makes the task more difficult (Ellis, 2003). In addition, using two pictures poses some responsibility on each learner, and this often puts learners under pressure who are afraid of losing face, which may well weigh heavily on the Japanese mind (Gray & Leather, 1999).

The use of tricky pictures also gives opportunities for learners with lower English ability to contribute to class since the task involves a minimal amount of language. Such opportunities for contribution are of great significance in learning (Williams & Burden, 1997), as they make every single learner feel that their presence can have a positive effect on the class.

4.4 Task-cycle stage

Task (2-3mins)

Learners, in pairs, conduct the task of finding animals in the picture. While the learners are working, the teacher stands back and monitors the class. When one minute passes, the teacher stops them and asks each pair how many animals they have found. In case the pairs have found fewer than two animals, the teacher offers

them another thirty seconds for the task.

Justification and rationalization

Regarding the time given for the task, it may be questioned whether learners are provided with enough time for completing the task. However, there are some advantages in setting a short time limit. This facilitates learners' concentration on the task, while preventing them from lingering, and it is easy to extend the time limit (Jacobs & Hall, 2002). In contrast, it is not commendable to stop the task when some learners have not finished it since this is likely to demotivate them (Harmer, 2001).

Harmer (2001) also indicates that, when learners are conducting the task, teachers are tempted to help them or make some suggestions. This 'direct' support may be helpful for them at the moment, yet at the same time it causes learners to rely on help from teachers (Willis, 1996). This, if repeated frequently, prevents them from developing their strategic competence or communication skills in the end. Therefore, at this stage the teacher needs to encourage their work 'indirectly' by observing the class, not by providing direct help to learners.

Planning (10-12mins)

Each pair is given a worksheet (see Appendix 4) and asked to fill in it by writing keywords in three minutes. During this filling-in activity, the teacher encourages their work, writing down some useful phrases on the chalkboard. After that the teacher asks all pairs to choose two animals which they think the other pairs may not have found. The time allowed is one minute.

Then the teacher asks learners whether they would like to know other pairs' findings. After, hopefully, obtaining their consent, the teacher further asks them whether they would like to have some time for preparation, to which, hopefully, they are likely to say 'yes'. The teacher gives learners five minutes and asks them to plan a report, in which they need to describe the animals they have found and where they are. While learners prepare for the report, the teacher stands some distance from the learners and observes the class, keeping in mind that the teacher should not interfere with their interaction unless they get totally stuck.

Justification and rationalization

Regarding the introduction of the reporting activity, the teacher could mention in the pre-task stage that learners will be required to give a report later, as Willis (1996) suggests. According to her, this announcement functions to 'motivate them to take it more seriously' (p.56). On the other hand, this is likely to place some learners under unnecessary pressure at the task stage, which may affect their performance (Wakabayashi & Negishi, 1993). Considering that learners are already motivated, the teacher can adopt a 'negotiating' style instead of a directing style, by asking them whether they are interested in other pairs' findings. Since the learners,

who are not sure how many animals are hidden in the picture, are likely to answer ‘yes’ to this question, asking the learners for their opinions will enable the teacher to naturally lead them to the reporting activity and this will create a positive attitude towards the activity, as Breen and Littlejohn (2000) indicate.

The use of the worksheet seems to be appropriate in this teaching context. Compared with other means such as note-taking, it gives learners a clear idea about what information they need to write down. In addition, blank columns in the worksheet makes them notice that there are some other animals that they have not found in the task, which will naturally raise their curiosity to find out what these animals are.

Report and listening (13-15mins)

The teacher asks learners for their consent for recording their reports for the purpose of reflection, which, hopefully, will be gained, and then asks each pair to report about one animal which other pairs have not referred to. Next, while listening to other learners, one of the pairs fills in the worksheet.

Each time a pair has reported finding one animal, the teacher stops them and asks them to listen to the tape which has a speech recorded by a fluent speaker explaining the hidden animals in the picture. They circle animals in the picture while listening. The speech can be repeated depending on learners’ understanding.

Justification and rationalization

The use of speech by fluent speakers for listening activities is important (Kimura, 2001). In this situation, this listening is conducted after the learners’ report, aiming for learners to ‘compare the strategies speakers used in the recording with their own strategies’ (Willis, 1996:90). Considering that the main task is a sort of puzzle type, this listening needs to be implemented after the reporting. Otherwise, learners’ interest in others’ reports would be lost, which may affect the meaningfulness of the reporting and listening activities (Kimura, 2001).

When listening both to other learners’ reports and the tape of the speech, the worksheet is used for filling in. This worksheet sets out learners’ clear purposes for listening. Accordingly, it prevents learners from not paying attention to the reports (Kosuge & Kosuge, 1995), while allowing learners to focus on specific listening points.

4.5 Language focus stage

Learners listen to the recording of their report and reflect on their performance and the teacher gives some positive feedback to learners who reported, writing some useful words or phrases on the chalkboard and giving some exercise on their pronunciation, when necessary.

Justification and rationalization

The recording of learners’ reports may be questioned as this can place learners under more pressure, which

could affect their performance (Wakabayashi & Negishi, 1993). However, given that the recording is not used for formal evaluation as in Japanese school educational contexts, but only for reflection, it is not considered to give learners the same amount of pressure. Moreover, it is beneficial for both learners and teachers in certain respects. Listening to learners' recording offers learners opportunities to check on their performance and notice their habits in speaking (Wakabayashi, 1983). It also enables teachers to give learners more precise feedback. Considering the context in which the teacher is a non-native speaker of English and does not have sufficient experience in TBL, this recording will be of great help for the teacher.

Giving positive feedback by referring to some specific examples is crucial (Kosuge & Kosuge, 1995), as it greatly affects learners' motivation (Williams & Burden, 1997). Now that this is the first time for learners to perform a reporting activity and that they are likely to lack confidence, it is of vital importance for the teacher to motivate learners. The teacher also needs to try not to make too many points in language form, as this may lead to demotivating learners (Wakabayashi, 1983).

4.6 Extra task

The teacher gives learners an extra task, which is the same as the main task but with a trickier picture. This time learners work as a class. The teacher shows them the picture (see Appendix 5) and asks them to find animals hidden in the picture in one minute. When learners find an animal, they put their hands up. Then the teacher appoints some learners and asks them to explain the animals they have found, where they are, and in what colors they are painted. After these reports the teacher gives them positive feedback.

Justification and rationalization

After having received positive feedback and advice for improvement in the language focus stage, most learners probably hope for a chance to try another task, which allows them to reflect on their improvement. This extra task is designed to meet their expectations. As the extra task is more difficult than the main one, learners, hopefully, enjoy the challenge.

When learners report their findings, the teacher needs to give them positive feedback, this time emphasising that they have made some improvement in a short time. This feedback will provide learners with more confidence in learning language (Wakabayashi, 1983), which is of particular importance for elderly learners, as indicated by Sidwell (1992).

5 Conclusion

This study has explored the applicability of the TBL framework in the Japanese teaching context. The literature review has shown that TBL can provide learners with far more opportunities to use English in a less

controlled situation than PPP (Willis, 1996), and that the consideration of teaching contexts is necessary for TBL to function effectively (Cadorath & Harris, 1998). Then the study has discussed some conditions to implement TBL in the Japanese teaching context (see 2.4), and shown that the context of teaching elderly Japanese learners described in this paper may well have more ‘appropriacy’ in adopting TBL.

The proposed lesson plan for elderly Japanese learners and its tasks consider most of the learners’ needs and the burden on non-native teachers with little experience of TBLT. These considerations seem to make the suggested TBL lesson practical for implementation. After experiencing some TBL lessons, both learners and teachers will become more accustomed to TBL. Then they will be ready to try various TBL tasks in more flexible forms, which will lead to further development in learners’ communication skills (Shirahata, Tomita, Muranoi, & Wakabayashi, 1999).

As regards their self-learning at home, which is important for the learners in the context, they can practise by listening to the tape by a fluent speaker explaining the hidden animals in the pictures and by reading the transcript of the speech. This self-learning will become more meaningful if the learners are asked to present their speech in the next lesson.

This proposed lesson plan suggests that it is important to ask the learners for their opinions and use their own recordings of speech for reflection on their performance, in accordance with their experience and cognitive learning style (Sidwell, 1992). As Harmer (2001) indicates, elderly learners need different approaches of teaching from those for younger learners. In Japan, however, this issue obviously has not been dealt with sufficiently, as studies concerning this issue are limited to Childs (2003) and probably a few others.

Given the limited literature in this area, it is hoped that the suggestions made in this paper will be of some use to teachers who are teaching elderly Japanese learners at an elementary level, or those who are seeking ways to implement TBLT in their teaching frameworks. My next task is to explore ways to implement TBLT in the Japanese regular school context, as well as to develop more effective lesson plans based on task-based teaching frameworks, as I think current plans will not help them communicate with foreign people when traveling abroad, which is one of their needs. More importantly, I think it is necessary to put the suggested plan into practice and examine what changes will be brought about by its implementation. Such a reflective cycle of teaching and experimentation, as Sano (2000) indicates, will help vastly improve any teaching programme.

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