

**Issues in and Possibility of Adopting Task-Based Language Teaching
in English Classrooms in Japan**

WAKAARI Yasuhiko

Akita University

In my presentation, I asked myself and answered the following three questions:

- (1) To what extent has TBLT been implemented in ELT in Japan?
- (2) Why doesn't TBLT become the mainstream approach?
- (3) How can TBLT be implemented?

To answer Question 1, I referred to Doi (1995) and Izumi (2007), who stated as follows:

“...attempts to implement TBLT in Japan seem to have been, in most cases, not on the level of the syllabus, but on the level of classroom activities under the existing syllabus (e.g., structural syllabus), and the tasks employed in such activities are only those which try to help students acquire particular grammar rules of English...”

(Doi, 1995:313)

“...the ELT in Japan...seems to stay within the realm of ‘focus on forms’, which is the impression that I think can be shared many other people. Certainly, there are some signs which show that ‘focus on meaning’ is being gradually spreading among teachers, but still the concept seems to stay in the ancillary position...”

(Izumi, 2007:21)

On the basis of these statements, I concluded that TBLT is not implemented in full so far in Japan.

To answer Question 2, I referred to Samuda and Bygate (2008), who listed the following three problems which TBLT has:

- perceptions of task-based language teaching (TBLT) as a “top-down” initiative (Van den Branden, 2006), imposed on teachers by researchers with limited understanding of the demands of everyday pedagogy (Swan, 2005)
 - conceptual unease among teachers about the potential pedagogic value of tasks and pedagogic approaches that make significant use of tasks (Littlewood, 2007)
 - unrealistic demands and expectations placed on teachers in the implementation of task-based programmes of instruction (Van den Branden, 2006)
- (Samuda & Bygate, 2008:192-193)

In addition, I pointed out the following 13 factors in relation to the English language teaching context in Japan: (1) Language-learning environment (Takashima, 2005); (2) Classroom culture (Gray & Leather, 1999); (3) Number of class hours (Takashima, 2005); (4) Class sizes; (5) Number of examples of TBLT in Japan; (6) Teaching materials (Takashima, 2005); (7) Evaluation of tasks; (8) Teachers’ language skills; (9) Teachers’ knowledge of TBLT; (10) Teachers’ workload; (11) Cooperation with colleagues; (12) Students’ goals of language learning (Tsuduki, et al., 2008); and (13) Students’ beliefs on language learning.

To answer Question 3, I presented three models according to the level of adoption and examined their applicability in the ELT context in Japan: (1) Adopting TBLT at the curriculum level; (2) Adopting TBLT for the whole lesson; (3) Adopting TBLT for part of a lesson. The examples presented for explaining these models are based on my teaching experiences at the university level, namely my classes in (1) Materials development for graduate students, (2) Introduction to English language teaching for sophomores, and (3) English for academic purposes for freshmen, the goals of and procedures for which are stated as follows:

Class: Materials Development (MD)

Goals: Acquisition of practical knowledge of and skills in MD

- Procedures: (1) Analyze and rewrite texts in textbooks;
- (2) Develop activities for newspaper English;
 - (3) Analyze in-house materials for General English;
 - (4) Develop alternative materials for GE
 - (5) Teach a class with the developed materials;
 - (6) Revise the developed materials

Class: Introduction to English Language Teaching

Lesson goals: Qualifications for school teachers

Procedures (90 minutes in total):

- (1) Interview each other in pairs on the teachers that students have met so far;
- (2) Report your findings to your group of four;
- (3) Discuss the traits commonly found ;
- (4) Report the findings to the whole class;
- (5) Discuss what qualifications future teachers (need to) have

Class: General English II

Activity goals: To get used to speaking English

Procedures (8-15 minutes in total):

- (1) Interview each other in pairs on the topic of the lesson;
- (2) Check those expressions which you were not able to use;
- (3) Report your findings to your group of four

By examining the models from the viewpoint of practicality in relation to the ELT context in Japan, I concluded that (1) the first model is not feasible in English classes in junior and senior high schools, as in these classes the textbook functions as a syllabus and it is difficult to change the syllabus itself; (2) the second model is feasible in junior and senior high schools, but for only a few hours in a year, as the model is not compatible with the textbook; (3) the third model is more feasible in everyday teaching practices, if it is conducted for a shorter time as an unfocused task.

Bibliography

- 和泉伸一 (2007) 「流行の習得理論 (指導法) と授業の変化」『英語教育』, 56(7), 20-21.
- 高島英幸 (2005) 『文法項目別 英語のタスク活動とタスク : 34 の実践と評価』 大修館書店.
- 高橋一幸 (1991) 「『沈黙する生徒』をどうする? : 英語授業の活性化をめざして」『英語教育』, 28(1), 22-24.
- 都築数雄他 (2008) 「TBLT 導入による英語授業の改善—タスク活動を通じたコミュニケーション能力の育成」『愛知県総合教育センター研究紀要 第 98 集』. Retrieved May 31, 2009, from http://www.apec.aichi-c.ed.jp/shoko/98syuu/kyouka_eigo/taskindex.htm.
- 土井利幸 (1995) 「Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT)」田崎清忠編『現代英語教授法総覧』(pp.305-316), 大修館書店.
- Gray, P., & Leather, S. (1999). *Safety and challenge for Japanese learners of English*. London: English Teaching Professional.
- Littlewood, W. (2007) Communicative and task-based language teaching in East Asian classrooms. *Language Teaching*, 40(3), 243-249.
- Samuda, V. & Bygate, M. (2008) *Tasks in second language learning*. Basingstoke: Palgrave.
- Swan, M. (2005) Legislation by hypothesis: The case of task-based instruction. *Applied Linguistics*, 26(3), 376-401.
- Van den Branden, K. (2006) *Task-based language education: From theory to practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Wakaari, Y. (2005) *An analysis of a selection of English language textbooks designed for Japanese lower secondary schools from the viewpoint of communicative language teaching*. Unpublished master's thesis, University of Exeter.
- Wakaari, Y. (2009). *The roles and problems of teaching materials in the teaching of English in Japan*. Manuscript submitted for publication.
- Willis, J. (1996) *A framework for task-based learning*. Harlow: Longman.