

NUFS Workshop 2008

## *Newsletter No. 4*

*< Summer Workshop 2008 >*

### **“Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT): Theory and Practice”**

**Date:** August 4-6, 2008, 9:30-16:30

**Venue:** Nagoya University of Foreign Studies, Room 322

**Goal:** The goals of these three days are: 1) to deepen your understanding of the framework of TBLT; 2) to provide you with hands-on activities about TBLT; 3) to develop tasks based on the framework of TBLT.

**Outline:** The eighth NUS Summer Workshop deals with a hot topic—task-based language teaching (TBLT): theory and practice. Although TBLT has gained prominence in foreign language teaching in recent years, most teachers know little about how to make a task and how to develop a lesson plan through tasks that are based on your textbook.

Willis, J. (1996) affirms that TBLT helps “you to manage classroom interaction so as to maximize opportunities for learners to put their limited language to genuine use, and to create a more effective learning environment” (p. 19). Then, how can language teachers create an effective learning environment by using tasks? How can they modify the textbook they are required to use? How can they develop a lesson plan by using tasks?

Presenters will explain the framework of TBLT and demonstrate a variety of tasks so that participants will actually experience them as students. Then participants will work in groups, applying their new understanding of tasks to develop a lesson plan which they will present on the last afternoon.

Lectures, hands-on activities, group work and presentations by participants are all conducted in English. You can improve and practice your English while learning new teaching techniques. Finally, you will have many opportunities to learn from one another. You can share your own ideas and materials with other participants.

### *<Day 1>*

**Date:** August 4, 2008, 9:30a.m.-12:30a.m., 13:30p.m. - 16:30p.m.

**Instructor:** Kazuyoshi Sato (Nagoya University of Foreign Studies)

### *Morning*

**Title:** Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT)

**The number of participants:** 29

**Abstract:** What is the definition of tasks? What is the framework of TBLT? Yoshi will explain three phases including the pre-task, the task cycle, and the language focus by using hands-on activities. Moreover, he



will show examples of tasks that his fourth-year seminar students developed last year so that participants can see models. They are expected to understand how to make a task through this session.

## Afternoon

**Title:** Preparation for group presentations

**The number of participants:** 28

**Abstract:** Participants will make groups of three according to their teaching level (Junior high schools or senior high schools). They will choose one lesson from the textbook and develop a lesson by using tasks. Yoshi and Nancy will be advisers. (Participants should bring their school textbook all three days of the workshop.)

### 1. Interesting activities you might want to use in your class. Why?

- I found it interesting to listen to the partner, to summarize what he/she said and to report to the class. This activity can be used in various situations of classroom activities. This easily combines speaking and writing, so students can have communications and chances to notice their language use.
- Interview activity, because it involves speaking, writing, reading and listening skills. It is also very interesting in that it helps students to know more about other classmates.
- Concentrated card game is good. I'll do this as Yoshi did. He started with grammar, and did the card game to confirm the grammar. Students read the sentence matching the cards and learn the grammar. That is a great idea!
- I'd like to use demonstration 1(card game), because my students are weak in learning English and they don't really concentrate on studying English for 50 minutes. If I introduce this activity to them, they will learn grammatical points easier than usual.
- Tape-recording activity. Students can reflect on their own conversation: their voice, pronunciation, grammar, etc. With three steps (first: writing down a plan, second: practice for recording, third: recording) I could feel I made progress in expressing my vacation plan. Recording is useful for feed-back.
- Five-minute conversation. It was embarrassing to have my English tape-recorded, but I think tape-recording our own English and listening to it later will surely improve our speaking skills. I'd like my students to try this to improve their skills.



### 2. What you learned from today's workshop.

- One big thing I learned today is a task should have a goal. So far I have thought activities are just additional practice for grammar learning and it should be just fun.
- To build up the task seems difficult to me. However, to let the students deepen their understanding, the task following both context and grammar is important. To make a lesson and task plan is very beneficial. At school I usually didn't take time for thinking about task before.
- I have used some task-based activities, but I first learned the components of the TBLT framework. I think language focus after tasks will improve students' learning a lot.

- Every time I attend this workshop, I learn from both a lecturer and other participants, because they never fail to give me new and excellent ideas I've never thought of. Working together is much, much better than working alone. This is what I learned today.
- Knowing about theories and theoretical background enables me to see the text differently. Before the workshop, I didn't understand TBLT very well but through out doing tasks ourselves, it became clearer.
- I didn't know there are so many types of tasks. I thought tasks were activities to master some grammatical points, but by realizing many kinds of tasks for many kinds of goals we can make students interested in the topic from different kinds of view.
- I learned the benefit of giving pre-task. It introduces the new topic and vocabulary related to the topic. It also shows the model of the goal. Task is 'goal-oriented'. Setting a clear goal is the most important thing.



### 3. Questions and answers

**Q (1): I support CLT, LCT, TBLT, SCT (Students Centered Teaching), and Cooperative Learning etc, but I also still think drills and explicit grammar explanations could be effective. How could teachers balance these different approaches?**

**A:** CLT does not exclude mechanical drills and even translations as long as the main goal is to develop the learner's communicative competence. It is OK to use them, but make it short.

**Q (2): What decides on task types? Is it a characteristic of the target grammar or situations where the target grammar is used? Are there any good suggestions to decide on task types?**

**A:** It is up to the task you are going to develop. You can use a variety of tasks instead of sticking to a few ones.

**Q (3): If students find the lesson topic to be boring, how can you make the task activities fun or interesting for them?**

**A:** How to choose a topic is very important. If you think it is boring for your students, you should not use it. Or you may want to use different material that might attract your students and make the boring lesson in the textbook supplementary.

**Q (4): Definition of task (2) and (4) says "Task completion has some priority", and of course, it's important to complete tasks, However, I think students learn many things in the process of working on a task. Does this statement mean "students need to think about the goal of the task all the time while working on the task"?**

**A:** Of course, the process is very important. However, when the goal is clear, students are more motivated to work on the task. For example, you may want to make the task competitive among several groups. They do work harder, involving weaker students who are not good at English.

**Q (5): Do you know of a good source where I could get lesson ideas? It always helps to have a**

**nice book or internet resource with some new ideas.**

**A:** If you are looking for some books which include form-focused tasks, you may want to take a look at some of the following ones. You can borrow some of them from the workshop library. Ask Chihaya about them!

1. Five-Minute Activities (Penny Ur & Andrew Wright, Cambridge)
2. Grammar Games (Rinvolutri, Cambridge)
3. The Anti-Grammar Grammar Book (Hall & Shepherd, Longman)
4. Grammar on the Go (Holder, Addison-Wesley)
5. Boost! Grammar (Longman)
6. すぐに使える英語の言語活動(米山朝二他、大修館)
7. 英語楽習 (樋口忠彦他、中教出版)

**Q (6): I'd like to know more about conversation strategies. Will you recommend an easy and good book to learn about them?**

**A:** Get "Nice talking with you" from Macmillan. Other textbooks I recommend are "ICON" from McGraw-Hill and "Touchstone 1-4" from Cambridge University Press..

**Q (7): How long do you think is it necessary for instructors to continue using the method of videotaping in order to bring some amount of improvement to L2 learners?**

**A:** If you are teaching high school students, say second-year students, it takes at least one year. You may want to start with a two-minute conversation in April. Your students will make a steady progress and will achieve a three-minute conversation in fall, and eventually a four-minute conversation in March. Please read Sato & Takahashi (2008).



**Q (8): I wonder how students' speaking ability improves so dramatically after a month of speech practice.**

**A:** They are first-year university students. In our new curriculum, they take four English classes (Discussion & Debate, Intensive Reading, Academic Writing, another Discussion & Debate in this order) a week. They cover one topic in two weeks and have their conversations recorded in pairs. So, all these four classes are integrated according to the same topic. This is our new experiment and we found that our students made a remarkable progress compared to a typical once a week university class. In fact, our students could achieve a five-minute conversation after this semester, which usually takes one whole year in our traditional curriculum. It means articulation is very important. If you are a high school teacher, you may want to integrate, for example, English II and Writing according to the same topic.

**Q (9): To-infinitive is used in many different ways. For example, 'I was happy to see him.' or 'He grew up to be a doctor'. Is it possible to introduce all these different usage through one or two task (in one or two periods) instead of spending many lessons?**

**A:** You should focus on one grammatical point at a time, as I demonstrated today. Otherwise, you will confuse your students. If you are a junior high school teacher, make a form-focus task a main activity

and spend less on the textbook (reading comprehension, etc.). If you are a high school teacher, choose basic grammatical points for tasks and give brief explanations for less frequent ones or postpone them in the second year (or make them for self-study if your students are good). You need to make a wise decision about which ones to teach.

**Q (10): I can come up with task for junior high school students, but when English gets complicated in senior high, it's very difficult to use task activities, because I have to teach a lot on one period of class, using more difficult textbooks. Do task-based activities work when I'm using a difficult grammar textbook for entrance exam?**

**A:** Yes, it works. On Day three, Miwako will show you how effective form-focused tasks are in a high school grammar class.

