

Developing a Task based lesson using information gap activity

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Abstract

English language teaching and learning receive considerable attention in Pakistani schools and universities in the current scenario of continuous efforts of development. The primary purpose of this paper is to contribute to the efforts of development through the application of a modern instructional practice for English language teaching and learning on the undergraduate level. This activity strives to suggest that the adoption of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) would be a more effective means of increasing the students' comprehension and communication skills when compared to the traditional teaching method of the English language that involves (among other things) prompting and drilling of students.

Introduction

I teach Business English to B.B.A (Bachelors of Business Administration) students at a public sector university in Pakistan. The students are freshmen so they are almost at an intermediate level of proficiency in English. I teach this class every Monday and Tuesday for an hour and a half. The dual goals of the course are to improve the students' Business English knowledge and to prepare them for using English effectively in their national and international business careers. Their regular B.B.A. business courses are traditional teacher-centered lectures with little interaction. My student-centered classes are designed to give them a chance to practice their English. I employ task based instruction in my classroom and adapt it to teach business tasks such as business letter writing, presentations, fax writing, and report writing.

The class consists of thirty-five university B.B.A. candidates from different cities of Pakistan. The class spends time working on all four language skills: reading, listening, speaking and writing. The main Business English textbook recommended for this course is, *Target Score*. But I can supplement the materials, and the unit in the textbook being discussed for this lesson has the theme of leisure and travel. The outline of the lesson will follow the framework of a Task Based Language Teaching (TBLT) lesson plan. Emphasis is on meaning over form, and the plan is to teach itineraries, which are common in business environments. The activity is stimulating and it does get students to work together on a project.

TBLT Itinerary Lesson Plan

1. Pre-Task Phase (10-15 min)

The introduction to the task consists of a short article that the students have read as homework. The article describes the best travel destinations suggested by the popular travel guide publisher *Lonely Planet*. Because the students have already read the article, they are familiar with the subject matter. They are also supposed to look up the meanings of any unknown vocabulary words before class begins. The teacher introduces the article by asking why the students think tourists should visit any country.

The teacher will also show a list of recommended sights from *Lonely Planet* to get the students think about sights that a visitor might be interested in. The class will discuss this subject as a whole for approximately ten to twelve minutes, and the teacher will scaffold the upcoming task by discussing itineraries and their basic structures. The students will be separated into groups with assigned roles. Each group will be given a blank itinerary planning chart (a) to help the group with planning. The teacher will show the class a sample itinerary (b), but the decision of how to present the itinerary is up to the student groups.

a) Itinerary planning chart

Day	Activity/Sight	Location	Transportation	Time needed

b) Sample Itinerary of Pakistan

Day	Activity	Overnight stay (city)
1	Arrival in Karachi Visitors can be shown around the famous the mausoleum of the founder of Pakistan, National Museum, Dream world (Amusement & Water park, hotel & golf), Hill Park, Memon Mosque, I.I. Chandrigar Road, PAF Museum, Maritime Museum, Arena and the beach at Clifton & DHA.	Karachi
2	Arrival in Lahore The Lahore fort, The Badshahi Mosque, Minar-e-Pakistan or the Eiffel Tower of Pakistan, Imperial Baths and the Asif Jah Haveli (inner city), Lahore Museum, Lahore Zoo, Lawrence Gardens & Library, Lahore Fortress	Lahore
3	Arrival in Islamabad Lok Virsa Museum, Golra Pakistan Railways Heritage Museum, Pakistan Museum of Natural history, National Art Gallery, Daman-e-Koh (resort), Japanese Park, Rawal Lake, Mosques, shrines & monuments	Islamabad
4	Murree Kashmir Point, Pindi Point (chair lift), Lawrence College & Church, The original colonial Cecil Hotel, Patriata, Ayubia (picnic spot), Nathia Gali (hikking), Bhurban (resort), Khanspur (trekking)	Murree

Source: <http://wikitravel.org/en/Pakistan>

2. Task Phase (5-10 min)

The teacher will then introduce the main task by telling the students that they might be visiting a country of their choice this summer for vacation, and they need to develop a travel itinerary. The task is for the students to

decide what tourist places they would want to see in the country of their choice, why they should do those things, and to present this information in written form. The teacher requires a written itinerary and or a map as a visual for the presentations. This written itinerary could be in any form, including a Power point or Prezi presentation or brochure. Students will need to work in pre-assigned groups of three students and create an itinerary to visit their favorite country for a week. Once the group develops a consensus over the country they want to visit for vacation from the list of recommended sights from *Lonely Planet*, Student A will get a handout from the teacher about major tourist spots in the country of their choice. Student B will receive a handout on transportation facilities in different cities. Student C will get a map of the country to mark the distance between various tourist spots and choose appropriate means of transportation.

The Students will have already learnt the vocabulary associated with business travel as part of their travel themed unit in *Target Score*. They already have done vocabulary practice with some of the following words and phrases:

- taking a _____ cab, taxi, train, car, bus, boat, airplane, subway
- visiting a _____ museum, city, sight
- renting a car
- registering at a hotel
- checking in at the _____ hotel, airport
- boarding a ferry boat

c) Key Travel Vocabulary and Phrases (Talcott and Tullis, 89)

All this vocabulary can be applied to the itinerary task but, no single word or phrase is necessary to complete the task. The students, therefore, have a good base of language to begin the task. The textbook unit also contains a vocabulary building exercise focused on creating adjectives and adverbs from nouns (Talcott and Tullis, 89). Students can use this knowledge to describe the sights accurately and make them sound appealing. For example, they can write “After registering at your luxury hotel, take a taxi to visit the famous Beale Street in downtown Memphis.”

3. Planning Stage (20 min)

Students will next move onto the planning stage. Working together for 20 minutes, they will brainstorm the sights and experiences that should be included. One member of the group, student A, will take on the role of a recorder and make a preliminary list of sights. The other two members of the group, student B and C, will use the city transit information and the list of famous places to visit in their favorite country to help student A complete the Itinerary planning chart. Students should use as much English as possible for the planning stage, and the teacher will move around the room listening for English and interacting with students.

At the end of the planning stage, each group will write a list on the white board of at least ten sights they think they will include on their itinerary. The groups will then have a spokesperson of their choices explain to the whole class their sight choices and rationale in just a few short sentences. Each spokesperson will also take questions from the teacher and class about their sights. This will give students the chance to play with language to describe in English things that they know well in their native language. Also, it gives the groups a chance to take ideas from each other.

4. Reporting Stage of Task Cycle (30 min)

The reporting stage of the task could be the actual itinerary. The itinerary will include a paragraph explaining each sight or travel experience chosen. Each day of the week will be broken down and include the

details of estimated timing and transportation. The group will use itinerary worksheet to help with details. The role of the teacher will be a facilitator during this stage, and there will be minimal error correction to encourage the flow of language. The students will work on the itinerary in their groups with an available computer or laptop to check information on the internet and type up their presentations. I would encourage students to try to search the internet in English since that will be the language they will use for reporting. They will be given 30 minutes to write their itineraries and prepare their presentations.

Every member of the groups needs to have an equal part in the presentation. The projector will be available to show their itinerary, or the group could choose to use the white board or develop the information into a short Power point presentation. The teacher may provide vocabulary or short corrections if asked, but error correction will be minimal. The object is for the students to stretch their English language skills and be creative while fulfilling their assignments as a group. I have observed similar activities for my practicum class at IEI, and all groups chose to create elaborate Power point presentations with many photographs. The students were always excited to talk about their favorite country and show off their knowledge of tourist sights.

5. Analysis Stage of Language Focus

The next stage of the lesson is analysis. First, the teacher will identify similarities from the itineraries about how the information was presented. Most likely, the itineraries will be written in the future tense or modals will be used. The class can compare the different tenses and aspects that were used and why. The teacher can use the white board to write the verb tenses and aspects used by the groups. The teacher can then explicitly explain which work best for this assignment on itineraries. The whole class could then brainstorm and discuss other applications for this form. The teacher will also relate this task back to the unit in the textbook *Target Score* on travel and leisure and emphasize the basic structures of itineraries that students have used. The whole class could then complete the exercises in the textbook related to the key vocabulary and phrases in Figure c. This focus on form will help the students notice grammar forms that they encountered in this lesson that they are likely to experience again. Willis and Willis point out that if the students are given a chance to notice these forms, they are more likely to learn them (25).

6. Practice Stage of Language Focus

The class will now get another chance to practice their new skills in their homework. The assignment due the next class will be to write an itinerary for a weekend trip to a City or country they have visited or are interested in visiting. The itinerary should cover both days and include at least 10 sights and their descriptions. At the beginning of the next class, they will hand in this first draft of the new itinerary for homework. They will have more time during the next class to continue work on this itinerary and could include more complex language with the help of their group members and teacher. Each student will also get a chance to present a summary of this itinerary to the class in five minutes.

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