

**Towards the Fulfillment of EFL Learning Conditions:
Task-Based Learning in EFL Classrooms**

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Abstract

Informed by Jane Willis's framework for task-based language learning and Michael Breen's insights into the involvement of learners in the evaluation of learning task cycles, a unit of study was designed and implemented to experiment with clustered tasks as a means of maintaining peer-peer oral/aural interaction in the classroom at substantial levels. This analytical approach is an alternative to the task-repetition approach proposed by Martin Bygate.

Keywords: analysis of learning tasks; clustered tasks; meaningful interaction; skill enhancement.

Résumé

En se basant sur les études de Jane Willis concernant l'apprentissage de la langue par l'action et le travail de Michael Breen relatif à l'implication des apprenants dans l'évaluation des tâches d'apprentissage, une unité d'étude a été conçue et mise en pratique. Cette approche analytique est

considérée comme une alternative à l'approche par tâches proposée par Martin Bygate.

Mots-clés: Analyse des tâches d'apprentissage; cluster de tâches ; interaction significative ; amélioration des habiletés.

ملخص استنادا إلى العمل الذي قامت به جاين ويليس والمتعلق بالسياق القائم على إشراك المتعلم في عملية تعليم اللغة وفكرة مايكلبرين المتعلقة أيضا بإشراك المتعلمين في عملية تقييم الدورات التعليمية، تم تصميم وتطبيق وحدة تدريس لإجراء تجربة باستعمال عدة نشاطات كوسيلة تفاعل شفوي / سمعي لمتعلم مع متعلم داخل القسم على مستويات معتبرة. بينما النتائج تدل على انه كلما استعمل المتعلمون اللغة الانجليزية للتواصل داخل القسم لوقت أطول، كلما تطورت مهاراتهم. وفي الختام، يمكن اعتبار هذه المقاربة التحليلية كبديل لمقاربة النشاط التكراري المقترح من طرف مارتن بايقات.

الكلمات المفتاحية : تحليل النشاطات التعليمية، مجموعة النشاطات، تفاعل ذو معنى، تدعيم المهارة .

Introduction

Many studies reported results as attempts to probe for the actual teacher talking time versus student talking time in foreign/second language classrooms. These various results revealed that “a great deal of the classrooms talk in the sessions recorded with intermediate-level groups was done by the students”¹. Nonetheless, behind these results there is painstaking and time-consuming preparation of a considerable amount of small activities handed over to the students in order

1- Hitotuzi, N.(2005). Teacher Talking Time in the EFL Classroom. Profile: Issues in Teachers' Professional Development.p.103

to keep them talking. Working on a large variety of short activities may seem interesting from the point of view of the students; but it is quite an overload of work for the teacher who, depending on his or her teaching context, may have to cope with several numerous groups in different educational settings. Thus, no sooner had researchers confirmed empirically that, in terms of talking time, there was a comfortable level of learner empowerment in intermediate groups than their classroom-management style began posing this somewhat challenging problem. It was obvious to them though that whatever the solution to this deadlock, it had to do with parsimony. That is, the number of small activities had to be reduced without compromising student talking time. Grounded in this hypothesis, we decided to design and implement a tentative unit of work capitalizing basically on Willis's (1996) framework for task-based learning and Breen's (1989) evaluation of learning task cycles.

Based on the work plan unit, the students were required to go through a series of integrated micro task cycles that constituted the building blocks of a macro task cycle. The macro task, in turn, consisted of the evaluation of the activities comprising the whole of the micro-task frameworks. Nevertheless, while some specific learning aims of the activities conducted through this task-within-a-task model were outlined in terms of grammar, lexis and pronunciation, there were no expectations as to what the group would exactly learn from them, since, as many language-oriented theorists and practitioners suggest, the process of learning an L2 does not seem to be linear (e.g. in the same order as the teacher presents it in the classroom), or

cumulative (Corder, 1967; Selinker, 1972; Rutherford, 1987; Ellis, 2003 and others).

1. Statement of the Problem

The problem of this study is twofold; it aims, on the one hand, at checking whether or not clustered tasks would prove effective in keeping the participants engaged in face-to-face meaningful oral/aural interactions for an extended period of time; on the other hand, its immanent aim seemed to be in line with those of the designed unit of work, and the tenets of the task-based learning (TBL) approach (Willis, 1996; Skehan, in Willis & Willis, 1996; Ellis, 2003; Leaver & Willis, 2004; Nunan, 2004; Van den Branden, 2006; Willis & Willis, in press). The choice of this approach for the experiment was based on the literature reviewed in this paper, which suggests that a task-based learning approach towards teaching a FL is likely to contribute to the development of learner *interlanguage*, which ultimately is the language with which people communicate in an alternative language (Selinker, 1972).

2. Basic Assumption

It was assumed, however, that to some extent this unit of study would contribute to the development of the students' target-language system (Breen, 1989). This could be checked through the comparison between their performances in writing, reading, speaking and listening prior to the experiment and those thereafter.

3. Literature Overview

In this section, on the basis of the latest research developments on task-based language learning and teaching, a case will be made in favour of the adoption of this approach in the L2 classroom. But first, for the sake of contextualization, it seems important to briefly trace back the direct roots of TBL. The literature presents one major predecessor of TBL within the field of language teaching: Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). Thus, focusing on language in actual performance, Hymes devised an interdisciplinary (Hayes Jacobs, 1989) model of communicative competence which was summarized by Canale and Swain (quoted in Neves, 1993) as: “The integration of grammatical (what is formally possible), psycholinguistics (what is feasible in terms of human information processing), sociocultural (what is the social meaning or value of a given utterance), and probabilistic (what actually occurs) systems of competence”¹.

It is important to point out, though, that regarding the purpose of this paper one could not do justice here to the various scholars, from different fields of knowledge, whose works have played a major role in the development of Communicative Language Teaching. It seems sufficient to say that from an interdisciplinary *invisible* movement CLT emerged, a version of which, known as task-based language learning, began to materialise some twenty years ago. On the issue of paradigm shifting, Hermans (1999) argues for the existence of an invisible college which mostly unnoticed establishes or changes theory paradigms. And it appears that Prabhu’s Communicational Teaching Project in Bangalore (Prabhu, 1987) was a major milestone in the process of changing winds and shifting the sands towards this new language-teaching paradigm (Leaver & Willis, 2004; Van den Branden, 2006). In reality, the results of this project seemed to have indicated that TBL might represent a promising alternative to existing

1- Neves, M. (1993). *Communicative Teaching of English as a Foreign Language*. Universidade de Minas Gerais, Belo Horizonte, MG.P.16

methods of the 1980's, as suggested by Tarone and Yule (1989).

3.1. Defining a communicative task

After close examination of a number of task definitions, it was decided that the one proposed by Rod Ellis appears to be more adequately in line with the kinds of activities developed in this paper: "A task is a work plan that requires learners to process language pragmatically in order to achieve an outcome that can be evaluated in terms of whether the correct or appropriate propositional content has been conveyed. To this end, it requires them to give primary attention to meaning and to make use of their own linguistic resources, although the design of the task may predispose them to choose particular forms. A task is intended to result in language use that bears a resemblance, direct or indirect, to the way language is used in the real world. Like other language activities, a task can engage productive or receptive, and oral or written skills, and also various cognitive processes" ¹. In other words, an educational task should resemble an outside-world task insofar as it requires interaction among participants and the application of all abilities and cognitive processes involved in actual language use.

Since the implementation of the Bangalore Project, considerable amounts of research findings have provided reasonably firm grounds for the adoption of a task-based approach in the FL classroom, in various guises, to meet specific requirements of different classroom contexts (Bygate, Skehan & Swain, 2001). Such flexibility of the model seems to account for the variety of task definitions recurrent in the works of some scholars, such as Ellis (2003), Nunan (2004), Leaver and Willis (2004) and Van den Branden (2006). Thus, in this section we present a summary of findings deriving from

tasks which may not conform entirely to the task definition proposed by Ellis (2003). Amongst the many language-oriented researchers who have informed TBL with their empirical investigations is Cathcart (1986, cited in Chaudron, 1988) who, after observing eight Spanish-speaking kindergarten children in various activities for a year, pointed out that “An increase in utterance length or complexity was found [...] in those peer-peer interactions, involving tasks with a joint goal (as in a joint block-building activity)”².

The results of Rulon and McCreary’s (1986, cited in Chaudron, 1988) “comparison between teacher-fronted and group work negotiation for meaning”³ also seem to endorse the reliability of TBL. The point they make is that through group work focussed on meaning, interaction is promoted and, eventually, L2 learning ensues (see also Johnson, 1983; Gaies, 1983b; Pica & Doughty, 1985; Duff, 1986, all cited in Chaudron, 1988). On the aspect of meaning negotiation during the interaction event, Long (1990), one of the pioneers of TBL according to Van den Branden (2006), identified a larger volume of negotiation in tasks in which the participants need to respond to a common problem. Pica, Kanagy and Falodun (1993) also suggest the possibility of an increase in the volume of negotiation from specific interactive activities.

Lochana and Deb’s (2006) project in a school run by the Basaveshwara Education Society in India is yet another evidence in support of a task-based approach to language teaching and learning. They developed an experiment in which

1Ellis, R. (2003). *Task-based Language Learning and Teaching*. Oxford University Press.p.16

2- Chaudron, C.51988). *Second Language Classrooms: Research on Teaching and Learning*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.p.98.

3- Ibid.p.108.

non-task-based textbook activities were converted into task-based ones in order to test two hypotheses: (1) “Task-based teaching enhances the language proficiency of learners; and (2) Tasks encourage learners to participate more in the learning processes”¹. Their findings suggest that TBL is beneficial to learners not only in terms of proficiency enhancement but also motivation wise. Similar results were also obtained by Rocha (2005) and Gutiérrez (2005).

Reports of research findings such as these are likely to encourage teachers to comfortably apply TBL to their classrooms, inasmuch as it seems to fulfill fundamental conditions for learning a foreign language, namely exposure (or input), meaningful use, motivation and language analyses, as Willis (in Willis & Willis, 1996) makes the point.

3.2. The ‘backbone’ of the unit of work

Along the years, defenders of TBL have also addressed this question, perhaps as an attempt to swerve the radicalism of focus on meaning (or use) in the initial stage of this new language-teaching paradigm. From the late 1980’s a number of theorists and practitioners began admitting of tasks focussed on *form* as a preparation for later focus on *use* (Breen, 1989; Tarone & Yule, 1989; Widdowson, 1990). Recently, this approach has been classified as “task-supported language teaching” as opposed to “task-based language teaching”¹. Current discussions on task-based learning have also contributed to striking a balance between these two binary features of the FL classroom and Jane Willis’ seminal work,^A

1- Lochana, M & Deb, G.(2006). Task-based Teaching: Learning English Without Tears. *Asian EFL Journal*, 8(3) p.149

Framework for Task-Based Learning, published in 1996, still provides the groundwork for an adequate way of addressing the dilemma of form versus use in the EFL classroom (Dave Willis and Jane Willis's (in press) *Doing Task-Based Learning* seems to be a detailed explanation and expansion of the ideas proposed in that work). Willis divides her TBL framework into three major stages: *pre-task*, *task*, and *language focus* as shown in(Figure 1):

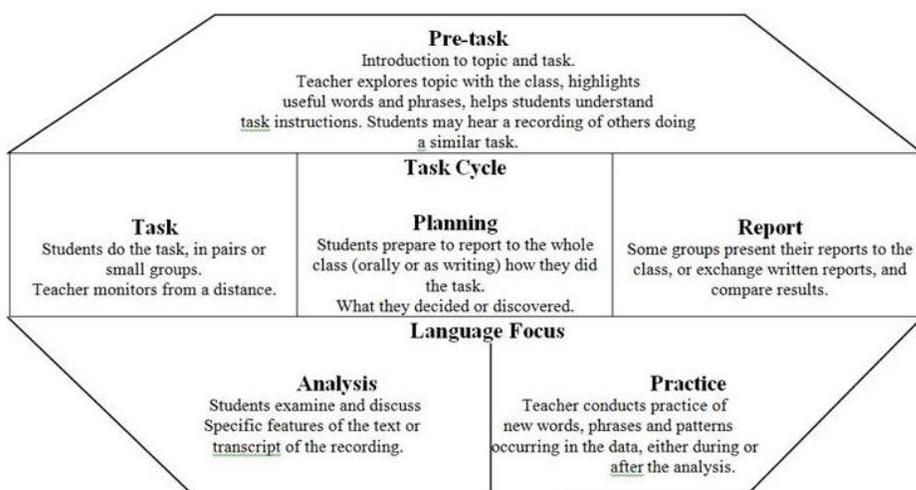


Figure 1: Components of the task-based learning framework(adapted from Willis, 1996, p. 38)

A Close scrutiny of Willis's framework seems to indicate that its last stage is the key component to achieving a desirable balance between use and form. Nonetheless, it is important to point out that the teacher's conception of language learning is crucial to establishing such equilibrium. Apparently, teachers who hold a holistic view of language learning may comfortably

work with TBL, and may be happy with applying consciousness-raising (C-R) activities to their students during the language-focus stage. For the design of the unit of work tested on the group of students, in conjunction with Jane Willis's ideas, we have also capitalised on Michael Breen's argument concerning the involvement of EFL learners in the evaluation of learning task cycles as a means for target-language development and use.

4. Research Design

4.1. Participants

The experiment was conducted on a group of twelve first year EFL students at the University of Batna. The participants (1 males and 11 females) attending the Oral Expression course, held once a week in three-hour sessions, were in the 19-22 age range. The participants were randomly selected from a group of 40 students who regularly attended their Oral Expression course, and the chosen ones have positively responded to their involvement in the study.

4.2. Means of Instrumentation

A 3-minute extract from a coverage of May Day demonstrations on *BBC News*; the book *Basic Law for Road Protestors* (Gray, 1996); an audio-recorded interview with Clare Solomon and Roger Gale (both the script and the recording were used in the experiment), and Peter Roach's *English Phonetics and Phonology* (Roach, 1991).

A Panasonic video camera was used for the recording of the lesson involving the task informing the answer to the initial

question. In addition, a stopwatch was used to time peer-peer interaction during this final task, the timing of which was done when we viewed the 60-minute video recording in private (Figure 2). Moreover, for the recording of (1) the interview, and (2) an original monologue on types of protests, the participants were encouraged to use their mobile phones to record the two micro-task activities. Moreover, five different kinds of C-R activities were devised: two on perfect tenses, two on pronunciation and another one containing some of the students' utterances during the video recorded lesson.

4.3. Procedure

4.3.1 Phases of the macro-task framework

The unit was structured in a peculiar fashion. A macro-task framework was designed in which data from four micro-task frameworks were fed in order to be analysed by the participants in its task-cycle stage. As demonstrated in figure 2, the four micro tasks functioned as a pre-text for the macro task to materialize (Cecily O'Neill uses the expression 'pre-text' as an umbrella term to cover any 'text' that can provide occasions for initiating dramatic action).

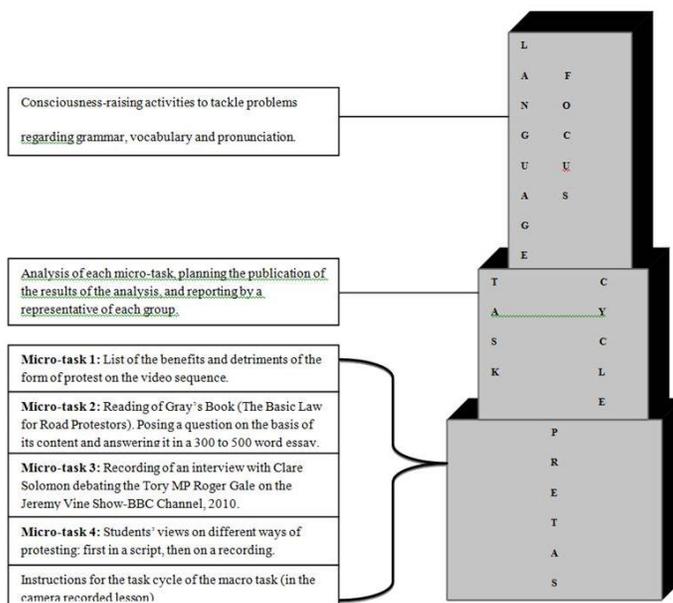


Figure2: The Planned Unit of Work (The Macro-task Framework).

4.3.1.1 The pre-task: After being briefed about the whole cycle of activities comprising the unit of work, the group first watched a video sequence on May Day demonstrations, discussing it in small groups afterwards. They then read Gray's book (14,292 words), and were requested to write an essay on protests. Subsequently, the group listened to and read the script of the interview with Clare Solomon and Roger Gale; here, in small groups of three per each, the students audio-recorded the enactment of the dialogue between the interviewer and the interviewee. Next, they also recorded the monologue expressing their views on different kinds of protests. Finally, in

a video recorded session, they reflected on the whole cycle of TBL activities, and prepared a report on its strong and weak points, presenting possible solutions for the flaws.

4.3.1.2 The task cycle: (a) The task – in small groups, the students analysed each one of the phases of the micro-task frameworks within the planned unit, detecting positive and/or negative aspects of the phases, and of the whole process as well as possible solutions for the weak points. b) The planning – each group prepared a report about the strong and weak points of the entire cycle of activities they had carried out so far, presenting some possible solutions for the flaws. (c) The report – a spokesperson elected within each group presented their group’s report in front of the class. The whole sequence of this phase of the macro-task framework was captured on video camera. As demonstrated here, the outcome, or the “successful completion of the task”¹ of the macro task was evinced by the participants’ completion of the evaluation of the activities within the frameworks of the micro tasks, and their suggestions presented to the entire class.

4.3.1.3 The language focus: After analysing the video in private, we prepared C-R activities. Small groups were given a list of some of their assertions captured on video, and were requested to identify possible errors, justify their views, and think of more appropriate ways of rephrasing the sentences or chunks that they thought were incorrect. The whole class viewed the videotaped lesson, and again responding to our request, attempted to identify problems concerning

1- Leaver, B.L. & Willis, J.R. (2004). *Task-based Instruction in Foreign Language Education*. Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press. p.13

pronunciation. We then drew their attention to pronunciation problems overlooked during the ‘spot-the-error’ activity.

The activities carried out by the participants at his stage are labeled as focused tasks by Ellis(003).

4.3.2. Summary of the video recorded lesson: This lesson was conducted in a 60-minutes session, and all 12 participants attended it.

Framework 1- Video Sequence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Explanatory activity involving new vocabulary study and general comprehension. → Task involving discussion of the topic and presentation of oral report. → C-R activities highlighting grammar (tenses).
Framework 2- Reading of a booklet: Basic Law for Road Protestors by Peter Gray.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Reading comprehension. → Writing activity in two phases: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a-<u>Writing/analysis</u> of the first draft. b-<u>Editing/analysis</u> of the essay.
Framework 3- Interview with Clare Solomon debating Tory MP, Roger Gale.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Listening to the interview → C-R activities on pronunciation → C-R activity on word classes, involving strong and weak forms informed by Peter Roach’s book against the recording and the script of the interview. → C-R activities on <u>grammar (tenses)</u>.
Framework 4- Writing and Speaking activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Analysis in groups of each of the three previous phases → Writing: scripted comments on different types of protests. → Recording of the script → Teacher’s feedback on these activities.
Framework 5- Analysis of the four micro-task frameworks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Debriefing on the activities involving the micro tasks. → Instructions for the micro task. → Analysis of the activities carried out within the frameworks of the micro tasks. → Identification of positive and negative aspects involving the whole of the micro-task framework. → Suggestions aiming at the improvement of future cycles of activities based on TBL approach. → C-R activities on relevant morphosyntactic and suprasegmental information that were necessary but were either missing or incorrectly supplied.

Table 1: A suggested list of activities for the whole cycle of TBL.

4.4. Analysis

In order to find out whether or not the participants would be engaged extensively in peer-peer meaningful interaction in the classroom as a result of their engagement in the macro task, the total amount of talking time in the classroom captured in the video recorded lesson was timed. Moreover, to reckon the amounts of time the students spent interacting with each other, the classroom talk length (CTL) was divided into teacher talking time (TTT), student talking time (STT), and periods that neither the teacher nor the students spoke (henceforth, silence length (SL)), as demonstrated hereafter in Figure 3.

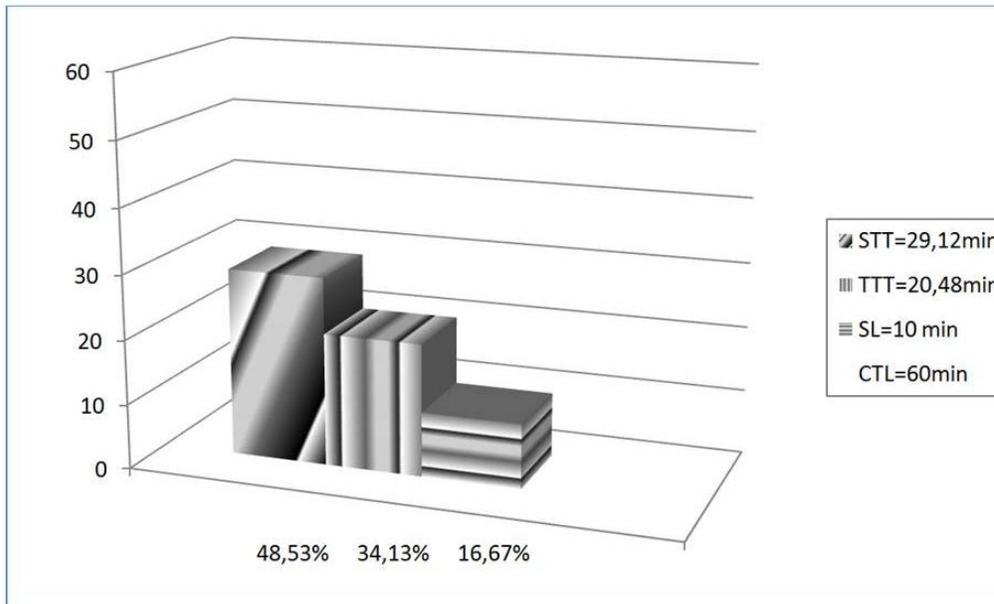


Figure 3: Video recorded lesson

5. Results

5.1. On the outcome of the macro task

The above graphic indicates that 48.53 percent of CTL was spent on STT, which is at the level of our expectations for intermediate-to-advanced STT in a 60-minute session (e.g. 45 to 70 per cent). This seems to show that a few integrated small learning tasks, used as a pre-text, can provide scaffolding for extended face-to-face meaningful interaction amid learners engaged in task-cycle analyses. Furthermore, these results also point to the fact that such an approach can be more economical in terms of time allocated for preparation of lessons aiming at

the provision of ‘fodder’ for massive student talk than one involving a variety of small tasks. At any rate, because the bulk of the macro task consisted essentially of discussions, it appears that these were an important variable accounting for the high proportion of STT. According to Skehan (2003) a discussion task provides “facilitation for extended turns, and allows learners to reach the greater depth of interaction”¹.

Another important dimension of this task-within-a-task (TWAT) model seems to be its implications for the development of the learner as a whole. They can be an important enhancer of learner autonomy. Planning is yet another important characteristic of the TWAT model. The fact that this metacognitive learning strategy seems to allow learners to work on tasks more comfortably and confidently may account for its beneficial influence on fluency and complexity.

5.2. Feedback on skill development

Retrospectively, the cycles of TBL activities described here seem to have contributed to integrating the learners’ target-language skills. This was verified by simple comparison between the participants’ performances in writing, reading, speaking and listening prior to the experiment and those during and after it. Although *thought* was not assessed in the experiment, it is likely that it has been developed throughout the stages of the investigation, inasmuch as the cycles of activities involved a thinking process.

1 - Skehan, P. (2003). *Task-based Instruction. The Language Teacher*.p.5

5.2.1. Writing: It was observed that the approach adopted towards the writing task, that the participants were asked to carry out as a result of their reflections on the theme underlying the tasks they had done so far, yielded positive results. It appears that the use of acronyms to pinpoint errors in the group's first drafts, and the opportunity that the students were given to edit them may have contributed to the drastic decrease in the number of errors normally found in their essays prior to the study. The effectiveness of the approach can be amply exemplified by the comparison between the learners' first drafts and the edited essays.

5.2.2. Reading: Basically, the feedback on this skill was derived from the essay on Peter Gray's book plus the discussion in the classroom involving the video sequence, Clare Solomon and Roger Gale's interview, and the book proper. It was observed, however, that some of the learners avoided referring to the content of the book in crucial occasions, perhaps for the same reason that other FL learners strategically avoid using complex-structure forms. In hindsight, to solve the problem of comprehension, a glossary of the relevant technical jargon in the book should have been provided, as one of the participants pointed out in the analysis stage (see participants' quotes below). Probably allowing the learners to choose a book of their liking would have invalidated the second hypothesis.

5.2.3. Speaking: While not following Willis's TBL framework *ipsis litteris*, the group had not been working interactively in the classroom for the previous term sessions. Thus, perhaps for this reason, most of them did not speak with fluency

compatible with the level of the course. Nonetheless, it was observed, during the implementation of the unit, that the learners were more focused on the discussions than before. Apparently this is accounted for by the necessity to produce a tangible outcome found in Willis's framework. Additionally, perhaps on account of their knowledge of the purpose of the set of activities, the participants tried to 'show off' their English. However, many are likely to agree that the halo effect (Brown, 1988) in such a context cannot be seen as a threat to the validity of this kind of experiment, since ultimately it is aimed at the enhancement of the participants' performance in the target language.

5.2.4. Listening: Due to its brevity, any improvement in the listening comprehension skills of the participants as a result of the experiment was unlikely to be measurable. However, it is possible that the administration of TBL activities for long periods of time can have a positive influence on FL learners' listening abilities. And this may be the case because a genuine TBL model capitalises heavily on authentic input (Nunan, 2004), which seems to be the crux of language skills enhancement in general.

5.3. The participants' comments on the cycles of TBL activities

The participants had had genuine opportunity for meaningful communication in and outside the classroom throughout some of the phases of the cycles of TBL activities. This was especially the case with the task in which they were requested to analyse the micro-task frameworks as a whole, and present suggestions for improving future TBL activities.

Notwithstanding all the intimidation a video camera can cause (Allwright & Barley, 1991), the students spent about 30 minutes (precisely 29'12") engaged in genuine oral/aural interaction in the target language in the attempt to convey their viewpoints on each and every stage of the planned unit. Thus, contrary to Nunan's (2004) suspicion of "rhetoric not matching reality"¹, the experiment has revealed how effective a task-based learning approach can be in terms of creating the necessity for real communication in the classroom. Here are some of the participants' comments on the cycles of TBL activities, which seem to demonstrate the students' purposefulness and engagement in the discussions:

Clare Solomon's interview was nice because (...) it gave us the opportunity to see how native speakers express themselves.

We learned a lot of things from this video passage.

We learned some expressions... idiomatic expressions.

We could test our listening skill.

It was a kind of activity that really got us involved.

It also increased our knowledge about British culture and their law [system].

We had the opportunity to be in touch with different levels of registers.

1 - Nunan, D. (2004). *Task-based Language Teaching*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. P.14

We improved our speech and pronunciation when we recorded and listened to ourselves.

We developed the four skills.

The first time we saw the video it was hard to understand everything.

We had contact with natural and real-time English.

A negative point about the book is that there were many technical words. I think we should have a kind of glossary [on] a separate [sheet].

I think we should have an equipped laboratory, a special palace to do [the recording].

We didn't have special [equipment] to record the audio interview.

We had to listen to [the interview], and later had to record it. After [recording it], we could listen to our own voice and sy... so I have improved [on] this, I'm good [at] that (...).

When I heard my voice I was so surprised [at] myself because... I... I... It was funny

because er... I said: 'It's my voice! I don't believe!' And I [was] surprised, especially

because I'm improving now. Yes... I think this experience was great for me.

6. Suggestions and Implications of the Study

The main task of the macro-task framework described here can be categorised as both a pedagogic task and a target task, following Nunan's (2004) task classification. At the same time that it was conducted in the classroom and had an educational aim, it was a real-world task to the extent that those were real EFL graduates engaged in analysing methodological approaches to language teaching and learning. On the face of it, at least four suggestions emerge from the experiment. Firstly, micro tasks within a macro task may lend themselves as a useful tool for familiarising learners with the task-based learning process, which in turn may enhance their proficiency in the target language (Bygate, 1996). Secondly, micro cycles of TBL activities as an element in the pre-task stage of a macro cycle may provide data for genuine communication to take place in the classroom in an economical fashion. Thirdly, integrated workplans can be designed to cater for learners' needs in terms of all five skills, namely listening, speaking, reading, writing and thinking. Lastly, a TWAT model can provide enough 'fodder' for meaningful peer-peer interactions over extended periods of time. Additionally, there is also room in this approach for work on lexis and grammar through C-R activities, which are most likely to play a pivotal role towards striking the complex balance between form and use in the FL classroom, as suggested by a number of theorists and practitioners (Leaver & Willis, 2004).

The above suggestions seem to yield positive implications for the L2 classroom. One is that the accomplishment of a task-cycle evaluation involving the learners might be an important component in the developmental process of proficiency in the target language (Breen, 1989). Additionally, this approach

might be a less uniform routetowards achieving the results of the task-repetition approach proposed by Bygate (1996, 1999, 2001), which may not be welcome in certain classroom contexts (Plough & Gass, 1993). Seemingly, another beneficial implication is rendered by the ability to develop all the five skills, and to tackle structural and lexical problems through activities that raise learners' awareness of the target language.

Conclusion

In conclusion, despite the limited scope of the experiment, the results as well as the entire process reported in this paper seem to indicate that the main objective of the unit of work was successfully achieved; and that the major factor accounting for it was the set of integrated micro tasks and its subsequent analysis by the participants. For one thing, each phase within the four micro-task frameworks fed important cumulative data into the task cycle of the macro-task framework, which was a key element informing the results of the experiment. For another thing, as the participants experienced each component of Willis's framework, they grew more familiar with the TBL model, and, as a corollary, their performance improved significantly in the subsequent micro task cycles and in the macro task cycle. Thus, the basic assumption could be validated at his level and the principle behind this finding is echoed in the following assertion by Rod Ellis (See also Foster & Skehan 1996; Skehan & Foster 1997) assuming that when learners know what they are going to talk or write about they have more processing space available for formulating the language needed to express their ideas with the result that the quantity of the output will be enhanced and also fluency and complexity.

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