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MA TEFL

Adapting Tasks to Textbooks and Beginning Learners

Module 3 Essay

SM/02/03

Produce a set of materials for a short unit of work (about equivalent to one unit of a coursebook), specifying the learning objectives of the unit. Trial the materials with your students, and discuss the extent to which the learning objectives are realized.

Approx.4,000 words
17 pages

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1. Introduction

This paper will propose, trial, and evaluate a unit of materials for false beginner “Intro” classes at a private English school, English for You, in Nagano, Japan. The trials adapted false beginner students’ text, New Interchange Intro (Richards 2000), to Task-Based Learning (TBL). Materials were designed for Unit 2 of the text and test implemented on 2/21/2003 and 3/1/2003 with 2 and 4 students respectively. First current literature regarding syllabus design will be reviewed. Next, the syllabus and materials developed will be presented. After an analysis of the trial lessons the conclusion will focus on the benefits and drawbacks of the syllabus designed, considering the impact the design and trialing process will have on the author’s future class planning.

1.1 Beginner Language Learner Focus

Private EFL language teachers face a dilemma when designing course materials. In my experience, institutions require students to purchase a textbook from international series like Gateways (Frankel & Kimbrough) or New Interchange (Richards 2000). Yet researchers indicate a teacher who depends on a book for the class syllabus implements a “degenerate syllabus” (Sinclair & Renouf 1988:146), because books aren’t tailored to classroom or students’ needs. Also, researchers indicate TBL is preferable to the methodologies most popular textbooks are based on (Willis & Willis forthcoming, Skehan 1996:18-19, and Shortall 1996:41).

For conversation teachers like me, teaching independently of texts is often impractical. As a colleague said, “There’s no way I could possibly come up with my own curriculum, so I use the textbook to supply my syllabus.” If TBL is an effective teaching methodology and current classroom strategies are characterized by “relative failure” (Skehan 1996:16), texts must be adapted to TBL. Also, most TBL material in recent studies focuses on intermediate and advanced students, leaving a paucity of material for beginners. To help fill this shortage, this paper will demonstrate the trial of a unit of TBL materials for false-beginner students.

2. Syllabus

A unit of material is only meaningful in the context of the syllabus it is couched in. Therefore, the syllabus is the first consideration in materials development. This section will review options available to teachers as syllabus planners in light of recent ESL/EFL research then Section 3 will present the syllabus the trial unit was part of.

2.1 Type A vs. Type B

The broadest options available in specifying a syllabus are the Type A or Type B syllabuses, with the Type A syllabus dominant as the current tradition. A Type A syllabus sees the teacher as the principal controller and planner in the classroom, and students have things done to them to encourage language learning, such as drilling of sentence forms and sentence gap dialogs (White 1988).

Type A syllabuses include the notional-functional, grammatical, lexical, and skills syllabuses. The notional-functional syllabus, with roots from the 1970s, teaches language notions and functions (White 1988:75). Notions represent ‘concepts expressed through language, such as time, frequency, duration, causality’ (Nunan 1988:158), and functions represent ‘the communicative use to which an utterance or longer piece of language is put, such as apologizing, greeting, describing, defining, and contradicting’ (Nunan 1988:158). The lexical syllabus concerns itself with teaching vocabulary based on word frequency and occurrence in a language corpus (Willis 1990). A skills syllabus teaches skills as applied through language, such as “introducing an idea” and “using punctuation” (White 1998:71).

Currently there is an aversion to teaching grammar, so communication is a major focus of classroom time (Shortall 1996:31). Yet Willis (1990) argues that the notional-functional syllabus isn’t communicative because it concentrates on one grammatical aspect of English at a time, such as use of the past simple tense. Willis (1990) also argues that skills syllabuses, by categorizing language skills, fail to acknowledge that language skills are dependant on competence in the language. For example, in teaching “skimming text for information” students must first understand the text language before they can effectively apply “skimming” techniques.

Shortcomings of the Type A syllabus include the following:

- Students don’t learn language in an externally dictated order, but the Type A syllabus encourages the teacher or textbook to dictate language learning. Language learning is natural and follows a cyclical order (Skehan, 1996:19).
- Currently catalogs of function/form variations or skills don’t exist, meaning it is difficult to rate the completeness or effectiveness of a given Type A syllabus (White 1988).
- Focus on language structures, such as the “simple past” then the “past continuous” is not communicative, as students are only practicing pre-selected language (Willis 1990:4). Edwards (forthcoming) shows that native speakers asked to guess the functions of obscure tools didn’t use hypothesis formation language like “I think it’s a...”, but used comparison and uncertainty language, like “It almost looks like...”, while in a Type A syllabus student utterances may tend to be restricted to forms highlighted in the classroom (Willis 1990:5).

The Type B syllabus, intended to address the concerns regarding Type A syllabuses, can be divided into several parts, Process, Procedural (White 1988:94), and Task-Based. The Procedural Syllabus has

received extensive attention in research, as Prabhu (1987) developed and implemented it in public primary schools in India. It is characterized as appearing to be a general education class where English is used as the medium of communication, rather than a language classroom, and uses information gap, opinion gap and reasoning gap activities (White 1988). A characteristic activity might include the teacher and students exchanging information in order to complete an incomplete map.

The Process Syllabus, which remains largely untested, sees learners taking control of decision-making processes and charting the course of their studies for themselves, choosing which language they want to focus on, and whether they are interested in performing communicative tasks, or in studying the forms of the language, perhaps even varying between the two extremes, concentrating on form one week, then communication the next (White 1988).

The Task-Based Syllabus is relatively new and has learners perform a series of tasks in the classroom where communication is the focus of the tasks. Willis (1996:53) defines a task as “A goal-oriented activity in which learners use language to achieve a real outcome. In other words, learners use whatever language resources they have in order to solve a problem, do a puzzle, play a game or share and compare experiences.” Edwards (forthcoming) suggests adding a qualification that language focus during task performance be meaning rather than form. A strong criticism of TBL is that it encourages communication at the expense of fluency (Shekan 1996). In answer to this challenge Willis (1990) proposed a task cycle that encourages focus on communication and focus on language form.

It has been suggested beginners start with a Type A syllabus that takes their needs into account, but which shifts to a Type B syllabus where learners take responsibility for and negotiate their own direction of study (White 1988). White (1988:47) suggests a syllabus designer may attempt to compromise between Type A and Type B, though he adds, “Although attempts can be...made to combine different types, as in hybrid and proportional syllabuses, there is a basic incompatibility between Type A and Type B which might make some combinations or compromises unworkable” (White 1988:109). The “incompatibility” arises because the former instructs “explicit knowledge” and the latter “implicit knowledge” (White 1988:110). Explicit knowledge is conscious knowledge of language rules, while implicit knowledge is intuitive, unconscious understanding of language (Smith 1981:159). If learners start with Type A, when do they have enough explicit knowledge to learn implicitly? If Type B syllabuses better facilitate learning spontaneous language, the objective of English conversation classes, perhaps learners should be started with a Type B syllabus.

The next section further introduces TBL, a teaching methodology that includes language as communication (implicit knowledge) and focus on language forms (explicit knowledge) as proposed by Willis, D. (1990) and Willis, J. (1996a).

2.2 Task-Based Learning (TBL)

It is thought that the proper balance between focus on communication and focus on form is crucial to efficiently developing students' language proficiency (Skehan 1996). Intended to promote both communication and form within the context of a lesson, TBL is gaining popularity, with Willis, D. (1990) and Willis, J. (1996a) two vocal proponents. Research into task sequencing and variation is still in its infancy, but a three-step framework for task-based lessons exists (Willis 1990 & Willis 1996). The three-part task cycle is summarized in Table 1.

Table 1: The Three-Part Task Cycle (based on Willis 1996 & Willis 1990)

1. *Pre-Task*, where the topic, task, and necessary vocabulary are introduced. Structures are not taught at this stage. Students are asked to think about how they will accomplish the task. Students may also hear a similar task being performed by native speakers, or the teacher could model performing the task.
2. The *Task Cycle* includes three sub-stages; *Task*, *Planning*, and *Report*. In the *Task*, the students perform the task, in *Planning* they prepare a presentation for the report stage, and in *Report* students report their findings to the class. A final part of the task cycle may involve students listening to native speakers performing the same task and comparing the strategies used in the classroom to the strategies used by native speakers.
3. *Language Focus* is where students can perform an *analysis* of language, *practice* the language used in class, and perform follow-ups such as changing partners and performing the task a second time in light of the analysis and practice. Bygate (1996) shows advantages of repeating a previously performed task include more challenging language production on the part of the student.

By having students shift from small groups to class presentations, Willis' task cycle incorporates code switching (Willis 1990). Code switching is the tendency for speakers to use different language in different situations (Willis 1996a), for example when speaking with friends or when giving a lecture at a conference. In small groups students concentrate on exchange of meaning, an informal code, but when presenting to the class, they switch to a formal code and use consciously filtered language (Willis 1996a). These effects of small-group and teacher-fronted activities on student utterances have been noted in research (Doughty & Pica 1986). Teachers can encourage student code switching by helping students to refine their presentations during the planning phase of the task cycle (Willis 1990). Table 2 summarizes the code switching process.

Table 2: The Task Cycle and Code Switching

Cycle	Phases	Objective	Language Code
Pre-Task		Familiarize Ss with the task	Informal or Formal
Task	Task	Accomplish the task	Informal
	Planning	Rehearse for presentation	Informal to Formal
	Report	Present to class	Formal
Language Focus		Consciousness raising	Informal or Formal

Within the task cycle, many types of task are possible, and how to sequence tasks by difficulty is a concern. Willis (1996b) proposes six different categories, roughly sequenced by difficulty, and summarized below.

- *Listing* is the simplest task activity, for example, listing countries one wants to visit.
- *Ordering and sorting* involves placing items into an order, such as ordering the above countries by preference, or rearranging a jumbled dialog.
- *Comparing* requires students to discuss the differences and similarities between two things. An example would be students comparing the similarities and differences in each others' ordered list of countries, above.
- *Problem solving* involves finding a solution to a problem. Students could be given "personality profiles" and asked to determine which country on students' lists (above) would be best for each personality to visit.
- *Sharing personal experiences* might include describing a students' vacation to one of the countries on their list, or a friend or family member's experience.
- *Creative tasks* could involve researching more information about a given country, and perhaps making an itinerary and budget for a 5-day stay there, then presenting findings to the class.

As can be seen above, the same topic can be extended to include most or all task-types, and generally listing is less difficult than ordering and sorting, which is less difficult than comparing, through to creative tasks, which often are the most difficult. Willis (2000:90) also notes that, "To a large extent learners will adjust the task to their own level. The level of difficulty is not simply a function of the task, it is also a function of the way learners interpret and approach the task."

3. Syllabus Determination

Syllabus options should be weighed in light of teacher beliefs, institutional realities of the classroom, and individual students' goals, expectations, and needs, a process referred to as "needs analysis" (Nunan & Lamb 2001:40,45). White (1988:84-88) also indicates that a "means analysis", or an accounting of the

materials and resources available to the language teacher, should be given equal consideration during the process of syllabus planning. Breen and Candlin (2001:9) offer a series of questions to guide the designer in making these decisions: “What is to be learned? How is the learning to be undertaken and achieved? To what extent is the former appropriate and the latter effective?” Applying these questions to syllabus organization, in this section I will propose a unit of materials for an innovative syllabus at English for You in Nagano, Japan. The answers to the first two questions follow in the next section. The third question will be addressed in the trial analysis.

3.1 What is to be learned? How is the learning to be undertaken and achieved?

The objective of the Intro class is familiarizing learners with basic spoken English to help them succeed in sequentially higher courses. Classes are 60 minutes once a week, 44 classes per year. Students range from 18 to 45 years old, with various motivations and goals, for example, a nurse wants to interact with international patients, two housewives study English as a hobby, and a high school student wants a jump-start on his university English requirement. The Intro classes use a textbook designated by the school, *New Interchange Intro* (Richards 2000). False beginners, students can read but have little spoken L2 ability.

The school expects the textbook to be followed in roughly linear order, though teachers can develop and plan their classes according to personal preference. I chose a Type B syllabus as the most effective means of developing students’ conversation abilities. The Procedural syllabus has received extensive attention in literature, but didn’t meet classroom needs, as students paid exclusively to learn English, so classes were expected to give the impression that English and not Geography was being studied. A process syllabus was impractical, as in my experience Japanese students are often ill-equipped to answer the question, “What do you want to learn, in what way?” Therefore a TBL syllabus (Willis 1990) was chosen so English could be the explicit subject of study without excessively burdening the students with decision-making responsibilities.

Willis (1990) suggests vocabulary, or lexis, form the foundations of class syllabuses, and in assigning and sequencing tasks, topic of study is a good organizing factor (Willis 1996a), so the syllabus was built using the following steps:

1. vocabulary from each textbook unit was listed
2. topics were assigned to the vocabulary lists
3. tasks following Willis’ (1996) task-types were listed for the topics
4. the weeks each unit would be covered were decided

A section of the resulting syllabus is represented in Table 3.

Table 3: TBL with New Interchange Intro

Unit	Vocabulary	Topics	Tasks (Type)	Week #
1	first, last, name, my, his, her, spell, Mr., Ms., Mrs., be, good, morning, afternoon, evening, hello, OK, I, 0-10, good-bye, bye, night	names, saying hello, saying good-bye	sort example sentences into ways of saying hello and ways of saying good-bye (ordering and sorting), list extra examples of saying hello and goodbye (listing), list the names of all the students in the classroom (listing)	1,2,3
2	pager, CD player, sunglasses, watch, calculator, camera, cell phone, electronic address book, book, eraser, English, dictionary, notebook, encyclopedia, a, an, wastebasket, pen, desk, map, table, pencil, bag, board, window, cassette player, clock, chair,	classroom objects, traveling	determine which item from a group another person has 'lost' (problem solving), make a shopping list for your English lesson (listing), describe a picture to your partner, so they can replicate it (problem solving)	4,5
3	Tokyo, Mexico City, Sao Paulo, New York, Bombay, Shanghai, Los Angeles, Calcutta, Buenos Aires, Seoul, Argentina, Brazil, China, India, Japan, Mexico, South Korea, The United States, be, not, I he, it, we, they, North America, Europe, Asia, The Caribbean,	traveling, describing people	list countries you would like to visit (listing), match cities to their respective countries (ordering and sorting), decide where you want to go with your partner on a 2-week vacation (creative)	6,7
4	clothes, work, leisure, shirt, tie, belt, blouse, jacket, pants, suit, coat, shoes, blouse, scarf, skirt, high heels, raincoat, dress, hat, gloves, sweater, jeans, boots, cap, t-shirt, shorts, socks, sneakers, pajamas, swimsuits, warm cold, for, weather,	shopping, describing weather	list possible gifts (listing), list gift recipients (listing), determine which gifts match which recipient (ordering and sorting)	8,9
Review 1-4	as above	describing items in a picture, describing people in a picture	describe the location of items in picture (comparing), and where you think they should be positioned (problem solving), describe the similarities and differences between pictures of two different people (comparing)	10,11
5	Hello, hi, oh, yes, in the, morning, AM, noon, afternoon, evening, midnight, at night, Vancouver, Los Angeles, Mexico City, Lima, Montreal, New York City, San Juan, Brasilia, Sao Paulo, London, Moscow, Bangkok, Seoul, Tokyo, Sydney, time zones, city, time,	determining time differences, describing	determine which "time" a partner is thinking of (problem solving), determine which city a partner is thinking of by comparing Japan time to the local time on a time zones map (problem solving)	12,13

3.2 Unit Materials

The trial unit, Unit 2, carries the topic “travel”, with vocabulary including: “shoes”, “wallet”, “earrings”, “lipstick”, “sunglasses”, “briefcase”, “books”, “purse”, and “keys”. The task chosen for the trial was to “determine which item from a group another person has ‘lost’”, a *problem solving* task. The vocabulary above was printed and laminated on 70x100mm cards with a picture on one side and the corresponding text opposite. Two a sample template of two vocabulary cards is included in the Appendix. Since in my experience students tend to concentrate on written instructions and read them to one another verbatim, modeling and oral instructions were used exclusively to encourage more original interaction. Blank A4 paper was provided during the *planning* and *report* phases of the task cycle and for the *language focus* cycle. Oral instructions were written out, and board work was summarized in advance of the trials.

The resulting materials included the vocabulary cards (see Appendix), oral instructions for students and board work (see Tables in Section 4), and blank A4 paper.

4 Trial Implementation

Making the planning and report phases practical for beginners was the most difficult part of adapting TBL to the Intro classes. While intermediate and advanced student language may change when shifting from small groups to class discussion, beginner students are likely to exhibit few differences between formal and informal L2 codes, and are often intimidated by having to speak before the entire class. To encourage a greater contrast between task and report language, and to facilitate successful reports, mode switching was used in addition to code switching. Mode switching refers to changing communication medium, in this case from spoken to written. During planning students “scripted” role-plays which the teacher critiqued and corrected, including circling error locations and encouraging students to solve the errors in pairs. The presentation phase was a role-play performance, where students “acted out” their memorized scripts. In future classes and at higher levels such scripting may not be appropriate, as Breen & Candlin (2001) note that spoken language should be spoken and written language written.

Lessons were taped using a play-back cassette recorder. The resulting data was then transcribed.

The lesson objective was for student ‘scripts’ to be more linguistically refined than language used during the task phase. A second objective was for students to change partners and practice the different scripts, introducing them to the different language strategies used to solve the task.

4.1 Pre-Task

The oral and written directions for the Pre-Task are included in Table 4.

Table 4: Student Instructions for Pre Task (red indicates changes after initial planning)

<p><i>Listing travel items</i></p> <p>Board Work:</p> <p>Travel Vocabulary Traveling abroad, what do you take?</p> <p>1)</p> <p>2)</p> <p>.</p> <p>.</p> <p>.</p> <p>Spoken: Repeat above, if necessary, offer an example, “For example, suitcase.”</p>
<p><i>Ordering by importance</i></p> <p>Board Work:</p> <p>Most important</p> <p>↓</p> <p>Least Important</p> <p>Spoken: “What is the most important to you? What do you think?”</p>
<p><i>Discussing personal experiences regarding lost items</i></p> <p>Board Work:</p> <p>Have you ever lost something traveling?</p> <p>Spoken: “Have you ever lost something? What does ‘lost’ mean?” Explain through gestures. “For example, it’s very sad. I lost my bank card in Kyoto. Yes. I remembered my money, but I forgot my bank card. How about you?”</p>

The pre-task foreshadowed the task through teacher-fronted mini-tasks; listing travel items, ordering the lists by importance, then sharing personal experiences of losing things. After compiling a list of eight items, ranking them, and sharing experiences, the vocabulary cards were introduced through conventional flash card drilling. Students were expected to use the vocabulary cards in the task.

In the first trial lesson, students had considerable difficulty with the listing of travel items. Particularly, they had difficulty with the term “vocabulary”. After great difficulty a list of only two items included “vacation” and “honeymoon”. The directions were changed to, “Traveling abroad, what do you take?” With the modified directions students in each lesson were able to compile a list of eight items. After ranking the items the vocabulary cards, detailed in 3.2 Unit Materials, were introduced. For the task phase, students were expected to use the vocabulary cards.

4.2 The Task Cycle

Oral and written directions for the Task Cycle are included in Table 5.

Table 5: Student Instructions for the Task Cycle

<p><i>Task</i> Board Work: blank Spoken: Place vocabulary cards face-up on the table. “Now, you’re going to lose something. It’s a secret. For example, I lost something. I’m going to write it down. I lost something. What can you ask me?” Assign partners and have one partner write down what they “lost”. Have students switch roles. Do not correct student errors.</p>
<p><i>Planning/Scripting</i> Board Work: A: <Elicited question> B: A: B: . .</p> <p>Spoken: “Now, I want you to write a script. You’re going to act out in front of the class. So, for example, I lost something. What question can you ask me? What question?” <Elicit question> “Next? Please write it down.” After scripts are completed, correct students’ scripts as necessary. Circle errors and encourage them to determine the corrected form. After correction is complete, “Please practice together. When you’re ready, say ‘Ready.’” Encourage students to stop referring to their scripts.</p>
<p><i>Performance</i> Board Work: blank “Who is ready? Please stand up. 3, 2, 1, action!” After performance, applaud. Do not correct student errors.</p>

The task phase language is indicative of concentration on communication. Students use one-word questions and answers, communicating efficiently but not grammatically (see Table 6). The students performed the task twice in pairs so everyone had a chance to complete the task. After everyone had completed the task, the scripting phase was begun by eliciting a question to begin the scripts. In one trial this question was, “*What did you lose something?” To encourage use of self-generated forms and discourage a dependence on the teacher for answers, students wrote this incorrect question down to start their script. The question was then corrected along with other student errors after the scripts were completed. Once finished, I checked the scripts for errors, following the instructions outlined for *Planning/Scripting* in Table 5. The scripts students wrote during the planning stage are included in Table 7 (page 13). In Table 6, for comparison, a transcript of pair 1 performing the task is juxtaposed with the script they developed. After script correction and practice the performance phase followed the outline in Table 5.

Table 6: Pair 1’s Task Performance and Written Script (red indicates teacher-initiated corrections)

Transcription of student-student task interaction	Students’ script of the task:
M: Purse.	M: What did you lose something?
S: No.	Did you lose something?
M: Bag.	S: Yes.
S: No.	M: Is that keys?
M: ???	Are these
S: No.	S: No.
M: Uh...briefcase.	M: Is this it a wallet?
S: No.	S: No.
M: Uh...keys.	M: Is this it a briefcase?
S: Yes.	S: No. Wearing . No. Something to wear.
	M: Are these they sunglasses?
	S: Yes.
	M: Here you are.
	S: Thank you.
	M: You’re welcome.

4.3 Language Focus

The language focus phase is intended to give students greater insight into language forms. To encourage this, students practiced the different scripts developed during class, performing additional role-plays after practicing in pairs. Students used the corrected scripts from different groups and changed roles, allowing them practice with the different language forms developed and used in class. After practicing the different scripts, students again role-played before the class as a whole. These later role-plays exhibited more pausing and uncertainty as students struggled to remember and use language developed by a different group or language for a different role. The intention was for students to leave the classroom having refined the language available to them before class, and to have exposure to language that may not have been available before entering the classroom. Since groups used different question forms, one “What-questions” and the other “yes/no with be”, this phase of language practice was more varied than originally expected.

5. Analysis of Trial

Comparing pair 1’s transcription of their initial task performance with their finished script, in Table 6, it can easily be argued that student language production during the task isn’t challenging, while the script does pose a linguistic challenge, evidenced by the many teacher corrections, indicating that code and mode switching encouraged students to concentrate on language form.

Furthermore, during the Planning/Scripting phase student production is more refined than in the task phase, even before correcting the scripts. In Table 6 pair 1’s script shows that one-word answers are still

prevalent, but question forms are used instead of single words with intonation, and once the answering student attempts to give a hint, “Wearing”. This again indicates that during the planning, or scripting, phase there was a greater focus on producing correct language forms and less on efficient communication.

As can be seen in Table 7, which includes the student scripts developed in the trial lessons, one group answered the question, “Did you lose something?” while the other pair answered the question “What did you lose?”

Table 7: Student Scripts

Class 3-1-2003 (Pairs 1 & 2)

Pair 2:

H: What did you ~~lost~~ **lose** something?

A: **Um** I lost a bag. This one.

H: This one? OK?

A: **Yes**. Thanks you.

H: You’re welcome.

Class 2-21-2003

Yu: What ~~do~~ **did** you ~~lost~~ **lose**?

Yo: I lost **my** keys.

Yu: Here you are.

Yo: Thank you.

Yu: You’re welcome.

Pair 1:

M: ~~What did you lose~~ something?

Did you lose something?

S: Yes.

M: ~~Is that~~ keys?

~~Are these~~

S: No.

M: Is ~~this~~ **it** a wallet?

S: No.

M: Is ~~this~~ **it** a briefcase?

S: No. ~~Wearing~~. No. **Something to wear**.

M: Are ~~these~~ **they** sunglasses?

S: Yes.

M: Here you are.

S: Thank you.

M: You’re welcome.

In a more traditional classroom, only one of the question forms, “yes/no with ‘be’” or “what-questions” would have been covered, or both forms would have been drilled separately then incorporated into a single fill-in-the-gap dialog. In the trial classes, each group role-played their own form in front of the class then practiced the different language forms used by other groups. Had students been drilled before the task performance, they would likely have concentrated on replicating drilled forms rather than developing their own unique language (Willis 1990). This would indicate that that class content is appropriate, as both question types are covered separately in students’ texts (Richards 2000). The task cycle also seems effective, as student language shows refinement as they progress from the task cycle to the report phase.

Willis (1990) argues that basing a TBL lesson on traditional textbooks is neither desirable nor efficient. Yet if TBL is the preferred methodology for learning spontaneous language (Willis 1996, Skehan 1996), waiting for TBL texts to become widely available is impractical. Even when TBL texts are available, series like New Interchange are unlikely to disappear, so TBL methods must be juxtaposed with existing texts. In the trial unit, the class textbook covers plural/singular “be” forms, and Table 7 indicates students

may benefit from homework related to plural/singular “be”, meaning there can be correspondence between task language and textbook grammar.

6. Conclusion

The lesson met its objectives, as student language developed from one-word utterances into more complex forms. Students seemed to gain familiarity with their self-generated language forms, and showed interest in error correction and practicing their scripts. Since only 6 students were involved in the trial, it should be remembered that the results may not be replicable in other classrooms with different students and teachers.

Regarding professional development, the trial lessons helped to show me how much L2 language even beginner students bring into the classroom with them. Before the trial I was expecting “What-questions” exclusively during the task, and that the pairs’ dialogs would be linguistically similar. Instead the language is varied yet solves the task successfully.

It would be practical to use the task-cycle and scripting strategy again in future classes, though it is unlikely that the mirror of the above syllabus can be created for all my classes. My schedule, with more than 25 classes per week, along with the skepticism with which colleagues view a departure from their standard teaching routines, makes such a large-scale investment of time and resources impractical. Also, students have been known to complain to management when classes are “too difficult”, and often seem to want a classroom experience where the teacher takes responsibility for generating and teaching language forms. In the above trials, the material covered was not new, as the previous week had concentrated on the same vocabulary items, so students were perhaps better prepared for the linguistic responsibility of generating their own language forms during the task cycle.

While a TBL syllabus as outlined in Table 3 is impractical in my teaching context, integration of pre-existing activities as tasks has added additional character to my classrooms. Students are more often encouraged to work in pairs then present to the class, even though the tasks are from form-focused textbooks. Also, in many activities the language form queues, such as “Use expressions like...” are removed from handouts given to students, to encourage them to use already familiar language forms. The results have had a positive influence in the classroom, even though they haven’t resulted in a widespread implementation of task cycle-based syllabuses.

Tasks have become another valuable tool in this teacher’s repertoire, though they have not superceded other, pre-existing tools in frequency of use. This fact brings to mind Nunan & Lamb’s (2001:31) observation.

The truth is that language is, at one and the same time, both a system of rule-governed structures and a system for the expression of meaning. Learning is a pattern of habit formation as well as a process of activations through the deployment of communicative tasks.

Nunan and Lamb's statement would imply there is space in a language learning curriculum for traditional teacher-directed language focus and, at the same time, task-cycles where students are required to self-generate language for the completion of a task. Willis' (1990) cycle is a powerful tool in a growing repertoire, but perhaps like any other tool it has a function which calls for its use in a particular time and place, but doesn't supercede the functions of other teaching tools which also have their own times and places for use.

Appendix: Sample Vocabulary Cards



purse



wallet

References

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