Pedagogical Grammar

Lecture Notes

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Presentation, Practice & Production (PPP)

- **Presentation** – explicit focus on single point of grammar or function → understanding
- **Controlled Practice** – use and ‘automatise’ the newly grasped rule or pattern
- **Production (‘free stage’)** – reproduce the target language more freely in communication

(J. Willis 1996: 135)

'Free' Production Stage

The irony is that the goal of the final P – free production – is often not achieved. How can production be free if students are required to produce forms that have been specified in advance?

(Shedeh 2005:14)

2 common outcomes:
- focus on form (=practice stage)
- focus on meaning (often without using item to be reproduced)

Traditional Grammar Teaching vs Task-based Learning 1

Traditional approach

- “form-based”
- sequencing language structures to be presented and practised
- focus on form before practice stage
- teacher control initially strict and then gradually relaxed in practice stages
- success in terms of target forms (with acceptable level of accuracy)
- assumes a direct correlation between “input” and “intake”

Traditional approach
Traditional Grammar Teaching vs Task-based Learning 2

Dilemmas

- It’s difficult to focus on both form and meaning in practice stages.
- It’s rare for learners to incorporate newly ‘learnt’ structures into their spontaneous language production (Willis & Willis 2007a: 18).
- SLA research shows that learners do not acquire structures in an orderly progression.
- Effective learning is constrained by natural developmental processes. (Willis & Willis 2007b: 173)

Traditional Grammar Teaching vs Task-based Learning 3

Task-based approach

- “task-based”
- sequencing communicative tasks to be carried out in target language
- focus on meaning, interaction & communication (rather than form)
- learner control - freedom to use any available language resources (language structures are not prescribed beforehand)
- success in terms of completing the task (but learners may disregard any target norms in the process)
- assumes language acquisition is driven by purposeful communication, whereby learners create a meaning system in which they can operate efficiently.

Traditional Grammar Teaching vs Task-based Learning 4

Dilemmas

- without encouraging any focus on form, the learners’ language system may not develop towards the target norm (fossilisation).
- how to provide focus on both meaning and form.

Challenge for task-based approaches:

to devise a methodology which affords learners the freedom to engage natural learning processes in the creation of a meaning system, but which also provides them with incentives to ‘restructure’ their system in the light of language input. (Willis & Willis 2007b: 174)

Traditional Grammar Teaching vs Task-based Learning 5

Task-based approaches to accuracy

- acknowledge the need to focus on language form and accuracy within the task-based cycle (Skehan 1996)
- address accuracy after learners have carried out the task.

Why after?

- helps learners make sense of the language they have experienced within a relevant communicative context
- highlighting salient language for future use; i.e. noticing \(\rightarrow\) learning
- increases motivation – more receptive to find ways to express meaning.
What Is a Task?

Definition 3
A language learning task is:
- an activity
- that has a non-linguistic purpose or goal
- with a clear outcome
- and that uses any or all of the four language skills in its accomplishment
- by conveying meaning in a way that reflects real-world language use

(Nunan 2004: 20)

Selecting Topics

Criteria for selection
- feature in textbooks
- typical in exams/oral tests
- feature elsewhere in the school curriculum, e.g. geography, history
- of topical or seasonal interest
- figure in casual conversation, e.g. breaks, mealtimes, on holiday
- what learners might want to talk/write about outside class, e.g. with foreigners, on web-based chat sites

(Willis & Willis 2007a: 64)

Types of Task 1

- listing
- ordering & sorting
- matching
- comparing
- problem solving
- sharing personal experiences
- projects & creative tasks

(Willis & Willis 2007a: 108)

Types of Task 2

Listing
- brainstorming e.g. how to reduce your ecological footprint, strategies for improving your English
- fact-finding e.g. about things / people / nature
- games
  - quizzes e.g. creating quizzes (full response or true/false)
  - guessing games e.g. 20 questions (animal, vegetable or mineral)

(Willis & Willis 2007a: 66-8)
Types of Task 3

Ordering & Sorting
- sequencing e.g. jumbled story, order of a process
- ranking e.g. holiday destinations (according to criteria)
- classifying e.g. the stuff we carry around with us, food
- games e.g. “odd one out”, what do these things have in common?

(Willis & Willis 2007a: 72-8)

Types of Task 4

Matching
- listening & matching e.g. identity parade, personal photos, buildings, house plans, maps
- reading & matching e.g. short texts (paragraphs) to pictures or headings, best summary of longer text, directions to routes on a map

(Willis & Willis 2007a: 85-9)

Types of Task 5

Comparing
- comparison tasks e.g. morning/bedtime routines (quickest/earliest/latest?), household chores, favourite holiday experiences
- games (similarities & differences) e.g. find things in common (time limit), “spot the difference”

(Willis & Willis 2007a: 90-3)

Types of Task 6

Problem Solving
- advice & recommendations e.g. global issues (people smuggling), environmental issues (nuclear power), teenage issues (smoking), social issues (STDs), school issues (bullying)
- prediction e.g. guessing content (e.g. ending) of a reading passage/recording using cues
- games & puzzles e.g. logical puzzles, jigsaw tasks (piece together different information)

(Willis & Willis 2007a: 93-9)
Types of Task 7

Sharing Personal Experiences

- **Story telling, anecdotes & reminiscences**

  e.g. interesting experience/story about a pet, most memorable childhood experience, most frightening experience, most embarrassing moment, funniest things that has happened to you, memorable holiday

(Willis & Willis 2007a: 105-7)

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Types of Task 8

Projects & Creative Tasks

Possible outcomes

(Willis & Willis 2007a: 100)
Pre-task (including topic and task)

The teacher
- introduces and defines the topic
- uses activities to help students recall/learn useful words and phrases
- ensures students understand task instructions
- may play a recording of others doing the same or a similar task

The students
- note down useful words and phrases from the pre-task activities and/or the recording
- may spend a few minutes preparing for the task individually

Task cycle

Task
The students
- do the task in pairs/small groups. It may be based on a reading/listening text
The teacher
- acts as monitor and encourages students

Planning
The students
- prepare to report to the class how they did the task and what they discovered/decided
- rehearse what they will say or draft a written version for the class to read
The teacher
- ensures the purpose of the report is clear
- acts as language adviser
- helps students rehearse oral reports or organise written ones

Report
The students
- present their spoken reports to the class, or circulate/display their written reports
The teacher
- acts as chairperson, selecting who will speak next, or ensuring all students read most of the written reports
- may give brief feedback on content and form
- may play a recording of others doing the same or a similar task

Language focus

Analysis
The students
- do consciousness-raising activities to identify and process specific language features from the task text and/or transcript
  - may ask about other features they have noticed
The teacher
- reviews each analysis activity with the class
  - brings other useful words, phrases and patterns to students' attention
  - may pick up on language items from the report stage

Practice
The teacher
- conducts practice activities after analysis activities where necessary, to build confidence
The students
- practice words, phrases and patterns from the analysis activities
- practise other features occurring in the task text or report stage
- enter useful language items in their language notebooks

(J. Willis 1996: 155)
**Language Analysis 1**

1. Focus on meaning
2. Focus on form

**Language Analysis 2**

1. Focus on Meaning
   - through contextualised examples from the task
   - through new but closely related examples/contexts
     - Importance of the recognisable context/examples as regards the meaningfulness of the language focus
     - Guided examination – pupils 'find out' ways of expressing specific meanings for themselves (relationship between form & meaning)
       - functions, e.g. asking/granting permission, agreeing/disagreeing
       - notions, e.g. tense (future, past), probability, ability, obligation

**Language Analysis 3**

2. Focus on Form
   - Guided examination – pupils 'find out' important aspects of form for themselves, e.g. how questions are formed, do something/have something done, simple/progressive forms
   - Compare/contrast – with Swedish or other structures in English (esp. where only one equivalent in Swedish)
   - Clear model – in a textually & visually accessible format which can be used as reference, e.g. tables

**Language Practice 1**

- Recycle examples/text from the task
- Recall exercises:
  - gap-filling exercises
  - grammaticisation – remove grammatical markers for pupils to restore
  - jumbled sentences – words in the wrong order to be put back in the right order
  - progressive deletion – delete words step by step from a (model) sentence for pupils to restore from memory
  - dictogloss – recreating a previously unfamiliar text
**Language Practice 2**

**Dictogloss**

- **Step 1** – read aloud a text (maximum of 10 lines) at conversational pace; pupils just listen
- **Step 2** – read it aloud again; pupils can now jot down words & phrases
- **Step 3** – read it aloud again; pupils just listen
- **Step 4** – students now work in pairs to try & recreate the text in writing

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**Designing Tasks 1**

**Task parameters**


2. **Starting points for task**: a text? a visual? a case study? a teacher story? learner experience? web research? Input and timing of priming stage

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**Designing Tasks 2**

**Task parameters**

3. **Pre-task preparation**: with or without planning time? Priming stage: timing, input: free or guided planning? Teacher-led or learner-led? Written preparation: in note form or in full?

4. **Control of agenda and task structure**: explicit steps, formats supplied? Time limits / deadlines / word limits? Mid-task interventions? Degree of reference or written support?

5. **Interaction patterns and participant roles**: individuals, pairs, groups, teacher with whole class? Roles of chair-person / writer / spokesperson / language consultant / editor? One-way or two-way information flow? Long or short turns?

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**Designing Tasks 3**

**Task parameters**

6. **Pressure on language production**: 'pushing output' to achieve accuracy – prestige language (planned, rehearsed, public) versus informal language (spontaneous, exploratory, private). Recording and transcribing learner interactions; scaffolding teacher feedback – negative and positive to encourage experimentation and complexity.

Bibliography 1


Bibliography 2


D. & J. Willis’s website about task-based learning: http://www.daveandjane.demon.co.uk/ELT/