

## THE IMPACT OF TASK-BASED LEARNING ON SPEAKING FLUENCY OF B1 LEARNERS IN UZBEK UNERSITIES

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**Annotation:** This article explores the impact of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) on the speaking fluency of B1-level English learners in Uzbek universities. The author analyzes the role of TBLT within communicative language teaching, examining how different types of tasks influence learners' language skills—particularly their oral fluency. Drawing on Paul Nation's 4/3/2 technique, the concept of fluency is discussed in depth. The article also addresses the importance of task sequencing and highlights the relevance of cognitive approaches in designing effective language syllabi. Through theoretical foundations, prior research, and methodological insights, the study supports the effectiveness of TBLT in enhancing learners' communicative competence.

**Keyword:** - Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) - Speaking fluency - Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) - 4/3/2 technique - B1 learners - Uzbek universities - Task sequencing - Comprehensible output - Language pedagogy - Cognitive and sociocultural theories

### **Tasks in language teaching**

Like researchers, language teachers, materials writers, and course designers have not been slow to recognize the value of tasks. However, they have differed considerably in the use they have made of them. Some methodologists have simply incorporated tasks into traditional language-based approaches to teaching. Others, more radically, have treated tasks as units of teaching in their own right and have designed whole courses around them. These two ways of using tasks can be referred to respectively as task-supported language teaching and task-based language teaching. In both cases, tasks have been employed to

make language teaching more communicative. Tasks, therefore, are an important feature of communicative language teaching (CLT). We will begin, by considering CLT and the roles that tasks play in it.

### **Task-based Language Teaching**

Task-based language teaching constitutes a strong version of CLT. That is, tasks provide the basis for an entire language curriculum. We should note, however, that task-based teaching is not the only way of achieving a strong version of CLT. Stern (1992) offers a comprehensive classification of “communicative activities” That includes field experiences, classroom management activities, inviting guest speakers, talking on topics related to the students’ private life and on substantive topics drawn from other subjects on the school curriculum (as immersion Programmes), and what he calls “communicative exercises”, i.e. tasks. These are arranged in descending order with those closest to communicative reality at the top And those furthest removed at the bottom. Clearly, a strong version of CLT can be Realized in a variety of ways, not just by tasks. Nevertheless, tasks can function as a Useful device for planning a communicative curriculum, particularly in contexts where there are few opportunities for more authentic communicative experiences, for xample, many FL situations.

### **Communicative language teaching**

Although it is not always immediately apparent, everything we do in the classroom is underpinned by beliefs about the nature of language, the nature of the learning process and the nature of the teaching act. These days it is generally accepted that language is more than a set of grammatical rules, with attendant sets of vocabulary, to be memorized. It is a dynamic resource for creating meaning. Learning is no longer seen simply as a process of habit formation. Learners and the cognitive processes they engage in as they learn are seen as fundamentally important to the learning process. Additionally, in recent years, learning as a social process is increasingly emphasized, and sociocultural theories are beginning to be drawn on in addition to (or even in preference to) cognitive theories (see, for example, Lantolf 2000).

Another distinction that has existed in general philosophy and epistemology for many years is that between ‘knowing that’ and ‘knowing how’ (see, for example, Ryle 1949), that is, between knowing and being able to regurgitate sets of grammatical rules, and being able to deploy this grammatical knowledge to communicate effectively. In the days of audiolingualism ‘knowing that’ was eschewed in favour of ‘knowing how’. However, now, the pursuit of both forms of knowledge are considered valid goals of language pedagogy. These views underpin communicative language teaching. A great deal has been said and written about CLT in the last 30 years, and it is sometimes assumed that the approach is a unitary one, whereas in reality it consists of a family of approaches. And, as is the case with most families, not all members live harmoniously together all of the time. There are squabbles and disagreements, if not outright wars, from time to time. However, no one is willing to assert that they do not belong to the family.

## **IMPROVING SPEAKING FLUENCY**

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This paper examines the improvement of learners of English during the performance of a speaking activity which involves repeating the same unrehearsed talk. Improvements in fluency, grammatical accuracy, and control of the content showed that during the short time spent doing the activity, learners performed at a level above their normal level of performance. It is argued that working at this higher than usual performance is a way of bringing about long-term improvement in fluency.

Speaking activities in the language classroom can have a variety of goals. These include

*The following.*

The learning of content matter.

2. The learning of language items from other participants.

3. The development of fluency.
4. Learning communication strategies
5. Developing skill in discourse.

This paper looks at the development of fluency, in particular at a technique called the 4/3/2 technique.

Fillmore's (1979) first kind of fluency is "the ability to fill time with talk . . . a person who is fluent in this way does not have to stop many times to think of what to say next or how to phrase it'. As Fillmore goes on to show, this fluency will depend on a range of factors including having quick access to and practised control of many of the language's lexical and syntactic devices, being able to decide readily when it is appropriate and efficient to use them, as well as having familiarity with interactional and discourse schemata. Brumfit(1984) sees fluency "as the maximally effective operation of the language system so far acquired by the student". These definitions suggest that fluency can be measured by looking at (1) the speed and flow of language production, (2) the degree of control of language items, and (3) the way language and content interact.

From a teacher's point of view, activities to develop fluency are those which focus the learner's attention on the message that is being communicated and not the language forms. Brumfit describes such activities in the following way: "The emphasis in making the accuracy/fluency distinction is on the mental set of the learner . . . language work focused predominantly on language is always accuracy work, however 'fluently' it may be performed, whereas language work which entails using the target language as if it is a mothertongue is always fluency work .. ." Canale (1983) makes a similar distinction between

#### Knowledge-oriented and skill-oriented activities

The goal of fluency-directed communication activities is to enable the learner to integrate previously encountered language items into an easily accessed, largely unconscious, language system as a result of focussing on the communication of messages.

Such activities are essential to language learning if the learner is to be able to use the language. Some teachers, for example Allwright (1979), argue that activities with a message focus are all that are essential for language learning to occur.

Swain (1985) presents evidence to support her belief that in order for native-speaker fluency to be achieved in another language, learners need to be “pushed” towards “the delivery of a message that is not only conveyed, but that is conveyed precisely, coherently, and appropriately.” In addition, she suggests that the move from semantic to syntactic processing is necessary in order for a learner to master a language for production. This move can come from the need or pressure to produce language or from being “pushed” to produce well.

“‘Being ‘pushed’ in output. . . is a concept parallel to that of the  $I + 1$  of the comprehensible

Input. Indeed, one might call this the ‘comprehensible output’ hypothesis.”

### **Task sequencing**

Designing a syllabus inherently implies sequencing content with the goal of maximizing language learning. Today, it is still largely the case that syllabus content is sequenced based on some notion of linguistic complexity, as this is assumed to affect the ease with which structures can be learned (more complex structures being optimally learned only after simpler structures have been mastered, in this account). Long (2007, pp. 126-7) has argued that this is problematic and ineffective. The claim that one grammatical form (e.g., relative clauses) is more complex than another (e.g., conditionals) is often based on intuition rather than any empirical evidence of the supposed difference in learnability of the two structures. And given that time periods of instructional exposure are usually limited (sometimes extremely so), there is no clear rationale for why some aspects of language and not others should be chosen for presentation and practice in classrooms. These, and other long-acknowledged problems with the structural linguistic syllabus, have recently been summarized by Robinson (2009) and Ellis and Shintani (2013) and we refer readers to these sources for further discussion.

It is worth pointing out that apart from proposals for structural syllabus design, there have been many other rationalizations for second language syllabus design, including Notional Functional syllabuses (Wilkins, 1976), Communicative syllabuses (Yalden, 1983) and Lexical syllabuses (Willis, 1990), but none of these proposals have been supported by empirical research that provides an evidentiary basis for judging whether or not these proposals have effects on learning and performance in L2 programs, when implemented in the short and longer terms. As Bygate, Norris and Van den Branden (2009) note:

The communicative movement itself was also heavily dependent on theoretical reflection. For example, key publications in the 1970s .... Were almost entirely grounded in the authors' various first-hand experiences of learning and teaching, and were principally elaborated via theoretical examination – generally informed by linguistic theory – of the nature of language and language learning.

In contrast, the growing and cumulative research into the effects of task complexity, within the framework for task design provided by the Triadic Componential Framework (Robinson, 2001b, 2005, 2007a; Robinson and Gilabert, 2007b), as guided by the Cognition Hypothesis (Robinson, 2001b, 2003a, 2011a), and its stated implications for syllabus design (which we describe later in this chapter), aims to provide an evidentiary, empirical research basis for task sequencing decisions, to which it is the purpose of this book to contribute.

## **ASSESSING SPEAKING**

-From a pragmatic view of language performance, listening and speaking are almost always closely interrelated. While it is possible to isolate some listening performance types (see Chapter 6), it is very difficult to isolate oral-production tasks that do not directly involve the interaction of aural comprehension. Only in limited contexts of speaking (monologues, speeches, or telling a story and reading aloud) can we assess oral language without the aural participation of an interlocutor.

While speaking is a productive skill that can be directly and empirically observed, those observations are invariably colored by the accuracy and effectiveness of a test-

ta) {er'\$ list~IliIlg skill, which necessarily compromises the reliability and validity of an oral production test. How do you know for certain that a speaking score is exclusively a measure of oral production without the potentially frequent clarifications of an interlocutor? This interaction of speaking and listening challenges the designer of an oral production test to tease apart, as much as possible, the factors accounted for by aural intake. Another challenge is the design of elicitation techniques. Because most speaking is the product of creative construction of linguistic strings, the speaker makes choices of lexicof, structure, and discourse: If your goal is to have test-takers demonstrate certain spoken grammatical categories, for example, the stimulus you design must elicit those grammatical categories in ways that prohibit the test-taker from avoiding or paraphrasing and thereby dodging production of the target form. more and more open ended, the freedom of choice given to test-takers creates a challenge in scoring procedures. In receptive performance, the Elicitation stimulus can be structured to anticipate predetermined responses and only those responses. In productive performance, the oral or written stimulus must be specific enough to elicit output within an expected range of performance such that scoring or rating procedures apply appropriately. For example, in a picture-series task, the objective of which is to elicit a story in a sequence of events, test-takers could opt for a variety of plausible ways to tell the story, all of which might be equally accurate. How can such disparate responses be evaluated? One solution is to assign not one but several scores for each response, each score representing one of several traits (pronunciation, fluency, vocabulary use, grammar, comprehensibility, etc.).

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