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COMMUNICATIVE LEARNING TASKS FOR THE ESP COURSE "ENGLISH FOR BANKING"

These days English language teaching is big business. An international language is a logical requirement in an era of world wide information-sharing and commercial exchange. For better or worse, the role has fallen to English. The result is that its status in education systems and settings is an extraordinary one. The high status, however, does not mean that all is wonderfully well in the classrooms. Many learners of different age become disillusioned because of inappropriate or stultifying methods or materials.

My project "Communicative Learning Tasks for the ESP Course "English for Banking" is an attempt to promote and motivate learning English for specific purposes. Communicative learning tasks will allow the learners to approximate, in class, the sorts of behaviors required of them beyond the classroom. The communicative task design will be done in Nunan's task components, namely goals, input activities, teacher and learner roles and settings. The project will be implemented in the Ukrainian Academy of Banking. By communicative task I mean a piece of classroom work which involves learners in comprehending, manipulating, producing or interacting in the target language while their attention is principally focused on meaning rather than form. In Nunan's terms a communicative task consists of the following components: goals, input, activities, teacher and learner roles, and settings. Let me clarify all these task components as related to my project:

Goals. Goals are general intentions behind any given learning task. General goals of Business English communicative tasks may be the following: a) establishing and maintaining interpersonal relationships, and through this to exchange information, ideas, opinions, attitudes and feelings, and to get things done; b) acquiring information from more or less "public" sources in the target language (e.g. books, newspapers, signs, films, television, slides, tape, radio, public announcements, bank brochures) and using this information in some way.

Specialized goals of "Business English" may include the developing of the four specialized macroskills. Thus specialized writing, for instance, may include writing business letters.

Input. Input refers to the data that form the point of departure for the task. Here I am particularly interested in authentic texts (bank brochures, formal letters, business cards, memo note, invoices, notice newspaper extracts, balance sheets, economic graphs and others).

Activities. Activities specify what learners will actually do with the input which forms the point of departure for the learning task. Nunan (1989: 59) proposes three general ways of characterizing activities: rehearsal for the real world; skills use; and fluency/accuracy. A first way of characterizing activities deals with activity authenticity or the extent to which authentic /non-authentic distinction mirrors real-world and pedagogic activities. For instance, certain activities might only remotely resemble the sorts of things learners are required to do in real world. However, they would probably be justified in the grounds that, in carrying out the activities, learners are required to practice skills which will be useful in the real world.

A second way of characterizing activities touches upon the processes of skill getting and skill using. Skill getting involves cognition (knowledge) and production (or pseudocommunication). Skill using means interaction or real communication. I think it may be very interesting and thought provoking to investigate the extent to which tasks of various sorts do or do not promote genuine communication.

A third way of analyzing learning activities is those which focus the learner on developing accuracy, and those which focus on developing fluency. I am also interested here in the degree of teacher/learner control inherent in any activity.

Teacher roles. Communicative tasks presuppose the change of teacher roles. I think the role of the teacher as a star performer is not required any more. Her role is to create space for the learner so that the latter can develop to his full potential (Littlewood 1982: 8). The greater emphasis on learning rather than teaching makes the teacher organizer, supporter, "animateur", observer, and co-communicator rather than instructor. All this means that the teacher has to develop a complex range of insights and skills. She also needs opportunities to work out and renew through discussion, reading, workshops, training abroad in order to form the conceptual framework which guides her activity.

Learner roles. I think that the change of learner roles is based on assumption that learning cannot be controlled by the teacher. Therefore learners themselves must take responsibility for their own learning, developing autonomy and skills in learning-how-to-learn. The focus on learners as determiners of their own learning paths requires a thorough needs analysis and matching the external syllabus of any ESP course as closely as possible with the learner's needs.

Settings. "Settings" refers to the classroom arrangements specified or implied in the task. Settings involve two aspects of the learning situation, namely mode and environment. Learning mode refers to whether the learner is operating on an individual or group basis. Environment, which is closely connected with mode, refers to where the learning activity takes place. It might be a conventional classroom in any educational institution, an industrial or occupational setting, a self-access center and so on.

I think that the convenience of these task components is that they allow the teacher to accommodate a wide range of teaching and learning behavior, from the conventional to the experimental, for instance, learner independence and the unpredictability of outcome in tasks where the interpretation and intention of the learner may differ from that of the teacher.

The *implementation* of the designed tasks will be done in two groups of the Ukrainian Academy of Banking to begin with.

Evaluation of the implemented project will be formative and summative. Formative evaluation will be undertaken for general and specific purposes. General purposes of evaluation will include: betterment of the whole course; teacher's self-development; accountability of the project. Specific purposes of evaluation will be the following: 1) evaluation of materials with communicative tasks; 2) evaluation of the teacher who implemented these tasks (the level of autonomy, discretion, decision making; influence of the communicative tasks on the classroom through feedback received from students); the teacher's role, ways of motivating students, ways of giving feedback; 3) evaluation of learning models of students; 4) evaluation of students' emotions and impressions. Formative evaluation will be done in the following forms: tutorials; plenary sessions; semester student process reports; semester teacher process reports; questionnaires; classroom observation; students' interviews. Summative evaluation will be executed in two forms: end-of-course evaluation and after-course evaluation.

Dissemination. On the basis of evaluation the proposed project may be implemented in other groups of the Academy and presented at the conference of TESOL teachers in Ukraine. If summative evaluation of the whole ESP course will be positive the Ukrainian Academy of Banking is ready to provide some training of ESP teachers who, in their turn, can disseminate these changes in their own institutions.

References: Nunan, D. (1989) Designing Tasks for Communicative Classroom. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

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