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Increasing Motivation in the Japanese University EFL Classroom

- Towards a task-based approach to language instruction -

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日本の大学英語授業における学習意欲の向上

—タスクを中心としたアプローチに向けて—

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Abstract

本稿では、日本の大学における EFL としての英語授業の教授法の現状と課題について考察する。日本の大学の英語授業における学生の学習意欲の低下については、動機づけを理由とする指摘が多くある。この問題の主な原因の一つとして EFL におけるシラバスデザインが挙げられる。近年の EFL 研究においては、他のアプローチではなく、タスク中心の TBA アプローチをシラバスに取り入れた指導と実践に関する論文が多くみられる。日本の EFL クラスにおいて、タスクに基づいた学習方法はあまり活用されていない。したがって、本稿では、特に、研究と授業実践を密接にリンクさせたタスク活動中心の学習方法のあり方を提示する。また、長崎大学の EFL クラスにおける TBA のデザイン、実践、および教育実践の結果について記述し、分析をおこなう。さらに、この予備的調査研究から、英語教授法 (ELT) 分野において、TBA が教育効果の高いものであることを確認できたことを示す。

Key Words: EFL pedagogy, task-based language teaching (TBLT), motivation, syllabus design

1. Introduction

“I hear and I forget; I see and I remember; I do and I understand”.

– Confucius –

Many reports commenting on the motivation problem in Japanese universities have been written over the years (Sugimoto 1997, McVeigh 2002), particularly concerning the compulsory English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classes taken by non-English majors (Moritoshi 2009). Addressing this issue, Moritoshi (2009), using the comments he collected from 50 English teachers in a workshop he conducted, offers the following indicators of low intrinsic motivation: poor attendance, poor participation and poor preparation. In observing the oral abilities of a group of Japanese university EFL learners, Helgesen (1993) reported that his learners rarely initiated conversation, avoided bringing up new topics, did not challenge the teacher, seldom asked for clarification, and did not volunteer answers. While the writers certainly recognize that some of these behaviors may be due to some learners being extremely shy and/or experiencing some level of foreign language anxiety and cross-cultural inhibition (Cutrone 2009), this does not seem to be an adequate explanation for some of the more overt acts of misbehavior that have been commonly reported in tertiary EFL classes in Japan. These include failing to do homework, circumventing the attendance requirements, using cellular phones and sleeping during class (Matsumoto 2008).

Clearly, there is a motivation problem in this context, and the first step towards improving this problem is to consider some of the potential sources underpinning the above-mentioned behaviors. For instance, in the high school context in Japan, many learners may be motivated extrinsically to study English because they need to do well on the English component of university entrance exams; however, in the university context, with the all-important life-defining entrance exams behind them, learners may lack any clear extrinsic motivation to learn English beyond getting a passing grade in a particular class. Thus, to use Cogan’s (1995) fitting acronym, learners may find themselves in the apathetic position of LENOR, i.e., Learning English for No Obvious Reason. From the perspective of English teachers in Japanese tertiary institutions, this is only one of many motivational challenges they have to contend with. Many of the compulsory English classes for non-English majors have a large number of students in them, and these students are often thrust into classes comprising mixed levels ranging from beginner to advanced proficiency levels (Hidasi 2004). Consequently, teachers have to not only be especially determined but extremely creative and innovative as well in their quest to reach the learners in this context.

While there exist many tried and tested methods that teachers can employ to raise their learners' motivation (Dörnyei 2001), perhaps the greatest impact a teacher can have on what happens in the classroom is by means of the syllabus (and content therein) they choose to administer. Hence, taking into account the circumstances teachers have to deal with, research into language learning and some of the methods currently employed in Japanese tertiary EFL classes, the writers strongly advocate a task-based approach (TBA) to EFL teaching in this context.

2. Rationale for a Task-Based Approach

2.1 What is a Task-Based Approach?

Before providing a rationale for a TBA, it is necessary to provide a working definition of what a TBA is. In brief, a TBA is an approach in which the task is the focal point of each lesson, the lessons are specified and graded in terms of these tasks, and communication is seen as a process (means driven) focusing on how something is learned rather than a set of products (ends driven) focusing on what is to be learned (Nunan 1988). Although several definitions of task exist (see e.g. Breen 1987, Prabhu 1987, Skehan 1996), for present purposes, this paper will identify four criteria commonly associated with tasks: a task involves some negotiation of meaning; task completion has some priority; the assessment of task performance is in terms of task outcome; there is some sort of relationship to the real world.

In other words, a TBA tries to cater to the individual needs and circumstances of a particular group of learners. Therefore, while advocating the general principles of a TBA, this paper includes information and examples describing a pilot version of a task-based syllabus (TBS) that the writers specifically created for their English Communication classes at Nagasaki University, which are typically comprised of forty to fifty mixed-level, non-English major learners. The learners in these classes are most often from the Kyushu region of Japan, eighteen or nineteen years old and in their first year of university. Excluding our focus on the Kyushu demographic, these types of compulsory English Communication classes to non-English majors are widespread in Japan.

2.2 Research Support

The primary rationale for a TBA is that there exists a large body of empirical evidence advocating it over other approaches (Long 1985, Crookes 1986, Long & Crookes 1992, Skehan 1996, Willis 1998, 2000). Research has shown that there is

little resemblance between acquisitional sequences and instructional sequences based on linguistic forms (Lightbown 1983, Ellis 1989), and learning is non-linear and cumulative (as are analytic approaches such as the TBA) rather than linear and additive (commonly found in synthetic syllabi) (Kellerman 1985, Selinker & Lakshaman 1992). In other words, learners seem to best learn languages implicitly (i.e., naturally rather than being taught grammatical rules and structures) and at their own pace. So, sequencing and organizing course books according to the presumed difficulty of grammatical structures is probably not as effective as many teachers have assumed. While teachers can help learners by exposing them to natural models of language by which they can internalize the grammar of the language for themselves, they would not be well served in presenting learners with structured chunks of language to learn at specific points.

Moreover, research findings in various domains such as general education (Swaffer, Arens & Morgan 1982), into teachers' classroom practices (Shavelson & Stern 1981), and in second language acquisition (Long & Crookes 1993) have many EFL professionals convinced that the TBS has a richer potential for promoting successful language learning than do other syllabus types (Rooney 2000). The research to date helps teachers in several ways. It shows teachers that where one uses language is often less relevant than what one uses it for (i.e., task). Further, we have also learned that language is primarily a meaning system in that it develops in response to the need to mean and to understand what others mean (Halliday 1975); thus, learners manipulating grammatical structures without exchanging meaning are not really helping themselves to acquire the L2 (i.e., second language).

However, this is not to suggest that a focus on form is useless in task-based language teaching (TBLT). To the contrary, evidence has shown that a focus on form after meaning has been negotiated is highly beneficial to learners (Zobl 1985, Schmidt & Frota 1986, Pienemann & Johnson 1987, Eckham, Bell & Nelson 1988, Crookes 1989, White 1989, Schmidt 1990, Long 1991). In other words, once learners have negotiated meaning (as they would in trying to complete a task), their awareness becomes heightened and their cognitive state is much more receptive to accepting the linguistic items necessary to perform the task (comprehensible input). Against this background, several ELT professionals advocate a methodology which adopts task as the unit of analysis in an attempt to provide an integrated, internally coherent approach to seven components of the teaching of a task-based lesson, and one which is compatible with SLA (second language acquisition) theory.

3. Advantages of a TBA Over Other Approaches

The writers, with more than thirty years combined EFL teaching experience, were drawn to explore the potential of a TBA because of the drawbacks they often experienced with some of the more traditional structural and functional/notional syllabi they have used in the past. These shortcomings and how they are addressed in a TBA can be framed in three main areas concerning EFL materials and syllabus design: authenticity, practicality and motivation. Regarding some of the criticisms that follow, the writers are in no way suggesting that traditional product-based syllabi are always and/or wholly ineffective. Undoubtedly, there is great variation and merits/demerits within any one approach, and some of the points made below only serve to emphasize some of the areas the writers thought to be particularly worthy of analysis and discussion. Further, the writers have presented the criticisms of materials in a general way and have, thus, avoided using specific course book names, since this paper's purpose is to improve language pedagogy in Japan and not to belittle the work and efforts of others.

3.1 Authenticity

Although some dialogues are more realistic than others, the fact is that the conversations included in many EFL course books' lessons are not real (i.e., not authentic). These dialogues are created primarily to model the target language of each particular lesson. Consequently, such conversations in EFL lessons sometimes sound too contrived and unnatural to competent speakers of English. Unnatural language as it is used in many books will, unfortunately, do little to prepare learners for the real-world language they will encounter outside the classroom; the writers believe the learners know this to be true and are, thus, not as motivated as they would be if the English they were learning was authentic. Second, as the next section expands upon, learners are more likely to be motivated by talking about things that are real such as real places, real people, real events, and real problems that they already have some L1 (i.e., first language) content knowledge about and actually mean something to them in a personal way. Seemingly, course books that are based on fictitious events and characters are not as motivating as course books that include real events, people, etc.

Perhaps the greatest difference between a TBA vis-à-vis other approaches is that a TBA typically uses authentic dialogues to serve as language models. That is, the dialogues that the learners hear in a TBS have been created by native-English speakers carrying out a task as they would normally. Thus, without any prior knowledge of the

task or any time to prepare, the native speakers' aim is solely to complete the task, and they have been instructed to speak as they would naturally in their efforts to complete the task. In this way, a TBS is able to create authentic models of language. This was evident in one of the lessons the writers designed in a pilot version TBS. In this particular lesson, the main task required learners to make plans while considering the options presented in the entertainment section of a newspaper. In an effort to negotiate this in groups, speakers needed to state their likes and dislikes, etc. In comparing the language used by a group of native speakers to complete this task with that of a group of learners, noticeable differences were plain to see. Several times, when the native speaker(s) wanted to express their affinity for something, they produced natural phrases such as "I'm into ...", "I'm partial to ...", and "... appeals to me". The learners, on the other hand, relied on simplistic phrases such as "I like ..." and "I don't like ...", which might be perceived as somewhat redundant and unimaginative in the real world outside the classroom. While the natural phrases presented above seem to be quite commonplace for native speakers (as evidenced by the great many times they were used by the speakers attempting to achieve the task objective), we do not often see such expressions used, especially in natural contexts, in other ELT materials. The writers believe that this provides only a glimpse of what can be achieved using a TBA.

3.2 Practicality

The topics and activities used in many books are often not found to be practical by Japanese EFL learners, which may demotivate learners. First, there is the problem that many course books contain topics that Japanese EFL learners are not interested in and/or lack content knowledge of. Second, there is the problem that course books often have learners engage in tasks that they will likely never have to do in their real lives outside the classroom such as role-plays and other activity types where learners are imagining they are people quite different from themselves. While these activity types can be beneficial and fun for beginner level learners, more proficient learners are likely motivated by activities that seem practical to them. That is, activities and tasks where learners can see the face-validity of using language and doing tasks which are similar to those they do in real life. Similarly, many course books and teachers' methods involve the use of language drills. While some controlled practice may aid beginner level learners who are having problems with form, the writers have found this to be a largely ineffective way to teach EFL, especially with higher levels. As the

sections outlining a TBA below explain in greater detail, learners seem to learn best when they do tasks by which the exchange of meaning is important. Hence, a learner being able to manipulate grammatical structures with no exchange of meaning does little, if anything, to help them acquire the new language. Third, there is the problem that some course books seem ill suited for conversation courses, which are so widespread in Japan. That is, some of the communication course books on the EFL market seem to have too many reading texts and other activities, which take away from learners' speaking time. Further, when learners do have a listening task, they are not necessarily listening to a conversation but may be listening to someone reading out one of the passages in the book. Quite simply, the writers believe that in conversation courses in Japan learners want and need to hear and practice conversations and not other forms of talk. Too often, the link between the language models learners hear in their courses and the language they are asked to produce is weakly integrated.

To motivate and engage learners, a TBA attempts to replicate actual real-life tasks that learners might have to undertake at some point when communicating in English. To this end, the writers have informally surveyed the English needs of their learners over the years. The writers have discovered that some of the more common reasons learners in the supposed LENOR context mentioned above might need English in their futures involved talking to foreigners who visit Japan. Some specific examples that are often mentioned involved giving advice to foreigners in Japan, giving them directions, showing them around, etc. So, for instance, learners should be able to see the face-validity of doing tasks such as interpreting a Japanese menu for an English speaking friend or negotiating plans for the evening with their English speaking friends, etc. (i.e., something they might actually have to do outside the classroom in their real lives).

3.3 Motivation

As the preceding sections have touched upon, learners are likely to be demotivated by the following factors: learning English from inauthentic texts, talking about things that are fictitious, talking about things that they are not interested in or know little about, and doing tasks or activities that seem impractical to them. Regarding the latter, the activities in many syllabi require learners to perform an activity for no apparent reason. For instance, an activity which requires learners to ask each other questions about a picture for no other reason than to practice English would not be very

motivating because it does not have any objective for which the learners are driven to achieve, i.e., there is often no feeling of completion and accomplishment in performing such tasks.

The most compelling reason for using a TBA in EFL classes in Japan lies in the power of the tasks to motivate learners. That is, each task in a task-based lesson asks learners to attempt to reach a predetermined objective (i.e., the exchange of meaning is important). So, for instance, in one of the lessons in the writers' pilot version TBS, the task objective for learners is to choose whether a homestay or student dormitory would be most suitable for a foreign exchange student visiting Japan. Consequently, in communicative tasks such as this, learners are driven by the need to complete the task. They tend to feel less inhibited because they are not so worried about sounding perfect; instead learners focus their energies on trying to achieve the objective of the task. Further, learners in this context would also be motivated because this is the type of task they might actually have to perform in their real lives (i.e., giving advice to a foreign student about where to stay in Japan and/or discussing this all-important topic as it relates to Japanese students planning to study and live abroad). The next section presents the methodology of a TBS as put forward by Willis (1998). This will explain in greater detail how other types of short-term motivations are tied into the seven phases of a TBS.

4. The Seven Steps of a Task-Based Lesson

4.1 Pre-task

This introduces and draws learners' attention to the lesson topic or theme. Further, it helps to prepare learners for the upcoming task by providing them with content knowledge and giving them initial exposure to target forms within a communicative context. For instance, in one of the lessons in the writers' pilot version TBS, the main task requires learners to explain various Japanese dishes on a menu to foreign visitors; hence, the pre-task involves a class discussion about which foods foreigners to Japan are likely to need an explanation of.

4.2 Task 1

Task 1 is the focal part of the lesson from which all other aspects derive. This task provides an opportunity for learners to focus on and realize target meanings. As each task contains a clear objective for the learners to achieve, learners are likely to sacrifice accuracy for fluency at this stage. In other words, their aim here is task

completion and not grammatical accuracy. In our pilot-version TBS, task types included matching, speculation, ranking, rating, information gap, decision making and problem solving activities. Besides making concerted efforts to produce tasks with clear (and manageable) objectives, the writers tried to create tasks that were both realistic in terms of what they might do (i.e., give advice to foreigners visiting Japan) and relevant to them (i.e., all of the situations in the syllabus relate to university students in Kyushu), as follows:

- Introducing oneself to foreign guests
- Giving advice to foreign visitors preparing for their trip to Japan
- Helping foreign visitors choose between a homestay and student dormitory
- Giving foreign visitors directions on a map
- Ranking sightseeing places in Nagasaki
- Rating tourist destinations in other places in Kyushu
- Presenting on one's hometown
- Arranging a day out with foreign friends
- Explaining and recommending Japanese foods to foreign guests
- Helping foreign visitors choose which hotel to stay in
- Providing the details of Kyushu-based festivals to foreign guests
- Ranking the leisure activities of Japanese university students
- Suggesting Japanese souvenirs to foreign guests when they return home
- Giving advice to foreign visitors wanting to study Japanese
- Saying goodbye and setting goals for the future

4.3 Planning

In this stage, teachers help their learners to prepare for the next stage, an oral report of what transpired in the previous step, the main task. The planning stage allows the learner to begin focusing on accuracy and allows for assistance from the teacher. Teachers should be aware that a certain degree of flexibility is necessary in administering a TBS, and teachers should, thus, modify activities as they see fit. For instance, in piloting our TBS with our learners, the writers sometimes had to shorten and, in a few cases, even skip Steps 3 and 4 (i.e., the Planning and Report stages of the lesson) altogether, so there would be enough time to complete the base activities of that day's unit.

4.4 Report

In this stage, learners report to the rest of the class the results of their work during the Task 1 phase. By doing so, the Report stage of the task-based lesson has created a situation in which learners focus primarily on accuracy because the circumstances of the communication are public, rehearsed and final. Thus, another advantage of this approach is that educators are giving learners the true to life experience of having to speak English in a range of social settings, such as *casual* in Task 1 and *formal* for the Report. Willis (1998: 17) explains as follows:

A focus on form is beneficial in two phases in the framework. The planning stage between the private task and the public report promotes close attention to language form. As learners strive for accuracy, they try to organize their reports clearly and check words and patterns they are not sure of.

4.5 Listening

In this stage, the teachers play a recording of native (or wholly proficient) speakers of English performing the same (or similar) task as the one the learners performed in Task 1 previously. This should be especially motivating to learners as it gives them a chance to hear the target forms used in a context that has become familiar to them through their own attempts to perform and report the task. In piloting the TBS, the writers divided the listening component into two distinct parts. In the first part, learners were not allowed to look at the audio scripts and were asked to do a macro-level listening task to see if they could decipher some of the key points in the conversation (i.e., focusing mainly on listening comprehension). In the second part, learners were allowed to follow the audio scripts and were asked to fill in the blanks with words they heard as well as underline unfamiliar words and phrases. Accordingly, the second part serves to draw learners' attention to specific features of language that were new to them and/or were deemed important in being able to effectively complete the task.

4.6 Language Analysis

This consists of language awareness exercises that give learners a chance to formulate generalizations about the language they have just heard or read. Willis (1998: 18) explains how the process works:

The aim of analysis activities is to encourage learners to investigate language for themselves, and to form and test their own hypotheses about how language works. In the task-based cycle, the language data comes from the texts or transcripts of recordings used in the task cycle, or from samples of language they have read or heard in earlier lessons. Having already processed these texts and recordings for meaning, learners will get far more out of their study of language form.

In creating their pilot version TBS, the writers created Language Analysis Activities pertaining to various features of language that occurred frequently in each dialogue and/or were deemed necessary to successfully achieve the task objective. Accordingly, the preceding steps of a task-based lesson have been designed to demonstrate to learners that they need to develop specific language features to achieve the task they had previously attempted. Thus, as Section 2.2 alluded to, learners at the Language Analysis stage of a task-based lesson would likely be much more receptive to learning new features of language. Consequently, this is the section of a task-based lesson that involves grammatical exercises and explanation. So, for example, in the lesson in the writers' pilot version TBS that required learners to rank the sightseeing places in Nagasaki, the writers focused on comparatives and superlatives in their Language Analysis Activities. This grammatical focus was chosen because an analysis of the authentic language of native English speakers used to perform this task revealed that these structures were commonly used to achieve the task objective.

In addition, it is important to point out that the audio transcripts of a task-based lesson provide EFL teachers with the unique opportunity to analyze a corpus containing authentic language. Consequently, EFL teachers do not need to limit themselves or their learners to the features of language presented to them in the Language Analysis Activities of a particular TBS, such as the ones created by the writers. That is, teachers may have their own points of focus for a particular group of learners and are, thus, encouraged to explore any parts of the language in the dialogues that they or their learners might be curious about.

4.7 Task 2

In this stage, teachers can either administer a task that closely replicates Task 1, and/or teachers can have learners do activities that practice the new words, phrases, and patterns occurring in the data. Alternatively, teachers can add communicative activities to help practice the target language that was, up to this point, only practiced

in the Language Analysis Activities. It may be beneficial for teachers to administer this final stage of a task-based lesson in the subsequent class for two reasons. First, students often complete the preceding step, the Language Analysis Activities, at different paces. Thus, in an effort to keep everyone at the same stage, some of the students may need some extra time after class to complete these exercises. Second, since classes are often several days to a week apart (at least they were in the writers' tertiary context described above), revisiting the task and the features of language focused on in the previous class provides an excellent chance for teachers to reinforce the target language in class.

5. Considerations in Sequencing and Grading Task-Based Syllabi

Another way that a TBS serves to motivate learners is by the way the lesson stages are ordered. While most syllabi in course books order each lesson stage using a method similar to the standard presentation, practice, production (P-P-P) methodology (i.e., building up to a final application or role-play at the end), a TBS begins with a task near the beginning. As this paper discussed above, this is effective because it creates a need within the learners to acquire the target language. That is, upon going through the great effort of attempting to accomplish a particular task in the L2, learners would subsequently pay more attention to learning the target language through the course of the lesson because they could now see for themselves that they need to learn the target language to be able to accomplish a similar task in the future.

Ideally, the lessons in a TBS should be sequenced and graded according to the complexity of the main tasks. In other words, Task 1 in the first lesson should be the easiest, while Task 1 in the last lesson should be the most difficult. The complexity of these tasks is not based on the linguistic items (i.e., grammatical structures and vocabulary) used in the task, but resides in aspects of the tasks themselves. In no particular order, some of the cognitive dimensions affecting level of difficulty that have been suggested in the research include the following:

- Planning time: Tasks that include planning time are easier than ones without planning time (Bygate 1987).
- Number of elements: Tasks involving more elements are more difficult than tasks involving fewer elements (Brown, Anderson, Shilcock & Yule 1984).
- Single versus dual tasks: For instance, in our pilot-version TBS, the main task in Lesson 3 is thought to be easier than the main task in Lesson 4 because the

former makes only one demand (choosing between a homestay and a school dormitory), whereas the latter makes two demands of learners (for them to think up a route on a map and describe it at the same time) (Robinson 1998).

- **Prior knowledge:** Tasks in a domain which learners have prior knowledge are easier than tasks in a domain in which learners have no prior knowledge of (Robinson 1998).
- **Modality:** Speaking leads to more pressure than writing, and listening leads to more pressure than reading (Ellis 1987).
- **Stakes:** Tasks in which it is important to do the task correctly are more difficult than tasks where there is no consequence that follows from task completion (Willis 1993).
- **Control:** Tasks in which the participants have a great deal of control are easier than tasks in which the participants have less control (Pica, Kanagy & Falodun 1993).

With these cognitive dimensions in mind, the writers tried to sequence their TBS according to task complexity; however, they discovered that it was necessary to balance the order of task complexity with the overall progression of the theme of the book (i.e., visiting Kyushu). Hence, from a thematic point of view (as Section 6.1 discusses below), Lesson 3, whose main task requires learners to choose between a homestay situation and a dormitory, had to be presented to students near the beginning of the book, as it deals with the arrival of a foreign visitor, whereas Lesson 13, whose main task requires learners to consider what Japanese souvenirs would appeal to foreigners, had to be placed near the end of the book, as it deals with the departure of a foreign visitor.

6. Initial Observations

The development of the writers' TBS is a work in progress, as it is currently undergoing a series of steps that involve the continuous piloting and revising of various elements. In the midst of this flux, the writers would like to share some initial observations of six task-based lessons they administered in their English Communication classes (see Section 2.1 for details about the context) in the spring semester of 2013 at Nagasaki University. In addition to the two writers of this paper who administered the task-based lessons, a total of 287 students commented on their general impressions of these lessons. The writers recognize that simply asking

teachers and students what they thought of a lesson is a somewhat crude measurement technique and are, thus, planning a more systematic approach to officially piloting a more complete version of their TBS in the future. For now, these informal observations can at least provide readers with a sense of the strengths and weaknesses of a TBA.

6.1 Teachers' Observations

Our experience designing and implementing a TBS has definitely been a positive one. From comparing how students behaved and performed in our task-based lessons versus how they did in our previous classes (which contained various degrees of P-P-P and teacher-centered methodologies), the transformation was nothing short of a miracle. The writers witnessed firsthand how learners, who were supposedly of the demotivated ilk, responded ultra-positively to the TBS. That is, most students seemed thoroughly engaged in the lesson and all its facets. In our opinion, learners were not only able to process comprehensible input more effectively than learners using a P-P-P methodology but seemed to have more fun doing so.

Ironically, this high level of motivation may also pose as somewhat of an obstacle in a task-based lesson. That is, a few of the learners we observed seemed to be so motivated and engrossed by the task objective, and perhaps also by the chance to converse with their peers about things that were relevant to their lives, that they often broke into L1 Japanese when the teacher was out of earshot. Thus, for a TBA (or any approach that gives the students additional responsibility) to be most effective, teachers have to closely monitor what the students are doing at all times, making sure that they are not only on task but also in the right language when they are required to take part in L2 communicative tasks.

While the writers found that their TBS was a success overall, they discovered a few other kinks that still needed to be ironed out. One such issue involved time management. In one of the lessons in the initial pilot study, one of the writers was not able to complete all seven steps required of a task-based lesson in the ninety-minute lesson time span. As Breen (1987) suggests, it is a good idea to be flexible in implementing a TBS. That is, if things are not progressing as planned, teachers need to be prepared and willing to alter their syllabi, as mentioned in Section 4.3.

Lastly, with the cognitive dimensions outlined in Section 5 in mind, the writers tried to sequence their TBS according to task complexity; however, they discovered that it was necessary to balance the order of task complexity with the overall

progression of the theme of their TBS, which they were attempting to turn into a book about helping foreign guests adjust to life in Kyushu, Japan. For instance, a lesson requiring learners to choose the best accommodation for foreign learners (i.e., comparing a homestay with a university dormitory) such as Lesson 3 would need to be introduced near the beginning of the course, as this type of situation would only occur at the beginning of a trip in real life. In other words, since many subsequent situations in the TBS were derived from the foreign learners having arrived and settled in Kyushu, Japan, it made sense to include this near the beginning of the course; thus, efforts were made to simplify this task (i.e., reducing the number of choices) to make it feasible for learners at this stage of the course.

6.2 Students' Observations

Consistent with the teachers' observations above, the students' responses were overwhelmingly positive. Most, if not all, learners responded that they enjoyed the task-based lesson they participated in. The majority of learners commented that they felt the lesson was useful for them, and many also reported an immediate increase in their confidence and motivation (in speaking English) during and after the lesson. The following responses demonstrate the general feeling among students (pseudonyms have been used to protect learners' identities):

Akiko: This was the most fun I've ever had in English class. I am looking forward to next class.

Chieko: I really liked the tasks about Japan. I think the grammar exercises were very good for giving me the language to use in task (sic) like that in my future.

Kenji: I felt that this English was useful for me. Before, I did not feel that.

Maya: I feel more confident about saying things I want to say in English.

Nagako: The order of the lesson made me very want to know (sic) the kind of English I can use in that situation.

Shintaro: This lesson was great for me. It's so good that we can talk about Nagasaki, because these are the thing (sic) I know well. I think I will look at my papers after class is over because English is need (sic).

Taro: I can use this English in my real life. Thanks for that.

As above, while the overall learner comments were positive and encouraging, eleven learners indicated that they thought that the listening part was challenging, with the qualifiers they gave ranging in degree from *a bit* difficult to *extremely* difficult. This was not surprising as the sudden jump from the contrived models of English (that the learners were listening to previously) to authentic language (provided in a TBA) is a big one and may require some time for learners to get used to. Even so, TBLT is highly variable and flexible by nature, and there is no compelling evidence to support the contention that it is unsustainable for low-level learners. To the contrary, proponents of a TBLT insist that learners with a limited grammar can function effectively enough in a L2 to benefit from a TBA (Willis & Willis 2007). According to Ellis (2009), TBLT provides learners with both input and output opportunities, which, in turn, gives them a chance to not only use the language resources they have but also to develop the grammatical resources they will need to speak and write.

Furthermore, even though they are of limited value to language learners in the real world, ELT materials with tidy, simplistic and contrived samples of conversation are widely used in Japan. It is well documented that, despite several years of studying English, the Japanese university graduate is seriously incompetent as an English speaker (Ellis 1991, Farooq 2005). From not having received enough exposure to real-world English, Japanese EFL learners are often ill-equipped to deal with the subtle, unpredictable and spontaneous nature of English exchanges away from the classroom. In the writers' opinion, just because something is potentially difficult at first is no reason to simply abandon it. In fact, the writers believe that the very fact that the status quo does not seem to be working in Japan is reason enough to justify trying something different. For ELT professionals in Japan brave enough to try something new, a TBA, which focuses on real-world communication, offers an innovative method to expose one's learners to the kinds of natural spoken discourse that they are sure to encounter beyond the classroom walls.

7. Conclusion

Without question, the advantages of a TBA far outweigh the disadvantages. The main reason we believe that TBLT holds great promise in ELT is that it truly motivates learners. Learners are motivated by the fact that the tasks are communicative, the language they learn is useful to them, and they are exposed to natural language. With the success we experienced in our TBS, it is surprising to us that this approach has not become more popular in Japan. As we have alluded to

above, educators may find it difficult to assess task difficulty and sequence tasks in a TBS. Further, in the publishing domain, the amount of work that goes into producing a TBS can be daunting, as producing natural samples of language is far more difficult and time consuming than simply requesting actors to read out contrived conversations based on a teacher's intuition. Publishing companies may not be willing to spend the extra time, incur the extra costs and/or give up the creative control that a TBS requires. We, thus, feel extremely fortunate to have found a publisher that is as committed to TBLT as we are, and we kindly invite readers to try out our new course book, titled "Welcome to Kyushu, Japan: A Task Based Approach to EFL Learning Using Authentic Dialogues (Cutrone & Beh 2015)", which is based on the ideas and descriptions of the pilot-version TBS described in this paper.

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