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Using Goal Setting and Task Analysis to Enhance Task-Based Language Learning and Teaching

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Abstract

This paper will focus on the contributions Goal Setting and Task Analysis can make to more effective Task-Based language learning and teaching.

Task-Based Language Learning and Teaching has received sustained attention from teachers and researchers for over thirty years (Ellis, 2003; Leaver & Willis, 2004; Long, 1985; Loschky & Bley-Vroman, 1993; Nunan, 2006; Willis & Willis, 2007). It is a well-established pedagogy that includes the following characteristics: major focus on authentic and real-world tasks, choice of linguistic resources by learners, and a clearly defined non-linguistic outcome (Ellis, 2003).

Important as a focus on real life tasks and authentic language is, learners still need help accomplishing these tasks especially if the goal is for them to eventually be able to accomplish tasks on their own. Promoting goal setting and task analysis will add value by helping learners *plan how* they approach a task. If teachers take the time to help learners understand how to plan their individual approaches to a task, the results can be quite rewarding for both teacher and student. These rewards include a transformed learning environment as learners show increased motivation, especially feelings of self-efficacy[1], increased self-esteem, increased ability to problem solve, increased learner ability to take control of their learning, greater focus on the learning process, and even transfer of planning skills to other subjects and their personal lives (Castrillón, Jaramillo & Lopez, 2013; Clemente & Rubin, 2008; Tutistar Jojoa & Ballesteros Muñoz, 2013).

Goal Setting and Task Analysis

Eventually, each learner needs to be able to determine his/her own SMART goal for a task. While the acronym SMART goal has several interpretations, in our work we use it to mean the following: S (specific), M (measurable), A (achievable), R (realistic), T (time-based).

Goals should be Specific enough so that they can be measured; Measures should be observable so learners are able to recognize their own achievement. Measures should be observable without teacher input, so that learners develop control of their own learning process; Achievable requires learners to consider the time and knowledge they bring to accomplish the task (attempting to do a task when a learner does not have the time or sufficient knowledge can be very frustrating and self-defeating). Relevant encourages learners to consider the importance of a task for themselves (the more relevant a goal is to each specific learner, the more motivated that learner will likely be), and Time-Based requires each learner to set a time limit

to accomplish a task. By doing so, each learner can then consider whether changes are required in his/her goal or strategy or time allotted to accomplish a goal.

Learners need to be involved in setting their own goals for many reasons. Most importantly, when learners set their own goals, they can judge for themselves if and when they have accomplished a goal. Making such judgments can allow learners to feel more in control of their own learning. Further, by stating and then evaluating their own SMART goals learners can gain a sense of accomplishment and self-efficacy[2].

It is important to consider two kinds of goals: a language goal and learning goal. A language goal focuses on some aspect of the target language that a learner wants to improve (e.g., spelling, pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, pragmatics, discourse). While in many classrooms, it is the teacher who sets a language goal, if asked learners vary greatly in what they think they need to focus on. Some might feel they are having trouble with spelling while others may report issues with pronunciation or vocabulary. These individual differences can occur while working on the same task.

A learning goal focuses on some aspect of the student's learning process and how he/she will improve it. Some learning goal examples are: working on improving skills in memorizing, developing ways to control emotions, improving ability to set appropriate goals meaningful to a specific learner, or learning how to select appropriate strategies for a particular task.

Task Analysis

Task Analysis (TA) consists of three parts: Task Purpose, Task Classification, and Task Demands. When a TA is completed. a learner is ready to create an action plan. When learners perform task analysis in advance of beginning a task, they will know how much time they need to allocate to the task, what tools they need, what knowledge they already have and what knowledge they need to accomplish a task, and what strategies might be appropriate for a particular task. TA can give learners a critical sense of control and positive feelings that they have the necessary ability and knowledge to succeed.

Task Purpose

Task Purpose (TP) asks the question: Why do I want to achieve a particular goal? TP can be an important motivator especially if a learner's purpose is not just pedagogical (e.g., to get a good grade, pass this course) but rather more connected to a life goal (e.g., professional, social, personal). Readers are encouraged to see Rubin and Thompson (1994) and Rubin (2001) for a more complete description of these purposes. Once a learner is able to determine that the task is relevant for his/her own current or future life, it is highly likely that that learners will become more highly motivated[3]. TP is directly connected to the R in SMART goals. In TP a learner considers a specific purpose and comes to recognize the specific relevance of the task for his/her life[4].

Task Classification

Task Classification[5] (TC) requires a learner to ask the question: What do I already know about this particular kind of task? By developing TC for a specific task,

a learner can begin to consider what he/she knows and does not know about the following aspects of a text:

1. The *genre*/the structure of a text (e.g., the structure of a newscast, a lecture, or an advertisement),

2. The *rhetorical style* (e.g., expository, descriptive, explanatory, procedural, narrative, persuasive),

3. The overall characteristics of the *language* (e.g., tenses used, type of verbs, types of descriptors, type of repetitions, standard/non-standard grammar)

4. The *vocabulary* in terms of the categories of vocabulary expected (e.g., in a job interview, questions about work history, education, job aspirations).

Learners may also consider how they feel about a skill such as listening or about a topic. More advanced learners may consider the audience/interlocutor, especially if writing or speaking in the foreign language or about any expected visuals if listening or reading. TC is extremely important because it requires the learner to consider details of the language and the skill of a particular task and recognize what he/she feels or knows or needs to find out in order to accomplish the task.

Task Demands

Once a learner completes a TC, he/she then asks him/herself: Given the TC I developed *what* can I do about these identified characteristics; what strategies (e.g., cognitive and socio-affective) can I use to complete the task? For example, if the task is to be able to listen to a newscast and the learner's purpose is to be able to find out what the most important news is, by considering his/her TC the learner might come to recognize that: listening is difficult, that a newscast has a specific structure which might consist of a brief summary of the main news, details about that news, other less important news, summary of news, human interest plus assorted ads depending on the channel and that news consists of very formal language with complete sentences. In Task Demands (TD), the learner can ask him/herself what to do about each TC discovery. Since the learner noted that listening to news is difficult, he/she could decide to pay more attention while listening; since his/her purpose is to find the most important news, in TD, the learner might decide to focus on the first part of the news; since news is very formal, the learner might want to look for who, what, where, when, and maybe how. As for vocabulary, the learner might want to focus on names of people and places that might have been mentioned in the news in his/her first language. It is clear that TC and TD are directly related one to another. (See Attachment 1 for an example of how TA and TD may be connected).

Action Plan

Finally, the learner can use the results of TD to make an action plan. Since many different strategies may have been identified, the learner will need to consider which strategies to use in which order.

All of this can be challenging and time consuming for a learner to accomplish in addition to learning the target language. However, in our experience with teacher training in Mexico and Colombia, once language teachers and language counselors/advisors promote this kind of planning, students begin to recognize how helpful it

can be in achieving their goals, not only those of language learning but also those of their academic and personal lives. Learners find it very empowering to be in charge of their own learning and be clear about where they are going, why they are going there, and what they need to do to succeed.

Teaching SMART Goal Setting

The literature provides many suggestions for teaching learner strategies (Chamot. Barnhardt, El Dinary, & Robbins, 1999; Cohen & Weaver, 2006; Griffiths, 2008; Harris, 2001; Rubin, Chamot, Harris & Anderson, 2008; Oxford, 1990; Rubin, 2013). In this section, I present a few specific teaching strategies for SMART goal setting and Task Analysis.

Because for many the idea of goal setting for *language* learning is novel, teachers should expect it to take several lessons, even as many as eight to 10, until learners are comfortable with creating their own SMART goals. While many teaching strategies for helping learners become comfortable setting SMART goals have been identified, only a couple shown here.

Teaching Strategy 1: Go from the Known to the Unknown

Setting goals is something everyone does, all the time. To remind students of how this is done, a teacher can first model some of his/her life goals and then discuss why these goals are SMART. For example, when taking an exercise class the teacher can tell students what his/her goal might be, how he/she will measure the goal, and what amount of time would be needed to achieve that goal. Then, the teacher can discuss whether the goal is achievable and why it is relevant to him or her. After providing several personal examples, then the teacher can ask learners to create SMART goals for their own life situations and then tell their peers why they are SMART. If learners have trouble identifying goals, there are three techniques that might be of help: (1) identify their own problems by reviewing their last exercise or exam, (2) determine the kind of errors they would like to address, and (3) identify some potential goals after learners have written about their problems in journals [6].

Teaching Strategy 2

Provide learners with *a rubric* to help them evaluate their SMART goal setting. Figure 1 a compilation of a rubric created by Castrillón, Jaramillo, and Lopez (2013) and Tutistar Jojoa del Rosario and Ballesteros Muñoz (2013) can be used to evaluate SMART GOAL setting.

Criteria	Best (4)	3	2	Poor (1)
Specific	The goal is very specific.	The goal is not very specific or there are several goals.	The goal is vague or not clear.	The goal is not a goal or no goal is given.
Measurable	Clear and explicit criteria for measurement are stated.	Criteria are not very clear or very explicit.	Criteria given are hard to apply.	No measure of stated goal is given.

Achievable	The learner provides specific evidence why the goal is achievable citing their own knowledge and time constraints.	The learner identifies steps to reach goal but only mentions time or knowledge why it is achievable.	The learner identifies steps to reach goal but does not mention their own knowledge or time constraints.	No answer is given.
Relevant	The learner provides detailed reasons why the goal is relevant to his/her interests.	The learner provides sparse evidence why the goal is relevant and personal.	The learner says the goal is relevant but provides no evidence that the goal is relevant.	There is no indication No answer is given.
Time-based	The learner states a clear and realistic time for accomplishing the goal. It is realistic given the knowledge a learner has.	The learner gives a specific time for accomplishing the goal but it doesn't seem realistic.	The stated time is vague or unrealistic given the stated goal.	No time for accomplishing the goal is stated.

Figure 1. SMART Goal Rubric.

Teaching Task Analysis

Teaching TA can take longer than learning to set SMART goals because it requires a new kind of thinking for the language learning process and requires more practice to feel comfortable doing it. Yet, TA is not that new for first language courses since in fact, many elements are often presented in writing and reading courses at many grade levels. For example, Williams (2007) demonstrates the importance of text structure in reading comprehension instruction for students at or above the fourth grade. Below are a couple of teaching strategies to help teachers learn to promote TA.

Teaching Strategy 1: Genre Selection

Choose a genre from a list (e.g. a job interview or a recipe or a letter). Then ask learners to do a TC.
1. Decide on a goal and a purpose
2. Answer the following questions:
    a. What do I know and feel about this task?
    b. What do I know about this genre?
    c. What can I say about the rhetorical style?

    d.   What can I say about the characteristics of the language of this genre?

    e.   What can I say about the vocabulary?

Another variation on this teaching strategy to make it a bit simpler is to ask students only to complete a genre analysis for several types of text[7]. One teaching strategy to demonstrate how helpful genre analysis can be is to model what the specific structure of each of a variety of textbooks is and then discuss TC why may be helpful.

Teaching Strategy 2: Use TC to Determine TD

Once learners have completed a TC for one type of genre, ask them to consider what they can do about this classification. By so doing learners will be able to identify what might be some appropriate strategies to use for a task. Here are a couple of examples. If learners are watching a television interview with a famous violinist and their TC noted that the genre has the following structure—introductions, questions and answers, expression of gratitude and best wishes, and closings, then learners can create a TD. Some questions they could ask themselves include the following: what might the introduction include; what kind of questions would you ask a famous violinist, what kinds of expressions of gratitude and best wishes, and what kind of closings. For an example of teaching Task Analysis for writing, see Rubin & McCoy, 2008.

Successes in Teaching Planning

My student teachers and I have used many different teaching strategies to present and practice SMART goal setting and Task Analysis. In this section, there are examples of how effective these strategies were in a range of instructional situations and different relationships (e.g., teacher, advisor), different grades (4th to postsecondary), and different socio-economic situations (e.g., public schools in very poor barrios to wealthy private institutions).

Teaching Goal Setting

In an Action Research Project in Colombia (Castrillón et al., 2013), students were shown and practiced how to set SMART goals over the course of a semester. One group of 11th grade students (n = 30) came from a very poor neighborhood in Bogota. Their ultimate task was to be able to carry out a conversation with their peers. Prior to this research, many teachers at this school had complained that students were very passive and never spoke in English. By the end of the semester, that was not the case with this group of students. By the thirteenth intervention focused on learning how to set goals and analyze a conversation, the teacher, Luis Lopez, reported,

> *Learners were very happy and excited; they were interacting with each other in the target language. At this point when they made some mistakes they were not afraid. On the contrary, some of them said that making mistakes fostered them to improve their language performance. (November 4, 2012)*

In another observation, Lopez reported that success is contagious.

> *I noticed that some learners were setting SMART goals for different academic subjects such as Social Sciences, Math and Natural Sciences in*

> order to achieve their tasks. As well, some teachers were asking me some questions about this research because they have been seeing how my learners have been interacting outside the classroom and challenging them to keep a conversation in the L2." (November 4, 2012, thirteenth intervention).

Another example of how goal setting helped a student find a clear direction for his studies comes from my workshop on language counseling at a Mexican university (Clemente & Rubin, 2008). As part of the workshop, I observed the practice of two teachers with an EFL student at their university. The student, Antonio (pseudonym), wanted help with passing the new university TOEFL requirement. The counselor-practitioners asked what Antonio *specifically* wanted help with. He replied *listening* and *speaking*. It is clear that this is not a very specific goal. It was determined that if Antonio was to establish a more specific goal he needed more information about his skill level. In order to allow Antonio to get this information for himself, he was given a sample TOEFL test. After completing the test the counselors discussed Antonio's results with him and this helped increase his knowledge of his skill level; Antonio came to recognize that he was only a beginner and had a long way to go to pass the test at the required level.

Reasoning that listening was the most difficult part of the exam, Antonio then set as his goal improving his score in the listening portion of TOEFL. This was a SMART goal. It was specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-based. At the same time, Antonio was not discouraged because he had a clear SMART goal and knowledge of how to study to attain this goal.

A further example of successful teaching of SMART goal setting took place in Colombia as part of a Master's Program at the Universidad de La Sabana in Bogota. Two Action Research groups (Castrillon, et al., 2013 and Tutistar Jojoa & Ballesteros Muñoz, 2013) taught their students SMART goal setting; one for speaking and the other for listening. All five teachers found a clear relationship between increases in SMART goal setting and self-efficacy. These results, while probably not statistically reliable, came from two instruments created by each group: one measured skill in setting SMART goals before and after their interventions, and the other measured self-efficacy. Probably the most remarkable results came from the poorest school which had focused on speaking. This group of 11th graders showed a 53% improvement in goal setting and a 76.6% improvement in self-efficacy. A second research group which focused on listening to songs saw a smaller increase in self-efficacy (28%), but a larger increase in goal setting (52%).

Teaching TA

In order to help Antonio improve his skills in taking the TOEFL (Clemente & Rubin, 2008), the two counselor-practitioners decided to do some TA with him. They discussed what kinds of genres were used in the test. After examining a sample test, the three determined that the most recurrent genre types were conversations and lectures. Then, they analyzed the structure of these two genres and considered how that might prove of use to Antonio. It was suggested that this might reduce Antonio's expectations of what he might hear which might then help lower his anxiety and help Antonio concentrate more on the task. In addition, they discussed which

topics he might expect to hear to be prepared to focus on his listening.

Next, the counselors had Antonio consider the structure of the test and concluded that there were several kinds of questions (e.g., *multiple choice, yes/no, fill in the blank).* Again by making these observations, Antonio was able to narrow down his expectations and feel more comfortable taking the test.

After thinking about these two kinds of genre (conversations and lectures), possible topics and kinds of questions, Antonio retook the sample TOEFL test. The difference between results on the two tests was striking. The first time he took the test his score was 10% but after doing a little Task Classification, the second time his score was 48%. One can only imagine how motivating that must have been for Antonio. He had developed some self-efficacy (I can do it!) about himself by clarifying his goals and doing some Task Analysis[8].

Some may question whether TA works with more difficult students. Next, there are some examples where TA affected considerable change. McCoy conducted an experiment with a group of EFL university students in Mexico (Rubin & McCoy, 2008a, 2008b). Indications of how problematic their behaviors were include:

- A 30-40% failure rate, both for this course (102) and for the previous English course (101) taken at this university;

- 10% of the students in the sample had taken this course, or the previous one, several times before, either because they failed it or because they dropped it;

- Low motivation. Students would often suggest to the teacher that they go eat breakfast rather than stay in class, and would start getting ready to leave about ten minutes before the class was over;

- High absenteeism and failure to turn in assignments;

- Students often use inappropriate study strategies, for example, students would limit their studying to reading textbook pages without engaging in productive tasks;

- Student learning behaviors are not consistent with stated beliefs. For example, one student stated that "it was very important to create a system to identify one's own errors but seldom did it" (Rubin & McCoy, 2008, p. 298-99).

Given the issues evidenced by this experimental group, the results obtained from practicing TA were promising.

Our results indicate that learners can improve their ability to do TA with intensive instruction. In addition to the improved TA scores, the Experimental Groups evidenced greater mention of emotions, of the time needed to accomplish a task, of the need to pay attention while working and of the need to have a good attitude when studying. (Rubin & McCoy, 2008b, p. 10).

As noted, since the sample size was small, with a larger sample, even better results could be expected.

An even more clear-cut example of how TC can be very enabling was helping primary and secondary students in Columbia consider the structure of a conversation (Castrillón et al., 2013). Whereas most textbooks provide conversations for students to memorize, students never come to understand what the segments of a con-

versation might be. In the case of the Action Research group at the Universidad de La Sabana, Colombia which worked with three different school levels, teachers helped learners recognize that conversations generally had a basic structure consisting of: greetings, small talk, serious conversation (can be optional), and closings. The three teachers then had their students practice each of the parts of a conversation as well as variations. Practice included types of greetings (more and less formal) and occasions when they could be used. The students agreed that saying *Hi* to the president of a country was inappropriate whereas saying *Good afternoon, sir or m'am* to a classmate was equally inappropriate. Then they discussed kinds of small talk and when each was appropriate. Suddenly, what was once a boring memorization task for learners became an interesting and fun task. These learners were able to construct their own conversations with each other and not just rely on memorized stilted conversations.

Teaching goal setting and task classification can suddenly change a classroom from one where the students are disinterested and poor performers to one where everyone is involved in completing a task — a teacher's dream. The studies show that students found that teaching Goal Setting and TA provided an amazing classroom transformation as is documented in the quotations above.

Finally, in yet another setting, a student enrolled in a Learner Self-Management course at a Mexican university in Puebla himself taught EFL at a local university there. This university catered to affluent students who were known as not very good learners. In class, they often didn't pay attention and were quite noisy, talking to each other, and not bothering with homework. At the mid-term, students did very poorly. The teacher Antonio Sulaya (a student of mine) chose not to tell them how badly they did; rather he offered to help them do better. They began by identifying their problems on the test and this was followed by Antonio's promoting Goal Setting. Once this class began to focus on planning, problem-solving and evaluation, the atmosphere in the classroom completely changed—learners were engaged in the learning process and focused on accomplishing their goals. At the end of the semester, a proctor took over Antonio's class while he took my course. When he returned to his university, the proctor asked what Antonio had done with his students, noting that they came in, sat right down and did the work on their own. Their focus on the work amazed this proctor and demonstrated the critical importance of helping students learn by teaching them to do extensive planning before beginning a task.

Conclusions

In this paper, I have provided detailed examples of what SMART goal setting and TA consist of, suggested some strategies to teach Goal Setting and TA, and given specific examples of how these learning strategies affect teachers, learners, and the entire classroom atmosphere. The examples show that teaching SMART goal setting and TA is not limited to grade level (starting from Grade 4 to university), type of institution (public versus private), or socio-economic status (ranging from poor barrio students to affluent university students).

In conclusion, taking the time to help learners acquire specific language learning skills, in particular, the metacognitive skills of SMART goal setting and TA, can make Task based teaching and learning much more effective.

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Appendix

Task Classification and Task Demands for a Job Interview

Job Interview	Task Classification	Task Demands[9]
Genre	1. Greetings 2. Q & A *(about general topics—weather, traffic)* 3a. Q & A *(about work experience)* 3b. Q & A *(about abilities & skills)* 4. Q & A *(about personal interest in job)* scenario set up & response *(what would you have done in this type of situation)* 5. Q & A *(from the interviewee about conditions and terms* 6. Next communication 7. Closings *(thank you, shake hands)*	1. Note the type of greeting and degree of friendliness 2. Consider good small talk topics 3. Predict questions & topics 3. Prepare to say something about experience 4. Learn about company so that I can connect my experience to the company's needs 5. Prepare 2-3 questions to ask interviewer. 6. Be sure to determine next procedure or communication 7. Find phrases to state how pleased you were with the interview
Rhetorical Style	1. Describing *(candidate may state factual information about their qualifications & job history)* 2. Persuading *(giving reasons why they would be the best candidate for the job)* 3. Explaining *(clarifying issues as directed by the interviewer)* While the interviewer is eliciting answers, the interviewee is focused on describing their background & work experience & explaining why that suits the job. There is also a persuasive element to the interviewee's language as they try to convince the employer to hire them. The same persuading could be done by the employer who is trying to tempt someone to work for them. The employer would describe the job & both parties may be trying to inform each other.	1. Determine the most flattering ways to present your qualifications and job history 2. Consider reasons why there is a good fit between you and the job. 3. Consider what issues you might be asked about and prepare best answers

Language Features	1. Use of polite language (*e.g. indirect questions, tone of voice, would you be able to tell me… Is there any chance I could….*) 2. Use of fillers to gain time (*e.g. Let me see..")* 3. Imperatives or requests (*please take a seat*) 4. Conditional (for hypothetical situations)	1. Research polite language such as indirect question starters 2. Avoid hesitation; consider fillers that are appropriate 3. Recognize imperatives and research a variety of ways of making requests (for ex. Rises in intonation) 4. Research and practice conditionals (used in problem solving questions)
Vocabulary	1. Education & training 2. Experience 3. Expectations (interviewer & interviewee) 4. Best and worst traits 5. Abilities and skills	1. University, on the job training, computers, clinical, practical 2. Certain machines, certain practices 3. Salary, hours, benefits 4. Work all the time 5. Task-oriented, tidy, communication skills, collaborative skills, leadership skills

Endnotes

[1] Castrillón, Jaramillo & Lopez, 2013; Clemente & Rubin, 2008; and Tutistar Jojoa del Rosario & Ballesteros Muñoz, 2013.

[2] Locke et al, 1981; and Locke and Latham, 1990 reviewed hundreds of studies of goal setting in industrial settings and found that goals affect performance by directing attention, mobilizing effort, increasing persistence, and motivating strategy development.

[3] Pintrich, 2003, includes self-efficacy and relevance (intrinsic value) among several major components of motivation.

[4] A student in my workshop in Oaxaca, Mexico, who taught English in a remote rural impoverished Mexican village, cited an example of a lesson that had no relevance to the learners. The task was to learn to order in a restaurant, something these learners would probably never have experienced and given their economic status, most would never experience in their lifetime,. On the other hand, there is no predicting relevance. Another student in a remote Columbian village, asked why he wanted to learn something said: "Because I want to be a pilot." (Thanks to Pedro Maldonado, Universidad de La Sabana, Bogota, Columbia for this example).

[5] For an extensive application of TC for a four year course in the German language, see the work of Professor Heidi Byrnes and her colleagues at Georgetown University.

[6] See Rubin, 2003, for suggestions about how to encourage journal writing that focuses on problem identification.

[7] I use the word 'text' here to refer to any sequence of language in any skill.

[8] For further discussion of the relationship between test taking strategies and performance, see Purpura (1997).

[9] Note that each task demand is in the imperative; it is something the creator of the analysis might find useful to do/prepare.