A Task-Based Instruction in EFL Classroom

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Abstract

Analisis wacana bahasa, baik lisan maupun tulisan, terbukti sangat membantu dan menginspirasi dalam pengajaran linguistik dan bahasa Inggris. Analisis ini idealnya dapat diterapkan pada berbagai instruksi pengajaran bahasa; salah satunya adalah instruksi berbasis tugas. Instruksi berbasis tugas diyakini sebagai pendekatan komunikatif untuk pengajaran bahasa, menggunakan keberhasilan penyelesaian "tugas" komunikatif sebagai prinsip pengorganisasian utamanya. Studi ini secara umum mengkaji instruksi berbasis tugas melalui analisis wacana, peran guru sekolah kejuruan kelas X, tujuan pengajaran, dan kemampuan siswa. Melalui observasi kelas, analisis wacana, dan wawancara guru, penelitian ini menunjukkan pentingnya pembicaraan guru dalam melibatkan siswa dalam belajar bahasa dan tugas, tujuan menyeluruh dari instruksi berbasis tugas. Beberapa implikasi untuk pengajaran dalam program pengajaran berbasis tugas dan pengembangan profesional guru muncul dari penelitian ini.

Kata Kunci: *Wacana Lisan, Pengajaran Berbasis Tugas, Literasi, Pengajaran Bahasa.*

Abstrak

Discourse analysis of language, spoken and written like, is proved to be very helpful and inspiring in linguistics and English language teaching. This analysis can be ideally applied to various language teaching instructions; one of is task-based instruction.Task-based instruction is believed as a communicative approach to language instruction, using the successful completion of communicative "tasks" as its primary organizing principle.This study generally examines task-based instruction through discourse analysis, the role of tenth grade of vocational school teachers, the goals of instruction, and the students' proficiency. Through classroom observations, discourse analysis, and teacher interviews, this study shows the significance of teacher talk in engaging students in learning both language and task, an overarching goal of task-based instruction. Several implications for instruction in task-based instruction programs and the professional development of teachers emerge from this study.

Kata Kunci: *Spoken Discourse,Task-Based Instruction, Literacy, Language Teaching.*

INTRODUCTION

Discourse analysis has now become trend in language teaching. Teachers can use discourse analysis not only as a research method for investigating their own teaching practices but also as a tool for studying interactions among language learners. Learners can benefit from using discourse analysis to explore what language is and how it is used to achieve communicative goals in different contexts. Thus discourse analysis can help to create a second language learning environment that more accurately reflects how language is used

and encourages learners toward their goal of proficiency in another language.

In the case of method used to teach language, task-based instruction has come to color language teaching pedagogy. With the coming of the communicative language teaching approach in the early 1980s and much emphasis onlearners' communicative abilities over the last two decades, the term task-based instructionor task-basedlanguage teaching cameinto prevalent use in the field of foreign language teaching in terms of developing process-oriented syllabi anddesigning communicative tasks to promote learners' actual language use. Within the varying interpretations oftask-based instruction related to classroom practice, recent studies exhibit three recurrent features: task-based instruction is compatible with alearner-centered educational philosophy (Ellis, 2003; Nunan, 2005; Richards and Rodgers, 2001) it consists ofparticular components, such as goal, procedure, specific outcome (Murphy, 2003; Nunan, 2004; Skehan, 1998) itadvocates content-oriented meaningful activities rather than linguistic forms (Beglar and Hunt, 2002; Carless, 2002; Littlewood, 2004).

Although a substantial amount of professional literature argues for the potential benefits of task-based instruction, limited research exists on how this type of instruction is actually appropriated, understood, and carried out by foreign language teachers. Foreign language teachers are often grounded in language teaching methodology and knowledge about language and cultures. However, when faced with a foreign language course that draws on the school's academic curriculum as the vehicle of language instruction, teachers often lack the knowledge and the pedagogical approaches to support exploring academic subject matter.Some teachers may focus on academic content without providing explicit language instruction, hindering students' abilities to fully develop the modes of communication.

This study seeks to inform the literature on discourse analysis andtask-based instruction, show how teacher in one school district integrate or isolate language and task, and increase understanding of how classroom talk and tasks shape a task-based foreign language course.

Related Literature

Discourse Analysis

Discourse analysis is "a particular way of talking about and understanding the world (or an aspect of the world)"(Jorgensen and Phillips, 2002). Stubbs (1983) defines discourse analysis as a field of research, which is concerned with (1) the use of language over the level of a sentence or utterance, (2) the interrelationship between language and society, and (3) the interactive properties of daily communication. Hoey (1991) also contributed his own understanding of discourse. He summarizes discourse as any stretch of spoken or written language, longer than one sentence, which is self-contained in a reasonable way. In brief, he concluded that there are spoken and written discourse.

In this study, I focused on spoken discourse because of the importance to learning of teacher–student talk. Drawing on the work of (Edward and Mercer, 1987),Gibbons(2005)argues that it is through talk that knowledge is constructed and "it is essentially in the discourse between teacher and students that education is done or fails to be done" (Edward and Mercer, 1987:101). Thus, spoken discourse analysis is a useful tool to examine how task-based instruction is carried out by language teachers in their moment-by-moment interactions with students. Hall (1995) discusses the significant role that teacher discourse plays in the classroom and argues that teachers construct frameworks of interactive practices that are significant to learning and provide models of competent participation, including the uses of appropriate discursive structures and other linguistic resources associated with the practices. Teachers also play an important role in providing learners with multiple opportunities to use these means in ways that help them to develop the

competencies needed for their own successful participation(38).

Task-Based Instruction

Task-based instruction is "a piece of classroomwork that involves learners in comprehending, manipulating, producingor interacting in the target language while their attention is focused onmobilizing their grammatical knowledge in order to express meaning,and in which the intention is to convey meaning rather than to manipulate form" (Nunan, 2004:4). Task-based instruction is different from other more traditional methods of language teaching. Lessons are constructed according to the language required to perform specific tasks rather than according to the aspects of language such as structure and vocabulary. Brown (2000:50) views task-based instruction as "a set of communicative task that are directly linked to the curricular goals they serve, the purposes of which extend beyond practice of language for its own sake". While Richards and Rodgers (2001:223) see this instruction as "an approach based on the use of tasks as the core unit of planning and instruction in language teaching".

Krahnke (1987)states the theory of task-based instruction. He asserts "the ability to use a language is gained through exposure to and participation in using it, that experience, not training, is necessary"(59). Krahnke goes on to explain that task-based instruction develops "communicative competence, including linguistic, sociolinguistic, discourse and strategic competence"(59). Processing the information used during specific tasks through understandable input provides students with linguistic and sociolinguistic competence. Discourse competence is gained by the different types of language students use to accomplish the tasks. Finally, "strategic competence, or the ability to use communicative strategies, is acquired through the need for understanding during the interaction required to accomplish the tasks"(59). When planning a task-based unit, teachers can do it alone, work with other teachers, or involve the students in the process. Students can help determine the content by sharing their needs. For example, in an adult education situation, teachers can ask students what kinds of transactions they most want to learn to do in the target language. These transactions may be anything from learning how to make a doctor"s appointment to filling out a job application. Ramirez (1995) recommends four major points to consider during the planning stage:

1. The purpose of the task (e.g., find the main idea in a story or practice a certain grammatical feature).

2. The content of the task (e.g., skills needed to make a phone call or go shopping).

3. How the task is accomplished (e.g., recall and/or transfer of previously learned information or skills).

4. Location where the task is performed (in class, outside class, or at home for homework

Research Question

In this study, I examined the role of the teachers' discursive practices on task-based instruction, the goals of instruction,and the students' linguistic development. Ianalyzed discourse data from two tenth gradetask-based Indonesian classrooms in the same school taught by two different instructors who used the same curriculum. The insights gained from this analysis clear up how task-based instruction is realized in two classrooms and the relationship between teachers' talk, classroom tasks, and students' language development. The overarching research questionof this study was: How is task-basedinstruction carried out discursively in two tenth grade Indonesian classes?

METODE

This study is qualitative in nature andit seeks to document, analyze, and interpretnaturally occurring data in the task-basedinstruction classroom setting. For thisreason, I made no attempt at manipulatingvariables or predicting performance.Research in the qualitative paradigm seeksto understand a phenomenonas it emerges dynamically andsocially in the experiences of the participants(Marshall and Rossman, 1999). I chose aqualitative approach based on my own initialobservations of these classes and the differencesthat I perceived in the construction oftalk in these classrooms. Qualitative researchallowed me to explore and analyze closely thediscursive features of these classes and theeffects of these different features on classroomparticipation and student outcomes.Given the qualitative nature of thestudy, the findings may not directly generalizeto all teachers in task-based classrooms.However, this study provides a closeanalysis of how task-based instructionis carried out in one school district in particular,and makes clear the approach oftask-based instruction in general.

Setting, Source of Data, andTechnique of Data Collection and Data Analysis

This study was conducted in one of suburbanvocational schools (SMK) in Jombang, East Java, Indonesia.In this school, students of tenth grade study English twice a week with 90 minutes per meeting. For this study, data were collected from two tenth grade classes taught by two English teachers, Samy and Devi (pseudonyms). To collect data on the discourse of task-based instruction, informal observations and interview were conducted. I worked inductively from the data and selected the discursive features that were recurrent and emerged from the instructional tasks each teacher used. The features of the teachers' talk reveal how this teacher explored and discussed academic task discursively with their students. Additionally,I selected discursive features that areimportant when analyzing the developmentof interactional and linguistic competence in discursive contexts (Hall, 1993; Johnson, 2001; Young, 1999).

Thus, inthe data, I attempted to isolate discourse features that enabled discussions about academic task while simultaneously supporting the development of foreign language proficiency, an overarching goal of alltask-based instruction programs.The discourse features for this studyare (1) language-related talk and task-relatedtalk, (2) conversation features ofinterpersonal communication, (3) the use of first language for translation, and (4) teacher feedback and error correction. I believe these four features capture how talk shapes discussion of academic task while simultaneously promoting language development

Findings

Language-Related Talk and Task-Related Talk

To examine the integration of language and task, I analyzed the talk deriving from each classroom task. In the analysis, I determined if the discourse of the task was focused on enabling the students to discuss the academic task, to reflect on target language forms, or both. The analysis of the tasks in these classrooms reveals that both classes were predominately focused on language learning tasks that promoted discussions of academic concepts, in this case the concept ofelectronic mail (e-mail).The research result shows that in Devi's classes, 88%of the tasks were related to the academictask, compared to 60% of the tasks inSamy's classes. This analysis indicates thatDevi used instructional tasks focused on discussing academic task more thanSamy.

In her classroom, Devi's questions enabled students to discuss the topic by requiring small practice, evaluation and justification of e-mail. In contrast, Samy's questions in his classroom required students to display knowledge of the comparative forms (degree of comparison) and their English meanings in the context

of vocabulary related to e-mail. Devi initiated the interaction by asking the students to compare mail and e-mail by displaying the picture of both written means of communication through LCD-Projector, and provide a justification for their opinions. By asking the question in this manner, she encouraged students to go beyond grammatical form and lexical meaning.

In summary, these interactions raise two important issues. First, despite the task based nature of this program, the teachers' discursive interactions with students appear to have the goal of mastery of language for rather than discussions of academic task. Second, although the teachers share the same curricular goals, the difference in the percentage of task related indicates that these two teachers carry out the practice of task-based instruction in two distinctly different ways. The contrast in discourse practices suggests that the teaching of task-based instruction might yield different instructional outcomes depending on how teachers understand and implement the goals of a task-based curriculum. Thus, classroom discourse becomes an important feature of task-based instruction that deserves systematic analysis to understand further this increasingly popular model of instruction dealing to the abillity of teacher in delivering knowledge.

Conversational Features of Interpersonal Communication

I observed two classes prior to video taping and noticed differences in the ways that each teacher interacted with the students during their opening conversations. Since these opening conversations reflected the interactional oral practices that I observed in both classes through out entire lessons, they served as a proxy for the teachers' customary interactional style with their students. Conversational features include coherent topical themes for discussion, expressive reactions to interlocut or contributions, and feedback that advances the topic of conversation. Interactions constructed in pragmatically appropriate ways are considered useful discursive environments for the development of interactional competence(Hall, 1995). In conclusion, there are differences between the two teachers. The differences in the opening conversations of these two teachers reflect an orientation to discourse in the teachers' lessons, including the discourse of task-based instruction. In his classroom, the focus of Samy's lesson is on the use of comparative phrases in the context of lexical items dealing with e-mail. This approach contrasts with Devi's discussion of e-mail in which these comparative expressions played a role in the expression of student opinion. Devialso encouraged students to elaborate on academic task using discursive features such as open-ended questions and topic development, a feature that was also observed in her opening conversations, and the practice dealing with the task the students should do. However, one interesting finding is that the two teachers are consistent in their orientation to classroom talk across time and a variety of instructional activities (while students doing their task).

The Use of Students' First Language for Translation

The extensive use of translation into Englishsignals a focus on decontextualized vocabularyrecognition rather than contextualizedacademic content knowledge. The continualuse of oral translation may undermine students'ability to make meaning in contextby emphasizing to students that languageis composed of discrete vocabulary andultimately by preventing the coconstructionof language. To determine the extent anduse of English for translation, I coded allinstances of the use of Bagaimana mengucapkan X dalam bahasa Inggris?(How do you say X in English?) and Apa maksudnya X? (What does X mean?).Over four class periods (meetings), 30% of Devi'sutterances involved English translation;the remainder of her instructional talk wascarried out in Indonesia. Samy used English translations 50% of the total turns of talkover four class periods, a much higher percentage and consistent with his focus onthe language content rather than on thetask itself. I arrived at this percentage by dividing the total number of turns ineach class by the turns that

were coded as English translations.Samy used translationto review vocabulary in the e-mail unit inthe context of a game.The translation was used toelicit the English meanings of the categoriesin the game. The game itself also involved translation. While thetask drew on vocabulary from the e-mail unit, translation focused studentattention on word recognition rather thangiving students the opportunity to statewhy certain e-mail may be betterfor the environment than others.

Error Correction and the Construction of Form

To examine the integration of language and task, I analyzed implicit and explicit error correction and the construction of form. Explicit error correction occurs when the teacher provides the correct form; implicit error correction occurs when the teacher guides the student toward the correct form, for example by prompting for self-repair. Prompting involves the teacher's use of rising intonation, questions, and repetitions to help students identify their errors, reflect upon them, and consequently correct them. Correct forms also may arise though the construction process in which teacher and students jointly contribute to building forms and meanings during interaction (Donato, 1994; Foster, 1998; Jacoby and Ochs, 1995; Ohta, 2001). The construction of form involves collaborative talk between the teacher and the students (or the students with each other)to reflect on, hypothesize about, and jointly construct appropriate grammatical forms in local discursive contexts. In this research, the result shows the number of explicit and implicit error corrections and the construction of form in both Devi's and Samy's classrooms. The amount of teacher talk dealing with error-construction in Samy's classroom over four class periods was almost half the amount of Devi's classrooms. In addition, Samy's classroom discourse has fewer instances of error correction and these corrections were largely explicit.

Interviews with the Two Teachers

As part of the study, I interviewed the two instructors about their beliefs and experiences with task-based instruction. The purpose of the interview was to examine whether my analysis could be enriched by the teachers' comments about their experiences with task-based instruction. Both teachers seemed concerned with the lack of materials for this type of instruction. Both Samy and Devi agreed that professional development workshops would be helpful to assist teachers with task-based instruction.

Both teachers acknowledged the challenges of integrating language and tasking teaching and assessing task-based instruction. However, clear differences in each teacher's attitude toward the use of task-based instruction emerged in the interview. Although Samy stated that he enjoys task-based instruction, he indicated, "It's difficult to grade language based on the task. It's difficult to do both; it seems like I'm doing either one or the other, Indonesian or techology. It's hard to fit in grammar . . . Verbs are difficult." He further expressed the need for explicit grammar instruction as he observed that his students lack knowledge of grammatical structures. In addition, Samy stated, "It's hard also since a lot of the students don't know the material in English so I have to teach them a few things (in English)." Although Devi also struggled with "differentiating between language and task and how to grade it," she had a more positive response toward task-based instruction than Samy. Devi stated:

> I love teaching language through task. This makes it more real and not just a small isolated piece of their day. I'd rather have a kid who speaks enthusiastically and with mistakes about something in Indonesia than a kid who knows how to conjugate verbs perfectly. What is that good for? I mean, when someone learns the native language as a child, that child speaks with mistakes. Why would we then try to teach a second language in such an unnatural way (with) verb conjugation and grammar sheets?

The differences in the way that theseteachers envision task-based instructionwere reflected in their classroom discursivepractices, classroom tasks, and students'performance on the literacy assessments (writing).While both seem to enjoy task-basedinstruction and face challenges in integratinglanguage and task, Samy feelsthe need for explicit grammar instructionwhile Devi is satisfied with teachinglanguage in the context of the academictask. Despite Samy's extensive focus onlanguage in the classroom, we observedno explicit grammar instruction. His classroomdiscourse and tasks reflected a focuson formulaic utterances with limited studentlanguage production and few interactionsabout language form. It is notsurprising that in a class where the focusis on memorized chunks of language, thereis little opportunity for students to makegrammatical errors and for the teacher andstudents to reflect on these inaccuracies. Asexpressed in the interview, Samy finds itchallenging to focus on both language andtask. This is also reflected in the literacyassessments, with Samy's students performinglower than Devi's in all areas, includingaccuracy. Devi's interview confirms thefindings of the classroom discourse analysisand the literacy assessments. As stated inthe interview, Devi enjoys teaching task-based instruction because it providesa real-world context for teaching language.The discourse analysis of her teachingshows that she is, indeed, able to integratelanguage and task.

Discussion and Implications

Several implications for instruction in task-based instruction programs and theprofessional development of teachers emergefrom this research. These instructional implicationsinvolve two complementary goals:the continual development of language proficiencyand student achievement in meetingacademic content objectives. The followingimplications derive from the research andaddress both these concerns.To promote student proficiency withinthe context of task-based instruction,teachers in these types of programs needto be aware of the language of instructionwhen teaching academic task. Oneway to promote continual attention to thedevelopment of language competence is toinclude explicit language objectives in thecurriculum.

These language objectives derivefrom the academic subject matter and connectlexically and functionally to the taskbeing addressed. Teachers need to learn how to monitortheir oral interactive practices in and acrosstheir lessons, and to develop the ability tolead conversations with their students that reflect a cohesive academic topic and conversational features of interpersonal communication.The teacher's use of feedbackmoves rather than evaluative statements inconversations provides students with occasionsto elaborate, create personal meaningsusing the foreign language, and develop academic concepts discursively with the teacher and each other. To support student language development, teachers also must limit their use of English and use translation only for specific purposes, for example, to managethe class, to ensure classroom safety, and togive directions for tasks that may be too difficultin the target language.To this end, teachers can monitor their discursive practices by providing feedback toone another through peer classroom observations(Hall, 2001). Teachers also will benefit from observations by a language coordinator who can provide constructive feedback on their teacher talk and analyze with teachers how this talk is consequential to the developmentof language ability and content knowledge.

The use of videotape analysis of teaching, a familiarization with the role of classroom discourse in supporting student learning,and teacher lesson study groups are addition always to raise teachers' awareness of the importance of classroom talk. The sheltered instruction observation protocol used to observe and assess teachers who integrate language and task instruction in English as aforeign language classes can serve as a modelto develop an observational tool for teachers and program coordinators in task-based instruction programs.Further, these observations and conversations about classroom discourse in a task-based instruction program will point outdirectly to teachers how their talk promotesor inhibits students' attainment of language and task objectives. One way to address the level of preparationof teachers is to develop ongoing

and active collaborations between language teachers and task-area teachers.Through this collaboration, teachers can learn more from each other and developsimilar tasks driven by the same institutional and curricular goals. Working together in this way is essential if studentsat the same grade level, taught by different teachers, are to achieve the samegoals. Although Samy and Devi indicated that extensive collaboration between them and grade-level teachers took place mainly through observations, such collaboration needs to be more systematic to implement similar classroom practices that support the curriculum.

Additionally, interactions with content teachers provide opportunities forforeign language teachers to learn about approaches and methods of subject-area teaching that were not a part of their foreign language certification programs.Ongoing professional development workshops with a focus on task-based instructionare highly recommended. Task-based instruction is still a rather recent approach in the history of teaching foreign language and teachers might have little exposure toits techniques during their certification programs.Thus, a more in-depth introduction totask-based instruction would be beneficialto foreign language teachers. As Devi reported,these workshops could provide "solidexamples that teachers could take with themso that they see what is expected and desiredat the end." In such professional-developmentworkshops, teachers also would benefitfrom examples of appropriate content-basedinstruction materials. Having such materialsenhances the practices of teachers in task-basedinstruction programs, allowing them todevote more attention to instructional deliveryrather than curriculum and material design.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study clearly pointout the significance of teacher talk foraspects of student learning beyond oralproficiency. Devi's discourse balanced academictask and a focus on language,including implicit error correction, providedopportunities for theconstruction ofform, and revealed conversational featuresof interpersonal communication. In contrast,Samy's discourse focused primarilyon manipulative practice of language form,explicit error correction by the teacher,and nontopically related exchanges withhis students. Because Devi's students performedhigher in the literacy assessments,it is possible that there is a link betweenfeatures of classroom discourse and studentperformance when doing academictask. Thus, teachers in task-basedinstruction must consider how their languagemight influence various aspects ofstudents' language proficiency beyond spokeninterpersonal communication.While there has beenmuch discussion of the benefits of task-basedinstruction, little is known about howthis type of instruction is actually carried outdiscursively in the foreign language classroom.In this study, detailed classroom discourseanalysis served as a tool to examine howtask-based instruction was used to achievecurricular goals and the integration of languageand content in two tenth grade classes.The findings show that a teacher's discursivepractice can shape the language and contentknowledge gained by students as reflected inthe students' oral and written discourse. Myfindings indicate that an effective task-basedinstruction class includes attention toboth task and language through conversationsthat encourage student language use anddevelopment, as well as metalinguistic awarenessby collaboratively negotiating form andby the teacher's feedback.As previously mentioned, given thequalitative nature of the study, the findingsof this study relate to one task-basedinstruction program in particular. However,by analyzing how task-based instructionis implemented through a contrastivediscourse analysis of two teachers in thesame program, we have uncovered importantdiscursive features that contribute tounderstanding the construct of this typeof instruction, the challenges that teachersface, and the importance of classroom talkas fundamental to language developmentin this instructional framework. To date,despite the rich theoretical and practicalliterature base on task-based instruction,it seems that minimal research attention has been given tohow teachers actually weave together foreignlanguage and academic task instruction.Further research is needed to describe effectiveforeign

language task-based instructionclasses from a discourse perspective,addressing the discursive integration of bothlanguage and task. It is my hope that thisstudy has initiated such a research agenda.

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