Integrating Task-Based Learning and Pragmatics: some practical ideas

Integrando o Ensino Baseado em Tarefas e Pragmática: algumas ideias práticas

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Abstract: Task-based Language Teaching (TBLT), or Ensino de Línguas Baseado em Tarefas, in Portuguese, requires pragmatic skills from its students because it privileges authentic communicative interactions. However, very little has been written about how to combine TBLT with pragmatics in teaching contexts. This article offers two lesson plans that consider both TBLT and a specific pragmatic aspect, speech acts, with the purpose of providing ideas to be adapted to different contexts. The target audience contemplated in the article was native Portuguese speaking first graders, from a bilingual public school, that adopts Context and Integrated Language Learning (CLIL). The subject is Science, and the class is taught in English. Both lessons are an adapted version of an asynchronous online lesson planned and taught by me in September 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak.

Keywords: task-based language teaching, pragmatics, lesson plan, CLIL

Resumo: O Task-based Language Teaching (TBLT), ou Ensino de Línguas Baseado em Tarefas, em português, exige de seu aluno desenvoltura pragmática, porque privilegia interações comunicativas autênticas. Entretanto, muito pouco foi escrito sobre como combinar TBLT com pragmática em contextos de ensino. Este artigo oferece dois planos de aula que consideram tanto o TBLT quanto um aspecto pragmático específico, os atos de fala, com o objetivo de proporcionar ideias práticas para serem adaptadas a diferentes contextos. A situação contemplada no artigo considera como público-alvo alunos de primeiro ano do Ensino Fundamental falantes nativos de português de uma escola pública bilíngue, que adota o Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL). A disciplina é Ciências, e a aula é ministrada em inglês. As duas aulas são baseadas em uma versão adaptada de uma aula online assíncrona planejada e ministrada por mim em setembro de 2020, durante o surto de pandemia COVID-19.

Palavras-chave: ensino de línguas baseado em tarefas, pragmática, plano de aula, CLIL

Until the late 1970s, foreign language teaching was primarily based on a set of strict practices intended to develop the students' speaking skill by concentrating efforts on their linguistic competence. This is true for most of the major language teaching methods such as the Direct Method and the Audiolingual Method. Nevertheless, as Freeman (2013) points out, some educators noticed that the grammatical accuracy displayed in the classroom was not always reproduced in real-life communication: something was missing. This situation led to discontent and opened up an opportunity for the emergence of a new approach to language teaching that considered not only structure but mainly "knowing when and how to

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say what to whom" (Freeman, 2013). This is a very brief account of how Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) emerged.

Representing the development of CLT´s strong version, a modality that avoids the use of artificial grammar-driven exercises, Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) is an approach "which bases work around the preparation for, doing of, and reflective analysis of tasks that reflect real-life needs and skills" (Scrivener, 2011, p. 32). This means that TBLT does not focus on teaching about the language, but it is concerned about preparing students to communicate in authentic situations, which entail turn-taking in conversations, conversational implicatures, and speech acts. Those and other many features belong to the realm of pragmatics.

However, specialized literature has not been paying much attention to research and practice comprising both TBLT and pragmatics simultaneously (Taguchi & Kim, 2018; Kim et al., 2018). Conversely, this paper aims to present the planning of two classes that consider both TBLT and a specific pragmatic aspect, namely, speech acts. The second class stands as a continuation of the first, and together they represent a unit. They were designed for the science class at a bilingual public school that adopts Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL). The topics dealt with are 'materials' and 'science experiment presentation', and the students are first graders from disadvantaged families. The two classes are based on an adapted version of an asynchronous online class planned and rendered by me in September 2020, during the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak[2].

The activities presented here are heavily based on the understanding of TBLT and 'task' offered by Ellis (2009). The writings of Taguchi and Kim (2018), and Kim, Lee, and Kim (2018) were important to understand the relationship between pragmatics and TBLT. The Vygotskyan sociocultural perspective is adopted for the classes, and consulting of the book *Vygotsky:*

a interação no ensino/aprendizagem de línguas (Figueiredo, 2013) was informative in this regard.

This article is divided into four more sections, namely: Tasks, Pragmatics, Integrating Task-Based Learning and Pragmatics: examples of activities, and Conclusion, respectively. The first one deals with the concept of 'task', its types, and how to plan and execute them according to a sociocultural perspective. In 'pragmatics', a definition is offered for the term as well as for 'speech acts'. A part of the section is also a rational for integrating pragmatics in TBLT practice. The next section contains the planning which was briefly depicted above with the reference class details. Finally, I present some final remarks on the planning.

Tasks

As the name implies, TBLT relies on the notion of 'task'. In this regard, Richards and Rodgers (2016, p. 174) state that TBLT "refers to the use of tasks as the core unit of planning and instruction in language teaching". However, what exactly is a task? This question has been answered by many authors (c.f. Bygate, Skehan, Swain, 2001; Ellis, 2009; Ellis, 2013) but some of those responses are not consistent enough to distinguish tasks from other types of classroom activities (c.f. Ellis, 2009; Ellis, 2013). This paper has adopted Ellis's (2009, 2013) understanding of 'task' since it seems to make such differentiation clear. It consists of a four-criteria concept to distinguish tasks from grammar-driven 'exercises'. The four criteria are (Ellis, 2009, p. 223):

1. The primary focus should be on 'meaning' (that learners should be mainly concerned with processing the semantic and pragmatic meaning of utterances).

2. There should be some kind of 'gap' (i.e. a need to convey information, to express an opinion or to infer meaning).

3. Learners should largely have to rely on their

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[2] The school in which the referred class was taught adopted the synchronous and asynchronous online class system because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Up to the moment this article was finished, the mentioned method was still being employed since the pandemic had not been over.

own resources (linguistic and non-linguistic) in order to complete the activity.

4. There is a clearly defined outcome other than the use of language (i.e. the language serves as the means for achieving the outcome, not as an end in its own right).

'Tasks' are not all the same. In this text, three opposing pairs are used to classify them: real-life tasks vs. pedagogic tasks; unfocused vs. focused; and input-providing vs. output-providing. When it comes to language teaching and learning, Ellis (2009, 2013) points out that there are two types of authenticity, i.e., situational authenticity and interactional authenticity. The latter refers to simulating real-life events in a classroom, like getting a taxi or buying a book, even though this reproduction makes the situation inevitably less authentic. On the other hand, the former has to do with activities designed only with educational purposes in mind and little real-life resemblance, such as carrying out a role-play where leaners take on the roles of reporters and celebrities, if they are neither. According to Ellis (2009, 2013), pedagogic tasks have their place in TBLT practice provided they display the qualities existing in an authentic conversation, such as negotiation of meaning, scaffolding, and inferencing, to mention some.

Tasks can be 'unfocused' or 'focused'. Ellis (2009, p. 223) explains that "unfocused tasks are tasks designed to provide learners with opportunities for using language in general communicatively. Focused tasks are tasks designed to provide opportunities for communicating using some specific linguistic feature (typically a grammatical structure)". He also clarifies that the focused task is different from a regular grammar exercise in that the structure to be used in the unfocused task is not explicit to the student. As a result, "learners are expected to orient differently to a focused task and a situational grammar exercise" (Ellis, 2009, p. 224).

Tasks can also be 'input-providing' or 'output-prompting'. Input-providing means that the students are assigned with listening or reading tasks, whereas output-prompting provide students with speaking and writing tasks. There is also the possibility of integrating different skills in the same task. Detractors of TBLT, argues Ellis (2009, 2013), claim that the TBLT is not suitable for beginners since they would find it difficult to engage in collaborative work involving whole-class, pairs, or groups. Nonetheless, input-providing tasks can offer the opportunity for beginning learners to participate in more individual tasks until the point they are able to move to output-prompting tasks.

TBLT advocates usually organizing a task into three phases, dividing it into actions to be carried out before, during, and after the task. However, there is no unanimity as regards to what to do and how to proceed in each phase, if all of them are necessary, and their names. For Willis (2007), e.g., the third phase is always dedicated to focusing on the structural aspects students found problematic while performing the task, such as grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation difficulties. Ellis (2009) thinks differently and recommends the teaching of structural aspects whenever it is necessary, regardless the stage in which the need arises. He also claims that the task phase is the only indispensable step. The planning presented in this paper considers three steps for the lesson, which are named pre-task, task, and post-task, and it does not contemplate grammar *per se*, but the teaching of speech acts, which can occur when the teacher deems necessary, although there are some specific moments dedicated to presenting them more formally.

What to do in each phase? The possibilities are many and it depends on factors like teachers' preferences, the type of task to be applied, and the type of students. Nunan (2003) presents some suggestions on how to answer this question. He states that, among other possibilities, the pre-task phase might have the function of creating student interest, helping them build schema concerning the topic, and presenting language items such as keywords and grammar that might be useful in the task. For the task itself, he observes that this usually comprises several student-centered steps and subtasks, and the teacher's job is to monitor

and give the necessary support for successfully carrying out the task. Nunan (2003) does not call the last phase post-task as adopted in this paper but mentions that at this point students might report their experience, the teacher can comment on the student's performance, or tackle some errors s/he might have noticed.

Finally, it is relevant to state that the activities proposed in section 4 of this paper are based on the Vygotskyan sociocultural theory. It means that the whole teaching and learning practice, including the planning, presupposes that "interaction favors learning and human cognitive development" (Figueiredo, 2019, my translation from Portuguese). This interaction is mediated by sociocultural symbols, mainly language, and artifacts, which are man-made instruments, such as books and smartphones, that facilitate learning and development of high-order psychological functions. This focus on interaction seems to favor genuine communication and, consequently, involve pragmatic aspects. In short, sociocultural theory favors the type of leaning intended in TBLT.

Having discussed the perspective adopted here for tasks, the next section deals with some basic aspects of Pragmatics that are relevant to this article, especially speech acts.

Pragmatics

Linguistics research is divided into two main poles, depending on the researcher's perspective on language and the subsequent understanding of the relationship between language and its internal and external elements (Wilson, 2018, my translation from Portuguese). In the first pole, attention is drawn to the language structure, and not much attention is paid to the speech context. That is the case, e.g., of Saussure's conception of language, which he believes is a social system existing only in the brains of those who speak it. Chomsky's understanding of language is also part of this group[3]. For him, language is the result

of a child's exposure to one or more languages, causing the activation of certain parameters belonging to a brain structure proper to humans, the Universal Grammar (UG). Therefore, language is a virtual grammar system for both Saussure and Chomsky.

In the second pole, the focus is mainly on social-interactionist and functionalist aspects, and it considers "language use conditions in real communication situations, that is, the moment in which the so-called communicative or pragmatic competence is highlighted, considering now the relations between form and function, between grammatical and social factor" (Wilson, 2018, p. 88, my translation from Portuguese). The same author (2008) goes on and states that sociolinguistics, interactional sociolinguistics, functionalism, cognitive linguistics, discourse analysis, and pragmatics are some of the linguistic schools aligned with the perspective dealt with in this paragraph. This paper is especially interested in Pragmatics. Nonetheless, what does Pragmatics mean exactly?

Some practical examples may help answer this question. From a structuralist viewpoint, *What time is it?* is simply a question. However, uttered by the host to a visitor, it might mean something else, like *It's high time you go. It's late, and I want to sleep*. Besides that, depending on contextual elements, e.g., the age of the speaker, their relationship, the setting, the example sentence might assume different formats, such as *Excuse me, could you tell me what time it is, please?, or Do you have the time?, among other possibilities. Therefore, it is possible to conclude that u*nderstanding the meaning of written or spoken sentences involves much more than lexis and grammar knowledge, and that *meaning and form depend on social-cultural and situational aspects in which the language is immersed.*

The analysis that extrapolates the bounders of language bits and how they are organized to form sentences and considers how language

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[3] Later on, in addition to focusing on the internal structural patterns of the language, Chomsky also included pragmatic aspects in his theory. Nonetheless, according to Papi (1996, p. 89, apud Wilson, 2018, p. 88, my translation from Portuguese), the pragmatic aspect of his theory, i.e., the pragmatic competence, "is situated at the same layer of the hypothetical mental structures regardless the use of these structures in communicative or interactive concrete circumstances".

is actually used by real speakers in genuine verbal interactions is the concern of pragmatics. Accordingly, Huang (2007, p. 2) states that "Pragmatics is the systematic study of meaning by virtue of, or dependent on, the use of language. The central topics of inquiry of pragmatics include implicature, presupposition, speech acts, and deixis". This paper focuses on speech acts.

The purpose of producing sentences is not a mere matter of describing true or false states, but it includes performing actions in the world. Therefore, producing a sentence is a speech act, which is composed of three simultaneous acts, namely, locutory, illocutory, and perlocutory, according to Austin's theory (c.f. Huang, 2007; O'Keeffe, Clancy, Adolphs, 2011). The locutory act is subdivided into phonic, phatic, and rhetic acts, corresponding "broadly to the three distinct levels and modes of explanation in linguistic theory, namely, phonetics/phonology, morphology/syntax, and semantics/pragmatics". The illocutory act is the purpose speakers have in mind when producing a sentence, like ordering, advising, and negating. This concept is so relevant to the theory that "the term 'speech act' in its narrow sense is often taken to specifically refer to illocutionary acts" (Huang, 2007, p. 124)[4]. Finally, the perlocutory act represents the intentional or incidental effects caused by a speech act to its addressee.

Therefore, the speech act theory encompasses not only formal aspects of the language but also considers the speaker's intentions and the addressee's reactions, offering a much more realistic perspective on language and communication than the structuralist viewpoint does. Consequently, given that both the speech act theory and TBLT are concerned about genuine verbal interactions, it seems to be a coherent decision to unite them into a single teaching-learning practice. By doing so, in practical terms, the TBLT language teacher will no longer focus on pieces of grammar and vocabulary in preparing and delivering their lessons. By concentrating

on speech acts, the goals change from, e.g., teaching 'may', 'might', 'must', and 'could' to 'speculating about the past', which entails a myriad of utterances, speaker's intentions, and addressees' reactions.

How to put together TBLT and Pragmatics in a coherent teaching plan for kids whose school utilizes both their native language and a foreign one? There are certainly many answers to this question, and the following section presents one of those possibilities.

Integrating Task-Based Learning and Pragmatics: examples of activities

The planning presented in this section consists of two Science lessons, where the second is the continuation of the first. They deal with the same topics, 'materials' and 'presenting a science experiment', and they are designed to place the science presentation by the students in the second class, after leaners are furnished with the necessary linguistic material in the first class, with emphasis on speech acts. Therefore, the first class falls into the input-providing category described by Ellis (2009, 2013), which he claims to be a suitable model especially for beginners.

It is important to point out that each class has two goals, one linguistic, and the other subject-related to meet the needs of CLIL[5] rationale. The classes are thought to be delivered in an interactive way following the Vygotskyan sociocultural tenets, and the reference class, the one which inspired this article, is constantly referred to along the planning of the first class. The second class planning does not have a correspondent model in real-life, but it represents a logical sequence to the first class, which would be probably executed, if classes were presential. General comments and suggestions are also part of the planning.

The class that inspired this article was asynchronous, about 15 minutes long, for a group

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[4] In communicative language teaching contexts, as Richards (2015) states, speech acts are normally referred to as functions. Nevertheless, this assertion seems to fall into the narrowed sense mentioned in Huang´s (2007) quotation above, and the illocutionary act looks like as if it is the only existing one.

[5] More on a practical view of CLIL, cf. MEHISTO, MARSH, FRIGOS, 2008.

of 25 first graders from underprivileged families. The school is in a disadvantaged neighborhood in São Luis, the capital of the State of Maranhão, Northeast Brazil. Portuguese and English languages each have about 50% of the total school's workload, and Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) is adopted. The subjects taught in English are English, Science, Arts, and Math, and the ones taught in Portuguese are Portuguese, Religion, Physical Education, Math, and Science. Although Math and Science are taught in both languages, teachers and contents do not coincide, but work cooperatively.

Task 1 – Science Presentation, Part I.

1. Subject goals
- Review the names and properties of some materials.
- Linguistically prepare students to present science experiments.

2. Speech acts
- Speech act(s): Giving instructions.
- Possible realizations: imperatives, text organizers (first, second, then, finally; step one, two, three; one, two, three).

3. Before the lesson
- Collect the necessary materials for the experiments and prepare the homework. In my practice, I needed a transparent glass, two sheets of paper, a coin, and water. As homework, I assigned a column-matching exercise, described in the post-task phase below.

4. Lesson procedures

Pre-task
- Spark students' interest. In my experience, I told students they would learn how to do three amazing science experiments, so amazing that they looked like magic. In the first one, I placed a sheet of paper on top of a glass full of water. Then I turned the glass upside down, and the sheet of paper

prevented the water from dropping. The second and third experiments are originally magic tricks, but they meet the goals of the class. In the second one, I folded a sheet of paper the size of a bill into half, opened it a little in order to make it shape like a 'v', and I laid a coin (I used a R$ 0,50 because it is thicker than the others) on the vertex of the 'v'. I opened the sheet of paper little by little until it formed a 180° angle, but the coin remained balanced on the edge of the sheet of paper for some seconds. In the last trick, I put a coin on the table, placed a transparent glass on it (but the coin was still visible), and I filled the glass with water, making the coin 'disappear'. I did not provide detailed explanations for the experiments' unexpected outcomes. They would probably be way too difficult for the students to understand. Besides, such scientific explanations were not part of the leaning goals.
- Present the materials to be used, one by one, eliciting their names and properties (*What material is this? Is it transparent? Is it hard?*). Let the students repeat them and interact with the materials so that they can feel their texture, shape, weight. Since my experience was virtual, I tried to focus the students' attention on such aspects by asking questions like *What do you think it feels?*, *What shape is it?*, *Is it heavy or light?*.
- Ask the student to try and find objects in the classroom made with the same materials. Teaching synchronous online classes, I normally ask students to pick up objects with their hands and show them through the camera. The model class was asynchronous, and I did not have the chance to do so.

Task
- Interactively perform the scientific experiments, sparking students' curiosity and encouraging their active participation (*What do you think is going to happen next?*

Do you believe it's going to work?). Make sure to stress the language functions to help them with their upcoming homework. In my experience, after each experiment, I recapped the procedures by asking questions like 'what do we do first?', 'what's step one?'.

Post-task

- Ask students which experiment they liked best and elicit their general impressions. Assign a follow-up activity for them to practice on their own, providing the necessary instructions. In my original rendering of the class, I included the homework guidelines at the end of the video. Regarding homework preparation, I took advantage of the fact that the class was recorded, and I used my own images performing the experiments and prepared an activity about text organizer (step 1, step, 2, step 3; first, second, third; first, then, finally) composed of three questions, one for each experiment (the exercise is available in the appendix). It is important to bear in mind that the students are learning how to read and write and that I explained in the video-class the procedures to answer the activity.

To my surprise, besides the assigned homework, three independent students on their own initiative, each with the help of their families, decided to prepare videos reproducing the experiments carried out in class and sent them to me. The videos were performed with zest, and the students employed their available linguistic resources, including the use of textual organizers in their speech. This situation made me think that I could have assigned a video recording as homework along with the worksheet.

Task 2 – Science Presentation, Part II.

As explained before, this second task represents a hypothetical continuation of the first lesson. It has never happened before. However, it is at this second moment that students will perform their presentation of a scientific experiment, assuring that the non-linguistic goal will be accomplished, one of the TBLT pre-requisites (Ellis, 2009, 2013).

To make this class possible, the teacher should prepare videos with different experiments and assign them as homework along with a worksheet with some sort of exercise dealing with the functions used in presenting the experiment. Without students knowing, the videos are sent in order to form groups: group 1 watches video A, group 2 watches video B and so on.

1. Subject goals

- Review the names and properties of some materials.
- Present science experiments in groups in a whole-class fashion.

2. Speech acts

- Speech act(s): Giving instructions.
- Possible realizations: imperatives, text organizer (first, then, finally; step one, two, three; one, two, three).

3. Before the lesson

- Collect the necessary materials for the experiments.

Lesson procedures

Pre-task

- Ask the students if they watched the videos and tell them they will reproduce the experiments in class (*Can you do the experiment yourselves here in class?*). Split up the class into groups according to plan.
- Once groups are all set, ask each one of them if they know exactly the materials they need and assist them in the collection. This collection can take place in the form of a game if the teacher prefers.
- Now, ask them to recall the experiment they are supposed to present and the steps it entails. Make each group perform for its members as a way to get prepared for a

whole-class presentation. Help students along the way as necessary, making sure that they remember the names of the materials and some of their properties, and that the presentation follows a logical sequence.

Task

- A whole-class presentation takes place. Students from other classes might be invited to watch the performances, which can be filmed to be sent home for family appreciation.

Post-task

- After praising the students for the performances, the teacher could review materials and their properties, or the steps of the experiments in a whole-class style (*What comes first in this experiment? Next? What is step 1?*) writing the discourse organizers (first, second, third, then, finally etc.) used by the students on the board. He could also tackle some errors he might have picked while monitoring. Homework could be designed especially for the group, if the teacher notices the need for it.

Conclusion

The two-class examples offered in this paper are by no means the only alternatives to planning and delivering the selected topics. Many other alternatives to combining TBLT and pragmatics can be proposed, depending on factors such as teacher's experience and beliefs of what language and teaching are; the target students' traits, like their first language, ages, English language level; school environment; and so on. That is why there are no prescriptive intentions here since the 'one size fits all' approach has been historically proven fallible and incongruent with up-to-date research. The expectations of providing such planning examples only show some of the alternatives, hopefully, to spark language teachers' curiosity and desire to navigate into the nearly, at least up to this point, uncharted waters of a language

teaching practice that combines TBLT and pragmatics.

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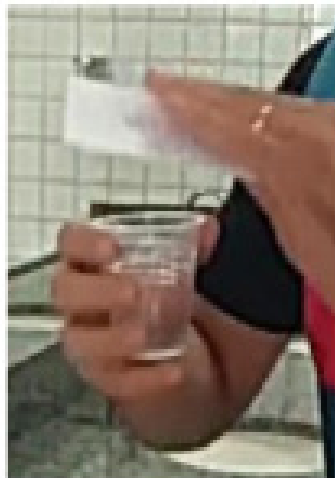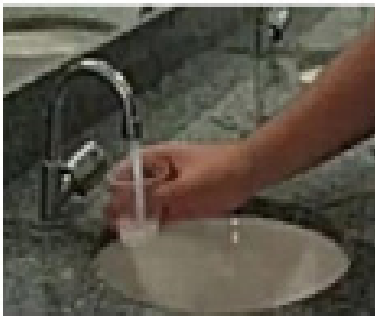
Appendix

NAME:_____

ROOM:_____

DATE: _____/_____/_____   ENGLISH - LESSON 33

1. WRITE

SECOND	FIRST	THIRD

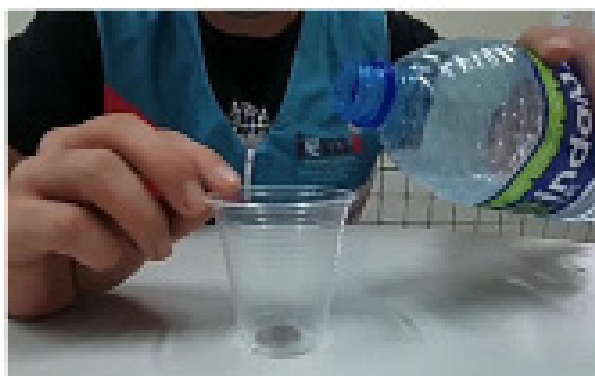|		

2. CONNECT

STEP 1

STEP 2

STEP 3

3. TRACE THE DOTTED LINES

First

Then

Finally