

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The review of literature consisted of three topics: theoretical background of task-based learning, types of speaking-listening skill assessments, and related research on task-based learning.

With today's highly advanced technology in communication, the English Language has no doubt played a universal role as a messenger conveying ideas, thoughts and feelings to people worldwide. It is difficult to imagine what people would do without this international language. Because English has gained such a prestigious place in the business world, much attention has been directed towards complete competency.

Going back into history, it was in the early 70's that "*Communicative Competence*" gained interest in both Europe and North America (Silberstein, 1993). As Europe was overwhelmed with immigrants, a special syllabus based on notional-functional concepts was designed to cope with the learners' needs (Celce-Murcia, 2002).

This kind of concept later evolved into today's communicative approach (Silberstein, 1993).

Similarly in America, Savignon conducted research concerning adults' acquisition of French at the University of Illinois and defined *Communicative Competence* as "the learners' ability to interact with other speakers" and become more active in asking for information and clarification (Celce-Murcia, 2002). As a result, communicative activities provide learners with real life situations that they can practice in class and apply the learnt skill out of class (Littlewood, 1981). In other words, learners are taught patterns that will be useful for them in the real world.

The Communicative approach has contributed greatly to the improvement of communicative competence by providing "situationally relevant phrases and vocabulary appropriate for 'relevant' topics". This beginning stage is useful for providing students with ways to communicate in real situations. However, as stated by Mitchell (cited in Swrbrick, 1994), it failed to lead the learner systematically to linguistic independence and creativity. As pointed out by Swan (cited in Rossner and Bolitho, 1990), many communicative activities engage students with predictable responses

to recurrent situations. In real life, some “utterances are not conventional responses to familiar situations” (Rossner and Bolitho, 1990). In other words, students should be able to create their own patterns that they feel comfortable using to convey the same idea or meaning.

From the communicative approach emerged approaches with similar pedagogical principles such as the content-based and task-based approaches (Beale, 2002). According to Willis and Willis (cited in Beale, 2002), task-based learning “is actually a more resolutely communicative application of CLT (communicative language teaching) principles.” It allowed students freedom to use any patterns to complete the tasks.

2.1 Theoretical Background of Task-Based Learning

2.1.1 Definitions of Task

The term “task” has been defined by many researchers in different ways. According to Breen (cited in Long and Crookes, 1992):

Any structural language learning endeavor, which has a particular objective, appropriate content, a specified working procedure, and arrange of outcomes for those

who undertake the task. 'Task' is therefore assumed to refer to a range of work plans which have the overall purpose of facilitating language learning-from the simple and brief exercise type, to more complex and lengthy activities such as group problem-solving or simulations and decision-making. (p. 39)

Richards, Platt and Weber (cited in Nunan, 1988) linked tasks to:

An activity or action which is carried out as a result of processing or understanding language (i.e. as a response). For example, drawing a map while listening to an instruction and performing a command... A task requires the teacher to specify what will be regarded as successful completion of the task. (p. 45)

Likewise, Prabhu (cited in Long and Crookes, 1992) defined task as:

An activity which required learners to arrive at an outcome from given information through some process of thought, and which allowed teachers to control and regulate that process. (p. 35)

Also focusing on the issue of activity, Nunan (cited in O'Brien, 1998)

claimed a task to be:

A piece of classroom work which involves learners in comprehending, manipulating, producing or interacting in the target language while their attention is principally focused on meaning rather than form. (p. 24)

Nunan (2001) further divided task into two different categories:

1. Real-world or target task: A communicative act we achieve through language in the world outside the classroom.
2. Pedagogical tasks: A piece of classroom work which involves learners in comprehending, manipulating, producing or interacting in the language while their attention is principally focused on meaning rather than forms. They have a non-linguistic outcome, and can be divided into rehearsal tasks or activation tasks.
 - 2.1 Rehearsal task: A piece of classroom work in which learners rehearse, in class, a communicative act they will carry out outside of class.
 - 2.2 Activation task: A piece of classroom work involving communicative interaction, but NOT one in which learners will be rehearsing for some out-of-class communication. Rather they are designed to activate the acquisition process. (p. 3-4)

Finally, Willis (1996) proposed task to be:

A goal-oriented activity in which learners use language to achieve a real outcome. In other words, learners use whatever target language resources they have in order to solve a problem, do a puzzle, play a game, or share and compare experiences. (p. 53)

From all the previous definitions, Ellis (cited in Reynolds, 1999)

proposed his own criteria of task:

1. A task is a work plan.
2. A task involves linguistic activity.

3. A task requires primary attention to be on message (cf. 'exercise').
4. A task allows learners to select the linguistic resources they will use themselves.
5. A task requires learners to function primarily as language users rather than learners.
6. A task has a clearly defined non-linguistic outcome.

Therefore, it can be concluded that a task is a form of activity that leads to a productive outcome which includes the learner's linguistic knowledge and chosen patterns that they feel comfortable using.

2.1.2 Task-Based Learning

For the last fifteen to twenty years, there has been an increase in research in the field of second language acquisition. From the researches emerged three general approaches (Skehan, 2002). Michael Long was the first person to push towards using tasks in language teaching (cited in Doughty and Williams, 1998). He focused on the quality of tasks that were appropriate for learners' needs. Jane and Dave Willis (Willis, 1996) believed a task should "promote constant learning and improvement". They created a framework which consisted of three stages: pre-task, task cycle and language focus. Finally, Peter Skehan and Pauline Foster supported the third

approach which impelled learners towards higher accuracy through familiar but structured tasks (Skehan, 2002). Ellis (2003) best summarized task-based learning as an approach which promoted communication as well as social interaction.

For the purpose of this study, Willis's task-based learning framework was chosen because it provides exposure for the learners as well as a "sense of security" (Willis, 1996). Willis (1998) illustrated the process of task-based learning in a three-stage framework: pre-task, task cycle and language focus.

Table 1: Task-Based Learning Framework

Pre-Task Stage

INTRODUCTION TO TOPIC AND TASK

Teacher explores the topic with the class, highlights useful words and phrases, and helps learners understand task instructions and prepare. Learners may hear a recording of others doing a similar task, or read part of a text as a lead in to a task.

Task cycle Stage

Task	Planning	Report
<p>Students do the task, in pairs or small groups. Teacher monitors from a distance, encouraging all attempts at communication, not correcting. Since this situation has a “private” feel, students feel free to experiment. Mistakes don’t matter.</p>	<p>Students prepare to report to the whole class (orally or in writing) how they did the task, what they decided or discovered. Since the report stage is public, students will naturally want to be accurate, so the teacher stands by to give language advice.</p>	<p>Some groups present their reports to the class, or exchange written reports, and compare results. Teacher acts as a chairperson, and then comments on the content of the report.</p>

Language Focus Stage

Analysis	Practice
<p>Students examine and then discuss specific features of the text or transcript of the recording. They can enter new words, phrases and patterns in vocabulary books.</p>	<p>Teacher conducts practice of new words, phrases and patterns occurring in the data, either during or after the analysis.</p>

In Willis’s framework, learners get the opportunity to recall their previous knowledge during the pre-task stage. During the task cycle stage, learners are given freedom to put into practice whatever knowledge they possess as well as explore with new patterns. The language focus stage lets learners analyze what they learned and reflect on their overall performances.

2.2 Speaking and Listening Skills

2.2.1 Definitions of speaking and listening skills

2.2.1.1 Speaking skills

Speaking is a way of expressing and sending messages to a certain person or a group of people. Rivers (1968) described speaking as an act of communication influenced by cultural and social factors. Similarly, Skinner (cited in Rivers, 1968) viewed speaking as a “verbal behavior...dependent on reinforcement from another organism.”

Byrne (1987) suggested that speaking is a two-way communication process which required both speakers to possess the abilities to encode and decode messages correctly. The factors that influenced complete understanding of the message were stress and intonation of the sentence.

Scheidel as cited in Grice and Skinner (1995), defined speaking as a process of ‘transmission and reception of symbolic cues.’

Auksaranukraw (cited in Sommit, 2002) stated that “speaking ability means the ability of producing language and the process of conveying meaning.”

For foreign language learners, speaking a language requires them to be successful in transmitting the message, deliver utterances with correct pronunciation, grammar usage and appropriate expressions accepted in the social situations. Oral communication also entailed non-linguistic elements such as “gestures, body language/posture, facial expression...” (Shumin, 1997). As a result, learners who were never totally submerged in an English speaking environment might have difficulties achieving oral proficiency (Chelle de Porto, 1997).

2.2.1.2 Listening Skills

Listening refers to the process of receiving sounds and then interpreting the meaning behind the sounds (Grice and Skinner, 1995).

According to Hyslop and Tone (1988):

Listening provides a foundation for all aspect of language and cognitive development, and it plays a life-long role in the process of learning and communication essential to productive participation in life. (p. 1)

Hirsch (cited in Hyslop and Tone (1988) defined listening skills as:

Neurological responses and interpretation of sound, understanding and assigning meaning by reacting, selecting meaning, remembering, attending, analyzing, and incorporating previous experience.

According to River (1968), “speaking does not of itself constitute communication unless what is said is comprehended by another person.” Therefore, in order to understand the message that was conveyed, the listener needs to interpret the meaning according to the stress and intonation given.

Likewise, without sufficient knowledge of the sound system, vocabulary and syntax, the meaning of the message might be received incorrectly (Bacon, 1989).

Willis (cited in Saricoban, 1999) provided “a series of micro-skills of listening”:

1. Predicting what people are going to talk about.
2. Guessing at unknown words or phrases without panic.
3. Using one’s own knowledge of the subject to help one understand.
4. Identifying relevant points; rejecting irrelevant information.
5. Retaining relevant points (note-taking, summarizing)
6. Recognizing discourse markers, e. g. , Well; Oh, Another thing is; Now, Finally; etc.
7. Recognizing cohesive devices, e. g. , *such as* and *which*, including linking words, pronouns, references, etc.
8. Understanding different intonation patterns and uses of stress, etc. , which give clues to meaning and social setting
9. Understanding inferred information, e. g. , speakers’ attitude or intentions.

It can be concluded that speaking and listening is the process of oral communication. Effective oral communication requires the speaker and the listener to transmit and receive messages correctly. In order to do so, both the speaker and the listener need appropriate usage of vocabulary, language structure, correct interpretations and understanding of implicit meaning of the message. Both speaking and listening skills are needed to achieve oral proficiency and therefore cannot be separated from one another.

2.2.2 Speaking-Listening Skills Assessment

Learners with competent oral communication skills had greater chances of becoming more successful academically and professionally. According to Mead and Rubin (1985), communication skills could be improved through appropriate feedback in forms of assessment. For oral assessment, tests of oral production include both speaking skills as well as listening skills (Heaton, 1988).

As stated by Kitao and Kitao (1996), communicative language tests were used to measure productive skills and receptive skills. For productive skills, learners were tested on appropriateness of the sentence rather than grammar accuracy. As for receptive skills, the

emphasis was on the speaker's intention rather than specific details. Most often, both types of skills were combined to form communicative testing. As a result, learners must be able to understand and deliver appropriate responses.

According to Norris (2000), 'alternative assessments' like portfolios, self and peer assessment and observation have been given much attention in the performance-based and task-based language testing. Correspondingly, Heaton (1988) suggested ways of assessing performance. For the speaking skills, he proposed interviews, picture descriptions, role plays and problem-solving tasks which involved pair work or group work. As for listening skills, he suggested dialogues, lectures and individual talks.

2.2.3 Types of Speaking-Listening Assessment

2.2.3.1 Oral Interview

For oral interview, the learners were asked to perform a specific oral task. The task could be between the learner and the test administrator, in pair work or in a group. Most importantly, the learners should be given topics that they could easily discuss in a relaxed atmosphere (Mead and Rubin, 1985 and Heaton, 1988).

2.2.3.2 Peer Assessment

Joughin (1998) has placed peer assessment as part of assessment and evaluation in higher education. This type of assessment involves learners providing feedback to their peers after oral presentation. The feedback could be given orally or in a written form. Afterward, learners could perform self-assessment based on peers' recommendations.

2.2.3.3 Reflection Writing

Reflection writing could be beneficial to both teacher and learners (Orem, 2001). Gebhard and Oprandy (1999), and Richards and Lockhard (1994) promote a teaching journal as an important element of reflective practice for teacher development. According to Orem (2001), a teacher's journal provides reflection of what worked and did not work in class. As a result, the teacher was able to conduct self-assessment and come up with possible solutions to problems encountered during the teaching process.

For the learners, they could use their reflections to make changes for future development. Not only were they able to focus on specific problems but they also shared opinions and insights (Hansen-Thomas, 2003).

Although many people believed that speaking skills could only be improved through oral exercises, there have been suggestions that writing could also help improve speaking skills. Takagaki (1997) mentioned in his article that “writing can reinforce what has been practiced orally...” Therefore, writing could help facilitate oral proficiency in communication. Naturally, it would be unrealistic to exclusively depend on writing activities such as reflection writing to help learners improve their speaking skills. However, Reid (1991) claimed that despite belonging to different systems, oral and written communication both depended on “situation, task, audience, and function.”

2.3 Related Research on Task-Based Learning

There have been several studies concerning task-based learning done by researchers throughout the world. These studies involved the implementation of task-based learning for learners of all levels.

In Littlewood’s (2003) recent paper on task-based interactive learning, Western and Asian students from eleven countries favored interactive learning. Task-based interaction was placed in a methodological framework divided into three dimensions:

- Degree of involvement
- Degree of focus on meaning
- Degree of autonomy

From the framework, students were able to develop communication skill, cognitive strategies and interpersonal skills which involved their learning experiences and personality development.

Ahmed (1996) proposed using a task-based approach in syllabus design for higher level studies at the International University of Japan. The success of the task-based approach could be attributed to the functional use of the language. Students found the institutional contexts, well-defined tasks and the practicality of the activities useful for future language development.

Murphy (2002) found in his study that task analysis could help students focus more on their output form after talking to their partner about possible changes and move towards developing learner autonomy. Similarly, Nobuyoshi and Ellis (1993) found in their small-scale study that “pushing learners to produce more accurate output, by the teacher making requests for clarification, contributed to acquisition.”

Foster (1999) claimed that by providing learners with sufficient time to plan their tasks, they will improve in the areas of complexity, accuracy and fluency. Newton (2001) on the other hand, focused on vocabulary learning through communication task. He stated that the meanings of the new words were “retained in the days after the task performance.” Thus, a task-based approach helped reinforce vocabulary learning.

Wattanamara (1996) provided positive results from a study using a task-based learning approach to teach air force military students in their second year at the air force military academy. The findings revealed that students who were taught through a task-based learning approach improved in their listening, speaking, reading and writing skills. Similarly, Deeprom (cited in Sommit, 2002) developed task-based activities for business English 1 for thirty-nine students at the vocational level. The study showed that all activities were effective. The students found the tasks to be applicable for daily life.

Tepsuriwong and Pichaipattasopon (2002) used task-based learning to promote creative thinking. The students stated that the tasks encouraged them to think creatively while communicating their

thoughts through English. Overall, they had positive attitudes towards the assigned tasks.

Sricharoen (2001) developed an Agricultural Technology English Lesson 1 through task-based learning for a first-year diploma in vocational education students. Her results revealed that the six lessons of ATEL 1 were very effective and suitable for the students' knowledge and abilities. The students' opinions about the classroom atmosphere were positive in all factors.

Sommit (2002) also conducted a study in which she designed English listening and speaking lessons for hotel service personnel through task-based learning activities. The results revealed that all fourteen lesson plans were effective in helping the learners improve their listening and speaking abilities.

From all the studies cited, it was found that task-based learning could be applied to students of many levels. Therefore, the researcher developed task-based learning lesson plans to be used with students at a university level to find if task-based learning approach will help promote students' speaking and listening skills.