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A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF TASK-BASED LANGUAGE TEACHING (TBLT) CRITERIA IN COURSE BOOKS FOR UPPER INTERMEDIATE ENGLISH STUDENTS

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Abstract

Recently, the importance of task-based language teaching (TBLT) is presumably clear and therefore has also widely being used in many countries. The process of recognizing a 'task' itself could be one of the fields where it tends to be slightly fuzzy, especially for a new, learner and inexperience teacher. Many English experts and task-based supporters have published various books to assist their ideas. Perhaps that is why; we now have had different criterion of assessing a 'task'. This paper thus, intends to establish the extent to which a modern course book has encompassed principles and practice of TBLT when compared with older books. I have therefore taken two books as the source of data for this paper; Natural English-Upper Intermediate Student's Book and Workout Upper Intermediate Student's Book, both aimed at the same language level of learner. Both are intended to upper intermediate student.

Abstrak

Akhir-akhir ini, pengajaran berbasis Task (TBLT) dianggap penting dan telah banyak diaplikasikan di banyak Negara. Proses mengenal sebuah "task" sendiri bisa saja merupakan suatu hal yang agak sedikit sulit, khususnya bagi seorang guru yang masih baru, pemula dan belum berpengalaman. Para ahli bahasa Inggris dan pendukung pembelajaran berbasis task telah mencetak berbagai buku untuk mendukung ide mereka. Mungkin, karena itulah mengapa; kita sekarang mempunyai kriteria yang berbeda dalam menilai sebuah "task". Oleh karena itu, tulisan ini bertujuan untuk menunjukkan sejauh mana buku pelajaran modern telah menerapkan prinsip dan pelaksanaan dari TBLT dibandingkan dengan buku lama. Untuk itu, penulis mengambil dua buku sebagai sumber data untuk tulisan ini; buku Natural English-Upper Intermediate Student dan buku Workout Upper Intermediate Student. Keduanya diperuntukkan untuk murid yang sama tingkatannya, yaitu murid tingkat upper intermediate.

Key Words: *Pembelajaran berbasis Task, buku teks, murid bahasa Inggris.*

INTRODUCTION

Over the last few decades, task based-language teaching has caught the attention of many English language teachers and researchers. Much discussion currently concerns the desirability of task-based language teaching. This phenomenon was possibly due to the introduction of the communicative language teaching and the strong shift that language could not mainly taught by focusing on the traditional grammatical exercises such as gaps filling, multiple choices or sentences changing. At the same time, the initial approach of communicative language teaching (CLT) has opened and created new ways of teaching English for the learners and task-based language teaching seems to be one of the most favourite alternatives to convey the communicative messages processes in teaching, rather than imposing rules and repetition in grammar-oriented approach. Slowly but sure, the ‘communicative task’ then has become a preferred alternative and provide a more interactive and learner-centred teaching approach rather than language centred approach by endorsing the learners to be actively involved and engaged in a learning process.¹

Even the importance of task-based language teaching (TBLT) is presumably clear and therefore has also widely being used in many countries. The process of recognizing a ‘task’ itself could be one of the fields where it tends to be slightly fuzzy, especially for a new, novice and inexperience teacher. Many English experts and task-based supporters have published various books to assist their ideas. Perhaps that is why; we now have had different criterion of assessing a ‘task’.

In this paper, I intend to establish the extent to which a modern course book has encompassed principles and practice of TBLT when compared with an older book. I have therefore taken two books, Natural English-Upper Intermediate Student’s Book and Workout Upper Intermediate Student’s Book, both aimed at the same language level of learner.

In this paper, therefore, at the very beginning, I will first provide definitions of a task, or in other word, I will establish a brief overview of what we exactly meant by task and its criteria as an integrated part of the rising of communicative

¹Rooney, K, “Redesigning Non-Task-Based Materials to Fit a Task-Based Framework” <http://iteslj.org/Techniques/Rooney-Task-Based.html> [online], on *The Internet TESL Journal*, Vol. VI, No. 12, December 2000, p. 1 (accessed 27 November 2006).

language teaching concept with reference to current thinking and concepts. In the following section, I will then, continue to look at the data in the two chosen course books and try to meet whether it will match to the criteria of a task or not. Finally, at the last part of this paper, several conclusions will be drawn in order to present the answer of the analysis that has been discussed beforehand.

Review of Literature

Communicative Approach (CA)

Prior to the communicative approach (CA), the superiority of traditional ways or grammar-vocabulary based teaching approach in the early years of language teaching is quite dominant. Teacher's duty was to transfer knowledge mechanically to the learners. This approach has lately been criticized and discredited over the last few decades. The close relationship between language and social context has brought us to an era where is quite necessary for language teachers and experts to design a more communicative approach for the language teaching. Real interaction is the heart of this method. The advent of communicative approach in the late 1960 has apparently seen as a vibrant foundation to learn a language. Language has naturally established as a part of social life and not simply a set of regulation that has to be imposed, remembered, and repeated for the learners. Nunan and Prabhu had come with a remark that seems similar to this argument. The former suggests that: "Among other things, it has been accepted that language is more than a system of rules. Language is now generally seen as a dynamic resource for the creation of meaning".²

What Nunan proposes above is supported by the latest linguists who believed that an effective learning process occurs when the learners are completely involved in a task and not exclusively learning a new language like a robot or a machine controlled by teacher.³

CA, as a result, has become very familiar in the latest years. This popularity may be stimulated due to its prominent goals to develop learner's communicative ability. It encompasses linguistic competence, pragmatic competence, discourse competence, strategic competence and fluency simultaneously. Perhaps, the

²Nunan, D. *Designing Tasks for the Communicative Classroom*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989, p. 12.

³Prabhu, N.S. *Second Language Pedagogy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987, p. 2.

clearest characteristic of this approach is that “it pays systematic attention to functional as well as structural aspects of language, combining these into more fully communicative view”.⁴

What is Task?

We can trace the rising of TBLT back to the eighties when Prabhu’s conducted a communicative teaching language experiment in Bangalore for the primary and secondary schools.⁵ Prabhu’s project and experiment has created a great implication for the next TBLT supporters like Ellis (1993) and Willis (2003). Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) was originally recognized in form of Presentation, Practice and Production (PPP).

At that time, TBLT is a critical response to PPP learning mainly because we can not solely learning in the prescribed way and the acquisition of language is not pre-programmable. Skehan tends to agree with this breakthrough, he affirms this point of view and states that: With the passage of time, however these arguments (presentation, practice and production) have become less and less powerful. Two major reasons account for this. First of all, the evidence in support such an approach is unimpressive. Levels of attainment in conventional foreign language learning are poor, and students commonly leave school with very little in the way of usable language.⁶ The underlying theory for a PPP approach has now been discredited. Learners do not simply acquire the language to which they are exposed, however carefully that exposure may be orchestrated by the teacher.

PPP is merely focusing on the language form; whilst in TBLT the focus on language form only appears at the end of activities. In other word, PPP somehow only forcing the learners to learn a language in a narrow and ‘traditional’ perspective of failure and success rather than letting the learners to see ‘the big

⁴Littlewood, W., *Communicative Language Teaching: An Introduction*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981, p. 1.

⁵Prabhu, N.S., *Second Language ...*, p. 1.

⁶Carroll, J. B., *The teaching of French as a foreign language in eight countries*, New York: John Wiley, 1975 See also Stern, H. *Fundamental Concepts of Language Teaching*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983.

picture' of an integrated language in use.⁷ Another problem in PPP is the outcome. In PPP the outcomes sometimes are not very clear. In the production phase of PPP, the speaking activities are often may not produce a real outcome. For example, when the learners practising a conversation about their favourite foods and drinks in the classroom may not produce a real outcome, instead of visiting a museum and make a list of things that must be prepared beforehand or even make notes of some interesting objects inside the museum and then discuss it to the classroom. Afterwards, PPP is subsequently considered as the 'weak' experience of learning a language, whereas TBLT is often claimed as a 'strong' experience of learning a language. The limitation of PPP then, has led to the advent of TBLT in the early eighties. Since that time the concept of TBLT has been developed to fit in more applicable teaching context. The example of a strong focus of TBL in that case then, is exactly as illustrated by Prabhu in his task based syllabus.

However there are still some disadvantages of a strong focus version of TBLT that could be noticed. Firstly, more often TBLT does not involve enough language input such as vocabulary. The lack of language input therefore could make some student put less attention to the materials that are being taught. Subsequently this could lead to fossilization if the language is not in progress. For example, we find advanced students who communicate with great skill and who make very few errors, but still do not master the grammar aspect in English. In addition, TBLT did not seem to take advantage of cognitive facilitation on adult. Then, the reliance of strategic competence is quite often producing another disadvantage. This is probably the most noticeable problem in TBLT. The student might be able to get meaning across and communicate well by applying certain strategies to achieve the target language, but they do not offer an encouragement for structural change towards an interlanguage system with greater difficulty.⁸ The learners did not perceive any appropriate language learning if they are focusing only on the fluency instead of accuracy, and of course, it might generate another drawback in the implementation. A spontaneous approach which applied in a

⁷Willis D. *Rules, Patterns and Words: Grammar and Lexis in English Language Teaching*. Cambridge University Press, 2003, p. 16.

⁸Skehan, P. 'Second language acquisition research and task-based instruction.' In Willis, J and Willis D. (eds). 1996. *Challenge and Change in Language Teaching*. London: Heinemann, 1996, p. 17-20.

small-group discussion could deal with some procedural problems as well. For instance the class might be “dominated by one individual, some groups work much faster than others, repeat the points that already mentioned or seem reluctant to value their own and expecting a correct answer from the trainer or teacher”.⁹ Sometimes, in this situation, the learners were become more dependent rather than being independence and self-confidence in that sort of situation.

After that, the task-based framework was introduced in order to overcome the above advantages of TBLT. The task-based framework engages three phases, namely, pre-task, while-task and post-task. Willis describes this phases in slightly different terms She categorizes this framework into pre-task, task cycle and language focus. I will then try to pinpoint in detail how this framework performs its function.¹⁰

In the pre-task phase, introducing the learners to take some times by reading some preparatory readings in order to understand what they are going to do and discuss in the next phase. The teachers could start the lesson from various entry points. The language input could be from the teachers as well as the learners. In this phase the teachers must highlight some key vocabulary and state clearly the purpose of the upcoming activity. But they should not stress on the form or mention the linguistic targets at all. This phase considered as the ‘warming-up activity’ before getting into the main task.

After the initial phase, the main-task or the task cycle would provide a chance for learners to make a list of problem to be solved. They could do it in pairs or group in accordance to the most relevant situation. At this point, the opportunity to use the language they have possessed beforehand. They can mean what they say and say what they mean by making a planning and report to their friends later. They will perform their language ability, written and spoken in public use rather than in private use. Motivation and self confidence are very important for learners at this point to make them active in producing the targeted language skills.

⁹Parrot, Martin. *Task for Language Teachers: A Resources Book for Training and Development*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993, p. 14-15.

¹⁰ Willis, J. ‘A flexible framework for task-based learning’. In Willis, J and Willis D. (eds). 1996. *Challenge and Change in Language Teaching*. London: Heinemann, 1996, p. 52-62.

At the very last of this framework, the post task is quite vital to avoid fossilization. At this stage, focus on language form and analysis must be exposed so that the learners will not repeat the same mistake over and over again. A comprehensive comment is needed from teacher and learners could be requested to take notes as appropriate. The formulation of rule should be exposed to learners as guidance in conducting the follow-up activities.

So far, I have discussed the evolution of TBLT in terms of its relationship to PPP. However, I will touch more specifically upon what a task entail in the next part of this paper.

Task Criteria

It is noticeable that the criteria of a task-based language teaching will vary based on different situation and the point of view of the writers. However, we should bear in mind that eventually we would somehow come across to some visible and potential criteria or characteristic of a task.

So, it is very important for us to identify what task really means. Defining task is not as easy as it seems. There are various criteria of task that has been introduced by some English researchers. Hence, Skehan's and Willis definition could be different, even though they still have the same 'main features' inside. For instance, both stated a task is likely to express meaning and focus on process rather instead of form, structure and product.

In Longman Dictionary of Applied Linguistics, a task is explained as "an activity or action which is carried out as the result of processing or understanding language..."¹¹ Furthermore, some of task-based proponents such as Jane and David Willis, David Nunan, Peter Skehan, Rebecca Oxford and Rod Ellis are among those who has dedicated most of their times in developing a more relevant task-based language learning approach. One of task definitions is as outlined by Nunan, "The communicative task is a piece of classroom work which involves learners in comprehending, manipulating and producing or interacting in the target language while their attention is principally focused on meaning rather than form".¹²

¹¹Richards, J., Platt, J. and Weber, H. *Longman Dictionary of Applied Linguistics*, Michigan: The University of Michigan, 1986, p. 289.

¹²Nunan, D. *Designing Tasks for the ...*, p. 10.

In addition, Willis argued that a task should have an outcome, to learn and produce new things. It is one of the most central contents of what we should constitute as a task if we want to make a clear-cut of a task definition.¹³ In other words, language is not merely about repetition and correction. More importantly, the language is expected to utilize the development process and clarification. For example when teacher ask the students to match the two tables about common geographic knowledge of England could be accepted as a task because it provides learners with reasoning, information gap and logic knowledge. However, we must remember that an outcome is different from an aim of a task. An outcome would be the real product of a task such as a letter or a recorded video. In contrast, an aim or a purpose is something to do with the linguistic target for example vocabulary, language skills (receptive or productive) and grammar point.

Another feature of a task is, it allows for more interaction and negotiation. This is important because creating an interaction in the classroom in pairs or small group would give the impression of spontaneous, ephemeral an exploratory in a private use as well as the rehearsing and planning when they talk to the whole class or what is often called as 'public use'.¹⁴ A task consequently has to take into account this factor, so that the overall outcome expected could be reached without neglecting the natural process. Hence, later on, they could catch and built up a comprehensible notion from the task activities. The process of engaging students' involvement in a spontaneous ways could ease their anxiousness and push them to produce more in the target language confidently, since they does not feel afraid of making mistakes anymore. One simple illustration is when the learners are required to play a 'shopping game' with a restricted budget. It would ideally let them able to speak confidently in private and public use and result an outcome too.

It would of course possible to notice that a task fulfil the need of cognitive process for learners. The process of thought and language awareness in a task would incorporate relevant inference, logical reasoning, and connecting pieces of

¹³Willis D. *Rules, Patterns ...*, p. 17-18.

¹⁴Willis, J. *A Framework for Task-Based Learning*. Harlow, U.K. Longman Addison- Wesley, 1996.

information from a given task.¹⁵ In other words, problem solving, selecting or listing, planning and producing a report are naturally included in a good task. Learners might be requested to do some agreement and disagreement discussion or debate based on the given task or even explaining why they try to solve the information gap in the shopping game via certain strategies or alternatives provided.

The next feature of a task is authenticity, or as some other linguists mention in different terms such as real-life activity or real world activity. Long affirms this idea by points out that a task must be a real-world one and everything that people really do in they everyday life.¹⁶ For example, the students are assigned to write a letter of invitation for a well-known footballer to visit their school. Authenticity also comes across of integrating any of four basic language skills; speaking, reading, listening and writing.¹⁷ Likewise, an authentic or real life task involves deflection inside.¹⁸ Deflection is a situation when learners do not really aware of the actual language content or practising certain skills in the task given. On the other hand, the less real life tasks are potentially focusing on grammar and it appear to be almost similar to an exercise, though justified by some to be a task.¹⁹

In this case, afterwards, I could perhaps come up with concise and mixed criteria as a combination from the previous explanation. I would select some important criterion that I believe would be helpful in this paper. Hence, here is the hybrid version criterion refined from many linguist or task-based language learning proponents. My own criteria suggests that task based-language learning should anyhow be:

7. real world activity
8. outcome and pedagogic purpose are different

¹⁵Prabhu, N.S. *Second Language ...*, p. 77.

¹⁶Long, Michael. *Task-Based Language Teaching* Oxford: Blackwell, 2001.

¹⁷Ellis, R. *Task-Based Language Learning and Teaching*, Oxford: Oxford University Press. 2003, p. 6.

¹⁸Newton, J. 'Vocabulary Learning through Task-Based Interaction'. Proceedings from the Korean Language and Culture Centre's 20th Anniversary International Forum, Korea University, 21 October 2006: 29-54.

¹⁹Ellis, R., *Task-Based Language ...*, p. 10.

9. involve any of four language skills
10. allows for more interaction and negotiation in meaning rather than grammar

This paper will apply these criteria as an entry point to analyse and discuss the two course books in the upcoming section.

Data Analysis

Materials Description

Because I anticipate that the latest course book is often claimed to carry more task features rather than the old course book, the data of this paper is taken from two course books, that is, *Workout Students' Book (W)* and *Natural English Students' Book (NE)*. The former course book was published in 1993 and the latter was published in 2003. Both are intended to upper intermediate student.

Overall, there are fifteen units of lessons in the former course book, whereas the latter consist of twelve units of lessons. The paper will only use two sample units from each course book as the materials for analysis. In addition, in the former course book, I will choose the sixth unit and the eleventh unit, whereas in the latter one I will only select the third and the fourth unit. On the whole, there will be four units which will be used as the basis data of the analysis. Presumably, the chosen units in the course books could be considered as the rough representative of the whole content of the course book. The skills items in each course book that will be analysed whether it would contain task features or not as described earlier are; grammar, speaking and writing section. The four criteria of task mentioned in the previous section will be the basis of analysis of the selected units in the course books.

Analysis

As I have said in the introduction, my goal is to establish whether the selected activities in these course books can conform to the criteria above. Therefore, before doing anything else, I would first explain that in this sense, categorizing the language item in the course book need to be measured by certain scale or parameter. In this paper, I would use words such as 'strong' or 'weak' task to describe the level of 'taskness' to rate an activity in terms of how far the activities within those two course books' unit can fulfil the task criteria. To some extent, this

seems to be an interesting approach to analysis. Then, a task or an activity have to carry out all the prescribed criteria that I have designed previously, namely, authenticity or real life, the outcome and pedagogic purpose are different, involve any of four language skills and allows for more interaction and negotiation in meaning rather than grammar to get a high score and identified as a 'strong' task. On the contrary, if the activity only meets one or two criteria, then, it will be judged as a 'weak' task.

Moreover, I will only analyze certain parts of the units, since it is impracticable and of course, we do not have lots of times if we are going to discuss all the details in this relatively concise paper. Besides, in order to enable all of us to underline and distinguish some basic task criteria from the selected unit in the course books, I would try to describe the data analysis in a table of assessment for every unit in the course books.

Table 1. Unit 6 of Workout for Upper-Intermediate Student's Book

Criteria	Real life activity	Outcome and pedagogic purposes are different	Involve any of four language skills	Allows for more negotiation	Task category
Activities	Unit 6 of Workout Course Book				
Grammar (p.45)	No	No	No	No	Weak
Writing (p.46)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Strong
Speaking(p.44)	No	No	No	No	Weak

The grammar activity (see appendix 1) in this unit as we can observe, is obviously considered as a very weak task. The grammar focus is explicitly introduced in the initial part of this activity and it does not convey a process of deflection at all. In addition, the outcome and pedagogic purposes are similar, that is, *modal verbs, must, have to and need to*. The integrated language skills also do not appear in this activity. Therefore, there is process of allowing negotiation and interaction for learners is very limited. Quite often, learners were provided by yes and no or closed type questions as we can see in activity 19 (giving advices). The learners were forced to the exercise as prescribed in the course book. There is only a

very little room for them to express meaning and use their language skills. It could further analyze that this seems to be an old-fashioned and traditional way of teaching grammar. It is almost similar to a drill of grammar, particularly when learners are requested to make a true sentence in activity 16 by changing and imitating the provided grammar table of modal verbs. In activity 18, there is an attempt to make a lively situation by letting learners to work in pairs. However, it only occupy a private use of language skills in a very limited circumstance. Another thing is if we have a quick look at the activity 15. It is possibly acting as a pre-task activity, while activity 16-18 will be considered as a main-task and activity 19 could perhaps become a post-task for the whole activities.

Then, in writing activity (see appendix 2), we can found that the process of negotiation is better rather than what we have observed in grammar activity formerly. Here, learners have more chance to express meaning and exploring their ideas. It seems that the activity also involves not only a single skill, but also involves speaking and reading as well. The topic, in addition, is something to do with everyday life and it is very helpful to ease the learners to catch the targeted language skills. The outcome is to write a letter of invitation to their friends and the pedagogic purposes are possibly to utilize the grammar points in the previous activity (appendix 1), so they are somewhat different.

With regard to real life category, perhaps this part does convey a real life activity. But, it does not seem to have a report mechanism after conducting writing activities. For example, the letter must be sent to a friend in a class and should be replied in the next meeting. As a result, in this case, it is perhaps what we call a 'weak' task, since the strong task not only involves planning and producing activities but also reporting activity. So the deflection process only to make the learners unaware of the grammar points that they have learned. Overall, though we have barely a little problem in reporting stage, we can categorize this activity as a strong task. The pre-task as preparation could be identified in activity 21, whilst the main task is perhaps occurred in activity 21 and 22. However, in general, we can analyse that this segment can be called a 'strong' task.

Yet again, the speaking activity (see appendix 3) does not constitute with all the task criteria above. It is a 'weak' task. In this activity, learners do not come up with the skills of language that they have perceived from the previous lessons or

some other sources. If they do have a chance, it might be in terms of making a list of famous people they feel strongly about. It is not a real life activity as well as does not produce a real outcome. It also does not involve any other language skills except speaking itself. The outcome and the pedagogic aim is the same. Learner must be able to display that they understood the concept shown in the course book. Anyway, this activity is quite short, and perhaps as a pre-task cycle of the next activity (reading).

Table 2. Unit 11 of Workout for Upper-Intermediate Student's Book

Criteria	Real life activity	Outcome and pedagogic purposes are different	Involve any of four language skills	Allows for more negotiation	Task category
Activities	Unit 6 of Workout Course Book				
Grammar (p.81)	No	No	No	No	Weak
Writing (p.82)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Strong
Speaking(p.80)	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Strong

Grammar as the first section (see appendix 4) that I will discuss is noticeably measured as a 'weak' task. At a certain degree, the activities that appear in this section tend to repeat the same version with the former section of grammar in unit 6 that I have analyzed. The pedagogic purpose and the actual outcome is exactly the same. So does the real life activity, negotiation and interaction and language skills development is fully controlled in any case. The only different thing is when learners are asked to form groups (activity 11-14) and play a game of 'wish' that somehow can ease the tension from the heavy grammar points beforehand. At this point, the process of negotiation will slowly release the 'locked' language skills they have had to appear. I personally think that this sort of activity would be better if it would emerge in the initial part of this section and could attract learners' attention in studying.

To some extent, we could say the speaking section (see Appendix 5) probably implied more conformity to task criteria. Therefore, I will regard this section as a

'strong' task. Actually, the personality questionnaires are very fascinating and very authentic as well. I suppose that the learners will be very much attracted with this 'little quiz' to put their mind in rest at first. Nonetheless, this part in fact, does not produce the real outcome at the end. For example, if each option in the questionnaire could be given a score and then the learners eventually counting their total, then, it would consider as a task in that case. Even the pedagogic and the outcome are quite vague and seem unclear, I personally feel that this is reasonably different, since the learners were encouraged to answer the questionnaire, not only artificially being pushed to use the target vocabulary such as 'embarrassed' or 'nasty' unnaturally.

The writing section (see appendix 6) has some task features and could somehow moderately regard as having a 'strong' content of task criteria. In relation to real life activity, this section provides learners with an activity to match the names to the facial features in activity 16. It would perhaps triggers learner motivation to be more vigorous and use their language skills in the class with their existing knowledge about the pictures and the figures listed. It also allows learners to participate more intensively with other members of the class whenever they are trying to figure out the answer of the pictures. At this stage, the process of negotiation and focusing on meaning rather than form is occurring. Nevertheless, once again the incomplete process of negotiation could be considered by noticing the reporting section. After learners accomplish the planning, listing, solving and producing the answer and the writing, it seems there is no special occasion for them to report it in front of the public use in the class. Perhaps, it could be developed by the teachers by a little twist and improvisation. In this section, it is noticeable that the pedagogic target and the real outcome is not the same. The actual outcome expected in this section is in fact matching the pictures and make a piece of writing, whereas the pedagogic purpose here is conceivably practising the vocabulary and grammar points that have been mentioned earlier. Clearly, the pre-task activities come up in activity 16 and 17 as a preparation to make a real piece of writing in activity 18.

Table 3. Unit 3 of Natural English for Upper Intermediate Students Book

Criteria	Real life activity	Outcome and pedagogic purposes are different	Involve any of four language skills	Allows for more negotiation	Task category
Activities	Unit 3 of Natural English				
Grammar (p.37-38)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Strong
Writing (p.40-41)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Strong
Speaking(p.42-43)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Strong

In this course book, grammar (see Appendix 7) was being taught in completely dissimilar from what we have seen in first two analysis of the earlier course book. It is visible that the starting point of teaching grammar as we have perceived here is very rich. In this part, the grammar is introduced naturally by creating a process of thought or as we often called as brainstorming phase. Learners are asked to imagine, to comment and later on, to generate their own law on the basis of the example in the course book. The entry point is not grammar. Grammar has smartly inserted in the middle of the cognitive process, so that the learners can freely discover and exercise their language skills they have possessed. They do not realize that they are practising their skills because they are so interested in solving the problem. The pedagogical purpose and the outcome are different at this point. The outcome is to make a list, or precisely, to complete the unfinished regulation, while the pedagogical purpose is to practise learners' language skill as well as to be able to master and to incorporate grammar points of *obligation, necessity and prohibition*. Additionally, the *lead in* activity (1 and 2) in page 37 could be regarded as preliminary and warming up activities before entering the main task in activity 3 and ended with a post task in activity 4. Unfortunately, in activity 4 there is no opportunity for learners to present their ideas in public use, even though they have had a nice chance to express what they meant in private use with another pair.

From the above findings, it seems pretty understandable that this section could be called a 'strong' task-course book. Of course, since it is convey a lot of modification to meet TBLT model, we can classify this section as a 'strong'

task. That is why, perhaps we can easily find the task criteria inside. It is noticeable that the real life activity took place when learners are encouraged to design a website and selecting certain performers to be included in their new band. The real-life atmosphere is occurred perfectly in these sections and will motivate the learners to accomplish the task as best as they can. The focus at this stage, are possibly the building learners confidence, self-expression and fluency. The role of teacher would thus be as a motivator and facilitator and maybe provide clarification if necessary. No repetition at all, since the learners are focusing on meaning and process. Gradually, and with further exposure it might be argued that the learners will arrive at the acquisitions of the target language as expected. The pedagogic purpose and the outcome are completely different. The pedagogic purpose is introducing *linking verbs* in writing and the definite outcome is a website profile. In addition, they have a chance to present their ideas in public use when they are asked to tell the class of their website profile on the basis of their notes (after having a discussion with their partner).

In speaking section (see Appendix 9) which comes into sight at the very last section in this unit, we can see some ample proof that this activity can be identified to carry 'strong' features of a task. First, evidently the tangible outcome in this section is to create a new band and a website profile as a result of limited candidate's checklist that has been selected from the audition that will be presented in front of the class. Unlike the outcome, the pedagogic aim is some specified vocabulary and to be able to speak confidently. This is also a real life task, because the topic is very familiar to nowadays circumstances. Another feature is of course, learners will have plenty of time to express their ideas and opinions and allows for more negotiation in meaning, instead of focusing on grammar point. Here the teacher and students can individually and interchangeably exchange some ideas, supervise or polish some specific grammatical problems. Learners do not aware that they have indirectly accomplished any of four language skills within these activities as well as came across of some grammar points at the end.

Table 4. Unit 4 of Natural English for Upper Intermediate Students Book

Criteria	Real life activity	Outcome and pedagogic purposes are different	Involve any of four language skills	Allows for more negotiation	Task category
Activities	Unit 4 of Natural English				
Grammar (p.49)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Strong
Writing (p. 51-53)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Strong
Speaking(p.54-55)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Strong

Alike the previous unit of the same course book, in general, from the above table; we can say that this unit is considered as a 'strong' task. The grammar section (see appendix 10) in page 49 might be quite simple and short. Nonetheless, the approach learners seem fascinating. Yet again, the use of website anyhow would make learners pay more attention to the materials that is being taught. The pedagogic aim is different from the explicit outcome. *Future simple and continuous* is the pedagogic goal of this section, whereas the concrete outcome expected is how successful learners to answer a 'little quiz' in the website. It also covers and incorporates reading, writing and speaking at the same time. Thus, it will lead them to activate their thought inside their mind and gap information (in activity 1). The pre-task stage seems to come into view in activity 1, main task in activity 2 and post-task in activity 3. In activity 3, the role of teacher is possibly to explain some important points and to stress certain language focuses that need to be clarified comprehensibly.

Then, the writing section afterwards (see Appendix 11), is similarly can be analysed as a 'strong' task all over again. The actual outcome of this section is an edited email, an email that must be sent to one of their friend and a reply email from someone in the class as well. On the other hand, the pedagogic purpose is enhancing learners' writing development and to make them to be able to make correct *request and response* sentences in an email. Yet, the use of language only limited in a private use of a pair or partners which is considerably does not conforms of a TBLT framework. This supposes to be the main-task cycle in TBLT

framework where learners are able to make an appropriate public presentation. The involvement of integrated language skills, like reading (activity 1-left bottom of page 53), writing (as the most dominant activities) and speaking (at the right bottom of page 53) is very much useful for learner to retrieve their language skills regularly. A variety of language skills development approach also would permits the meaning negotiation and promotes two way interactive communications between learners and teacher. Both have the equal chance inside the classroom to share their ideas and discuss the problems.

Speaking, as the last part to be assessed in this paper provide a much more interesting for learners (see appendix 12). It tends to be very exciting when learners are assigned to fill the survey whilst at the mean time they were practising speaking, reading (activity 3 and 4) and writing (activity 7). An integrated language skill authorizes learners to make a consensus of what is the most suitable solution, opinion or idea between them to accomplish the task. They are asked to fill in their answer in the survey and later on, allot to present a summary based on a list of question that created the most discussion to the other groups. When this activity has been done, the actual outcome is completed. Yet, the pedagogic purpose in this section is specified vocabulary (at the right top of page 55), grammar/spelling/punctuation points (activity 4) and speaking ability development. In relation to TBLT framework, the firsts and the second activity in page 54 has been set-up to become a pre-task phase activities. Next, the main-task activity appear in activity 5 to 7, and the post task comes into sight in activity 8 and 9 that accomplished by a language focus and some grammar exercises at the very final part of this section.

CONCLUSION

Although some criteria of a task have been set up from the advocates, the issue of task criteria is far more multifaceted than it appears to be. However, from these perspectives we could drawn several core characteristics of what we constitute as a task. Then, I summarized some key criteria for a task, that I have mention in the literature review.

We have discussed so far the two course books from at least from the basis of four outlooks; real word activity (authenticity), outcome and pedagogic purposes

are different, involve any of four language skills and allows for more interaction and meaning rather than grammar. The previous analysis and discussion in the previous section may gave us a clear border to distinguish and categorize whether the activities or a unit generally within a course book.

Several conclusions could be drawn from the analysis. It is obvious that the latter book (of *Natural English*) which was published in 2003 are far more better in sense of conveying strong task criteria in the overall activities, whereas the former course book (*Work Out*) only apply a very low content of task criteria. As I assumed earlier in the introduction, it is very likely that the old book merely offer a modest portion of task features inside, while typically a recent course book is often claimed to carry more task features. However, it does not automatically mean or we could simply claim that all of old materials in the course books do not fit to the task-criteria as we have described prior to this.

The second course book (NE) obviously has been able to occupy a wide rage of variety in approaching the learners. The task does not strictly stick to a single way of approach in terms of introducing the targeted language skills. Several times, the vocabulary, grammar and listening activities were nicely and unnoticeably included within the speaking and writing activities. The cognitive load is reasonably following the sequencing process so that the learners could perform an attainment of the pedagogic purposes as well as outcome without having serious difficulties. The second course book is comparatively worth to be implemented.

However, the clear border of some main task criteria will need to be taken into account to ensure a greater degree of effectiveness. This, in turn will have a positive implication for the improvement of communicative approach as well as task-based language teaching and learning in the future. Additionally, this may particularly have a lot of constructive impact for the EFL teachers and the second language learners as well. In TBLT, the teacher ought to think about the learner's needs and wants, so that they can single out a proper task for them. Meanwhile, for the learners, exploring their desires could benefit them in achieving the target language (pedagogic purpose and outcome) before proceeding to the further parts of learning. This process would allow negotiation between the teacher and learners, and break the barrier between them. It is also possible as Parrot argues that "the teachers are thus learning something about the experience of their students, or at

least re-familiarizing themselves with the experience”.²⁰ The process of re-familiarizing, to some extent would create an atmosphere where the teachers role could be widened not only as a knowledge-transformer, but also as the “friend” for their learners. Therefore, we can infer that the affective factors such as attitudes and emotional responses could be one of many factors to result an encouraging side-effect of effective TBLT.²¹

Once again, we should bear in our mind that somehow this is not a matter of black or white, since at a certain point, as Batstone suggested, “adopting any one method, either process or product based grammar learning, and would be a fallacy.”²² Only teachers and learners can evaluate the success or failure of any one method, and it is best to keep your options open.

²⁰Parrot, M. *Task for Language ...*, p. 3.

²¹Hedge, T. *Teaching and Learning in the Language Classroom*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000, p. 20.

²²Batstone, R. ‘Product and Process: Grammar In The Second Language Classroom.’ In Bygate, M, Tonkyn, A and Williams, E. (eds) *Grammar and the Language Teacher*. New York: Prentice Hall, 1994, p. 224 - 236.

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