



A pedagogical proposal for intermediate Spanish

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Research objectives

- Design a pedagogical unit with tasks that address learning needs of fourth semester Spanish language learners at IU
- Pilot subset of pedagogical tasks with current learners
- Evaluate learners' perceptions of tasks
- Make suggestions for future implementation of tasks

TBLT: Theoretical underpinnings

- TBLT not a method, but an approach that draws on SLA research (Ellis, 2009)
 - “...language learning will progress most successfully if teaching aims simply to create contexts in which the learner’s natural language learning capacity can be nurtured rather than making a systematic attempt to teach the language bit by bit” (p. 222)
- Task as central construct (NB: variety of operationalizations)
 - Task complexity and sequencing (e.g., Robinson, 2001; Willis, 1996)
- Compatibility with cognitive-interactionist theories of SLA (e.g., Robinson, 2001; Skehan, 1998; Gass, 1997; Long, 1996; Mackey, 1999)

TBLT implementation

- Some examples:
 - Bangalore [ESL] (Prabhu, 1987)
 - University of Hawaii at Manoa [Korean] (Chaudron et al., 2005)
 - Georgetown University [German] (cf. Byrnes, 2002)
 - Belgium [Dutch] (Van den Branden et al., 2006)
 - Thailand [ESL] (McDonough & Chaikitmongkol, 2007)
- Common elements and key take-aways
 - **Needs** (learners, instructors, stakeholders)
 - Immediate and future, determined by **context**

What about implementation in larger-scale, US foreign language programs?
Spanish!

Needs analysis (Henderson et al., 2014)

- Sources: S250 students ($N = 216$), S250 supervisor, Director of Basic Language Program
- Methods: Online questionnaire, interviews
- Key findings
 - Students: Professional > Travel > Academic needs
 - Supervisor & Director: Effective communication in different domains, complex discourse, preparation for S280

Research questions

Based on the findings of a needs analysis (Henderson et al., 2014) conducted at a large public research university in the US:

1. What would a task-based pedagogical unit look like for fourth semester Spanish FL learners?
2. Do task outcomes match the objectives of the tasks?
3. What are learners' perceptions towards the tasks?

METHODOLOGY

Participants

- 10 English-speaking learners of Spanish enrolled in Second Year Spanish II (HISP-S250)
 - Tasks 1 & 2 ($n = 4$)
 - Task 3 ($n = 6$)

Operationalization of task

- Tasks met four criteria outlined by Ellis (2009):
 1. Primary focus on **meaning**
 2. ‘**Gap**’ (i.e., must convey or infer meaning)
 3. Reliance on linguistic and non-linguistic **resources** to carry it out
 4. Clear **outcome** that requires use of target language
- Focused vs. **unfocused** tasks
- Input-providing vs. **output-prompting** tasks

Materials

- Pedagogical unit: *¡Yo quiero trabajar!*
 - Business setting
 - Task 1: Identify client's needs in an email (50 minutes)
 - Task 2: Respond to client's email addressing his/her needs (50 minutes)
 - Medical setting
 - Task 3: Identify and act on patient's needs (50 minutes)
 - Law enforcement setting
 - Task 4: Resolve situation with a civilian (50 minutes)
 - Task 5: Write detailed report of encounter with civilian to turn in to supervisor (50 minutes)

Materials, cont.

- Post-task questionnaire
 - Demographic information
 - Self-reported during-task focus and cognition
 - Self-reported affective response during and after task
 - Self-reported perception of success
 - Opinions regarding task relevance
 - Comments regarding task

Task design

- All tasks followed pre-, during-, and post-task design (Skehan, 1996)
 - Pre-task: Activate background knowledge; provide useful, relevant lexical and/or pragmatic support; provide context
 - During-task: The task itself
 - Post-task: Evaluate task outcomes
- Tasks related to business setting and law enforcement setting designed as two-task sequences of increasing complexity (cf. Robinson, 2007)

Procedure

- Task piloting took place in two different sessions, with two different groups of learners
 - Session 1: Tasks 1 & 2
 - Task 1 completed verbally in group setting
 - Task 2 completed on computer by each learner participant
 - Post-task questionnaire
 - Session 2: Task 3
 - Role-plays conducted in pairs, audio recorded
 - Post-task questionnaire

Coding & analysis

- Audio-recorded materials transcribed
- Task performance coded and analyzed for content accuracy and completion of task objective for each learner
 - Distinct coding scheme for Task 1, 2, and 3
- Post-task questionnaires analyzed for general trends

Task 1	Task 2	Task 3
<p>Were students able to identify the main needs of the client from the email he sent?</p>	<p>Did the student include all of the necessary information to adequately address the needs of the client mentioned in the email they received from him? If not, what information was missing?</p> <p>Were all necessary parts of a formal email in Spanish included? If not, which were missing?</p>	<p>Doctor: Were the students able to utilize common expressions and vocabulary reviewed in the pre tasks to understand what the patient needs, provide a diagnosis and treatment? If not, what information was left out?</p> <p>Patient: Were the students able to utilize common expressions and vocabulary reviewed in the pre tasks to express symptoms to the doctor? If not, what information was left out? Were there general production or comprehension breakdowns in regards to grammar or vocabulary? Did students appear to need tools (grammar, pragmatic, lexical) not provided for in the pre-tasks? If so, what were such tools?</p>

RESULTS

Sample Task 2 email



Agente de Cursos E.S.L. Idiomas

Carrer de Roger de Llúria, 44. 1r – 4A

08009 Barcelona

Manuel López

Calle de María de Molina, 4

28745 Madrid

Barcelona, 6 de abril de 2014

Opciones de Cursos

Estimado Señor López:

Gracias para escribir a Cursos E.S.L. Idiomas. Tengo algunas opciones para su hijo por aprender a inglés en un país extranjero.

Si quiere que su hijo va a Inglaterra, es una escuela en Brighton que se llama Escuela de Idiomas Brighton. Tienen cursos intensivo y estándar con precios más razonables. Es 2944 para vivir con una familia y asistir a lecciones para 8 semanas.

Una otra opción es los Estados Unidos. Hay la Escuela de Idiomas Los Angeles y tienen cursos intensivo y estándar por allí también. El precio es 4848 para 8 semanas con una familia y lecciones.

También, un catálogo de muchos cursos se encuentra en su sitio de web: <http://www.esl-idiomas.com>.

Gracias para escribir a Cursos E.S.L. Idiomas y espero que una opción buena existe para ti.

Tasks 1 & 2

Task 1

- All students identified all client's needs from the email

Task 2

- In general, all students addressed all but two of the client's needs in email
 - Unaddressed needs: proficiency level of classes, optional outside of class activities
- All letters appropriately formatted and organized
- Non-linguistic strategies employed (e.g., directing client to website for more information)

Students' perceptions of Task 1 & 2

- What they reported thinking about
 - Email format, how long it would take, response formulation
- What they reported focusing on
 - Email format and content
- Affective reactions
 - During task: engaged, relaxed, distracted, uninterested (mixed)
 - After task: accomplished, knowledgeable, mild disappointment in self
- Self-reported perceptions of success
 - Somewhat successful (4) – successful (5)
- All participants reported that tasks were relevant to Spanish learners at IU

Task 3

Students as **doctors**

- All but two students consistently utilized vocabulary/expressions from task note cards to identify patient's needs
- Tools from the pre-task were not consistently used
- Almost all students suggested treatments, a few provided diagnosis
- Some students used their own expressions, not found in the task materials
- Pragmatic elements:
 - *Usted* form not used or abandoned after initial use
 - Greetings not used consistently, no leave-takings

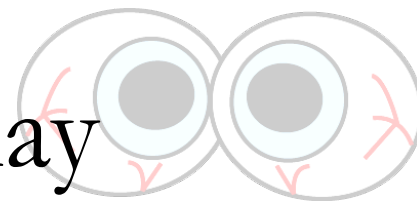
Students as **patients**

- Primarily relied on information on note cards
- Pre-task tools employed by one pair (*tengo náuseas/me duele(n)...*)
- Patients could express symptoms generally, had trouble giving specific details, needed scaffolding from peer
- Some students used their own expressions, not found in the task materials
- Pragmatic elements:
 - *Usted* form not used or abandoned after initial use
 - Greetings not used consistently, no leave-takings
 - The title “doctor” was employed by some pairs

Task 3, cont.

- Students as **doctors**
 - Production breakdowns
 - Verb conjugations (scaffolded only with infinitives)
 - Past tense errors
 - Question word confusion (*qué/cómo*)
 - Needed fixed phrases
 - *¿Qué le duele?*
 - Specific lexical items related to
 - Conditions and treatments
 - No comprehension breakdowns
- Students as **patients**
 - Production breakdowns
 - Verb conjugations
 - Lexical gaps ('sometimes,' 'blurry', 'comes and goes')
 - Comprehension breakdowns
 - Lexical (*cuando, quizás*)
 - Did not understand other vocabulary, even when translation provided on note card)

Sample Task 3 role-play



Doctora: Hola. Um ¿qué duele?... ¿Qué te duele?

Paciente: Um. No me duele pero mis ojos son rojos

Doctora: Ok um...um ¿cuando veas um la luz molestarte en tus ojos?

Paciente: ¿cuándo? What did you say? /Repea-/

Doctora: /Cuando/... veas en el luz or la luz

Paciente: Oh. Sí um la luz me molesta.....porque mis ojos son... rojos [laughs]

Doctora: [laughs] um quizás tienes algo en el ojo

Paciente: Quizás what?

Doctora: Maybe you have something in your eye

Paciente: Oh [laughs] uh posiblemente um uh doctor tiene? tengo glaucoma?

Doctora: [laughs] Um quizás, le voy a examinar tus ojos con examen ocular...y voy a dar...voy a darte gotas para los ojos

Paciente: Está bien

Doctora: Está bien

Paciente: Wow.

Doctora: Ok

Paciente: Ok. So maybe, maybe I don't know what I'm doing

Doctora: Yeah



Students' perceptions of Task 3

- What they reported thinking about
 - Vocabulary, grammar, responding to situation appropriately
- What they reported focusing on
 - Word choice, verb conjugations
- Affective reactions
 - During task: confused, unprepared, incompetent, defeated
 - After task: adequate, happy to learn, relieved, confident
- Self-reported perceptions of success
 - Neutral (3) – somewhat successful (4)
- All participants reported that Task 3 was “useful” to Spanish learners at IU

DISCUSSION & CONCLUDING REMARKS

Summary of findings

1. What would a task-based pedagogical unit look like for fourth semester Spanish FL learners?
 - Variety of professional settings
 - Variety of task modes (written, oral; receptive, productive), incorporating increasing complexity
 - Spans five, 50-minute class sessions
2. Do task outcomes match the objectives of the tasks?
 - Generally, yes
3. What are learners' perceptions towards the tasks?
 - Overall optimistic
 - Positive perceptions of task relevance among “non-specialists”

Implications

- TBLT implementation in study context must take into consideration future needs of learners
 - Findings support success of needs analysis
- Pedagogical materials/resources not readily available
- Evidence of learner engagement with principles of TBLT
 - Tasks brings to light gaps in language ability
 - Tasks as vehicle for real-world, functional language use
 - Task as medium for incorporating authentic samples of language

Considerations & future directions

- Small participant sample
- Inclusion of greater variety of professional settings
- Take into consideration learners' comments for future task implementation
 - More time
 - More feedback
 - Build awareness of tasks and connection to real-world

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