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# **Applied Linguistics to Foreign Language Teaching and Learning**

**Unit 8: Recent Developments in Language Teaching Pedagogy**

Bessie Dendrinou

School of Philosophy

Faculty of English Language and Literature

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## Introduction

Unit 2 makes a historical review of the approaches to foreign language teaching and learning that were developed in the 20th century. The present Unit will present in greater detail the three approaches which were influential at the turn of the century in European FLD and which still inform discourses of the discipline as well as instruction materials and assessment tools. These are:

- the Communicative Approach,
- the Task-Based Approach, and
- the Intercultural Approach. Finally, this Unit will briefly discuss new concerns and directions in the field, concentrating on issues that are pertinent to the teaching and learning of English as a 'foreign' language.

### 1. Claims of the Communicative Approach and its characteristics

The main distinguishing feature of the Communicative Approach is that it aims at the development of **communicative competence** by focusing not only on form and meaning but also on language use, and on skills which are required for the comprehension and production of authentic oral and written texts. It relies on **semantic syllabi** (often Notional/Functional) rather than structural ones or, in any case, syllabi that may list grammatical and vocabulary categories but also language functions. In the best of cases '**communicative**' **syllabi** contain interrelated categories of grammar (formal or semantic grammar), vocabulary, language functions, situational contexts, areas of discourse (topic); in other words, they tend to relate form and meaning to **social contexts of language use**.

The concern of the Communicative Approach, about how language is used not only correctly but also **appropriately**, resulted in a basic question about the knowledge to be transmitted and acquired in FL courses: Which uses of language (i.e., functions, topics, situations) does one select to include in the course syllabus? The most obvious answer to this question was: The uses that learners are most likely to be involved in outside the classroom, in the 'real' world. It was this response that facilitated a turn of attention from the language (what elements should be taught / acquired and how) to the *learner* and his or her **communicative needs**. Such interest pointed to new ideas regarding teaching practices in the 'communicative' classroom, so that even though the Communicative Approach does not constitute a teaching/learning methodology, the claims it is based upon have resulted to a series of principled pedagogic practices and instructional activities.

#### Task 1:

Read carefully the claims in the five subsections that follow so that you can decide which of these claims inform each of the activities in Appendix 1.

#### 1.1 Communication is a process involving unpredictability

Communication is an exchange between people; that is, exchange of knowledge, information, ideas, opinions and feelings. It is certainly not always an exchange of well-ordered utterances.

Communication is full of surprises. It is this element of unexpectedness and unpredictability that makes communication what it is. The cases where responses are predictable are a very small number of special situations, i.e., in the case of social formulae (such as: 'How do you do', My 'condolences', 'Please give my regards to your parents') that serve to establish or maintain relations between speakers rather than to convey information. In most cases, however, responses are completely unpredictable. For example, a question such as 'Did you watch the games?' could produce any of the following responses: 'You bet we did and got no sleep afterwards', or 'Oh, have

you heard about Mary trying out for the basketball team?’ or ‘Oh, that reminds me... I wanted to tell you to go see the film ‘The Final Match’. It’s excellent!’. The Communicative Approach aims at preparing learners for this sort of interaction which had often been ignored in language teaching.

FL courses before the Communicative Approach were mainly concerned with either the formation of language habits or the development of linguistic competence which would allow students of a foreign language to produce well-formed sentences. Little or no attention was given to the development of **communicative skills**. Stimulus/response drills, dialogues and question-answer exercises encouraged students to think that any given question or remark has a set reply. Although this type of classroom practice could prove valuable in some ways, it is a means to an end rather than an end in itself, and the transfer to real life is not automatic: intermediate processes are required.

## 1.2 Communication involves more than the exchange of ideas

Language is not used merely so as to convey ideas, news and information but also so as to relate feelings, attitudes and opinions about them. To give a simple example: If someone says “*It’s raining*”, the person s/he is addressing may show surprise, frustration, satisfaction, concern. In order to convey his/her feelings, the respondent may use verbal but also non-verbal cues. Attitudes and feelings are expressed with language but also with intonation, gesture and facial expression. In fact, meanings which are socially meaningful are conveyed through language but also through other paralinguistic and non-linguistic devices such as bodily contact, physical proximity, orientation, bodily posture, gesture, head-nods, facial expressions, eye-movement and even appearance; they are also conveyed through the speed at which a person speaks, the loudness or softness, the quality and pitch of his/her voice.

The Communicative Approach claims that foreign language learners must learn to communicate meanings with language and paralinguistics not just to produce sentences and sentences combined to form socially decontextualized texts. They must become able to understand and convey ideational but also affective and attitudinal information, which means that verbal and non-verbal aspects of communication should interrelate in a teaching program.

## 1.3 Communication presupposes communicative competence

In order to communicate effectively users need not merely linguistic competence which allows them to understand and produce grammatically correct sentences but utterances and larger texts articulated in language appropriate to the situational context. This is because language does not occur in isolation; it occurs in a social context and fulfils social rather than linguistic purposes. Children acquiring their first language develop knowledge related to the form and meaning (in other words, they come to intuitively know rules about what is grammatically correct) but also related to the use of language (they come to intuitively know rules about what is **appropriate to the social context** of language use). They develop **communicative competence** which includes both linguistic and sociolinguistic competence. There are many ways of saying the same thing, and we choose one rather than another according to the criterion of social context ‘appropriateness’. Sit down and open your book is a perfectly correct sentence, from a grammatico-syntactical point of view, but it would be socially incorrect (i.e., inappropriate) if it were said by a student to his or her teacher. Likewise, “Would you be so kind as to open your books to page 5, that is if you don’t mind” is perfectly correct English, but it would not be an inappropriate way for a teacher to speak to his or her students. “Two hundred people killed in plane crash” would be a grammatically incorrect sentence, because there is no verb (it should actually read as “Two hundred people were killed in plane crash”) but it would be an absolutely correct utterance as a newspaper article title.

The development of communicative competence requires that teachers must do more than offer the learner knowledge about how the linguistic system operates and opportunities to practice making

grammatically correct but socially decontextualized sentences, texts and dialogues. FL teachers and the instructional materials they use must demonstrate how language elements are used, and in what situational context they are appropriate. In short, foreign language learners have to master knowledge and skills related to language usage but also to its use.

#### **1.4 'Knowing how to' and 'being able to' is not enough**

People may know that such and such a way of saying or writing something is correct and appropriate, but they may be unable to put their knowledge into practice. Or, they may have developed communicative competence and skills, but when involved in a communicative event they may be unable to perform in ways that result to effective communication. The crucial question that 'communicative' foreign language teaching asks is how competence leads to performance or how to make a smooth transition between 'skill-getting' and 'skill-using'. The gap is difficult to bridge because the classroom environment, by its very nature, makes genuine communication extremely elusive, i.e., communication stems from necessity, and this element is usually absent in a classroom situation. In most cases, learners know in advance what that will say and what everybody else will say too. If a teacher gives a prompt to student A such as: "Ask what Alex was doing yesterday", everybody in the class knows that the correct response is: "What was Alex doing yesterday?". And if student B is asked to respond to A's question on the basis of a picture showing a girl playing the piano, everyone in the class knows that the response should be: "She was playing the piano". Teachers usually ask questions to which they (and perhaps other students in the class) already know the answer either because it's in an instructional text or because it is obvious. For example, the teacher may ask "George, am I writing on the blackboard right now?". Interested in formal grammar, s/he is practicing the present progressive and expects to hear: "No, you are not writing on the blackboard right now. You are looking in your book". Nobody is exchanging any information and consequently nobody really needs to listen to what is being said. The element of choice and surprise that is so characteristic of communication has been missing from the foreign language classroom.

Communicative teaching wants to compensate for that which had been missing. It claims that necessity, in the form of doubt, of unpredictability can be created through *information-gap* activities. That is, activities where the class participants have only part of the total information or where the person doing the asking (including the teacher) may not have the information at all, and is motivated through the type of activity to provide accurate information in appropriate ways. For example, students are asked to give instructions to the class divided in groups to create an object that they know how to. The group that finishes their construction first win and the student that has been able to give correct and appropriate instructions gains a point too.

#### **1.5 In real communication errors are inevitable**

Developing communicative competence means a reassessment of teachers' (and learners') attitudes towards errors. Errors of all sorts are common in different kinds of communicative situations between people and whereas some errors of language use may result in ineffective communication or in endangering relationships between people, errors of usage (errors in pronunciation, grammar and vocabulary) are unlikely to. Many errors that people (even L1 users) make – errors of usage or use – are corrected by the speaker him/herself in the process of communication. Otherwise, they may be compensated for. In real communication, particularly in oral communication, all kinds of errors, mistakes, lapses, ungrammaticalities, hesitations, stuttering, unfinished sentences and the like are extremely common.

The Communicative Approach takes all the above into account, and adopts the stance that learners should be allowed to make errors as part of the language learning process. In answer to questions raised regarding the extent and kind of errors that should go uncorrected, the response is that it depends on the pedagogic goal each time but generally speaking the types of errors corrected are

those that impede communication. It is not necessary to stamp out immediately every grammatical, lexical or pronunciation error made, thinking that if they are not learners will develop bad habits impossible to get rid of later. It considers errors as a necessary part of the learner's progress towards the mastery of the language and that errors will right themselves in the normal process of things, as the learner receives more information. It maintains that learners must be given the opportunity to test out a new language element (word, structure, function, etc.) so they can find out what the boundaries of its use are. Therefore, they should be given the opportunity to make them. This does not mean that linguistic or pragmatic errors should not be corrected at any time, but it need be done with special care, and not necessarily on the spot. Emphasis on correct production all the time can lead to serious inhibitions on the part of the learner.

### **Task 2:**

Having read the above about 'communicative' teaching, decide whether there would be anything you would change in the definitions of the notions below (cf. Richards, Platt and Weber (1987:108).

**Fluency:** It refers to the ability to produce written and/or spoken language with ease but some inevitable errors, mistakes or hesitations. It also means being able to communicate ideas, feelings and opinions effectively, in continuous speech, without causing comprehension difficulties or communication breakdown.

**Accuracy:** It refers to the ability to produce grammatically correct sentences but may not include the ability to speak or write fluently, or the competence to produce language appropriate to the context of situation.

**Appropriacy:** It refers to the use of language in a way which is appropriate for the context of situation.

### **Task 3:**

Now read the characteristics of the Communicative Approach as described in the subsection below, and then read the statements about foreign language teachers and teaching in Table 1 that follows. Decide whether they respond to principles of the Communicative Approach.

## **1.6 Basic characteristics of 'communicative teaching'**

- The goal of teaching/learning is the development of learners' communicative competence. Therefore, it concentrates on use and appropriacy rather than on usage and correct grammatical forms and vocabulary.
- A tendency to favour fluency-focused activities rather than simply accuracy-focused activities.
- The C.A. concentrates on the development of receptive and productive skills separately. For example, it offers opportunities for listening comprehension with activities that do not require production, such as someone giving directions to get someplace and learners trace the route on a map. However, it also concentrates on the development of receptive and productive skills in an integrated fashion. Therefore, they are given a text that presents the problem a young man is facing and they are asked to read it and suggest to him ways of dealing with his problem. Or they are asked to write an e-mail to him to help him with his problem. Speaking or writing is integrated with reading.
- Language practice, which moves from highly controlled activities to progressively freer ones, is not limited to the understanding and production of decontextualized structures but contextualized utterances and socially purposeful texts.
- The notion of error is not restricted to incorrect grammar or choice of vocabulary but it is extended to include errors of appropriacy. Furthermore, committing errors are not considered as capital offenses but as part of the learning and the communicative process.

- The focus is on meaningful interaction between learners, on pair and group work activities where learners have the feeling that there is some purpose for communicating.
- In order for activities to involve learners in real communication and to be meaningful for learners they must entail some information gaps.
- Aiming at learners' fluency in the target language, as well as at developing their ability to deal with real, everyday communication through that language, communicative activities for pedagogic practice must relate in some way to learners' real-life needs and social contexts.
- Texts used for listening and reading practice should be authentic or authentic-like and so must the activities which are based on them.
- Activities for writing or speaking production are often set up as role plays or simulations where the learner knows who is talking/writing to whom and for what purpose. Determining the communicative parameters for any language production is a necessary part of practicing and assessing appropriateness of language choices.

<b>Table 1: Statements about teachers and teaching.</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
1. The teacher is the facilitator of the communication process, a needs analyst and a guide to the learning process.		
2. Students are expected to master the linguistic system through the controlled practice of grammar and vocabulary.		
3. Linguistic and text variation is an important feature of instructional materials.		
4. Communication is not encouraged from the very beginning. It is encouraged when users can produce correctly.		
5. Teaching aims at native-speaker phonological competence.		
6. Attends to structure/form and decontextualized meaning rather than to contextualized meaning and use.		
7. The target linguistic system will be learnt best through the process of struggling to communicate.		
8. The use of the students' L1 is forbidden.		
9. Social contextualisation is a basic premise for the presentation, practice and production of language.		
10. Fluency and acceptable language is the primary goal; accuracy is judged not in the abstract but in context.		

**Task 4:**

Now that you have read about the communicative approach and looked at the activities in Appendix 1, read the information in Table 2 below, and decide if there are any other features you would include in the two columns.

Table 2: Features of instructional activities.

Non-communicative activities	Communicative activities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• They serve the purpose of showing to the teacher) what students have learned</li> <li>• They may motivate classroom rather than social interaction</li> <li>• They focus on practicing linguistic form rather than the use of language</li> <li>• They are usually constructed (especially at initial stages of language teaching) to offer practice opportunity for a specific linguistic structure</li> <li>• They often require teacher intervention (e.g., there is a correct response to an answer and the teacher has the right answer plus the knowledge so as to say if performance was accurate or not).</li> <li>• They give opportunities for controlled practice but not guided free production.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• They...</li> <li>• They...</li> <li>• They...</li> <li>• They...</li> <li>• They...</li> <li>• They...</li> </ul>

**Task 5:**

Now look at activities in Appendix 1, and reflect on the features you have just read so as to decide:

- Why it is that they respond to the principles of the communicative approach.
- Whether they are ‘high’ or ‘low’ on what Harmer calls “the communicative continuum”? Where on the continuum you would place them?

**Task 6:**

Table 3 that follows includes characteristics of two different approaches. One is the Audiolingual Approach briefly discussed in an earlier Unit and the other is the Communicative Approach presented in detail in this Unit. Read the characteristics and decide:

- Which is which
- Use the knowledge you have developed so far to fill in the missing information in the two columns.

Table 3: Audiolingual Approach and Communicative Approach

..... approach	.....approach
	Meaning is paramount
Structure based dialogues are memorized	Dialogues, if used, canter around communicative functions and are not normally memorised
Language items are not contextualised	
Language learning is learning structures, words, sounds	Language learning is learning to communicate
Mastery of the formal system is taught	Effective and appropriate communication is sought



..... approach	.....approach
	Comprehensible pronunciation is taught
Grammatical explanation is avoided	Any device which assists learners is accepted
Communicative activities may come only after a long process of drilling, repetition	
	Translation may be used where students need or benefit from it
Reading and writing are deferred until speech is mastered	All language skills are developed from the beginning
The target language system will be learnt through the overt teaching of the patterns of the language	
Linguistic competence is the desired goal	Communicative competence is the desired goal
Varieties of language are recognized but not emphasised	
“Language is habit” so error must be prevented at all costs	Language is created by the individual through trial and error
Accuracy, in terms of formal correctness, is a primary goal	
	Students are expected to interact with other people through pair and group work or through their writing
The teacher cannot know exactly what language the students will use	
Intrinsic motivation will spring from an interest in what is being communicated in the language	

## 2. Task-based pedagogy as an approach to language learning

Before theoretical discussions related to this approach appeared in international publications, this approach was implemented in Greece. Task-based pedagogy was the basis for the ELT work carried out in Greece experimentally in the early 80s –work which resulted in the writing and design of a series of EFL course books, entitled *Task Way English*, published by the Greek Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs in 1986<sup>1</sup>. It was used as an exclusive course book series (the first of its kind on an international level) for the teaching of English in Greek state schools for many years.

<sup>1</sup> The experimental project was carried out by a team of Greek scholars and educators, working under the leadership and guidance of Bessie Dendrinou, who had conceived of this approach to learning, and later was also head author of the coursebook series *Task Way English 1, 2 and 3*.

## Task 7:

Before further discussing this approach think about what the common meaning of the word 'task' is<sup>2</sup>. Then, read the subsection below and compare it to the meaning that 'task' takes in a pedagogic context.

### 2.1 What is a 'task' in a pedagogic context?

'Task' in the context of teaching and learning has been defined by some as a kind of problem-solving activity which involves learners in a variety of cognitive and communicative processes applied to existing and new knowledge. However, there are several other definitions of task to read and compare.

1. Richards, Platt, Weber (1985:289) claim that a task is an activity or action which is carried out as the result of processing or understanding the language (i.e. as a response). For example, drawing up a map while listening to an instruction and performing a command. A task usually requires the teacher to specify what will be regarded as successful completion of the task.
2. Nunan (1989:10) sees it as a piece of classroom work which involves learners in comprehending, manipulating producing or interacting in the target language while their attention is primarily focused on meaning rather than form.
3. Willis (1986:23) understands tasks as activities where the target language is used by the learner for a communicative purpose (goal) in order to achieve an outcome.
4. *The Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching & Applied Linguistics* (third edition) defines task as an activity which is designed to achieve a particular learning goal. A number of dimensions of tasks influence their use in language teaching.

Task dimensions that influence their use and shape the pedagogy include:

- **Goals:** The kind of goals and objectives teachers working with learners identify for a task (Note that common goal setting makes learners feel that they share responsibility for their learning).
- **Procedures:** The operations or procedures learners use to carry out and finally complete a task.
- **Order:** The location of a task within a sequence of other tasks.
- **Pacing:** The amount of time that is spent planning and executing a task
- **Product:** The outcome or outcomes learners produce, such as a set of questions for an interview, a poster, or a book-review as the outcome of a book-reading task
- **Learning strategy:** The kind of strategy [intentional and organized plan] the learner uses when doing a task hoping to complete it successfully
- **Assessment:** Setting criteria for how success on the task will be measured
- **Participation:** Whether the task
- **Resources:** The materials and other resources used with a task
- **Language:** The language learners use in completing a task [use of the target language as well as L1], the particular vocabulary, structures, functions, etc.

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<sup>2</sup> For your information, one of the definitions provided by *Collins Cobuilt English Language Dictionary* (p. 1496) is: "[It is] an important and often difficult piece of work which is undertaken for a particular reason, especially one which is part of a larger project." Think about and find other definitions.

## 2.2 What theoretical premise does this approach operate by?

From the late 80s on much has been published regarding this approach to learning languages, which informed and continues to inform pedagogic practices and instructional materials. One of the first foreign language teaching specialists to develop theoretical arguments in favour of this approach was Prabhu (1987: 69-70), who explains that task-based pedagogy operates with the concept that, while the conscious mind is working out some of the meaning-content, some subconscious part of the mind perceives, abstracts or acquires (or recreates, as a cognitive structure) some of the linguistic structuring embodied in those entities, as a step in the development of an internal system of rules. The intensive exposure is caused by an effort to work out meaning. Content is thus a condition which is favourable to the subconscious abstraction –or cognitive formation– of language structure.

### Task 8:

Can you think of any reasons why task-based pedagogic activity can be motivating and useful for the desired goals of learning? Read the following subsection to help you.

## 2.3 Why is Task-based pedagogy considered an effective approach to FLT/L

Task-based pedagogy is central to many theories for classroom practice not only in foreign language courses but courses across the curriculum. The choice of tasks, usually made by the teacher or teachers working as a group together and with their students, basically determines:

- The learning goals
- How learning is to take place
- How the outcomes of learning will be assessed

When used in a foreign language course, task-based pedagogy provides a socially meaningful purpose for pedagogic activity which goes beyond the practice of language for its own sake.

Interactive tasks in particular offer opportunities for language learning: through:

- through meaningful communication and interaction
- by negotiation of meanings
- as a result of engaging in authentic language use

The Task-based approach concentrates on the process of learning rather than on teaching methodology and technique. Therefore, it is often referred to as **Task-based Learning** (henceforth TBL), while it could also be thought of as a learning-centred approach (i.e., learning-centred in juxtaposition to learner-centred<sup>3</sup>). To remember Prabhu again (ibid: 71 and 72), TBL adopts the view that the acquisition of any element in language is not an instant, one-step procedure. It may take several instances of intensive exposure to different samples of language before any abstraction is made, or cognitive structure formed, and particular instances may or may not lead to any such result. In order to facilitate it, occasional explanations concerning language use or usage may be desirable, not only on the part of the teacher but also on the part of the learner. Those explanations, however, are not comparable to what one would find in a linguistic or even a pedagogic grammar. They are reflective observations as a result of experiencing language in use. The reflective observations that learners are guided to make are possible because of the internal system developed by successful learners and which in fact is far more complex than any grammar yet constructed by a linguist. For this reason, task-based pedagogy does not promote the teaching of descriptive grammar.

Since TBL, as already mentioned, focuses on the learning process rather than teaching of linguistic content (structural, semantic or pragmatic), those that have discussed task-based course organisation on a theoretical level claim that it should be less concerned with the idea of linguistic

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<sup>3</sup> The C.A. is often referred to as a learner-centred approach because it does aim at focusing on the learner or rather his/her communicative needs.

grading of the material than with the idea of task grading. However, experimental work with task-based-learning instructional materials, particularly course books, indicates that it is useful to attend to both types of grading. It also indicates that linguistic grading should be informed by functionalist rather than structuralist perspectives of language because it is more conducive to the proposed combination.

Ideally, however, TBL should not make use of set course books or a-priori syllabuses. It requires highly trained, creative teachers and in the case of foreign language courses, these teachers should also have high proficiency of both the target language and the learner's L1, so they can cope with designing a-posteriori or procedural syllabuses and tasks stimulated by materials they create themselves in collaboration with learners to suit the profile of their class and individual learners therein.

### **Task 9:**

The benefit of the learner performing a task in a pedagogic context is some kind of learning –not linguistic per se– and, in this sense, learning tasks is a more suitable term than the term communicative tasks that is sometimes used in FLD. Support this argument by thinking through the following situation:

Suppose that you are an EFL teacher and you are working with a syllabus suggesting a variety of different tasks that learners are expected to carry out in the target language, such as:

- making a personal webpage,
- drawing maps based on oral instructions and directions,
- solving mind puzzles on the basis of linguistic clues,
- working through mystery stories that they hear on the basis of bits of information they read,
- cataloguing information in files,

What will learners learn through these tasks and what skills might they develop?

## **2.4 What conditions should a task respond to?**

In performing tasks, learners are likely to be involved in highly socialized activities, during which they are engaged in negotiative processes (cf. Breen, 1985):

- with themselves (in terms of what they already know)
- with others (in terms of sharing and refining knowledge)
- with the language-course content (in terms of what has to be learned)

Therefore, tasks should create conditions for this kind of activity. Some of these conditions are discussed by Candlin (1987: 8-10) who also refers to certain criteria for 'good' language learning tasks. He also refers to different approaches to task classification by different authors, highlighting different aspects of outcome, such as:

- target (real world) social practices
- cognitive strategy
- communicative performance
- generalized processes
- social structures in the classroom

## Task 10

Skim through *Task Way English* 1, 2 or 3 and decide whether it highlights one, some or none of the aspects above. Then, scan the material and see how many different types of tasks it contains. The Table below will help you.

Table 4: Typology of tasks

Types of Tasks	Description
Language awareness training tasks	They provide opportunities to learners to reflect and understand how the language works as a grammatical (or lexicogrmmatical) system and as a system of communication.
Information-sharing tasks	They provide learners with opportunities to work together and, for example, share information that each person in a group has been able to acquire, in order to come up with a single, logical answer.
Learner-strategy tasks	Learners are asked to select, classify, judge, make conclusions, support an opinion, etc.
Cognitive processes tasks	Involving a variety of cognitive processes and aiming at the learners' cognitive growth
Instrumental tasks	They provide opportunities for language practice, while learners teach each other how to make/do practical, life-world things such as drawing a map, designing a webpage, cook something, etc.
Social and (inter) cultural awareness tasks	Learners may be asked to deal with social or cultural stereotypes, to use their cultural experiences to re-view those of others, or to do something and to then evaluate its cultural appropriateness in particular situations.
Socializing tasks	Learners are asked to work in groups for class work and homework, in ways that they learn to work together, share responsibility and rewards.

## Task 11:

Tasks are selected and graded in terms of a number of criteria some of which are listed in the subsection below. Look at the *Task Way English* course book that you worked with before, and see whether the tasks therein are graded in terms of at least one of these criteria.

### 2.5 How are tasks selected and graded?

Candlin (1987: 19-20) lists the following criteria on the basis of which tasks are selected and graded:

- cognitive load,
- code complexity and interpretive density,
- communicative stress,
- content continuity,
- particularity and generalizability,
- process continuity.

**Task 12:**

Reflect on what you have learned so far and read the three main principles of TBL. Would you change anything in the way these principles are articulated? Think again and try to add one more basic principle. Table 4 might help you.

**2.6 Main principles of TBL**

- Learners learn *what* is meaningful to them (providing tasks that are related to students' needs and interests). This in turn will increase their motivation for completing the task.
- Learners learn *in ways* that are meaningful to them. Each learner brings to the learning process a set of personal attributes, preferred ways of learning and learning strategies (providing a variety of tasks which allow for different learning styles and individual preferences and personalities).
- Learning takes place in a social context and *through interaction* with other people. Using language is essentially a social activity and interaction in the target language is an integral part of the learning process (providing tasks that stimulate meaningful interaction between students and between the students and the teacher).

Table 5: The TBL Framework

The TBL Framework	Description
<b>Pre-task</b>	<p>The teacher:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>introduces and defines the topic,</li> <li>uses activities to help students recall/learn useful words and phrases,</li> <li>ensures students understand task instructions,</li> <li>may play a recording of others doing the same or a similar task.</li> </ul> <p>The students:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>note down useful words and phrases from the pre-task activities and/or the recording,</li> <li>may spend a few minutes preparing for the task individually.</li> </ul>
<b>Task cycle</b>	<p><b>Task.</b></p> <p>The students:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>do the task in pairs/small groups. It may be based on a reading/listening text</li> </ul> <p>The teacher</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>acts as monitor and encourages students</li> </ul> <p><b>Planning.</b></p> <p>The students:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>prepare to report to the class how they did the task and what they discovered/decided,</li> <li>rehearse what they will say or draft a written version for the class to read.</li> </ul> <p>The teacher</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>ensures the purpose of the report is clear,</li> <li>acts as language adviser,</li> <li>helps students rehearse oral reports or organize written ones.</li> </ul> <p><b>Report.</b></p> <p>The students</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>present their spoken reports to the class, or circulate/display their written reports.</li> </ul> <p>The teacher:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>acts as chairperson, selecting who will speak next, or ensuring all students read most of the written reports,</li> <li>may give brief feedback on content and form,</li> <li>may play a recording of others doing the same or a similar task.</li> <li></li> </ul>

The TBL Framework	Description
Language focus	<p><b>Analysis</b></p> <p>The students</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>do consciousness-raising activities to identify and process specific language features from the task text and/or transcript</li> <li>may ask about other features they have noticed</li> </ul> <p>The teacher</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>reviews each analysis activity with the class</li> <li>brings other useful words, phrases and patterns to students' attention</li> <li>may pick up on language items from the report stage</li> </ul> <p><b>Practice</b></p> <p>The teacher</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>conducts practice activities after analysis activities where necessary, to build confidence</li> </ul> <p>The students</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>practice words, phrases and patterns from the analysis activities</li> <li>practice other features occurring in the task text or report stage</li> </ul> <p>enter useful language items in their language notebooks</p>

### 3. Intercultural awareness / communicative competence and FLL

One way to understand the term 'intercultural communication' is to think of two or more people from different cultural backgrounds or ethnic groups attempting to understand each other as they are interacting. The language they are using may be a language that is not an L1 for any of them. Imagine, for example, one Greek and one Spanish mathematics teacher at a European conference talking about their classroom experiences in English. Or, it might be an L1 for one of the speakers and a second or foreign language for another. Imagine, in this second case, a British executive discussing business issues with a South African, a Dutch, and a Japanese executive. In doing so they are or should be negotiating meanings which are culturally bound. If they do not negotiate meaning during the process of communication and each one merely expects his/her interlocutors to talk and act in ways that is appropriate to the British, communication is likely to break down.

#### Task 13:

Resort to your own experiences when attempting to communicate with people that are culturally different from you and answer the question: Does having information about the values and practices of peoples from another culture necessarily help someone be what we could call an 'interculturally communicative' speaker? Then check your answer by reading the part immediately below.

Having information about the values and practices of peoples from another culture does not necessarily help someone be what we could call an 'interculturally communicative' speaker. What s/he needs is to learn to communicate in ways that are culturally sensitive, by recognizing the cultural



differences as encoded in language and language use, and employ communication strategies which facilitate the negotiation of meanings –invariably linked with culture; i.e., his/her own culturally bound meanings and those of his/her interlocutor.

#### **Task 14:**

Now reflect on your experience as a learner of English as a foreign language and try to remember how issues of culture were dealt with in your classes. Work with a partner and share your memories. Then read the section that follows and identify the experiences you and your partner had.

### **3.1 Culture, language learning and FLT**

The cultural dimension in language learning is not new. However, the concern in mainstream foreign language programmes has consistently been to provide learners with some understanding of the target culture –that is, to provide information such as about how the people in this culture live their daily lives, in what types of environments; what social occasions or feasts are important to them; how they think and do things in everyday situations. The rationale behind this kind of pedagogic practice was (and still is, in many cases) that, if language learners know how things are done in the target culture, they will be able to say the right things at the right moment in ways that are appropriate in that culture –the ultimate purpose of the language teaching project being to enable foreign language learners to accommodate to L1 speakers of the target language. That is to say, it is believed that by providing learners with cultural information, separately from the teaching of language or, rather, from the teaching of grammar and vocabulary, they will become culturally sensitive communicators.

More recently, however, with the greater emphasis on language learning for communication, the idea of teaching language as separate from culture –i.e., focusing on grammar or vocabulary, and providing cultural insights as ‘background’ information– has seriously been questioned. Fresh FLT perspectives have been sought to deal with the cultural dimension in language learning. The search for these new perspectives has been based on the understanding that knowing facts about the culture in which the target language is used does not guarantee an effective outcome of the interaction. If communication is to be successful, the people involved need to share the same referential meaning of the words they are using –something which is not true for speakers of different languages and cultures. Byram and Fleming (1998), who have published work with which they suggest new ideas for coping with the cultural dimension in foreign language learning, make the following argument:

When people interact in a language which is foreign to at least one of them, the shared meanings and values it carries for those involved cannot be taken for granted in the way they are when those involved are from the same language group. Learning a language as it is spoken by a particular group is learning the shared meanings, values and practices of that group as they are embodied in the language. However, precisely because they are shared and only made explicit when there is a breakdown of communication and interaction, learners find it difficult to discern them and understand their significance. Only after a process of discovering those meanings and practices can learners negotiate and create a new reality with their interlocutors, one which is new to both learners and interlocutors, a shared world of interaction and experience.

And they conclude that:

This means that language courses should be concerned with the ways in which language learners need to go beyond the acquisition of a linguistic system, and that language teachers should find new ways to help them do so. This makes language learning and teaching more demanding than ever. The more we understand about the nature of language and its function in society, the more the task becomes complex and difficult.



### **Task 15:**

Having read the information above, try to define the notion of 'intercultural communicative competence'. Then read the section below and check your answer.

## **3.2 Intercultural communicative competence: a new purpose for language teaching**

Given the more recent concerns discussed above, new approaches and methods of foreign language education have been advocated in the last few decades, aiming at organizing programmes whose purpose is not merely to provide cultural information but, through the teaching and learning of language in use, to develop a cultural awareness and, more importantly, skills for communication that is culturally sensitive and accommodating to the interlocutors –often assumed to be L1 speakers of the target language. Thus, modern EFL course books, for example, include activities intended to allow such type of skill-development (see Appendix for an example of such an activity).

There is another issue at hand, however. The increasing demand to prepare citizens who are able first of all to live productively in a multicultural and multilingual 'global village' and in societies with varying degrees of linguistic and cultural diversity, as well as citizens who are able to move from one country to another to study and work, has created the need for language learning which will allow them to use, with relative communicative effectiveness, 'international' languages like English as a contact language with linguistically diverse groups of people from different cultures. This suggests that language learners must develop a cultural sensitivity which goes beyond familiarization with the target linguistic group's culture. It suggests that they should develop a substantial recognition and tolerance for cultural diversity in general, and an understanding that people across cultures have different ways of thinking, acting, and participating in groups –ways that are not to be considered better or worse than 'ours', but different. Finally, it suggests that language learners should be given the opportunity to see that, during communication, these differences must be negotiated; otherwise, it is likely that communication will break down. Language learning in this sense becomes a means for the development of intercultural awareness, tolerance and understanding as well as of intercultural communicative competence.

The very notion of interculturalism suggests that a variety of related goals be realized through foreign language programmes and language education in general. Where foreign language programmes are concerned, the emphasis is to shift from the foreign or second language speaker accommodating to the L1 speaker of the target language to his/her developing positive attitudes towards cultural diversity, and a willingness to negotiate cultural differences so that mutual understanding is possible. The new programmes are to be built on the understanding that all speakers involved in a communicative situation should be negotiating their referential meanings in order to understand each other. It is not enough if the negotiation is one-sided.

With the knowledge that cultural differences are a given, the foreign language learner has to somehow realize that, in order to negotiate meanings with his/her interlocutor, s/he may have to implicitly or explicitly explain his/her own ways of saying and doing things. This, of course, entails a consciousness into one's own cultural meanings, patterns and practices –a consciousness developed sometimes by being offered the opportunity to have a monitored contact with that which is different, with the purpose of helping language learners to become increasingly open to acquiring such awareness. This, in fact, may be an essential goal in itself in foreign language teaching and learning.

Of course, cultural awareness with regard to one's own ways of thinking, doing and saying does not only come from guided or chance encounters with that which is different. Actually there is a possibility

that perspectives on one's own society and culture in a commonsensical manner may lead to someone overvaluing his/her own ways and considering those of the other inferior. There is also the danger that viewing one's ways from the vantage point of another may lead him/her to undervalue them.

In thinking about the above, one can easily arrive to the conclusion that the development of cultural awareness is a long term-project which can be effective if all of language education in school purposefully aims towards it such awareness. Mother tongue education, for example, should ideally lead to understanding but also critically reassessing what one has come to accept as the only culturally acceptable way of doing things. Many language education curricula in today's Europe, particularly concerned with intercultural understanding, make explicit reference to such a goal (see, for example, the English national curriculum by visiting the relative website).

The methodological question which then arises is how to do this. How does language education (mother tongue or foreign language education) help language learners question their own taken-for-granted world and learn to deal with the world of the other? What methods and techniques are most useful in the language classroom? In trying to come up with answers to these questions, language educators have come up with various practical suggestions. A case in point is Byram and Fleming's work mentioned earlier. They propose the use of drama and drama techniques, ethnographic methodologies and modes of experiential learning used in the foreign language programme. The purpose of their proposed foreign language teaching and learning practices is, they claim, to prepare learners to meet and communicate in cultures and societies other than the specific one usually associated with the language they are learning. They suggest that classroom activity should aim at the:

- integration of linguistic and cultural learning to facilitate communication and interaction;
- comparison of others and self to stimulate reflection on and (critical) questioning of the mainstream culture into which learners have been and continue to be socialised;
- shift in perspective from that which is familiar to that which is unfamiliar.

Social concern about the development of intercultural awareness and intercultural communicative competence, reflected in the work of some language educators and modern language curricula, as well as in frameworks for language curricula (e.g., The Common European Framework for Languages), is not always evinced equally in pre-service or in-service foreign language teacher-training programmes. This means that foreign language teachers in many European countries are ill-prepared to deal with the cultural dimension of language learning in this way. Furthermore, foreign language course books, particularly international publications, continue to include reading matter that exclusively aims at the learners' familiarization with the 'national' target culture, wrongly based on notions of culture as a unified whole, consequently resulting to the development of stereotypes about peoples.

### **Task 16:**

Stop and think to answer the questions that follow and then think about how such understanding can be incorporated into the language teaching project as a whole, into instructional materials in particular:

1. To your knowledge, are the Americans, the British, the Canadians, the Australians and the New Zealanders have the same values, cultural patterns, ways of behaving and interacting?
2. Would you say that all the people of a national or ethnic group think and act the same, or do their way of thinking and acting depend on sociocultural factors such as educational background, profession, social class, age group, gender identity? To answer this question think about the following:

- Would a Greek teenager immersed in today's global youth culture establish greater rapport and understanding when interacting via English with a Japanese youth or with an older Greek person who has no understanding or tolerance of youth culture?
- Would an Australian doctor, talking in English with a group of Brazilians in the medical profession be able to communicate better with them, with a group of poets or with a group of police officers from his/her own country?

Going back to foreign language course books, it is not only reading matter but also and exercises and activities that –even when they do not deal with language void of its cultural meanings– their underlying purpose is usually the development of linguistic and communicative competence to accommodate to the L1 speaker of the target language. They continue thus to sustain this which has been an implicit goal for many years in foreign language teaching and learning situations: to lead language learners into identifying with the other and in a sense denying their own cultural identity. This is what it means when the language teaching project judges as the best language learner to be the one who comes nearest to a native speaker mastery of the target language – the one who can 'pass for', or be identified as a native-like speaker that communicates on an equal footing with him or her.

Attention to intercultural aspects in language learning leads to a different kind of judgement about who good language learners are. That is, learners who are aware of their own identities and cultures, and of how they are perceived by others, and who also have an understanding of the identities and cultures of those with whom they are interacting. These 'intercultural speakers', according to Byram and Zarate (1994), are able to establish relationships between their own and the other cultures, to mediate or explain difference, and ultimately to accept it and perhaps even understand the logic behind it.

#### **Task 17:**

The sections above have provided you with quite a bit of input regarding the notion of 'intercultural awareness'. Use it and try to provide a definition on your own. Then, read the section that follows to check your answer.

### **3.3 What is 'intercultural awareness'?**

Intercultural awareness indicates sensitivity to the cultural dimension of language learning which views language as a culturally embedded phenomenon that encodes and reproduces values and practices of a given society. This approach suggests that an objective of an intercultural learner is development of multiple communicative competences (e.g. linguistic, cultural, discursive) that are required for effective negotiation of shared meanings during intercultural encounters. Cultures vary across national and regional borders and understanding their dynamism involves skills of active interpretation and a great degree of conscious reflection on the gaps between the native culture of a learner and the culture introduced through the target language. What is self-evident about the learner's lifestyle might not be so in the reality of another culture. The first step to being 'intercultural' is understanding that many rituals are a matter of culture-specific convention. For instance, national food is a very frequent and superficial illustration of cultural diversity. But, eating practices, which play a major role in structuring our lives, are often neglected.

Understanding one's native culture is facilitated by the encounter with the 'otherness' of different perspectives and values which remain unconscious until an effort on behalf of a learner is made to stimulate critical awareness about them. Learning a foreign language results in new insights about a target culture and a re-examination of one's own. Yet, another example suggests that knowledge of one's own and foreign values reveals that culture holds sway of our fundamental aspects of thinking, behaviour and relationship-building.

An intercultural learner does not perceive cultural schemata as universal and upholds and implements the ideas of cultural relativism. Cultural diversity is not considered to be a threat from the foreign to the norms and rules of the native culture, which often escalates into fear (xenophobia), but is appreciated as a source of mutual enrichment among peoples. Therefore, intercultural language learning highlights the importance of positive attitudes free of hostility and prejudice. Stereotypical preconceptions, for example, often influence the real-life relations among individuals and even nations and result in discrimination and inequality.

Intercultural awareness aims at constructive communication among people from different cultural background who attempt to resolve conflicts and tensions and face interactive challenges in order to promote understanding and cooperation among cultural groups. Living in Europe today creates a framework for experiential intercultural learning, not limited to the classroom boundaries, which should contribute to recognizing and overcoming prejudices, affirmation of diverse European identities and coexisting in harmony and respect.

**Task 18:**

Look at the communicative activities in the Appendix and suggest how two of them could be revised or used as they are for the development of intercultural awareness.

**Task 19 (Mini group project):**

Choose an EFL course book published in the last 6 years. Study the texts, exercises and activities therein, and:

- Decide whether, generally speaking, this course book is intended to facilitate the development of intercultural awareness and intercultural communicative competence. By making specific references to this book, explain your positive or negative response (about 500 words).
- Choose one activity that aims at either the development of intercultural awareness or of intercultural communicative competence. Explain how it does this.

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