The role of tasks in CLIL program development

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Goal

• The goal of this paper is to discuss the role of tasks and task-based research may play in content and language integrated learning (CLIL) program development.

QUESTION: What are some of the aspects of research into tasks that CLIL can benefit from?
Some assumptions

1) Task-approaches and CLIL share common principles:

- They are “analytic” approaches to language teaching (i.e. learner analyzes the language)
- Teaching is mainly driven by meaning but there is room for “attention to form”
- Language learning happens mainly implicitly, although there is room for explicit learning.
Some assumptions

2) Evidence from task-based research can be **useful** for and **complementary** to current research into and implementation of CLIL.

In the last three decades...

- **An interactive perspective**
  - Learner-learner
  - Teacher-learner

- **A cognitive perspective**
  - Language processing

Balanced development of L2 production and acquisition

(See Gass & Mackey, 2007)

TBLT program design

As an illustration of a task-based program:
Blanquerna School of Communication Studies (URL)
(journalism, advertising and P.R. and media studies)
Academic and professional orientation
Task is the unit in all areas of TBLT program design

A definition

A task is a differentiated goal-oriented process, with a number of steps, which draws on a series of cognitive and communicative procedures, and that has a defined outcome. Additionally, tasks are sequenceable and can be subject to pedagogical intervention.

When organized into a syllabus, their goal is to prepare speakers/learners for real-life performance.
Task-based NEEDS ANALYSIS has shown that the “task” is a useful unit of analysis: example of a crisis communication plan (P.R.)

- Efficient way of identifying what needs to be taught (and what not).
- The language associated with each task and sub-task can be identified and described. Samples can be collected.
- Task evaluation criteria can be collected during needs analysis.

Long, 2005  Gilabert, 2005
Conclusion about Needs Analysis

• CLIL can benefit from research conducted within task-based needs analysis (e.g. task as a unit of analysis).

• Subjects which are taught through CLIL (e.g. chemistry, physics, gymnastics, etc.) may be described in terms of tasks.

• However, can all subjects be taught through tasks? How do we integrate tasks and texts?
Traditional grammar-based programs have relied on general consensus to sequence units for balanced development of fluency, accuracy, and complexity.

- **Skehan (1998):** task sequencing by difficulty
  - language, task difficulty, learner factors

- **Robinson (2007):** sequencing by complexity
  - cognitive, interactive, learner factors

- **Van den Branden (2006):** sequencing by intuition

*Task sequencing should be decided on by teachers.*
Current research on task sequencing

Sequencing by complexity

Simple task
+ planning
+ few elements
+ no reasoning
+ familiarity

- Simple task
+ planning
+ few elements
+ no reasoning
+ familiarity

Complex task
+ planning
+ few elements
+ no reasoning
+ familiarity

+ Complex task
+ planning
+ few elements
+ no reasoning
+ familiarity

Sequencing by topic

Sub-topic 1

Sub-topic 2

Sub-topic 3

Sub-topic 4
Conclusion about sequencing

• Research into sequencing is of utmost importance since it may contribute to L2 development (i.e. it may draw attention to form).

• Research into sequencing is minimal. There are many suggestions but very few findings, so it’s an unresolved issue.

• What provisions is CLIL making for sequencing content/units/tasks?
This is the area that has received most of the attention

Research agenda interested in how **INTERACTION** may lead to acquisition

(See Gass & Mackey, 2007 for a summary)

- Split vs. shared info
- Convergent vs divergent
- Required vs optional info
- Open vs closed
- One-way vs two-way

Research agenda interested in how **COGNITION** may lead to balanced development of fluency, accuracy, and complexity and acquisition

- Planning time
- Reasoning demands
- Task familiarity
- No. of elements
- Conversation episodes (e.g. recasts, LREs)

balanced language development and acquisition
**TASK GOAL and OUTCOME**

**Goal:** To gather, share, and organize information about TV-watching habits of boys and girls around the world. 
**Outcome:** a statistical report

- In 1999, boys watched 3 more hours than in 2000.
- In 2001, boys watched on average 8 hours per week.
- In 2003, girls watched 2 more hours than in 2001.
- In 2005, girls' average increased by 2.5 hours.
- In 2002, boys' dropped by 1 hour as compared to 2001.
- In 1998, the number of TV hours of girls decreased by 2 hours.
- In 2003, the number of TV hours of girls went up by 3 hours.

**TASK FEATURES**

- multiple-way convergent
- required closed
- split information
- information transfer task

In 2003, girls watched 2 more hours than in 2001.
In 2005, girls' average increased by 2.5 hours.
In 2002, boys' dropped by 1 hours as compared to 2001.
In 1999, boys and girls watched TV the same number of hours.
Evidence shows that:

- Main focus is on processing **meaning**
- It guarantees **balanced participation** of all members
- Certain **linguistic features** can be targetted, so it encourages **focus on form**
- It generates **interactional episodes** (e.g. clarification requests, recasts, LREs) that draw attention to form
- It’s **challenging** and **motivating**
Conclusion on pedagogical task design

• Research into task design, both from an interactive and a cognitive perspective, can inform material/task design within CLIL by promoting focus-on-form during interaction and task performance.

• Small changes in task design can make a world of a difference.
This is the area in which TBLT and CLIL most clearly share some techniques.

**TBLT program design**

**Need Analysis**
- What to teach

**Task selection, grading, and sequencing**
- In what order?

**Input elaboration**
- Input enhancement

**Input flooding**
- Task essential language

**PRO-ACTIVE**
- Methodological implementation

**REACTIVE**
- Recasting
- Negotiation of output
- How to teach them
- Output enhancement
- Interaction enhancement

**POST-ACTIVE**
- Evaluation
- Language awareness-raising tasks
- How to measure progress

**Focus-on-form techniques**

**PRE-TASK**

**TASK CYCLE**

**POST-TASK**

**Program assessment**
- Does TBLT work?
Methodological implementation

How to teach them

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PRE-TASK

TASK CYCLE

POST-TASK
The story begins when Norman Bates, who is an employee in a motel, is looking through a hole in the wall of his motel office. In the other room, a woman is going to take a shower. She undresses. She then starts taking a shower. She likes it a lot. Suddenly, behind the shower curtain, you can see the silhouette of a person near her. The person pulls the shower curtain through a hole in the wall of his motel office. In the other room, a beautiful blond woman, who is a guest at the motel, is getting ready to take a shower. She slowly takes off her clothes. She actually takes off her nightgown. She then starts taking a shower which she seems to enjoy.

In the room, office. In the motel, a beautiful woman, who is a guest at the motel (that is, someone who is staying at a hotel or motel), is getting ready to take a shower. She slowly takes off her clothes (or she undresses). She then takes off her nightgown. She finally starts taking a shower. Suddenly, the person pulls the shower curtain, and you can see the silhouette of a person near her. The person looks horrifying. The woman's face can't be seen. The person pulls the shower curtain open. You can see that the person is a man. He seems to be black or dark. She's laying face down on the bathroom floor. After that, the man pulls the woman's body out of the bathtub. He then sees his hands are blood-stained. He washes them. He finally mops the floor before he takes her body into the trunk of his car.

The story begins when Norman Bates, who runs (or is responsible for) a small and not-very-busy motel, is peeping through (or looking through) a hole in the wall of his motel office. The story begins when Norman Bates, who runs a small not-very-busy motel, is peeping through a hole in the wall of his motel office. In the other room, a beautiful blond woman, who is a guest at the motel, is getting ready to take a shower. She slowly takes off her clothes. She actually takes off her nightgown. She then starts taking a shower which she seems to enjoy.

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(simplified text)

The story begins when Norman Bates, who is an employee in a motel, is looking through a hole in the wall of his motel office. The story begins when Norman Bates, who runs (or is responsible for) a small and not-very-busy motel, is peeping through (or looking through) a hole in the wall of his motel office. (elaborated text)
The story begins when Norman Bates, who runs or is responsible for a small not-very-busy motel, is peeping through (or looking through) a hole in the wall of his motel office.

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Methodological implementation

How to teach them
Corrective reformulations of students’ erroneous utterances.

Student: “and then he said he go there.”

Teacher: “OK, and then he said he went (with emphasis) do it” (implicit)

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- **PRE-TASK**
- **TASK CYCLE**
- **POST-TASK**
Conclusion on methodological techniques

- Research into techniques that may draw learners attention to FORM before, during, and after task performance will be beneficial for both TBLT and CLIL programs.
Thank you!