

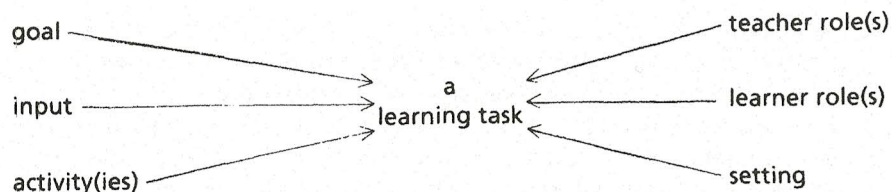
7.4 Task analysis

BACKGROUND

Language lessons very often involve students 'doing' something with language, with some phases of the lesson involving specific tasks. For the moment, we will define a task as a piece of meaning-focussed work involving learners in comprehending, producing or interacting in the target language (Nunan 1989).

One way by which we can analyse a task is through the following framework, proposed by Nunan, of goal, input, activity, roles and setting.

7 Materials and resources



An example of a task analysed using this framework is shown below. Students were given a questionnaire on sleeping habits. They had to make sure of the meaning and pronunciation of words and, following this, they had to use the questionnaire in paired interviews.

Goal: exchanging personal information

Input: questionnaire on sleeping habits

Activity: i) reading questionnaire

ii) asking/answering questions on sleeping habits

Teacher role: monitor, facilitator

Learner role: conversational partner

Setting: classroom, pair work

(Nunan 1989:48)

TASK OBJECTIVE

The objective in this observation is to help you to consider the various components of a language learning task.

PROCEDURE

BEFORE THE LESSON

1. Make yourself familiar with the framework for task analysis as given above. Arrange to observe a lesson that has a communicative goal and that will involve the learners using the language communicatively.
2. Make yourself familiar with the chart opposite.

DURING THE LESSON

Use the chart to help you record information about a task used in the lesson. In the column *Observations*, make notes in regard to each of the task component headings.

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Task components		Observations
Goal	= intended outcome(s)	
Input	= data that forms the point of departure of the task	
Activity(ies)	= what the learners are asked to do with the input	
Teacher role Learner role	= the parts played in carrying out the task	
Setting	= the social arrangements in which the task is carried out	

7.4 Task analysis

AFTER THE LESSON

1. How easy or difficult was it to analyse the task according to the categories of goal, input, activity, roles and setting? Would you like to *modify* these components in any way?
2. You may like to express your revisions *diagrammatically*:

a
learning task

3. In the light of your experience of observing and analysing a learning task, you may wish to reflect on the *definition* of 'task' (Nunan 1989), quoted on page 129. For example, consider these questions:
 - a) Do you consider that a learning task always has to be meaning-focussed?

- b) How important is it that a task involves the production of language?
- c) Does a communicative task entirely preclude the use of the learner's first language?
- d) To what extent should the task involve the learner in 'real-world' (not only classroom) activities/skills?
- e) To what extent should the task be able to stand alone as an independent communicative act?

REFLECTION

Make a note of what you consider you have learned through this observation. Looking to the future, do you predict any changes in the way you will be selecting/designing learning tasks? Are there any issues that you are interested in exploring further?

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This task makes use of material in D. Nunan, *Designing Tasks for the Communicative Classroom*, Cambridge University Press, 1989.

7.5 Task design and evaluation

BACKGROUND

This task seeks to identify and explore the features of a good language task. It also seeks objective ways of measuring classroom tasks in order to evaluate their effectiveness as materials. What criteria can be used to evaluate and design good learning tasks?

TASK OBJECTIVE

You will consider your own criteria for the evaluation of good learning tasks; then evaluate a task in terms of these criteria; and then re-assess the original criteria.

PROCEDURE

BEFORE THE LESSON

1. By way of preparation, consider your own beliefs about learning tasks. Consider the following six statements relating to the features of good learning tasks and circle the appropriate number on this scale:

- 0 - not a characteristic of a good task
 1 - this characteristic is optional
 2 - this characteristic is reasonably important
 3 - this characteristic is extremely important
 4 - this characteristic is essential

Statements

Good learning tasks should:

- a) enable learners to manipulate and practise specific features of the language. (0 / 1 / 2 / 3 / 4)
- b) provide an opportunity for learners to rehearse communicative skills they will need in the real world. (0 / 1 / 2 / 3 / 4)
- c) involve learners in risk-taking. (0 / 1 / 2 / 3 / 4)
- d) involve learners in problem-solving or resolution. (0 / 1 / 2 / 3 / 4)
- e) be process - as well as product-orientated. (0 / 1 / 2 / 3 / 4)
- f) offer learners choice. (0 / 1 / 2 / 3 / 4)

Are there any other characteristics that you would consider essential to a good learning task?

2. Now make yourself familiar with the questions to guide you during the lesson (see below).

DURING THE LESSON

1. Observe a complete lesson and pay particular attention to any learning tasks that the teacher sets. Consider the context of the task: how it is managed from beginning to end by the teacher; and how it is 'processed' by the learners.

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2. Try to sit closely enough to be able to hear students working with a task. Listen for the language they produce to help them negotiate their way through the task.
3. Select *one* of these tasks and record information about the following aspects, using the questions below to guide you.

Observing the teacher

- a) How was the task introduced?
- b) What instructions were given?
- c) How many steps were involved in the task?
- d) Was any monitoring involved?
- e) Was there a report-back phase?
- f) How was the task 'resolved'?

Observing the learners

- a) Was the level of the task commensurate with the level of the learners?
- b) Were the instructions adequate for the task?
- c) Were the learners able to 'process' the task?
- d) Were the learners able to 'perform' the task?
- e) Was collaboration/interaction involved?
- f) Comment on the language of 'task-doing' that you overheard.

AFTER THE LESSON

1. Which of the tasks that you observed worked well and which didn't? Can you isolate the factors that are responsible?
2. Consider one task:
 - a) Was the task personally meaningful/relevant to the learners?
 - b) How many phases were involved?
 - c) How well did the learners cope with the 'logistics' of the task?
 - d) How complex were the instructions?
 - e) How much prior knowledge was assumed? Was this linguistic knowledge or knowledge of the world?
 - f) Were the language demands on the learner in line with their level of learning?
3. Return now to your pre-lesson activity. To what extent were the characteristics of a good learning task as you understand this apparent in the tasks you observed in the lesson?
4. You may wish to revise the list of criteria by which a good learning task can be evaluated (see *Before the lesson*). Are there any other features of a good learning task that you now wish to include? Are there any you now consider unimportant? Can you pinpoint any-

7.5 Task design and evaluation

- thing specific in the lesson that stimulated you to refine your understanding of tasks?
5. We have been looking at task design and choice. Consider now the question of management. How were the tasks managed?
 - By the teacher: consider how the tasks were introduced, what instructions were given, what monitoring took place and what round-off, report-back or resolution was involved.
 - By the learners: could they process the instructions? Perform the task as required? Were they comfortable with the climate of the task?
 6. Consider the learners' language as they performed the task. In pair or group work, was language used to negotiate and collaborate? Was this related to the actual language needed to complete the task? How important is it that language is used to process and deal with the task?

REFLECTION

Is there any aspect of your own task selection/design that you predict will change as a result of the experience of this observation task? If so, describe the change you predict.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This task draws ideas and material from D. Nunan, *Designing Tasks for the Communicative Classroom*, Cambridge University Press, 1989: 138-41.