

## TASK-BASED LANGUAGE LEARNING MODELS IN THE FIELD OF SPORT

Research note

Tatiana Hristakieva

National Sports Academy "V. Levski", Sofia, Bulgaria

### Abstract

*The article presents English language learning models in the field of specific sports, based on tasks completed by the students working in groups. It is aimed at improving students' communicative skills in exchanging sports information and in the acquisition of sports terminology. A pedagogical experiment with an experimental and a control group of students (consisting of 34 students each) was organized at the National Sports Academy "Vasil Levski". Interactive techniques, including group work based on tasks, to improve language learning were applied. The language skills of the two groups of students were tested at the beginning and the end of the experiment. The results were processed with mathematical and statistical methods - alternative analysis, variation analysis and Student's t-test. Tasks like sharing personal experience, enumeration, games, creative tasks, problem-solving, arranging and sorting were used. Examples of topics alpine skiing and athletics were presented in the paper. Obtained results show that variety of interactive techniques, including those based on tasks, leads to better results for the students from the experimental group concerning the four basic language skills – listening, speaking, reading and writing at the end of the experiment. Improved positive attitude of the students to the application of interactive techniques in the specialized English language course of study at the sport academy is also noted.*

**Keywords:** sports terms, task-based learning, English language

### INTRODUCTION

The constant exchange of information is of key importance in the present day. According to the educational philosophy of constructivism, people "construct" their knowledge based on already existent knowledge and experience, adapting it to their specific needs and requirements. Contemporary foreign language learning is mainly grounded on the communicative approach and the use of interactive learning methods, aiming at the specific needs and requirements of the students. According to Dianne Larsen-Freeman, in the communicative approach, the roles of teacher/tutor and learners are changed. Learners are the active party, and the teacher helps them organize their activities (Larsen-Freeman, 2000). The word "interaction" presupposes at least two or more participants involved in some kind of activity - about foreign language learning, they exchange information, ideas, emotions, etc. As Ivanov (Иванов)(2014) notes, interactive learning offers an opportunity for students to turn from passive listeners, into active constructors of their knowledge.

A typical example of the communicative approach is the method of Task-Based Learning - TBL. The method is grounded on the understanding that solving problems, close to real-life situations through language communication is a natural way to develop participants' communicative language skills. This method has a lot of followers, but N.S. Prabhu is among the first. He developed a methodology for teaching English through tasks in Bangalore, India. He gave practical tasks to his students and found that in the course of work, they acquired the language better. His definition of a communicative task is the following: "An activity which required learners to arrive at an outcome from given information through some process of thought, and which allowed teachers to control and regulate that process, was regarded as a 'task'" (Prabhu, 1987, p.24).

A similar definition of a communicative task was given by David Nunan. In his definition, he accentuates on the importance of students' ability to convey meaning rather than focus on form, and also on the fact that a task should have a sense of completeness, "being able to stand alone as a communicative act in its own right" (Nunan, 1991, p. 8). A communicative task should be organized so that it creates an opportunity to receive and process specific information leading to

language production. Special attention is given to the exchange of information. Successful communication has priority over the correct language form.

Jane Willis (1996) offers a classification of learning tasks according to the comprehension processes with reference to different topics. Her classification includes six categories of tasks:

1. Tasks for enumeration: brainstorming, guessing games, questionnaires;
2. Tasks for arranging and sorting: chronological sequences (e.g. a cooking recipe), rating (e.g. tourist destinations), etc.;
3. Tasks for comparing: finding similarities and differences;
4. Problem-solving tasks: giving advice, recommendations, etc.;
5. Sharing personal experience tasks: stories (e.g. a story about sb.'s pet), an anecdote, etc.;
6. Creative tasks: posters, presentations, etc. (Willis, 1996, p. 149-154).

This classification is still up-to-date and quite useful. The tasks can be worked out in direct communication between the participants and indirectly – through information technologies.

Shopov (Шопов)(2013) formulated five basic features of communicative learning tasks:

- they have a plan for students' activities;
- they are focused on a comprehensive information and the negotiation of meanings;
- they include authentic language use;
- they involve students' comprehensive knowledge;
- they lead to purposeful communication.

A learning task ought to have these five features to be effective. In the first place, there must be an action plan, i.e. students ought to know how to approach the task and to have some time to plan the activities. A model activity presented by the teacher could be used or worked out by the participants in the form of steps. It is important to include suitable language material, including phrases appropriate to the respective authentic situation. The task ought to be relevant to the social experience of the students and to offer communication opportunities close to real life, to be successful (Shopov (Шопов), 2013). These features and parameters allow for better estimation and evaluation of the different aspects of a learning task, thus providing its effective performance.

## METHODS

The acquisition of specialized terminology in different fields of knowledge is an important part of learning a foreign language. Modern language learning methodology advocates teaching a foreign language according to the specific conditions and language needs of the students. Elements of different methods can be adapted for specific purposes of language learning (Kumaravadivelu, 2006, p. 163-184; Stefanova (Стефанова) 2015, p.62). A pedagogical experiment with an experimental and a control group of students (consisting of 34 students each) was organized at the National Sports Academy "V. Levski" using interactive techniques, including group work based on tasks, to improve language learning. The language skills of the two groups of students were tested at the beginning and the end of the experiment. The results were processed with mathematical and statistical methods - alternative analysis, variation analysis and Student's t-test (Hristakieva (Христакиева), 2018).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Work in small groups is a natural environment for communication. It offers a lot of advantages for language learning (Hristakieva (Христакиева), 2019). According to Brown, H (1994), group work provides opportunities for students to exchange ideas without being the center of attention. They also develop a sense of belonging to the group and a feeling of responsibility for the achievement of common tasks. Sports are usually dynamic activities, presupposing interaction between athletes. Using interactive techniques based on tasks and group work is closely related to activities (Mileva (Милева), 2019). Elements of Task-Based Learning are used in the specialized English language course at the National Sports Academy "Vasil Levski" to develop different topics from the curriculum. Some tasks, like sharing personal experience, enumeration, games, etc., are used in the introduction of the lesson, others – creative tasks, in the main part, still others, such as problem-solving, arranging and sorting, etc. - in the revision and consolidation. We present two of the topics as examples here. These are alpine skiing of the winter sports, and athletics of the summer sports.

### Alpine skiing

#### Lesson 1:

- Introduction: Group work (5 minutes) – Learn more about your colleagues: Conversation about personal experiences in the sport. Summarizing the most important facts by one of the students in each pair or group (questions as prompts on the whiteboard).

- Main part, work on the main topic: a. pair work (20 minutes). The ski school: Studying the basic elements of the beginner ski school in groups – demonstration with a person from another group. Members of each group take turns to give and to follow instructions. b. Group work (15 minutes) - Avalanches: Reading a text about avalanches. Creating a table with 10 pieces of advice for tourists in the mountains (useful phrases on the whiteboard – you should/shouldn't; you must/mustn't).

- Revision and consolidation: Group work (5-7 minutes) – A game: Arranging jumbled instructions about the use of chair lifts – the first group to finish, wins 5 points. The group of the winners presents the instructions to their colleagues.

#### Lesson 2:

- Introduction: Group work (10 minutes): A game: Two teams take turns to say words and terms answering questions about winter sports. One representative per team writes the terms on the board. The team which has more correctly written terms on the board is the winner. (Questions: a. What equipment and clothes are needed to

go skiing. b. What are the basic skiing facilities c. What qualities are needed to be a good skier?)

- Main part, work on the main topic: Group work (20 minutes) – Sports biographies: Kjetil Aamodt, Janitca Kostelic, Alberto Tomba. Students are divided into 3 groups. Each group reads their material and prepares a presentation about its skier, using a model on board. Each group or one of the group members presents their skier.

- Revision and consolidation: Teamwork (10 minutes) – A game: Circles of friends – advising about winter sports. A student from one group draws a piece of paper with some problem on it, connected with skiing. The student announces the problem. Another student from his group has to advise in 1 minute. If they fail, the other groups can take their chances. The best advice wins points for the respective group.

### Athletics:

#### Lesson 1:

- Introduction: Group work (10 minutes) – A quiz about the history of athletics: - questions and answers. Students are divided into two groups. Students from each group take turns to draw a list and ask a question – first to their group, if they can't answer, the question is addressed to the other group. The group with more correct answers is the winner.

- Main part, work on the main topic: Teamwork (25 minutes) – Presenting an athletics event: students are divided into small groups of 2-3. Each group receives a material on one of the athletics events-sprints, distance running, jumps and throws, etc. (pp. 173-179 book) and they have to prepare for a given time to present it orally to their colleagues in 2-3 minutes. The groups work independently with some help from the teacher.

- Revision and consolidation: (5-7 minutes) After the presentation each group is evaluated by their colleagues with points 1 to 3. Criteria: relevance, fluency and originality of the presentation.

#### Lesson 2:

- Introduction: Group work (10 minutes) – Sports comment: a comment on the sports results from the Olympic Games in Seoul 1988. Students are divided into 2 groups. Each group analyses and comments on the results of the Bulgarian athletes – which are successful events.

- Main part, work on the main topic: Group work (20 minutes) – Sports biographies. Each group receives materials in Bulgarian about one of the athletes Stefka Kostadinova and Hristo Markov. Students prepare a short written biography in English. They work independently with some help from the teacher. Students from each group present their athlete orally.

- Revision and consolidation: Group work (10 minutes) – Sports crosswords: Students from each group fill in the puzzles with terms from athletics. The group which finishes first wins 5 points. An allotment of 100 points from game activities provides an excellent mark for the students.

The comparative analysis of the results from the initial and final test of the pedagogical experiment organized with an experimental and a control group of students from the National Sports Academy "V. Levski" shows that using a variety of interactive techniques, including those based on tasks, leads to better results for the students from the experimental group concerning the four basic language skills – listening, speaking, reading and writing at the end of the experiment. There is also a positive attitude of the students to the application of interactive techniques in the specialized English language course of study at the Academy. Students appreciate the opportunity for greater personal involvement in the course of

education, concerning the increased current need to use foreign languages in their work (Hristakieva (Христакиева), 2018).

## CONCLUSION

From the above-mentioned we can summarize, that using interactive techniques based on group work, where group members join efforts in the completion of common tasks, creates better opportunities for effective communication and the acquisition of specialized foreign language terminology.

## REFERENCES

- Brown, H.D. (1994). *Teaching by Principles. An Interactive Approach to Language Pedagogy*. New Jersey: Prentice Hall.
- Христакиева, Т. (2018). Влияние на интерактивни техники върху обучението по английски език при студенти от НСА. [The influence of interactive techniques in teaching English to students from the National Sports Academy Vasil Levski Sofia. In Bulgarian] (Unpublished doctoral thesis) София: Факултет Педагогика, НСА „Васил Левски“.
- Христакиева, Т. (2019). Интерактивно чуждоезиково обучение и работа

- в групи. [Interactive foreign language learning and group work. In Bulgarian] Спорт и наука, 1(2), 141-147.
- Иванов, И. (2019). Интерактивни методи на обучение. [Interactive methods of teaching. In Bulgarian] Retrieved 20 June, 2019 from [www.ivanpivanov.com/uploads55\\_Interaktivni-metodi-za-obuchenie.pdf](http://www.ivanpivanov.com/uploads55_Interaktivni-metodi-za-obuchenie.pdf)
- Kumaravadivelu, V. (2006). *Understanding Language Teaching. From Method to Postmethod*, Lawrence Erlbaum. New Jersey: Associate Publishers
- Larsen-Freeman, D. (2000). *Techniques and Principles in Language Teaching (Second edition)*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Милева, Е. (2019). Младежки дейности и спорт - теория и практика. [Youth activities and sport – theory and practice. In Bulgarian] София: Авангард Прима.
- Nunan, D. (1991). *Language Teaching Methodology*. New Jersey: Prentice Hall.
- Prabhu, N.S. (1987). *Second Language Pedagogy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Стефанова, П. (2015). Методика на обучението по съвременни езици. [Methodology of teaching modern languages. In Bulgarian] София: НБУ.
- Шопов, Т. (2013). Педагогика на езика. [Pedagogy of Language. In Bulgarian] София: СУ “Св. Климент. Охридски”.
- Willis, J. (1996). *A Framework for Task-Based Learning*. Harlow: Longman.

## Correspondence:

Senior lecturer Tatiana Hristakieva, PhD  
Department of Language Learning and Information Technologies,  
National Sports Academy „Vasil Levski“  
21, Akad. St. Mladenov Str., Studentski Grad, Sofia-1700.  
E-mail: [hristakieva@yahoo.com](mailto:hristakieva@yahoo.com)