論　　文

Language Related Episodes (LREs) in Task-based Language Teaching in Japan

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Abstract

This study attempted to examine task-based language teaching (TBLT) in the context of a Japanese junior high school, with the aim of isolating factors that contribute to its successful implementation. A process of action research was followed to complete a small-scale study. Six pairs of students were recorded completing a narrative construction task with differing set ups. Their interaction was transcribed and analysed and instances of learner-initiated focus on language were isolated. The Language Related Episodes (LREs) observed in each task set up were then compared. Overall findings suggested that there are several factors that should be included in task set ups to ensure that TBLT provides learners with opportunities to acquire language in EFL classes in a Japanese Junior high school. The implications for using TBLT in such a context are discussed, and suggestions given on potentially fruitful future research.

Glossary of terms:

EFL — English as a Foreign Language
ESL — English as a Second Language
LRE — Language Related Episode
MEXT — Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology
　　　　　（文部科学省，Monbu-kagaku-shō）
NNS — Non-Native Speaker
NS — Native Speaker
PPP — Present, Practice, Produce
SLA — Second Language Acquisition
STEP — The Society for Testing English Proficiency
TBLT — Task Based Language Teaching
TOEFL — Test of English as a Foreign Language
TOEIC — Test of English for International Communication

INTRODUCTION

Significance of the problem

From April 2011, when English language lessons were included in the government approved curriculum for elementary schools, English language learning became an integrated part of compulsory education in Japan. This means that all students aged 10 to 18 must gain proficiency in English as one of their core subjects. In addition, students are expected to pass certain standardized tests of English; the Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) has set a benchmark of Eiken Grade Three for all junior high school students, and Eiken Grade Two for all high school students (MEXT, 2003). The Eiken test is widely administered in Japan, and tests English listening, reading, speaking and writing. This contributes to the approximately 2,500,000 Japanese students taking Eiken tests every year (STEP, 2011). Furthermore, many universities require a minimum TOEFL test score as a prerequisite for admission. Private junior high schools attempt to have their students achieve these targets in the year prior to the MEXT benchmark, publishing the results to attract students to the school. As the requirements of junior and senior high schools' curricula and Universities' admissions offices increase, so does the pressure on English teachers to deliver quantifiable results.

The teaching approaches adopted by English teachers in Japan, however, are far from unified (Ellis, 1996; Macedo, 2002; Sato, 2009). The traditional Confucian-heritage born educational concepts of rote-learning, grammar-translation exercises and a historical emphasis on written examinations that characterize many language classrooms across Asia are at odds with contemporary language teaching methodology (Butler, 2005; Sato 2009). This conflict is often reflected in schools in which foreign, "Native Speaker" (NS) teachers work alongside Japanese "Non-Native Speaker" (NNS) teachers where the potential for tensions to arise between teachers and students with varying expectations of their own and each other's roles in the learning process is significant (Macedo, 2002). A striking illustration of the disconnect between Japanese and foreign teachers is that the first ever jointly-held conference between the main professional organizations representing the two groups was not held until 2008.

Exacerbating this situation are the current demographic changes in Japan, where the decreasing birthrate is intensifying competition between educational institutions as their "markets" gradually shrink. The onus falls therefore to both NS and NNS English teachers in Japan - regardless of their cultural background - to help improve their departments' and schools' performance, such that they are perceived to be successful in an increasingly competitive environment. One way of doing this is to publish the results of students' performances in standardized tests such as Eiken and TOEFL. Teachers therefore

have the choice of either "teaching to the test" in an attempt to inflate students' scores or taking the riskier, more rewarding route of striving to foster genuine L2 acquisition, which will surely be reflected in improved performance on standardized tests of English tests. For many NS teachers, taking the riskier route means using Task Based Language Teaching (TBLT) (Ellis, 2009; Willis and Willis, 2007) to involve students in cycles of activities that prioritize meaning in order to promote the acquisition of English. Foster and Ohta (2005), Kumaravadivelu (2003), Skehan and Foster (1997, 2002), Swain (1985, 2000), Swain and Lapkin (1995), and Williams (2001) have all shown TBLT to be effective in promoting acquisition.

One of the key principles of current TBLT theory is that when learners negotiate meaning while completing a task, their attention is brought to features of the language which then have the potential to be successfully acquired (Poole, 2005). This "focus on form" when coupled with "forced output" (Swain, 1985), can result in learners vocalising their questions and opinions about what language is required to complete the task. These "Language Related Episodes" (LREs) are observable incidences of learners focusing on form (Williams, 1999; Swain and Lapkin, 1995; Swain and Lapkin, 1998). Thus, one feature of successfully conducted TBLT (i.e. TBLT that affords learners opportunities for language acquisition) is that LREs can be frequently observed.

Although several writers have highlighted the difficulties of introducing TBLT in Japanese and other Asian countries' junior and senior high schools (Sano *et al.*, 1984; Li, 1998; Sakui, 2004; Butler, 2005; Lochana and Deb, 2006; Carless, 2003; Sato, 2009.), much of the research into conducting TBLT in general and in Japan in particular focuses on adult EFL classes. To the best of my knowledge, no research has been conducted that explicitly examines the factors that promote the occurrence of LREs in TBLT in a Japanese junior high school context.

Objectives

In the light of the issues outlined above, this paper is an attempt to shed light on the factors that determine successful TBLT in a Japanese junior high school, as measured by the frequency of occurrence of LREs while students are on task. This research follows Seedhouse and Almutairi (2009) in employing a holistic approach to task based interaction where the focus is mainly on the "task-in-process" stage of what actually happens during the task, while making reference to the "task-as-workplan" stage that precedes it and the "task-as-outcomes" stage that follows.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Defining tasks

For this study, Willis and Willis' (2007:13) definition was used to select the tasks employed as it offers a straightforward checklist against which potential activities may be evaluated for their task-like status:

The more confidently we can answer yes to each of these questions the more task-like the activity.

1. Does the activity engage learners' interest?
2. Is there a primary focus on meaning?
3. Is there an outcome?
4. Is success judged in terms of outcome?
5. Is completion a priority?
6. Does the activity relate to real world activities?

Characteristics of TBLT

To the Willises (2007) TBLT has three distinct foci that are cycled through in the course of completing a task sequence: a focus on meaning, where communication is prioritized, a focus on language when the task is paused as either the learners reflect on how best to express themselves or the teacher facilitates by clarifying learner language, and finally a focus on form, where the teacher isolates and draws learners' attention to lexical or grammatical items. This study investigates the factors that can lead to the second focus - the focus on language.

How does TBLT work in the classroom?

All tasks encourage students to focus primarily on meaning (Willis and Willis, 2007). At some point during the task, learners will consider what language they need to use to complete the task. If this thought process is vocalized during a task it can be recorded as a language related episode (LRE). However, including a post task with a focus on form after the main task may be beneficial for several reasons: students may feel more motivated by seeing clearly the language they have used (and the progress they have made) during the main task. In addition, by raising students' conscious knowledge of form, we increase the probability that these linguistic features will be noticed when encountered again (Schmidt, 1990). TBLT therefore uses real-world activities with a focus on meaning then language followed by consciousness raising form-based activities in order to improve learners' communicative competence.

Development of TBLT and focus on form (language)

TBLT can be viewed from a number of distinct perspectives. Krashen's (1985) work on comprehensible input influenced those such as Long (1983, cited in Ellis, 2000) who viewed SLA through the lens of the interaction hypotheses. To Long (1983, cited in Ellis, 2000), in TBLT learners provide each other with feedback on their performance at an appropriate level of complexity, and thus help each other modify future language use. This may also draw learners' attention to aspects of the language which can facilitate acquisition.

Swain (1985) noticed that Krashen's input hypothesis was not supported by her observations of Canadian immersion students (albeit in an ESL, not EFL context); although they had encountered large amounts of comprehensible input, their L2 development was less than the input hypothesis would predict. She

posited that output must also be a significant factor in L2 development, meaning that learners should be given chances to use the L2 in order to help them notice gaps in their interlanguage and thus lead to a process of introspection that can facilitate acquisition. Skehan (1996) concurs that in order to promote the development of interlanguage, TBLT must include focus on language. This interaction hypothesis therefore complements Schmidt's (1990) noticing hypothesis that language can only be acquired if attention is paid to it i.e. it is "noticed".

A number of studies have added to this hypothesis. Notably, Swain and Lapkin (1995) posited that output sets noticing in train, leading to mental processes that result finally in modified output. In other words, there is more to the process of noticing than input; output also fosters noticing and therefore acquisition.

Studies such as this and Kumaravadivelu (1993) signaled a shift towards the study of the types of interaction that occur between participants during tasks, specifically how meaning is negotiated, and the implications this has on language acquisition.

Lyster and Ranta (1997) examined negotiation of meaning between learners and teachers and found that students were more likely to self-repair their mistakes if feedback was provided in the form of meta-linguistic feedback, clarification requests and repetition

rather than through recasts where the teacher would correctly paraphrase the students' utterances. This seemed to show that focusing on language leads to acquisition, or at least uptake.

Swain and Lapkin (1998) add to this proposition and echo Kumaravadivelu (1993) by positing that the process of negotiating meaning is in itself the process of language being acquired. In other words, by providing opportunities for learners to negotiate meaning and focus on language, they are provided with learning opportunities. In an attempt to reveal why collaborative activities might encourage L2 learning they used a joint problem-solving activity in a classroom where two intermediate level French students were required to negotiate meaning. The students' vocalizations were recorded, transcribed and analyzed for LREs where students commented on, questioned or corrected their own or their partners' language use. Swain and Lapkin (1998) observed students co-construct and write a narrative and argued convincingly that the students' LREs were evidence not only of a communicative function being fulfilled, but also of the students actively acquiring language.

Williams (2001) expanded on her previous findings by delayed testing of students on their use of linguistic features that had been the subject of spontaneous attention. She found no significant differences in acquisition depending on which participants (student, other student, or teacher) initiated the

LREs, but was able to conclude that attention to a linguistic feature leads to its use and that the frequency of this increases with proficiency level.

Kim (2009) noted that although previous research had concluded that high proficiency learners produce more LREs than beginners, the influence of task complexity on this had not been thoroughly investigated. Kim's study tested the Cognitive Hypothesis by investigating how task complexity affected LREs, concluding that different levels of task complexity resulted in higher or lower amounts of LREs being observed; students of lower ability produced significantly more LREs in a low-complexity task, and students of higher ability produced significantly more LREs in a high-complexity task.

Foster and Ohta (2005), investigated negotiation of meaning and the modified output produced by dyads completing communicative tasks and found that learners modify their output and focus on language even in the absence of negotiation of meaning. A supportive environment and a clear task afford learners spare attention to give to focusing on language, supporting Kim's (2009) findings that overly complex tasks lead to a dearth of LREs in low level students. To sum up, negotiation of meaning is important, but not a prerequisite for SLA. There are many interactional processes and factors such as task complexity that can facilitate the acquisition of language.

One area of these findings that I set out to explore in this paper is whether variables other than task complexity such as task set up, time limits, goals and rewards will affect the number and nature of the LREs students produce during communicative tasks.

Criticism of TBLT

TBLT has been criticized from pedagogical, cultural and methodological standpoints. Swan (2005) criticizes "Task-based Instruction" as being based on unproved hypotheses and being ineffective in teaching new language. He also claims that its proponents misrepresent traditional language teaching, and concludes that creating a meaning-based/form-based dichotomy is unproductive in language teaching. Of particular relevance to this study is Swan's question "Where does new language come from?". In the TBLT model, there is an assumption that when learners interact, language will "emerge" from the interaction. Clearly weaker students can learn from stronger students, but, "it seems a less than ideal basis for instruction" (Swan 2005: 390). This criticism may have been answered in part by the Willises' (2007) and de Boer's (2009) clarification of teachers' roles during tasks as facilitators and scaffolders.

As noted above, in common with Ellis (1996), Sato (2009) questions the appropriateness of a TBLT approach in a non-Western culture; specifically Japan. Sato (2009:13) concurs with Ellis and concludes that TBLT is "not yet as practical in application as the PPP

(Present, Practice, Produce) approach" because the forms that learners choose to focus on during lessons may not match those pre-selected by the curriculum and therefore the forms that are tested in examinations. Carless (2003) and Butler (2005) echo Sato's concerns and add the limited second language ability of many Asian teachers to the list of factors preventing the full up-take of TBLT in Asia.

TBLT has also been criticised on other counts. Firstly, as we have seen the definition of what constitutes a task continues to evolve. In addition, despite the requirement of most proponents of TBLT that tasks have a "real world" component, there is evidence that unrealistic activities can be valuable L2 learning tools providing they hold significance for learners (Howatt and Widdowson, 2004:367). Indeed, artificial episodes of "language play" can promote language noticing more effectively than realistic simulations that hold no interest or relevance for learners (Howatt and Widdowson, 2004:368). The risk proponents of TBLT may run is that by attempting to create tasks that reflect the real world, they may produce activities that lack meaning for learners.

BACKGROUND TO THIS RESEARCH

The teaching context

As Nunn (2009) notes, it is important to clarify various aspects of the institutional context that research is conducted in. This research was conducted in the specific teaching context of third year "regular" English classes in a Junior High School in Japan, taught by English Native Speaker teachers (known as Native Teacher [NT] classes). These classes were chosen because they are typical of classes offered by schools across Japan, and thus the results may be generalised to other contexts. The teaching focus of the third year regular course NT classes includes all four skills but with a bias towards speaking and listening; each class usually contains pair or group speaking activities.

Concerns about adopting TBL: Challenges for students

One of the challenges faced in this teaching context is that the learners tend to exhibit a low tolerance for ambiguity; if they do not have access to the language needed to complete an activity, they can become frustrated. This frustration is often manifested in withdrawal from the activity they are doing.

A second, related concern is the ability of students to understand the activity instructions in the L2, and teachers' ability to give activity instructions in the L1. The expectation that teachers teach in English combined with students' limited language resources means that there is further potential for ambiguity, and therefore for students to withhold participation in the activity. McDowell suggests that this problem might be ameliorated if teachers "consider L1 support for instructions" (McDowell, 2009). Unfortunately, many "NT" teachers do not have sufficient Japanese ability to complete this successfully.

Task completion issues

Other causes for concern are the expectations that students and teachers bring to the class regarding their role and the purpose of activities; students tend to focus on the result, whereas in a TBLT approach, the main focus is on the process used to achieve that result (Willis and Willis, 2007:5). An example of this is students completing an information gap activity by exchanging worksheets and copying the missing information from their partners rather than communicating verbally to complete the activity. This seems to be an instance of differing cultural expectations of the role of teachers, students and activities in class, as identified by Ellis (1996) and Sato (2009) above. On the other hand, it also reveals an opportunity for learner training in order to increase learner autonomy and "help students learn how to learn" (de Boer, 2009:42)

TBLT with young learners

Carless (2002) lists three themes in relation to implementing TBLT with young learners that may have implications for this study: noise and indiscipline, L1 use, and pupil engagement with the task. Noise and indiscipline were found to increase due to unclear instructions, inappropriate task complexity, and the nature of the task itself. L1 use was found to increase if the task were linguistically complicated or open-ended, and if the students had few L2 resources at their disposal. Pupil involvement was increased by encouraging all students to participate and providing opportunities for all students to play different roles e.g. group leader, participant and observer. These issues are reflected in this teaching context and therefore influenced this study significantly.

Curricular and administrative issues

A further practical concern was that although TBLT is "certainly not designed with examinations in mind" (Willis and Willis, 2007:2), the courses taught in this teaching context certainly are. Consequently, for these reasons and those outlined in the introduction above, students, teachers, administrators and parents assign far greater importance to the written test than speaking tests.

This in turn means that lesson time that is spent on activities not immediately and obviously related to improving students' written test and Eiken test scores can be perceived as time spent unproductively. This may impact student motivation and participation negatively.

This study therefore was an attempt to find a way of implementing TBLT with these students in order to give them the best chance of acquiring English. In order to investigate this thoroughly students were recorded creating a narrative under a variety of conditions, and an analysis was conducted of their on-task interaction to discover any conditions that could be varied to increase students' focus on language and thus the chances that English would be acquired.

METHODS

Task Choice

The target task of creating a narrative from picture prompts was chosen because of weaknesses exhibited by my students in this area: they were unable to relate a simple story. The students had all attended English lessons with their Japanese teachers that focused on the grammar of the simple past tense and the past continuous so although they could explain what these forms were in Japanese, they could not explain how they were used, nor could they use them in a meaningful way.

Participants

The students were 14 and 15 years old native-level Japanese speakers and had an elementary knowledge of English. Seventy One Percent (71%) of the students passed the STEP Eiken test grade 3 in their second year of junior high school (Imai, T. Personal communication, 15 January 2011). The third grade has been compared to a similar level as the CEFR's Grade A1, or a TOEIC score of less than 400 (STEP 2011). Despite many students having passed the Eiken grade three test, they exhibited low levels of confidence and motivation. As noted above, this can manifest itself in different ways. In particular, they have a low tolerance of ambiguity; if meanings are unclear, rather than guess or try to work around the difficulties encountered, students are more likely to stop participating in the activity or the class.

Material Selection

Requiring students to create a narrative from scratch carries the danger of the task becoming too complex for students to pay attention to the language required. As Van Patten (1990, 1994, cited in Skehan, 1996) showed, this could result in poorer task performance and distract from learners focusing on form during the task. Taking this into consideration, and bearing in mind Swain and Lapkin's (1998) previous success in using a narrative task to promote LREs, I selected three sets of comic strip-style picture stories taken from a conversation-based English textbook. The first two sets of three pictures could be arranged in a variety of ways to show a short story and then be used as prompts to construct a narrative. They were copied, enlarged and cut out to enable the students to physically arrange them in the order they thought would make the best story. The third set was of a slightly longer story (four pictures), and the pictures were presented in order. After discussing the story in either English or Japanese, the students wrote their narrative on the Story Writing Worksheet (Appendix 1) in English. The worksheet was provided to give the students with a tangible goal, and set parameters as to the narratives' length.

Groupings

Following its effective use in previous studies (Williams, 1999; Williams, 2001; Swain and Lapkin, 2000), pair work was selected as the most appropriate grouping for students to complete the task in order to facilitate recording and

transcription, and to maximize student participation. This avoided the difficulties encountered when attempting to analyze recordings of groups of three or more participants i.e. identifying all the speakers correctly, and transcribing numerous simultaneous overlapping turns. Furthermore, pairs of students sitting facing one another with one assigned the role of "scribe" encouraged all the participants to vocalize their thoughts; in larger groups, less motivated students were apt to "sit back" and let others contribute to the narrative. In pairs, this was rarely a problem.

Data collection

The task set up was adjusted in a number of ways, and three pairs of students were recorded completing the task for each set up. Each recording was timed. The recordings and written narratives were then examined by a panel of three experienced teachers and ranked according to the following criteria; time on task, participants' engagement with the task, and the degree to which the task was completed successfully. In order to obtain the samples most representative of my students, the recordings which gained the highest and lowest ratings were eliminated and the remaining samples were then transcribed and examined for the frequency and nature of LREs they contained.

Task set ups

The task was set up was varied in 6 ways. As part of the process of action research, I reflected on the effectiveness of each set up as manifested in student performance to inform adjustments to the next task. These adjustments were made in an attempt to discover the most

Table 1 A summary of conditions varied in the task set ups

	PS 1	PS2	PS3	J Ins	Story Sheet	WB	No L1	Time	Post-task	L2	Reward
1 (a,b)	☑	☑		☑	☑						
2 (a,b)	☑	☑		☑	☑	☑					
3	☑			☑	☑		☑		☑		
4 (a,b)	☑	☑		☑	☑	☑		☑	☑	☑	
5			☑	☑	☑			☑	☑	☑	☑
6 (a)			☑	☑	☑			☑	☑	☑	☑

PS = Picture Set

J Ins = Japanese Instructions

Story Sheet = students wrote their story

WB = Students completed workbook pages between tasks.

No L1 = L1 use strictly prohibited.

Time = Time limit given

Post-task = Students read narrative to class post-task

L2 = Students verbally encouraged to use L2

Reward = Students were rewarded with coursework points depending on narrative content and use of L2.

effective ways of fostering student-initiated attention to language. A final, peer-correction task (6b) was included in the study.

As discussed above, the goal of the tasks (apart from 6b) was to construct a narrative from picture prompts, using either Picture Set 1, 2 or 3. In each task set up the group dynamic was always two students working together. In addition, all students were supplied with instructions in Japanese, and students always wrote the story on the Story Writing Worksheet sheet (Appendix 1). Aside from these conditions, there were other variations in the task set up:

● Two groups completed a workbook page between tasks,

● In one group Japanese was strictly forbidden,

● Three groups were given a time limit,

● Four groups were given a post-task,

● Three groups were encouraged to use the L2 while on task,

● Two groups were given a "reward" of extra course points for completing the tasks.

Data analysis
Defining LREs

Learner generated focus on form (i.e. LREs) was defined as any event where the learners talked or asked about the language they needed to complete the task. This included students asking the teacher, questioning their own language use, and asking a fellow student. This echoes Williams's (1999; 2001) definition

with one significant addition; on several occasions throughout the study students referred to electronic dictionaries. I included these events as a separate category of LREs because although they may not necessarily include verbal interaction (in fact, most of them did include speech events where the students asked for the dictionary or announced they would use one), they are clearly instances of learner-generated focus on language.

The types of LRE coded were therefore:
・Learner-initiated requests to the teacher about language (Req-T)
・Learner-initiated requests to another learner about language (Req-OL)
・Learner-learner negotiation over a language item (L-L neg)
・Learner-learner metatalk (metatalk)
・Learners consulting a dictionary (dict).
　・(adapted from Williams, 1999:596)

Learner-initiated requests to the teacher about language (Req-T).

These requests for help were generally preceded by a marked request ("Teacher!"), and were made both in English and in Japanese.

Learner-initiated requests to another learner about language (Req- OL)

Almost entirely in Japanese, these requests focussed on the form of language required to complete the task, rather than for example the order of the pictures.

Learner-learner negotiation over a language item (L-L neg)

For negotiation to occur in a language class, it must be preceded by misunderstanding resulting from miscommunication (Gass and Veronis, 1991, cited in Williams, 1999). As in Williams (1999) study, I expected these items to be very rare and always related to meaning, as opposed to form. They were nonetheless coded.

Learner-learner metatalk

LREs by definition focus on language, therefore interaction that focused on the content of the narrative being created e.g. "I think she is singing" were not coded. However recasts and assistance provided by other learners were included in this category. Metatalk LREs did not necessarily have to include linguistic terms, although some of them did.

Data analysis procedure

After the recordings were transcribed, the LREs were coded and analysed. The data were transferred into Tables 2 and 3. In Table 2 the total number of LREs of each type in each task set up were noted and the average number of LREs per turn was calculated.

The mean and standard deviation from the mean of LREs per turn for each task set up were also calculated. In addition, in Table 3 the average percentage of each type of LRE in each task was calculated, in addition to the standard deviation from the mean. This allowed the identification of the kinds of LREs that tended to be produced as a result of each task set up.

It should be noted that the narratives produced by the pairs were not subject to analysis, although they were taken as an indication of the extent to which

Table 2 Language-Related Episodes (LREs) and task set ups

Task set up	LREs	Total Turns	LREs/turn
1a	61	112	0.54
1b	36	45	0.80
2a	81	110	0.74
2b	37	54	0.69
3	45	113	0.39
4a	51	69	0.74
4b	46	49	0.94
5	37	51	0.73
6a	47	68	0.69
6b	26	42	0.62
MEAN			0.688
Standard Deviation			0.148534

Table 3 Type of Language Related Episodes (LREs) and Task Set Up.

	1 a	1 b	2 a	2 b	3	4 a	4 b	5	6 a	6 b		
LRE Type												
Req-T	2	0	0	0	2	1	0	0	5	7		
%	3	0	0	0	4	2	0	0	11	27	MEAN	4.7
											SD	8.551153
Req-OL	18	7	19	5	7	7	4	5	10	9		
%	30	19	23	13	16	14	9	14	21	35	MEAN	19.4
											SD	8.099383
L-L neg	2	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0		
%	3	3	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	MEAN	0.8
											SD	1.316561
Meta	37	26	50	32	35	43	42	29	30	10		
%	61	72	62	87	78	84	91	78	64	38	MEAN	71.5
											SD	15.77797
Dict	2	2	2	0	0	0	0	3	2	0		
%	3	6	2	0	0	0	0	8	4	0	MEAN	2.3
											SD	2.907844
Total:	61	36	81	37	45	51	46	37	47	26		

learners had engaged in the task when selecting pairs for detailed analysis.

RESULTS

LREs per turn and task set up

As can be seen in Table 2, the amount of LREs per turn varied considerably. The lowest frequency of LREs was observed in Set Up 3, where Japanese was prohibited. This result exceeded two standard deviations below the mean. Set up 4b produced the highest occurrence of LREs, easily exceeding one standard deviation above the mean. This was the set up in which the students used Picture Set 2 following Picture Set 1, and included the Japanese instructions, a time limit, gentle verbal encouragement to use English on task

and a post-task of reading their story to the class. The other results fell within one standard deviation of the mean.

Types of LREs observed in each task set up

Table 3 shows the frequency with which each type of LRE occurred in each task set up. The mean of the percentage of which LRE type occurred in each task set up has been calculated along with the standard deviation. Thus we can see considerable variation in the nature and frequency of the occurrence of LREs.

In Task 1a promoted Req-OL and L-L neg LREs exceeding one standard deviation above the mean, showing that students were more likely to ask other

learners for help, and seek to clarify misunderstandings, although there were only two actual instances of this phenomena.

Task 1b also resulted in L-L neg LREs occurring in excess of one standard deviation above the mean, although it actually only occurred once, illustrating how rare learner to learner negotiation of meaning occurred in these tasks. Task 1b also promoted Dict LREs exceeding one standard deviation above the mean.

The result for Req-OL LREs in 4b exceeded one standard deviation below the mean, showing that in this task, students rarely asked other learners for language-related assistance completing the task. However the result for Meta LREs in the same task set up exceeded one standard deviation above the mean, showing that students made a large number of comments on the language required to complete the task.

The result for Dict LREs in task set up 5 exceeded two standard deviations above the mean, showing that this dyad checked their dictionaries much more than the average pair.

The peer-correction task, Task 6b, perhaps unsurprisingly had three results falling outside one deviation of the mean, the most of any of the task set-ups; the students asked the teacher for more help than in other task set ups; Req-T LREs exceeded two standard deviations above the mean. Students also asked each other for assistance; Req-OL LREs exceeded

one standard deviation above the mean. Students tended not to make suggestions and have them confirmed in this task, hence Meta LREs exceeded two standard deviations below the mean.

All the results from task set ups 2a, 2b, 3, 4a and 6a fell within one standard deviation of the mean showing that there was little variation in terms of the types of LREs that occurred in each.

DISCUSSION

The occurrence of Language Related Events

The aim of this report was to examine whether TBLT could be effectively conducted in a Japanese junior high school. In other words, could tasks be conducted that encouraged learners to engage in focus on language as evinced by the occurrence of LREs? In view of the results shown in Table 2 and Table 3, it is evident that during the tasks observed, many LREs took place. This is consistent with earlier studies conducted with adult learners (Williams, 1999; Swain and Lapkin, 1995; Swain and Lapkin, 1998). Furthermore, Table 3 shows that the way tasks are set up can affect the type of LREs that are produced. Thus we can conclude that by carefully setting up tasks to take into account a number of variables, TBLT can provide learners with opportunities to acquire English and can therefore be an effective approach to take in this teaching context.

Overall, taking into account the difficulties I have faced conducting similar activities, the extent to which my

students engaged with the tasks was pleasantly surprising. I believe this to be a function of three factors; firstly, the narrative task with its clear set out and tangible goals appealed to the students, and avoided the dangers of being overly complex (Kim, 2009). Secondly the Japanese instructions and explanation of the students' role on the task appears to have added to students' engagement, echoing McDowell's (2009) findings. Thirdly, the pair groupings proved as in earlier studies (Williams, 1999, 2001; Kim, 2009) to be effective in keeping students focused on the task.

Perhaps the three most interesting results were those obtained for task set ups 3, 4b, and 6b, to which we will turn next.

Set up 3 - How restrictions on L1 use influenced LRE production

One of the most striking results gained was that students who were prohibited from L1 use while on task 3 produced many fewer LREs than the average. Although restricting use of the mother tongue has long been a concern of many English teachers (Eldridge, 1996), this result appears to suggest that it may be counterproductive at the beginner level. While an English language class characterised by students conversing in their L1 may be anathema to many language teachers, there is research to suggest that classes such as this may be productive. Eldridge (1996) found that in Turkish secondary school, students remained on task regardless of whether they switched between L1 and L2. The

results gained from Task 3 could add support to Swain and Lapkin's assertion that L1 usage allows students more resources to focus on language (Swain and Lapkin, 2000).

Set up 4b - The most successful task

The most successful task given the objective of the research was 4b, in which students produced the most LREs per turn by some margin. In addition to the task set up factors that were shared by all the tasks i.e. a clear task, a clear goal, pair grouping and Japanese explanations, this task set up included the students firstly completing a similar task (4a), then the workbook pages which included a focus on language that could be used in a similar task, having a time limit and being encouraged to use English as much as possible.

Let us briefly examine each of these factors in turn.

Repeating tasks and providing planning time have been shown to improve students' performance on tasks and thus be a useful pedagogic procedure (Lynch and Maclean, 2000; Willis and Willis, 2007). This, like L1 use may be related to attention in that prior experience with a task "frees up" resources that students may then use to apply to focussing on language while repeating the task.

By completing the workbook exercises, students' attention was drawn to language they could employ when they repeated the task. This may have led to it being noticed (Schmidt, 1990), and the

output stage that followed may have led students to focus on language during Task 4b, as they attempted to incorporate the language they had noticed on the workbook pages. This result seems to support the emphasis accorded by Swain (1985) and Skehan (1996) to output.

Time limits have been shown to be an effective way of improving student fluency and accuracy (Nation and Newton, 2009), and it would appear that they had a positive effect in this study.

Rather than prohibiting the use of L1, the teachers gently encouraged the use of L2 with verbal reminders throughout the task. This seems to have avoided any detrimental effects such as those witnessed in Task 3.

Set up 6 - a different type of task

Task 6b was not a narrative, but a correction exercise and as such elicited more requests for help from fellow students and the teacher than the other task set ups. It was only conducted on one task set up, but the results obtained suggest that it may be a useful post-task to help students focus on language in more detail having completed a pair task as part of a larger group; to have pairs exchange stories and check them is an extremely practical technique that required no preparation and seems to result in increased focus on language, particularly requests to teachers and learners about language.

Implications for teaching and further research

As mentioned above, this may be the first study to explicitly examine the occurrence of LREs during TBLT in a Japanese junior high school. The fact that it has shown that TBLT can be conducted effectively, and gives some indication of how this may be achieved may encourage other teachers to implement TBLT in their classes in similar contexts. Should further research and teaching practice result in students efficiently acquiring language and thus performing better on standardised tests, we may see the curricula and administrative obstacles described earlier ameliorated to some degree.

Implications for teachers' development

According to Gebhard (2005), action research is a cyclical process of identifying a problem, investigating it and trying to solve it. A key component is that teachers engage in reflection on the problem, and modify their approaches to it in response to what they learn from observation.

The fact that in this study decisions about which elements of the task set up to vary were sometimes made "on the fly" could be considered a strength of this study, because this replicates the decisions teachers in teaching contexts such as mine have to make every day. When a teacher identifies an area that could be improved (in this case identifying an element of a task set up that could be adjusted to increase the number or change the nature of LREs

that occur), the luxury of extensive planning time may not be available. Teachers must then utilize their experience and instincts to decide on alterations to implement in their next class. This "real world" element of the research could be seen as a useful model for other teachers to follow not only when conducting research but also as they engage in reflection on their teaching on a daily basis. This can lead to multiple benefits related to professional development, increased awareness of one's teaching, improved reflective skills and the provision of opportunities to participate in discussion about teaching Gebhard (2005).

Future Implications for TBLT in Japan

According to the results obtained here, factors that contribute to the effective implementation of TBLT in teaching contexts in Japan include:

・Using a clear, concrete task,
・Including a clear goal,
・Pair work,
・L1 explanations of the task and expected student roles,
・Repeating similar tasks,
・Including a focus on form between tasks,
・Including a time limit,
・Encouraging students to use L2.

Prohibition of L1 should be avoided as it seems to be detrimental to students' ability to focus on language while on task. This may be encouraging for Japanese teachers of EFL, who may lack confidence in their spoken English

ability. EFL teachers in Japan who wish to employ TBLT in their classes should bear the following in mind:

Jacob *et al.* (1996) concluded that teachers who wish to maximize the benefits of cooperative learning must design and set up tasks to facilitate opportunities for SLA, monitor groups carefully, and fine tune their approach if those opportunities do not arise. This gels with Van den Branden's observation that even tasks with a specific focus have wide learning potential where linguistic features aside from the lexical or grammatical area the teacher intends to focus on are the subject of LREs (Van den Branden, 2009). This fluidity may result from the individual teaching approaches and the unique interplay between each teacher and student. Tasks in themselves do not predict behavior in the classroom; they are best seen as a starting point, a single variable with unpredictable potential to provide language learning opportunities. This unpredictability may make TBLT unappealing to Japanese teachers, particularly in high school who are often under pressure to prepare students for university entrance tests, and so must focus their valuable resources on imparting specific language points to their students in a very limited time. Furthermore, teachers may require training and practice before they feel confident in using TBLT in the Japanese context.

Limitations of the study

There were several limitations of this

study. Firstly, due to constraints imposed by school schedules and class sizes, the research conducted was limited in scale. Only three dyads were recorded for each task condition, and of each of these, only one selected for detailed analysis. Although the selection process was designed to eliminate unrepresentative samples, generalizations made from the results obtained must be made with caution.

Another limitation of this research is that it did not measure SLA. Although it has been established that student-generated focus on language provides opportunities for SLA (Lyster and Ranta, 1997; Swain and Lapkin, 1998; Williams, 2001), this study was limited to identifying and manipulating these opportunities for SLA during TBLT. It did not include any measures to quantify actual SLA. Thus the claims of the study are limited to being framed in terms of different task set ups providing opportunity for SLA, rather than promoting SLA.

CONCLUSION

Despite the limitations of the study noted above, it is clear that TBLT has the potential to provide opportunities for learners to acquire language in teaching contexts in Japan. Carefully selected and set up tasks, and attentive, responsive teachers can create an environment where students focus on language during tasks.

Furthermore, the process of conducting action research such as is

reported here is beneficial to teaching professionals on many levels. Potentially fruitful further research should seek to quantify SLA resulting from TBLT in Japanese junior high schools. This could be achieved by conducting large scale longitudinal studies tracking and testing language which is focused on during tasks and comparing the results with similar items taught via different approaches such as PPP. This will be helpful generalizing the results found here to the broader context of teaching EFL to young learners in Japan.

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APPENDIX 1 - Story Writing Worksheet

Names:	Class:

Story # 1

Story # 2