

Task Design: Oral Interaction and Cultural Construction with Beginners

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Abstract

The theme of the present workshop refers to a classroom task wherein the facilitator uses of students' culture as a resource. In practice, the approach of this work is "task continuity" (Nunan 1989:119), classroom work consist of a several activities linked by a thematic line and dependant in terms of content and skills; and the task focuses on "oral interaction", i.e. application of acquired structures and production of utterances with a communicative purpose. The theoretical framework is represented by cultural constructionism: for the constructionists "talk" is a form of practice and "everybody is a practitioner in the creation of cultural life and everybody is invited to share and to place practices of theory and action into a collaborative and creative relationship" (Gergen 1999:167).

Introduction

The workshop contains the following parts:

Theoretical frame: Cultural construction

Classroom task

Cultural gallery: Personalities, Rogues gallery, and Which is ...?

Presentation of cultural objects.

Oral Interaction: steps for guiding students into the integration of syllabus points.

Model for oral interaction and cultural construction.

"Language enters life through concrete utterances,
and life enters language through utterances as well"

Kenneth Gergen

Cultural construction

When we thought of a task for meaning making we considered three aspects: (1) the task should make students face a problem, a situation that requires them to integrate elements, make a synthesis and elaborate something, (2) to accomplish those operations the task should contain a story, virtually the best way of organizing human experiences, (3) the story should be the channel of their culture, which would require them to represent their culture in the target language.

Such task of meaning making implies "construction", subjects build something, "interaction", the constructed object is the result of the interaction, and "culture", such construction implies taking the culture as a resource in the classroom. Therefore, the theoretical frame chosen to support the task is cultural constructionism, more specifically, socio-cultural constructionism. Constructionism, as a theory about learning, maintains that people learn best when they are

active participants in construction activities, and these design activities give them more involvement in the learning process. Constructivists, in education, support the notion that knowledge is not supplied by teachers but constructed by learners. Constructionists go even further when they affirm that learners construct something external and shareable. When the individual constructions that express cultural identity are enhanced by independent and shared activities, thus the social setting encompasses a community of learners, we are dealing with Sociocultural Constructionism.

In the field of language, we take from constructionism and its partners (social and cultural constructionism) the following features: a shared external construction, focus on meaning, connects the classroom with the outside world, and the link between those two settings is the students' culture, taken as a task resource. The ideas herein commented adhere to the sphere of cultural constructionism (Gergen 1999): individuals are eager to learn through creating objects that express their cultural identity.

Classroom task.

Galleries. Personalities.

Write on the board the name of famous people and ask questions about them.

Galleries. Rogues gallery.

In Vietnam ...

My opinion:

My classmates' opinion:


In Vietnam ...	My opinion:	My classmates' opinion:
1. Who is the most famous president?		
2. Who is the most famous politician?		
3. Who is the most famous poet?		
4. Who is the most important writer?		
5. Who is the most famous actor?		
6. Who is the most famous actress?		
7. Who is the most famous criminal?		
8. Who is the most famous sports person?		
9. Who is the most famous scientist?		
10. Who is the most famous painter?		
11. Who is the most important historical figure?		
12. Who is the most famous singer?		

Galleries. Which is?

1. Which is the most renowned film?		
2. Which is the most prestigious university?		

3. Which is the most delicious dish?		
4. Which is the most beautiful place?		
5. Which is the most popular song?		
6. Which is the most famous book?		

Presentation of cultural objects



This is Mafalda.
Mafalda is 7 years old and lives in Buenos Aires.
Mafalda is short, pretty and has black hair.
She is very nice and very intelligent.
Mafalda goes to school every day.
Her favourite classes are English and Spanish.
She wants to be a translator and work at the UN.
She loves The Beatles and hates eating soup.



Nguyen Anh Quan ... *Chau Hoa*
He is a stage actor of Hanoi Youth Theatre Troupe.
One of the highlights of his career was in
Le Hung's staging of "Macbeth".
Quan lives in Hanoi.

His name is Nguyen Anh Quan. He is
He lives in He is years old. He is
intelligent and handsome. He is famous for

In groups, choose famous singers, actors, musical groups, comedians, etc and introduce them.

Oral Interaction: integration of syllabus points

Classroom interaction in the target language is the device that let teachers of language observe whether learners have actually acquired vocabulary, grammatical structures and skills to use those tools (Macaro 2003).

My favourite book/film	I		
1. Book/Film			
2. Book: writer			
3. Film: director			
4. Main character			
5. Physical description			
6. Personality			
7. Nationality			
8. Where-live?			
9. Age			
10. Lover?			
11. Married / unmarried			
12. Birthday			
13. Other characters			
14. Key word/s			
15. Theme			
16. End			
17. Feelings in the story?			
18. Relation between the story and your culture			
19. Relation with your circumstances			
20. Why do you like the story?			

Model for oral interaction and cultural construction

We built a model based on two elements:

- 1) a task containing 5 linked activities, and
- 2) reconstruction of stories and oral interaction.

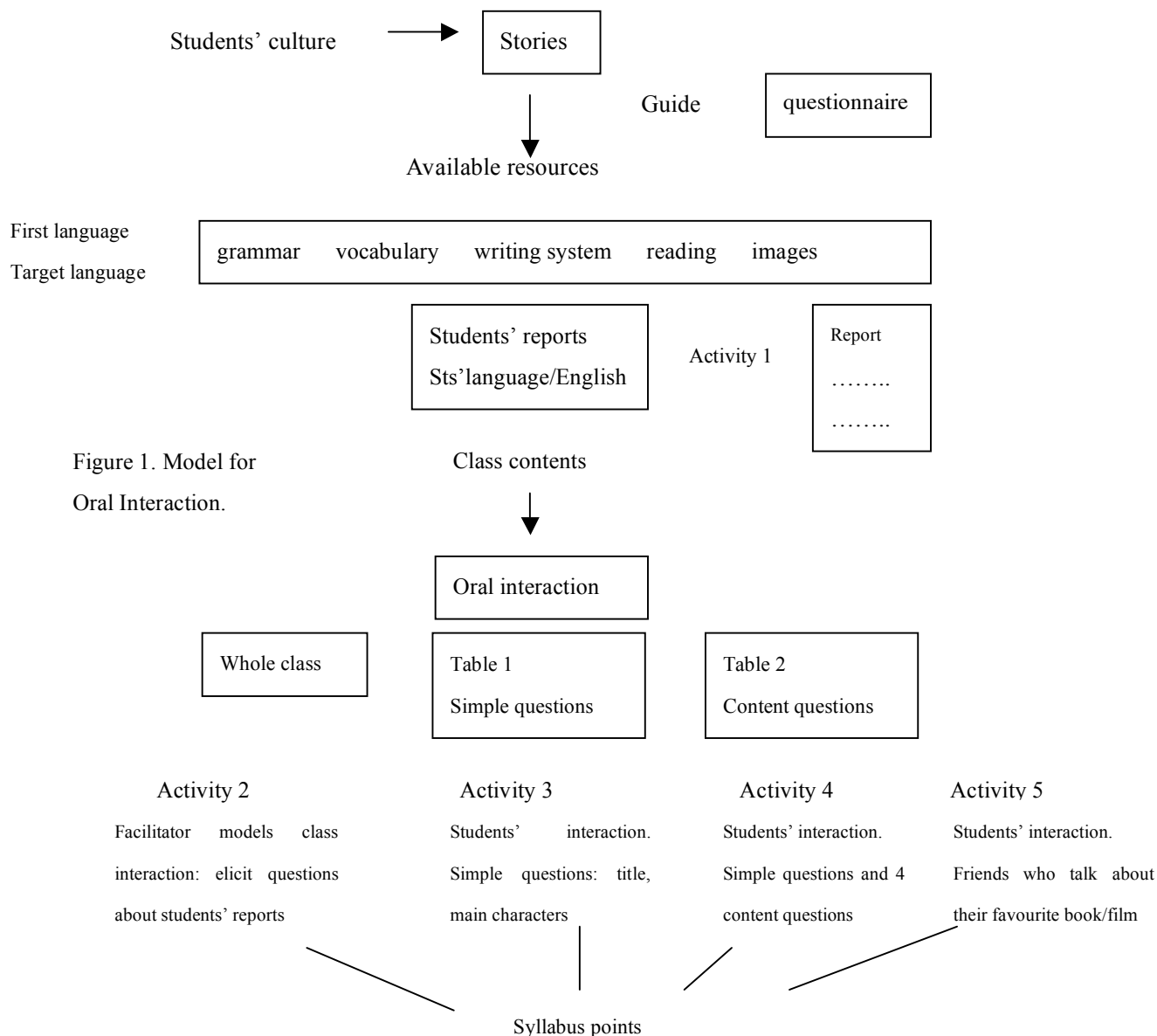


Figure 1. Model for Oral Interaction.

Model. The approach is “task continuity” (Nunan 1989:118-132): a set of activities that are sequenced so as to pursue the general aim and also according to their complexity. Task: “...any structure language learning endeavour which has a particular objective, appropriate content, a specified working procedure, and a range of outcomes for those who undertake the task.” (Breen 1987:23, cited in Nunan 1989:6). Components of the task (Silva 2005):

- Goal: integration of a great deal of the syllabus points.
- Topic. The participants talk about their favorite film or book.
- Input: it refers to the work-plan received by students.
- Activity: the task included a written activity (reply to a questionnaire), a

controlled oral activity, a non-controlled oral activity, and interaction with peers.

- Procedures: written report and interaction.
- Teacher role: provide students with guides, tables and make sure students understood all the questions, words and instructions.
- Learner role: conversational partner, learners share the cultural background.
- Setting. The task is intended as an informal conversation among friends.
- The formulaic openings and closings. As the practice is structured as if it were a friends meeting, they should use informal expressions (e.g. hello, bye, okay).

Conclusions

We are concerned with a combination of meaning (students' culture) and forms (structures learned according to the syllabus). The completion of the task comprises several cognitive processes such as selecting (a book or film), classifying (information from a source so as to complete the provided guide), sequencing information, transforming information from one system into another, making and answering questions during classroom work.

The emphasis should be to make classroom interaction as close as possible to everyday practices because, as such practices as are important to those who engage in them, then we can expect those practices to be important also to second language learners, engaged in express their cultural identity in the target language. In the same way everyday practices contain predictable and unpredictable features, classroom practice also contain both aspects. In order to provide learners with some cognitive security and help them to cope with unpredictable aspects, work with tables. Engaging students in this kind of interaction is an utterly important experience because participants can discover that they can use the structures learned in class in an informal conversation with friends wherein they interchange features of their cultural objects.

References

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