

Take a Detour out of the Text into Context

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Finding motivating, relevant materials and activities to engage university students is a challenge for any subject. Not all students are motivated to focus effort into furthering their knowledge and skills to achieve the goals of a class or for self-development or future career goals despite their choice of major. In this paper, practical suggestions are offered regarding development of class and homework activities to address these issues, using the example of a compulsory English class for students majoring in tourism. The activities are based on original ideas developed and adapted from material presented in the textbook *Oxford English for Careers Tourism 1*, an ESP text designed for English learners specializing in tourism. How to prepare the students for the activities including materials or equipment required, language activities to focus on and practice, and guidance on scheduling are outlined. Although the activities are based around the theme of tourism, the basic concept of lifting themes from a text and making them relevant to students' learning motivations by connecting to authentic experiences can be adapted and transferred to other subject areas.

Most Japanese universities have compulsory English classes for first- and second-year students regardless of the major. Kubo (1997) reported that motivation in Japanese university students studying English is enhanced by a sense of fulfillment during training, and self-esteem garnered from reward. Irie (2003) suggests that Japanese university students have a positive attitude to studying English for exams and career, instrumental orientation, as well as interaction with speakers of the target language, which appear to be typical attributes of university students in Asia in general compared with the rest of the world. In a survey of science majors at a Japanese university, Kaneko (2012) found that exposure to relevant

role models improved motivation to study English.

In my experience of teaching compulsory English classes for first- and second-year students in the Department of International Tourism, many first-year students tend to display fairly high motivation, which for some drops off by the second year. This presents a particular challenge for English instructors to facilitate students' accomplishment of the objectives of such courses. One solution is to adapt material to be sufficiently goal-oriented while at the same time providing an authentic communicative experience.

The compulsory English classes in the Department of International Tourism to date have been streamed according to TOEIC scores. For the 2015-2016 academic year, a colleague and I were responsible for all the second-year compulsory English classes, six classes in total with give or take 40 students in each class (around 240 students in total). I was responsible for the class with the highest-level TOEIC scores (555-950), the class with the lowest-level TOEIC scores (150-350), and one of the middle range TOEIC score classes (445-490). The wide range in the highest-level class reflects the fewer number of students at the upper TOEIC level (for example, only one student with a TOEIC score above 900, two within 801-900, and four within 701-800). While my colleague and I used the same textbook, we determined organization, teaching, and assessment for the classes individually. The content in this paper refers specifically to what I carried out in my classes. The instructions to the students in my classes for all activities and tasks were the same for all the three levels, mainly owing to time constraints but also to ensure all students were clearly informed regardless of their level.

To address the issue of motivation regarding these compulsory English classes, a series of activities was devised based on and inspired by the main text used, *Oxford English for Careers Tourism I* (Walker & Harding, 2006), to engage the students and help them understand the relevance of what they were studying in English classes to other areas of their tourism studies. Some of these activities are highlighted below with suggestions on how to plan and execute them.

Background

Basturkmen (2010) stated that context is the essential element for any ESP program. Moreover, students actively participating with each other in communicative activities, namely, peer interaction, promote language learning on a number of different levels including motivation and language acquisition (Philp, Adams, and Iwashita, 2014). Therefore, there is strong pedagogical support for providing meaningful context and meaningful interaction to promote and motivate language acquisition among students.

The main theoretical basis supporting the promotion of the activities outlined in this paper derives from a combination of motivation and task-based learning: essentially motivation through tasks and tasks engendering motivation. Research on motivation and tasks or task-based learning appears to bear this out, namely, that they are co-dependent on each other (Dörnyei & Tseng, 2009).

Extensive research has been carried out on motivation, commonly considered one of the main determinants underpinning achievement in acquisition of a second or foreign language. Dörnyei (1994) divides learner motivation into 3 components: (1) the language level, concerned with the learner language level; (2) the learner level, concerned with learner attitude such as personal motivation, which includes self-confidence and personal goals; and (3) the learner situation level, concerned with the learning context. Motivation can be harnessed using tasks. However, while tasks in themselves may stimulate motivation, it may be the result rather of doing something different to break the monotony of learning from a text rather than owing to a specific task (Dörnyei, 2001).

One of the above three motivational components of Dörnyei (1994) relevant to the focus of this paper is the learning situation level. In this level, he expands on how best to execute task-based learning with specific components led by the instructor, which he calls “teacher-specific motivational components” (p. 277). These components include three action steps on the part of the teacher, namely: (1) modeling; (2) presenting the task; and (3) feedback (p. 279). The framework for the activities outlined is adapted from these three steps into 5 key stages: (1) using the textbook as an introduction to the task (“Text”); (2) preparation or demonstration of the task using a template or scaffold, equivalent to Dörnyei’s

modeling step (“Demonstration / Template”); (3) execution of the task by the students (“Task”); (4) a post-task activity (“Post-task activity”); and finally (5) a feedback activity, equivalent to Dörnyei’s feedback step (“Feedback”).

Dörnyei and Tseng (2009) provide a schematic representation for task motivation incorporating: the task execution (the engagement of the learner in undertaking the task with explicit instructions from the teacher); task appraisal (the learners processing of input and output arising from stimuli deriving from the task); and action control (the learners applying the language learned by doing the task). This construct is especially applicable to language learning tasks involving communication such as role plays. The successful outcome of a task is suggested to be the result of a balanced interplay among the three elements.

In relation to task-based language learning, Nunan (2004) sets out seven principles: (1) scaffolding, meaning clear provision and instruction of the tasks; (2) task dependency, meaning a framework of language tasks that can build on each other; (3) recycling, using the same language repetitively in different tasks; (4) active learning, meaning that the students use the language learned; (5) integration, meaning that learners can make a connection between the language they are learning and the learning context; (6) reproduction to creation, meaning learners can adapt their learning to a new situation indicating mastery of the language; and (7) reflection, whereby learners pause and consider what they have mastered.

Long (2015) also emphasizes that tasks should be clearly relevant to the communicative needs of the learner, be motivating, and incorporate samples as close as possible to authentic language. This will ensure the tasks are dynamic rather than static as in many texts. There are other benefits to using tasks apart from motivation in that task-based learning appears to promote retention of language and vocabulary (Ajideh et al., 2013).

In summary, activities in context are a useful tool to promote motivation and language acquisition in the language classroom. Focusing on the specific content area of a class can help identify the appropriate context, which can then be used to develop materials to engage students. For the best outcome, it is important to provide clear instructions and clear materials, models, and examples that can

be used for scaffolding. Moreover, developing a series of activities that build on language from the previous activity can enhance learning and acquisition by providing valuable recycling of language. Finally, a variety of communicative speaking activities among students not only promotes learning but is fun and motivating for the students, too. These findings were incorporated into a 5-step framework as mentioned above for developing a range of activities to take a detour out of the text and into context for an ESP text to both complement and supplement the text's content with the aim of increasing student motivation and engagement in the class both inside and outside the classroom.

Activities

The textbook was the springboard for the ideas for the activities included here. The text is divided into 12 units comprising various aspects of tourism and the tourism industry as follows: (1) What is tourism?, (2) World destinations, (3) Tour operators, (4) Tourist motivations, (5) Travel agencies, (6) Transport in tourism, (7) Accommodation, (8) Marketing and promotion, (9) The airline industry, (10) Holidays with a difference, (11) Reservations and sales, and (12) Airport departures.

Here activities for three of these units, namely, Unit 3 on tour operators, Unit 4 on tourist motivations, and Unit 5 on travel agencies, are presented in detail. The activities are described below.

The activities were designed to cover a number of elements to harness the motivation of the students in line with some of the recommended strategies for motivating students interweaved with task-based learning, including but not limited to: giving the students an opportunity to apply the content of the text in a meaningful context that provided an authentic experience or a simulated authentic experience, namely, as close as possible to an authentic experience; allowing the students to do research on their own, in most cases with some element of choice; providing students an opportunity of working together as part of a team for some tasks; allowing the students to be creative; providing meaningful speaking activities with specific language expressions related to authentic or semi-authentic situations; and providing some element of critical

thinking in some cases. A degree of choice by students was included, for example, choice of topic, place or person to interview, to incorporate an element of student-centered learning, a feature considered important for successful task-based learning (Long, 2015).

The basic pattern of the activities as explained above is: text, demonstration / template, task, post-task activity, and feedback. The demonstration / template step includes clear examples and guidelines to make sure students of all levels could achieve the required outputs. Some steps may be merged into a single multi-part task and executed together at the same time, such as the post-task activity and feedback activity, as in some cases this seems the more logical way to proceed rather than separately.

Tour operators

The purpose of this activity is to provide context for the topic of tour operators by simulating a tourism fair, where tour operators introduce their package tours to travel agents. This provides students with a hands-on experience of the role a tour operator. The students prepare posters of package holidays and then take it in turns to role play the tour operators and travel agents. This provides a break from the text in a number of ways: The students need to do research for the poster, and the travel fair role play is a communicative activity using materials developed outside the text.

Text: The relevant material for this activity in this unit of the text (pp. 20-27) is the introduction to the role of tour operators through the concept of package holidays and how tour operators are involved in developing and selling the package holidays to customers via travel agents. One of the tasks in the textbook is a speaking activity based around a tourism fair where tour operators introduce their package tours to travel agents. The speaking activity includes questions such as “Do you have any brochures of your tours?” and “Does the price include transfers?” (p. 23). There is also a task on a package tour where students are asked questions about the content of that package tour.

Demonstration / Template (preparation): The model for this activity is the textbook content of the package holiday, and some examples of previous

years' students' posters. Guidelines of the expected content for the posters are additionally provided.

Task: The task is for students jointly prepare a poster for a 5-day, 10-day, or 15-day package tour on A3 paper in groups of two or three. Following preparation of the poster, the students are given a question grid to prepare for the tourism fair, so they have the language input and can ask and answer questions with efficiency for their roles in the travel fair. The grid also serves as a form to record the answers from the speaking activity.

Post-task activity: The post-task activity is the tourism fair itself. The groups are spread about the class to mimic stalls at a fair. Students in each group take it in turns to play the role of tour operator (sitting down at their table and fielding questions from the travel agents mingling around) and travel agent (wondering around the tour operators and asking questions about the package tours).

Feedback: In addition to formal grading, peer feedback was used, and students voted for the best package tour, best content, and best poster design. Furthermore, students were asked to reflect on their posters and consider what they would do differently given a second chance.

Posters that received higher grades from the instructor had also received more votes from the students, indicating that the students recognized and comprehended the requirements of the task. Many students indicated that that they enjoyed making the posters and wanted to do better next time, for example, include more content or more pictures. This may have been influenced by seeing posters of other students as well as by the peer feedback.

While some students do make more effort preparing their posters than others, it was my observation that most students participated very actively in their roles as the tour operator and travel agent in the simulated travel fair, some especially enjoying the selling roles. On the other hand, it was usually clear which students did not contribute much to their group as they appeared to be unfamiliar with the content of their posters, struggling at the beginning of the session.

Overall, this task was successfully completed by a majority of students at all levels with only one or two exceptions in the highest- and lowest-level

classes. I think that the success of the activity hinged on three main aspects: the engagement of the students by the instructor in monitoring both the creation of the product and the participation in the communicative activity of the trade fair, the level and nature of the engagement required between students, and the enjoyment of a creative pursuit.

Tourist motivations

The purpose of this activity is to provide authentic context to the students regarding the study of tourism, which is the major for many of the students. For this activity the students go out and interview in English foreign tourists visiting a popular tourist attraction in the city to ask them why they are visiting. This provides the students with an authentic experience to complement the content of the text.

Text: The relevant material for this activity in this unit of the text (pp. 28-35) is vocabulary related to reasons for travel and a listening activity of a survey of passengers at an airport. The text provides language input related to asking questions in a survey to travelers.

Demonstration / Template (preparation): Students are provided with a handout featuring a short dialog based on the dialog in the text. Students created their own foreign tourist characters from the examples provided and extend the questions. The students then practiced, taking turns playing the role of a surveyor conducting a survey (which included introducing themselves and the purpose of the survey) and the role of a tourist. From this activity, students created their own shortlist of questions to ask tourists. The students were also prepped on how to handle potential problems, for example, communication problems, lack of interest, too much interest, and difficulty finding suitable candidates.

Task: Students, in groups of two or three, interviewed foreign visitors in English at a famous tourist attraction. Although in pairs or small groups for moral support and safety, the students were each expected to undertake two or three interviews.

To include some element of monitoring of the activity, it is advisable beforehand to compile a list including students' names and groups, where they

intend to go, and on which day they would go. This also signals to the students that this is a task required to be carried out in the context as instructed.

Post-task activity: Students participated in a speaking activity using questions and answers in the third person to exchange the results of their surveys.

Feedback: Students were asked to write a paragraph to provide an opinion on their experience of doing the survey.

Students generally reported being very nervous when they carry out the interviews and commented on their lack of English communication skills. However, student feedback indicated relative satisfaction from the experience of undertaking the interview. For example, one student from my higher-level class wrote “I enjoyed doing the survey. I went to Asakusa. There were many foreigners and they were friendly. However, sometimes, some people couldn’t understand me and I could not understand they said.” This feedback demonstrates that even though the outcome was not completely successful, owing to communication breakdown, the student had a meaningful motivating experience through carrying out the task. Some of the lowest-level students from the lower level class typically wrote comments such as “I was very nervous.” or “It was difficult”, or in some cases “I can’t speak English.” On the other hand, over 50% of the students in the lower-level class reported that they had enjoyed the experience even though they some reported some difficulty communicating in English. This may have been because, as many reported, the foreign tourists they approached were friendly, thus contributing to a positive experience in spite of some communication breakdown.

It should be noted that for this particular activity, I could not be sure that all students actually went out to interview people. However, from the content and quality of the work submitted by the students, it seemed that many of the students, across all class levels, did in fact complete the assigned task.

Travel agencies

The purpose of this activity was to provide context on the sales process role of travel agents. Students went to an actual travel agent and ask about a travel plan. This provided the student with an authentic experience of the selling process of

travel agent as well as the communication skills travel agents need to use with customers.

Text: The relevant material for this activity in this unit of the text (pp. 36-43) is an overview of the language and content of the role of travel agents. There is a review of which travel agency products and services are free and which require payment. There is also an outline of the six steps to successful selling by travel agents: (1) raising awareness of their products (for example, through advertising), (2) establishing rapport with customers, (3) investigating customer needs, (4) presenting the products, (5) closing the sale, (6) after-sales service. Additionally, there is a listening activity of a travel agent going through a number of these stages with a customer. Open and closed questions are also presented in the text.

Demonstration / Template (preparation): Students role played the listening activity of the travel agent and customer, taking turns to read the dialog of the travel agent and the customer. Students then created their own idea for a travel plan and role played this activity, finishing with the phrase “I’ll think about it”. This was to prepare students to be able to finish a visit to a travel agent without feeling any obligation to purchase. Finally, students prepared their travel ideas for visiting a travel agent. Students were provided with a template of questions to report back on their visit to the travel agent.

Task: Students visited a travel agent and completed the report template. There was no requirement to use English in their visit to the travel agent since the focus is on the travel agent selling process, but the report had to be in English.

Post-task activity: Students participated in a speaking activity using the questions from the report template.

Feedback: Students provided feedback on the activity.

For some students, this was the first time they have visited a travel agency in person, as opposed to making travel plans online. More than 75% of students had a positive experience and reported they were satisfied with the way in which the travel agent conducted the exchange. Around 10% of students also reported that they would use that same travel agent in future, while others would not. One student wrote that it was the first time she had been to a travel agency but she was impressed by the knowledge and skill of the staff. Such feedback confirms that by

engaging in a task related to a real experience, students not only experience an authentic exchange related to their field, but they also gain a broader awareness of the context including the communication skills and physical working environment of those working in the field, enhancing both their knowledge and understanding, in addition to their own communication skills. Although it appeared that some students may have copied the model, from the content of the work handed in, it seemed that most students in all three classes did go to a travel agency or reported on one they had visited in the past to complete the task.

In summary, the activities were fairly successful in terms of providing engaging and motivating tasks that apply language and content from the text into a meaningful context with a variety of communicative activities as well as feedback and reflection. Furthermore, this activity, being carried out in the field, provided a different learning experience than that by using a textbook solely in a classroom setting.

Other projects

While I have outlined in detail only a limited number of the activities that I carried out in my classes due to space constraints, there are many other activities that I have used similarly successfully such as: interviewing foreigners living in Japan to complement a section in the text on cultural differences; a presentation on the cultural customs of another country, also related to the section in the text on cultural differences; writing an A-Z diary of places as an extension activity for a task about describing places, A-Z meaning describing one place for each letter of the alphabet; and SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) analysis of tourism promotion in a regional area not well promoted, related to marketing and promotion.

Conclusion

It is often useful to use a textbook for teaching in the English language classroom for a number of reasons: One reason is the instructor need not prepare materials from scratch as there are already pre-prepared activities and materials covering one or more of the four skills of listening, reading, writing, and speaking with additional supporting activities, such as grammar review and practice, and a

ready-made syllabus. Another reason is that the students will have a collection of the course material at the beginning of the course that they can readily access to prepare for or use in class. However, through my experience and observation, students often welcome the opportunity to apply what they have learned outside the text. This could be because it is a break from the routine of using the text rather than the task itself (Dörnyei, 2001). Consequently, for my compulsory second-year English classes I try to include an “external” element for each unit of the text to provide a chance for students to use authentic language in real life contexts. This not only provides useful context, but also adds an added element of motivation for both motivated and less-motivated students studying English in compulsory English classes.

Although for some activities it was not possible to verify that students actually conducted the task activity, based upon the reports submitted by the students, it seems overall that more than 60% did for the lower-level class, more than 75% for the higher-level class and close to 100% for the mid-level class. The most successful application across all tasks was by the students in the mid-level class. Some students in the higher-level class and lower-level classes clearly did not apply themselves, a common pattern I have observed among the compulsory English classes taught at Toyo University.

Although this paper focused on tourism studies, the ideas of how to adapt, expand, and lift the language and content out of a text and into context can be applied to other ESP areas.

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