The TATE model: a curriculum design framework for language teaching

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This article proposes a curriculum design framework for instructed additional language learning comprising four phases: Text, Analysis, Task, Exploration (TATE). The framework is argued to be compatible with both natural order theory and skill acquisition theory through its ability to integrate meaning-focused tasks within a task-supported approach to language teaching that allows for both implicit and explicit learning processes to occur. It is presented as an integrated skills model consistent with contemporary research on the learning of both lexis and grammar, recognizing the importance of both written and spoken language practice during tasks. Evidence of current trends in global coursebook design is presented to support the framework from a sociocultural perspective. I argue that the framework is potentially compatible with CLIL and project-based approaches to language learning, but caution that the model is not presented as universally applicable; as such it is offered as a tool in the curriculum designer's and teacher's 'toolbox' for planning courses and curricula.

Introduction

This article proposes an original curriculum design framework for instructed additional language learning, broadly consistent with trends in global coursebook structure and tendencies for language teaching in a range of contexts worldwide (Anderson 2017a). It offers a critique of the modular curriculum recently proposed by Ellis (2019), and argues that a task-supported language teaching (TSLT) model can provide for both implicit and explicit learning of lexis and grammar if it involves meaningful holistic tasks and offers opportunities for both pre- and post-task form focuses, which the proposed model does.

A 'task' is here defined as a meaningful language-use activity that allows learners to make free use of their languaging resources to achieve an envisaged outcome in written or spoken form. Following Leung and Valdés (2019), the term 'additional language learning' is preferred here to 'second language acquisition' (SLA), although the term 'SLA' is used with reference to the body of literature commonly known by that name.

Ellis's proposal for a modular curriculum

In a recent article, Ellis (2019) proposes a modular language curriculum, comprising a combination of task-based and task-supported language

teaching (TBLT and TSLT, respectively). This proposal is significant as a distinction has frequently been made between these two approaches in the instructed SLA literature that sees them as incompatible, even oppositional (e.g. Long 2015). According to this distinction, in TBLT, no predictive form focus (e.g. grammar instruction) takes place before the task. Tasks are selected appropriate to learners' communicative needs, and any form focus typically accompanies or follows the task, depending on the communicative challenges that learners experience. This approach is supported by a body of psycholinguistic SLA research indicating that a learner's grammar learning follows an internal syllabus that is not amenable to the synthetic instruction of specific features, and that a focus on form may only be useful if it is provided at the point of need—when the learner is developmentally ready for it. In contrast, TSLT is often seen as a 'weaker' communicative approach, in which, prior to the task, a form-focus is provided involving one or more of the specific features expected to be used during the task, making it essentially analogous to PPP without the middle 'P', as Ellis has himself noted (e.g. Li, Ellis, and Zhu 2016), and is based on the same skill acquisition theory of learning. This approach also receives support in the SLA literature, particularly from writers perceiving an interface between implicit and explicit language learning (e.g. DeKeyser 2015). Norris and Ortega's (2000) meta-analysis indicates that both these approaches can facilitate acquisition, and research evidence, including a study by Ellis himself (see Li et al., 2016), indicates that TSLT can be more effective than TBLT when the learning focus involves acquisition of a specific (grammatical) feature.

While some authors (e.g. Long 2015) have argued that TBLT and TSLT are fundamentally incompatible, Ellis (2019) argues that when used in conjunction, TBLT and TSLT may be more effective than a reliance on one or the other, providing two primary justifications for this: the need for accuracy-oriented work to counteract learned selective attention, and a recognition of the less than ideal conditions in which many learners learn additional languages (particularly state-sponsored secondary education). He also mentions two more factors supportive of his proposal: differences between individual learners' grammatical inferencing ability—some appear more able to acquire complex grammatical structures through explicit instruction—and developmental differences between learners concerning readiness to learn a specific structure. Given that a class of learners will inevitably include different aptitudes for grammatical inferencing and a variety of developmental levels, it can be argued that Ellis's modular curriculum provides a wider variety of opportunities for both implicit and explicit learning more suited to varying needs than a TBLT-only curriculum. Of three modular approaches discussed, Ellis goes on to argue for one involving TBLT as the 'primary' and initial component of his modular syllabus, with the 'structural component' (i.e. TSLT) introduced at a later stage 'to address residual problems with specific grammatical features' (Ellis 2019: 465).

Ellis's recognition that learners in state school systems around the world experience conditions far from conducive to 'first' language acquisition is of note, given the limited success in implementing stronger forms of TBLT in state school education, and the arguments of a number of authors (e.g. Bruton 2005) that TBLT is fundamentally unimplementable in such contexts. It is noticeable that even Long (2015: 371), when

Jason Anderson

concluding his dialectic in favour of strong TBLT, notes five preconditions for successful implementation of TBLT, three of which are rarely, if ever, realities of state-sponsored secondary education around the world, especially in low- and middle-income countries, where the majority of instructed additional language learning occurs.

Two weaknesses in Ellis's model

As an attempt to provide a realistic framework for language teaching that is more communicative than those often found in education systems in many parts of the world, Ellis's model is laudable. However, two weaknesses can be identified, specifically in the TBLT first and dominant option he argues for. Firstly, Ellis's justification for prioritizing TBLT in the model is that there are both structures (he cites 'English articles' as an example of this; Ellis 2019: 457) and learners (those with low grammatical inferencing ability) for which/whom explicit instruction of target forms (TF) would not work. He notes, 'there will not be enough time to provide in depth mastery of the full system' (ibid.: 462). Aside from questions of what is meant by mastery, and whether mastery can be reasonably expected of—or required by—many post-childhood additional language learners, Ellis appears to overlook the fact that, even when used within a synthetic grammar curriculum, tasks can retain the primarily meaningful communication and holistic language use that allows for implicit learning to occur alongside the explicit practice of specific structures. To exemplify this point, suppose a forms-focused task involved a story-telling activity to practise use of past 'narrative tenses' (as often referred to in coursebooks). Such a task, providing the focus was on meaningful language use, would provide ample opportunities for pushed output and implicit learning of a range of structures that are not the specific form-focus of the task, including articles, prepositional phrases, time adverbials, adverbs of manner, finite and infinite verb clauses, and many more. Both during-task (Long's 'reactive' focus on form; Long 2015: 317) and post-task (Willis's 'language focus'; Willis 1996: 38) form focuses could provide support with such structures as required, as recommended in stronger TBLT approaches, regardless of the pre-task form focus, a point that Ellis himself has also acknowledged on a number of occasions (e.g. Ellis and Shintani 2014: 121). There is no evidence, nor reason to suggest, that just because the task itself may be occurring in a TSLT or PPP lesson on narrative tenses, implicit acquisition of other structures, as suggested above, cannot occur. Further, opportunities for implicit learning the form-focus itself ('narrative tenses', in the example) are also likely to occur at other stages in such a unit of study (e.g. while responding to pre-reading discussion questions or meaning-focused text comprehension questions). Many other examples of activities designed to practise a specific area of grammar that may nonetheless provide opportunities for implicit acquisition (and post-task focus) of numerous other structures can be found in form-focused tasks in mainstream global ELT coursebooks. As such, within a TSLT approach, the use of meaningful, holistic tasks would appear sufficient to provide opportunities for both the implicit and explicit learning that Ellis argues are necessary for effective instructed language learning. It can be argued not only that the TSLT component warrants a greater share in his modular curriculum but that the TBLT component may not be necessary at all.

A second weakness in Ellis's model relates to its minimal discussion of the learning of lexis at all levels, but particularly in early stages of the learning

process. Ellis quotes his earlier work to argue that 'a sufficiently varied lexis' should have developed before 'grammar teaching' should begin (Ellis 2019: 464), implying that this should happen inductively during the initial TBLT component, although no detail is provided as to how this may occur. Given that Ellis has previously acknowledged (Ellis and Shintani 2014: 106) the extensive evidence that, in contrast to grammar, the deliberate learning of lexis within a synthetic syllabus 'is not only an efficient but also a very effective way of L2 vocabulary acquisition' that 'can be used to quickly learn the 2,000 most frequent word families in English' (Elgort and Nation 2010: 101–02), it seems puzzling that his recommended model includes only TBLT at the beginner level (see Ellis 2019: 464), a choice that can only be understood within Ellis's primarily grammar-focused discussion.[1] Indeed, Ellis acknowledges in relation to one of two other models he discusses (but rejects) that 'there might be a case for an initial explicit component for teaching vocabulary' (Ellis 2019: 463)—this appears to be a very strong case, according to the available evidence.

Thus, providing tasks are meaningful and holistic, and providing that appropriate pre-, during-, and post-task form focuses occur, TSLT, as discussed here, appears to be able to provide for both implicit and explicit learning of both grammar and lexis, and as such, is compatible with the two theories of learning (natural order theory and skill acquisition theory) perceived as incompatible by Long (2015). As DeKeyser (2015: 102) notes, 'Skill Acquisition Theory is not incompatible either with other contemporary tendencies in the way focus on form is implemented, such as task-based learning.'

Towards a TSLT-mainly curriculum design framework

Given the arguments presented above, I would like to propose an alternative curriculum design framework for instructed additional language learning that provides the necessary opportunities for form focus before, during, and after the task. The proposed model involves a single structural component that is broadly consistent with TSLT, in as much as it recommends a pre-task language focus, but also allows for TBLT as required (see below). It draws upon empirical evidence of current trends in the design of both global and some local ELT coursebooks, making it amenable to use with such coursebooks. As such, uptake of the framework may be more widespread than uptake of models that are either more complex (such as modular ones), or less sympathetic towards either coursebook structure, or syllabi within both state-sponsored and private school language teaching, whenever these mandate the use of a synthetic grammar syllabus (such as a stronger TBLT model as proposed by Long 2015).

Recent analysis of contemporary global ELT coursebooks (Anderson 2017a) indicates that, contrary to several critiques of such books (e.g. Tomlinson and Masuhara 2013), since 2000, units of study do not typically follow a PPP structure, as was more common in the 1980s and 1990s. Rather, they follow a context–analysis–practice structure that involves first a written or aural text (frequently seeded with a specific, usually grammatical, feature) that is initially read or listened to for meaningful comprehension, followed by analysis of the feature in question, and then practice that may or may not include both the controlled practice (e.g. 'gapfill' cloze exercises) and the freer production of the PPP model (see Figure 1). While prior to

2000, visual, or situational contexts for new language were more likely, stating that more recent coursebooks only 'deviate slightly' (Tomlinson and Masuhara 2013: 247) from PPP oversimplifies the thematic integrated skills approach generally used today, and the potential benefit of pre-analysis exposure to meaningful text that may facilitate receptive acquisition of lexis and grammar effectively.
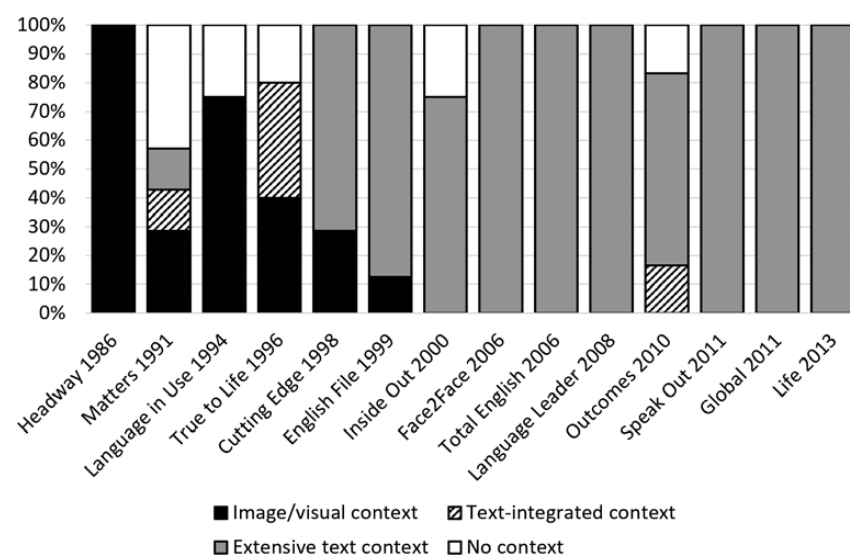
Based on this analysis, I have argued that this context–analysis–practice 'paradigm' is the most common instructional model in contemporary (weak) CLT, and discussed it, not as a normative prescription for how to teach, but as a description of a current tendency, arguing that both trainee and novice teachers would benefit from noticing and experimenting with it as an initial planning framework, thereby facilitating their socialization into institutional and community norms for instructed additional language learning in relevant contexts (see Anderson 2017b). See Figure 2 for a graphic representation of the typical stages in this model, in which the fourth 'evaluation' stage is seen as an optional element, frequent in the practice of some teachers and promoted on some teacher certification courses (e.g. the Cambridge CELTA), but not necessarily emphasized in global coursebooks themselves.

The TATE framework

FIGURE 1
Pre-analysis context types in first editions of global ELT coursebooks from 1986 to 2013. 'Image/visual context' involves the use of images, diagrams and possibly text to contextualize new language (e.g. ordering images). 'Textintegrated context' involves learners completing or manipulating text to raise awareness of new language (e.g. a gapped text or a sentence ordering activity). 'Extensive text context' involves learners reading and/or listening to longer (often complete) texts, within which new language is noticed and subsequently analysed (e.g. a radio interview). 'No context' indicates that only example sentences, or a very short text (under 30 words) were used to introduce new language, without clear indication of why or by whom the text was produced.

The model proposed here recognizes the dominance of the CAP/CAPE paradigm, but seeks to bring it more in line with the SLA research findings discussed above concerning the need for both implicit and explicit learning opportunities for effective grammar acquisition. It also provides for Nation's 'four strands' of effective lexical learning ('meaning-focused input, meaning-focused output, language-focused learning, and fluency development'; Elgort and Nation 2010: 103) and recognizes the influence of text-based language teaching and related curriculum models common in academic contexts. It is intended to offer enough flexibility to enable teachers and curriculum designers to prepare lessons appropriate to specific contexts, constraints, and personal preferences, including when these constraints include the expected use of a global or local coursebook, although the model is not expected to be universally

The TATE model: a curriculum design framework for language teaching   Page 5 of 10

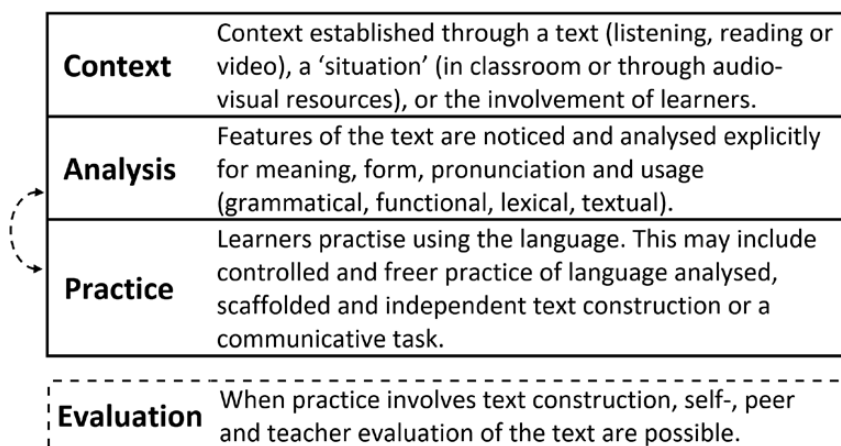|	
Context	Context established through a text (listening, reading or video), a 'situation' (in classroom or through audio-visual resources), or the involvement of learners.
Analysis	Features of the text are noticed and analysed explicitly for meaning, form, pronunciation and usage (grammatical, functional, lexical, textual).
Practice	Learners practise using the language. This may include controlled and freer practice of language analysed, scaffolded and independent text construction or a communicative task.
Evaluation	When practice involves text construction, self-, peer and teacher evaluation of the text are possible.

FIGURE 2
The CAP/CAPE model.

applicable (discussed below). It includes opportunities for pre-task (as per TSLT), during- and post-task (as per TBLT) form focuses, both of pre-selected language features (as per skill acquisition theory) and ad hoc features emergent from the task itself (as per natural order theory), both lexical and grammatical. It comprises four phases that would normally be seen as sequential, and may take place over one or several lessons, cognizant of significant differences in time constraints, continuity, and pace expectations in different contexts. Each phase may include a number of stages, involving one or more activities. The four phases are expected to be thematically linked, thereby allowing for longer cycles compatible with curriculum structuring recommendations within both project-based learning and content- and language-integrated learning (CLIL). The four phases of the model are: Text, Analysis, Task, Exploration (TATE) requires the inclusion of both receptive and productive skills practice and, as such, is an integrated skills model. It ascribes no greater importance to spoken or written language use, recognizing both as important to communicative interaction around the world and online today. Figure 3 presents the model in simplified form. Each of these phases is discussed in detail below.

Text

The first phase of the model involves a written or aural text (recorded or live) or texts (as in jigsaw activities), as frequently found towards the start of units in ELT coursebooks, and also recommended in some models for TBLT during task preparation (e.g. Willis 1996: 45). As is frequent in ELT coursebooks, pre-text preparation activities may involve lexical work (e.g. brainstorming) or schema-raising (e.g. thematic discussion). Within the model, while-reading/listening tasks are envisaged that engage learners primarily with the meaning-content of the text(s). This is followed by an awareness-raising task that serves as a bridge to the analysis phase.

Analysis

The analysis phase involves analysis of specific features of grammar or lexis found in (or related to) the text(s) that are likely to be useful during the subsequent task phase. It is envisaged to begin with an awareness raising 'bridge' task to promote 'noticing' of the selected lexical or grammatical features in the text, followed by an attempt to develop

Jason Anderson

FIGURE 3
The TATE curriculum design framework. The four phases may occur in a single lesson, or over a period of lessons: (a) 'Text' could be written or aural, and may be linked to the task thematically, functionally, or in terms of a shared lexical and/or grammatical focus; (b) 'Analysis' could be learner- or teacher-led. It may be retrospective (analysis of text), and may be preparative (as preparation for a task in TSLT), but not always (as in TBLT); (c) 'Task', as well as engaging productive skills, may also involve receptive use of language, spoken or written; (d) 'Exploration' may include evaluation, review, and form-focused instruction, offering corrective feedback and a focus on emergent language.

Phase	Description	Examples of potential implicit processes	Examples of potential explicit processes
Text [a]	Receptive skills practice through meaningful engagement with a written or aural text	Lexical priming Reinforcement	Inferring meaning from context
		Noticing	Raising awareness
Analysis [b]	Learner- or teacher-led focus on target features (TF) of lexis or grammar related to the text and/or task	Translanguaging Proceduralisation activities	Focus on lexis Form-function focus Contrastive analysis
Task [c]	Meaningful, mainly productive skills practice that may include opportunities to use lexis or grammar from previous phases	Pushed output Negotiation of meaning Translanguaging Automatization of TF	Use of TF (optional) Incidental form focus
		Uptake / Noticing the gap Reinforcement	Raising awareness
Exploration [d]	Evaluation, review and form-focus responsive to task success and challenge		Emergent language focus Reflection Planning for future

learners' explicit knowledge of said features. The model makes no assumptions or recommendations as to how the analysis takes place, nor regarding who leads this analysis, thereby allowing for both more learner-oriented constructivist approaches to development of explicit knowledge, as in discovery-learning, and more teacher-led direct instruction, consistent with reduced cognitive load theory (see Waters 2015). The analysis phase may include explicit multilingual analysis, through contrastive analysis with shared other languages (SOLs) in the classroom, or more implicit translanguaging practices that embed target features (TFs) in more familiar shared languaging resources (SLRs) during analysis, thereby increasing co-textual familiarity with the TFs. It may also include analysis of lexical strings/chunks through collocation awareness raising, highlighting of fixed expressions and formulaic language, or work using data-analysis software, such as concordance samplers, based on relevant corpora (e.g. of locally appropriate and/or international Englishes). Analysis phases may include activities categorized under 'practice' in the PPP model (e.g. spoken drills, cloze exercises, or other activities to facilitate proceduralization of the declarative knowledge involved; DeKeyser 2015).

Task

The task phase in this model is envisaged as a meaningful opportunity for extensive productive skills practice, either written or spoken, and may extend to project work, in which the 'task' itself spans more than one lesson and involves multiple stages including differentiated learner roles. While the primary focus of this phase is productive, it may also include the integrated use of receptive skills (reading or listening), especially through task content prompts, information/opinion gap materials, or learner-research work (e.g. using the internet). Consistent with TSLT, it is likely that the learners will draw upon the language focus of the analysis phase, although, consistent with the emphasis on holistic, meaningful language use in tasks, this is not considered obligatory; depending

on varying developmental levels, grammatical inferencing ability, and aptitude for noticing the gap in any class, different learners are likely to vary in this regard. As well as tasks designed to provide opportunities to use grammatical features from the analysis phase, due to the dual lexical and grammatical focuses of this model, tasks that have a primarily functional or transactional focus may also be included (i.e. with no specific grammatical focus); on such occasions, the analysis phase may be oriented towards appropriate lexical resources for use during the task (thematically related), or on receptive-only analysis of features of the text, meaning that the model may also include unit cycles consistent with theories of learning underpinning stronger TBLT models. Language choice during the task will vary depending on context, SOLs, and SLRs, but, given the primary meaning focus, particularly for young learners in contexts where there is a dominant SOL, it is likely that this SOL will feature heavily during the task phase, although translanguaging may be encouraged through the integration of dual/multiple language resources and stimuli (e.g. texts in the target language [TL], requirements for TL texts to be produced as part of the task itself, or expectations for TL presentations during the subsequent exploration phase). In such contexts, the percentage of TL features emerging during learner translanguaging is likely to increase as proficiency, confidence in the TL system, and TL self-esteem increase. Responsive focus on form from teacher and/or peers may occur during this phase as recommended by Long (2015), either learner-initiated (when learners ask for form-related or lexical scaffolding), or through teacher intervention (e.g. during communication break-down). Unlike Long, I suggest that this may involve both aspects of the pre-task form focus, and other aspects of form emergent from the task as required for effective communication and task completion, thereby avoiding undermining the primary focus on meaning of the task.

Exploration

The final phase of the model involves post-task exploration of any of a number of areas related to the task itself. Some of these may also involve meaningful language use, constituting 'meta-tasks' in so much as they focus on exploration of task performance and its consequences. The phase may include:

1. self-, peer-, and teacher evaluation of achievement or performance during the task; how successfully it was completed and reflection on challenges faced
2. learner-centred presentations, peer-review (e.g. of written texts) or publishing (e.g. online) of outcomes of tasks or projects when appropriate
3. a responsive focus on emergent language (see Andon and Norrington-Davies 2019), which may include specific focuses on forms used, and corrective feedback where deemed appropriate by the teacher or requested by learners, but also on providing input of alternative lexis, functional exponents, and structures appropriate to perceived communicational needs and developmental levels of learners
4. planning for future lessons, such as when learners and/or teacher perceive a need for a specific, possibly remedial, language focus prompted by reflection upon task performance—this is envisaged to

Jason Anderson

be useful for novice teachers or teachers with lower proficiency in the TL who feel more challenged by the unpredictability of responsive form focus.

The extent to which each or any of these may be the focus of the exploration phase will necessarily be determined by the length of the TATE cycle (cf. one-lesson cycles versus two-week cycles), the specific syllabus context of the course (cf. short communication-oriented courses versus year-long national syllabi involving project work), and context-specific norms and expectations (whether a remedial language focus is deemed appropriate, for example).

Conclusion

The proposed TATE model is offered as an integrated-skills, TSLT-mainly framework for developing curriculum units that attempts to foster a 'synergy' (DeKeyser 2015: 105) between implicit and explicit learning processes. It may be of potential use to teachers, curriculum designers, and coursebook writers. It is perceived to have some flexibility, enabling it to be adaptable to a range of different teaching contexts, potentially including secondary and tertiary state-sponsored education, and general English for adult learners. However, it is not offered as a universal model. It would not be appropriate for very young (pre-primary and early primary) learners, for whom explicit grammar instruction is rarely useful, and also on ESP courses at higher proficiency levels where the primary focus of instruction may be on effective functional or transactional communication (e.g. business English). It may serve as an initial planning framework for use with pre-service and novice teachers, but will be less useful to more experienced teachers, who may plan more needs-oriented, flexible, and adaptive syllabi, dealing with aspects of form as and when deemed appropriate to the differentiated needs of individual learners, as is most feasible in smaller (under 20 learners) classes in well-resourced contexts.

Final version received September 2019

Notes

1 Even here, DeKeyser (2015: 101) states that skill acquisition theory applies more in earlier stages of learning, further undermining Ellis's arguments for a TBLT-first model.

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