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Enriching Students' Linguistic Repertoires Through Text-Based Guided Output Tasks

L2 input, such as a reading text, constitutes a rich source of information on how meanings are expressed in the L2. Helping learners to use this information effectively should be one of the main goals of L2 teaching. In this article, I propose text-based guided output (TBGO) as a technique for "pushing" learners to make better use of the learning opportunities that L2 text has to offer. I make a case for the integration of TBGO into text-based ESL lessons for adults and conclude by discussing important features of design and my own experience with this type of task in teaching a group of upper-intermediate–advanced university students during 1 semester.

Introduction

It is widely accepted in the field of SLA that exposure to L2 input is of primary importance to L2 learning. Reading is considered especially beneficial because it is usually done at the learner's own pace, allowing the learner to attend to the forms that he or she needs to attend to on his or her own terms. However, because reading (comprehension) does not always require close attention to all the linguistic elements that make up a written text, learners do not always make the most of the learning opportunities that such input has to offer if they are left to their own devices. Depending on their purpose and design, text-based activities engage learners with the language of a text to varying degrees. In this article, I discuss text-based guided output (TBGO) as a task type that aims to involve learners in using linguistic information contained in L2 text to express meaning. I make a case for the integration of TBGO tasks into text-based ESL lessons for adults. I conclude by discussing important features of design and my own experience in using TBGO tasks with a group of university students of upper-intermediate–advanced level, with whom I used TBGO tasks intensively during one semester.

Getting Learners to Make Good Use of Input

It is recognized by many in the field of SLA today that, contrary to Krashen's claim (1985), exposure to comprehensible input is often not enough for effective acquisition of all aspects of an L2. The noticing hypothesis (Schmidt, 1990) states that learners must consciously notice input items if they are to incorporate these items into their developing interlanguage (IL) systems. It has also been argued that learners must notice the "gap" between their own output and the target for learning to occur (Schmidt & Frota, 1986). A number of methods have been proposed as promoting noticing of target input items. Of particular interest to us in this article is the role of output in triggering noticing. Swain (1995) argues that while producing output, learners are likely to become aware of "holes" in their knowledge or things that they are unsure about or have questions about. Awareness of such "holes" and uncertainties is argued to sensitize learners to relevant forms in the input. Swain has termed this the *noticing function of output*. Swain's claim has found support in a number of empirical studies (see, for example, Izumi, 2002).

Using the Noticing Function of Output in Text-Based ESL Lessons

The noticing function of output can be put to especially good use in text-based activities, as here learners have input available to them in which to notice forms needed to express their meanings. From the above arguments it follows that if we get learners to discover "holes" in their knowledge that the available input can help them to "fill," this should promote learning. By basing an output activity on text we also create opportunities for learners to notice the "gap" between their own output and the target. Task design is what often determines the extent to which the linguistic information contained in a text can be of use to learners and, just as important, the extent to which learners will make use of this information (Koval, 2012). Purely meaning-focused or communicative work with a reading text often requires only a global understanding of the text. Here learners can often avoid the need to attend to input features that may nonetheless be essential for their IL development. Learners may even process some of the input items incorrectly without its affecting their ability to understand the text as a whole and to perform purely meaning-focused or communicative tasks based on this text. Swain's claim (1995) is that learners are likely to pay more attention to input items if first they are made to feel the need for these items and to realize that these are lacking in their IL. However, because there is usually more than one way to express the same meaning and because it is usually perfectly possible to get one's message across effectively with nontargetlike or greatly reduced sen-

tences, it is often hard to make learners feel the need for the more targetlike or new and more challenging items in open-ended or purely communicative activities. In such activities, learners are free to fall back on avoidance strategies that may often obviate the need to use the less familiar items or to try out new combinations of words, thus avoiding the need to learn anything new. The more closed-ended activities have been shown to be more successful in pushing learners to make use of target input forms (see, for example, Izumi & Bigelow, 2000; Laufer & Girsai, 2008). I will now present TBGO as a closed-ended task type aimed at getting learners to make use of linguistic information contained in text.

Text-Based Guided Output Tasks

TBGO tasks aim to engage learners in using linguistic information contained in a reading text to express meaning. In TBGO tasks we get learners to make use of available input by placing them in "linguistic situations" in which using a targeted item from the text is the only way to express a given meaning. This is accomplished by predetermining something about the sentence that the learners are to produce. We may predetermine as little as one word or even one letter in a word. This way, the learners have no choice but to express a given meaning by organizing the rest of their sentence in such a way as to accommodate the predetermined part, which necessarily requires the use of the target item(s). We may predetermine a larger section of a sentence and ask the learners to complete the sentence by using the text as a source of needed linguistic information. Two important features of TBGO design are that in performing these tasks learners must engage in expressing meaning and that the predetermined part must not supply the targeted form (or at least not in its entirety where the form is a multiword expression) but must rather necessitate its use, as the aim is to get learners to need the targeted items. TBGO builds on well-known techniques, such as cloze and word substitution, but differs, as will be seen in the section on design, from the traditionally used formats in a number of ways that are psycholinguistically significant. In TBGO tasks we direct learners' attention to target input items by making them need these items in expressing meaning. The learners must find the needed linguistic information in the input and think about how to use it in their given situations. Thus, in TBGO, rather than telling learners what input items to use or attend to, we have learners discover these items in response to a need to express meaning.

TBGO can be used in such task formats as translation, restatement, sentence completion, sentence improvement, saying the oppo-

site, making predictions, drawing conclusions, and so on. Here is an example of a guided restatement:

(a) *Sentence in the text:* I have committed their names to memory.
Sentence in the exercise: Memorize these numbers. (use the word "memory")
Target sentence: Commit these numbers to memory.

Here is an example of a heavily predetermined restatement that learners are to complete. Here one blank ("___") represents one word:

(b) *Sentence in the text:* Keep your feet off the sofa.
Sentence in the exercise: Whatever you do, don't let him go in the kitchen. = Whatever you do, ___ him ___ of the kitchen.
Target sentence: Whatever you do, keep him out of the kitchen.

TBGO activities can be created by teachers for work with any type of reading text. They can also be integrated into course book design alongside other text-based activities. The targeted items can be novel or items that have been explicitly focused on previously. It is up to the teacher or task designer to decide on the appropriate level of complexity and novelty of items that they choose to target. I would recommend, however, that the targeted items not be explicitly singled out immediately before TBGO activities as the aim is for students to use the text to discover the targeted linguistic information in response to a need to express meaning.

Students perform TBGO activities after reading the text, in which the targeted items are not visually enhanced. In performing TBGO activities, students may use some of the targeted input items from memory if they noticed and remembered these while reading the text and if they recognize that these can help them to express a given meaning, or they can reread the text in search of needed information on how a given meaning can be expressed. Students are to consult the text for linguistic information that they think they need before turning to the teacher for feedback. As will be seen in the discussion of my observations later in this article, an important effect that TBGO activities have on students' reading strategies is that students invariably come to realize that it helps, while reading, to underline in the text any linguistic forms that they suspect might be targeted in the TBGO tasks. In this case, students can be said to engage in "enhancing" their own input by paying close attention while reading to any potentially useful linguistic information and marking it for ease of subsequent reference. Then,

during TBGO activities, students can be said to consult texts that they have visually enhanced for themselves.

While TBGO can be used with adult learners of any proficiency level, it is particularly useful in the beyond-the-beginner stage. Once learners develop a certain communicative repertoire (however reduced or nontargetlike it may be) that allows them to function in the L2, the need to learn anything new may not be as pressing. TBGO is an effective tool for pushing learners beyond their current level by making them incorporate new, more complex, and often more target-like vocabulary and structures into their L2 repertoire.

A Case for the Integration of TBGO Into Text-Based ESL Lessons

In TBGO we present learners with fun linguistic puzzles that they are to solve based on the input data available to them. In trying to solve these puzzles, learners come to need, find, and use target input items, which coincides with *need*, *search*, and *evaluation*, the three components of involvement load argued to be the determining factors of the potential learning value of a task (Laufer & Hulstijn, 2001).

An important benefit that TBGO offers is that it allows us to target, with high involvement load, items that learners will often avoid in free production and even in translation activities (Koval, 2012). This is often hard to accomplish in any other type of output task without explicitly telling learners what items to use or attend to. TBGO tasks can truly be called "pushed output" activities as they "push" learners to stretch their existing L2 resources and enrich their L2 repertoire by attempting to use new and more challenging language from the text. Two other important benefits of TBGO tasks are that in these tasks learners practice extracting and using relevant linguistic information from input (thus learning to learn from input) and that TBGO requires a proactive focus on form by the learner.

In TBGO tasks, learners' strategies for using linguistic information contained in the input are revealed and can be addressed by the teacher. In these tasks learners cannot avoid the need to use the new or more challenging words or structures as they are made by the predetermined part of the sentence to need these items. Wherever learners fail to perform a TBGO sentence correctly, we are likely to discover a problem with the way they process input or use input forms in their output, such as incorrect form-meaning connections, failure to notice a word's part of speech, failure to "think syntactically" when using the input item(s) in their sentence, and so on. An ability to make good use of available input for learning is a crucial skill for learner autonomy. TBGO tasks contribute to the development of this important skill.

TBGO is a focus on form (FonF) activity (Long, 2000; see also

Laufer & Girsai, 2008, for a discussion of how the FonF/FonFs distinction can be applied to vocabulary learning) as here, rather than being dictated by a syllabus and treated as discrete, decontextualized units, grammar features and vocabulary items are addressed as they occur in the text and as learners need them in their expression of meaning. Unlike with "proactive FonF" in its traditional sense, learners are not presented in advance with the items they will focus on during a lesson; instead, they discover these in the text as the need for these items arises in the output activities. Learners do, however, focus on form proactively: They are required to seek out in the input answers to the linguistic questions that TBGO aims to raise in their minds. Thus, we can say that in TBGO tasks learners must work to find their own "feedback." This is different from reactive FonF (the kind in which the teacher provides reactive feedback) in that rather than leaving it up to the teacher to be the judge of how their output compares to the target, learners must review the input data available to them and judge on their own, based on what they find.

The benefits outlined above make TBGO a useful addition to any text-based ESL program. I do not propose TBGO as a replacement for any existing techniques; rather, TBGO tasks may add to the effectiveness of certain tasks. For example, in communicative activities that follow TBGO activities the chances of learners' using items that have been targeted in TBGO are increased, as these items have been made more salient to them. At the same time, other text-based activities that are used in combination with TBGO may provide additional practice with target items that learners discover in the input. I will now turn to features of design that are important for a TBGO activity to achieve its purpose.

Features of Design

TBGO can be used to target input items of our choice. Having said that, some items, such as vocabulary and prepositions, may be easier to target than others, such as certain grammar features that are part of a complex system, as acquisition of the latter often involves abstraction of patterns and regularities that may be difficult to incorporate into TBGO task design. It is important that our students be developmentally ready to make use of the linguistic information that we choose to target in TBGO.

At first glance, the example in (b), being a heavily predetermined sentence, may remind one of a traditional fill-in-the blank exercise. However, TBGO activities differ from such and similar exercises in a number of ways that are psycholinguistically significant:

No List of Words to Choose From Is Provided. The learners have to search the entire text for relevant linguistic information. They must first decide what kind of information they need and then judge what part(s) of the text can be of use to them in expressing a given meaning and how. This requires more cognitive effort as well as a higher degree of involvement (Laufer & Hulstijn, 2001).

The Relevant Information in the Input Is Not Visually or Otherwise Enhanced. In TBGO, learners practice using unenhanced, naturally occurring input to extract needed linguistic information. In this way TBGO contributes to learners' overall ability to learn from exposure to input.

Learners Must Use Their Existing Linguistic Resources and the Available Input to Express Meaning. Here is an example of a sentence completion that is not suitable for TBGO:

> It is a b… flight. (Learners are to insert a vocabulary item from a list/text.)

The problem with this sentence completion is that it does not create a need in the mind of the learner to express meaning. Here learners do not know what meaning they are to express until they find a word that makes sense in the given sentence, which is not how language is used in real life. An important consideration in TBGO design is that we must create a need to express a meaning and learners must engage in looking for a way to express this meaning and at the same time accommodate the predetermined part of the target sentence. Thus, despite predetermining a part of the sentence, we still have learners move from meaning to form and not the other way around.

Learners Are Not Told What Items to Use. Unlike tasks in which learners are explicitly asked to use the target items, in TBGO tasks learners discover the target items in the text in response to a need to express meaning. The purpose of predetermining a part of a sentence in TBGO is, therefore, not to make the learners' job easier by supplying part of their output but rather to make them need the targeted items.

Learners Use the Target Input Items in Novel Situations. Unlike text reconstruction and other similar activities, in TBGO learners use the target items in novel situations. It is up to the task designer to decide how different the new situation should be from the situation in the text. This will determine, on the one hand, how much analysis and cognitive effort the task will require on the part of the learners, and on the other hand, the risk of the learners' failing to see that the target input items can be of use to them.

Relevance to Real-Life Language Use

Real-life communication is not limited to verbalizing how or what we feel at a given moment. It often involves narrating something that happened, recounting what someone else has told us, thinking a long time about how to phrase a thought, paraphrasing what we have said, restating the same information to avoid repetition, helping others to find the right words, and so on. In these situations, the meaning is more or less predetermined and we have only to use our linguistic resources to express it. Often, our choice of words depends on the other words in our sentence, and thus how we finish a sentence depends on how we begin it. Often, also, we decide to use a certain word and then we build our utterance around it. Sometimes we may stop to think about what article or preposition to use in a sentence (especially L2 learners). At this point, we look for a way to complete a sentence that is by now partially predetermined. From a psycholinguistic perspective, therefore, one could argue that predetermining the meaning a learner is to express and/or a part of a learner's output sentence does not take away from a task's relevance to real-life language use.

TBGO in Action

Here are a few other examples of heavily predetermined restatements. The answers are given in parentheses.

You came at just the right moment. = Your ___ couldn't have been better. (timing)
All it takes is a sneeze and you'll set off the alarm. = If you ___ ___ ___ sneeze, you'll set off the alarm. (so much as)
Fifteen minutes after the game began he said he had to go. = He left fifteen minutes ___ the game. (into)

In the following examples, learners are asked to say the same but without using the words that are crossed out.

We ~~didn't go to bed~~ until 4 in the morning. (We stayed up until 4 in the morning.)
I know ~~how we can~~ get inside without a key. (I know a way to get inside without a key.)

I have used TBGO in various contexts and with different proficiency levels. I have also published a course book that incorporates TBGO tasks. The experience that I will describe in this article concerns a group of 12 upper-intermediate–advanced Ukrainian university EFL majors with whom I used TBGO intensively during one se-

mester. I wrote TBGO tasks for every text that we worked with during the semester; the same input items were targeted in at least two different task formats (see suggested task formats above). The students performed TBGO tasks mostly as home assignments that were later discussed in class. We spent an average of two hours a week in classroom time engaged in TBGO activities. I made the following observations:

- The students greatly enjoyed TBGO tasks. Whenever they failed to "solve" a sentence, they were always very curious to know the "answer."
- TBGO stimulated discussions (and disputes) among the students about various linguistic items in the text and their semantic and grammatical properties. Therefore, TBGO can also be successfully used for group work.
- In TBGO activities, I was able to address the students' input-processing strategies and their strategies for using the linguistic information contained in the texts in their output. The tasks themselves often caused the students to discover that there was something they did not know about the use of some of the words or structures occurring in the text, or they prompted them to use a dictionary to verify their understanding of some of the words.
- Without my telling them to, the students soon began to underline words and expressions in the texts before doing the exercises. These were forms that they suspected would be needed in performing TBGO activities. We can say that the students independently engaged in "enhancing their own input," thus taking more control of their learning.
- The students also began to underline linguistic forms in books that they read for self-study and for which they did not perform TBGO tasks. In the two years of my teaching these students before working with TBGO, they had hardly ever underlined anything in these books. When asked what they underlined, two of the students offered (translated from Ukrainian): "I wouldn't have used this article here, so I underlined it because it is useful information" and "I had always thought that it was 'at', not 'on.'" This observation suggests that performing TBGO tasks may also contribute to the development of habits of reading with more attention to linguistic form.
- The students subsequently used many of the new and complex items that had been targeted in TBGO in spontaneous speech.

Conclusion

In this article, I have presented text-based guided output tasks and made a case for their integration into text-based ESL lessons. I have argued that these tasks can enhance L2 learning from reading texts. An important feature of TBGO, I have argued, is that this type of task is based on learner discovery of relevant input forms in response to a need to express meaning.

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