Lecture 11

**What is task-based language learning?**

Task-based language learning is an approach where the planning of learning materials and teaching sessions are based around doing a task. In education, a task refers to an activity where communication is necessary: for example; deciding something, solving a problem, designing or organising something, or telling someone to do something.

Task-based learning is the approach that Net Languages applies to most of its material design. A different approach would be to design a course around a grammar syllabus and grammar practice activities, like practising the past simple or conditional sentences, where the aim of each activity is just to practise one particular aspect of language. To understand this difference, we can use the analogy of learning to drive. Imagine if you just study the road rules and the instruction manual for the car. Would you then be able to drive? What about if you learnt to drive by actually driving? Well, in the same way, task-based learning is based on the idea that you learn a language by using it, rather than by studying its different components in isolation.

**How does it work?** In a task-based approach, learners learn by doing. Task activities are usually rich in language, involving a wide variety of language areas, as well as all the skills; reading, writing, listening and speaking. By definition, a task must involve the processing of information, and some kind of communication or interaction. And a task can be something that you do alone, or that you do with someone else or in a group.

**What is the aim of a task-based course?**

In task-based learning, a lesson or unit is designed to help learners to complete a task: for example; write a letter, make a reservation, plan a trip, collaborate to design something, or hold a meeting. In task-based learning the language content is defined, not by a grammar syllabus, but by what learners need to complete the task. The tasks themselves can reflect real-life situations, for example in educational or work contexts; giving an academic presentation, attending an interview or meeting, applying for a job, or dealing with the public – things that people need to do every day in different fields like tourism, health services, business and education.  Because it is closely linked to learners’ real needs, task-based learning can be highly motivating for learners and extremely useful.

**How do you design a task-based course?**

As mentioned above, if you use a task-based approach, the language you focus on is going to be rich, and it will include all aspects of language, including functional language, the phrases and expressions that you need to communicate something, or get something done; for example, greeting, agreeing, reporting, asking for information, etc.

We use a task-based, topic-based approach to develop Net Languages courses and materials. For example, if the topic is travel, a typical task could be organising travel dates with a friend, finding out information from a travel agent, or checking in at the airport. Or, in a work context with a topic of dealing with the public, typical tasks could be giving information, getting a person’s details, or explaining what someone has to do. Being able to do the task becomes the objective of each unit or part of the course.