

Preparing EFL Students for Communicative Task Performance: The Nature and Role of Language Knowledge

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This paper examines how a secondary school English teacher in Hong Kong prepared her students for a communicative task. Of particular concern are the nature and the role of language knowledge (LK) in the pre-task stage. The data came from the initial phase of a wider project that investigated whether and how English teachers in Hong Kong integrate a focus on LK with meaningful communication in a task-based teaching context. A qualitative analysis of the classroom teaching and interview data reveals that the teacher concerned was not always able to address students' language needs for the subsequent communicative task performance. Such a phenomenon seems to be the result of the teacher's predominantly code-based view of LK. With a tendency to equate LK with acquisition of lexical meanings, pronunciation and grammar rules, the teacher failed to equip students with appropriate language resources to deal with tasks that require discourse and genre awareness in the pre-task stage. The results of the analysis point to the need for teachers to revisit their perceptions of what LK should constitute in terms of its scope and nature, relevance to the communicative tasks, as well as transferability from one task to another in different language use contexts. A framework with guiding principles is proposed to assist teachers to identify key components of LK for communicative task performance.

Introduction

In the field of language learning, communication-oriented tasks are believed to be useful in developing learners' language knowledge (LK)