

ВОПРОСЫ ТЕОРИИ И ПРАКТИКИ ОБУЧЕНИЯ АНГЛИЙСКОМУ ЯЗЫКУ

PPP and Co

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In this paper I will address the issue of teaching models. I will examine some of the existing models and compare them with each other.

1. PPP (presentation, practice, production)

It appeared extremely difficult to trace the origin of PPP model in the literature though this sequence is used by many authors [1, 2, 5, 6]. PPP stands for Presentation, Practice and Production, which are the stages the teacher is supposed to follow sequentially in language teaching.

Presentation

During this stage the teacher presents small pieces of language that have previously been selected to exemplify particular structures. Presentation may consist of pattern sentences given by the teacher or short dialogues or texts illustrating target items. This stage is teacher-directed and students say very little. However, Byrne [1] suggests that presentation can also be conducted by means of unstructured activities that "get the learners to communicate with the language they already know in order to decide what new language they need to be taught" [1, p.32].

Practice

The aim of this stage is to practice the target item until the students are familiar with it and can say and use it correctly. Now students turn to do most of the talking, while teacher's task is to "devise and provide the maximum amount of practice, which must at the same time be both meaningful and memorable" [1, p. 2]. The activities that can be used at this stage are drills (mechanical and meaningful) and exercises connected to the texts. The important part of presentation stage is incorporating the activities that would promote transition to production stage, such as composing dialogues, classifying or grading objects and language games [for more examples see 1, 2, 4, 6].

Production

During this stage the target item is incorporated into the larger body of language. Students are given opportunities to use language freely, even if they sometimes make mistakes as a result.

Learners should work as much as possible on their own. Group work is extremely useful at this stage as it provides the conditions and environment for the students to communicate with minimal amount of direction from the teacher. Such activities as role-playing, discussions, problem-solving activities are used at this stage.

Advantages of PPP model

- The apparent advantage of the procedure is that it is a simple, clear and workable lesson model. It provides teachers with straightforward guidelines of how to arrange the teaching process.
- It is a "smooth and logical progression from the teacher's selection and teaching of discrete items to the fully integrated use of these items in the learner's own language" [9, p. 80].
- The role of the teacher is clearly defined and the teacher is in charge of procedures which are relatively easy to organise [10, p. 17].
- This approach lends itself to accountability since there will be clear and tangible lesson goals that can be evaluated. Providing specific learning goals can also motivate the students by making the learning appear achievable.
- Dave Willis [11, p. 48] acknowledges that the model helps students to identify some of the fixed phrases which make up a large part of language and helps them consolidate these units.

Problems with PPP model

- Language learning often stops at the practice stage. Many teachers don't go beyond it [1, p. 2]. This situation is especially familiar for me as this is exactly what is happening in Russia as due to existing ELT traditions neither the textbooks provide activities for students' successful production nor the teachers possess necessary skills and knowledge to complement the lack of the materials. However, I would argue that this is not the problem of the model but the problem of its implementation as the model itself implies that the learning should proceed at all three stages.
- The model describes only one kind of lesson and fails to portray the many ways in which teachers can work. The model assumes that learning is a 'straight line' and that following it will guarantee learning. In this respect it is considered to be behaviouristic and is criticised for not taking into account the discoveries about second language acquisition [9, p. 80].
- It describes the events from teachers' perspective and makes it possible to plan a lesson entirely without reference to the learners (ibid).
- The model is apparently prescriptive and lacks flexibility. However Scrivener [9, p. 80] noted that the prescription is not explicit and that the teachers often create these prescriptions internally. I would therefore

argue that Scrivener speaks about how the model is interpreted by teachers and teacher trainers and not about the limitations of the model itself. It can be claimed that you cannot 'protect' any model from being interpreted and adapted and this is not the fault of the model but is just natural and inevitable.

- Jane Willis [12, p. 134] suggests that sometimes learners manage to do the task at the production stage without using the target form. And sometimes students tend to overuse the target form and make conversations unnatural. The author also argues that the goal of production stage is often not achieved because a production cannot be 'free' if students are required to produce forms which have been specified in advance.

My intention is not to 'defend' the PPP model. However, it has to be said that criticising the model the authors often don't take into account the development that it underwent in the course of the time. Byrne [1] states that the stages of the model are not *recipes* for organising lessons and that we need not follow this sequence too rigidly. He provides the diagram of stages of language learning (figure 1) and suggests that "we can move either from presentation to practice to production or from production to presentation to practice according to the level of students, their needs and the type of teaching materials being used" [1, p. 3].

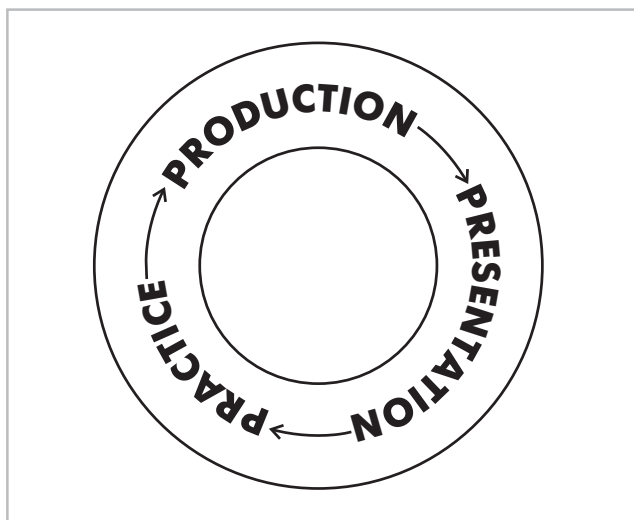


Figure 1. 'Progressive' view of PPP model.

Grundy [3] also suggests the description of 'postmodern' or 'new wave' PPP. Where during the presentation stage learners provide language models. At practice stage learners recycle their own model language and at the production stage students report back and set future agenda [3, pp. 6–8].

Therefore, the model can no longer be called prescriptive and inflexible and does not assume that learning is a straightforward process.

I will now proceed to examining some alternatives for PPP model.

2. ESA (*engage, study, activate*)

Harmer [4] suggests that there are three elements that need to be present in a language classroom to help students learn effectively. The elements are as follows.

Engage

"This is the point in teaching sequence where teachers try to arouse the students' interest, thus involving their emotions" [4, p. 25]. Activities and materials used at this stage are games, music, discussions, stimulating pictures, anecdotes, etc. Otherwise teachers may engage students with the topic by asking them what they think about it or involving students in predicting activities. The author remarks that even unusual behaviour or the way the teacher is dressed can engage students in learning. He argues that "when students are *Engaged*, they learn better..." [4, p. 25].

Study

During this stage the students are asked to focus on language (or information). It is the stage at which the construction of language is the main focus. Activities at this stage range from the study and practice of a single sound to an investigation of how a writer achieves a particular effect in a long text; from an examination and practice of a verb tense to the study of a transcript of informal speech to discuss a spoken style [4, pp. 25–26]. It is noticeable that the description of the stage resembles the aims of presentation and practice stages in PPP paradigm.

Activate

The aim of this stage is to get students to use language as freely and 'communicatively' as they can. "The objective for the students is not to focus on language construction and / or practice specific bits of language ... but to use all and any language which may be appropriate for given situation or topic" [4, p. 26]. The activities may comprise role-plays, debates and discussions, story and poem writing, etc. The stage seems to be in line with production stage in PPP model.

Harmer argues that ESA elements need to be present in most lessons or teaching sequences. Though they should not necessarily be in the same order. He illustrates three types of teaching sequences using the ESA elements.

Harmer suggests that this sequence is designed for elementary-level students. Such sequence may work well with certain structures. However Harmer warns "if we teach all our lessons like this we may not be giving our students' own learning styles a fair chance" [4, p. 27]. The procedure may work at lower levels for straightforward language but might not be appropriate for advanced learners [4, pp. 27, 64]. Such sequence is obviously similar to PPP model (figure 2).

In this sequence after the engagement stage the students are fulfilling one of the activate activities while the teacher is making notes of the difficulties they have. The practice of those difficulties occurs in the study phase. A subsequent activate activity can be organised to give

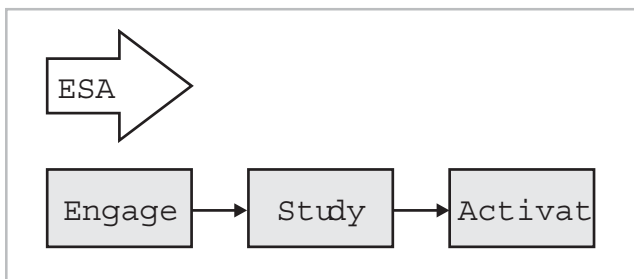


Figure 2. ESA 'Straight Arrow' sequence

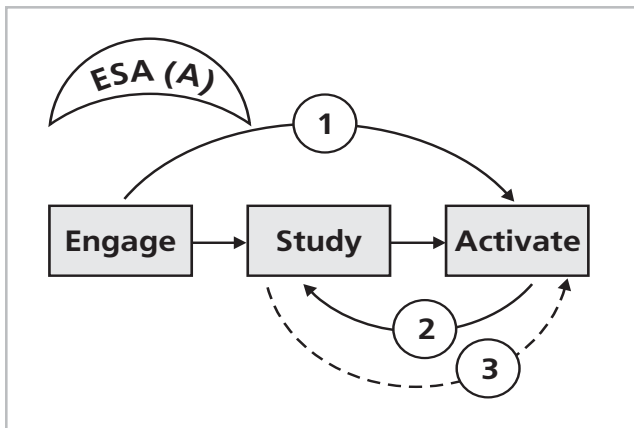


Figure 3. EAS(A) 'Boomerang' sequence.

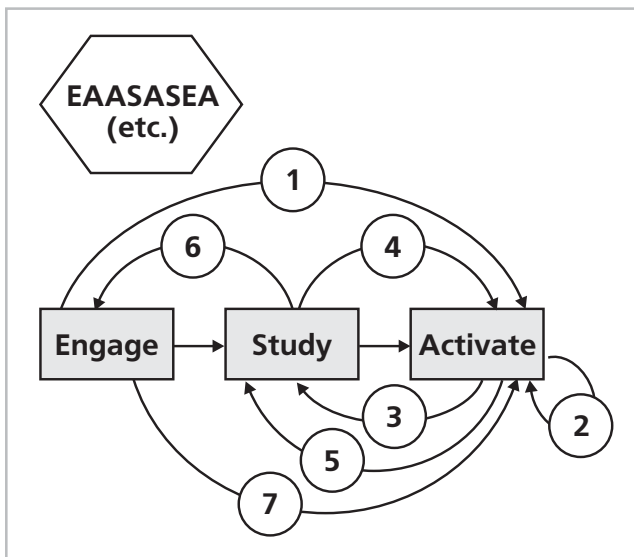


Figure 4. EAASASEA (etc.) 'Patchwork' sequence.

students the chance to bring in the knowledge they gained. Such procedure allows the teachers to answer the students' needs. They are not taught the language until they have a need for it. This sequence may be more appropriate for students of intermediate and advanced

level [4, pp. 28, 64, 65]. The model is similar to the one suggested by task-based learning which will be discussed in Chapter 4 (figure 3).

Many lessons are not as clear-cut as ones described. Instead, they are a mixture of procedures and a variety of short episodes building up to a whole. This is reflected in the 'Patchwork' sequence (figure 4) where the elements may be used in different order more than once. Harmer argues that such classes probably reflect the way we learn — not in a straight line — and provide a balance between Study and Activation [4, pp. 29–30, 65]. The model described in some cases resembles PPP (description of Study and Activate elements, 'Straight Arrows' sequence) but it also has differences. It introduces the Engage element which is not made explicit in PPP model. It also gives more elaborated variants of sequencing the elements within a lesson or number of lessons. As though 'modern' PPP indicates that the stages can be in different orders it does not suggest the variety of sequences.

3. ARC (authentic, restricted, clarification)

ARC model was suggested by Scrivener as a "simple, clear, flexible way of describing what teachers and learners do when working with language in the classroom" [9, p. 81]. The three elements of the model are as follows:

Restricted

The language available for the learners to use or understand is in some way restricted. The learners are practicing the forms for accuracy. The activities at this stage include language work across the four skills and may comprise drills, copying, reading course book text and so on [9, p. 85]¹.

Authentic

Conversely to the first element authentic activities are ones where the language is not restricted and students are provided with the opportunity to use the language they know to communicate meanings. Scrivener suggests that authentic activities are for communication, meaning, fluency, real life and pleasure [9, p. 85]. He also argues that both elements are aimed at improving students' performance².

Clarification

This element is aimed at building the students' linguistic competence. It concerns the parts of the lesson where the students need to focus on language item. Scrivener claims that this is not simply another term for presentation as it also includes discovery activities [9, pp. 85–86]³.

Scrivener puts forward a description of the variety of approaches to sequencing the lessons.

Some of the lesson types the author describes are as follows:

¹ The stage is in line with Practice and Study stages described above.

² The stage is similar to Production and Activate stages in PPP and ARC models.

³ The stage is congruent with Study element and 'modern view' of Presentation stage.

CRRA

The lesson follows essentially the same pattern as the PPP one. The teacher starts with presenting information about an item of language, then students do some oral and written practice of the item and finally they are given the opportunity to use this and other items in communicative activities [8, p. 133].

RCR

In such lesson the teacher selects an activity requiring use of specific language points and notes problems the students experience while doing it. After that the teacher focuses on the problems and then follows on with the activity similar to the first one. Such approach assumes that the students know something about the language item, it will help the teacher not to waste time telling students what they already know. A possible variation will be to use communicative activity as a follow up which will turn the model into RCA [8, pp.135–136].

ACA

Similar to the one described before with the difference that the teacher starts with a communicative activity then focuses on the problems students experienced and follows up with another communicative activity [8, p. 135].

Other variations of lesson types are obviously possible [8, pp. 133–138; 9, pp. 87–89].

Scrivener suggests that the model is non-evaluative and can be used:

- for analysing a lesson;
- for raising points and comparing approaches;
- as a descriptive tool in observation;
- as a way of introducing, describing and analysing a range of route maps;
- as a starting point for post-lesson discussions [9, pp. 98–90].

Scrivener mentions that the decision as to how to categorise an activity may not be clear cut and even when watching the same lessons teachers may come to different conclusions. He advocates for not paying too much attention to this and using the evoked differences for follow-up discussions [9, p. 86].

Compared to PPP model, ARC model serves different aim that is to describe and analyse rather than to suggest and prescribe. The author also expands the Clarification activities by suggesting different ways in which the language can be presented. I would argue that though undoubtedly valuable the model is very open for interpretations and therefore may result in confusion and uncertainty of how then to teach students and which description is most appropriate for which situation; more guidelines may be needed especially for novice teachers.

4. TBL (Task-based learning)

The major difference of task-based learning from PPP is that focus on language form comes at the end. The communication task is central to the framework (figure 5). Willis [13] defines task as “a goal-oriented activity in which

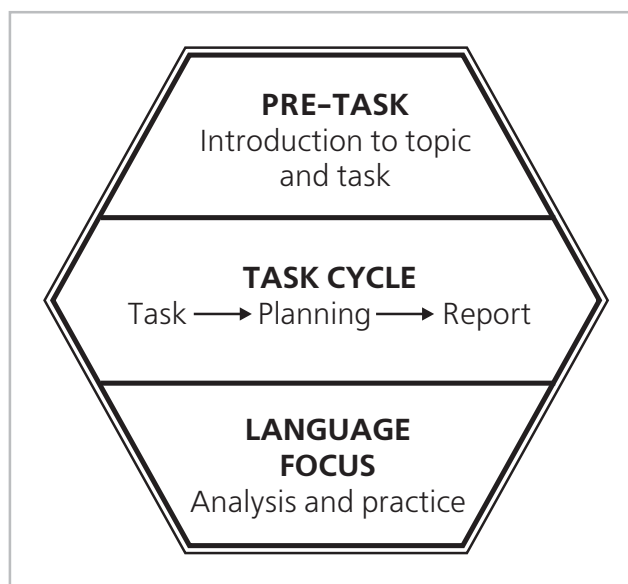


Figure 5. A framework for task-based learning.

learners use language to achieve a real outcome” [13, p. 53]. The important thing is that while doing the task the learners are using language to exchange meanings for a real purpose. No new techniques are needed for task-based approach although it does demand a different weighting and sequencing. The *pre-task stage* gives students exposure which helps them to recall relevant words and phrases. Teacher sets instruction for the task, may highlight useful words or phrases but will not pre-teach new structures. Listening to parallel task or preparation time may also be included into this stage. *The task cycle* consists of three stages. Task – when the students do the task in pairs or groups using whatever language they have to express themselves; the teacher monitors the work and can help students to formulate what they want to say but will not intervene to correct errors or form. Planning – the students prepare for the next stage when they will be asked to report the outcomes of the task; students draft and rehearse what they want to say or write. Report – some pairs report to the whole class so that everyone can compare the findings; teacher gives comments on the content of the reports but gives no public correction. The planning and report stages are introduced to reduce the danger of learners gaining fluency at expense of accuracy. They make students to switch from “private use” when they are doing the task to “public use” when reporting the outcomes [13, p. 55]. *Language focus* – teacher sets some language-focused tasks and conducts practice activities. An optional follow up can be organised where the students repeat the same or similar task or discuss how they felt during the task cycle and what they would like to do next time [13, pp. 56–58].

It can be argued that TBL is similar to PPP but in reverse order. However Willis claims that there is a difference in the way students use and experience language in the task cycle: the components of task cycle are genuinely free of

language control; there is a genuine need to use language to communicate. It also differs from PPP in providing a context for grammar teaching and form-focused activities while in PPP the context has to be invented [12, p. 136]. However this is only true about traditional PPP model.

Despite definite *advantages*, like providing an effective motivation for learners to make best use of the language they already have; giving students greater fluency and capacity to solve communication problems TBL has certain *weaknesses* that should be mentioned.

- First of all the model looks also prescriptive as it was in the case with PPP. Moreover, the authors are operating within only one theory – SLA⁴. Willis also suggests that PPP can be totally substituted by TBL.
- The approach does not provide “effective incentive for structural change towards an interlanguage system with greater complexity”. Learners may rely on pre-fabricated chunks to solve their communicative problems which will not lead them to long-term progress [10, p. 22].
- There might be cultural or traditional constraints in implementing TBL. For example, the students in Russia have certain expectations of the role of the teacher and of what they should do during the lesson. So, using only task-based approach may result in frustration and negative motivation on the part of the learners. Students might think that they are not learning and that the teacher is not doing the job.
- The approach puts greater burden on the teacher. Since there are no textbooks designed according to this framework it becomes teacher’s job to look for materials. It becomes even more demanding since the teachers are supposed to work on whatever language problems students experience doing the task. It also implies that the resources such as various materials and photocopying are readily available which is very seldom the case for example, in Russia.
- Willis in her critique of PPP mentions that sometimes the students could do the task without using the target form. It can be argued that it is even more difficult to elicit the necessary language in TBL. Students may continue doing the tasks using only their storage of language. It becomes hard for the teachers to fulfil the requirements of the curriculum that specifies certain language and skills that the students should have.
- The same is true about examination requirements. The usage of TBL in upper classes becomes problematic because the format and content of examinations seldom reflect what is being done in task-based classrooms.

Skehan [10] emphasizes that designing the task-based instructions teachers should engineer the situations

providing balance between three goals: accuracy, complexity / restructuring⁵ and fluency and that it is desirable not to emphasize one of the goals for any extended period of time [10, pp. 22–23]. The model suggested by Skehan (figure 6) therefore includes introducing new forms by means of explicit and implicit teaching and consciousness-raising activities at the *pre-task phase* as a complement to responding to general cognitive demands of the task.

| | <i>Purpose of Phase</i> |
|--------------------|--|
| <i>Pre-task</i> | Cognitive: ease subsequent processing load Linguistic: introduce new forms into attention |
| <i>During task</i> | Manipulate pressure: influence processing balance Calibrate: influence processing balance |
| <i>Post-task</i> | Retrospect: remind learners of importance of form |

Figure 6. Stages in task implementation.

However, the author mentions that there is no guarantee that the learners will use the studied language in the task or that it will lead to learning in the short term. At the *task phase* Skehan emphasizes that it is crucial to get the difficulty of the task right. It should not be too difficult as this may result in fossilization and may produce only routine solutions to communication. It should not be too easy so that no extension of interchange development or consolidation is achieved. At the *post-task phase* students may be involved in reporting the results with following analysis and focus on language or structures [10, pp. 24–27]. Interestingly the model designed by Skehan resembles PPP in the way that it starts with pre-teaching of items and then proceeds to incorporating them into the larger body of language. It expands PPP by introduction of post-task phase.

After examining the models of language teaching it is quite possible to make a conclusion that each of them contains similar features. To explore the rationale for this I will present the methodological framework suggested by Littlewood [7]. Though he speaks about teaching oral English some connections can be made with the models described.

⁴ Second Language Acquisition.

⁵ Complexity concerns the elaboration of the language which is produced. Restructuring is a process which enables the learner to produce more complex language.

5. A Methodological Framework

Littlewood [7] presents a methodological framework that is dealing with “neither pure theory, nor pure practice, but links the two”.

Describing the language as means for communication he argues that the ability to make choices within grammatical system is essential prerequisite to using language as communication [7, p. 15]. At the same time a learner must be able to produce language while his or her primary focus is on communication of meaning [7, p. 44]. The author calls teaching grammar structures, pronunciation, vocabulary and communicative functions *part-skill* practice and the stage where learners integrate part-skills and are involved in meaningful communication – *whole-task* practice. In this framework Littlewood combines the ideas of natural learning and skill learning as he believes that “each kind of learning has its own useful contribution to make in the classroom” [7, p. 63]. The top and the bottom boxes in the framework (figure 7) describe two aspects of the goal towards which the activities should lead: “the language system has to be internalised and it has to become available for the communication of meanings” [7, p. 80].

Part-skill practice

Internalising the language system is seen as the goal of all language-learning activities and it also describes a component of the methodology for achieving this goal – the activities that focus specifically on the system of language. Linking language with its literal meaning is achieved through *talking about shared knowledge*⁶ and through *exchanging literal information*⁷. Linking language with functional and social meanings is achieved through *practicing communicative functions*⁸ and through *role-playing tasks*⁹. Literal and functional / social meanings can be combined when the students need to find out literal meaning by means of operating functional / social meanings [7, pp. 80–89].

Whole-task practice

There is no clear division between part-skill and whole-task practices. “There is a gradual progression from very controlled activities at one end to completely free communication at the other” [7, p. 89]. At the whole-task end of the continuum the interaction is less controlled and emerges from internal sources – the meanings that learners decide to express. The whole-task practice may include problem solving, discussions, role-playing, simulations and experiential learning [7, pp. 89–93].

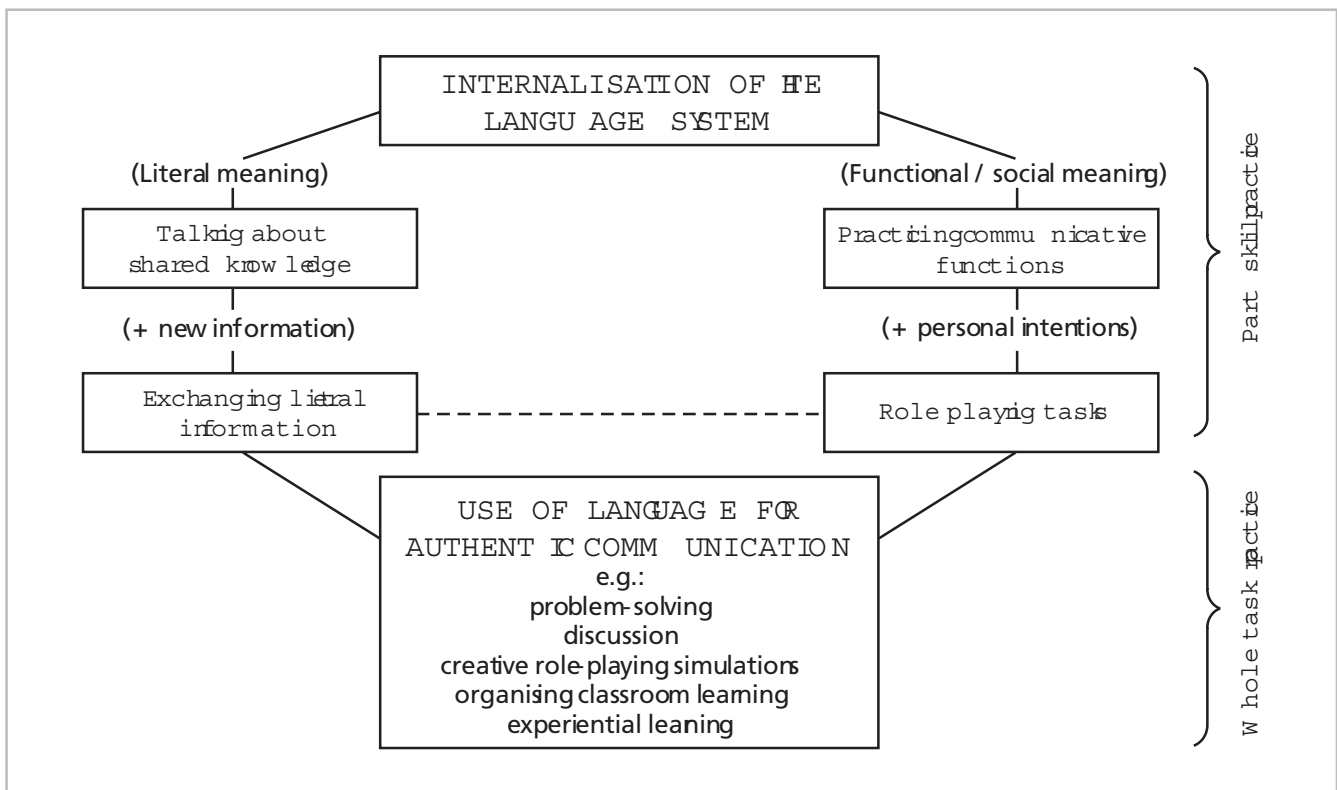


Figure 7. A methodological framework for teaching oral communication.

⁶ Learners are asked to focus on some situation or area of knowledge that they share and to use the new language in order to describe it.
⁷ The need to convey new information for a communicative purpose is added.
⁸ Students practice language which is more authentic because it performs particular communicative act.
⁹ Students begin to express communicative intentions that are their own rather than determined by materials or teacher.

Littlewood concludes that this framework is not intended as a prescription for classroom methodology, nor it is intended to represent the sequence of activity-types. It is equally possible to start a sequence from any activity [7, p. 94]. However it is important that these elements are present. Explicit teaching of language is as essential as providing conditions for authentic communication. Thus, the framework provides methodological rationale for the kinds of models examined.

6. Discussion

In previous chapters I outlined the characteristic features of some models of language teaching. Interestingly the models did not appear as different as some authors tried to present them. Figure 8 represents my idea of the congruency of described models¹⁰.

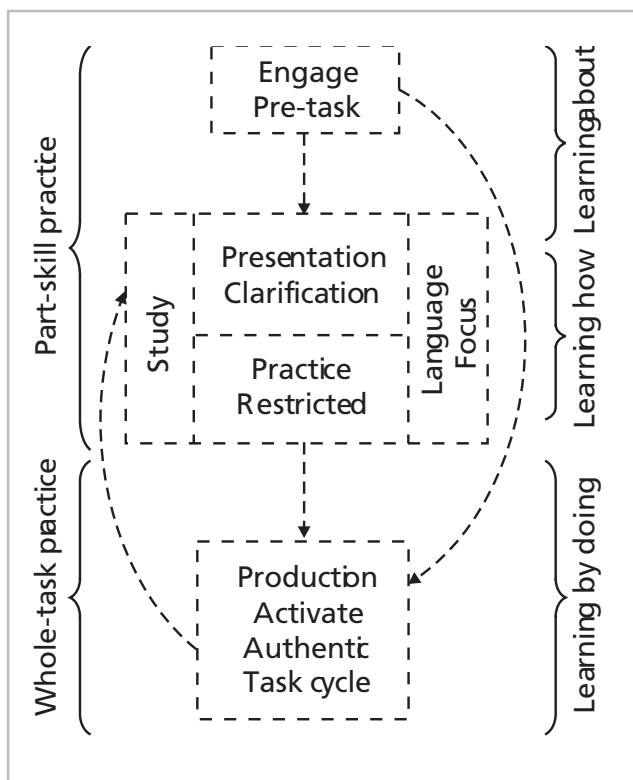


Figure 8. Summary of the models.

There is certain correspondence in the way the Engage stage and Pre-task stages are described by Harmer and Willis. Presentation and Clarification stages are also congruent. I would suggest that both these stages represent *learning about* practices. Practice and Restricted stages (Scrivener) are also operating within similar notions. These stages are in line with *learning how* practices. Study stage (Harmer) and Language focus (Willis) comprise the presentation and practice stages. All stages above can be classified as what Littlewood calls part-skill practices. The final stage deals with authentic

language use. Such elements as Production (PPP), Activate (ESA), Authentic (ARC) and Task cycle (TBL) seem to fit here. This stage can be characterised as *learning by doing* or whole-task practices. The stages can be sequenced directly or one can start with production stage and then move on to presentation and practice. I am not arguing here that the models are absolutely the same therefore I used dotted lined for the diagram. What I want to show is that there are more similarities in the models than was acknowledged in the literature.

In the attempt to avoid prescriptiveness the authors created enormous resource of descriptions from which the teacher could select ideas for sequencing the lessons. Despite the value of this variety it is now extremely difficult for the teacher to decide which one to follow. I will therefore attempt to suggest some guidelines that may help teachers to make their choice.

I want to start by presenting the models as a continuum (figure 9).

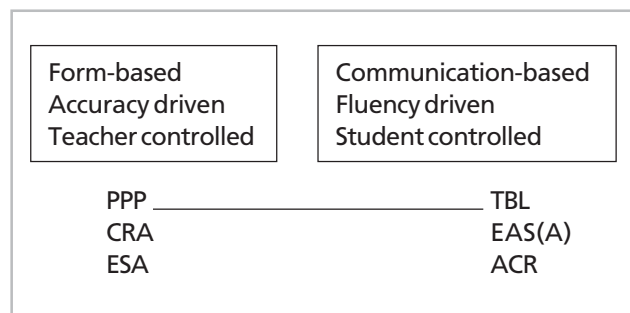


Figure 9. Continuum of teaching models.

On the left side of the continuum the models are focusing primarily on form aiming at achieving accuracy first and then incorporating it into fluency. Most of the activities here are teacher controlled. The right side of the continuum represents the models focusing on communication and aiming at greater fluency that may subsequently result in accuracy. Students control or direct most of the activities in these models. Undoubtedly there are number of positions alongside the continuum which represents the resource from which teachers may choose. My belief is that we should not 'throw away' any of the models. Skehan [10] claims that "neither focused instruction nor acquisition-oriented activities can be guaranteed to produce results" [10, p. 28]. Therefore since there is no clarity about how students learn it is worth trying different ways. I am arguing for the necessity of eclectic approach to sequencing the lessons.

There are no recipes in how to organise a lesson or series of lessons. However some guidelines are necessary. I will now address the issue of how the teacher may make decisions about sequencing the activities by means of suggesting a number of questions the answers to which may prompt the choice.

¹⁰ For the sake of clarity of the diagram I use the description of TBL stages provided by Willis [12, 13].

- What is the level of your students? Beginners might need more language-focused activities, as the language they process is quite limited. Advanced learners on the contrary may need more opportunities to use the language they have which may give the teacher the chance to observe the problems learners experience.
- Is the item likely to be difficult for the learners? Some structures may be particularly difficult for the students due to the difference with the mother tongue or conceptual difficulty. Such language may need pre-teaching.
- Are learners likely to have met the item for example in texts? Even if you have not taught the particular item before the students may already have met it. In this case you might not need to present it and start directly with communicative activities or you might use discovery activities¹¹ as means of presentation.
- What sequence did you use during last lessons? If you had a number of PPP lessons lately you might want to change the sequence. By varying the sequence you may increase the students' motivation and eliminate boredom. Also as I mentioned before it gives you the opportunity of 'attacking' the students' minds by different means thus increasing the possibility of learning. When deciding on what task to use either at the beginning or at the end of sequence teachers might want to ask the following questions.
- If you are using a PPP-like sequence, did the Presentation and Practice stages prepare the learners for doing the task? Did you include activities that would insure the transition from Practice to Production?
- Is the task likely to elicit the language you want? It is especially important when you are starting with the task expecting to focus on particular item after it. But it is also essential if you do the task as a final element. It should provide opportunities for students to use the target item though it will not guarantee it.
- Is the task of the right level of difficulty? Do the students have enough language to cope with the task? Is the task challenging enough?

Finally, one word of caution should be made. I believe that the teachers should not simply vary the sequencing making decisions after each lesson. The overall judgements on the way one is going to sequence the lessons should be made prior to the course so that the lessons are coherent. The teachers may plan the details of the tasks or introduce amendments in the process of teaching but this must fit into the overall scheme of the course.

Conclusions

The literature review showed that there is a lot of critique of PPP model and a lot of new models are suggested. However as I tried to show those models are not radically new. Moreover, criticising PPP researchers often do not pay attention to the development the model underwent in the course of time. I believe that more quality may be desirable in professional argument about the matter.

PPP is being criticised for describing teaching not learning and for being prescriptive. However there is certain value in this especially for initial teacher training. It may effectively equip teachers with at least one of the ways of sequencing the lesson(s) and help them to survive when they start teaching.

I would also emphasize the importance of explicit language focus. Though it "does not guarantee that it will lead to learning in the short term ... it will create conditions under which it may occur" [10, p. 25]. Usage of non-communicative activities can be quite productive as "the ultimate criterion for judging the usefulness of language activity in the classroom is not whether it is communication but whether it helps people to *learn* to communicate" [7, p. 83].

However, the availability of different descriptions provides more alternatives for sequencing the lessons that can help the teachers to be more effective in the classroom. Describing what we do by means of other models we can become more aware of the paradigms within which we are working and other people's [14, p. 8].

Each of the sequences might have its place in the classroom. It is also important that balance between accuracy and fluency is achieved as both focused instructions and acquisition-oriented activities contribute to successful learning. Therefore I suggest here that the described models represent the continuum or the resource from which teachers may select.

Variety of models gives a number of approaches to how the lessons can be sequenced. However I believe that more practical guidelines for teachers about when each sequence is more appropriate are necessary.

It is also interesting to note that all models have three elements in it which seems to be beyond mere coincidence. Examining the reasons for this is an area that may need further research which is beyond the scope of this paper.

¹¹ See Scrivener [8, pp. 128–133] for self-directed or guided discovery as means of presenting new items.

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