# MULTIPLE INTELLIGENCES TO SUPPORT TASK BASED LANGUAGE LEARNING IN EFL

**Ana MUNTEAN,**

**English and German Philology Chair**

*Abstract: Profesorii de limbi străine sînt preocupaţi de ineficinţa actului de predare atîta timp cît studenţii nu vorbesc limba fluent şi fără greşeli. Aceasta îi face sa caute noi metode şi abordări, studiind experienţa savanţilor si practicienilor în domeniu. Articolul în cauză descrie caracteristicile învăţării bazate pe sarcini atunci cînd acestea sînt susţinute de teoria inteligenţelor multiple elaborată de Howard Gardner.*

*Cuvinte cheie: învăţare bazată pe sarcini, inteligenţe multiple, metoda comunicativă, scopul învăţării*

Increasing learners' motivation and performance has always been the primary concern of teachers. Many foreign language teachers reflect on why students react differently to class activities and why they show various degree of interest and consequently, different results in language competence. Leading scholars and educators have carried research and suggested varied approaches to teaching a foreign language. In a recent interview, well-known writer and teacher-trainer Jeremy Harmer affirms that if we look at all the English language teaching that takes place in the world it is not one hundred percent successful. Therefore, in his opinion, we have to keep looking and searching and thinking about ways to make it better and better. Jeremy Harper distinguishes two trends of what is called innovation in teaching. The first is in the methodology of how to teach and how we think people learn and the second is in what we teach and what language we are offering to the students. In terms of methodology, the last thirty years are viewed by the author as a battle ground between different theories of how people should teach. "We have had grammar translation method and audio lingual method

where people drilled for hours and then there came communicative approach where people learned by acting out and doing tasks. There doesn't exist one efficient method in EFL, there is a combination of methods used by teachers to achieve better results", the scholar claims. [2]

The article in question will reveal the positive features of task based learning supported by Howard Gardner's Theory of Multiple Intelligences.

Task Based Learning (TBL) has become popular among EFL teachers. Well-known experts, Prabhu (1987), Nunan (1989), and Willis (1996) tried to define 'task' in the context of language teaching. Prabhu stands as the first significant person in the development of TBL. He defines a task as "an activity which required learners to arrive at an outcome from given information through some process of thought, and which allowed teachers to control and regulate that process" [6, p.24]. David Nunan uses the word 'task' instead of 'activity'. He defines a task as "a piece of classroom work which involves learners in comprehending, manipulating, producing or interacting in the target language while their attention is principally focused on meaning rather than form" [5, p. 10]. He suggests that in all definitions of tasks, one can see communicative language use where the learner focuses on meaning instead of linguistic structure. Jane Willis is another figure who contributes to the use of tasks in language classroom. According to Willis (1996) "tasks are always activities where the target language is used by the learner for a communicative purpose (goal) in order to achieve an outcome" [8, p.23]. Furthermore, Willis presents a TBL approach where tasks are used as the main focus of the lesson within a supportive framework. She holds that "the aim of tasks is to create a real purpose for language use and to provide a natural context for language study" [8, p.1]. One might summarize that a task is an activity in which students use language to achieve a specific goal. It is important that this activity reflects real life because learners focus on meaning and they are free to use any language they want.

It is easier to "determine how task-like a given activity is by asking the following questions. a) Does the activity engage learners' interest? b) Is there a primary focus on meaning? c) Is there an outcome? d) Is success judged in terms of outcome? Is completion a priority? e) Does the activity relate to real world activities?" The more questions get an affirmative answer, the more task-like the activity. These criteria do not constitute "a watertight definition of what constitutes a task, but they will provide us with guidelines for the design of activities which are task-like in that they involve real language use." [9, p.78]

TBL can be seen as a minor change or even improvement of communicative language teaching as well as a reaction to the use of form-focused models such as present-practice-produce method [7, p. 57]. From the mid-1980s onwards, the term 'task-based' was increasingly used to describe this development in language teaching methodology, in which students are engaged in meaningful and relevant tasks aiming to produce meaningful language.

Jane and Dave Willis speak about seven types of task which may be distinguished for a language classroom: Listing, Ordering and Sorting (sequencing, ranking, classifying), Matching, Comparing, Problem solving, Sharing personal experiences, Projects and creative tasks. The following chart provides more detailed description for each type of task, as well as its purpose to the student. Prabhu points out the importance of a linguistic action or task that students are required to perform in TBL [6, p. 54]. The completion of this task will generate new language or new paths of learning. In terms of language learning, students are expected to complete some sort of task (e.g., make a shopping list; decide what items to take to a desert island); the completion of the task requires learners to generate their own language, not copy and reproduce that of other students; language produced should resemble language use in the real world; meaning in TBL is more important

than form (grammar), though tasks are design to meet the students' language proficiency level.

| Task types | Purpose | Description |
|---|---|---|
| Listing: brainstorming and/or fact finding | Motivating students to brainstorm and express their ideas (e.g. things, qualities, people, places, features, things to do, reasons). | Students share different opinions |
| Ordering and sorting: sequencing, ranking, classifying | Helping students to order, arrange, rank and classify objects or information. | Students sequence story pictures, rank items according to cost, popularity, negative or positive features. |
| Matching | Answering Yes/No questions, responding to oral messages by doing something. | Students listen and identify, listen and do (TPR), match phrases /descriptions to pictures, match directions to maps. |
| Comparing: finding similarities or differences | Encouraging students to compare or contrast. | Students compare ways of greetings or local customs, play 'Spot the Difference', contrast two seasons, working day routine, ingredients in a recipe. |
| Problem-solving: logic puzzles, real-life problems, case studies, incomplete texts | Creating the atmosphere of a real world. | Students solve logic problems, they take roles in giving advice, proposing and evaluating solutions, predicting a story ending. |
| Projects and creative tasks | Learning about each other / a topic by eliciting information (Journalist task). | Students do and report a survey, produce a class newspaper, plan a radio show, design a brochure. |
| Sharing personal experiences: story-telling, anecdotes, reminiscences, opinions, reactions | Raising students' consciousness about topic. | Students share memories of early schooldays, terrible journeys, embarrassing moments, personality quizzes. |

Appropriate examples of tasks for an English language class might be:

- Help the cat find the mouse! Say where the mouse is.  (primary school learners)

- Draw up your ideal school timetable (11-12 year olds)

- How strict are/were your parents? Whose parents are/were the strictest? (7th-12th forms)

- Plan a class party for the end of term  (mind map, group decision (9th-12th forms))

- Describe how to make your favourite food; classify dishes, compare recipes (5th-12th forms)

- Places of interest – design a postcard / brochure for overseas tourists /visitors (the task may be adapted for students of various ages)

A more careful analysis of the task features can allow us to associate them with the seven intelligences, the theory advanced by American researcher Howard Gardner. Since the inception of Gardner's Multiple Intelligence Theory in 1983, educators have been captivated by the belief that all students learn differently and the role of the educator has shifted from an authority on content knowledge to a facilitator of student learning. Gardner's theory gives educators hope that all students can learn if material is presented to them within their preferential intelligence using a variety of instructional strategies or tasks.

Multiple Intelligences are defined as a unique blend of capabilities and skills; they define to an extent the type of learner we are naturally inclined to be. Gardner believes every individual has at least eight intelligences which are in their basic form, present to some extent in everyone, although a person will generally be more talented in some than in others [3]. The eight multiple intelligences are listed as follows:

1) Verbal/Linguistic Intelligence. It is the ability to use language effectively and creatively both orally and in writing. This intelligence relates to the meaning, rhythms and sounds of words.

2) Logical/Mathematical Intelligence. It is the ability to use numbers effectively, to recognize abstract patterns, to discern relationships and to reason well. The people with logical/mathematical and verbal/linguistic intelligences enjoy solving problems, finding patterns, outlining and calculating. It forms the basis for most systems of education, as well as for all forms of currently existing standardized testing programs.

3) Visual/Spatial Intelligence. It involves the ability to sense form, space, color, line, and shape including the ability to graphically represent visual or spatial ideas. People with this intelligence like to design, invent, imagine and create.

4) Bodily/Kinesthetic Intelligence. It is the ability to use one's body to learn and solve problems through physical experiences such as mimicking and touching.

5) Musical/Rhythmic Intelligence. It is the ability to recognize tonal patterns and a sensibility to rhythm, pitch, melody, etc. This intelligence can be seen in advertising professionals, musicians, dance bands and composers.

6) Interpersonal Intelligence. It is the ability to understand people's moods, feelings and intentions, including the ability to work cooperatively with others in a group and to communicate verbally or nonverbally with other people. This intelligence can usually be found in such people as counselors, teachers, therapists, politicians, and religions leaders.

7) Intrapersonal Intelligence. It involves the ability to understand one's own emotions, motivations and moods.

8) Naturalist Intelligence. It involves the ability to recognize and classify plants, minerals, and animals, rocks, grass, and all variety of flora and fauna. It also includes the ability to recognize cultural artifacts like cars, sneakers, etc.

In Gardner's view, it is of vital importance to recognize and develop all of these varied human intelligences, and all of the combination of intelligences. These intelligences are of neutral value; none of them is considered superior to the others and they manifest a full display of learners' individual differences; they are understood as tools that every learner possesses to make sense out of new information which can be stored for later use. In addition, each of these frames is autonomous, changeable and trainable and they interact to facilitate the solution of daily problems. Armstrong (1999) maintains that "one can use this model to teach virtually anything, from the "schwa" sound to the rain forest and back. The master code of this learning style model is simple: for whatever you wish to teach, link your instructional objective to words, numbers or logic, pictures, music, the body, social interaction, and/or personal experience." [1]

The following table shows the relationship between the development of multiple intelligences and task-based teaching activities.

| Task types | Task-based teaching activities that match with MI theory | Intelligences involved |
|---|---|---|
| Listing Matching | Listening to English stories, news and songs, dubbing background music for texts, mimicking by means of real objects and pictures, holding discussions in English. | Verbal/Linguistic intelligence Visual/Spatial intelligence Musical intelligence Interpersonal intelligence Intrapersonal intelligence |
| Sharing personal experience | Encouraging students to tell stories with rich gestures and expressions; encouraging them to illustrate the pictures in the text, asking them to answer questions; asking students to hold discussions on specific topics; asking students to deliver speeches in English | Verbal/Linguistic intelligence Logical-mathematical intelligence Bodily-kinesthetic intelligence Visual/Spatial intelligence Musical intelligence Interpersonal intelligence |

| Ordering and sorting: sequencing, ranking, classifying | Doing independent thinking of the texts or the materials to be learned, inducing and summarizing these texts or materials after reading, keeping notes, sequencing events, classifying | Verbal/Linguistic intelligence Interpersonal intelligence Intrapersonal intelligence Logical-mathematical intelligence |
|---|---|---|
| Project and creative tasks | Keeping English diaries、 classroom notes and observation notes, writing poems and songs, compiling English electronic works and board newspapers, brochures, leaflets, maps. | Verbal/Linguistic intelligence Logical-mathematical intelligence Musical intelligence Interpersonal intelligence Naturalistic intelligence |

Further on, an example of TBL, involving multiple intelligences will be provided. We shall use the textbook in English "English for You" for the 6th form, written by Iulia Ignatiuc et al., and namely Unit Three, Lesson Three, entitled *This is London* [4]. The authors designed seven exercises for the lesson, which require students to read, match, listen to information and follow a map, talk (in pairs), and write the correct form of the auxiliary *be* for the Past Continuous.

In Exercise One students are supposed to read the Do You Know information box and answer the questions. Apparently, it is a typical instruction, which doesn't seem to be motivating or involving. Yet, the questions which follow do not require students to reproduce the text as reading-comprehension questions eventually do. In fact, students are encouraged to pay attention to numbers and classify (What do numbers 135, 32, 25 and 30 refer to?), calculate (How many people can enter all the capsules of the London Eye?) and compare (Why is the structure called the London Eye? What does it resemble? A bysicle, a wheel?). Thus, the exercise offers students with the dominating logical-mathematical intelligence respond to clearly set tasks with more enthusiasm and confidence. As pre-

stage to the activity, the teacher may choose to watch a short video that describes the London Eye, in which a family of four members (two adults and two children) buy tickets. The teacher may set a different task here, to calculate the total amount of money the family spent for the 'flight'. In addition, students' visual/spatial intelligence may be explored, asking students to list other places of interest the family visited in London.

Exercise Four is designed to develop students' listening skill. Students have to listen to the information about London sights and find them on the map. This is an interesting activity for students with a dominant visual/spatial intelligence, who will look for the places of interest they hear on the map. The map is printed on the back cover page of the book, and its size allows students to recognize more interesting sights of London that are familiar to them. They may, thus, create their own routes for tourists and explain and justify their options. This is a real life task, that, hopefully the students will find interesting to do in their English classroom. In such a way, students will get engaged in real communication, driven by the desire to share and to defend their choice or point of view. Interpersonal intelligence will find its application in this situation, as students will have to interact, collaborate and share.

Even though numerous exercises in the textbook require students to read, match, fill in gaps, it is up to the teacher to approach the textbook creatively and apply TBL, trying to involve a variety of students' intelligences in class. Every teacher should decide for her/himself when, in what ways and how much of the suggested methodology can be implemented at his/her lesson of English.

MI theory provides language teachers with a variety of means to understand and classify human intelligences, raising our awareness of what makes learning possible and effective for individual students. On the other hand, MI theory is to catalyze ideas. Therefore, MI model should not be considered as rigid or prescriptive pedagogical formula. Thus, MI theory

might be considered a useful tool for planning language learning tasks which insure that students can cope in even more challenging situations. When learners see what they can do, this has a positive effect on their self-esteem and can lead to enhancing success in language learning.

**REFERENCES:**

1. Armstrong T. Seven kinds of smart: Identifying and developing your multiple intelligences. New York: Penguin Putnam Inc., 1999. 304p.
2. BBC Learning English. Inspiring Language Learners for 70 years, 2009 http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/learningenglish/teachingenglish/radio/innovations.shtml (vizitat 20.11.2015)
3. Gardner H. Frames of Mind: The theory of multiple intelligences. New York: Basic Books. 1983, 440p.
4. Ignatiuc I. ş. a. English for You. Pupil's Book, form 6.Chisinau: Editura Prut, 2015. 128p.
5. Nunan D. Designing tasks for the communicative classroom. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989. 215 p.
6. Prabhu N .S. Second language pedagogy. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987. 153p.
7. Samuda V., Bygate  M. Tasks in Second Language Learning. Palgrave Macmillan, 2008. 256p.
8. Willis J. A framework for task-based learning. Harlow: Longman, 1996. p.23. 192p.
9. Willis J., Willis D. Doing Task-based Teaching. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007. 278p.