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IMPROVING NARRATIVE WRITING THROUGH TASK-BASED LANGUAGE TEACHING FOR B1 LEARNERS

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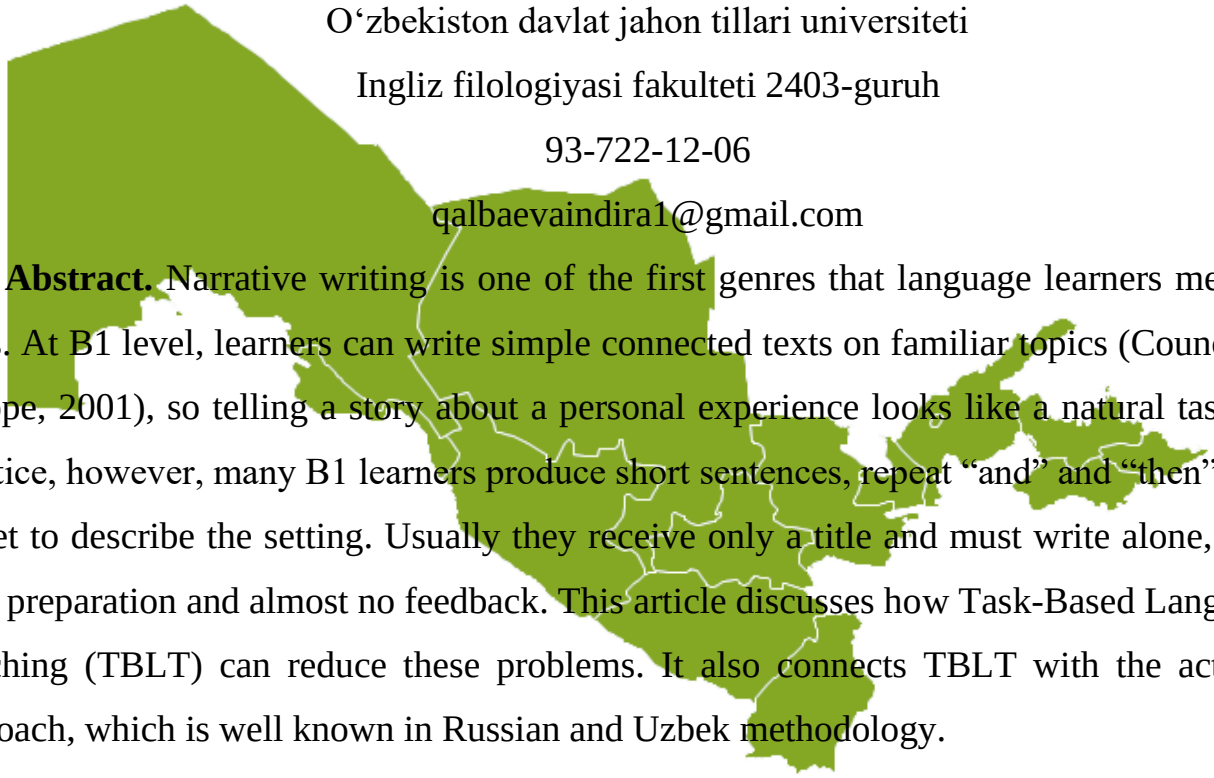

Abstract. Narrative writing is one of the first genres that language learners meet in class. At B1 level, learners can write simple connected texts on familiar topics (Council of Europe, 2001), so telling a story about a personal experience looks like a natural task. In practice, however, many B1 learners produce short sentences, repeat “and” and “then”, and forget to describe the setting. Usually they receive only a title and must write alone, with little preparation and almost no feedback. This article discusses how Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) can reduce these problems. It also connects TBLT with the activity approach, which is well known in Russian and Uzbek methodology.

Keywords: Narrative writing, Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT), language learning, writing skills, personal experience, activity-based approach, communicative competence, pre-writing activities, feedback.

Introduction

Authors define a task in slightly different ways. According to Ellis (2003), a real task has four main features: the focus is on meaning, there is a gap in information or opinion, learners use their own language resources, and there is a clear outcome which is not only language practice. Nunan (2004) makes a useful distinction between real-world tasks, which copy what people do outside the classroom, and pedagogic tasks, which are designed for the

classroom. For narrative writing, the instruction “Write a story” is not enough. A better task has a purpose, an audience and a result, for example a story for a class magazine.

Leontiev (1975) states that human activity is driven by a motive and is carried out through actions with conscious goals [48-49p]. In a lesson this means that learners write better when they have a reason to write, and not only a grammar aim. Vygotsky (1934) introduced the zone of proximal development, the distance between what a learner can do alone and what he or she can do with help [171-172p]. This idea supports pair work and teacher guidance in a writing lesson. Galskova and Gez (2004) describe writing as a type of speech activity and support communicative tasks in foreign language teaching [247. In my view, the Western and the Russian traditions meet at one point: language is learnt when learners use it for a meaningful purpose and receive support.

Willis (1996) suggests three stages for a lesson. In the pre-task stage the teacher introduces the topic and learners collect words and ideas. The task cycle has three parts: learners do the task, plan how to present it, and report to the class. In the language focus stage they study useful forms from their own texts. Ellis (2003) describes a similar sequence of pre-task, during-task and post-task phases, and Ellis, Skehan, Li, Shintani and Lambert (2020) show how these phases can be adapted to different contexts. Form is not ignored in this model. Learners communicate first, and the teacher draws attention to accuracy afterwards. For writing this order is helpful, because B1 learners can think about their ideas first and correct grammar and vocabulary later.

Hyland (2003) explains that second language writing can be taught through different approaches, for example by focusing on language structures, on the writing process, or on genre. A narrative has a typical structure: setting, events, a problem and an ending. When learners see this structure in a model text, they understand how a story is built. The process approach is useful too. Learners plan, write a draft, get feedback and revise it. This is very close to the planning and report stages of the task cycle, so the two ideas support each other.

The following lesson follows Willis’s framework. The topic is “A day I will never forget”.

The teacher shows a short model story, and learners find the setting, the problem and the ending. They also note the linking words *first, then, suddenly* and *finally*. The model story can be as short as this:

Last summer, I went to the mountains with my family. First, we were walking happily. Suddenly, I lost my phone. Finally, my brother found it near a tree.

In pairs, learners choose a real memory and write a first draft for the class magazine. Pairs check the draft and exchange it with another pair. The teacher acts as an adviser, not as an examiner. The teacher takes examples from learners’ drafts and explains the past simple for the main events (*I lost my phone*) and the past continuous for the background action (*I was walking when I saw a dog*). Linking words at the beginning of a sentence are followed by a comma. Then learners correct their drafts and write the final version alone.

This approach has several advantages. The task gives learners a real purpose for writing, which can increase motivation. Pair work lets them share ideas and vocabulary before they write. The planning stage reduces pressure, because nobody has to produce a perfect text immediately. Finally, the language focus connects grammar with a text that learners have written themselves. There are also limitations. A task-based lesson needs careful preparation, and the teacher must control the time. Some learners may use their first language in pairs, and weaker learners may depend on stronger partners. Clear instructions and different roles for each learner can reduce these problems.

Conclusion

Narrative writing suits B1 learners because it uses personal experience and familiar language. TBLT supports this genre with preparation, meaningful communication and a later focus on accuracy, and the activity approach explains why a motive and cooperation are important. Teachers can use the framework of Willis (1996) together with the ideas of Ellis (2003) and Nunan (2004) to design lessons in which learners write more clearly and with more confidence. A classroom experiment with a control group would be a good next step to measure the effect of this approach.

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