Communicative Tasks, Conversational Interaction and Linguistic Form: An Empirical Study of Thai[1]

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Abstract: *Second language acquisition (SLA) research suggests that some of the processes that occur during conversational interaction may facilitate second language learning. Carrying out communicative tasks designed to promote these processes can provide learners with the opportunity to focus on linguistic form in the context of meaning. Much of the SLA research on conversational interaction and communicative tasks has been carried out with the more commonly taught languages, such as English or Spanish. This article describes a series of communicative tasks designed for use by learners of Thai as a second or foreign language and reports on a study that tested the tasks' effectiveness at providing opportunities for learners to focus on linguistic form during conversational interaction. Finally, practical issues in the implementation of tasks in L2 classroom and research contexts are discussed.*

Introduction

Second language acquisition (SLA) researchers have suggested that communicative tasks can encourage the conditions and processes believed to facilitate second language acquisition (see Crookes and Gass, 1993a, 1993b and Skehan 1998 for review of recent work on tasks). In this paper, we: (1) briefly review some of the theoretical and empirical SLA work that suggests that tasks can be useful in second language learning; (2) describe the design and testing of a series of tasks for Thai as a second or foreign language; and (3) discuss issues in the classroom and research implementation of tasks.

Although definitions of 'task' have ranged from any conceivable human activity (Long 1985) to a classroom-based activity (Nunan 1989), at the core of each definition is an emphasis on the communication of meaning. While there are many different types of tasks, they typically share features such as requiring learners to work in pairs or small groups, to share information, and to orient toward a goal. Although tasks can be designed for individual use, the tasks reported in this study were created for use in pair or small group work. The tasks we developed and tested in this study were designed to be applicable in both the classroom language instruction context and the second language (L2) research context. Clearly task administration and implementation vary according to the specific pedagogic or research goals. For example, when using the tasks in an instructional context, many practitioners suggest that it is desirable to incorporate a real-world component. This can be done through post-task activities or homework assignments. Basing the tasks on a careful needs analysis is also advisable.

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For discussion of real world needs in the context of tasks see Long (1998).

Theoretical Rationale for Tasks

One of the most prominent rationales for task-based activities in the L2 classroom evolved from Long's "interaction hypothesis" (1980, 1981, 1983, 1996). According to this hypothesis, learners' attention may become oriented to linguistic form when breakdowns in the communication of meaning occur. When learners fail to understand their interlocutor, they often negotiate meaning to achieve mutual comprehension. The effort to achieve mutual comprehension can involve the use of a variety of strategies, such as asking an interlocutor to confirm message content, or requesting that an interlocutor explain something further. Another supposedly helpful interactional feature is a *recast*, in which interlocutors reformulate learners' nontarget-like utterances. Recasts were first discussed in the first language acquisition literature; see Baker and Nelson (1984) for discussion. Proponents of the interaction hypothesis (Gass 1997; Long 1996; Pica 1994) claim that through conversational interactions,[2] learners may receive information that their utterances were nontarget-like, and may have opportunities to reformulate those utterances.

Examples from learners of Thai carrying out task-based activities in pairs for this study illustrate these interactional features. In Example 1, learner A stated that there were three rings in her picture, but her word order was nontarget-like. Learner B did not appear to understand her partner's statement and requested additional information. Learner A repeated the statement, again with nontarget-like word order, and again her partner seemed to check comprehension. Learner A repeated the information, producing an utterance with target-like word order. In Example 2, learner A used the incorrect classifier, and her partner provided a recast with the number and the target-like classifier.[3]

Some recent work in SLA has demonstrated empirically that interaction that contains negotiation and/or recasts can facilitate L2 development (Ellis et al. 1994; Gass and Varonis 1994; Long et al. 1998; Mackey, 1999; Mackey and Philp 1998; but see also Loschky 1994 and Gass et al. 1998 for a recent review).

The use of task-based activities as vehicles for facilitating L2 development is also supported by Swain's output hypothesis (1985, 1995). Based on work in Canadian immersion programs, Swain argued that it is through the process of producing language (output) that learners may be able to test their theories about the target language, gain control over form, and perhaps internalize linguistic knowledge. In the process of producing language, learners may receive feedback about their utterances or may be required to negotiate with their interlocutors. Through this interaction, learners may have an opportunity to modify their original utterances (modified output) as part of negotiation or in response to feedback.

Other researchers (Gass 1988, 1997; Pica 1994; Schmidt and Frota 1986) have also claimed that having to produce language may create opportunities for learners to notice differences between their interlanguage and the target language norms. When they communicate to carry out tasks, learners may be constrained to produce troublesome target language forms. This act of producing language and receiving feedback may facilitate their SL development.[5]

To summarize, theoretical and empirical work in SLA to date has suggested that learners may benefit from the negotiation and recasts that may arise during meaningful communication. Clearly, the challenge in task design is to create tasks that provide learners with opportunities to engage in meaningful interaction and to direct their attention to linguistic form. As Pica (1994) has noted, the movement to facilitate authentic communication in L2 classrooms has led to tasks that provide learners with opportunities to talk to their instructors and to other learners. However, as she points out, we need to question whether these tasks lead learners "to ask the kinds of questions about form and meaning that will really deliver L2 data to them" (521).

We now describe an empirical study that was carried out to determine whether a series of communicative tasks designed for learners of Thai could promote interactional features (negotiation and recasts) that also involved targeted morpho-syntactic structures. Nine communicative tasks were designed to target form and meaning in Thai, and a small-scale study was carried out to test these tasks.

Issues in Task Design

Task Type

Previous research in task-based interaction has provided insight into a variety of task characteristics, and the

Figure 1

TASK TYPES AND EXAMPLES

Task Type	Examples
Picture Drawing	Contents of a Kitchen Nature Scene Packing for Vacation
Picture Difference	Beach Shopping Room in a House
Story Sequencing	Throwing an Office Party Preparing for an Auction Going on a Picnic

potential effect of those characteristics on task performance. One framework for identifying different kinds of tasks was put forward by Pica and her colleagues (Pica et al. 1993), who proposed a classification scheme based on the flow of information between the learners and the requirements in communicating information to achieve goals. According to this taxonomy, communicative tasks that require information to be supplied by both learners to achieve a convergent goal, and which have only one possible solution ("jigsaw" tasks) are most likely to generate opportunities for learners to work towards comprehension, feedback, and interlanguage modification processes. Another type of task likely to generate these opportunities is an information gap task. This differs from "jigsaw" tasks in that only one learner supplies information. Other types of tasks, such as information exchange tasks, may be less likely to create opportunities for learners to engage in the types of interaction believed to be beneficial for SLA, according to Pica. One general principle that applies to these tasks is that it is usually best to discourage learners from visually sharing their pictures, since this may reduce their need to communicate verbally.

Thus in the current study, three different task-based activities were created for contexts where learners work in pairs. The first is a well-known kind of "jigsaw" task (a "spot the difference" activity) in which learners work in pairs to determine how two pictures of a similar scene are different. The second type is an information gap activity in which one learner describes a picture while another learner draws it. The third task is similar to a "jigsaw" task in that both learners are required to exchange information while working toward a convergent goal, but there is more than one possible solution. This is a story sequencing task in which learners collaborate to create a story by putting pictures in order. Each student has three or four related pictures, and they exchange information about these pictures in order to decide which picture comes first, second, third, and so on.[6] Three different examples of each of the task types were created, making a total of nine tasks. The tasks are described in Figure 1, and samples of the tasks are provided in the appendix.

Linguistic Forms

In addition to designing tasks according to features believed to facilitate interaction, we also created the tasks to target specific linguistic forms. In their discussion of tasks and grammatical development, Loschky and Bley-Vroman (1993) suggest that the linguistic forms to be targeted by a task must be crucially involved in successful task performance. According to them, the extent to which a grammatical form is involved in task performance can be classified into three categories: naturalness, utility, and essentialness. A "task-natural" linguistic form occurs frequently when learners carry out the activity. However, successful completion of the task does not require the form. "Task-utility" refers to linguistic forms that greatly facili-

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Example 1

EXAMPLE OF NEGOTIATION[4]

Negotiation	Explanation
A: *mii săam wĕɛn there be three ring 'There are three rings'	nontarget-like word order
B: mii arai ná there be what particle 'There's what?'	← request for more information
A: *mii săam woŋ wĕɛn there be three classifier ring 'There are three rings'	nontarget-like word order
B: mii wĕɛn rɔ̆ə there be ring question particle 'There are rings?'	← check understanding
A: wĕɛn săam woŋ ring three classifier 'Three rings'	target-like response

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Example 2

EXAMPLE OF RECAST

Recast	Explanation
A: *mii aŋùn...sɔ̆ŋ...klùm there be grape two classifier 'There are two bunches of grapes'	incorrect classifier
B: sɔ̆ŋ phuaŋ two classifer 'Two'	← recast
A: sɔ̆ŋ phuaŋ two classifier 'Two'	repetition of recast

Example 3

CLASSIFIER WITH A NOUN AND NUMBER

tâaj	tônmáaj	mii	wua	hâa	tua
under	tree	there be	cow	five	classifier
'Under the tree there are five cows'					

tate the learners' ability to complete the task. Although it is possible to successfully complete the task without using the form, doing so would be awkward and time-consuming. Finally, "task-essential" structures are linguistic forms that are necessary for successful task completion.[7]

Based on a review of Thai textbooks[8] and interviews with Thai language instructors and students, noun classifiers were selected as the primary linguistic form to be targeted in the tasks. Specifically, the use of classifiers with nouns and numbers was targeted. In this context, the target-like word order is noun, number, classifier. Classifiers are also used in other contexts, such as with demonstrative particles and adjectives; however, the tasks were not designed to elicit classifiers in those contexts. An example of the sort of structures targeted appears in Example 3.

This structure may be problematic for learners because there are a number of different noun classifiers in Thai, and the use of a particular classifier is determined according to the characteristics of a given noun. Learners often use an incorrect classifier or overuse a general classifier instead of producing a more target-like form. Another potentially problematic issue is word order. Learners occasionally have difficulty with word order, such as omitting the classifier completely or reversing the order of the number and noun. These tasks were designed to create opportunities for students to produce a variety of the most commonly used noun classifiers.

Questions, a second linguistic form, were also selected to be targeted in the tasks. In Thai, questions can be formed by adding either a question particle or a question word. Question particles are used to elicit responses of affirmation, negation, or concurrence and are typically placed at the end of an utterance, as in the example below.

Question words, such as "who," "what," and "when," are used to elicit information and can be placed at various positions in the sentence. For example, the question words "who" and "what" can be placed in the subject position or the object position. In Example 5, the question word "what" is used in subject position. Other question words, such as "when," can fill either sentence-initial or sentence-final slots for time phrases. Example 6 illustrates the sentence-final use of the question word "when," which could also be placed in sentence-initial position.

While the formation of questions in Thai is not particularly complex, learners are often uncertain as to when to use the different question markers, and may rely on one or two forms exclusively. Furthermore, it is necessary for learners to remember the meanings of the various question words.

Testing Procedure

The testing procedure is illustrated in Figure 2. The first set of native speaker pilot tests were conducted to determine whether the tasks elicited the targeted linguistic forms.

These involved eight native speakers of Thai in four dyads. After the initial testing with two dyads, some of the materials were revised. The revised materials were then tested with two more native speaker dyads. The data from these dyads indicated that both classifiers and question forms occurred frequently. Thus, both forms were assumed to be "task-natural."

As our aim was to design tasks that provided learners with opportunities to pay attention to linguistic form in the context of meaning, we also explored the extent to which the targeted linguistic structures were crucial to task completion. An additional dyad of native speakers was asked to complete a picture drawing task and a picture difference task without using the targeted structures. The results of this pilot indicated that classifiers were structures with "task utility," but question forms were not. Nevertheless, the frequent occurrence of questions creates opportunities for learners to receive feedback on the comprehensibility of their question forms.

Once the tasks had been pilot-tested with the native speakers, they were tested with eight intermediate-level learners of Thai (four dyads). The learners carried out the tasks in three fifty-minute class sessions over a one-week period. The dyads consisted of both same gender and mixed gender pairs. Each learner had an opportunity to carry out at least one task with every member of the class. Thus, the

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Example 4

QUESTION PARTICLE

paj	kin	khâaw	kan	máj
go	eat	rice	together	question particle
'Do you want to go eat?'				

Example 5

QUESTION WORD (*WHAT*)

arai	¨jùu	bon	tó
what	be	on	table
'What's on the table?'			

Example 6

QUESTION WORD (*WHEN*)

phŷan	čà	maa	¨ráb	mŷaràj
friend	will	come	pick up	when
'When will your friend pick you up?'				

Example 7

RECAST INVOLVING MORPHO-SYNTACTIC
FORM (CLASSIFIER)

A: mii šŷa
   there be shirt
   'There's a shirt'

B: mii sŷa k̈ii tua
   there be shirt how many classifier
   'How many shirts?'

A: *tua sɔ̌ɔŋ
   classifier two
   'Two'

B: sɔ̌ɔŋ tua?   ◀ recast
   two classifier?
   'Two?'

A: sɔ̌ɔŋ tua
   two___ classifier
   'Two'

Example 8

NEGOTIATION INVOLVING MORPHO-SYNTACTIC
FORM (CLASSIFIER)

A: *mii khanǒm sǎaṁ
   there be candy three
   'There are three candies'

B: mii arai ná   ◀ request for clarification
   there be what particle
   'There's what?'

A: sǎam chín
   three classifier
   'Three'

B: sǎam...?   ◀ request for clarification
   three...?
   'Three?'

A: khanǒm sǎam chín
   candy three classifier
   'Three candies'

B: øh, sǎam chín
   oh, three classifier
   'Oh, three'

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tasks were tested with a total of eighteen different participants, both native and non-native speakers of Thai.

Results

Only the sessions carried out by the learners of Thai (and not the Thai native speaker sessions) were coded for analysis. A total of twenty task-based interaction sessions were recorded with approximately fifteen minutes of conversational interaction for each session (approximately 300 minutes or five hours of data). To address the research question, the number of negotiation and recast episodes that occurred in the interaction between the Thai learners were counted and classified according to the nontarget-like feature of the utterance (phonology, morpho-syntax, lexicon, and semantics) that triggered the episode.

During the task-based interaction sessions, ninety-two negotiation and recast episodes occurred. The number of
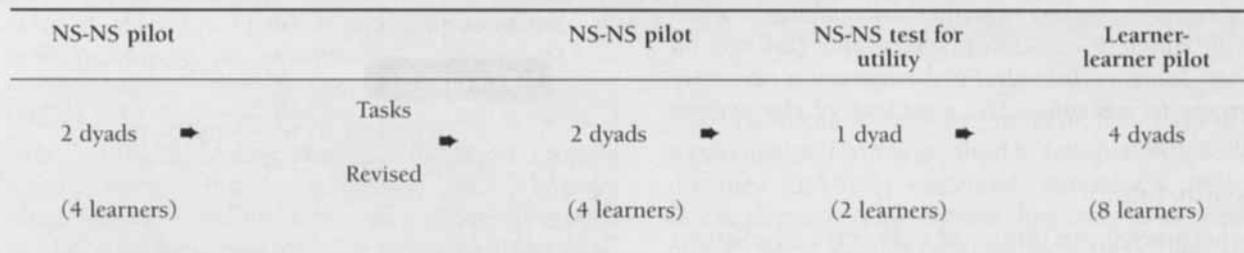
episodes per task ranged from three to seven, with an average of 4.6. The episodes varied in length from two to fourteen turns, with an average of seven turns per episode. Thus, the negotiation and recast episodes comprised approximately thirty-two turns in each of the task-based sessions.

Of the total number of episodes, thirty-nine involved lexical items (42%), twenty-six involved morpho-syntax (28%), seventeen involved phonology (19%), and ten (11%) were meaning-based,[9] as illustrated in Figure 3.

Twenty-two of the morpho-syntactic errors that triggered a negotiation or recast episode involved classifiers (85%). Examples 7 and 8 illustrate this finding. In

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Figure 2

TESTING PROCEDURE

NS-NS pilot		NS-NS pilot	NS-NS test for utility	Learner-learner pilot
2 dyads ➡	Tasks ➡ Revised	2 dyads ➡	1 dyad ➡	4 dyads
(4 learners)		(4 learners)	(2 learners)	(8 learners)

NS = Native Speaker

Example 7, learner A produced the form *tua sɔ̌ɔŋ (classifier two) when describing the items on the bed in a picture difference task. Learner B provided the target-like form sɔ̌ɔŋ tua (two classifier) in a recast, and learner A repeated it.

In Example 8, illustrating negotiation, the learners were discussing how many pieces of candy were in a jar. Learner A stated that her picture had three pieces of candy, but omitted the classifier. Her partner requested more information, and learner A responded with the number and classifier for candy. After learner B again requested more information, she produced the complete phrase of candy, number, and classifier, which learner B partially repeated.

In contrast to noun classifiers, question forms did not trigger any negotiation or recast episodes. Even though the Thai learners produced a large number of questions (a total of 513 questions with 60% involving question markers and 40% involving question words), they were not the focus of any feedback episodes.

Summary of Findings

The learners of Thai participated in ninety-two negotiation and recast episodes during twenty task-based interaction sessions. Of those episodes, 23% involved one of the target structures, noun classifiers. The research question focused on whether tasks could be designed to promote interactional features (negotiation and recasts) that involved targeted structures. This small-scale study suggested that the tasks were effective at promoting negotiation and recasts that involved noun classifiers, but not question forms.
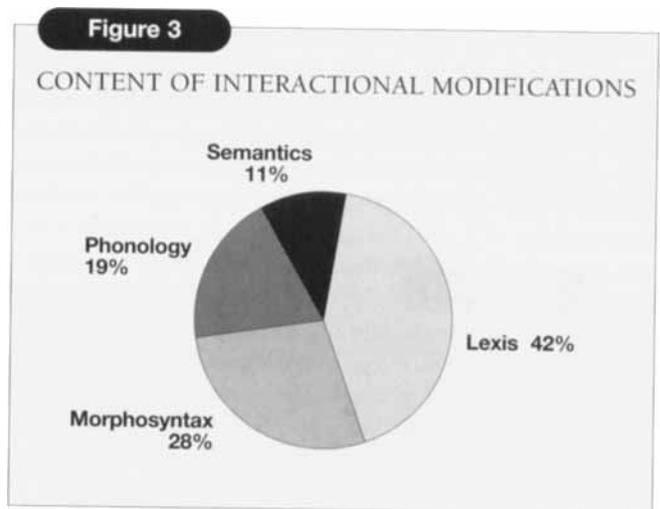
Discussion

Interactional Features Involving Form

Various researchers have pointed out that it is difficult to design tasks that promote interactional modifications involving some types of linguistic form. As Pica (1994) has cautioned, "negotiation seems to work most readily on lexical items and larger syntactic units," and may be less effective for grammatical morphology (518). In this study, nearly half of the negotiation and recast episodes involved lexical items, confirming Pica's observation. However, morphosyntactic structures (both classifiers and locative constructions) were the focus of negotiation and recasts for 28% of the episodes. Although negotiation of lexical items occured more often, the fact that more than one quarter of the feedback concerned morpho-syntax is noteworthy. Like Mackey (1994) who described tasks designed to target questions in English, we conclude that careful task design can contribute to the creation of materials that promote the conditions and processes believed to facilitate SLA.

Modified Output

As described earlier, modified output occurs when learners

Figure 3

CONTENT OF INTERACTIONAL MODIFICATIONS

Semantics 11%
Phonology 19%
Lexis 42%
Morphosyntax 28%

Example 9

MODIFIED OUTPUT CONTAINING CLASSIFIERS

A: lɛ́ mii daaw sǎam duaŋ
   and there be star three classifier
   'And there are three stars'

B: *mii nỳŋ daaw
   there be one star
   'There's one star'

A: mii ñỳŋ duaŋ   ← recast
   there be one classifier
   'There's one'

B: daaw nỳŋ duaŋ   ← modified output
   star one classifier
   'One star'

Example 10

PROVISION OF MORPHO-SYNTACTIC FORM (CLASSIFIER)

A: mii pʰuukhǎw sɔ̌ɔŋ... sɔ̌ɔŋ
   there be mountain two...two
   'There are two mountains'

B: lûuk   ← provision
   classifier

A: sɔ̌ɔŋ lûuk
   two classifier
   'Two'

B: pʰuükhǎw sɔ̌ɔŋ lûuk?
   mountain two classifier?
   'Two mountains?'

reformulate their previously nontarget-like utterances, typically in response to signals that their interlocutors have not understood. Of interest here is whether learners produced modified output containing the targeted structures. The learners participated in twenty-two negotiation and recast episodes that involved noun classifiers. During these

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Example 11

AVOIDING CLASSIFIERS

A: *mii naŋsўyphim nÿŋ   ← classifier avoided
    there be newspaper one
    'There's one newspaper'

B: khɔ̌ɔŋ chăn mii sɔ̌ɔŋ
    of I there be two
    'Mine has two'

A: *mii wídthajú nÿŋ   ← classifier avoided
    there be radio one
    'There's one radio'

B: wídthajú rɔ̌ə khɔ̌ɔŋ chăn mâi mii ləəj
    Radio question marker of I not there be at all
    'Radio? Mine doesn't have any'

Example 12

PROVISION OF NONTARGET-LIKE FEEDBACK

A: mii aŋùn rýplàaw
    there be grape question particle
    'Are there any grapes?'

B: mii săam...săam arai
    there be three...three.. what
    'There's three... three what?'

A: săam... (laugh)
    three...
    'Three...'

B: (laugh) mâi châi wĭi
    not classifier
    'Not (classifier)'

A: *chúd (laugh)   ← nontarget-like classifier
    'classifier'

B: *(laugh) chúd kɔ̂dâaj mii aŋùn săam chúd
    okay classifier there be grape three classifier
    'Okay (classifier). There's three bunches of grapes'

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negotiation and recast episodes, learners produced modified output containing noun classifiers eighteen times. In other words, the interactional features led learners to reformulate their previously nontarget-like utterances for 82% of the classifier episodes. This finding is illustrated in Example 9.

In this example, learner B produced an utterance with nontarget-like word order (number, noun). Immediately following this nontarget-like utterance, learner A provided a recast. After the recast, learner B modified her original utterance and produced a sequence of noun, number, and classifier — target-like word order.

Provision of L2 Form

The analysis of the data revealed that the tasks also contributed to another type of interaction, which we termed "provision of form."[10] This occurred when speakers seemed unable to complete their intended utterance and stopped, or repeated the last word they appeared to be able to produce. At this point, their interlocutors completed the utterance by supplying a word or phrase. In this study, sixteen provision sequences (57%) appeared to be triggered by a problem with a morpho-syntactic form and twelve (43%) appeared to be triggered by a learner's inability to produce a lexical item. Almost all instances of morpho-syntactic provision (94%) occurred when learners did not produce a classifier and their partners supplied it in the consecutive turn.

As mentioned earlier, there are many classifiers in Thai and each noun takes a specific classifier. In Example 10, learner A needed to say that the picture on the wall had two mountains in order to complete the task. However, it seems that she did not know which classifier to use with the word "mountain," as she stopped in the middle of the utterance and repeated the word "two." In the immediately following turn, her partner supplied the appropriate classifier.

The fact that the needed form was provided at the precise moment when the learner was struggling to communicate meaning may have promoted noticing of that form. Controlled experimental studies would be required in order to make any claims about provision of L2 form with respect to learning, yet in these descriptive data, its frequent appearance was noteworthy.

Practical Issues in the Implementation of L2 Tasks

The findings of this study suggest that several issues should be considered when implementing tasks. One important issue concerns the role of the instructor (or in some contexts, researcher) while learners are carrying out the tasks. Some trends in these data suggest that it may be beneficial for L2 development if an instructor takes an active role in monitoring the learners' performance and

providing feedback when necessary. For example, one dyad regularly avoided the use of classifiers when they seemed uncertain which classifier should be used with a given noun. This is illustrated in Example 11.

In this exchange, learner A avoided producing a classifier in two obligatory contexts, with the nouns "newspaper" and "radio." Although learner B did not produce the classifier for the noun "newspaper" either, this is a common ellipse and is considered acceptable by native speakers of Thai. Throughout the task, both learners failed to produce classifiers when it was contextually appropriate to do so. By monitoring the learners' performance and drawing their attention to the appropriate classifiers (explicitly or implicitly, depending on the instructional context), instructors can minimize the extent to which learners avoid difficult forms. Of course instructors cannot monitor the performance of every learner at one time. This avoidance of use also needs to be taken into account when using structure-focused communicative tasks in the L2 research context.

In addition, it was found that the learners whose production was analyzed for this data set occasionally provided nontarget-like feedback to each other. In Example 12, it seems that learner B was aware that she did not know the correct classifier to use with grapes, but learner A was not able to provide the appropriate form. After learner B stated that the classifier was not wĭi (used with bananas), learner A suggested that they use the classifier chúd (typically used with sets of items). Learner B agreed and they continued the task. Unfortunately, chúd is not the correct classifier.

While learners occasionally provide and incorporate incorrect feedback, research suggests that such feedback is unlikely to influence development and may be a transient reflection of variation in learner interlanguage systems (Bruton and Samuda 1980; Gass and Varonis 1989; Porter 1986).

When problematic exchanges occur, it seems possible that learners might benefit from immediate feedback from the instructor. While they might "notice the gap" (Gass 1988, 1997; Pica 1994; Schmidt and Frota 1986) between what they want to say and what they are able to say, some learners may not be able to bridge this gap alone. Brief intervention by the instructor (or a more competent learner) who provides the appropriate classifier might help learners produce and develop this form. Instructors can utilize opportunities to draw learners' attention to linguistic form during task-based activities without disrupting the communicative focus of the task. However, such techniques need to be explored empirically and utilized judiciously, because extensive "feedback" interruptions may quickly become counterproductive due to their disruptive nature, possibly negatively affecting learner confidence and motivation (see also Aston 1986).

In addition to suggestions based on the empirical findings of this study, we also think it is important to highlight some general issues in task implementation. Before implementing these types of communicative tasks in an instructional context, instructors may need to consider how to incorporate tasks into their syllabus. As Gass (1997) notes, tasks are simultaneously independent of and dependent on syllabus type (152). On the one hand, tasks are independent because they can be designed to complement any syllabus type. However, on the other hand, the focus of the lesson plan dictates the type of task that will be used, and the lesson plan is created based on the syllabus. Instructors can incorporate task-based activities into a wide variety of syllabus types by emphasizing different aspects of the tasks.

The use of pretask and post-task activities also increases the adaptability of tasks to a variety of syllabus types. As Samuda (1993, cited in Gass 1997) has suggested, tasks can be used in the classroom context to create a "need to mean" in which learners need a particular linguistic form in order to complete a task. It may also be particularly valuable to include a real world focus in the pretask and post-task activities, so that the learners' communicative needs outside the classroom are addressed at the same time that the linguistic features elicited by the tasks are reinforced.

Different language objectives can be met through the use of tasks by manipulating planning time. Allowing students to prepare before undertaking a task may promote complexity, but a lack of such planning opportunities may promote fluency (Crookes 1989; Foster and Skehan 1996). Some studies have suggested that requiring students to engage in post-task activities can affect the complexity of their language (Skehan and Foster 1997).

Another important issue concerns the likelihood that learners will modify their interaction in ways claimed to be helpful. For example, Foster (1998) found that classroom learners made few attempts to negotiate meaning, and those attempts were restricted to a few individuals. Foster suggests that teachers may need to take a more active role in encouraging and training learners to negotiate when breakdowns in communication arise. Through such coaching and training, as well as carrying out carefully designed tasks, learners may be more inclined to exploit rather than ignore opportunities to negotiate.

Conclusion

The results of this study suggest that communicative tasks can be designed to promote conversational interaction involving specific linguistic forms. Such task-based materials provide learners with the opportunity to focus on particular linguistic structures while involved in meaning-based communication. Careful task design can increase the likelihood that learners will negotiate and recast linguistic forms.

NOTES

1. We would like to thank Chatraporn Lertvatrakan and Pornpimon Suppakorn for Thai language assistance, Jenefer Philp for illustrations, as well as two reviewers and the editor who provided insightful comments. Any errors are ours.

2. The terms "negotiation," "negotiated interaction," "modified interaction," and "conversational interaction" have been used in SLA literature to sometimes refer to the same concept. In this paper, "conversational interaction" is used.

3. In these data, recasts and negotiation moves did not co-occur in the same turn. Feedback episodes (more than one turn) that involved features such as requesting additional information or checking message content were coded as negotiation. Feedback episodes consisting of a recast were coded as recasts. There were three feedback episodes (approximately eight turns in length) that were coded as containing both negotiation moves and a recast.

4. The Thai script was romanized following the system outlined in Haas (1964).

5. Long and his colleagues (Long 1991, 1996; Long and Robinson 1998) have described what may occur as a result of these interactional features as "focus on form" when learners temporarily shift their attention to linguistic form as a result of perceived problems with perception or production.

6. Due to scheduling conflicts, not all of the learner–learner dyads were able to carry out the story sequencing tasks. As a result, the story sequencing tasks are not reported in the data set for this paper.

7. Creating tasks with task-essential forms requires a great deal of control over the discourse, for example listening tasks. Because the goal was to create tasks for oral language production, activities with task-essential forms were not created. However, listening comprehension tasks which target the same forms could be used to complement the tasks described here.

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9. A semantic episode was operationalized as an instance of negotiation or recast that was not triggered by a nontarget-like utterance.

10. There is some mention of this type of interactional pattern in interaction literature, but it appears not to have received primary attention. For example, Gass and Varonis (1989) describe a similar phenomenon as completion, while Bygate (1988) refers to it as framing or completion.

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APPENDIX

Examples of Tasks

Picture Difference Task: Beach Scene

Version A

Version B

Picture Drawing Task: Nature Scene