The Impact of Pre-task Explicit Instruction on Task Processes

Martin Hawkes
University of Shiga Prefecture, Japan
(Email: hawkes.m@shc.usp.ac.jp)

Abstract

This paper describes a descriptive, classroom-based study that investigated the impact of explicit instruction on learner orientation and task processes. Audio recordings were collected for two different task performances from participants in two intact EFL classes at a Japanese university. The classes received explicit instruction either before or after the tasks. The audio data were transcribed and analyzed qualitatively using a cumulative case study approach, which also allowed for quantification of certain features. The pre-task instruction impacted the orientation of participants, manifested by the presence of certain interactional features including minimalization, correction, disfluency markers, and mining. Those participants who received the instruction tended to orient towards target form production during the main task, while the other participants, who did not receive the instruction, appeared more oriented towards meaning and task completion. However, these effects were not universal, and the true influence of the instruction was somewhat more nuanced. Orientations were dynamic, shifting from one focus to another as interactions evolved. The findings suggest that the impact of pre-task explicit instruction on task interaction is more complex than has been previously claimed. Perhaps practitioners should remain flexible and pragmatically adjust their teaching methods and techniques according to the inherent features of specific tasks, as well as individual learners and groups of learners.

Keywords

Introduction

As the interest in task-based language teaching (TBLT) has expanded over the past two decades, there has been extensive research into the myriad factors that can affect the outcomes of language learning tasks. One area that has attracted considerable attention is the way in which formal aspects of language can be incorporated into task-based pedagogy.

There is, of course, a view of communicative language teaching that takes the position that no language form should be taught. This strong *focus-on-meaning* (Long, 2015) or *zero-grammar* (Ellis, 2005) approach may have some advocates, and could be appropriate as a fluency-building strand of a language programme, but most teachers and researchers would probably agree that some attention should be given to form to push interlanguage development (Doughty & Williams, 1998), promote grammatical accuracy (Spada, 2014), and avoid fossilization and pidginization (Johnson, 1996). Having learners simply perform communicative tasks without any attention to form may lead to lexicalization of the ensuing interaction. Seedhouse (1999) showed task interaction to be full of minimalized structures as learners disregard form and seek the most efficient route to task completion. This focus-on-meaning approach relies solely on

implicit learning for acquisition, which, as Long (2015) pointed out, is too inefficient for most learners after childhood.

Another option that has received much attention is incidental focus-on-form, which Long (1991) described as when a teacher "overtly draws students' attention to linguistic elements as they arise incidentally in lessons whose overriding focus is on meaning or communication" (pp. 45-46). One clear benefit of this technique is that the teacher can target a form for which there is an observable gap in a learner's knowledge. Further, because the issue is addressed immediately, it may aid in the creation of new form-meaning mappings as it is easier for learners to appreciate the relevance of the feedback; indeed, Doughty (2001) claimed that there is only a 40-second cognitive window for such feedback to be optimally effective. Cumulative findings from research into corrective feedback have shown it to be effective for acquisition (Li, 2010; Lyster & Saito, 2010; Russell & Spada, 2006).

Although incidental focus-on-form has captured the imagination of researchers, questions remain regarding its efficacy in real classrooms. Swan (2005) lamented that such an approach does not allow for the principled introduction of new forms into lessons and only develops the accuracy of partially internalized language. Also, it seems difficult to implement effectively in contexts where student numbers are high — how can a teacher possibly attend to and give effective feedback to each and every student in a class of 20, 40, or even 60 individuals? Research has shown smaller classrooms and individual attention to be important for focus-on-form (Nabei & Swain, 2002; Nassaji, 2013). And, even if the class size is small, providing prompt and effective feedback may be difficult for some inexperienced or less proficient teachers (Mackey, Polio, & McDonough, 2004; Medgyes, 1992).

Other approaches to form-focused instruction (FFI) have been proposed over the years. While Spada (2011) stated that FFI needs to be embedded within meaning-focused activities, Ellis' (2001) more inclusive view accepted the isolated and explicit teaching of forms. Considering the issues with incidental focus-on-form, it seems prudent, as others have done so recently (Ellis, 2018; Li, Ellis, & Zhu, 2016), to reappraise the role that explicit instruction can play. One aspect of the implementation of explicit instruction is the question of where it should be positioned within a sequence of classroom activities. Although competing pedagogically-focused proposals have been put forward (Nunan, 2004; Willis & Willis, 2007), there has been a notable lack of empirical exploration of the impact of the timing of explicit instruction on task processes. This paper reports on part of a larger descriptive study that investigated pre-, -during, and post-task explicit instruction. While the larger data set also includes findings from a repeat task performed one week later, the current paper focuses on how the timing of pre-task explicit teaching influenced the orientation of learners during the ensuing task interaction.

Explicit instruction in TBLT
Explicit teaching can be incorporated into an instructional sequence through either a pre-, during, or post-task intervention (Ellis, 2018). Each position has its advocates and detractors, who have described the apparent benefits and drawbacks. In this paper, I focus on the pre-task option, but this is framed with reference to the post-task alternative.

Undoubtedly the most prominent manifestation of the pre-task teaching of forms is the much maligned presentation-practice-production (henceforth, P–P–P) approach, in which items are explicitly taught before being used in controlled and then freer practice activities. Although many would not consider it a form of TBLT, later interpretations of P–P–P embrace the use of communicative tasks during the third stage as a valuable vehicle for freer practice.

Earlier proponents of P–P–P claimed that it is necessary for learners to first internalize specific grammatical forms before being allowed to participate in freer conversations (Higgs & Clifford, 1982). However, over the years, leading figures in SLA and language teaching research have vociferously attacked P–P–P (Long, 2015; Skehan, 1996). Skehan (1996) – an especially vocal critic – put forward two main objections: First, inherent in the P–P–P model is the assumption that whatever form-of-the-day is taught will be learned. This seems to be at odds with what is known about developmental sequences in second language learning (Ortega, 2011); second, although P–P–P has been practiced in classrooms for many years, the number of learners who have received such instruction and became successful is low, and it is only those particularly talented learners who reach higher levels of proficiency. Swan (2005) addressed both of these criticisms, claiming that the order in which forms are taught is not haphazard or random; rather, it has been devised by experts, based on many years of combined pedagogical experience in numerous diverse contexts. Swan also pointed out that with the myriad challenges facing L2 learners around the world, it is quite a stretch to lay all the blame on P–P–P. Others have suggested that the apparent failure of P–P–P is not due to a problem with the approach, but with teachers not paying enough attention to the final P — the production stage (Johnson, 1996; Sato, 2010).

Recent versions of P–P–P have referenced skill acquisition theory (Anderson, 2010) to strengthen their theoretical foundation (DeKeyser, 1998; Johnson, 1996). From this point of view, the use of tasks in the third stage provides an ideal opportunity for contextualized practice. Indeed, it has been argued that such practice covers areas that input and interaction alone cannot and is vital for L2 development (Lyster & Sato, 2013). Furthermore, the explicit instruction inherent in P–P–P-like methods has been shown to be effective (Anderson, 2017; Spada & Tomita, 2010), so it seems that some of the basis for the previous criticism of there being a lack of empirical support is not as strong as previously thought.

One TBLT framework that places explicit instruction before the main task is the following proposed by Nunan (2004):
>   Step 1: Schema-building tasks
>   Step 2: Controlled practice of target language
>   Step 3: Listening
>   Step 4: Language focus
>   Step 5: Freer practice
>   Step 6: Pedagogical task (pp. 31-35)

While Nunan would probably not see his six-step framework as being a form of P–P–P, it clearly focuses explicitly on language during steps two and four, prior to the two task-like activities in the final two stages, during which students "should be encouraged to extemporize, using whatever language they have at their disposal to complete the task" while acknowledging that "Some students may 'stick to the script', while others will take the opportunity to innovate" (2004, p. 33).

A final point to be considered with pre-task teaching approaches is that much of the discussion of the benefits and drawbacks of P–P–P has derived from cognitive SLA research, but, of course, it is also essential to consider practitioners' views. Idrus (2018) reported teachers' views of the benefits of pre-task form-focused instruction, and, despite the criticisms over several years, P–P–P remains widely practiced and preferred by many language teachers (Carless, 2009) and is still a principal component of teacher training programs (Harris, 2015, cited in J. Anderson, 2017).

The idea that any formal instruction should only be done *after* completing a pedagogical task is one that had been persuasively argued by its proponents. Pre-teaching can lead to *structure trapping* (Samuda, 2001; Skehan, 1998), where learners are compelled to use the taught form in the task interaction. Willis and Willis (2007) discussed at length the problems with beginning a language lesson by teaching isolated forms. When this is done prior to the main task, it is "very difficult for learners to think about both form and meaning at the same time" (p. 16) in the task-like production stage. They claimed that learners will follow one of two paths in this situation. The first sees them trying to produce the target form(s), but the resulting language will be "halting and stilted" (p. 17) as they concentrate on regurgitating the forms prescribed to them. Instead of any focus on meaning, the final stage "is likely to become a 'further practice' of form activity" (p. 113). The second possibility sees learners ignoring the target forms, thus rendering the "declared aim of helping learners incorporate the target form in their spontaneous language use" (p. 17) a failure. (Indeed, Muller (2006), in a classroom-based study, reported this to be the case.) For Willis and Willis, language development is unlikely to occur through a pre-task approach like P–P–P, but it can through a task-based approach while learners focus on understanding and conveying messages: During pre-task activities learners can *mine* the input for potentially useful forms, but these are not dictated by the teacher. Then, while performing the main task, learners can freely choose whatever forms they wish to communicate their meanings; language knowledge develops through self-correction, the use of resources such as dictionaries, and teacher feedback.

Learner orientation

As seen above, one theme that frequently appears when considering the timing of explicit instruction is the impact on learner attention, or *orientation*. Critics of pre-task instruction have essentially claimed that learner orientation will be directed towards form at the expense of meaning during the task performance.

While the majority of research into tasks has come from a cognitive standpoint, there has been a line of research looking at learner orientation from a socio-cultural position and especially *activity theory* (Wertsch, 1998), which has shed light on learner motives and how they orient in response to the way teachers set up activities (e.g. Coughlan & Duff, 1994); the dynamic nature of orientation as it changes through the course of a lesson (Roebuck, 2000; Tocaimaza-Hatch, 2015); and the collective scaffolding of task interaction (Donato, 1994).

There have also been several studies that have looked at orientation from a conversation analysis perspective: Hellerman and Pekarek Doehler (2010) and Mori (2002) both showed how learners do not necessarily orient in the direction that the teacher had intended, while Lee and Burch (2017) illustrated the unfolding orientations of learners in a collaborative planning task. Seedhouse (2004) described the kinds of orientations demonstrated by learners in different teaching contexts, characterizing *task-oriented* learners as using highly minimalized language in order to quickly and efficiently navigate a task. He contrasted this with the type of interaction found in *form-oriented* contexts, where learners are focused on the careful and accurate production of specific language forms.

The present study

Previous studies have measured performance after pre-task instruction in terms of complexity, accuracy and fluency measures. Mochizuki and Ortega (2008) reported that it led learners to use the targeted forms but had no influence on global measures of complexity and fluency. Conversely, Ellis, Li, and Zhu (2019), while also observing an increase in use of the target forms, found that accuracy, complexity, and fluency were all negatively affected. However,

less attention has been paid to deductive analyses of the processes involved, especially with reference to the impact on learner orientation.

In this paper, I describe in detail the task processes which unfolded in the interaction of a class of learners who received pre-task instruction, in terms of interactional features which indicate orientation. I use Tocaimaza-Hatch's (2015) definition of orientation as being "the way in which individuals view a task and the means they devise to fulfil it" (p. 492), and, in order to investigate how it may be impacted by instruction, the following research question was formulated: How does pre-task explicit instruction affect the orientation of university-level EFL learners as they perform tasks?

Method and Data Analysis

To investigate the research question, a hybrid research design was followed (Grotjahn, 1987; Samuda & Bygate, 2008). While the design has a quasi-experimental appearance, with two different intact classes of learner participants, the data set collected was essentially qualitative. The analysis was also qualitative and interpretive, based on the theoretical framework of activity theory, and primarily focusing on the interaction of individuals and groups of learners. However, following Seedhouse and Almutairi (2009), a limited set of interactional features was identified in the qualitative analysis, and this allowed for a degree of subsequent quantitative analysis to support the main qualitative findings.

Participants and setting

This study was conducted at a private university in Japan. The participants were first-year non-English majors (18-19 years old) in their second semester at university, who received two 90-minute compulsory EFL classes each week. All were L1 Japanese speakers with six years of experience studying English at secondary school. Following an in-house placement test, students in this context were placed into either an *advanced* or *basic* English course. They were then divided into three sections, again based on their test scores. The participants of this study all belonged to the top level of the basic course. Students in two intact classes were asked to participate in the study. After being given information regarding the nature of the investigation, all 44 individuals in each class signed informed consent forms and agreed to take part (although some students were absent in each data collection session). The author was also the teacher of these classes. At the time of data collection, the author held a master's degree in TESOL and had approximately 10 years teaching experience.

Procedures

The basic English course ran for 15 weeks and focused on oral communication skills, loosely following a required textbook *New Interchange 1A* (Richards, Hull, & Proctor, 2012). The textbook acted mainly as a departure point for students to engage in thematically related communicative tasks. The data collection was carried out in two 90-minute class periods during weeks 4 and 10. A different task was used for each session: a decision-making task and a jigsaw task (see Appendix A).

The lesson began with pre-task activities to introduce the topics. Next, one of the classes received approximately 15 minutes of explicit instruction (EI) on forms determined to be useful. The EI consisted of teacher-led consciousness-raising activities followed by controlled practice pair-work (see Appendix A for details of the EI). The EI was given before the main task, operationalizing the pre-task approaches described earlier (e.g. DeKeyser, 1998; Nunan, 2004). The second class did not receive the EI (although, to ensure high ethical standards, they

did receive it after the data collection period was finished). An overview of the instructional sequences is shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1
The Instructional Sequences of the Two Participating Classes
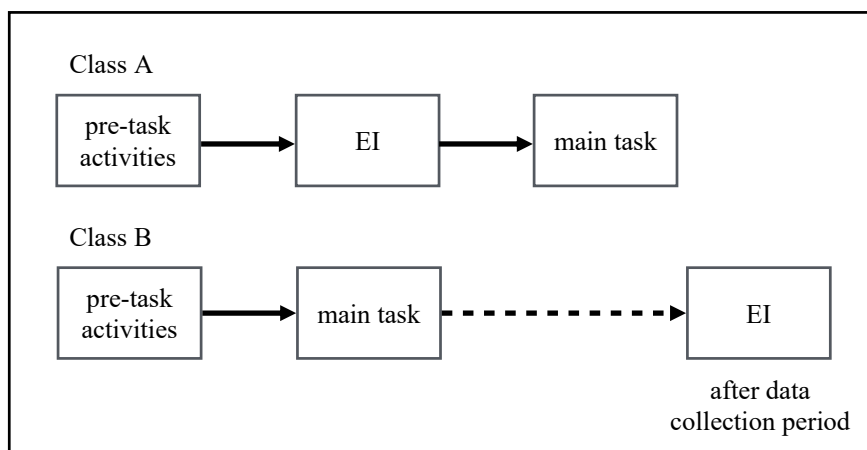
Tasks and target forms

The goal of the decision-making task was for groups of three to organize a day trip to the cinema. The first pre-task activity was a listing and ranking task, where learners discussed their favourite film genres. Next, learners brainstormed what they would have to arrange for a trip to the cinema (e.g. what film to watch, where to meet, and what food to eat). These ideas were shared in plenary and written on the board. When the task began, groups used these ideas to help with them make their plans. No time limit was given but groups finished the task in between four and six minutes. To avoid affecting learner orientation to forms, no corrective feedback was given during the task. The target forms highlighted in the pre-task EI were suggestion phrases, which were chosen as they had occurred frequently and caused trouble for learners in the same context during a pilot study (although the participants certainly would have met these phrases in their secondary school education). Based on suggestion phrases which occurred in two expert-speaker task performances, and a corpus-based grammar reference book (Willis, 2004), the following suggestion phrases were targeted:

• let's…

• it might be good…

• shall we…?

• why don't we…?

• what/how about…?

• we could…

In the jigsaw task, dyads had to determine whether twelve corresponding pictures of people doing various activities were the same or different. Six of the pictures contained a single point of difference. No time limit was given but learners completed the task in between seven and ten minutes. Learners described the pictures to each other to try to locate the differences. In the pre-task activities, learners did timed talks about the clothes which they were wearing. Based on the pilot study and two native-speaker task performances, target forms were identified for this task and focused on in the EI stage; however, as opposed to the functional exponents targeted in the decision-making task, this time the forms were grammatical, namely the use of present continuous and *have (got)* to describe actions and possessions. These forms were

familiar to the learners, but pilot studies showed that learners in the same context struggled to use them spontaneously.

A task characteristic relevant to this study was that of task-essentialness. According to Loschky and Bley-Vroman (1993), tasks place varying demands on learners to produce certain linguistic forms. Tasks that are *task-essential* require the use of certain forms for successful completion. These are sometimes known as *focused tasks* (Ellis, 2003). *Task-utility* tasks may be successfully completed without specific forms, but the use of certain forms will be helpful. Finally, *task-natural* tasks do not require specific forms, though some may repeatedly arise as a natural consequence of the task interaction. Such tasks have been referred to as *unfocused tasks*.

The two tasks used in this study had different levels of task-essentialness. The decision-making *cinema trip* task (henceforth, CT task) was one that was task-natural or task-utility; that is, it was relatively unfocused. Conversely, the jigsaw *describing people* task (henceforth, DP task) was more focused with a higher degree of task-essentialness.

Data collection and analysis
Audio recordings were made of 33 group task performances: For the CT task, there were six groups in Class A (three triads and one dyad) and seven groups in Class B (all triads), and for the DP task, there were 11 dyads for Class A and nine in Class B. The recordings were transcribed and analyzed using the software *Transana* (Woods & Fassnacht, 2018). Video was deemed to be both prohibitively expensive and, with the data being collected in an intact class, more invasive, which might have impacted participation. As there was no video, identification of participants was a potential issue even though the researcher knew each participant to some extent. To help with this, the tasks were performed in triads or pairs with a mix of genders and each student gave their name and student number at the beginning of the recording. These measures, along with the researcher's familiarity with the students allowed for accurate transcriptions to be produced. From the outset of the analysis, an inductive approach was taken to look for patterns of interest in the interaction data through a cumulative case study approach. Interactional features which revealed aspects of learner orientation were identified and characterized in individual cases. These features included co-constructions, disfluencies, minimalization, mining, off-task talk, and self-correction. As the individual case data sets accumulated, certain themes emerged and became the focus of further scrutiny, and it soon became apparent that the main points of interest occurred around those exchanges where participants had opportunities to use the target forms. In previous research, coding systems such as suppliance in obligatory context (SOC) (Brown, 1973) and target-like use (TLU) (Pica, 1983) have been used to measure the filling of obligatory occasions and accuracy. However, this paper is concerned with opportunity, not obligation; and orientation, not accuracy. Therefore, a new bespoke coding system was devised: *Target form opportunities* (TFOs) along with *target forms uses* (TFUs) became the units of analysis for the systematic examination of the data. These are described and illustrated in the section below. The data were coded by the author alone.

Findings
This section describes and discusses the content and features of interaction that indicated how orientation was impacted by the pre-task EI in Class A. It has been divided into five parts, although there is some degree of overlap with certain features.

Use of target forms

Perhaps the most fundamental measure of how the Class A participants oriented in response to the pre-task EI was whether they actually used the target forms during the tasks. For the CT task, the target suggestion phrases were not essential for successful task completion, so their mere presence indicated an orientation towards their use. Excerpt 1 shows a short exchange from a group in Class A containing two TFOs (see Appendix B for transcription conventions). The first, in lines 1-2, is successfully filled (albeit with some hesitation) by the target suggestion phrase *why don't we*; therefore, it was categorized as a TFU. The second TFO appears in line 3, where there is a possible opportunity for EH to use one of the suggestion phrases. Here, participant EH does not employ one of the target forms but simply utters a restaurant name with rising intonation; thus, the latter attempt was not categorized as a TFU, but as an extreme example of *minimalization* (Seedhouse, 2004), where a possible suggestion phrase has been entirely omitted.

Excerpt 1 (Class A/CT task)
1 AH: eh? (1.5) eh? why don't we go to the °go to the° we go to eat
2   (1.3) eat hehe before movie? hehe
3 EH: er:: ☺McDonald☺?
4 AH: ☺McDonald☺ [okay after hehe after eat (.) go to (.) movie, okay?
5 EH: [hehe
6 YI: okay

While minimalized structures were, in fact, the most common alternative means to fill a TFU, two further strategies were identified. In the first of these, participants simply made a *bald statement* with none of the softening typically seen in suggestions, as in lines 4-5 of Excerpt 2, in which KK "suggests" a time to arrive at the cinema.

Excerpt 2 (Class A/CT task)
1 TE: =whe- er when:: when (5.0) hehe whe:n (1.5) do we, (3.5) when-
2   when will we, (1.5) go:: (..) ci- (..) cinema?
3   (8.0)
4 KK: we will go (9.0) we- we will, (1.0) we will arrive-*u* (1.5) cinema
5   (2.5) eleven.

The third way TFOs were filled was by using a *preference statement*, which was also rarely employed by Class A. On such occasions, participants simply stated the movie they wanted to see. Excerpt 3 shows an example of this kind of utterance, in which KJ states her preference for going to the late show.

Excerpt 3 (Class A/CT task)
1 MK: what time?
2 KJ: late show is (2.0) cheaper (..) than, (7.0) late show is
3   cheaper, I wanna (2.0) at night (..) I wanna watch at night

Both bald statements and preference statements do not allow much room for a hearer to respond in the negative. They force the hearer to directly refuse the proposal, and this arguably makes such statements less pragmatically appropriate than a suggestion phrase, which might be a less direct. These alternative strategies show that participants were using their own linguistic resources, indicating an orientation other than towards the target forms.

The Class B data were most valuable for the way in which they reveal how the participants used their own resources to navigate the task and fill the TFOs. In the Class B interactions for the CT task, the most common way of making suggestions was through minimalized structures or preference statements. Excerpt 4 shows an example of the former.

Excerpt 4 (Class B/CT task)
1 NO: =where to eat
2 YN: where to eat
3 NO: Umeda?
4 YN: Umeda.

Table 1 gives an overview of how the participants in the two classes used the target forms in the main task. Compared to those participants in Class B, who received no pre-task instruction, the TFOs of the Class A participants were filled much more by target suggestion phrases, demonstrating that they were not simply ignoring the taught forms. In Class B, the target forms were used occasionally, indicating some existing knowledge, but minimalized and preference statements were much more common.

Table 1
Instances of TFOs for the CT Task

	Class	
	A (n=17)	B (n=21)
TFOs	74	74
Mean (SD)	4.35 (2.03)	3.52 (2.44)
TFUs	57	5
Mean (SD)	3.35 (1.97)	.24 (.54)
Alternative forms	1	1
Mean (SD)	.06 (.24)	.05 (.22)
Minimalized forms	10	38
Mean (SD)	.59 (.94)	1.81 (1.78)
Bald statements	2	2
Mean (SD)	.12 (.33)	.10 (.30)
Preference statements	4	28
Mean (SD)	.24 (.44)	1.33 (1.15)

Notes. (1) The mean values show the average number of each feature per participant (n=17 and n=21 for Class A and B respectively). (2) Five of the 22 students were absent from Class A, and one from Class B, on the day of data collection.

However, it was clearly not the case that all Class A participants used the target forms at every opportunity. There were major differences within and between groups. For example, although the two participants in Excerpt 5 had eight TFOs in their task performance, only two —both of which actually appeared in the opening two turns— were filled with target suggestions.

Excerpt 5 (Class A/CT task)
1 KK: why don't we go and see a movie. (.) next week
2 TE: good. how about Captain Philipps?

It is not surprising that learners would orient strongly towards form immediately after explicit instruction. However, this quickly faded and both KK and TE thereafter appeared to orient

solely towards meaning and task completion, evidenced by their subsequent suggestions, which were either minimalized or used alternative strategies:

- er:: ten o'clock.
- er:: eleven thirty:
- we will arrive-*u* (1.5) cinema (2.5) eleven.
- I hope Wednesday,
- after?
- hmm Saizeria.

While the overall pattern for Class A shows a tendency to reproduce the target forms, this was not universal for all participants at all stages of the task.

The grammatical target forms for the DP task (*have (got)* and present continuous), had a much higher degree of task-essentialness than the suggestion phrases in the CT task. Those forms, or minimalized versions of them, were used to fill the vast majority of TFOs. Therefore, the DP task analysis needed a change in focus to look at learner orientation as the mere presence of the target forms did not necessarily indicate an orientation towards form in the same way it did for the CT task. Instead, accuracy and minimalization served as a rough indicator of orientation. As Table 2 indicates, many learners in both classes made a high proportion of non-target uses of the target forms, suggesting that they were not part of their implicit or procedural knowledge. However, those learners in Class A who were oriented towards producing the target forms were able to cast their mind back a few minutes to the EI, or even refer to the EI materials, before using their explicit knowledge to produce their more accurate utterances. The Class A participants demonstrated more accurate use of the target forms, but the interaction data indicated that to use them accurately, many participants still had to consciously orient towards them (discussed below). As the Class A participants had access to the EI materials, those who were oriented towards the target forms were more likely to produce them accurately.

Table 2
Instances of TFOs for the DP Task

	Class	
	A (n=22)	B (n=18)
TFOs	387	270
Mean (SD)	17.59 (4.96)	15.0 (5.36)
TFUs	366	241
Mean (SD)	16.64 (5.17)	13.39 (3.65)
Present continuous		
TFUs	232	176
Mean (SD)	10.55 (3.46)	9.78 (3.10)
Target-like	134	18
Mean (SD)	6.09 (3.84)	1.00 (1.28)
Non-target-like	98	158
Mean (SD)	4.45 (4.00)	8.78 (3.47)
Have (got)		
TFUs	120	45
Mean (SD)	5.45 (2.67)	2.50 (1.69)
Target-like	95	17
Mean (SD)	4.32 (2.68)	.94 (1.47)

Non-target-like	25	28
Mean (SD)	1.14 (1.17)	1.56 (1.82)
TFUs (unclear target)	14	20
Mean (SD)	.64 (.90)	1.11 (1.37)
Alternative form	21	29
Mean (SD)	.95 (1.70)	1.61 (2.70)

Notes. The mean and standard deviation values show the average number of each feature per participant (n=22 and n=18 for Class A and B respectively). (2) Four of the 22 students were absent from Class B on the day of data collection.

On many occasions, participants used lexicalized versions of the present continuous by omitting one or more of its four elements: subject, auxiliary *be*, lexical verb, and/or -ing morpheme. By looking at both the frequency of minimalized forms and the extent of this minimalization, it is possible to see how closely participants were reproducing the taught forms. As Table 3 shows, Class A not only produced fewer minimalized descriptions, but they also had a higher completion rate than Class B. Though it would be perfectly acceptable for task-oriented learners to use lexicalized language to efficiently navigate the task, it seems the pre-teaching of forms oriented those learners toward fuller production.

Table 3
Minimalization in DP Task Interaction

	Class	
	A (n=22)	B (n=18)
Proportion of forms containing minimalization (%)	33.6	79.4
Mean completion rate (%)	82.5	57.0

The Class A participants did not focus only on describing actions and states using the target forms. As shown in Table 2, 5.4% of TFOs were filled by alternative structures such as "her hair is long" instead of the taught "she has long hair". As well as using language for conducting the task itself, participants also described background or peripheral objects using existential *there*, as shown in Excerpt 6. This again demonstrates that the participants' orientation to the taught forms was not constant, and there were regular instances of meaning- and task-oriented exchanges.

Excerpt 6 (Class A/DP task)
86 MI: uh yes eh the right side-*o* there is a tree?

L1 Off-task talk
Throughout the data set, there were few instances of off-task talk, but those that did occur were revealing. Excerpt 7 shows a Class A task performance in which there were several occasions where off-task talk revealed a strong orientation towards producing a variety of the target forms. It contains an extended sequence where the three members of the group are conscious of using the same target form (*how about*) repeatedly. In line 2, a seemingly amused GO comments on EM's frequent use of *how about*, and EM's laughter at the start of line 3 acknowledges this point. In line 17, a further use by YN seems to be the cause of more amusement for GO (line 18). Finally, in lines 23 to 24, YN starts to use *how about*, but she hesitates and indicates that she wants to say something else. GO jokes that YN (like EM before) also overuses *how about*. This prompts YN to attempt a different target form, *why don't we*;

however, after a pause, it seems YN is not confident in using it and reverts back to the tried and trusted *how about*. This excerpt suggests that at least one member of this group — GO — felt they should be using a variety of the target forms even though *how about* was an entirely acceptable phrase for conveying the intended meaning. It seems that part of GO's orientation was not only towards the reproduction of a target suggestion phrase but a number of different ones.

Excerpt 7 (Class A/CT task)
1 EM: how: about- *ju   kuji kara chau*? {T: from 9 or 10, isn't it}
2 GO: hehe how *sukisugi* {T: you like it too much}
...
17 YN: hehe un::: how about (1.4)
18 GO: hehehe
19 YN: eleven o'clock?
...
23 YN: =I (1.5) how about (1.4) ah *chau wa* {T: that's wrong} (2.8)
24   *hazukashi* {T: it's embarrassing}
25 GO: hehehe how about *sukisugiru* {T: like it too much} (2.6) okay okay
26 YN: why don't:: (1.3) hehe [how about
27 GO: [ele- ele- eleven o'clock is okay okay

Off-task talk also revealed that the Class A participants were not *exclusively* focused on reproducing the target forms from the EI. As Excerpt 8 shows, off-task talk served a variety of task-oriented purposes, including the following: to signal the end of a topic (line 3); to suggest that a partner should discuss the topic more by disagreeing with a previous suggestion (line 4); to enquire about what questions to ask next (lines 8-9), and to respond to such a request (line 10); and to gather thoughts on how to proceed during instances of private speech (line 13). In all of these examples, the participants are oriented towards neither form nor meaning but towards the task proceedings, that is, the individual stages they must complete to successfully meet the task goal.

Excerpt 8 (Class A/CT task)
1 MI: hm: I would like to see (3.5) hm Kazetachinu
2 MM: ah nice nice
3 TS: *kimachatta* {T: it's decided}
4 MM: hehe *hantai (shite) hantai* {T: disagree disagree}
5 TS: oh I'm not really into Kazetachinu
6   (2.6)
7 MM: okay ah:: (2.5) let's watch the (.) Percy Jackson.
8 MI: oh sounds good (2.0) eh: (2.5) when (3.0) hm (4.0) *nani kiitara*
9   *ii?* {T: what should I say?}
10 TS: *jikan kiite xxx nanji desu ka nanji no xxx* {T: ask about the time}
11 MI: when should we (2.0) watch (..) this movie?
12   (2.7)
13 TS: *nani miru dakke* {T: what are we seeing again?} (3.0) ah:: how about
14   (1.0) ten o'clock

Though there were only a few examples of off-task talk in the Class A interactions, they demonstrate that some of the participants seemed oriented towards producing a variety of accurate target forms, a feature that did not occur in the Class B dataset.

Disfluencies

A noticeable feature of the Class A data is the frequency and extent of disfluency that occurred before and during the production of target forms. For example, Excerpt 9 illustrates the kind of disfluencies before target forms that permeate the CT task data sets. In lines 1-2, AS is reviewing the group's plans so far, and she speaks relatively fluently with minimal hitches. It seems at this point that she is orienting towards meaning. However, in line 4, as she turns her attention towards a new topic and uses a target suggestion phrase (*shall we*) to propose a showing time, AS shows much hesitancy through a prolonged period of silence interrupted twice with fillers. Here, it seems that AS is actively trying to reproduce the target suggestion phrase, likely causing the pre-TFU disfluency.

Excerpt 9 (Class A/CT task)
1 AS: we will go to Umeda Station (.) at eleven o'clock↑ (.) and↑
2   (.) go to (1.0) Jolly Pasta hehe
3 YK: yes
4 AS: and↑ (2.2) er (1.2) hm (1.7) ∘ja∘ {T: right then} shall we
5   watch (1.1) the movie↑ at-*o* (1.5) thirteen (2.4) o'clock? hehe
6 YK: thirteen o 'clock

In Excerpt 10, there is a representative set of disfluency markers from the DP task. Immediately after beginning, there is a 4.5 second pause before AS produces her description. It is difficult to know whether the hesitation was due to a word search involving the target form (present continuous) or perhaps the lexical item "wear". In line 07, however, YS seems focused on producing the target form. Before YS makes his description, there is a hesitation marker between two unfilled pauses, which is followed by sound stretching on "he", and, finally, there is vowel marking on "wearing". These are all signs of an orientation towards the production of accurate target forms.

Excerpt 10 (Class A/DP task)
1 AS: one picture (0.6) in one picture a man? (hand) (4.5) hehe man
2   wearing a watch
3   (3.3)
4 YS: right hand?
5 AS: yes.
6   (1.1)
7 YS: er: (2.0) he: is wearing-*u* striped shirt

Corrections

Another overt indication of orientation to target forms can be seen through the kinds of self- and other-correction that the Class A participants made. In the CT task, they sometimes stopped in the middle of a suggestion to change the target form, which could have been due to some uncertainty with a particular suggestion phrase. Excerpt 11 shows KJ starting her suggestion with what appears to be *why don't we.* The unfilled pauses indicate some trouble, and she stops and elects to use *how about*, a form she had used successfully earlier in the task.

Excerpt 11 (Class A/CT task)
1 KJ: yeah, sure
2 YS: okay.
3   (3.2)
4 KJ: why- (3.1) how about-*o*: hm (3.1) how about (1.2) okonomiyaki?

5 MK: hehe okay.

The DP task data contained several examples of participants repairing the target forms in interactions that had few instances of self-correction overall. Excerpt 12 shows a typical correction of present continuous descriptions, while Excerpt 13 gives an example of a correction with *have*.

Excerpt 12 (Class A/DP task)
1 AS: next
2 YS: next hehe
3 AS: ☺nine☺ a woman drink (0.8) ing- is drinki:ng something? and (.)
4   walking?

Excerpt 13 (Class A/DP task)
1 AH: hehe
2 TS: calling=
3 AH: =calling (1.5) she- (1.0) she- (..) she is: (1.0) SHE HAS-*u*
4   (2.0) black-*u* black hair

These examples of target form correction indicate an orientation towards not only using the target forms but towards their accurate use. The more task-oriented interactions from Class B were devoid of such incidences of correction and naturally did not contain the same focus on accurate production of the yet-to-be-taught target forms.

Mining
Examples of mining could be seen throughout the Class A dataset, most strikingly in the opening statements of six of the seven groups for the CT task, who used the same opening suggestion—*why don't we go and see a movie this week?* —which was written in the task model. Excerpt 14 shows an example of this.

Excerpt 14 (Class A/CT task)
1 YS: why don't we go and see a movie this week.
2 MK: sure what's on? hehe

For the DP task, at times of uncertainty, instead of attempting to use their own resources, some participants resorted to mining the task materials. For instance, Excerpt 15 shows EM having some trouble, indicated by the unfilled pauses. She completes her description with "he has a hat like a baseball cap", which were the exact words used in the model and printed on the task materials.

Excerpt 15 (Class A/DP task)
1 TE: hehe eleven (2.9) he has (1.5) something
2 EM: yes hehe (1.4) she (2.3) ah s-he has a (1.9) hat like baseball
3   cap
4 TE: no he don't (.) wear (.) cap.

Discussion
As predicted by Willis and Willis (2007), the data presented for Class A quite clearly shows that most participants did not ignore the target forms, and the pre-task explicit teaching seemed to result in some hesitant and disfluent production during certain parts of their task interaction.

Nevertheless, there remained plenty of instances during the tasks where the participants did not appear to be oriented in this direction. For example, there were meaning-oriented discussions of the different options in the CT task, and certainly not all TFOs were filled by the two target forms in the DP task. Furthermore, some of the picture descriptions in the DP task did not focus on the characters and instead targeted peripheral background features. In addition, the purpose of many turns during the task performances was to organize the task interaction according to the goals and instructions, whether through questions to gather proposals in the CT task or evaluations of whether picture sets were identical in the DP task.

In sum, while pre-task teaching seemed to mostly orient learners towards form, the interaction data suggest that instances of form orientation were a series of temporary, isolated events that occur in the background of a mostly meaning-based activity and that the frequency of these shifts to form was heavily determined by the tendencies and inclinations of individual learners. Orientation manifested itself as a dynamic entity that changed for individuals over the course of a task in response to factors both internal (e.g. when a participant suddenly consciously reasserted their focus towards form) and/or external (e.g. when a learner heard a peer using a target form). When learners perform another task on a different day, myriad factors may affect orientation including interlocutor pairings, the target forms, the teacher, and positive or negative factors from their lives outside of school.

Limitations and Avenues for Future Research
While this study was originally envisioned as a series of cumulative qualitative case studies of group interactions in intact classes, it soon became apparent that a number of features suitable for quantification were emerging from the data. The two classes reported here were similar in many ways: they had been streamed into levels through a placement test, the participants had received very similar secondary school English education, and they did the same English classes at university. Nevertheless, a pre- and post-test design was not used, so a quasi-experimental test of acquisition for the target forms was not possible. Future research could involve (quasi-)experimental studies to investigate the impact of EI position on some of the features identified in this study.

Concerning data collection, it would have also been desirable to have also conducted stimulated response interviews (Gass & Mackey, 2017), which could have provided additional support for some of the deductions made from the interaction data. Unfortunately, due to a lack of participant volunteers to take part in what would have been an activity done outside of class time, it was not possible to gather such data. In addition, this study only involved the use of audio data; a richer analysis would be possible with multimodal data that could illustrate non-verbal indications of orientation (Seedhouse & Almutairi, 2009)

While the relative homogeneity of the participants added to the internal validity of the study, it naturally had the opposite impact on external validity. Further, only two task types were used, leaving the possibility of different outcomes for other tasks. More studies looking at a variety of tasks and contexts are needed to make more general claims about the issues taken up in this paper. On the basis of this study alone, it is difficult to make confident claims for contexts with different learner factors including, but not limited to, majors, age groups, gender balance, interlocutor relationships, and proficiency.

Conclusion
This study offers some support for previous claims about pre-task explicit instruction; however, the findings suggest that they are incomplete descriptions of the true complexity of classroom

task interaction, which is far more nuanced, context-specific, and dependent on individual learners' orientation and motives.

For those teachers who are practicing a pre-task approach, possibly based on the P–P–P model, this study shows that it may indeed draw learners' attention overtly towards target form production and negatively impact fluency. If the aim of an activity is to allow learners to communicate primarily using their own resources, perhaps this approach should not be taken. However, there may still be plentiful opportunities for learners to use their own linguistic repertoire outside of the obligatory occasions for target forms. Tasks can be designed that have a lower density of such obligatory occasions, and a suitable balance may be found between providing both practice of predetermined forms and more meaning-based communication opportunities. Moreover, while it appears true that there are certain drawbacks to a pre-task approach, and some may not consider it a type of TBLT at all, it may be unproductive to simply dismiss it as being an inherently inferior approach given that P-P-P and related methods are deeply entrenched in many contexts (Carless, 2009; J. Anderson, 2017). As Larsen-Freeman (2015) pointed out, "teaching is a contingent act. Decontextualized proscriptions and prescriptions are not likely to be universally applicable" (p. 272). Perhaps teachers ought not to be dismissive of pre-task explicit instructions; instead, they should be prepared to be flexible depending on the task type, the pedagogic goals, and, perhaps most importantly, the learners.

Appendix A
Task and EI Materials
CT Task Materials

Megaplex Cinema Umeda			
Gakuyahime monogatari (J)	10:00 ~ 12:30 14:30 ~ 17:00 17:30 ~ 20:00	Captain Phillips (E)	08:30 ~ 11:00 11:30 ~ 14:00 14:30 ~ 17:00 17:30 ~ 20:00 20:30 ~ 23:00*
Percy Jackson (2D) (E)	10:00 ~ 12:00 14:20 ~ 16:20	Percy Jackson (3D) (J)	12:30 ~ 14:30** 17:50 ~ 19:50**
Room Mate (J)	11:50 ~ 13:50 16:30 ~ 18:25 21:15 ~ 23:10*	The Family (E)	09:00 ~ 11:05 13:00 ~ 15:05 16:50 ~ 18:55 19:20 ~ 21:25
Kazetachinu (J)	11:15 ~ 13:05 19:00 ~ 20:50	Subete wa kimi ni aeta kara (J)	11:15 ~ 13:15 14:15 ~ 16:15 17:00 ~ 19:00 20:00 ~ 22:00*
Carrie (J)	18:30 ~ 20:25	Carrie (E)	12:00 ~ 13:55 16:00 ~ 17:55 18:25 ~ 20:20 21:00 ~ 22:55*
Wallflower (E)	15:40 ~ 17:40 17:50 ~ 19:50* 20:20 ~ 22:20*	The Counselor (E)	18:50 ~ 21:00

Admission
Adult: ¥1,800   Student: ¥1,500   *Late Show: ¥1,200   ** 3D show: + ¥400

CT Task Explicit Instruction Materials

<u>Language Focus - Suggestions</u>

A. *Listen again and read the model task.*

```
A: So why don't we go and see a movie this week?
B: Sure, what's on?
A: Here's the cinema listing. what do you wanna see?
B: hmmmmm we could watch Carrie?
A: Ooh, I'm not really into horror.
B: ah okay hmm
A: how about the new Tom Hanks movie, Captain Phillips?
B: ah sorry I've already seen it. hmm what about Percy Jackson?
A: Ah Percy Jackson! I heard that was quite good. Okay, sounds good.
B: Yeah yeah. do you wanna see it in 3D or 2D?
A: Hmm is it the same price?
B: Ah I think 3D is a little bit more expensive.
A: Ah... oh 400 yen but that's okay, ah yeah 3D sounds pretty cool.
B: Yeah. um alright when is good for you?
A: It'll have to be Saturday or Sunday.
B: afternoon?
A: yeah. how about the er the two-twenty?
B: two-twenty works for me.
A: okay.
B: well do you wanna- do you wanna grab some lunch first?
A: ah that sounds great. Do you know any places around there?
B: what do you fancy eating?
A: shall we go to a pizza place or something?
B: Yeah there's a- there's a nice little um Italian restaurant just
   around the corner I think.
A: but when should we meet?
B: tell you what, let's meet at about one o'clock.
A: one o'clock, and then we'll buy tickets and go to the restaurant.
B: yeah.
A: it might be good to meet in the lobby then.
B: in the lobby yes
A: okay see you then
```

B. *Underline the words that are used to make suggestions. There are <u>eight</u> to be found.*

C. *Look at the suggestions below. Which are correct? Check (✔) the boxes.*

Suggestion	correct	incorrect
Why don't we *Monsters Inc*?		
Why don't we watch *Monsters Inc*?		
Why don't we watching *Monsters Inc*?		
What about *Jolly Pasta*?		
How about eating at *Jolly Pasta*?		
What about eat at *Jolly Pasta*?		
We could meet in the cinema lobby?		
We meet in the cinema lobby?		
We could meeting in the cinema lobby?		
Shall we go to the six thirty show?		
We go to the six thirty show?		
Shall we going to the six thirty show?		
Let's go and see *Toy Story*?		
Let's *Toy Story*?		
Let's going and see *Toy Story*?		
It might be good to eat after the movie.		
It might be good eat after the movie.		
It be good to eat after the movie.		

D. *Write the missing words for rules for making suggestions. Choose the answers from the box.*

verb phrase (動詞句)	noun (名詞)	-ing phrase (動名詞)	verb phrase
verb phrase		verb phrase	to + verb phrase

1. why don't we…?

why don't we + _____?

2. what about…? / how about…?

how/what about + _____?

how/what about + _____?

3. we could…

we could _____?

4. shall we…

shall we + _____?

5. let's

let's + _____?

6. it might be good…

it might be good + _____?

E. *With your partner, take turns picking a card and reading it to your partner. When replying your partner should make a suggestion. Try to use a* <u>*different*</u> *suggestion each time.*

Example

```
A: What should we have for dinner tonight?
B: How about pizza?


B: How do you want to go to Osaka?
A: Shall we take the train?
```

DP Task Materials

Same or Different?   **Student A**

Same? □ Different? □	Same? □ Different? □	Same? □ Different? □
Same? □ Different? □	Same? □ Different? □	Same? □ Different? □
Same? □ Different? □	Same? □ Different? □	Same? □ Different? □
Same? □ Different? □	Same? □ Different? □	Same? □ Different? □

Same or Different?

Student B

Same? □ Different? □	Same? □ Different? □	Same? □ Different? □
Same? □ Different? □	Same? □ Different? □	Same? □ Different? □
Same? □ Different? □	Same? □ Different? □	Same? □ Different? □
Same? □ Different? □	Same? □ Different? □	Same? □ Different? □

DP Task Explicit Instruction Materials

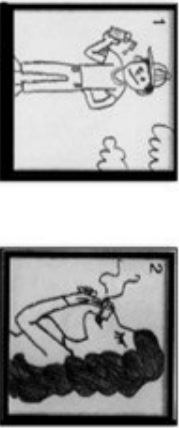*Materials for language focus stage (LFS)*

Language Focus - Describing People

A. *Look at two pictures. Listen to and read the model task.*

John's pictures

Lily's pictures

John: in picture one a man is wearing trousers and a plain shirt.
Lily: yeah same
John: and he has a hat.like a baseball cap
Lily: baseball cap yeah. in mine too. hmm. maybe these pictures are the same eh?
John: maybe yeah. hmm. is your man drinking something?
Lily: no - he's got a donut or something. so they're different!
John: okay next
Lily: hm picture two is of a woman.
John: yes a woman.
Lily: She has got long hair.
John: yes, long hair. and she's holding a cigarette.
Lily: yeah. she's smoking. hmm. this woman has dark hair, how about yours?
John: yes. she has black hair. I think these pictures are the same.
Lily: okay, same.

B. *Underline the words that are used to describe the people in the pictures.*

C. *Look at some more descriptions below. Which are correct? Check (✔) the boxes.*

Description	correct	incorrect
1. A boy is playing with a smartphone.		
2. He got big ears and a long nose.		
3. He wears a blue, striped shirt.		
4. He have many accessories.		
5. She's got big dark sunglasses.		
6. She holds a brown bag.		
7. He is carry a wallet.		
8. He has a tie with many stars on it.		

D. *Choose three correct rules for ways of describing people. Check (✔) the boxes.*

a) You can use subject (主語) + be + ing (現在進行形). ☐
b) You can use subject (主語) + present simple (現在是在形) (any verb). ☐
c) You can use subject (主語) + has + noun phrase (名詞句). ☐
d) You can use subject (主語) + got + noun phrase (名詞句). ☐
e) You can has subject (主語) + got + noun phrase (名詞句). ☐

E. *With your partner, practice describing the people in these pictures.*

Appendix B
Transcription Conventions

[	overlapping speech
(0.5)	length of silence over half a second*
(.)	micropause (less than half a second)
(..)	short pause (less than one second)
CAPS	high volume
::	lengthened phoneme
—	self-interruption, cut-off, abrupt finish/false start
?	rising intonation contour
.	falling intonation contour
,	continuing intonation contour
↑ ↓	sudden rise/fall in intonation
(speech)	transcriber's best guess at content
(( ))	other events
° °	quieter than surrounding talk
XXXXX	unintelligible speech (If L2, italics are used)
-*o*	vowel marking
italics	Japanese words
{T: }	English translation of participants' Japanese
☺	smile voice

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Martin Hawkes is an Associate Professor at The University of Shiga Prefecture in Japan, where he is primarily responsible for teaching both EFL and EMI courses. He holds a PhD in Applied Linguistics and an MSc in TESOL from Aston University in the UK. His current

research interests include task-based language teaching, engagement in language learning, and EMI and its role in study abroad preparation.