

Employing Social Media in Text-Based Instruction

Merrilee Brinegar

(Graduate School of TESOL, Hankuk University of Foreign Studies, South Korea)

ABSTRACT:Text-Based Instruction was first introduced over two decades ago but still has relevance for language teaching today. However, the texts typically used in this approach are of a literary or academic nature rather than texts that are motivating and more immediately relevant to learners' lives. This paper proposes the use of social media platforms, in particular Instagram, as a way to make the utilization of Text-Based Instruction more meaningful to students.

KEYWORDS –genre theory, whole texts, Text-Based Instruction, English language learning, contemporary texts

I. INTRODUCTION

Text-Based Instruction (TBI), sometimes used synonymously with genre-based approach, is a language teaching approach based on the explicit teaching of grammar and linguistic structures in authentic texts that are spoken or written (Feez & Joyce, 1998). These texts, which are not presented as excerpts but as whole texts, are connected to their social and cultural context, as TBI draws from genre theory (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). By learning about the features of a text, through guided practice learners are scaffolded until they can reproduce their own whole texts in the same genre using the structures that they learned from the model text (Feez & Joyce, 1998).

In TBI, the focus is on a text as defined to contain specific language sequences that are used in particular contexts in precise ways (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). A "whole" text is one that has a beginning, middle, and end and has a certain structure it follows with detailed language, content, and organizational pattern. An example of a whole written text is an email, as it has a beginning (the subject and greeting), a middle (the body of the email), and an ending (the closing). Other whole written texts could include a poem, a printed advertisement, a recipe, a set of instructions, a newspaper article, a lesson plan, a business memo, or a text message.

As for whole spoken texts, an example is a phone conversation to inquire about a bill, as it has a beginning (greeting and stating the purpose of the call), a middle (inquiring about details of the bill through a series of questions), and an ending (repeating key information, expressing thanks, and saying goodbye). Other whole spoken texts could include a quick chat with a coworker to ask about lunch plans, a TED talk, an elevator pitch, a one-sided conversation with a pet, or giving directions to a stranger on the street.

II. TBI CYCLE

Unlike some other language teaching approaches, TBI has specific steps that are followed in a lesson or a series of lessons to complete the cycle (Feez, 1998). The overall idea is that the teacher presents a model text and teaches learners the grammar and structure of the text with the end goal being for students to create their own such text. Through this process, the teacher's role as scaffolder is vital, as the cycle depends on the teacher supporting and guiding learners and even collaborating with them to write a new text. In TBI, this process follows five phases.

The first phase is building the context. In this phase, students are introduced to the model text, including the cultural and social context of the text. Attention may be given to drawing learners' attention to the register used and the relationships among those using the text. At this point, pictures, graphics, audiovisuals, or videos may be introduced to increase awareness of the context in which the text occurs.

The second phase is modelling and deconstructing the text. This includes focusing on the text as a whole and also analyzing the specific language used in regards to particular expressions or grammar structures. This stage is generally quite teacher-centered, with the instructor "teaching" the structures in the text; however, teachers may also lead students to notice specific patterns of language use, for example, by showing the text with particular structures underlined or in italics. At this point, the teacher might also have learners compare the model text with other models of the same type of text.

The third phase of TBI is joint construction of the text. It is in this step that learners begin to create a new text, albeit with the careful guidance of the teacher. At the beginning of this step, the teacher must provide learners with ample support, which may gradually be reduced throughout the process to move learners closer to being able to work independently on text creation. In this phase, the teacher will again be guiding most of the process front and center, helping students create a text similar to the model text. The teacher may provide the basic scenario for the text, or the teacher can elicit ideas from the class. Then the teacher starts constructing the model text either on the white board or on a screen where all students can see it and can contribute ideas as the process continues. For students who need more scaffolding, the teacher can also provide a skeleton text to help facilitate the process of co-constructing a text using the language and structures covered in the previous phase.

The fourth phase is independent construction of the text. Since learners already jointly constructed a text with the teacher in phase 3 with ample scaffolding that was gradually reduced, in this fourth step learners should be ready to create their own text using their own ideas but still following the structure of the model text and using appropriate expressions for the social context of the text.

The fifth and final phase of TBI is linking to related texts. Learners are presented or may find on their own other texts of the same type and compare them to the model text to find similarities and differences in structure and language use. This can be done for either spoken or written texts, and learners may also compare a spoken version of a text (e.g., a quick phone call to a friend to confirm a meeting place) to a written version of a text (e.g., a text message to a friend to confirm a meeting place).

III. TEXT TYPES AND RESEARCH ON TBI

Burns and Joyce (1997) gives examples of text types in a genre-based approach that would be appropriate for students preparing to study at university, including essays, reports, reference materials, enrollment forms, library catalogs, exam papers, and critiques. As well, many instructors and researchers have experimented with TBI with a variety of text types. For example, Emilia (2005) employed TBI on foreign language students in Indonesia taking an academic English writing course. She focused on teaching argumentation, using the topic of the Miss Universe Contest. Likewise, another teacher implemented TBI focusing on introducing arguments but with Australian primary students in a literacy class (Martin & Rose, 2007).

Additionally, Henry and Roseberry (1998) investigated a genre-based approach with university students in Brunei. Two classes used the same model text, a tourist information text, but one class was taught traditionally while the other was taught with a genre-based approach. They found that the genre group outperformed the non-genre group when producing a tourist information text.

Moreover, Hyon (2001) researched the use of genre-based teaching on 11 students in a university course of EFL students. She used four genres based on the reading needs of the learners, two of which were academic – a textbook and a research article, and two of which were texts learners might want to be able to read – a news story and a feature article. As in TBI, students followed the sequence of first observing text features, followed by later jointly constructing a text of the same genre in groups. In line with the fifth phase of TBI, for homework students researched similar texts for comparison. One of the many benefits of her genre-based approach was that students mentioned they were able to notice patterns and devices in other text types as a result of what they learned in the class.

Furthermore, Hirvela (1993) conducted a study in which he used science fiction short stories as model texts for language learners in Hong Kong. After studying the model texts, learners then created their own science-based texts. Years later, Hirvela (2001) used a genre-approach in genres of both literary and nonliterary texts for students at an American university in an EAP writing class. Based on his positive findings on both types of text, he argued that in ESP and EAP courses there should be both literary and nonliterary texts. However, the majority of studies on genre-based approaches or TBI feature traditional academic texts. This suggests a need to expand the scope of text types of focus in language learning classes using TBI.

IV. TBI PHASES WITH MODERN TEXT TYPES

Feez (2001) purports that the texts used in TBI should be those that students will actually need to use. Likewise, Hyland (2004) echoes this assertion, suggesting that teachers should choose texts from genres that students need for real life. He further suggests that texts should be selected based on skills or functions of the most immediate needs of students. Derewianka (2003) notes that a limited number of genres are actually covered in school, overlooking a variety of text types and subtypes. Melrose (1995) also says that contemporary ideas about genre are flexible, instead of focusing on traditional rules or conventions. Holliday (1994) furthermore purports that the purpose of language is for making meaning – both experiential and interpersonal. Nonetheless, as can be seen from above, most accounts of TBI in use have been with literary or traditional academic texts. Bearing this in mind, teachers should opt for texts where students can make meaning through texts that allow for interpersonal exchange, studying and creating texts from genres they need for real life.

Thus, we must consider what kinds of texts students actually encounter and want to use in real life. Given the prevalence of social media in the lives of learners at the present time, teachers should consider how to use TBI to meet the needs of students in that arena. For example, learners are typically interested in connecting with other English language speakers online through platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok. Let us consider the example of Instagram following the five phases of TBI.

1. Building the context

In this stage, learners need to become familiar with the social purpose of an Instagram post. Further, they need to consider the relationship between the poster and the audience. As comparing model texts is a common technique in phase 1, it is useful to compare the model Instagram text to one in the learners’ native language for them to notice if there are any prominent differences. Figure 1 below shows an Instagram post about a cat in English, whereas figure 2 features a similar post about a cat in Japanese. Thus, students could first consider the post in figure 1, reflecting on the purpose and motivation of the post as well as the intended audience. Thereafter, the two different posts could be compared to find similarities and differences.

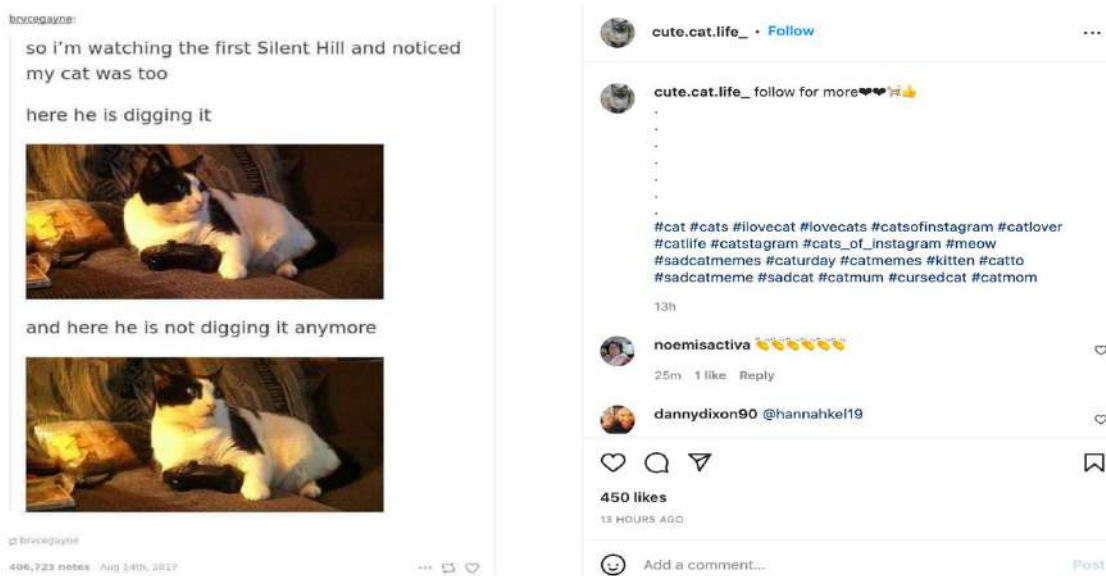


Figure 1. Instagram post from cute.cat.life_

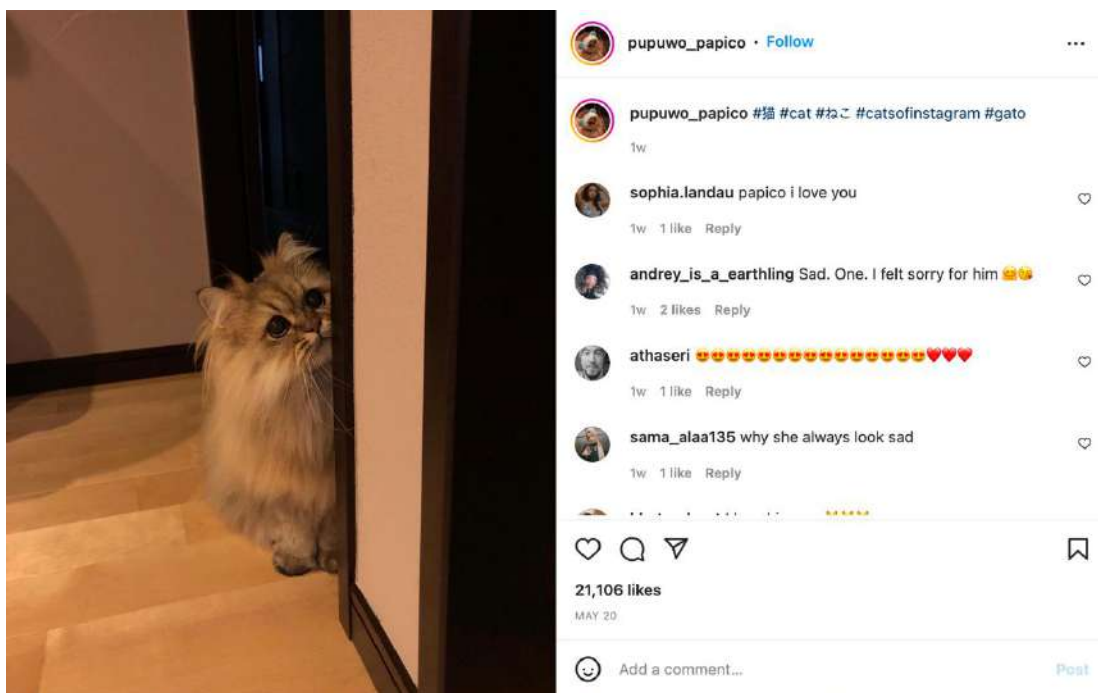


Figure 2. Instagram post from pupuwo_papico

2. Modelling and deconstructing the text

In this stage, the focus is on structural patterns and the specific language used in the model Instagram post. Additionally, learners may also compare the model to other English language examples of Instagram posts about cats. Looking at the model text shown in figure 1 above, attention could be drawn to the lack of capitalization or punctuation, which is starkly different than what is modeled in academic texts but which is extremely common on Instagram posts. Moreover, there should be a focus on language structures used as well as vocabulary, such as *digging it, so I'm...*, and the repetition and contrast of *digging it* and subsequent *not digging it* for comedic purposes.

Additionally, the teacher should point out the use of hashtags and discuss their purpose, and the teacher can ask students to reflect on why this post has so many hashtags as compared to the Japanese post in figure 2. Then attention should be given to the language used in the hashtags, noting the length and the style. Finally, the teacher can point out the use of periods with multiple line breaks and ask students why the poster used that technique, of which the purpose was to not have audience comments showing near the top of the post.

Thereafter, learners can compare the model text in figure 1 to another post of the same text type, as in figure 3. Here we can see that although the model text uses neither capitalization nor punctuation, the post in figure 3 employs some capitalization, both in the text on the image, as well as in their comments, but does not use proper ending punctuation in all sentences. Additionally, in figure 3 the teacher can point out the phrase *My cat really thinks he's...*, which could thereafter be used in a skeleton text for phase 3. Also, the teacher can explain what *the lights are on but nobody's home* means.



Figure 3. Instagram post by catswithheirtonguesout

An additional post of the same type can be introduced, as seen below in figure 4. Here attention can be drawn to the absence of any text on the image. The only text used is in the post itself with *double tap*, an expression that can be taught. Additionally, this post has numerous hashtags, like in figure 1, so learners can look for any overlapping hashtags and also note different kinds of hashtags used, as well as discussing their purpose.



Figure 4. Instagram post by happycatclub and sweetcatclub

3. Joint construction

In this phase, learners should jointly construct an Instagram post about a cat with the teacher. Thus, the teacher would first need to provide an image around which learners would co-construct their text. An example is shown below in figure 5.



Figure 5. Picture provided for joint construction of Instagram post

After showing the pictures to learners, the teacher can ask students what comes to mind when they see this picture. Further, the teacher can ask students what they think the cat is thinking. Then the teacher can provide a skeleton structure for the post using the language from the sample texts shown in phases 1 and 2.

- My cat really thinks he's...
- So I'm...
- Here he is..... and here he is not.....anymore

The teacher can write the three structures above on the board and elicit possible endings for the expressions that would be appropriate for the picture in figure 5. Since this picture has only one scene, the teacher helps students deduce that only the first expression is appropriate. Then students might answer *My cat really thinks he's too good for the floor* or *My cat really thinks he's the king of trash*.

Then for the second phrase, the teacher can provide two photos so that students can make use of the second and third target phrases. Since learners will have already jointly constructed in a very controlled and scaffolded way with the teacher using figure 5, in this second joint construction, the teacher can have learners work together in pairs or groups to jointly construct text for an Instagram post using figure 6 below.



Figure 6. Image provided for joint construction with peer(s)

For this step, the teacher can provide students with a skeleton structure as below. In pairs or groups, learners decide how to fill in the blanks, including creating appropriate hashtags.

<p>so I'm _____ and my cat was too</p> <p>here he is digging it</p> <p>and here he is not digging it anymore</p> <p># _____ # _____ # _____</p>

4. Independent construction of the text

In this phase, learners are meant to work independently with the text. Thus, since the model text is about a cat, this step would work best as a homework assignment. Learners could be tasked with taking a picture of their own pet. Then using that picture, they should create their own Instagram post using the structures learned in phases 1-3. Depending on the age of the learners, they may not have Instagram accounts, in which case the learners can simply upload their pseudo-Instagram posts to a class blog using a link provided by the teacher.

5. Linking to related texts

In this final phase, learners explore other texts with content that is the same or similar. For example, students could be asked to find other Instagram cat posts online and pick a favorite to share with the class. Then in class, each student could share their chosen post, explain why they like it, and detail the similarities and differences in the model texts used in class as compared to the post they found. Another possibility for linking to related texts would be to have students look for other Instagram posts using the phrase *the lights are on but nobody's home*.

V. CONCLUSION

Derewianka (2003) pointed out that rather than dealing with language at the sentence level or teaching vocabulary discretely, for example, TBI places emphasis on whole texts, as “meaning accumulates and evolves over a stretch of text (p. 135). As such, teachers should choose whole texts where meaning is apparent because of the social context in which it is embedded. Furthermore, to increase meaningfulness to learners, the texts chosen should be those which learners both need to learn and immediately use in real life. As social media is a part of the lives of virtually all language learners, using platforms such as Instagram can be an engaging way to get learners motivated to learn English while also providing them with skills they want and can employ to make meaning and communicate and connect with other English speakers.

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