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Designing Tasks was dedicated to my young daughters Jenny and Rebecca.
This work is dedicated to my grown-up daughters, Jenny and Rebecca.

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Introduction

The purpose of the book

This book began life as the second edition to *Designing Tasks for the Communicative Classroom*. The original volume was written in the mid-1980s, and was published in 1989. At that time, task-based language teaching was beginning to arouse attention. Although it was more than a distant prospect, it was far from a mainstream concept. As with the original book, this volume is aimed at practising teachers in ELT and applied linguists (teacher trainers, language planners, and materials writers), as well as teachers in preparation.

When I began working on this volume, I quickly realized how far the field had come. It was brought home to me that I was embarking on the creation not of a second edition but of a completely new book, and that in consequence it deserved a new title.

Recently, I completed a study into the impact on policies and practices of the emergence of English as a global language (Nunan 2002, 2003). Data were collected from a range of countries in the Asia-Pacific region including Japan, Vietnam, China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Korea and Malaysia. In interviews with teachers, teacher educators and ministry officials, and from a study of curriculum guidelines and syllabuses, ‘task-based language teaching’ emerged as a central concept. At the same time, I was involved in preparing a publication proposal for China on behalf of a commercial publisher. I was given a reasonable degree of latitude in putting the proposal together, but was informed that in order to be considered by the Ministry of Education it had to contain ‘task-based language teaching’ as its ruling rubric.

These two anecdotes illustrate the extent to which the concept has moved to the centre ground, rhetorically at least. However, it still has a long way to go to become rooted in classroom practice. In workshops and seminars in different parts of the world, I am constantly asked by teachers, ‘What is task-based language teaching, and how do I make it work?’ This book is an attempt to answer both parts of that question. As with *Designing Tasks*, the purpose of the book is to provide teachers with a practical introduction to task-based language teaching along with the theoretical and empirical bases that support it.

Introduction

In addition to a complete revamping and updating of principles and ideas from *Designing Tasks*, I felt four areas deserved their own chapter-length treatment. These were:

- A model for task-based language teaching (TBLT) that articulated the relationship between tasks and other curricular elements.
- The empirical basis for TBLT.
- The place of a focus on form in TBLT.
- Assessing TBLT.

In order to accommodate these new chapters, chapters in the original book had to be dropped, condensed or otherwise rearranged. The structure of the present book is described below.

The structure of the book

Chapter 1 defines the notion of ‘task’ and illustrates the ways in which it will be used. The relationship between task-based language teaching and communicative language teaching is discussed and set within a broader curriculum framework. Ideological assumptions about the nature of language pedagogy inherent in TBLT are also discussed. In the final part of the chapter I look at the impact of the concept of TBLT on both the learner and on institutional policy and practice.

The first section of Chapter 2 introduces a framework for TBLT. The framework defines and exemplifies the key elements in the model that underlies the rest of the book. The sections that follow outline a procedure for creating an integrated syllabus around the concept of the pedagogic task and discuss issues of lesson planning and materials design. The final section summarises the key principles underpinning TBLT.

Chapter 3 looks at the key elements that constitute a task, namely, task goals, input and procedures. The chapter also deals with teacher and learner roles as well as the settings for TBLT.

One notable aspect of TBLT has been an explosion in the amount of research stimulated by the subject. The purpose of Chapter 4 is to provide a summary of this research. One area of particular interest is that of task difficulty. The research covered here provides a basis for the subsequent discussion of task grading.

The place of a focus on form in TBLT remains controversial. In Chapter 5, I examine the nature of the controversy, and spell out where I see a focus on form fitting in to a task-based instructional cycle.

Chapter 6 looks at issues and difficulties associated with the grading of tasks as well as at options for sequencing and integrating tasks into lessons or units of work. This chapter contains updated material from

Introduction

Chapters 5 and 6 of the original volume, as well as a considerable amount of new content.

Task-based language teaching presents challenges in all areas of the curriculum. This is particularly true for assessment, which is coming under increasing scrutiny as it is realized that TBLT cannot be assessed according to traditional methods. In Chapter 7, I look at key concepts, issues and controversies in assessment and relate these to TBLT.

Chapter 8 is devoted to tasks and teacher development. The purpose of this chapter is to look at task construction and evaluation from the perspective of the teacher, and to provide suggestions for introducing tasks in teacher development workshops.

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