

Task-Based Language Teaching

Task-based language teaching (TBLT) is an approach that differs from traditional approaches by emphasizing the importance of engaging learners' natural abilities for acquiring language incidentally through the performance of tasks that draw learners' attention to form. Drawing on the multiple perspectives and expertise of five leading authorities in the field, this book provides a comprehensive and balanced account of TBLT. Split into five parts, the book provides an historical account of the development of TBLT and introduces the key issues facing the area. A number of different theoretical perspectives that have informed TBLT are presented, followed by a discussion on key pedagogic aspects – syllabus design, the methodology of a task-based lesson and task-based assessment. The final parts consider the research that has investigated the effectiveness of TBLT, address critiques and suggest directions for future research. TBLT is now mandated by many educational authorities throughout the world and this book serves as a core source of information for researchers, teachers and students.

Rod Ellis is a research professor in the School of Education, Curtin University in Perth, Australia, as well as a visiting professor at Shanghai International Studies University and an emeritus distinguished professor of the University of Auckland. His most recent publication is *Reflections on Task-Based Language Teaching* (2018).

Peter Skehan is an honorary research fellow at Birkbeck College, University of London. His most recent publications include *Processing Perspectives on Task Performance* (2014) and *Second Language Task-Based Performance* (2018).

Shaofeng Li is an associate professor of second and foreign language education at Florida State University and an honorary professor at Zhengzhou University and Guangdong University of Foreign Studies. His main research interests include TBLT, language aptitude, working memory and form-focused instruction.

Natsuko Shintani is a professor in the Faculty of Foreign Language Studies, Kansai University. Her work has been published in leading journals and she is author of *Input-Based Tasks in Foreign Language Instruction for Young Learners* (2016).

Craig Lambert is an associate professor of applied linguistics and TESOL at Curtin University in Perth, Australia. His research on TBLT has appeared in leading journals and he is author of *Referent Similarity and Nominal Syntax in TBLT* (2019).

THE CAMBRIDGE APPLIED LINGUISTICS SERIES

The authority on cutting-edge Applied Linguistics research

Series Editors 2007–present: Carol A. Chapelle and Susan Hunston
 1988–2007: Michael H. Long and Jack C. Richards

For a complete list of titles please visit: www.cambridge.org

Recent Titles in This Series:

Feedback in Second Language Writing

Contexts and Issues

Edited by Ken Hyland and Fiona Hyland

Language and Television Series

A Linguistic Approach to TV Dialogue

Monika Bednarek

Intelligibility, Oral Communication, and the Teaching of Pronunciation

John M. Levis

Multilingual Education

Between Language Learning and Translanguaging

Edited by Jason Cenoz and Dirk Gorter

Learning Vocabulary in Another Language

2nd Edition

I. S. P. Nation

Narrative Research in Applied Linguistics

Edited by Gary Barkhuizen

Teacher Research in Language Teaching

A Critical Analysis

Simon Borg

Figurative Language, Genre and Register

Alice Deignan, Jeannette Littlemore and Elena Semino

Exploring ELF

Academic English Shaped by Non-native Speakers

Anna Mauranen

Genres across the Disciplines

Student Writing in Higher Education

Hilary Nesi and Sheena Gardner

Disciplinary Identities

Individuality and Community in Academic Discourse

Ken Hyland

Replication Research in Applied Linguistics

Edited by Graeme Porte

The Language of Business Meetings

Michael Handford

Reading in a Second Language

Moving from Theory to Practice

William Grabe

Modelling and Assessing Vocabulary Knowledge

Edited by Helmut Daller, James Milton and Jeanine Treffers-Daller

Practice in a Second Language

Perspectives from Applied Linguistics and Cognitive Psychology

Edited by Robert M. DeKeyser

Task-Based Language Education

From Theory to Practice

Edited by Kris van den Branden

Second Language Needs Analysis

Edited by Michael H. Long

Insights into Second Language Reading

A Cross-Linguistic Approach

Keiko Koda

Research Genres

Exploration and Applications

John M. Swales

Critical Pedagogies and Language Learning

Edited by Bonny Norton and Kelleen Toohy

Exploring the Dynamics of Second Language Writing

Edited by Barbara Kroll

Understanding Expertise in Teaching

Case Studies of Second Language Teachers

Amy B. M. Tsui

Criterion-Referenced Language Testing

James Dean Brown and Thom Hudson

Corpora in Applied Linguistics

Susan Hunston

Pragmatics in Language Teaching

Edited by Kenneth R. Rose and Gabriele Kasper

Cognition and Second Language Instruction

Edited by Peter Robinson

Research Perspectives on English for Academic Purposes

Edited by John Flowerdew and Matthew Peacock

Computer Applications in Second Language Acquisition

Foundations for Teaching, Testing and Research

Carol A. Chapelle

Task-Based Language Teaching

Theory and Practice

Rod Ellis

Curtin University, Perth

Peter Skehan

Birkbeck, University of London

Shaofeng Li

Florida State University, Tallahassee

Natsuko Shintani

Kansai University, Osaka

Craig Lambert

Curtin University, Perth



CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge University Press
978-1-108-49408-3 — Task-Based Language Teaching
Rod Ellis , Peter Skehan , Shaofeng Li , Natsuko Shintani , Craig Lambert
Frontmatter
[More Information](#)

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

University Printing House, Cambridge CB2 8BS, United Kingdom
One Liberty Plaza, 20th Floor, New York, NY 10006, USA
477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia
314–321, 3rd Floor, Plot 3, Splendor Forum, Jasola District Centre,
New Delhi – 110025, India
79 Anson Road, #06–04/06, Singapore 079906

Cambridge University Press is part of the University of Cambridge.

It furthers the University's mission by disseminating knowledge in the pursuit of education, learning, and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

www.cambridge.org
Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781108494083
DOI: 10.1017/9781108643689

© Rod Ellis, Peter Skehan, Shaofeng Li, Natsuko Shintani and Craig Lambert 2020

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements, no reproduction of any part may take place without the written permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 2020

Printed in the United Kingdom by TJ International Ltd, Padstow Cornwall

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library.

ISBN 978-1-108-49408-3 Hardback
ISBN 978-1-108-71389-4 Paperback

Cambridge University Press has no responsibility for the persistence or accuracy of URLs for external or third-party internet websites referred to in this publication and does not guarantee that any content on such websites is, or will remain, accurate or appropriate.

Contents

<i>List of Figures</i>	page vii
<i>List of Tables</i>	viii
<i>Series Editors' Preface</i>	xi
<i>Authors' Preface</i>	xiii
PART I INTRODUCTION	1
1 <i>The Pedagogic Background to Task-Based Language Teaching</i>	3
PART II THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES	27
2 <i>Cognitive-Interactionist Perspectives</i>	29
3 <i>Psycholinguistic Perspectives</i>	64
4 <i>Sociocultural Perspectives</i>	103
5 <i>Psychological Perspectives</i>	129
6 <i>Educational Perspectives</i>	155
PART III PEDAGOGICAL PERSPECTIVES	175
7 <i>Task-Based Syllabus Design</i>	179
8 <i>Methodology of Task-Based Language Teaching</i>	208
9 <i>Task-Based Testing and Assessment</i>	241
PART IV INVESTIGATING TASK-BASED PROGRAMMES	281
10 <i>Comparative Method Studies</i>	283
11 <i>Evaluating Task-Based Language Teaching</i>	303

vi *Contents*

PART V MOVING FORWARD	331
12 <i>Responding to the Critics of Task-Based Language Teaching</i>	333
13 <i>Questions, Challenges and the Future</i>	353
<i>Endnotes</i>	371
<i>References</i>	374
<i>Index</i>	412

Figures

1.1	Outline of the task-based learning framework (based on Willis 1996, p. 52)	<i>page</i> 15
2.1	Cognitive-interactionist model informing TBLT	31
2.2	Model of non-understanding routines (Varonis and Gass 1985)	35
2.3	The explicit/implicit continuum (slightly modified from Lyster and Saito 2010, p. 278)	53
4.1	Activity theory model (Engeström 1999)	110
6.1	Maehr's theory of personal investment (from Lambert 1998)	161
9.1	An outline model for task-based testing	245
11.1	Types of evaluation	308

Tables

1.1	A typology of task types (based on Prabhu 1987, pp. 46–7)	<i>page 8</i>
1.2	Criteria for defining a task-as-workplan (based on Ellis and Shintani 2014)	10
1.3	Features of different tasks	11
1.4	TBLT and CLT/CLIL compared (based on Ortega 2015, p. 104)	18
2.1	Indicator types in corrective feedback (based on Lyster and Ranta 1997)	36
2.2	Task design and implementation variables investigated in interaction studies	40
3.1	Potential sequences in the SSARC model	83
3.2	A comparison between the LAC approach and the CH/SSARC model	87
3.3	Malicka and Sasayama’s analysis of CH-linked variables	92
4.1	Basic constructs in sociocultural SLA	106
6.1	Instruction task discourse based on LGC	165
6.2	Narrative task discourse based on LGC	166
6.3	Opinion task discourse based on LGC	166
6.4	Strengths of LGC and TGC tasks within the L2 curriculum	168
7.1	Prabhu’s criteria for task sequencing	183
7.2	Ellis’ criteria for task sequencing (Ellis 2003)	198
8.1	Summary of pre-task methodological options	211
8.2	Summary of within-task methodological options	223
8.3	Summary of post-task methodological options	229
8.4	Participatory structure of task-based interaction	236
9.1	Overview of meta-analytic results	248
9.2	Level of difficulty linked to Conceptualizer and Formulator influences	263
10.1	‘Need’, ‘search’ and ‘evaluation’ in PPP and TBLT (Shintani 2015, p. 58)	294

	<i>List of Tables</i>	ix
10.2	General programme comparisons between TBLT and PPP	296
10.3	Focused comparison studies	298
11.1	Factors determining the success of innovations (from Ellis 1997, p. 29)	305
11.2	A selection of evaluations of TBLT programmes	310
12.1	The characteristics of TBLT according to Swan (2005a)	334
12.2	Critiques of TBLT	352

Series Editors' Preface

Task-based language teaching (TBLT) has been enormously influential since the 1980s, when it inspired a generation of language teachers seeking to engage productively with Communicative Language Teaching. Since then it has developed as an approach to methodology, assessment and syllabus design. As TBLT has grown in popularity it has also diversified, incorporating a number of theoretical stances towards how languages are learnt.

This book provides a substantial overview of the current position of TBLT in the language-teaching world. It covers both pedagogic and research perspectives, arguing that the two activities are complementary and mutually supportive. In terms of research, the book provides a detailed account of the theoretical approaches that underpin TBLT. Those theories relate to a number of perspectives: cognitive, psycholinguistic, sociocultural, psychological and educational. Under those headings, the book includes comprehensive and authoritative assessments of research into such issues as: the roles of interaction and feedback; measures of complexity, accuracy and fluency; the importance of classroom phenomena such as scaffolding and individual variables such as motivation; the relation between psychological variables and language learning; and the intersection between educational practice in general and language teaching in particular.

The pedagogic chapters are more practically oriented, but also draw extensively on research into the effectiveness of TBLT. They provide a wealth of information on how to design a task-based course, what methods are used in such courses and why, and how task-based learning can and should be assessed. What comes across strongly is the degree of variation within TBLT: there is no one syllabus design and no one methodology that takes precedence over others. The authors argue convincingly that this is a positive feature of TBLT, in that it can be adapted to suit a variety of contexts and learning styles. In short, the authors do not present TBLT as an approach wherein a centre imposes action on a periphery. Rather, the principles that lie behind TBLT are an inspiration for many kinds of classroom and assessment contexts.

xii *Series Editors' Preface*

The final part of the book presents an honest appraisal of task-based language teaching in relation to language teaching more generally. Research that addresses this issue is summarized and a balanced conclusion presented. TBLT is not a 'magic bullet', and research still needs to be undertaken to establish the extent of its efficacy. The chapters in this part indicate how this research can be done, and what challenges are involved in carrying it out. To date, the effectiveness of TBLT is apparent in situations in which it is the dominant paradigm and also in those where it exerts an influence on teaching and assessment approaches that prioritize attention to meaning and interaction.

The authors present TBLT as a major development in language teaching, and a crucial part of current pedagogic practice. The message of this book is that in TBLT research and practice form a continuous whole. It is a welcome addition to the series.

Authors' Preface

Interest in task-based language teaching (TBLT) has burgeoned over the last thirty years. It can now be considered one of the mainstream approaches to teaching second/foreign languages as reflected in the growing number of publications intended for teachers (e.g. Willis 1996; Willis and Willis 2007; Ellis 2018a) and an expansive body of research that has investigated the effect of task design and implementation variables on the performance of tasks and on L2 acquisition (e.g. Ellis 2003; Van den Branden, Bygate and Norris 2009; Robinson 2011; Long 2015; Skehan 2018).

This book aims to provide a comprehensive survey of the pedagogic and the research literature. It has three aims:

1. The general aim is to provide a broad-based and accessible state-of-the-art account of TBLT by considering the pedagogical aspects of this approach and by reviewing relevant theories and research that have informed the design and implementation of task-based courses. While these two perspectives are inter-related they have led to somewhat different justifications for designing and implementing task-based courses.
2. The second aim is to examine the effectiveness of TBLT in relation to other mainstream approaches to language teaching. One of the criticisms levelled at TBLT is that there is insufficient evidence to demonstrate that TBLT is more effective in developing L2 learners' communicative abilities than other more traditional approaches. A number of comparative method and evaluation studies enable us to examine the validity of this criticism and to demonstrate that TBLT is effective.
3. The third aim is to examine the criticisms of TBLT that have been advanced by advocates of traditional language teaching and then to identify a number of 'real' issues that need to be addressed. To this end, we will consider the problems that teachers face in introducing TBLT into their classrooms and how these problems can be addressed.

xiv *Authors' Preface*

There are two general principles that inform the positions we have taken in the book:

1. Task-based pedagogy and task-based research are complementary. There is perhaps no area of language teaching where pedagogy and research have been so closely intertwined. The practice of TBLT in real classrooms has raised questions that are not just important for teachers but also of interest to researchers. For example, teachers have expressed concern about learners' use of their first language (L1) when they are performing speaking tasks while researchers have investigated specific ways in which the use of L1 can facilitate both the performance of a task and second language (L2) learning. Research-directed activity has also fed into the practice of teaching. For example, the usefulness of having learners plan before they perform a task has been clearly established through the research that has investigated pre-task planning. As Pica (1997) noted teachers, methodologists and researchers have a shared interest in the use communication tasks. This shared interest is what informs the book.
2. We view TBLT as an approach, not a method. That is, TBLT is based on a set of general principles that inform how a language is best taught and learned but it is not prescriptive of either how to design a task-based course or how to implement tasks in the classroom. Nor is the approach monolithic. There are different versions of the approach. We acknowledge these differences and consider how TBLT can be adapted to take account of the needs of teachers and learners in different instructional contexts. This acknowledgement of the diversity in TBLT is a key feature of the book that distinguishes it from the narrower, more circumscribed view of TBLT found in some other publications.

Each part of the book approaches TBLT from a different angle while always maintaining the interface between pedagogical concerns and research and acknowledging the diversity within TBLT. Part I provides the general background to TBLT and serves as a foundation for subsequent parts. Part II focuses on the theories and research that have informed task-based research. It examines a number of different perspectives by addressing the theoretical constructs that underlie each perspective and the research methodologies that have been utilized in investigating them. In Part III the focus switches to pedagogy, drawing on relevant research and emphasizing the diversity in TBLT. It addresses the principles that inform the selection and sequencing of tasks in a task-based course, the methodological principles that

underlie proposals for implementing a task in the classroom, and the kinds of assessment that are compatible with TBLT. Part IV looks at the research that has investigated complete TBLT courses. It considers whether the claim that TBLT is more effective than traditional, structural approaches to language teaching is justified and reports on evaluation studies that have examined the viability of introducing TBLT in different instructional contexts. Part V concludes the book by first examining the criticisms of TBLT that have been made and suggesting the lines of research needed to further understanding of the relationship between tasks and learning. Finally, we return to considering how task-based research and task-based teaching can most profitably interface.

The primary readers of this book will be researchers, postgraduate students and teachers who are interested in using TBLT in their classrooms. It seeks to be accessible to readers who are not familiar with the research and theory that inform TBLT but it is not a 'how-to-do-it' book. Our aim is to survey the field in order to provide a wealth of information that can inform the design of task-based courses, the planning of task-based lessons, the assessment of learning and the evaluation of courses.