



## TASK BASED LANGUAGE LEARNING

**Dr. Rajendrakumar Patil**

Principal Sinhgad College of Education,  
Training and Research, Ambegaon Pune 41. (MS)  
Email drpatilrt@gmail.com

### Introduction

#### Task Based Language Learning

Task Based Language Learning (TBLT) is an approach which is based on the use of tasks as the core unit of planning and instruction in language teaching. Some of the proponents of Task Based Language (TBLT) present TBLT as a logical development Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). Tasks are proposed as vehicles for applying the principles of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT).

#### Assumptions of Task Based Language Learning (TBLT)

Focus is on process rather than product. Basic elements are purposeful activities and tasks that emphasize communication and meaning. Learners learn language by interacting communicatively and purposefully while engaged in the activities and tasks. Activities and tasks can be either those that learners might need to achieve in real life: those that have pedagogical purpose specific to the classroom. Activities and tasks of a task based syllabus are sequenced according to difficulty. The difficulty of a task depends on a range of factors including the previous experience of the learner, the complexity of a task, the language required to undertake the task and the degree of support available.

#### Task

A task is an activity or goal that is carried out using language such as finding solutions to a puzzle, reading a map and giving directions, making a telephone call, writing a letter or reading a set of instructions and assembling a toy. (Richards & Rodgers)

Tasks are activities which have meaning as their primary focus. Success in tasks is evaluated in terms of achievement of an outcome, and tasks generally bear a resemblance to real life language use. So task based instruction takes a fairly strong view of communicative language teaching (Skehan)

The communicative task is a piece of classroom work which involves learners in comprehending, manipulating, producing or interacting in the target language while their attention is principally focused on meaning rather than the form. The task should also have completeness being able to stand alone as a communicative act in its own right. (Nunan)

Task based language teaching proposes the notion of task as a central unit of planning and teaching.

#### Approach

#### Theory of Language

Task based language teaching (TBLT) is motivated by a theory of learning. There are several assumptions about the nature of language can be said to underlie approaches to TBLT.

- Language is primarily a means of making meaning



Task based language teaching (TBLT) emphasizes the central role of meaning in language use. “Meaning is primary the assessment of the task is in terms of outcome.” (Skehan)

- Multiple models of language inform TBI

TBI is not linked to a single model of language but rather draws on all three models of language theory.

- Lexical units are central in language use and language learning.

Vocabulary has been considered to play more central role in second language learning than was traditionally assumed. Vocabulary is here used to include the consideration of lexical phrases, sentence stem, prefabricated routines, collocations and not only words as units of linguistic lexical analysis and language pedagogy.

- Conversation is the central focus of language and the keystone of language acquisition.

The majority of tasks that are proposed within TBLT involve conversation.

### **Theory of Learning**

Some traditional principles play a central role in TBLT theory.

- Tasks provide both the input and output processing necessary for language acquisition.

Tasks are believed to foster processes of negotiation, modification, rephrasing and experimentation that are at the heart of second language learning. This view is part of a more general focus on the critical importance of conversation in language acquisition. The task is pivot point for stimulation of input output practice, negotiation of meaning and transactionally focused conversation.

- Task activity and achievement are motivational.

Tasks are always said to improve learner motivation and therefore promote learning. This is because they require the learners to use authentic language, they have well defined dimensions and closure, they are varied in format and operation, they typical include physical activity, they involve partnership and collaboration, they may call on the learner’s past experience and they tolerate and encourage a variety of communication styles.

- Learning difficulty can be negotiated and fine tuned for particular pedagogical purposes.

Task can be designed to facilitate the use and learning of particular aspect of language. There is trade off between cognitive processing focus on form in designing or selecting tasks.

### **Syllabus**

A TBLT syllabus specifies the the tasks that should be carried out by learner within a progamme. Nunan suggested that a syllabus might specify two types of tasks:

1. Real world tasks which are designed to practice or rehearse those tasks that are found to be important in a needs analysis and turn out to be important and useful in the real world.
2. Pedagogical tasks which have a psycholinguistic basis but tasks do not necessarily reflect real world.



In the Bangalore Project both types of tasks were used as given below the list of first ten task types:

1. Diagrams and formation e.g. naming parts of diagrams
2. Drawing e.g. drawing geometrical figures
3. Clock faces e.g. positioning hands on a clock to show a given time
4. Monthly calendar e.g. calculating duration in days and weeks in the context of travel, leave
5. Maps e.g. constructing a floor plan of a house from a description
6. School timetables e.g. constructing timetables
7. Programmes and itineraries e.g. constructing itineraries from description of travel
8. Train timetables e.g. selecting trains appropriate to given needs
9. Age and year of birth e.g. working out year of birth from age
10. Money e.g. deciding on quantities to be bought given the money available.

Willis proposes six types of tasks:

1. Listing
2. Ordering and sorting
3. Comparing
4. Problem solving
5. Sharing personal experiences
6. Creative tasks

Pica, Kanagy and Falodun classify tasks according to the type of interaction

1. Jigsaw tasks
2. Information gap tasks
3. Problem solving tasks
4. Decision making tasks
5. Opinion exchange tasks

#### **Characteristics of tasks**

1. One way or two way tasks: whether the task involves a one way exchange of information or two way exchange.
2. Convergent or divergent: whether the students achieve a common goal or several different goals.
3. Collaborative or competitive: whether the students collaborate to carry out a task or compete with each other on a task.
4. Single or multiple outcome:
5. Concrete or abstract language
6. Simple or complex processing
7. Simple or complex language
8. Reality based or not reality based

#### **Learner's role**

Group participant, monitor, risk taker, innovator

#### **Teacher's role**

Selector and sequencer of tasks, preparing learners for tasks, consciousness raising

**Instructional material**

- Pedagogic material  
Instructional materials play an important role in TBLT because it is dependent on a sufficient supply of appropriate classroom tasks.
- Media  
Newspapers, Television, Internet

**Procedure**

The way in which task activities are designed into an instructional bloc can be seen from the following example by Richards.

- Basic social survival transaction
- Face to face informal conversations
- Telephone conversation
- Interviews on the campus
- Service encounters

A set of role play activities was developed focusing on situations students would encounter in the community and transactions they would have to carry out in English. The following format was developed for each role-play task.

**Pre task activities**

1. Learner – take part in preliminary activities, introduces the topic and situation, role play activities like brainstorming, ranking exercises, problem solving tasks.
2. Read dialogue on a related topic, perform in the role play task, provide examples

**Task activity**

Learners – perform role play, work in pairs, talk and negotiate.

**Post task activity**

Learners – listens to recordings of native speakers, imitate

**Conclusions**

TBLT offers a different rationale for the use of tasks as well as different criteria for the design and use of tasks. Many aspects of TBLT yet to be justified such as proposed schemes of task types, task sequencing and evaluation of task performance.

**References**

1. Richards, J C , T S Rodgers (2009) *Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
2. [Http://en.wikipedia.org/TBLL](http://en.wikipedia.org/TBLL)