

TBLT | DIFFERENT VERSIONS

Task-based language teaching (TBLT) is an approach to language teaching that views tasks as the central units of instruction, where lessons include activities to scaffold the tasks (pre-task), the tasks themselves (main task), and activities to complement those tasks (post-task). Tasks are generally defined as activities in which learners engage in language use to convey a message in order to achieve a communicative outcome (i.e. non-linguistic).

There are different views and approaches to TBLT. These approaches are often defined as '*strong*' and '*weak*' forms of TBLT, with the former advocating a syllabus exclusively made of tasks (*Task-based*) and the latter supporting a syllabus in which tasks can be the carriers of pre-determined language items (*Task-supported*).

The following is an attempt to present different versions of TBLT and their corresponding possible pedagogic procedures for implementation.

	STRONG (TASK-BASED)			WEAK (TASK-SUPPORTED)		
	Prabhu (1987)	Long (1985; 1991; 2014)	Skehan (1998; 2011, 2018)	Willis (& Willis) (1996, 2004, 2007)	Ellis (2003, 2017, 2018)	Nunan (2004)
Natural language use ¹	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Type of tasks ²	Pedagogic input and output tasks	Primarily real-world output tasks	Pedagogic output tasks	Real-world and pedagogic input and output tasks	Real-world and pedagogic input and output tasks	Real-world and pedagogic input and output tasks
Linguistic focus ³	Unfocused	Unfocused	Unfocused	Primarily unfocused	Focused and unfocused	Primarily focused
Approach ⁴	Task-based	Task-based	Task-based	Primarily task-based	Task-based Task-supported	Primarily task-supported
Pre-task linguistic support ⁵	No	Primarily no	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Focus on form ⁶	In the pre-task and main task phases (implicit / incidental / pre-emptive / reactive)	In the main task phase (primarily implicit / reactive)	Primarily in the pre-task phase (pre-emptive) but also in the post-task phase (reactive)	In the pre-task and post-task phases (pre-emptive / reactive)	In the pre-task, main task and post-task phases (pre-emptive / reactive)	In the pre-task, main task and post-task phases (pre-emptive / reactive)
Learner-centeredness ⁷	No (but possible)	Yes / No	Yes	Yes / No	Yes / No	Yes / No
Rejection of traditional approaches ⁸	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No

¹Language is treated as a medium for communication and not as an object of study. The focus of a task is on conveying and negotiating meaning, rather than studying de-contextualized linguistic forms and manipulating them.

²*Real-world tasks*: input and output tasks that aim at authentic situations and interactions that learners may encounter in real life (e.g. making a hotel booking). / *Pedagogic tasks*: input and output tasks that aim at activating specific linguistic features in authentic interactions, but do not necessarily reflect real-life situations (e.g. spot the difference).

³*Focused tasks*: tasks that are designed with a specific language focus in mind (e.g. a grammatical item). / *Unfocused tasks*: tasks that are not designed with a specific language focus in mind (e.g. a grammatical item). However, different unfocused tasks will inevitably 'invite' the use of a selection of different linguistic features.

⁴*Task-based* refers to an approach whose syllabus is entirely based on unfocused tasks (i.e. there is no linguistic specification); *Task-supported* refers to an approach whose syllabus is based on focused tasks (i.e. there is a linguistic specification).

⁵In the pre-task phase of the lesson, the teacher draws the learners' attention to 'useful' linguistic features (generally lexical rather than grammatical) that learners may need later when performing the task.

⁶The teacher draws the learners' attention, implicitly or explicitly, to linguistic features that may help learners improve the way they convey or negotiate meaning. This can take place in the pre-task, task or post-task phase of the lesson.

⁷Classroom interaction in which learners perform tasks in pairs or small groups. This is in contrast to teacher-centered interaction in which the teacher conducts tasks in teacher-student(s) mode.

⁸Rejection of grammar-translation and presentation-practice-production models.

TBLT Framework | PRABHU

Overview

Natural language use	Yes	Pre-task linguistic support	No
Type of tasks	Pedagogic input and output tasks	Focus on form	In the pre-task and main task phases (implicit / incidental / pre-emptive / reactive)
Linguistic focus	Unfocused	Learner-centeredness	No (but possible)
Approach	Task-based	Rejection of traditional approaches	Yes

Definition of task

"[A task is] 'an activity which required learners to arrive at an outcome from given information through some process of thought, and which allowed teachers to control and regulate that process.'" (Prabhu, 1987: 24)

Framework and pedagogic procedures

PRE-TASK	MAIN TASK	POST-TASK
PRELIMINARY PUBLIC TASK (via teacher-led whole-class dialogic instruction and elicitation) - Orientate learners to the pre-task by establishing/reviewing some essential information (e.g. numbers, times, locations, etc.) PUBLIC TASK (via teacher-led whole-class dialogic instruction and elicitation) - Perform the same or similar main task adjusting (reactively) the complexity of the task (i.e. breaking it down into smaller steps) and input (i.e. spontaneous, not pre-selected) according to the learners' abilities and/or responses to the task. This public task establishes the outcome(s) of the main task and serves as demonstration / preparation for the main task (to be performed individually). - Reactively provide incidental implicit language feedback and support (e.g. via teacher- or learner-initiated re-formulation and/or correction) to facilitate the completion of the task Task types - Information-gap activity (preferably): transfer of given information from one person to another - Reasoning-gap activity: derive some new information from given information through processes of inference, deduction, practical reasoning, or a perception of relationships or patterns - Opinion-gap activity: identify and articulate a personal preference, feeling, or attitude in response to a given situation	MAIN TASK (via learner-led individual written productions) - Orientate learners to the main task by reviewing some essential information covered in the pre-task phase - Perform the main task (independently on a worksheet. Task instructions and questions may be provided on a worksheet or orally by the teacher) - Reactively provide incidental implicit language-related feedback and support (e.g. via teacher- or learner-initiated re-formulation and/or correction) to facilitate the completion of the task Task types - Information-gap activity - Reasoning-gap activity (preferably) - Opinion-gap activity Sample tasks - Naming parts of a diagram - Finding, naming, or describing specific locations on a map - Constructing timetables - Constructing events from narrative accounts - Filling in forms - Interpreting information presented in tables - Deciding on choices which best meet given needs - Listening to stories and completing them with appropriate solutions - Identifying factual inconsistencies in given narrative or descriptive accounts Full list in: Prabhu (1987: 140-145)	MARKING / EVALUATION - Mark productions and provide feedback on outcome(s) and success (i.e. non-language-related) - Return productions (and compare results with other learners if desired)

Adapted from: Prabhu (1987)

TBLT Framework | LONG

Overview

Natural language use	Yes	Pre-task linguistic support	Primarily no
Type of tasks	Primarily real-world output tasks	Focus on form	In the main task phase (primarily implicit / reactive)
Linguistic focus	Unfocused	Learner-centeredness	Yes / No
Approach	Task-based	Rejection of traditional approaches	Yes

Definition of task

"A task is a piece of work undertaken for oneself or for others, freely or for some reward. Thus, examples of tasks include painting a fence, dressing a child, filling out a form, buying a pair of shoes, making an airline reservation, borrowing a library book, taking a driving test, typing a letter, weighing a patient, sorting letters, taking a hotel reservation, writing a check, finding a street destination, and helping someone across a road. In other words, by "task" is meant the hundred and one things people do in everyday life, at work, at play, and in between. "Tasks" are the things people will tell you they do if you ask them and they are not applied linguists." (Long, 1985: 89)

Framework and pedagogic procedures

PRE-TASK	MAIN TASK	POST-TASK
PRE-TASK ACTIVITIES - Define the topic and the task and create and/or revise content-knowledge about the task - Introduce and understand the main task (also via video, audio, teacher- or learner-led demonstration of the task) - Provide elaborate (i.e. modified to increase comprehension but not linguistically simplified) input (oral or written) via a model performing the same or similar task, or text providing information, to scaffold the task. Input can be enhanced to increase salience of language considered important for the main task that may be incidentally (less often intentionally) noticed/detected. Comprehension-based activities can be incorporated. - Research and gather content-related information necessary for the main task - Prepare materials necessary for the main task (e.g. survey questions) - Plan how to perform the main task - Perform similar tasks (increasing in difficulty - these can be teacher-led input-based tasks and learner-led mini-tasks in pairs, groups or whole-class mode) leading to the main task - Provide primarily implicit reactive language-related input and feedback	MAIN TASK - Perform the main task - Provide primarily implicit reactive language-related corrective feedback	EVALUATION - Content-related feedback - Language-related feedback ASSESSMENT/EXIT TASK - Perform the same or similar main task for assessment purposes

Adapted from: Long (1985; 1991; 2015) and Long et al. (2003)

TBLT Framework | SKEHAN

Overview

Natural language use	Yes	Pre-task linguistic support	No
Type of tasks	Pedagogic output tasks	Focus on form	Primarily in the pre-task phase (pre-emptive) but also in the post-task phase (reactive)
Linguistic focus	Unfocused	Learner-centeredness	Yes
Approach	Task-based	Rejection of traditional approaches	Yes

Definition of task

"[A task is] 'an activity in which: meaning is primary; there is some communication problem to solve; there is some sort of relationship to comparable real-world activities; task completion has some priority; the assessment of the task is in terms of outcome. (...) [Tasks] do not give learners other people's meaning to regurgitate; are not concerned with language display; are not conformity-oriented; are not practice-oriented; do not embed language into materials so that specific structures can be focused upon.'" (Skehan, 1998: 95)

Framework and pedagogic procedures

PRE-TASK	MAIN TASK	POST-TASK
PRE-EMPTIVE ACTIVITIES - Create or revise schematic knowledge (e.g. topic, task type, discourse macro-features, etc.) about the main task (e.g. prediction, mind maps, brainstorming, etc.) - Process a text (oral or written) for content and/or meaning to introduce and facilitate the main task - Observe and/or examine a model (oral or written) of others performing the same or a similar task - Carry out activities to implicitly or explicitly highlight, learn, recall useful language for the main task - Carry out activities to practice useful language for the main task - Plan and evaluate content-related features needed to perform the main task (e.g. topics, ideas, etc.) - Plan and evaluate language-related features needed to perform the main task (e.g. lexis, grammar, etc.) - Perform the same or similar task	MAIN TASK - Remind learners of language accuracy and complexity - Inform learners of post-task activities - Perform the main task - No intervention or feedback TASK FACTORS (influencing difficulty) Code complexity - Complexity and range of language expected/needed for the task (learners can be informed immediately before the task if accuracy is required, or a specific structure is to be used) Cognitive complexity - Familiarity with the task in relation to schematic knowledge of topic, task type, discourse macro-features, etc. - Intellectual demands in relation to the content of the task (e.g. describing your room - easy Vs describing a manufacturing process - difficult). This also relates to the introduction of a 'surprise element' midway while performing the task (e.g. learner plan the menu for a dinner party. In the middle of the task they are told that some of the guests are vegetarian) Communicative pressure - Time available to complete the task - Language skills to be mobilized (listening/speaking – more pressure Vs reading/writing – less pressure) - Number of participants in the task, number of relationships, etc. - Emphasis on completing the task correctly (e.g. giving an approximate description Vs giving an exact description) - Amount of control over the task (e.g. deciding goals, asking for repetitions, asking for clarifications, etc.)	POST-TASK ACTIVITIES 1 - Perform the same task publicly (i.e. in front of the teacher, a larger group of learners or a camera for later analysis) POST-TASK ACTIVITIES 2 - Repeat the same or similar main task - Carry out language-focused activities to exploit emergent and salient language with a focus on accuracy and complexity (e.g. transcribing the main task performance, clarifying an area of difficulty, practicing a language item, etc.)

Adapted from: Skehan (1998; 2011, 2018)

TBLT Framework | WILLIS (&WILLIS)

Overview

Natural language use	Yes	Pre-task linguistic support	Yes
Type of tasks	Real-world and pedagogic input and output tasks	Focus on form	In the pre-task and post-task phases (pre-emptive / reactive)
Linguistic focus	Primarily unfocused	Learner-centeredness	Yes / No
Approach	Primarily task-based	Rejection of traditional approaches	Yes

Definition of task

"[Tasks are] activities where the target language is used by the learner for a communicative purpose (goal) in order to achieve an outcome." (Willis, 1996)

"[A task can be determined] by asking the following questions. (...) 1. Does the activity engage learners' interests? 2. Is there a primary focus on meaning? 3. Is there an outcome? 4. Is success judged in terms of outcome? 5. Is completion a priority? 6. Does the activity relate to real world activities?" (Willis & Willis, 2007)

Framework and pedagogic procedures

PRE-TASK	MAIN TASK	POST-TASK
FACILITATING TASKS - Introduce, define and explore the topic - Create or revise content-knowledge about the main task (e.g. prediction, mind maps, brainstorming, etc.) - Process a text (oral or written) for content and/or meaning to introduce, facilitate and prime the main task - Observe and/or examine a model (oral or written) of others performing the same or a similar task - Carry out activities to highlight, learn, recall useful words and phrases - Carry out strategy-focused activities to raise awareness of ways to prevent and/or overcome possible communication problems - Understand main task instructions and intended outcome(s) - Prepare for and/or rehearse the main task - Perform the same or similar task (simplified version: mini-task)	MAIN TASK - Perform the main task - Do not provide language-related feedback or support ↓ PLANNING to REPORT - Prepare to report (including oral rehearsal or written draft) the outcome(s) of the main task to other members of the class - Provide language-related feedback and support ↓ REPORT - Report (orally or by displaying written work) the outcome(s) of the main task to other members of the class - Examine or observe a model (oral or written) of others performing the same or a similar task - Provide content- and language-related feedback	ANALYSIS - Carry out consciousness-raising activities to identify, process and expand specific language features that appeared in the model of others performing the same or a similar task - Process a text (oral or written) for content and/or meaning and/or language to expand and enrich the main task - Raise awareness of additional useful words, phrases, patterns, etc. - Provide language-related feedback PRACTICE - Carry out language-focused activities to practice and reinforce language (words, phrases, patterns, etc.) covered in the analysis stage - Practice other features occurring in the model text(s) or report stage REPETITION - Repeat the same or similar main task - Repeat the report

Adapted from: Willis (1996, 2004) and Willis & Willis (2007)

TBLT Framework | ELLIS

Overview

Natural language use	Yes	Pre-task linguistic support	Yes
Type of tasks	Real-world and pedagogic input and output tasks	Focus on form	In the pre-task, main task and post-task phases (pre-emptive / reactive)
Linguistic focus	Focused and unfocused	Learner-centeredness	Yes / No
Approach	Task-based / Task-supported	Rejection of traditional approaches	No

Definition of task

"[A task] must satisfy the following criteria: 1. The primary focus should be on 'meaning' (by which is meant that learners should be mainly concerned with processing the semantic and pragmatic meaning of utterances). 2. There should be some kind of 'gap' (i.e. a need to convey information, to express an opinion or to infer meaning). 3. Learners should largely have to rely on their own resources (linguistic and non-linguistic) in order to complete the activity. 4. There is a clearly defined outcome other than the use of language (i.e. the language serves as the means for achieving the outcome, not as an end in its own right)." (Ellis, 2009: 223)

Framework and pedagogic procedures

PRE-TASK	MAIN TASK	POST-TASK
FRAMING OPTIONS - Frame the main task, state purpose, utility and outcome(s) - Define the topic and the task and create and/or revise content-knowledge about the task (e.g. prediction, mind maps, brainstorming, etc.) - Understand main task instructions and intended outcome(s) MODEL OPTIONS - Observe and/or examine a model (oral or written) of others performing the same or a similar task PREPARATION OPTIONS - Carry out language-focused activities to raise awareness of useful lexical items and features (less often grammatical ones) - Carry out strategy-focused activities to raise awareness of ways to prevent and/or overcome possible communication problems PLANNING OPTIONS - Plan and evaluate content-related features needed to perform the main task (e.g. topics, ideas, etc.) - Plan and evaluate language-related features needed to perform the main task (e.g. lexis, grammar, etc.) SIMILAR TASK OPTIONS - Perform the same or similar task (also as a dialogic teacher-led activity)	PERFORMANCE OPTIONS (Handling the task) - Perform the main task under time pressure to promote fluency - Perform the main task without time pressure to promote accuracy - Perform the main task with access to the input data (e.g. referring to pictures, texts, etc.; using language embedded in the task such as in an information-gap activity; 'borrowing' language examined in pre-task stages) - Perform the main task without access to the input data (i.e. relying solely on personal resources) - Introduce a 'surprise element' midway while performing the task (e.g. learner plan the menu for a dinner party. In the middle of the task they are told that some of the guests are vegetarian) PROCESS OPTIONS (Handling generated discourse) - Learner- or teacher-initiated implicit language-related feedback and support (e.g. requests for clarification, reformulations, recasts of errors, etc.) - Learner- or teacher-initiated explicit language-related feedback and support (e.g. explicit corrections, questions or comments using metalanguage, queries about form, reminders of useful language, clarifications of rules or patterns, etc.)	REFLECTION OPTIONS - Report (orally or by displaying written work) the outcome(s) of the main task to the class - Reflect on own performance of the main task (e.g. challenges and successes in relation to fluency, complexity and accuracy; communication strategies; new language learnt; etc.) - Reflect on improvements needed in the performance of the task (e.g. fluency, complexity and accuracy; communication strategies; language needed; etc.) - Evaluate the task itself (e.g. learner interests, preferences, opinions, attitudes towards the task) LANGUAGE FOCUS OPTIONS - Carry out consciousness-raising activities to identify, analyze, process and expand specific language features which were incorrectly used or avoided - Carry out noticing activities such as analyzing the transcript or a recording of the performance to raise awareness of personal knowledge gaps - Carry out language-focused activities to practice and reinforce language (words, phrases, patterns, etc.) analyzed and/or used in previous stages REPETITION OPTIONS - Repeat the same or similar task (privately, with a different partner/group, publicly)

Adapted from: Ellis (2003, 2006, 2017, 2018)

"The term 'borrowing' (originally defined by Prabhu) is contrasted to 'reproduction': borrowing refers to 'taking over' a sample of language independently and voluntarily (i.e. the learner chooses to do so); reproduction refers to 'taking over' a sample of language arbitrarily because of 'some external authority' (e.g. the teacher imposes the use). Ellis states that 'borrowing is compatible with task-based learning but reproduction is not'. (Ellis, 2006: 27).

TBLT Framework | NUNAN

Overview

Natural language use	Yes	Pre-task linguistic support	Yes
Type of tasks	Real-world and pedagogic input and output tasks	Focus on form	In the pre-task, main task and post-task phases (pre-emptive / reactive)
Linguistic focus	Primarily focused	Learner-centeredness	Yes / No
Approach	Primarily task-supported	Rejection of traditional approaches	No

Definition of task

"[A task is] a piece of classroom work which involves learners in comprehending, manipulating, producing, or interacting in the target language while their attention is focused on mobilizing their grammatical knowledge in order to express meaning, and in which the intention is to convey meaning rather than to manipulate form. The task should also have a sense of completeness, being able to stand alone as a communicative act in its own right." (Nunan, 2004: 4)

Framework and pedagogic procedures

PRE-TASK	MAIN TASK	POST-TASK
SCHEMA BUILDING - Introduce the topic, set the context for the task, introduce key vocabulary and expressions for the task ENABLING SKILLS ↓ Language exercises: reproductive use (i.e. manipulation) of restricted language models provided by the teacher and the materials with a focus on lexical, phonological and/or grammatical systems - Observe and/or examine a model (oral or written) of others performing the same or a similar task - Provide restricted/controlled practice of key vocabulary, structures and functions for the main task - Provide intensive listening practice using a model of others performing the same or a similar task - Carry out language-focused activities to notice, analyze and/or practice useful lexical, structural and phonological items and features needed for the main task Communicative activities: reproductive use (i.e. manipulation) of restricted language models provided by the teacher and the materials with a focus on meaningful communication - Carry out pair or group work activities which allow for genuine information exchange (e.g. information-gap) in preparation for the main task	PEDAGOGICAL TASKS - Rehearsal tasks: perform a main task which replicates authentic out-of-the classroom situations and interactions that learners may encounter in real life - Activation tasks: perform a main task which activates emerging language skills in authentic interactions, but do not necessarily reflect real-life situations	DEBRIEFING TASKS - Provide content- and language-related feedback - Reflect on learning experience and personal development

Adapted from: Nunan (2004)

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