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Teaching English as a Second or Foreign Language

FOURTH EDITION

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Teaching English as a Second or Foreign Language, Fourth Edition

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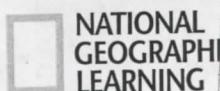
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KEY QUESTIONS

- What is task-based language teaching?
- Where did task-based language teaching come from? That is, what are the conceptual and empirical wellsprings from which it evolved, and how does task relate to broader educational considerations?
- How is task-based language teaching realized in terms of materials development and classroom action?

EXPERIENCE

After graduating from Seoul National University, Sunyoung Kang worked in a local high school for five years before spending two years in Sydney, Australia, completing a master's degree in teaching English to speakers of other languages (TESOL), and teaching both Korean and English part-time. On returning to Seoul, she took a position as a teacher at a private language institute in Seoul. She has worked there for three years.

The class she is teaching consists of seven men and five women, all of whom are young professionals working in fields such as banking, travel, and technology. Although the class is oriented toward business, Sunyoung also likes to bring in aspects of social English. Because the students are all in full-time employment, the class takes place in the evening, and because her students are generally tired after a long day in the office, Sunyoung organizes lots of communicative group tasks that give the students opportunities to improve their spoken English through using it.

In the following Experience, the students are practicing the function of "making arrangements to meet." Sunyoung sets the scene by reminding the class of the objectives of the unit they have been working on. (The last class was based on several short conversations in which the people were making arrangements to meet.) She then divides the class into two. One group receives the Student

A Worksheet, while the other group receives the Student B Worksheet (see Figure 1).

Sunyoung: So, tonight we're going to do an information-gap task. You all know what an information-gap task is—we did one last week, remember? You're going to work in pairs, and you have the same task to do, but you have different . . . what? Different . . .?

Eunha: Informations.

Sunyoung: Right. Good, Eunha, different information. And you have to share your information. You have to share it. OK? So before we do that, I want you to look at your worksheet. I want to make sure you understand the words. Work together in your groups, and look at the activities on the worksheet. This is what people are doing on the weekend, on Friday, Saturday, and Sunday, OK? Now, which activities are related to work and which are not? Discuss among yourselves and decide. Some are work activities, and some are personal activities. If you don't know some words, you can ask me. I'll give you five minutes to make sure you know the words.

While the students are checking the words, she shuttles back and forth among the groups. When she is sure that the students understand the words, she claps her hands.

Sunyoung: OK, now, it's time to get into pairs. So I want one person from Group A

Student A Worksheet

	Friday evening	Saturday afternoon	Saturday evening	Sunday afternoon	Sunday evening
Bob	<i>work late</i> _____		<i>meet boss at airport</i> _____		<i>prepare for a meeting</i> _____
Karen	_____	<i>free</i>	_____	<i>go shopping</i>	_____
Philip	<i>free</i>	_____	<i>free</i>	_____	<i>free</i>
Joan	_____	<i>take car to garage</i>	_____	<i>bake cookies</i>	_____

Student B Worksheet

	Friday evening	Saturday afternoon	Saturday evening	Sunday afternoon	Sunday evening
Bob	_____	<i>go to meeting</i>	_____	<i>free</i>	_____
Karen	<i>clean apartment</i>	_____	<i>visit aunt in hospital</i>	_____	<i>free</i>
Philip	_____	<i>play tennis</i>	_____	<i>study for exam</i>	_____
Joan	<i>free</i>	_____	<i>go to concert</i>	_____	<i>free</i>

Figure 1. Sample task: Making arrangements to meet.

to pair up with one person from Group B. But don't show each other your worksheet—don't share your worksheets. This is an info-gap task. You have to share your information—not show it.

The students rearrange their chairs so that they are sitting in pairs.

Sunyoung: Right, so—ready? S. K., ready? Good. So this is what you have to do. Take a look at your worksheets. What are the names of your friends on the worksheets? Their names.

S.K.: Bob, Karen, Philip, and, er, Joan.

Sunyoung: Bob, Karen, Philip, and Joan. So, on the worksheets, you can see some of the things they have to do this weekend. Some of the things that they have to do are related to work, and some are not. You and your partner want to go to the movies some time over the weekend with your friends. Understand? Good—off you go.

As the students complete the task, the teacher circulates among the pairs and ensures that they are completing the task correctly. When all pairs have finished, she claps her hands together and points to one of the pairs.

Sunyoung: So, Eunha and Kelly. Did you manage to find a time slot when everyone is free?

Eunha: No, no slot, free slot.

Sunyoung: No free slot?

Eunha: No free slot.

Sunyoung: So what did you do? Decide not to go to the movies?

Kelly: We decide Sunday evening.

Sunyoung: Sunday evening. Why Sunday evening?

Kelly: Because only one person isn't free.

Sunyoung: Which one?

Kelly: Bob.

Eunha: Yes. Bob.

Sunyoung: So, poor Bob misses out! (laughs)

Eunha: Yes. Bob have to miss out.

Sunyoung: Do the rest of you agree?

Students: Yes, yes.

Sunyoung: OK. So, now I want you to change one thing about each person's schedule, just one thing, all right? Then I want you to change partners—find a new partner and do the task again.

WHAT IS TASK-BASED LANGUAGE TEACHING?

Task-based language teaching (TBLT) has its origin in a number of philosophical positions and empirical traditions in education, applied

linguistics, and psychology. These include experiential learning and humanistic education, learner-centered instruction, and process-oriented and analytical approaches to syllabus design.

In this section, I build on the opening classroom Experience to describe and illustrate some key principles of TBLT, first showing how it fits into a larger historical curriculum framework and, second, offering a definition of the concept. I then look at its philosophical and empirical bases.

The Experience you just read is an extract from a lesson based on principles of TBLT. What do you notice about the extract? First, the learners are engaged in exchanging meanings, not memorizing and repeating utterances presented by the teacher or the textbook. In fact, the language they need to complete the task was practiced in a previous lesson. The learners exchange meanings based on the worksheet they have been given and do not simply repeat someone else's meaning. While the task is a pedagogical one (you would not see two people doing a task like this outside the classroom), there are clear connections between the in-class task and the real-world task of making plans and arrangements. Finally, the success of the task is assessed in terms of a communicative goal (negotiating and coming to an agreement about the best time to meet friends), not in terms of successfully manipulating linguistic forms. (For a discussion of these features, see Skehan, 1998.)

Any approach to pedagogy needs to take account of a number of broader curricular considerations before the actual process of designing courses and materials can begin. TBLT is no exception. Before turning directly to TBLT, I provide an overview of these curricular issues.

The term *curriculum* is a broad one, encompassing all the planned learning experiences provided by an institution or a course of study. The father of modern curriculum study is Ralph Tyler (1949), who presented his Rational Curriculum Model over 60 years ago. Since then, educators have staked out the curriculum terrain in different ways. Most, however, follow Tyler's argument that the curriculum needs to specify four essential elements: aim and objectives, content, learning experiences, and learning outcomes. Underlying Tyler's (1949) model were four key questions:

1. What educational purposes should the school seek to attain?

2. What educational experiences can be provided that are likely to attain these purposes?
3. How can these educational experiences be effectively organized?
4. How can we determine whether these purposes are being attained? (pp. 46–47)

These four questions equate to syllabus design, methodology, and assessment/evaluation, where: (1) syllabus design is concerned with specifying content and articulating this content in terms of goals and objectives; (2) methodology identifies, organizes, and sequences learning experiences; and (3) assessment and evaluation set out the means for determining whether the goals and objectives have actually been achieved (see Figure 2).

These three slices of the curriculum "pie" appear in some shape or form in most curricular proposals. However, they are sliced in different ways and have different degrees of prominence. In TBLT, for example, it is difficult to draw a strict separation between syllabus design and methodology, and the methodology slice is larger than in more traditional approaches, which give greater prominence to content.

Tyler's model, along with other similar models, represents a static product-oriented approach to curriculum design. At the end of the day, the designer has a set of products: lists of content, a set of goals and objectives, an inventory of task and activity types, assessment and evaluation instruments, and so on.

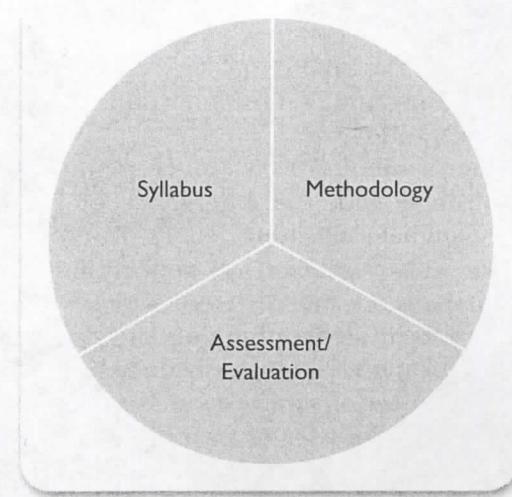


Figure 2. The three components of curriculum.

In the mid-1970s, an alternative, process approach to curriculum study was proposed by the British educator Lawrence Stenhouse (1975). Rather than emphasizing curriculum products, Stenhouse argued that the curriculum should articulate the processes and procedures for selecting content, learning experiences, and evaluation instruments. He argued that the curriculum should be formulated to make it accessible to critical scrutiny. Ideological positions should be made transparent. Teachers should have a greater say in curriculum design and development. The arguments for transparency and a greater say for teachers reflect Stenhouse's democratic, rather than elitist, approach to education. His approach takes a dynamic view of curriculum. The curriculum is a living entity that continues to change and evolve during the course of the instructional process, a notion that resonates strongly with my own views on curriculum.

To my mind, the development of content and objectives, learning experiences, and assessment and evaluation instruments is the beginning, not the end of the curriculum development process. This work, which is carried out before the instructional process begins, represents the planning phase of the curriculum and results in syllabuses, textbooks, tests, and so on. A second dimension, the curriculum in action, occurs as the curriculum is enacted in the moment-by-moment realities of the classroom. Finally, there is the curriculum as outcome, that is, what students actually learn as a result of instruction. We now know from classroom-based research and second language acquisition research that the relationships between planning, implementation, and outcomes are complex and asymmetrical. In other words, the traditional view that planning equals teaching and that teaching equals learning is simplistic and naïve.

Process-oriented views of curriculum resonated strongly with the emergence of communicative language teaching (CLT). Interestingly, this approach developed in applied linguistics at about the same time as Stenhouse's work was beginning to influence thinking and practice in general education. Language came to be seen not so much as a set of static products to be memorized but as a fluid set of procedures to enable human communication. It was out of these shifting perspectives on curriculum and communication that TBLT was born.

Before turning directly to TBLT, let us touch on the relationship between CLT and TBLT. (See Duff, this volume, for an expanded discussion.) CLT is a broad philosophical approach to language pedagogy. It draws on research in linguistics, anthropology, psychology, and sociology and rests on a view of language as a tool for communication rather than as a body of content to be mastered. TBLT is a realization of this philosophy at the levels of syllabus design and methodology. At the risk of oversimplifying a complex relationship, I would say that CLT addresses the question *why*? TBLT answers the question *how*?

Task defined

It is now time to look more directly at what we mean when we talk of tasks. TBLT belongs to a family of approaches to language pedagogy that are based on what is known as an analytical approach to language pedagogy (Wilkins, 1976). Here I describe this approach, contrasting it with the synthetic approach in the next section of this chapter. Before I look at the conceptual and empirical bases of TBLT, however, I need to clarify what I mean when I talk about tasks.

Tasks have been defined in various ways. As I mentioned when discussing the Experience that begins this chapter, I draw a distinction between pedagogical tasks and real-world or target tasks. The former are tasks learners do in the classroom to acquire language; the latter are the ways people use language outside the classroom to accomplish tasks in the real world. In an early and rather programmatic definition, Long (1985) characterizes real-world tasks as "the hundred and one things people do in everyday life, at work, at play and in between" (p. 89). He provides a long list of these things, including domestic chores such as painting a fence, dressing a child, and writing a check and workplace tasks such as weighing a patient, typing a letter, and sorting correspondence.

Pedagogical tasks, on the other hand, are what learners do in the classroom to activate and develop their language skills. Creating an inventory of real-world tasks, that is, listing the actions that learners will actually or potentially need to perform outside the classroom, is a first step in the development of a TBLT curriculum. The next step is to turn these into pedagogical tasks. Such tasks involve learners

in comprehending, manipulating, producing, or interacting in the target language to achieve a non-linguistic outcome. In Sunyoung's classroom the learners had to exchange and negotiate information to find the most suitable time to go to the movies with their friends. The learners, working in pairs, have access to related but different pieces of information. This is known as an information-gap task, a basic task type in TBLT. Other task types include problem solving, opinion exchange, and values clarification.¹ Notice that, although there is no explicit focus on pronunciation, grammar, or vocabulary, students need to mobilize their linguistic resources to achieve the goal of the task. Notice also that there is a concrete outcome that goes beyond the manipulation of linguistic forms. The task has a sense of completeness, and at the end of the task, learners are able to evaluate how well they have done.

In short, while pedagogical tasks should always have some kind of relationship to real-world tasks, the relationship may be somewhat tenuous. However tenuous the relationship might be, the link between the classroom and the world beyond the classroom should be clear to the learners.

Despite their diversity, most definitions of *task* in the literature have several characteristics in common. Skehan (1998) synthesizes the views of a number of writers and suggests that pedagogical tasks exhibit five key characteristics. If you refer back to the discussion of the Experience earlier in this chapter, you will find exemplification and elaboration of these features:²

- Meaning is primary.
- Learners are not given other people's meanings to simply repeat.
- 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.

CONCEPTUAL UNDERPINNINGS

TBLT draws strength from the following six principles:

1. The point of departure for developing courses and materials is the development of an inventory of learner needs rather than an inventory of phonological, lexical, and grammatical items.

2. Learners develop the ability to communicate in a language through using the language rather than studying and memorizing bits of the linguistic system.
3. Learners' own personal experiences are central to the learning process.
4. There is a focus on learning processes and strategies as well as on language content.
5. Classroom language learning is systematically linked to learning outside the classroom (which I call task authenticity).
6. Learners are exposed to authentic listening and reading texts.

The point of departure for pedagogy

The traditional approach to pedagogy is rooted in the three language systems: the phonological, the lexical, and the grammatical. These systems are analyzed and broken down into their component parts, which are then taught separately, one at a time. The task for the language learner is subsequently to put these language bits back together to communicate. In other words, they have to synthesize the elements (Wilkins, 1976).

The alternative approach is to begin not with the language but with the learner. Under this approach, curriculum developers and materials designers begin with an inventory of the sorts of things that learners actually or potentially need to do with language. In the classroom, learners engage with authentic and/or naturalistic texts, and they are required to analyze the language into its component parts. Analytical approaches include TBLT, project-based language teaching, network-based, and content-based instruction (CBI) (Brinton, 2003). Project-based language teaching, network-based instruction, and CBI are discussed in the Classroom Applications section of this chapter. Wilkins (1976) provides the following articulation of analytical approaches:

Prior analysis of the total language system into a set of discrete pieces of language that is a necessary precondition for the adoption of a synthetic approach is largely superfluous.... [Such approaches] are organized in terms of the purposes for which people are learning languages and the kinds of language that are necessary to meet these purposes. (p. 13)

Learning through doing

In TBLT, the learner acquires the language primarily through using the language in carefully structured situations. Proponents of a strong interpretation of TBLT argue that communicative engagement in tasks provides the necessary and sufficient condition for second language acquisition. In other words, there is no point in focusing on linguistic form because communicative engagement provides the necessary and sufficient condition for language acquisition (Krashen, 1981, 1982). Proponents of a weak interpretation (of which I am one) argue that a systematic focus on language systems is also healthy for language acquisition. Theoretical and empirical support for this position can be found in Doughty and Williams (1998a), an edited collection that presents original studies demonstrating the benefits of a focus on language form in CLT. Contributors to the collection argue that we need to move beyond the dichotomous notion that the only choice in second language teaching is either to adhere to a traditional grammar-only approach or to eschew the teaching of grammar altogether.

Learners' own experiences as a point of departure

The notion of learning through doing has its roots in experiential learning, which sees education as a process of building bridges between what learners already know and what they have to learn. Experiential learning has diverse origins, drawing on Dewey's (1938) progressive philosophy of education, Lewin's (1936) social psychology, and Piaget's (1972) developmental psychology. The work of Maslow (1970) and Rogers (1969) in humanistic psychology has also been influential.

The most articulate application of experiential learning to language teaching is provided by Kohonen (1992):

Experiential learning theory provides the basic philosophical view of learning as part of personal growth. The goal is to enable the learner to become increasingly self-directed and responsible for his or her own learning. This process means a gradual shift of the initiative to the learner, encouraging him or her to bring in personal contributions and experiences. Instead of the teacher setting

the tasks and standards of acceptable performance, the learner is increasingly in charge of his or her own learning. (p. 37)

In many respects, his model can be seen as a theoretical blueprint for TBLT, as can be seen in the following principles for action, which are a synthesis of Kohonen's (1992) paper.:

- Encourage the transformation of knowledge within the learner rather than the transmission of knowledge from the teacher to the learner.
- Encourage learners to participate actively in small, collaborative groups.
- Embrace a holistic attitude toward subject matter rather than a static, atomistic, and hierarchical attitude.
- Emphasize process rather than product, learning how to learn, self-inquiry, and social and communication skills.
- Encourage self-directed rather than teacher-directed learning.
- Promote intrinsic rather than extrinsic motivation.

These principles see learning as a collaborative and transformative rather than a transmissive process, one in which the teacher creates an environment within which the learners take control of their own learning processes. Self-direction and learning how to learn are seen as central to the mastery of content.

Focus on learning strategies

While not a necessary component of TBLT, a focus on learning strategies and processes has emerged as an important concomitant of the approach.³ Sensitizing learners to the processes underlying their learning is particularly important for learners who come to the TBLT classroom from a traditional classroom and who may not recognize or accept task-based language learning as legitimate. Learners' perceptions about what they should contribute to task completion, their views about the nature and demands of the task, and their perceptions of the situation in which the task takes place will all influence the task outcomes. We cannot know for certain how learners will actually go about completing a task, and it is certainly unwise to assume that the way we look at a task will be the

way that learners look at it. There is evidence to suggest that, while we as teachers are focusing on one thing, learners may well be focusing on something else. For example, learners look for opportunities to practice grammar in tasks designed to focus them on exchanging meaning. Conversely, they may focus on meaning in activities designed to have them practice grammatical forms. Recent classroom research has also shown that learners consistently transform the nature, purpose, and outcomes of a task in the course of completing it (Chan, 2010).

One way to reconcile these mismatches between teachers' and learners' views is to add a focus on learning strategies and learning how to learn. (See also Purpura, this volume.) If learners develop a reflective attitude toward the intention of the task designer and toward their own preferences and attitudes about language learning, perceptual gaps may be reduced.

Task authenticity

As I indicated at the opening of this chapter, the point of departure for designing task-based curricula and materials is an inventory of the kinds of things that the learner actually or potentially needs to do in the world outside the classroom. There is thus an automatic link between the pedagogical world and the experiential world. There should be systematic links between the world of the classroom and the world beyond the classroom. The closer the link between the pedagogical and the experiential worlds, the greater the *task authenticity*.

Text authenticity

In addition to task authenticity, text authenticity is an important feature of TBLT. *Text authenticity* is the use of spoken and written material that has been produced for purposes of communication, not for purposes of language teaching. The issue here is not whether authentic materials should be used but which combination of authentic, simulated, and specially written materials will provide learners with optimal learning opportunities. Specially written texts display features of the phonological, lexical, and grammatical systems for learners. Input is simplified for beginning learners, and patterns are made explicit. While such texts are necessary,

they do not prepare learners for the challenge of coping with the language they will encounter in the real world outside the classroom. Scaffolded⁴ in-class opportunities to process authentic aural and written texts are intended to assist learners to develop strategies for comprehending such texts in the world outside the classroom.

CLASSROOM APPLICATIONS

One issue that has surfaced many times since the development of CLT has been the place of grammar. At one extreme, as we have already seen, is the view that a focus on grammar is not necessary for successful SLA (Krashen, 1981, 1982). At the other extreme is the notion that grammar is central to the acquisition process (Doughty & Williams, 1998a). Somewhere in the middle is the notion that an incidental focus on form can be helpful (Long & Robinson, 1998).

R. Ellis (2008) draws a useful distinction between focused and unfocused tasks. *Unfocused tasks* are not designed with a particular grammatical form in mind, and learners are free to use whatever linguistic resources they have at their disposal to complete the task. Figure 3 illustrates a guided role play that exemplifies an unfocused task. Although some of the grammatical items that students taking part in the role play will need might be predictable, they are not required for the successful completion of the task. On the other hand, according to R. Ellis (2003), *focused tasks*:

aim to induce learners to process, receptively or productively, some particular linguistic feature, for example, a grammatical structure. Of course, this processing must occur as a result of performing activities that satisfy the key criteria of a task, i.e. that language is used pragmatically to achieve some non-linguistic outcome. Therefore, the target form cannot be specified in the rubric of the task. Focused tasks, then, have two aims: one is to stimulate communicative language use (as with unfocused tasks), the other is to target the use of a particular predetermined target feature. (p. 16)

"Picture difference" tasks can be used to practice a wide variety of grammatical structures. In this task type, students work in pairs. Each student has a different version of a picture. (See also Bohlke,

Task: Work in pairs. One student looks at Card A. The other looks at Card B. Practice the conversation.	
Card A	Card B
You would like to arrange to go out with B this coming week. You call him/her up.	You receive a call from A who wants to make arrangements to do something during the coming week.
A Check if B has any free time during the coming week.	A
B	B Tell A you have some free time and ask what A has in mind.
A Tell B that you were thinking of Tuesday evening, which works well for you.	A
B	B Reply that Tuesday evening is not convenient. Give a reason.
A Try to persuade B to change his or her plans.	A
B	B Refuse. Suggest Wednesday or Thursday evening.
A Tell B that you can make Wednesday but not Thursday. Ask B if 7 pm works.	A
B	B Agree. Ask what A has in mind to do.
A Tell B there's a new Thai restaurant you've been wanting to try.	A
B	B Tell A that you love Thai food. Suggest meeting at the restaurant.
A Enthusiastically agree. Tell B that you will email him/her the address and directions to the restaurant.	A

Figure 3. Sample unfocused task.

this volume.) The differences may be subtle or not so subtle. Without looking at each other's picture, the students have to describe their picture to their partner and identify the differences. If you want your students to practice prepositions of place, the picture might show an untidy bedroom with certain items in different places. In Picture A, for example, there may be a backpack on the desk. In Picture B, the backpack is under the bed. This should lead to interactions such as the following:

A: Is there a backpack in your picture?

B: Yes, there is. It's under the bed.

A: Oh, in my picture, it's on the desk.

The task is a focused one because it cannot be completed successfully without the use of appropriate prepositions.

This type of task can readily be modified for learners at different proficiency levels or for mixed-ability classes simply by modifying the instructions. Weaker students can be instructed to find five differences and students with a slightly more advanced proficiency level to find nine differences. The better students might simply be told to "find as many differences as you can."

The examples of tasks provided so far have been relatively closed; that is, there is a single or limited number of correct answers. For students with beginning and lower levels of proficiency, it is best for tasks to be relatively closed because they provide a greater degree of security and the students are able to self-check whether they have the right answer. However, as students become more proficient, it is good to introduce more open-ended tasks where there is no one right answer. "Opinion exchange" tasks, such as the one illustrated in Figure 4, are typically open-ended.

Decision-making tasks can be more or less open-ended depending on the amount of information provided and the parameters within which the task must be completed. The decision-making task in the Experience at the beginning of this chapter is an example of a relatively closed task because there is really only one logical conclusion. The task in Figure 5, on the other hand, is much more open-ended. This task can encourage creativity, the use of personal experience, and occasionally considerable negotiation. I once observed a group completing a version of the task in which one student argued against the seemingly obvious choice of taking a cell phone.

She had been on a similar hike and had taken her cell phone, which proved to be useless because there was no service in the remote area where her group was hiking.

A. Work in groups of three to five. Brainstorm, and come up with a list of the five most helpful inventions and the five most annoying inventions.
Helpful inventions
Example: <i>Satellite navigation systems for cars</i>
1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
Annoying inventions
Example: <i>Downloadable cell phone ring tones</i>
1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
B. Share your lists with the class, and give reasons for your opinions.

Figure 4. Sample open-ended task.

A. You are going on a weekend hiking trip with your friends to a remote part of the countryside. The weather forecast is for hot sunny days and cold nights. Look at the following list of items and decide on 10 items to take.	
flashlight map of the area plastic rain coat umbrella matches cell phone first-aid kit 1 bottle of water pair of sunglasses	warm jacket energy bars large plastic sheet spare pair of hiking shoes compass watch pair of shorts flares hunting knife
B. Work with two other students. Share your lists and come up with a composite list of 10 items.	
C. Now join with another group of students. Share your two composite lists and come up with a single composite list.	

Figure 5. Sample open-ended decision-making task.

The decision-making task also exploits the principle of task repetition. The students get two opportunities to negotiate and come up with a single composite list. Although the actual substance of the discussion will vary from Phase B to Phase C, depending on the items chosen, the functional language will be similar (agreeing, disagreeing, raising objections, giving reasons, etc.). Plough and Gass (1993) have argued for task repetition, showing that the increased familiarity with the task can lead to greater fluency and more complex language, although if this is overdone it can also lead to boredom. Bygate (1996) has demonstrated that boredom can be avoided by making simple modifications, as in the exercise. Learners are, in effect, being given the opportunity to rehearse the task.

Relating TBLT to project-based, content-based, and network-based instruction

Project-based instruction. Projects are super-tasks that incorporate a number of self-contained but interrelated subsidiary tasks. In the real world, a project might be getting a job or renting an apartment. Subsidiary tasks in getting a job might include writing a resume, evaluating/rank-ordering the positions available in advertisements for their suitability (in terms of salary, location, and match to qualifications and experience), making an appointment, and taking part in an interview. Renting an apartment might involve deciding on a suitable suburb or neighborhood, identifying desirable facilities (proximity to public transportation, shops, or recreational facilities), rank-ordering the properties available to rent according to price or location, making an appointment to inspect an apartment, and so on.

In their book on project-based instruction, Ribe and Vidal (1993) argue that there have been three phases, or generations, in the evolution of TBLT. In the first generation, the focus was on developing communicative ability in a specific area of language through simulations and problem solving. The second generation included communicative development but extended it to cognitive development as well. Third-generation tasks involve language and cognitive development but go a step further, aiming at the development of the whole learner and using foreign language learning

as a vehicle. Language learning thus transcends the utilitarian development of skills for communicating and becomes a truly educational endeavor.

Ribe and Vidal (1993) provide the following example of a third-generation task or project – to design an alternative world:

1. Students and teachers brainstorm aspects of their environment they like and those they would like to see improved. These may include changes to the geographical setting, nature, animal life, housing, society, family, leisure activities, politics, etc.
2. Students are put into groups according to common interests. The groups identify the language and information they need. The students carry out individual and group research on the selected topics. The students discuss aspects of this “alternative reality” and then report back. They decide on the different ways (stories, recordings, games, etc.) to link all the research and present their final projects.
3. Students present the topic and evaluate the activity. (Ribe & Vidal, 1993, p. 3)

Ribe and Vidal (1993, p. 4) then articulate the following characteristics of third-generation tasks.

- They are open and flexible, and it is the students who occupy center stage.
- They involve the teacher and students negotiating objectives, planning together, monitoring, and evaluating processes and results.
- They incorporate the students’ previous knowledge and personal experiences.
- They appeal to the students’ imagination, creativity, and affectivity.
- Their scope and length can be quite extensive.
- Their thematic content is related to the students’ immediate environment and interests.
- They require the use of all the language skills and organizational strategies.
- They approach language globally, not sequentially, according to the needs created by the task.

In this list, you can see echoes of many of the principles already discussed. Language is seen as a dynamic, organic entity. An experiential approach is taken to learning, with learners’ own experiences as the point of departure for learning. There is a strong focus on learning strategies. Finally, there is a linking of the classroom to the wider world beyond the classroom.

Content-Based Instruction. In CBI, all or part of the instructional content of a class is adapted from other subjects in the school curriculum, such as science, math, and social studies. (See Snow, this volume, for a detailed discussion of CBI and its origins in immersion education.) By integrating language and academic content, learners receive instruction that is both interesting and relevant; the subject content provides a rich context for the learning of language (Brinton, 2003).

Brinton (2003) and Snow (this volume) describe three different prototype models of CBI: theme-based language instruction, sheltered instruction, and adjunct instruction. These models vary according to the type of students and the setting in which they are learning, the lesson focus (whether the focus is on content, language, or both), the source of content, and the degree of coordination between the language and content teachers.

A *theme-based approach* is typically adopted in classes with students from diverse backgrounds. The themes therefore have to be broad enough to cater to this diversity as well as being age appropriate. For elementary or junior high school students, the theme might be “friendship” (from social science) or “endangered species” (from science). For older students preparing for college entry, themes might include “advertising” or “health.” Courses following this model are very similar to TBLT courses for general purposes, where units of work are usually based on themes such as “entertainment,” “transportation,” and “neighborhoods.”

The sample task in Figure 6 was designed for a group of older adolescents or young adults who are preparing for college entry. It is taken from a unit on “personal health.”

Sheltered content courses exist at all educational sectors, although they are generally found in secondary and post-secondary school settings. The term *sheltered* refers to the second language learners’ being separated from the native speakers of the language. Instruction is delivered by content teachers who have received special ESL training. The following scenario illustrates how, in a sheltered class, a task-based approach might be implemented. In a junior high school science class, ESL learners work in small groups. They have two sets of cards, one set showing pictures of insects, birds, and animals and the other with the names of the insects, birds, and animals. Step 1 of the task involves having the students match the

How Healthy Are You?	
I. Complete the following survey. Check the responses that are true for you, and then add up the numbers in the brackets.	
Eats red meat	
<input type="checkbox"/>	every day [1]
<input type="checkbox"/>	3–5 times a week [2]
<input type="checkbox"/>	once a week [3]
<input type="checkbox"/>	once a month [4]
<input type="checkbox"/>	3–5 times a year [5]
<input type="checkbox"/>	never [6]
Eats fruit and vegetables	
<input type="checkbox"/>	every day [6]
<input type="checkbox"/>	3–5 times a week [5]
<input type="checkbox"/>	once a week [4]
<input type="checkbox"/>	once a month [3]
<input type="checkbox"/>	3–5 times a year [2]
<input type="checkbox"/>	never [1]
Eats dessert	
<input type="checkbox"/>	every day [1]
<input type="checkbox"/>	3–5 times a week [2]
<input type="checkbox"/>	once a week [3]
<input type="checkbox"/>	once a month [4]
<input type="checkbox"/>	3–5 times a year [5]
<input type="checkbox"/>	never [6]
Walks	
<input type="checkbox"/>	every day [6]
<input type="checkbox"/>	3–5 times a week [5]
<input type="checkbox"/>	once a week [4]
<input type="checkbox"/>	once a month [3]
<input type="checkbox"/>	3–5 times a year [2]
<input type="checkbox"/>	never [1]
Plays sports or exercises	
<input type="checkbox"/>	every day [6]
<input type="checkbox"/>	3–5 times a week [5]
<input type="checkbox"/>	once a week [4]
<input type="checkbox"/>	once a month [3]
<input type="checkbox"/>	3–5 times a year [2]
<input type="checkbox"/>	never [1]
Smokes cigarettes	
<input type="checkbox"/>	every day [1]
<input type="checkbox"/>	3–5 times a week [2]
<input type="checkbox"/>	once a week [3]
<input type="checkbox"/>	once a month [4]
<input type="checkbox"/>	3–5 times a year [5]
<input type="checkbox"/>	never [6]
2. Now compare your responses with three to four other students. Who is the healthiest person in the group? (The higher the score, the better!)	

Figure 6. Sample task for a theme-based unit on "personal health."

pictures with the vocabulary cards. Step 2 involves having them group or classify the pictures together according to the category to which they belong.

English for Architecture

Assessment Task Guidelines

At the end of the course, you are required to give a 10-minute oral presentation based on your scale model. If you wish, you may accompany your talk with a slide presentation.

Your English instructor and the professor of Architectural Design will jointly assess you. Your presentation will be assessed in terms of the following:

- Language (grammar, vocabulary, fluency, and pronunciation)
- Content (mastery of architectural concepts and feasibility of the design)
- Organization (clear introduction and overview, body, and conclusion)
- Style (confidence and ability to maintain audience interest)

Detailed assessment criteria for each of these areas are attached.

Figure 7. Sample end-of-term task for an adjunct model class.

In the *adjunct model*, students are concurrently enrolled in both a language class and a content class. While the classes meet separately, the language and content instructors collaborate in planning their classes so that the instruction is coordinated. The task in Figure 7 is an end-of-semester assessment task for first-year architecture students at an English-medium university in Asia. All students are required to take a four-credit English for Architecture course. The major project in the course is to design and build a scale model of an architectural project. At the end of the course, the students are required to give a 10-minute oral presentation, for which they are assessed.

From these descriptions and examples, you can see that CBI and TBLT are closely related. I see CBI as a variant of TBLT. TBLT provides the pedagogical principles and methodology, while the academic subject areas provide the content (as opposed to types of TBLT courses described elsewhere in this chapter where, for example, content might be derived from a needs analysis of the everyday survival needs of immigrants).

Network-based language teaching and learning. Computer-assisted language learning (CALL), and particularly Internet-based instruction, have rapidly become an integral part of the design and delivery of education. This is particularly true of language

learning and teaching. Initial skepticism about the notion of learning language online has given way a broad acceptance that there are aspects of language learning and teaching that can be done online more effectively than in face-to-face instruction. Technology has four major roles to play in second language pedagogy (Nunan, 2011a):

1. as a carrier of content
2. as an instructional practice tool
3. as a learning management tool
4. as a communication device

As a carrier of content, technology gives learners access to authentic spoken and written data as well as information on the three linguistics systems (phonological, lexical, and grammatical). As an instructional practice tool, it provides opportunities for learners to practice the four skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) as well as to do a wide range of drills and exercises. As a learning management tool, it enables the teacher and learners to organize their learning in various ways, to monitor progress, and to keep records of achievement. Finally, as a communication device, it provides learners with opportunities for authentic spoken and written communication with other language users.

In this section, I focus on one form of CALL, *network-based language teaching* (NBLT). Warschauer and Kern (2000) define NBLT as follows:

NBLT is language teaching that involves the use of computers connected to one another in either local or global networks. Whereas CALL has traditionally been associated with self-contained, programmed applications such as tutorials, drills, simulations, instructional games, tests, and so on, NBLT represents a new and different side of CALL, where human-to-human communication is the focus. Language learners with access to the Internet . . . can now potentially communicate with native speakers (or other language learners) all over the world twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, from school, home, or work. (p. 1)

NBLT is pertinent to TBLT (as I have defined and discussed it in this chapter) for several reasons. First, it gives learner access to an enormous amount of authentic spoken and written data. Second, it enables learners to function autonomously and to

develop their language skills through doing. And third, and probably most important, particularly for learners studying in foreign as opposed to second language contexts, it provides a means for authentic interaction. It thus fulfills three of the four roles for technology summarized here. It is as a communication device that NBLT becomes particularly potent, as Warschauer and Kern have made clear.

In a study of task-based language learning via audiovisual networks, Zahner, Fauverge, and Wong (2000) set out to evaluate the suitability of task-based language learning to networked environments. A group of university students in England who were studying French were teamed up with a group of French students in Paris who were studying English. They had to collaborate to complete two large-scale tasks, which were more like projects (one in English, the other in French). For example, one task (done in English) was to develop and present a marketing strategy for a French company trying to break into the British market. Student interactions were recorded and analyzed. The researchers concluded that networked environments were particularly suited to collaborative task-based learning.

FUTURE TRENDS

Crystal-ball gazing has always been an uncertain undertaking. In our increasingly uncertain era, it becomes even more problematic. However, here are my predictions of trends that are not specific to TBLT but that I believe will have an impact on TBLT.

Impact of English as a global language

The emergence of English as a global language has strengthened the rationale for a task-based approach to language pedagogy because it gives learners in English as a foreign language environments not only the opportunity but, indeed, the need to use the language for authentic communication. English becomes a tool for communication rather than an object of study. This trend is almost certain to increase. Millions of language learners around the world will have opportunities for the authentic use of language.

Greater focus on intercultural issues

Ownership of English can no longer be claimed by any one country or society. There are now more second language users than first language users. It is a truism that language and culture go hand in hand. The question, however, is *whose culture?* This question will come under increasing scrutiny in the years ahead and will have a significant impact on the nature of task-based language programs.

Increasingly important impact of technology

Technology has become an integral part of all aspects of life. In language education, it is also pervasive. In the past, it has given learners convenient access to authentic data. In the future, it will provide access to and opportunities for authentic interaction on a global scale. The Internet will provide opportunities for learners to engage in authentic communication with other users around the world.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I have provided an overview of TBLT. At the beginning of the chapter, I demonstrated TBLT in action using a classroom Experience and set out some general design considerations. The bulk of the chapter was then given over to defining *task* and summarizing the empirical and conceptual basis of TBLT while elaborating on a number of key principles. Although TBLT has been around since the 1980s, it is only in recent years that the concept has begun to gain traction at the level of classroom practice. This may seem surprising, but it should not be. The rule of thumb for any significant innovation to enter the bloodstream of an educational system is that it takes between 20 and 30 years.

SUMMARY

- TBLT is a methodological realization of communicative language teaching.
- The point of departure for TBLT is an inventory of the things that learners actually or

potentially need to be able to do in the target language rather than lists of phonological, lexical, and grammatical features of the language.

► TBLT belongs to a family of approaches to pedagogy that are essentially process-rather than product-oriented. It is closely related to project-based learning and content-based instruction.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How can you differentiate between pedagogical tasks and real-world tasks? Provide an example of each.
2. What do you see as the pros and cons of synthetic and analytical approaches to language teaching?
3. What is the relationship between TBLT and other related approaches, such as project-based, network-based, and content-based instruction? What do you see as the three most important principles connecting these different approaches?
4. What rationale is provided in the chapter for a focus on learning strategies?
5. What is meant by *text authenticity* and *task authenticity*?
6. What is your position on the place of form-focused instruction in TBLT?

SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

1. Select three or four tasks that are familiar to you and evaluate them using the checklist in the Appendix. What strengths and weaknesses of the tasks emerged as a result of this exercise? What modifications would you make to the tasks in light of the evaluation?
2. Write a short narrative of your own language learning history. Analyze the narrative. Can you find evidence of some of the principles discussed in this chapter, such as a focus on learning strategies, activation through real-world language use, and exposure to authentic texts?
3. In small groups, brainstorm an idea for a student project (e.g., a trip to an unknown world, or an ideal weekend for a group of visitors in your town or city). Using the following template, sketch the idea for your project.

Idea for Student Project:	
Title of Project:	
Underlying Language Needs of Students:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • • • • •
Themes and/or Subthemes:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • • • • •
Potential Sources of Information:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • • • • •
Materials Needed:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • • • • •
Potential Obstacles to Implementing the Project:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • • • • •

4. Design a unit of work based on the following model (adapted from Nunan, 2004, pp. 34–35).

Step 1. Scaffolding

Create a number of schema-building tasks that introduce initial vocabulary, language, and context for the task.

Example

Look at newspaper advertisements for rental accommodations. Identify key words (written as abbreviations), and match people with their accommodations.

Step 2. Controlled practice

Give learners controlled practice in the target-language vocabulary, structures, and functions.

Example

Listen to a model conversation between two people discussing accommodation options, and practice the conversation. Practice again using information from the advertisements in Step 1.

(continued)

Step 3. Authentic listening	Example
Give learners an authentic listening practice.	Listen to several native speakers inquiring about accommodations, and match the conversations with newspaper ads.
Step 4. Focus on linguistic elements	Example
Focus learners on an aspect of pronunciation, vocabulary, or grammar.	Listen again to conversations in Step 3, and note intonation contours. Use cue words to write complete questions and answers involving comparatives (<i>cheaper, closer, more spacious</i> , etc.).
Step 5. Free practice	Example
Provide free practice.	Pair-work information-gap role play. Student A: Play the part of a potential tenant. Make a note of your needs and then call a rental agent. Student B: Play the part of a rental agent. Use ads to gather information, and offer Student A suitable accommodations.
Step 6. Pedagogical task	Example
Have learners complete the target task.	Group-work discussion and decision-making task. Look at a set of advertisements, and decide on the most suitable place to rent.
Step 7. Learning strategies	Example
Focus learners on an aspect of the learning process.	Have students list 10 new words and 2 new grammar points. Have students review three learning goals and, on a 3-point scale, have them evaluate how well they performed these goals.

FURTHER READING

Ellis, R. (2003). *Task-based language learning and teaching*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

This volume provides a detailed examination of the research basis for task-based language learning and teaching, and it explores the relationship among research, teaching, and tasks.

Nunan, D. (2004). *Task-based language teaching*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

A comprehensive introduction to TBLT for practicing teachers and teachers in preparation, this book deals with the theory, research, and practice of TBLT.

APPENDIX: CHECKLIST FOR EVALUATING TASKS

The following checklist was designed to enable to comprehensive evaluation of pedagogical tasks (Nunan, 2004, pp. 174–175).

Goals and rationale

- To what extent is the goal or goals of the task obvious (a) to you (b) to your students?
- Is the task appropriate to the learners' proficiency level?
- To what extent does the task reflect a real-world or pedagogic rationale? Is this appropriate?
- Does the task encourage learners to apply classroom learning to the real world?
- What beliefs about the nature of language and learning are inherent in the task?
- Is the task likely to be interesting and motivating to the students?

Input

- What form does the input take?
- Is it authentic?
- If not, is it appropriate to the goal of the task?

Procedures

- Are the procedures appropriate to the communicative goals of the task?

- If not, can they be modified to make them more appropriate?
- Is the task designed to stimulate students to use bottom-up or top-down processing skills?
- Is there an information gap or problem that might prompt a negotiation of meaning?
- Are the procedures appropriate to the input data?
- Are the procedures designed in a way that will allow learners to communicate and cooperate in groups?
- Is there a learning strategies dimension, and is this made explicit to the learners?
- Is there a focus on form aspect, and if so, how is this realized?

Roles and settings

- What learner and teacher roles are inherent in the task?
- Are they appropriate?
- What levels of complexity are there in the classroom organization implicit in the task?
- Is the setting confined to the classroom?

Implementation

- Does the task actually engage the learners' interests?
- Do the procedures prompt genuine communicative interaction among students?
- To what extent are learners encouraged to negotiate meaning?
- Does anything unexpected occur as the task is being carried out?
- What type of language is actually stimulated by the tasks?
- Is this different from what might have been predicted?

Grading and integration

- Is the task at the appropriate level of difficulty for the students?
- If not, is there any way in which the task might be modified to make it either easier or more challenging?
- Is the task so structured that it can be undertaken at different levels of difficulty?

- What are the principles on which the tasks are sequenced?
- Do tasks exhibit the task continuity principle?
- Are a range of macro skills integrated into the sequence of tasks?
- If not, can you think of ways in which they might be integrated?
- At the level of the unit or lesson, are communicative tasks integrated with other activities and exercises designed to provide learners with mastery of the linguistic system?
- If not, are there ways in which such activities might be introduced?
- Do the tasks incorporate exercises in learning how to learn?
- If not, are there ways in which such exercises might be introduced?

Assessment and evaluation

- What means exist for the teacher to determine how successfully the learners have performed?
- Does the task have built into it some means whereby learners might judge how well they had performed?
- Is the task realistic in terms of the resources and teacher expertise it demands?

ENDNOTES

¹ *Values clarification* is a classroom activity in which students are asked to examine the values that they hold and to articulate why these values are important in their lives; often, the activity involves assigning a ranking (e.g., from 1 to 5) to a list of values.

² See also Bygate, Skehan, and Swain (2001); R. Ellis (2003); Willis and Willis (2001).

³ Note, in the preceding section, the centrality of learning processes in Kohonen's scheme of things.

⁴ A *scaffolded instructional sequence* is one in which the learning process is facilitated by supporting frameworks. (The term *scaffold* has been appropriated from the building industry and is used metaphorically.) In a reading lesson based on an authentic reading text, for example, the teacher might scaffold the learning by preteaching difficult vocabulary; he or she might also build up background knowledge of the topic by asking a series of leading questions and engaging students in a pre-reading discussion.