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Task-Based Language Teaching

Theory and Practice

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

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.

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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.

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.

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.

Part I

Introduction

Task-based language teaching (TBLT) constitutes an approach to language teaching that prioritizes meaning but does not neglect form. It emphasizes the importance of engaging learners' natural abilities for acquiring language incidentally as they engage with language as a meaning-making tool; it thus contrasts with structural approaches that emphasize language as an object to be systematically taught and intentionally learned.

The purpose of the chapter in Part I of the book is to provide a general introduction by outlining a number of key issues that will be addressed more fully in subsequent parts. We begin by providing a historical sketch of TBLT, showing its pedagogic origins in communicative language teaching (CLT) and its theoretical foundations in second language acquisition (SLA) research and principles of sound education. We then trace the development of TBLT from its early days, pointing to the multiple influences that have helped to shape its evolution. We address key issues such as how to define 'task', how tasks have been classified, how they can be sequenced into a syllabus, how a complete lesson can be built around a task, the use of tasks in computer-mediated (CM) language teaching, and task-based assessment. We introduce the key construct of 'focus on form' and explain its importance in TBLT and consider the difference between 'task-based' and 'task-supported' language teaching.

TBLT constitutes a major innovation in those instructional contexts where language has been taught through a structural syllabus. For this reason, the evaluation of task-based courses plays an important role in understanding how TBLT can be made to work efficiently and effectively in different contexts. TBLT has not always been welcomed by members of the language teaching profession. We are aware of the critiques that have been mounted against TBLT and briefly address them. We point out that these are often based on misunderstandings of

TBLT, but we also acknowledge the need to demonstrate that TBLT is in fact more effective than traditional approaches.

As noted in the Preface, the position we have taken in this book is that TBLT is not a monolithic, tightly defined approach but quite diverse. There are many issues relating to the design and implementation of task-based courses that continue to be debated. It is appropriate, therefore, that the chapter ends with a set of questions rather than a summative statement about TBLT. These questions are addressed in subsequent chapters of the book.

1 *The Pedagogic Background to Task-Based Language Teaching*

The overall purpose of the chapter is to introduce key issues in task-based language teaching (TBLT), which will be taken up in subsequent chapters. We first consider initial proposals for a task-based approach in the 1980s. We then examine how TBLT subsequently developed, focusing on the design of a task-based syllabus and the methodology for implementing tasks. We briefly consider how TBLT has been adapted to computer-mediated (CM) environments and also look at task-based assessment. We discuss what evaluation studies have shown about the effectiveness of TBLT and the problems that teachers face in implementing it. The chapter concludes with a brief discussion of the criticisms that have been levelled at TBLT.

Starting Points

The importance of including tasks in a language curriculum was established in the communicative language teaching (CLT) movement of the 1970s and 1980s. TBLT grew out of this movement, with further input from early research in second language acquisition (SLA), which led to a questioning of the structural approach to teaching languages where a language is broken down into bits to be taught sequentially one at a time.

CLT

CLT drew on theories of language that emphasized communicative competence (Hymes, 1971) and that viewed language as functional in nature (Halliday, 1973). These theories led to the recognition that ‘there is more to the business of communicating than the ability to produce grammatically correct utterances’ (Johnson, 1982) and to the idea of replacing a traditional structural syllabus with a notional syllabus (Wilkins, 1976). In other words, there was a move away from

a 'synthetic' way of teaching founded on an inventory of grammatical structures to an 'analytic' approach based on language functions such as 'expressing agreement or disagreement' and semantic notions such as 'time' and 'space'. However, the language teaching materials based on a notional syllabus (e.g. Abbs and Freebairn, 1982) did not differ greatly from those based on a structural syllabus. That is, the linguistic forms for expressing each notion were mainly presented in situations and then practised in controlled exercises. Thus, while the organizational framework of a language course had changed, the methodology had not.

There was, however, a growing recognition of the need for a communicative methodology. Johnson (1982), for example, advocated what he called the deep-end strategy, where 'the student is placed in a situation where he may need to use language not yet taught' so as to activate 'the ability to search for circumlocutions when the appropriate language item is not known' (p. 193). This called for communicative tasks where the learner's use of language was judged not in terms of whether it was grammatically correct but in terms of whether the communicative outcome of the task was achieved.

CLT never developed into well-defined 'method'. Howatt (1984) distinguished a weak version, where teaching content was defined in terms of the linguistic realizations of notions and functions, but the methodology remained essentially the same as in the traditional structural approach, and a strong version, where the content of a language programme was specified in terms of communicative tasks and the methodological focus was on fluency. TBLT grew out of the strong CLT approach.

SLA Research

The SLA research that started in the 1960s and 1970s fed into the emergence of TBLT. Cross-sectional studies of learners acquiring a second language (L2) naturalistically (e.g. Dulay and Burt, 1973) provided evidence that there was an acquisition order that was common to all learners irrespective of their first languages (L1) or their age. Furthermore, a very similar order was found in classroom learners, suggesting that instruction did not have a major impact on the developmental route learners followed. Longitudinal studies (e.g. Cancino, Rosansky and Schumann, 1978) showed that learners passed through a series of stages involving 'transitional constructions' en route to the target form. Progress was gradual and often very slow, and at any one stage of development considerable variability was evident in those constructions that had been acquired up to that point.

Furthermore, it was clear that learners did not set about achieving target-like use of grammatical structures in linear fashion. Rather, they worked on several structures concurrently. This research led to the claim that there was a ‘natural route’ for mastering the grammar of a language and that learners had their own ‘built-in syllabus’ for learning it (Corder, 1967).

Drawing on this research, Krashen (1985) argued that true proficiency in an L2 depends on ‘acquisition’, defined as ‘the subconscious process identical in all important ways to the process children utilize in acquiring their first language’ and not on ‘learning’, defined as ‘the conscious process that results in “knowing about” language’ (p. 1). *The Natural Approach* (Krashen and Terrell, 1983) constituted an attempt to apply Krashen’s ideas about how languages were ‘acquired’ to pedagogic practice. It emphasizes activities that focus learners’ primary attention on meaning and caters to incidental acquisition. TBLT is based on the same principle.

Early TBLT Proposals

‘Tasks’ figured in both early CLT and *the Natural Approach* but in neither were they conceived of as the units around which a complete language course could be built. It was not until the mid- to late 1980s that the first proposals for a task-based approach appeared. These early proposals (Long, 1985; Candlin, 1987; Breen, 1989) were largely programmatic in nature. They focused on the rationale for a task-based syllabus and outlined how to design and evaluate a task-based curriculum. Prabhu (1987) provided the first complete account of a task-based course while Nunan (1989) gave practical advice about how to design tasks.¹

Rationale for TBLT

These early proposals were based on:

- research in SLA (Long, 1985);
- general educational principles (Candlin and Breen);
- dissatisfaction with structural-based teaching and the intuition that the development of grammatical competence was best achieved through the effort to cope with communication (Prabhu);
- the utility of ‘task’ as a unit that integrates *what* learners will learn (i.e. the syllabus) with *how* they learn (i.e. methodology) (Nunan).

From the start, therefore, there were multiple inputs into the rationale for TBLT.

- Drawing on research in SLA, Long (1985) argued that ‘there is no reason to assume that presenting the target language as a series of discrete linguistic or sociolinguistic teaching points is the best, or even *a* way to get learners to synthesize the parts into a coherent whole’ (p. 79). He saw an approach based on tasks as providing an ‘integrated solution to both syllabus and methodological issues’ (p. 89).
- Candlin (1987) critiqued traditional approaches from an educational standpoint. He argued that they failed to ‘emphasize educational goals ... in their pursuit of cost-effective training’ (p. 16). Along with Breen (1989), he emphasized the importance of teachers and students jointly negotiating the content of a course and argued that tasks provided the best means for achieving this. Candlin claimed that an approach based on tasks would enable learners ‘to become more aware of their own personalities and social roles’ (p. 17), foster self-realization and self-fulfilment and enhance their self-confidence.
- Prabhu’s (1987) starting point was dissatisfaction with the Structural-Oral Situational Method which was dominant in his particular teaching context (India) at that time. He argued that ‘the development of competence in a second language requires not systematization of language input or maximization of planned practice, but rather the creation of conditions in which learners engage in an effort to cope with communication’ (p. 1) and that this could be best achieved by having students perform tasks.
- Nunan (1989) sought to provide teachers with a practical introduction to the design and use of tasks. He claimed that basing teaching on tasks avoided the traditional distinction between syllabus and methodology. Traditional syllabuses did have a role, but as checklists rather than as directives about what to teach. Thus the starting point was the selection of the task(s) for a particular lesson.

Defining ‘Task’

The early proposals for task-based teaching all provided definitions of a ‘task’ but these varied in a number of ways. Breen’s (1989) definition was the most encompassing. A task is ‘a structured plan for the provision of opportunities for the refinement of knowledge and capabilities entailed in a new language and its use during communication’. According to this definition, a task could be both a brief practice exercise and ‘a more complex workplan that requires spontaneous communication’. Other definitions emphasized four important aspects of a task:

- A task is a meaning-focused activity. It requires learners to focus on meaning rather than form (Nunan, 1989).
- A task does not specify the exact meaning-content to be addressed as this will be subject to modification when it is performed. The language needed to perform a task is negotiable as the task is performed.
- A task should bear some resemblance to a task that people perform in real life. Long (1985) defined tasks as ‘the hundred and one things people do in everyday life, at work, at play and in between’ (p. 89).
- A task should have ‘a sense of completeness’ and ‘stand alone as a communicative act in its own right’ (Nunan, 1989, p. 10).

One of the problems with these early definitions is that they conflated two senses of ‘task’ – task-as-workplan and task-as-process (Breen, 1989). It was the failure to make this crucial distinction that led to the claim that the traditional distinction between ‘syllabus’ and ‘methodology’ loses relevance. We will argue later, however, that this distinction is very relevant to TBLT and that it is best to define task as a workplan.

Classifying Tasks

We find a mixed bag of suggestions for distinguishing different types of task in these early proposals. Candlin commented that it is not possible to ‘offer anything other than implicit suggestions that tasks might be catalogued under several distinct types’ (1987, p. 14) and that as a result ‘a typology is bound to be fuzzy-edged and at most a managerial convenience’ (p. 15). Long distinguished ‘target tasks’ (i.e. real-life tasks such as ‘selling an airline ticket’), ‘task types’ (i.e. general tasks such as ‘selling an item’), and ‘pedagogic tasks’ (i.e. the actual tasks that teachers and students work with). Nunan presented a number of task typologies drawn from different sources, the most useful of which is Prabhu’s (see Table 1.1). This is based on how the information in a task is handled by the participants.

Grading and Sequencing Tasks

The early proposals for TBLT identified a number of criteria for determining the difficulty of pedagogical tasks:

- The linguistic complexity of the input provided by a task.
- The amount of input provided in the task.
- The number of steps involved in the execution of a task.
- The degree of structure in the information presented or required by the task.

Table 1.1 A typology of task types

Type of task	Definition
Information gap	This type involves ‘a transfer of given information from one person to another – or from one form to another, or from one place to another’.
Reasoning gap	This type involves ‘deriving some new information from given information through the processes of inference, deduction, practical reasoning, or a perception of relationships or patterns’.
Opinion gap	This type involves ‘identifying and articulating a personal preference, feeling, or attitude in response to a given situation’.

Source: Based on Prabhu (1987, pp. 46–7).

- The number of objects, events or people that need to be distinguished when performing the task.
- The extent to which the task requires reference to present or past/future events.
- The extent to which reasons for actions or decisions need to be given.
- The intellectual challenge posed.
- The learners’ familiarity with the topic of the task.

It should be immediately apparent that while such factors can clearly influence the difficulty of individual tasks, they cannot be easily used to grade tasks. It is not evident, for example, how one factor should be balanced against others. Prabhu found that the grading and sequencing tasks in the Communicational Teaching Project was more a matter of intuition than precise measurement and therefore largely a matter of trial and error.²

Evaluating Tasks

The importance of evaluating tasks was also recognized in these early proposals for TBLT. Long made the point that the success of a task needs to be judged in terms of task accomplishment rather than target-like linguistic production. He suggested that specialists should assess whether learners had mastered the ability to perform a ‘target task’. Candlin proposed three general areas to be considered in evaluating the utility of a task – its diagnostic value, its implementability in the classroom and the extent to which it fits in with and leads to other tasks. Nunan offered the most detailed proposal in the form of a

checklist of questions to be asked about a task (see pp. 135–7). This list includes questions relating to the design of the task (e.g. ‘Is there an information-gap?’), its implementation (e.g. ‘What type of language is stimulated by the task?’), and the learners’ affective response to the task (e.g. ‘Does the task engage the learners’ interests?’). As with the other aspects of TBLT, these suggestions were insightful but clearly programmatic.

Subsequent Developments

Over time, the issues raised in the early proposals were built on and new issues emerged. The rationale for TBLT was further expanded to incorporate general educational principles. The thorny issue of the definition of a task was revisited. The assumption that the traditional distinction between syllabus and methodology was no longer applicable in TBLT was challenged as it became clear that the issues relating to the design and implementation of tasks remain distinct and thus warrant separate consideration.

Broadening the Rationale for TBLT

We have seen that the underpinnings of TBLT lay in CLT (the ‘strong version’) and in SLA research and theory. With the exception of Candlin (1987), little attention was initially paid to broader educational principles. One of the major developments that followed was an attempt to align TBLT with general theories of education. Samuda and Bygate (2008) drew on Dewey’s (1938) critique of the traditional classroom with its view of learning as the mastery of ready-made products and his emphasis on the importance of learning that connects with experience of the real world. They pointed to Bruner’s (1960) emphasis on ‘learning for use’ where the learner is positioned not just as a ‘student’ but as a ‘practitioner’. TBLT is highly compatible with the holistic, experience-driven pedagogies advocated by these prominent educationalists.

Defining ‘Task’

Definitions of tasks have proliferated over the years. Van den Branden (2006) reviewed a total of seventeen different definitions which he divided into two groups, depending on whether they were viewed as tasks in terms of language learning goals or educational activity. We do not find this proliferation of definitions helpful and argue that there is a need for a definition that is applicable across contexts and purposes.

The problem in arriving at such a definition originates in the failure to distinguish task-as-workplan and task-as-process. This is evident in the meaning attached to the word ‘activity’, which figures in many of the definitions. This term is ambiguous as it can refer to both the actual materials that constitute a task (i.e. the workplan) or to the language use resulting from the performance of the task (i.e. the process). We argue that a task cannot be defined in terms of process as this is, to some extent, unpredictable. Moreover, from the perspective of course design as well as language testing and research, the starting point needs to be the task-as-workplan, namely the design materials that will create a context for the communicative use of the L2. Whether this is in fact achieved (i.e. whether the task-as-workplan results in the activity intended) is an important question which can only be answered by investigating the task-as-process.

We propose, therefore, a definition based on criteria that can be used to distinguish whether a given workplan is a task or not a task (i.e. an ‘exercise’). We nevertheless acknowledge that some workplans may satisfy some but not all the criteria and therefore can be more or less ‘task-like’. The criteria are listed in [Table 1.2](#).

Table 1.2 Criteria for defining a task-as-workplan

Criteria	Description
The primary focus is on meaning	The workplan is intended to ensure that learners are primarily concerned with comprehending or/and producing messages for a communicative purpose (i.e. there is primary focus on meaning-making).
There is some kind of gap	The workplan is designed in such a way as to incorporate a gap which creates a need to convey information, to reason or to express an opinion.
Learners rely mainly on their own linguistic and non-linguistic resources	Learners need to draw on their existing linguistic resources (potentially both L1 and L2) and their non-linguistic resources (e.g. gesture; facial expressions) for comprehension and production. There is therefore no explicit presentation of language.
There is a clearly defined communicative outcome	The workplan specifies the communicative outcome of the task. Thus task accomplishment is to be assessed not in terms of whether learners use language correctly but in terms of whether the communicative outcome is achieved.

Source: Based on Ellis and Shintani (2014).

Issues Relating to Task Design

TASK TYPES

There is still no generally accepted way of classifying tasks. By and large, pedagogical accounts have continued to distinguish tasks in terms of the operations learners are required to carry out when they perform them. Willis (1996), for example, distinguished six types – listing, ordering and sequencing, comparing, problem solving, sharing personal experiences and creative. Other ways of classifying tasks have emerged from research that has investigated the communicative and cognitive processes involved in performing different tasks leading to a set of features (see Table 1.3) that may impact on the language a task elicits. Any particular task can be described in terms of the specific features it incorporates. For example, an information-gap task that requires one learner to provide detailed descriptions of a set of pictures

Table 1.3 Features of different tasks

Task type	Description
One way versus two way	In a one-way information-gap task, one participant holds all the information that needs to be communicated and thus functions as the information-provider while the other functions primarily as the receiver of the information but may interact if communication becomes problematic. In a two-way task, the information is split between the participants so both need to function as the providers and receivers of the information.
Monologic versus dialogic	A monologic task places the burden of performing the task entirely on a single speaker and therefore involves a long, uninterrupted turn. A dialogic task is interactive and thus necessitates interaction between the participants and typically results in shorter turns.
Closed versus open	In a closed task there is single (or very limited set of) possible outcomes (i.e. solutions). In an open task there are a number of possible outcomes. A closed task is typically an information-gap task whereas an open task is typically an opinion-gap task.
Convergent versus divergent	Opinion-gap tasks can require learners to converge on an agreed solution to the task or can allow learners to arrive at their own individual solutions.
Rhetorical mode	The task can involve describing, narrating, instructing, reporting or arguing.

in order for another learner to identify the objects referred to is one-way, monologic, closed, convergent and descriptive. An opinion-gap task where learners are given information about four people who need a heart transplant and have to decide which person will be given the one heart available is two-way, dialogic, open, potentially divergent and argumentative.

Another important distinction is between *real-world* and *pedagogic tasks*. The former are based on target tasks and so have situational authenticity. An example might be a task where two students take on the roles of hotel receptionist and prospective guest where the latter has to make a booking for a room based on the information provided by the former. A pedagogic task lacks situational authenticity but must still display interactional authenticity (i.e. result in the kind of natural language use found in the world outside the classroom). An example is the picture-description task described in the previous paragraph. An issue of some debate (considered below) is whether a task-based course should consist only of real-world tasks or whether pedagogic tasks also have a place.

A task can be *input-based*, requiring learners to simply process the oral or written information provided and demonstrate their understanding of it (for example by drawing a picture or making a model), or it can be *output-based*, requiring the learner to speak or write to achieve the task outcome. This distinction is important because, as Prabhu (1987) noted, beginner learners cannot be expected to use the L2 productively so task-based learning must initially be input-driven.

Tasks can also be unfocused or focused (Ellis, 2003). An *unfocused task* is intended to elicit general samples of language. In the early proposals for TBLT it was generally assumed that tasks would be unfocused. A *focused task* must satisfy the general criteria for a task but is designed to orientate learners to the use of a particular linguistic feature – typically but not necessarily a grammatical structure. This possibility was explored in an important article by Loschky and Bley-Vroman (1993). They suggested that a task could be designed in such a way that it made the processing of a particular grammatical structure:

1. 'natural' (i.e. the task lends itself, in some natural way, to the frequent use of the structure (p. 132),
2. 'useful' (i.e. the use of the structure is very helpful for performing the task) or
3. 'essential' (i.e. successful performance of the task is only possible if the structure is used).³

The incorporation of focused tasks into a task-based curriculum need not result in a return to a structural approach if there is no attempt to teach the target structure directly, only to create a communicative context for its use. Some proponents of TBLT (e.g. Skehan, 1998; Long, 2015), however, favour a curriculum consisting only of unfocused tasks. Focused tasks, though, have a role in directing attention at those specific linguistic features that learners have shown they have difficulty in using accurately. Also focused tasks have been used frequently in researching tasks.

TASK SELECTION

Long (1985) proposed that the tasks to be included in a course should be needs-based, that is, the starting point is the target tasks that a specific group of learners need to ‘function adequately in a particular target domain’ (p. 91). Once identified these target tasks can be grouped into task types. The obvious advantage of such an approach that it ensures the relevance of a task-based course. However, it may prove very difficult to identify the target task needs of some groups of learners (e.g. learners in foreign language settings). Cameron (2001), for example, argued that for young foreign language learners a needs-based syllabus is not feasible.⁴ Van Avermaet and Gysen (2006) also questioned whether any transfer of learning from the performance of one task to another task of the same type can be expected. It does not follow, for example, that because learners can ‘buy a railway ticket’ then can also ‘buy an airline ticket’ even though both belong to the same task type (i.e. ‘buying a ticket’).

Arguably, what is needed for general purpose learners are pedagogic tasks that draw on interesting and familiar content. Estaire and Zanon (1994), in one of the earliest attempts to provide practical guidance in how to plan a task-based course, suggested that task selection should be based on ‘themes’, which they classified in terms of how close or remote these are to the lives of the learners – the students themselves, their homes, their school, the world around them and fantasy and imagination.⁵ They suggested that those themes closer to their everyday lives would be more appropriate for beginner-level learners and more remote themes for more advanced learners. However, there are dangers in materials writers or teachers deciding what their students will find familiar, relevant or interesting. Park (2015), for example, reported a marked gap between the topics that Korean middle school teachers considered ideal and the topics preferred by their students.

TASK COMPLEXITY

The early TBLT proposals identified a number of factors that influence the complexity of a task but gave no guidance as to how these factors could be applied in the practical business of grading tasks. In [Chapter 3](#) we will examine what light theories of task complexity and the research they have generated shed on the problem of grading tasks. There is, however, little evidence that these theories have had much influence on the design of task-based courses. Willis and Willis (2007), for example, offered a list of variables for assessing task difficulty but then, like Prabhu, concluded that teachers have to rely on their own intuition. They suggested that teachers will in general have an idea about whether a particular task is suitable for their students but that referring to a list of variables can help to sharpen their intuitions.

However, there have been attempts to develop explicit guidelines for determining task complexity. Duran and Ramant's (2006) 'complexity scale' for input-based tasks distinguishes three categories of task complexity: (1) the world represented in the task, (2) the processing demands required for task performance and (3) the linguistic input features. Parameters relating to each of these categories are identified and arranged on a three-point scale (from simple to complex). For example, for (1), the parameters are 'level of abstraction' (i.e. whether the topic is concrete or abstract), 'degree of visual support' (i.e. whether visual support is provided and supports task performance) and 'linguistic context' (i.e. whether the linguistic context is available and supports task performance). There have also been attempts to investigate the effects of specific variables predicted to influence the complexity of a task on both learners' actual performance of a task and on their subjective appraisal of its difficulty. We will consider this research in [Chapters 3](#) and [7](#).

Research may lead to a theory of task complexity that can inform the grading and sequencing of tasks. However, tasks are conglomerates of variables and complexity is therefore influenced by the intersection of countless variables in ways that may make codification difficult if not impossible. Also, complexity depends on how the task is implemented (e.g. whether there is opportunity for learners to plan before they perform the task) as much if not more than on the design of the workplan. The grading and sequencing tasks remain a major challenge in TBLT. Perhaps the best that can be done, as Prabhu and Willis and Willis have suggested, is for teachers and course designers to rely on their experience and intuition while loosely guided by what research and theory has shown can affect task complexity.

Methodological Issues

The early proposals had little to say about how a task should be implemented and, with the exception of Prahbu, even less about how to plan a task-based lesson. Subsequently, however, greater attention has been paid to methodological issues in TBLT.

THE TASK-BASED LESSON

In the Communicational Language Project, a task-based lesson consisted of a pre-task, which served as a preparation for a main task of the same kind. The pre-task was performed in a whole-class context while the main task was completed by the students working individually. In other words, there was no small group work. In the pre-task the teachers guided learners' performance of the task by simplifying, repeating and paraphrasing their input to make it comprehensible and, where necessary, by reformulating the learners' own attempts to use the L2 in a target-like way. Prabhu rejected group work on the grounds that it would expose learners to poor models of English.

Willis (1996) proposed a very different framework for a task-based lesson, one that prioritized learner–learner interaction. This framework is shown in outline in [Figure 1.1](#) and an example of a lesson plan based on it can be found in the [Appendix](#) to this chapter. It established the standard format for a task-based lesson, namely a pre-task stage, a main-task stage and a post-task stage. Willis prioritized small group work in the main task phase (called the 'task cycle') but allowed for teacher-centred activity in the pre-task and language focus stages.

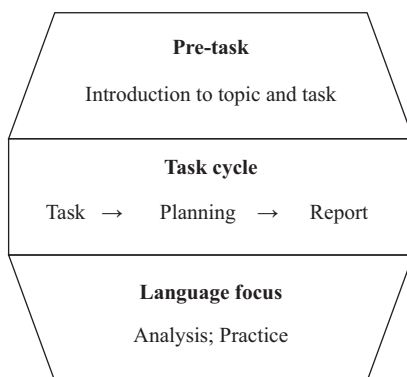


Figure 1.1 Outline of the task-based learning framework
 Source: Based on Willis (1996, p. 52).

FOCUS ON FORM

Willis (1996) advised teachers to ‘stand back and let the learners get on with the task on their own’ (p. 54) and argued they should resist the temptation to provide language support or correct learners’ production while they are performing a task. She suggested that a concern for accuracy would arise naturally in the reporting stage of task cycle and could be addressed directly in the language focus stage. Long (1991), however, argued that there was a need to draw learners’ attention to form *during* the performance of a task. He coined the term ‘focus on form’ to refer to a teaching strategy that ‘overtly draws students attention to linguistic elements as they arise incidentally in lessons whose overriding focus is on meaning or communication’ (pp. 45–6).

Long (2015) saw focus on form as essentially reactive but in fact it can take place both pre-emptively (e.g. when a teacher or student anticipates the need for a specific linguistic item as they perform the task) and reactively in response to students’ comprehension or production problems. It can also be very implicit, as when the teacher quickly recasts a learner utterance, or very explicit, as when the teacher points out an error and corrects it. In other words there are a variety of strategies available to teachers to attract learners’ attention to form while they are performing the task (see Ellis, Basturkmen and Loewen, 2002).

The recognition that task-based teaching does not necessitate an exclusive focus on meaning but also allows for (indeed requires in the opinion of many commentators) attention to form during the performance of a task constitutes one of the major developments in TBLT. Nevertheless, the belief that teachers should not intervene either pre-emptively or reactively in a ‘fluency’ activity still holds sway in popular teacher guides. Hedge (2000), for example, observed that the teacher notes accompanying course books frequently instruct teachers to avoid correcting learners until the end of a fluency activity. There is, however, growing evidence that focus on form facilitates acquisition (see Ellis, 2015a).

According to Willis (1996), the point of the pre-task stage of a lesson ‘is not to teach large amounts of new language and certainly not to teach one particular grammatical structure’ (p. 43). Tomlinson (2015) took an even stronger stance, arguing against the pre-teaching of any language on the grounds that it ‘risks changing the task into a language activity’ (p. 329). These commentators adhere to the general principle of task-based teaching, namely that there should be no direct teaching of the language needed to perform a task. However,

opportunities for introducing a focus on form in the pre-task phase are available. One possibility is to give learners the opportunity to plan before they perform a task. This will involve them in both conceptualizing what they wish to communicate and formulating the language they will need. Pre-task planning places the burden of working out how to perform the task squarely on the learner and thus is compatible with a key principle of TBLT, namely that the learners should be free to choose from their own linguistic repertoires. See [Chapters 3 and 8](#) for research on planning in TBLT.

The post-task stage offers the clearest opportunities for form-focused activities including traditional ones. Willis and Willis (2007) suggested that when the task cycle is complete the teacher is free to isolate specific linguistic forms for study and work on these forms outside the context of the communicative activity. Selection of the linguistic forms for instruction can be based either on the task workplan – for example, by identifying specific items from the texts included in a workplan and preparing activities to practise or develop awareness of the use of them – or on linguistic features the learners experienced actual difficulty with when they performed the task.

The methodology of TBLT is now well articulated but there is no consensus about which methodological procedures are appropriate. There is a growing consensus that attention to linguistic form is needed as long as the primary focus remains on meaning. There are differences in opinion, however, regarding whether a focus on form is desirable during the performance of the task and also what strategies should be used to draw attention to form.

Content-Based Language Teaching and TBLT

Content-based instruction (CBI) and content-integrated language learning (CLIL) share with TBLT the assumption that a language is best learned when learners are primarily focused on using language. In CBI and CLIL learners learn language through the process of mastering the content of (typically) academic subjects (e.g. history, science, mathematics) and this can include completing subject-relevant tasks. It might seem, then, that CBI/CLIL and TBLT are just versions of the same overall approach. Ortega (2015), however, points out that ‘the two fields are pre-occupied with quite distinct issues’ (p. 103). [Table 1.4](#) summarizes the differences Ortega identified. These differences are by and large contextual in nature, reflecting the importance of context and pedagogic purpose in shaping meaning-oriented approaches to language teaching. However, the differences are historical, reflecting how the two fields have evolved, rather than

Table 1.4 TBLT and CLT/CLIL compared

Task-based language teaching	Content-integrated language learning
Emphasis on college-level learners	Mainly implemented with school-level learners
Easier to implement in second language contexts	Common in foreign language contexts
Experimental research carried out in laboratories	Descriptive research of intact classrooms
Emphasis on transfer of learning from pedagogic tasks to real-life (target) tasks.	Emphasis on demonstrating balanced gains in language learning and content learning

Source: Based on Ortega (2015, p. 104).

fundamental. For example, there is growing recognition that TBLT is highly relevant for foreign language contexts and for young children.

Lyster (2007) provides an example of the kind of task that figures in a CBI. Students were asked ‘to create a continent, identifying its name and illustrating its geographical features on a map, which they then presented to their teacher and classmates with a detailed explanation of how the various geographical features influence the continent’s overall climatic conditions’ (p. 74). This task illustrates one advantage that CBI has over TBLT: the choice of topics is determined by the need to follow the syllabus for a particular academic subject. However, CBI/CLIL do not rely exclusively on tasks to provide language-rich content. Teachers may engage in types of classroom interaction (e.g. initiate-response exchanges) that TBLT is designed to replace. This reflects the final point in Table 1.4, namely that in CBI/CLIL content learning is of equal importance to language learning and that tasks are not the only (or in some cases perhaps not even the best) way of teaching content.

Technology-Mediated TBLT

One of the major developments in the last thirty or so years has been the use of technology in language teaching – micro-computers in particular, but also mobile phones, telecommunication systems and social media sites. Computer-mediated language learning (CALL) appeared on the scene in the 1980s at much the same time as the early proposals for TBLT. While the initial proposals for TBLT had the face-to-face classroom very much in mind, it was not long before suggestions appeared for CM task-based teaching. Developments in

CALL mirrored those in language pedagogy in general. There was a structural/behaviourist phase that gave way to a communicative phase and finally to a more integrative stage with the 'centrality of task-based authentic learning moving increasingly into the foreground' (Thomas and Reinders, 2010, p. 6).

Technology-mediated TBLT has a number of advantages. Lai and Li (2011) emphasized the natural synergy of technology and TBLT:

On the one hand, technology facilitates and enhances TBLT both in terms of its effectiveness and its contribution to our understanding of TBLT; on the other hand, TBLT serves as a useful pedagogical framework and set of principles that can enrich and maximize the use of technology for language learning. (p. 499)

Technology affords multi-modal opportunities for presenting complex workplans (aural, written and visual) and for performing them synchronously and/or asynchronously. Appel and Gilabert (2002) describe a task that involved planning a route and budget for a one-night trip that required email exchanges, the use of web pages and synchronous communication. Technology allows the input materials for a task to be fed into the performance of the task in steps. This is also possible in the face-to-face classroom but is much easier in a technologically mediated environment. In short, technology makes tasks that require complex outcomes possible and it can make rich, multilayered input available for achieving them. It not only enriches learners' opportunities for language learning but also helps to foster electronic literacy and increase learners' ability to handle multi-modal communication.

By and large the model of TBLT presented in the previous sections of this chapter is premised on a set of more or less disconnected tasks which provide the basis for individual lessons – as, for example, in the Communicational Language Project. Ortega (2009) suggested that technologically driven TBLT should be reconceptualized as project-based, where there is a series of interlocking tasks relating to the overall goal of the project. Again, this is possible in a face-to-face environment – in fact Skehan (1998) proposed just this – but it is arguably easier to organize with the assistance of technology.

The increasing interest in technology-mediated TBLT is reflected in the growing literature on the subject (e.g. González-Lloret and Ortega, 2015; Thomas and Reinders, 2015) and in the appearance of online TBLT courses (e.g. Duran and Ramault, 2006). There are also problems and challenges. Learners may lack the necessary technical skills to exploit the multi-modal resources made available to them. Teachers often lack training in how to handle tasks in a technologically

mediated environment while the emphasis on learner-centredness can leave them uncertain of their own role.

Task-Based Language Assessment

The development of TBLT ran in parallel with ‘a general move away from discrete-point, indirect testing, and towards more integrated, direct performance assessments’ (Norris et al., 1998, p. 54) based on tasks. In fact, though, as Bachman (2002) pointed out, the use of tasks for assessment purposes had figured in direct language testing for some time. What was new was the idea of using tasks not as a means of eliciting learner performances as basis for assessing learners’ general abilities (i.e. their language proficiency) but for determining whether they were capable of performing specific target tasks. When tasks are used to assess L2 general proficiency, the assessor makes a judgement of the learner’s performance of a task based on a rating scale that specifies the different abilities being assessed and the level achieved. Popular tests such as TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) and IELTS (International English Language Testing System) assess proficiency in this way. In task-based language assessment, however, task performance is assessed in terms of task accomplishment.

The basic principle of task-based assessment was clearly stated by Long and Norris (2000):

Task-based assessment does not simply utilize the real-world task as a means for eliciting particular components of the language system, which are then measured or evaluated; instead the construct of interest is performance of the task itself. (p. 600)

For Long and Norris – in line with Long’s (1985) views about TBLT – the tasks used for assessment should reflect target tasks (i.e. real-life tasks). They proposed using needs analysis to identify the specific target tasks relevant to a particular group of learners and deriving authentic assessment tasks from these. Douglas (2000) developed a framework for analysing target tasks as communicative events with the aim of achieving a high level of correspondence between the target task and the assessment task.

There are, however, problems with such an approach (see Bachman, 2002). As we have already pointed out, a needs-based approach is not appropriate for all learners. *Situational authenticity* is clearly important if the purpose of the test is to assess learners’ ability to perform the tasks in a specific target domain but it is less relevant when the purpose is to assess the communicative abilities of general purpose learners for whom there is no clearly defined target domain. For such learners a

more realistic aim is *interactional authenticity* in the assessment tasks. However, guaranteeing interactional authenticity is not easy. The very fact that learners know they are being assessed encourages them to display what they know rather than to interact in a natural way.

Teachers, however, are more likely to be concerned with formative rather than summative assessment. Formative assessment is an essential part of TBLT and involves obtaining information about how learners perform tasks. The information needed relates to both the product of the task (i.e. did the students succeed in achieving the outcome of the task?) and its actual performance (i.e. did the students engage actively when they performed the task?). Van Gorp and Deygers (2014) provide a detailed account of a formative assessment of a reading task designed for primary school students in Belgium. It was based on a set of key questions that addressed whether (1) the students' reading of the task-based material was goal oriented, (2) they could find the information they were looking for, (3) the teacher could identify and address any problems the students experienced and, more generally, whether (4) the students demonstrated self-reliance, positive attitudes to the task and reflective ability. Such a formative assessment can shed light not just on the students' abilities and the teacher's contribution to their development but also on how the task itself might be improved for future use. There is a strong case for student self-assessment. After completing a task, learners can be guided to self-assess their own performance of it. Butler (2017a) was able to show that not only are quite young children capable of this but that their self-assessment correlates well with more objective assessment.

Task-based assessment is discussed in [Chapter 9](#).

Evaluating TBLT

We have seen that TBLT grew out of CLT but developed into a distinct approach to language teaching. By rejecting the premise that a language can be taught piecemeal in linear fashion and by proposing instead an approach catering to the learner's natural propensity for learning a language, TBLT can be seen as a radical alternative to traditional forms of language teaching – what Long (1991a) called 'focus on forms'.

There is plenty of evidence of the uptake of TBLT. Starting in 2005, there has been a biennial TBLT conference where task-based educational ideas and research are presented and discussed. A number of countries have officially mandated the use of TBLT. In 1999 the Education Department of Hong Kong launched the Target Oriented Curriculum, which was underwritten by a task-based approach. In Belgium task-based syllabuses and materials

were developed for teaching Dutch both as a first and second language at the primary, secondary and adult education levels (see Van den Branden 2006). The new English curriculum in China does not specify any particular teaching approach but recommends the use of task-based teaching as the means for achieving integrated skills development, problem-solving abilities and cooperative learning (Wang, 2007). There have also been countless small-scale implementations of TBLT in contexts where teachers are free to choose their own approach (see, for example, Leaver and Willis, 2004 and Edwards and Willis, 2005). TBLT has progressed well beyond theory into actual practice but it is clearly important to evaluate to what extent TBLT has been successfully implemented in different instructional contexts.

There have been a number of evaluations of TBLT programmes. One of the first was Beretta and Davies' (1985) evaluation of Prabhu's Communicational Teaching Project. This reported results that lent support to the effectiveness of task-based teaching. Beretta and Davies concluded that task-based instruction produces significantly different learning from traditional form-focused instruction. In a follow-up evaluation, however, Beretta (1990) questioned whether the methodological innovations required by the project were actually implemented by the teachers involved. He concluded that the principles and methodology of task-based instruction had not been fully assimilated by the regular classroom teachers involved in the project.

Later evaluations of TBLT carried out in different teaching contexts pointed to a number of difficulties in implementing it:

- teachers' misunderstanding about the nature of a 'task'
- problems with oral use of the target language in the case of teachers for the whom the target language was also an L2
- overuse of the L1 by the students when performing tasks
- difficulty in adjusting tasks to the students' level of proficiency
- difficulty in implementing tasks in large classes
- lack of task-based teaching resources and limited time for teachers to develop their own resources
- uncertainty about how grammar was to be handled in TBLT
- the need to prepare students for formal examinations
- lack of training in TBLT.

This list paints a bleak picture of the viability of implementing TBLT. However, many of the same problems are likely to arise whenever teachers are faced with an innovation of any kind and are addressable by ensuring that the appropriate conditions for innovation have been established – in particular through teacher training programmes.

Also, there are cases showing the successful uptake of TBLT. González-Lloret and Nielson (2015), for example, report a carefully planned evaluation of a TBLT course for agents in the US Border Patrol Academy who needed to use Spanish in their daily work. The students in the task-based course outperformed students in a traditional grammar-based course in terms of fluency and also achieved an equivalent level of grammatical accuracy. They all passed the performance-based assessments. The students also reported finding the course useful and relevant to their work. In Chapter 10 we examine a number of experimental studies that have compared TBLT and other approaches, while in Chapter 11 we look at evaluation studies that have examined how TBLT has been implemented in a range of different instructional contexts.

Critiques of TBLT

The advocacy of TBLT has to a large extent been driven from the top down by teacher educators with a background in applied linguistics, in particular SLA. For this reason, perhaps, TBLT has met with considerable resistance and is the subject of a number of critiques (e.g. Sheen, 1994, 2006; Swan, 2005a). Many of these critiques, however, derive from a misunderstanding of TBLT (Ellis, 2009a; Long, 2016). For example, some critics have wrongly assumed that it necessarily involves learners working in groups to perform speaking tasks. Often critics have failed to recognize that TBLT is not monolithic but incorporates a range of possibilities which share the central idea that a language is best learned *through* the effort to use it communicatively. The critiques have also been directed at TBLT for general language teaching and ignore the obvious suitability of TBLT for specific-purpose language teaching.

However, some criticisms deserve serious consideration. One of the main criticisms is that there is no evidence that TBLT is more effective than a traditional focus-on-forms approach. Sheen, in particular, has argued the need for comparative studies that investigate the relative effectiveness of the two approaches and attempted such a study himself (R. Sheen, 2006). Sheen is right in demanding evidence but his own study was methodologically flawed in several ways and demonstrates the difficulty in designing comparative method studies. In fact, though, there is evidence from both evaluation studies and from experimental studies (e.g. Shintani, 2015) that TBLT can deliver on its promise to foster the development of both linguistic and communicative competence in an L2 more effectively than traditional ‘focus-on-forms’ instruction.

Another criticism worthy of serious consideration is that TBLT is incompatible with cultures of learning that are different from those in

Western settings. Littlewood (2014), for example, argued that CLT (including TBLT) is ill-suited to the traditional Chinese culture of learning, where ‘education is conceived more as a process of knowledge accumulation than as a process of using knowledge for immediate purposes’ (p. 653) and which therefore emphasizes knowledge transmission and teacher-centred instruction. Littlewood came out in favour of task-supported language teaching, where tasks are used to provide communicative practice for language items taught in accordance with a traditional structural syllabus – in other words, presentation, practice, production (PPP).

This last criticism leads to an important question. To what extent should the choice of teaching approach be determined by psycholinguistic or cultural factors? To a very considerable extent the advocacy of TBLT has been based on the former. Opposition to TBLT has been based on the need to acknowledge the cultural realities of classroom life. If the goal is to achieve the ability to use an L2 for real-life purposes then traditional approaches do not have a good record of success. If, however, the alternative to these approaches – TBLT – proves difficult to implement, then, it too is unlikely to be successful. There is no easy resolution to this conundrum except to note that a modular language curriculum makes room for both a traditional approach and for TBLT.⁶

Conclusion

We have seen that TBLT grew out of disillusionment with the structural approach. It was informed by CLT and recognition of the need to develop fluency in an L2, by theory and research in SLA that pointed to the difficulty of intervening directly in the process of L2 acquisition, and by educational theories that challenged traditional transmission-style teaching and emphasized the need for holistic, experiential instructional activities. From its starting point in the 1980s fully-fledged proposals for using tasks as the basic unit for teaching and assessment have been developed and there are now accounts and evaluations of complete task-based programmes. There are books that detail how teachers can set about implementing TBLT in their classrooms. Not surprisingly there are also critiques that have raised a number of issues relating to both the rationale for TBLT and its implementation.

We conclude with a list of questions arising from the account of TBLT in this chapter:

1. How should the central unit of task-based teaching – the task – be defined?

2. What kinds of tasks are appropriate for different groups of learners? Is a needs-based approach for identifying target tasks appropriate for all learners?
3. How can the problems of determining the complexity of tasks be resolved to ensure that learners of different levels of proficiency are faced with tasks that pose a reasonable challenge?
4. How can task-based teaching be made to work for beginner learners who have no or very little knowledge of the L2?
5. Is there a role for focused as well as unfocused tasks and, if so, how should focused tasks be incorporated into a task-based syllabus?
6. Is there merit in a modular curriculum that includes both a task-based component and a traditional structural component? How should such a curriculum be organized?
7. What alternatives are there for the organization of a task-based lesson? Is the lesson format proposed by Willis (1996), which has proved very influential, the only way?
8. How can a focus on form be best incorporated into a task-based lesson?
9. How can teachers carry out formative assessments of task-based lessons to gather evidence of whether learning is taking place and what changes may be needed to the task?
10. What problems do teachers face in implementing task-based teaching and how can these be addressed?

This chapter has offered provisional answers to these questions based on our own views about TBLT but, as we have also pointed out, there are alternative positions. These questions are revisited throughout the book and in particular in the concluding chapter.

Appendix: Example of a task-based lesson plan (based on material developed by Tom Marchand – see <http://willi-elt.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/1StrictParents.pdf>)

Talking about Families—How Strict Are/Were Your Parents?

1 *Introductory questionnaire:*

When you were a child:

- a) Do you think your parents were strict or easy-going?
- b) Did they allow you to stay out late at night?

- c) Did they let you go on holiday on your own?
- d) When you went out did you always have to tell them where you were going?
- e) Did you always have to do your homework before supper?
- f) Did your parents make you help about the house?
- g) What jobs did they make you do?
- h) Did you have to wash the car?

PREPARATION: Teacher makes sure that learners understand the questionnaire.

TASK: Learners work in groups to answer the questions.

PLANNING: Teacher tells learners that a spokesperson from each group will be asked to report the results of their discussion to the class as a whole. Learners are given time to help the spokesperson plan the report.

REPORT: Spokespersons for two or three of the groups deliver their reports. The other groups listen and make notes comparing the report with their own results. Teacher leads a round-up discussion which will include contributions from groups which did not report.

2 Discussion: *Whose parents were the strictest?*

TASK: Learners work in groups to decide which of them had the strictest parents.

PLANNING: Teacher tells learners that a spokesperson from each group will be asked to report the results of their discussion to the class as a whole. Learners are given time to help the spokesperson plan the report.

REPORT: Spokespersons for two or three of the groups deliver their reports. The other groups listen and decide which parents were the strictest. Teacher leads a round-up discussion which will include contributions from groups which did not report.

3 Listening: Tim made recordings of some of his friends talking about how strict their parents were. For example:

My Dad is a quiet man really, so he didn't really make me do much at home. He sometimes asked me to wash his car or cut the grass, but I was never forced to do it, and I could usually get some pocket money for it as well. I think my Mum was also pretty easy-going; she let me stay out late with my friends. As long as she knew where I was, she wouldn't mind so much what I did.

4 Language practice:

For the form-focused work, the final stage in a task-based cycle, activities focusing on expressions of permission and compulsion were devised.