Task-Based Language Teaching: Theory and Practice (2020)
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Task-Based Language Teaching
Theory and Practice

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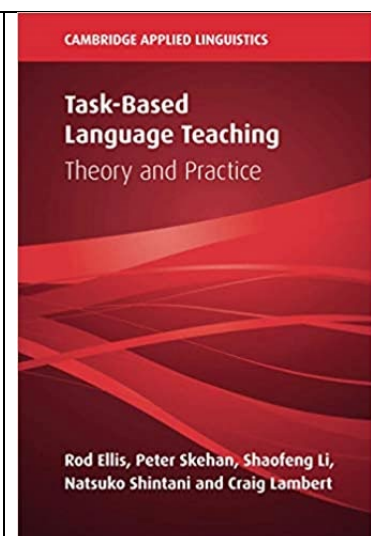
This book provides a comprehensive account of the task-based language teaching (TBLT) approach from its beginning in the late 1970s till the present time. It covers virtually all developments, aspects and strands of the TBLT approach including defining TBLT and the construct of 'task' in a TBLT framework, the rise of TBLT, researchers' interest in TBLT, the basis of TBLT, the theoretical approaches that underpin it, theory and research in TBLT, the pedagogy and implementation of TBLT, and assessment and testing in a TBLT environment, amongst several others. Drawing on the multiple perspectives and expertise of five leading authorities in the field, the book provides a historical account of the development of TBLT and introduces the key issues facing the area.

The book consist of five parts: Part I, The Pedagogic Background to Task-Based Language Teaching, is an introductory chapter (Chapter 1) that provides a general background to TBLT and serves as the foundation for subsequent parts. This part of the book traces the rise of TBLT to the late 1970s-early 1980s and the researchers' interest in it, how it evolved and developed into a full-fledge approach and methodology to L2 teaching, learning and assessment. The authors state that "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" (p. 3).

Part II, Theoretical Perspectives, consists of five chapters that focus on the theories and research that have informed TBLT research. These are the cognitive-interactionist perspectives (Chapter 2), the psycholinguistic perspectives (Chapter 3), the sociocultural perspectives (Chapter 4), the psychological perspectives (Chapter 5), and the educational perspectives (Chapter 6). For each perspective, the authors illustrate the theoretical foundation of the

perspective, the research findings based on this specific perspective, and how these inform the principles of the TBLT approach.

Part III, Pedagogical Perspectives, consists of three chapters that focus on pedagogy of TBLT. These are task-based syllabus design (Chapter 7), methodology of task-based language teaching (Chapter 8), and task-based testing and assessment (Chapter 9). This part considers all issues and considerations that relate to the implementation and utilization of TBLT in the classroom. The authors state that this part "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" (p. xiv).

Part IV, Investigating Task-Based Programmes, contains two chapters that review the research that has investigated complete TBLT courses. These are comparative method studies (Chapter 10) and evaluating task-based language teaching (Chapter 11). This part considers whether and to what degree TBLT is a viable L2 teaching and learning approach that is more effective than the traditional structural syllabuses and the presentation, practice, production (PPP) approach (i.e., audiolingual method) in different second and foreign language teaching contexts.

The final part of the book, Part V (Moving Forward), consists of two chapters that conclude the book by examining and responding to the criticisms that have been leveled at TBLT (Chapter 12), and the challenges that still face TBLT and suggesting lines of research to further our understanding of the relationship between tasks and learning (Chapter 13). The authors predict that TBLT will continue to expand in scope, depth and complexity in terms of theory, research and implementation. They argue that "Theory and research about TBLT show no sign of losing vitality" (p. 331).

Unique to this book is the list of questions that guide and/or arise from each Part. Specifically, Part I (Chapter 1) concludes with 10 questions that have been provisionally answered by that Part, but are also revisited throughout the book, in particular in the concluding chapter (Chapter 13). For instance, question 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?", is revisited in Chapter 8 (Part III) and Chapters 12 and 13 (Part V). Parts II through V are each guided by four key questions that are addressed in that specific part. For instance, question 2 in Part II asks: "What key theoretical constructs inform the investigation of tasks in the different perspectives?" (p. 27). Question 4 in Part III asks: "What kind of assessment is compatible with TBLT?" (p. 175). Question 1 in Part IV asks: "How effective is task-based language teaching (TBLT) in comparison to more traditional approaches?" (p. 281). And Question 4 in Part V asks: "In what ways can task-based research and task-based teaching profitably interface?" (p. 331).

Another noteworthy feature of the book is that it contains ample authentic illustrative examples of the various aspects of task-types, task-selection, task-sequencing, task-complexity, amongst others; and two informative appendices that illustrate an example of a task-based lesson plan based on material developed by Tom Marchand (Chapter 1, pp. 25-26), and an actual task-based lesson based on Willis's (1996) framework (Chapter 8, pp. 237-240), respectively.

Overall, the book provides a comprehensive survey of the pedagogic and the research literature. Against this ultimate goal, the authors revisit throughout the book the recurring issue in the TBLT literature of how task-based research and task-based teaching can most profitably interface. The authors provide plenty of evidence, convincing arguments, case studies, and success stories that all illustrate the reciprocal benefit task-based research and task-based teaching provide each other with.

Although most of the content of the book falls under surveying, compiling and classifying existing literature rather than producing new knowledge in the strict sense, I strongly believe that the conceptualization of the book is quite original in that the coverage and synthesis of virtually all TBLT-related topics, aspects and issues, and the rigor and readability of the book surpass, in my opinion, all other books on TBLT published to date. I have no doubt that this book will be one of the classic resources and reference books worldwide on task-based language teaching for researchers, research students, language professionals, and classroom teachers alike.

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