Task-Based Language Teaching in Foreign Language Contexts: Research and Implementation

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Task-Based Language Teaching in Foreign Language Contexts: Research and Implementation is a collection on how task-based language teaching (TBLT) has been researched and practiced in different English-as-a-foreign-language (EFL) contexts around the world. Divided into two main sections (Different variables affecting learners’ interaction/performance and contextual adaptations of TBLT for implementation), it includes 13 studies, six from Japan, two from China, and single studies from France, Korea, Turkey, Spain, and Venezuela.

This book contributes a much-needed strain of research on EFL task-based methods. As Pica states in the Foreword, this is of extreme importance, because the challenges facing TBLT in EFL settings are compounded by their unique contexts. In Chapter 1, Shehadeh contextualizes TBLT research and problematizes task-based teaching as an instructional method in EFL settings.

The common thread that unites the five studies in the first section is their focus on task-variable effects on constructs of learner performance, such as fluency, accuracy, and complexity. Chapters 2, 3, and 4 explore findings in terms of Skehan’s trade-off hypothesis and Robinson’s cognition hypothesis. In Chapter 2, Sasayama and Izumi examine the effects of task complexity and pretask planning on Japanese high school students’ oral production. In Chapter 3, Malicka and Levkina investigate the impact of student proficiency on perceived task difficulty and intended task complexity among university undergraduates in Spain. In Chapter 4, Genc focuses on the effects of strategic planning during oral and written tasks carried out in an intensive EFL program in Turkey.

Sharing an emphasis on lexis, Chapters 5 and 6 vary in their approximation to task-based vocabulary acquisition. Exploring the effects of different instructional protocols, Horiba and
Fukaya (Chapter 5) hone in on issues of content-based and vocabulary-based memory during oral recall tasks among undergraduate nursing students in Japan. Psycholinguistically evocative, they broach questions about how cognitive representation during text processing is mediated by the L1 and L2.

In Chapter 6, Hobbs takes a pragmatic stance toward vocabulary learning, demonstrating how predictable discourse patterns, lexical bundles or chunks, from native speakers’ task performance can be used as teaching tools, especially with Japanese learners who have little or no access to advanced-speaker models.

In the second section of the book, eight studies cover how task-based approaches were carried out in the classroom. In Chapter 7, Iwashita and Li examine patterns of corrective feedback in teacher-student interactions in an undergraduate oral English course in China. By focusing on the specific challenges of implementing TBLT in the Chinese context (e.g., large class sizes and a historical emphasis on public assessment), the authors illustrate an example of successful task-supported learning and teaching which overcame cultural hurdles.

In Chapter 8, Moore contributes to research on student-to-student language-related episodes, revealing how learner-generated focus-on-form in a Japanese undergraduate context was influenced by negotiated features of interaction. In Chapter 9, Chan provides an in-depth look at how four primary school teachers implemented TBLT throughout five different lessons. Comparing teaching styles, it revealed that the ways in which tasks were implemented in the classroom depended on a multiplicity of interwoven aspects, including management of linguistic, cognitive, and interactional task demands.

Drawing on the field of computer-assisted TBLT (CATBLT), chapters 10 and 11 explore the integration of technology-based tasks into the EFL curriculum. Focusing on writing in Chapter 10, Park compares two grade 7 classrooms in Korea, one adopting a CATBLT approach and another a traditional grammar-based syllabus. Results showed that not only did CATBLT students outperform traditional ones on task-based assessments but also performed similarly on traditional tests.

In Chapter 11, Chacón focuses on the Venezuelan context, illustrating how film-based projects can be an integral part of a student teaching program. Results demonstrated increased collaboration, autonomy, and fluency among student teachers.

Examples of mixed-methods research, Chapters 12 and 13 provide insightful methodological analyses. In Chapter 12, Jackson shows how task-based teacher training was exploited to support curricular innovation. In Chapter 13, Weaver shows how tasks provided students and teachers with important feedback on competency level, difficulty, and performance.

In Chapter 14, McAllister, Narcy-Combes and Starkey-Perret examine the beliefs of teachers involved in a task-based blended learning program in France. Interviews focused on whether teachers’ own beliefs were consistent with the underpinning TBLT program, discovering that institutional change was intricately linked to instructors’ personal convictions of language and learning.

In his concluding chapter, Carless surveys the TBLT research to date and proposes five directions for the field, including areas of research methodology, context, assessment, teacher education, and progress implementing task-based approaches in Chinese settings. He also points to several directions for future research, including EFL studies in different settings, qualitative classroom research, contextual adaptations, teacher education and support, and the classroom/task-assessment interface.
Besides being a valuable addition to TBLT, there are several considerations for the reader. The first lies in the title of the volume, which could more clearly identify its exclusive focus on *English* as a FL, as opposed to FL teaching in the United States (e.g., students learning Arabic in the US). A second point surrounds the dearth of research examining the academic features of language present during task implementation. Particularly valuable would be studies that adopt diverse theoretical orientations, such as sociocultural theory (Brooks & Donato, 1994), activity theory (Coughlan & Duff, 1994), critical discourse analysis (Gebhard, Demers & Castillo-Rosenthal, 2008) and systemic functional linguistics (Tan & Seah, 2011).

**REFERENCES**


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