

BLOCK 4.

The past meets the present: Language teaching methods in the 20th and 21st centuries

Sub-block 4.3. Communicative approaches

Unit 4.3.4. Task-based Language Teaching (TBLT)

Outline

1. Objectives of this unit
2. Goal of TBLT
3. Historical background and rationale behind TBLT
 - 3.1. Origins (Prabhu's Bangalore Project, 1984). Procedural syllabuses and process syllabuses vs. product syllabuses.
 - 3.2. What is a *task*? Real-world tasks vs. pedagogical tasks
 - 3.3. Types of tasks for use in the language classroom
 - 3.4. Two key issues in TBLT from a pedagogical perspective:
 - 3.4.1. Tasks as units of syllabus design (Long & Crookes, 1992, 1993)
 - 3.4.2. Tasks as units of lesson planning
 - a) Style more geared towards weak CLT version. Task-supported teaching (Ellis, 2009). Estaire & Zanón's (1990) proposal
 - b) Style more geared towards strong CLT version. Task-based teaching (Ellis, 2009). TBL framework by J. Willis (1996), D. Willis & J. Willis (2007) and elsewhere
4. Analysis of the components of TBLT
5. Critical assessment of TBLT

1. Objectives of this unit

1. Report on the origins, fundamentals and rationale of TBLT.
2. Highlight the links of TBLT with CLT.
3. Highlight the advantages and disadvantages of this teaching approach for both teachers and students and its requirements.



2. Goal of TBLT

To develop communicative competence



3. Historical background and rationale behind TBLT

3.1. Origins. Procedural syllabuses and process syllabuses vs. product syllabuses

- ✓ Several terms: TBI (Task-based Instruction); TBL (Task-based Learning); TBLT (Task-based Language Teaching).
- ✓ TBLT emerged in the early 1980s as an approach to language teaching where “task” is the unit of syllabus design and lesson planning.
 - ❑ A good deal of SLA research from that date until today has focused on tasks as language learning tools. Learning is attained by engaging in language use and creation and exchange of meanings.
 - ❑ “[...] The claim is that language learning will result from creating the right kinds of interactional processes in the classroom, and the best way to create these is to use specially designed instructional tasks” (Richards, 2005: 30) which stimulate “input-output practice, negotiation of meaning, and transactionally focused conversation” (Richards & Rogers, 2001: 229).

3. Historical background and rationale behind TBLT

3.1. Origins. Procedural syllabuses and process syllabuses vs. product syllabuses

In this unit we will focus on TBLT for language teaching purposes, i.e. analysing task as an instructional unit of pedagogical action, rather than focusing on TBL “as a computational model of acquisition in which tasks are viewed as devices which can influence learners’ information processing” (García Mayo, 2007: 91).



*In other words, we will study tasks from a **pedagogical** perspective and will not primarily focus on tasks as instruments to study SLA processes (for instance, as in Byrnes & Manchón, 2014).*

3. Historical background and rationale behind TBLT

3.1. Origins. Procedural syllabuses and process syllabuses vs. product syllabuses

- ✓ TBLT: a spin-off of CLT
- ✓ The origins of TBLT can be traced back to Prabhu's "Bangalore/Madras Communicative Teaching Project (CTP)" (Prabhu, 1984, 1987).

*Communicative teaching in most Western thinking has been training **for** communication, which I claim involves one in some way or other in preselection; it is a kind of matching of notion and form. Whereas the Bangalore Project is teaching **through** communication; therefore the very notion of communication is different.*

(Prabhu, 1980:164. Emphasis in the original)



So to which version of CLT do you think that TBLT belongs?

3. Historical background and rationale behind TBLT

3.1. Origins. Procedural and processes syllabuses vs. product syllabuses

✓ Prabhu's "Bangalore/Madras Communicative Teaching Project (CTP)" (Prabhu, 1984, 1987).

- ❑ The teaching in ESL primary and secondary classes in India consisted of the implementation of a series of classroom tasks.
- ❑ The emphasis was on the *what* of messages (the content or meanings) rather than on the *how* of messages (forms).
- ❑ The learners did not focus on language but on the completion of the task. Attention to language occurred in order to complete the task. Incidental error correction.

3. Historical background and rationale behind TBLT

3.1. Origins. Procedural and processes syllabuses vs. product syllabuses

✓ Prabhu's "Bangalore/Madras Communicative Teaching Project (CTP)" (Prabhu, 1984, 1987).

❑ *There is therefore no syllabus in terms of vocabulary or structure, no pre-selection of language items for any given lesson or activity and no stage in the lesson when language items are practised or sentence production as such is demanded. The basis of each lesson is a problem solving or a task.*

(Prabhu, 1984: 275-276)

❑ The syllabus emphasised task completion, pedagogical means and procedures for learning rather than the language learning outcome or product.



PROCEDURAL SYLLABUS

3. Historical background and rationale behind TBLT

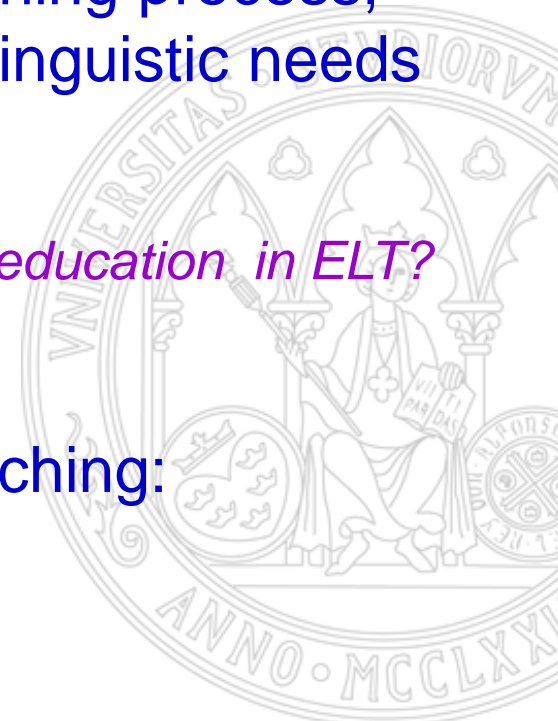
3.1. Origins. Procedural syllabuses and process syllabuses vs. product syllabuses

- ✓ In more general terms, TBLT is located within the strand of **progressive view of education** (Dewey, 1916, 1933, 1938):
It places the learner at the centre of the learning process, focusing on his/her affective, cognitive and linguistic needs and learning strategies.

Can you think of any forerunners of progressive education in ELT?



- ✓ General types of syllabuses in language teaching:
 - Process syllabuses
 - Procedural syllabuses
 - Product syllabuses.



3. Historical background and rationale behind TBLT

3.1. Origins. Procedural syllabuses and process syllabuses vs. product syllabuses

✓ General types of syllabuses in language teaching:

❑ **Process syllabuses** (Breen, 1984, 1987b; Breen & Littlejohn, 2000; Candlin, 1984):

Two senses:

- a) In their most extreme forms, syllabuses that grant the learners the right to intervene at all times in decisions related to the learning situation –syllabus and pedagogical procedures. “Negotiated syllabuses”/“Learner-centred syllabuses”.
- b) Syllabuses that focus on classroom processes and “the process of language use” (Batstone, 1994), rather than the product (see below).

❑ **Procedural syllabuses** (Prabhu, 1987). Learning triggered by tasks (preselected in the syllabus by the teacher). Focus on the *procedures* for learning. “Learning-centred syllabuses”.

❑ **Product syllabuses**. Aimed at the *objectives* to be achieved or *content* to be learned –whether grammatical structures, functions, topics, themes or communicative and cognitive skills (White, 1988). Traditional view of education. “Language-centred syllabuses”.

3. Historical background and rationale behind TBLT

3.2. What is a task? Real-world tasks vs. pedagogical tasks

✓ Real tasks:

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

(Long, 1985: 89. Emphasis in the original)



Do you think that real tasks can be transferred to the language classroom as such? Is the goal of real tasks the same as that of the activities implemented in the FL classroom?

3. Historical background and rationale behind TBLT

3.2. What is a task? Real-world tasks vs. pedagogical tasks

✓ Real-world tasks vs. pedagogical tasks

- *Real world tasks [...] are designed to practice or rehearse those tasks that are found to be important in a needs analysis and turn out to be important and useful in the real world.*
- *Pedagogical tasks [...] have a psycholinguistic basis in SLA theory and research but do not necessarily reflect real-world tasks.*

(After Nunan, 1989. In Richards & Rodgers, 2001: 231).

Think about the four following examples of task used in language teaching. Can you identify which type of task they mostly belong to?

- Roleplay to arrange an appointment at the dentist's.*
- Drawing geometrical figures/formations from sets of verbal instructions (Prabhu, 1987)*
- Selecting trains appropriate to given needs (Prabhu, 1987)*
- Spotting the differences between two similar pictures.*



3. Historical background and rationale behind TBLT

3.2. What is a task? Real-world tasks vs. pedagogical tasks

Real world tasks** emphasize the use of the right strategies and rely on choosing the right actions to achieve the desired goal. The nature of those strategies and actions is not necessarily linguistic. Moreover, **language use may not be necessary at all for performing some tasks.

*However, second language learning classrooms are obviously centred on tasks that involve the use of language. And this is not the only difference to be noticed. Not all tasks requiring the use of language aim at language as the most important goal to be reached. Most often the use of language is a means to an end, but not the end itself. In those cases **language use is of a merely instrumental character.***

*Real world tasks consist therefore of operations with a goal in mind, but these operations are not necessarily of a linguistic nature; performance requires attention and skills, but not necessarily linguistic skills; **they require a focus on what is being done, but not necessarily a focus on linguistic meaning.** The tasks language teachers refer to are tasks of a specific kind and nature and they must be studied and analysed under this perspective.*

(Sánchez, 2004: 53. Our highlighting)

3. Historical background and rationale behind TBLT

3.2. What is a task? Real-world tasks vs. pedagogical tasks

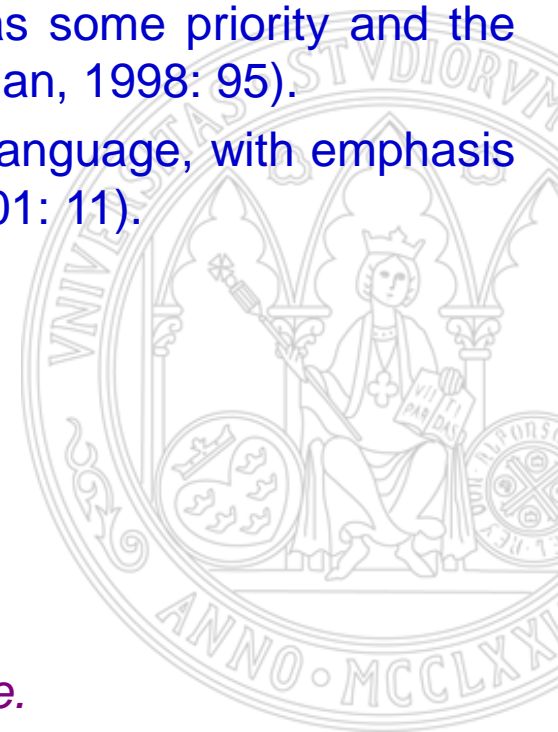
- ✓ Many different definitions of “task” for language teaching purposes have been proposed in the literature (see Ellis, 2003: 4-5; Samuda & Bygate, 2008: 63 and Sánchez, 2004: 47-50, for a review).

Now we will consider three of them:



Slide 17

1. “An activity in which meaning is primary, there is some sort of relationship to comparable real-world activities, task completion has some priority and the assessment of the task is in terms of outcome” (Skehan, 1998: 95).
2. “A task is an activity which requires learners to use language, with emphasis on meaning, to attain an objective” (Bygate *et al.*, 2001: 11).
3. Ellis (2003: 9-10):
 1. *A task is a workplan.*
 2. *A task involves a primary focus on meaning.*
 3. *A task involves real-world processes of language.*
 4. *A task can involve any of the four skills.*
 5. *A task engages cognitive processes.*
 6. *A task has a clearly defined communicative outcome.*



3. Historical background and rationale behind TBLT

3.2. What is a task? Real-word tasks vs. pedagogical tasks

- ✓ A key aspect in the conceptualization of tasks is the existence of **in-between stages and their sequencing**. An incorrect position of the activities within a given task results in a failed accomplishment of such a task (Criado, 2009, 2010).

Example: How to cook a Spanish tortilla.

1. Peel potatoes,
2. slice them,
3. put them in a frying pan with hot olive oil,
4. beat some eggs,
5. wait for the potatoes to be fried,
6. add the beaten eggs to the frying pan,
7. mix everything together,
8. wait for the lower side of this mass to thicken,
9. reverse the saucepan so that the original upper part also thickens.



What happens if you reverse the basic order? What is the “moral” of this example?



3. Historical background and rationale behind TBLT

3.2. What is a task? Real-world tasks vs. pedagogical tasks

✓ Fourth definition of task:

“An action/activity or a series of actions/activities,
organised and *sequenced*
so as to achieve a specific goal”.
(Criado, 2010: 99)



Remember this key aspect of tasks –the in-between stages– for section 3.4.2 (tasks as units of lesson planning)

3. Historical background and rationale behind TBLT

3.3. Types of tasks for use in the language classroom

- ✓ Among others, the literature indicates as types of tasks those used in the Bangalore Project (Prabhu, 1987):
 - ❑ **Information-gap task:** it involves the exchange of information among participants in order to complete the task. For instance: completing a tabular representation with information from a piece of text.
 - ❑ **Reasoning-gap task:** it requires that students derive some new information by inferring it from information already given to them. For instance: working out a teacher's timetable on the basis of given class timetables.
 - ❑ **Opinion-gap task:** the students should express their personal preferences, feelings, or attitudes in order to complete the task. For instance: discussion of a social issue (e.g. unemployment and related solutions), advising a friend on a moral dilemma, etc.

Why do you think that the activity typology in CLT and TBLT is so similar?



3. Historical background and rationale behind TBLT

3.3. Types of tasks for use in the language classroom

✓ Overall, we could distinguish the following typologies of tasks for pedagogical purposes:

1) Prabhu's types of tasks and **derived information-gap tasks** (see above plus slide 31 in Unit 4.3.2)

2) **Unfocused and focused tasks** (Ellis, 2009): whether enacting open-ended communication or structured communication respectively.

Example of a focused task (Samuda, 2001): The 'Things-in-Pocket' task. Students were asked to speculate about the identity of a person when shown the contents of this person's pockets. The targeted structure for which opportunities of oral use were created was epistemic modals. The teacher's mediating actions were recasts and more explicit strategies.

3) **Input-providing and output-prompting tasks** (Ellis, 2009).

4) **Miscellanea** (J. Willis, 1996; D. Willis & J. Willis, 2007). See next slide.

3. Historical background and rationale behind TBLT

3.3. Types of tasks for use in the language classroom

1. Listing: brainstorming and/or fact finding

e.g. things, qualities, people, places, features, things to do, reasons.

2. Ordering and sorting: sequencing, ranking, classifying

e.g. sequencing story pictures, ranking according to cost, popularity, etc.

3. Matching

e.g. listen and identify, listen and do (TPR), match phrases/descriptions to pictures, match directions to maps.

4. Comparing: finding similarities and differences

e.g. comparing ways of greeting or local systems, playing 'Spot the Difference', contrasting two seasons.

5. Problem-solving: logic puzzles, real-life problems, case studies, incomplete texts

e.g. logic problems, giving advice, proposing and evaluating solutions, predicting a story ending.

6. Projects and creative tasks

e.g. doing and reporting a survey, producing a class newspaper, planning a radio show.

7. Sharing personal experiences: storytelling, anecdotes, reminiscences, opinions, reactions

e.g. early schooldays, terrible journeys, embarrassing moments, soap opera scenes, personality quizzes.

3. Historical background and rationale behind TBLT

3.4. Two key issues in TBLT from a pedagogical perspective:
Tasks as units of syllabus design and lesson planning

1) Tasks as units of syllabus design (Long & Crookes, 1992, 1993)

FOUR PEDAGOGICAL PRINCIPLES IN A TASK-BASED SYLLABUS

- 1. Elements of linguistic form are not pre-specified in the syllabus or at the beginning of a lesson.*
- 2. Pedagogical tasks are not seeded with pre-selected linguistic features, nor are they designed to target particular elements of form.*
- 3. Attention to form emerges out of task performance on the basis of problems occurring in the context of meaningful communication. These may be identified (and resolved) by learners themselves during the task, and/or by the teacher after it has been carried out.*

(After Long & Crookes, 1992, 1993. In Samuda & Bygate, 2008: 202)

3. Historical background and rationale behind TBLT

3.4. Two key issues in TBLT from a pedagogical perspective:
Tasks as units of syllabus design and lesson planning

1) Tasks as units of syllabus design (Long & Crookes, 1992, 1993)

Also, a fourth pedagogical principle:

*Pedagogic tasks are then derived from task types and sequenced to form the task-based syllabus. [...] **Simplicity and complexity will not result from application of traditional linguistic grading criteria**, however, but reside in some aspects of the tasks themselves. The number of steps involved, the number of solutions to a problem, the number of parties involved and the saliency of their distinguishing features, the location (or not) of the task in displaced time and space, and other aspects of the **intellectual challenge** a pedagogic task poses are some of the potential grading and sequencing criteria that have been proposed.*

(Long & Crookes, 1993: 40-41. Our emphasis).



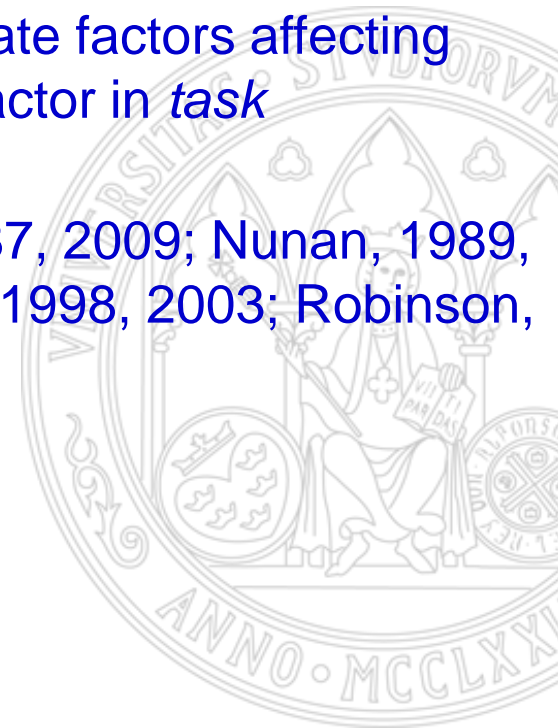
*If linguistic factors are not the core parameters for task sequencing, what **kind** of factors are indicated in the above quotation?*

3. Historical background and rationale behind TBLT

3.4. Two key issues in TBLT from a pedagogical perspective: Tasks as units of syllabus design and lesson planning

1) Tasks as units of syllabus design (Long & Crookes, 1992, 1993)

- ✓ Several studies have been carried out to investigate factors affecting task complexity (or *gradation*), which is a major factor in *task sequencing* and thus of *task-based syllabuses*.
- ✓ For discussions, see Brindley, 1987; Candlin, 1987, 2009; Nunan, 1989, 2004; Ellis, 2003; Johnson, 1996; Skehan, 1996, 1998, 2003; Robinson, 2001a, 2001b, 2009, 2016.



3. Historical background and rationale behind TBLT

3.4. Two key issues in TBLT from a pedagogical perspective: Tasks as units of syllabus design and lesson planning

1) Tasks as units of syllabus design (Long & Crookes, 1992, 1993)

STEPS IN THE DESIGN AND DEVELOPMENT OF A TASK-BASED SYLLABUS

1. *A comprehensive needs analysis →*
2. *Diagnosis of learner needs →*
3. *Identification of target tasks learners are preparing to carry out + real-world performance criteria →*
4. *Classification of target tasks into task types →*
5. *Development/selection of pedagogic tasks for classroom use →*
6. *Sequencing of pedagogic tasks to form a task-based syllabus →*
7. *Implementation of syllabus via appropriate pedagogic procedures →*
8. *Assessment through performance on tasks/task-based criterion reference tests*

(After Long & Crookes, 1992, 1993. In Samuda & Bygate, 2008: 201).

3. Historical background and rationale behind TBLT

3.4. Two key issues in TBLT from a pedagogical perspective: Tasks as units of syllabus design and lesson planning

2. Tasks as units of lesson planning

Two styles:

- a) More geared towards the weak CLT version. “Task-supported teaching” (Ellis, 2009)
 - b) More geared towards the strong CLT version. “Task-based teaching” (Ellis, 2009)
- ✓ As stated in section 3.1, TBLT belongs to the strong version of CLT.
 - ✓ However, tasks as a type of activity as such can also be used in the weak version of CLT.



Where do you think that tasks in this last sense (weak version of CLT) will most probably appear in lesson planning: At the beginning, middle or end? Why?

3. Historical background and rationale behind TBLT

3.4. Two key issues in TBLT from a pedagogical perspective: Tasks as units of syllabus design and lesson planning

2) Tasks as units of lesson planning

- a) Style more geared towards the weak CLT version (Estaire & Zanón, 1990)

They distinguish between “tareas posibilitadoras” (enabling tasks, which are also called minor tasks) and “tareas finales” or “tareas de comunicación” (final tasks or communicative tasks).

Examples of enabling tasks: “Presentation”, “exploration”, “explanation and discussion” and “practice and correction”.

a) Just from the very name of each type of task in Estaire and Zanón’s TBLT framework and the examples for the tareas posibilitadoras, can you identify an underlying activity sequencing pattern that we have mentioned in previous units?

b) Put it in other words: What is the difference between Estaire and Zanón’s approach to TBLT and Prabhu’s approach?



3. Historical background and rationale behind TBLT

3.4. Two key issues in TBLT from a pedagogical perspective: Tasks as units of syllabus design and lesson planning

2) Tasks as units of lesson planning

- b) Style more geared towards the strong CLT version (J. Willis, 1996; D. Willis & J. Willis, 2007 and elsewhere)

Two of the very few authors who have actually written about the *application* of TBLT in the language classroom.



1


As stated in J. Willis (1996) and D. Willis & J. Willis (2007), some trainee teachers once described TBLT as a “PPP upside-down”. What are the pedagogical implications of this in terms of accuracy and fluency?

Remember this when we study the Presentation-Practice-Production model of activity sequencing in section 3 of Block 6.



4. Analysis of the components of TBLT

Axis 1. The Why. Underlying principles and beliefs

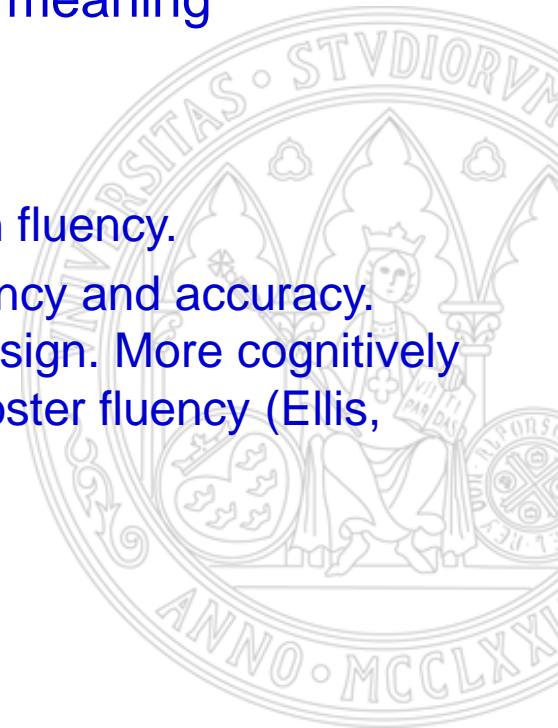
- ❑ Theory of language (nature of language, including approach to culture)
 - Emphasis on the communicative nature of language.
 - Emphasis on natural language use (Widdowson's (2003) "authenticity").
 - Language is for communication and implies "doing".
 - Primarily: Interactional view of language. Also (Richards & Rodgers, 2001: 226-227):
 - Structural view (for determining linguistic complexity of tasks) (Skehan, 1998)
 - Functional view (personal, narrative and decision-making tasks) (Foster & Skehan, 1996)
 - Central role of "meaning": semantic and pragmatic meanings of utterances (Ellis, 2009).  *Unit 4.4.1.*
 - Culture: not explicitly addressed although some tasks may contain cultural focus

4. Analysis of components of TBLT

Axis 1. The Why. Underlying principles and beliefs

□ Theory of learning (learning principles)

- Key processes in language learning advocated by TBLT: input reception, output production and negotiation of meaning
- Tasks should be intrinsically motivating.
- Fluency and accuracy requirements:
 - Initial conceptions of TBLT: primary emphasis on fluency.
 - Later conceptions of TBLT: concern for both fluency and accuracy. Learning difficulty can be manipulated in task design. More cognitively demanding tasks reduce attention to form and foster fluency (Ellis, 2009; Richards & Rodgers, 2001)



4. Analysis of components of TBLT

Axis 1. The Why. Underlying principles and beliefs

- Theory of teaching (pedagogical principles)
 - Tasks as the units of syllabus design and lesson planning
 - Real-world tasks vs. pedagogical tasks
 - Inductive approach to teaching language
 - Attention to form (besides attention to meaning):



How do you think that attention to form has been viewed and conceptualized from the initial account of TBLT (Prabhu, 1987) to later and current accounts?

- Error correction: in general, incidental and absence of explicit procedures. Implicit procedures in communication plus brief grammatical explanations afterwards.
- L1 role: Prabhu (1987) explicitly reported a role for L1 in explanation of instructions and occasional glossing of words. Cook (2008) states that TBLT minimises the use of the L1. Larsen-Freeman & Anderson (2011) indicate that there is not an explicit role for the L1.

4. Analysis of the components of TBLT

Axis 2. The What. Objectives of teaching. Syllabus specifications

- ❑ Emphasised language: vocabulary and lexical phrases/chunks
- ❑ Grammar is not dismissed, though: J. Willis (1996) and Ellis (2009) argue that it can be catered for by means of consciousness-raising tasks in the post-task phase (J. Willis) and the teacher directing attention to form in pre-emptive and reactive focus-on-form activities (Ellis, 2009)
- ❑ Prioritised skills: oral (interactional view of language) but written skills catered for too
- ❑ Syllabus: made up of tasks. An obvious question arises: Which tasks to select and in which order?



Long & Crookes' 1993 quotations (slides 21 and 22 in section 3.4)

4. Analysis of the components of TBLT

Axis 3. The How. Activities through which the selected content is transmitted to the students and other procedural aspects

□ Activities



Real-world tasks and types of tasks (sections 3.2 and 3.3)

[...] for a language-teaching activity to be a 'task' it must satisfy the following criteria:

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

4. Analysis of the components of TBLT

Axis 3. The How. Activities through which the selected content is transmitted to the students and other procedural aspects

Procedure

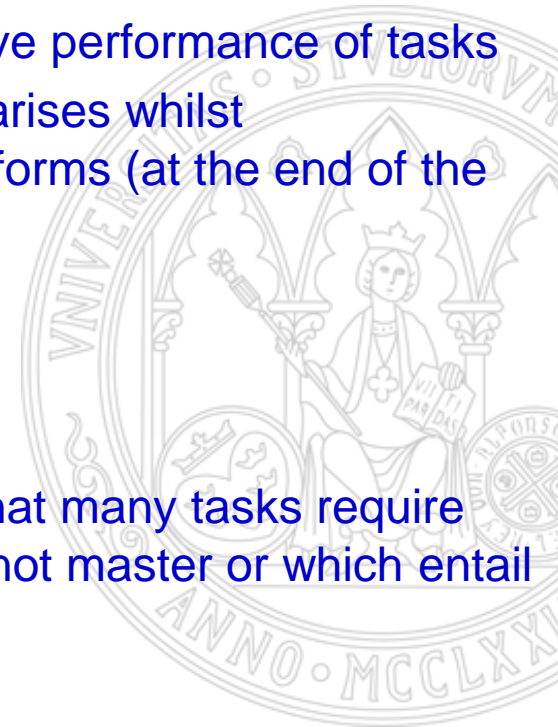
See the overview of J. Willis' (1996) TBL framework available at <http://ocw.um.es/humanidades/english-language-teaching-history-approaches-and/class-materials>



4. Analysis of the components of TBLT

Axis 3. The How. Activities through which the selected content is transmitted to the students and other procedural aspects

- ❑ Roles of teachers
 - Very active and very demanding:
 - a) Selector and sequencer of tasks
 - b) Manager and facilitator of students' communicative performance of tasks
 - c) Provider of timed focus on form (when the need arises whilst communicating) or provider of inductive work on forms (at the end of the task)
- ❑ Roles of learners (Richards & Rodgers, 2001: 235)
 - An active role
 - a) Group participant
 - b) Risk-taker and innovator. This refers to the fact that many tasks require learners to produce language which they still do not master or which entail experiences unknown to them.

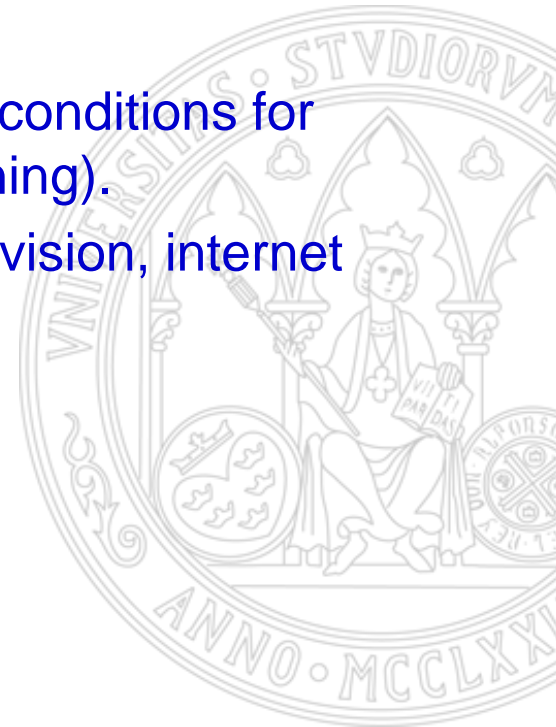


4. Analysis of the components of TBLT

Axis 3. The How. Activities through which the selected content is transmitted to the students and other procedural aspects

□ Roles of instructional materials

- Very important. They have to cater for optimal conditions for learning (input, output and negotiation of meaning).
- Authentic materials or *realia*: newspapers, television, internet (Richards & Rodgers, 2001: 237)



5. Critical assessment of TBLT



Can you think of any advantages and disadvantages of TBLT?



5. Critical assessment of TBLT

□ Positive aspects:

1. *TBLT offers the opportunity for 'natural' learning inside the classroom.*
2. *It emphasizes meaning over form but can also cater for learning form.*
3. *It affords learners a rich input of target language.*
4. *It is intrinsically motivating.*
5. *It is compatible with a learner-centred educational philosophy but also allows for teacher input and direction.*
6. *It caters to the development of communicative fluency while not neglecting accuracy.*
7. *It can be used alongside a more traditional approach.*

(Ellis, 2009: 242)

5. Critical assessment of TBLT

❑ Negative aspects:

- 1) It is difficult to identify what TBLT exactly is (Hall, 2011), due to the many interpretations of tasks –very similar to communicative activities – and other issues such as task sequencing in lesson planning
- 2) Little or virtually no empirical evidence that TBLT works more effectively than the PPP (Richards, 2005)
- 3) Complexity of establishing a clear, workable sequencing criteria for tasks in a syllabus.
- 4) Addressing classroom processes poses a problem for instructional settings where fixed language learning outcomes (tested in exams) are compulsory (Richards, 2005)
- 5) How to implement TBLT with beginners or learners who do not master the basic foundations of the L2? Resort to input-based tasks (e.g. TPR) (Bruton, 2003; Swan, 2005).
- 6) How to implement TBLT in large, monolingual classes (e.g. Spanish secondary education)? (Bruton, 2003). Resulting implications for interlanguage development

5. Critical assessment of TBLT

❑ Negative aspects:

- 7) Task-based interactions are pidginized language as a result of the learners' over-reliance on context and the limitations of their linguistic resources. (Seedhouse, 1999)
- 8) Problems in TBLT implementation in cultural contexts where learning is not seen as a collaborative and experiential activity (Widdowson, 1993)
- 9) Real-life relevance for the students is not catered for (“I regard this as desirable but difficult to obtain in practice”. Skehan, 1998: 96).
- 10) “The basic assumption of TBLT –that it provides for a more effective basis for teaching rather than other language teaching approaches – remains in the domain of ideology rather than fact” (Richards & Rodgers, 2001: 241)

5. Critical assessment of TBLT

❑ Negative aspects:

11) Classroom research in TBLT:

- “For a credible pedagogic framework for TBI to emerge, research needs to be conducted in real classroom contexts” (Bruton, 2003: 7).
- Two of the strongest advocators of TBLT, D. Willis & J. Willis (2001), acknowledge that TBLT formal research in classrooms is virtually non-existent (D. Willis & J. Willis, 2001).
- For Skehan (2003), task-led classroom elements of prime interest to teachers such as teaching sequences, project work, syllabus design and course books, “are less likely to be derived from research (which is not to say that relevant research is not desirable) but grounded in classroom experience” (p. 9).



Do you agree with Skehan’s statement? Which consequences on FLT can you think of in relation to it?

A very thought-provoking and very well-argued article about the negative points of TBLT is Swan’s (2005). Another very thought-provoking and very well-argued article refuting negative criticisms targeted at TBLT is Ellis’ (2009). You can find both references in the References and Bibliography link of this unit.



5. Critical assessment of TBLT

□ Influence of TBLT on FLT:

- Great influence on (I)SLA, where tasks are used as tools to study SLA processes.
 - Most empirical research on TBLT has focused on the effects on learner's performance (output, input) and attention as revealed by the manipulation of certain variables of tasks, such as task types (interactive vs. monologic; concrete vs. abstract); task characteristics (cognitive complexity, topic familiarity, relationships between participants) and conditions of task implementation (planning time, repetition).
 - This research has been mostly performed under laboratory conditions or in intact classes whose intervention did not cover more than two weeks and less than an hour per week (for comprehensive reviews of this SLA-driven research, see Ellis, R., 2003; Skehan, 1998, 2003; Van den Branden, Bygate & Norris, 2009).

5. Critical assessment of TBLT

□ Influence of TBLT on FLT:

- Great influence on FLT literature: many books, chapters and articles contributing proposals for tasks and justifying merits behind them (for example, Shehadeh & Coombe, 2010; Thomas & Reinders, 2007; J. Willis, 1996; D. Willis & J. Willis, 2007).
- But considerably less influence on actual FLT practice (Ellis, 2003; Skehan, 1998; Swan, 2005; D. Willis & J. Willis, 2007).



Why do you think TBLT has not gained ground in actual FLT practice?

5. Critical assessment of TBLT

□ Influence of TBLT on FLT:

A: Issues pursued by researchers	B: Issues raised by teachers
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Planning time• Task familiarity• Task repetition• Interaction effects• Interlocutor effects• Discourse effects• Attention capacity• Task complexity• Negotiation for meaning	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Using tasks in monolingual classes in FL settings• Matching tasks with skill level• Integrating tasks with a prescribed syllabus• Viability of tasks for beginning level students• Using tasks to introduce new language• Giving feedback on task performance: how and when• Fitting tasks with other kinds of activity• Tasks and grammar learning• Using tasks in mixed ability classes• Motivating students to engage in tasks

TBLT: Issues of concern to researchers; issues of concern to teachers. From Samuda & Bygate (2008: 193)