

TAKING IT TO TASK

The newsletter of the JALT task-based language teaching SIG. Volume 6 Issue 1 – Winter/Spring 2023

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EDITORIAL

Welcome to the first issue of *Taking it to Task* in 2023!

Winter has just about left us for now and the cherry blossoms have made an appearance in most parts of Japan. In our latest newsletter, we open with an article by Trevor Sitler on TBLT and its suitability for ESP instruction. This is followed by a couple of lesson plans that you may wish to try out in your own classes. Ying Zhou takes us through her idea for raising awareness of cultural differences in perceptions, followed by Charlie Bell's plan to promote discussion on the most attractive traits looked for in a prospective partner. We wrap up with my own review of a book that presents a research study into how TBLT is implemented in foreign language classes in the New Zealand school context.

Finally, on behalf of everybody in the TBLT SIG, I would like to thank the outgoing Publications Chair, Rick Derrah, for all his hard work over the past few years and we wish him all the best for the future. I am very grateful for the support he has offered me as co-chair. I am currently 'flying solo' but we are looking for extra support, so if you are interested in getting involved then please don't hesitate to contact us!

Martin Spivey, Publications Chair

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Are you attending the JALT PanSIG Conference in Kyoto in May? If so, we would love to see you at the TBLT SIG forum on *Exploring under-researched areas: TBLT in non-university settings*. We have two presentations lined up by Chie Ogawa and Matthew Chudleigh. These will both be followed by some (lively?!) discussions on the issues raised. I'm sure it will be a very interesting and informative event!

ARTICLE

Getting Specific About Tasks: TBLT and ESP

Trevor Sitler, University of Birmingham

ABSTRACT

This paper seeks to examine the utility of the TBLT syllabus in teaching English for Specific Purposes (ESP). TBLT encompasses a wide variety of approaches, however the approach offered by Long (2015) advocates for a syllabus that is derived completely from a Needs Analysis of the specific students' situation. This type of approach has a high potential to be effective in an ESP course. Three studies incorporating a TBLT syllabus into an ESP program will be examined (Gonzolaes et al, 2019), (Gonzalez-Lloret, 2015), and (Whyte, 2013). This paper will argue that a TBLT syllabus is an excellent match for an ESP course.

ESP

First, this paper will go over a brief definition of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) before examining how TBLT can meet the needs of ESP. Hutchinson and Waters (1987, p.19) define ESP as '...an approach to language teaching in which all decisions as to the content and method are based on the learner's reason for learning'. Students take ESP classes because they have a narrow focus of what they want to achieve with English. Perhaps students are international business people in a specific field and they need certain negotiation skills and vocabulary to conduct their jobs. Or maybe they are university students who would like to pass a job interview in their chosen field of study. ESP differs from more general English courses in that ESP is focused solely on the learner's needs. Any potential ESP syllabus designer would have to adapt and accommodate the syllabus to these needs.

THE TBLT SYLLABUS

Next, this paper will give a brief description of the TBLT syllabus before evaluating whether or not this syllabus is a good fit for ESP. White (1988) categorizes TBLT as a Type B syllabus, in contrast to a Type A syllabus. Type A syllabuses focus on the product, which is usually defined as a set of grammar points that students are to learn in a predetermined order. Type B syllabuses are, in contrast, more concerned with the process of learning, with identifying what and how students need to learn and then trying to facilitate the learning process in a natural way. This focus on student needs over grammar points may have an advantage in ESP, where student needs are paramount.

As Ellis (2009) notes, TBLT is more of an approach than a strict methodology so there is a wide range of variation among different theorists. Even the definition of a task, the central organizing feature of TBLT, has a variety of definitions. Willis and Willis (2007: 24) give six questions that can be used to determine how task-like an activity is:

1. Does the activity engage the learners' interest?
2. Is there a primary focus on meaning?
3. Is there an outcome?
4. Is success judged in terms of outcome?
5. Is completion a priority?
6. Does the activity relate to real-world activities?

It is this last point about relating to real-world activities that has the most important implications for using TBLT in ESP. Since ESP is centered entirely around the students' need for English in the real-world, TBLT'S capacity to incorporate student needs into the syllabus shows potential for being

effective in an ESP course. However, the extent to which the tasks should resemble real-life situations is still a matter of debate among TBLT theorists. Nunan (2004), for example, makes a distinction between a real-world task, in which the task is directly related to the students' daily life, and a pedagogic task, which has no relation to daily life but nonetheless motivates students to interact. Long (2015) takes the most hardline approach, however, and argues that all tasks should be derived directly from a Needs Analysis of the students' situation, so that the entire lesson is in some way related to the students' lives. A Needs Analysis is a large-scale attempt, usually by teachers and administrators, to determine the exact needs that the students have in terms of learning English. The main task or target tasks should likewise be authentic, that is closely resemble what the students will encounter in their day-to-day lives. Since ESP is centered around student needs, it is this approach to TBLT that will be analyzed in more detail in the studies below.

CRITICISMS

TBLT has been criticized by advocates for a more traditional Type A (White 1998) grammar-based syllabus. Swan (2005) and Sheen (2003) characterize TBLT as neglecting grammar and relying exclusively on conversation for acquisition. Swan, and Fotos (2002), both argue that interaction itself does not provide enough input for grammar learning to take place unless the students are in an ESL environment or already have a high level of grammar knowledge.

Seedhouse (1999) claims that the narrow context of the task itself is inadequate to push the student to use all of their linguistic resources. Since the purpose of TBLT is completion of a task, Swan argues that students will tend to use only the language necessary to complete the task, thus severely limiting their ability to practice new language. While this may have some real-world benefit if students are completing tasks they need in their daily lives, Seedhouse argues that TBLT by itself does not provide enough space for students to fully utilize all their linguistic knowledge. Research comparing a TBLT program with a grammar-based program will be examined below.

CHALLENGES

Teachers who attempt to implement a TBLT syllabus face a number of challenges in terms of designing the course. Teachers and administrators must determine how they will conduct a needs analysis, who they will talk to and what methods they will use to determine student needs. Another issue, as Van Avermaet and Gysen (2006) point out, is the extent to which teachers should generalize tasks or keep them specific in order to remain as close to the needs analysis as possible. For example, going to the supermarket, going to a restaurant, and going to the movies are all potential tasks that could derive from a needs analysis. Should the teacher generalize them all into some kind of “Going to a Shop” lesson? Or do they each deserve their own individual lesson? In the former case, the teacher risks ignoring the important differences between these three tasks. However, if the teacher never generalizes, then they are left with an ‘endless list of tasks’ (Van Avermaet & Gysen, 2006, p.29).

Next, after the teacher has a set number of tasks for the lesson, the task sequence must be determined. Ideally, simple tasks come first and lead to more complex tasks later. However, determining complexity can be very subjective. A medical student may have an easy time reading a medical article, yet struggle to order at a restaurant, whereas a literature major who has just studied abroad for a year can order with ease but at the same time have little to no medical vocabulary.

A number of solutions have been proposed to find parameters for specificity and to grade task complexity. Edwards and Willis (2005) note that there are a number of ‘task variables’, such as difficulty, familiarity and whether or not the task is structured, that can help teachers organize and categorize tasks. Robinson (2001, p.287) found three criteria for organizing and grading tasks: task complexity (complexity inherent in the task itself), task difficulty (difficulty inherent in the learner) and task conditions (the communicative demands of the task). Robinson also devised a way to determine complexity by representing tasks as being along a series of dimensions or continuums. Examples of these dimensions include the extent to which a task is familiar or unfamiliar or the time limit of a given task. Though difficult, it would seem it is not impossible to specify, organize and determine the complexity of a task.

RESEARCH ON TBLT AND ESP AT THE UNIVERSITY

Next, this paper will analyze a number of research studies that have investigated the implementation of a TBLT syllabus for an ESP program at a university. How the program carried out a Needs Analysis will be analyzed as well as how tasks were devised and organized.

The first study (Whyte, 2013) that will be analyzed took place in a French graduate course. A TBLT syllabus for ESP was implemented into three programs: a Master's course in business administration, a Master's course for secondary school science teachers and a course for doctoral students in the humanities. Needs analyses were conducted for each course primarily in two ways: by interviewing the program director and by giving tests and learner surveys to the students. Tasks were then created from these analyses that were meant to replicate as closely as possible the students' real-life need for English. Tasks were arranged according to complexity, with the course ending in the most difficult and complex target task, which happened to be a presentation for all three courses. Before the target task, the tasks in the prior lessons consisted of preparing for this presentation, e.g. by preparing slides, doing research in English etc. Though the study did not explicitly mention the methodology for grading tasks, this would seem to accord with the method referred to above by Robinson (2001).

Next, the details for each course will be examined. The business administration course included work training at international banks and businesses, so being able to cooperate with colleagues in English as well as give presentations in English was a priority. Tasks were centered around collaborative research and presentations, with the final task being a group presentation using PowerPoint. The topics that were researched were business topics and the group presentation was meant to replicate authentic business presentations. In other words, students were to research and present "in ways similar to practices in the business community" (Robinson, 2001, p.9).

For the secondary-school science teachers, there was less of an immediate need to learn English as they would not need it on a day-to-day basis in their classroom. However, if the teachers had a firm grasp of English for scientific purposes, it would be easier to integrate into their class the large body of scientific research done in English. The tests conducted in Needs Analysis showed a deficit in oral skills in comparison to reading and listening proficiency, so the class was to focus on developing oral skills, with the final task being a science presentation. This was also in line with the program director's recommendation. However, this task was considered to be less authentic than the target task for the business students mentioned above as the students had no clear need to learn English and no real future purpose for it.

The ESP course for the doctoral students had an advantage because it was not a new course. A needs analysis had already been conducted in the course prior to the research. The purpose of the course had been to give academic coaching and help students to present and publish their research. The prior needs analysis was based on teaching experience and course evaluation by the students. The central task of the course was giving a presentation on the students' own research. This was considered to be an authentic task, as researchers are often required to present their own research. The only main difference between the task and a real conference presentation being that the classroom task was about ten minutes shorter and the audience were non-specialists, since the other students came from different fields in the humanities.

After the course, students were prompted to do an anonymous online course evaluation. This was not compulsory and not all the students participated. The questionnaire gauged the extent to which the students felt the task met their needs and whether or not they felt more confident in their English after the course. The doctoral students had the highest approval of the task, which may be as a result of the fact that the final task was quite realistic for them. The business students found the presentation task to be helpful for their presentation skills, yet they themselves did not feel any improvement or confidence boost in their English skills. Finally, the lowest rating of all came from the secondary science teachers, whose feedback suggested that the class was not important for them. The results suggest that the authenticity of the task has a direct effect on both student improvement and motivation, at least in an ESP environment. This would seem to support Long's (2015) support of authentic tasks, as opposed to Nunan's admission of occasional pedagogical tasks mentioned in section 1.

Another study at a university analyzes mechanical engineering students at the University of Costa Rica (Gonzolaes et al., 2019). Though the study does not go into detail about how a needs analysis was conducted, there were two target tasks that were created for the students: explaining the construction of a model crane and a job interview. Given the students major in mechanical engineering, this would seem to be a fairly authentic task.

According to surveys given to students after the course, students reported that they felt more confident doing the tasks in real-life and that nervousness and frustration were minimal, suggesting real-world transfer. Furthermore, 80% of the students reported that they felt motivated because the tasks were authentic. Also, according to evaluation sheets given to course administrators, the study also found that students were able to incorporate new vocabulary and new grammatical forms into their performance of the task. This is evidence that TBLT can teach new linguistic forms while at the same time promoting communication skills.

Both of these studies provide evidence that student motivation as well as perceived improvement are related to the authenticity of the task. The doctoral students in the Whyte (2013) study and the engineering students in the Gonzolaes et al. (2019) study both felt a boost in confidence, motivation and a feeling of real-world transfer due to the task resembling real-world situations. In contrast, the secondary science teachers in the Whyte (2013) study did not report feeling the class was a priority, as the task itself was not authentic.

TBLT, ESP AND ON THE JOB TRAINING

The above studies focus on university students, however the next research that will be examined focuses on adults who need to learn a language for their current job. Gonzalez-Lloret (2015) researched the effects of a TBLT syllabus on a Spanish program for U.S. border patrol agents. Students must use Spanish in order to communicate in complex and sometimes dangerous situations, like explaining legal rights or resolving conflicts. The new TBLT course was studied and

compared to the grammar-translation course which had been in place before the TBLT course. The TBLT approach was modelled after Long's approach and so contained no explicit grammar instruction. Grammar problems were addressed reactively, when a problem arose, in keeping with Long's interpretation of focus on form mentioned in section three. Students varied in ability, but all of them were considered below intermediate level.

Despite the problems associated with finding, compiling and grading tasks mentioned above, there were no reported problems in this study. A needs analysis was done by interviewing agents, supervisors and trainers, in addition to analyzing the tactical training given to new agents. The target tasks include conducting a high-risk vehicle stop, giving first aid and interviewing a person, among other tasks. The tasks themselves were created after watching videos of experienced officers completing these tasks in the real world. Then the tasks were sequenced in order by complexity.

TBLT seemed to have a positive influence on affective factors. Two surveys were administered, one for students currently enrolled in the program, and one for active border patrol agents who had completed the program. According to these surveys, students were highly motivated to continue learning Spanish after the program. Many active agents also reported an increase in confidence about their jobs following the course.

The extent to which the course could transfer to other domains was a bit more mixed, though there is strong evidence that the course helped the students to perform their job. The active border patrol agents strongly agreed that what the course taught was directly applicable to their job and the students who were currently enrolled also found the content relevant. However, many students report that they were not yet confident to use Spanish outside of their job tasks, and requested more tasks related to using Spanish in daily life, suggesting limited transferability.

Nonetheless, tests show that general Spanish proficiency had increased after the course, which would seem to suggest some level of transferability outside of the set tasks that the students had studied. The increase in proficiency seems to counter criticisms from Seedhouse (1999) that TBLT

would encourage students to speak minimally. It should be noted that this was done in an L1 English environment and students were not allowed any exposure to Spanish outside the classroom. These findings then go against criticisms from Fotos (2002) and Swan (2005) that there is not enough input in TBLT in an EFL environment to generate fluency.

Another interesting finding is the extent to which grammar acquisition was possible using Long's unfocused TBLT model. When compared to the students in the grammar-translation course, the TBLT students scored very similarly on the grammar test, despite their lessons being unfocused. TBLT students also scored higher in fluency and complexity.

This study provides ample evidence that TBLT was more effective than the former grammar-translation lessons. Motivation and confidence increased and the students found what they learned in the classroom could transfer directly to their job. As their needs were very specific and their backgrounds were similar, there were no problems with grading and organizing tasks.

CONCLUSION

TBLT's connection to real-world activities, especially when combined with a needs analysis, seems to be a promising syllabus for ESP for both university students and working adults. The authenticity of the task seemed to be a big factor in student motivation, at least as shown in the Whyte (2013) study. Gonzolaes *et al.* (2019) and Gonzalez-Lloret (2015) reported a positive effect on affective factors, with students showing increased motivation to learn their L2 as well as increased confidence in real-world English situations. Furthermore, Gonzalez-Lloret (2015) reported that a TBLT syllabus was more effective at improving L2 proficiency than the prior grammar-based syllabus. However, these programs were neither easy nor cheap. Implementing a needs-based analysis form of TBLT does require a large amount of financial and administrative resources to be done successfully. However, if these hurdles can be overcome, the above studies show promising results.

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LESSON PLAN

Do People Have the Same Images When Hearing the Same Words?

Ying Zhou, Akita International University

Keywords: Intercultural awareness, cooperative learning, task-based learning

Level: Pre-intermediate and above

Age: Junior high school ~ University

Preparation time: 5-10 minutes

Task time: 10-15 minutes

Materials: PowerPoint slides, handouts for notetaking (Appendices A & B)

INTRODUCTION

This lesson plan introduces an intercultural-awareness-raising task conducted in one Japanese undergraduate English for Academic Purposes (EAP) class, which can be used to cultivate students' awareness of differences in perceptions, especially those who are at the early stage of learning intercultural communication. Understanding that people perceive the same thing differently is basic and important knowledge for language learners who need to participate in intercultural communication. Bennett (2004) regarded cultural learning as learners' increasing sensitivity to cultural differences and Moran (2001) also assumed that learners' knowledge of cultures increases as they accumulate the experience of perceiving cultural differences. This awareness-raising task conducted in the author's teaching practicum in one Japanese undergraduate EAP class was designed to support students' reading material from Fisher and Adams' (1994) five features of perception, i.e., perception is experiential, selective, inferential, evaluative, and contextual. It served as a warm-up in a 75-minute lesson for students to develop an awareness of differences in perceptions. It is also suitable for students who are at the early stage of learning intercultural

communication. This is because the task enables students to become aware that their perceptions are influenced by their personal experiences and cultural backgrounds, and they should not take for granted that their perceptions are the only reflection of reality. The task could also enable students to be aware that it is necessary to check whether there are different understandings during intercultural communication. The task has the typical characteristics of a “task” identified by Ellis (2003). (1) The task assigns a clear role for each student. They take turns to be speakers and note-takers. (2) The primary focus is on meaning. Students retrieve their personal experiences from their memory and conceptualize the content for themselves. (3) The task requires students to ask and answer questions that reflect those in real-world communication. (4) The requirement that students take note of others’ descriptions provides for a clear outcome of the task.

Preparation:

1. Prepare the PowerPoint slides (Appendix A).
2. Print enough copies of handouts (Appendix B). <Include Appendix B into the PowerPoint instead of printing it out if this activity is conducted online.>

PRE-TASK

1. Divide students into two groups, A and B. Ask group A to close their eyes and show group B the left picture (the image of a lion) on slide 1 (see appendix A). Then, ask group B to close their eyes and show group A the right picture (the image of a rabbit) on slide 1.
2. Ask students to share what kind of animal they have seen. Then show both pictures on slide 1. Ask why they saw different animals in the same picture and how they felt about this fact.
3. Show slide 2 (see Appendix A) and tell students that they are going to do an activity in which they can discover how different their images can be even if the words that they hear are the same.

MAIN TASK

1. Ask students to close their eyes and imagine a scene according to what they hear. Read out the sentence “A person played fetch with a dog” to them. Repeat the sentence so that they have enough time to form clear images in their mind. Then tell them to open their eyes.
2. Hand out the worksheet (see Appendix B) on which students need to write down their images of the person, the dog, the weather, the location, and the thing that the dog fetched. Tell them to write down at least the details listed in the table.
3. Arrange students into groups of 3 to 5.
4. Ask students to share their images in a group. Tell students that while one student is speaking, listeners can always ask questions to get more detailed information, and listeners need to take note of the speaker’s descriptions.
5. Ask students to compare the differences in their images and discuss two questions (1) Where do their images come from? (2) Why are their images the same/different?

POST TASK

1. Show pictures of the possible images (slide 3, see Appendix A). Confirm the answers to the discussion questions. The possible answers might be “their images come from their personal experiences” and “everyone has different experiences from others”. Highlight the point that cultural backgrounds and personal experiences influence people’s perceptions and might lead to misunderstandings in communication. Emphasize that we need to check if there are different interpretations of the same objects when we participate in intercultural communication.
2. Ask students to imagine 1-2 scenes in which they need to check whether there are different understandings during intercultural communication. For example, the same gestures might have different meanings depending on cultures, and there are various ways for people to show

politeness, etc. This could be used as a written assignment that students need to share orally at the beginning of the next class.

CONCLUSION

The pre-task and the main task were conducted in the EAP class, while the post-task was added later in the author's teaching reflection. This is because the author thought step 1 in the post-task could help deepen students' understanding by providing visuals and step 2 in the post-task could provide students with opportunities for relating the class content to what they already know and help develop their writing and speaking skills.

This task was effective in promoting students' awareness of differences in perception. The students experienced the experiential aspect of perception that they have read in Fisher and Adams's (1994) five features of perception. During the in-class discussion, students shared that they realized they had different perceptions from their classmates and that their personal experiences and social background could influence their perceptions. One example was that many of them assumed the person was a man. They considered the reason and realized that it was because they were influenced by the social bias that the word person/people usually refers to man/men, while not including woman/women. Another example was that on the after-class discussion forum, a student wrote she "was struck by the fact that my image and that of my classmates were different in places". She thought a park was the place for playing fetch with a dog and never thought of other places, but the discussion with classmates made her realize there could be many other possibilities.

All in all, this activity can fit into the early stage of a course that introduces intercultural communication. It can help to motivate students to think about how different their perceptions can be due to their various personal experiences and cultural backgrounds, and how to apply this knowledge to their intercultural communication practices.

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APPENDIX A

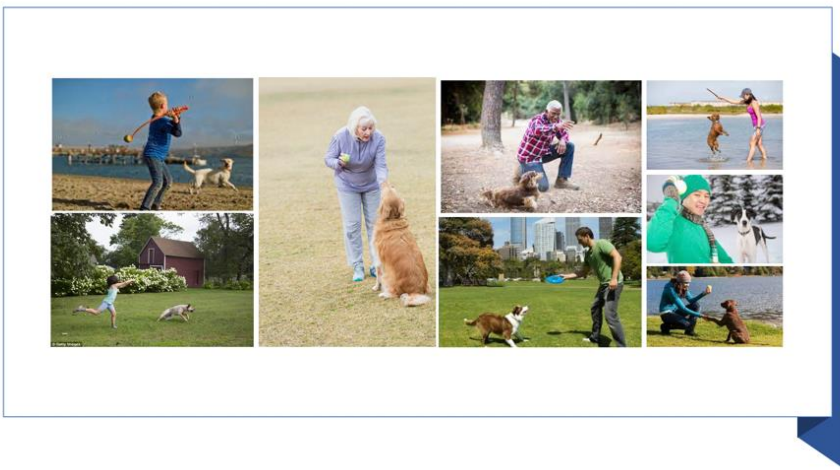
Slide 1



Slide 2



Slide 3



APPENDIX B

Handout

Name: _____

Person	Dog	Weather	Location	Thing fetched	Any other thing
Gender	Breed				
Age	Size				
Nationality	Color				
Any specific person	Any specific dog				

LESSON PLAN

The Ideal Partner

Charlie Bell, The University of Occupational and Environmental Health

Keywords: Supporting an opinion, speculating, talking about people, relationships

Level: Lower-intermediate and above

Age: University

Lesson time: 60-90mins

Materials: Laptop, projector, internet connection, student notebooks

INTRODUCTION

In this task, students are required to make a list of what they think are the most attractive traits in a partner, and provide justification for their ideas, as well as listen to an authentic English conversation and discuss the opinions of others on the same topic. This lesson puts an emphasis on speaking practice. The lesson is light-hearted and fun, and the students get to think critically about a topic that is relevant to their age group but may not usually come up in English classes.

While designing this task, I drew inspiration from Kang's (2005) concept of situational willingness to communicate (sWTC), which suggests that the psychological antecedents of sWTC are security, excitement, and responsibility, influenced by both the topic and the interlocutor. My focus while working on this lesson was primarily on the importance of the topic, but I will also try to highlight other academic influences throughout the text.

PRE-TASK 1

I start the class by splitting the students into pairs or groups of three and ask them to make a list of the traits they think are most important in a partner. I always try to keep groups small, because this usually increases the responsibility of each student to participate (Kang, 2005). This can be their own ideas, or what they think popular traits may be. Sometimes the students may need a bit of extra guidance here, so I might give them a few areas to focus on, such as personality, appearance, lifestyle, hobbies, interests, and work. I'll try to elicit an idea or two from the students before they start talking, or if the students are still warming up, I'll put a couple of very typical examples on the board. While the students share their ideas, I observe the students' conversations and take a mental note of any particularly interesting or unique ideas that they produce. After a few minutes of thinking time, I ask the students for their ideas and write them up on the board. The students tend to become more motivated to perform the task when hearing the opinions of their classmates.

PRE-TASK 2

Now that the students have warmed up, and that part of the brain that stores all their knowledge and vocabulary about this topic has been activated, I tell them that we are going to watch a video from one of my favourite YouTubers titled '26 Traits Japanese Girls want in a Guy'. The video features a pair of YouTubers: the host, Chris, a popular Japan-based YouTuber from the UK, and his English-speaking Japanese friend Chiaki. They are discussing the results of a survey that found 26 traits Japanese girls want in a guy. The video is light-hearted and humorous, and it features a fluent English-speaking Japanese person who may act as a motivating role model for the learners. To learn more about the motivating potential of near, or attainable, role models I recommend reading Murphey and Arao (2001) for an EFL perspective, and Gartzia et al. (2021) for a more general perspective.

For this task, I ask the students to watch the video and make a note of the ideal traits that the YouTubers discuss, as well as the potential reasons that are given for those traits. The video is made for a native-speaking audience, but I have found that the students can still get a lot of information from it, possibly because it's something they are interested in listening to. I play the video for about five minutes and then I give the students a couple of minutes to quickly check their answers with one another before I elicit the answers from them.

Video link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RuAQo97K-zE&t=6s>

Summary

- Pre-task 1: Ask students to list what they think are the most attractive traits in a partner.
- Ask the students to share their ideas.
- Pre-task 2: Watch a clip from the YouTube video '26 Traits Japanese Girls want in a Guy'.
- Ask students to make a note of the traits mentioned, and the reasons discussed.
- Let the students check their notes together before eliciting the answers from them.

MAIN TASK

The main speaking task builds on the first pre-task and requires the students to come together and decide what they think are the five most attractive traits in a partner, as well as providing justification for each of their choices. I put a strong emphasis on providing justification. It may even be worth specifying that students need to provide a minimum of 2-3 sentences for each trait. Clear communicative goals are after all a cornerstone of TBLT (Ellis 2003). Hopefully the previous video has encouraged the students to think of a few new ideas in addition to the ideas they came up with at the start of the lesson. Again, students can either give their own opinions, or tell us what they think most people would say if they preferred.

An alternative task for lower-level students is to provide each group with a set of cards with various traits on them. I ask each group to sort the cards into two piles: one pile for traits that they consider to be attractive in a potential partner, and another pile for traits that they do not consider to be attractive. I emphasize the importance of justifying their decisions when sorting the cards. Providing students with the same information may make their understanding easier in the presentation phase later on.

To keep the conversations fresh, I recommend mixing the groups up so they can share their ideas with different people. Depending on the level of the students, I might allow for a few minutes of individual task planning before asking the students to get together and the use of simple notes during the discussion. However, I encourage students to keep planning brief and only use their

notes as prompts. You can read more about the effectiveness of pre-task planning on L2 production in Skehan et al. (2012). I often assign one student in each group as the discussion leader or monitor, who is responsible for facilitating the discussion to ensure that all group members have a chance to contribute, and making sure discussion in Japanese is kept to a minimum. This is an idea I picked up from Lowe (2012), but it also contributes to that idea of responsibility in Kang's work on sWTC.

I let the students know that after they have completed the task, they will be presenting their ideas to their classmates, so it may be a good idea to make some notes for that purpose. I don't like to provide a print-out for this particular task because I find that the students end up focusing too much on the writing and spend less time actually talking. Assigning one member of the group to do the note-taking is a good way to solve this problem. Depending on the number of students, you can get the groups to present their results to the whole class, but in larger classes it may be better to have the groups present their results to another group, allowing the students to have more opportunities to speak.

Summary

- Main Task (option 1): make a list of the 5 most attractive traits in a partner.
- Main Task (option 2): sort a set of cards with various traits into piles of attractive and unattractive traits.
- *Optional: allow a few minutes for individual task preparation.*
- Split students into small groups.
- *Optional: assign discussion leader and notetaker.*
- Students discuss their ideas, providing at least 2-3 sentences to justify each decision.
- Students present their ideas to the class, or to another group.

POST-TASK

For this particular lesson, I like to extend the main task to give the students more opportunities for discussion. In this post-task, rather than justifying their own decisions, I want the students to try to justify the decisions of others. Although not identical to the main task, this task has similar requirements of the students and can be considered a form of task-repetition. The value of

immediate task repetition has previously been investigated by Lambert et al. (2017). I split the students into small groups and provide them with a list of additional traits that were featured in the video after we stopped watching. This list includes a range of traits, but I narrow it down to a selection of 5-10 traits in order to focus the discussion. You can easily download a copy of the transcript by clicking on the three dots, selecting 'show transcript,' and then copying and pasting the transcript into a Word document. It's worth checking for errors, though, as YouTube transcription is not always perfect.

The ideal guy...

- 1.... often rolls up the sleeves on their long-sleeved shirts.
- 2.... loves cola.
- 3.... has a lot of friends.
- 4.... is kind and gentle.
- 5.... is a member of an athletic club (sports club).
- 6.... is thin and muscular.
- 7.... will give you accessories for your birthday present.
- 8.... has a short hairstyle.
- 9.... has black hair.
- 10.... asks you "are you ok?" when you are feeling bad.
- 11.... spends less than 10,000 yen on clothes per month.
- 12.... spends a lot of time in the Harajuku neighbourhood.
- 13.... prefers navy blue or white clothing.
- 14.... is the oldest of his siblings.
- 15.... often wears hooded sweatshirts.
- 16.... has had three prior girlfriends.
- 17.... was born in August.
- 18.... regularly texts/emails/calls you.
- 19.... is into beetles.
- 20.... can drink a lot of alcohol.
- 21.... doesn't wear aftershave or cologne.

I will then ask the students to speculate about the reasons behind these traits and to come up with 1-2 potential explanations for each one. I go around the classroom again listening out for any particularly interesting ideas. After the students have completed the task, I go through the different traits individually and ask the different groups for their ideas. As a homework assignment I ask the students to watch the whole video when they get home and check whether their predictions were correct. Hopefully, the students will be interested to find out why these particular traits were chosen.

Summary

- Post-task: guess the reason why particular traits were thought to be attractive.
- Ask students to come up with potential explanations as to why some traits were chosen as attractive.
- Students share their ideas with the class.
- Homework (or in class): students watch the whole video and compare their answers to the video.

CONCLUSION

It is common for students in Japan to engage in discussions about topics in English conversation classes that are familiar to them, such as travel, hobbies, and school life. While familiarity with a topic provides a certain level of security and may help to facilitate conversation, it may also be beneficial to expose students to more novel or relevant topics on occasion, which can lead to excitement, and potentially more L2 production. From my own experience this is one lesson that students are very interested to talk about.

About the author

Charlie works full-time at a small university in northern Kyushu. He has a Master's degree in TESOL from the University of Birmingham. His academic interests include: TBLT; the motivating potential of peer modelling; and AI-supported language learning.

If you have any feedback or questions about this lesson plan, feel free to get in touch by email.

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BOOK REVIEW

Pedagogical Realities of Implementing Task-Based Language Teaching. Rosemary Erlam and Constanza Tolosa. (2022).

Reviewed by Martin Spivey, Akita Prefectural University

Pedagogical Realities of Implementing Task-Based Language Teaching is the 14th book of the ‘Task-Based Language Teaching’ series published by John Benjamins. The book reports on the findings of a study into the implementation of tasks in second language education in the New Zealand school context. The investigation is presented in two parts. In Part 1, there is a focus on how teachers learn about task-based language teaching (TBLT) as part of their professional development and whether it becomes a part of their teaching repertoire soon after completing their programme. Part 2 examines the extent to which a task-based curriculum is adopted by teachers who finished the course a few years prior and considers the main impediments to introducing a task-based syllabus into the foreign language school curriculum.

Chapter 1 serves as an introduction to the book and presents a case for the need to research TBLT from the perspective of the teacher in a real foreign language classroom environment. There is also a discussion of language learning theories that align with TBLT as well as pedagogical reasoning for its implementation. This is followed by a fairly detailed outline of the New Zealand educational context and the Teacher Professional Development Languages (TPDL) programme in which tasks and TBLT are introduced. Chapter 2 opens Part 1 and explains how 13 schoolteachers near the beginning of TPDL learn about pedagogy and reflect on it through reading log assignments. In Chapter 3, attention is given to an investigation into the teachers’ design of tasks as part of their learning inquiry written assessment. The analysis provides details on the type of tasks that were created and for which pedagogical purpose, as well as to what degree each task met the four main task criteria set out by Ellis & Shintani (2014). Part 1 concludes with Chapter 4, in which the authors move from studying how teachers learn about TBLT to how they implement it in their classes a year after TPDL. Nine participants were interviewed about their teaching practices and while none adopted TBLT as a central approach, the majority did use “pedagogic tasks” (Long, 2015) to varying levels of frequency. In class observations involving three of the teachers, it was found that all the

tasks were “focused” and there was some evidence that there were difficulties in designing tasks that were set at the right language level for the students.

Part 2 attempts to shine a light on the potential impact TBLT study in the TPDL can have on teachers in the long term. Chapter 5 reports on the observation of six teachers who had completed the programme an average of four years previously. Data was gathered through teacher transcripts and documents such as worksheets, observation notes, and student questionnaires. An in-depth analysis of ten classroom tasks found that while most relied on pre-selected language, the majority were designed with a focus on meaning. The teacher often acted as a facilitator and scaffolder, and student feedback suggests working with peers is a key motivational factor for teenage learners. In Chapter 6, the authors return to all eight teachers they initially observed and consider the degree to which all the tasks and activities meet Ellis & Shintani’s (2014) task criteria, as well as to what extent their classroom practices match Long’s (2015) ten TBLT principles. Only 20% of the 15 activities met all four task criteria, however 80% showed a concentration on meaning. It was found that several of Long’s (2015) principles did feature in the classes, including a focus on form, negative feedback, and cooperative/collaborative learning. There was, however, no proof that a task-based syllabus was followed, possibly in the main due to external assessment pressures placed on the teachers.

Chapter 7 looks at the perspectives of the teachers under investigation. Interviews were conducted with eight of the teachers who had been observed. Findings showed that the majority claimed that learning about TBLT and tasks on their TPDL was ‘significant’ and most also believed that using tasks in class was motivating for their students. As for obstacles, there was evidence of pressure on teachers of older students to teach towards assessments, and a lack of time for task planning and making materials was seen as a constraint for several teachers. The book concludes with Chapter 8, during which the authors summarize the previous chapters and offer recommendations based on their results. These include providing more time to teachers to learn about tasks in their professional development courses, advocating for input-based tasks for very low-level learners, and developing task resources that would be available for all foreign language teachers.

While this book is quite long at 282 pages, it is recommended reading for any TBLT practitioner or student who is interested in using tasks with young learners in foreign language education. There is little research available in this area, and although this study focuses exclusively on New Zealand

schools, many of the ideas and issues raised can be applied to various contexts and educational environments and provides the reader with much food for thought on how TBLT may be successfully introduced to pre-tertiary language learners. At the time of writing, the e-book version is freely available to download from the publisher's website.

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