

A general overview of task-based language teaching (TBLT), from theory to practice

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Abstract: Task Based Language Teaching (TBLT) as an innovative approach is the development of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). It has linguistic, philosophical and pedagogical bases, as well; however, its theories of learning are more fundamental than those of language. TBLT focuses on language itself, language acquisition and language performance, simultaneously. It is learner centered and promotes learners' confidence and enthusiasm. Tasks are of paramount importance since they facilitate learning and teaching activities. Even novice teachers who can engage learners in communication can handle such a class. The teacher is expected to be open minded and creative. Pair work, group work and teacher tailored tasks are done in classes. TBLT has all the four major skills within its domain and language is used in order to be learnt. Such being the case, it trains autonomous learners who can use English outside the classroom in real life circumstances. Learners are involved in classroom assessments and negotiation of meaning which increase teachers' and learners' awareness of learning and test taking strategies, respectively.

Keywords: Task, Communication, Autonomous Learners, Negotiation of Meaning, Pre-task Phase, Task Phase, Post-task Phase

Background

Task Based Language Teaching (TBLT) is a teaching approach which is based on the use of communicative and interactive tasks in order to plan and deliver instruction. Task based language teaching is an extension of the characteristics of communicative language teaching and an attempt by its supporters to apply principles of L2 to teaching. It has been regarded as an innovative approach. Such an approach is "a development of CLT". This approach relies on three major notions in terms of tasks. Richards and Rogers (2002) introduce such criteria as:

"1. Activities involve real language communication are essential for language learning.

2. Activities in which language is used for carrying out meaningful tasks promote learning.

3. Language that is meaningful to the learner supports the learning process."

As a matter of fact, tasks gained importance as the most major part of instruction since the 1970s to challenge traditional form based methods. In TBLT learners face

language in various ways in comparison with previous approaches; thus, it has been claimed that they are more interested in learning the target language. Teachers, too, can select and make innovatively helpful class activities. This approach provides learners with an authentic context in which they can use language. In such an approach, they have abundant chances to interact with each other and acquire the language as a result of attempting to understand each other and to be understood.

1. Approach (Theory)

Like any other approach, TBLT has linguistic, philosophical and pedagogical bases. A chief underlying notion here is that theories of learning are more essential than those of language. According to (Nunan, 2004) in TBT "...the deployment of grammatical knowledge to express meaning" reveals that in TBLT form and meaning are closely interrelated; in other words, grammar is a great asset to facilitate conveying meaning for interlocutors (Xin-ming, 2010). Naturally, tasks greatly facilitate

learning and teaching activities. TBLT adds to all the previous approaches and methods without discrediting them. It actually emphasizes the notion of how to learn more than how to teach. It focuses on language itself, language acquisition and language performance simultaneously (Jiangquin, Feng & Min, 2008). Yet another major plus point about TBT is its being learner centered. This not only increases chances of meaningful communicative activities but also as a result of being centered around learners' personal experiences and needs, they are much more likely to be interested and involved. In other words, classroom activities are not pre determined by teachers but instead are adopted, devised, adapted and revised to meet needs of those specific groups.

1.1. Theory of Learning

As fundamental bedrock, it is believed that with TBLT, many people are provided with the confidence as well as the willingness to interact with others effectively in a foreign language. This is true even for those who are not as proficient as they are expected to be in terms of grammar and form. In TBLT learners are provided with abundant opportunities to exploit the language they already know in the classroom without being afraid of making mistakes. In other words, it promotes learners' confidence and enthusiasm. This is a result of both task activity and the follow up achievement. TBLT, contrary to what many may believe, does not rule out form focused activities. Indeed, such activities are emphasized to develop oral use of the target language. In other words, in TBLT the main focus is empowering meaningful interaction while students' attention is drawn to language form when and where necessary. It has been indicated by SLA research that developing a second language is not only a function of exposing learners to "comprehensible input" but mostly depends on getting them involved in naturalistic and meaningful communication. A TBLT classroom revolves around pair work, group work and teacher tailored tasks. Such a teacher is supposed to be open minded; even an inexperienced teacher who can engage learners in communication can handle such a class. Creativity, however, can be a great asset for such a teacher.

TBLT has all the four major skills within its domain. As a matter of fact, in such a class language is used in order to be learnt. Naturally, the language which is practiced in TBLT classroom is not predetermined but rises from the specific projects and tasks that students are required to fulfill. However, it must be emphasized that TBLT is not basically designed for examinations. Its very first goal is to train autonomous learners who can use English outside the classroom in real life circumstances. Some of projects encourage learners to move into the real world and have real life encounter with language. This way, the gap between language study and language use can be made up for to a satisfactory extent. Here, final judgment is based upon learners' improvement to use the language for communication; for example, assessment helps the teacher

to make decision whether to use similar tasks in future classes or try to use other alternatives. It goes without saying that getting learners involved in classroom assessments increases both teachers and students' awareness of learning and test taking strategies. This awareness includes both input and output processing. It also provides them with promising opportunities to figure out their weak points as well as their strengths. Another chief underlying notion behind TBLT is believed to be "negotiation of meaning." in acquiring L2, meaning negotiation brings some specific parts of the learners' utterance (elements of form) into attention for further revision and modification. This whole process, which includes negotiation of meaning, revision, modification, further rewording and experimenting with the new language items is a focal factor acquisition. In TBLT language acquisition takes place as a result of interaction and negotiation of meaning. These follow from development of learners' L2 interlanguage. Also, learners' attempt to co-construct meaning in groups facilitates the acquisition. (Tavakoli, 2009).

1.2. Theory of Language

Although TBLT is mostly concerned with theories of learning than theories of language, it regards language as a means through which meaning is conveyed. In other words, meaning is of utmost importance. This approach is not "concerned with language display". Language focus refers to conscious thinking about language in the context of a meaning focused activity. In other words, as learners are getting ready for a meaning focused activity, they think about the language or work together to solve their language problems. Based on the nature of the task and related texts, items are identified for a more precise focus on form. Here, the parts that are to be dealt with are selectively decided for and chosen. This is done selectively because it is clearly impossible or impractical to cover all the language of a text or a task. Proponents of TBLT refer to language as structure, function and a means of interaction. This means that TBLT benefits from all three models together and none of them specifically in isolation. An underlying belief behind benefiting from tasks in ELT is that they can bring all other units of instruction such as syntactic, lexical and functional ones together. A fundamental belief here is that lexical units of language are focal both in language acquisition and language use. TBLT puts a stronger emphasis on vocabulary in comparison with traditional approaches.

2. Design/Method

2.1. Introduction

Task based approaches start from the meaning; thus, they contrast with the ones that have form in the center of attention; TBLT casts doubt upon such assumption about the way language is learnt. Here, it is firmly believed that

language learning is not just an additive process; instead, it is a process of formulating and hypothesis checking. In TBLT, objectives must be perfectly matched with the specific needs of learners in real world contexts. Naturally, the particular content skills and abilities that are acquired as a result of task processes are less important than the process dimensions. In brief, the task-exercise distinction, the construct validity of task and pedagogic outcomes are three major criteria that should be taken into consideration. Thus, the main goal in TBLT is to provide learners with a usable meaning system that can be used authentically based on a range of language to which they are exposed. A significant departure point between TBLT and previous approaches is placing focus on form at the end of a series of activities. This is significantly different from the traditional PPP method in which learners are conditioned to concentrate on a limited set of forms without having meaning in the center of attention. In TBLT, however, a flexible attitude is taken with regard to instruction. This is mainly a function of learners' needs and developmental readiness (Huang, 2010).

2.2. Syllabus

In more recently developed proposals on syllabus design three approaches receive more emphasis, namely, procedural syllabus, process syllabus, and task based language teaching. In TBLT, however, a significant departure point from procedural syllabus and process syllabus is the necessity of conducting a thorough needs analysis beforehand. In this regard, attention must be paid to recognizing possible difficulties that might tamper with or completely block the applicability of the syllabus in terms of sources task complexity, grading and sequencing learners' level and teaching materials. The last two items are believed to be the most challengeable criteria ahead of syllabus designers in TBLT. Regarding learners, attention must be paid to language data, learners' level, information, age, cultural backgrounds, learners' learning style and educational values in which TBLT is to be put into practice. For instance, in terms of language data, the importance of authenticity of language data is undeniable; this well enables learners for real life situations. Unlike what many might suppose, the syllabus relies on sets of grammatical, phonological, lexical, functional and even notional items rather than just distinguishing a peculiar item. TBLT benefits from a dynamic syllabus which is determined by both teachers and learners. Such a syllabus is an outcome of a careful needs analysis which is the base for devising and developing a curriculum. Multiple frameworks have been offered for syllabus design. These include authenticity, form function integration, and task dependency (Xin Ming, et al., 2010). Another consideration is learners' level. Ellis (2004) believes that as learners advance, their main concern shifts from meaning and lexis to form. Hence, attention must be paid to the fact that as learners further in their language proficiency, they tend to work with usable language not explicit description of language.

As went above, a major feature of TBLT is its dependence on needs analysis prior to selecting any pedagogic materials. These needs can be approached as four major categories namely: cognitive, social, affective and psychomotor (Xin-ming, et al., 2010). It is evident that every individual learner has his or her own way of learning, and it is due to their different knowledge set, past experiences, motivation, communicative needs and cultural and pedagogic values. This highlights the significance of well-planned needs analysis containing:

1. Target situation analysis: the demands of the target situation
2. Deficiency Analysis
3. Strategy Analysis
4. Means Analysis
5. Language audits

In the other theory four stages in developing language program are stated, first of which is needs analysis. It is believed that tasks determine a framework for classroom teaching stages. He also believes that data about learners needs can be directly obtained from researchers in SLA rather than people such as teachers. Another approach to needs analysis rises from the fact that tasks can be well used as units of analysis to analyze ones' language skills. In other word, this can be considered as an innovative way of analyzing what goes or has taken place in classroom. In doing so tasks are classified based on analysis and consequently needs analysis into three distinct levels. In the first level, tasks can be analyzed as target task which included people, daily interactions. These form the first criterion of needs. Second, needs analysis can be done with regard to task types. These results in tailoring courses to meet requirements of heterogeneous classes. Finally, it is believed that another approach to analyze learners' needs and develop suitable tasks for them is to consider pedagogic tasks. By this he means class materials and activities from another concern with regard to needs analysis. These tasks focus on various aspects of L2 skills which are necessary to cope with other tasks. A major factor in syllabus design for TBLT which is overlooked by many is cultural and social context of SLA. In this regard, dominant pedagogic values in the target, learners' learning styles and values must be carefully tended to.

2.3. Tasks

TBLT benefits from innovation with regard to both methodological and philosophical aspects. From a methodological perspective, learners mostly resemble language users than language learners in that a task based syllabus revolves around tasks and proceeds through them. Task, is any activity which is designed to help achieve a particular learning goal. These can be categorized based on different dimensions of their use. These can be goals, procedures, order, pacing, product, learning strategy, assessment, participation, resources and language. In other words, task is as an activity with an outcome. In order to perform a task, learners must go through a process of

thought which is monitored and organized by teachers. However, it must be mentioned that tasks, exercises and activities are different. Unlike an exercise, a task does not focus on a specific grammatical structure, but instead is an act of communication without a specifically linguistic outcome. An exercise, on the other hand, has a limited focus on a particular language item and has a clear linguistic outcome. An activity lies somewhere in the between, with some overlaps with both tasks and exercises. A task is a manifestation of any sort of real life activity. Exercises are great assets in pre task stages. A more analytic probe of the differences between task, exercise and activity can lead us to the frame work which has been offered by (Little Wood, 2006). He has presented five criteria. These spread over a spectrum which has solidly form based activities on the one end and purely communicative ones on the other end. These all can be included in different stages of a TBLT class session.

As Little Wood (2006) believes, there are non-communicative activities with a vivid focus on form, pre-communicative language practice in which slightly a meaning oriented focus on form is observed, communicative language practice form is exploited in order to convey meaning and information, structured communication in which a well-confined focus in communication of meaning is sought, and finally authentic communication is introduced as the most obvious form of communication in which having communication of meaning in the center of attention, language forms cannot be anticipated nor pre dictated beforehand (Little Wood, 2006). These can be of great help in planning, sequencing, prioritizing and adapting a series of activities for a given class with all its minute complexities.

2.3.1. Types of Tasks

A task based lesson goes far beyond a single task and incorporates a sequence of several overlapping tasks that back up one another. These fall into several classifications. From one perspective, tasks can be real world tasks and pedagogical tasks. In a broader sense tasks, according to (Richards and Rogers, 2002: 234) can be:

- “1. One way or two way tasks in terms of exchange of information and ideas
2. Convergent or divergent tasks based on similarity of the final goal or goals
3. Single or multiple possible outcomes
5. Concrete or abstract language based on the use of concrete or abstract language
6. Simple or complex processing based on cognitive processing
7. Simple or complex language
8. Reaching based or not reality based”

From a more limited and traditional perspective, classes can be introduced in the form of listing, ordering and sorting, comparing, problem solving, sharing personal experiences and creative tasks. These include jigsaw tasks, information gap, tasks, opinion exchange tasks, decision

making task and problem solving tasks. Tasks can be categorized based on skill, whether it requires speaking, writing, reading or listening. Text genre is another issue of importance. Also tasks vary according to the level of information processing which they demand. Yet another factor can be the interlocutors (participants in the task). Theme and topic of the task are other factors. Finally, contextual support which is provided by the class materials as well as linguistic features of the tasks must be taken into consideration. Willis introduces three levels of representing real world. These can be based on level of meaning in which meaning is produced based on its use in real world. In the second level, which is called “level of discourse” learners are supposed to recognize the discourse and act according. Finally, in “level of activity” learners take part in activities which represent real life and call for exploiting whatever language they know. These can be looked upon from a different angle too. ” Target tasks” which reproduce discourse activities which are normally observed in daily interactions. The other group is” facilitating tasks” which pave the way for the former group i.e. “target tasks”. Real world tasks can be in a number of ways. For instance, in EAP approached (English for academic purposes) and ESP (English for specific purposes) learners are equipped with what they will actually encounter in real world together with the skills they need in real situations. These two can greatly benefit from jigsaw tasks, role play activities and prediction tasks (for EAP reading).

Another perspective can be tasks which are centered on everyday English. These can include conversation, story telling, discussion, etc. learners’ attention must be raised regarding the link between the task and real life activity. However, learners should be given the choice for the topics of discussions. Another case for this perspective can be electronic communication in writing and reading, in a sequence of mails. However, some other tasks, though real world in nature is that they sometimes involve real world meaning and discourse, can be called “artificial tasks” because they do not reflect the real world in which learners want to use English. For instance, describing or recalling objects or asking partner to clarify what has been said are used as this type. Similar to real world tasks, pedagogic tasks are essential to any TBLT classroom. These are naturally derived from and designed and sequenced to lead to target tasks. These tasks are graded according to their level of complexity.

2.3.2. Task Complexity

As went above, a chief issue in task design is level of complexity. In broad terms, complexity can be defined as a composite measure of language use, which normally reflects the length of utterances and the amount of subordination used. In order to make basic decisions in TBLT, possible sources of task complexity need to be anticipated and prepared for. The most promising guide to identify the level of difficulty of the task is the teachers’ intuition. Still, seven criteria can be introduced to increase

teachers' awareness and strengthen his/her intuition. These include open or closed outcome starting for the TBLT class or task, pre task preparation and the amount of time and teachers' assistance, control demands of task structure and agenda, interaction patterns and participant roles, pressure on language production, and post task activities (Willis & Willis, 2007). However, Willis and Willis (2007) introduce more clarified features to judge task complexity in grading. These include cognitive familiarity of the topic and its predictability, cognitive processing and the amount of computation, the amount of work and intellectual effort required, communicative stress which involves timing issues, code complexity which refers to linguistic complexity and variety and finally cognitive processing and the amount of computation, the amount of work and intellectual effort required for understanding and conducting the task. (Westhoff, 2009).

Generally speaking, it is a commonly held belief in cognitive psychology that knowledge is acquired as a natural result of mental activity. This knowledge is believed to pile up in LTM (Long Term Memory) as records which derive from the activities in working memory (WM). Accordingly, tasks can be evaluated with regard to diversity, and strength of the mental processes which are imposed on WM. Efficient SLA tasks activities and exercise rely upon five major assumptions (Westhoff, 2009). These can be called "the SLA penta _pie, containing all the basic ingredients of a complete and nutritious "language meal". At first, exposure to a comprehensively rich language input is an indispensable factor, although not exclusive for SLA. This exposure; however, must not be too far above the learners' level of competence. Vygotsky puts it as "zone of proximal development" and Krashen names it "i+1". The next consideration is said to be content oriented processing claiming that mere exposure to decent input is not enough, and input must be comprehended and made into meaning input for WM. The next criterion is form oriented processing in which form including grammar is focused on and processed. However, weak interface hypothesis puts emphasis on content oriented input processing along with instruction on form. The next consideration is pushed out put hypothesis. Here, mention is made of benefits of such out put for raising learners' awareness regarding their own weak point and drawbacks. This, in turn, leads to rise in their motivation.

3. Procedural/ Pedagogical Perspective/ Practice in Class

Having discussed different aspects of task based teaching so far, now it is time to bring all the theoretical knowledge and frame works in to practice. Naturally, any class sessions needs a strategy point based upon which class continues through some themes, texts, activities and so on. So, it is crucial to spend enough time on ways of devising tasks. (Ellis, 2004) introduces two approaches to TBLT

planning, namely, pre-task and within-task planning. These are classified regarding time of the planning, either before the task or during the performance. As went before, a task-based class session includes a series of tasks which overlap and back up each other. It can be as simple as a teacher-led introduction in which learners are supposed to process the input for its meaning. This priming paves the way for the upcoming parts. Clearly, a TBLT classroom can start from various points. These can be exemplified by watching a visual presentation, eliciting learners' experiences or listening to some audio materials. During the priming stage, input can be solidly authentic in the form of searching through websites. It can be preplanned and prefabricated by the teacher. This can proceed through some parallel or serial tasks. This leads to analysis of the form in the very final stages. In SLA, two alternative approaches with which class can be initiated have been introduced as form-focused start and meaning-focused start. TBLT lies on the notion that encouraging learners to use the language to the extent possible disregard of some possible shortcomings, slips, inaccuracies and information gaps. In such meaning-based approaches learners are offered opportunities to utilize and exploit language in class for communication. Incidental focus on form naturally and inevitably takes place in such classes. In other words, during such sequences of activities, learners explore their "language repertoire" (Willis and Willis, 2007) to find appropriate materials through which they can best express themselves. This focus on language can be occasionally led and intervened by the teacher, in order to refine their utterances and make it more comprehensible. This can continue by shifting learners' focus on form more clearly.

In brief, such a class starts with a focus on meaning, followed by focus on language and finally focuses on form. Evidently, this is a significant difference between TBLT and former form-focused approaches. In TBLT, as just mentioned, focus on form is put aside until final stages of the class session. Such a classroom differs from traditionally form-focused ones in a number of ways. First, learners' utterances are not normally controlled nor limited by the teacher. This way, learners can better feel and comprehend the language they have been exposed to in context so far and ponder it more analytically later on. Moreover, learners' ability to utilize the language is the most major scales to evaluate the functionality of the methodology. This actually emphasizes language which will most probably be encountered or required in real life circumstances. Unlike CLT, in TBLT it is believed that studying form can increase chances of accuracy on communication. In other words, such highlighting of form makes it more likely to be recalled later on. Another justification is that during a meaning-focused sequence of tasks, activities and exercises, focus on language and form naturally happens, since learners will seek possible ways to make themselves understood as clearly as possible. In order to solve such shortage of knowledge, they consult their peers or available sources to find what they lack. This

incidental focus on form is believed to be of countless benefits. Last but not least, focusing on form at the end of the sequence is motivating for learners since they are always curious to know why they have been studying what has been presented to them. This belief, disregarding of our method, learners need to be made aware of the learning chances provided for them in a given lesson. Clearly, while students are struggling with the task and trying their best to express all the meaning they have on mind, a focus on form at the end of the sequence provides them with great relief as they find proper answers to all possible questions and deficiencies of knowledge which they have encountered during the sequence. This well justifies not starting the class with grammar.

3.1. Planning a Task Sequence

Evidently, a well planned sequenced of tasks is essential to any TBLT classroom. This starts by identifying a topic by the teacher. One which is a result of through needs analysis. This is followed by devising a series of target tasks which are better to be authentic and real life. A major consideration is to decide how to warm learners up by priming them. Priming can include introducing necessary vocabulary items, drawing students' attention on the ingredients of the series of tasks, and how to provide them with clearly explicitly guidelines on what they are supposed to reach in the target task. This leads to facilitating tasks which in turn build up to target task. To introduce these all in detail, a TBLT class session can be divided into three major phases namely opening (pre task phase), performance (task phase), and ending (post task phase)

3.1.1. Opening (pre-Task) Phase

This phase is aimed at preparing the learners, both cognitively and linguistically for the upcoming parts of the lesson to enhance acquisition. A thoughtfully prepared and conducted opening phase greatly increases learners' motivation to take part in the task. It also prepares them for the performance phase by providing them with knowledge of language and appropriated knowledge of the words. Another consideration in this stage is "organizing the performance phase" (Van den Branden, 2006: 99). This is through vivid instructions regarding the objectives of the task and most probably useful guide lines on how the task must or can be carried out. In order to bring these all into practice, a number of acts can be done. As went above, in this 'stage 'learners should be prepared both cognitively and linguistically for the main task. According to Ellis (2004) in this stage four alternatives are at teachers' disposal. First, a task similar to the main task can be done. In this trial performance the teacher leads this "smaller version" of the main task so that learners' performance during the main task can be scaffolded. This is believed to pave the way for "self-regulation" through "other-regulation" (Ellis, 2004: 24). Another alternative in this phase can be offering a model. This not only can lower the cognitive burden of the main task to a great extent but also

can increase students' consciousness with regard to minute complexities and aspects of the main performance. However, SLA research indicates that a major consideration in this kind of activity is enabling learners to scaffold one another during the main task phase. Another concern here is that this type of activity might lead to focusing on one or two particular aspects of form and consequently might be mistaken with an exercise. Yet another option in pre task phase can be Non-task preparation activities. These can greatly lower the linguistic and cognitive complexity of the main task for the learners. In terms of the linguistic aspects of activities of this type, it has been advised that vocabulary should receive much more attention than grammar. Teachers can actually deal with unfamiliar words or ones that can come in handy in the main performance stage. By "strategic planning" learners can be asked to decide how they will conduct the task. Here, learners can be given the final goal and left alone to devise strategic steps to reach that goal. Another option can be providing them with guide lines which can be "detailed" or "undetailed". In this sort of planning which can be done individually, in peers or in groups, attention must be paid to optimal time limit. Interestingly, the amount of time spent on this stage reveals no significant influence on learners' fluency. In the main task stage SLA research advises one to ten minutes as practical timing for activities of this type. Another point which is worth attention is that when strategic planning is guided by the teacher, it can be mostly form focused or content focused.

Generally speaking, pre task stage is aimed at establishing schemata of any type in order to provide learners with a grasp of the theme and expectations (goals) of the task. However, this stage should not be over loaded since it is naturally supposed to take much less time than the main phase of task thus it is not necessary at all for the teacher to present and explain all the new vocabulary items of the real world must be at the service of the main task. Effects of such planning can be approached in terms of accuracy, fluency and complexity. A study by Philip, Oliver and Mackey (2006: 550) indicates that effectiveness of such planning on learners' accuracy is subject to uncertainty. This is partly due to diversity of definition for accuracy and partly due to variety of task related factors. However such pre task planning reveals improvement in terms of complexity of the language which is produced by planning in comparison with non-planners.

3.1.2. Performance (Main Task)

As the title goes, in this stage learners are busy with the task. As it was previously mentioned, in this stage students are given the opportunity to make use of all the language they already have. During this phase, the teacher keeps monitoring the students and provides them with guidelines and support. Although this phase can be done individually, it is highly advised that the task should be done in pairs or groups. This can greatly lead to more spontaneous, confident and analytical talk. Moreover any kind of success

in fulfilling the goals of the task, increases learners' motivation. In this phase two major procedural options can be utilized by the teacher. Ellis (2004) calls these "task performance options", which should be planned by the teacher prior to the class. Here in performance options and process options where on the spot decision making and planning take place, while class is working on the task, teacher can decide to give students limited time or let them be free. He or she can decide whether let learners have access to input data during task performance or not. This has been a matter of debate for quite sometime. According to (Prabhu, 1987, as cited in Ellis, 2004:250) "borrowing" from a set of input data is compatible with TBLT, since learners take over an available verbal formulation in order to express some self-initiated meaning content instead of generating the formulation from one's own competence. Clearly there is a difference between "borrowing" and "reproduction" in which learners "take over" an input sample which is chosen by external authority such as the teacher or the textbook. This "borrowing" which is well in line with sociocultural theory can vividly lead to acquisition. Yet third option with regard to task performance can be "introducing a surprise element". This is done by providing some surprise or extra information halfway through the task performance. However research has not yet verified the effectiveness of this element on learners' fluency, accuracy or language complexity.

According to Ellis (2004), the second procedural option that can be taken into account by the teacher is called "process option". These simply refer to all the activities, planning and selection that take place in the course of performance. These all are a function of both the teacher and learners' learning and teaching experience, their philosophy of education, learning or teaching styles/habits, and of course "practical knowledge". In order to make this possible, in TBLT, texts need to be learner-centered and chosen with utmost care to meet learners' needs. This can greatly encourage their active participation in the process of performance. In practice, in TBLT learners are assumed to forget where they really are and disregard of the classroom, learn language through utilizing it instead of being taught. This naturally can come to life through team work. Without feeling the teachers' presence, learner' risk taking behavior can improve. However, this ideally pure student-student interaction can have some destructive rather than constructive outcomes. A number of such major concerns are to be regarded cautiously and be headed off. One of these can be mineralization. In brief mineralization refers to students' resorting to minimizing their utterances to get their message across. This way evidently, they can communicate what they want, but it is not of any benefit to "stretch" their language, which is an underlying objective in TBLT. This can partly rise from the fact that in a purely TBLT classroom condition, language might be regarded only a means to an end. Naturally, the simpler the means, the better. Still, a well-planned and well-monitored task performance can prevent such concerns to a great extent.

Another way to tackle such situations is to integrate episodes of focus on form into the performance. This can be included right before initiating performance by eliciting and directly focusing on the possible forms that are essentials to the performance of given task. Another option can be incidental focus on form. This, which is of several benefits, can take place both on the teachers' side and the learners'. A general notion here is that in task performance the content is directed by students, the form only by the teacher. On the teachers' side incidental correction and feedback can take place. This kind of feedback, which is selective on the spot and occasional, is naturally different from systematic approaches to provide correction and feedback. The teacher which monitoring the students must bear in mind that incidental focus on form during the performance can greatly accelerate acquisition. So the teacher can either focus on form implicitly or explicitly during the performance. These can range from negotiation of meaning to negotiation of form during a performance. This however, must be done with utmost care and caution in order not to interfere with the performance which has been set on going. To meet this crucial need a number of techniques have been suggested by Ellis (2004). These can be utilized both by the teacher (an interlocutor in the performance of the task) and the learners. A plus point about these techniques is that they not only do not tamper with the ongoing performance of the task, but also add to this authenticity and naturalness. In other words, such techniques are inherent to any daily conversation and interaction. On the implicit side, request for clarification and recast can be mentioned. On the explicit side, explicit correction, metalingual comment /question, query and advice are proposed as possible techniques. Implicitly or explicitly of the approach is largely a function of the level of proficiency and motivation. Naturally lower level learners or ones with lower motivation require a selectively controlled and structured agenda. On the contrary, as factors such as level of the learners, level of motivation and level of complexity of the task rise, "a looser" agenda can be opted. This will naturally leave some parts open to learners to be devised and planned through negotiation and intra group communication. This can be within a time limit. Though a flexible timing system is what actually takes place in a real classroom, when learners are given some limited time, they feel more obliged and thus motivated to act quickly.

However, it is largely a matter of goals of the task, learners' level, fluency, objectives and other factors. Timing can also be done in terms of fulfilling a number of goals; i.e., if some assigned goals are fulfilled by the teams, it can be called a wrap. Still, for a "looser" agenda students decide for such issues as timing through negotiation. With regard to what actually is put into practice, previously mention was made of different task types, first a traditional classification includes, according to Willis and Willis (2007), listing which can put into practice through brainstorming, fact-finding, games based on listing(quizzes,

memory challenge and guessing games). Next ordering and sorting can be done as sequencing a series of pictures and developing a story for it, rank ordering of a series of items, classifying some items or ideas and games based on classified sets. The next traditional criterion is comparing and contrasting which can be brought into practice through comparison tasks and games. Fourth, problem-solving tasks and puzzles. Next is sharing personal experience through story telling, anecdotes and reminiscences. These can also be included in the pre-task phase. Last but not least, creative task can be mentioned. These students are supposed to make projects or class presentation. Regarding interactional classification on task, jigsaw task, also called a split-information task are amongst the most popular. In such tasks different groups have different pieces of information. Final conclusion is reached by putting these pieces together through negotiation and interaction. Another criterion is information gap tasks. These gaps that are formed in corrupted texts can require factual pieces of information, linguistic information or be in need of being reordered. In order to fill the gaps, students are required to go through interaction and negotiation. These can be regarded as a problem solving activity. In reordering a corrupted text, sentences and phrases are reordered in order to restore the text as it is supposed to be. Other criteria with regard to interactional classification include problem solving, decision making tasks and opinion exchange tasks.

3.1.3. Post Task

Post task is the third phase in which learners' look back at their activities up until this stage. Evaluation in this stage is done both by the teachers and by the students while students review what they have accomplished. Here, again the teacher has the role of a counselor and a consultant. In this stage, a number of activities can be put into practice. An approach at the teachers' disposal in post task is to recycle texts. A text, which has been exploited to a great extent in pre task and task phases, has still a lot to offer. It is inclusive of useful language items. In post task such language items can be brought into attention for further study. It simply provides learners with useful language from the already studied text. Recycling can be done through memory challenge, corrupted text, quizzes, group dictation, communal memory, summaries and personalizing tasks. These are aimed at persuading learners to process language in various ways. Another option in post task is reporting. It is proved to be of several benefits. For instance, less confident learners, by reporting to a partner, can gain more confidence in this kind of activity and to extend the audience can increase accuracy as well as fluency. According to a study by Johnston (2005) as cited in Willis and Willis (2007) following a planning and report stage, level of syntactical accuracy showed improvement in learners. Their choice of vocabulary and functions was more native like and of more diversity in comparison with the main performance phase. This is first focused on reviewing content and later deals with more details

regarding form. Focus on form can be done in an oral or written manner.

Yet another option is task repetition. This is proved to be of numerous benefits. Several scholars including Ellis, 2003; Pinter, 2005; Bygate, 2001; and Essig, 2005; as cited in Willis and Willis (2007) all agree that repeating the same task with the same goal leads to a more comprehensive lexical level with higher accuracy, fluency and structural complexity. However, in order to make it more challenging and fine, stricter time limits can be assigned. Besides, the teacher can include some language work during post task. Focus on form in this stage is more detailed and comprehensive in comparison with the pre task stage. Obviously, focus on form in this stage is mostly in an inductive manner. Obviously, this focus on form must be planned in advance. As a result of this attentive focus on form, learners' knowledge will be more systematized and their consciousness regarding words and functions will grow. In addition to this preplanned focus on form, there are other ways in which focus on form is rather done off handedly. For instance, class can analyze task recordings or teacher can collect examples by providing students with words and expressions they lacked or required in the performance stage. Finally, evaluation and feedback can be included in the final stages of the sequence. To do so, students are asked to write anonymous notes on their feelings regarding how the task went on. These can include both ideas for and against the whole sequence. Interestingly, this can be looked upon as a real life task in nature. These data can be of great constructive outcomes for the teacher to orient, reorient, arrange and adapt his or her tasks and activities in order to have finer tuned tasks for the future.

3.2. Evaluation/ Assessment/ Examination

Several scholars have discussed micro and macro evaluation in TBLT. These can be conducted in both formative and summative formats. Generally speaking, assessment is done based on the degree of their demonstration and real life testing. Naturally, it evaluates the task outcome. As previously discussed, TBLT basically aims at enabling learners to use the language in daily situations. However, nobody can deny the importance of testing in language teaching and learning. Tests today include both communicative and form focused sections. A good example for this can be introducing a short test on vocabulary or structure right in the post task phase compatible with the tests they have ahead of them. This can be a very traditional multiple choice test or a gap filling one. Another alternative, which seems more TBLT based, is to ask students design their own tests on the materials they have just worked with. Here, students can be looked upon as "question masters" (Willis & Willis, 2007). A major need to develop a medium to assess learning tasks was the driving force behind the fact that a number of CFL teachers, especially in Europe, made a great effort to find realistic tasks which were rich in real life content and linguistic aspects. Accordingly, tasks should be evaluated regarding

the type, diversity and strength of the mental processing they impose on WM.

3.3. Snapshot of the Classroom

So far, different aspects of running a class session in TBLT have been illustrated. However, the teacher, learners, class materials and class room language need more clarification.

3.3.1. Classroom Language

As previously mentioned, TBLT provides learners with abundant opportunities to deal with language in a less confidence and less traditionally teacher dominated classroom. This is facilitated through getting learners involved in a large arena of extended discourse for spontaneously daily interaction. Utterances can be monologues, dialogues and class discussions. However, the classroom is still confined to some extent in comparison with a real life context. Still, the TBLT teacher is responsible for preparing students to cope with a wide range of daily circumstances they have ahead of them. A major concern has always been use of L1 in TBLT classrooms. This is believed to be of both plus point, and minus points. On the upside, it can facilitate the pace of class in dealing with social and cognitive functions. In this regard, students' use of L1 while working in group or pairs can give rise to developing hypotheses about the target language. This can be justified according to principles of CLT. Moreover, regarding learners' identity, in cases use of L1 eases communication of cultural values and beliefs they have in common. However, this can give learners' the freedom of overusing L1. Evidently, this can gradually dilute the psycholinguistic rationale in a TBLT class. This is dispiriting for the teacher as well. This can rise from at least three reasons. According to Carless (2008) being placed in a teacher oriented class, teachers' inability to establish interaction among learners, and students' concern about making mistakes motivate them to resort to L1 use. These all can be handled to a great extent through pair work and group work in TBLT. Also, task repetition can really encourage use of L2 instead of L1 in later performances. Some teachers set less strict rules with regard to use of L1 at earlier stages of each sequence. These rules get stricter as the sequence goes on. Still, benefits of selective and reasonable use of L1 is undeniable. In another study by (Lee, 2002) use of TBLT in teaching pronunciation. Through technological teaching aids in order to provide a TBLT based model for handling pronunciation in class. This model uses an authentic task as a radio program. The most interesting part of this model is that it is conducted over a period of 5 weeks and includes a series of mini tasks which are put together to result in the final goal/task.

3.3.2. Teachers' Role

In TBLT classes, the teacher retains his/her traditional role to a large extent. As went before, such a teacher is

supposed to be open minded; even an inexperienced teacher who can engage learners in communication can handle such a class. This is done by exposing learners to L2. However, there are several other roles associated with a TBLT teacher. Such a teacher is mostly a leader and organizer of tasks and class management in order to lead the whole class towards the objectives of tasks. This is much more than being merely a supplier of knowledge. In broad terms, such a teacher leads and organizes discussions, manages groups and pairs, facilitates performance and acquisition, motivates learners by appropriate feedback and highlighting their achievements, advises learners on language and finally acts as a language teacher. Other roles of such a teacher can be selecting and sequencing tasks, preparing learners for tasks, and finally consciousness-raising. These roles vary according to what part of the sequence the class is dealing with.

3.3.3. Learners' Role

Being a learner centered approach, in TBLT it specific roles are assigned to each member of the team, more balanced participation and a more well-organized flow of tasks can be gained. These can include being a writer/secretary/reporter, a long wage consultant, a leader/chairperson, a spokes person, and an observer of interaction/participation (Willis & Willis, 2007). Richards and Rodgers (2002) mention some other roles for learners within the frame work of TBT. Learners can be group participants to fulfill the above mentioned roles. Also, they are highly supposed to notice how language is used in real life communication. This monitoring can include both the learner themselves as well as other peers. Another role which is assigned to learners is risk taker and innovator. Here, learners are required to create and interpret utterances beyond the domain of their linguistic resources and already held experiences.

3.3.4. Class Materials

In TBLT pedagogic materials are of great importance. They carry the burden of many of the tasks within the frame work of TBLT. These can vary from already existing materials to those which are by the teacher. These are greatly a function of tailored the intuition and experience of the task designer. Many of such materials are highly used in other approaches such as CLT, collaborative learning as well as any kind of small group project or activity. Fortunately, a number of resource books are available to be exploited in TBLT classrooms. Materials can greatly benefit from multimedia, specifically tailored task cards as well as realia. Realia is greatly emphasized by advocates of TBLT. This can be due to the fact that in order to practice authentic tasks, authentic materials are the best options. These can include the mass media (newspapers, television and the Internet). However, the majority of text books are not flexible enough to meet this approach. Thus, instructors in many cases are supposed to produce self-access materials. Consequently, teacher, usually need to develop and devise course materials. A highly new trend in TBLT is developing courses based on

CALL and network based tasks. In order to utilize these, factors such as aptitude, motivation, cognitive style, interest and learning strategies must be considered.

4. Arguments against TBLT

As any other approach, a number of short coming have been associated with TBLT. These have been put forward by proponents and critics of TBT as justifications against emphasizing tasks as the main medium of instruction. Willis provides a comprehensive list of such criticism. First, it has been argued by many that a major reason to avoid using TBT is lack of time. This includes both the time which is required for planning and compiling materials and the time spent on performing tasks. Another one can be labeled as confusion. This is mostly at the teacher's level. Many teachers are not well-familiar with TBLT, though they do not deny the effectiveness of using tasks to teach English. Some of these teachers, being followers of more traditional approaches of TESOL, do not find TBLT natural development of the previous approaches. In some cases, they even do not regard it as an alternative to what they have already been doing in class. They argue that milder version of TBLT as task supported teaching can not either serve them any good claiming that "If I'm not actually teaching, how they can be learning?" (Willis & Willis, 2007). This, according to Westhoff (2009) a priori assessment of language learning should be handled by raising teachers' competence to evaluate the efficiency of learning materials. Another study by Ogilvie and Dunn (2010) shows that dealing with TBLT in TTCs can potentially enhance teachers' attitude towards the method. In TTCs it must be emphasized that TBLT is an innovation both at the philosophical level and the methodological one. Another hindrance can be predominant beliefs about learning and teaching in the given society. At the learners' level, many cannot simply trust the potency of basing a whole class session on tasks rather than grammar. Little Wood (2006) in a study on Asian classrooms in Korea, Japan, Main Land China and Hong Kong and Thailand realized that although learning through tasks has been part of the TESOL instruction in such countries, learners avoid taking part in tasks actively either because it was in contrast with their mentality of a real class or it was not in line with pedagogic norms, objectives and traditions in those countries. However, teachers decided to adapt TBT with their traditional educational values and use a modified version of it, they found this much better than totally avoiding TBLT. This study advocates merging TBT with local pedagogic systems through adapting and reforming it so that it can well suit cultural and local norms.

Moreover, empirical evidence shows that learners try to take a shortcut to get the tasks done by using minimal language. By producing merely a "modest linguistic output" (Carless, 2004, as cited in Little Wood, 2006) to get it over with. Learners sometimes do not fully exploit their language resources. In other cases they opt simple ways to

convey what they have on mind in order to tolerate less this issue heightens in lower levels. In many cases, learners find their L1 a good resort to handle the task in order to fulfill the final target. Another challenge on the teachers' side is possibility of losing control over class. If the teacher is not experienced enough, he or she will find the class off the track. Such teachers might fear any sort of unforeseen language needs that naturally arise during a task performance; they simply do not feel prepared enough to tackle such burden. In a study in some primary schools in Hong Kong realized that many teachers could not let go of their authority for a more learner -centered approach. In a similar study, (Carless, 2004, as cited in Little Wood, 2006) argues that in TBLT, noise and discipline control are matters of concern.

Still a major claim by those who try to question TBLT is examination and assessment. On the one hand, it has been proved that holding different types of tests during a course can provide both the teacher and learners with some indexes that illuminate their progress. Another side of this claim is that exams are usually not compatible with TBT, here, the backwash effect casts hesitation on bringing TBT into practice or not. According to Little Wood, TBLT does not prepare learners for form-oriented tests which they frequently face (Carless, 2003). Some other concerns include lack of course books which are developed based on TBLT. Also, Lambert (2010) believes that TENOR (Teaching English for No Obvious Reason) is another challenge ahead of TBT advisors. In a fully TBLT based class, learners might find themselves involved in an unfocused series of activities with no clear functional objective. Finally, SLA research still calls for comprehensive research on providing a framework for task sequencing.

5. Conclusion

As an innovative learner centered approach TBLT is mostly concerned with theories of learning than theories of language, and considers language as a means which conveys the meaning. A significant difference between TBLT and former form-focused approaches is the fact that TBLT classes begins with a focus on meaning and then are followed by focus on language and eventually focuses on form. It involves learners in a meaning focused activity. Compared with traditional approaches, it emphasizes on vocabulary and its objectives are matched with the specific needs of learners in real world contexts. Providing learners with a usable meaning system is the main aim of the approach. It puts a strong emphasis on procedural syllabus, process syllabus, and task based language teaching. The syllabus relies on sets of grammatical, phonological, lexical, functional and notional items rather than just recognizing a specific item. It is the result of an exact analysis depending on the needs of the learners. As opposed to CLT, in TBLT it is believed that studying form can enhance chances of accuracy on communication. Level of complexity is of

great importance to design a task.

A TBLT class session is divided into three major sections including opening (pre task phase), performance (task phase), and ending (post task phase). Evaluation can be done in both formative and summative formats and assessment is done based on the degree of their demonstration and authentic testing. Open or closed outcome starting for the TBLT class or task, pre task preparation and the amount of time and teachers' assistance, control demands of task structure and agenda, interaction patterns and participant roles, pressure on language production, and post task activities are seven yardsticks which increase teachers awareness and power, respectively. However, like any other approach, some drawbacks have been taken into account in TBLT. For instance, it is not used since class hours are limited and more time is needed to handle such classes. Moreover, a large number of teachers are not well-acquainted with TBLT and tasks using in their classes. Also, at the learners' level, many cannot trust the potency of having a whole class session on tasks rather than grammar.

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