Task-Based Language Teaching

Daniel O. Jackson. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press. 2022. Pp. 1-74.

Task-Based Language Teaching by Daniel O. Jackson is part of the Cambridge Elements series published by Cambridge University Press in 2022. This book adopts a cognitive-interactionist stance on language learning, and serves as a guide to task-based language teaching (TBLT) for language instructors, teacher educators, and other interested parties. In response to a lack of practical guidance, Jackson, currently a professor at Kanda University of International Studies in Japan, seeks to broaden TBLT's accessibility to more teachers. Therefore, the book orients readers to main concepts and issues in TBLT, serving as a reference for practitioners aspiring to provide opportunities for meaningful and engaging communication conducive to acquiring a target language through comprehensible input, feedback, and modified output.

The book is organized into six sections: (1) "What is TBLT?," (2) "The task-based curriculum," (3) "Task-based approaches in context," (4) "Research into TBLT," (5) "Teachers and tasks," and (6) "Epilogue: The potential of TBLT." The opening section provides readers with key definitions essential to understanding TBLT, such as *pedagogic tasks* vs. *target tasks*, *task-as-workplan* vs. *task-in-process*, *retask* vs. *detask*, and *monologic* vs. *dialogic* tasks. Next, it introduces task types put forth by Pica et al. (1993), enabling researchers, designers, and teachers to make informed decisions about which tasks to use by categorizing, comparing, and ranking them based on their distinctive characteristics. Specifically, it presents a summary table of five task types—*jigsaw*, *information gap*, *problem-solving*, *decision-making*, and *opinion exchange*—alongside four parameters of task design features, which are then elaborated upon. Subsequent subsections delineate each task type in detail, with hands-on visual sample materials, such as a menu from a cafe. Finally, the author discusses two additional aspects of task design worth noting: *task-essentialness* and *learners' level of engagement*. This section succeeds in succinctly introducing key terms and concepts in TBLT.

Section 2 directs readers to the stages in building the strong version of the TBLT curriculum, as opposed to task-supported language teaching. The author distinguishes between TBLT and traditional approaches, pointing out that the former is *analytic* with *focus on form*, whereas the latter is *synthetic* with *focus on forms*. The author then guides readers through the six stages of a TBLT curriculum: *needs analysis*, *task selection and sequencing*, *materials development*, *teaching*, *assessment*, and *evaluation*. Each subsection begins with a description of a stage and explanation of how the stage contributes to designing TBLT curricula distinct from traditional ones. Examples that illustrate particular learning settings follow to facilitate understanding of how each stage promotes TBLT. For example, the author showcases Park's (2015) research that examined the needs of English as a foreign language (EFL) students in an urban middle school in South Korea, and examples previously used recur to illuminate how tasks are selected and sequenced. The author does not only provide examples, but also grounds the discourse in theoretical frameworks applicable to some stages. For instance, Robinson's (2007) Cognition Hypothesis is introduced as one of the bases of sequencing, whereas Willis's (1996)

framework is included as a way of task implementation. Despite this section's brevity and its skillful balance in elucidating the stages of TBLT, the paucity of detailed explanations regarding the theoretical frameworks raises concerns with regard to their practical application in teaching contexts.

Section 3 contextualizes TBLT in local environments in which tasks are adapted to exemplify "localized implementations" (p. 22). The author presents six cases that represent diverse geographical locations and educational settings, characterized by variations in learner demographics such as age, first language, socioeconomic status, L2 proficiency, and other relevant attributes. The review encompasses six target languages: Chinese, Dutch, English, German, Spanish, and Zapotec. To consolidate the reader's understanding of the previous section, each example epitomizes how learners' particular needs are analyzed, subsequent tasks are selected and sequenced, and the program is evaluated. For instance, an illustration of teaching Chinese concerns a blended university program in which asking for directions was considered an important real-world task. In another example, the author depicts a context in which EFL is taught to young beginner learners. By providing diverse examples, this section carefully answers possible questions that could be raised by prospect readers regarding applicability and feasibility of TBLT across various contexts.

Section 4 reviews TBLT studies published between 2011 and 2021, grounded on perspectives that view TBLT as either a static workplan or a series of processes implemented by teachers and learners (e.g., Breen, 1987; Samuda, 2015; Van den Branden, 2016). The author organizes this section into five subsections: design, mode, preparation, interaction, and repetition. Each subsection includes five studies conducted in various contexts, including location, setting, learners, and task. Relevant theories, such as Robinson's Cognition Hypothesis, are briefly referenced when appropriate, followed by the findings of the five studies. At the end of each subsection, the author provides a summary of key findings along with commentary on how the results can be applied to teaching and learning. By incorporating areas that have been consistently researched (e.g., task repetition), as well as relatively recent research areas (e.g., tasks in the written mode), the book aims to address a gamut of considerations in practicing TBLT. Finally, the author evaluates all the studies using three criteria for establishing a researched pedagogy suggested by Samuda et al. (2018): directionality, transparency, and relevance. In conclusion, the author asserts, "it is even truer now than when first asserted 'TBLT is the closest thing to a researched language pedagogy that exists'" (Long, 2015, as cited in the current work, p. 50).

Section 5 covers studies into teachers' experiences with understanding, preparing for, and doing TBLT. The author cautions against "anthropomorphizing tasks" (p. 50) despite the fact that they provide teachers with flexibility and stability, thus emphasizing the importance of the role teachers play during task implementation. The studies introduced in this section briefly spell out what perspectives teachers in various educational settings have towards TBLT, such as concerns about their lack of knowledge about TBLT. Subsequently, studies investigating pre- and in-service teachers' experiences with TBLT training are introduced. Lastly, the author talks about teacher involvement as being crucial to TBLT, presenting studies that probed teacher agency in designing and implementing tasks. This section concludes by positioning teachers as active agents, rather than mere task designers.

In the epilogue, the author briefly discusses three transformative purposes for putting tasks into practice. First, the goal of TBLT is "to transform classrooms into spaces full of rich, elaborated input and collaborative/cooperative interaction" (p. 53). Second, the aim of TBLT is to transform language programs, as TBLT cannot be understood without attention to complex social realities. Lastly, TBLT can empower learners and make positive societal impacts.

Overall, the book under review exhibits two notable strengths. Firstly, this book serves as an accessible guide to TBLT suitable for language instructors, teacher trainers, and other interested parties. The author's concerted effort in providing a succinct guide to the core concepts and challenges in TBLT is evident. Structurally, the book is meticulously organized, presenting essential components of TBLT in a coherent and well-sequenced manner. Additionally, what stands out in this book is the balanced overview of both *task-as-workplan* and *task-in-process*, emphasizing the crucial role of task implementation in shaping outcomes with regard to predetermined plans. Moreover, the author provides ample illustrative examples of how each stage in the development of TBLT curricula unfolds. The provision of practical resources, including ready-made tasks, appeals to readers with limited time.

Secondly, the book presents a number of up-to-date empirical studies to situate TBLT in diversified contexts, suggesting its adaptability and feasibility across different educational settings. As the author explains, the focus is to illustrate "the use of tasks in practice, rather than methods comparison studies" (p. 30). Through reiterative discussions with ample empirical evidence, the author answers the *what* and *how* of TBLT that readers might have difficulty with. Section summaries appended at the end of each subsection serve to enhance reader comprehension and retention of complex concepts from the literature discussed. The author strategically includes Section 5, which focuses on the relationship between teacher and tasks, to direct readers to concerns practitioners in action have raised. Furthermore, the inclusion of discussion questions in the Appendix invites readers to engage in critical discourse and reflect on key concepts mentioned throughout the text, as the author partly intends this book to be used as a resource in pre-service or in-service teacher education courses and workshops.

Although this book exhibits several strengths, it is crucial to acknowledge the accompanying caveats. It should be noted that the overarching aim of this book series, characterized as offering "short and practical guide[s]" (p. 2), has resulted in a degree of superficiality in some areas. For example, while the author briefly touches upon the application of TBLT with young learners, more emphasis is placed on adult learners. Consequently, the lack of in-depth information on this topic could render the book less impactful for teachers who want to practice this pedagogy with their young learners. Moreover, teachers who are completely new to TBLT might not find this book practical since it better serves as a reference for teachers with some level of familiarity or experience with TBLT.

In summary, this book makes a significant contribution to language education by offering a concise overview of the main concepts of TBLT and its current footings in diverse contexts. The book's emphasis on task planning and implementation speaks more powerfully to practitioners aspiring to implement, get answers on some aspects of, and engage in discussions about TBLT. Even though this book may not be the ideal resource for novice teachers new to

TBLT, it is of great use for a wide range of teachers and teacher educators, especially in seminars and workshops.

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