

CAMBRIDGE APPLIED LINGUISTICS

Task-Based Language Teaching

Theory and Practice

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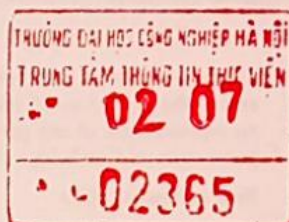
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Series Editors' Preface

Task-based language teaching (TBLT) has been enormously influential since the 1980s, when it inspired a generation of language teachers seeking to engage productively with Communicative Language Teaching. Since then it has developed as an approach to methodology, assessment and syllabus design. As TBLT has grown in popularity it has also diversified, incorporating a number of theoretical stances towards how languages are learnt.

This book provides a substantial overview of the current position of TBLT in the language-teaching world. It covers both pedagogic and research perspectives, arguing that the two activities are complementary and mutually supportive. In terms of research, the book provides a detailed account of the theoretical approaches that underpin TBLT. Those theories relate to a number of perspectives: cognitive, psycholinguistic, sociocultural, psychological and educational. Under those headings, the book includes comprehensive and authoritative assessments of research into such issues as: the roles of interaction and feedback; measures of complexity, accuracy and fluency; the importance of classroom phenomena such as scaffolding and individual variables such as motivation; the relation between psychological variables and language learning; and the intersection between educational practice in general and language teaching in particular.

The pedagogic chapters are more practically oriented, but also draw extensively on research into the effectiveness of TBLT. They provide a wealth of information on how to design a task-based course, what methods are used in such courses and why, and how task-based learning can and should be assessed. What comes across strongly is the degree of variation within TBLT: there is no one syllabus design and no one methodology that takes precedence over others. The authors argue convincingly that this is a positive feature of TBLT, in that it can be adapted to suit a variety of contexts and learning styles. In short, the authors do not present TBLT as an approach wherein a centre imposes action on a periphery. Rather, the principles that lie behind TBLT are an inspiration for many kinds of classroom and assessment contexts.

The final part of the book presents an honest appraisal of task-based language teaching in relation to language teaching more generally. Research that addresses this issue is summarized and a balanced conclusion presented. TBLT is not a 'magic bullet', and research still needs to be undertaken to establish the extent of its efficacy. The chapters in this part indicate how this research can be done, and what challenges are involved in carrying it out. To date, the effectiveness of TBLT is apparent in situations in which it is the dominant paradigm and also in those where it exerts an influence on teaching and assessment approaches that prioritize attention to meaning and interaction.

The authors present TBLT as a major development in language teaching, and a crucial part of current pedagogic practice. The message of this book is that in TBLT research and practice form a continuous whole. It is a welcome addition to the series.