

The Applications and Reflection of TBLT (Task-Based Language Teaching) in College English Reading Courses

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Abstract:

Task-based Language Teaching (TBLT) was born in the 1960s, and had something in common with the dominant CLT (Communicative Language Teaching) at that time. From the 1960s to the present, scholars and researchers have defined more than 20 definitions of “tasks” from different research perspectives. All of these definitions emphasize that tasks are closely related to real-world activities, and they emphasize the expression of meaning and the use of language. The curriculum in the mode of TBLT (Task-based Language Teaching) should design meaningful activities around a central task. The activity process involves the learner's solution, operation, application and interaction between the target language. The learner needs to use the acquired language knowledge to express meaning, solve the problem and accomplish mission.

This paper first mainly introduces the development history of TBLT in recent decades, and lets us learn how previous scholars and researchers gradually developed TBLT to the scale of today. Next, this paper sorts out some principles of TBLT by collecting data based on the previous researches. And then this paper gives an example for the applications of TBLT (Task-Based Language Teaching) in college English reading classroom and gives some analysis. This may be an example or reference for English teachers when designing tasks and helps English teachers to think about how to apply the principles of TBLT into classroom to promote English teaching. At last, this paper lays out some most findings and disadvantages and suggestions for improvements.

Keywords: TBLT (Task-based Language Teaching), English teachers, task, principle

中文摘要

任务型语言教学法产生于 19 世纪 60 年代，它与当时占主导地位的交际语言教学法有一些共同点。从 19 世纪 60 年代到现在，学者们和研究者们从不同的研究角度给“任务”下的定义已超过 20 种，所有这些定义都强调任务要与现实世界活动密切相关，重视意义的表达和语言的运用。任务型语言教学模式下的课程应围绕一个中心任务设计有意义的活动，活动过程涉及学习者对目标语言的解、操作、运用和学习者间的互动，学习者需要动用已掌握的语言知识来表达意义，解决问题，完成任务。

本文首先主要介绍近几十年来任务型语言教学法的发展历史，让我们了解以往的学者和研究人员如何一步步地将任务型语言教学法发展到今天的规模。接下来，本文在前人研究的基础上，通过收集数据，整理出了任务型语言教学法的一些原则。然后本文给出了一个任务型语言教学在大学英语阅读课堂中的应用实例，并做出了一些相应的分析与思考。这可作为英语教师在设计任务时的一个示例或参考，并帮助英语教师思考如何更好地把任务型英语教学法的原则应用到课堂来促进英语教学。最后本文列出来本论文的主要研究结果并指出了不足和改进意见。

关键词：任务型语言教学，英语教师，任务，原则

1. Introduction

The teaching practice over the years has proved that although the traditional English teaching method of '3P' (presentation, practice and production) has its advantages, it also hinders the development of students' innovative ability to a certain extent. If students only rely on mechanical practice and memory, the cultivation of comprehensive application ability on language does not achieve good results. The Department of Higher Education of the Ministry of Education has compiled the goal of college English is to develop students' comprehensive English application skills, especially their listening and speaking skills. Advocating a task-based teaching model, requires teachers change the simple language teaching methods to TBLT (Task-based Language Teaching), which puts higher requirements on college English teaching.

Although TBLT (Task-based Language Teaching) emerged in the 1980s abroad, it started to be accepted gradually in China since the 21 century. TBLT (Task-based Language Teaching) is a teaching approach that developed on the basis of the CLT (Communicative Language Teaching). There are two versions of CLT (Communicative Language Teaching) including strong version and weak version. The weak version stresses the importance of providing learners with opportunities to use their English for communicative purposes while the strong version advances the claim that language is acquired through communication. TBLT stresses learning by doing, which has something in common with the strong version of CLT. Over the years, TBLT has had a major impact in English teaching practice, and more and more schools and teachers have adopted TBLT in the classroom.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Related Researches on TBLT abroad

In 1962, Vygotsky first proposed and introduced TBLT (Task-based Language Teaching) in his book

Thought and Language. He has an important revelation in observing the learner's learning process, that is, in language learning, the interaction between learners and teachers can positively promote language learning. And the way that can effectively reflect the interaction of language learning is "task-based" teaching.

In 1985, Long proposed TBLT is a language teaching method that uses real language materials and requires students to use the target language to accomplish meaningful tasks in his article.

In 1987, Prabhu defined the term "task" in his book *Second Language Pedagogy*, that is, the task is an activity in which students draw conclusions through self-thinking according to some given information. Prabhu hosted a language teaching reform project in Bangalore, India. In this project, he put forward the concept and method of "task-based language teaching" from the practice of communicative teaching method.

In 1989, Nunan argues that tasks in classroom teaching could be divided into real-world tasks and pedagogical tasks. And the tasks that simulate the things of the real world in the classroom is also called the of the real-world tasks.

In 1996, Willis began her "task-based language teaching" experiment and published her book *A Framework for Task-based Learning*. On the basis of teaching experiments, the book comprehensively describes the basic framework, main features, task classification and specific operations of TBLT.

In 2004, David Nunan defined the definition of TBLT in the book *Task-based Language Teaching*, and explained more aspects of contents about TBLT in detail including the framework and task composition, task evaluation, and teachers.

In 2015, Michael Long comprehensively expounded the theoretical basis and implementation methods of TBLT in *Second Language Acquisition and Task-based Language Teaching*. This book condenses his thoughts on TBLT research for more than 30 years, and also provides detailed operational ideas for language teaching.

2.2. Related Researches on TBLT at home

Domestic research on TBLT (Task-based Language Teaching) started relatively late, focusing on research after about 2000.

In 2002, Ma Jianfei discussed the characteristics, classification and grading of communicative tasks in the article *Task-style Syllabus and Chinese Communicative Tasks*, and proposed the idea of establishing a teaching model with Chinese communicative tasks as the teaching organization unit. This provides some references for English task-based teaching.

In 2003, Gong Yafu & Luo Shaoqi published the book *Task-based Language Teaching*, which is an earlier book that introduces task-based language teaching relatively systematically.

In 2004, Wei Yonghong believed that the purpose of task-based language teaching is to create conditions for language learning and opportunities for real language communication, and the generalization of the language system should be left to the language learners themselves.

In 2009, Cheng Bei thought that the confusion and obsolescence of teaching materials is an important factor hindering teachers from implementing task-based language teaching. Therefore, he suggested that if teachers can use the teaching materials under the principle of TBLT, it will help them to implement

this teaching mode more actively and accurately in the classroom.

In 2013, Qin Lili and Dai Weidong proposed that learners should shape tasks rather than tasks shape learners. Therefore, teachers should pay attention to the whole process of language learners completing tasks, so that learners can use English to solve practical problems in the process of completing tasks and teaching activities become a practical activity for learners to learn English.

In 2014, Shu Dingfang said there are many foreign language colleges in China that are reforming English teaching methods. However, in fact, many front-line English teachers pay little attention to foreign language classroom teaching theory, and the teaching content is not in line with the students' learning needs. So there's still a very long way to go for TBLT.

In 2017, Ji Meng said when teachers design tasks, cooperative learning can be used as a form of classroom organization because it can significantly increase the chances for students to practice their oral English and motivate students' initiative.

In 2017, Wu Xudong pointed out that the specific operations of TBLT and CLT are not exactly the same. The main difference is that TBLT is the result of the operation of the theory of CLT and its core concept is task.

In 2019, Deng Hailong compared the differences between Task-based Language Teaching and Production-oriented Approach from the aspects of ideas, assumptions and processes in his article. Bi Zheng also compared the differences between task-based Language Teaching and Production-oriented Approach from the aspects of teaching material designing and using.

3. The Principles of TBLT

3.1. Principle of Authenticity

The task designing should provide students with clear and true language information. The language situation and language form should conform to the actual language function and language rules, so that students can experience and learn the language in a natural, real and simulated real situation.

3.2. Principle of Combining Form and Function

Pay attention to the combination of language form and language function when designing tasks. Students should learn to master the ability to master language functions while mastering the language form; and the design of each stage task should have certain importability, so that students can understand the function of the language and apply it in communication through training a series of tasks on the basis of learning language forms.

3.3. Principle of Diversity

This principle requires teachers to brainstorm and be eclectic when designing specific teaching tasks. Because the tasks of foreign language learning are diverse, there are some traditional task forms, such as replacement exercises, sentence pattern conversion exercises, right and wrong judgments, multiple choice questions, and translation exercises, etc. There are also some popular tasks that focus on the real use of language, such as enumerating tasks, sorting tasks, comparing tasks, solving problem tasks, and communicating personal experience tasks. Teachers need to transform and combine these different forms of tasks to ensure that students are not bored. Only in this way can we truly stimulate students'

interest and enthusiasm to participate in the task, and fully develop the ownership spirit of students.

3.4. Principle of Novelty

Innovation is the soul of a nation. Innovation is also the source of the vitality of classroom teaching, and it is the trigger for students' learning motivation and interest. The principle of novelty requires that college English teachers should use the designer's vision, grasp the textbooks macroscopically, and process the textbooks microscopically based on textbook but not constrained by the textbooks. When designing teaching tasks, it should be easy to understand and change. This innovation includes not only the innovation of teaching concepts and ideas, but also the innovation of teaching design and methods. This requires teachers to continuously strengthen theoretical study to enrich their professionalism, continue to summarize to enhance their ability to respond to other things, and continue to think critically to expand their ability to innovate. Only by ensuring the novelty of the task can the teaching be unconventional.

3.5. Principle of Reparatory

The principle of reparatory refers to the factors that teachers should consider when they are designing tasks, such as students' current cognitive level, knowledge reserve, and learning ability. To consider whether these factors are ready for students to complete tasks, consider whether the task is suitable for your students. If the task is too easy, the students will do not think about it, and do not have to work hard to complete, which will make students lose interest; on the contrary, if the task is too difficult, the student can't complete even with all the knowledge reserves, it will dampen the enthusiasm of students to complete the task. In short, the task must be in moderate difficulty. So students can learn by doing (things), and gain and accumulate corresponding learning experience by completing specific tasks. They can stimulate students' desire to complete tasks and improve their participation. Thus the students' interest in learning and enthusiasm for learning can be improved.

3.6. Principle of Cooperation

The so-called cooperation is to divide the students into different groups. The group members have different specific arrangements and work together to complete the common tasks. Cooperative learning transforms the competition between individuals into competition between groups. The team spirit of students has been cultivated, and it has also made up for a teacher's difficulty in coping with the differences of many students, and would truly achieve the goal of each student's development. Cooperative learning enables students to actively and voluntarily devote in learning, which is conducive to cultivate students' collaborative skills, communication skills and competition awareness, and promoting their common improvement and common development.

3.7. Principle of Task-chain

The designed tasks should be from simple to complex, from easy to difficult, connected to each other, forming a cycle from primary to advanced tasks, and then advanced tasks covering the primary tasks, and consisting of several micro-tasks to form a "task chain".

4. The Applications and Reflections of TBLT (Task-Based Language Teaching) in College English Reading Courses

4.1. Three Stages of Tasks in English Class

For the three phases of the task designing in the TBLT, Jane Willis summed it up and described it as the following three stages:

4.1.1. Pre-task

This stage is mainly the preparation stage of the task. According to Gong Yafu and Luo Shaoxi (2003), this stage has two main purposes: one is to activate the students' existing knowledge resources and help them to reconstruct the language system and the way of thinking; and the other is to enable students to have the cultural knowledge and language knowledge to complete the task so as to mitigate cognitive pressures when completing tasks in the next phase. This part determines the success or failure of the whole class. Therefore, teachers should help students understand the theme and purpose of the task, and give students a certain time to recall related vocabulary phrases and think about how to do the task.

4.1.2. Task Cycle (while-task)

- (1) Task: Students perform tasks while teachers monitor;
- (2) Planning: Students prepare for the next report;
- (3) Report: The student completes the report and the teacher gives the comment.

4.1.3. Language Focus (Post-task)

(1) Analysis: The teachers arrange the language focus task and answer the questions raised by the students. Then review and summarize the relevant language knowledge, and the students making a record:

(2) Practice: The student completes the assignment arranged by the teacher based on the previous language analysis.

4.2. One Example for the Applications and Reflections of TBLT (Task-Based Language Teaching) in College English Reading Classroom

This paper takes the teaching task design of the third unit "Marriage Across Nations" in the second volume of College English as an example. Through the analysis of this case, we will think about how to implement task-based teaching in the college English class in a better way.

The teaching content of this module is about transnational marriage, and the learning objective is to know some English expressions about love and marriage, and understand the advantages and disadvantages of transnational marriage to provide some reference for future marriage. We can integrate the language knowledge to be learned and mastered, and the language skills to be developed into specific tasks, so that the teaching of this lesson is no longer a simple language learning, but the target language English as a tool to use. Thus students will be interested in the interest and practical nature of this topic, so they can use it in learning and learning in use to receive good results.

4.2.1. Student Analysis

Analyzing the situation of students is conducive to the practical application of TBLT. After the previous study, the students have become accustomed to the learning style of TBLT, and have certain sensibility and reading ability. They can clearly explain their own views on the common topics in life, and have the ability to collect, process and self-learn. TBLT requires teachers to take students as the main body, give full play to students' enthusiasm, guide students to read and understand, realize learning experience, deeply understand the content of the article, and achieve the expected teaching goals.

4.2.2. Step 1: Pre-task

Task 1 -- Preparing

The teachers asked the students to find information about the love and transnational marriage before class to prepare for class discussion and presentation. Students can use the library, network and other channels. But there are two requirements: the first one: presenting the information found in various forms, which can be Chinese text, English text, film, video, audio, courseware and other forms and being prepared to introduce them to the group and the class in English in class, and the second one: using vocabulary and language knowledge of this unit as much as possible.

Analysis: The topic of love is very attractive to students. This time students can gather information and stimulate their interest, because the information they find is closely related to their actual life. The focus of TBLT is on the process, not the outcome, so the process of preparation for students is also the process of learning. In addition, the task is designed to effectively expand the teaching contents in terms of time, space, content, etc. The activities are not limited to classroom teaching but extend to the life outside the classroom, which will greatly enrich the classroom teaching content.

4.2.3. Step 2: Task Cycle (While-task)

Task 2—Group Work: Discussion

The teachers divide the students into 8 groups with 5 members in each group, and then let the students exchange and discuss the relevant information collected before the class during the group, and then summarize the most representative content for presentation in the whole class.

Analysis: This task is a “jigsaw task” that requires students to put together a number of scattered information into one. The information that students are looking for is not the same. This design is consistent with the principle of diversity in the design of task. This task, from another perspective, is also a “decision-making task” that allows learners to choose an outcome through negotiation in a variety of outcomes.

Task 3: Presentation

Each group recommends a representative to show up the outcomes of the group discussion, communication and arrangement in the previous task in the whole class. Students can use multimedia teaching equipment, such as video, pictures and other teaching aids. Students are also required to select the best two groups and reward them within the class.

Analysis: This part allows students to fully demonstrate their pre-class preparation knowledge and help students develop their foreign language application skills. While training verbal ability, it lays a good

foundation for hearing and removes hearing impairment. This task can foster the awareness and ability of learners to learn collaboratively.

Task 4: Role Play

Suppose two people from different countries are falling in love: their names are Mike and Lucy, but Lucy's parents object to them. The teachers let a student from each group participate in role-playing, and the five students play the male and female protagonists in the story, Lucy's father and mother, and the storyteller. Students think over and perform a dialogue in front of the class.

Analysis: This task simulates a situation that may happen in our future lives. It is easy to motivate students' internal learning motivation. This design is consistent with the principle of cooperation in the design of task. Learners can complete tasks in a relaxed and pleasant atmosphere, and develop their initiative at the same time.

4.2.4. Step 3: Language Points (Post-task)

Task 5: Evaluating

This part is mainly to summarize the completion of various tasks in the first two stages. Teachers timely check, summarize and evaluate tasks. At this stage, teachers mainly analyze and evaluate the situation of each group's members and the difficulty of language learning. And teachers analyze the students' classroom performance and find the problems and causes of the students in the task process, and then explain and analyze different problems to prevent students from making mistakes when encountering similar problems in the future.

Task 6: Homework

Students are required to freely combine within four persons each group to prepare an English TV interview program: introducing the traditional wedding in their hometown. One person is the host, and the other three are interviewee. And then perform to the class next time.

5. Conclusion

5.1. The Most Findings

This paper first mainly introduces the development history of TBLT in recent decades, and lets us learn how previous scholars and researchers gradually developed TBLT (Task-Based Language Teaching) to the scale of today. Although there have been many different doubts and difficulties during their researching process, the research results seem to be a great theoretical wealth for today, which laid a solid foundation for the later research on language teaching and TBLT.

Next, this paper sorts out some principles of TBLT by collecting data based on the previous researches, including principle of authenticity, principle of combining form and function, principle of diversity, principle of novelty, principle of reparatory, principle of cooperation and principle of task-chain. These principles must be taken care of by English teachers when designing classroom tasks in order to better implement TBLT in English classes and motivate students to learn English and complete the tasks. And then this paper gives an example for the applications of TBLT in college English reading classroom and gives some analysis. This may be an example or reference for teachers when designing tasks and helps English teachers the principles of TBLT.

5.2. The Disadvantages and the Suggestions for Improvements

Firstly, the implementation of TBLT should take into account the limitations of our existing language learning environment. English learners in our country are far away from the English society. They do not live in a natural environment of English learning. It is impossible to use English political and economic life as the purpose of learning for them. Most of their English learning is to cope with various examinations. It is impossible for learners to acquire English in a natural environment, and the language input of learners is extremely limited. Therefore, this model of TBLT that advocates language acquisition in the natural environment is not universally applicable in China. The application of TBLT mode should be targeted and selective.

Secondly, TBLT ignores the learning of language knowledge. TBLT believes that the purpose of teaching is to create the conditions for language learning and the opportunity for real language communication, but the generalization of the language system should be left to the language learners themselves. But English is a foreign language for us Chinese, not a second language that we can touch a lot. Most English learners do not have the ability to generalize the language system themselves. Therefore, the study of the necessary language knowledge is still indispensable. So we can say that the scope of TBLT mode is limited in China. If a language looks like a fluent learner but with mistakes in sentence grammar, it is difficult to develop in the right direction because of its own acquisition, because some mistakes have become a habit. Therefore, the task-based language teaching model is not suitable for adopting in any stage of English education in China. If teachers want to carry out the mode of TBLT, they should take these situations into consideration.

Thirdly, this paper doesn't explain more related theories about TBLT. And it doesn't give more examples about the applications of TBLT on listening or writing English courses. So next study can figure out more related theories about TBLT, give more examples, and analyze the availability of TBLT in college English classroom.

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