

Building Inclusive Language Classrooms: Cooperative Learning, Task-Based Pedagogy, and  
AI in Multilingual Higher Education

# The Challenges and Opportunities of Task-Based Language Teaching in Multicultural Classrooms



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# We are in Mi'kma'ki, the unceded territory of the Mi'kmaw.

"One of the long-lasting effects of Indian residential schools was the systematic dismantling of our ability to pass on the language to our children; the [Mi'kmaw Language Act of 2022 is] key to really help us promote the language outside our communities, not just within our communities. We want it to be everywhere." (Chief Leroy Denny)

## gelusit

Translation: He/she speaks

Example of word used in a sentence:

Text: Mawi awisiw gelusit na ji'nm.

Translation: That man rarely speaks.

Pronunciation Guide: ge·lu·sit





What does it mean  
to “know” a  
language?

What are the goals  
for learners in our  
language  
classrooms?





Is this the goal?



Is this the goal?



Is this the goal?



OR is this the goal?  
Do you and your students share the same goal?



Linguistic  
competence

Communicative  
competence



How do we achieve that goal? Like this?



Or this?



# The Challenges and Opportunities of Task-Based Language Teaching in Multicultural Classrooms

## Agenda

- What is task-based language teaching? What are its origins?
- “It’s difficult for me, but interesting”: Chinese Undergraduates’ Perceptions of TBLT
- Bridging the Gap: Strategies for TBLT in Culturally-Diverse Classrooms

Slides available at  
[jennifermacdonald.ca](http://jennifermacdonald.ca)





# Jigsaw Reading





Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) is an educational framework for the theory and practice of teaching second or foreign languages.

Based on empirical research, TBLT adopts **meaning-based, communicative tasks** as the central unit for defining language learning needs, determining curriculum goals, designing activity in the (language) classroom, and assessing language competencies



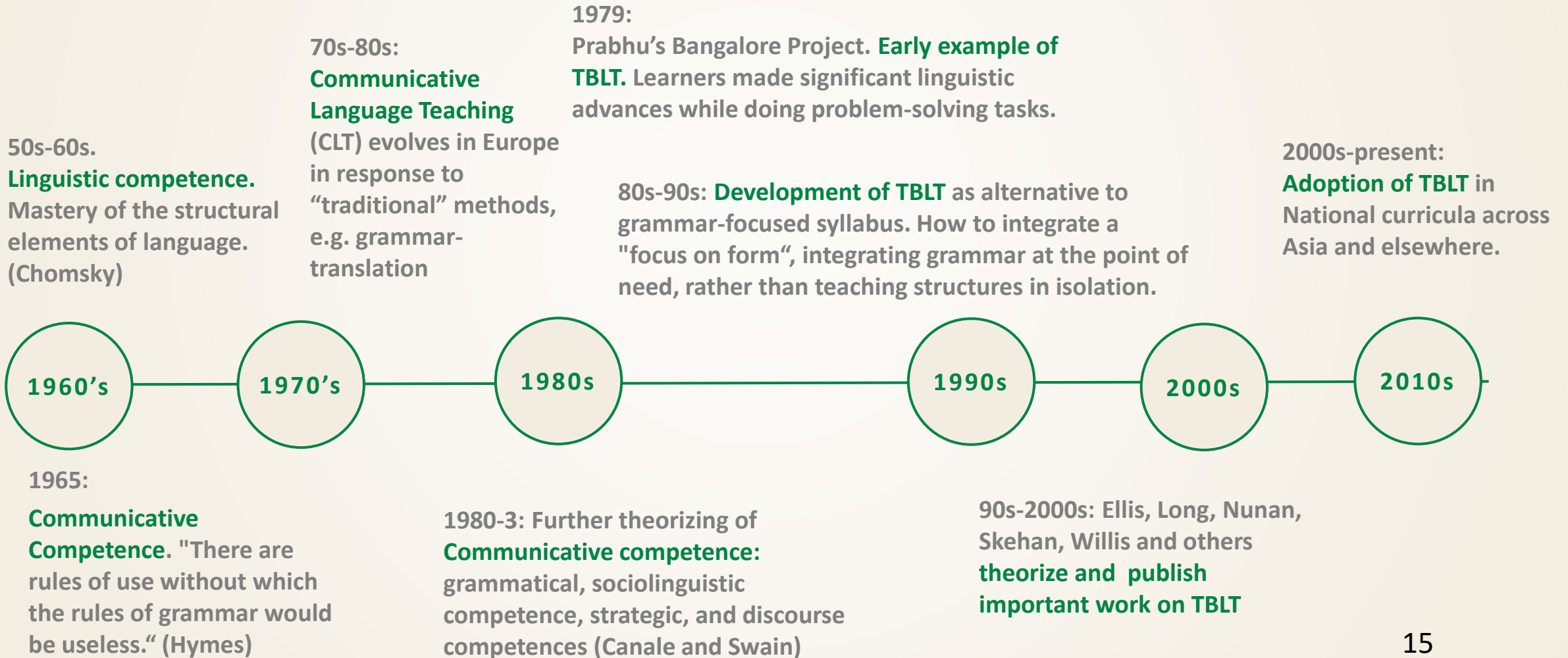
TBLT gives learners both the opportunity to **use language meaningfully and authentically**, to develop **language fluency**, and benefit **learner motivation and autonomy**.





## A BRIEF OVERVIEW

# Task-Based Language Teaching





What is a task?





# Is it a task or simply an exercise?

## *Criteria for Determining Whether a Workplan is a Task*

<b>Criteria</b>	<b>Description</b>
The primary focus is on meaning	The workplan is intended to ensure that learners are primarily concerned with comprehending or/ and producing messages for a communicative purpose (i.e. there is primary focus on meaning-making).
There is some kind of gap	The workplan is designed in such a way as to incorporate a gap which creates a need to convey information, to reason or to express an opinion.
Learners rely mainly on their own linguistic and non-linguistic resources	Learners need to draw on their existing linguistic resources (potentially both L1 and L2) and their non-linguistic resources (e.g. gestures; facial expressions) for comprehension and production.
There is a clearly defined communicative outcome	The workplan specifies the communicative outcome of the task. Thus task accomplishment is to be assessed not in terms of whether learners use language correctly but in terms of whether the communicative outcome is achieved.



## WORKPLAN 1

# Examples of TBLT

### Is it a task?

- Is the primary focus on meaning?
- Is there some kind of gap?
- Do learners rely mainly on their own linguistic and non-linguistic resources?
- Is there a clearly defined communicative outcome?

### Workplan 1

Look at Mary's shopping list. Then look at the list of items in Abdullah's store. Work with a partner. One person is Mary and the other person is Mr. Abdullah. Make conversations like this.

**Mary:** Good morning. Do you have any flour?

**Abdullah:** Yes, I have some

#### Mary's Shopping List

- |            |                  |
|------------|------------------|
| 1. oranges | 4. powdered milk |
| 2. eggs    | 5. biscuits      |
| 3. flour   | 6. jam           |

#### Abdullah's Store

- |                 |                   |
|-----------------|-------------------|
| 1. bread        | 7. rice           |
| 2. salt         | 8. sugar          |
| 3. apples       | 9. curry powder   |
| 4. tins of fish | 10. biscuits      |
| 5. coca cola    | 11. powdered milk |
| 6. flour        | 12. dried beans   |



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## WORKPLAN 2

# Examples of TBLT

### Is it a task?

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- Is there a clearly defined communicative outcome?

### Workplan 2

**Work with your partner. One of you be A and the other B. Do not look at your partner's instructions.**

#### **Student A:**

**You are going shopping at Student B's store. Here is your shopping list. Put ticks next to the items on your list you can buy.**

- |            |                  |
|------------|------------------|
| 1. oranges | 4. powdered milk |
| 2. eggs    | 5. biscuits      |
| 3. flour   | 6. jam           |

#### **Student B:**

**You own a store. Here is a list of items for sale in your store. Find the items that Student A asks for that you do not stock.**

- |                 |                   |
|-----------------|-------------------|
| 1. bread        | 7. rice           |
| 2. salt         | 8. sugar          |
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## WORKPLAN 2

# Examples of TBLT

### Is it a task?

- ✓ Is the primary focus on meaning?
- ✓ Is there some kind of gap?
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# Example: Planning a Trip

- Willis's (1996) task cycle framework: Pre-Task / Task / Post-Task
- Widely adopted for its flexibility and simplicity
- "Grammar at the point of need". Focus on form is not limited to the post-task stage.

## **Pre-task:**

- Teacher introduces vocabulary for travel destinations, accommodations, and activities and discusses language for making suggestions, agreeing, and disagreeing, and shares a successful example of a trip plan.

## **Task:**

- Students work in groups with a limited budget and a set of travel options.
- They rank destinations by preference, considering factors like cost, weather, and activities. They collaboratively problem-solve to create a final trip plan, balancing their budget and personal interests. Teacher provides ad hoc support and facilitation.
- Each group plans and presents their trip to the class, explaining their choices.

## **Post-task:**

- Teacher provides feedback on the target language used during the task, focusing on both fluency and accuracy, and highlighting effective use of vocabulary for travel and decision-making, as well as functional language for expressing opinions, agreeing, and disagreeing.
- Analyze specific language forms that emerged during the task, such as comparatives.
- Practice via a brief error-correction activity, where common mistakes are reviewed and corrected collaboratively and optionally, follow up with a short, targeted practice activity to reinforce key structures or vocabulary.



# How is TBLT different from PPP?

PPP: Presentation – Practice - Production

<u>Dimension</u>	<u>PPP</u>	<u>TBLT</u>
<b>Pedagogic orientation</b>	Form-led, linear progression from input to output	Meaning-led, task-driven, non-linear
<b>Learning process</b>	Language is mastered through controlled practice building to freer use	Language emerges through use during meaning-focused tasks
<b>Role of teacher &amp; learner</b>	Teacher-centered; learners move from passive to active	Teacher as facilitator; learners are active negotiators of meaning
<b>Classroom activity design</b>	Decontextualized drills leading to simulated communication	Authentic, goal-oriented tasks reflecting real-world use
<b>Treatment of language (grammar &amp; errors)</b>	Pre-selected forms; explicit instruction; immediate correction	Focus on form as needed; attention to errors often delayed/post-task
<b>Learning outcomes</b>	Accuracy in targeted structures	Communicative effectiveness and functional language use



# TBLT Language Learning Task Bank

<https://www.thetaskbank.com/tasks/index.html>



Indiana University

Login



## TBLT Language Learning Task Bank

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[IATBLT.org](#)

### Search for tasks

Try these: [Written output](#) [Written input](#) [Writing](#) [Working adults](#) [Whole class](#) [Vocabulary](#)





Have you ever had a task-based activity work well with some students, while others struggled with it?



# “Traditional” Language Learning Contexts

→ Focus on linguistic competence (mastery of grammar and structures) rather than communicative competence

- Knowledge-transmission model
- Teacher-centered
- Explicit explanation and instruction
- Large class sizes
- Techniques such as grammar-translation, use of L1, reading aloud/choral reading, repetition, dictation, etc.
- Interaction, critical thinking, communicative competence less highly valued
- Emphasis on standardized testing



## Challenges to TBLT Adoption in “Traditional” Contexts

→ A mismatch of the goals and methods of language learning

- Teachers often have difficulty understanding what a task is
- “Teaching how they’re used to”: grammar focused
- Students used to explicit instruction may fail to see the point in performing tasks
- Limited linguistic proficiency leads to reliance on L1
- Structural issues: large size of classes, lack of suitable teaching materials
- Need to prepare students for traditional exams



There is often a gap between government curricular innovations and the practice in actual classrooms.

This can be due to a mismatch between prevalent educational paradigms, and top-down imposition of new curricular approaches.



“It’s difficult for me, but interesting”

Chinese Undergraduates’ Perceptions of  
Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT)



# Practitioner-Research Team

Shandong University of Finance and Economics, Jinan, China

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GU, Mingwei



WANG, Yingjie



ZHANG, Xue



# TBLT in Chinese Higher Ed

TBLT in Chinese curriculum brought about “a paradigm shift from a traditional teacher-centered, knowledge-based transmission mode of teaching to a more learner-centered, teacher-facilitated model of teaching.” ( Liu et al., 2018, p. 133)

Adaptation and localization to Chinese higher educational context: focus on form and grammar, exam preparation, integrating target and pedagogical tasks, large class sizes, discussion of teacher role as facilitator.

Student perspectives underexplored.

Lu et al. (2025); Luo and Yi (2013); Ji and Pham (2018); Hu (2013)



# Exploring Chinese Undergraduates' Perceptions of TBLT

## **Purpose of the Study**

Explore Chinese undergraduates' experiences with TBLT

Inform the application of TBLT in Chinese university language education

## **Research Question**

What are students' perceptions of task-based instruction in terms of learning and engagement?

## **Context**

Northern Chinese public, provincial university, first-year economics and statistics students (n=186)

Joint program with Dal

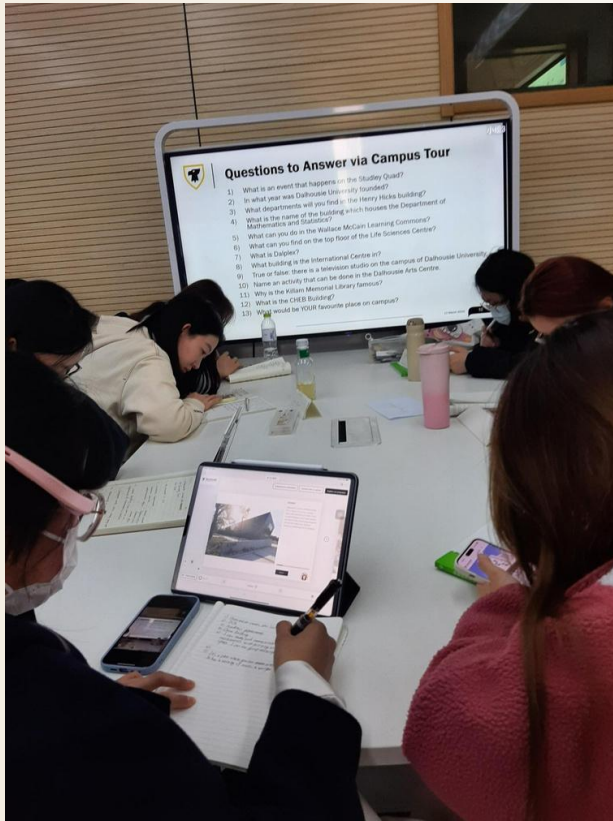
## CANTEEN

Here, we can have delicious and healthy meals. The most important is we do not to wash the dishes by ourselves.



# Task Examples

1. Language Learning Tip Sheet
2. Researching Jobs and Creating Job Interview Questions
3. Professional Introduction
4. Role Play: Job Interview
5. Virtual Tour and Scavenger Hunt of Partner University
6. Creating a Campus Tour
7. Role Play: Intercultural Communication
8. Personal Graph Description



12/15-hour speaking module in College English and Business English courses

Tasks adapted to large class sizes (45-49 Ss), 90-minute sessions.



# Methodology

Sequential explanatory design

Survey with Likert-like and open-ended questions

Open-ended questions in English or Chinese

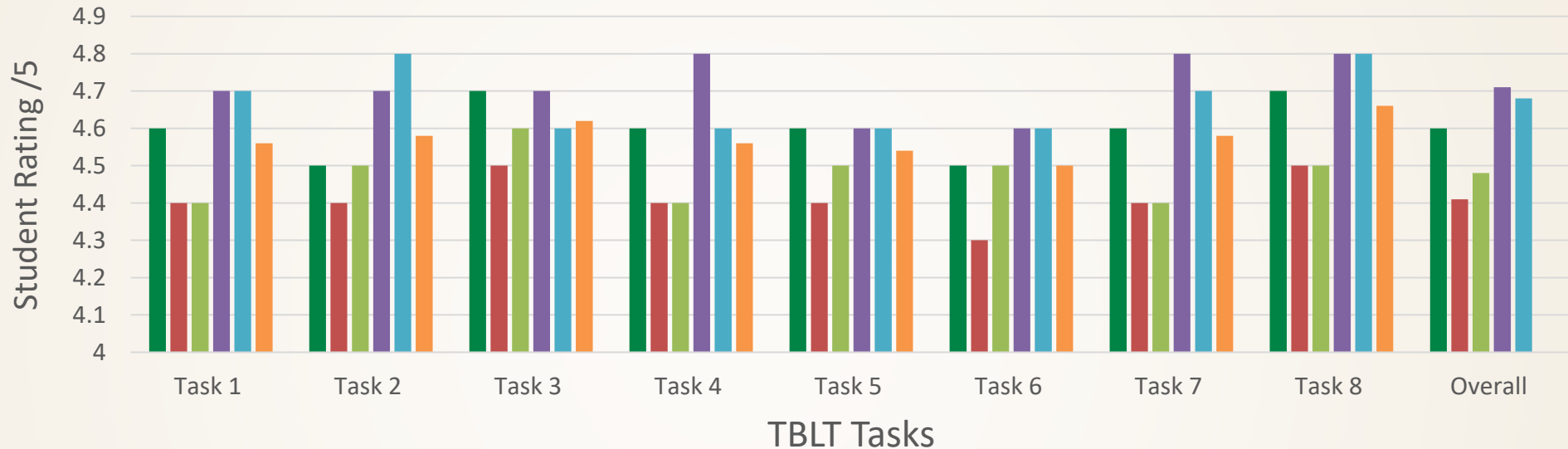
Closed questions on perceived learning, fluency, confidence, and task enjoyment

Open-ended questions on challenges, preferences, and feedback

Administered using Mentimeter



# Students rated their experiences with tasks highly.



- I improved my [overall] English doing this activity.
- I improved my English fluency doing this activity.
- I felt more confident speaking English after this activity.
- What I learned doing this activity will be useful for me in the future.
- I enjoyed doing this activity
- TOTALS PER TASK



# Qualitative Findings

→ Reported challenges with vocabulary, grammar, fluency; working in teams, confidence, fear of mistakes, listening comprehension and subject knowledge.

- “[...] What impressed me most was making [a campus tour Powerpoint]. It's difficult for me but interesting.”
- “My foundation of English is so weak that sometimes I can't understand what to say.”
- “I often couldn't find the right English words to express my thoughts, and I had a lot of grammatical mistakes.” [Translated from Chinese].
- “I think it's my introverted character. But I really think that these activities help me a lot.”
- “Sometimes [I] cannot understand accurately”
- “Team work is hard to start”
- “When making PPT, I feel the time is tight and the task is heavy”



## Discussions and Conclusions

TBLT positively impacts learning and engagement.

Students valued task-based learning for its perceived benefits to their learning and engagement, even if they found it new, or challenging.

Highlights the potential for integrating “traditional” and communicative teaching approaches to improve outcomes and experience for students.

How can we help our students bridge the gap between their experience in “traditional” language learning contexts and their learning in our classrooms?





# Strategies for Practice

Integrating TBLT in Culturally-Diverse Language  
Classrooms



# Task-Based vs. Task-Supported Teaching

- Modular curriculum (Ellis, 2019; 2024): Principled integration of task-based and task-supported learning
- Balance of approaches can shift over the course of the semester.
- Explicit explanation of the “why” of your use of TBLT/TSLT

## **Task-supported language teaching**

- Use tasks for communicative practice
- Otherwise follow a conventional grammar or function-based syllabus

## **Task-based language teaching**

- Treat the task as the central unit of curriculum and lesson planning
- Follow a stricter definition of “task”



# Implications for Practice: Task Design

- Integrating target/real-life tasks and pedagogical tasks
- Balancing focus on meaning and form
- Providing individual, pair, as well as small group options or elements
- “[A]dding grammatical input, encouraging the students to focus on form, to discuss grammar matters and to provide mutual corrective feedback[...]”

(Ji and Pham, 2018, p. 164; Luo and Yi (2013))



# Implications for Practice: Vocabulary

- Address vocabulary throughout the task cycle
- For real-life tasks, focus on discipline-specific vocab that might be new for learners
- Explicit teaching of communication strategies focused on vocabulary (i.e. paraphrasing)
- Don't forget about pronunciation of new vocabulary, supporting its application and use



# Implications for Practice: Fluency

- Provide scaffolding tools such as sentence stems/starters, scripts, phrasebanks, templates, etc.
- Adjust delivery to allow more thinking and preparation time
- Reduce complexity of tasks
- Emphasize the goal of communicative competence rather than solely grammatical accuracy and highlight satisfactory task achievement



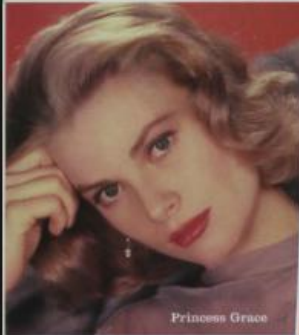
# TASK-ifying *your* Textbook

Textbook can be an important scaffold

## 9.1 20th-century icons

Grammar past of to be affirmative  
Can do make simple statements about people from history

Bruce Lee



Princess Grace



Diana, Princess of Wales



Elvis Presley

### Reading

- 1 a Look at the underlined words in the texts. Check their meanings in a dictionary.  
b Read the texts. Match a text to a photo.

1 He was a singer and an actor. He was born on 8th January, 1935, in Mississippi. His parents were very poor. He was a factory-worker, then a driver. His first song was *That's All Right*. He was 'The King of Rock and Roll'.  
Famous quote: 'When I was a child, ladies and gentlemen, I was a dreamer.'

2 She was an actor and a princess. She was born on 12th November, 1929, in Philadelphia. Her parents were very rich. She was a model and then an actor. Her first film was *Fourteen Hours* in 1951. Her husband was Prince Rainier III of Monaco.  
Famous quote: (about flowers) 'I talk to them and they talk to me.'

3 He was an actor and fighter. He was born on 27th November, 1940, in San Francisco. His parents were from Hong Kong. They weren't rich. His father was a singer. His last film was *Enter the Dragon*. He was short and thin but he was very strong and very fast.  
Famous quote: 'Don't think. Feel.'

4 She was a princess and a fashion icon. She was born on 1st July, 1961, in Sandringham. Her parents were rich. She wasn't a good student at school but she was a good pianist. Her wedding was in St Paul's Cathedral in London. Her husband was Prince Charles. Their life together was not happy.  
Famous quote: 'There were three of us in this marriage.'

c Complete the sentences with names from the photos.

- 1 Diana and Grace were princesses.
- 2 \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ were born in the US.
- 3 \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ were actors.
- 4 \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ were poor as children.
- 5 \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ were the wives/husbands of famous people.

d Close your books. Work in pairs. What can you remember about the people in the texts?

Bruce Lee was born in San Francisco. His parents were ...

'Who is your favourite 20th Century icon? Tell your partner about the person.'

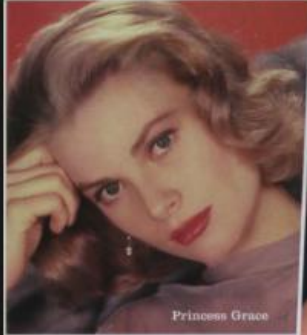
Comes at the end of a Grammar section on *was / were* which follows a reading activity.

Willis (n.d.)  
(Willis and Willis 2006)

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## Examples

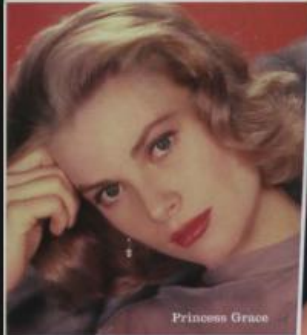
(1) In pairs, look at your list of famous people. Which people are most likely to remain popular and become 20th century icons? Rank them from most popular to least popular and be prepared to justify your order to another pair.

(2) Compare your list of possible 20th century icons with your partner's list. Did you have any people in common? Tell each other why you chose them. How many reasons did you both think of? Finally, combine your two lists, but keep it to five people.'

Willis (n.d.)  
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## Extend Existing Activities

- Listing and/or brainstorming
- Matching
- Ranking, Sequencing
- Give reasons for or justify decision.
- Explain how they did the task or tell their story to another pair or to the whole class.
- Comparing: finding similarities and differences
- Problem-Solving
- Sharing Personal Experiences and Story-telling
- Quizzes, questionnaires and projects
- Tasks based on reading and listening texts

Willis (n.d.)  
(Willis and Willis 2006)



How can you help learners “bridge the gap” by adapting TBLT to culturally-diverse language teaching environments?

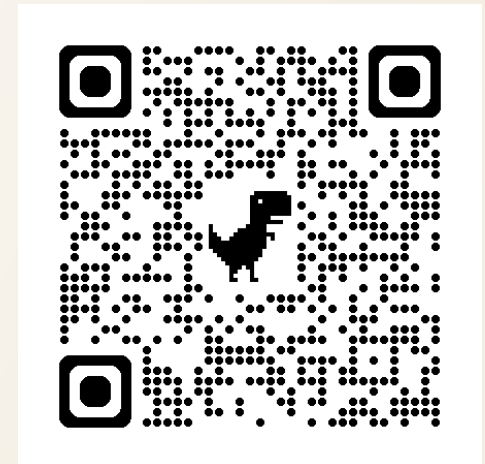


Thank you!  
Merci!  
Wela'lin!

[hello@jennifermacdonald.ca](mailto:hello@jennifermacdonald.ca)



Slides and References



LinkedIn