

Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) refers to an approach based on the use of tasks as the core unit of planning and instruction in language teaching. An interest in tasks as potential building blocks of second language instruction emerged when researchers turned to tasks as SLA research tools in the mid-1980s. SLA research has focused on the strategies and cognitive processes employed by second language learners. Language learning is believed to depend on immersing students not merely in comprehensible input but in tasks that requires them to negotiate meaning and engage in naturalistic and meaningful communication (Richards & Rogers, 2001).

1.1. Definition of Task as an Educational Activity

There are different definitions of the task that all of them emphasize the primacy of meaning: the learner's attention should be primarily directed towards meaning exchange. According to Willis (1996), task are activities where the target language is used by the learner for a communicative purpose (goal) in order to achieve an outcome. Ellis (2003) also defines task as a workplan that requires learners to process language pragmatically in order to achieve an outcome that can be evaluated in terms of whether the correct or appropriate propositional content has been conveyed. To this end, task requires the learners to give primary attention to meaning and to make use of their own linguistic resources, although the design of the task may predispose them to choose particular forms. A task is intended to result in language use that bears a resemblance, direct or indirect, to the way language is used in the real world. Like other language activities, a task can engage productive or receptive, and oral or written skills, and also various cognitive processes.

41 Van den Branden (2006) defines tasks as the kinds of activities in which people engage in order to attain some non-linguistic objective, and which involve or necessitate the functional use of language. Task-based activity is intentionally driven.

1.2. Characteristics of the Task

According to Ellis (2009), there are some criteria for language teaching to be considered task, the most important ones are as follows:

- 1- The primary focus should be on meaning (by which it is meant that learners should be mainly concerned with processing the semantic and pragmatic meaning of utterances)
- 2- There should be some kind of gap (a need to convey information, to express an option or to infer meaning)
- 3- Learners should largely have relied on their own resources (linguistic and non-linguistic) in order to complete the activity.
- 4- There is a clearly defined outcome other than the use of language (the language serves as the means for achieving the outcome, not as an end in its own right)

1.3. Goals of Task

Accuracy, complexity/restructuring, and fluency are the three pedagogic goals of task-based language pedagogy (Skehan, 1996).

Accuracy, fairly obviously, concerns how well language is produced in relation to the rule system of the target language.

Complexity concerns the elaboration of the language which is produced. How far do learners rely on prefabricated phrases and established routines, and how far do they need to expand their language resources to meet the communicative challenge?

The process which enables the learners to produce progressively more complex language is restructuring, a willingness and capacity, on the part of the learner, to organize their own underlying and developing language system, to frame and try out new hypotheses and then to act upon the feedback which is received from such experimentation.

Fluency concerns the learner's capacity to produce language in real time without undue pausing or hesitation. It is likely to rely upon more lexicalized modes of communication.

According to Willis (1996), the main goals of task-based language instruction are as follows:

- 1- to give learners confidence in trying out

whatever language they know; 2- to give learners experience of spontaneous interaction; 3- to give learners the chance to benefit from noticing how others express similar meanings; 4- to give learners chances for negotiating turns to speak; 5- to engage learners in using language purposefully and cooperatively; 6- to make learners participate in a complete interaction, not just one-off sentences; 7- to give learners chances to try out communication strategies; and to develop learners' confidence that they can achieve communicative goals. 1.4. Task Difficulty Skehan (1996) argues that the difficulty of the task

depends on the criteria below: Language factors ☞ Syntactic complexity ☞ Lexical complexity 2. Cognitive Factors ☞ Familiarity of material in the task, does the task simply require learners to produce well-organized language from memory, in ready-organized chunks, or does it require new or less-organized material to be drawn on? 43 ☞ Nature of material: abstract vs. Concrete, are real-world referents involved, or does the learner have to deal with generalizations, abstractions, etc, working with LEGO models compared to making judgments or giving advice? ☞ Reasoning operations required, does the task require a number of mental operations for its completion, with material involved needing to be transformed or manipulated in some way, collaborative solving of some sort of mental riddle? ☞ Degree of structuring contained, is there inherent structure because of the requirement of a task, a narrative in which beginning, middle and end are reasonably clear, or a description based on some clear underlying schema, a tour of a house? 2.1. Theory of Learning TBI shares the general assumptions about the

nature of language learning underlying Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). According to Richards and Rogers (2001), the additional principles that play a central role in TBLT theory are as follow: 1- Tasks provide both the input and output processing necessary for language teaching acquisition. Tasks provide full opportunities for both input and output requirements, which are believed to be key processes in language learning. Other researchers have looked at negotiation of meaning as the necessary element in second language acquisition. Tasks are believed to foster processes of negotiation, modification, rephrasing, and experimentation that are at the heart of second language learning. 2- Task activity and achievement are motivational Tasks require the learners to use authentic language; they have well-defined dimensions and closure; they are varied in format and operation; they typically include physical activity; they involve partnership and collaboration; they call on the learner's past experience; and they tolerate and 44 encourage a variety of communication styles; therefore, because of these reasons tasks can improve learner motivation. 3- Learning difficulty can be negotiated and fine-tuned for particular pedagogical purposes Long and Crookes (1991) assert that tasks provide a

tool for the presentation of suitable target language samples to learners, input which they will inevitably reshape via application of general cognitive processing capacities, and for the delivery of comprehension and production opportunities of negotiable difficulty. 2.2. Theory of Language TBLT is motivated primarily

by a theory of learning rather than a theory of language. According to Richards and Rogers (2001), the most important of them are: 1- Language is primarily a means of making meaning In common with other realizations of CLT, TBLT emphasizes the central role of meaning in language use 2- Multiple models of language inform TBLT TBI is not linked to a single model of language but rather draws on three models (structural, functional, and interactional) models of language theory, 3- Lexical units are central in language use and language learning Vocabulary in TBI is used to include the consideration of lexical

phrases, sentence stems, prefabricated routines, and collocations. 4- Conversation is the central focus of language and the keystone of language acquisition Speaking and trying to communicate with others through the spoken language is the main focus of TBI. 45 2.3. The Role of the Teacher According to Swan (2005), TBLT promotes learner-centeredness at the expense of teacher-directed instruction. Swan further states that the thrust of TBLT is to cast the teacher in the role of manager and facilitator of communicative activity rather than an important source of new language. Criticizing Swan, Ellis (2009) notes that there is a place for teacher-centered activities in language teaching, being helpful through small group work in creating contexts for the kinds of language use that will promote acquisition. In many instructional contexts, the teacher is the major source of input. Ellis (2009) states that TBLT is not different from any other instructional approach as like other types of teaching TBLT can be both learner- and teacher-centered. According to Van den Branden (2009), language teachers are active, thinking decisions maker who make instructional choices by drawing on complex, practically-oriented, personalized, and context-sensitive networks of knowledge, thoughts, and beliefs. According to Richards & Rogers (2001), teachers are selector and sequencer of tasks, preparing learners for tasks, and consciousness raiser. 2.4. Learner Roles Richards & Rogers (2001), made a list of learners' role in TBI as follow: Group participant Since many tasks are done in pairs and small groups. Monitor Class activities must be administered in a way to provide the opportunity for learners to notice how language is used in communication. Learners need to attend not only to the message in task work, but also to the form in which such messages typically come packed. Risk-taker and innovator 46 Many tasks require learners to create and interpret messages for which they lack full linguistic recourses and prior experience. The skills of guessing from linguistic and contextual clues, asking for clarification, and consulting with other learners may also need to be developed. 2.5. Lesson Design According to Van den Braden (2006), task based syllabuses do not chop up language into small pieces, but take holistic, functional and communicative tasks, rather than any specific linguistic item, as the basic unit for the design of educational activity. The design of a task-based lesson involves consideration of the stages or the components of a lesson that has a task as its main component. According to Ellis (2003), various designs have been proposed; however, all of them have in common three key phases. These phases reflect the chronology of a task-based lesson. The first phase is pre- task and concerns the various activities that teachers and students can undertake before they start the task, such as whether students are given time to plan the performance of the task or not. The second phase, the during task phase, centers on the task itself and affords various instructional options, including whether students are required to operate under time pressure or not. The final phase is post task and involves procedures for following up on the task performance. Only during the task phase is obligatory in the task-based teaching. 2.6. Task Planning According to Ellis (2000), two main challenges commonly facing the practitioners of task-based language pedagogy are planning task based instruction and improvising during task based activities. There are two main types of task-based planning: pre-task planning and within-task planning. These are distinguished simply in terms of when the planning takes place, either it is performed before the task or during its performance. Pre-task planning is further divides into rehearsal and strategic planning. Rehearsal entails providing learners with an opportunity to perform the task

before the main performance. In other words, it involves task repetition with the first performance of the task viewed as appropriation for subsequent performance. Strategic planning, on the other hand, entails learners preparing to perform the task by considering the content they will need to encode and how to express this content. In pre-task planning, the learners have access to the actual task materials. It is this that distinguishes strategic planning from other types of pre-task activity (brainstorming content; studying model performance of the task; dictionary search). Within task planning can be differentiated according to the extent to which the task performance is pressured or unpressured. This can be achieved most easily by manipulating the time made available to the learners for the on-line planning of what to say/write in a task performance. In an unpressured performance, learners can engage in careful on-line planning. In pressured performance, however, learners will need to engage in rapid planning resulting in unplanned language use (Ellis, 2005).

2.7. Critiques of Task-Based Language Teaching

Over the last decade, there have been interesting critiques of a task-based approach to instruction or task based research. For example, cognitively oriented researchers do not generally work within a negotiation of meaning framework. Similarly, socio-cultural theorists essentially doubt that the conceptualization of interaction in other task-based approaches will enable acquisition to be accounted for (Skehan, 2003). But other critiques come from outside the task based paradigm. Some critiques focus on just one aspect of a task-based approach, attack it and as a result the entire task-based enterprise was considered doomed. For example, Sheen (1994) attacks tasks as if they were still input-dominated, and deriving their credentials from Krashen's work. He also criticizes a small number of studies supportive of the claim that learners do not particularly learn errors from one another during tasks. Given the developments reported above, this critique needs to be widened and updated if it is to have any force. Similarly, one of the aspects of Seedhouse's (1999) critiques is that negotiation of meaning is inadequate as an account of the complexity of classroom interactional pattern, unproven, and unprovable. A number of scholars also argue that task-based research is limited by its excessive concern for referential tasks, and that what is missing from such research is the inevitable social dimension of language use. On occasion the critique is extended to include the quantitative approach to research that is used by many researchers. Clearly there is little that can be said to those who think that systematic, careful control of variables is impossible or meaningless in task-based research. Aston (1986) argues that tasks which require a lot of negotiation of meaning irritate learners, with the result that any potential that negotiation might have to provide relevant feedback is not realized. He further notes that recasts are not particularly frequent in the classes; the feedback that they provide is not noticed by learners