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**A Study on Task-based Language Teaching
and Learning: Tasks and Language Focus**

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Abstract

Since the *New Curriculum Standards* clearly encouraged the use of the TBLT in the Chinese mainland in 2001, it has attracted more and more attention from scholars, researchers and front-line teachers. Yet, many of these researches have been conducted under laboratory conditions or in tightly controlled settings. The study aims to find out what the real role of the TBLT in ordinary classrooms, how front-line teachers make use of it, and how they balance tasks and language focus. Hereby, the author observed three primary teachers' classes in Xiangzhou Experimental School for three weeks, and collected data.

First, the traditional Grammar Translation Method (GT), Direct Method (DM), Audio-lingual Method (ALM), Total Physical Response (TPR), Communicative Language Teaching Method (CLT), etc., have been reviewed. Then, the definition of "task", varieties of tasks, the differences between tasks and exercises are carefully studied. Next, its theoretical support is analyzed from two perspectives: second language acquisition and social-constructivism. Last, the author concludes by identifying five features of the TBLT: authenticity, communication, language dependency and task completeness, "learn by doing", and cooperation.

Methodologically, the study has adapted the Class Observation Scheme for Communicative Orientation of Language Teaching for data analysis, (Allen, Frölich and Spada, 1985; Chaudron, 1988; cited in Nunan, 1996) and has found that one of the teachers combined TPR with TBLT, the second teacher used CLT and TBLT, and the third teacher didn't use TBLT at all. Teachers' confusion about tasks and exercises, teacher-centred class, and students' reluctance or inability to use English caused difficulties in task implementation.

The research also found: 1) students were interested in tasks, partly because they were motivated by bonus marks, rather than completely task-driven; 2) fun is primary for primary students rather than "meaning is primary", so teachers can do something entertaining in class in order to make them interested in tasks; 3) pair/group work can, to some extent, solve the problems caused by the large class size; 4) teachers must direct students' attention to language focus, otherwise, students will not focus on language automatically when they are doing tasks; 5) teacher might as well provide inputs that are in advance a little of students' current level, and give a push

when students produce language, and then students can better acquire language; 6) without authentic context, real communication are not likely to happen.

Thus, the study suggests: 1) teachers should try the strong form of TBLT and increase the difficulty level of tasks occasionally; 2) students should be more independent from teachers and their mother tongue, and responsible for their learning; 3) authentic context, good rapport between teachers and students, good classroom management, rich input, a push for high-quality output, and appropriate entertaining activities are necessary for a successful TBLT class.

Key words: TBLT; tasks; language focus



List of Abbreviations

GT	Traditional Grammar Translation Method
DM	Direct Method
ALM	Audio-lingual Method
TPR	Total Physical Response
CLT	Communicative Language Learning and Teaching
PPP(3P)	Presentation, Practice, Production



Contents

Acknowledgement	i
Abstract.....	ii
List of Abbreviations.....	iv
List of Tables and Figures	vii
Chapter 1 Introduction	1
1.1 Research background	1
1.2 Research objectives.....	4
1.3 Research questions	5
1.4 Research significance.....	5
Chapter 2 Literature Review	7
2.1 An Overview of language teaching methodologies.....	7
2.2 Introduction to TBLT	12
2.2.1 Definition of task.....	13
2.2.2 Tasks vs. exercises.....	14
2.2.2 Varieties of task.....	16
2.2.3 Principles for TBLT.....	16
2.2.4 Framework of task.....	18
2.3 Rationale of TBLT	18
2.3.1 Second language acquisition.....	19
2.3.2 Pedagogical rationale.....	23
Chapter 3 Methodology	25
3.1 Research participants	25
3.2 Data collection	27
3.3 The role of the researcher.....	29
3.4 Research method and design.....	29
Chapter 4 Data Analysis and Findings	32
4.1 Natural and real class by three teachers	32
4.1.1 Mr. X.....	33
4.1.2 Ms Y.....	40
4.1.3 Ms Z	42
4.3 Summary of findings.....	49
Chapter 5 Conclusion and Suggestion	55
5.1 Conclusion	55
5.2 Suggestions	56
5.3 Limitation of the research	59
Reference	60

Appendices.....	63
Appendix A: Three lesson plans by Mr. X	63
Appendix B: Three lesson plans by Ms Z	66



List of Tables and Figures

Table 2. 1 Differences between tasks and exercises I	15
Table 2.2 Differences between tasks and exercises II	15
Table 3.1 Data collected from Mr. X, Ms Y and Ms Z.....	28
Figure 2.1 Foreign language teaching methodologies world wide.....	7
Figure 2.2 Framework of TBLT	18
Figure 2.3 Acquisition and learning in second language production	20
Figure 2.4 Operation of the “affective filter”	22
Figure 2.5 The process of meaning negotiation	23
Figure 3.1 The research design	31

