

How can Task-based Language Teaching be adapted in EFL contexts ?

A case study in China

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Outline

1. Research Background
2. Research Design
3. Methodology
4. Main Findings
5. Implications & Further Study

1. Research Background

Task-based Language Teaching/TBLT:

- TBLT as a branch/recent development of CLT (Communicative Language Teaching);
- CLT: strong versus weak (role of grammar) --- Task-based and Task-supported

What is a task? A task (Ellis 2003: 9)

- Is a workplan
- Involves a primary focus on meaning
- Involves real-world processes of language use
- Can involve any of the four language skills
- Engages cognitive processes
- Has a clearly defined communicative outcome

1. Research Background

- TBLT: a debated area – confusions, challenges, opportunities
- In China: Curricular shifts from CLT to TBLT in the late 90s

Teachers meet lots of constraints: conceptual/societal-institutional/classroom level...

- Contextual flexibility? Adopt or adapt?

(Ellis 2009, Butler 2011, Littlewood 2007)

1. Research Background

- Existing studies into classrooms in China:
 1. Mostly unsuccessful cases reporting the same problems / experimental studies
 2. Empirical studies mostly in Hong Kong, Guangdong...

(Carless 2002-2004, 2007-2009, Deng & Carless 2009, 2010, Chen 2011)

How can I do my research
differently?

2. Research Design

The Case School in Hangzhou, Zhejiang

- Private, secondary boarding school
- Institutional autonomy: textbook, exam/assessment, small class size (approx. 25)
- Communicative approaches since mid 80s – COFLE (cultural-oriented foreign language education)

2. Research Design / Methodology: The Case Study

RQ: To what extent and how is TBLT effectively adapted in the COFLE framework of HFLS?		Methods	Data Source/ Instruments	Data Type
Sub-Questions	① What are teachers' beliefs toward COFLE as opposed to TBLT?	Individual Teacher Interviews	Audio-Recordings	Qualitative
	② How do their teaching practices resemble or against TBLT?	Direct Classroom Observations	Adapted COLT Observation Scheme/Field Notes/ Video-recordings	Quantitative /Qualitative
	③ What are the facilitating and hindering factors for the adaptations of TBLT in HFLS?	Individual Teacher Interviews	Audio-Recordings	Qualitative

2. Methodology:

Data Set Summary

Participant	Interview Slots	Total Time Duration	Lessons Observed
Teacher Participant 1	4	3 hrs 20 mins	N/A
Teacher Participant 2	3	1 hr 53 mins	2
Teacher Participant 3	2	50 mins	2
Teacher Participant 4	N/A	N/A	2
Teacher Participant 5	3	1 hr 50 mins	2
Teacher Participant 6	2	50 mins	2
Participant 7 (Vice Principal)	1	34 mins	N/A

3. Methodology:

Adapted COLT Observation Scheme

- Part A in COLT: Communication Orientation of Language Teaching, (Spada and Flohlich (1995)
- Littlewood's (2004) Continuum of Communicativeness

Focus on forms		←	→	Focus on meaning
Non-communicative learning	Pre-communicative language practice	Communicative language practice	Structured communication	Authentic communication
Focusing on the structures of language, how they are formed and what they mean, e.g. substitution exercises, 'discovery' and awareness-raising activities	Practising language with some attention to meaning but not communicating new messages to others, e.g. 'question-and-answer' practice	Practising pre-taught language in a context where it communicates new information, e.g. information-gap activities or 'personalized' questions	Using language to communicate in situations which elicit pre-learned language, but with some unpredictability, e.g. structured role-play and simple problem-solving	Using language to communicate in situations where the meanings are unpredictable, e.g. creative role-play, more complex problem-solving and discussion
'Exercises'	←	(Ellis)	→	'Tasks'
'Enabling tasks'	←	(Estaire and Zanon)	→	'Communicative tasks'

3. Methodology:

Observational Data

Categories	Data Types
1) Activity and Episode	Qualitative
2) Organisation	Quantitative
3) Skills	Quantitative
4) Content Control	Quantitative
5) Activity Type	Quantitative
6) Materials	Qualitative
7) Teacher Role	Qualitative
8) Assessment	Qualitative

4. Main Findings from Statistical Data:




Percentages of Time Spent on Types of Classroom Organisation (40mins=100%)

Participant	Class				Group			Individual		
	Total	T-S/C	S-S/C	Choral	Total	Same	Dif.	Total	Same	Dif.
Mean	83.1	63.0	18.0	2.1	7.5	7.5	/	9.5	6.3	3.2
Participant 2	88.6	52.7	30.4	5.5	6.3	6.3	/	5.2	5.2	/
Participant 3	80.7	60.4	15.1	5.2	7.3	7.3	/	12.0	12.0	/
Participant 4	78.2	63.6	14.6	/	9.7	9.7	/	12.2	12.2	/
Participant 5	96.8	79.6	17.2	/	1.3	1.3	/	2.0	2.0	/
Participant 6	66.3	58.6	7.7	/	12.8	12.8	/	16.0	/	16.0

4. Main Findings from Statistical Data: Percentages of Time Spent on Types of Classroom Activities (40mins=100%)

Participant	Non-communicative learning	Pre-communicative practice	Communicative practice	Structured communication	Authentic communication
Mean	2.8	8.7	12.5	28.6	47.4
Participant 2	/	5.5	8.7	30.1	55.8
Participant 3	13.9	34.2	16.3	14.1	22.2
Participant 4	/	/	20.1	42.4	37.6
Participant 5	/	3.9	17.6	48.7	29.9
Participant 6	/	/	/	8.3	91.8

4. Main Findings from Qualitative Data: Teaching Methods/Resources in COFLE

- ‘No L1’ rule from beginners 
- A variety of communicative activities (in class/weekly) 
- Formative assessment combined with summative examinations 
- More communicative P-P-P combined with TBLT

Activities	Types	Student Levels	Descriptions
Mini Play	Group Performance	Junior 1/2/3	A group of students act out an episode in a text/piece of news/novel/film...
News Report	Individual Report	Junior 2/3	Each student reports a piece of news and make relevant comments;
	Group Presentation		A group of students report recent news happened in school/China/the world;
Film Dubbing Show	Group Performance	Junior 1/2	A group of students dub an episode of a film/TV show;
Culture in Mind	Group Presentation	Junior 1/2	A group of students report interesting cultural phenomenon (e.g., a festival in a foreign country);
Listen & Enjoy	Group Presentation	Junior 2	A group of students introduce a favourite singer/band and their songs;
Newspaper Reading	Group Presentation	Junior 2	A group of students summarize and report interesting news in a chosen newspaper;

English Learning Assessment Sheet for Junior 1

Term 1, 2011

Student Name:

Types	Percentages	Descriptions	Results
Text recitation	15%	Text recitation work given by the teacher	
Reading	5%	After class extensive readings	
Classroom involvement	10%	All kinds of classroom activities, e.g., individual report, pair dialogue, classroom interactions...	
Written work	10%	All kinds of written work given by the teacher, in terms of the completion status, writing quality, language proficiency	
School activities	5%	All kinds of English-relevant school competitions and contests, e.g., writing competition, spelling contest...	
Dictation	5%		
Written Exam	40%	Mid-term and final exams	
Oral Test	5%	Mid-term and final tests	
Self-assessment and extra points	1-5%		



Task Characteristics:		Mentioned by participants:
Commonly Agreed:		
1.	A task usually involves pre-selected language forms;	Participant 1, 3
2.	A task involves an outcome, usually in the form of a product (e.g., presentation, report) and there is a report stage for students to present the outcome;	Participant 1, 2, 5
3.	A task involves group work with different roles of group members that asks students' cooperative learning;	Participant 1, 2, 5
4.	A format/criteria/example of the end-product should be given by the teacher;	Participant 1, 5
5.	A task gives a purpose to communicate;	Participant 1, 3
6.	The task setting should be close to students' real-life;	Participant 1, 5
7.	A task should use authentic materials;	Participant 2, 3, 5
8.	A task should involve every student;	Participant 5, 6
9.	The teacher plays multiple roles: before teaching - a designer/decision-maker of teaching content; during teaching - an organiser/assistant/instructor/error corrector/the one who scaffolds students language;	Participant 1, 2, 5, 6
10.	Activities which are planned after class and reported in class also count as tasks;	Participant 1, 2, 3, 5, 6

4. Main Findings from Qualitative Data: Teachers' knowledge of TBLT

- Major concerns:
- How to manage input in a task?
- How to make sure all language points in the textbook are covered?

Textbook-based, 'P-P-P' teaching approach

Insufficient knowledge and Lack of examples and resources in task implementation

Before starting the plan, ask yourselves:

1. What do the kids need?

Love, healthy food, equipment, books, classroom, desks & chairs.

2. What can we do?

Give them some books we don't read. Teach them some knowledge. Give them some love.

3. What would we like to do and why?

Try to make lunch with them because it can develop our relationships and make friends with them.

Now make a plan in a group of 2-4 people:

1. What do we need:

Some money, old books and useful equipment, also some healthy healthy food.

2. How do we do it?

Step 1: Preparation:

Ask people to save money for the charity and contact vegetable sellers to offer vegetable every day and use money to buy some equipment.

Step 2:

Bring the things to the school and ask people deliver equipment to the school.

Step 3:

Begin to teach students and make friends with them.

3. Anticipated difficulties & ways to get over it:

Some children's parents don't want to let their children to study because they are so poor and need someone to help. Communicate with them and let them realize how important knowledge is.

4. Task distribution & Peer Assessment(A: Excellent B: Good C: Needs improvement):

Student	Task	Performance
Christine	Find information ; act	✓ B C
Alice	Find information ; report ; act	✓ B C
Jack	Find information ; act	✓ B C
Michael	Find information ; act	✓ A B C

Lesson Example

Well-planned tasks delivered in a P-P-P procedure

Lesson Plan	Description	Time
Textbook	Go For It! (Revised in China) Volume Page 32-33	Duration
Topic	Helping Others	
Teaching objectives	Learn the Sentence Patterns; Understand the Text; Design an Outreach Programme for Kids	
Teaching Procedures	1. Students 'News Report'.	8'10
	2. Presentation of target sentence patterns.	5'15
	3. Lead-in: Teacher-led free talk of the topic using target sentence patterns & practise with students.	11'55
	4. Students finish text comprehension exercise.	7'00
	5. Teacher-led brainstorming of the outreach program: What do you think the kids need? What can we do to help them?	2'40
	6. Teacher distributes the hand-out and gives instructions on steps of the task and group work distribution.	4'00
	7. Student Planning.	1'00
Homework	Finish the program and report in next class.	

Lesson Example

Well-planned tasks delivered in a P-P-P procedure

- A pre-dominance of teacher-fronted teaching;
- Teacher's strategic use of contextualised input: – pre-task or the 1st 'P'?
- ① stories/problematised situations
- ② pictorial representations to build semantic networks/lexical sets
- The absence of task planning/ implementation phase – teacher's knowledge/confidence? limited teaching hrs? other factors?

5. Implications & Further Study

- Teachers' understanding toward TBLT – effective adaptations:

In-service teacher education: school-based, practice-focused TBLT teacher coaching and training (Van den Branden 2006)

- From 'P-P-P' to TBLT – a starting point:

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5. Implications & Further Study

- Other possible starting points:
 1. Communities of learning, English-speaking environment (e.g., weekly activities) (Butler, 2011)
 2. School-based assessment with formative purposes
- Limitations of the current research:
 1. Students' points of view?
 2. Other schools?
 3. Methodology - COLT

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