

Book reviews

REFLECTIONS ON TASK-BASED LANGUAGE TEACHING

Rod Ellis

Bristol, Blue Ridge Summit: Multilingual Matters, 2018

Elham Mohammadi

Deakin University

In this systematic account of task-based language teaching (TBLT), Ellis puts forward a critical discussion of the past research and the pedagogy of the approach. He argues in favour of the need to adopt a research perspective that is focused on the implementation of TBLT in the actual classroom environment, rather than in purposefully manipulated contexts. In line with this key argument, and having clarified the legitimacy he considers for the traditional methods of language teaching as opposed to the advocates of purely task-based approaches, he proposes that the inclusion of a structural component to the curricula informed by TBLT could be advantageous in the accomplishment of the approach's goals.

The book is organized in four main sections. The introductory section provides a background to the research and theories that gave rise to the development of TBLT, as well as the theoretical foundations that underlie its emergence and development dating back to the 1970s. Although this descriptive background of the theoretical perspectives is very illuminating for researchers in the field, the discussion of components of TBLT could benefit from tangible examples, so that practitioners might be helped to a better grasp of technical terms.

In the second part, Ellis addresses earlier research that attempted to tackle theoretical as well as practical issues in TBLT. In the first two chapters of this section, he highlights the importance of two different kinds of tasks -Nonreciprocal and Focus on Form- and criticises some of the theoretical frameworks that have addressed such tasks, and attempts to dismiss loosely-founded criticisms addressing Focus on Form. The appeal of the remaining chapters in this part is in the detailed theoretical and practical accounts of the

conflicting issues that could serve as valuable guidelines for practitioners: task-preparedness (Chapter 5), the role of explicit instruction (Chapter 6), and measurement of oral production (Chapter 7).

Part three, although slightly overlapping with part two in terms of reviewing previous TBLT research, switches its attention towards the pedagogical concerns of the approach. It begins by responding to criticisms of TBLT by clarifying the misconceptions underpinning them, while acknowledging real problems that need to be addressed for TBLT to move forward as an approach. As an SLA scholar who does not reject the role of traditional approaches to language teaching, Ellis proposes a modular language curriculum, in which a structural component accompanies a task-based component in a non-parallel fashion to facilitate the successful implementation of tasks. Further, Ellis takes on a liberal perspective and encourages an option-based approach to TBLT which allows practitioners to selectively manipulate task components in accordance with the requirements of the learners and the setting. The section is concluded by a more detailed practical account of practitioners' perspectives towards the actual implementation of tasks and provides an explanatory account of task "micro-evaluation" and the multiple bases it can be applied to. The final part of the book concludes with a summary of the discussions around previous research and pedagogy, and addresses some of the common questions regarding the implementation of TBLT that can be of value to teachers as a practical guide.

As a final note, throughout the book Ellis makes multiple references to the need for further research on the effects of task completion on language acquisition, as an unexplored area. He does not, however, provide any guidance as to what could pave the way for the emergence of this line of research. Nevertheless, this book provides enlightening insights on both the research and pedagogy of TBLT, and can be adopted as a useful guide for better understanding and implementation of the approach, both for researchers and practitioners in the field.