

Developing Students' English-Speaking Skills Through Task-Based Language Teaching

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Abstract: This article examines the potential of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) for developing students' English-speaking skills in higher education. Particular attention is paid to the principles of communicative task design, the stages of task-based instruction, and the teacher's role in creating conditions for meaningful oral interaction. The article discusses how TBLT can contribute to the development of speaking fluency, accuracy, complexity, learner autonomy, and communicative competence. Different types of speaking tasks, including information-gap, problem-solving, decision-making, opinion-gap, role-play, and professionally oriented tasks, are presented and analyzed. The advantages and possible challenges of implementing TBLT in university English courses are also considered. It is concluded that TBLT can serve as an effective approach to creating meaningful opportunities for students to use English for authentic academic, social, and professional communication.

Keywords: Task-Based Language Teaching, TBLT, English language teaching, speaking skills, oral communication, communicative competence, fluency, accuracy, complexity, communicative tasks, learner autonomy, interaction.

Introduction:

Contemporary higher education places increasing emphasis on students' ability to use English as a practical means of academic and professional communication. English is required for participation in international conferences, academic mobility programs, professional internships, research collaboration, access to international publications, and communication with specialists from different countries. As a result, knowledge of vocabulary and grammatical rules alone is no longer sufficient. Students are expected to be able to communicate their ideas clearly, participate in discussions, explain problems, justify opinions, negotiate meaning, and respond appropriately in spontaneous communicative situations.

Speaking is one of the most challenging components of foreign language competence. Even students who possess sufficient grammatical knowledge and vocabulary may experience difficulties when they need

to formulate ideas spontaneously, maintain a conversation, express agreement or disagreement, explain causes, or defend a particular point of view. One possible reason is that traditional classroom practice frequently emphasizes controlled exercises and the reproduction of predetermined linguistic structures rather than genuine communication.

In this context, Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) has attracted considerable attention in foreign language education. TBLT organizes language learning around the completion of meaningful communicative tasks. Rather than using English simply to demonstrate knowledge of particular grammatical structures, learners use the target language to exchange information, solve problems, make decisions, express opinions, and achieve specific outcomes [1; 2].

The central principle of TBLT is therefore closely related to the functional nature of language. Language is treated primarily as a means of communication and interaction rather than merely as an object of study.

This feature makes TBLT especially relevant to the development of speaking skills.

METHODS

The study is theoretical and methodological in nature. The main methods include the analysis of academic literature on Task-Based Language Teaching, the comparison of traditional and communicatively oriented approaches to speaking instruction, and the methodological design of speaking tasks appropriate for university students.

The theoretical framework is based on the works of R. Ellis, J. Willis, D. Willis, P. Skehan, P. Foster, M. Long, and M. Bygate, whose studies address the nature of communicative tasks, the organization of task-based instruction, and the analysis of second-language performance in terms of fluency, accuracy, and complexity [1–6].

Special attention is also given to studies that investigate the relationship between TBLT and the development of oral proficiency. Research in this area suggests that meaningful tasks can increase opportunities for language production, interaction, negotiation of meaning, and active learner participation [7; 8].

The key concept in Task-Based Language Teaching is the **task**. A communicative task differs from a traditional language exercise because its primary purpose is not simply to demonstrate correct use of a linguistic form. Instead, learners are expected to use language in order to achieve a specific communicative result.

For example, an activity such as “Put the verbs into the correct tense” focuses directly on grammatical form. The expected outcome is linguistic accuracy.

By contrast, an instruction such as:

Discuss the three proposed solutions and decide which one would be most effective. Explain the reasons for your decision.

requires learners to exchange ideas, evaluate information, negotiate with one another, and reach a conclusion. The language is necessary because students need it to accomplish the task.

Ellis identifies several important characteristics of a task, including a primary focus on meaning, the use of learners’ own linguistic resources, the existence of a

clearly defined communicative outcome, and a relationship to real-world language use [1].

Therefore, TBLT should not be understood as the complete rejection of grammar and vocabulary instruction. Rather, it changes the relationship between form and communication. Instead of beginning every lesson with the explicit presentation of a grammatical structure, students may first encounter a communicative need. Language analysis can then follow the task and focus on linguistic forms that were necessary or problematic during communication.

This balance between focus on meaning and focus on form allows the lesson to remain communicative while still providing opportunities to develop linguistic accuracy [1; 2].

TBLT and the Development of Speaking Skills

The potential of TBLT is particularly evident in speaking instruction because most communicative tasks require active interaction. Learners may need to ask questions, clarify information, give explanations, make suggestions, agree or disagree, compare alternatives, persuade partners, and respond to unexpected ideas.

Research on task-based oral performance often considers three major dimensions: fluency, accuracy, and complexity [3; 4].

Fluency refers to learners’ ability to maintain speech at an appropriate rate without excessive hesitation, long pauses, or frequent breakdowns.

Traditional speaking activities sometimes allow students to prepare complete answers in advance. Although such preparation can be useful, it does not always develop the ability to respond spontaneously.

Task-based interaction creates greater unpredictability. Learners often do not know exactly what their partner will say. Consequently, they need to listen, process information, formulate a response, and continue the interaction.

For example:

Your group has a limited budget and can finance only one student development project. Discuss all available options and agree on one project.

During this activity, students must react to other participants rather than simply deliver prepared monologues.

Regular task-based practice can help learners retrieve vocabulary more quickly, use familiar expressions more automatically, and develop strategies for maintaining communication.

Planning can also influence performance. Research by Skehan and Foster indicates that task conditions, including opportunities for planning, may affect fluency and other characteristics of oral production [3].

Accuracy refers to the correct use of grammatical, lexical, and phonological forms.

TBLT does not require teachers to ignore errors. However, excessive correction during the communicative stage can interrupt interaction and reduce students' willingness to speak.

A more appropriate strategy may be to observe students while they perform the task, identify recurring problems, and address those issues after the task has been completed.

For example, the teacher may notice repeated production of:

If I will be the manager, I will change the system.

After the task, the class can analyze the difference between that sentence and:

If I were the manager, I would change the system.

In this way, grammar is connected to a communicative situation students have already experienced.

Post-task language work can therefore help learners improve accuracy without destroying the communicative purpose of the activity. **Complexity** refers to the range and sophistication of lexical and grammatical resources used by learners.

Simply encouraging students to speak more does not automatically lead to more sophisticated language. Some learners may complete every speaking activity using short and repetitive sentence patterns.

For this reason, teachers need to increase the cognitive and communicative demands of tasks gradually.

Compare the following activities:

Do you like online education?

and

Your university plans to replace half of its face-to-face courses with online instruction. Discuss the possible advantages and disadvantages and prepare three

recommendations for the university administration.

The second task is more likely to encourage the use of language for comparison, cause and effect, evaluation, hypothesis, recommendation, and justification.

Students may naturally need expressions such as:

One possible consequence would be...

This could be beneficial because...

On the other hand...

If the university introduced this system...

The main concern is that...

Thus, carefully designed tasks can create conditions that encourage students to expand the complexity of their spoken language.

Stages of a Task-Based Lesson

Different models of TBLT exist, but a common lesson structure includes three broad phases: pre-task, task cycle, and post-task or language focus [2].

1. Pre-task Stage

The purpose of the pre-task stage is to prepare students for the communicative situation.

The teacher may:

- introduce the topic;
- explain the communicative goal;
- activate relevant background knowledge;
- provide contextual information;
- demonstrate a similar situation;
- clarify task procedures;
- give students limited planning time.

For example:

Situation: Your university wants to improve services for international students.

Task: Identify the most important problems and prepare five recommendations for the university administration.

Students may initially have two or three minutes to generate ideas individually before discussing them with their group.

The teacher should avoid giving students a complete model answer because this may reduce the need for independent language production.

2. Task Stage

During the main stage, students work in pairs or small groups to achieve the communicative goal.

At this point, the teacher primarily observes rather than controls the interaction.

The teacher may monitor participation; support students when communication completely breaks down; encourage quieter students to participate; take notes on language use; identify recurring communication difficulties.

Constant correction should generally be avoided while students are trying to complete the task.

3. Planning and Reporting

After completing the main task, students may be asked to organize their ideas and report their final decision, solution, ranking, or recommendation to the class.

For example:

Our group identified three major problems.

We believe the most urgent issue is...

Our first recommendation is...

Knowing that they need to present a final result can encourage students to pay greater attention to clarity and organization.

4. Post-task and Language Focus

The post-task stage creates an opportunity for focused language development.

The teacher may discuss frequent grammatical problems; useful vocabulary; pronunciation difficulties; discourse markers; effective expressions used by students; alternative ways of expressing an idea more naturally.

Short grammar, vocabulary, or pronunciation activities can be included at this stage if they are connected to difficulties that appeared during task performance.

This helps students understand the functional value of particular language forms.

Types of TBLT Tasks for Speaking Development

Information-gap activities create a situation in which different learners possess different pieces of information.

They need to communicate because no single participant has all the information necessary to complete the task.

For example, Student A and Student B receive different

versions of an international conference schedule. Each version contains missing information.

Their task is to complete the schedule by asking each other questions.

Students may naturally use:

What time does the second session start?

Who is giving the presentation?

Where is the workshop being held?

Could you repeat that, please?

Information-gap tasks are particularly useful because communication becomes necessary rather than optional.

Problem-solving tasks require students to analyze a situation and suggest a solution.

For example:

Situation: An international company has received several complaints from customers. The company has a limited budget.

Task: Discuss the problems and decide which three improvements should be introduced first.

Students need to express priorities, justify suggestions, challenge opinions, and reach a group decision.

Useful communicative functions include:

I think we should prioritize...

The main reason is...

I see your point, but...

Would it be better to...?

We need to consider...

Decision-making tasks provide several possible alternatives and require learners to agree on one or more final choices.

For example:

Task: Your university can finance only one of the following projects:

- a new library;
- an international internship program;
- a language center;
- a technology laboratory.

Discuss the advantages and disadvantages and agree on one project.

The phrase **agree on one** is important because it gives

the communication a concrete outcome.

Opinion-gap tasks encourage students to exchange and compare personal views.

A simple discussion question may be:

Should artificial intelligence be used in university assessment?

However, it can be developed into a stronger task:

Discuss the advantages and risks of using AI in university assessment and formulate three rules that universities should follow.

The second version requires participants to produce a final outcome rather than simply express unrelated opinions.

Ranking tasks require students to organize items according to specified criteria.

For example:

Task: Rank the following qualities from the most important to the least important for a successful manager:

leadership, creativity, communication skills, experience, discipline, flexibility, technical knowledge.

Students must agree on a common ranking and explain their choices.

This naturally encourages comparison, argumentation, and negotiation.

Role-play and simulation tasks can be especially valuable when students need English for future professional contexts.

For example:

Situation: A dissatisfied international customer contacts a company.

Student A: Customer
Student B: Company representative

Task: Identify the problem and negotiate a solution that both sides can accept.

The activity can require students to use language for clarification, apology, negotiation, explanation, and compromise.

One major advantage of TBLT is that tasks can be adapted to students' academic disciplines and future professional needs.

Business and Economics

Task: Product Pitch

Students receive information about a new product or service. They work in groups to prepare a short presentation for potential investors.

They must explain the problem; the proposed solution; the target market; competitive advantages; expected benefits.

The task integrates professional vocabulary with persuasive speaking.

Law

Task: Case Discussion

Students receive different pieces of information about a hypothetical legal case.

They must exchange information, identify the most important evidence, discuss possible interpretations, and prepare a legal position.

Information Technology

Task: Choosing a Technology Solution

Students compare three technology solutions for a company.

They must consider cost; security; usability; scalability; technical requirements.

The group then presents a final recommendation.

Speaking performance in task-based instruction should not be evaluated exclusively through grammatical accuracy.

Assessment can include several criteria.

Fluency refers to the learner's ability to maintain speech without excessive interruption. **Accuracy** concerns the correct use of grammatical, lexical, and phonological forms. **Complexity** concerns the range and sophistication of the language produced. **Interaction** refers to the ability to respond to others, ask follow-up questions, clarify meaning, negotiate, and contribute to the development of the conversation. **Task achievement** refers to the extent to which the learner successfully completes the communicative goal. For example, students participating in a negotiation task should not receive a high assessment simply because their grammar is accurate if they fail to interact with their partner or reach any meaningful outcome. A multidimensional assessment model is therefore more appropriate for TBLT.

TBLT can provide several important benefits for speaking instruction. First, it can increase student talking time. In teacher-fronted lessons, one student normally speaks while the rest of the class listens. Pair and group tasks allow several conversations to occur simultaneously.

Second, TBLT creates a meaningful reason to speak. Students communicate because they need to obtain information, solve a problem, persuade someone, make a decision, or create a final product.

Third, task-based interaction contributes to the development of communication strategies. Learners may not always know the exact word or grammatical structure they need. They therefore learn to paraphrase, explain, ask for clarification, reformulate ideas, and use other strategies to maintain communication.

Fourth, TBLT can support learner autonomy. Students make decisions about content, linguistic resources, and strategies rather than reproducing every sentence provided by the teacher.

Fifth, TBLT provides opportunities to connect English instruction with authentic academic and professional situations.

Recent research on TBLT and EFL speaking has also highlighted positive outcomes associated with oral proficiency, engagement, willingness to communicate, language complexity, and learner motivation [7].

Despite its advantages, TBLT also presents several methodological challenges.

One issue concerns differences in proficiency levels. Stronger students may dominate group interaction, while weaker students may contribute only short responses.

Teachers can address this problem by assigning specific roles or designing tasks in which every participant possesses information necessary for task completion.

TBLT should not necessarily be viewed as being in opposition to explicit grammar and vocabulary teaching. Students still need opportunities to develop linguistic knowledge. The key question concerns how this knowledge is connected with meaningful communication.

A productive sequence may involve:

Pre-task: preparation and activation of ideas;

Task: meaningful communication;

Report: presentation of the outcome;

Language focus: analysis of useful or problematic language;

Practice: targeted work on selected forms;

Task repetition: completion of a similar or repeated task using improved language.

Task repetition can be particularly useful because students already understand the communicative content and can devote greater attention to language quality during subsequent performance. This combination allows TBLT to maintain its communicative orientation while still supporting systematic language development.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis presented in this article suggests that TBLT has considerable potential for addressing one of the most persistent problems in English language education: the gap between knowing a language and being able to use it spontaneously.

Students may perform successfully on grammar exercises while experiencing significant difficulty in real-time interaction. Task-based instruction attempts to reduce this gap by requiring learners to mobilize their existing linguistic resources in order to achieve meaningful outcomes.

The effectiveness of TBLT, however, depends greatly on task design.

Simply asking students to “talk about a topic” may not create sufficient interaction. Students can provide individual opinions without listening carefully to one another.

By contrast, asking students to reach a joint decision, produce a ranking, solve a problem, identify missing information, or prepare a shared recommendation creates interdependence among participants.

This distinction is essential.

The communicative value of a task depends not only on the topic but also on the structure of interaction it creates.

Another important consideration is the relationship between communicative freedom and linguistic development.

Learners need freedom to experiment with language,

but they also need systematic feedback. Therefore, effective TBLT should combine meaningful interaction with carefully selected opportunities for focus on form. The approach is particularly promising in English for Specific Purposes because professional communication naturally involves tasks. Professionals participate in meetings, present projects, solve problems, negotiate decisions, explain procedures, write reports, conduct interviews, and respond to clients.

These real professional actions can provide the foundation for pedagogical tasks. Consequently, TBLT can contribute not only to language development but also to students' preparation for authentic professional communication.

CONCLUSION

Task-Based Language Teaching represents a promising approach to the development of English speaking skills because it places learners in situations in which language becomes a practical tool for achieving meaningful communicative outcomes. Information-gap activities, problem-solving tasks, decision-making tasks, opinion-gap tasks, ranking activities, role-plays, simulations, and professionally oriented tasks can create opportunities for extensive oral interaction and help students develop fluency, accuracy, complexity, interactional competence, and communicative autonomy. TBLT is particularly relevant in higher education because university students increasingly need English for academic and professional purposes. Tasks that simulate realistic situations can reduce the gap between classroom language study and the actual use of English outside the classroom.

At the same time, TBLT should not be understood as the complete rejection of grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation practice, or other forms of explicit instruction. Meaningful communication and attention to linguistic form should complement each other. The effectiveness of TBLT depends on the quality of task design, appropriate scaffolding, systematic feedback, learners' proficiency levels, and the professional competence of the teacher.

Thus, the systematic integration of Task-Based Language Teaching into English instruction can contribute not only to the development of isolated speaking skills but also to the broader communicative competence students need for successful academic,

social, and professional interaction.

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