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Task-Based Language Teaching: Principles and Common Misunderstandings

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Abstract

Task-based language teaching (TBLT) is widely promoted in communicative curricula, yet teachers often misunderstand what tasks are and how TBLT relates to grammar, examinations, large classes, beginners, and literacy. This position paper, based on a keynote at the 3rd TBLT Conference in China, clarifies core principles. It contrasts synthetic and analytic syllabus design, defines tasks through a focus on meaning, a communicative gap, learners' own resources, and a communicative outcome, and distinguishes tasks from exercises. It outlines task typologies and two-dimensional sequencing, then presents Willis's three-stage framework and Lambert and Hailes's six-stage cycle. The paper also addresses five common misconceptions: that TBLT is a rigid method, neglects grammar or examinations, works only for advanced learners, cannot suit large classes, or develops speaking only. It argues that TBLT is a flexible, theoretically grounded approach that can integrate fluency and accuracy across diverse contexts.

Keywords: task-based language teaching; task definition; syllabus design; task sequencing; pedagogical frameworks; misconceptions

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Introduction: Persistent Questions in Contemporary Language Pedagogy

In recent decades, Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) has evolved from an experimental SLA-informed pedagogical movement into a cornerstone of contemporary communicative language teaching worldwide. Across China, East Asia, and internationally, curricular reforms, such as the *Compulsory Education English Curriculum Standards (2025 Edition)* promulgated by the Ministry of Education of China, have progressively highlighted core competencies, authentic language use, and inquiry-driven learning. Increasing importance has been attached to TBLT as a viable and effective approach to meeting these new demands.

Yet, as TBLT has expanded into diverse primary, secondary, and tertiary contexts, frontline educators and curriculum developers frequently encounter practical and conceptual dilemmas. When discussing task-based principles with school leaders, pre-service trainees, and experienced classroom teachers, several recurring questions invariably come to the fore:

> *What genuinely constitutes a "task," and how does it fundamentally differ from an exercise, a contextualised drill, or a lively classroom game?*
>
> *Does TBLT abandon explicit grammar instruction, and how can learners develop grammatical precision without systematic structure-by-structure drills?*
>
> *Can task-based instruction truly accommodate large classes (frequently 40–60 students) with mixed proficiencies without descending into chaotic, unmonitored group work?*
>
> *Is TBLT restricted predominantly to spoken fluency, or can it systematically drive reading comprehension, written composition, and receptive literacy?*
>
> *How should tasks be logically sequenced across a multi-year syllabus rather than existing as isolated, one-off communicative episodes?*
>
> *What precisely is the teacher's pedagogical role once the classroom shifts from teacher-fronted lecture delivery to student-centred task execution?*

This position paper, derived from my keynote presentation delivered at the *3rd TBLT Conference in China* held in Dalian, Liaoning Province, generously hosted and organised by the Foreign Language Education Committee of the Chinese Society of Education (中国教育学会外语教学专业委员会), attempts to answer these pivotal questions. By examining the cognitive and psycholinguistic rationales of syllabus design, defining tasks against non-task activities, outlining multi-stage pedagogical models, and deconstructing five enduring myths, this paper demonstrates that TBLT is not an imported, idealistic novelty. Rather, it is a theoretically coherent, practically robust pedagogical approach entirely compatible with rigorous educational standards and test performance.

Syllabus Design: Synthetic versus Analytic Approaches

To comprehend why tasks serve as the ideal foundational unit for instruction, one must first step back from classroom tactics and examine the broader architecture of language curriculum design. Historically, language syllabuses have been divided into two contrasting paradigms: synthetic and analytic approaches (Wilkins, 1976; Long & Crookes, 1992).

The Synthetic Tradition and Its Psycholinguistic Limitations

Synthetic syllabuses include several types familiar to many frontline teachers, such as Structural Syllabuses, Notional/Functional Syllabuses (CLT), Situational/Topical Syllabuses (CLT), and Lexical Syllabuses (Brumfit, 1984). In a synthetic syllabus, the target language is

dissected into discrete, isolated linguistic units, such as grammatical rules, verb tenses, phonemes, situational phrases, or lexical lists. The course designer and textbook author decide *a priori* which grammatical structures are simple or complex, presenting them sequentially: simple present tense today, present continuous tomorrow, present perfect next month.

Under this model, the pedagogical sequence follows a classic additive process:

1. The curriculum designer pre-selects and segments the linguistic target.
2. The teacher presents and explains the isolated target item.
3. The learner is expected to practice and master each isolated piece independently.
4. Finally, when engaging in communicative interaction, the learner is expected to synthesise all these disparate parts into coherent discourse.

The synthetic approach assumes that language acquisition mirrors bricklaying: stacking one grammatical morpheme on top of another until an edifice of communicative competence is constructed. However, decades of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) research have demonstrated that this assumption violates natural psycholinguistic mechanisms (Ellis, 2008). Interlanguage development does not proceed linearly along external textbook sequences. As SLA researchers have repeatedly documented, learners acquire language along predictable, universal developmental sequences and natural stages (e.g., the acquisition of negation, question formation, and grammatical inflections), characterised by temporary plateaus, backsliding, and U-shaped behaviour. An instructional syllabus that imposes an external, atomised order forces learners into an "other-directed" posture, treating language as declarative knowledge rather than an organic, dynamic procedural ability.

The Analytic Alternative: Tasks as the Organising Vehicle

In contrast, an analytic approach does not pre-segment the target language into isolated linguistic fragments. Instead, it presents learners with holistic, authentic samples of language embedded within meaningful communicative activities. The term "analytic" does not imply that the teacher or course designer analyses grammar; rather, it indicates that the learner's internal cognitive processor analyses the rich linguistic input encountered while pursuing communicative goals.

Within an analytic syllabus:

> *Language is experienced holistically as formulaic chunks, slot-and-frame structures, and broader discourse patterns.*
>
> *Learners perceive recurring regularities in the input through genuine communicative processing.*
>
> *Learners induce underlying grammatical conventions and abstract structural rules based on communicative demand.*
>
> *Language emerges naturally as the learner faces progressively more demanding cognitive and interactional tasks.*

Analytic syllabuses (Brumfit, 1984) include procedural syllabuses (first championed by Prabhu in the Bangalore Project), process syllabuses, content-based instruction (CBI/CLIL), and task-based syllabuses. By establishing the task, rather than the linguistic structure, as the fundamental unit of selection, organisation, and assessment, TBLT aligns language pedagogy directly with the learner's internal acquisition syllabus (Bui, 2024, 2026; Ellis, 2003; Skehan, 1996, 1998).

Defining the Task

A chronic source of confusion in communicative language teaching is the indiscriminate use of the word "task." In daily pedagogical conversations, teachers often label any interactive exercise, such as reading a dialogue aloud in pairs, filling in blanks within a story, or answering comprehension questions, as a "task."

To maintain theoretical rigor and instructional clarity, TBLT often adopts the operational definition refined by Ellis (2003, 2009). An instructional activity is classified as a genuine task if, and only if, it satisfies all four of the following foundational criteria in Table 1.

Table 1. *Definition of a Task (Ellis, 2009)*

Criterion	Essential Defining Feature	Classroom Manifestation
1. A primary Focus on Meaning	Learners are oriented toward semantic, pragmatic, and communicative intent rather than displaying structural accuracy.	Participants use language as a vehicle to understand, interpret, negotiate, or solve a problem, not to display mastery of a specific target form.
2. A Communicative Gap	An authentic information, reasoning, or opinion gap which should be bridged through communication	One participant possesses information or perspectives that the other needs; meaning cannot be completed without interactive exchange.
3. Participants' Own Resources	Learners are not spoon-fed predetermined linguistic scripts; they must draw upon their available linguistic and non-linguistic repertoire.	Students select their own lexical, grammatical, and paralinguistic resources (gestures, drawings, circumlocution) to convey meaning.
4. A Communicative Outcome	The activity culminates in a clearly defined, communicative (often non-linguistic) outcome based on which the task is assessed.	Success is determined by whether a tangible goal was accomplished (e.g., drawing a correct map, selecting the best job applicant, solving a mystery), rather than whether every utterance was grammatically flawless.

In addition, Skehan (1998) and, more recently, Bui and Tai (2022) emphasise the criterion of 'some sort of real-world relevance', which serves to enhance both the ecological validity, and the transferable communicative skills learners derive from enacting classroom tasks.

Differentiating Tasks from Exercises

The distinction between a task and a situated exercise is absolute: A task must satisfy all four criteria. If even one criterion is omitted, the activity ceases to be a task and becomes a communicative drill or situated exercise.

Consider a classroom scenario where students are instructed:

> *"Work in pairs. Ask your partner what they did last weekend using the simple past tense: 'Did you watch a movie?', 'Did you play football?' Make sure you answer in complete sentences using past tense verbs."*

Although this activity takes place in pairs and involves personal topics, it fails the task definition: First, the primary focus is not on meaning, but on displaying past-tense morphology (Violates Criterion 1). Second, while an information gap might marginally exist, the linguistic output is prescribed and monitored for structural compliance rather than pragmatic resolution (Violates Criterion 3). Finally, the actual goal is grammatical display rather than an authentic (often non-linguistic) decision or product (Violates Criterion 4).

Conversely, consider this reformulation:

> *"A valuable laptop was taken from the staffroom between 2:00 PM and 4:00 PM on Friday. Working in groups of three, each student receives an alibi card detailing their whereabouts and what they saw. Compare your statements, identify discrepancies in the timeline, and collaboratively decide which suspect should be questioned by the school security committee."*

Here, all four criteria are satisfied:The focus is entirely on establishing facts, motives, and timelines (Meaning). No single student holds all the information; contradictions must be resolved through interaction (Communicative Gap). Students formulate questions, explanations, deductions, and counter-arguments using whatever language they can muster (Own Resources). The activity culminates in a concrete non-linguistic determination: identifying the primary suspect (Communicative Outcome).

Typologies of Tasks and Multi-Dimensional Curriculum Sequencing

Once tasks are defined, curriculum designers must address how to classify and sequence them logically across an educational syllabus without lapsing into grammatical grading.

Prabhu's Classical Tripartite Typology

In his pioneering Bangalore Project, Prabhu (1987) established a functional typology of tasks that remains an important conceptual framework:

Information-Gap Tasks: These tasks involve the transfer of given information from one person to another, from one form to another, or from one location to another. They require learners to decode and encode factual data. Classic examples include spot-the-difference picture pairs, split reading texts (where Learner A holds incomplete biographical data and Learner B holds the missing information), and directed map navigation.

Reasoning-Gap Tasks: These tasks require learners to derive *new* information from known data through inference, deduction, practical logic, or the perception of underlying patterns. They centre on problem-solving. Prototypical examples include reviewing conflicting eyewitness testimonies to identify a criminal suspect, working out an optimal

bus schedule based on multiple departure tables, or balancing an excursion budget under strict financial constraints.

Opinion-Gap Tasks: These open-ended tasks require participants to articulate personal preferences, ethical attitudes, emotions, or evaluations in response to a specific scenario. There is no predetermined or objectively correct answer. Examples include formulating an advisory reply to an "Agony Aunt" problem letter, engaging in parliamentary-style debates on artificial intelligence in schools, or prioritising community amenities for an urban development plan.

Although Prabhu's classical tripartite typology remains foundational, later typologies have supplemented it by foregrounding different dimensions of task design rather than displacing his gap-based scheme. Ellis's (2003, 2009) distinction between focused and unfocused tasks contrasts tasks designed to elicit general communicative language with those engineered to predispose learners naturally toward specific grammatical features. At the level of discourse, Yule (1997) examines tasks through communicative modes and functional genres, including description, instruction, narrative, and opinion tasks, which shape syntactic complexity and rhetorical structuring. Cognitive-functional typologies (Foster & Skehan, 1996; Skehan, 1998) further classify tasks into personal information exchange, narrative, and decision-making/problem-solving tasks, detailing how these differentially tax attentional capacity across complexity, accuracy, and fluency (CAF, Bui & Skehan, 2018). These alternatives cross-cut Prabhu's framework. For example, information-gap tasks reappear in Skehan's cognitive-functional taxonomy, while reasoning-gap tasks overlap with decision-making/problem-solving categories. However, each foregrounds a distinct design principle: pedagogic focus, genre, cognitive demand, or interactional structure.

Sequencing Tasks

A common critique of TBLT from traditional curriculum planners is: *"If we do not sequence by grammatical structures, how do we systematically grade tasks from easy to difficult?"* The model visualised in Figure 1 is an application of Robinson's SSARC Model (Simplify, Stabilise, Automatise, Restructure, Complexify) under the Cognition Hypothesis (Robinson, 2001) from Lambert and Robinson (2014). It provides a two-dimensional sequencing model incorporating both vertical and horizontal progression:

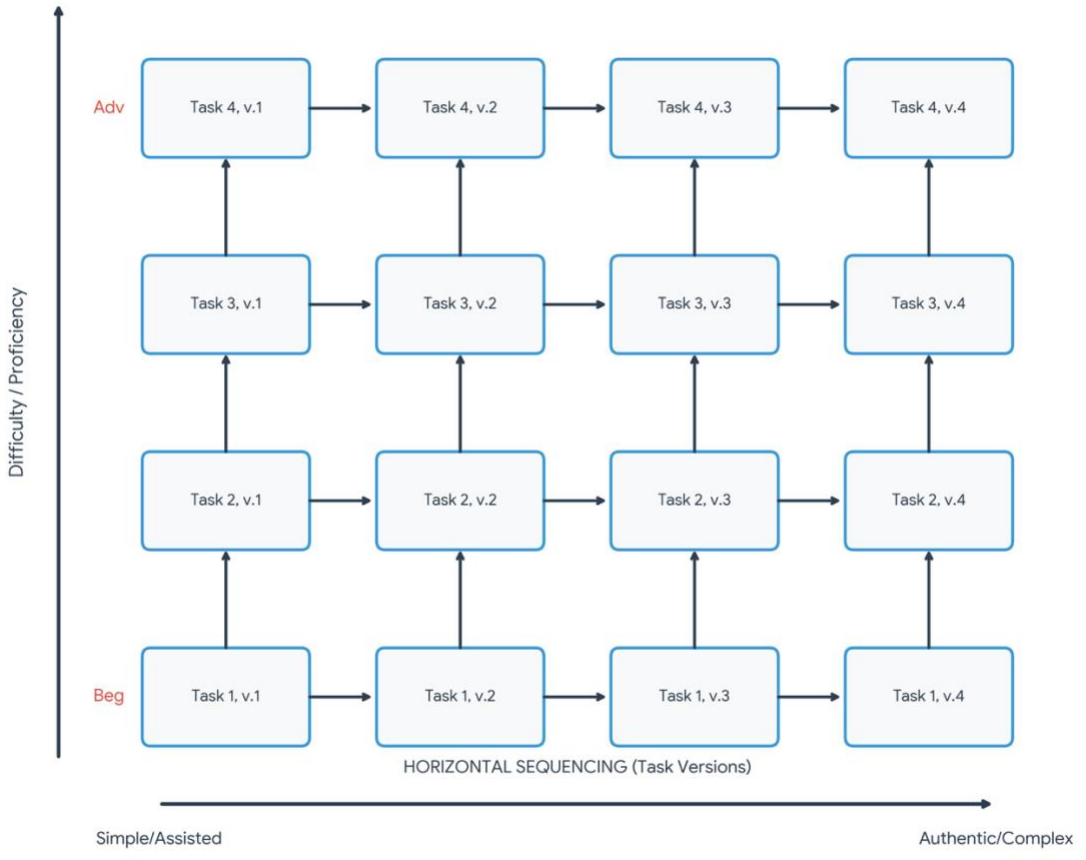


Figure 1. A Simplified Task Sequencing Model Based on Lambert & Robinson (2014)

1. **Vertical Dimension (Task Types Across Proficiency):**
   The vertical axis sequences entirely distinct task types relative to global learner proficiency. Simpler tasks with concrete, immediate, contextualised referents (e.g., concrete information-gap exchanges) appear at lower proficiency bands, whereas abstract, cognitively demanding tasks requiring complex causal reasoning and hypothetical evaluation (e.g., reasoning-gap debates and multi-criteria decision matrices) are scheduled at advanced stages.
2. **Horizontal Dimension (Versions of a Single Task Type):**
   The horizontal axis sequences progressive iterations or variants of the *same* fundamental task type, systematically manipulating task complexity according to cognitive processing demands.

Version 1 (Simple/Assisted): Here-and-now context, few elements, static relationships, abundant planning time, visual scaffolding, and shared background knowledge.

Version 4 (Complex/Authentic): There-and-then context, numerous dynamic elements, unshared information, high reasoning demand, dual-task conditions, and real-time execution pressure.

By combining vertical selection with horizontal manipulation of cognitive complexity, curriculum designers can construct a multi-tiered language syllabus that maintains an authentic focus on meaning while systematically expanding learners' processing capacity.

From Theory to Classroom: Pedagogical Implementation Frameworks

TBLT is fundamentally an approach rather than an inflexible, prescriptive method. Two sample pedagogical frameworks are provided below as practical structures for designing task-based lessons.

Framework 1: Jane Willis's Three-Stage Framework (1996)

Jane Willis's classic framework remains one of the most accessible and widely applied lesson structures:

Pre-Task Stage:

The teacher introduces the topic, activates relevant background schemata, and primes essential topic-related vocabulary and phrases without pre-teaching targeted grammatical structures. Learners may observe a recorded model of proficient speakers performing a similar task.

The Task Cycle:

Task: Students perform the task in pairs or small groups using their existing language repertoires. The teacher circulates discreetly as an adviser, offering supportive input without interrupting fluency.

Planning: Students prepare a written or spoken summary to report their findings or outcome to the wider class. This planning stage is critical: because students anticipate public exposure, they naturally focus on syntactic accuracy, coherence, and appropriate register.

Report: Selected groups present their outcomes to the class, while other students listen to evaluate, compare, or resolve an overarching question.

Language Focus Stage:

Analysis: The teacher highlights specific grammatical, lexical, and structural features from the task recordings, student output, or authentic transcripts. Students examine and reflect upon how meaning was grammatically encoded.

Practice: Students conduct focused practice activities (e.g., sentence building, collocations, form transformation) to consolidate the linguistic forms analysed during the previous step.

Framework 2: Lambert & Hailes's Six-Stage Cycle (2005)

Designed to systematically stimulate the cognitive mechanisms of noticing (Schmidt, 1990) and pushed output (Swain, 1995), Lambert and Hailes (2005) propose a six-stage sequence, as shown in Figure 2:

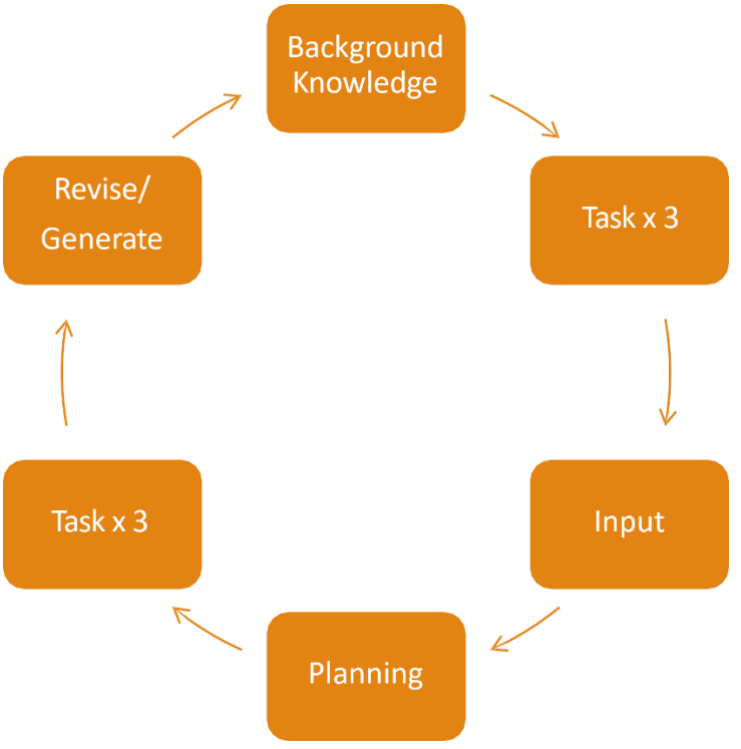


Figure 2. The Six-Stage Cycle Task-based Lesson Plan in Lambert & Haile (2005)

Stage 1: Background Knowledge (Priming)

- **Pedagogical Purpose:** Activates learners' existing schemata, world knowledge, and baseline L2 lexical resources pertinent to the task topic.
- **Mechanism:** Rather than pre-teaching discrete grammar rules or vocabulary lists in isolation, priming activities engage learners conceptually with the thematic domain. This activation lowers initial communicative anxiety, establishes communicative relevance, and readies cognitive resources for message generation.

Stage 2: Task × 3 (Initial Task Performance)

- **Pedagogical Purpose:** Pushes learners into meaningful communication based solely on their existing internal interlanguage resources.
- **Mechanism:** Learners execute three communicative tasks under real-time processing constraints. By encountering immediate communicative breakdowns or lexical voids, learners experience what has been defined as "noticing a hole" in their linguistic repertoire. Crucially, learners perform the task three consecutive times with different interlocutors, fostering initial fluency and solidifying communicative intent.

Stage 3: Input (Input-Based Observation and Analysis)

- **Pedagogical Purpose:** Provides salient, contextualised linguistic models that address the exact communicative challenges encountered during Stage 2.

- **Mechanism:** Learners listen to or read unanalysed, naturalistic performances of the identical task by proficient speakers. Having just struggled through the task themselves, learners exhibit heightened cognitive readiness and selective attention, enabling them to "notice the gap" between their own output and target-like models. Subsequent focus-on-form activities guide learners to deconstruct and analyse key grammatical structures, formulaic sequences, and lexical choices.

Stage 4: Pre-Task Planning (Strategic & Rehearsal Planning)

- **Pedagogical Purpose:** Provides structured, non-communicative time to organise content and integrate newly noticed linguistic forms.
- **Mechanism:** Research on pre-task planning demonstrates that unpressured planning time alleviates online processing demands (Bui, 2014, 2021; Foster & Skehan, 1996). In this framework, planning serves as a vital bridge between input processing and output production, enabling learners to deliberate on lexical choices, prioritise syntactic accuracy, and formulate communicative strategies before re-entering real-time interaction (Bui & Teng, 2019).

Stage 5: Task × 3 (Parallel Task Repetition & Performance)

- **Pedagogical Purpose:** Consolidates newly acquired language forms through guided production and automatisation.
- **Mechanism:** Learners engage in parallel versions of the original task (or repeat the core task under altered conditions or with fresh interlocutors) three times. This iterative repetition provides the rehearsal necessary for proceduralisation, allowing learners to successfully transfer newly noticed linguistic items from short-term awareness into active, communicative production.

Stage 6: Revise / Generate (Ongoing Review and Synthesis)

- **Pedagogical Purpose:** Consolidates learning through reflective synthesis and prepares learners for subsequent curricular units.
- **Mechanism:** Typically conducted as post-task activities, including: 1) Reviewing transcripts (reading) and finding ways to improve their own performance; 2) Creating ideal task performance in writing, and 3) Planning task content for subsequent lesson.

Deconstructing Five Enduring Misunderstandings about TBLT

Despite robust SLA evidence, widespread misconceptions continue to impede the effective implementation of TBLT in frontline educational ecosystems. It is essential to deconstruct these five pervasive myths directly.

Misconception 1: "TBLT is a rigid ELT method"

A fundamental conceptual error is conflating an approach with a method (Anthony, 1963; Richards & Rodgers, 2022). A *method* prescribes specific, fixed classroom techniques, step-by-step procedures, and rigid teacher behaviours (e.g., the Audiolingual Method or the Silent Way). When teachers view TBLT as a prescriptive method, they mistakenly believe that every lesson must rigidly march through an invariant sequence regardless of institutional constraints.

As Rod Ellis, Michael Long, and Peter Skehan have consistently emphasised, TBLT is an approach. It represents a comprehensive philosophy of language acquisition based on the

following tenets:

1. Language learning is driven by communicative need and meaning-making.
2. Rich exposure to comprehensible input and opportunities for output stimulate internal cognitive mechanisms.
3. Implicit knowledge is acquired primarily through incidental processing during communication.

Because TBLT is an approach, it accommodates diverse contextual configurations, such as the Willis's model and the Lambert's five-stage cycle illustrated above. Educators can dynamically tailor task implementations to the cultural expectations, learner proficiencies, and institutional goals of their specific classrooms.

Misconception 2: "TBLT cares little about grammar, making it incompatible with examination contexts"

This misconception represents perhaps the single greatest source of resistance to TBLT among educators and administrators in examination-intensive environments. It perpetuates a false dichotomy: "If you are doing tasks, you are ignoring grammar; and if you ignore grammar, students will fail high-stakes matriculation exams". To understand how TBLT addresses grammar, we must distinguish between traditional structural teaching and task-based form-focused instruction (Long, 1991) in terms of their approach to forms (grammar), as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. *Focus on Forms Vs Focus on Form*

Dimension	Focus on Forms (FonFs)	Focus on Form (FonF)
Instructional Style	Traditional, isolated grammar teaching. Grammar points are pre-selected, dissected, and practiced as ends in themselves.	Task-based, contextualised integration. Learners' attention is drawn to linguistic forms *incidentally* as they communicate.
Example Activities	Rote memorisation of structural rules, decontextualised sentence transformation, and isolated passive voice drills.	Pre-task language priming, incidental recasts, clarification requests, and post-task syntactic analysis.
Cognitive Outcome	Develops explicit (declarative) knowledge—facts *about* language that learners struggle to access under real-time communicative pressure.	Fosters implicit (procedural) knowledge—the ability to connect grammatical forms directly to their underlying communicative functions.

The anxiety that TBLT impairs exam performance is fundamentally mismatched with the evolution of modern testing. High-stakes examinations have shifted away from testing isolated, rote grammatical terminology. Instead, they evaluate contextualised language processing. Under strict examination time limits, the implicit, automatised knowledge fostered by TBLT enables students to process contextualised language rapidly and accurately. Consequently, learners who develop deep procedural control via task-based instruction achieve test scores that equal or frequently surpass those of peers subjected solely to repetitive, decontextualised structural drilling (Ellis, 2002). In fact, TBLT directly operationalises the core mandates of major domestic and international education frameworks:

The Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR)

The CEFR is an international benchmark for language competence (Council of Europe, 2020), which is constructed entirely around "Can-Do" illustrative descriptors. Language ability is defined not by how many abstract grammar rules a student can recite, but by the real-world tasks they can accomplish:

- **B1 Level:** *"Can deal with most situations likely to arise whilst travelling…"*
- **B2 Level:** *"Can give clear, detailed descriptions on a wide range of subjects… explain a viewpoint on a topical issue giving the advantages and disadvantages."*

China's Compulsory Education English Curriculum Standards (MOE, 2025)

Similarly, the Compulsory Education English Curriculum Standards (Ministry of Education, 2025) in China explicitly mandates that English education cultivate students' Core Competencies (核心素养): Language Ability (语言能力), Thinking Quality (思维品质), Cultural Awareness (文化意识), and Learning Ability (学习能力). When mapped directly against Prabhu's task typologies and Ellis's operational criteria, the synergy is undeniable. For example, reasoning-gap tasks directly foster thinking quality through inference and causal deduction; opinion-gap tasks require critical evaluation and perspective-taking, and the holistic execution of tasks cultivates authentic language ability anchored in communicative competence.

Misconception 3: "TBLT works only for advanced learners; beginners must master grammar first"

A frequent objection voiced by primary and lower-secondary educators is: *"How can my beginners perform a task when they don't even know the past tense or basic sentence structures? Surely they must master the grammatical foundations before doing tasks."*

As Ellis (2003, 2019) points out, this objection contradicts core findings regarding early language development. If humans required explicit grammatical mastery before attempting communication, no infant would ever acquire a first language. The assumption that language production must precede language acquisition is a legacy of synthetic grammar-translation paradigms.

For beginner learners, TBLT utilises input-based tasks (also known as listening-to-do or listen-and-select tasks). Beginners are not thrown into complex, unassisted spoken debates. Instead, In the initial stages, learners participate via comprehension-driven tasks: listening to spoken directions to colour or arrange physical objects, matching complex oral descriptions to visual scenes, identifying suspects based on audio cues, or categorising items following simple procedural instructions. Then, learners indicate their communicative outcomes through non-verbal actions, physical movement (e.g., TPR; Bui, 2018), single-word responses, or pointing.

Through input-based tasks, beginners naturally construct an internal mental grammar and

lexical storehouse. Once this baseline receptive competence is established, output-based tasks are gradually introduced through structured priming, visual scaffolding, and shared interaction.

Misconception 4: "TBLT cannot work in large classes"

Large class sizes are an inescapable pedagogical reality across many public education systems in China and throughout the developing world. Critics frequently argue that task-based group work in a room of 50 adolescent students inevitably sparks disciplinary chaos, excessive L1 use, and an impossible monitoring burden for a single teacher. While large classes present genuine logistical challenges, they do not invalidate TBLT. In reality, teacher-fronted lecture methods in large cohorts produce an illusion of learning: the teacher lectures from the podium while only a handful of front-row students remain cognitively engaged, leaving the majority passive.

TBLT resolves the challenges of large cohorts through structured design:

Input-Based Class Tasks: The entire class participates in centralised listening or reading tasks simultaneously, recording decisions or outcomes on individual response sheets or digital voting platforms, maintaining universal cognitive engagement.

Highly Structured Grouping: Tasks are designed with interdependent roles (e.g., Information-Gap and Jigsaw structures). When each student holds unique information essential to the group's collective outcome, social loafing is minimised.

Public Reporting Accountability: Because students know that groups will be selected at random to present their findings, outcomes, or solutions to the whole class, in-group accountability increases dramatically.

Misconception 5: "TBLT is only for L2 speaking and neglects reading and writing"

Because TBLT is historically linked with communicative oral interaction, a pervasive myth persists that tasks are exclusively oral discussions or speaking games that neglect reading comprehension and written literacy. In truth, tasks can be operationalised across any communicative modality, namely receptive, productive, or integrated:

Reading as a Task: For example, students read three contrasting travel brochures or scientific reports to synthesise data and resolve an authentic logistical problem.

Writing as an Authentic Communicative Outcome: For example, opinion-gap tasks often culminate in writing formal editorial submissions or collaborative policy proposals, to real-world problems.

Multimodal Integration: In contemporary task design, learners read input, negotiate meaning orally in groups, and write a collaborative decision memo. TBLT systematically develops academic literacy across four skills rather than superficial conversational banter.

Conclusion: Embracing TBLT in Contemporary Classrooms

Task-Based Language Teaching represents neither an imported educational panacea nor an impractical theoretical abstraction. Grounded in robust psycholinguistic principles of second language acquisition (Bui, 2026; East, 2021; Skehan, 1998), it resolves the fundamental disconnect of synthetic syllabuses: the expectation that learners can miraculously assemble

isolated, memorised grammatical bricks into spontaneous, fluent communication. TBLT provides an actionable architecture for language classrooms. When implemented thoughtfully, drawing upon established pedagogical models (e.g., Willis's three-stage framework and Lambert and Hailes's six-stage cycle), leveraging horizontal and vertical task sequencing, and addressing persistent myths regarding grammar, class sizes, and beginner readiness, TBLT successfully bridges communicative fluency and grammatical precision. For educators, curriculum designers, and researchers in China and across global EFL contexts, the imperative is clear: we must move beyond sterile debates that pit grammar against communication. By embracing TBLT as a principled, flexible, and theoretically grounded approach, we can cultivate resilient language learners equipped with both the cognitive capacity and communicative confidence to navigate an increasingly digitalised and AI-mediated world (Bui, 2027).

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