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Richards, J. C. & Rodgers, R. (2010). *Approaches and methods in language teaching*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

## Chapter 18: Task-Based Language Teaching

### Key Words

1. Task-Based Language Teaching – an approach based on the use of tasks as the core unit of planning and instruction in language teaching
2. task – an activity, project, or job students perform to mimic “real world” experiences as part of TBLT lessons; they provide practical interactions for language learning, e.g. reading a map and giving directions, reading a set of instructions to assemble a toy, or making a telephone call
3. vocabulary – in TBLT, lexical phrases, sentence stems, prefabricated routines, and collocations, rather than just words as significant units of lexical analysis and language pedagogy.
4. fluency – the learner’s capacity to produce language in real time without pausing or hesitation
5. input – exposure to an L2 in a manner that beginning students can understand
6. output – in language learning, the opportunity to practice speaking the target language; TBLT argues that tasks offer adequate opportunities for both input and output

### Questions

1. How do teachers using TBLT adequately address grammar? Do students learn grammar as part of the tasks, or do teachers spend several lessons focusing only on grammar?

2. As students “negotiate meaning” during their tasks, how can they be sure they are using the correct forms of words without explicit grammar instruction?
3. Are task-based syllabi typically designed by individual teachers, or do they come as part of pre-packaged courses? (I’m thinking primarily of public schools in the U.S.)
4. How do teachers monitor the L2 input students receive and will use during tasks to ensure students can create the expected output?
5. The authors refer to Skehan (1998) as stating that not much work has been done to describe task dimensions or difficulty. Why not? Shouldn’t information on grading tasks be a major part of this language-teaching method?

### **Observations**

Task-Based Language Teaching, like Competency-Based Instruction, makes a lot of sense to me. I have used tasks in my classroom before to help students “experience” a concept rather than me simply lecturing to them about it. My students have enjoyed using tasks in history class, but I’m not sure how successful using tasks would be in an L2 class. If students were given enough information during the pretask stage to prepare sample questions or dialogues in advance, the tasks may be easier for them to complete. However, I would worry that students who share a common native language would revert to using their L1 rather than using English to “talk around” the problem. A teacher using TBLT would have to be careful when establishing groups in order to put students together who would encourage the use of the L2 rather than “cheat” and use their native language(s).

Another issue when using a TBLT approach in U.S. schools is how to pair tasks with state standards, which by default are almost always competency-based standards. Using tasks to help students meet state goals would help them “learn by doing,” but teachers would probably be responsible for designing their own tasks without much help from their school system’s textbooks or

ancillary materials. Using a task-based approach combined with state standards, though, should help students meet and/or exceed those standards since the students would be active participants in learning, rather than passive participants who just listen to the teacher.

Using realia as part of tasks is also something students enjoy. In the past, I've used first-hand narratives from different historical periods as part of lessons on World War I, for example, as well as newspaper articles and media clips to teach about current events. These items could be incorporated into L2 lessons to help students learn more about American culture while completing a task designed to help them achieve a language-learning goal.

## **Evaluation**

This overview of Task-Based Language Instruction was very thorough, in fact, it may have been too thorough. The authors explained in great detail what a task is, as well as how task-based instruction works, but unlike other methods and approaches, task-based instruction is fairly self-explanatory. Students learn language by negotiating meaning as they complete real-world tasks. Simple. I'm not sure why the authors gave such an extensive description of this method, although the section describing types of learning and teaching activities was very informative and could be used as a reference when designing lessons differentiated to various student levels and academic needs.

As in many of the previous chapters, the authors make great use of lists again to explain TBLT. They also use subheadings and italics to emphasize important features. However, they use many more block quotes (long quotes) from other sources than I noticed in previous chapters. Why didn't the authors summarize more like they did in other chapters? Including short summaries rather than block quotes would have made it easier to read this chapter.

## Chapter 19: The Post-Methods Era

### Key Words

1. Post-Methods Era – the period of L2 teaching and research beginning at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century through the present during which time most language educators realized that it is not necessary to use a specific method (and only one method) to successfully teach a language
2. approach – in this textbook, a set of beliefs and principles that can be used as the basis for teaching a language
3. method – in this textbook, a specific instructional design or system based on a particular theory of language and of language learning containing information about course content, roles of teachers and learners, and teaching procedures and techniques
4. practicality – in the context of a language teaching method, it refers to how easily a given method can be turned into teaching materials and textbooks; the more practical a method is, the more likely teachers are to use it, especially if it requires no special training
5. cultural imperialism – when one particular culture or aspects of one culture dominate a community, often to the exclusion of all other cultures

### Questions

1. If we really are in a post-methods era, why do the authors believe novice teachers should be trained in “the techniques and procedures of a specific method”?
2. How can new teachers develop their own approaches to education in school systems where only one or two methods are used? How can they grow as educators if they are limited by the rules of their school district?
3. What learner-based innovations are current or “trendy” now? The authors claim these occur in 10-year cycles, but what cycle are we in now?

## **Observations**

The chapter states that methods tend to have shorter lifespans than approaches, and I agree. A method is a prescribed “how-to” list, whereas an approach can be adapted to fit a specific teacher’s needs at a specific time. I’ve taught in several school systems, and it seems like every year or two a new method was introduced for teachers to use. However, when we were given a new approach to teaching – like differentiation of instruction – more teachers accepted the changes and actually used them in their classrooms. Some teachers, though, prefer methods since they are often prepackaged ways of teaching. Personally, I like being given the flexibility to teach content the way I feel is best for my students, rather than following a set of generic instructions that are “supposed” to work in all situations (what the chapter refers to as a “top-down” scenario where administrators force teachers to follow a set method).

## **Evaluation**

This entire book compares approaches and methods, but the authors wait until the last chapter to finally explain their definitions of these two terms. Since the main focus of the book is comparing and contrasting various approaches and methods, why didn’t the authors include information found in this chapter at the beginning of the book? The list dividing the approaches from the methods was very helpful. Most of the time, I prefer content that’s presented in chronological order, but in this case, I would have preferred it if the chapters in the book were arranged according to approaches and methods. I think this would have made it easier to tell which chapters were more closely related to each other, even though I understand the authors’ current organization of the textbook to show the development of these approaches and methods over time.

Again, the authors make good use of lists in this chapter. They use italics when needed to emphasize key points. Rather than a final conclusion, they include a section labeled, “Looking forward,” which offered a few of their expectations for future changes.