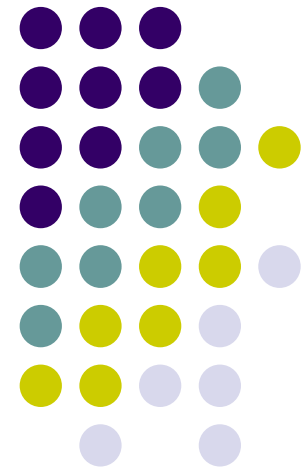


Task-Based Learning: Myth or reality?

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Introduction

- Task-Based Learning: a brief history
- Some comments on ‘task’
- Some patterns
- Some issues
- Summary
- Conclusion



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Task-Based Learning: History



- Prabhu (1987)
- Breen & Candlin (1984, 1987, etc.)
- Long & Crookes (1989, 1992, 1997, etc.)
- Skehan (1996, 1998, etc.)
- Willis' (1996, 2007, etc)
- Nunan (1989, 1993, 2004, etc.)



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Some comments on 'task' 1



- One of a set of differentiated, sequencable, problem-posing activities involving learners and teachers in some joint selection from a range of varied cognitive and communicative procedures applied to existing and new knowledge in the collective exploration and pursuance of foreseen or emergent goals within a social milieu. (Candlin & Murphy, 1987, p. 10)



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Some comments on 'task' 2



- target tasks = what the learner will eventually do in English
- pedagogic tasks = activities worked on in the classroom - approximate above
- (Long, 1989, p. 6)



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Some comments on 'task' 3



- ‘...selection of a task-based (procedural, task or process) syllabus would sit well with such methodological options as communicative problem-solving activities done by students working in small groups, but would preclude classroom procedures which assume structural grading,’ (Long & Crookes, 1993, p. 10)



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Some comments on 'task' 4



- In this book tasks are always activities where the target language is used by the learner for a communicative purpose (goal) in order to achieve an outcome. (J. Willis, 1996, p. 23)



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Some comments on 'task' 5

- '... 'task' has generally been used not as the organizing principle of courses but as a methodological device for implementing the final step of a well-established methodological sequence, i.e. PPP in linguistically organized courses.'

(Ellis, 2003, p. 320)

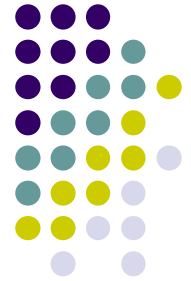


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Some comments on 'task' 6



- In order to distinguish between tasks and functions, Nunan has said tasks 'can be thought of as functions + context' (Nunan, 2004, p. 29)



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Some comments on 'task' 7



- Tasks are defined as activities that are meaning-focused and outcome-evaluated and have some real-world relationship. (Foster & Skehan, 1996, p. 300)



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Some patterns

- Task as the syllabus unit
- Task as part of a negotiated syllabus / learner centredness
- Task as a reflection of real world activity
- Task as a creator of optimal SLA conditions
- Task as a tool to identify areas to address in subsequent work



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Some issues

- Consciousness raising / metacognitive tasks
- Attention to form in pre-task activities and instructions
- Relationship with Communicative Language Teaching
 - PPP: Present, Practise, Produce
 - TTT: Test, Teach, Test



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Summary



- ‘...giving learners tasks to transact, rather than items to learn, provides an environment which best promotes the natural learning of languages.’ (Foster, 1999 pg 69)



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Summary Table



Y	Breen & Candlin	Long	D & J Willis	Nunan	Skehan	Ellis
Task as a reflection of real world activity.	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Task as key syllabus component.	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Task as part of a negotiated syllabus/learner-centredness.	Y	N	X	Y	X	X
Task as a creator of optimal conditions.	X	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Task as a tool to identify areas to address in subsequent work.	X	X	Y	Y	X	X
Can include consciousness raising / metacognitive tasks.	X	N	N	Y	Y	Y
Allows attention to form in pre-task activities and instructions.	X	N	N	Y	Y	X



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Conclusions

- Impact of TBL very significant, but it is not a revolution, rather it is an evolution from CLT.
- TBL is a development of CLT at the syllabus level which has allowed developments in SLA and learner-centredness to be realised.
- It is a task if it is within a task-based syllabus.



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