Chapter - 3

A Brief History of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT)
CHAPTER 3

A BRIEF HISTORY ON TASK-BASED LANGUAGE TEACHING (TBLT)

3.1. What is Task-Based Language Learning?

According to Willis (1996), “A Task can be defined as an activity where the target language is used by the learner for a communicative purpose in order to achieve an outcome” (p. 23). Task-based learning is a different method of teaching languages. It can help the language learners by placing him/her in a real life situation. Task-based learning has the advantage of getting the student to use her skills at her current level. It has the advantage of getting the focus of the student toward achieving a goal where language becomes a tool, making the use of language a necessity (Willis, 1996).

Willis (1996) supported the idea that TBL is a learner-centered approach, in which the learners learn the target language through self-motivated, task-based, and project-based group investigations. In TBL, language learning turns into “a process that involves opportunities for learners to contribute in communication, where making meaning is primary” (Skehan, 1996, p. 38). So, TBL uses interactive tasks that need meaningful communication and interaction among learners (Nunan, 2004). According to Ellis (2003), “TBL is typically about the social communication between learners as a source of input and methods of acquisition and includes the negotiation of meaning, communicative strategies, and communicative effectiveness” (p. 65).

Task-based language learning has its root in communicative language teaching and is a subcategory of it. Teachers adopted task-based language learning for a variety of reasons. Some moved to task-based syllabus in an attempt to make language in the classroom truly communicative, rather than the pseudo-communication that results from classroom activities with no direct connection to real-life situations. Others, like Prabhu in the Bangalore Project, thought that tasks were a way of tapping into learners’ natural mechanisms for second-language acquisition, and weren't concerned with real-life communication (Leaver & Willis, 2004).
3.1.1. Definition of Task-Based Language Learning Approach by Various Scholars

Long (as cited in Hyltenstam & Pienemann, 1985) believed that linguists have not come to an agreement as to what creates a task, for example; Willis (1996) defined classroom task as “goal-oriented activity in which learners use language to achieve a real outcome” (p. 53). Some examples of tasks are as follows; filling a form, buying some fruits, booking an airline ticket, borrowing a library book, taking a driving test, typing a letter, writing a paper, finding a place and helping someone cross the road, making a video, preparing a presentation. Tasks may also be complex, for example, creating a school newspaper or easier such as making a hotel reservation (Lightbrown & Spada, 1999).

According to Prabhu (1987), a task can be defined as "an activity which needs learners to come to a conclusion from given information through some process of thought, and which allows teachers to handle and control that process" (p. 24). Nunan (1989) stated that a task is “a piece of classroom work which involves learners in comprehending, manipulating, producing or interacting in the target language while their attention is principally focused on meaning rather than form” (p. 10). According to Skehan (1996), a task is an activity in which the priority is given to the meaning. The task is related to the real world in some sort; task accomplishment has some priority, and the performance of the task is assessed in terms of task outcome. All of these definitions have several common features for example; the first definitions highlight the significance of focus on meaning. In the second definition, tasks focus on goals, and in the third, tasks require an active role of the contributors (Long as cited in Hyltenstam & Pienemann, 1985).

Ellis (2003) believed that TBL is teaching and learning a language by using language to complete open-ended tasks. He claimed that TBL follows learner-centered educational philosophy. TBL offers content-oriented meaningful activities. According to Breen (as cited in Candlin & Murphy, 1987), TBL refers to any structured language learning work which has a specific objective, proper content, a particular working procedure, and a variety of outcomes for those who carry out the task.
3.2. Methodology of Task Based Learning.

As stated by Willis (1996), Prabhu (1987) and Nunan (1985), the TBL framework contains three main stages for language learning that can be stated as follows; pre-task, task-cycle (task) and post-task stages (language focus). Willis (1996), indicated that these phrases are planned very carefully to produce most satisfactory conditions for language acquisition, and thus offers valuable learning opportunities to match different types of learners.

In TBL, usually familiar tasks to a learner’s everyday life are used, that may include the imitation of activities such as visiting the dentist, conducting an interview, or asking an address from someone (Ellis, 2003). The connection between grammar and CLT is not very different from that between grammar and TBLT. Both of these approaches do not seem to approve the significance of grammar at the beginning strongly. The recent reappearance of interest in grammar teaching has encouraged some researchers to find out how grammar should be placed within CLT or TBLT which will be discussed in the following sections.

3.2.1. The Pre-Task Stage

In the pre-task phase, learners prepare for the task completion (Willis, 1996; Ellis, 2006 and Skehan, 1996). Willis (1996) demonstrated that one of the activities in this stage is introducing the target language to the learners or providing the learners with language support. Willis (1996) stated that “this language support can be about vocabulary or forms that are necessary for the task completion” (p. 1). He believed that the goal of tasks is to provide a real intention for language use and to create a natural context for language study. Frost (2004) demonstrated that in the pre-task, the teacher familiarizes the class with the topic and the task activating topic-related words and phrases. According to Ellis (2003), the pre-task phase can also include playing a recording of people doing the task which provides the learners a clear model of what will be expected from them. The learners can take notes and spend time getting prepared for the task.

3.2.2. The Task-stage

Prabhu (1987) demonstrated that in Task-Stage, the learners perform the activity by themselves. The learners complete the task in pairs or small groups while
the teacher frequently observes them (Ellis, 2003). This stage provides the learners speaking and writing contact with chances for them to learn from each other. The learners then make a plan on how to tell the other groups about what they did and how it went. Then they report on the task orally or in written form and, compare notes on what has happened (Willis, 1996). According to linguists, there are three components of a task cycle such as; the task (activity), planning (where learners plan their reports efficiently and maximize their learning opportunities) and report. Similarly, Candlin and Murphy (1987) stated that tasks can be significantly structured based on systematic components including goals (the general aim for the task), input (verbal or non-verbal materials that learners can manipulate), setting (environment in which the task is performed), activities (the things participants will be doing in a given setting), roles of both the teacher and learner, and feedback of the task evaluation.

3.2.3. The Post-Task Stage / Language Focus

According to Willis (1996), the Post-task phase is the stage after the main activity is accomplished. The post-task stage provides a closer examination and analysis of some of the specific aspects taking place in the language used during the task cycle (Skehan, 1996). Willis and Skehan (1996) demonstrated that at this stage, first, the learners may do a public performance, where they do the task again with the class, another group, or teacher as the audience. Therefore, the learners have another chance to interact in the target language. Secondly, learners may have focused language activities such as consciousness-raising activities, the practice of sentences, phrases, words, and patterns (Willis, 1996). Thirdly, the learners can participate in the correction of both content and language. Finally, the teacher may provide feedback about the learners’ language accuracy.

Crookes and Gass (1993) stated that most of the researchers and linguists for a long period of time have been exploring the best approaches that are helpful to language teaching and learning. According to Nunan (1989), these approaches are broadly categorized as form-based (content-based) or meaning-based. Although, in a content-based instruction like Presentation, Practice, and Performance (PPP), the focus is on subject matter content (Long, 1998), whereas, in task-based instruction, the focus is on an entire set of real-life tasks (Skehan, 1999). Ellis (2003) believed that PPP chiefly focuses on the linguistic forms of the target language. On the other
side, Crookes and Gass (1993) demonstrated that the task-based language teaching, sometimes simply referred to as TBL (Task-Based Learning), TBLL (Task-Based Language Learning), Task-Based Approach (TBA) or TBLT (Task-Based Language Teaching) which once again gained popularity among linguists.

The emphasis of Task-Based Learning (TBL) is on the completion of tasks that engage learners to use the target language in lifelike situations in which, learners acquire excellent communication and social interaction skills. The notion of this approach is to help learners to learn the target language by being exposed to meaningful task-based activities. They do tasks in pairs or, in small groups after which they provide a report and submit their findings to the class in written or spoken form.

3.3. Background of Task-Based Learning

Prabhu (1987) first established Task-based learning (TBL) in Bangalore, Southern India. Prabhu believed that learners might learn more efficiently when the focus of their minds is more on the task, rather than on the language they are using (Prabhu, 1987). Ellis (2003) stated that ‘a task’ occupies a significant position in second language acquisition research and language pedagogy. According to Nunan (1989), a task-based curriculum comprises “a combined set of processes involving, among other things, the specification of both what and how” (p.1).

3.4. How Grammar Relates to TBLT

Studying the definitions of ‘task’ by the researchers can illuminate the relationship between grammar and TBLT. Many researchers have attempted to present their own definitions of a task for their different theoretical emphases. The definition of task was improved after Ellis (2003) merged numerous views in task-based research and pedagogy (as in Breen, 1987; Long, 1985; Richards, Platt, and Weber, 1985; Prabhu, 1987; Nunan, 1989; Skehan, 1996; Bygate, Skehan, & Swain, 2001). Ellis (2003) defined the task as; “A work plan that needs learners to deal with language pragmatically in order to attain a result that can be assessed in terms of whether the right or suitable propositional content has been transferred. To achieve this aim, giving foremost attention to meaning and using their own linguistic resources is required. However, the design of the task may prepare them to choose particular forms. A task is planned to result in language use that shows a similarity,
direct or indirect, to the way language is applied in everyday life. Like other language
activities, a task can involve productive or receptive, and oral or written skills and
also various cognitive processes” (p. 16).

This definition proposed by Ellis (2003) embodies the six criterial features of a
task which can be stated as follows:

i. A task can be considered as a work plan.
ii. In a task, the main focus is on meaning.
iii. A task includes everyday processes of language use.
iv. A task can comprise any of the four language skills.
v. A task involves cognitive processes.
vi. A task has a clear defined communicative result (Ellis, 2003).

The emphasis on meaning, real-life language use, employment of cognitive
processes and the use of the four language skills are the same as those commonly
employed by CLT. The task is considered as the principle of organization to teaching
because it is a work plan and has an obviously-defined communicative outcome. Like
its predecessor, the communicative language teaching approach, the paramount
concern for TBLT is the communication of meaning. The next concern is that the
attention to language forms should be relegated to a position of secondary importance.

This superiority of meaning over form is stated by researchers like Willis
(1996) who believed that learners in Task-Based Learning (TBL) are allowed to select
any kind of language forms to express what they mean in order to achieve the task
goals. According to him TBLT would defeat the intention of dictation or control the
forms of the language. It gives the impression that ‘meaning’ and ‘form’ are two
incompatible notions in the communicative and task-based approach. However, Ellis
(2003) added more limitation to his description of a task which somehow opposes
Willis’ (1996) idea that TBL learners are allowed to select any kind of language forms
they want to express what they mean. Ellis (2003) stated that the freedom of the
learners to use their own linguistic resources is eligible when the design of the task
leads them to select certain forms. This situation offers a new aspect to the
connection between form and meaning in TBLT, as it improves the significance of
form in TBLT.
Communicative tasks only grant opportunities for learners to practice using the language for communication. Learners cannot spontaneously make appropriate use of the language to achieve the desired result. Fluency, accuracy, and complexity in using a language to perform tasks rely on the user’s ability to employ appropriate language forms. Richards (1999) mentioned that despite using of task-work activities which lead to fluency, but the level of linguistics accuracy in language classrooms is low, due to ‘grammar gap’ in the development of linguistic competence. In completing tasks, learners may also prevent to use certain forms which they are expected to use because it may be beyond their ability which may also stop them from trying out the language and reaching higher levels of complexity in the use of the language. The need to focus on form and the filling of the grammar gap became commonly accepted by the 1990s for facilitating effective communication, within CLT or TBLT. There is a propensity to combine form-focused instruction with communicative interaction. This point of view towards the relative situations of form and meaning has been stated by Skehan (1998) “The challenge of task-based instruction is to plan adequate attention to the form to enable interlanguage improvement to progress without affecting the naturalness of the communication that tasks can create” (p. 4). Apart from the problem of naturalness, there are other difficulties related to focusing on form in TBLT as well. Loschky and Bley-Vroman (as cited in Crookes, & Gass, 1993) represented some problems related to producing tasks with a focus on form. They classified three types of participation in a grammatical structure in a task, as task-naturalness, task-utility, and task-essentialness: "In task-naturalness, a grammatical construction might appear naturally during the performance of a specific task, but the task can often be accomplished perfectly well, even very easily, without it. In the case of task-utility, it is achievable to finish a task without the structure, but with the structure, the task develops easier. The utmost extreme demand a task can place on a structure is essentialness: the task cannot be successfully performed unless the structure is used" (Loschky & Bley-Vroman as cited in Crookes, & Gass, 1993, p. 132). Of the three types of contribution, task-essentialness is the very hard to accomplish. According to Loschky and Bley-Vroman (as cited in Crookes, & Gass, 1993), “Essentialness is a greatly more inflexible condition than utility; to achieve Essentialness, there should be correspondingly more control over the discourse. Thus, the objection in construction tasks is likely to be limited to task-utility or task-naturalness, while in comprehension
tasks, task-essentialness can very simply be attained” (p. 139). Since tasks are essentially production-oriented, it is not easy, to ensure that particular forms are necessary for performing them which often leads to the accomplishment of tasks without utilizing forms that learners are expected to use. The probability of avoiding the use of the targeted forms is not favorable for language improvement.

To eliminate this tension between form and meaning, researchers have proposed several ways of integrating a focus on the form into TBLT. One way to integrate a focus on form is to produce a focus on the form and consider it as a separate part of the task; however, it should be a part of the task also. The other way is to induce a focus on form as something entirely separate from the task, but still being a part of it. Some researchers distinguish between "task" and "exercise" as tools which help learners to practice using the language. Tasks are used to carry out real-world activities for achieving specified communication outcomes. The accurate use of language is often contextualized. Practice with a discrete, uncontextualized focus on grammatical forms often makes use of exercises rather than tasks. According to Ellis (2003), tasks are activities that are used for primarily meaning-focused language use, while exercises are activities that are used for primarily form-focused language use. Based on this distinction, a task is about ‘pragmatic meaning’ which refers to the use of language in context, whereas an exercise is about ‘semantic meaning’ that refers to the systematic meaning that particular forms can convey regardless of context. The distinction between task and exercise indicates that grammar teaching within TBLT does not need to be task-based in itself and these discrete exercises can be used in TBLT as they can emphasize the attention on grammatical forms which will be used for the completion of the task later.

Patten (1996) described ‘meaning’ and ‘form’ as two distinct aspects which draw the attention of the learners during the learning process. He stated that learners of a second language are like limited capacity processors who are not able to focus on different aspects of learning at the same time and attending to one will lead to giving less attention to the other. To solve the unpleasant relationship between form and meaning and allowance of integration of form-focused instruction in TBLT, some researchers also attempt to distinguish between the strong and weak form of TBLT. Skehan (1996) demonstrated a strong form as a form that considers tasks as the basic unit of teaching that manages the acquisition process.
A weak form perceives tasks as a fundamental part of language instruction but one that is fixed in a more complex pedagogical context. They are essential but may go before focused instruction, and after use may be followed by a focused instruction which is depending upon task performance (Skehan, 1996). According to Richards (1999), TBLT with a strong emphasis on grammar, which contains a variety of formed-focused activities, is generally a weak form of TBLT.

TBLT is a production-oriented teaching approach, so it is never really amenable of a strong stress on grammar. Grammar and TBLT are fundamentally incompatible subjects, and for co-existence, they need to make adjustments on both sides. So to make this happen, task-based teaching should be less task-based, and grammar teaching should be less grammar-focused. Researchers, who are concern about grammar teaching within a communicative framework, distinguish between ‘focus on form’ and ‘focus on forms’. According to Long (as cited in Hyltenstam & Pienemann, 1985), ‘focus on forms’ is an approach for establishing instruction for synthetic syllabuses which stress the growth of individual language structures. ‘Focus on form’ alternatively was counted as another methodological option which draws learners’ attention to specific language structures are the result of a communicative activity. ‘Focus on forms’ is nowadays mostly considered as attention to decontextualized grammatical structures and correctness in language, while ‘focus on form’ is incidental, where attention to

Form in the context of a communicative activity is not predetermined but rather happens according to the participants’ linguistic needs as the activity progresses (Ellis, 2006, p. 100). In other words, it is a ‘focus on form’ which “involves a prerequisite engagement in meaning before attention to linguistic features can be expected to be effective” (Long, 1991, as cited in Doughty & Williams, 1998, p. 3). So, ‘focus on form’ signifies to draw attention to particular language forms which result from tasks and happen in meaningful contexts. It is this type of form-focused method which is often considered acceptable in TBLT, rather than the type of universal form-focused approach which intends to achieve overall accuracy usually, is known as ‘focus on forms’. In TBLT, the ‘weak’ form of grammar instruction (focus on form) is used rather than the ‘strong’ form of grammar instruction (focus on forms) which is acceptable. It is visible that most of the current researchers are agree to some extent that there is a need to add some form-focused activities into task-based
teaching. They have proposed numerous ideas about how a focus on form can be induced in TBLT.

3.5. A Review of Studies on Task-Based Language Learning

In the recent years, that there is a massive growth of interest in task-based language learning and teaching (Ellis, 2000, 2003; Skehan 2003 and Littlewood, 2004). According to Nunan’s (2004), study about the interviews with teachers, teacher educators, and ministry officials notes, TBL has developed as a fundamental concept from a study of curriculum guidelines and syllabi in the Asia-Pacific countries. Barnard and Nguyen (2010) carried out a comprehensive investigation of teacher perception in Vietnamese high schools using a ‘multi-methods’ of data collection. In which teachers were asked to write thoughtful comments about their attitudes towards TBL in Vietnamese and their recent experience of applying TBL in their classroom. Barnard and Nguyen (2010) stated that TBL is an effective model of language learning in schools. However, Pham (2000), argued that “modern teaching methods should be applied with a close and careful consideration of the cultural values of Vietnam” (p. 23).

Based on Richards and Rodgers’ (2001) examination of the general English use objectives for EFL oral communication, the Malaysian English as a Foreign Language (EFL) secondary curriculum is a task-based communicative curriculum. In the same manner, Sidek (2012) analyzed the reading instructional approach of EFL secondary school curriculum in Malaysia by investigating the curriculum concerning theories of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) and theories of L2 reading along with learners’ roles with regard to Communicative Task-Based Language Teaching (CTBLT) features. The investigation discovered that the most of the reading tasks in the selected EFL secondary reading curriculum are highly lacking CTBLT characteristics. Other research, such as Mackey (1999) have revealed that performing tasks can also help the acquisition of grammar.

3.6. Grammar Teaching and Task-Based Language Teaching

In the contemporary era, many research has been conducted on whether the formal instruction is helpful for second language acquisition. By the 1990s and 2000s, it can be seen that researchers have come to the conclusion that formal instruction in some way is beneficial. Hence, the focus of research moved towards
how a focus on form can be persuaded through different strategies and how it can be combined with the practiced second language teaching approaches, such as Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT).

For a long time, the CLT approach, which is the predecessor of TBLT, has ruled the L2 acquisition. It is often assumed that significant communicative interactions in the classroom simplify the language learning. CLT is against the more Structural-Based language teaching approaches like the Grammar-Translation and Oral Structural Approaches which were previously popular before it. CLT chiefly concerns about the meaning, and it do not pay much attention to form. For some time, the language teaching and learning focused on the use of language for the purpose of communication and gave up the structural accuracy in favor of fluency. In the 1990s, the concern about the grammar that was neglected in the Communicative Approach and its effect on learners’ ability to produce accurate language re-appeared.

According to Littlewood (1981), CLT placed communication at the center of learning. The Task-Based Approach (TBLT) has taken its root from CLT, and it has become a global practical approach for teaching the second language in the past two decades. Indeed, CLT and TBLT are known as two closely related or similar teaching approaches with similar instructions. CLT is a slightly comprehensive and it is a more general language teaching approach than TBLT. The logic behind the Communicative Approach and the Task-Based Approach is mostly similar. Both approaches stress on the communication of the meaning. The main difference is that the latter (Task-Based Approach) depends on the explicit use of tasks for arranging to learn, as is suggested by Richards and Rodgers (2001) who defined the Task-Based Approach as "an approach based on the use of tasks as the core unit of planning and instruction in language teaching" (p. 223).

The tasks within the Task-Based Approach referred to as the mediums through which students can make use of actual language they use in everyday life for meaningful communication. The fundamental principles of CLT and TBLT someway come with the notion of “Communicative Tasks,” which is counted as the main language outcome that TBLT seeks out to achieve. As suggested by Doughty and Williams (1998) while performing Communicative Tasks, learners will obtain
perceptible input and reformed output. These processes are essential to second language acquisition and will eventually give rise to the improvement of both linguistic and communicative competence.

According to Richards (1999), successful language learning depends on the involvement of students in tasks that need to discuss the meaning and engage them in realistic and significant communication. This concept is often found at the heart of much current communicative or task-based materials, such as "discussion-based materials, communication games, simulations, role plays and other group or pair-work activities" (Richards, 1999, p. 5). Nunan (1989) also defined the communicative task as “a piece of classroom work which engages the learners in comprehending, manipulating, and producing or interacting in the target language while their attention is principally focused on meaning rather than form" (p. 10). Other researchers also restate the relationship between the communicative task and meaning, and its detachment from the form. Crookes and Gass (1993), for example, defined communicative tasks as "devices to allow learners to practice using the language as a tool of communication rather than as a device to get learners to focus on grammatical features of the language" (p. 124).

The connection between grammar and CLT is not very different from that between grammar and TBLT. Both of these approaches do not seem to approve the significance of grammar at the beginning strongly. The recent reappearance of interest in grammar teaching has encouraged some researchers to find out how grammar should be placed within CLT or TBLT which will be discussed in the following sections.

3.7. How to Achieve a Focus on Form in TBLT

As a teaching approach, the definition of TBLT is unclear. According to Markee (1997), it can be defined as “an umbrella term that includes the process syllabus, the procedural syllabus, and pedagogical applications of more current theoretical and empirical work in SLA investigations, classroom studies, and action studies” (p. 35). TBLT can adopt different identities based on the purposes of different researchers. The form of TBLT in the classroom depends not only on task design but also on the way that the teacher applies it.
According to Nunan (1989), “with the improvement of communicative language teaching (and also TBLT), the division of syllabus design and methodology becomes gradually problematical” (p. 1). Littlewood (2004) also suggested a comprehensive definition that can cover both Communicative and Task-Based Language Teaching, which is called as ‘communication-oriented language teaching’. He taught that this can aid the learner in a better understanding of the complementary roles of form-focused and meaning-focused tasks in our methodology because it permits us to focus on important aspects that differentiate (from the learner’s perspective) different kinds of tasks, the level of task-involvement and the level of focus on form or meaning. Within such a comprehensive and undetermined teaching approach, the ways that form-focused instruction can be integrated into it are naturally unspecified or varied, as researchers established various efforts to focus on form through different types of task design and implementation.

3.7.1 Task Design and Implementation

Several research have studied various features of task characteristics and their influence on teaching and learning. Pica, Kanagy and Falodun. (as cited in Crookes & Gass, 1993) began with the hypothesis that acquisition happens as a function of the learner engaging in interaction which leads to the requirement for learners to express and discuss meanings which may stretch the use of interlanguage. According to this assumption, the analyzation of tasks regarding their potential, lead to comprehensible input, with the use of a categorization system which classified different types of interactional activities and communication goals. Duff (as cited in Day, 1986) investigated the difference between convergent and divergent tasks. The former accepted a commonly agreed solution whereas the latter accepted various opinions. As there were not much difference of language produced with each task type, hence, the Duff’s prediction that convergent tasks would cause more beneficial negotiation of meaning, was not achieved at the end, but, this research indicated the significant interactional and discourse differences. The turns that are produced by the convergent tasks are more and shorter, while the divergent tasks generated fewer but longer and more complex turns.

The investigation by Brown (1991) tried to discover elements influencing language learning through small group interaction. He suggested three different
scopes for analyzing types of tasks; the degree of ‘tightness’ or ‘looseness’ of the tasks, the degree of ‘openness’ or ‘closeness’ of the tasks, and the degree of ‘procedural’ of the task. In which they discussed what decisions to make, or ‘interpretive,’ which led to interpreting data according to participants’ understanding and experience. This study discovered no significant differences in the level of modification (in terms of fluency and repair) happening in the three task types.

Nevertheless, the interpretative tasks use considerably more instructional input and hypothesizing as compared to the procedural. This study proposed that the level of challenge, determined by its procedural or interpretive nature, may be a significant element for forcing learners to express their ideas in more complex language.

Skehan and Foster (1997) studied the effects of different types of task on learners’ oral performance. Three distinct types of tasks that were used can be stated as follows; (I) information exchange task, (II) narrative task, and (III) decision-making task. The performance of the tasks was assessed in terms of fluency, complexity, and error-free clauses. Outcomes showed that types of the task have different effects on performance. The accuracy of the personal and decision-making tasks was significantly higher than the narrative task, while the information exchange task caused lower complexity than the other two tasks. The fluency produced by the narrative and decision-making tasks were least as compared to the personal task. Besides task characteristics, planning condition and time also had an effect on complexity and fluency. When the planning time is more the complexity and fluency will be better and greater. Planning time and condition is one aspect of task implementation. Many investigations have been conducted about the aspects of task implementation for inducing a focus on form. Skehan (1998) conducted research on two contrasting ways of applying tasks that he called ‘structure-oriented tasks’ and ‘communicative-driven tasks.’ For the structure-oriented tasks’, Loschky and Bley-Vroman (as cited in Crookes, & Gass, 1993) classified three structure-to-task relationships which can be stated as follows; naturalness, utility, and essentialness. According to Loschky and Bley-Vroman (as cited in Crookes, & Gass, 1993), the third criterion was the most difficult, but the most desirable to achieve for focusing on form (as cited in Skehan, 1998).
Willis (as cited in Skehan, 1998) studied the other method such as making use of ‘communicative-driven tasks.’ He believed that tasks which are based on ‘naturalness’ condition and are not conformity-based or display-oriented for any specific structure, will increase the learners’ language proficiency effectively. Through transacting tasks, learners will create the most meaningful lexis of a language in a spontaneous way, and they will be able to use such lexis in syntactic patterns. As compared to the former approach, the latter seems to need a less explicit and more natural way of focusing on form. Research in the 2000s diverged into numerous different features of task design and task implementation for achieving a focus on form. Garcia Mayo (2002) conducted research on advanced EFL learners who cooperatively completed two different types of form-focused tasks a dictogloss and a text reconstruction in which the learners' interactions in both tasks were collected and classified and Language-Related Episodes (LREs) identified. The outcomes showed that it is essential for classroom teachers and researchers to be careful about the selection of a task, and how learners interpret and complete the task. The research by Samuda (as cited in Bygate, Skehan, & Swain, 2001) studied the significant aspect of task implementation and the role of the teacher in generating a focus on form in TBLT.

According to Samuda (as cited in Bygate et al., 2001), the task and the teacher play a substantially complementary role in regards to each other. Gibbons (1998) emphasized on the ‘lead from behind’ which stressed on the role of the teacher in complementing and supporting the motion in the formulating and negotiating of the meaning in the task. In her research, Samuda (as cited in Bygate et al., 2001) discovered the complementary relationship between task and teacher in the context of tasks in which semantically complex form-meaning plotting are made. The participant of the teacher plays a significant role in complementing the task by directing attention towards form-meaning relationships. At different phases of her/his teaching process, the teacher tries to induce various types of explicit and implicit focus on form through discoursal or interactional means. Outcomes showed that the targeted forms happened in both learners’ output (the spoken and written), which Samuda (as cited in Bygate et al., 2001) determined as the primary form-meaning plotting and also there was evidence of language improvement in using the targeted
forms. The importance of teachers’ role in response to learners’ needs in TBLT was discovered.

Murphy (2003) conducted a small-scale study on eight intermediate learners of English, about the relationship between tasks and learners. The results revealed that there were unexpected results in task performance, as each learner interacted in a different way with the tasks and developed alternative strategies to complete them which indicated that the impact of learners on the task could jeopardize the task designer's intended pedagogic outcomes. According to Murphy (2003), just the manipulation of task features and processing conditions are not sufficient to focus the learner's attention on the challenging goals of accuracy, fluency, and complexity. It is also essential to pay attention to the ways in which learners interact with tasks within the classroom environment. “This has effects on teachers and task designers in making decisions for planning, designing and enacting task-based activities from the primary stage of “task-as-work plan” to the actual application of task in process” (as cited in Candlin & Murphy, 1987, p. 23). Further classroom-based studies would help improve the potential in task-based learning include the learners’ contribution. Another study by Fujii and Mackey (2009) studied learner-learner interactions in an authentic EFL classroom. The study made it clear that how patterns of interaction may be formed by cultural, contextual, and interlocutor-related factors, therefore, it helped in appraising considerations while designing task-based instructions.

3.7.2. Integrating a Focus on Form into Different Stages of TBLT

In addition to exploring different ways of inducing a focus on form through manipulating task features and conditions, researchers have also studied how form-focused instruction can be added to different stages of TBLT. Bygate (as cited in Bygate, Tonkyn & William, 1994) believed that there are four main areas where a teacher may interfere with task-based learning that can be stated as follows; pre-task preparation; task selection; manipulation of on-task conditions; and post-task follow-up. All these areas offer chances for the teacher to affect learning by changing different aspects of the learning task to persuade a focus on form. According to Skehan (1996), methodological procedures can be organized at three stages of task-based teaching which can be stated as follows; pre-task, during-task, and post-task. Similar thoughts about persuading a focus on form at various stages of task-based
teaching have been offered by Ellis (2003), Willis (1996), Willis and Willis (2007). Willis and Willis (2007) especially emphasized the effectiveness of focusing on specific forms at the end of a task sequence which according to them has three advantages which can be stated as follows; (I) It aids learners to understand the language they have experienced; (II) It emphasizes the language that they are probable to experience in the future; and (III) It offers motivation.

3.7.3 Form-Focused Feedback

Several research investigated the effectiveness of feedback during and after the task. Some of these investigations studied feedback during the process of interaction, while others studied post-task corrective feedback. A few studies were about the use of feedback to input-oriented versus output-oriented strategies, and explicit versus implicit attention to form. Some of them have studied the effectiveness of explicit or implicit corrective feedback (Ellis, Loewen, & Erlam, 2006; Sheen, 2006; Varnosfadrani & Basturkmen, 2009). Outcomes supported the effectiveness of explicit feedback over implicit feedback, or the benefit of explicit feedback for improving implicit as well as explicit knowledge, especially in the study by Ellis et al. (2006) and Varnosfadrani and Basturkmen (2009). Some research also investigated the effectiveness of feedback during the process of interaction. Nassaji (2007) studied the effectiveness of two major types of interactional feedback (elicitation and reformulation) in dyadic interaction. The result confirms the role of prominence and opportunities for pushed output as significant features of effective feedback. Another research was concerned about recasts in face-to-face interaction. Lai, Fei, and Roots (2008) explored the efficacy of recasts in text-based online chatting in Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC), in which it was discovered that participants explained contingent recasts considerably more often than noncontingent recasts. Besides, working memory and pre-writing were found to mediate the contingency effect, but learner’s proficiency level was found to have an effect on neither the noticing of recasts nor the contingency effect. Sauro (2009) studied the effect of two types of computer-mediated corrective feedback on the progress of adult learners’ L2 knowledge: (I) corrective feedback that reformulates the error in the form of recasts, and (II) corrective feedback that provides the learner with metalinguistic information about the nature of the error. Results showed no significant advantage for either feedback type on immediate or sustained gains in
target form knowledge, although the metalinguistic group showed significant immediate gains about the control condition.

3.7.4 Out-of-Class Grammar Learning/Practice

According to studies conducted by Murphy (2003) and Fujii and Mackey (2009), learners play a significant role in the process of task application, for example, the ways that learners interact with the tasks and the other learners, have a great impression on prosperous learning in a task-based context. Their learning achievement might also outspread beyond the classroom, particularly for grammar learning which often needs repeated practice. A few research explored out-of-class grammar learning or practice, most particularly in connection with the use of computer technology, such as Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL) or Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC).

The study by Heller (2005) examined the effectiveness of a web-based English grammar learning tool with a comprehensive body of reliable English language examples, the Chemnitz Internet Grammar (CING), for the self-learning of intermediate learners of English. The CING software offers a variety of learning materials prepared according to inductive or deductive rules that include descriptions of grammatical rules as well as chances for users to practice their grammar skills by answering gap-fill, multiple choice, or correction exercises. Learners might also attempt to "discover" the grammar rules themselves by navigating the reliable language body and making use of the most inductive materials. The results from a questionnaire on usability and content difficulty showed that CING offers a commonly positive learning experience, although learners who learned the design and content structure in a better way appeared to have a more positive experience in working with the CING than those who did not. The study emphasized the potential of this kind of on-line grammar self-learning tool for intermediate English learners. The adaptation and materials evaluation, as well as the analysis of learner requirements in this study, will be beneficial for the future progress of similar on-line grammar learning software.

AbuSeileek (2009) studied the efficiency of using an online-based course on the learning of sentence types inductively and deductively. A pre-test/post-test design (between-subject) was used to examine the influence of two factors: medium
(Computer-Based Learning vs. Non-Computer-Based Learning) and method (induction vs. deduction) on students' learning of sentence types. The Computer-Based Learning Method was discovered to be useful for more complex and elaborate structures, like the complex sentence and compound-complex sentence, and more complicated grammar structures were better taught by use of the deductive technique. The inductive and deductive techniques were not effective with simple grammatical structures such as the simple sentence and compound sentence. The study revealed that Computer-Based Grammar Learning is useful for more complex and elaborate structures, whether the inductive or deductive method is used. Computer-based learning can also offer opportunities for encouraging self-learning and a student-centered approach to grammar learning.

Other research studied the use of computer technology for practicing the language structures. Ozdener and Satar (2008) conducted research on Turkish high school English students. It tried to develop students' fluency in speaking through Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) technologies (in both text and voice forms), which offered them chances for practicing and internalizing language structures. The outcomes of the investigation explained the strategies that can be used in Computer-Mediated Communication technologies and considered the experiences and understanding of the learners. CMC can offer a useful context for students with low proficiency and for students who are suffering from high foreign language anxiety levels and helping them to develop their language skills. It can be a valuable substitute for face-to-face interaction about the challenges of speaking a foreign language faced by the students to supplement classroom teaching. Son (2007) believed that computer technology leads to improving students' motivation to learn by offering reliable and remarkable learning materials and activities. He studied the use of the Internet for language learning. He studied ESL (English as a Second Language) learners' experiences on Web-Based Language Learning (WBLL) activities in an English language intensive course for overseas students. In his research, scholars were asked to do two types of Web-Based Language Learning (WBLL) activities that can be stated as follows; (I) pre-created language exercises that are simply available on the web, and (II) task-based web activities utilizing web resources to make certain results including communication, information assembly or problem-solving. The students' involvement in the proposed activities was perceived,
and their attitudes towards the activities were analyzed. The result demonstrated that the web is a beneficial tool for learning ESL, particularly as a supplementary resource. Most learners also found the WBLL activities to be beneficial in terms of acquiring information, getting instant feedback on exercise errors and taking the chance of working by themselves. Besides, teacher simplification is also a significant factor in the success of computer-assisted instruction in the language classroom. Successful grammar teaching and learning in TBLT rely on various approaches of persuading a focus on form through task design and implementation. The participations of both teachers and learners in different stages of the teaching and learning process are also significant factors. The next section will study recent investigations about the efforts to theorize in a systematic way about the various types of form-focused activities often used in TBLT.

3.7.5 Focused Tasks

Ellis (2003) suggested an outline of using ‘focused tasks’ to persuade a focus on form in TBLT. According to him, ‘focused tasks’ refer to tasks designed or used with a purpose of emphasis on form, integrating various key types of form-focus instruction within the tasks, such as reception-based (input-based), production-based (output-based) and grammatical consciousness-raising strategies. Ellis (2003), believed that ‘focused tasks’ are tasks that can be used to “elicit use of specific linguistic characteristics, whether by design or by the use of methodological procedures that emphasize attention on form in the application of a task” (p.141). He suggested three types of focused tasks that are named as follows; (I) Structure-Based Production Tasks, (II) Comprehension Tasks, and (III) Consciousness-Raising Tasks. These three types of focused tasks can be used at different stages of input, interaction, or production.

Ellis (2003) stated that focused tasks must comply with tasks in general. They can be responsive or involve production which means they can either emphasize incidental attention on form receptively or elicit incidental production of a targeted feature. Ellis (2003) also illustrated two psycholinguistic basis for focused tasks. The first includes skill-building theories and the concept of automatic processing. To control learners’ gain of declarative knowledge and involvement into automatic processes/procedural knowledge, learners should practice the skill, which can be done
through the use of a focused task. The second psycholinguistic basis includes theories of implicit learning. According to Ellis (2003), the weak non-interface model suggested in Ellis (1993; 1994) (based on Schmidt's Noticing Hypothesis) illustrated explicit knowledge as facilitating implicit learning in two significant ways; (I) it assists in the process of perceiving relevant structures in the input stage to turn them into the intake. (II) It may also aid learners in perceiving the gap between what they are saying and how the feature is used in the input they are exposed to in the monitoring stage. The focused task is not a new notion for form-focused instruction in TBLT.

Somehow, it is an effort to theorize about focusing on form in TBLT systematically. The focus task represents various strategies of attaining a focus on form in TBLT. It uses task design or performance; it challenges explicit or implicit methods; it can be input-oriented or output-oriented; and it can even use grammatical consciousness-raising strategies, where grammar is the content of communication. The unclear relationship between meaning and form has led researchers to investigate different ways of teaching grammar in TBLT, and it is not possible to consider a single method as the most acceptable and efficient in persuading a focus on form. Approaches vary from the more traditional to the more innovative, and researchers have different rationales for the efficiency of the methods they suggested. Some researchers even declared that grammar instruction in TBLT has something in common with the traditional presentation-practice-production (PPP) teaching approach, whose failure in easing communication has often been considered as a significant reason for the development of the communicative and task-based teaching approaches. This interesting relationship between TBLT and PPP will be explored further.

3.7.6 TBLT and Presentation-Practice-Production (PPP)

Presentation-Practice-Production (PPP) was a common method for second language teaching established in the 1970s and the 1980s and is still popular with many teachers today. In this Grammar-Focused Method, teaching is structured according to the grammatical structures to be taught, and teaching is divided into three stages. In the presentation stage, grammatical structure is presented to the learners. At the practice stage, the learners practice through organized activities which
emphasize on the accurate reproduction of the structure. The final stage learners are allowed to express meanings more spontaneously using the target forms with greater freedom (Hedge, 2000). Many researchers have discussed the inadequacy of PPP. They doubted about whether the expressed explanation of the structures and controlled repetition in the practice stage will lead to implicit grammatical knowledge and simplify the acquisition of the structure (Ritchie, 2003). Repetition does not produce strong and productive input either, and lessons that comprise of repetitive drilling are not of much interest to students.

In the 1980s, there was an anti-grammar movement at the beginning of the communicative and TBLT approaches that stated some of the shortcomings of PPP. These approaches questioned the rigid structure of presentation, practices, and production, and emphasized more on accurate communication or the achievement of communicative tasks which obviously emphasized production rather than presentation and practice. However, the communicative and TBLT approaches also have some shortcomings. TBLT stresses on production or language use, but it is often the case that in completing a task, targeted language structures can be neglected and alternative means of communication can be employed. The use of the language can also be minimized in tasks which emphasize real-life communicative consequences like solving a problem or completing a plan. Some researchers have consequently doubted the effectiveness of TBLT in helping learners acquire language structures. Without an aim to direct attention on specific language forms, and making them fundamental for completing the task (task-essentialness) (Ellis, 2003; Loschky & Bley-Vroman, 1993), it is uncertain whether the learners’ language competence can be pushed forward through production. Tasks with a grammar focus and activities used in the PPP approach are somehow similar. Ellis (2003) described Consciousness-Raising tasks as one type of focused task. According to Ellis (2003), CR Tasks are focused tasks that emphasize on directing attention to form. The activities that are used in CR tasks are very similar to those used in the ‘practice’ stage of the PPP approach. Ellis (2003) in one of his example of a consciousness-raising task, asked the learners to:

1. Highlight the time expression in the passage
2. Write the time phrases into this table” (p.18).
Highlighting grammatical structures and writing words and expression are routine strategies used in the practice stage of the PPP approach, which might consist of a range of activities ranging from more discrete exercises to more teacher-guided comprehension or production activities. At times a lesser number of these activities can also be used in the presentation stage.

One would wonder if Ellis' definition of Consciousness-Raising tasks actually matches with his definition of a task that includes the six standards features. It is uncertain whether they include an initial focus on meaning, as the focus appears to place more on the language forms. More certainly, they do not really comprise real-world language processes, as the main content of communication includes grammatical structures, which are rarely the topic of real-life communication. These tasks can be only considered as a ‘weak form’ of TBL as explained by Ellis and the other researchers (Skehan, 1996, as cited in Richards, 1999). To settle this conceptual confusion, a distinction can be made between the task-based teaching of grammar and teaching grammar in TBLT. The former comprised of using a task that placed into the definition with the six criterial features, which is usually a completely developed task within TBLT. If such an equipped task is used to teach grammar, the emphasis is naturally on persuading the learners to create the desired structures in performing the task. In such a case, all the disagreements about task-essentialness and the probability of avoiding the use of the aimed structures and the failure in drawing learners' attention to the form recover. The latter approach, teaching grammar in TBLT, permits the use of activities that cannot be fitted into the exact definition of a fully-fledged task. It suggests that grammar-based teaching approaches which can fit into TBLT are acceptable. Especially, grammar teaching can be explicit and grammar-based, or more implicit and task-based. There is always a conflict between meaning and form. If more stress is placed on the explicit teaching of the form, it naturally tracks the activities that are less task-based or signifies a weaker version of TBLT which all resumed to the principal issue of whether a strong form or a weak form of task-based teaching is implemented. If a weak form of task-based teaching is suitable, it also represents that a range of more explicit grammar teaching approaches can be accepted in TBLT. According to the result of conducted research, many of the Asian countries that have slowly switched to CLT and TBLT approaches have not really discarded PPP completely. Somewhat, many of them have integrated different
levels of the PPP approach into their own type of TBLT (Hui, 1997 as cited in Carless, 1999; Edwards & Willis, 2005). For areas with an ethos of more grammatical stress, PPP is yet counted a useful approach for focusing attention on grammar.

According to Cadorath and Harris (1998), the establishment of TBLT in many countries has to be based on local realities. The truth is that areas with a culture of more grammatical stress in second language teaching find it difficult to leave PPP completely while they are gradually changing to TBLT approaches. Many of them have integrated changeable levels of the PPP approach into their own type of TBL T. According to Ritchie (2003), “explanation and practice of specific features of language is likely, under some circumstances, to be of benefit” (p. 118).

Carless (1999) argued about the need of adaptation curriculum innovations according to local contexts. It was suggested that different levels of the PPP approach could be integrated with different stages of TBLT. As suggested by Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman (1999) and Littlewood (2004), the traditional instruction of presentation followed by practice and then production can also be changed or even reversed. Grundy (2001) also proposed the use of modified instruction models constructed according to the PPP structure, which he referred to it as ‘new wave PPP.’ These models used modified forms of the presentation, practice, and production stages and a different sequence of performing these procedures, such as Scrivener’s ARC instruction model (Authentic use, Restricted use, Clarification/Focus) or other variants like CRA (Clarification/Focus, Restricted use, Authentic use), or ARAC (Authentic use, Restricted use, Authentic use, Clarification/Focus).

Conclusion

The above discussion shows that contemporary theorists and researchers have shown more flexibility and tolerance in the ways grammar can be taught within TBLT. Some explained the use of a ‘multifaceted approach’ (Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 1999), while others mentioned a more ‘eclectic approach’ (Hedge, 2000). In short, there is a growing tendency of a variety of grammar teaching approaches - whether Task-Based in themselves or not, are becoming acceptable within TBLT.
References


