Exploring task-based learning: Past, present, and future trends

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Abstract: There has been renewed interest in Task-Based Learning (TBL). Since 2014, gradual changes in TBL have been observed. Several studies have documented the synergy between communicative tasks and technology. This paper explores past, present, and future trends of this strong approach to teaching English as a second language. In this context, this article attempts to contribute to future studies on TBL mainly. By looking back, this article considers authors who have discussed TBL in the last 30 years. It then explores the theoretical foundations of this strong communicative approach and its role in creating affordances to developing English as an L2 through tasks. Overall findings show there is a significant increase in the number of studies in the field. However, further studies on this topic need to be undertaken especially approaching Technology-mediated Task-Based Learning, intercultural and symbolic awareness, and the possibilities for promoting critical language development through tasks.

Keywords: Task-based learning; Past and present trends; Future trends.

Título: Explorando aprendizagem baseada em tarefas: tendências passadas, presentes e futuras

Resumo: O interesse na Aprendizagem Baseada em Tarefas (ABT) tem se renovado. Desde 2014, observam-se mudanças graduais a respeito da ABT, com vários estudos tem documentando a sinergia entre tarefas comunicativas e tecnologia. Este artigo explora tendências passadas, presentes e busca contribuir para estudos futuros dessa abordagem considerada forte no ensino de inglês como segunda língua. Nesse contexto, o artigo faz uma leitura de autores que têm discutido a ABT nos últimos 30 anos e, em seguida, explora os fundamentos teóricos desta abordagem comunicativa e seu papel na criação de possibilidades para o desenvolvimento da língua inglesa como segunda língua por meio de tarefas. Os resultados gerais demonstram um aumento significativo no número de estudos na área, entretanto mais estudos sobre esse tema precisam ser realizados, especialmente abordando a ABT mediada pelas tecnologias, a consciência intercultural e simbólica e a possibilidade de promover um desenvolvimento linguístico crítico através de tarefas.

Palavras-chave: Aprendizagem baseada em tarefas; Tendências passadas; Tendências futuras.

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Introduction

This article explores past, present, and future trends of Task-Based Learning (TBL), an approach to teaching and learning English as a second language (L2), which has received widespread attention from language teachers and researchers since the late 80'and early 90'. It also aims to contribute to future studies on TBL, especially in Brazil, representing a paradigm shift of mainstream views about language teaching and learning. It begins by considering authors who have discussed TBL for the last 30 years, starting with Prabhu (1987), also revisiting the works of Ellis (2003a, 2003b, and 2018), Nunan (1989, 1996, and 2004), Kumaravadivelu (2006), Bygate (2015), with a particular emphasis on Willis (1996, 2007, 2012), and on the methodological principles, established by Long (2015). It explores the theoretical foundations of TBL and their role in the language classroom to create affordances to develop language as students are exposed to tasks. It then discusses the theoretical consistency of TBL against research in the second language acquisition field (language development in this article) regarding the conditions for learning an L2 according to Willis' model (1996; 2012). It also examines recent Brazilian studies, which found synergy between tasks, technology, and critical language development. Finally, it concludes by discussing issues to be addressed in future studies and practices.

Looking back

According to Ellis (2018), the exact date for TBL's emergence is unclear. The author refers to the first edition of the book by Richards & Rogers called "Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching," published in 1986, which included Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) but not TBL. However, the second edition of the same book, published in 2001, listed Task-Based Learning under current communicative approaches. The renowned researchers in the TBL field, Jane & Dave Willis (2001), stated that it was Allwright one of the first to advocate the efficacy of tasks as a stimulus for learning languages (ALLWRIGHT, 1981). It may be said that TBL emerged in the field between 1981 and 2001. It is worth highlighting the work developed by Prabhu in India and published under "Second Language Pedagogy" (PRABHU, 1987) during this period. Ellis (2018) does not mention three publications that have contributed to developing TBL as an approach to learning/teaching English as an L2 and are mentioned as follows.

The first was the publication of an innovative series of books called Collins Cobuild (WILLIS, J.; WILLIS, D., 1998), which put TBL's theoretical foundations into practice in the language classroom. The series used the most purist approach to TBL. Each unit presented a task as a core to the unit and, from this task, along with the analysis of the recordings used during the lessons, emerged the grammar which would be later analyzed and practiced. These books may be assumed to have a nonlinear approach to teaching language items. This characteristic had not been seen up to that moment in the field of communicative language teaching (CLT). It is believed this series was unsuccessful and removed from the market as the

books did not approach the teaching of English as an L2 linearly. The books did not present each grammar item one after the other, expecting students to learn them accordingly, a linear approach that teachers were more used to at the time.

The second was the book published by Jane Willis called A Framework for Task-Based Learning (WILLIS, 1996). This book provides a guide to teachers who wish to use TBL offering an alternative to Presentation-Practice-Production (P.P.P.), which was commonly used at the time and still is. The book explains and brings practical examples of each approach component, beginning with the pre-task, moving to the task cycle, and concluding with the language focus. It offers TBL as an approach that integrates all skills and encourages students to seek fluency and accuracy while performing the tasks.

The third was a textbook entitled Cutting Edge (CUNNIGHAM, S.; MOOR, P., 1999), promising a practical approach to TBL. The authors referred to the fact that all units were divided into two parts: A and B. Part A presents language items, such as grammar, skills, and vocabulary, and practices these items, and at the end, there is a production stage. In other words, part A consisted of the linearity found in P.P.P., and part B offered TBL. The book presented the best of two worlds: the linearity found in P.P.P., allowing students to be at ease in class, and tasks that seemed fashionable at the time. Differently from the Collins Cobuild series, Cutting Edge became very successful among teachers, and it was expanded to a series of books, from the Starter to the Advanced level. The first Cutting Edge book, the intermediate level was published in 1999 and is now in its third edition. Ellis (2018) did not mention these three works which had a relevant impact on developing Task-Based Learning as an L2 teaching/learning approach.

Another relevant work in the TBL field, mentioned by Ellis (2018), was a book published in 2004 called Task-Based Instruction in Foreign Language Education (LEAVER, B.L.; WILLIS, J., 2004). Betty Lou Leaver and Jane Willis compiled the contributions of 19 teachers from around the world who had successfully implemented TBL in their regular classes and explained the principles of this success, discussing how emerging problems were solved. According to Ellis (2018), CLT, an approach rather than a method, has had a profound impact worldwide. Nowadays, even approaches with a structural program and following a Presentation-Practice-Production methodology (P.P.P.) claim to be communicative as they include tasks in the final production stage. Based on this interpretation, TBL emerges as a robust version of CLT to occupy this gap.

As shown above, the first proposal for TBL started to emerge towards the end of the 80s. The first proposals (BREEN, 1989; CANDLIN, 1987; LONG, 1985) were programmatic and focused on a study program around tasks. However, Prabhu (1987) was the first researcher to provide a complete account of a course based on tasks, while Nunan (1989) made practical recommendations on how to plan tasks by presenting tested examples and showing their efficacy.

The ever-present past

Various researchers in second language acquisition have contributed to the emergence of TBL. To name just a few, the work of Stephen Krashen and Tracy Terrell at the end of the 70s resulted in the publication of the book called *Natural Approach* (KRASHEN; TERRELL, 1983). The natural approach is based on the principle that the development of an L2 does not require intentional learning by the students, emphasizing activities focused on meaning and providing incidental acquisition. According to Ellis, Krashen's statement that acquiring a second language cannot be taught has fed the first TBL proposals (ELLIS, 2018). This idea is in consonance with Prabhu (1987), when he mentioned that the development of language competence requires the creation of conditions, which this article proposes to call the emergence of affordances, in which learners join efforts to communicate.

There seem to be a few points of contact between Krashen's hypothesis (1982) and TBL. One relationship may be regarding the input hypothesis. It proposes that we acquire a language only when we understand it and comprehend that it contains structures beyond what we already know. There is a desired condition (but not sufficient) for the learner to move from stage i to stage i + 1 in which the individual understands the input containing i + 1, where "understanding" means to be focused on meaning and not on form. This movement may be observed in TBL as it is grounded on the fact that learners should be exposed to the language, which is one of the main conditions for learning a second language. Students receive meaningful input during the task cycle when learners carry out the task, always focusing on the message and not the form. TBL advocates agree with Krashen (1982) that we learn a language initially focusing on the meaning of the message, and as a result, we acquire the structure of this language. TBL provides students with exposure to the language (input), opportunities to use this language to do things without being afraid of making mistakes and express what they want to (meaningful output), focusing on the development of their own interlanguage while they go through the task cycle and analyze and practice the structure of the language.

More recently, Verspoor, Lowie & De Bot (2008) analyzed the importance of input from the perspective of the dynamic system theory. The authors claim that the same source of input is not always processed by learners in the same way during the learning process, as this input is in constant change due to the dynamic and complex interactions between this and all the other variables which affect the development of an L2 (VERSPOOR; LOWIE; DE BOT, 2008). This perspective regarding input, based on dynamic and complex systems, suggests that the development of an L2 is nonlinear, adaptive, interactive, dependent on resources, and self-organizing. It is the result of the interaction not only with the environment but also with its internal re-organization (VERSPOOR, LOWIE, DE BOT, 2008), which is highly relevant for this article as it intends to propose a change from the term input to the creation of affordances, updating the term for the present, and for future works.

Krashen's affective filter hypothesis (1982) states that comprehensible input is necessary to acquire an L2, but it is not sufficient. The learner must be open to this input and

willing to learn, and the affective filter should be low. The individual should show motivation, self-confidence, and low anxiety levels for an effective learning process. TBL reserves a moment during the task cycle in which learners are prompted to develop these skills. During the task phase, students work in pairs or small groups in which they feel "protected" and may lower their affective filters. In the next stage, during planning, learners make sure the grammar forms they are about to use are correct by asking for the help of colleagues or even the teacher, then they report their findings to the big group in the last stage of the cycle – report. At the end of the cycle, students are more motivated and self-confident to carry out the report as they have already planned their speech feeling "safer" and consequently less anxious. Thus, when learners arrive at the end of the task cycle, the effective filters are lower, allowing more effective language development.

In closing, another example of the contribution of research in the area of L2 acquisition has made to the development of TBL is the ten methodological principles enunciated by Long (2015,) which will be dealt with later in this article due to their importance for the area.

Task-Based Learning

Kumaravadivelu, in his article published in 2006 and entitled "Tesol Methods: Changing tracks, Challenging trends", traced the major trends in TESOL methods and determined three main shifts in the area. The author established the first shift from communicative language teaching to task-based language teaching.

Kumaravadivelu states:

> CLT offers perhaps a classic case of a center-based pedagogy that is out of sync with local linguistic, educational, cultural and political exigencies. The result has been a gradual erosion of its popularity, paving way for a renewed interest in task-based language teaching (TBLT), which according to some, is just CLT by another name. (KUMARAVADIVELU, 2006, p. 64).

According to Kumaravadivelu (2006), TBL has blurred the boundaries between major methods for teaching English as an L2. In other words, these boundaries may be flexible once tasks are centered on the language, the learner, and the learning process (KUMARAVADIVELU, 2006). The author goes on to say that tasks may be dealt with using various methods and that tasks may not be linked to one method in particular (KUMARAVADIVELU, 2006). Moreover, for Bygate (2015), TBL is a pedagogical approach that has challenged beliefs and established practices inside the domains of the area of L2 development. Bygate (2015) goes on to say that tasks are supposed to promote a space in which learners lead the work, and teachers should take a step back. Teachers should be clear about mediating the entrance of learners into this new learning environment and providing them with the necessary support. Teachers play an essential role in negotiating the task and the interaction in the classroom as a whole. (BYGATE, 2015).

At this point, a definition of tasks is needed. However, this definition is faced with the difficulty of numerous concepts under the TBL perspective. Prabhu (1987) defines a task as

an activity that demands the learner to get to a final result from the information provided based on reasoning processes, allowing the teacher to control and regulate this process. According to Skehan (2003), there is an additional difficulty for this definition consisting of the relationship between the task and the real world. Long (2015) relates tasks to everyday life, while other researchers prefer to say that a task has a direct or indirect similarity with how the language is used (SKEHAN, 1998). Bygate (2015) defines, in pedagogical terms, tasks as classroom activities that intend to develop the learning process of a language, both orally and written, focusing mainly on meaning instead of form, aiming at creating, communicating, or deriving non-linguistic understanding based on social relations, feelings, ideas and provided information.

Jane and Dave Willis (2007) prefer to define tasks, not by questioning "is this a task?" but by answering how similar an activity is to a task. According to the authors, the following questions should be asked: a) does the activity grab the learner's interest? b) is there a primary focus on meaning? c) is there a result? d) is the success of the activity judged in terms of results? e) is the conclusion of the activity paramount? and f) is the activity related to the real world? If the answer to all these questions is yes, the activity is a task. Skehan (1996) offers a definition that seems to be more appropriate: "a task is an activity in which meaning comes in the first place; there is a relationship with the real world; the conclusion is priority, and the assessment is carried out in terms of results."

A task under the perspective of a dynamic approach can be defined as an activity that creates affordances for language competence development as well as to develop other areas such as symbolic competence (KRAMSCH, 2006) and intercultural competence (BYRAM, 1997) so that learners are equipped not only to deal with the challenge of communicating in a different language but are also prepared to play the symbolic power game (KRAMSCH, 2006) in this other language.

Methodological Principles for Task-Based Learning

As Long (2015) stated, TBL shows consistency with recent research in second language acquisition (development). The author divides teaching approaches for an L2, based on Wilkins (1976), into two groups: synthetic and analytical approaches.

Synthetic approaches encompass the presentation of an item from the language curriculum of some sort (most of the time a grammar item, but it may also be functional, lexical, or even a mixture of the three) and determined by a textbook author who is kilometers away from the students, not aware of their reality, using P.P.P as a methodology. These grammar items are practiced using repetition exercises (drills). They are classified according to their complexity, in addition to simplified dialogues and reading exercises devised to illustrate the presented language form. If students can correctly reproduce the target language forms during the drills and present adequate performance in the other stages of the methodology, the process is said to be successful. In summary, learning a language is intentional, and teaching, most of the time, is explicit, and the focus of the lessons is the L2 as

an object.

On the other hand, analytical approaches avoid using a language curriculum or a lesson focused on language codes. Instead, learners are exposed to broad and holistic examples of the target language, where the interaction in the classroom is communicative, using genuine conversations and texts. The syllabus is developed around some topics, such as current affairs, and the L2 is used to approach and/or teach using these topics. The materials consist of texts native speakers originally wrote. They are not created to make students' understanding easier. By using this approach, language learning is incidental, that is, the students learn the language while doing other activities. The focus is on the content itself and not the language forms used to elaborate it. It is expected that the learners analyze the affordances and, based on this analysis, reach conclusions regarding grammar rules and the meaning of unknown vocabulary, going through the same natural process for developing the second language just as if they were in the country where this language is considered the first one. Long (2015) refers to this approach as focusing on the meaning which differs from the synthetic approach, which focuses on form.

Lastly, Long (2015) proposes an analytical curriculum based on tasks also focusing on form and, as a result promoting the teaching of an L2 with the following characteristics:

a) adapting to the student's needs;

b) avoiding shortcuts from underlying theories and results from approaches that are purely synthetic;

c) doing a and b above using data from the most recent studies in second language acquisition, which show how adults learn (develop) a second language.

According to Baralt & Gómez (2017) and based on the words of Long (2015), teachers who decide to adopt TBL should be aware that this approach is based on theory, educational philosophy, and psycholinguistics research. However, TBL is not a fit-all situations approach as there are various interpretations in the academic world. In order to deal with suggestions based on theories and research, as well as endless ways of putting these suggestions into practice in the language classroom, which is in consonance with the needs and peculiarities demanded from the contexts in which teachers are inserted, Long (2015) proposes to consider TBL in terms of Methodological Principles (MPs). These principles take into consideration what should be taught, in other words, what should be done to maximize language learning. They are based on theory and research and thus inform methodological decisions.

Long's Methodological Principles (2015) are universally desired instructional characteristics for the acquisition of a second language and are motivated by theory and research in the area. They are either necessary to develop a second language or facilitate the process. Currently, there are ten MPs for TBL, which are briefly reported below, according to Long (2015)[2]:

MP 1 – Use task, not text, as the unit of analysis; MP 2 – Promote learning by doing; MP 3 – Elaborate input; MP 4 – Provide rich input; MP 5 – Encourage inductive chunk learning; MP 6 – Focus on form: MP 7 – Provide negative feedback; MP 8 – Respect learner syllabi and

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[2] Refer to Long (2015) for further information on the MPs.

developmental processes; MP 9 – Promote cooperative collaborative learning; MP 10 – Individualize instruction (LONG, 2015).

This paper proposes an update for MPs 3 and 4 according to complex and dynamic systems theory. Instead of providing a detailed, not simplified, and rich input, teachers using TBL are recommended to provide *affordances* from where language patterns may emerge and then be analyzed. Tasks themselves may be viewed as these affordances which create the emergence of a situation when language should be used to solve a problem or to do things.

Theoretical consistency of TBL regarding studies in L2 acquisition

TBL is solidly grounded and consistent with theory and practice. As previously mentioned, there are two main approaches to consider when elaborating a study program for language development: synthetic, mainly focusing on language forms, and analytical focusing on the content itself and not language forms.

However, theoretical motivation to use an analytic program and focus on meaning instead of form generates a few problems. One of them is that analytic approaches implicitly admit that the ability of adult learners to develop an L2 incidentally and implicitly is still strong. It is well known that the ability for implicit learning declines after youth but does not disappear (JANACSEK et al., 2012), a relevant factor when considering L2 teaching approaches focused on meaning. Many adults who have experienced intentional learning and were unsuccessful would be motivated to overcome these obstacles and attempt to develop an L2 incidentally, focusing on meaning rather than form or pre-established language items, in a quest to develop language competence in this L2.

According to Long (2015), the implementation of analytic programs represents an improvement, that is, a step forward, in many aspects regarding synthetic programs. The author mentions that focusing on meaning and communication instead of a focus on grammar provides more exciting and motivational lessons that capture students' attention for a longer period, a vital aspect of developing the target language. By focusing on meaning and communication, one does not want to say that there would be no opportunities to focus on form as well. There is space for such activities when using a teaching program with analytic characteristics. However, the only difference is that synthetic programs start by focusing on forms hoping that students, in the end, will reach a certain level of communication competence. Analytic approaches start by focusing on meaning and, in the end, give the deserved attention to the language forms which emerged during the lesson. In other words, analytic approaches are the same synthetic but upside down.

Long (2015) questions if there is a future for TBL, assuming that this approach differs fundamentally from traditional – synthetic and with a focus on forms – and the one purely analytic, which mainly focuses on meaning. Embracing TBL as a teaching approach demands comprehension of how people learn an L2 and being open to a learning process centered on the learner rather than the material and the teaching process itself. This shift in the focus for teaching English as L2, to continue the development of the learners' meaning system,

demands a deep understanding of the language development process, both practice, and theory.   In other words, the proposal is to change the question "How can the teacher teach students in the best way possible?" to "How can the teacher help students to learn?" or "How can teachers create affordances so that students can learn from?" or yet, "How can teachers help students to develop their own meaning system and not only teach them a pre-established system?". Learners have extremely powerful learning resources, and this fact should be taken into consideration when using TBL.

The answer to Long's question in the previous paragraph is positive, meaning that TBL has a promising future. Students are powerful agents of their learning, which should be considered when TBL is proposed as a learning/teaching approach. In addition, the task cycle is a Complex Dynamic System, as stated in Lopes Jr. (2015), and these types of systems evolve through adaptation. Larsen-Freeman (2018) proposes that we should teach students not only to learn a language but also to shape their language resources according to constantly changing situations. According to the author, we adapt our mother tongue to the situation in this way whenever necessary. However, this adaptation process is not so easy to carry out using a second language. That is why we need to find ways of providing the affordances for these situations to emerge in the classroom so that learners can adapt to them. TBL has its breath renewed by a complex perspective.

 Using TBL in the classroom also demands a high proficiency level from teachers once the task cycle is an unpredictable system under development, in addition to being open and sensitive to external influence (LOPES JR., 2015). As a result of these three, to mention just a few, characteristics of the task cycle as a complex system, it is recommended to the non-native teacher of English as L2 to have a high proficiency level so that he/she is not caught by surprise when using this approach. This condition has scared away teachers from the most purist form of TBL. The fact that learners are free to choose any language resources during the task cycle could be intimidating to teachers who have always been used to determining what happens in the classroom. In other words, not having control of what is taught or learned during the class might represent more than a challenge but an obstacle.

In answering his question about the future of TBL, Long (2015) states that we should build the road as we travel, meaning that we should continue the research in the TBL area as an analytic approach to develop English as L2 and attempt to solve emerging problems along the way, using new theoretical foundations to reach our goal.

Conditions for learning an L2 and Willis' model for TBL

There are at least three methodological structures for TBL: Ellis (2003b), Nunan (2004), and Willis (1996; 2012). There seem to be more similarities than differences among these models, mainly in how these structures encourage teachers to reflect upon the different methodological options during the task cycle to maximize learners' performance and contribute to students' language development. This article chooses Willis' model (1996; 2012) as a recommendation for teachers who want to implement TBL in the language classroom.

According to Willis (1996; 2012), four conditions should be met when learning an L2:

a) exposure to the target language;

b) use the language to do things;

c) motivation to use the language;

d) focus on forms.

This article proposes a fifth condition: use emerging affordances for language development. TBL provides opportunities for free and meaningful use of the target language, creating affordances for students to actively engage in a communicative task where the main focus is to reach the goals previously established. This approach meets all the conditions for language development, attempting to develop students' interlanguage by providing tasks and affordances to use the language to do things.

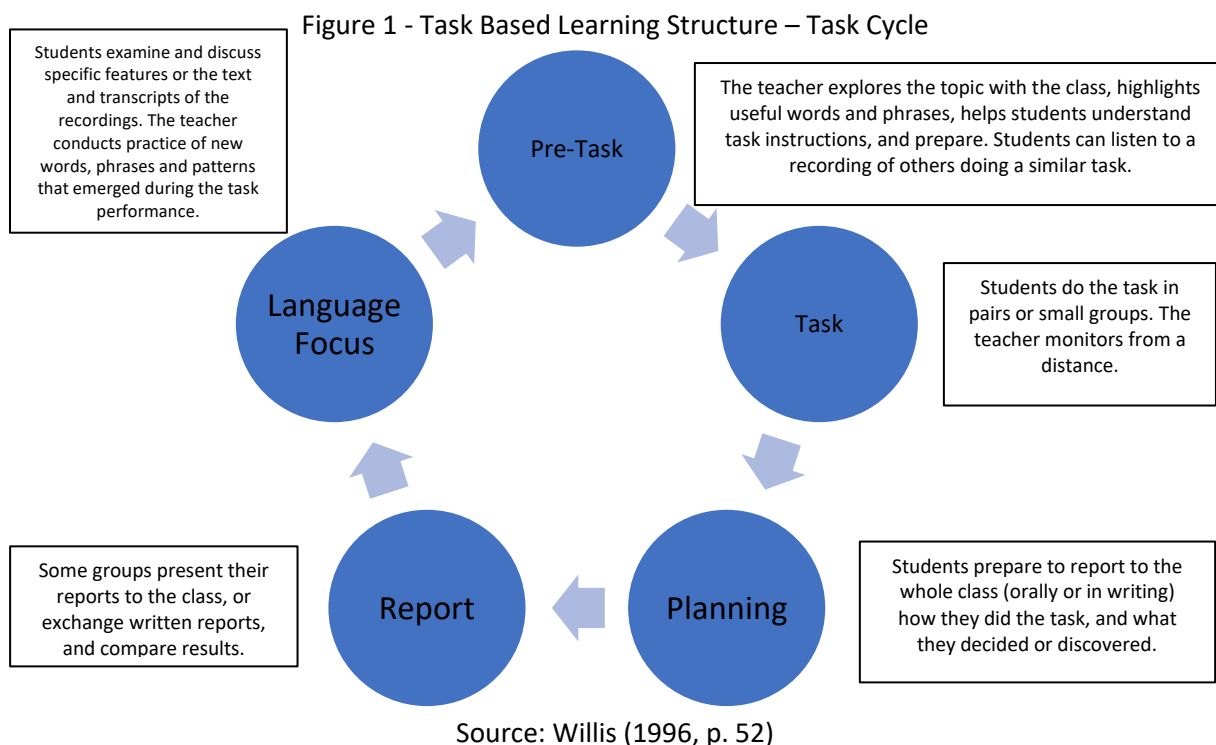TBL, using Willis' model (1996), is characterized by three phases:

a) pre-task;

b) task cycle (task/planning /report);

c) language focus (analysis and practice).

During the pre-task, students are introduced to the topic discussed in the lesson or to the task. In this stage, the role of the teacher is to present the task and give students clear instructions on what they will have to do during this stage. The teacher should help learners to recall some language items which might be helpful in the task. The pre-task can also include a recording of other people carrying out the same task. This activity provides students with a clear example of what is expected from them in the next phase. Students may make notes and spend time getting prepared for the next phase: the task cycle. After being exposed to the language and the proposed activity, students move on to the core phase of the approach: the task cycle. This phase comprises the task, planning, and report. During the first moment, learners carry out the task in pairs or small groups using all their language resources. The teacher monitors and offers motivation for the performance without making corrections once the aim is fluency.

Once the task is completed, students move on to the next stage: planning the report. At this moment, they are supposed to prepare a short report, written or oral, telling the rest of the class about their findings during the task. Learners practice what they are about to report within their groups while the teacher is available for language advice regarding any doubts they might have. Differently, from the task, the planning stage aims at accuracy, and as a result, the role of the teacher is to provide help with language items and to make corrections. After planning their speech, students move on to the last phase of the cycle: the report. During this stage, learners tell the rest of the class about the conversation they had during the task and report what they learned about each other. This report is preferably oral, but it can also be written, or the written part may be assigned as homework. The teacher chooses the order in which the reports are presented, may give feedback on content, and ask further questions. At this stage, the teacher may play a recording of other people doing the same task so that students can compare their performance with other learners and even with native speakers carrying out the same task.

At the end of the cycle, there is a phase focusing on language. Firstly, teachers and students analyze relevant parts of the recordings used during the pre-task and report and analyze the language that emerged during the report phase. Secondly, the teacher helps students to practice difficult areas based on their needs and what emerged during the task cycle. Students then perform activities to strengthen self-confidence and make notes about useful language items for their language development.

Figure 1 summarizes the methodological structure to implement TBL based on Willis' model (1996; 2012).

Figure 1 - Task Based Learning Structure – Task Cycle

Students examine and discuss specific features or the text and transcripts of the recordings. The teacher conducts practice of new words, phrases and patterns that emerged during the task performance.

The teacher explores the topic with the class, highlights useful words and phrases, helps students understand task instructions, and prepare. Students can listen to a recording of others doing a similar task.

Students do the task in pairs or small groups. The teacher monitors from a distance.

Students prepare to report to the whole class (orally or in writing) how they did the task, and what they decided or discovered.

Some groups present their reports to the class, or exchange written reports, and compare results.

Source: Willis (1996, p. 52)

Recent studies on TBL in Brazil

Lopes Jr. (2015) examined the design and theory behind TBL, specifically the task phase, from the complexity theory perspective. By establishing points of contact between TBL and complexity theory, this study aimed to discuss whether or not the task cycle can be characterized as a complex system using the ten characteristics proposed by Larsen-Freeman (1997). Results revealed that the task cycle is dynamic, complex, nonlinear, sensitive to initial conditions, unpredictable, chaotic, sensitive to feedback, open, adaptive, and self-organizing, and therefore can be characterized as a complex system. Lopes Jr. et al. (2017) analyzed the task cycle from the perspective of Ecological Linguistics. They also analyzed the affordances which influenced the paths taken by the students when developing English as an L2. The study identified mutualism, commensalism, competition, and parasitism as examples of ecological interactions. The most frequent was mutualism, when students benefit equally from the interaction.

Farias et al. (2020) examined some challenges and possibilities for designing and

implementing a task cycle for beginning-level English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners in an elementary school classroom in the south of Brazil. Results revealed that deciding on target and pedagogical tasks and supporting tasks for beginners were two primary challenges that pointed to the essential roles of needs analysis and a clear instructional framework in using tasks. Farias et al. (2021) were among the first to discuss the possibilities for promoting critical language development through tasks. The authors used two doctoral studies in which teacher-researchers implemented critical task cycles to promote critical language development by fostering elementary and high school students' reflections on gender issues. Through this innovative study, the authors demonstrated the feasibility of teaching critically through tasks, the positive role of a critical needs analysis in designing and implementing critical tasks, and the use of critical dialogue for fostering knowledge co-construction and the development of final projects to challenge common-sense discourses.

Lopes Jr. et al. (2021) took a step forward. They analyzed the process of teaching/learning English as an L2, emphasizing oral interaction in an environment mediated by a synchronous communication tool (Zoom) using TBL under the Complexity theory perspective. In this new learning environment, the authors demonstrated that the task cycle is sensitive to initial conditions, unpredictable, open, dynamic, adaptive, complex, chaotic, nonlinear, self-organizing, and sensitive to feedback. They also attempted to contribute to developing a new area of investigation in CALL due to the need to understand better the pedagogical implications of the interactions in this unique learning context in a complex and non-reductionist manner using a robust theory as the Complexity Theory. Lopes Jr. et al. (2022) discussed learning English as a second language based on blended tasks in a flipped online classroom. Using a netnographic methodology, the authors attempted to verify the possible contributions and limitations of blended tasks for learning English in a Flipped Online Classroom. Observations and analysis of the results indicated a more active engagement of the students, and their findings showed that the Flipped Online Classroom promotes affordances for learning English.

Moving forward

TBL started to take form as an approach to teaching English as an L2 with Prabhu and his publication in 1987. Since then, various scholars in the area have carried out various studies and published articles and books about the approach. Mike Long (1985; 2015), Jane Willis (1996; 2012), Skehan (1998), Rod Ellis (2003a, b), David Nunan (2004), Kumaravadivelu (2006), and Dave Willis (2007) are among the most renowned names. However, all the works previously cited in this article considered the face-to-face classroom. The arrival of the computers was followed by a technological revolution that has also reached the area of learning/teaching an L2 and, most recently, TBL, creating a new area of research in CALL named Technology-mediated Task-Based Learning and Teaching (GONZÁLES-LLORET & ORTEGA, 2014).

When we communicate, we choose what we want to express, but nowadays, we can

also choose which technology to use to express our ideas. We can use social networks such as Facebook and Twitter or synchronous communication software like Skype, Facetime, Google Meet, and Zoom. The Covid-19 pandemic has catapulted synchronous communication tools and introduced several new challenges to teachers and researchers. According to Ziegler (2016), although many researchers in the field of language teaching have attempted to integrate technology with the L2 classroom, many of them have concluded that the benefits brought by technology in the areas of linguistic and sociocultural development are limited since the application of technology is not based on approaches supported by empirical research.

A number of recent studies have shown synergy between technology and tasks (LOPES Jr. et al.,2021; LOPES Jr. et al., 2022). Results from these studies support the idea of tasks enhancing affordances for language development in a technology-mediated learning environment. Despite promising results, further work is required to establish the feasibility of Technology-mediated Task-Based Learning grounded on a solid theoretical framework.

Another potentially fruitful avenue for future research is to provide insight into the affordances provided by Technology-mediated Task-based to enhance intercultural and symbolic awareness. Research questions that could be asked include: Can technology-mediated TBL help to build trust and confidence among students when learning English as L2? Are students ready to participate in intercultural exchanges using English as an L2? Is communicative competence enough, as proposed by Canale & Swain (1980)? Or should students also be able to use semiotic practices to make and convey meaning and position themselves in the symbolic power game established by and through language (KRAMSCH, 2006)? Such questions are somehow revived in a technology-mediated learning environment.

More recent attention has focused on promoting critical language development through critical task cycles, emphasizing the affordances and challenges of promoting social transformation (FARIAS, et al., 2021). Further work is needed to determine whether Critical Language Teaching is possible in the various technology-mediated learning environments which emerged during social distancing caused by the Covid-19 pandemic.

Final words

The current article offered insights into past, present, and future trends of Task-based learning. The paper set out by looking back on the emergence of TBL in second language teaching, exploring its pioneers' works. It revisited the ever-present past of this solid approach exploring publications that are and will always be references to any scholar who intends to investigate TBL. It then provided a brief review of Task-based learning, its methodological principles, theoretical consistency, and conditions for learning English as an L2. It also examined recent Brazilian studies, which found synergy between tasks, technology, and critical language development. This paper pointed toward future areas of research which should be explored in more depth, such as technology-mediated TBL and critical language teaching, and promising research fields such as enhancing intercultural and symbolic

awareness through TBL.

TBL empowers learners by giving them the opportunity to use English to communicate with other people, either face-to-face or in technology-mediated environments. They can choose what language is more relevant, ignoring what they are not interested in. TBL affords opportunities for students to become aware of what is happening in the world in various areas of interest: culture, science, sports, and politics. Technology-mediated TBL provides students with opportunities to listen to other people speaking English and learn by being exposed to different accents. Learning English through critical tasks empowers students and affords knowledge to challenge common-sense discourses (FARIAS, et al., 2021). Students are empowered through TBL to become more curious, motivated, and autonomous in their language development process.

Based on the account given, the contribution of this study is to demonstrate that TBL is a strong approach to teaching English (ELLIS, 2003a) and represents a paradigm shift in mainstream views about language teaching and learning. In addition, the task cycle can be characterized as an adaptive complex system (LOPES Jr., 2015; LOPES Jr., et al., 2021). As such, it is ready to investigate further technology-mediated learning environments, critical language development, and intercultural and symbolic awareness. Due to its adaptive nature, TBL can be used with technologies with educational potential which may not be available to the language classroom yet but will be soon, such as augmented reality and the metaverse.

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