Technology Matters

A Task-Based Approach to On-Demand Lessons: Connecting Theory to Practice

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This paper outlines how instructors can incorporate Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) methodology into on-demand language learning formats to enhance communicative competence. While on-demand learning offers flexibility and accessibility, instructors may struggle to integrate the format with methodologies like TBLT. By incorporating principles such as task authenticity, meaningful interaction, and reaching a defined outcome, instructors can transform on-demand lessons into communicative learning experiences. This paper discusses how to adapt TBLT principles to on-demand lessons, emphasizing the design of tasks that promote real-world communication, negotiation of meaning, and collaboration among learners. Through the application of TBLT methodology, on-demand language learning platforms can become more engaging, interactive, and effective in promoting communicative competence.

この論文は、タスク中心の言語教育（TBLT）メソッドをオンデマンド形式の語学学習に取り入れ、コミュニケーション能力を向上させる方法を概説しています。オンデマンド学習は柔軟性とアクセスのしやすさを提供しますが、TBLTのようなメソッドとの統合に苦労することがあります。タスクの真実性、意味のある相互作用、明確な成果の達成といった原則を取り入れることで、オンデマンド授業をコミュニケーション中心の学習体験に変えることが可能です。この論文では、TBLTの原則をどのようにオンデマンド授業に適応させるかを議論し、現実世界でのコミュニケーション、意味の交渉、学習者間の協力を促進するタスクの設計に焦点を当てています。TBLTメソッドを適用することで、オンデマンドの語学学習プラットフォームは、より魅力的でインタラクティブかつ効果的にコミュニケーション能力の向上に貢献できるようになります。

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (MEXT) created school guidelines to prevent

the spread of infection and guarantee the safety and well-being of students and staff while maintaining the continuity of education (MEXT, 2020). One major guideline was the implementation of online learning options in schools. These options include real-time online lessons and "on-demand" lessons, allowing students to access materials and complete assignments asynchronously.

Asynchronous lessons are rather popular with higher education Japanese students (Iwasaki & Konda, 2024). Such students prefer the on-demand format for a number of reasons: learners can study at a convenient time, complete assignments at their own pace and spend more time with the lesson (Iwasaki & Konda, 2024). However, lesson plans that are successful in person do not always work in an online context (Baralt & Morcillo Gómez, 2017). Instructors may find it necessary to recontextualize their lesson plans. Particularly, on-demand lessons may prove difficult for language instructors who aim to utilize communicative methodologies such as Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT).

Review of TBLT

The foundation of TBLT is "tasks". These are communicative activities that have been defined in a variety of ways over the years, but Ellis et al. (2019: 10) offer a concise definition according to a few criteria:

- The primary focus is on meaning.
- There is some kind of gap.
- Learners rely mainly on their own linguistic and non-linguistic resources.
- There is a clearly defined communicative outcome.

This means that learners rely on their language rather than focusing on grammar to engage in meaningful communication. There must be a goal and some degree of sharing information. Overall, there is a focus on authentic meaning and communication in tasks which may be challenging to accomplish in a format like on-demand lessons which prioritize individual learning and flexibility over real-time interaction. Without the immediacy of feedback or peer interaction, learners may struggle to engage with one another authentically. As a result, language instructors must find innovative ways to adapt communicative language teaching principles to the on-demand learning environment to ensure

that learners have ample opportunities for meaningful interaction despite such limitations. The following demonstrates how instructors can integrate core TBLT principles and strategies in online asynchronous lessons to offer a structured approach to designing on-demand TBLT lessons.

Task Design for On-Demand Classes

The standard framework of a TBLT lesson consists of three phases: pre-task, task, and post-task (Ellis et al., 2019). When planning a task sequence, the instructor should first select the lesson's topic (e.g., sports, drug abuse, global warming) and determine a suitable task (Willis & Willis, 2007). While the range of potential topics is vast, tasks must adhere to the previously established criteria.

An important aspect of creating tasks is deciding on the task's outcome or goal. For example, if the topic is traveling, an instructor may task learners with planning a trip in groups. A suitable outcome for this task may be designing a trip itinerary. In this situation, learners practice negotiating a knowledge gap utilizing their own language and producing an outcome. This satisfies the required criteria.

After deciding on the task, instructors should determine the platform through which learners will submit their output. The first thing to consider is the specific language skill focus: writing, reading, listening, or speaking. For instance, if the task involves speaking and listening skills, learners might give an opinion on a topic through a video. An instructor may choose from platforms like Loom or YouTube for video submission. For tasks requiring only audio, applications like VoiceThread or Vocaroo may be more appropriate. Tasks focusing on written output might involve submitting essays or reports through platforms such as Google Docs, Google Classrooms, or Microsoft Word Online.

After deciding the target skill and the platform, instructors must consider whether learners will interact with external materials or not. Willis and Willis (2007) suggest utilizing real websites or other authentic online material for tasks as well. By utilizing material from outside the class, such as news websites, blogs, social media, or other similar online material, learners engage with authentic language written for the purpose of communication rather than classroom

instruction. As for listening tasks, rather than blogs or articles, a task might require learners to engage with authentic online materials such as YouTube videos or audio recordings. However, it is important that materials maintain reasonable authenticity and do not oversimplify language for learners (Gilmore, 2007; Field, 2008). Using authentic listening materials exposes learners to aspects of language that are vital for developing listening skills, such as the natural flow of speech and a variety of accents (Gilmore, 2007), as well as natural speech patterns and vocabulary used in everyday contexts (Field, 2008; Treve, 2023). However, because the instructor is not present with the learners, they must be sure that the materials are appropriate for learners in regards to their language proficiency, cultural awareness, and maturity (Treve, 2023).

Tasks can integrate external material in a variety of ways. For example, a task might require searching a site for particular information (information gap), collecting it, and consulting with peers through a platform (e.g., Google Classrooms or a blog) to reach an outcome such as making a group decision, summarizing the material, forming opinions on the material, sharing different sets of information, or even creating comprehension questions for other learners (Willis & Willis, 2007). For low-proficiency learners, instructors may be more comfortable with input-based tasks, which focus on more passive listening or reading skills and are successful with even complete beginners (Shintani, 2016). In these tasks, learners perform an action according to what they have comprehended without relying on productive language skills like reading and speaking (Shintani, 2016). In the case of an on-demand lesson, an input-based task may require learners to watch an instructional video or read some instructions and then follow through with the directions. For instance, if the material instructs learners to take a picture of a particular object, they would accomplish this by taking the picture according to the instructions and uploading it on a platform like Google Classrooms. In an on-demand format, how the learners will accomplish tasks based on external materials depends on the platform and the task type.

When considering the platform and materials for a task, the instructor must also consider the level of privacy. This depends on the desired outcomes

and the degree of interaction between learners. For example, a private task may involve recording a personal reflection using an app like Loom, which provides a link to learners that they may share selectively. A more interactive task might require learners to post on Google Classroom for all the class to see, allowing peer feedback or responses. The more public the platform, the more caution instructors should take in guaranteeing the safety of learners. Platforms such as YouTube, Facebook, and X may be more accessible or convenient for learners, but they also pose potential risks, such as the exposure of personal data (Marín et al., 2023).

Alternatively, instructors may choose not to have learners engage with one another or with online material. Perhaps the instructor feels learners are not ready to engage with news articles and YouTube videos. In this case, the instructor might provide the materials or not use materials at all. Examples of the latter include asking learners for their opinion on a matter, having students describe something, or sharing some kind of information that they already possess, such as facts about their hometowns. These all involve information gaps that require a meaningful exchange of language and may serve as tasks (Ellis et al., 2019). For an example of a task involving teacher-provided materials, Willis and Willis (2007) suggest sending a chain of emails with one email missing. Learners read the emails and write their own that could function as the missing email in the chain. However, instructors risk compromising the materials' authenticity when utilizing teacher-prepared material. For this example, an instructor may use authentic emails exchanged with colleagues after receiving permission, as it guarantees that the language is not edited for learners. In this way, learners respond meaningfully to authentic material without the need to engage with other learners or external materials.

Next, the instructor must consider the pre-task, which primes learners for the topic in general, appropriate vocabulary, and the content of the main task, as well as modeling how to accomplish the task (Willis & Willis, 2007). For an online environment, Baralt and Morcillo Gómez (2017) suggest starting a pre-task phase by sending learners a video as a model for the task as well as clearly detailed written instructions. Besides outlining the task, the instructor should

send technical instructions regarding how to use online tools necessary for the task (Baralt & Morcillo Morcillo Gómez, 2017). This guarantees that learners will understand how to accomplish the task given to them.

The instructor must also plan the post-task phase carefully. In this stage, learners receive direct feedback on the language forms they used during the task (Ellis et al., 2019). In an on-demand learning environment, the teacher may deliver written or video feedback through the platform selected for the lesson. To reinforce learning, instructors may assign follow-up activities such as homework that focuses on the specific language structures practiced in the task (Nunan, 2004). This step helps solidify learners' understanding and encourages them to apply what they have learned.

Some examples of on-demand TBLT lesson planning come from a fully on-demand Spanish class (Lee, 2016). In this class, the instructor created a class wiki with a class calendar, class resources, and instructions on using the various platforms used throughout the term. Additionally, the instructor created videos demonstrating how to use the wiki and the platforms for the pre-task phase. For the pre-task phase, learners had access to task instructions and the instructor sent videos or recordings for front-loading vocabulary and modeling tasks. The platforms used included Voicethread and Audioboom for speaking tasks and Blogger for writing tasks. Through these platforms, learners wrote blog entries sharing their opinions on Cuba, made audio recordings on topics such as their dream job and favorite celebrations, and responded to other learners' posts with feedback or with their own ideas. Often, the outcomes involved exchanging opinions between learners. In the post-task phase, the instructor gave prompt feedback related to error correction as well as oral and writing skills. Due to the asynchronous nature of the class, the instructor also sent direct feedback to students by email. Thus, despite not being in "real-time", the instructor successfully designed an on-demand TBLT class.

Conclusion

In today's fast-paced world, instructors must continuously evolve their teaching approaches to keep pace with technological advancements and shifts

in educational developments. As new policies and formats emerge, it becomes crucial for instructors to uphold effective teaching methodologies. Even when a learning environment transitions to a format such as on-demand lessons, the core principles of methodologies like TBLT still remain relevant. Dismissing methods solely because of a shift in environment is a mistake. Instructors may integrate TBLT with an on-demand format by ensuring that pre-tasks and post-tasks bookend the primary task and providing clear instructions, timely feedback, and well-structured, safe online platforms and materials for interaction with learners. Through the creative use of materials, instructors can not only adapt to asynchronous learning but also equip students with vital skills for an increasingly digital world. As the future of education continues to evolve, those who embrace these innovations will position themselves—and their learners—for academic and professional success.

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