

Task-Based Language Teaching and Second Language Acquisition: Ecological Perspectives in TESOL

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Abstract

Second Language Acquisition (SLA) research has long sought to explain how learners acquire additional languages and how pedagogy can accelerate this process. Within applied linguistics and TESOL, Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) has emerged as a prominent approach, emphasizing authentic communicative tasks rather than decontextualized grammar drills. This paper explores the intersection of SLA theory and TESOL practice through the lens of TBLT, situating it within broader ecological perspectives that highlight learner identity, sociocultural context, and technological mediation. Drawing on seminal SLA theories (Krashen's Input Hypothesis, Long's Interaction Hypothesis, Swain's Output Hypothesis) and contemporary empirical studies, the paper reviews how TBLT fosters communicative competence, intercultural awareness, and learner autonomy. Methodologically, the study synthesizes qualitative and quantitative research on classroom discourse, learner corpora, and technology-enhanced environments. The discussion emphasizes three strands: (1) the theoretical foundations of SLA and their pedagogical implications, (2) empirical evidence for TBLT effectiveness in diverse

TESOL contexts, and (3) emerging challenges and opportunities, including AI-driven feedback and online learning. Ultimately, the paper argues that TBLT represents not only a pedagogical innovation but also an ecological paradigm that situates language learning within dynamic social, cultural, and technological ecosystems. By integrating SLA theory, corpus-based insights, and pragmatic analysis, TESOL practitioners can design curricula that are both theoretically grounded and responsive to global linguistic realities.

Introduction

Language learning has always been central to human interaction, but in the twenty-first century, globalization, migration, and digital communication have intensified the demand for effective second language pedagogy. English, as the dominant lingua franca, has become the focus of TESOL programs worldwide, raising questions about how learners acquire communicative competence and how teachers can facilitate this process. Applied linguistics provides the theoretical foundation, while TESOL operationalizes these insights in classrooms. Second Language Acquisition (SLA) research has produced multiple theories explaining how learners process input, negotiate meaning, and produce output. Krashen's Input Hypothesis emphasizes comprehensible input, Long's Interaction Hypothesis highlights negotiation of meaning, and Swain's Output Hypothesis stresses the importance of production. These theories collectively inform pedagogical approaches, but their classroom application requires adaptation to diverse learner contexts.

Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) emerged as a response to the limitations of traditional grammar-translation and audio-lingual methods. By focusing on authentic tasks—such as problem-solving, role-plays, or project work—TBLT aligns pedagogy with

communicative needs. Learners engage in meaningful interaction, negotiate meaning, and produce language in context, thereby operationalizing SLA principles.

This paper situates TBLT within ecological perspectives that view language learning as embedded in social, cultural, and technological ecosystems. It argues that TBLT not only reflects SLA theory but also responds to contemporary challenges: intercultural communication, learner identity, and digital mediation. The paper proceeds with a literature review of SLA and TBLT, outlines methodological approaches, discusses empirical findings, and concludes with implications for TESOL practice.

Literature Review

SLA Theories

- Krashen's Input Hypothesis: Comprehensible input is necessary for acquisition.
- Long's Interaction Hypothesis: Negotiation of meaning enhances comprehension and acquisition.
- Swain's Output Hypothesis: Production fosters syntactic processing and awareness.
- Vygotskian Sociocultural Theory: Learning occurs through social interaction and scaffolding.
- Complex Dynamic Systems Theory: SLA is nonlinear, adaptive, and context-dependent.

Task-Based Language Teaching

- Emerged in the 1980s and 1990s as part of Communicative Language Teaching.
- Focuses on tasks that require learners to use language for real purposes.
- Ellis (2003) defines tasks as activities where meaning is primary, learners use their own resources, and outcomes are non-linguistic.

- TBLT operationalizes SLA theories: input through tasks, interaction via negotiation, output through production.

Empirical Studies

- Studies show TBLT improves fluency, accuracy, and complexity.
- Research in Asian TESOL contexts demonstrates effectiveness in large classrooms.
- Technology-mediated tasks (e.g., online role-plays, simulations) enhance engagement.
- Corpus-based studies reveal pragmatic development in task-based settings.

Ecological Perspectives

- Language learning is embedded in sociocultural ecosystems.
- Learner identity, motivation, and intercultural competence shape outcomes.
- Technology creates new ecologies: online platforms, AI feedback, digital corpora.
- Ecological SLA emphasizes adaptation, emergence, and interconnectedness.

Methodology / Review Method

This paper employs a qualitative review method, synthesizing theoretical and empirical studies on SLA and TBLT. Sources include peer-reviewed articles, monographs, and TESOL case studies. The review focuses on three dimensions: theoretical foundations, empirical evidence, and ecological perspectives. Data include classroom discourse analyses, learner corpora, and technology-mediated studies. The synthesis identifies convergences and divergences across studies, highlighting implications for TESOL practice. Limitations include focus on English TESOL contexts, excluding other languages. The rationale is to provide a comprehensive, theoretically grounded, and pedagogically relevant synthesis.

Discussion

Theoretical Foundations

TBLT operationalizes SLA theories: tasks provide input, foster interaction, and require output. Sociocultural theory emphasizes scaffolding, while dynamic systems theory highlights adaptation. Together, they frame TBLT as an ecological pedagogy.

Empirical Evidence

Studies show TBLT enhances fluency, accuracy, and complexity. Learners negotiate meaning, produce output, and develop pragmatic competence. Corpus-based analyses reveal development of speech acts, politeness strategies, and discourse markers. Technology-mediated tasks increase engagement and provide authentic contexts.

Ecological Perspectives

TBLT situates learning within ecosystems: classrooms, communities, digital platforms. Learner identity and motivation shape outcomes. Intercultural competence emerges through tasks requiring negotiation across cultures. Technology creates new ecologies: online collaboration, AI feedback, digital corpora.

Challenges and Opportunities

Challenges include large classes, assessment, and teacher training. Opportunities include AI-driven feedback, online platforms, and corpus-based pedagogy. TBLT can integrate computational tools to track learner development and provide personalized feedback.

Pedagogical Implications

TESOL practitioners should design tasks that are authentic, intercultural, and technologically mediated. Assessment should focus on communicative competence, not isolated

grammar. Teacher training should emphasize SLA theory, task design, and ecological perspectives.

Conclusion

Task-Based Language Teaching represents a synthesis of SLA theory and TESOL practice, situating language learning within ecological contexts. By operationalizing input, interaction, and output, TBLT fosters communicative competence, pragmatic awareness, and learner autonomy. Empirical evidence demonstrates its effectiveness across diverse contexts, while ecological perspectives highlight the role of identity, culture, and technology. Challenges remain in assessment and teacher training, but opportunities abound in AI-driven feedback and corpus-based pedagogy. Ultimately, TBLT exemplifies how applied linguistics can inform TESOL practice, bridging theory and pedagogy to meet the demands of global language learning. Future research should pursue comparative studies, integrate computational tools, and explore ecological dimensions of SLA. For TESOL practitioners, TBLT offers a paradigm that is both theoretically grounded and pedagogically responsive, ensuring that language education remains relevant in a rapidly changing world.

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