

**BOOK REVIEW: East. M. (2021). *Foundational Principles of Task-based Language Teaching, 1<sup>st</sup> Edition*. New York: Routledge, 198 pp., ISBN: 978-0-367-47906-0.**

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Task-based language teaching (TBLT) is widely recognized as a powerful pedagogical approach. It has gained considerable interest among second/foreign language (L2) researchers and educators over the years. TBLT has also been positioned as an established language teaching approach by a large body of literature—both theoretical and empirical—. Nevertheless, recent research (e.g. Andon, 2018; Bygate, 2020; Spada, 2021) indicates that despite reaching a level of orthodoxy in L2 literature, TBLT has not achieved the status of a mainstream pedagogy in naturalistic L2 settings, which is often linked to the failure in the translation of theory into practice in the real world of language teachers. In this vein, East's *Foundational Principles of Task-based Language Teaching* should be a welcome addition to the library of those who have an interest; yet, lack a foundational understanding of what exactly TBLT is and how it is implemented in the context of real classrooms.

The book is organized into a preface, three main parts with a total of nine chapters, and a postface. Each chapter begins with an introduction, includes reflection points where the readers are asked content-related questions for reflection, and ends with a conclusion, suggested readings, and references. Part 1 lays the foundation by providing the theoretical perspectives that inform TBLT. Part 2 presents an overview of how TBLT is put into practice in classrooms with a particular focus on the stages of a task cycle, language learner, and focus on form. The last part of the book centers on the use of tasks for assessment and the evaluation of TBLT along with discussions on the challenges of implementing TBLT in everyday classrooms.

Part 1 consists of three chapters, and East focuses these chapters on providing theoretical backgrounds and key concepts underpinning TBLT. Starting with a discussion of how languages are learned and how they should be taught, Chapter 1 lays an initial foundation of how TBLT has emerged in the history of L2 pedagogy delineating three main theoretical approaches (i.e. behaviorism, innatism and interactionism) and L2 teaching methods (i.e. grammar-translation, audiolingualism, natural approach, and communicative

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language teaching). In Chapter 2, East continues to build the foundation laid in the previous section. He explores some key issues (i.e. the input, output, and interaction hypotheses, interactionism from a sociocultural perspective, skill acquisition theory, and usage-based theories) and relates them to TBLT through theoretical discussions and the provision of an illustrative example. The third chapter focuses on defining the construct of *task*, identifying essential characteristics of tasks, and introducing a range of task types. The first part of the book provides a well-rounded overview of theoretical rationales underlying TBLT and helps the reader gain an in-depth understanding of how TBLT has developed over the years.

The second part of the book is divided into three chapters devoted to the exploration of how TBLT is implemented. Chapter 4 starts with the presentation of some contexts across the globe (e.g. South India, Belgium, Hong Kong, China, New Zealand) where TBLT ideas are put into practice. East continues with the exploration of different syllabus types (i.e. synthetic, analytic and hybrid) since these frameworks play a decisive role in the extent to which TBLT can be utilized. Nevertheless, later in the chapter, the author highlights the centrality of teachers in the successful implementation of TBLT regardless of the requirements of different kinds of syllabi. Forwarding the discussions in the third chapter, East raises some fundamental issues revolving around the evaluation, sequencing, and scaffolding of tasks in Chapter 5. More specifically, the author provides the reader with some practical tips on how to (a) distinguish between an activity/exercise and a task, (b) sequence tasks according to learners' levels, and (c) assist learners to get the most out of a task. East concludes the chapter with an example to concretely illustrate how task sequencing and scaffolding can be applied in practice. Chapter 6 starts with a brief discussion about the central position tasks occupy in TBLT and comes to the issue of how to attend to grammar in task-based language classrooms. With a particular focus on during- and post-task phases, East holds useful discussions on the timing, place, and extent of grammar teaching alongside the roles of learners and teachers during form-focused instruction in TBLT. Part 2 is very valuable from a practical viewpoint as it allows readers to judge how taking up different positions on a continuum between two poles, namely, teacher-led TBLT and learner-centered TBLT, will influence the way they practice TBLT ideas.

Part 3 centers on the evaluation of TBLT and is made up of three chapters. It explores the use of tasks for assessing students' learning and the ways to evaluate the efficiency of TBLT as a learner-centered pedagogy. Chapter 7 is focused on the use of tasks as formative and summative assessment tools. East presents a brief overview of how task-based language assessment (TBLA) emerged by drawing parallel lines with the developments that took place in the history of language teaching methodology. Further, the author delineates what task-based language assessment looks like in classrooms expounding on the use of outcome evidence as an evaluative technique. The chapter gains more depth and clarity through discussions in relation to the provision of more detailed evidence of task performances, enhancement of reliability and validity of assessments, employment of different sources to broaden evidence concerning learning gains, and the relationship between the requirements of high-stakes tests, and the adoption of TBLT. In Chapter 8, East explains two main types of evaluation to gauge whether TBLT is working in actual practice. They are (a) the micro-evaluation of TBLT based on an individual teacher's reflections for, in or on action and (b) the macro-evaluation of TBLT at a broader context (i.e. institutional, regional, and national levels) based on the experiences of a wider range of students and teachers. Finally, in Chapter 9, East lists a range of arguments for

and against TBLT, presents an overview of variables influencing teachers' implementation of TBLT, and suggests a series of recommendations to support teachers in their TBLT endeavors.

As a teacher educator, I found this book a handy resource for educational stakeholders interested in a quick overview of the principles and practice of TBLT. The greatest strength of this work lies in the fact that it is informed by the author's own experiences in the field as an experienced teacher, researcher, and teacher educator. Reflection questions for readers can be stated as another true strength of the book since journeys into inner worlds allow for the personalization of the content. Nevertheless, this work has some shortcomings. The book would have been stronger if Part 2 included some concrete examples of best practices across the globe for those looking for models of how to implement TBLT ideas. This could have allowed the reader to vividly apprehend how foundational principles of TBLT are successfully put into action in different contexts. Moreover, lack of a glossary and a list of abbreviations are also noticeable.

Overall, this book can give the reader a jump start due to its succinct presentation of the theoretical and practical considerations regarding TBLT. Combining theoretical discussions with personal reflections and practical guidelines, this book can well-serve the interests of undergraduates, postgraduates, teachers, teacher educators, and researchers undertaking study either in L2 teaching or applied linguistics.

### **About the Author**

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