

# The Application of TBLT to English Reading Teaching in Senior High School

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## Abstract

Reading is one of the most important ways of language learning, which occupies an important position in language teaching in senior high school. Under the influence of the new curriculum reform, it has gradually become the trend of English teaching in senior high schools to emphasize the student-oriented teaching and learn by doing teaching. Task-based Language Teaching is an approach based on tasks as the core unit of language teaching, which enables students to use the target language to communicate in activities, and promotes the learning and mastery of language in the process of performing tasks, thereby improving language application ability. The application of TBLT to reading teaching can effectively stimulate students' interest in learning and improve students' reading ability. This paper takes Book One Unit5 into the Wild in FLTRP as an example to illustrate the application of TBLT in English reading teaching.

**Keywords:** task-based language teaching, reading teaching, senior high school

## 1. Introduction

Reading occupies an important position in English teaching and plays an important role in developing students' comprehensive language ability. However, most of the current high school English reading teaching adopts traditional teaching methods, resulting in students' low interest in English reading and lack of reading ability. The new English curriculum standards point out that the presentation and learning of various language knowledge should be based on the perspective of language use, in order to improve students' ability to "do things in English". (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2011) The task-based

teaching method is an English teaching method that integrates the learning of language knowledge, the mastery of language skills and the development of language ability, with specific tasks as the center and carrier, students as the main body, and task completion as the driving force. Therefore, teachers can use the task-based teaching method in reading teaching, by creating various contexts close to real life, and adopting step-by-step language practice activities to mobilize students' initiative, stimulate learning interest, and improve reading ability. Cultivate students' language ability.

## 2. Theoretical Research on Task-Based Language Teaching

## 2.1 Definition of Task

There are different views on the definition of tasks. Prabhu (1987) saw the task as learners need to provide results from given information and teachers can control and regulate this process. Breen (1987) explained the task is assumed to a range of workplans which aims to facilitate language learning. Willis (1996) regarded task as a communicative activity where learners need to use the target language to complete the task.

Considering different definitions of the task, we can conclude that there exists some common characteristics in the definition of the task. Firstly, the task is target-oriented activity. In addition, the language usage of the task is meaningful and there exists an outcome. All in all, tasks refer to some communicative activities that students perform in real contexts in order to learn a language. During the process of completing a task, learners will have a good understanding of knowledge.

## 2.2 Definition of Task-Based Language Teaching

Task-based Language Teaching has become increasingly popular since 1980s. A large number of researchers have provided their own explanations for the definition of TBLT. Nunan (1999) thought that the purpose of TBLT is to improve language proficiency based on a series of tasks, which focus on accomplishing the task in target language under the condition of the language environment condition which is closed to students' real life. (Nunan, D, 1999) Ellis (2003) proposed that TBLT is a kind of language teaching task in class which is needed to be decided by the functional interaction in real life. English teachers will design effective plans to lead students through group collaboration and independent learning to complete tasks, enabling them to master comprehensive language capacity. (Ellis. R, 2003) Chen Xiaotang (2005) pointed that TBLT is kind of language teaching method which is based on the task. In the process of completing various learning tasks, students are able to understand and apply foreign languages in a real language environment. (Chen Xiaotang, 2005)

In sum, task-based language teaching approach is an approach based on tasks as the core unit of language teaching which emphasizes learning by doing and puts more emphasis on promoting language learners to learn actively by utilizing several specific tasks. (Rodgers, T. S., 2001) It is a

new type of teaching method that enables students to use the target language to communicate in activities, and promotes the learning and mastery of language in the process of performing tasks, thereby improving language application ability.

## 2.3 Principles of Designing Tasks

In the application of TBLT, the design of tasks and activities must follow some principles.

### 2.3.1 The Authentic Principle

In task design, the language materials should be based on the real-life situations, which means that what students acquire in tasks completion can be applied in real life. Meanwhile, the context and specific activities of the task should be as close to real life as possible. (Wang Shanling, 2014) Teachers should strive to create a real or near real environment so that students can contact and process real language information as much as possible. By completing tasks, it is conducive to stimulating students' learning interest and classroom participation, and also mastering and applying language knowledge and cultivate comprehensive language ability.

### 2.3.2 Form—Function Principle

This principle is based on the authentic principle, taking into account both fluency and accuracy. The relationship between language form and function is further clarified so that students can deepen their understanding of language form and function, the relationship between language and context and the appropriateness of language in the process of completing tasks. (Wang Siyi, 2018) Students can practice language, express meaning and function and communicate appropriately with others in different forms without departing from context and function.

### 2.3.3 Task Dependency Principle

As for the principle Task-dependency, the teacher should think it over about the dependency of the task before designing tasks. The planned tasks should follow the principle from easy to difficult as the tasks are so difficult that students can't finish, which will discourage students' confidence. Therefore, teachers should prepare appropriate tasks for students in the class. The steps of the task should be coherent and step-by-step, and the completion of the previous step will support the completion of the next step, which helps students move into a higher level of communicative performance step

by step.

#### 2.3.4 Learn by Doing Principle

Dewey (1913), a founder of constructivism, proposed approaches that students should learn by doing. Students should be guided to be involved in constructing their own knowledge actively through experience and problem solving. (Larsen-Freeman, D., 2001) In task-based teaching, students gain learning experience by actively participating, thinking, discussing, communicating and cooperating, learning and using language in completing various task activities, and they finally achieve the purpose of internalization.

### 2.4 Theoretical Basis of Task-Based Language Teaching

#### 2.4.1 Social Constructivism Theory

Piaget (1975) pointed that the development of children is related to the interaction with the surrounding environment and they should develop their own cognitive structures in the interaction. The interaction between children and the environment includes assimilation and adaptation. The cognitive structure will be gradually constructed through assimilation and adaptation. (Piaget J., 1975) Vygotsky (1978) emphasized that learning is a process of social interaction with the target language in a social context and emphasized that learning is best achieved through the dynamic interaction between the teacher and learners, as well as between learners. Therefore, TBLT emphasizes learner-centered and learning by doing. Students construct knowledge based on their own experiences and what they already know in the process of performing and completing tasks. (Vygotsky L S., 1978)

#### 2.4.2 Krashen's Input Hypothesis

Krashen (1985) proposed that the Input Hypothesis refers to the explanation of the process of language acquisition. And it requires that an important condition for language acquisition to occur is to understand that input language containing the structure slightly beyond one's current level of competence. (Krashen S., 1985) This theory should show that comprehensible input is the premise of language acquisition, and task-based teaching method is mainly to construct learning situations through real language materials, so that students have more opportunities to obtain comprehensible knowledge and real language input, so that they

can be more understand, learn and use language well.

#### 2.4.3 Long's Interactive Hypothesis

On the basis of supporting Krashen's view, Long (1985) proposed that people ought to turn their attention to how to comprehend input language rather than whether input language can be understood. (Zhou Siying, 2020) This hypothesis puts forward that learners' input can be achieved through a combination of appropriate communication with interaction, which is regarded as the main way to master language skills and achieve information dissemination during collaborative communication. In addition, learners can comprehend the information through a series of ways, such as information input, processing, and output. In TBLT, learners can understand, absorb and acquire language through interaction between the teacher and learners and between learners.

### 3. The Application of Task-Based Language Teaching in Reading Teaching

According to task-based language teaching, the reading teaching can be divided into three stages in senior high school, namely pre-reading, while-reading and post-reading stage. Teachers need to design different learning tasks for students according to different stages. (Wenli, 2021) Here is an example selected from FLTRP Book One Unit5 An encounter with nature to illustrate the practice of TBLT in English reading teaching.

#### 3.1 The Application of TBLT Before Reading

Pre-reading activities refers to tasks that students do before they read the text in detail. These activities can gather existing knowledge about the topic and predict the content of the text. Teachers can introduce topics in various ways, such as pictures, videos, songs, etc., to stimulate students' interest in the topic. At this stage, students understand the background knowledge and general content of the text by completing the task which paves the way for the successful completion of the task in the next stage. The following is the specific teaching step of the case at pre-reading stage.

#### Task Looking and Predicting

The teacher introduces the topic by presenting the word cloud and the pictures, asks students to look at the word cloud and the pictures and encourages students to predict what happens in the story.

(Justification: This task is to stimulate students' interest in the topic and make preparations for the following activities.)

### 3.2 The Application of TBLT in Reading

At this stage, students can understand the main idea of the article through task and grasp the structure and specific content of the text. The purpose is to cultivate students to comprehensively use reading skills and strategies. Teaching tasks can take various forms of summarizing the main idea, selecting, judging whether it is correct or not, and filling in the blanks, etc. The following is the specific teaching step of the case at while-reading stage.

#### Task 1 Reading and Checking

The teacher asks students to read the passage independently and figure out what they should pay attention to when reading the passage and check their predictions after reading the passage quickly.

(Justification: This task to guide students have a general understanding of the passage as a whole and cultivate their ability to think independently.)

#### Task 2 Reading and Matching

The teacher divided students into group of four to discuss and match the main idea of each paragraph after reading the passage for the second time.

Para. 1 a. Yellowstone National Park's bears.

Para. 2 b. The reason why he likes his job as a nature photographer.

Para. 3 c. A reminder to respect animals.

Para. 4 d. The author's experience of encountering a bear.

(Justification: This task is to let students form a general understanding of the passage as a whole and cultivate students' skimming and generalization ability.)

#### Task 3 Reading and Answering

The teacher divide students in groups to read the passage carefully and discuss the following questions and generalize the key elements to develop a story.

- (1) When and where did the story happen?
- (2) What did the photographer come across?
- (3) How did photographer encounter it?
- (4) What happened when they saw each other?
- (5) How did the encounter end?

(Justification: This task is to let students understand the details of the passage and train students' scanning ability and generalization ability.)

#### Task 4 Thinking and sharing

The teacher asks students to read the sentences and guess the meaning of the words in bold independently and divides students into several groups to discuss the meaning of the words in bold in groups, then the teacher invites representatives of each group to share their answers with the class.

Read the sentences from the passage and work out the meaning of the words in bold.

- (1) When I finally stepped out of the trees, the view was **breathtaking**.
- (2) An eagle flew over the snow-capped mountains, which were **reflected** in the still lake below.
- (3) My most **frightening** but magical experience was now captured forever in a single image.

(Justification: This task is to help students understand the structure and logic of the passage and master the skill of describing events according to time order and develop their ability to guess the meaning of new words according to the context.)

### 3.3 The Application of TBLT After Reading

At this stage, the teaching purpose is to check the fulfillment of reading tasks, evaluate the application of reading strategies and guide students to apply what has been learned, which contributes to improve students' ability to comprehensively use language. Tasks involve summarize the content, role plays, discussion and writing, etc. The following is the specific teaching step of the case at post-reading stage.

#### Task 1 Discussing and sharing

The teacher organizes a group discussion about the question about what can people do to protect animals and invite some students to share their answers.

(Justification: To develop students' awareness of cooperative learning and to deepen students' thinking about how to live in harmony with animals and what they can do to protect them.

#### Task 2 Imagining and writing

The teacher plays a video about the elephants in Yunnan which walked out of their habitat and wandered into the human world and asks



students to imagine that they have an encounter with elephants and continue the story outline.

When I was picking corn in the field, an elephant walked close to me.

.....

(Justification: This task is to develop students' imagination and creative thinking and ability to predict and continue the story.)

#### 4. Conclusion

Task-based language teaching method advocates learning by doing, which emphasizes learner-centered teaching. By using this approach in reading teaching, teachers create the context that are close to real life and design a variety of tasks which are as close to real life as possible. Students gain learning experience by actively participating, thinking, discussing, communicating and cooperating, learning and using language in completing various task activities. (Wang Bei & Zhang Lili, 2019) Therefore, compared with teachers' monotonous knowledge explanation, the application of task-based language teaching approach in reading teaching can be conducive to mobilizing students' interest and enthusiasm in learning more and develop their comprehensive language ability by combining language knowledge and language skills.

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