

## GUEST EDITORIAL PREFACE

# Special Issue on Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT)

*Michael Thomas, School of Languages and International Studies, University of Central Lancashire, Preston, Lancashire, UK*

*Chun Lai, Faculty of Education, Division of Chinese Language and Literature, The University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong*

This special issue of IJCALLT addresses a number of key issues related to task-based language teaching (TBLT) utilizing digital technologies. Interest in task-based Language teaching has been growing over the last two to three decades, particularly in the west but most recently also in Asia. The TBLT approach emphasizes the importance of real-world communicative tasks as part of an experiential learning process in which learners engage in the negotiation of meaning. Although efforts have been made to align TBLT with an “authentic”, “experiential”, and “process-oriented” approach focused on “non-linguistic” goals, it has attracted a number of critiques. These include challenges associated with implementing TBLT in formal classroom situations, in which both learners and teachers may find it difficult to maintain the illusion of “authentic” interaction which is not geared towards assessments and class assignments. TBLT may also promote a restrictive functional approach that limits learner creativity. Furthermore, TBLT implies an active style of learning which may not fit well with other

cultures that rely on more passive interactions between learners and teachers, or where large class sizes and mixed proficiency groups, may present obstacles in terms of learner motivation and involvement. Technology presents opportunities to overcome a number of these challenges, by expanding the range of resources available to learners; presenting learners with the opportunity to participate in online communities and cross-cultural communication; enhancing the authenticity of tasks through the use of online simulations; and enabling learner agency and improving learner identity. Furthermore, the use of technology in language learning contexts may also improve a range of so-called 21st century skills such as digital literacy. By examining the intersection of TBLT and technology, the five articles in this special issue seeks to examine these challenges and opportunities from both teacher and learner perspectives.

In the first article, “Integrating Technology-enhanced Student Self-regulated Tasks into University Chinese Language Course,”

Irene Shidong An discusses findings from a semester-long project with Chinese learners that utilized a Web-based podcasting technology. Focusing on the principles of task design, the paper explores a rich variety of learner data and underlines the importance of careful task preparation that understand different individual learning styles and need to establish and maintain a constant rapport with learners.

In “Synchronous Text-Based Computer-Mediated Communication Tasks and the Development of L2 Academic Literacy,” Jinrong Li examines the impact of SCMC tasks on the development of L2 academic literacy via a group of three ESL students. The research indicates that SCMC tasks may contribute to the development of L2 academic literacy, but more work needs to be done to understand how the differences between learners may be influential factors in the process. The study calls for further research on students' learning experiences focusing in particular on their perceptions of the tasks.

In “Effects of a Technology-enriched, Task-based Language Teaching Curriculum on Chinese Elementary Students' Achievement in English as a Foreign Language,” Guofang Li and Xiaopeng Ni explore research on TBLT and young learners, an area where few studies to date exist. The study examines the impact of a technology-enhanced TBLT curriculum on Chinese elementary students' in an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context. The research draws on a Non-equivalent Groups Design framework with 471 participants. Analysing data from pre and post tests, findings suggest that learners who utilised a TBLT enhanced approach made more significant progress in language proficiency and underlines the potential of technology-mediated approaches to augment curriculum level change.

The fourth article, “The French Digital Kitchen: Implementing Task-Based Language Teaching beyond the Classroom,” reports on research from an innovative research project from the University of Newcastle-upon-Tyne in the UK. The French Digital Kitchen utilised digital sensor technology alongside a TBLT

approach to provide learners with an authentic environment for learning aspects of French language and cuisine while engaged in real-world cooking tasks. Drawing on data from the study to date, the article employs conversation analysis of learner transcripts to understand how learners can exploit this rich resource for foreign language learning. Findings suggest that there is significant potential for learners to benefit from the approach and to augment vocabulary learning in the target language.

The final article in the special edition, “TBLT in Business English Communication: An Approach for Evaluating Adobe Connect and Second Life in a Blended Language Learning Format,” focuses on the potential of TBLT in the context of international undergraduate learners studying in the UK. Exploring the specific context of business communication in English, the paper outlines a framework for comparing the use of two synchronous technologies (the video conferencing software Adobe Connect and the three-dimensional virtual world of Second Life) within the context of a blended language learning approach. Based on a year-long study learners indicated that Second Life lowered learner anxiety and created an engaging task-based environment. Moreover, it is important to understand the cultural context of the participants in order to elaborate the appropriate blend of tasks, technology, online and face-to-face contact that is conducive to effective task completion.

Research on TBLT and digital technologies holds a great deal of potential for realising engaging and authentic language learning environments over the next five to ten years. It is hoped that this special edition contributes to raising awareness about this potential and to identifying new pathways for future research.

*Michael Thomas  
Chun Lai  
Guest Editors  
IJCALLT*