

## TASK AND TECHNOLOGY: WHAT IS NEW IN THE AREA?

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ORTEGA, Lourdes & GONZALEZ-LLORET, Marta. *Technology-mediated TBLT: Researching Technology and Tasks*. Amsterdam /Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 2014.

It is not possible to picture the world without technology anymore. Our entire lives revolve around computers, tablets, iPad's, television, to cite but a few of the many technological devices that have adapted our existence. Concerned with this adaptation, several scientific fields have updated their studies regarding our current technological necessities, as it can be seen in the book *Technology-mediated TBLT: Researching Technology and Tasks*, which is an effective proposal to adapt technology within Task based approach. Therefore, for those who have interest in the TBLT and the technological fields, this book is an essential reading. The book may also be a good optional reading for well-informed educators who are searching for ideas on how to use technology in their classrooms, since the book brings experiments that were conducted in the classroom context.

The book is the sixth volume of the series *Task-Based Language Teaching: Issues, Research and Practice (TBLT)*, and it was edited by Gonzales-Lloret and Ortega and was released in 2014. The edition gathers 12 chapters that bring fascinating discussions on the attempt of including technology into task-based language teaching. Most chapters are empirical studies in which the researchers share with us their research design, rationales, methods, discussion, results and conclusions.

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The first chapter, entitled ‘Towards technology-mediated TBLT’ is an introductory chapter in which Gonzalez-Lloret and Ortega present the book. The authors draw our attention to the fact that technology is now effectively part of our lives, especially for those who have been born since the early 2000. Technology has shaped the way they see the world, their skills, literacies, and cognitive and learning processes. Because of that, it is necessary to incorporate technologies into our pedagogical practices. Nevertheless, the authors emphasize that this incorporation must be guided by educational and language development rationales, otherwise it would be nothing more than entertainment. Thus, as a means of guidance, task-based language teaching (TBLT) seems to inform this process of bringing technology to language learning and teaching. Moreover, the authors also present the organizational structure of the book as well as the summaries of each chapter. And finally, in the end of the chapter, the authors present limitations and suggestion for further research, which, in our opinion, should be included in a closing chapter, since they talk about the methods and results of the chapters the reader will not have read yet, if the reader chooses to read the book in its organizational order.

In Chapter 2, entitled ‘The need for needs analysis in technology-mediated TBLT’, Gonzalez-Lloret stresses the necessity and importance of needs analysis (NA) in a TBLT curriculum, being NA one of the key elements of TBLT curriculum, followed by task selection and sequencing, materials development, pedagogical choices, among others. Notwithstanding NA’s importance, the author states there is little research on the topic. The author also offers a discussion on the definition of NA. She presents several definitions from other areas in order make us understand how complex the concept is. In addition to the definitions, the author claims that several ideas to conduct NA were proposed, but no researcher has suggested a systematic framework. The author also provided the readers with examples of NA in the language teaching context, as it is the case of the development of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses and curriculum. Moreover, Gonzalez-Lloret discusses the elements that should be included in the NA of technology-mediated TBLT. For her, it is important to include tasks, tools, digital literacies, and finally access to technology.

In chapter 3, entitled ‘Prior knowledge and second language task production in text chat’, Adams and Alwi present a study, which investigated the role of prior knowledge in text chat task-based production. The authors explain that most of the studies on prior knowledge were conducted in a face-to-face setting, which justifies the necessity to investigate the issue

on a virtual environment. Considering this lack of research, Adams and Alwi present a study conducted in an academic context. Their participants were engineering students from two different specialties: electrical engineering and chemical engineering, who had to interact through chat. The authors were able to control the prior knowledge variable by using a topic in which only the electrical engineering students were familiar to. Generally, prior knowledge affects production; however, in this study, inconclusive results were presented. Adams and Alwi claim that some chat characteristics may play a role in the process.

Following this classroom context, in chapter 4, entitled “Textbooks, tasks, and technology”, Solares presents an action research study, which aimed at investigating the value of blending technology into a task-based module. In order to achieve this goal, the author had three different groups of students: Group 1, which received the technology-task lessons; Group 2, which received only task lessons; and finally, group 3, which received standard communicative lessons through textbook. All the groups engaged in the same amount of lessons, which were delivered within nine weeks. Solares meticulously describes the whole research process, and she acknowledges the studies’ limitations that mostly occurred by conducting classroom research. Despite the problems throughout the study, the author was able to collect and analyze the data generated in the classrooms and by students’ interviews. One of her main findings was that students who engaged in the technology-task treatment showed to be more satisfied with the lessons compared to the other groups.

In chapter 5, entitled ‘Promoting foreign language collaborative writing through the use of Web 2.0 tools and tasks’, Oskoz and Elola bring a sociocultural perspective into play, when working with the concept of collaborative work and technological tools as mediation means. The aim of this chapter was to present a study that dealt with the benefits of chats and wikis within a module, which was designed to teach argumentative and expository writing genres. During the module, the participants engaged in a series of interactive, structured, and sequenced tasks, which encompassed process writing states, such as planning, drafting, revising, among others. Students’ interaction during chats was recorded, and the researchers had access to students’ drafts, which were submitted via the wiki.

In chapter 6, entitled “TBLT and synthetic immersive environments”, Sykes brings into light the use of games, more specifically synthetic immersive environments (SIEs), in the process of foreign language learning. Even though it is difficult to adapt and bring games into a real classroom, Sykes highlights that SIEs offer the potential to create tasks that focus on

discourse-level features of language, such politeness, which are not easy to be brought to the traditional classroom. Sykes used a game called *Croquelandia*, which were developed to engage students in pragmatic behaviors, and this game was used as a unit in a Spanish language course with university students. Students played the game online, and all the interaction was recorded and used as data for analysis. While playing, students had to perform tasks in order to pass a phase, and they were able to redo the task if they were willing to. However, as one of the results, the author pointed out that once students passed the phase they did not redo the task in order to gain a better performance.

In chapter 7, entitled ‘Collaborative tasks for negotiation of intercultural meaning in virtual worlds and video-web communication’, Canto, Graaff and Jauregi problematize the development of intercultural competence in the classrooms. The authors draw our attention to the fact that in foreign language classrooms, students usually share the same mother tongue, which does not open room for them to interact with people or other students that speak another language. This interaction with people with different first language is a way to develop intercultural competence. Bearing that idea in mind, Canto, Graaff and Jauregi developed a study in which university students of Spanish engaged in five tasks with the focus on intercultural aspects in a virtual world called *Second Life*. This platform allows people from all part of the world interact, and the point was for the students to interact with native speakers of Spanish during the tasks. The online interaction was recorded and used as data for analysis and instances of intercultural negotiation was possible to be seen.

In chapter 8, entitled ‘The third dimension: A sociocultural theory approach to the design and evaluation of 3D virtual worlds tasks’, Gánem-Gutiérrez brings virtual world scenario such as *Second Life* and a sociocultural perspective into play as well. However, the author does not present an experimental study as it can be seen in most chapters of this book. She, in fact, presents a proposition of a framework for the design and evaluation of tasks for virtual worlds based on Vygotskian Sociocultural Theory and Activity Theory, which are two related sociocultural approach to language learning and teaching. For this preposition, Gánem-Gutiérrez provides an overview of the use of virtual worlds for L2 learning, a summary of the main key concepts of sociocultural theory, and main points of activity theory that can be used to evaluation. Moreover, the author also presents an example of task for virtual world, which follows a sociocultural perspective. All in all, Gámen-Guriérrez provides

a well designed and informed framework. She also reminds the educators that may follow this framework of the importance of learners' individual needs while developing tasks.

In chapter 9, entitled 'Lessons from the fandom: Technology-mediated tasks for language learning', Sauro presents a discussion on the use of fandoms that are online networks for fans of books, movies, bands, among others as an online source to design tasks for language learning and teaching. The author presents a range of alternatives that fans use to discuss their favorite books, movies, and bands such as blogs, role playing games, wikis, translation software for subtitling, to cite but a few, and she points out possible alternatives to use these means for task design. Sauro, for instance, claims that blogs could be used with more advanced students to create more extended storytelling, which would make them focus on more discourse level aspects of writing, such as plot, characters, and themes.

In chapter 10, entitled 'Formative, task-based oral assessments in an advanced Chinese-language class', Winke brings the issue of assessment, which many times is seen as peripheral to learning. She reminds us of the importance of it to the learning and teaching process, and how it may be adapted to the kind of learning we are using. In this chapter, Winke presents a study in which students of Chinese engaged in a cycle of tasks, which occurred with the help of power point presentation and websites. The participants had to record their oral opinions about a topic and, after that, to evaluate their own performance. Then, Chinese experts evaluated their performance, and the experts' ratings were compared to the students' self-evaluation. Winke points out students' judgments of their own performance matched the experts' evaluation, which showed that students were realistic on the evaluation of their performance.

Also in a Chinese learning environment, in chapter 11, entitled 'Evaluation of an online, task-based Chinese course', Nielson presents a study whose main aims was to describe and evaluate an online task-based course through the oral performance of the participants. There were two groups of participants; one group participated in the online course, and the other group did not. The participants that took the online course demonstrated a gain in the oral performance compared to the participants from the control group. However, Nielson claims that it is not possible to affirm that this improvement was a result of the course itself. Eventually, the author highlights that Task-based approach is a good choice to develop online courses.

And, finally, in chapter 12, entitled ‘Afterword: Technology-mediated TBLT and the evolving role of the innovator’, Chapelle discusses the changes that have occurred during the last 10 years in the field of tasks and technology. The author highlights the controversy it was to adapt the new technologies discoveries into the classroom in the past. Educators were reluctant to include technology in their lessons, because they believed face-to-face meetings and books were enough. Chapelle claims that a lot has changed and that nowadays we have to rethink some concepts in order to include technology. Redefining tasks and L2 competence, for instance, is something very important nowadays, according to the author.

Considering the review just presented, it is possible to say that the book *Technology-mediated TBLT: Researching Technology and Tasks* is a rich source of studies on the integration of tasks and technology. The book brings cognitive and sociocultural issues related to learning and teaching, besides a range of ideas on how to take advantage of technology to teach a second or foreign language. Most chapters provide appendices with the instruments used to conduct the research, which facilitates replication studies. Moreover, the studies presented in the book deal with other languages such as Spanish and Chinese rather than just English, which is the language most studied within a task-based perspective.

### **Referências:**

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