





# TBLT: From Theory to Practice



**Which TBLT?**

**Geoff Jordan & Neil McMillan**

# What is a task?

- just another communicative activity?
- Rod Ellis (2003) definition?
  - primary focus on (pragmatic) meaning
  - some kind of gap (info, reasoning, opinion)
  - participants choose needed linguistic resources
  - clearly defined, non-linguistic outcome
- one of a number of 'task types'?

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**Anderson & McCutcheon:** categorising, opinion gaps, problem-solving, sharing experiences, creative design, 'whole class' (text reconstruction)

**Bruton:** problem-solving, decision-making, spontaneous role-playing; information/opinion gap resolution; cued prompted interaction; question-answer exchanges; prepared role plays; focused receptive language; focused written language; understanding; written expression

"Based on such a miscellany of activities, skills, modalities, pedagogic procedures, language, conversational moves, and cognitive processes, it would be impossible to define task or task type or know what would and would not qualify as examples of either." (Long 2016)

# The Willis & Willis "Taskiness" Test

1. Will the activity engage learners' interest?
2. Is there a primary focus on meaning?
3. Is there a goal or an outcome?
4. Is success judged in terms of outcome?
5. Is completion a priority?
6. Does the activity relate to real world activities?'

(Willis and Willis 2007)

Think of the busiest day you have had recently. Work in pairs.

Tell your partner all the things you did.

- Decide which of you had the busiest day, then tell the class about it.
- Decide who in the whole class had the most hectic day (and say why.)
- Finally, from memory, write a list of the things one person did on their busiest day, and, without revealing their name, read it out to the class (or display it on the wall) to see how many people can remember whose day it was.



# "Taskiness" Test

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(Willis and Willis 2007)

# Issues

- A "task-supported" syllabus (TSLT) mainly delivers a synthetic syllabus
- TSLT approach epitomised by Cutting Edge CB series - "structure-trapping" tasks
- Also advocated by Rod Ellis (focused tasks, modular syllabus), Klapper, Waters, Anderson & McCutcheon
- Useful where Ts must follow CB and/or Ls are tested on declarative knowledge
- **But** problems of synthetic syllabus remain
- Tasks, on close analysis, fail the Willis's own test

## Pre-task (including topic and task)

### The teacher

- introduces and defines the topic
- uses activities to help students recall/learn useful words and phrases
  - ensures students understand task instructions
- may play a recording of others doing the same or a similar task

### The students

- note down useful words and phrases from the pre-task activities and/or the recording
  - may spend a few minutes preparing for the task individually

## Task cycle

### Task

#### The students

- do the task in pairs/small groups

#### The teacher

- acts as monitor and encourages students

### Planning

#### The students

- prepare to report to the class how they did the task and what they discovered/decided
- rehearse what they will say or draft a written version for the class to read

#### The teacher

- ensures the purpose of the report is clear
- acts as language adviser
- helps students rehearse oral reports or organise written ones

### Report

#### The students

- present their spoken reports to the class, or circulate/display their written reports

#### The teacher

- acts as chairperson, selecting who will speak next, or ensuring all students read most of the written reports
- may give brief feedback on content and form
- may play a recording of others doing the same or a similar task

## Language focus

### Analysis

#### The students

- do conscious-raising activities to identify and process specific language features from the task text and/or transcript
- may ask about other features they have noticed

#### The teacher

- reviews each analysis activity with the class
- brings other useful words, phrases and patterns to students' attention
  - may pick up on language items from the report stage

### Practice

#### The teacher

- conducts practice activities after analysis activities where necessary, to build confidence

#### The students

- practice words, phrases and patterns from the analysis activities
- practice other features occurring in the task text or report stage
- enter useful language items in their language notebooks

# More issues

- Anderson & McCutcheon's 'Dictogloss' (2019: pp. 126-8)

**PRE-TASK:** Chat about sports, pre-teach vocab

**TASK:** Students listen to narrative twice, then try to reconstruct the text. Compare with OG.

**POST-TASK:** Exploit the gap: focus on narrative tenses, cohesive devices

*Although the language focus is post-task, a 'Focus on Forms' approach with mainly explicit language work sneaks in ... task does not seem life-like.*

# Long's definition of a task:

- Long defines a task using the ordinary meaning of the word to refer to “the hundred and one things people do in everyday life, at work, at play, and in between”.
- A task is a piece of work undertaken for oneself or for others, freely or for some reward.

sorting letters

typing a letter

filling out a form

making an airline reservation

making a hotel reservation

finding a street destination

helping someone cross a road

buying a pair of shoes

weighing a patient

borrowing a library book

taking a driving test

# Stages in Long's TBLT

1. Needs analysis to identify target tasks
2. Classify into target task types
3. Derive Pedagogic tasks
4. Sequence to task-based syllabus
5. Implement with appropriate methodology & pedagogy
6. Task-based, criterion-referenced, performance assessment
7. Evaluate programme

"TBLT is still a relatively recent innovation—one whose adoption requires expertise on the part of course designers and classroom teachers, and a considerable investment of time and effort if it is to be successful. Success will be more likely in programs housed in institutions with a stable, qualified, and experienced teaching staff and a relatively stable student population (thereby making an NA and materials development worth the effort), located in societies where language learning is a serious matter and recognized and supported as such. Increasing numbers of school systems, universities, and government language programs in many countries meet those requirements. Programs for refugees and migrant workers would be very well served by TBLT, too, but often lack adequate staffing, funding, and other resources, and so require the assistance of volunteers."  
Long (2016)

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# Horses for courses?

- 🐎 1. Well-funded institutional courses: **Long's TBLT**
- 🐎 2. Immigrant/refugee ES(O)L: **Long's TBLT \*possible\***
- 🐎 3. Private/in-company classes: **Long's TBLT IF client can pay for it**
- 🐎 4. Smaller schools/  
institutions that adopt TBLT: **A "Long light" approach: NA but tasks more generic. Materials bank/training support.**
- 🐎 5. Teachers going against the grain in CB-driven schools: **Dogme/T-T-T, TBLT "on-the-fly", TSLT/'Taskify' the CB**



# Examples of TBLT versions (not TSLT)

- Reject the synthetic, coursebook-provided syllabus
- Respect Long's methodological principles

1. Long's TBLT: tasks in syllabus derived from representative "target tasks", constructed from samples of real tasks analysed for discourse, which were identified using a thorough needs analysis.



Example target task: "Buying and selling a cup of coffee" (Long 2015, 198-200; Bartlett 2005, 338)

2. "Long-Light": more generic tasks curated in a local materials bank such as that of the cooperative SLB.

3. TBLT "on the fly": T-T-T/Dogme: T & Ls co-construct task.

Avoidance of generic term

Ellipsis

Widely attested forms

- 284 interactions recorded
- 168 transcribed and analysed

s: Hi. Can I help you?  
c: Can I get a **grande latté with vanilla?**  
s: Did you want that blended or on the rocks?  
c: Blended, I guess  
s: 2% or skimmed?  
c: Uhm 2%  
s: 2%. OK. Any whipped cream?  
c: Sorry?  
s: Did you want whipped cream on that?  
c: Yes  
s: **Anything else?**  
c: No, that's it. Oh no. **Can I get-** are those scones?  
s: Yeah, we have cranberry and blueberry  
c: I think I'll have one of those (pointing)  
s: A blueberry scone?  
c: Yeah. **The one in the back**  
s: **This one**  
c: Yeah **that's it**  
s: Ok. For here or to go?  
c: To go  
s: Ok. **That'll be three forty-eight**  
c: (hands over money)  
s: How about a frequent user card?  
c: Oh sure  
s: Thank you. 52 cents is your change (hands over change).  
And your card. Ok. It'll be ready for you in just one minute  
c: Thank you  
s: **There you go** (hands over drink). Have a nice day  
c: You too

Deictics & pronouns

*On how to use in class -no prescriptions but principles*



*Substantial amount of work to get to classroom stage*



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# TBLT on the fly?

1. Identify a target task from previous NA or immediate need arising.

2a Set roles, Ls try the task

2b Find video of task online

3a Feedback on task & language, responsive work

3b Watch, check understanding

4a Ls repeat task with new partner

4b Generate transcript, key word/phrase list, Ls work on relevant language, exchanges

Test Teach Test - cf. Brumfit's "Deep End Strategy" but roots are deeper ...

5b Set roles, Ls try the task

Adapted from Scott Thornbury's post "E is for eCoursebook" - with apologies!

# TSLT and 'taskifying' the CB

1. No NA; tasks/activities selected according to L interests or 'what's next' in CB ; generally follows Willis framework, or PPP.
2. Pre-task: may include discussion, explicit teaching, listen to e.g. of task
3. Ls do task, perhaps followed by reporting on the results
4. Post-task language focus, perhaps with some controlled practice of certain forms/functions





10 Work with a partner and design a new community. This could be co-housing or an estate of completely separate properties. What facilities and resources will you include?

11a **TASK** Tell another pair about your community. Then write ten sentences comparing the two communities, using the language from exercise 6.

# Pros & Cons

## Long's TBLT

optimum version:  
principled & well-  
supported

precise meeting of  
learners' needs

considerable effort &  
resources required

## "Long light"

schools need to change  
approach: placement,  
mats & training

learner needs  
prioritised

MPs and general  
approach respected

**A good materials bank could  
underpin all these approaches**

# Pros & Cons

## TBLT 'on the fly'

some learner needs  
prioritised

low-resource/online  
resources

considerable T-  
expertise needed

T-intuitions on input

## TSLT/Taskifying CB

few learner needs  
prioritised

focus on forms by  
stealth

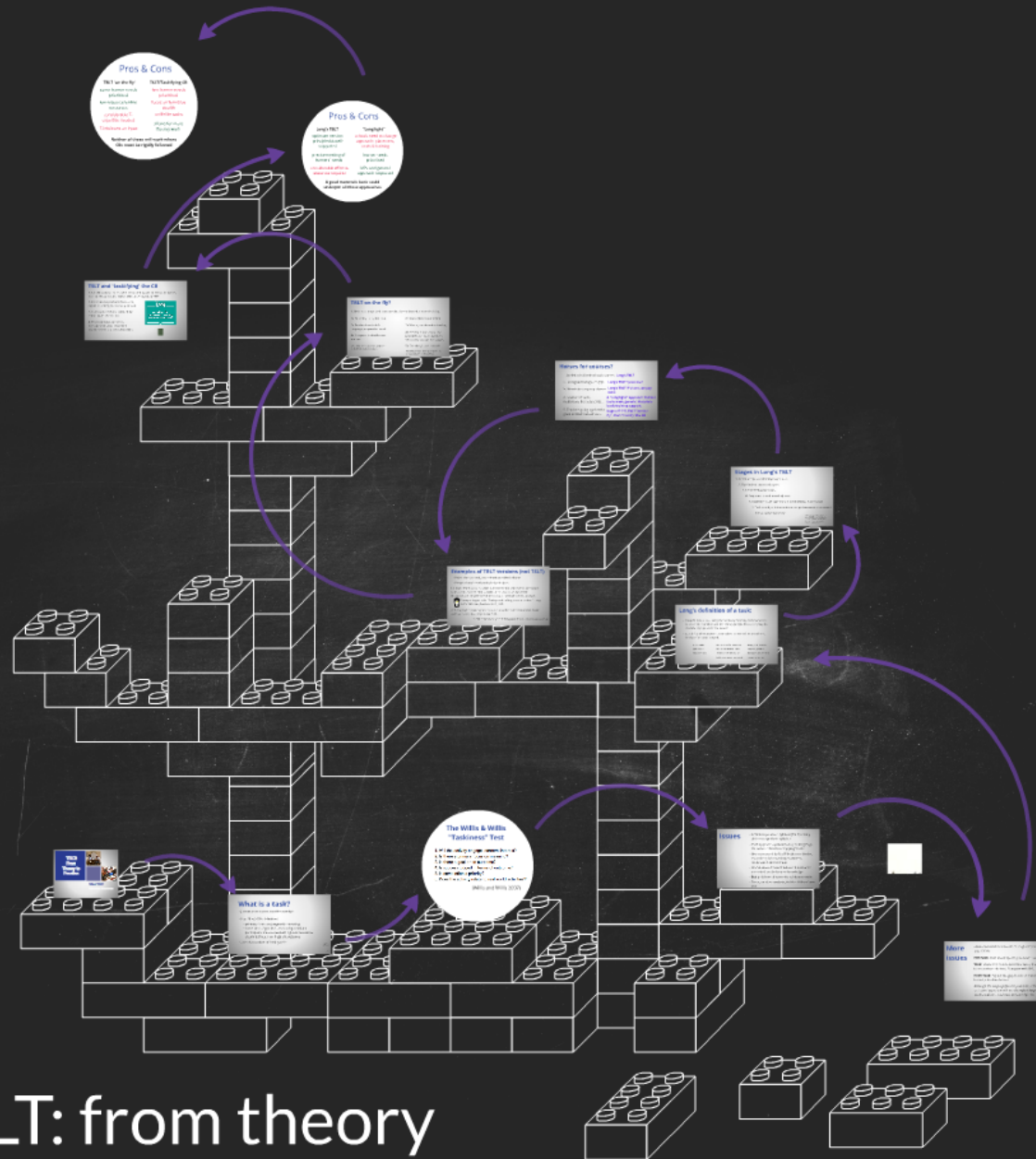
unlifelike tasks

allows for more  
fluency work

**Neither of these will work where  
CBs must be rigidly followed**







# TBLT: from theory to practice