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HOW TO TEACH AN ADDITIONAL LANGUAGE: TO TASK OR NOT TO TASK (A BOOK REVIEW)

Mauro Marinho da Silva[1*]

Raquel Carolina Souza Ferraz D'Ely[1**]
[1]Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina, Florianópolis, SC, Brasil

In this 2022 book, Kris Van den Branden, professor of linguistics and head of the language teacher education department at the University of Leuven in Belgium, explores the effectiveness of task-based language teaching (TBLT) in additional language education[1]. Drawing on research and his own experience, Van den Branden examines the principles of TBLT in the context of modern language learning, providing guiding principles for classroom practice and contributing to the ongoing discussion of TBLT as a researched pedagogy.

In Chapter 1, "Setting the scene," the author introduces the complexities of language teaching, highlighting that there is no one-size-fits-all approach. He emphasizes the challenges teachers face, including managing diverse student personalities, proficiency levels, and motivations, as well as limited class time. The

*Mauro Marinho da Silva is a doctoral candidate in Linguistic and Literary Studies at the Graduate Program in English (PPGI), Federal University of Santa Catarina (UFSC), holds a Master's degree in Education from the Federal University of Western Pará (UFOPA), and is a professor at the Federal Institute of Pará (IFPA). E-mail: mauro.marinho.silva@hotmail.com. ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7065-9383.

**Raquel Carolina Souza Ferraz D'Ely, PhD (Federal University of Santa Catarina, Brazil), is an Associate Professor in the Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures at the Federal University of Santa Catarina. Her research interests include second language acquisition, task-based language teaching and learning, and individual differences in SLA. Her publications include articles in leading Brazilian journals and book chapters on task-based performance, with particular emphasis on strategic planning and repetition as metacognitive processes, the use of pedagogic tasks in intact classrooms, task-based mediated technology, and critical approaches to ELT pedagogy. E-mail: raqueldely@gmail.com. ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2851-1868.

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chapter discusses the importance of high-quality language education in today's globalized world and reviews the ongoing debate between explicit knowledge-based approaches, such as the Present-Practice-Produce (PPP) method, and TBLT, which focuses on implicit knowledge through meaningful tasks. Van den Branden argues that the choice between approaches depends on learners' specific needs and goals, and that teachers often adopt a mixed approach. The chapter concludes with an outline of the book, which aims to synthesize research insights to inform teaching practices.

The second chapter, "Cognitive aspects of additional language acquisition," explores the complex intellectual process of becoming a skilled user of an additional language. The chapter discusses key principles of instructed second language acquisition, including those proposed by Ellis (2003) and Long (2015), emphasizing the importance of meaningful input and interaction (primary tenets of Long's theoretical framework), alongside learner output and feedback, which are central to Ellis's guidelines for classroom-based language instruction. Van den Branden highlights the role of implicit and explicit learning, the need for active engagement with the target language, and the significance of cognitive strategies and self-regulation skills, in order to transform linguistic input into internalized intake, a necessary condition for students to move beyond rote memorization toward the autonomous and flexible completion of authentic real-world tasks (Long, 2015). The chapter concludes by outlining guidelines for teachers to foster cognitive processes that drive language learning, including providing rich input, opportunities for output and conversation, clear feedback, and encouraging students to develop cognitive strategies and use available resources.

The subsequent chapter, "Motivational and affective aspects of additional language acquisition", explores the complex and dynamic role of motivation and emotions in additional language acquisition. The chapter discusses various theories of motivation, including Self-Determination Theory, Expectancy-Value Theory, Social Cognitive Theory, and Mindset Theory. Van den Branden emphasizes the importance of autonomy, relatedness, and competence in fostering motivation and emphasizes the significance of positive emotions, such as enjoyment and interest, in language learning. The chapter also examines the concept of "flow" and its relation to motivation and cognition, as well as the role of teachers in enhancing students' language learning motivation through strategies such as providing constructive feedback, promoting learner autonomy, and creating a supportive classroom environment. Ultimately, Van den Branden argues that teachers must consider both cognitive and affective aspects of language learning to create powerful pedagogical spaces that support students' development.

Chapter 4 outlines "Ten principles for high-quality additional language education", grounded in research and theory. These principles - Activate, Challenge, Connect, Recycle, Interact, Globalise, Assess, Diversify, Care, and Excite - aim to tap into the cognitive, motivational, and emotional dimensions

of language development. By implementing these principles in an integrated manner, teachers can create rich pedagogical spaces that cater to students' diverse needs. However, such principles alone do not guarantee sustainable language learning: their long-term impact depends on wider factors (e.g., teacher training, curricular design, institutional support, and policy). In contexts like Brazil, sustainability often requires coordinated action across classrooms, schools and teachers. With practical examples and research-based insights, this chapter provides a comprehensive guide for language educators to design effective and engaging language learning experiences that foster student engagement, motivation, and language acquisition.

Chapter 5, "Curriculum design for 21st-century additional language education", focuses on setting goals, selecting content, and organizing assessment practices. It explores the product-based and process-based approaches, highlighting the importance of needs analysis and task-based language teaching in creating effective learning experiences. Rodrigues do Ó (2024) argues that TBLT provides guidance on how to combine tasks with curricular components, such as pedagogical materials. The chapter also discusses integrating technology, embracing multilingualism, and clever globalization to enhance language learning and prepare students for real-life communication. In this sense, Rocha (2024) investigated the contribution of written feedback to the production of a digital story by learners of English as a second language and reports that participants' texts improved progressively after receiving that feedback.

The sixth chapter, "Implications for assessment", explores the complexities of assessment in language education, emphasizing the need to consider four key questions: why assess, what to assess, how to assess, and what is next. The chapter discusses the purposes of assessment, including summative and formative approaches, and highlights the importance of task-based language assessment (TBLA) in evaluating language use in real-life contexts. It also examines the role of validity, reliability, and feasibility in assessment, providing examples of effective assessment practices, including the use of portfolio assessment, peer and self-assessment, and feedback that promotes learning and progress.

Chapter 7, "The dynamics of innovating additional language education", emphasizes the crucial role of teachers in improving educational quality. It discusses the challenges of implementing task-based language teaching (TBLT) and highlights the importance of supporting teachers through professional development initiatives that focus on content, active learning, collaboration, and feedback. Van den Branden seems to suggest that fostering a culture of collaboration and innovation enables educators to create meaningful and effective language education programs that support student learning and development. However, this endeavor can be complex and challenging, especially when considering the diverse contexts in which teachers work. Considering these challenges, educators

must reflect on their own contexts and adapt their approaches to best support student learning and development.

Finally, in the concluding chapter, the author reflects on the rewarding yet challenging nature of teaching an additional language, emphasizing the importance of using meaningful tasks to foster communicative competence. By making tasks the central unit of analysis for curriculum design, classroom activity, and student assessment, teachers can fuel students' motivation, emotion, and cognition. The chapter emphasizes the crucial difference high-quality language education can make in learners' lives, enabling them to participate fully in society and fulfill their dreams. With teachers innovating and putting research-based principles into practice, the future of language education looks promising, and the author encourages educators to take on the challenge of providing high-quality instruction that can transform the lives of billions of learners worldwide.

Van den Branden's *How to Teach an Additional Language: To Task or Not to Task (2022)* is a significant contribution to the field of language pedagogy, effectively bridging the gap between research and practice. The book provides a comprehensive framework for designing, implementing, and evaluating high-quality language instruction rooted in robust theoretical principles. A thorough evaluation of the book suggests TBLT presents both strengths and weaknesses.

On the one hand, its strengths include: 1) real-world application: TBLT focuses on practical, real-life tasks that learners can relate to; 2) learner-centered approach: TBLT encourages learner autonomy and engagement; 3) holistic language learning: TBLT integrates language skills and promotes communicative competence. Consistent with Van den Branden's emphasis on learner-centered tasks, Zulaiha et al. (2026) note that TBLT empowers learners as active participants and collaborative team members while repositioning the teacher primarily as a facilitator and guide, a dynamic that supports autonomy, interaction, and real-world language use. On the other hand, some potential weaknesses include: 1) implementation challenges: TBLT requires careful task design, implementation, and assessment; 2) contextual limitations: TBLT's effectiveness can vary depending on the learning context, learner needs, and teacher expertise and 3) assessment complexities: evaluating learner performance in TBLT can be complex and time-consuming.

One of the book's major strengths is its balanced approach, which integrates findings from Second Language Acquisition (SLA) and educational psychology with actionable pedagogical principles. This understanding of task-based language teaching (TBLT) is grounded in the work of researchers such as Long (2015) and Ellis (2003). By combining theoretical insights with practical applications, Van den Branden provides a comprehensive overview of TBLT that is both accessible and informative.

Another notable strength of the book is its emphasis on teacher preparation and professional development. Van den Branden emphasizes the importance of equipping teachers with the knowledge, skills, and support they need to implement TBLT effectively. This emphasis was already echoed by researchers such as Freeman and Johnson (1998), who argue that teacher learning is a critical factor in successful language teaching, and more recently by Silva (2020), who discusses the role of the teacher in a TBLT implementation, highlighting strategies for guaranteeing the task's critical objectives, directing students' attention (to form or to critical issues), overcoming technical and material difficulties, and facilitating students' learning (Silva, 2020). Van den Branden emphasizes the importance of teacher preparation and provides a valuable resource for those language educators seeking to improve their teaching practices.

The book also considers practical implications for teachers, including the need for sustained professional development, systemic support, and opportunities for reflection and growth. These implications are grounded in the work of researchers such as Darling-Hammond (2006), who argues that teacher learning is a lifelong process that requires ongoing support and development. Additionally, they align with the findings of D'Ely and Gil (2005), whose research suggests a potential link between reflection, growth, and change, as the process is motivated by educational tools. Van den Branden offers a valuable resource for language teachers and educators by providing practical guidance on how to implement TBLT. Furthermore, East (2022) acknowledges the need to adopt a cyclical reflective perspective in contexts of teacher preparation and support for TBLT.

One of the main shortcomings of the book, however, is the limited discussion of challenges and potential difficulties in implementing TBLT. While TBLT is not a one-size-fits-all approach, the book should give greater attention to needs analysis as a fundamental component of TBLT and contextual adaptation. This would provide a more nuanced understanding of the complexities of TBLT and help teachers prepare for potential difficulties.

Another potential weakness of the book is its assumption about teacher expertise and pedagogical content knowledge. The book assumes a certain level of teacher expertise and knowledge, which may not be realistic for all teachers. Plausibly, Shulman's (1986) argument – that teacher knowledge is a complex and multifaceted construct that requires ongoing development and support – remains valid (Almeida et al., 2019). Notably, the book may not be intended as an introductory resource and therefore may provide only limited guidance for novice teachers who lack the assumed pedagogical expertise.

The book gives relatively little attention to teacher support systems such as mentoring programs, peer coaching, and curated online resources.

While this omission may reflect the author's narrower aims, discussion of such supports would strengthen practical uptake of TBLT by showing how teachers can develop the sustained guidance and collaboration Richards and Farrell (2005) identify as central to professional learning. A future edition could usefully address these systems and concrete examples of how they facilitate implementation.

In sum, Task-Based Language Teaching is a valuable, research-informed guide to TBLT that clearly presents its theoretical foundations and practical applications. While it could more explicitly address implementation challenges, teacher support, and tools for adapting principles to varied contexts, these caveats do not undermine its usefulness as a must-read for educators seeking to adopt task-based approaches. Van den Branden's book is a strong contribution to the field and a recommended resource for teachers and teacher-educators, also providing a foundation for further research on the interplay of tasks and language pedagogy.

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During preparation of this book review, the authors used AI-assisted tools for drafting, rephrasing, and factual checks: ChatGPT (OpenAI) was used to review and reformulate draft passages and summarize content. We also used Google to check ABNT formatting and verify bibliographic details. The authors reviewed, edited, and integrated all outputs and suggestions from these tools and take full responsibility for the final content.

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End notes

1. Following Van den Branden, this review uses the term additional language acquisition; where cited authors use the term Second Language Acquisition (SLA), their original phrasing is retained.

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