

# On the Appropriateness of CLT And TBLT in The Chinese Foreign Language Teaching Environment

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**Abstract:** With the comprehensive promotion of the new round of basic education curriculum reform in China, the new curriculum standard advocates to change the tendency of the English curriculum to pay too much attention to the explanation and teaching of grammar and vocabulary knowledge, and neglect the cultivation of students' practical language usability, to achieve this goal, the Communicative Learning Teaching Method (CLT) and the TBLT method (TBLT) were popular at one time. The paper analyzes the advantages and disadvantages of the two teaching methods according to their definitions and points out that teachers should choose the appropriate English teaching method according to comprehensive factors such as students' needs, social environment, and learning objectives.

**Keywords:** Communicative language teaching (CLT), Task-based language teaching (TBLT), Foreign language teaching.

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## 1. Introduction

Communicative language teaching (hereinafter referred to as CLT) and Task-based language teaching (hereinafter referred to as TBLT) have had a significant and far-reaching impact on the field of English language teaching worldwide. In the past forty years, English education in China has also experienced a series of reforms and developments. Due to the informatization of contemporary social life and the globalization of the economy, the importance of proficient knowledge of English has become increasingly prominent. In order to improve the quality of English teaching, the Chinese education authorities have enacted and implemented a series of relevant English teaching reform policies. As an important part of the contemporary English teaching reform, CLT and TBLT have been successively introduced into Chinese English classrooms. Given this, this paper will briefly introduce CLT and TBLT, analyze and discuss the advantages and disadvantages of the two teaching methods, and analyze and study the appropriateness of the two teaching methods in the Chinese foreign language teaching environment.

## 2. Brief Introduction

### 2.1. CLT

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), also known as the Idea Approach (Notional Approach), which is also generally regarded as a kind of second or foreign language teaching idea, was put forward by British applied linguists in the 1970s based on reflecting on the theory of structuralist language teaching method, with the basic concepts of Idea, Function, and Communication. The basic concepts of CLT are Idea, Function, and Communication. CLT is a kind of language teaching method with the core objective of enhancing students' communicative competence, which aims to cultivate students' communicative competence, including linguistic competence, discourse competence, pragmatic competence, competence, and pragmatics. competence), strategic competence) and fluency (Hedge, 2000). The principle of CLT is to let students learn language by using language in communication, to let students experience their language in communication, and then to correct it in

communication, and finally to achieve real accuracy in communication. It emphasizes student-centeredness, and through the use of multimedia teaching technology and other means it creates real situations to mobilize students' multiple senses so that they can actively participate in teaching activities. The key lies in emphasizing the practical nature of language acquisition and letting students become the masters of learning.

### 2.2. TBLT

TBLT (Task-based Language Teaching) is an important branch of CLT, which emerged in the 1980s, advocating student-centeredness, emphasizing "learning by doing" and "meaning first", and focusing on teaching students to improve their comprehensive application of listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills in the process of completing a series of tasks. Long (1985), Breen (1987), Nunan (1989), and others have defined "task" from different perspectives, but it can be divided into two categories. According to the broad task school, any activity in which learners are involved to improve language learning can be called a task. Tasks can be categorized into "learning tasks" (language-based practice activities) and "communicative tasks" (using the target language to complete tasks for communication purposes); while the narrow task school believes that only activities that use language for some communicative purposes can be called tasks. can be called a task. Tasks must have a result, so activities such as practicing grammar, structure, phonics, vocabulary, etc. cannot be called tasks. TBLT is a language teaching method based on the completion of CLT, with planning and manipulation as its central elements, aiming at enabling students to develop their language skills, thinking skills, as well as the ability to communicate and cooperate in the process of doing things with a clear goal of the task, to improve the ability to use language in an integrated way. However, in the process of trying TBLT, many teachers are confused about the difference between tasks and exercises in traditional language teaching. Tasks and exercises are both activities in the language teaching classroom, and their most essential difference is that in tasks, learners accomplish something in steps around a specific goal. In practice, learners do something around the language item itself that is designed

to review or consolidate that language knowledge. Among the many classroom teaching models proposed by foreign scholars, Willis's model retains more of the features of the TBLT theoretical framework and is related to the 3P model,



### 3. Advantages and Disadvantages

#### 3.1. Good points

3.1.1 CLT focuses on giving full play to students' innate ability to learn and use the language, and emphasizes a student-centered, language learner-centered classroom teaching mode, i.e., in CLT classroom teaching, the teacher is no longer a traditional transmitter of language knowledge, but becomes an auxiliary in the language activities, so as to let the students become the real dominant players in learning.

3.1.2 CLT takes the cultivation of students' communicative competence as its ultimate goal and focuses more on the meaningful function of language, that is, all the classroom activities in CLT provide students with the opportunity to communicate in language as the most important goal so that students can not only acquire the grammatical knowledge of the language, but also master the pragmatic function of the language in the CLT classroom activities.

3.1.3 CLT emphasizes that the curriculum develops students' comprehensive language skills from the perspective of their learning interests, life experiences, and cognitive levels, so that the process of language learning becomes a process in which students form positive emotional attitudes, think actively and practice boldly, improve their cross-cultural awareness, and develop their ability to learn independently.

3.1.4 CLT focuses on developing students' listening and speaking skills with the goal of communicative exchange, allowing students to listen carefully and produce authentic, meaningful, and creative output.

3.1.5 Compared to the traditional classroom, the activities in the TBLT classroom place higher demands on students, not by asking them to simply and mechanically repeat the language, but by asking them to use the language to say or do something meaningful. This type of activity is essential for learning authentic language.

3.1.6 Cooperative group learning is the core of TBLT. Cooperative learning refers to interactive learning in which students work in groups or teams with a clear division of responsibilities in order to accomplish a common task. It requires mutual support and cooperation, especially face-to-face facilitative interaction, active assumption of responsibility in a task, and necessary communication to build interaction and self-confidence. Cooperative learning transforms competition between individuals into competition between groups and helps to develop team spirit and a sense of competition.

#### 3.2. Shortcomings

3.2.1 Due to the students' different personalities, abilities, and varying knowledge structures, as well as some deficiencies in the teachers' own qualities, etc., it is difficult for CLT to achieve the desired results in the cultivation of students' comprehensive language-use skills.

which is easier to draw on in practical use.

Willis proposes the following basic model for task-based language teaching.

3.2.2 Given the large class size and limited teaching time, it is difficult for teachers to take care of every student when organizing communicative teaching. Students with poor English proficiency can easily relax their minds when other students are demonstrating conversation, and it is also difficult for them to enter into the scenarios and roles set by the textbook, whereas CLT emphasizes students' initiative in the learning process, so it seems that the learning effect of these students in the classroom is almost zero.

3.2.3 Some scholars point out that there are more problems in the current secondary school English TBLT: too many tasks, too much performance flavor; the character design is out of reality; the preparation before the task is not sufficient; the grouping arrangement is not paid attention to; and the evaluation after the task is monotonous. Some scholars explain that TBLT should not be strongly advocated in China and its main problems in the practice of English teaching in China from the aspects of students' motivation, learning environment, learning rules, teaching conditions, teachers' conditions, etc., and point out that it is biased to strongly advocate TBLT or any other western linguistic method in China.

3.2.4 TBLT places high demands on the quality, level, and competence of teachers. First of all, in terms of language level, teachers must master strong language use skills in addition to good language knowledge. The phenomenon of uneven teacher qualifications of English teachers is more common, especially the educational attainment rate of teachers in rural areas and factories and mines, and these teachers are more than capable of TBLT. Secondly, TBLT requires a high level of knowledge from teachers. In designing tasks, they will encounter various topics, such as how to negotiate, how to hold a press conference, etc., which requires teachers to have a wide range of knowledge. Again, today is the network era, but many teachers still use projectors and wall charts as the mainstay of their teaching, and they are not yet able to use multimedia teaching equipment to assist teaching, which requires teachers to constantly learn new educational technologies and develop new abilities to use technology to assist teaching, otherwise, TBLT cannot be put into practice.

3.2.5 TBLT emphasizes the ability to use language, shifts from knowledge-based to student development-based, and focuses on the teaching of listening and speaking. As a result, some teachers misunderstand the true meaning of "downplaying grammar", mistakenly believe that grammar teaching is dispensable, ignore the role of grammar teaching in English language teaching, and even discard the grammar teaching experience they have accumulated over the years. TBLT is not against grammar teaching. TBLT is not against grammar teaching but emphasizes the importance of letting students use the language knowledge they have acquired to express meaningful ideas rather than focusing on the language itself.

## 4. Appropriateness

Despite the widespread popularity of CLT and TBLT, there is much controversy about the appropriateness of these two teaching methods, so the author will analyze them separately.

### 4.1. CLT

4.1.1 The first and most important issue to be considered is the difference between the Chinese and foreign cultural and educational environments and the degree of teachers' acceptance of the Communicative English Language Teaching (CLT) method. CLT originated in the 1970s, when the rapid development of business and trade in the European world led to an increase in the demand for listening and speaking skills for face-to-face communication and the high demand for communicative competence could hardly be realized in the traditional teaching methods of teaching grammar knowledge and translation, and the implementability of CTL in the Chinese cultural and educational environment was questioned. This high demand for communicative competence is difficult to realize under the traditional teaching methods of grammar and translation, and the implementability of CTL in the Chinese cultural and educational environment has been questioned. In addition, students in China have been used to "duck-filling" teaching since they were young, and they are more or less resistant to and concerned about independent learning or cooperative learning. Teachers also have different degrees of acceptance and subjective willingness to CLT. After all, in China, the level of teachers is measured by students' examination results, and the examination of students at the primary level is still based on grammar rules, vocabulary, and structures, so how to improve the teaching effect and the selective use of CLT has become a challenging problem for teachers in China. (2) The second issue concerns the design of a syllabus used for classroom purposes. CLT emphasizes that people use language for functional purposes, i.e., to fulfill functions such as greeting, apologizing, inviting, refusing, complaining, etc. The purpose of language learning is not to learn its grammatical structures but to be able to use the structures to communicate. However, it is difficult to design a syllabus that has a one-to-one correspondence between function and form. Often one function of a language can be realized by several language forms, and similarly, one language form may have multiple functions, all of which create problems for syllabus design. (3) Finally, it was questioned whether the pedagogical approach applied to learners of all ages, or at all levels. In choosing to adopt CLT, it is necessary to consider clearly whether it meets the needs of the learners, whether it serves as an enhancement aid for the learners, and whether the learners can adapt to the teaching method.

### 4.2. TBLT

4.2.1 First of all, students' basic knowledge of English varies and their overall level is not high, so TBLT is too difficult for them. The use of TBLT emphasizes that in classroom teaching, students are allowed to use English to complete real or near-real-life tasks, which requires the integration of knowledge and skills, and the use of the target language to complete the tasks through activities such as listening, speaking, reading, writing, etc., and the development of their ability to use the language in the process of completing the tasks. This requires students to have a good knowledge of the basics of English, and in our country at

present, although many secondary school students have long been in contact with English before entering secondary school, the foundation of English is still very poor, and there is no uniform standard of measurement of English learning before entering secondary school, some students lose confidence in English learning because of the poor English foundation; some students are not interested in English; and some varying degrees of low self-esteem, lack of self-confidence and other phenomena, all of which create obstacles to the implementation of TBLT. In addition, our students lack an English language environment, the main way of English learning is in the classroom, and there is almost no opportunity to use English in daily life, which leads to the poor language application ability of students, and they can't accomplish the "task" successfully. (2) The objective environmental conditions for the implementation of TBLT are an authentic and natural language environment, a large amount of language input, the input of relevant task information, and students' language practice. Except for the English classroom, Chinese students spend the rest of their time communicating in their mother tongue and have little or no opportunity to communicate with local people. Due to the limitations of the language environment, students cannot create an urgent need to communicate in English, and it is difficult to realize the teaching idea of TBLT, which advocates task-based teaching with the purpose of exchange and communication. (3) Teachers' daily teaching tasks are too heavy and their time and energy are limited, while TBLT requires teachers to carefully prepare appropriate teaching materials and design teaching tasks, and they may need to prepare different materials according to the individual differences of students, which is a great challenge for teachers. (4) At present, the evaluation of teachers teaching basic education English teaching in China is still based on formative evaluation combined with summative evaluation. For example, it is based on the promotion rate of students in the "middle school examination" and "college entrance examination" as well as the "touch base examination", "monthly examination" and "unified examination" set by each school. "The ranking of the student's grades in each subject in each class in each school is the standard of measurement. Some teachers, who are comfortable with traditional grammar teaching and "teaching to the test", do not have confidence in using TBLT to teach grammar in the classroom, and for the sake of scores in the college entrance exams, they can only take a coping attitude towards TBLT, and improve students' scores by letting them do a lot of exercises. It has been proved from theoretical or practical studies at home and abroad that the implementation of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) is highly beneficial in promoting comprehensive language use abilities. But at the same time, it has to be admitted that these abilities are not completely linked to students' test scores. It has been proved that students' comprehensive language use abilities have been improved, but their test scores may well not be as satisfactory as they would have been if the traditional teaching method had been implemented. It can be seen that if the evaluation and examination system continues to remain unchanged, there will be great difficulties in carrying out TBLT in classroom teaching in China. (5) Textbooks are the main basis for English teachers to implement the English curriculum and the main content for students to learn. However, most of the textbooks for TBLT in China are copied from those used for second language teaching abroad. The language scenarios provided in these

textbooks are practical for native English-speaking students, but not for Chinese students. Nowadays, the English textbooks for primary and secondary schools published in China are either difficult in task design or lack systematization in content writing, all of which should be taken into consideration for TBLT to be able to be successfully carried out in China's foreign language teaching and learning environments.

## 5. Conclusion

To summarize, the author believes that although there are different problems with the application of CLT or TBLT in Chinese domestic English classrooms, its effective results in English language teaching cannot be denied, and its positive role in helping learners acquire English grammar and pragmatic knowledge cannot be ignored. Whether it is CLT or TBLT, only what fits the teaching context is really a good teaching method. Therefore, as educators, we need to analyze each situation, improve our own quality and teaching ability, and effectively combine the teaching concepts of CLT and TBLT with the Chinese English classroom context, so that Chinese students can better master English language knowledge in the classroom. At the same time, teachers should focus on students and emphasize the cultivation of

students' practical and comprehensive language usability, so that students can keep up with the development needs of the knowledge economy era in terms of language skills, language knowledge, affective attitudes, learning strategies, and cultural awareness, and better cultivate export-oriented talents who can adapt to the times and go global.

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