

TASK-BASED LEARNING AND LISTENING COMPREHENSION

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Abstract: *This article explores the role of Task-Based Learning (TBL) in enhancing listening comprehension in second language acquisition. TBL, which focuses on real-life tasks rather than explicit grammar instruction, provides learners with meaningful opportunities to use language in authentic communicative situations. The article discusses how TBL improves listening comprehension by offering exposure to real-world listening materials, fostering interactive communication, and emphasizing the importance of understanding meaning over form. Additionally, the stages of listening within the TBL framework—pre-task, task cycle, and post-task—are examined, highlighting how each phase supports the development of listening skills. While TBL presents challenges such as cognitive load and the need for form-focused support, its benefits in improving active listening, especially through task repetition and diverse listening inputs, make it an effective method for language learners.*

Keywords: *Task-Based Learning (TBL), Listening Comprehension, Second Language Acquisition (SLA), Communicative Language Teaching, Authentic Listening Tasks, Interactive Learning, Task Cycle, Real-World Language Use, Language Input, Listening Skills Development.*

Task-Based Learning (TBL), also known as Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT), is a language teaching approach that emphasizes the use of real-life tasks as the central unit of planning and instruction. TBL shifts the focus from traditional grammar-based approaches to using language in meaningful, communicative tasks. It draws on the principles of communicative language teaching, where learners engage in tasks that are relevant to everyday life situations, such as booking a hotel room, giving directions, or resolving a customer service issue.

TBL is characterized by three main stages:

- **Pre-task:** The teacher introduces the topic and the task, often activating prior knowledge or teaching key vocabulary and phrases needed for the task.
- **Task cycle:** Learners work on the task in pairs or groups, using the target language to achieve the task's goal. This stage includes the task itself, planning how to report on the task, and the report phase.

➤ Post-task: The teacher provides feedback, and there may be opportunities to focus on specific language features encountered during the task.

TBL's central feature is its emphasis on completing tasks, rather than explicitly teaching grammar or language rules. This creates a more dynamic, learner-centered environment where language is used naturally and communicatively.

Listening Comprehension in Language Learning

Listening comprehension is the ability to understand spoken language, which is a crucial skill in second language acquisition (SLA). It involves not only recognizing words and phrases but also processing meaning, understanding context, and inferring implied information. Listening is considered a receptive skill, where learners receive and process input, making it a vital part of language learning.

Listening comprehension can be particularly challenging for learners because spoken language often includes:

- Connected speech: Where words are linked together, making it hard for learners to distinguish individual words.
- Varied accents and speeds: Speakers may use different accents or speak too quickly, which can add to the difficulty.
- Cultural references and idiomatic expressions: Spoken language often includes cultural nuances and idioms that are unfamiliar to learners.
- Non-verbal cues: Gestures, tone, and facial expressions also play a role in comprehension.

The Role of TBL in Enhancing Listening Comprehension

Task-Based Learning can be particularly effective in improving listening comprehension for several reasons:

➤ Authentic listening tasks: TBL incorporates tasks that simulate real-world situations, which means learners are exposed to more authentic listening materials. These could include dialogues, interviews, or listening to announcements, which are relevant and functional in real-life contexts. By engaging with these materials, learners develop the ability to understand spoken language in a natural setting.

➤ Focus on meaning: Since TBL prioritizes meaning over form, learners are encouraged to listen for general understanding and specific information, rather than focusing solely on individual words or grammatical structures. This helps learners develop top-down listening skills, such as inferring meaning from context and identifying the speaker's intent.

➤ Interactive nature of tasks: TBL typically involves pair or group work, where learners must listen to their peers and negotiate meaning. This interactive component allows learners to engage in real communication, which reinforces active listening skills. Learners must pay attention not only to the content but also to how it's being communicated.

➤ Task repetition: One of the benefits of TBL is that tasks can be repeated with different partners or in different contexts. Repetition allows learners to improve their listening comprehension by becoming more familiar with the language patterns and

structures encountered during the task. Over time, learners become more comfortable with listening to and processing spoken language.

➤ Exposure to different accents and speakers: In many TBL classrooms, learners are exposed to a variety of listening materials featuring different accents, dialects, and speaking styles. This diversity helps learners develop the ability to understand a wider range of speakers, which is important for real-world listening comprehension.

Stages of Listening in a TBL Framework

In a TBL framework, listening tasks often follow a structured process that encourages active listening and processing of information. Here's how listening comprehension activities might be integrated into the three stages of TBL:

➤ Pre-task: In this phase, learners might listen to an audio clip or watch a video that introduces the topic of the task. The focus is on familiarizing learners with the vocabulary and context they will encounter during the task. Teachers might ask learners to predict the content of the task based on what they hear or to listen for specific details that will help them during the task cycle.

➤ Task cycle: During the task cycle, learners engage in a listening task that is related to the main task. For example, they might listen to a conversation, interview, or set of instructions that directly relates to the task they need to complete. Learners must use their listening comprehension skills to understand the information and complete the task successfully.

➤ Post-task: After the task, the teacher provides feedback on learners' performance, including how well they understood the listening materials. There may be a focus on specific language features or listening strategies that were challenging. Learners can reflect on their listening experience and identify areas for improvement.

Challenges in Using TBL for Listening Comprehension

While TBL offers numerous advantages, there are also some challenges to consider when applying it to listening comprehension:

➤ Cognitive load: Listening to authentic materials can be cognitively demanding, especially for lower-level learners who may struggle to keep up with the pace or complexity of the input. Teachers need to carefully scaffold tasks to ensure that learners are not overwhelmed.

➤ Limited focus on form: Since TBL focuses on meaning rather than form, some learners may need additional support in developing specific listening skills, such as recognizing individual sounds or intonation patterns. Teachers can address this by incorporating form-focused activities alongside the task cycle.

➤ Assessment of listening: Assessing listening comprehension in a task-based framework can be challenging, as it may not always be clear how much learners have understood during communicative tasks. Teachers may need to design specific listening tasks or use comprehension checks to ensure that learners are developing their listening skills effectively.

In conclusion, Task-Based Learning offers a dynamic and engaging approach to developing listening comprehension. By focusing on meaningful communication and real-world tasks, learners are exposed to authentic listening experiences that help them develop the skills they need to understand spoken language in various contexts. While there are challenges to implementing TBL for listening, the benefits of interactive, task-based activities make it an effective method for improving listening comprehension in language learners.

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