Task-Based Language Teaching in Second Language Acquisition Research:

The Implications for TBLT Application in Japan

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1. Introduction

Underlying much of current second language acquisition (SLA) research is the assumption that, although similar in some limited aspects to first language acquisition, learning an additional language during adulthood is a challenging process that few people complete to native-like levels. The bulk of current research is attempting to define and provide evidence for how learners go through this process, with many focusing on both the internal processes involved within the learner and the social aspects of learning. As a field closely connected to education, applied linguistics, and many other disciplines, the end result of this research effort is assumed to be the designing of pedagogical practices that facilitate the SLA process and closely match the needs and natural tendencies of these learners.

Task-based language teaching (TBLT) is just such a result—an attempt to apply SLA research data on how and why learners achieve the best results in ESL and EFL classrooms, while simultaneously considering the real-world needs and goals of these same students. It is a method with a firm basis in the current leading theories in the field, although it is not without controversy among educators and SLA researchers alike. Through this review, I hope to address the following question:

"What is the basis for task-based language teaching within second language acquisition research (specifically Interaction Theory), and what are the implications for its application in the Japanese EFL context?"

The problem I hope to address by answering this question, and the reason

this question is important in the first place, is the controversial nature of this approach's application in Japan and the questioning of the evidence supporting TBLT by those who oppose it. Although (as I will show through this review), TBLT fits well into current SLA approaches that most align with the available evidence (e.g. Interaction Theory, cognitive theories of SLA, Socio-cultural Theory, etc.), not all educators in Japan are convinced of its validity within the bounds of SLA theory or as a method of instruction (and often cite opposing theories of SLA and instructional approaches). I hope to make the case that, when examining research into the processes involved in second language acquisition, exploring action research that attempts to connect these theories with observations of actual language learners, and reviewing the current state of TBLT application in Asia and Japan, the soundness of this approach for this context will become clear. Although the end of this review will provide suggestions for the practical application of TBLT in the Japanese EFL context, the bulk of this review will consist of exploring the basis of TBLT within theories of SLA and evidence from observations of the processes involved with this approach, and will not be concerned with methodology, per se.

The following key words were used as the criteria for searching out data on this subject:

tasks, task-based language teaching, task-based language instruction, task-based instruction, second-language acquisition, interaction, input, output, feedback, negotiation for meaning, noticing, Japan, Asia, presentation-practice-production (PPP), and *computer-assisted language learning*

Although much of the action research and discussions on education policy are drawn from studies specifically concerning Japan, data from the larger Asian EFL setting were included as well because of concurrent trends underway concerning TBLT in this entire region.

2. Literature Review

To begin this investigation of task-based language teaching and its

application, it is helpful to first explore what has been written on the theories supporting this approach and what tools can be utilized when investigating TBLT. My main focus is how TBLT fits into Interaction Theory, how it supports each of the components of the IIO model, and how it stands within a cognitive approach to SLA. To better support the case for TBLT within the larger SLA research domain, connections between Socio-cultural Theory and task-based learning will also be made. After looking at some seminal and more recent work in this area, I will then turn to action research conducted by educational practitioners interested in the effects of TBLT on the SLA process. Finally, I will discuss several authors' work examining the application of TBLT (and the larger approach of communicative language teaching) in Asia and Japan and the impediments to this shift that have been observed.

The Theoretical Basis for Task-Based Language Teaching

Most researchers first encounter discussions on task-based instruction when examining the work of people such as Pica, often within the context of investigations into Interaction Theory. Pica, Young, and Doughty's (1987) seminal work examined the benefits of interactional modification on learners, with the instrument of this experiment featuring a task that elicited negotiation for meaning. Pica, Kanagy, and Falodun (1993) later discussed types of tasks, helping to categorize them into five forms (e.g. information gap, opinion exchange, etc.). Through these two landmark works alone, the potential for classroom tasks to act as both facilitators of interaction and as tools of instruction and research became clear.

Jane Willis (2004) has also dedicated much of her career to exploring the issues involved with TBLT. She explains that this approach came about as a result of the general trend toward communicative language teaching and making classroom activities as similar to real world scenarios as possible, with three key premises concerning how TBLT benefits the second-language acquisition process: 1. SLA is an "organic process" (Willis, 2004, p. 8) and not linear in nature (in opposition to earlier approaches such as grammar-translation and the audiolingual method), 2. focus on meaning helps the

subconscious process of form acquisition (with Willis citing Krashen's work on the importance of comprehensible input), 3. opportunities for output, interaction, and negotiation for meaning are crucial to the SLA process (with Willis citing Long and Swain's work in these areas) (Willis, 2004). As is clear from these premises, TBLT seems to naturally fit into the perspective of Interaction Theory, with many overarching themes (importance of input, interaction, output, negotiation for meaning, etc.) overlapping. This, along with the Pica, et al.'s (1987, 1993) work previously mentioned, helps to firmly root TBLT into the realm of Interaction Theory.

Three types of tasks (citation, simulation, and replication) are also categorized by Willis, with replication cited as most beneficial due to its real-world modeling of activities and lack of target forms (allowing interaction and output utilizing a student's entire interlanguage). Many researchers view replication as the only genuine task type, claiming that focus on form should be provided during other stages (Willis, 2004).

Work on the usefulness of tasks as research, learning, and teaching tools has also been conducted, with two more recent articles by Pica (2005) and Pica, Kang and Sauro (2006) examining how information gap tasks work in this regard: they provide mutual student/participant goals, and prompt them to "receive feedback, enhance their comprehension, and attend to message form and meaning", again helping to connect TBLT and Interaction Theory (Pica, 2005, p. 341). In her study, Pica (2005) chose target forms that students were developmentally prepared for (with Pica citing Pienneman's Teachability Hypothesis), choosing determiners, articles, modal verbs, and other forms with low perceptual salience or whose form/meaning connection was relatively unclear. Asian ESL students in a film course were given tasks utilizing texts they were already reading for class. While performing the task, Pica noticed that "[a]s [participants] negotiate, they modify their input, provide corrective feedback, and produce modified output." (Pica, 2005, p. 346). Pica explains that each step of the task provides a chance to track the SLA process, and that students were observed using metalinguistic terms to justify their choices of forms, seeming to especially remember forms that they negotiated the meaning for during the task (Pica, 2005).

Because of the complex nature of tasks and TBLT, it is helpful to look at different authors' definitions for what tasks are. Samuda and Bygate (2008) explain that "[a] task is a holistic activity which engages language use in order to achieve some non-linguistic outcome while meeting a linguistic challenge, with the overall aim of promoting language learning, through process or product or both" (Samuda & Bygate, 2008, p. 69). In their textbook on the subject, the authors note research conducted by several prominent figures, with that of Donato helping to connect TBLT and the ideas of Socio-cultural Theory. Samuda and Bygate explain Donato's findings on French learners who could not construct certain phrases in the L2 themselves, but who collaborated and shared knowledge during tasks, leading to successful target-like production (and that this type of scaffolding is not possible in whole-class interactions) (Samuda & Bygate, 2008). With this, we see that theoretical support exists for TBLT from not only the cognitive arena, but from SCT as well.

The research concerning tasks is not without its critics however, with Block (2003) calling the view of tasks as information exchange activities "narrow, confining, and partial" (Block, 2003, p. 70), and explaining that language play, maintenance of relationships and status, and many other linguistic activities run counter to the perception that language is mostly concerned with the passing of information between parties.

Action Research on Task-Based Language Teaching
Cognitive/Interaction Theory Connections to TBLT

Now that the connection between TBLT and Interaction Theory has been established, it is helpful to look into research conducted on this subject by language instructors, examining how these theories play out when actual language learners are involved. The first set of studies will continue to connect TBLT with Interaction Theory, with several other works later helping to make connections with socio-cultural theory as well. In addition, other notable areas of learner-psychology research and SLA research (e.g. attribution theory, CALL, etc.) and their connections to TBLT will be noted as well, in an attempt to highlight the theoretical support for this approach.

To begin looking at cognitive/Interaction Theory connections with TBLT, I will first explore the function of noticing within tasks and how tasks can be used to elicit attention to form. In a study on this issue involving Japanese university students, Hanaoka (2007) investigated how tasks can be used to encourage the noticing of particular forms. Participants were made to perform a writing task involving story creation based on a picture, followed by comparisons of their first drafts to writing samples of native speakers, and then creation of second and third drafts of the writing (with two months separating the last two steps). Hanaoka reports that nearly two-thirds of lexical issues were noticed by participants when comparing their drafts with those of native speakers, and that noticed forms were corrected 92% of the time in subsequent drafts. These participants noticed both problems they were previously consciously of and problems they were unaware of within their interlanguage. However grammatical and lexical improvements noted in second drafts were not as evident in the delayed third drafts, indicating that benefits to be drawn from the noticing function of tasks may require immediate and repeated reinforcement to make permanent changes to learners' proficiency (Hanaoka, 2007).

Negotiation for meaning, another key aspect of learner interaction in the language acquisition process, has also been investigated in regards to its observed presence during tasks. Futaba (2001), in another study involving Japanese university students (this time ESL learners in a US setting), looked at differences in negotiation patterns between non-native speaker/non-native speaker pairs and native speaker/non-native speaker pairs during a task. In an information gap-style activity involving descriptions of pictures and the ordering of these pictures by a partner, NNS/NNS pairs were observed negotiating for meaning more often than the NS/NNS groups. More frequent instances of negative feedback elicitation were also noted between NNS pairs, however no differences in amounts of input modification or the target-like levels of output by NNS's in these two group types were found. The implications for this study have great relevance for those researching SLA in EFL contexts, in that interaction between non-native speakers (a norm for that setting) is observed to have benefits in regard to the importance

negotiation for meaning holds in the SLA process (Futaba, 2001).

In addition to interaction and noticing, the other key components of the IIO model are input and output, both of which have also been investigated in regard to their connection to TBLT. A study conducted by Shintani (2011) helps us to address the issue of input/output and TBLT while again focusing on Japanese learners of English. Differences in the effect of input-focused versus production-focused tasks on the vocabulary acquisition of young EFL learners was explored, with an additional participant control group (which used TPR and other methods but had no target forms) added for comparison. Although both experimental groups (input and production/output) showed gains in the target forms as compared to the control, no significant differences were found between the effectiveness of input and output focus. Even though this experiment does not seem to indicate a difference in effect, it appears to give general support to the benefits of the application of Interaction Theory and the use of task within that model (be it input-focused, output-focused, or both), as opposed to more naturalistic or unfocused learning (Shintani, 2011).

Negotiation for meaning (another key concept within Interaction Theory) and its connection with the SLA process when occurring during tasks is yet another interesting area for investigation. Encouraging negotiation for meaning, along with the explicit instruction of discourse strategies before and during tasks was implemented in a study by Nakatani (2010) in an effort to investigate their effects on participants' oral English proficiency. Japanese university students were given "OCS [oral communication strategy] guide sheets" (Nakatani, 2010, p. 119) to use during simulation-type tasks. The author found that participants who successfully used discourse strategies showed better quality L2 output, more fluent output, and had fewer breakdowns in communication. Higher comprehension and clarification check rates also predicted higher task success, with improved test scores observed in students who used the strategies and negotiating for meaning more often (Nakatani, 2010).

Socio-cultural Theory Connections to TBLT

In addition to making connections between the IIO model and TBLT, it also helpful to include evidence for the effectiveness of tasks within the

Socio-cultural Theory of SLA as well. Lee (2003), in a study conducted on adult Korean EFL learners, noted the benefits of learner-centeredness (a key component of TBLT (Willis, 2004)) and the scaffolding that occurs between higher proficiency and lower proficiency learners during tasks. The task at hand involved participants designing model businesses in groups and explaining them in English, a realistic activity for these learners considering their future career paths (Lee, 2003). Lee claims that greater amounts of scaffolding of learners by teachers occurred in the learner-centered groups, and that more interaction occurred in learner-centered groups as well. The implications for this study from the perspective of SCT are for the possibility of reducing student anxiety through peer scaffolding, as well as the influence of learner confidence success in these groups helps foster.

Other Research Connections to TBLT

Now that the connection between cognitive/interaction and socio-cultural theories of second language acquisition and task-based language teaching have been established, it is also worthwhile to cite several other action research studies that investigate TBLT and other aspects of SLA not previously mentioned in this review. How the instruction of cultural knowledge, the influence of attribution, the use of technology, and other areas come into play during task-based learning will also be explored in light of their potential benefits to language acquisition.

Instruction on the culture of target language populations can be an important component of EFL instruction, but what evidence exists for the benefit of combining this with a task-based approach? Ishii (2009) sought to answer this very question in a Japanese high school setting, focusing on potential benefits in regard to how this type of instruction affects learner attitudes and proficiency gains. Using a technique referred to as a "culture assimilator" (Fiedler, Mitchell, & Triandis, cited in Ishii, 2009), experimental-group participants were engaged in decision making tasks in small groups concerning situations of cultural conflict, with potential explanations being presented from the perspective of both home and target cultures. Upon completion of the task, learners participating in culturally-focused task groups were observed holding more positive attitudes toward

the target culture and showing significantly higher English proficiency gains than participants in the non-culturally focused control groups (Ishii, 2009).

Another avenue of SLA research we can connect with TBLT (in an attempt to illuminate the positive effects of this approach on language learning) is that of attribution theory. This theory, originally postulated by psychology researchers such as Burke and Weiner (cited in Mori, et al., 2010), can be used to demonstrate what aspects of the self or the environment people attribute to successes or failures. Mori, et al. (2010) sought to connect this theory to the second language learning process, examining how Japanese and Thai students differed in the attributions they made to successes and failures during English tasks. Both groups showed similar patterns of responses on a questionnaire originally designed by Vispoel and Austin (1995, cited in Mori, et al., 2010), with successes made during tasks attributed to external factors (e.g. the instructor, the perceived easiness of the task) and failures attributed to internal factors (e.g. ability, effort). Since these attributions can directly affect learner motivation, which in turn affects the SLA process, instructors are suggested to be cognizant of these issues in Asian learners (pertinent for the context of my research question), and to consider issues of culture when designing tasks. Helping students manage attributions for failure after tasks is similarly crucial in attempting to avoid negative effects on the SLA process and motivation (Mori, et al., 2010).

Another interesting avenue of research that connects TBLT with other important trends in the field is that of technology and CALL, and their connection with how tasks affect language acquisition. The teams of Lai and Li (2011) as well as Kiernan and Aizawa (2004) both looked at this issue and how task implementation can be affected by the use of CALL approaches. After confirming that TBLT fits many of the characteristics of language learning explained by Interaction and Socio-cultural Theories, Lai and Li explain that the CALL approach also shares a similar push toward learner-centeredness as TBLT, and further helps the SLA process by lowering students' affective filters (due partially to the lack of face-threatening potential in online interactions in the L2) (Lai & Li, 2011). These authors show that evidence for long term gains in speaking proficiency, syntax, vocabulary

development, and other aspects of the interlanguage can be drawn from current studies on the combined use of CALL and TBLT. Technologically-oriented tasks were observed to help with: equal participation between students during tasks, increased noticing and self monitoring, and an increase in "social cohesiveness" (Lai & Li, 2011, p. 7). Kiernan and Aizawa (2004) also discuss the compatibility of CALL and TBLT within SLA research literature, and suggest that for students in Japan, the ubiquitous nature of cell phones can be used to further second language development during tasks. Although the data these authors present does not substantially confirm proficiency gains following tasks using these methods, participants in the study reported great interest in the use of cell phones and other technology during tasks, hinting that student motivation (and perhaps even the language acquisition process) could benefit from this approach (Kiernan & Aizawa, 2004).

Finally, it is also important to look at studies addressing the misuse (or perceived misuse) of TBLT by instructors, sometimes as a result of their perceptions on evidence from SLA research or their assumptions about the "realities" in their classroom. Plews and Zhao (2010) claim that blame is sometimes placed on non-native speaker instructors (usually in EFL settings) for the misuse of TBLT and the misrepresentation of the research evidence behind it, while at the same time many native speaker instructors are themselves misusing the TBLT approach in some way. In a qualitative study in which ESL instructors in Canada were interviewed about their use and perceptions of TBLT, the authors found that NS instructors who worried about the lack of grammatical focus within this approach often misused it by using a focus on forms style (often similar to grammar translation), used inflexible tasks, and did not repeat tasks (Plews & Zhao, 2010). As Interaction Theorists would likely agree, having stilted, inflexible interactions that do not mirror realistic communication, focusing entirely on forms, or any other patterns of learning that do not match the IIO model fail to promote second language acquisition to the extent that open interactions with comprehensible input and output can. The authors suggest a shift in the perception that NNS instructors are the only ones stunting the SLA process in their learners (by the misuse

of TBLT or other approaches), and that NS instructors are just as in need of training in the use and design of tasks as their NNS instructor counterparts (Plews & Zhao, 2010).

The State of TBLT Implementation in Asia and Japan

Now that the theoretical basis for TBLT and research on its use with language learners have been explored, I would like to now turn to an overview of how this approach is being implemented within Japan. Although the bulk of this paper until now has concerned TBLT connections within SLA research, this section will be somewhat pedagogical in nature and will examine language policy issues relevant to the Asian and Japanese settings.

The implementation of communicative language teaching (the approach on which TBLT is largely based) in Asia has been studied by a number of scholars, with the reporting of mixed results regarding the acceptance it has gained in different countries. In Taiwan, Chang (2011) interviewed eight university EFL instructors concerning their views on CLT implementation in the classroom. Factors cited as positively affecting CLT use included: the levels of teachers' professional training, students' classroom cooperation and need to learn English, school support and implementation of sound curriculum using CLT, and having sufficient resources and exams that reflected the CLT approach. On the other hand, teachers' lack of training, knowledge or skills, student resistance to CLT and their low proficiency levels, large class sizes, few contact hours, test-centered teaching styles, and the lack of English environments and proper CLT assessments were all cited as factors negatively impacting the use of the CLT approach in that setting. (Chang, 2011).

The dissemination in Asia of the TBLT approach itself is discussed by Adams and Newton (2009), explaining that resistance to this approach and the general tendency to continue the use of grammar translation have been observed. As the authors explain, it is often difficult to see immediate classroom and pedagogical responses to national initiatives (like the Asian drives toward CLT and TBLT instruction). Three factors that impede the shift toward TBLT in Asia are cited as: 1. institutional (such as a focus on

high-stakes testing), 2. classroom factors (such as Japanese students' lack of inclination to use English during tasks), and 3. teacher development (as instructors' hesitance to use this technique may be the result of a lack of knowledge on SLA research supporting TBLT) (Adams & Newton, 2009).

In Hong Kong, a debate between TBLT use and the more traditional presentation-practice-production (PPP) approach has been underway for some time. Carless (2009) interviewed ESL instructors from ten Hong Kong public schools, and found that trepidation about the use of TBLT was widespread, with perceptions on the necessity of teacher-centered classrooms and the familiarity of the PPP approach being cited as reasons for eschewing the use of TBLT. Even instructors who reported a preference for task-based instruction tapered off their use of it during the final years of high school, claiming the need to focus on high stakes examinations made the use of TBLT difficult (Carless, 2009).

To begin focusing on Japan specifically, it is useful to observe how the debate on TBLT use has played out within language instructor journals in this country. In a multi-year discussion published entirely within the Japan Association for Language Teaching (JALT) Journal, the researcher Sato (2010, 2011) and instructors Sybing (2010) and Urick (2010) debate the appropriateness of the trend toward TBLT in Japan. Sato (2010) published an article in which he claims PPP is a more effective method than TBLT for Japanese EFL learners, citing Anderson's Skill Acquisition Theory (cited in Sato, 2010) and its fit with the PPP approach as evidence. Sato further explains that since: 1. English is not widely used outside classrooms in Japan, 2. Japanese students must learn skills necessary for standardized tests, and 3. that since TBLT makes grammatical focus difficult, PPP is a preferred method of instruction. In response, Sybing (2010) discusses concern for Sato's "counter-reform approach", and argues that the status quo of language instruction should be challenged by educators if the Japanese student population is to become more communicative in their use of English (Sybing, 2010, p. 69). Urick (2010) similarly criticizes Sato's arguments, further explaining that Sato's use of Anderson's model of SLA is not one supported by the current SLA research community, and that Anderson himself has

backed away from claiming that all learning must first be declarative (Urick, 2010). Both Sybing and Urick note that TBLT can be flexible and that a focus on form approach can also be used within it, so the method should not be completely discounted. Finally Sato (2011) responds to these counter-arguments, again claiming that PPP can be best adapted to the needs of Japanese students in light of English textbooks used in that country and their linear approach to grammar instruction.

Although this debate continues between instructors and academics, it is also crucial to examine how Japanese students themselves view the use of TBLT approaches. Hood, Elwood and Falout (2009) conducted a survey of over 700 Japanese university students concerning their attitudes toward CLT and TBLT, their perceptions on the roles of teachers and students, and whether participants' backgrounds affected these perceptions. The authors found that students with over one year of exposure to TBLT methods preferred learner-centered classrooms and considered TBLT to be more effective than grammar translation. Around 90% of respondents looked favorably on group work (which fits well with the interaction component of the IIO model of SLA), and saw themselves (and not instructors) as being ultimately responsible for the language learning process. Additionally, they found that learners' individual backgrounds did not affect this perception as greatly as exposure to the CLT and TBLT approaches did (Hood, et al., 2009).

As we can see from this section, the use of TBLT has not been fully implemented in either Asia or Japan itself, and great effort and debate continue to surround this pedagogical shift. Despite what instructors themselves may believe, results like those of Hood, et al.'s (2009) survey seem to indicate that students are ready and willing to make this shift, and see the benefits of using task-based approaches.

3. Discussion

At the beginning of this review I noted the work of some prominent authors concerning the effectiveness of the TBLT approach and the evidence available from research on second language acquisition (and how specifically

Interaction Theory stands out as a model that easily fits with many aspects of TBLT). To revisit my research question, I began by asking what the theoretical underpinnings for TBLT were and what the implications were for its use in Japan. By noting the work of Willis (2004) and Pica (2005), and by citing the earlier collaborative work by Pica and her colleagues on this issue (Pica, et al., 1987; Pica, et al., 1993), I believe I have made a clear case for how soundly TBLT falls within the scope of Interaction Theory and the currently held consensus views on the second language learning process. By citing evidence on how TBLT elicits interaction, output, negotiation for meaning, negative feedback, and other behaviors that fall under the IIO model, I believe I can state confidently that task-based instruction is an approach that is supported by Interaction Theory and cognitive theories on the SLA process in general (Willis, 2004).

Action research conducted on actual language learners regarding the use of TBLT has shown numerous potential benefits for using this approach (in keeping with the ideas of Interaction Theory), and has further deepened my understanding of how this method can be utilized in a real world context. Behaviors that are seen as beneficial to the SLA process (from the perspective of Interaction Theory) have been observed and elicited in students during tasks, such as noticing (Hanaoka, 2007), making proficiency gains as a result of both input-focused and output-focused tasks (Shintani, 2011), and negotiating for meaning (Futaba, 2001). Other evidence from this area of research has also shown the benefits of combining TBLT with other instructional techniques, with students being observed making clear proficiency gains during tasks with simultaneous cultural instruction (Ishii, 2009) and CALL components (Lai & Li, 2011), and with evidence that many Asian students attribute their successes during EFL tasks to external factors while attributing failures to internal ones (Mori, et al., 2010).

Despite this evidence, however, it has also become clear that the use of task and the TBLT approach in general is a complex one, with many competing definitions for what tasks are, what the appropriate procedures are during task-based instruction, and whether grammatical/form focus is possible during TBLT (Willis, 2004; Samuda & Bygate, 2008; Sato, 2010).

Further increasing the complexity of this issue is that fact that TBLT can be combined with many other teaching techniques, allowing a great variety in its application.

The final part of my question, namely what the implications are for the use of TBLT in Japan, has been largely answered by the sources cited within this review. As we have seen, communicative language teaching itself has not been completely accepted into language instruction in this region (Chang, 2011), and neither has the relatively more recent arrival of TBLT approaches (Adams & Newton, 2009). Authors such as Carless (2009), Sato (2010, 2011), Sybing (2010), and Urick (2010) have shown that the debate surrounding TBLT and some researchers'/instructors' preference for the older PPP model continues, and has yet to be resolved. Although this is perhaps typical when a large-scale shift in instructional approaches is mandated by policy makers, and that perhaps it will take years of observed success for instructors to appreciate the potential benefits of the TBLT model, I believe this is a debate worth engaging in for the good of EFL learners in Japan.

4. Conclusion

As I have discussed in the previous section, I believe my questions regarding what is the basis for task-based language teaching within second language acquisition research (specifically Interaction Theory), and the implications for its application in the Japanese EFL context have been fully explored in this review, both by investigating the work of SLA theorists and examining the evidence from researchers working directly with language learners. Authors such as Pica (2005) have demonstrated that tasks are good not only as techniques for language learning and teaching, but also as research tools into how the SLA process works, its components, and how well ideas such as Interaction Theory match up with current methodological trends.

For myself, I believe I have benefitted greatly from this investigation, and have emerged more confident than ever that TBLT is well rooted in evidence from modern SLA research and has demonstrated successes in both ESL

and EFL classrooms. Especially helpful to my exploration of this issue was the body of evidence on how effectively TBLT can be combined with other approaches (e.g. Ishii, 2009), how other psychological constructs such as attribution theory can explain and guide the use of tasks (Mori, et al., 2010), and how technology and CALL can best intersect this approach to yield significant learner benefits (Lai &Li, 2011; Kiernan & Aizawa, 2004).

Many future questions I hope to find answers to regarding the use of TBLT in Japan stem from the last section of my review, in which the current trends concerning the use of this approach and the debate surrounding it were examined. Why the effectiveness of TBLT and the research evidence (and perhaps the ideas of Interaction Theory in general) have not been accepted in this setting still remains in debate, with many instructors simultaneously praising parts of the approach while continuing to use grammar translation or techniques such as PPP. Because of the wealth of evidence presented early on in this study concerning the many connections TBLT shares with the principles of Interaction Theory and the IIO model, I do not believe that issue needs to be fleshed out further. What will most help will be continued research on the successes of TBLT implementation in Japan and the testimony of language instructors from all levels of education whom have observed the benefits of this technique in learners. Some future questions that may be addressed include: 1. How are Japanese students' attitudes toward CLT and TBLT continuing to shift, and how can positive attitudes toward these approaches become the consensus within this population?, 2. How can EFL educators in Japan (and language instructors around the world) best be educated about the principles, correct use, and flexibility underlying task-based teaching approaches?, and 3. Should the use of older language teaching methods (e.g. PPP) continued to be allowed in the Japanese EFL classroom in light of the realities of English education in this country? Although my personal belief is that the needs of that student population can be met with TBLT, CLT, focus on form, and other current approaches based on Interaction Theory, we may yet find that not all approaches espoused by (mainly) Western SLA researchers work as well as hoped in the East Asian setting. Further studies should continue to explore this issue and how best to

implement task-based teaching methods in Japan.

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