

# **Task-Based Language Teaching in the Business English Classroom**

**By  
Colleen Hyde**

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**Major Advisor's Signature**

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## **Abstract**

Students all over the world attend classes in Business English to further their careers. Business English instruction can prepare students for jobs in international business or improve their current English level. Instructors use the most recent teaching methods for English language instruction and adapt them to the Business English classroom. One current instructional method is Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) which centers class time around a pedagogical task. Students work together in groups to complete tasks while the teacher acts mainly as a language guide. Since the business world primarily consists of tasks, TBLT can teach business tasks and Business English using classroom tasks. This paper examines both the history and characteristics of Business English and TBLT, and discusses how TBLT is suited for Business English instruction. TBLT is compared to more traditional, teacher centered approaches and methods. The basic stages of TBLT are examined and discussed with emphasis on when the teacher can focus on form and/or meaning. Two sample lesson plans developed for post-graduate university students are included in the paper to show how TBLT can be used in the Business English classroom. The lesson plans focus on the business tasks of writing business emails and writing an itinerary. These TBLT lessons plans can be adapted for use in Business English classrooms and illustrate how TBLT can be used to teach Business English by using pedagogical tasks that mirror real world business tasks. This makes the lesson plan more meaningful to the students, and allows them to use the business skills and language taught outside of the classroom. These basic lessons can also be used as templates to teach additional business tasks including: writing business letters, giving presentations, and preparing business reports.

## Table of Contents

<b>Introduction</b> .....	1
<b>1. Business English.</b> .....	2
1.1 History of Genre-Analysis and ESP. ....	2
1.2 Traditional Teaching of Business English. ....	5
1.3 Types of Business English Learners. ....	7
1.4 Goals of Business English Learners. ....	8
1.5 Cultural and Social Aspects to Business English .....	9
1.6 Business English and TBLT .....	10
<b>2. TBLT.</b> .....	11
2.1 TBLT's Basics and Origins .....	11
2.2 Social Constructivism and TBLT .....	12
2.3 TBLT and Communicative Language Teaching .....	13
2.4 Emergence of TBLT .....	16
2.5 Definition of Tasks in TBLT .....	17
2.6 Business English and Emphasis on Form .....	19
2.7 Combining Form and Meaning in TBLT .....	21
<b>3. Traditional Teaching Method- PPP</b> .....	22
<b>4. Stages of a TBLT Lesson</b> .....	23
4.1 Pre-Task Stage of TBLT .....	25
4.2 Task Cycle Stage of TBLT .....	27
4.2.1 The Task .....	27
4.2.2 Planning Stage of the Task Cycle .....	28

4.2.3 Reporting Stage of Task Cycle. . . . .	29
4.3 Language Focus. . . . .	29
4.3.1 Analysis Stage of Language Focus . . . . .	29
4.3.2 Practice Stage of Language Focus. . . . .	30
<b>5. Additional Information on the Role of the Teacher in TBLT . . . . .</b>	<b>31</b>
<b>6. Applying TBLT to Business English Teaching. . . . .</b>	<b>32</b>
6.1 TBLT in Action. . . . .	32
6.2 Sample Business English Lesson Plans . . . . .	33
<b>7. TBLT Itinerary Lesson Plan . . . . .</b>	<b>33</b>
7.1 Pre-Task Phase. . . . .	33
7.2 Task Cycle. . . . .	34
7.2.1 Task Phase . . . . .	34
7.2.2 Planning Stage. . . . .	36
7.2.3 Reporting Stage of Task Cycle. . . . .	36
7.3 Language Focus. . . . .	37
7.3.1 Analysis Stage of Language Focus . . . . .	37
7.3.2 Practice Stage of Language Focus . . . . .	38
<b>8. TBLT Email Lesson Plan. . . . .</b>	<b>38</b>
8.1 Pre-Task Phase. . . . .	39
8.2 Task Cycle . . . . .	40
8.2.1 Task Phase . . . . .	40
8.2.2 Planning Phase of Task Cycle . . . . .	40
8.2.3 Reporting Phase of Task Cycle . . . . .	41

8.3 Language Focus. . . . . 42

8.3.1 Analysis Phase of Language Focus . . . . . 42

8.3.2 Practice Phase of Language Focus. . . . . 42

**9. Discussion of the Lesson Plans . . . . . 43**

**Conclusions. . . . . 43**

**Works Cited. . . . . 45**

**Appendices. . . . . 49**

## **Introduction**

Today, English is the language of international business, and the field of Business English is growing to meet demand. Ellis and Johnson write that there are over 100 schools in the United Kingdom alone with Business English courses for non-native language learners, and the International Association for Teachers of English as a Foreign Language (IATEFL) reports 1500 members in their Business English special interest group (3). Despite this interest, the field of Business English is often neglected by linguistic researchers. But in recent years its popularity has caused educators and publishers to take notice (Ellis and Johnson 3). Instructors and schools are searching for ways to teach Business English that will prepare students for success in business communication. International business consists of individual tasks such as email writing, presentations, and meetings. The pairing of Business English instruction with Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) will help prepare students for careers in international business.

Although Business English is a growing field in language instruction and TBLT is a popular instruction method, there is little existing scholarship that deals with them together. In this paper, I will show that TBLT is an effective method of English instruction for Business English. I will investigate the field of Business English instruction, traditional language teaching methods and approaches, the emergence of TBLT as a popular method of English language instruction, and the basic theories behind TBLT. This paper will examine the application of TBLT in the Business English classroom. Specifically, this paper will examine Business English language learners who are seeking M.B.A. degrees and plan to have jobs in the field of international business. These learners will benefit from the application of TBLT to their Business English instruction, but there is little literature existing that addresses this language

learner group. The sample TBLT lessons at the conclusion of this paper will not only teach university students Business English but also will show them how to apply the language in authentic business settings.

## **1. Business English**

### **1.1 History of Genre-Analysis and ESP**

Business English is included in the English for Specific Purposes (ESP) category which encompasses specialized areas of English including: EAP (English for Academic Purposes), English for IT (Information Technology) professionals, and English for medical professionals. ESP characteristics are given by Sarani and Sahebi.

- 1) Designed to meet the specific needs of the learner
- 2) Related in content to particular disciplines, occupations and activities
- 3) Centered on language appropriate to those activities in syntax, lexis, discourse, semantic and so on, and analysis of the discourse
- 4) In contrast with “general English” (119)

Business English is, therefore, designed to meet the needs of learners who will be/are in business occupations. The roots of Business English lie in the analysis of the English language and situations that take place when English is used by business professionals. Business English, therefore, can be considered a unique genre, and researchers use genre-analysis to study English in the business sector to discover what language and situations can be categorized as the unique domain of Business English (Zhang 403). Business English, as a unique type of English instruction, owes its existence to the field of genre-analysis.

The roots of genre-analysis and the emergence of Business English as a genre of study lie in the study of discourse. Researchers of language learning believe that teaching language at a word or sentence level is not sufficient and that language exists in context. Nodoushan notes that linguists in the 1960s and 1970s began to study register (formal and informal language) and genres and first developed the field of genre-analysis (64). Swales, a leader in the field of genre-analysis, defined genre as “a class of communicative events commonly used by the members of a given community who share some set of communicative purposes” (Nodoushan 66). Linguists, like Swales, recognized that language can be divided into many distinct genres with their own rules and lexicon (Yayli 232). These genres can be taught separately to meet the needs of the language learners.

One way that researchers were able to isolate structures, vocabulary, and idioms unique to genres was by studying concordances. According to Huttner, Smit, and Mehlmauer-Larcher, linguists carefully analyze the concordances (lists of words and their frequency in a text or texts) on two levels to draw conclusions about the genre. “This step-by-step procedure pre-supposes two levels of analysis. The one deals with the situational concerns of the discourse community . . . and the other with the linguistic analysis” (102). So Business English seeks to look at both the communicative situation and the linguistic structures. The goal of studying genre was to make language learning and materials more relevant to language learners’ needs (Nodoushan 65). Myskow and Gordon also note that genre-based learning strategies have now expanded beyond just using linguistic properties of a genre for instruction into also considering their social functions (284). By using genre-analysis, researchers can provide both language teachers and learners with more information about Business English. Educators and publishers



of Business English materials must build upon the research of genre to provide an appropriate framework for instruction.

Students of Business English must develop an awareness of their genre to be effective business people. Yasuda believes that the goal of genre-awareness is to make the students recognize what is possible within the genre and be able to manipulate that knowledge to communicate with their intended audience (2). Students need to be aware of what is possible in Business English at the word, sentence, and discourse level (Nodoushan 64). Instructors need to develop their lessons so that students can internalize what vocabulary and sentence structures are used in Business English, and how English is used in discourse (conversation). “It is the recognition of the relationship between purpose, audience, and linguistic choice that is at the center of genre-based writing pedagogy” (Yasuda 4). This genre knowledge of Business English needs to be built up through exposure to authentic business discourse, explicit instruction in the rules of the genre, and opportunities to produce language. Students must be exposed to different authentic types of business writing, among other forms and areas of the genre, and understand the different rules of Business English.

English is now the international language of business, and around the globe people enroll in schools to learn Business English. Companies even set up classes in-house to improve their employees’ English skills (Ellis and Johnson 3). Business English is a specialized field and requires unique, tailored instruction. In order to understand the suitability of TBLT to teach Business English, it is important to first understand more about the traditional teaching of Business English.

## 1.2 Traditional Teaching of Business English

Genre-analysis is the method that isolates the field of Business English but that leaves educators to decide the best method of instruction. The Business English education industry emerged in the late 1960s in response to the growth of English as the international language of business. Ellis and Johnson, in their book *Teaching Business English*, write that some early Business English courses and textbooks primarily focused on business vocabulary and did not assume prior business knowledge (3). They note that “there was no consideration of how the learner might apply the language in real life, and no development of skills such as interacting in meetings or writing letters” (4). The Business English materials also did not take into account the needs of the non-native speakers, and materials were in some cases the same for non-native and native speakers of English (Zhang 402). Zhang writes that the emergence of ESP in the 1960s made Business English be seen as more than just a field with specialized vocabulary that could be easily learned (402). Instead, Business English began to be recognized as a field that needed to be explicitly taught according to the needs of the learner and the real world uses of English in the business world (Zagan-Zetler and Zagan-Zetler 247). As a branch of ESP, Business English began to differentiate itself from the study of General English.

Early textbooks and programs in the 1960s and 1970s did not assume prior business knowledge, and some reflected a view that new vocabulary alone was needed to use Business English. In addition, the text writers did not take into account varying levels of English language knowledge (Ellis and Johnson 5). This homogenous approach to materials and instruction was not sufficient to learner needs. Early methods in the 1970s began to focus on business skills like writing business letters, negotiating, and reading business materials and slowly began to focus on language use (Zagan-Zetler and Zagan-Zetler 247). But the prevalent methods of instruction

were close to the Audiolingual approach that emphasized drills and memorization (Ellis and Johnson 5). These early methods reflected the trends of English language instruction in general. The assumption was still that the learners just need to memorize business vocabulary and phrases to be successful.

In the 1980s, the emphasis shifted to developing the skills needed to use the Business English that is learned (Appendix A Business Skills). Zagan-Zelter and Zagan-Zelter note that during this time “course books began to put a greater emphasis on communication skills . . . teaching became thus more focused on functional areas- language for recommending, expressing opinions, giving advice, showing agreement” (247). According to Ellis and Johnson, the field has grown quickly since the 1980s along with the expansion of international business. Business English is taught not just as vocabulary, and today instructors believe that the teaching of Business English must inherently include the teaching of business skills. Ellis and Johnson emphasize the importance of teaching business skills as part of Business English:

The recognition of the need for business people to be proficient in business communication skills has had a major impact on Business English teaching. Although it is not the designated brief of the Business English teacher to train business people in behavioural techniques (for example, presentation or negotiation), it is hard to ignore the influence that good behavioural skills have on successful communication. (5)

Instructors began to realize that the business skills may be closely linked to effective teaching of Business English. Business English classrooms began to focus on the skills that students needed, and instructors focused on creating classroom environments to practice these skills. The

teaching of business skills can best be done through using tasks as the mode of language instruction which is the premise of TBLT.

### **1.3 Types of Business English Learners**

Another recent change in Business English instruction is that courses take into account the background knowledge of the learners and their goals. Students can be divided into two groups: pre-job experience students and job experience students (Ellis and Johnson 5). The students' exposure to the business skills in their native language will determine the amount of background their instructor will need to provide in the Business English class. Zagan-Zelter and Zagan-Zelter note that instructors not familiar with their students' backgrounds should start the course with a questionnaire on the learners' needs, their business experience level, and also an assessment of the students' language level (247). The business experience level can often be overlooked by educators. Typically, Business English students have some level of previous business experience, but the range of business experience is broad. The class can have students with only internship experience to students who worked several years in business. This range of business experience should be taken into account when instructors design their courses. Instructors need to teach the vocabulary and grammar of Business English at the same time that they need to explicitly teach business skills.

Many Business English courses and materials for non-native speaker also assume that the learners have an intermediate knowledge of English to build upon (Ellis and Johnson 4). Instructors may have to supplement the materials if their students are not at the intermediate level. My class ranges from low to high intermediate learners; so some activities require additional scaffolding to take into account both the learners' level of English grammar and their

business experience levels. For example, in a lesson on product demonstrations, I may need to show a video of a demonstration for students with less business background and also provide a short lesson on the use of comparatives and superlatives to describe the products.

Also, instructors need to take into account the goals of the class and the goals of the individual. Since student success in the working world will be largely dependent on skills needed in the business world, real life situations should be mirrored as much as possible in the classroom. Business English classes need to balance the needs of the learners to succeed in their program and their future needs to be successful in their careers.

#### **1.4 Goals of Business English Learners**

Another unique aspect of Business English is that there is a strong sense of purpose. According to Ellis and Johnson, the ultimate goal of Business English is the successful outcome of a business transaction or event (7). Business is first and foremost about competition, both inside and outside of companies, and learners of Business English, even university students, will focus on business success. Because their primary goal will be job performance, language learning goals will be secondary. But since that performance will be conducted in their non-native language, “the use of language has an implied element of risk: mistakes and misunderstandings could cost the company dearly” (Ellis and Johnson 7). Business English learners, therefore, should have a strong motivation to become proficient in the language and its uses.

The importance of Business English to the careers of the learners and the inherent risk that is often involved in business make it vital that the instructors focus on business skills and use tasks in the classroom. Business English classes need to teach business skills through tasks

and also prepare students for the interactions that occur in the business world. TBLT instruction, with emphasis on real business tasks, will best prepare the students to perform these tasks correctly in the business context and foster confidence in interactions with business professionals.

### **1.5 Cultural and Social Aspects to Business English**

Another benefit from using TBLT in the Business English classroom is that students can be exposed to near authentic experiences that allow them to practice both language and social skills. Business English teaches the international language of business and seeks to find a standard, common ground for social situations that is not necessarily bound to a single culture. Ellis and Johnson state that social language, often in formulaic phrases, needs to be part of the Business English classroom:

There is a need for an internationally accepted way of doing things so that people from different cultures, and with different mother tongues, can quickly feel more comfortable with one another. Social contacts are often highly ritualized. Formulaic language is used (in greetings and introductions for example) in the context of a routine pattern of exchanges. (Ellis and Johnson 8)

Formulaic language and common social situations can be taught using TBLT. While the language of Business English does seek to be international and not bound to just Western cultures, there is an emphasis on logical, clear communication which is a characteristic of Western culture. But Ellis and Johnson note that Business English is used frequently between people who may not count it as their first language (9). Business English is perhaps the best example of English as an international language.

## 1.6 Business English and TBLT

TBLT is an effective way to teach Business English because it prepares learners for real business tasks and develops needed business skills. Recently, TBLT has become popular in the field of language learning because it allows for authentic use of language. Students are given tasks to complete which require them to interact with other students and their teacher. There are many different types of tasks that range from presentations to producing emails. Their fundamental characteristic is that they focus on meaning and establishing authentic communication (Yasuda 6). The process of learning is just as important as the completed task in regards to contribution to the student's increased language knowledge.

The combination of the genre-awareness of Business English and TBLT is an excellent blend for the Business English classroom. Genre-awareness allows the learners to focus on the skills needed in the business world and the corresponding Business English required. TBLT allows the students to practice these skills. "A nexus between genre and task seems to have a great deal of potential in helping to operationalize a writing pedagogy that is focused on a range of social functions in written languages" (Yasuda 6). Students will become aware of what Business English writing (and other skills) look like and the process needed while they use the language for communication.

TBLT, and its origins and principals, must be discussed to further understand its suitability to the teaching of Business English. Business English and TBLT have both emerged recently in reaction to changes in the field of language instruction and the needs of language learners. TBLT owes its existence to some of the major educational theories of the past century.

## 2. TBLT

### 2.1 TBLT's Basics and Origins

TBLT has taken a central role in many language classrooms for the past several decades. This teaching method has characteristics that reflect current linguistic theories on language teaching such as the importance of meaning and the use of tasks that mirror the real world (Kumaravadivelu 64). Nassaji and Fotos provide four important features of TBLT. First, TBLT is student-centered, and it largely focuses on communication over accuracy. Second, lessons revolve around tasks that challenge students to stretch beyond their language levels while being exposed to realistic situations. Third, Nassaji and Fotos note that TBLT has been adopted by many instructors worldwide as a preferred approach to teach language because it allows learners to develop authentic language. Last, TBLT provides a flexible framework for language instructors to create a classroom that facilitates second language acquisition (Nassaji and Fotos 89).

TBLT was first developed with a primary focus on meaning, but recent expert opinions are that this focus on meaning can also accommodate a focus on grammatical forms (Nassaji and Fotos 100). This ability to be flexible in terms of form and meaning is a characteristic of TBLT that will allow it to endure changing views on language learning. To better understand TBLT, I will return to its roots. TBLT owes much of its development to two major forces in recent language education research: Vygotsky's Constructivism and Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). I will show the influence of these educational ideas on the emergence of TBLT.



## 2.2 Social Constructivism and TBLT

Social Constructivism, which made a significant impact on education in the last century, is based primarily on the idea that learning is a collaborative or social activity. A TBLT task, considered a community activity, depends foremost on language interactions between students with each other and with their teacher. So during a TBLT lesson, the primary role of the teacher is as a fellow communicator or participant. The teacher could also be named the ultimate interlocutor (Van Avermaelt, et al. 175). The communication between the teacher and the students, and the students themselves during the task, is based on collaboration. They must work together to negotiate meaning while working toward the task outcome.

This emphasis on collaboration brings to mind Vygotsky's teachings on Constructivism which states that learning is sociocultural. Vygotsky believed that all learning is a social interaction, and one can see this principle manifested in TBLT. Communication, especially verbal, is the key to creating new language and for building learners' own internal language or I-language (Ellis 2003: 176). Students, therefore, use language as a tool for further language learning and to communicate with other students and their teacher.

Vygotsky also believed in the concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) which is the area of potential development for each student. This zone is the potential that each student has to learn based on their current level. Teachers should design tasks that are just above the students' current language level and require that they use mental energy (Van den Branden 10). According to Vygotsky, learning requires interaction with others and scaffolding by teachers for students to build their internal language (Nassaji and Fotos 105). Any feedback from the teacher should take into account the learner's ZPD and should be in line with the teacher's scaffolding (Nassaji and Fotos 80). Supporters of Vygotsky would say that the role of

the teacher during TBLT is primarily to scaffold knowledge and provide rich interactions with the students. Teachers should keep the flow of communication going during the task (Van den Branden 10). Language teachers and researchers took Vygotsky's ideas on Social Constructivism and applied them to language learning. Fotos and Nassaji summarize the impact of Vygotsky on language learning:

In short, sociocultural theory highlights the importance of interaction and collaborative work in the process of language learning. When learners collaborate with others, they can develop what they have not yet mastered independently and can also use and consolidate their existing linguistic knowledge. In particular, when interacting with more capable people or co-operating with their peers, a supportive context is created that helps the learner reach a higher cognitive level than what they are able to achieve when they work alone. (107)

So one of the most important aspects of tasks is that the language learners must interact, and this process allows them to internalize the language. TBLT owes its emphasis on social learning, scaffolding, and tasks to the theory of Constructivism.

### **2.3 TBLT and Communicative Language Teaching**

TBLT inherited its focus on meaningful and authentic communication from Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). CLT, unlike Constructivism, focuses exclusively on the teaching of languages. TBLT emerged from CLT which started in the 1960s as a fresh new approach to language teaching. J. Willis describes CLT as “a reaction against the rigid control of the behaviorist Audiolingual methods of teaching in the 1960s” (“Perspectives” 4).

Audiolingualism focused on forms and relied heavily on language drills. Many linguists like Chomsky in the 1960s began to feel that the Audiolingual method of language instruction did not

teach students how to meaningfully communicate in the target language. Aliakbari and Jamalvandi note that students were able to “parrot responses in predictable situation of use” but had difficulty using the language outside the classroom (16). CLT sought to bridge this gap between classroom and the world outside. Kumaravadivelu writes that “CLT was a principled response to the perceived failure of the Audiolingual method, which was seen to focus exclusively and excessively on the manipulation of linguistic structure” (61). Instead of emphasizing linguistic structures, CLT sought to emphasize communication. CLT was also an approach to language instruction, not a structured method like Audiolingualism which relied on specific techniques.

CLT was championed as an approach to language teaching that focused on meaningful communication. It also introduced new classroom activities like games, information gap activities, and role plays (Kumaravadivelu 61). CLT is largely based on Hymes’ theory of communicative competence which points to the importance of being able to use language correctly, both functionally and interactionally. CLT also emerged partially due to new ideas on language and language acquisition that were proposed by linguists like Chomsky (J. Willis “Perspectives” 5). J. Willis notes that Chomsky changed linguists’ and educators’ views on how language is acquired and how languages should be taught.

Language learning and language use must be creative processes and that they cannot be accounted for by behaviorist theories. Chomsky saw language as rule-governed creativity. He believed that a basic rule system that underpins all languages is innate and that, given exposure to a specific language, children will naturally create the specific rules of that language for themselves. Learning is

thus seen as a process of discovery determined by internal processes rather than external influences. (J. Willis “Perspectives” 5)

Chomsky believed that language was learned differently than other human disciplines, and his research on the nature of language acquisition influenced views of the teaching of language. According to J. Willis, Chomsky influenced CLT classrooms to focus on providing rich exposure to the target language and in using language in context (“Perspectives”5).

Instead of using repetitive drills and explicit grammar instruction, CLT classrooms centered on the learners and gave them rich environments to use the target language. Meaning, according to J. Willis, was often the focus over form, and the goal was to get students to use the language. This was a big change from earlier teacher-centered classrooms in which the teacher was the dispenser of information, and the learners were just vessels (J. Willis “Perspectives” 4). The role of the teacher was primarily to encourage communication, to serve as a facilitator. But there was little emphasis on either error correction or the teaching of grammatical forms. Kumaravadivelu writes that the CLT classroom consisted of activities that underscored the creative and unpredictable use of language by using activities like information gaps, games, role plays and dramas to prepare students for real world communication (61). All of these activities were designed to encourage communication in the classroom.

CLT lessons often sought to model real life situations like booking a hotel room, buying a train ticket, or making an introduction. Ellis writes that CLT aims to teach language learners to use language in real communication (2003:27). The popularity of CLT for language learning led to more research into how to provide rich language environments for students to learn. It was also discovered that exposure to a rich environment alone is not enough to learn a language. Nassaji and Fotos point out the failures of CLT immersion classrooms in the 1970s and 1980s

which produced learners who “continued to make output errors despite years of study” (88). TBLT was created as instructors and researchers searched for ways to teach language that mirrored real life, authentic situations and allowed for some teaching of language form.

## **2.4 Emergence of TBLT**

Building on the theories of CLT, TBLT focused on having language learners complete tasks in the classroom. Tasks were often used in the CLT classroom but not as the primary focus. TBLT was perhaps first brought to the spotlight by the work of Prabhu, who taught in Bangalore, India (Nunan 56). Prabhu developed a language teaching program based on meaning focused activities and tasks. He explained his TBLT approach in his book, *Second Language Pedagogy*, published in 1987. Prabhu felt that language was best learned when learners were focused on meaning as opposed to grammatical form (46). He believed that a focus on grammatical form limited the learning potential of the students. This remains a major characteristic of TBLT even though some researchers now believe that TBLT can include both a focus on meaning and a focus on form (Nassaji and Fotos 100).

In addition to Prabhu’s belief that learners should focus on meaning, practitioners of TBLT also believed that language learning does not proceed in a linear fashion and that learners also need ample opportunities to use language in tasks modeled on real life situations (J. Willis “Perspectives” 8). Supporters of TBLT such as J. Willis felt that providing language learners with tasks to complete in the classroom was the optimal way to increase their language knowledge. Like Prabhu, they recognized that a task was not just a classroom activity for an isolated lesson (“Perspectives” 9). Nassaji and Fotos point out that tasks also can be used for long term planning across syllabi and curriculums (89). TBLT can be used to plan both individual lessons and entire courses and curriculums.

## 2.5 Definition of Tasks in TBLT

Experts agree on many the tenants of TBLT, but they do not always agree on the particular details. There are various definitions of the term “task” which also influence the different interpretations of TBLT. Prabhu, one of the earliest to use and report on TBLT, defines a task as “an activity which required learners to arrive at an outcome from given information through some processes of thought and which allowed teachers to control and regulate that process” (2). Ellis (2009) gives a more thorough definition and writes that for an activity to be called a *task*, it must meet these criteria:

1. The primary focus should be on ‘meaning’ (by which is meant that learners should be mainly concerned with processing the semantic and pragmatic meaning of utterances).
2. There should be some kind of ‘gap’ (i.e. a need to convey information, to express an opinion or to infer meaning).
3. Learners should largely have to rely on their own resources (linguistic and non-linguistic) in order to complete the activity.
4. There is a clearly defined outcome other than the use of language (i.e. the language serves as the means for achieving the outcome, not as an end in its own right). (223)

For both Ellis and Prabhu, meaning is more important than grammatical forms. There is also an emphasis on imitating the real world and trying to create authentic tasks.

J. Willis defines tasks as “activities where the target language is used by the learner for a communicative purpose (goal) in order to achieve an outcome” (“Framework” 23). Nunan provides a definition that summarizes several of the previous definitions.

My own definition is that a pedagogical task is a piece of classroom work that involves learners in comprehending, manipulating, producing or interacting in the target language while their attention is focused on mobilizing their grammatical knowledge in order to express meaning and in which the intention is to convey meaning rather to manipulate form (4).

Nunan identifies the fact that the learners focus on the task while the real learning is taking place; they are using the target language to stretch to new heights linguistically. The task communication forces them to use their existing language and trigger the building of new knowledge as they work together.

Experts differ on their definitions of task but most agree that a task is an activity focused on using language that seeks to imitate a real world situation. The following table adapted from Van den Branden summarizes several definitions of tasks.

More Definitions of "Tasks"	
<u>Researcher</u>	<u>Summary of Definition</u>
Skehan	An activity in which: -meaning is primary -there is some communication problem to solve -there is some sort of relationship to comparable, real world activities -task completion has some priority -the assessment of the task is in terms of outcome
Crooke	A piece of work or activity, usually with a specified objective, undertaken as a part of an educational course, at work, or used to elicit data for research.
Van den Branden	A task is an activity in which a person engages in order to attain an objective, and which necessitates the use of language.

Candlin	One of a set of differentiated, sequencable, problem-posing activities involving learners' cognitive and communicative procedures applied to existing and new knowledge in the collective exploration and pursuance of foreseen or emergent goals within a social milieu.
Bygate	An activity, influenced by learner choice, and susceptible to learner reinterpretation, which requires learners to use language, with emphasis on meaning, to attain an objective.

Figure 1. Definitions of “Tasks” Adapted from Van den Branden (7-8)

The above researchers also generally agree that a task is a communicative activity where students must interact which increases their language learning. All the definitions also focus on learners and not the teachers. This may be because the role of the teacher is ever changing in TBLT, and that TBLT calls for a student-centered classroom.

The cornerstone of TBLT is the classroom task, and Business English is built upon all of the business interactions or tasks that language learners may encounter. Using TBLT to teach Business English is therefore a good fit, but there is more to TBLT than just tasks. Instructors must also be aware of the relationship between form and meaning in the language classroom.

## **2.6 Business English and Emphasis on Form**

Some highlighting of form is needed in the Business English classroom, and TBLT allows for both meaning and form to be taught. For example, Business English lesson plans often deal with business emails because they are one of the most common forms of communication in business. Business email writing is a prime example of the need for the teaching of form in TBLT. Some explicit instruction in email writing is effective because it allows the students to learn the specific parts of an email like the greetings, statements of



purpose, and closings. Other subjects would include common polite phrases, idioms, and the correct register to use with business emails.

Business emails have relatively fixed forms with a greeting, introduction, body, conclusion and signature. They include language that is largely formulaic and tied to a certain part of the email. Students can be taught phrases that they can use in many different emails. For example, an email can begin by reminding the audience of how the writer knows him/her or their last point of contact. Students could be taught phrases like: “per our phone conversation yesterday” or “I enjoyed meeting you at the conference.” The idea is that many emails follow the same patterns which can be taught along with the specific language and idioms. It is beneficial to point out to students that there are also some basic types of business emails and that by recognizing the purpose they will already know the basic structures that they can utilize. Some types of emails include: lost or late shipments, late payments, request for clarification, request to do business and confirmation of services received.

Business emails also require a strong statement of why the writer is sending the email and a clear request for action to their audience. Students can develop an awareness of the Business English writing genre and employ this knowledge to create unique emails for any given situation. They can also apply this genre-awareness to other genres which is known as cross-genre awareness (Yayli 233). Students will not only learn Business English, but they will also be able to confidently use it in many different contexts including English for Academic Purposes.

Business emails are a form of discourse with a strong tie to an invisible but present audience. The audience for an email, as opposed to an essay or other forms of writing, is much more engaged (Yasuda 5). Business emails are also much more formal than personal emails.

But even within business emails, there are different types and registers that students can explore. For example, an email to a new business contact may be more formal in register than an email to a co-worker. When an instructor gives an email writing task in the classroom, it is important that the situation be well established and that the students know their audience (Yasuda 4). Also, an email writing task could be to write to a new supplier asking about a late product shipment. The instructor could include authentic details and tell the students that they work for ABC company in accounts payable and they are writing an email to a supplier, Mr. Brown of XYZ company, to get details about the 10,000 computer parts that arrived a week after they were expected. Tasks give students the opportunity to use their incomplete knowledge of Business English writing and to experiment with language to learn for themselves what is possible and what makes for effective communication.

## **2.7 Combining Form and Meaning in TBLT**

Recently, there is a movement to include more explicit grammar instruction with TBLT, giving a combination of form and meaning. CLT was primarily interested in meaning, and direct grammar focus was not integral. Focus on meaning rather than form was a characteristic of early TBLT, but now some researchers believe that there must also be some teaching of form to make tasks successful in language teaching (Van den Branden 9). Ellis points out that there is an opportunity at all stages of a task to include some attention to the teaching of grammatical form (2003: 33). Not every task needs to focus on a form, but combining a focus on both meaning and form within one task may accelerate language learning (Nassaji and Fotos 91). Ellis points out that whether there is a focus on form or meaning, the learners need “to connect grammatical forms to the meanings they realize in communication” (2006: 101). In other words, they need to realize the practical application of forms and how they relate to meaning. TBLT, with the ability

to combine both form and meaning, therefore goes beyond the simple meaning-based model of CLT.

### **3. Traditional Teaching Method-PPP**

Tasks were used in traditional language teaching methods but in different ways and with different philosophies. Ellis notes that traditional language methods, and even weak versions of CLT, use the basic procedure of present-practice-produce (PPP) (2003: 3). This PPP method emerged from in the 1950s from Audiolingualism and became more formalized as a teaching method when it became part of CLT (De Oliveria 254). J. Willis notes that tasks were often the last stage (production) in this PPP method and were seen as the end product of the language lesson (“Framework” 29). Business English was and still is often taught by this traditional PPP model. De Oliveira summarizes the basic steps of PPP.

1. Presentation-the instructor starts by introducing a specific language feature (a grammatical structure or a language function) embedded in a context. This is done through providing examples (sentences, dialogues, text excerpts, audio, video, acting out) and using elicitation techniques (e.g. brainstorming, use of realia, assigning a controlled pretask).
2. Practice- the instructor describes a situation (individual, pair, or group work) in which students are to practice the emphasized patterns . . . At this stage, the teacher checks student work for accuracy of form.
3. Production- the instructor presents students with an activity in which they are expected to use the forms just practiced. This could be a situation for roleplay, a topic for writing, or any task presumably requiring the use of the language patterns learned. (254)

De Oliveira writes that a teacher may plan a lesson based on shopping for clothes. In the presentation stage, the teacher may provide pictures of clothing and vocabulary related to clothing and shopping. In the practice stage, De Oliveira writes that students could practice a dialogue in pairs while the teacher provides feedback. Then in the final stage, students could each take a role in the dialogue to perform for the whole class (255). De Oliveira notes that the teacher “was the knower, the student more or less tabula rasa, and behavior modification via extensive practice the key to learning” (255). Many of these PPP activities, like shopping for clothes, do occur in TBLT, but they take on different purposes and occur at different stages. The emphasis in PPP is on the actions of the teacher and does not focus on either student interactions or language meaning. TBLT, however, does not use tasks in this way and provides a more student-centered classroom.

Critics of the traditional PPP method point out that the learners do not get to experiment with language until the final production stage. Ellis notes that error correction was also a major part of PPP in order to avoid the learners developing incorrect habits (2006: 90). In contrast, TBLT encourages the learners to experiment with language and to explore more possibilities. Also, by focusing the learner’s attention on just a few forms, PPP limits the potential of more forms to be noticed and added to their internal language (Nassaji and Fotos 104). TBLT provides a richer language environment with more opportunities for students to acquire language, not just learn a new linguistic form.

#### **4. Stages of a TBLT Lesson**

J. Willis, one of the foremost supporters of TBLT, believes that TBLT actually runs in an inverse order from the traditional PPP model. She believes that TBLT starts with the production

phase and ends with the presentation phase. J. Willis notes that language learning is more of an organic process than is shown with PPP (“Perspectives” 6). New terminology was developed by J. Willis and others to show instructors the ideal framework of TBLT. In Figure 2, J. Willis shows of the stages of a TBLT lesson and the roles of the students and the instructor. Her framework model in Figure 2 can also be viewed as a good summary of the procedures of tasks proposed by other TBLT researchers.

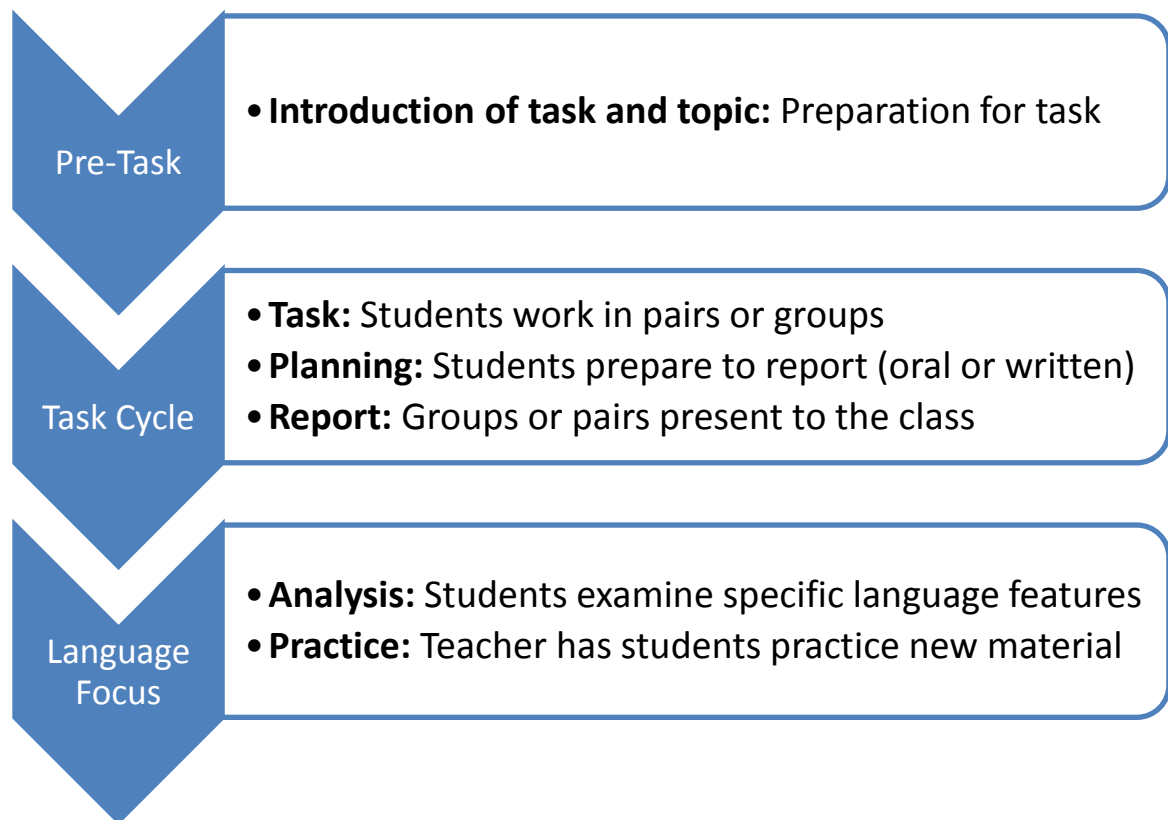


Figure 2. TBLT Framework (“Framework” 38)

The Figure 2 shows the different stages of TBLT and the focus of each stage. This diagram highlights the framework of a prototypical TBLT lesson and will be used to discuss the basic steps, the theory behind them, and the roles of the students and teacher.

#### 4.1 Pre-Task Stage of TBLT

During the pre-task stage, teachers introduce the task. At this stage, they can also provide valuable background information to scaffold the students' learning. New vocabulary or phrases may be introduced, but the focus of the pre-task stage is to prepare the students and attract their interest to the task and subject (J. Willis "Framework" 38). This pre-task stage takes place at the beginning or introduction of the lesson, or even the lesson before.

The teacher in a TBLT lesson, like in Constructivist lessons, needs to scaffold for the language learners. Scaffolding is assisting the learner to complete a task that they could not accomplish alone (Ellis 2003: 181). In TBLT, scaffolding is often providing information that the learners may need to complete the task. During the introduction or pre-task period of the lesson, the teacher may need to provide the students with additional information beyond the task directions to make the lesson successful. According to Aliakbari and Jamalvandi, this pre-task stage could also include small activities that prepare learners for the main task (19). This stage could be a balancing act for the teacher not to overload the students and derail the beginning of the task (Van Avermaet, et al. 176). The teacher's familiarity with the students and their language levels, and knowledge of the business task and vocabulary is vital to the planning of this stage.

One common form of scaffolding is providing key vocabulary at the introduction of the task. In the field of Business English, this would be the best time to introduce technical vocabulary specific to business and needed to complete the task (Sarani and Sahebi 120). For example, a teacher introducing a task about a lost shipment may introduce vocabulary that learners will need like: *deadline*, *customs*, *container ship*, and *invoice* on a vocabulary sheet to

use a reference during the task. Students could look up unfamiliar words in the dictionary or ask their teacher or classmates. The teacher is most likely the one scaffolding learners during TBLT but students can also scaffold each other's learning. Students could add to their language knowledge as they notice new forms (Nassaji and Fotos 104). Teachers can form mixed language level groups that involve high-level learners who may be capable of helping lower level learners.

Based on the introductory or pre-task phase, students will develop their own interpretation of what lies ahead, and this will influence the amount of mental energy they choose to invest. Motivation is closely linked to feedback and error correction. J. Willis writes that "if you actually tried to correct every error, including those of stress and pronunciation, the lesson would come to a standstill and learners would become demotivated" ("Framework" 7). Students need to be convinced that this Business English task will benefit them in the future.

Van Avermaet, et al. summarize the role of the teacher in all phases:

Raising the learners' enthusiasm for the task, arousing their curiosity, negotiating lesson content together with them in order to make sure that they will be willing to invest mental energy in performing the tasks they are given and developing an 'achievement orientation' is not confined to the introductory phase of the lesson. It is a task the teacher faces throughout all stages of task performance. (181)

This investment of mental energy by the student is motivation. The definition of motivation may be simple, but actually increasing the students' motivation is much more complicated. A high level of motivation is perhaps most important during the pre-task phase. Learners need to be interested in the task first and feel that they can successfully complete the task. They also need to set a goal for the lesson, which may be an entirely internal, subconscious process. In the case

of Business English, the learners may need to see how they could use this information in the future.

## **4.2 Task Cycle Stage of TBLT**

### **4.2.1 The Task**

The next stage is the task cycle, and it consists of three parts: the task, planning, and reporting. According to J. Willis, the task is often performed working with a partner or small group, and the students use the language they already have to try to communicate in the target language (“Framework” 38). The task in a Business English classroom could mirror a real business task whether the learners have some prior knowledge of it or not. The goal of the task is to encourage meaningful communication that leads to language learning and the completion of the task.

Van Avermaet, et al. emphasize the roles of the teacher as both motivator and supporter during this phase. First, the teacher as the motivator is responsible for the energy level of the task. The learners need to invest mental energy during the task to learn language, and the teacher needs to convince them to exert that energy (175). The primary goal of the task cycle stage is meaning. Students need to work together to communicate. Van Avermaet, et al. also write that the role of the teacher is also to interactionally support the task “in such a way as to trigger processes such as the negotiation of meaning and content, the comprehension of rich input, the production of output and focus on form” (175).

Teachers help students cope with linguistic and cognitive difficulties that arise during the task through both planned and unplanned interventions (Van Avermaet, et al 182). The nature of



a task in TBLT is that it should be challenging and should force students to take linguistic chances, so it is to be expected that problems will arise. This may make non-native English teachers apprehensive and avoid using TBLT. In the case of Business English, teachers may need to have specific business knowledge to plan and facilitate a task. Also, inexperienced teachers may feel more comfortable taking charge of the direction of the task. However, the teacher needs to support the students without eliminating or dampening the mental struggle because that is where the language learning takes place. Ellis points out that too much emphasis on accuracy during TBLT may impede the development of the students' naturally acquired language and "communicative ability" (2006: 91).

Teachers need to be keenly aware of this role and not excessively help the students but instead provide small hints and nudge learners in the right direction. These are skills that are hard to teach, and some teachers may feel uncomfortable in these situations. Regardless, the nature of TBLT lessons demand that the teacher be ready to deal with some chaos and balance how much support they give versus letting the students help themselves and each other. In the Business English classroom, providing additional vocabulary or grammar forms may be necessary.

#### **4.2.2 Planning Stage of Task Cycle**

During planning, the students work together to prepare what they will report back to the class. It gives them a chance to think about the language. Ideally, the students are given several options on how they chose to report their task. For example, they may be able to report verbally or in written form. The teacher should be available to help with language accuracy at this stage and can visit each group to offer language advice if solicited (J. Willis "Framework" 38).

Students could also use dictionaries and the internet to check for accuracy and should be allowed to use their native language to interact.

As with every stage of the task, error correction is allowed but should be kept to a minimum. J. Willis notes that the students will increase their independence and ownership of their education by allowing them more freedom at this stage (“Perspectives” 38). This planning stage would be similar to the planning that a business person would undergo to complete a business task like writing the first draft of an email.

### **4.2.3 Reporting Stage of Task Cycle**

In the reporting stage, groups, often using a spokesperson, communicate their findings to the class. The reporting method will vary depending on the task but somehow the group will complete the classroom task and share their work with the teacher and other groups. The reporting could be done by the entire group or a spokesperson. J. Willis notes that the reporting stage does not need to be a presentation but could also take many other forms: a brochure, an advertisement, a short story, interview, game, or even news broadcast (“Perspectives” 39). This reporting stage could be even done as homework. The possibilities are endless, and TBLT allows the teacher and students to use their imaginations and not be limited to traditional forms.

## **4.3 Language Focus**

### **4.3.1 Analysis Stage of Language Focus**

The final section of the TBLT framework is the language focus when the class often focuses on forms. First, in the analysis stage, students are encouraged by their teachers to analyze features of the language that they used to complete the task. Teachers may focus on one

or more language features, so the role of the teacher at this stage can be as a traditional grammar teacher giving explicit instruction. Focus on meaning rather than form was an integral part of early TBLT, but now some researchers believe that there must also be some teaching of form to make tasks successful in language teaching (Van den Branden 9). Ellis points out that there is an opportunity at all stages of a TBLT to include some attention to the teaching of grammatical form (2003: 33). Not every task needs to include a focus on a form. But teachers can combine a focus on both meaning and form within one task in order to accelerate language learning (Nassaji and Fotos 91). Explicit grammar teaching instruction needs to be carefully planned to not take away from the flow of the task. In many cases, this form instruction can take place at the last stages of the TBLT lesson to solidify learning. But these grammatical form lessons can also be unplanned, emerging naturally during the course of the task. I believe that the teacher should both build a focus on form into the latter part of the lesson, the analysis stage, or be prepared for what other forms may arise during the task that will necessitate a mini-lesson.

#### **4.3.2 Practice Stage of Language Focus**

The practice stage is the last stage in TBLT lessons. Teachers provide an activity to practice the features of the language that the students have analyzed. J. Willis states that TBLT is primarily concerned with a focus on meaning, but at this final stage there is often also a focus on form. Students are taught the finer points of the forms which they explored during the task (“Framework” 38). This stage would traditionally include homework to provide the students with the opportunity for additional practice.

## 5. Additional Information on the Role of the Teacher in TBLT

Language teachers need to be conscious of what roles they play in their classrooms. The role of the teacher in task-based language teaching (TBLT) is a complex subject, and teachers actually take on many different roles within the lesson. J. Willis summarizes the teacher's primary role as that of facilitator. The teacher sets up the task, makes sure the instructions are understood, and wraps up the lesson. During the bulk of the task, teachers are what J. Willis refers to simply as a language guides. They are there to support the learners who are the main drivers of the task ("Framework" 40-41). The teacher acting as a language guide can take on many different facets in response to the needs of the language learners. There are many more roles that the teacher may play in the space of a single TBLT lesson. Hismanoglu and Hismanoglu write that "The language teacher aiming at implementing task-based language learning in the foreign language classroom should perform three main roles: 1) selector and sequencer of tasks; 2) preparing learners for tasks; and 3) consciousness-raising" (5). This final "consciousness-raising" role would be the main role of the teacher during the task cycle and is similar to what J. Willis describes as the teacher as a language guide.

Language teachers must be prepared to take on many roles during just one TBLT lesson. They should be aware of what roles they might play in order to benefit their group of students (Van Avermaet, et al. 196). Teachers also need to understand the underlying principles of TBLT and not just use a task and call it TBLT. Well-prepared TBLT lessons take careful planning on the part of the teacher. When I teach a task, I take the time to plan it and try to anticipate what problems may arise, what scaffolding may be required, and what grammar forms should be explicitly taught and when. As a teacher, I am constantly interacting and judging what the

students need. TBLT lessons are an effective way for both students and teachers to learn and challenge themselves and each other.

The versatility of TBLT is one of its strong points, and that will be a key to its survival as an approach to language instruction. Instructors are able to develop an infinite number of real world-based tasks that create an environment for language learning, and learners are encouraged to use their own interlanguage to meaningfully communicate and negotiate meaning with other students. TBLT, once thought to solely concentrate on meaning, is now showing that it can simultaneously effectively focus on form. The future of TBLT in the classroom will most likely involve continued attention to both focus on meaning and focus on form.

## **6. Applying TBLT to Business English Teaching**

### **6.1 TBLT in Action**

I teach Business English to M.B.A. students from Taiwan who are at an intermediate level and studying for ten months in the U.S. Students have class every Saturday for two and a half hours. The dual goals of the course are to improve the students' Business English knowledge to attain a 750 score on the TOEIC exam and to prepare them for using English effectively in their international business careers. Their regular M.B.A. business courses are traditional teacher-centered lectures with little interaction. These classes are designed to give them a chance to practice their English. These lesson plans can be used by other instructors in their classrooms and adapted to teach other business tasks such as business letter writing, presentations, fax writing, and report writing.

## 6.2 Sample Business English Lesson Plans

I will now use two lesson plans to show how TBLT can be used in an actual Business English classroom. Both plans are designed for real life students and the classroom as their setting. The first lesson plan shows how meaning can be emphasized during the task, but forms can be discussed as part of the conclusion of the lesson. These forms then can be further practiced in the homework assignment.

## 7. TBLT Itinerary Lesson Plan

The class consists of ten university M.B.A. candidates from Taiwan at an intermediate English level. Each class spends time working on all four language skills: reading, listening, speaking and writing. The program director has identified one main Business English textbook, *Target Score*, that the course follows. But the teacher supplements the materials, and the unit in the textbook being discussed for this lesson has the theme of leisure and travel. The outline of the lesson will follow the framework of a TBLT lesson plan. Emphasis is on meaning over form, and the plan is to teach itineraries, which are common in business environments.

### 7.1 Pre-Task Phase

The introduction to the task consists of a short article that the students have read as homework. The article describes why the popular travel guide publisher *Lonely Planet* has named Taiwan one of the best travel destinations (Appendix B Taiwan Tourism Article). Because the students are all from Taiwan, they will be familiar with the subject matter. They should also look up the meanings of any unknown vocabulary words before class begins. The teacher introduces the article by asking why the students think tourists should visit their country.

The teacher can also show a list of recommended sights from *Lonely Planet* to get the students thinking about sights that a visitor might be interested in (Appendix C Taiwan Top Sights). The class discusses this subject as a whole for approximately ten to twelve minutes, and the teacher scaffolds the upcoming task by discussing itineraries and their basic structures. The students will be separated into their groups with assigned roles. Each group will be given a blank map of Taiwan (Appendix D Blank Map of Taiwan) and a blank itinerary planning chart (Appendix E Itinerary Table) to help the group with planning. The teacher will use the document camera to show the class two sample itineraries (Appendix F and G), but the decision of how to present the itinerary is up to the student groups.

## **7.2 Task Cycle**

### **7.2.1 Task Phase**

The teacher then introduces the main task by telling the students that she might be visiting Taiwan this summer, and needs to know what she should do. The task is for the students to decide what tourists would want to see in Taiwan, why they should do those things, and to present this information in written form however the group decides. The teacher notes that it could be in the form of a written itinerary and whatever they present requires a map for a visual. This written itinerary could be in any form, including as part of a Powerpoint or Prezi presentation or brochure. Students will need to work in pre-assigned groups of two to three students and create an itinerary for the teacher to visit Taiwan for a week. Groups rotate every few weeks so that all students get a chance to work together.

Students have learned vocabulary associated with business travel as part of their travel themed unit in *Target Score*. They have already done vocabulary practice with some of the following words and phrases.

<u>Key Phrases and Vocabulary</u>
taking a _____ cab, taxi, train, car, bus, boat, airplane, subway
visiting a _____ museum, city, sight
renting a car
registering at a hotel
checking in at the _____ hotel, airport
boarding a ferry boat

Figure 3. Key Travel Vocabulary and Phrases (Talcott and Tullis 89)

All of the vocabulary in Figure 3 can be applied to the itinerary task but, no single word or phrase is required to complete the task. The students, therefore, have a good base of language to begin the task. The textbook unit also contains a vocabulary building exercise focused on creating adjectives and adverbs from nouns (Talcott and Tullis 89). Students can use this knowledge to describe the sights accurately and make them sound appealing. For example, they can write “After registering at your luxury hotel, take a taxi to visit the famous National Museum in downtown Taipei.”



### **7.2.2 Planning Stage**

Students will next move onto the planning stage. Working together for 20 minutes, they will brainstorm the sights and experiences that should be included. One member of the group will take on the role of a recorder and make a preliminary list. Students should use as much English as possible for the planning stage, and the teacher will move around the room listening for English and interacting with students. Because some English translations of Taiwanese sights may be unknown, they can write them down and use some Mandarin or Taiwanese, and then use other students or the internet to check their translations. TBLT does not discourage the use of students' native languages.

At the end of the planning stage, each group will write a list on the white board of at least ten sights they think they will include on their itinerary. The groups will then have a spokesperson of their choices explain to the whole class their sight choices and rationale to the teacher in just a few short sentences. Each spokesperson will also take questions from the teacher and class about their sights. This will give students the chance to play with language to describe in English things that they know well in their native language. Also, it gives the groups a chance to take ideas from each other.

### **7.2.3 Reporting Stage of Task Cycle**

The reporting stage of the task could be the actual itinerary. The itinerary will include a paragraph explaining each sight or travel experience chosen. Each day of the week will be broken down and include the details of estimated timing and transportation. The group can use their blank map (Appendix D) and itinerary worksheet (Appendix E) to help with details. The role of the teacher will be a facilitator during this stage, and there will be minimal error

correction to encourage the flow of language. The students will work on the itinerary in their groups with an available computer or laptop to check information on the internet and type up their presentations. I would encourage students to try to search the internet in English since that will be the language they will use for reporting. They will be given 30 minutes to write their itineraries and prepare their presentations.

Every member of the groups needs to have an equal part in the presentation. The document camera projector will be available to show their map and/or itinerary, or the group could choose to use the white board or develop the information into a short Powerpoint presentation. The teacher may provide vocabulary or short corrections or recasts if asked, but error correction will be minimal. The object is for the students to stretch their English language skills and be creative while fulfilling their assignments as a group. I have taught this lesson to two classes, and all groups chose to create elaborate Powerpoint presentations with many photographs. The students were always excited to talk about their country and show off their knowledge of tourist sights.

### **7.3 Language Focus**

#### **7.3.1 Analysis Stage of Language Focus**

The next stage of the lesson is analysis. First, the teacher will identify similarities from the itineraries about how the information was presented. Most likely, the itineraries will be written in the future tense or use modals. The class can compare the different tenses and aspects that were used and why. The teacher can use the white board to write the verb tenses and aspects used by the groups. The teacher can then explicitly explain which work best for this assignment on itineraries. The whole class could then brainstorm and discuss other applications for this form.

For example, they could use the form to describe a procedure such as how to install computer software or a sequence of events such as a conference program. The teacher should also relate this task back to the unit in the textbook *Target Score* on travel and leisure and emphasize the basic structures of itineraries that students have used. The whole class could then complete the exercises in the textbook related to the key vocabulary and phrases in Figure 3. This focus on form will help the students notice grammar forms that they encountered in this lesson that they are likely to experience again. Willis and Willis point out that if the students are given a chance to notice these forms, they are more likely to learn them (25).

### **7.3.2 Practice Stage of Language Focus**

The class will now get another chance to practice their new skills in their homework. The assignment due the next week will be to write an itinerary for a weekend trip to a city or country they have visited or are interested in visiting. The itinerary should cover both days and include at least 10 sights and their descriptions. At the beginning of the next class, they will hand in this first draft of the new itinerary for homework. They will have more time during the next class to continue work on this itinerary and could include more complex language with the help of the teacher. The students will also get a chance to present a summary of this itinerary to the class in five minutes.

## **8. TBLT Email Lesson Plan**

This second lesson plan will focus on business email writing which is a skill that is used frequently in international business. Evans writes that “email has revolutionized the way in which professionals work and companies operate, and yet has received surprisingly little

scholarly attention” (202). Emails are definitely a huge part of business communication and deserve a major role in the Business English classroom. Many of my students will be working in Taiwan, and if they need to use English in their jobs, it will most likely be in the form of an email. The students have written business emails in several other lessons and are aware of their basic forms and some of the formulaic language used in this genre. This task also ties into the unit in their textbook *Target Score* about business travel and a section of the unit is on eco-tourism.

### **8.1 Pre-Task Phase**

The teacher can introduce this task by showing a short video of a vacation disaster like this *YouTube* video from the *Travel Channel*: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F50q9YZo8co>. This video clip shows a base jump where a tourist is injured on vacation. This is an extreme case of a vacation disaster, but it can get the students thinking about thinking that can go wrong during vacation. The class can discuss the importance of careful planning when traveling for business or pleasure. The teacher can ask if the class has ever used a travel agent or booking agent, and if the agent ever made a mistake on their reservation. The students will hopefully be able to relate to the discussion, and use their prior knowledge in the task cycle. The video will hopefully also pique their interest which will increase their motivation during the task cycle. Still pictures of drawings or photographs of vacation disasters can be shown if technology is not available in the classroom. The students have previously studied different types of business emails, and there are sample emails available in their textbook for the students to consult.

## **8.2 Task Cycle**

### **8.2.1 Task Phase**

Students will be arranged into groups of two to three for this lesson. The teacher will hand each group a copy of the email that they supposedly just received from their travel agent (Appendix H Travel Agent Letter). They will be attending an upcoming eco-tourism conference in Belize, and the agent is emailing them with some last minute questions and requests. Unfortunately, the travel agent has also made some mistakes in the email that the group must identify including a forgotten attachment. This is a kind of information gap activity common in CLT and TBLT classrooms.

The task will be to write a professional business email back to the travel agent that is consistent with business email practices and will make sure that the trip is a success. They need to produce the business email but have freedom in how it will be presented to the class. They have 8-10 minutes to examine the email together, discuss the errors and requested information, and brainstorm ideas. Groups will also get a chance to walk around the classroom and talk to each other about the errors that they found. This will increase the chances of the students identifying all of the errors and issues that need to be discussed.

### **8.2.2 Planning Phase of Task Cycle**

The groups will now come up with ideas on how they will produce an email that will solve the issues caused by the email. They will have 20-25 minutes for this stage. One member of the group will be the note taker and will record the email in writing. The group may begin

with a mix of their native language and English, but the finished email needs to be in English.

The group only submits one email so all members must agree on the final product.

The group will need to assemble a list of sights and activities for the agent as part of the email.

They can use their own knowledge and other sources like the internet to come up with a list.

Classroom computers and student laptops will be available. This will build upon their previous lesson involving travel itineraries and apply that prior knowledge to this task.

### **8.2.3 Reporting Phase of Task Cycle**

The reporting phase of the task will be the actual email. The group needs to deal with all the issues raised by the agent's mistakes and to produce a professional and polite email. The students learned about tone and polite language in a previous lesson. The students can decide how they wish to present their email to the class, but the email must be written first to share with the instructor. Presentation options could include: typing it up to show the class using a projector, document camera, or overhead, printing typed emails for all the groups, or writing it out on the white board. All members of the group need to take part in the presentation and each group will have 10 minutes to share their ideas. Even though the email is primarily a written form of communication, it has strong ties to spoken communication (Evans 202). I feel that all students need to also read their email to the class. This is another way to practice the language and also a way for students to engage their fellow language learners.

### **8.3 Language Focus**

#### **8.3.1 Analysis Phase of Language Focus**

This stage will focus on form and will take approximately 20 minutes. The teacher will first pull out similarities and differences between the emails. The class will discuss which are most effective in each situation. The teacher can use the best parts from all the groups to write one email with the class. Discussion can involve polite language, how to organize the email, and new vocabulary. The teacher should take this opportunity to discuss any vocabulary or grammar that he wanted to cover that did not naturally come up in the course of the lesson.

#### **8.3.2 Practice Phase of Language Focus**

The students will be given another business email that they will need to write a response to for homework (Appendix I Business Email Worksheet). The email involves a missing shipment and a business contract. The students must write an appropriate email to resolve the issue with the information they are given on the worksheet. Students can apply their polite language strategies and other forms that they learned in the previous task to complete this next email assignment. Students are given the choice of completing the task individually or with a partner. During the next class, each student will have the opportunity to present their email to the whole class. Willis and Willis point out that emails are often part of a longer chain and an ongoing discourse (141). After the students have a chance to present their emails, the next activity could be the students pairing up with another student to role play the two parties in the email. They could continue to email back and forth, and the teacher could add further complications to the situation.

## **9. Discussion of the Lesson Plans**

The two TBLT lesson plans were designed to present real world situations that Business English students may encounter in their future careers. Both lessons were designed to be interesting to the students and also applicable to the business world. The first lesson relied on the students' prior knowledge of Taiwan to provide a relaxed and engaging lesson. The second lesson was developed to address the need for students to be prepared to answer many types of business emails in their future professional lives. Future lessons would build upon the skills and vocabulary practiced in this task and related homework. Both TBLT lessons balance writing and speaking time which allows the students to practice both skills. They also contain a substantial amount of freedom for the individuals and groups to explore the language with each other and also have time to think about the language as they prepare to report to the class. The lessons emphasize the task as a collaboration involving both students and the teacher. These lesson plans can also be adapted to teach other business tasks including business presentations, invoice writing, and phone conversations.

## **Conclusions**

The need for Business English instruction and materials will continue to grow with the expansion of international business. Students will need to learn both the English language and also the business skills that will be needed to succeed in their careers. The increased demand for effective Business English instruction means that language teachers need to look for the best instructional methods currently available. TBLT is an excellent method of instruction, both for Business English and other language instruction, that combines the best ideas from previous language teaching methods including CLT. The tasks of the business world can be transported



into the classroom with TBLT and bridge the gap between the classroom and the business world. The nature of TBLT allows it to be versatile, and teachers can combine both form and meaning in a single lesson (Willis and Willis 5). Pedagogical tasks also create a learning community within the classroom where students can learn from each other and by interacting with their teacher.

Further study should be done into how TBLT can be used to teach university level students and business professional Business English to help them in their careers. Also, more materials, including textbooks and student workbooks, should be developed to give language teachers ideas on how to use TBLT in the Business English classroom. More sample lesson plans, like the two included in this paper, should be developed and made available for instructors to use as example of how to effectively use TBLT to teach Business English.

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Appendix A            Business Skills List

**Speaking**

Giving a formal or informational presentation

Demonstrating or instructing

Giving descriptions and/or explanations

Visiting a company or receiving visitors

Participating or chairing meetings

Interviewing

Making telephone calls

**Listening**

Following presentations, lectures or talks

Following instructions, descriptions and explanations

Following telephone conversations

**Reading**

Faxes, letters, emails, memos and reports

Professional journals and reference books

Contracts, legal documents, and manuals

**Writing**

Faxes, letters, memos and reports

Emails both within and outside the company

Long reports and articles for journals

Editing written materials

(adapted from Ellis and Johnson 36)

Appendix B            Taiwan Tourism Article

The full text has not been included due to copyright concerns. Students will read the full article on *Taiwan Today* available at <http://taiwantoday.tw/ct.asp?xItem=179141&CtNode=413>

Appendix C            Taiwan Top Sights

The full text has not been included due to copyright concerns. Students will receive the

*Lonely Planet* article on Taiwan's top tourist sights which can be found at

<http://www.lonelyplanet.com/taiwan>



Appendix D            Blank Map of Taiwan

Map of Taiwan not been included due to copyright concerns. Students will receive a copy of the blank map of Taiwan on the *D-maps* website located at [http://d-maps.com/pays.php?num\\_pay=111&lang=en](http://d-maps.com/pays.php?num_pay=111&lang=en)



## Appendix F          Sample Itinerary #1

Day		Overnight City
1	<p><b>Arrive in Taipei</b></p> <p>Visitors can be shown around to famous scenic tourist spots in Taipei including: the National Palace Museum, Martyrs' Shrine, Chiang Kai-Shek Memorial Hall, Lung Shan Temple, and Taipei 101 tower (world's second tallest building) *travel by taxi*</p>	Taipei
2	<p><b>Ilan- Taiwan Lantern Festival/ Jiaosi Hot Springs</b></p>	Jiaosi
3	<p><b>HUALIEN / TAROKO GORGE</b></p> <p>Taroko Gorge is an exceptionally beautiful, narrow ravine created by the Liwu river which has cut deep into the mountains of solid marble. A road carved into sheer walls of rock winding its way past forested peaks and cliffs towering thousands of feet above it, while hundreds of feet below a river roars past gigantic marble boulders. Stops will be made at Eternal Spring Shrine, Swallow Grotto, Tunnel of Nine Turns, Marble Bridge, and Tienhsiang.</p>	Hualian
4	<p><b>TAITUNG / EAST COAST NATIONAL SCENIC AREA / HUALIEN</b></p> <p>The East Coast National Scenic Area, known as "Taiwan's last unspoiled land", stretches 170 kilometers down the east coast of the island. Weather and erosion have produced a wide range of landforms here. Our tour will stop at Siaoyeliou, Sansientai, Stone Steps, Caves of the Eight Immortals. Overnight at Taitung and enjoy the spa and hot springs at hotel.</p>	Taitung

5	<p><b>TAITUNG /KAOHSIUNG</b></p> <p>Kaohsiung City, which is the second largest city in Taiwan. The tour will take you to Love River and Lio Ho Night Market.</p>	Kaohsiung
6	<p><b>KAOHSIUNG / TAINAN / SUN MOON LAKE</b></p> <p>Tainan City, the ancient capital of Taiwan. We willtake you to visit Koxinga Shrine, Chihkan Lou And Chimei Museum. Sun Moon Lake is the only lake in Taiwan so it is very famous.</p>	Sun Moon Lake

Adapted from WikiTravel <http://wikitravel.org/en/Taipei>

## Appendix G          Sample Itinerary #2

### **Day 1 Travel**

You fly overnight to Taipei, arriving the next day.

### **Day 2 Taipei**

On arrival in Taipei you will be met by your guide for the drive to your city center hotel.

### **Day 3 Taipei**

You will spend today with your guide exploring vibrant Taipei, modern and old, where Taoist temples sit alongside shopping malls. Taipei 101 will be a highlight of your day and offers outstanding views over the city. This afternoon you will visit the excellent National Palace Museum, home to an enormous collection of Chinese artifacts which Chiang Kai-shek took with him from mainland China after the Communist revolution.

### **Day 4 Taipei**

Today you will visit the port of Keelung and Yehliu National Park on the rock northern coast. Back in Taipei this afternoon you have the rest of the day free to enjoy Taipei at your own pace.

### **Day 5 Taipei to Taroko Gorge**

You drive to Taroko Gorge today where, after checking into your hotel, you have the rest of the day for leisure.

### **Day 6 Taroko Gorge**

Today is spent with your guide in this beautiful national park. There are many trails that you can take, and you may come across the occasional isolated village.

### **Day 7 Taroko Gorge to Sun Moon Lake**

You continue by road to Sun Moon Lake today with your guide. After checking into your hotel, you have the rest of the day free to relax and enjoy your surroundings.

### **Day 8 Sun Moon Lake**

Your guide will show you around the lake today, taking you to local temples and perhaps taking a boat on the lake itself.

### **Day 9 Sun Moon Lake to Alishan**

Driving on to Alishan today you will pass through delightful mountain scenery on the way.

Appendix G continued      Sample Itinerary #2

**Day 10 Alishan to Tainan**

This morning you can take a train farther up the mountain for a superb sunrise before you drive to the city of Tainan, on the west coast.

**Day 11 Tainan**

You'll spend time with your guide today exploring Tainan's temples, as well as the Dutch fort of Anping, on the coast.

**Day 12 Tainan to Taipei**

You take the high speed train back to Taipei today, where you will be met and driven to your hotel.

**Day 13 Taipei**

You have a final day free in Taipei today. Public transport is excellent in the capital and it is easy to get out of the city if you prefer, into the surrounding hills.

**Day 14 Fly home**

Adapted from Audley Travel website:<http://www.audleytravel.com/Destinations>

Appendix H            Travel Agent Letter

To: \_\_\_\_\_

From: Business Travel Agency

Subject: Your Upcoming Trip

Dear Customer,

I hope that you are excited about your upcoming trip to the Eco-tourism conference in Belize. I have been making your arrangements and require some additional information.

First, you will need a visa for this trip. Please mail me your passport so that we can arrange for the necessary visa. I will also need a check for \$3458.00 to cover the cost of the visa. It will take at least ten days for me to get you a visa to Bolivia.

Also, please email me a list of the sights and activities that you would like me to arrange for your two free days. I have attached a brochure on Belize for your reference.

Your hotel is conveniently located by the airport. It is just 200 kilometers away. Please let me know what method of transportation you would prefer for transportation to the airport.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Your Travel Agent

