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Task-Based Language Learning and Teaching with Technology

Michael Thomas and Hayo Reinders (Eds.) (2010)

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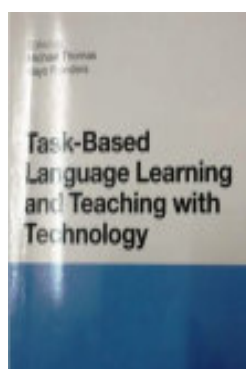
Reviewed by: **Ruchi Kaushik**

In theory as well as in empirical research, a lot of work has been done on the growing popularity of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) in face-to-face classrooms. However, very little has been published about TBLT in technology-mediated contexts, and the book under consideration is an attempt to fill this glaring gap.

In the introductory chapter, the editors highlight the objective of the book, which is to present a collection of international research articles that explore the interface between L2 task-based research and CALL (Computer Assisted Language Learning) in order to probe how research on classroom-based tasks can aid in the understanding of technology-mediated tasks as well as how the use of technology-mediated

tasks can advance task theory and research. The book is broadly divided in two parts. Part I (comprising five chapters) is titled “Research on Tasks in CALL” and addresses theoretical concerns around L2 task-based research and its influence on Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC). Part II is titled “Applying Technology-Mediated Tasks” and includes four empirical studies in different disciplines and contexts that engage with issues related to task-based learning and teaching.

In Part I of chapter two, Hartmann and Dittfurth focus on the field of telecollaboration while presenting an overview of the research done in the field of computer-based interaction in task-based teaching. The authors highlight the theoretical issues of Activity Theory (AT) from an interdisciplinary perspective, and suggest that it allows the integration of sociocultural and pedagogical aspects of research on CMC in TBLT. In the third chapter, Peterson explores research on real-time use of tasks in CALL and emphasizes the influence of psycholinguistic and sociocultural interactionist approaches in SLA. He further examines the advantages and limitations of synchronous text-based CMC as a venue for TBLT. The next chapter examines the main goals and approaches of ICALL (Intelligent CALL)—a subfield of CALL that utilizes artificial intelligence (AI) techniques in TBLT. Schulze discusses how over the last thirty years, ICALL has innovatively contributed to TBLT by using the capability of an intelligent computer as a tool to analyze and support student behaviour during task processing. In chapter five, Stockwell provides insights into the use of multiple modes of CMC-based communication tasks founded on empirical data and discusses the effects of these modes in designing and implementing technology-based tasks. The writer also highlights that in computer-based learning environments, it is imperative for the facilitator/teacher to choose the mode keeping in mind the pedagogical goal as technology



brings with it a range of semiotic losses and gains. Collentine, in the concluding chapter of Part 1, bases his arguments on an empirical study using tasks in synchronous CMC to suggest the types of tasks that materials designers must focus on to foster learner linguistic complexity.

Part II of the book begins with Hampel's article on designing tasks in Virtual Learning Environments (VLE), particularly in the context of distance learning. It describes the findings of a blended language course in two pilot studies from the Open University, UK. The author highlights how theoretical approaches focussing on interaction in language learning and learner support via scaffolding and mediation by the computer can significantly contribute in innovations in task design which have not been explored in traditional L2 classroom-based learning. In chapter 8, Raith and Hegelheimer explore the interface between teacher development, TBLT and technology. They elaborate on the role of technology, particularly the use of reflective e-portfolios, in supporting language teacher development by citing the research study findings on student teachers in Germany whose task-based teaching competencies were enhanced through mutual asynchronous feedback. Reeder, in chapter 9, presents a case study of an intelligent CALL (ICALL) prototype entitled *Edubba*. The article highlights three main elements of the *Edubba* language learning software—natural learning processing, a real-world database intentionally distributed across characters in a virtual world and instructional design linking cognitive processes with real-world linguistic processes, genres and forms. The writer draws on research to elaborate how the software was effectively used in creating authentic tasks drawn from professional journalism and critically examines learning tasks within a virtual world simulation. The concluding chapter of the book by Hauck focuses on research on the varied factors that

shape task design and implementation. Hauck's insights are based on a study of learners' e-literacy skills during a four-way telecollaborative project between pre- and in-service teacher trainees from the US and Germany, and German and English language learners from the US and Poland. The chapter also explores the interrelationship between multimodal literacy and online communication.

While the foreword to the book explains the need for this kind of book on TBLT that explores the significance of task-based communication in technology-mediated environments; the afterword suggests ways in which digital technologies and task-based approaches need to learn from each other. Moreover, it also highlights how more CALL research on tasks needs to be reported in order to examine how L2 learners respond to different digital contexts.

Though rich in its scope and coverage, this book may deter general readers from reading it from cover to cover due to heavy use of jargon and technology-related concepts. However, it is a significant attempt by the editors to bring to the fore an international collection of contemporary research articles on the role of technology in task-based learning and teaching.

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