

# *A Reconceptualisation of English Language Teaching and Second Language Teaching—Reflections on Task-Based English Language Teaching*

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**Keywords:** English teaching; Second language teaching; Task-based English teaching; tactics

**Abstract:** Task-based English teaching aims to redefine English education, which emphasizes students' practical language ability and makes up for the shortcomings of traditional grammar orientation. Task-based teaching emphasizes that the core purpose of language learning is to help students achieve practical tasks, not just memorizing words. This paper focuses on second language teaching in colleges and universities, defines the current situation of task-based English teaching, and puts forward specific strategies based on the current situation, so as to provide students with a more practical and interesting learning experience, help students master language skills, and cultivate students' ability of cooperation, independent learning and problem solving.

## 1. Introduction

English is the second language for most students in our country, and many domestic scholars and teachers mainly take English as the research object when studying the second language teaching. However, for many foreign scholars and teachers, English is the mother tongue, and Chinese, French and other languages are the second language, so the two sides have different objects in the second language teaching research. However, in the aspect of second language acquisition, language teaching has certain similarities and commonality, which can learn from each other, which is the basis for the application and improvement of relevant language teaching theories such as second language acquisition. At present, the construction of English teaching in colleges and universities in China is being pushed forward. In order to further construct the theoretical system of second language teaching in China and guide language teaching in colleges and universities more effectively, we should re-examine English teaching and second language teaching, and rethink the current teaching methods of college English teaching.

## 2. Overview of second language acquisition theory

### 2.1 Second language acquisition and second language acquisition theory

Second language acquisition (SLA) is a process in which learners overcome the knowledge, habits and experience brought by the first language and learn the second language on the basis of the acquisition of the first language. Under normal circumstances, learners of second language acquisition complete their second language learning under the guidance of teachers and through self-overcoming and construction. Therefore, second language acquisition itself is a reconstruction of language habits and language system. Second language acquisition theory is an educational theory proposed around second language teaching, which emphasizes that learners should not only pay attention to the learning of language knowledge and language skills, but also attach importance to the understanding and integration of social experience, values and culture, and learn and use in combination with life experience in specific situations, so as to gradually improve the degree of adaptation and application of the second language. Second language acquisition (SLA) theory has always played an important role in English teaching in China and is one of the important theoretical bases for the optimization and adjustment of college English teaching.

### 2.2 Influence of second language acquisition theory on college English

Traditional English teaching in colleges and universities pays too much attention to the teaching of English knowledge and pays little attention to students' English application practice, resulting in a separation between students' theory and practice, which affects the normal use of English as a language tool and violates the internal rules of language acquisition <sup>[1]</sup>. Since the second language acquisition theory entered the field of language education in China, it has gradually attracted the attention of scholars and teachers, and more and more English teachers have begun to introduce student-centered and practice-based teaching methods into English teaching. It can be said that the theory of second language acquisition has promoted the quality of college English teaching and the improvement of college English teaching methods in China to some extent.

## 3. Overview of task-based English teaching model

Task-based English teaching model is a teaching method that transforms knowledge points into project tasks. There are clear teaching objectives (tasks), basic information, activity methods and activity environment in TBLT. Teachers and students occupy their respective roles in TBLT, and students have full space and power to practice in the process of TBLT. Task-based English teaching can be roughly divided into three steps. After the teacher puts forward a clear task goal, the individual students or a group of students will put forward a plan to complete the task and carry it out, and report the implementation process and results of the task. In task-based English teaching, teachers are responsible for setting task objectives, supervising the process of task implementation, and commenting on the process and results of task implementation, while students are responsible for designing plans, implementing plans and reporting results. Under the task-based English teaching mode, students can not only fully exercise and cultivate their flexible English application ability, but also find their own shortcomings in the implementation of task plans, stimulate students' enthusiasm to lay a solid foundation, check for deficiencies, and help students improve their core English ability.

## 4. Problems existing in task-based English teaching mode in college English teaching

### 4.1 Students are not the main body

When college English teachers apply task-based English teaching model, there is a common problem that they fail to take students as the main body. Many college English teachers ignore their own need to lead students to complete the task, rather than truly assign the task and completely allow students to complete it by themselves. The final result is that although students have designed and implemented plans and achieved certain task results, there is actually a deviation between students' English ability cultivation and teachers' expectations, as well as a gap between students' actual needs<sup>[2]</sup>. After all, the English level of college students is not consistent, some students have strong English learning ability and can complete English learning tasks independently, some students have medium English learning ability and need the guidance of teachers, and some students are not suitable for using task-based learning mode. Students as the main body should be based on the real learning situation, rather than a simple across-the-board.

### 4.2 Lack of effective task design

Lack of effective task design is a common problem in college English education, which seriously hinders the effective implementation of task-based English teaching model. In many cases, the task design of task-based teaching is not sufficient, resulting in students' learning experience is not rich and useful, which is embodied as follows: (1) the task lacks the real world coherence. The activities students complete in the task are often too far removed from their real life and career needs, making the task lack practical significance, and students may feel that the task is only for the test, rather than a real learning experience. This kind of task design can not stimulate students' interest and motivation, and limit their enthusiasm in learning English. (2) The task lacks depth and challenge. The difficulty of the task should be adjusted according to the level of students, but in actual teaching, some tasks may be too simple to provide enough challenge, resulting in students' learning effect is not obvious. On the other hand, some tasks may be too complicated to understand and complete, which may make students feel frustrated and reduce their learning enthusiasm, which not only wastes students' time, but also may weaken their learning confidence. (3) Tasks should be designed with some consistency and logic to help students build language skills. However, part of the task design may be scattered, lack of coherence, resulting in students can not form an organic learning process, miss the opportunity to gradually develop language ability, it is difficult to achieve a higher level of language acquisition.

### 4.3 Unreasonable evaluation method

In college English education, the implementation of task-based English teaching model faces the challenge of unreasonable assessment methods. Assessment plays a vital role in education, but the following common problems affect the effectiveness of TBLT: (1) Some universities still insist on the traditional written assessment method. This type of test usually focuses on written tests and neglects the assessment of important aspects such as speaking, listening and practical communication skills. However, task-based English teaching emphasizes the ability of language in practical application, and a single written assessment cannot fully reflect students' language level and practical application ability<sup>[3]</sup>. Therefore, this unreasonable assessment method may lead to the goal of task-based teaching and assessment is not consistent, affecting students' learning motivation and interest. (2) Some evaluation criteria may not be clear and objective. In task-based teaching, students are often required to demonstrate their language ability, but the subjective and ambiguous

nature of the assessment criteria can lead to unfair grading results, which may not only confuse students and be unfair, but may also reduce the accuracy of the assessment. (3) Some universities may overlook the frequency and duration of assessment. Assessment should be an ongoing process so that educators can identify student problems in a timely manner and correct them. However, some colleges and universities may only focus on the final exam or a single assessment opportunity, and the lack of continuous tracking and assessment of students during the term, resulting in the accumulation of problems in the learning process, but not timely guidance and feedback, affecting their language acquisition process<sup>[4]</sup>.

## **5. The solution of task-based English teaching in college English teaching**

### **5.1 Student-led: strengthen students' learning engagement**

In college English education, student-led teaching method is the key to improve the effectiveness of task-based English teaching<sup>[5]</sup>. Strengthening students' learning engagement can not only enhance their learning motivation, but also improve their language skills. Teachers can strengthen students' participation in learning in the following ways: (1) Teachers can create an interactive environment for students. Teachers can create an interactive learning environment by encouraging students to actively participate in discussion and communication in the classroom. For example, in a course with the theme of travel, teachers can ask students to share their travel experiences and discuss travel culture and habits in a group, so that students can use English more confidently and improve their oral expression skills.(2) Teachers can provide independent learning resources. Teachers can provide students with a variety of independent learning resources such as online learning platforms, English learning apps and self-study materials. Students can use online English vocabulary learning tools to expand their vocabulary, or use English learning apps to participate in language games and interactive lessons, so that students can learn independently outside the classroom and improve their independent learning ability.(3) Teachers should encourage students to cooperate in learning. Teachers can organize group projects and cooperative tasks, allowing students to share and exchange knowledge in a team, and develop teamwork and communication skills. For example, in the English project on environmental protection, students can make environmental plans together and present them to the class. This kind of cooperative learning can not only promote cooperation among students, but also provide them with practical language application opportunities. (4) Teachers can design tasks for students. Teachers can invite students to participate in the design and development of tasks to ensure that tasks align with their interests and needs. For example, in a Business English course, students can choose to research a case from a specific industry and then present it to the class, thereby increasing student engagement.

Through the above practices, teachers can establish a student-led learning environment and encourage students to actively participate in task-based English teaching, which not only enables students to use English more confidently, but also cultivates students' independent learning ability, teamwork and communication skills, which helps to improve the comprehensive development of their English language ability<sup>[6]</sup>.

### **5.2 Task Upgrade: Improve the design and implementation of tasks**

Task upgrading is a key element of task-based English teaching, which requires teachers to design and implement tasks carefully to ensure that the tasks have practical application value while improving students' language skills. Specific ways to improve the task are described as follows: (1) The teacher should consider the practical application of the task. The task should be relevant to the student's real life and career needs to enhance the practical significance of the task. For example, in

business English courses, teachers can design tasks that require students to simulate business meetings and develop solutions, which can not only help students improve their oral English skills, but also help them practice practical business communication skills.(2) Teachers should design challenging tasks. The difficulty of the task should be increased moderately according to the level of the student, so as to encourage him to constantly challenge himself in the task and improve his language skills. For example, in English writing courses, teachers can gradually introduce more complex writing tasks, from short essays to essays, to stimulate further development of students' thinking and writing skills.(3) Teachers should introduce task continuity. Ensure that tasks have some consistency throughout the semester and build an organic learning path. For example, in English listening courses, teachers can gradually increase the difficulty of listening materials, from simple conversations to complex news reports, to help students gradually improve their listening comprehension.(4) Using multimedia and technical support. Teachers can make use of multimedia resources and technical tools to enrich the content and form of tasks and increase their attraction and interactivity. For example, in an oral English course, teachers can use video footage to get students to imitate English accents and intonations to improve oral fluency. Through these task upgrading practices, TBLT can better meet the needs of students, improve their learning motivation, and help students use the language skills in practical application, which is conducive to the all-round development of students<sup>[7]</sup>.

### **5.3 Multi-dimensional evaluation: Adopt diversified evaluation methods**

In TBLT, the use of diversified assessment methods is an important step to ensure students' all-round development and full mastery of language skills. The specific methods are described as follows: (1) Introduction of oral and listening assessment. The traditional written assessment usually only focuses on reading and writing ability, ignoring the importance of speaking and listening. To assess students' language ability more comprehensively, teachers can introduce speaking and listening tests. In the speaking test, students can give actual oral speeches or simulated conversations, while in the listening test, students can listen to real accents and speed to test their listening comprehension.(2) Formulate clear evaluation criteria. The evaluation criteria should be clear and objective to reduce subjectivity and fuzziness and improve the fairness of evaluation. For example, in writing assessment, teachers can establish clear marking criteria covering multiple aspects such as grammar, spelling, structure, content and expression to ensure comprehensiveness and impartiality of the assessment.(3) Implement continuous evaluation. In the assessment process, teachers should not only focus on the final exam, but also on the student's academic performance during the term. Regular assessments and feedback will help identify student problems and correct them in a timely manner. For example, in an oral course before the end of the semester, teachers can arrange multiple oral presentation tasks and provide feedback after each presentation to help students gradually improve their oral expression. Through these multidimensional assessments, educators can gain a more comprehensive understanding of students' language abilities while helping students improve their self-knowledge. Diversified assessment methods can not only reflect students' real language level more accurately, but also help cultivate students' critical thinking, problem-solving ability and practical communication skills, so as to better meet the educational objectives of TBLT.

## **6. Conclusion**

To sum up, rethinking English teaching and second language teaching is crucial to improving students' language acquisition and application ability. Second language acquisition theory provides educators with profound insights and emphasizes the importance of language context, interaction,

and output. Task-based teaching model is a powerful educational tool, which can put second language acquisition theory into practice. By placing learners at the center of learning, emphasizing tasks and meaning, and adopting a diverse approach to assessment, educators can more effectively achieve the goals of teaching English and provide students with a better language learning experience.

## Acknowledgement

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to all those who have supported and contributed to the completion of this project. Their guidance, encouragement, and assistance have been invaluable, and I am truly grateful for their involvement.

First and foremost, I would like to thank my supervisor, Dr. Puteri Zarina M.K, for her unwavering support and mentorship throughout this endeavor. Her expertise, insightful feedback, and constant encouragement have been instrumental in shaping this article and pushing it to new heights.

Furthermore, I would like to acknowledge the contributions of the numerous authors, researchers, and scholars whose work and publications have been an invaluable source of knowledge and inspiration. Their groundbreaking research and insights have laid the foundation upon which this project was built.

Finally, I would like to express my heartfelt appreciation to my family, especially my husband for their unwavering love, understanding, and support throughout this journey. Their encouragement and belief in my abilities have been a constant source of motivation, and I am grateful for their presence in my life.

To everyone who has played a part, big or small, in the realization of this project, I offer my sincerest thanks. Your support and contributions have been crucial in shaping the outcome of this research, and I am truly grateful for your presence in my academic journey.

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