

Review

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# Reflections of Task-Based Language Teaching on Grammar Teaching of Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language

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**Abstract:** Task-based language teaching (TBLT) has attracted increasing attention from Chinese experts and scholars during the quest for the reform of teaching Chinese as a foreign language (TCFL). Task-based language teaching has absorbed the essence of communicative teaching method, centering on tasks, emphasizing learning process, and advocating the usage of target language during the process of accomplishing meaningful tasks. It is a lively and interactive teaching method aiming to improve learners' communicative competence. At present, compared with that of teaching English as a foreign language in China, the theoretical research and teaching practice on TCFL, especially grammar teaching, are still in their initial stage. Beginning with the general introduction of the position and status quo of TCFL grammar teaching, this paper integrates the relevant research on TBLT both at home and abroad and combines the relevant theoretical and practical TCFL teaching experience of experts, scholars and teachers, aiming to analyze the reflections of TBLT on grammar teaching of TCFL, through reference to literature and observations of TCFL classes at Jiangnan University. The author hopes to appeal more attention to the application of TBLT on TCFL grammar teaching and deeper and wider research will be carried out in this field, promoting the smooth and flourishing development of TCFL.

**Keywords:** Grammar Teaching of Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language (TCFL); Task-based language teaching (TBLT); reflections

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### 1. Introduction

In this part, the paper introduces the research background, illustrates the research purpose and analyzes the research feasibility. Therefore, readers can have a better understanding of what this paper is all about and why the author chose this topic — Reflections of Task-based Language Teaching (TBLT) on Grammar Teaching of Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language (TCFL).

#### 1.1. Research Background

As China gains increasing global influence, the enterprise of teaching Chinese as a foreign language (TCFL) is provided with a favorable moment and a wide stage. More and more foreigners begin to learn Chinese and more and more TCFL institutes are established both at home and abroad [1].

However, the quantity does not match the quality. It is an undeniable fact that there are some problems remaining to be solved concerning TCFL, especially TCFL grammar teaching, such as a stale grammar system and rigid teaching modes. Therefore, we should

not ignore the quality and efficacy of TCFL, including the quality of teachers, the efficacy of teaching modes, and the completeness of the teaching system, etc.

Until now, experts and scholars have continuously explored the reform and development of TCFL in both theoretical and practical aspects. They have conducted extensive research and studies, applying relevant foreign language teaching theories and methods. Among them, task-based language teaching (TBLT) has attracted growing attention.

TBLT dated back to the 1980s, and was introduced to China in the 1990s. Since then, a lot of research has been carried out in the teaching English as a foreign language (TEFL) in China, but research on TCFL just took off. Studies on the relationship between TBLT and grammar teaching of TCFL are especially few [2,3].

### *1.2. Research Purpose*

It is a fact that cannot be ignored that the present grammar teaching of TCFL is not perfect, and many grammar teaching methods are stale and out of date. Since it is a consensus drawn by experts and teachers that grammar teaching is indispensable to TCFL and vital to its success, there is an urgent necessity to explore effective and fruitful teaching modes concerning grammatical rules. It is imperative to reform grammar teaching methods in TCFL [4].

By analyzing the current status of grammar teaching in TCFL, combining ideas and principles of TBLT advocated by experts both at home and abroad, and referring to pertinent literature and observations from TCFL classes at Jiangnan University, this paper aims to summarize the reflections and applications of TBLT on grammar teaching in TCFL. The author also expects to fix more eyes on the applications of TBLT on TCFL grammar teaching, to draw more attention to this issue and for the sake of the smooth and healthy growth of TCFL.

### *1.3. Research Feasibility*

The final destination of TCFL grammar teaching and TBLT is consistent. Grammar teaching is not supposed to simply impart detailed and diverse grammatical rules, rather to essentially improve learners' communicative competence and proficiency. Grammar teaching should assist learners to elevate their capabilities to use the target language smoothly and correctly in a real context. Consistently, the key thought of task-based language teaching is that "language is a tool used to express ideas, communicate feelings and solve problems [5,6]. What language learning should rely on is the usage of language, instead of mechanical drills focusing on forms. The aim of language learning is not only to grasp language knowledge, but also to learn how to solve problems by using language". We can see concordance between this idea and the ultimate end of grammar teaching of TCFL.

In addition, TBLT advocates "regarding the concrete tasks as learning motives, regarding completing tasks as a learning process, and demonstrating teaching results through displaying achievements of tasks, instead of through test marks". This concept of TBLT also contributes to solving the exigent problems in grammar teaching of TCFL.

Meanwhile, some cases of TBLT applications in TCFL have proven to be more effective and flexible for grammar teaching, during which learners are more easily motivated and learn more actively and with greater initiative [7].

To sum up, it is valid and valuable to summarize the reflections of TBLT on TCFL grammar teaching.

## **2. Grammar Teaching of TCFL**

This chapter involves the generalization of TCFL and grammar teaching of TCFL. To be more explicit, the chapter analyzes the status quo of TCFL by quoting statistics, and grammar teaching of TCFL by illustrating its importance and problems.

Teaching Chinese as a foreign language is a booming enterprise both at home and abroad, but there are still some problems relentlessly restricting its better development. Among the problems, the quality of teaching stands out. A very salient issue is concerning grammar teaching, which has aroused intensive discussions and debates in the field of TCFL in China. Where should TCFL grammar teaching go? Are the current teaching modes of grammar working? How should we teach grammar in more effective and flexible ways?

Grammar teaching is undoubtedly a vital part of TCFL, but also a nodus to foreign learners. To learn a foreign language, it is a must for learners to learn and memorize grammatical rules. Grammatical rules are necessary tools that help learners make phrases and sentences and perceive the characteristics of the target language structures [8].

However, in most grammar teaching of TCFL, the majority of teachers still simply use traditional teaching modes — teachers explain rules and give examples, with students listening, following and drilling [9]. Students in a passive position, this method is boring, rigid and lacking in vigor, which is likely to ruin learners' interest and initiative. In the author's view, grammar teaching should avoid being consistently rigid and lifeless. Therefore, teachers should adopt an active and flexible perspective in terms of grammar teaching.

### *2.1. The Status Quo of TCFL*

China's entry into the WTO, the successful 2008 Beijing Olympics, the 2010 Shanghai World Exposition, and sustained economic development have brought China to the global stage. With China's growing economic and political influence, an increasing number of foreigners are eager to learn more about Chinese culture [10]. Therefore, a "Chinese fever" is emerging, with the number of foreigners who are interested in learning Chinese language increasingly growing [11].

According to Wikipedia, "Increased interest in China from those outside has led to a corresponding interest in the study of Standard Chinese as a foreign language". "According to the Chinese Ministry of Education, there are 330 institutions teaching Chinese as a foreign language, receiving about 40,000 foreign students. In addition, there are almost 5,000 Chinese language teachers. Since 1992 the State Education Commission has managed a Chinese language proficiency exam program, which has tested over 142,000 persons."

In addition, according to 2009 statistics, "presently there are more than 40 million people overseas learning Chinese through various approaches, and China has established 282 Confucius Colleges and 272 Confucius classes in 88 countries around the world. More than 230,000 students have registered. Further, more than 160 educational institutions in 50 countries have applied for starting Confucius Colleges." Moreover, such well-known magazines as American Wall Street Daily, National Geography and British Financier have established websites with Chinese version. Also, an independent school in the UK made Chinese one of their compulsory subjects in 2006 [12].

To conclude, teaching Chinese as a foreign language is a promising and encouraging enterprise.

### *2.2. The Position of Grammar Teaching of TCFL*

Grammar teaching always plays an important role in the second language acquisition. TCFL Grammar belongs to the basic subject theory system of TCFL and it is a set of grammar compiled for TCFL learners.

For foreign learners, Chinese grammar proves to be a great obstacle for them to overcome. In the book *Explanations of Difficulties for Foreigners Learning Chinese*, i.e. *《Foreigners learn Chinese difficulties dispel》*, Ye Panyun and Wu Zhongwei gathered 228 frequent difficulties foreign students encountered when they learned Chinese, among which 181 are concerning grammar, accounting for 79.39%.

"Grammar is rules to make phrases and sentences and laws to organize language. Language teaching and learning practices have proved that learning grammar could help adults to grasp a second language faster."

However, Li Quan holds the view that grammar teaching should not be placed at the center of language teaching and should not be regarded as the primary content of language teaching. He also stresses that a correct concept of grammar teaching in second language teaching should be erected, only by doing this can grammar teaching be placed properly and carried out effectively.

Lu Jianming gives a comprehensive view. He points out that two issues are involved when it comes to the position of grammar teaching of TCFL: the one is the status of grammar teaching in the general process of TCFL; the other is that of grammar teaching in different instructional stages of TCFL. He states that on the whole, grammar teaching is very important, because, as he puts it, grammar teaching can facilitate the understanding and expressing Chinese correctly and reduce their grammatical mistakes in their articulations of Chinese. Further, he discusses different degrees of significance of grammar teaching in different stages of TCFL. To sum up, there is a consensus among Chinese scholars and experts that grammar teaching is indispensable to TCFL, because learning grammar will help students develop a better understanding of the characteristics of Chinese grammar, grasp the rules of Chinese grammar, so that students can correctly use Chinese, develop communicative competence and improve their proficiency in Chinese. In addition, some practical foreign studies also proved the important position of grammar teaching.

### *2.3. The Status Quo of Grammar Teaching of TCFL*

More than often, TCFL learners will feel lost and confused, doubting the reasonableness of Chinese grammatical rules due to the frequent answer given by teachers: this is how we Chinese say it and you just need to memorize the way it is. Such response is, of course, lacking in reliability and validity. What's worse, it will negatively affect learners' interest and initiative.

This phenomenon reflects a fact that our TCFL grammar teaching is not blameless and remains to be improved. The pedagogical grammar has not formed an indefectible system, and that many grammatical problems put forward by foreign learners could not be perfectly answered by teachers.

For now, the grammar system of TCFL is insufficient to cope with the current situation. It still basically follows the outlines of the Chinese Textbook, a publication of Zhao Yuanren in 1958, which marked the first establishment of the TCFL grammar system. This textbook puts particular stress on direct instruction of grammatical knowledge, with redundant grammatical contents and excessively trivial explanations.

As new language theories and teaching principles were constantly raised and introduced, and the research on Chinese and research on foreign language teaching kept being deepened, limitations of this system began to emerge. In the 1990s, scholars began to advocate reforming the grammar system. Some scholars put forward concrete suggestions of modification, and even the idea of establishing a new grammar system: e.g. Li Zhu suggests to create a three-dimensional instructional grammar system, including three language elements which are pronunciation, grammar and vocabulary, combine meaning, structure and usage, and carry out comprehensive training in listening, speaking, reading and writing.

Li Xiaoqi also tried to break the traditional grammar teaching system, and advocated establishing a "vocabulary-syntax teaching mode". The new grammar system should not only surmount the traditions of emphasizing grammatical knowledge, but also stress the combination of grammatical structures, meanings and practical usage.

Another problem concerning grammar teaching is that in most TCFL classes, the traditional grammar teaching method still takes priority. It takes teachers most of the class time to elaborately explain grammatical rules, with learners listening passively. What then

follow are repeated and monotonous exercises. Excessive emphasis is placed on grammatical forms. Consequently, it is very often that teachers fail to righteously deal with the most essential point in grammar: the relationship between grammatical form and grammatical meaning, which are core issues of both research on grammar and second language teaching. And the result is that students learn many rules and sentences but could not use them in a real target language environment. Teachers have ignored the pragmatic and communicative functions of language. Therefore, it is essential for teachers to provide authentic situations for learners to practice what they have learned.

In retrospect, this method is just how we learned English in high school. Mechanical exercises, mechanical exercises, and mechanical exercises! We were able to make high grades, but we were not able to utter a whole sentence in English. What a tragedy.

The last aspect I'd like to mention is that there is a lot of relative research on TCFL grammar teaching in China, while profound theoretical findings are inadequate and the instructional theories used in TCFL grammar teaching is virtually westernized. As Zhao Jinming states, at present, "theoretical studies on TCFL are mainly introduction of theories from western countries". Grammar teaching of TCFL remains to form a system with support of strong theories of Chinese characteristics.

In the article *Roles of Historical-Cultural Semantics: A TCFL Perspective*, Zhen-Ren Ouyang points out that the current Western-influenced approach to Chinese ontology research has determined the Westernized direction of teaching Chinese as a foreign language. In the article, he introduces Lv Bisong's statement that for a long time, the methods we adopt in teaching Chinese as a foreign language have been on the whole those of Indo-European language system. It is especially true to grammar teaching in TCFL.

"We have seemed to totally ignore the parataxis which stresses the combination of the meaning and the form, and we have nothing to teach apart from the SVO constructions and word classes such as verbs, nouns and adjectives, which originated from western grammar." What Guo-Tai Ouyang wants to argue is that we have nothing of our own characteristics to teach.

To sum up, grammar teaching of TCFL is hindered due to the outdated grammar system which emphasizes direct instruction of grammatical knowledge and trivial explanations, the inefficient traditional teaching methods, and the immature theoretical system.

### 3. Task-Based Language Teaching

In the previous chapter, I discussed key issues related to grammar teaching in TCFL. In this chapter, I will continue focusing on task-based language teaching (TBLT) by introducing what is TBLT and its development, as well as its relative research and perspectives by scholars and experts at home and abroad.

More and more experts and scholars are paying close attention to task-based language teaching (TBLT), and the amount of literature and number of publications on the topic is steadily increasing. TBLT is also gradually entering into our TCFL classrooms, although the step is relatively slow.

#### 3.1. *What is TBLT*

Task-based language teaching (TBLT) is an internationally influential teaching method that developed from the communicative language teaching and took shape in the 1980s. It generally reflects the latest knowledge of foreign language teaching of experts in the field of foreign language teaching and second language acquisition.

TBLT centers around tasks that motivate learners to think independently, solve problems, and practice the target language in authentic contexts, and provide learners with authentic and natural situations to practice the target language, in order to improve learners' communicative competence during accomplishing tasks.

A task, as defined by Ellis, is "an activity which requires learners to use the target language to accomplish a certain goal and pay attention to meaning" [12]. The teacher



gives students tasks to transact, rather than items to learn, which aims at enabling the students to apply the language in a skillful way through accomplishing various tasks and providing an environment which best promotes the natural language learning process. Obviously, TBLT is a flexible and creative interaction.

### 3.2. Research on TBLT Abroad

As a new pattern of communicative teaching method which intends to enhance learners' communicative capabilities and language proficiency, task-based language teaching (TBLT) dated back to the 1980s, when Prabhu, an English scholar, applied TBLT in a second language teaching practice, which was called Bangalore Project. It advocated a "learning through use" approach, marking the formal beginning of task-based language teaching.

During the 1980s to the 1990s, many scholars in the field of second language teaching abroad carried out research on TBLT from various aspects and laid the theoretical foundation for TBLT, including Candlin, Long, Nunan, Crookes, Willis, Skehan and Ellis, etc. Their diverse perspectives continuously contributed new insights and dimensions to the development of TBLT. The significance of TBLT has also gained wide acceptance in the second language teaching field abroad [12].

In 1989, Nunan, a professor of applied linguistics, published an article officially putting forward "task design" in communicative class teaching. According to Nunan, "the communicative task is a piece of classroom work which 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 convey meaning rather than to manipulate form". What's more, in 1991, he generalized five design features of the task-based approach to language learning:

- 1) emphasizing learning to communicate through interaction in the target language.
- 2) introducing authentic texts (teaching materials) into the learning situation.
- 3) providing opportunities for learners to focus not only on the language, but also on the learning process itself.
- 4) regarding learners' own personal experiences as important contributing elements to classroom learning.
- 5) attempting to link classroom language learning with real-life language use.

Liu stressed the significance of need analysis when designing teaching tasks, advocating that tasks should be closely connected with future communicative needs of learners and tasks should simulate situations in real world [5]. Besides, beginning with the theory of second language learning, long promoted the initial development of the Interaction Theory, analyzed the feasibility and validity of TBLT, and came up with theory base for paying attention to both language forms and tasks.

Furthermore, Willis's A Framework for Task-Based Learning offers teachers practical guidance for implementing TBLT in classrooms, representing a shift from theoretical to practical application. She proposed several principles: engaging with meaningful and practical language, using the language actively, focusing on linguistic features at certain points during the task cycle, to pay different degrees of attention to language use in different stages. She also divided TBLT into three stages: pre-task, task cycle and language analysis. "One job of the course designer and the teacher is to select topics and tasks that will motivate learners, engage their attention, present a suitable degree of intellectual and linguistic challenge and promote their language development as efficiently as possible".

Ellis's work, Task-Based Learning and Teaching, is undoubtedly a comprehensive account of recent achievements in TBLT research. She closely integrated the research on second language acquisition and teaching, carrying out research from multiple aspects. It is worth mentioning that Ellis provided a comprehensive summary of TBLT theories in

the field of second language acquisition of TBLT theories in the field of second language acquisition [12].

Despite different descriptions of TBLT, Regarding the theory of task-based language teaching, scholars have reached a consensus on the following principles: Language instruction should be activity-based, emphasizing the natural use of language and focusing on meaning rather than form, the meaning instead of the language form; language teaching should center on learners, rather than teachers. This perspective of second language teaching undoubtedly matters a great deal to our teaching Chinese as a foreign language.

### *3.3. Research on TBLT at Home*

This section focuses specifically on the development of TBLT research in the context of TCFL. Since the initial introduction of TBLT, relevant research has gained growing popularity in TCFL circle throughout the past 10 years. A group of scholars have done a great deal of exploration and pioneered research on task-based language teaching theory and its application to TCFL classroom.

Wu Zhongwei and Guo Peng's monography TCFL & TBLT, i.e. Task-based Teaching of Chinese as a Foreign Language makes a deep and elaborate study on TBLT with abundant classroom cases being provided, as well as giving an elaborate description of the development of TBLT applied to TCFL. Some cases and examples in Chapter 4 stem from this book and the foremost scholars and their contributions and perspectives are as follows.

The publication of New Pattern of Short-term Chinese Teaching Based on "Communicative Tasks" by Ma Jianfei marked the beginning of the exploration into TCFL in China. He discussed the nature of communicative tasks, outlined their definitions, and explored syllabus and classroom design for short-term teaching programs, and short-term syllabus design and classroom instruction design. He also assumed the compilation of correspondent teaching materials. In 2002, he published Task Conspectus and Chinese Communicative Tasks, further discussing the classification of Chinese communicative tasks according to the degrees of difficulty.

Wu Zhongwei published a series of papers on TBLT. He discussed the definition of tasks, the balance of forms and meanings in TBLT, the input and output theory, and the difference of task-based teaching and task-support teaching.

Another contributor is Wu Yongyi, who analyzed the difference between task-based language teaching and the communicative teaching mode. He believed that TBLT not only aims to improve learners' communicative competence, but also intends to cultivate their capabilities to find, analyze and solve problems. Besides, he advocated that TBLT should pay more attention to the process.

Liu expounded modifications of traditional teaching modes based on TBLT in his journal The Implications of TBLT on TCFL. He advocated "learning while doing" and emphasizing the balanced development of language fluency, accuracy and complexity, offering an initial exploration of the applications of TBLT on TCFL.

Since 2005, interest in TBLT among TCFL scholars has continued to grow, leading to a gradual increase in its practical applications in classroom settings.

The application of TBLT in TCFL has been explored by several scholars, including Mo Hua, Liu Huiling, Cai Yongqiang, Wang Ruifeng, and Zhao Lei. Mo and Liu conducted a teaching experiment to examine the effectiveness and challenges of applying TBLT in a modern Chinese practical writing course at the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology. Cai Yongqiang further introduced basic theoretical ideas of TBLT and put forward practical strategies of implementation of TBLT and the limitations. Zhao Lei elaborated the issue of establishing the TCFL oral Chinese teaching system based on TBLT.

Although Chinese scholars have conducted considerable research on various aspects of TBLT, the overall body of work remains fragmented and lacks a systematic framework,

the number of research literature in each aspect is limited, the research subject is single and its universality and representativeness still need to be discussed. Furthermore, while theoretical discussions of TBLT are progressing rapidly, its practical application in TCFL classrooms has not been widely adopted in the research field of foreign language teaching in China. In particular, the application of TBLT to grammar instruction in TCFL remains underexplored and most teachers still use traditional ways to teach grammar, unwilling to implement TBLT in their instructions.

#### **4. Reflections of TBLT on Grammar Teaching of TCFL**

Chapters II and III have laid a solid foundation for the current chapter, which seeks to explore how TBLT can be integrated into grammar instruction in TCFL, which will combine TBLT with grammar teaching of TCFL.

According to relevant research on and perspectives of TBLT which advocates "learning while doing" and "learning while using", It can be concluded that TBLT is a promising approach, which contributes to spicing the TCFL classroom atmosphere, stimulating learners' interest and initiative while encouraging them to use the target language in natural, classroom-based contexts. Tasks designed to target specific grammatical rules and structures are referred to as focus-on-form tasks. The application of TBLT to grammar teaching of TCFL is highly expected to be conducive to effective grammar teaching and learning, avoiding consistent mechanical illustrations by teachers and passive receiving by learners.

By referring to relevant literature and teaching materials and doing observations in TCFL classes at Jiangnan University, the author proposes to find reflections and manifestations of TBLT on grammar teaching of TCFL.

The following sections will explore three key reflections of TBLT in TCFL grammar instruction: learner-centeredness, contextualization, and active participation, i.e. centering on learners, emphasizing situations, emphasizing participation.

##### *4.1. Centering on Learners*

Traditional grammar instruction often positions teachers as the central figures, delivering knowledge through deductive and inductive methods. Learners, on the contrary, are "pure passive listeners", following teachers and receiving ready-made grammatical knowledge. The cramming consumes the majority of the class time. At most, learners will be spared the rest of time to practice what they have passively received.

Such a "spoon-feeding" approach is still prevalent in many TCFL and English language classrooms across China, as well as English classes in China. We cannot deny that these methods can facilitate the learning and understanding of knowledge and sentence structures. However, even though learners have understood the grammatical rules, they always fail to master them: students often struggle to apply grammar rules flexibly in real-world contexts. What they acquire is frequently inert knowledge — understood but not usable.

TBLT shifts the focus from teacher-centered to learner-centered instruction, as reflected in task design, implementation, and evaluation.

When designing tasks, teachers should take into consideration the level of learners, connecting tasks with real-life experience and cultural elements. For example, when teaching the expression of directions, transportations and asking and directing ways, the teacher could hand out the campus map to all students, divide them into several groups, and ask them to find ways and make directions using what they have learned. The teacher could ask them to map out routes from the dormitory to the cafeteria, from the post office to the infirmary, and so on. This kind of task is closely connected with students' daily life. Therefore, it is easy to involve students to practice the expressions and structures in class, helping them to grasp the relevant grammatical rules in a real and natural situation.



Another aspect centering on learners is considering their different social and cultural backgrounds. For example, when practicing "比" and causal structures, teachers could design and assign different tasks to students given the students' different backgrounds. To be more explicit, for married learners, the teacher could design a task like this:

Roles: Parents

Task: The parents plan to buy their 6-year-old boy a pet. In the market, they find four kinds of pets and discuss which one to buy. The pets include a rabbit, a tortoise, a puppy, and a kitten.

However, for learners who have not married, the teacher could directly ask them what their favorite animal is and why as a task to practice the causal structures.

This method enables every learner to express their opinions due to their rich and relevant life experience.

Another example concerning cultural element is designing a task of ordering in a restaurant. If there are students with dietary restrictions due to religious beliefs, such as those who avoid pork, teachers should design tasks with culturally appropriate options. It is very important for teachers to think in an all-round way.

Furthermore, in task implementation and evaluation, it is also essential to focus on students' needs and engagement. Teachers should act as supervisors, observing how students complete their tasks and selectively correcting mistakes at appropriate times rather than every single time. And it is very crucial to summarize and correct the common mistakes to all students.

#### *4.2. Emphasizing Situations*

Abundant foreign research and studies on the field of English teaching have proved that grammar teaching is not a catalyst to improve language competence. The learning of language knowledge is not equal to the acquisition of language competence. Having learned grammar does not mean having mastered grammar. Only by multiple practices can learners convert inert knowledge into language competence.

It is not that grammar is useless. Rather, grammar that can be used in real situations is really useful knowledge. However, in most TCFL classes, language forms and syntax drills are always considered to be of the uttermost importance, but the significance of contexts is always ignored. It is always the case that students learn a lot of grammatical rules in class, but they fail to utter a complete and correct Chinese sentence in a real situation.

Simply analyzing syntactic knowledge is not enough in the grammar teaching of TCFL, which tends to make students feel bored and passive. Teachers must introduce semantic and pragmatic analysis into their grammar teaching, so that students will comprehend when to use the grammatical structures and teachers can well handle various problems raised by foreign learners.

Tasks of TBLT offer learners suitable situations to understand and perceive what grammatical rules are intended for. TBLT advocates communication activities in real situations, putting emphasis on acquisition of real language by accomplishing tasks. Natural and authentic language situations will not only make preparations for real communication in the future, but also arouse learners' motivation and interest, for they are interesting and useful in daily communication. Grammar serves as an essential tool to help language learners enhance their communicative competence in target language contexts. Therefore, task-based grammar teaching is in accordance with the ultimate goal of TCFL.

Teachers are supposed to create real and natural situations in their teaching, offer sufficient authentic cases for learners, and activate language knowledge so as to integrate language into lifelike circumstances. The more authentic and natural the created situations are, the easier and faster it will be for learners to understand the grammatical knowledge. During the process of accomplishing tasks, learners experience the authentic situations, exercise what they have learned, and then have a deep impression on the usage of grammatical rules, instead of just remembering hidebound rules.

For example, when teaching the *ba* structure — a common Chinese grammatical pattern used to emphasize the handling or disposal of an object — Ms. Zheng, a TCFL teacher who teaches Comprehensive Chinese in the A1 class at Jiangnan University, asked her students to make a presentation in class using the *ba* structure [3]. Japanese students made sushi, and Korean students made pickles. During their presentations, they illustrated each step using the *ba* structure along with other grammatical rules they had learned. This authentic sushi-making scenario is vivid and engaging, clearly demonstrating the essence of TBLT — "learning while using" and "learning while doing".

#### 4.3. *Emphasizing Participation*

Task-based grammar teaching requires all learners' participation. Sometimes tasks are group activities, sometimes individual ones. No matter what form it takes, task-based grammar teaching pays attention to every member in the class, providing everyone with the opportunities to participate and think.

Take for example a review class in A1 TCFL class at Jiangnan University: Ms. Zheng assigned the after-class exercise as homework or a task, and asked students to answer questions by turns in a random sequence in the next lesson. In this way, all students in the class were highly concentrated, listening to Ms. Zheng and their classmates, thinking and preparing for the following questions. Everyone had plenty opportunities to practice what they have learned. Undoubtedly, the class atmosphere was motivated with everyone being involved in the task-accomplishment process [3].

What's more, participation also means active thinking in class. Learners will achieve the most and do the best if they keep using their brains while teachers are instructing. By thinking hard, learners will take an active part in the teaching and learning activities, eager to acquire knowledge, identify and ask questions, and summarize rules.

Therefore, teachers should offer students opportunities to construct their own patterns, concepts, and strategies by following the principle of discovery learning, helping them acquire grammatical knowledge through their own active thinking. Teachers should avoid keeping directly illustrating grammatical rules. Rather, they should prompt students to perceive, comprehend and practice the grammatical rules consciously by using observations, contrast, analysis and generalization.

By completing various tasks, students keep thinking hard during the whole process, students keep thinking hard during the whole process. They themselves are their own teachers and instructors to some extent. They will acquire this knowledge point more efficiently in this way than following direct instructions by teachers.

To sum up, task-based grammar teaching enables students to gradually cultivate abilities to examine and apply grammatical rules consciously by actively participating in task-solving activities and effectively interacting with teachers and students. In this way, students are able to acquire abundant understandable input and adjust their language output according to feedback, revising their original knowledge system, revising their original knowledge system.

### 5. Conclusion

#### 5.1. *Reforming Grammar Teaching in Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language: A Task-Based Approach*

Teaching Chinese as a foreign language (TCFL) has been greatly promoted as a result of China's reform and opening-up policy. To promote TCFL is of strategic significance to popularize the Chinese language and culture throughout the world, and to enhance the relationship between China and other countries all around the world.

As for TCFL, scholars have conducted abundant research on teaching ideas and principles, teaching methods, and every split aspect: reading, writing, speaking, listening and grammar. From the research, we can see that our TCFL enterprise is burgeoning despite some existent problems.

This paper narrows the topic down to the grammar teaching of TCFL, analyzing its present situation and some problems, and calling for reforms to its teaching modes. Further, the author introduces the task-based language teaching (TBLT), both a teaching theory and a teaching method, which is also deemed a favorable supplement and improvement for traditional grammar teaching. Definition, relevant ideas and perspectives about TBLT are given. Finally, based on valid literature and observations, the author connects TBLT with the grammar teaching of TCFL by analyzing three reflections of TBLT on grammar teaching, which represent the salient characteristics of TBLT.

The three principles are: centering on learners, emphasizing situations, and emphasizing participation. These three practical principles are conducive to breaking the traditional teaching pattern, which gives priority to form over meaning. To some extent, the traditional and mechanical teaching modes are among reasons that have hindered the TCFL enterprise from a better development. We should not stick to the methods widely used in the primary and middle schools in China, which are not always applicable to TCFL, with its learners being foreigners. Instead, we should find and practice vigorous and effective methods, which are suitable for TCFL.

Actually, grammar teaching should not be so mechanical and monotonous in TCFL classes. Considering that learners of TCFL are mainly foreign adults, whose ultimate objective of learning Chinese is not to get a deep and intensive study on Chinese, but to develop communicative capabilities in a real Chinese environment, teachers should not overemphasize the instruction of grammatical rules. Rather, teachers should become learners' instructors, motivators, and friends who can not only eliminate learners' fears of learning a seemingly unfamiliar language and encourage them to develop deep interest and take the initiative to learn it, but also can apply various effective methods and approaches while teaching. Effective ways can always arouse learners' interest and curiosity and keep them engaged in finding and asking questions and practicing. Active learning will certainly improve learners' language competence and proficiency to a much greater extent than passive receiving. Teachers of TCFL should develop and select a set of teaching modes in teaching practice, and deftly use them according to different students in different stages and situations.

The intrinsic laws and disciplines of applying TBLT to TCFL grammar teaching still remain to be explored through intensive research and teaching practice. Scholars, experts and teachers should learn and absorb advanced teaching ideas and practical experience of second language teaching, while paying attention to the particularity of TCFL.

## 5.2. Prospects

Since its emergence in the 1980s, TBLT has attracted and will continue to attract scholars and experts' attention. Since the introduction of it into China, more and more literature and teaching materials are emerging, and TBLT is also entering into our language teaching classrooms. Against this background, it is necessary to conduct all-round explorations of TBLT, and try to integrate TBLT into TCFL, in order to make TCFL more effective.

In the book *TCFL & TBLT*, entitled *Task-based teaching of speaking Chinese as a foreign language*, Wu Zhongwei and Guo Peng summarize three trends of TBLT based on relevant foreign research: 1, The theory pattern of TBLT presents a trend of pluralism. The application and research of TBLT have developed toward a trend of multi-angles and multi-dimensions according to different teaching environments and subjects. 2, More attention is paid to the balance of language form and communicative contents. A compromising way is preferred in order to help learners be aware of language form during meaningful communicative activities, and improve their capability of language application. 3, Deep research on enforcers of TBLT pattern is urgent and necessary. Teachers' quality is the key to successful implementation of TBLT.

Introducing TBLT into TCFL grammar teaching classes, however, does not mean discarding traditional grammatical instruction, which remains an essential step in grammar

teaching. What this paper advocates is to incorporate TBLT into TCFL as a way to improve the efficacy of TCFL grammar teaching, since entire and consistent instructions are not in accord with the contemporary era.

At present, although the theoretical pattern of TBLT is clear and distinct, it is not complete and perfect. Controversial issues in the field are also problems we encounter in practice in classes and experiments. Actually, the practice of TBLT in TCFL classes is not extensive, with the majority of teachers still sticking to pure traditional grammar teaching methods.

Introducing TBLT into grammar teaching of TCFL is necessary and helpful, considering all the advantages of TBLT in grammar teaching: 1, vivid, interesting and inviting, apt to arouse learners' interest and hold their attention; 2, natural, practical and realistic, offering multiple opportunities and approaches for learners to practice what they have learned in authentic situations; 3, all-inclusive, involving all members to participate in the tasks in and out of the class, and considering different levels of learners; 4, centering on learners.

The author hopes that more and more scholars and experts will pay attention to research on its applications to grammar teaching, and that teachers will adopt it in their classrooms.

The author suggests that some experimental classes could be conducted to verify the effectiveness and efficacy of TBLT to TCFL grammar teaching.

### 5.3. Limitations

Due to the author's limited perceptual and professional knowledge, as well as the lack of personal teaching experience, the paper develops in a narrow and shallow perspective, lacking deepness and profoundness, with little new ideas and problems being put forward.

In addition, since the period of TBLT and TCFL as a special subject is not that long, relevant literature is limited, especially that about the implementation of TBLT on grammar teaching of TCFL.

Also, although the author did two weeks' observations in TCFL class at Jiangnan University, the observations did not help a lot in composing this paper because few teachers use TBLT during grammar instruction. But I am still grateful for the permission and the advice given by Ms. Zheng.

I believe with more practical and professional experience; I could obtain much deeper understandings of this issue and write a better thesis.

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