

Newsletter No.6

Workshop in October

Date: October 10th, 2026 10:30-14:30

Venue: NUFs Meieki Campus (BIZrium Nagoya)

"Applying TBLT principles to project-based language teaching: A practical framework"



Presenter: Marcos Benevides (J. F. Oberlin University)

Bio: Marcos Benevides is an associate professor and coordinator of the College of Liberal Arts (LA) English language program at J. F. Oberlin University in Tokyo. His interests include task-based language teaching, materials writing, and extensive reading. He has written several influential books, including *Widgets: a task-based course in practical English*, considered the first truly TBLT coursebook.

Abstract:

This workshop presents an easy to use framework that helps teachers develop project-based task sequences that are aligned with TBLT principles. In project-based language teaching (PBLT), projects are defined as connected TBLT tasks that are done and assessed in sequence, over an extended period of time with clearly set objectives, and that build toward a meaningful product outcome. It is an experiential approach that can develop complex 'soft' skills such as creativity and critical thinking, and also subvert AI misuse. The presenter will show examples for discussion of several projects done by Japanese university students, and participants will practice using the framework to design their own projects.

The number of participants: 36

1. Interesting activities you might want to use in your class. Why?

- Explaining three pictures students took during school trip / Making an ideal school/graduating trip task
- I want to use Personal Improvement Project in my classes. It will help students improve their life as well as learn English.
- The one-minute video updating on personal development project.
- Creating flags activity – because students can talk about their flags even though their proficiency level is different.
- The examples given were helpful and I'm interested in creating my own TBLTs.



2. What you learned from today's workshop

- Today's workshop made my chin up because Marcos kept saying that TBLT can be done with slow or lower leveled learners. As an English teacher, I've learned the proper input and feedbacks are required for them. I could clearly imagine that I'm doing lessons with TBLT.
- I have tried doing TBLT in my class, but I've never thought about using it through several classes or periods. I want to try to make a longer plan using TBLT.
- Difference between synthetic approach and holistic approach. It was very clear.
- That TBLT does not need to be perfect, good enough is fine and that it doesn't need a complicated assessment.



3. Questions and Answers

- 1) **The vital aim of language teaching is not a 'project', but accurate foreign language from grammatical point of view. Speech/Writing essay with a lot of grammatical vocabulary mistakes will not convey the speaker's/writer's idea, and will not communicate well. It will lead misunderstanding. How do you comment to this opinion?**

Great question! First, though, I would disagree with the statement that “The vital aim of language teaching is [...] accurate foreign language from grammatical point of view.” I think most teachers and SLA researchers today would agree that aim of language teaching is to use a language communicatively, rather than to achieve grammatical accuracy¹. However, it doesn't mean that accuracy doesn't matter; it's just not the *only* thing that matters—and it's not the most important thing.

Of course, there is a connection between accuracy and clear communication; in other words, without good enough accuracy, we can't communicate clearly. But what is “good enough”? For example, there is a missing article in the question; it should be “...from a grammatical point of view.” But although this question lacks perfect accuracy, it's obviously a very clear and valuable question that no one could misunderstand based on this mistake. This example shows that *perfect* accuracy is not necessary for *adequate* communication. (Indeed I hope we can agree that, if a student were to make this mistake in an essay, it would be unfair for them to lose any points for it!)

So the real question is really *how much* of a focus on accuracy is ideal, and how this should work in practice—for example, when and how much do we correct student mistakes? SLA research pretty overwhelmingly indicates that simply targeting grammar forms by teaching and drilling them does not improve acquisition—whereas focusing on communicative uses does improve it. This is where TBLT can

¹ Projects are not the aim either, but projects do help to provide context for communication to happen.

be helpful, because it provides us with principles that we can use to focus on communicative use of language in a systematic way.

For example, we can focus on critical problems first. Those would be mistakes that—small or large—lead to the task’s communicative outcome not being achieved. In other words, before we start to look at grammatical accuracy specifically, let’s first decide if it’s “good enough” as an example of that kind of task. To put it another way, if the student writes a short essay—let’s say it’s a restaurant review—could an “average” reader read it and “get” right away that it’s a restaurant review? (Or, if you recall my video examples, if an average fluent user of the language can watch something and say, “Yes, that’s an elevator pitch”).

So if the answer is “no,” then we target the reasons why in our feedback—here we may well include some linguistic accuracy issues to the student to focus on and try to improve. (Not necessarily, though—it could be that the task outcome is off-topic, too long, too short, in the wrong format, etc.)

If the answer is “yes”, that means it’s “good enough” but we still then provide feedback, which will likely also include a consideration of linguistic accuracy. For example, maybe there are misspellings in the names of some dishes, or unclear grammar that makes some parts confusing. It’s no problem to target those accuracy problems. Also, if there was a particular grammar focus that the teacher was aiming for with this task—maybe using adjectives to describe taste, or using superlatives such as “better than” or “best”—then we give feedback on those too.

So this is where the focus on grammar, lexical, phonological, etc. accuracy exists in TBLT: it’s secondary to the focus on meaning, but it is still there.

2) Should teachers tell students the goal of the project? Which task should be presented first to students, main tasks or component tasks?

Yes, the teacher should tell the student clearly what the tasks are, and therefore also the expected outcomes. This is important, because students need to know what they are being evaluated on. Otherwise they may expect that they are being graded deductively on small mistakes and/or on the basis of using specific language forms. It would be unfair to ask students to, for example, *Design your dream house*, only to then be graded on how much they remember items from a vocabulary list. They need to understand that they are being graded holistically.



Introduce the main task (the “project”) first, and then component tasks as they come up. It may depend on your teaching context whether you want to give them the full scope of the whole project, including all component tasks in advance, but there’s nothing wrong with it in principle. But they need to know at least the big picture of what the project is about.

So, for example, “We will work on a big project for the next few weeks, and each of you will create your own fantasy country. Today, to start, we will design your country’s flag...”

You would want them to at least start connecting the idea that they are designing flags with a bigger purpose in mind, especially more mature students who might need that knowledge to develop a sense of engagement. Arguably, younger learners, such as lower elementary school students, will happily do whatever you ask them to do, such as designing flags; older learners might question why you’re asking them to do such a thing, so they need the bigger picture.

3) I’d love to relearn about evaluation now. If I could make how to evaluate clear and explain it to my co-workers, English lessons in my school would change a lot.

Assessment is something that I perhaps moved through too quickly in my slides, sorry! On the next page is a sample of the simple rubric that I use to grade tasks. The basic idea, as I mentioned in the workshop, is simple:



First, make a yes/no decision based on whether the task is achieved.

Basically, would the work be acceptable as an example of its type in the real world? If the task was to *Write a thank-you letter*, then the decision should be based on: “Would an average person feel thanked by reading this letter?” (e.g., If it’s so full of mistakes that it’s unreadable, then the answer is “no”; if it’s grammatically perfect but it fails to thank the recipient somehow, then the answer is “no”; if it’s crumpled up and dirty, showing a lack of pragmatic understanding, then the answer is probably “no”; etc.)

Second, decide on how good it is from 6-10, and provide feedback.

Or, if the first decision was “no”, then simply provide feedback and an opportunity for it to be redone if possible. Ideally, the next task will be of a similar task type, so that the student will have an opportunity to improve based on the feedback.

(see next page for the rubric example)

Universal Rubric for Task Outcome Assessment

Task: e.g. *Write a party invitation, Order a pizza by phone, Write a recipe, Give an elevator pitch, Make a hotel reservation online, Respond to a customer complaint, etc.*

Task outcome: What is the functional, real-world-like outcome that is expected? e.g. for the task *Write a recipe*, it could be: *Someone can follow this recipe to fully prepare the dish.*

Task parameters: What constraints are set? These must be clear to the learner and will guide assessment. e.g. *Include a list of ingredients; explain at least six steps; write a full page.*

1 YES or NO – is task outcome achieved? Is it at least adequate in a real-world situation? ☐ YES ☐ NO	2 if yes, HOW WELL is the outcome achieved? Give a holistic score from 6/10 to 10/10: D C B A A+ 6 7 8 9 10	3 give FEEDBACK Quantity of information: _____ _____ _____ Quality of information: _____ _____ _____ Manner or format: _____ _____ _____ Other: _____ _____ _____ Re-do the task? ☐ No ☐ Optional ☐ Yes
--	---	--

Some example tasks, outcomes, and parameters

Task	Task outcome	Task parameters
	Describe what must be achieved, under real-world conditions, for the task to be successful.	Set clear and explicit constraints for the task. For example, expected length, required information, politeness/persuasion conditions, etc.
Write a party invitation	A recipient would understand that they have been invited to a party, and they would have sufficient information to act on.	Invite a classmate to a party at your house. Include information about what to bring, about a dress code, and whether they can bring a guest. Make it a personalized and warm invitation, rather than a generic one.
Order a pizza by phone	A restaurant worker would understand the order and delivery details so that a pizza could be made and delivered correctly.	Order a pizza by telephone using the provided menu. Order details, total price, and delivery instructions must be clear and actionable. Use polite language that is appropriate to the situation.
Change a doctor's appointment	A receptionist at a doctor's office would understand the request and reschedule to another day or time.	Using the provided calendar, make a telephone call to change your doctor's appointment next week. Apologize for the inconvenience, and give a reason for the change.
Write a thank-you letter	The recipient would understand why they are being thanked, and they would feel appropriately thanked.	The must appropriately reflects the relationship between the sender and the receiver, and it must be long enough and thankful enough in relation to the initial action/favor.
Give an elevator pitch	The listener would clearly understand the purpose and scope of the pitched idea and could act on it; for example by explaining it to a third person.	The pitched idea must be clear, easy to understand, and delivered within one minute. The speaker can use resources reasonably available at an impromptu meeting, and be appropriately polite and persuasive.

AR Discussion

Date: October 10th, 2026, 14:30-17:00 (Room: MW01, 02)

Title: Action Research Report

Advisors: Takehiro Sato, Duane Kindt (NUFS)

The number of participants: 17



Next Workshop will be held on November 7th, 2026. Detailed information is here:

<https://www.nufs.ac.jp/workshop/news/>

NUFS Workshop

Nagoya University of Foreign Studies

57 Takenoyama, Iwasaki-cho, Nisshin-shi

Secretary: Chihaya Sugiura