COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING (CLT) AND TASK-BASED LANGUAGE TEACHING (TBLT)

Ziyoda Saparbayeva Rustamboy qizi
Student of Uzbekistan State
World Languages University

Abstract

This article compares two popular language teaching methods—Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT). Both approaches aim to help learners use language in real-life situations, but they go about it in different ways. CLT focuses on developing communication skills through interaction and fluency, while TBLT encourages learning through completing real-world tasks. By exploring their features, strengths, and challenges, this article helps language teachers choose or combine methods that best support their students' learning.

Keywords: Language teaching, CLT, TBLT, communicative competence, task-based learning, language acquisition, ESL, EFL, methodology comparison

Introduction

Teaching a language isn't what it used to be. In the past, students memorized grammar rules and vocabulary lists and translated long texts. But today, we know that language is more than rules—it's a tool for real communication.

That's why many teachers have turned to Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT). These two approaches share the same goal: to help learners use language in meaningful ways. However, they differ in how they structure lessons, how they treat grammar, and what role the teacher plays.

This article takes a closer look at both methods, comparing their strengths and weaknesses, and offering ideas for how they can even work together.

Understanding CLT and TBLT

What is CLT?

CLT started gaining popularity in the 1970s when linguists like Dell Hymes emphasized that knowing a language means knowing how to use it in social situations, not just forming grammatically correct sentences.

CLT lessons are typically centered around real communication, using activities like:

- Role-plays
- Pair and group discussions
- Problem-solving tasks
- Information gap activities

Grammar isn't ignored, but it's often taught implicitly—learners pick it up through use rather than direct instruction.

What is TBLT?

TBLT came later, grounded in research on how people actually acquire languages. Researchers like Rod Ellis and Michael Long found that learners absorb language better when they use it to complete meaningful tasks.

In a TBLT lesson, students might:

- Plan a trip
- Solve a community problem
- Conduct a survey
- Write and present a brochure

The structure is often divided into three stages:

1**. Pre-task:** Learners are introduced to the topic and prepare for the task.

2**. Task**: They carry out the task, usually in pairs or groups.

3. **Post-task**: There's feedback, and sometimes a focus on grammar that came up during the task.

CLT vs. TBLT: What is the Difference?

Feature	CLT	TBLT
Main Goal	Develop communication skills	Use language to complete real tasks
Grammar Focus	Usually taught indirectly	Addressed after tasks, as needed
Lesson Flow	Flexible and varied	Clearly structured stages
Typical Activities	Role-plays, interviews, discussions	Real-world tasks, problem-solving
Teacher's Role	Facilitator and guide	Task designer and monitor
Assessment	Often informal or performance-based	Can include task outcomes and accuracy

While both promote communication, TBLT is more task-driven, and CLT is more conversation-driven.

How These Methods Look in Real Classrooms

A CLT Example:

- Imagine a lesson about "health and illness." In a CLT class:
- Students begin by talking in pairs about the last time they were sick.
- Then, they role-play visiting a doctor.

- Finally, they discuss ways to stay healthy, sharing advice using modal verbs like should and must.
- The goal isn't perfect grammar, but expressing ideas clearly and naturally.

A TBLT Example:

Now imagine a TBLT lesson on the same topic:

- Students are asked to create a wellness brochure for their school.
- Before the task, they learn vocabulary related to health and lifestyle.
- During the task, they collaborate, use English to write their brochure, and present it to the class.
- After the task, the teacher gives feedback on useful phrases and corrects any common grammar issues.
- Here, the focus is on doing something meaningful using the language.

Research and Insights

Studies show that both CLT and TBLT can be effective:

- CLT tends to boost confidence, motivation, and fluency. Learners often feel more comfortable speaking and interacting in English (Savignon, 2002).
- TBLT supports deeper learning and grammar awareness, especially when the post-task stage includes reflection and feedback (Ellis, 2003).
- In practice, many classrooms blend both methods. For instance, a lesson might begin with a discussion (CLT), lead into a project (TBLT), and finish with grammar review.

Approach	Pros	Cons
CLT	- Builds fluency and confidence; - Encourages real communication.	- May not address grammar thoroughly; - Harder to assess progress objectively.
TBLT	- Encourages critical thinking; - Balances fluency with accuracy.	- Requires careful planning; - Some tasks may confuse learners.

Many teachers are already doing this. They start with a CLT-style warm-up, move into a TBLT task, and then return to CLT-style peer feedback or reflection.

For example:

a. Begin with a discussion about environmental problems (CLT);

b. Complete a task where students design an awareness campaign (TBLT);

c. Reflect on language used, correcting mistakes and learning new expressions (Post-task).

This approach makes the most of both fluency and accuracy, keeping lessons engaging and goal-oriented.

Conclusion

Both CLT and TBLT have changed how we teach languages for the better. While CLT is great for building confidence and getting learners to use language in real time, TBLT adds structure and helps learners do something meaningful with the language. When used together, they can create a dynamic, effective, and learner-centered classroom that prepares students to use language confidently in the real world.

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