

Beyond the classroom: Real-life impact of task-based language teaching for newcomers

By Betul Ozer Budak, Canada

As a LINC instructor at the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board (OCDSB), teaching Canadian Language Benchmark (CLB) levels 3 and 4, I have witnessed firsthand the transformative impact of task-based language teaching (TBLT) on my students. Working with newcomers to Canada, many of whom are adjusting to a new culture, language, and environment, I have found that practical, real-world tasks significantly enhance their language acquisition, engagement, and confidence. This approach not only improves their linguistic skills but also empowers them to navigate their daily lives more effectively.

Why task-based learning wins

Adult learners, especially those in LINC programs, need to know why they are learning what they are learning. Lessons must have direct applications to their everyday lives, as adult learning principles emphasize that adults are more motivated when learning is relevant and goal-oriented. TBLT addresses this need by focusing on tasks that mirror real-life situations, ensuring that learners see the relevance of their lessons. This approach allows students to apply the language skills they acquire in meaningful, authentic contexts, which directly contributes to their integration into Canadian society.

In addition to interaction, TBLT promotes learner autonomy—a crucial element for adult learners. As they engage in tasks independently or collaboratively, students develop problem-solving skills and the confidence to take ownership of their learning. This autonomy is key, as newcomers must often navigate new environments without the constant support of instructors or peers. TBLT equips them with the tools they need to face these challenges independently.

From tasks to task chains—boosting LINC lessons

In a LINC classroom, students benefit from interactive tasks like practicing job searches, filling out applications, and role-playing medical appointments. These activities help them develop essential language skills, improve their ability to interact and communicate with others, and prepare them for real-life situations they are likely to encounter in Canada. The value of these tasks in equipping students for real-world challenges is unquestionable.



On the other hand, not every task has to involve direct interaction. Independent tasks, such as navigating a grocery store or researching products, are equally important because they help students build self-sufficiency and problem-solving skills. These types of tasks encourage learners to rely on their own understanding and abilities, fostering autonomy. For newcomers, being able to accomplish everyday tasks independently is crucial to thriving in a new environment where familiar support systems may not be readily available.

In one such task, we employed a series of interconnected activities, or *task chains*, to deepen learning. Students were given a list of grocery items commonly found in Canadian stores, like fresh berries and butter tarts. The purpose of this task was to help students become familiar with store sections and introduce them to new and popular Canadian food items that they might consider including in their diet. First, they identified and located these items in the appropriate sections or aisles of the store. Afterward, they either recorded the prices or took photos of the items along with their price tags. In class, we then compared these prices across different stores for further discussion. This led to our second task: categorizing stores by price range (cheaper and more expensive), which also naturally introduced the use of comparative and superlative adjectives. This exercise enabled students to select the best store for their budget. In case their chosen store was not close to where they lived, we incorporated a third task—online grocery shopping—providing a practical solution and further enhancing their shopping skills and language use.

This task chain could extend to other related activities, such as requesting refunds or replacements, writing product reviews, or comparing a week's spending to one's monthly grocery budget and adjusting as needed for future purchases. These additional tasks would further enhance students' practical skills and language proficiency. By linking tasks in a coherent and relevant way, we offer students a comprehensive learning experience that not only develops language skills but also prepares them for real-life challenges. I believe that this interconnected series of activities makes TBLT even more effective by addressing students' needs in both language and everyday life.

TBLT as a newcomer's advantage

The benefits of task-based learning go beyond language acquisition; they are deeply tied to the cultural and social integration of newcomers. By working through real-world tasks, students are exposed to the social norms and expectations of Canadian society, helping them better understand the culture they are joining. For instance, role-playing exercises about renting an apartment or attending a job interview introduce students to not only the language required but also the cultural nuances and behaviors that are important in these contexts.

Additionally, TBLT fosters learner autonomy. Newcomers are often required to perform tasks independently in their daily lives—whether it is navigating public transportation, managing finances, or accessing healthcare



services. I remember when one of my students, a recent immigrant from Iran, shared with the class how she successfully booked a doctor’s appointment over the phone for the first time. We were all so proud of her as she described how she navigated the automated menu and explained her symptoms in English. This experience truly boosted her confidence in handling future healthcare tasks. Such empowerment is essential in adult learning, as autonomy and self-directed learning are vital for applying knowledge outside the classroom.

TBLT also encourages collaborative learning, which helps build a sense of community in the classroom. Newcomers may feel isolated, especially if they have recently arrived in Canada. Collaborative tasks such as group projects, discussions, or simulations provide opportunities for students to work together, share their experiences, and support each other. This creates an inclusive environment where students feel connected, not just to their language learning but to each other, which is vital for their overall well-being and adjustment to life in Canada.

Insight: From lessons to success

Task-based language teaching (TBLT) has truly transformed my approach to helping newcomers find their footing in Canada. Seeing students grow more confident and capable as they tackle real-life tasks is incredibly rewarding. TBLT makes learning feel purposeful and connected to their everyday experiences, turning each lesson into a step towards independence and integration. As we embrace this method, we are not just teaching a language, we are helping our students build a vibrant, successful life in their new home. Let’s keep turning those lessons into real-life victories—one task at a time.



Author Bio

Betul Ozer Budak, an educator, linguist, and translator with extensive experience in teaching, interpreting, and language program development, earned her MA in Applied Linguistics & Discourse Studies from Carleton University in 2019. Based in Ottawa, Betul works as an ESL instructor, supporting newcomers in developing language skills and adapting to life in Canada. She also serves as an interpreter for the Turkish Embassy. Betul specializes in task-based language teaching, crafting practical, learner-focused activities and materials to create engaging and effective learning experiences.

