

Game Design in TBLT Classes: Exploring Pragmatics

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Abstract—Based on reviews of various types of research, it is possible to generalize that combining TBLT and GBLL would promote language pragmatics. Pragmatics is critical in developing learners' ability to communicate effectively in the target language. As a result, it is possible to conclude that the combination of TBLT and GBLL would be beneficial and meaningful for second language learners learning their target language. Furthermore, task-based games in language learning have the potential to motivate and engage learners in meaningful learning while promoting autonomy and reducing anxiety, particularly among second language learners. It was also discovered that digital game-based learning is more effective than non-digital game-based learning because non-digital game-based learning cannot cover all critical elements of TBLT during implementation. Therefore, this essay will explore the possibility of implying game design to TBLT classrooms to achieve students' language pragmatics. Finally, some potential shortcomings and future developments will also be mentioned.

Index Terms—pragmatics, TBLT/CLT, game design, game-based learning

I. INTRODUCTION

Pragmatics and metapragmatics are relatively new to the fields of language learning and development. Pragmatics has been included under the lens of communicative competence as learners must be able to assess and utilize, in real-time, certain linguistic forms to match the social context of their interactions and behave appropriately [1]. However, an issue with teaching pragmatics is how much variability there is in a specific language community due to the macrosocial and microsocial variations [2]. Thus, pragmatic competence can be complex for learners to develop and for teachers to teach and assess.

On the other hand, the rising popularity of game-based learning in the SLA area has shown an alternative way of developing students' language pragmatics. Furthermore, the implementations of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) has proved that students language pragmatics can be developed through simulated situations in classes, which seems that pragmatics can be further achieved through mixing the game-based language learning (GBLL) theory into TBLT to create opportunities for students to enhance metapragmatic awareness. Therefore,

this essay will explore the possibility of implying game design to TBLT classrooms to achieve students' language pragmatics. Finally, some potential shortcomings and future developments will also be mentioned.

II. DEFINING PRAGMATICS AND ITS CHALLENGES

Generally, pragmatics is concerned with how speakers and listeners conduct meaningful conversations through verbal and non-verbal language [3]. Even though the term pragmatics emerged in 1930 in the United States, Charles Morrison coined the term and proposed three different areas within semiotics: syntax, semantics, and Pragmatics. Since pragmatics includes conversational rules "manifested in the production and interpretation of utterances" [4], to put it another way, speakers who have solid pragmatic competence may have the ability to analyze the windy conditions and make their utterances acceptable in different conversational environments. Furthermore, Thomas [5] has pointed out that a lack of pragmatic competence in speech acts may lead to communication failure and breakdown. Therefore, as a critical factor, pragmatic competence has played a role in helping conversational participants successfully perform in different linguistic situations and potential criteria that native speakers use to determine whether a non-native speaker is a successful communicator or not, especially in a job interview or public conferences.

Unfortunately, most English teaching courses usually highlight and cultivate communicative and grammatical competence, but pragmatism is often neglected. According to Scholar's work [6], the communicative competence in L2 teaching is usually described as an ability to understand native speakers' essential points and "respond in such a way that the native speaker interprets to response with little or no effort and without errors that are so distracting that they interfere drastically with communication" [7]. From Kramsch's standpoints, it can be found that most L2 language classrooms emphasize essential linguistic competencies and regard understandable inputs and outputs as the goal. In other words, most current L2 courses have ignored the importance of informal situations, which may cause a potential issue that ELLs may focus more on the sentence, regardless of the conversational situations. In Chomsky's work, he has raised an example, "Can you lift that box?" Based on his viewpoint, knowing the sentence structure accounts for a bit of point if the speaker can not recognize

the context-based meaning of the sentence. Without contexts, Chomsky's example can ask how strong the person is or a request requiring the participant to move the box.

Additionally, Chomsky [8] has mentioned that a language is used for a specific purpose. As he has stated, Pragmatic Competence has created the relationship between language and usage, which means it places the target language in an institutional context in which it is used and relates intent and purpose to the linguistic means. Therefore, in addition to knowing the language structure, we also need to know how to use it.

III. DEFINING TBLT/CLT & POTENTIAL ISSUES

Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT), also referred to as Task-Based Instruction, is usually implemented widely in the Second Language Acquisition (SLA) context of teaching language and language learning. The approach of TBLT focuses on learning the target language to be able to carry out common tasks such as visiting a doctor, having a conversation over the phone, or conducting an interview [9]. This makes TBLT particularly popular for developing fluency and confidence in the target language. Therefore, TBLT can be regarded as a branch of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT).

The main concern of task-based instruction is the practical purpose of using the appropriate target language [10]. The main difference between task-based instruction with content-based instruction is that task-based instruction is more about real-world tasks, whereas content-based instruction focuses on subject matter content and small pieces of language. Long & Robinson [11] proposed that Focus on Meaning (FoM) and Focus on Form (FoF) teaching approaches have been the main component of TBLT. When Focus of Meaning (FoM) instruction is applied, the main concern would be the meaning of the language and a little space for linguistic forms. So, most of the time, real-life communication tasks will be focused on, and either less or no time allocated for teachers to directly teach discrete linguistic terms [12]. Unlike Focus on Meaning (FoM), Focus on Form (FoF) also does stress the meaning of the language, but it also provides opportunities for the teachers to tell their students to pay attention to linguistics from when it is necessary. There are two forms of TBLT, as stated by Skahen [13], which are the solid and weak forms. In the strong form of TBLT, learners will be required to pay attention to the linguistic items when there is a need or necessity. Therefore, these linguistic items are said to be incidentally acquired by learners. This usually occurs during an unfocused task where a predetermined language focus is not being set ahead, and learners will have to complete the task by utilizing their linguistic resources. Ellis [14] stated that, in this context, corrective feedback is provided when it is needed to achieve focus on form. On the other hand, in the weak form of TBLT, the task will be focused with a predetermined language focus through focused instruction. Moreover, the focus of form is allowed to take place at the beginning and end of

the task using supplementary materials in a weak TBLT [15].

It is important to note that when this approach is implemented, it focuses on interaction, communication, and the target language instead of learning the language itself [16]. The goals of this approach are linguistics in nature as it pays attention to communication, purpose, and meaning and not grammar or phonology. Unlike traditional learning environments, the task-based approach focuses on tasks rather than the coursebooks [17]. Littlewood also found that TBLT is very effective for students who are learning a language as they concentrate on the task rather than the language they are utilizing. In order to create a meaningful and effective task during TBLT, it is essential to ensure that the task has a sense of wholeness and can be independent as a communicative act with a beginning, middle, and end in its own right [18]. Nunan also further mentioned that the task should involve learners in understanding, directing, producing, or interacting in the target language while the learner's attention is focused on expressing meaning using their grammatical knowledge instead of manipulating its form. Besides that, the tasks implemented during TBLT are usually complex and meet the needs and expectations of learners since the classroom activities are created based on similar situations encountered by learners outside the second language classroom [19]. Swan [20] suggested several characteristics of task-based instruction which includes the instructed language learning uses naturalistic use of target language; instruction should be learner-centered; the activities conducted should focus on meaning instead of language; communicative tasks are the most suitable tool; require formal pre-and post-task language study, and traditional approach such as passive formal instruction is ineffective as it moves away from communicative tasks.

The TBLT is said to play an important part in language pedagogy currently [21]. This approach encourages the active participation of language learners, which consequently increases their learning motivation. Furthermore, it provides learners to express their thinking through actions and apply what they have learned productively during class activities [22]. Learners will also be able to reflect and develop critical awareness in themselves as they engage in meaningful discussion with their peers and teachers and evaluate the views of themselves and others [23]. Ellis et al. also claimed that TBLT improves learners' vocabulary, pronunciation, and fluency.

However, there are also criticisms of TBLT as some researchers question the value of employing tasks in the pedagogy [24]. Buyukkarci mentioned that although TBLT promotes autonomy learning of learners, it still seems not effective for systemic teaching of a new language. For instance, in Turkey, TBLT was ineffective for second language learners due to limited time allocated for language classes and the unavailability of an environment outside of the classroom [25]. If TBLT is implemented inappropriately, there are chances for creating pressure for instant communication instead of change and the growth of interlanguage [26]. With TBLT,

learners are not provided with any knowledge to make interpretations more than what they have learned through the task-based activities, and they will not be able to stimulate factors that are associated that define actual language use situations [27].

Additionally, the elicited performances of learners will not depend on the proficiency of the language but the abilities and knowledge. Therefore, there are high chances that learners may experience language anxiety in the future if the TBLT approach is not carefully implemented. This should be considered as second language learners are vulnerable to language anxiety. Thus, a lot of communication and interaction exist outside of the second language classroom, which cannot be fulfilled with TBLT [28].

IV. GAME DESIGN & ADVANTAGES

The advancement in technology has introduced game-based learning, implementing game designs for educational purposes instead of entertainment purposes [1]. Gentile, Groves, & Gentile [29] developed a meta-theoretical model which incorporated general models of learning into a whole. The center of the model represents the learning experience which posits is the game design features. The learning theory, which depends on the game design features, reflects the type of challenges provided by the game, the type of responses facilitated by the game, and the type of feedback provided by the game. For example, if the game is a behaviorist approach, it would have a limited set of choices for players to respond to, and the feedback would be either right or wrong message, which is corrective feedback [30]. On the other hand, if the game design uses a constructivist approach, players can set their challenges, provide necessary tools to construct a response, and an appropriate system of peer feedback [30].

When TBLT and Game-Based Language Learning (GBLL) are compared, there are certain similarities between the task and quests of these two approaches [31]. Firstly, both have main objectives, known as task goals, in which second language learners have to adhere to certain rules to achieve the task goals [32]. Secondly, the difficulty level of the tasks and games increases as the learners move further during the learning process. Csikszentmihalyi [33] mentioned that to maintain the engagement of players throughout the learning process, the difficulty of the games increases with the skill of the player. Similarly, in TBLT, the complexity of tasks is sequenced to create a task syllabus [34]. Thirdly, both approaches provide rewards in the form of feedback after completion. Learners can experiment in a safe environment when feedback is provided from both of the approaches. Lastly, TBLT and GBLL are considered an authentic domain for the use of language. Authenticity is created when learners experience tasks. Based on Franciosi's [35] comparison, learners are engaged in an experiential process through GBLL, whereas TBLT engages learners in real-world language skills. An authentic learning design should be always adopted when combining TBLT and GBLL approaches. There are

several characteristics which needs to be adhered to when creating an authentic and engaging task. The tasks should be based on a real-world situation; should involve higher-order thinking skills and promote problem solving abilities; requires a lot of time and intellectual resources during task construction; should provide learners with opportunities to use multiples sources and think from different perspectives; allows collaboration; allows learners to reflect on their learning; allows learners to come up with various solutions instead of one single answer and the product of the task should be meaningful and adds value to learning [35]. Thus, it is noted that both approaches incorporate meaning-focused activities to engage learners in authentic interactions through semiotic elements.

Generally, technology-mediated tasks can increase learners' motivation and creativity, promote engagement and participation, and reduces anxiety [35]. Therefore, it produces greater language quality compared to face-to-face interaction. Furthermore, many researchers prove that digital game-based learning is more engaging, and learners can learn in a fun and interesting way compared to traditional outstanding classroom teaching and learning approaches. Recently, there has been an issue in which students are either not engaging sufficiently or not engaging with their college textbooks [36]. So, exciting investigated the difference in the engagement level of students when they were provided with digital game-based textbooks and traditional print-based textbooks. It was found that students were more engaged with digital game-based textbooks compared to the traditional print-based textbook as they put in so much mental effort to complete the task in the digital game-based textbook.

Similarly, Liao, Chang & Chang [37] found that game-based learning had more positive effects than traditional instruction on students' achievement in Taiwan. Other research conducted by Lin, Tsai, and Huang also reported that game-based learning has significant gains compared to traditional learning. York & William DeHaan conducted a study on the effectiveness of the integration of TBLT and GBLL using non-digital tabletop games. Board games were used as a mediating tool for low-learners to develop communicative competence and agency. Findings reported that the ability of students to use the target language in terms of fluency and speaking skills increased but not in terms of accurate use of language, grammar, and vocabulary acquisition.

Furthermore, it was found that time was limited to complete all the frameworks. Based on this statement, it can be derived that digital game-based learning provides more time for learning compared to non-digital game-based learning. Thus, digital game-based learning is more appropriate to integrate with TBLT. However, there is no exact answer for the argument between game-based learning and traditional learning. Studies [38] found that game-based learning and traditional learning had no significant differences. Reviews based on the research reported by Young *et al.* [39], Merchant *et al.* [40], and de Smale *et al.* mentioned that when traditional learning is compared to game-based learning, it was seen that

game-based learning had a little or no positive effects on knowledge and skill acquisition.

Gonzalez & Orthega [41] discussed designing an appropriate game-based learning approach using TBLT principles. The elements that were focused on in the game design incorporated with the TBLT approach were the primary purpose of the game, series of interrelated tasks, goal-oriented tasks, providing rewards after completion, authenticity, and fail states. The main objective of task-based games should be goal-oriented learning, problem-based learning, and learners should learn by doing. The series of interrelated tasks should represent sequenced or organized units according to research principles or syllabus. Each unit should provide scaffold learning tasks and subtasks. The goal-orienting element refers to learners' collaborative use of language, which encourages autonomy learning, problem-based learning, and goal-oriented learning. Rewards for completion, which is usually after the task, should provide feedback or scaffold learning through feedbacks. The authenticity of task-based games is wholly from learners' experience and not the task creators or teachers. Lastly, the failure states that again feedback should be provided to scaffold and allow task repetition to incorporate feedback. Without these elements being considered in TBLT, it is impossible to attain a successful and meaningful game-based learning experience [42]. Based on these characteristics, emotional design can be considered as an important game feature to be implemented to improve TBLT in games. This design encourages learners to express emotionally, be motivated, enjoy learning and increase performance through feedbacks. It has been proven that emotion affects students learning directly and indirectly as it mediates their higher order thinking skills, memory, motivation, self-regulation, social interaction and creativity [29]. These facts align with the aim of TBLT and GBLL approaches which makes it the most suitable game feature to be incorporated in TBLT games.

On the other hand, Maghsoud [43] stated that to create a successful implementation of TBLT and GBLL, amalgamating these two approaches into task-based games is necessary. Second language learners need to be well knowledgeable or be skillful to understand the unique technology-mediated tasks in the 21st century. Therefore, it is necessary to ensure that the learners acquire knowledge and utilize the tasks for assessment when TBLT and GBLL are integrated. Tasks-based games would serve learners with the same underlying purposes of TBLT and GBLL, which encourages active learning, provides contextualized learning, discovery learning, on-demand information, and different approaches with different merits. The combination of TBLT and GBLL to create task-based games could help reduce the ineffectiveness of each approach. For instance, the framework of TBLT can be used to overcome the weakness of GBLL implementation, such as being less associated with the standard curriculum and the inability to cover the whole scope of language in terms of skills

and components in an integrated and organized manner [44]. Maghsoud [44] proposed a rough idea of a task-based game, which was focused and input-providing, into three phases: The first phase is the pre-task phase, in which extraction of few words from the main task is done and presented together with their definitions.

Learners move to the following stage of pre-task once they have felt like they have learned the words. The second stage tests whether learners have learned the definition properly. Learners will be provided with positive feedback and score once they have matched the words to correct definitions, but when they choose an incorrect answer, they will lose a score but will be provided with a hint for a second try. The main task will require learners to either read or listen to a passage. Before the main task, learners will be required to answer a few questions about the passage that will be read or listened to later. This is to provide a background idea and increase the learner's curiosity. Learners will also be alerted that more questions will be asked after reading or listening to the passage. After that, learners will be required to answer verbally to some wh questions with fixed answers.

In the post-task phases, a prevalent grammar structure will be highlighted in the text, and learners will be required to answer multiple-choice questions about the structure and choose the best option which describes the structure's function. Later, learners will have to figure out similar structures and write them in numbers in boxes that represent similar structures. Learners will obtain a score for every similar structure identified. At the end of the task, learners must summarize the passage by recording their voice, providing their opinions and solution to the problem encountered in the passage, and send to the teachers to receive feedback. This proposed design was based on the TBLT lesson design incorporated into GBLL. Brom *et al.* mentioned that games allow better knowledge retention and transferability of learned material through contextualized and real-life activities. Maghsoud concluded in his study that the integration of TBLT and GBLL promotes motivation and autonomy, engages learners with different learning styles and cultural backgrounds, solves issues of TBLT such as implementing it in large classes introduce a new way of providing feedback.

Based on the comparison between proposed task games design and the important elements by, which need to be considered during design game-based learning by incorporating TBLT principles, there is a significant similarity. According to Maghsoud, three phases; the pre-task phase consists of elements of providing the main objective of the task or game; main task phase consists of series of interrelated tasks, and the post-task phase consists of the goal-oriented task, providing rewards after completion, authenticity and fail states. Therefore, the proposed game-based design based on TBLT principles is suitable to be implemented. Thus, this comparison represents incorporating task-based learning (TBL) in language into game-based learning design.

V. CONCLUSION

Based on the reviews of several types of research, it can be generalized that the combination of TBLT and GBLL would promote language pragmatics. Pragmatics is vital in forming the competence of learners to communicate effectively using the target language. Therefore, it can be concluded that the combination of TBLT and GBLL would be valuable and meaningful for second language learners in learning their target language. Furthermore, task-based games in language learning could motivate and engage learners to create meaningful learning while promoting autonomy and reducing anxiety, especially for second language learners. It was also noted that digital game-based learning is more effective than non-digital game-based learning since non-digital game-based learning cannot cover all the critical elements of TBLT during implementation.

Furthermore, it would also be suitable for young language learners who are technology savvy but may be difficult for senior-aged language learners as they need time to cope with the use of technology. As was mentioned by Maghsoud that learners have to be good at handling technologies available in the 21st century to understand technology-mediated tasks. However, it is also important to consider the weaknesses of the principles of TBLT and GBLL during their integration. TBLT was criticized for not defining the target language as a whole, whereas there are still arguments that GBLL may not be different from traditional teaching and learning. These limitations and weaknesses may be overcome by following the framework proposed by so that all important elements are included to full fill the requirements of TBLT and GBLL principles. At the same time, it is also essential to embrace the advantages of these two approaches, which outweighs the number of criticisms. It is crucial to ensure that the task-based games meet the needs and goals of learners for effective language learning. Based on this write-up, it is suggested that more research should be conducted to measure the suitability and effectiveness of the integration of TBLT and GBLL in language learning as there is minimal research on this topic.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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