
IT WORKS IN THEORY AND IN PRACTICE: A PRACTICAL GUIDE FOR INTRODUCING TBLT IN A BEGINNER SPANISH PROGRAM

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Task-based language teaching (TBLT) has been at the center of the debates on which approaches are most effective for structuring, planning, and implementing language courses. Several articles have focused on its effectiveness (Bryfonsky & McKay, 2017; Long, 2016; González-Lloret & Nielson, 2015), but few have shared specific implementation experiences in the classroom (Long, 2015; Torres & Seratini, 2016). The limited array of articles that address TBLT course creation focus on language courses for specific purposes, but little is known about the challenges and solutions found when designing and implementing a TBLT course that is part of a large general education language program. This article shares the authors' experience in developing and teaching such a course. Based on these experiences, realistic and actionable examples are offered of how to surmount the challenges encountered when developing, integrating, and teaching a TBLT course in an otherwise traditional grammar-centric First-Year university language program at a large US university.

INTRODUCTION

Task-based language teaching (TBLT) is gaining traction as an approach rooted in second language acquisition (SLA) research and theory (Bryfonski & McKay, 2017) that offers an alternative to more traditional form-focused approaches. The core of its merit is the fact that TBLT provides the opportunity for authentic language use related to daily-life tasks. These tasks

are selected according to the communicative needs of the learners, instead of being chosen based on the linguistic structures that they elicit, and are sequenced by their complexity (Ellis, 2018).

Despite the benefits of TBLT, putting the theory into practice presents considerable challenges, especially due to teachers' and students' beliefs and to the somewhat rigid structure of many language programs that include multiple sections and instructors. In order to facilitate the adoption of this approach on a larger scale in language programs, the language teaching community would profit from sharing examples of real courses, with thorough descriptions of the challenges and solutions found during their creation and subsequent implementation. However, only a few articles to date have offered step-by-step descriptions of TBLT implementations in the classroom (Long, 2015; Torres & Serafini, 2016), and those have focused predominantly on language for specific purposes (LSP) courses. No study, to the best of our knowledge, has yet reported on the design of a TBLT course that was part of a large multi-section general education language program. This article addresses this gap by presenting the steps and challenges in creating and teaching a hybrid (i.e., face-to-face classes combined with asynchronous online activities) TBLT-inspired¹ Spanish beginner course, offered as part of an otherwise traditional form-focused language teaching program at a large US university. The course was developed in order to address the interests and communicative goals expressed by beginner learners of Spanish and offer an alternative to the traditional form-focused version of the course for students interested in engaging with real-life tasks from day one.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Foundations of TBLT

TBLT is an approach to language instruction that centers a *task* as the primary unit for both program and individual lesson design. A *task* is broadly defined as an activity that meets the following criteria: 1. The primary focus is on meaning, such that learners should be attentive to processing pragmatic and semantic meaning first and foremost. 2. There should be a type of “gap” or need for the learners to convey information, infer meaning, or express an opinion. 3. Learners should predominantly rely on their own linguistic and non-linguistic resources to complete the task. 4. Each task builds towards a clearly defined outcome that extends beyond grammatical accuracy (Ellis, 2009). In this way, the successful completion of the task “checking your luggage” would be defined as the speaker’s ability to use available linguistic (e.g.: known words, phrases, question formation, circumlocution) and non-linguistic resources (e.g.: gestures, visual cues) to check one’s luggage at an airport, not necessarily the mastery of any one particular verb tense or vocabulary unit. Courses designed following this model differ from more traditional form-focused ones in that in the latter, programs and lessons are often organized by grammatical units (e.g., irregular present tense verbs) and a series of activities are designed to engage with, practice, and produce those forms in a communicative context. In this way, a successful outcome of this type of orientation would be the correct application of the grammatical structure and vocabulary in a given context (Anderson, 2017), not necessarily the successful completion of a task as defined above.

Fundamental to any TBLT course are the selection and sequencing of tasks, which are co-constructed by learners and instructors. These tasks are determined through a needs analysis and careful attention to the authentic language needs of the learners, while also taking their level of proficiency into account. The needs analysis should present an initial list of tasks that conform

to the perceived goals of the learner population, from which learners can select the ones they find more relevant or useful. These tasks could range from academic (i.e., writing an abstract) to everyday (i.e., ordering a sandwich) to more context-specific (i.e., communicating with asylum seekers at a political border). Once tasks are selected, they should be organized in ascending order of complexity (Baralt et al., 2014). In defining task complexity, Ellis (2019) proposes that instructors should consider the following criteria: cognitive complexity (i.e., more or less reasoning, closed vs. open outcome), context-dependency (i.e., how related the task is to the *here and now* of the learner), and information familiarity (i.e., how familiar the learner is with the information needed to perform the task). Furthermore, Ellis (2003) recommends focusing on consciousness-raising tasks when needed that are integrated into a syllabus most likely composed primarily of linguistically unfocused tasks. When working with focused tasks, instructors must attend to formal complexity, functional complexity, reliability, scope, metalanguage, and L1/L2 contrasts. Even though all these criteria are recognized as important, Ellis (2019) suggests that they not be used rigidly, but rather as contributors to instructors' and coordinators' final decisions about task sequencing, which will ultimately be based on their first-hand experience with specific groups of students in specific contexts.

Regarding evaluation, Ellis (2021) proposes that assessments in TBLT should be performance-based. In other words, assessments should align with the pedagogical approach of the course and evaluate the performance of the tasks that students are learning. However, there are differing perspectives as to what the evaluation of the task should measure such as rating aspects of language use (such as complexity, accuracy, and fluency), task completion, or a combination of both. In some instances, cumulative projects, self-assessments, and even traditional "fill-in-the-blank" exams could align nicely with the evaluation goals of the instructor, learners and/or institution. In short, there is no one universally accepted form of assessment, as practitioners should select the method or methods for evaluation that best align with the orientation and goals of the course and institution.

In addition, instructors and institutions should regularly assess and evaluate courses and learner outcomes to inform improvements to task and course sequencing, the execution of individual tasks, material design, lesson orientation, and assessment measures. Ideally, this type of course evaluation should invite participation from all stakeholders, from program coordinators to instructors to learners. This inclusive, holistic approach to assessment ensures the course aligns with program and institutional goals, the tenets of TBLT, and, above all, the needs of learners (Norris, 2016).

Positive Outcomes of TBLT Courses

Proof that TBLT courses can be successfully implemented and can favor students' linguistic and communicative development has been repeatedly found in the literature. Bryfonsky and McKay (2017) carried out a meta-analysis of 52 studies on the implementation and evaluation of TBLT programs to gauge the merits and challenges of task-based teaching. They focused on the outcomes and perceptions of the key stakeholders (learners, instructors, program coordinators) involved and found a strong positive main effect of TBLT use on learning outcomes. Furthermore, stakeholders in the meta-analysis tended to praise the positive effects of TBLT programs, with an average of 79% positive ratings across studies.

In the specific context of L2 Spanish, for example, González-Lloret and Nielson (2015) recount the creation and implementation of a successful TBLT Language for Special Purposes (LSP) course. This beginning Spanish course trained US Border Patrol agents to perform work-related tasks. Previously offered as a traditional grammar-centered course, the new TBLT version

was consistent with the methodological and programmatic principles of this approach. Thus, the course was structured following cycles of needs analysis, identification of tasks, selection of linguistic resources needed to perform those tasks, and sequencing the tasks into modules in order of complexity. Seasoned agents guided the selection of tasks and resources. The final performance of the tasks, mostly through a role-play with a highly proficient speaker, was evaluated at the end of each module. When the program finished, students' outcomes were measured in terms of fluency, lexical complexity, and grammatical accuracy, and were compared to those of students who participated in previous grammar-centered iterations of the course. TBLT students outperformed the grammar-centered group in fluency and lexical complexity measures, while performing similarly when it came to grammatical accuracy.

Implementing TBLT in Real Classrooms: Challenges and Solutions

Developing new TBLT courses and implementing them in the context of existing language programs can be an arduous task as it requires overcoming a series of challenges related to the realities of the language programs in place, as well as addressing instructors' and students' beliefs. Fortunately, solutions to adapt TBLT recommendations to specific teaching contexts have been proposed by practitioners who started creating and implementing what McDonough (2015) called *localized TBLT* courses. The idea is to move from an *adoption* mindset to one that puts *adaptation* at the center of TBLT course design (Butler, 2011). This has allowed the development of courses that less rigidly apply TBLT recommendations and that are better localized in the context where they are taught (e.g., Kim et al., 2017). In sum, most TBLT proponents have shifted from seeing TBLT as a fixed set of principles that need to be followed to a more open view of the field, where the specific context in which a TBLT course is implemented becomes key to adequate course design (Ellis et al., 2019; Ellis, 2021). In Ellis et al.'s (2019) words:

TBLT is based on a set of general principles that inform how a language is best taught and learned but it is not prescriptive of either how to design a task-based course or how to implement tasks in the classroom. Nor is the approach monolithic. There are different versions of the approach. We acknowledge these differences and consider how TBLT can be adapted to take account of the needs of instructors and learners in different instructional contexts. (p. xiv)

In the next sections, some common challenges that have been encountered by TBLT course developers in trying to adopt TBLT approaches will be presented, as well as some ideas that have been put forward to address them and better respond to the contextual realities of instructors and learners.

Needs analysis and students' interests

As outlined above, the selection of tasks in TBLT courses should be co-constructed by instructors and students to address learners' needs. However, as any classroom instructor would know, it is challenging to create a new needs analysis, sequence tasks, and create new materials for every offering of a course to adapt it to each new cohort of students. In fact, as Bryfonski & McKay (2017) observed in their meta-analysis of the implementation of TBLT courses, most do not include a needs analysis as a starting point for task selection. However, results of the meta-analysis displayed similar positive outcomes for TBLT courses where tasks were selected based on a typical needs analysis and those where no needs analysis was carried out. The authors thus concluded that the completion of a needs analysis at the beginning of a TBLT course may not

be as important as was originally thought. Ellis (2021) supports this idea and suggests that not all students have actual linguistic *needs* in their L2, especially when they live in communities where the L2 is not broadly spoken. Instead, Ellis invites instructors to identify *interests*, not *needs*, that students may have, and incorporate them in the classes. The idea that a course can still focus on tasks that correspond to students' interests while avoiding the step of a systematic needs analysis may come as a relief for many curriculum designers and instructors who have little flexibility when it comes to creating a completely new syllabus within each of their classes and whose students may not have immediate identifiable needs in their L2.

Integration of TBLT courses in language programs

Educational institutions differ in terms of cultural background, program and class size, as well as access to resources, which necessarily influences the design and execution of language programs, and constrains the options of instructors interested in creating TBLT courses. Additionally, the introduction of TBLT courses in a language program requires the design and implementation of adequate instructor training, as well as a flexible curriculum that accommodates the new courses in a preexisting structure. For these reasons, in the context of US post-secondary education, LSP courses have been more conducive to TBLT, as they tend to be less embedded in the typical beginner-intermediate-advanced sequence of general language courses. For example, Torres and Serafini (2016) reported on two Spanish LSP courses in two different universities. These upper-level university Business Spanish courses were designed using tasks as the basic unit of analysis in an attempt to better meet the requirements of their specific population. In the departments where the courses were developed, LSP courses, contrary to other language courses, typically had fewer students and were not integrated into a multi-course language program, thus enjoying more programmatic autonomy. Furthermore, the contents (i.e., target tasks), selected via a needs analysis for that concrete group, did not need to meet the requirements to pass to the next level in a series of courses.

Larger language programs composed of a sequence of courses impose more constraints on syllabus design, as each course is one part of the whole program. In the case of the typical lower-division Spanish language classes taught in US colleges and universities, those courses are offered for all students at the institution to meet general education requirements and are frequently seen as a popular option to satisfy the so-called *language requirement* (Lacorte, 2018). The high enrollment in these courses results in multiple sections, each being taught by faculty and/or graduate teaching assistants (GTA) who need to implement a coordinated approach to teaching in order to provide learners with a homogenous experience across sections. In other words, students enrolled in first-semester Spanish need to cover certain content to successfully move on to second-semester Spanish, regardless of their instructor or methodology. Thus, if tasks are to become the center of the curriculum in a particular course level or section in large language programs where courses are sequenced according to specific linguistic goals, it is paramount that the selected tasks elicit the specific structures and lexical units that are requisites for the next course level.

This reality is better accounted for when adopting an approach known as Task-Supported Language Teaching (TSLT), where tasks are selected based on the grammatical contents that students learn and practice (Ellis, 2003). For example, the objective of having students practice a conversation where they give someone instructions on how to get to a certain place would not only be to get that person to arrive at said place, but also to practice the use of imperative forms in an appropriate and relevant communicative setting. This more-flexible version of TBLT can better adapt to contexts where certain structural contents need to be taught

while still giving a central role to tasks. Another option is to adopt a modular approach that includes both TSLT and TBLT modules (Ellis, 2003, 2019, 2021). Concretely, Ellis (2019) proposes that such an approach should start with TBLT modules, where students focus strictly on meaning, followed by modules with a greater emphasis on specific grammatical structures that are more challenging to master through implicit learning (e.g., English articles, third-person -s). This modular approach would also allow instructors and course coordinators to maintain general meaning-focused goals in their courses while providing spaces for the explicit discussion of specific grammatical structures. Importantly, however, Ellis (2019) proposes that the selection of forms to be explicitly taught in class through “focused” tasks should take the form of a checklist (instead of a syllabus), from which instructors can select the structures that their students found more difficult within the unfocused tasks of the TBLT modules.

Instructors’ and Students’ Beliefs about Language Learning

Even after a course designer embraces any of the abovementioned versions of TBLT (i.e., strong TBLT, TSLT, modular), instructors’ and students’ beliefs may limit the success of a newly designed course. Indeed, instructors and students tend to resist and resent new pedagogical practices when these greatly differ from familiar practices (Borg, 2003a, 2003b). Students’ beliefs about language teaching and learning, like those of instructors, are shaped by previous experiences, but it is common to find mismatches between students’ and instructors’ perceptions about the effectiveness of specific instructional practices. For example, Brown (2009), and later Beaudrie (2015), compared and contrasted the perceptions of students and instructors about language teaching effectiveness. Although their participants were different (i.e., Brown studied foreign language students whereas Beaudrie focused on Spanish heritage learners), both authors found that the learners in their studies expressed a strong preference for grammar-based approaches, particularly for deductive grammar explanations, while instructors favored inductive approaches. This preference for explicit approaches to grammar teaching was recently confirmed in Daloglu (2020), demonstrating that this view is still pervasive nowadays among students. Similarly, students regarded frequent and explicit forms of error correction more highly, especially during oral tasks, and were more inclined to value lectures over group work. Alternatively, instructors found more value in group work, communicative activities, and moderate error correction. Such mismatches in beliefs can awaken students’ resistance in the face of the implementation of a course that follows strict TBLT principles. A few courses of action have been proposed to alleviate students’ initial discomfort with such courses.

First, course developers and instructors may opt to create courses that apply TBLT principles less strictly. As was mentioned earlier, developing a TSLT or a modular TBLT-TSLT course could alleviate students’ negative responses. By maintaining some classroom dynamics that they are more familiar with, such as explicit explanations of grammatical content when necessary, while also introducing more meaning-focused tasks, students may feel more at ease with the pedagogical innovations and not see them as odd replacements, but rather useful complements to more familiar methods. Alternatively, the introduction of a TSLT version of the course can also be an initial step in developing a fully TBLT course (Long, 2015) in order to ease students’ initial resistance. Indeed, as students become acquainted with the mechanics of tasks, their initial doubts or insecurities may slowly diminish (Kim et al., 2017), while the maintenance of a (light) focus on grammatical contents can still provide a certain level of comfort and reassurance (Ellis, 2019; Ohta, 2001; Willis, 1996) during the transition to a more strictly TBLT course.

When instructors would prefer to avoid spending too much in-class time on explicit grammar point, while still addressing students’ preference for the inclusion of explicit grammar, one possible solution is to employ a flipped classroom model (Vitta & Al-Hoorie, 2020). In this

model, students engage with rich input, models of the tasks to perform and relevant vocabulary and grammar content, on their own as assignments and then use what they learned at home to complete specific tasks in class (González-Lloret & Ortega, 2014). This type of model has been shown to be effective for students' language development, depth of processing, and active engagement (Li et al., 2018; Moreno & Malovrh, 2020). Importantly, it allows the instructor to devote the majority of in-class time to meaning-focused tasks and communicative interaction. In the case of TBLT courses, by taking advantage of the opportunities offered by online platforms, students can complete pre- and post-task activities, watch videos and complete exercises that engage explicit grammatical knowledge and vocabulary learning outside of class, while most in-class time is devoted to task completion and communication, thus following a hybrid format (i.e., mixing in-person and online components in a course).

Finally, independent of the format and approach used in designing a new course, students' beliefs need to be addressed by "explain[ing] the rationale behind classroom instructional strategies" (Beaudrie, 2015, p.278). For example, learners' resistance to group work, a necessary reality of tasks, can be reduced by providing metacognitive instruction and explicitly explaining the advantages of collaborative work in L2 learning (Fujii et al., 2016). Appropriate task modeling, as well as task repetition (Shintani, 2012), are also key in ascertaining that students appropriately engage with the tasks (Kim, 2013). The ability to offer such metacognitive training and to effectively model tasks previously required instructors to be trained and to feel comfortable themselves with the principles that underlie TBLT, or even TSLT. Therefore, the implementation of any course that deviates from more typical form-focused approaches needs to develop appropriate training opportunities for the instructors in order to ensure that they fully understand and embrace the purposes and dynamics of the new approach and can thus convey those ideas to their students.

COURSE STRUCTURE AND RATIONALE

The TBLT-inspired hybrid (i.e., combining online activities and in-person classes) course presented in this article, *SPA 1Y: Spanish for Travelers*, was designed to be integrated into a First-Year Spanish program that aims to satisfy the language requirement for beginner learners of L2 Spanish at a large public university in Northern California. This beginner Spanish program is composed of three courses (SPA 1, 2, and 3) to be completed over the course of an academic year. Approximately 10 sections of each course are offered during each 10-week-long academic term. Both SPA 1 and SPA 1Y share the same fundamental goal of providing the opportunity and structure for students to develop basic oral and written proficiency in Spanish and the completion of either of these courses grants students the right to enroll in the next course in the sequence: SPA 2. Both aim to help students access, use and navigate Spanish vocabulary and grammatical constructions for communication in real, meaningful situations. However, the fundamental orientation and organization of these two courses differ.

Before the creation of SPA 1Y, each course in the SPA 1-3 sequence followed a traditional form-focused model, with a syllabus designed around grammar points and thematic vocabulary units, as determined by the textbook used across all three courses. SPA 1-3 courses were all taught face-to-face, 5 days a week for 50 minutes a day. A typical lesson would involve the explicit presentation of the target vocabulary unit, grammatical structure or cultural topic. The instructor was expected to conduct a series of communicative exercises and activities designed around the target structure to help the students engage with course content in small and large groups. While great emphasis was placed on communicative competence and

interaction, the measure of “successful” learning in these courses was measured predominantly by form-focused fill-in-the-blank written exams and related homework assignments.

Alternatively, students enrolled in the new SPA 1Y course meet face-to-face only twice a week for 80 minutes each day, and complete pre- and post-task activities online the other three days of each week. The syllabus is designed around specific tasks, rather than grammatical or vocabulary units, and sequenced according to the logical progression of a trip, not the predetermined sequencing of a commercial textbook. As will be elaborated in subsequent sections, “successful” learning outcomes are measured in this course through a mixture of task performance assessments, pre- and post-task activities, self-reflections and some minimal form-focused assessments.

SPA 1Y is the only Spanish course that purposefully integrates aspects of TSLT and TBLT at this institution and is currently offered as an alternative to the traditional form-focused SPA 1. Therefore, students can choose between SPA 1 or the hybrid SPA 1Y version of the course as a first step into the year-long program and thus subsequently progress through the next course in the sequence: SPA 2, which still only exists in its form-focused format. Currently, in a given academic term, we are still only offering between one and three sections of SPA 1Y, depending on the academic term, as opposed to six to nine sections of SPA 1. However, the SPA 1Y sections are now systematically over-enrolled, with long waitlists of students who prefer the hybrid TBLT format to that of the form-focused one. Based on this increasing demand for the course, we aim to soon balance our offering of SPA 1 vs. SPA 1Y sections by making sure that at least half of the sections offered are SPA 1Y.

SPA 1Y follows a flipped classroom model (Vitta & Al-Hoorie, 2020) in that students complete the pre-task activities online, at their own pace, in preparation for the face-to-face class meetings. These activities include oral, written and audiovisual input related to the target tasks of each unit, as well as explicit instructional materials to help them understand that input. No particular emphasis is placed on memorizing grammar and vocabulary; rather, the focus is on ensuring students have the necessary tools to interpret the input adequately. During face-to-face meetings, students complete activities that follow a graduated increase in difficulty, starting with receptive tasks, followed by guided activities to practice the models from the pre-task input, and finally, the completion of the target task in pairs. At the end of the week, students work online, on their own, to complete a self-assessment to evaluate how comfortable they feel completing the target tasks, a short vocabulary and grammar quiz with unlimited attempts and open access to course resources, and a final written or oral assignment that complements the week’s target task (e.g., writing a review of a restaurant on Yelp after practicing how to order food from their menu during class).

Most sections of the courses in the introductory Spanish series are taught by graduate teaching assistants (GTA) under the supervision of the program director, who is in charge of their pedagogical training and syllabus design. While most GTAs are enrolled in the Spanish graduate program, the majority specialize in literature and less than a third focus their research on SLA or language pedagogy. Therefore, the level of interest in SLA theories and pedagogical innovations varies greatly among the instructors in the program. Since TBLT differs in orientation from the traditional form-focused model that GTAs may be used to teaching in the other courses in the series, and may require additional training, GTAs selected to teach SPA 1Y must have at least one year of experience teaching beginner Spanish and must have explicitly expressed an interest in TBLT. Once selected to teach the course, GTAs need to meet with the program director in order to learn about the tenets of TBLT and the differences between SPA 1 and SPA 1Y. They are also asked to participate in a series of workshops with GTAs who have taught the course in previous offerings in order to receive training from the people who have

the most first-hand experience with the course and receive actionable tips on how to address some of the typical difficulties encountered when teaching it.

CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS

Needs analysis

Unlike the traditional form-focused courses in the language program, which were designed around grammar and vocabulary units, the SPA 1Y syllabus is organized around specific tasks associated with travel. Task selection was determined based on a needs analysis performed prior to the creation of the course. However, the emphasis of the needs analysis was more on students' interests than needs, as will be described later. Concretely, an anonymous needs/interests analysis was designed and distributed to students in the introductory Spanish series (SPA 1-3) to determine what they would be interested in, rather than needed to be able to do in Spanish. The survey was distributed as a Google Form including a list of 9 tasks related to university daily life, travel, or personal life. Participants had to rate each task in terms of how interested they would be to learn how to perform it in a beginners' Spanish class on a scale from 1 (not interested at all) to 7 (extremely interested). In addition to those proposed tasks, an open-ended question was provided in which students were invited to suggest other tasks that they would be interested in. Of the 39 participants, 27% expressed a desire to perform travel-based tasks. Specifically, they were interested in learning how to "survive" if, and when, they travel to a Spanish-speaking country. Other tasks were not favored by as many students, which made travel-related tasks the most salient group of tasks around which to design the new course.

In addition to this initial motivation to structure the course around tasks related to travel, at the time of course design, students who wanted to enroll in short-term study abroad programs in Spanish-speaking countries at the institution under study did not have any language proficiency prerequisite prior to departure, leaving them unable to communicate appropriately on-site, especially upon arrival. Anecdotally, the director of the First-Year Spanish program, who is also part of the course design team, repeatedly received emails from students who wondered how to best prepare for their summer abroad program and could not find a course that would adequately train them into basic survival Spanish. This further encouraged the course design team to focus on tasks related to situations that could be encountered during a trip to a Spanish-speaking country, be it as part of a study abroad experience or a vacation. However, it is important to underline that many of the tasks embedded in the course could be relevant when speaking Spanish in the community, since tasks such as introducing yourself, buying food, ordering coffee, etc. could be performed in the setting where the course was taught (Northern California). Therefore, course designers saw great overlap in the concept of "surviving" in Spanish, as described by learners, in both their local communities and potential experiences abroad. Indeed, the presence of a growing Spanish-speaking community in the university town would offer opportunities for language engagement for students interested and motivated to do so, while students interested in traveling would benefit from the course as well.

Structure and Contents of the Course

Once it was clear that the course would be structured around tasks related to traveling in order to respond to students' interests, potentially prepare them for study-abroad or travel experiences, and even motivate them to perform some of them in their own community, decisions needed to be made about the ordering and organization of those tasks. Tasks were organized in the chronological order of a trip, with tasks related to preparing the trip being taught

first and those related to preparing the trip back home last. The result was a list of eight moments of the trip, each with its corresponding tasks, which are presented in Table 1. For most tasks, one could realistically expect that they should be completed in Spanish at that moment of the trip, except for two that would be realistically completed in the students' dominant language. Indeed, the initial step of the first module, namely *Decide where to go and what to do at your destination and discuss your plan with someone else*, would most probably be performed in the students' dominant language, as would be the case for the first task of the second module: *check-in your luggage*. We maintained them in the first modules since both tasks can work as an accessible introduction and warm-up of the general focus of the course on travel, while students practice helpful vocabulary and communicative structures (e.g., personal information, describing plans for the future) that are used frequently throughout the rest of the course.

In addition to the eight task-based modules, two more modules were included in the 10-week course to review and practice for the midterm and final performance assessments of oral and communicative skills.

Table 1: *Weekly Modules and Associated Tasks*

Moment of the trip	Tasks
1. Preparing the trip	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Decide where to go and what to do at your destination and discuss your plan with someone else. ● Buy plane tickets online and enter your personal information during the booking.
2. The day of the flight	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Check-in your luggage ● Find your seat on the plane ● Order food on the plane
3. Arriving to the destination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Go through customs ● Compare public transportation options to arrive to your final destination ● Take a taxi and give them directions to your destination
4. A weekend out of the city	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Plan a weekend in the countryside ● Book a hotel room ● Check-in at the hotel
5. A weekend in the city	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Buy tickets to go to a museum ● Ask for directions to arrive to the museum ● Order coffee at a café
6. Review week and midterm assessment	Preparation and practice for the midterm quiz and oral performance assessment
7. Inviting friends for dinner	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Buy food at the supermarket ● Follow a recipe to make a dish for dinner
8. Having dinner at a restaurant or at a friend's place	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Order food at a restaurant ● Describe your food preferences, allergies, intolerances, etc. ● Give compliments about the food
9. Preparing the trip back home	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Write a postcard to your friends ● Buy souvenirs for your family at a local market
10. Review week	Preparation and practice for the final quiz and oral performance assessment

It is important to point out here that, even though the central tasks of the course are not organized by difficulty or complexity but rather practicality related to the topic and travel context, the sub-tasks within each module are scaffolded with a pre-task, task, post-task structure, and a gradual progression of easier to more complex tasks based on Ellis (2019) criteria to determine task's complexity. Additionally, as the course is organized around tasks instead of grammar contents, different tasks that are distributed across the academic term may require similar grammatical and lexical knowledge. For example, students have opportunities to practice how to order food on three occasions throughout the course: when they select a meal on the plane in Module 2, when they order coffee at a café in Module 5 and when they order food at a restaurant in Module 8. Each one of these tasks presents an incremental rise in the level of difficulty in that the amount of food options increases from “chicken or pasta” on the plane to a whole menu in the restaurant. However, most of the interactions remain similar across communicative contexts in terms of the grammar structures and basic vocabulary that need to be used. Expressions such as “La cuenta, por favor [the check, please]” or “Me gustaría [I would like]” will be necessary in any circumstances where you are ordering food/drinks, independently of the specific items one is ordering. This organization of tasks, which allows students to review and recycle specific structures in incrementally more complex tasks, also allows them to develop more nuanced pragmatic uses. For example, in the tasks described above, students would be given the opportunity to practice different attenuation strategies to make the request more or less polite depending on the particular context and interlocutor.

Authentic input

One major challenge of designing this course was identifying and incorporating authentic materials in a predictable and accessible format for beginning language students. For reasons of privacy, security and feasibility, not all conversations associated with these tasks could be recorded and reproduced in authentic settings. For example, it was not possible to record and/or locate an open-source and authentic conversation with a customs officer that could be used in an instructional video. For these reasons, a series of 11 videos were designed that were tailored to the needs of the course and the target audience; each video demonstrated a different key task identified in each unit. The course design team, composed of three native speakers from Spain and one non-native speaker with extensive experience in Ecuador and other countries of Latin America, recalled key elements of conversations that aligned with the tasks at hand. The conversations were constructed based on the teams' recollections and reconstructions of similar conversations as they had experienced them first-hand, but also using information from websites and other resources associated with the target tasks. Before filming the videos, the dialogues were revised, discussed and checked by peers for relatability. Specifically, we asked several fluent speakers of Spanish outside of the team if the language used seemed realistic to them.

The resulting dialogues were not linguistically simplified in that no efforts were made to use only frequent vocabulary or only grammar structures that had been covered or were expected to be mastered by the students, as the objective was to present students with language samples that were as authentic as possible under the relatively inauthentic circumstances in which they were created (i.e., the creation of the course). These oral exchanges were video-recorded in a recording studio provided by the university. While the main character of the videos, the “traveler,” was consistent throughout, the other characters spoke different varieties of Spanish. Deliberate efforts were made to ensure that the people who participated in all videos and audios represented the diversity of voices and variation in the Spanish-Speaking world, from a Highland Peruvian speaker answering the phone at a hotel, to a Rioplatense speaker selling fruit at a market. This ensured that learners received the maximum exposure possible to various accents.

All videos were edited to ensure good sound quality and accessibility. The list of all the videos, and links to watch them, can be found here: <https://tinyurl.com/spa1yvideos>.

Given that the language in the videos was not necessarily simplified for beginning learners, some scaffolding was necessary to ensure that students would be able to understand the input and take full advantage of the pre-task, input-based activities. Two decisions were made to address this problem.

First, all modules in the course start with a welcome page in the Learning Management System, Canvas, that summarizes all the activities and deadlines in the Module and directs students to the necessary study materials. The main study material, the *Vocabulary guide*, is placed before the videos and includes the list of keywords and phrases found in the module, along with a short explanation of the grammar rules that may be needed to (1) better understand the input and (2) support the production of accurate language related to task performance. Therefore, the vocabulary guide includes single words and definitions, as well as phrases and grammatical structures fundamental to the units' target tasks. Students are reminded on the welcome page to always keep the vocabulary guide with them when working on course-related activities, be it in class or online. The vocabulary guide provides them with a source of reassurance in completing all activities, even when the instructor is not around. Importantly, students are never asked to memorize any of the contents of the *Vocabulary guide* but rather asked to use it when needed.

Second, in addition to the vocabulary guide, students have two sources of learning support to better understand what the characters are saying while watching the videos. Spanish subtitles are provided to facilitate sound recognition through the association of oral and written forms. Furthermore, each video includes comprehension checks created using Playposit. This online software made it easy to enrich video contents with a variety of activities ranging from multiple-choice questions to graded fill-in-the-blanks. This program allowed the course designers to cue learners into certain linguistic and pragmatic features needed to perform the target tasks while still allowing students to navigate the video at their own pace. To maximize engagement and exposure to input, each video is watched twice in each Playposit assignment in the following sequence:

1. A first version of the video with subtitles is watched uninterrupted to get a general idea of the topic and situation.
2. At the end of the video, a message indicates that they would watch the video a second time, with embedded questions to focus on certain linguistic and pragmatic features of task performance and promote deeper comprehension. After watching the video the second time and answering embedded questions, one or two questions are included at the end of the assignment, allowing learners to explore the task and specific situation by searching for additional information on the web.

This sequence of viewings and activities can be repeated as many times as needed depending on each student's comprehension level. At the end, as part of the pre-task online autonomous work in preparation for face-to-face classes, students complete a quiz to review contents seen in the videos. An example of this three-step treatment (i.e., first viewing, second viewing, quizzing) of the pre-task videos can be found here: <https://tinyurl.com/reservaspa1y>.

In addition to these videos that introduced students to the target tasks, many more sources of input were offered to the students, as each module also included at least two other input sources, be it additional videos or audios. For example, in Module 5, a video shows a Spanish woman giving a guided tour of the city center of Madrid. In Module 9, a Colombian man walks around a local market in Bogotá, discussing products and prices with different shopkeepers. These are just some examples of the multiple sources of input that all learners in the course are exposed to in each module. While none of these materials can be considered

authentic in the sense that they were all created for the course, best efforts were made to implicate actors and collaborators in the process who were not familiar with the overall course design and could contribute freely and naturally to the project. None of them were Spanish language teachers or were otherwise related to language education professionally. We asked them to record themselves but did not provide them with a script or list of words that we wanted them to use. All actors were free to structure their video/audio in any way they saw fit in hopes that this would result in more natural and relevant materials that would provide learners with opportunities to expose themselves to speakers of different varieties of Spanish, acting in real contexts of their every-day life.

Pre-task, task, post-task

As was mentioned in the description of the course, SPA 1Y presents a reduced number of face-to-face encounters compared to the form-focused SPA 1. In-person classes in SPA 1Y take place two days a week, for 80 minutes each, instead of five days a week, for 50 minutes each, in SPA 1. The other three days in SPA 1Y are planned for autonomous online work on the part of the students, an opportunity that did not exist in the form-focused version of the course where most work is completed in class, forcing all students to follow the same pace and rhythm. This distribution of time in SPA 1Y resulted in a flipped classroom model with a hybrid structure (i.e., part of it is online and part of it is face-to-face). At home, students complete the pre-task activities, focusing on different aspects of preparing, performing, and reflecting on the task(s). This could include exploring examples of a task in context (i.e., looking for a recipe) or focusing on the mechanics of grammar and vocabulary content needed to complete it (i.e., command forms, making a grocery list). Pre-task work could also include personalizing information to complete a task (i.e. finding accommodations, museum entrance costs) or practicing pronunciation and listening comprehension in task-related content at their own pace. In this way, all in-class face-to-face time is spent on applying this preparation in real-life situations where students work together to complete the tasks, often with information prepared at home.

Even though some highly motivated students may try to practice the tasks in the community, most language learners at this level generally display limited extrinsic motivation by simply wanting to enroll in the course in order to complete the language requirement (Lacorte & Suárez-García, 2014). Therefore, for most students, the tasks completed for this course represent the only opportunity to have realistic interactions in the target language in their everyday life. Several steps were thus taken to make those tasks as real as possible.

1. A series of pre-task activities are planned during the online days (i.e., Mondays, Wednesdays, Fridays) of the course when students have to search for information on real websites from the different countries that are represented in the course. For example, in the module where they have to buy food at a supermarket, they need to find information online about different products from a supermarket in Spain and another one in Ecuador. This activity aims to make students interact with authentic materials from those countries, recognize what words are used in different countries to refer to various types of food, and recognize how the internet gives them access to real content in Spanish that they can navigate successfully.
2. For the face-to-face sessions, learners are frequently required to bring objects and materials prepared online that are used in class to ensure that face-to-face sessions are engaging all senses and elements of the task- from the linguistic to the tactile. For example, if students are expected to perform tasks related to purchasing goods, reproduced versions of the goods and currency are provided, and students are asked to bring goods themselves as desired.

3. The final step of each face-to-face class is the creation of a dialogue with a peer as a way of applying what they have learned and of performing a task as realistically as possible. These dialogues function to incorporate the target tasks in a communicative context, using all linguistic and non-linguistic resources to co-create meaning and perform the target task. These dialogues follow the models provided in the pre-task online activities but each one is ultimately unique to the team of students and often requires them to solve a problem. For example, when learning how to ask for directions in a new city, students first listen to audios of people asking for directions; afterward, they use a map from the target city to figure out where they are being directed to go. The final task requires them to work together, using a map from the university and indicating to a peer where to find specific buildings or places. When buying food at a street market, students are instructed to negotiate prices, which results in each group having distinctly different dialogues, with final prices and items bought being unique to each dialogue.
4. Each face-to-face meeting is followed by post-task activities, completed online, as well as a culminating weekly reflection. These activities were designed to encourage learners to individually reflect on their task performance and comfort level, as well as review key lexical, pragmatic and grammatical elements of the tasks. As part of the weekly reflection, students are provided the opportunity to ask direct questions about the tasks and its different linguistic components. These self-assessment activities, reviewed weekly by their instructor, provide students with the opportunity to continuously reflect on their performance, their perception of the course and their learning, as well as request clarification on any topic. In addition, based on the feedback students provide in their weekly post-task reflections, the instructor can adjust lessons the following week to provide a space to review and clarify a difficult topic or task, and make adjustments to future iterations of the course to help mitigate these challenges.

Integration of the Course in the Language Program

Since SPA 1Y is organized around tasks, the grammatical, vocabulary, and pragmatic elements are extracted from the tasks themselves and therefore differ from a traditional grammar-based syllabus sequence. However, as this course forms part of a three-course introductory sequence, SPA 1Y students must be exposed to the grammar and vocabulary topics taught in the traditional version of the course to ensure that they could move to SPA 2 and SPA 3 successfully. This difficulty was addressed by making a list of (1) all contents covered in the traditional SPA 1 and (2) the tasks to be performed in SPA 1Y. Once identified, the contents covered in SPA 1 were aligned with the tasks in SPA 1Y to the extent possible. When the alignment was not possible, contents in both courses were modified accordingly by either eliminating some contents from SPA 1, moving them to SPA 2, and/or adding specific tasks in SPA 1Y that would allow for a more systematic treatment of certain grammar content.

For example, upon reviewing the verbs covered in SPA 1Y, we identified that students had more limited explicit exposure to a variety of regular verbs in SPA 1Y than SPA 1. While SPA 1Y tasks tended to require the use of frequent irregular verbs (e.g., *tener* “have”, *ser* “be”, *gustar* “like”) for communication, less attention was given to regular verb conjugations and categories of Spanish verb types (-ar, -er, and -ir) which did not fit easily in any of the initially listed tasks. This situation limited students’ exposure to regular verbs and possibly hindered their conjugation abilities, thus making their passage to SPA 2 potentially more difficult. In order to solve this issue, a task was introduced in SPA 1Y that required learners to send a postcard to a Spanish-speaking friend, where they would describe their life in the country where they were traveling/living and their favorite activities there. This task allows them to practice regular verb

conjugations in the present indicative, as students would normally do in SPA 1 while maintaining the relevance of the task. In the last iteration of the course, the postcard activity was replaced by a posting on social media, upon the suggestion of a reviewer, a change that was well received by students given the prominence of social media over paper mail in their everyday lives.

Importantly, these modifications to the contents and structure of both courses could only be implemented because the director of the program was part of the course design team and could make decisions that would change the shape of the form-focused and the task-based courses. This situation points to the fact that most instructors who would want to implement such courses, or modify the courses they already teach as part of a language program may be limited in their ability to do so. Indeed, they would not have the option to make syllabus changes on all courses to make sure that the novelties of their course do not affect their students' preparedness for the next course level. It is thus important to note that the implementation of TBLT courses or modules should not be a one-person endeavor but rather a team effort between program directors and instructors, with input from the learners (e.g., the abovementioned self-assessments).

Explicit Grammar

This course includes explicit grammar rules in the vocabulary guides of each unit, which students can consult on their own when necessary. However, the way in which grammar is treated in the class has evolved through the consecutive iterations of the course. In the original version of SPA 1Y, explicit grammar teaching was restricted to situations when students requested it, as recommended by more strict proponents of TBLT such as Long (2009), but this approach encountered three issues. First, students resented the fact that no time was devoted to grammar in class, as evidenced by their comments in the teaching evaluations at the end of that first academic term. Second, instructors realized that, while certain learners seemed to thrive in this model, others were not grasping some basic grammatical rules and were feeling confused, which limited their participation in class. Finally, instructors feared that, since this course needed to provide students with the same grammatical knowledge as the form-focused version of SPA 1 to make it possible for students to move through the rest of the language program, a lack of shared explicit grammar knowledge could be ultimately detrimental. Two changes were made to address these issues, aligning with Ellis' (2019) call for a less rigid application of TBLT principles:

1. The first 20 minutes of the face-to-face classes would be devoted to explicitly teaching and practicing grammar. However, the specific grammar contents treated in each class were not imposed in the syllabus but rather guided by student questions and selected by the instructor based on students' errors in the online, pre-task and post-task activities.
2. A *module 0* was created to introduce the most basic aspects of Spanish grammar (e.g., grammatical gender agreement, different verb endings in the present indicative). Before the first day of class, students would read some basic grammar explanations and complete related exercises online. The goal of Module 0 was to provide learners with enough information about those grammar contents to promote subsequent noticing in the input provided in the next units.

In addition to these curricular changes, the syllabus now includes detailed explanations of the approach and structure of the course, which allows students to make informed decisions about choosing this TBLT version of SPA 1 or preferring the traditional form-focused one. After a few academic terms, students seem to be better informed of the differences between both courses and tend to select one or the other based on their personal preferences and favored learning/teaching approach.

Evaluation

Efforts were made in the course design to allow each student to adapt the course to their own learning needs and pace. For instance, all online activities can be completed repeatedly until each student feels comfortable or satisfied with their result. No limit of time is established and students can repeat the activities as many times as needed. In addition to this continuous formative evaluation, students complete two performance-based assessments of oral and communicative skills, at the midpoint and end of the academic quarter, which both follow the same structure. Students are provided with task prompts a week in advance, and can prepare for them at home. The prompts present specific situations, such as buying fruit at a fruit stand, from the perspective of both people engaged in the conversation. For example, all students will receive instructions to recreate the situation from the perspective of the fruit stand seller but also from the perspective of the person who buys the fruit. On the day of the oral performance assessment, each student is assigned to a peer at random, and the instructor selects two prompts out of the ones they prepared for. The students then decide who is going to play which of the roles, and they complete the task as a role play. Given that each student prepares the prompts separately, they cannot just repeat a dialogue that they had both written beforehand. Instead, they need to use their linguistic personal linguistic repertoire when completing the task. In these oral performance assessments, each student is evaluated on their performance based on the efficiency of their communication skills and level of preparedness, with only 5 points out of 20 given for accuracy, whereas 5 points are given for intelligibility, another 5 for fluency and 5 more for using a varied vocabulary that is adequate for the context. Therefore, if a particular student is not yet ready to use a particular grammar structure, there is no pressure to artificially do so, and their grade could be excellent by displaying good communicative skills even if errors are present in their output.

Nonetheless, the pressure for ensuring that students would be well prepared for the next course of the program (i.e., SPA 2) compelled us to include a grammar quiz to complement the oral portion of the performance assessment. These quizzes represent 5% of the total final grade for the course, so grammatical accuracy is never seen as the main goal. Still, they push students to use the vocabulary guides to review some of the grammar relevant to complete the tasks.

CONCLUSION

This article presents the real case of a TBLT-inspired course developed and implemented as part of a multi-section Spanish language program at a large US university. While the orientation and organization of the course departs from traditional form-focused language teaching models, we have shown how this TBLT-inspired course addresses the more wide-spread goals of language students, instructors, programs and institutions for authentic language use and connection to real world tasks. The purpose of sharing details about how the course was imagined, designed, adapted and modified to align with student, instructor, and program goals, is to offer an example of the challenges that can be encountered when introducing TBLT into otherwise form-focused programs. By describing specific, actionable solutions that were found to address said challenges, we hope to encourage instructors and program coordinators/directors to use the lessons we learned in creating SPA 1Y and develop courses of their own, embracing TBLT as an innovative, accessible and exciting solution to address the communicative needs and goals of students and language departments.

NOTES

¹ Since the course does not adopt a strict TBLT format, we will not claim that it is a TBLT course but rather state that it is inspired by the TBLT approach while presenting many adaptations due to the constraints imposed by the context.

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