
ARTICLE

L2 Learner Anxiety And Perceived Competence: The Case For Task-Based Language Teaching

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This study explores task comfort and anxiety levels among learners enrolled in two equivalent yet pedagogically distinct online introductory Spanish language courses. The first course adopts a Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) approach while the other aligns with a more traditional Presentation, Practice, Production (PPP) orientation. Results indicate that both groups of learners experience mild levels of anxiety, but learners in the TBLT course developed a stronger sense of competence and felt more empowered overall to successfully negotiate communicative tasks. Therefore, this study promotes the adoption of TBLT at the beginner level as an approach to advance the development of oral competence and appeal to populations of learners with diverse interests and needs.

INTRODUCTION

Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT), a strong version of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), focuses on the completion of tasks that are designed to address the specific needs and interests of a learner population (Ellis, 2003; Ellis et al., 2019). While TBLT is gaining traction in the second-language acquisition (SLA) research community as a method that puts real-life communication at the center of the learning/teaching process and is supported by psycholinguistic research (Harris & Leeming, 2021), its widespread adoption in language programs is still lagging. For instance, the emerging body of research promoting its tenets as well as the existence of task databases and guides for implementation contrast with the limited representation of TBLT in second language (L2) textbooks (Sánchez Gutiérrez et al, 2022; Willis, 2021).

Previous literature has shown the positive perception of increased linguistic and communicative development in TBLT (Bryfonski & McKay, 2019; González-Lloret & Nielson, 2015), but less is known about its impact on certain emotional aspects involved in

language learning, such as learners' anxiety and sense of oral competence. This article contributes to filling this gap by comparing learners' (1) self-perceived competence to perform preferred and dispreferred speech acts as well as (2) their classroom anxiety levels in online beginner Spanish language courses that follow either a TBLT or a more traditional Presentation, Practice, Production (PPP) approach.

LITERATURE REVIEW

TBLT And Its Implementation In Language Programs

Current recommendations on best practices in the classroom center around CLT approaches that emphasize oral proficiency and, more specifically, communication as the principal goal of L2 learning (Dörnyei, 2009; Spada, 2007). Lessons are designed to foster personalized communication between learners, often organized around “real world” contexts (university life, hobbies, etc.), incorporating pragmatic development along with a progression in the complexity of grammatical and lexical topics. Therefore, “success” in CLT is broadly assessed through the ability of the learner to understand and produce target forms while engaging in meaningful conversations in specific communicative contexts (Dörnyei, 2009). “Weak” versions of CLT rely heavily on the PPP model, where grammar and lexical units are formally presented by the instructor, practiced and then produced in controlled communicative contexts by the learners (Noroozi, 2018; Samuda & Bygate, 2008). Alternatively, in a “strong” version of CLT, language form and use are determined by the communicative context and therefore acquired through use, with less emphasis on explicit and decontextualized grammatical and lexical instruction.

TBLT builds off the strong CLT model (Prabhu, 1987) in that instruction is designed around tasks determined by specific communicative contexts, such as ‘ordering a coffee’. The task itself is defined as an activity that is primarily focused on processing meaning, both pragmatic and semantic. Therefore, each task is organized to build towards a defined communicative outcome that extends beyond grammatical accuracy. Contrary to a PPP model where learners are encouraged to prioritize accuracy and use the target structure to form their responses, learners in TBLT courses draw primarily from their own resources—both linguistic (e.g., known words and phrases, circumlocution) and non-linguistic (e.g., visual cues and gestures)—to complete the task (Ellis, 2009).

In contrast to a PPP model where the organization of the course is often predetermined by a textbook, the selection and organization of tasks in a TBLT course is decided through a needs analysis that considers the potential linguistic needs of a group of learners (for example, asking for directions or communicating with asylum seekers), as well as their level of proficiency and the context of instruction. Ideally, the needs analysis is co-constructed, presenting learners with the opportunity to select which tasks seem most relevant to their goals. Once the tasks are identified and selected, they are organized in an ascending order of established cognitive or context-dependent complexity as well as familiarity of information (Baralt et al., 2014; Ellis et al, 2019). In this way, TBLT courses can vary greatly from one learner population to another. Clearly, it would not be reasonable nor sustainable to design a new TBLT syllabus for every section of a language course in a university from term to term or year to year. However, it is possible to design and create TBLT courses for specific learner populations that conform with widespread goals, needs and expressed desires at the same institution (Fernández, 2021; Sánchez-Gutiérrez et al, 2022).

TBLT, Interlanguage Pragmatics, And Speech Acts

Pragmatic competence has long been considered a necessary part of learning a language (Canale & Swain, 1980; Isihara & Cohen, 2021), but research has differed as far as how best to approach it considering multiple variables such as sociolinguistic background, context of instruction and individual differences (González-Lloret, 2020). In more recent years, TBLT has gained attention as a preferred framework for teaching pragmatics due to the inherent need of a task to connect to a real-world context and thus consider appropriate registers, politeness and illocutionary force (González-Lloret, 2019; Kim et al., 2023). In this context, the categorization of different speech acts in terms of their pragmatic meaning has become an invaluable tool for educators and researchers to systematically teach and measure pragmatic development in the L2 (Gómez, 2015). For instance, several studies have investigated how L2 learners in different contexts adjusted their pragmatic skills to specific acts, such as requests (Shively, 2011) or apologies (Kuriscak, 2015).

Speech acts can be divided into preferred (e.g., greeting or thanking someone) and dispreferred acts (e.g., apologizing, requesting or complaining) (Levinson, 1983). As explained in Glaser (2009),

dispreferred speech acts are more complex and challenging than their preferred counterparts: With dispreferred speech acts, careful and sensitive negotiation is necessary, resulting in more linguistic “material” (Levinson, 1983, p. 333) and thus a higher degree of structural complexity (p. 307).

In this context, learners, especially at lower proficiency levels, tend to avoid such dispreferred speech acts altogether while feeling more comfortable completing preferred acts (Bardovi-Harlig, 1999). It is thus relevant to explore whether teaching approaches affect learners’ sense of competence in both types of speech acts or in only one of them. In a recent study, for example, Taguchi (2022) demonstrates that learners adopt more native-like behaviors in completing dispreferred speech acts in a virtual reality environment with a computer-based elicitation task. This indicates that immersive linguistic environments can be conducive to more context-appropriate responses even when completing dispreferred speech acts. Since TBLT is expected to provide opportunities for more realistic interactions among learners, it is thus possible that this increased sense of linguistic immersion positively affects their self-perception of competence, even in dispreferred speech acts.

The Influence of Cognitive Factors In Language Learner Outcomes

Recent research in SLA has identified some cognitive factors that appear to influence L2 learner outcomes, such as enjoyment (Bielak, 2022), motivation (Zareian & Jodaie, 2015; Printer, 2023), self-efficacy (Harris & Leeming, 2021; Raoofi, 2012), anxiety (Çubukçu, 2008; Moore Torres & Turner, 2016) and competence (Ryan & Deci, 2017). This article specifically focuses on the interaction of (1) foreign language classroom anxiety and (2) perceptions of oral competence as expressed by learners in two equivalent, but pedagogically distinct, online introductory Spanish courses.

Self-Determination Theory (SDT)

In the context of SLA and language instruction, SDT (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ryan & Deci, 2017) contextualizes intrinsic and extrinsic factors that influence learner motivation. SDT has been used to investigate learner motivation in a variety of contexts, from intrinsic motivation and the cultivation of positive emotions in the classroom (Printer, 2023) to motivation to learn a second language (Noels et al, 2000) and learner proficiency and competence (Printer, 2021).

Concretely, SDT posits that humans need to satisfy three psychological needs: *autonomy*, *relatedness* and *competence*. *Autonomy* refers to a person's willingness to engage in a behavior or activity. Any behavior adopted autonomously would be opposed to a behavior that was forced upon them. For instance, in a classroom, two students could participate in the same task but one of them might develop a sense of autonomy or motivational engagement in doing so, whereas the other learner may not and would thus participate only out of obligation. *Relatedness* corresponds to a person's sense of belonging in a given context. A learner that feels more comfortable and engaged in the classroom and content may experience a greater sense of relatedness. Finally, *competence* is defined as "feeling effective in one's interactions with the social environment—that is, experiencing opportunities and support for the exercise, expansion, and expression of one's capacities and talents" (Ryan & Deci, 2017, p.86). Therefore, competence in the L2 relates to a learner's perception of their capacity to effectively interact and complete language tasks (Printer, 2021).

SDT, TBLT and PPP

Leeming and Harris (2022) recently suggested that SDT can offer useful insights into various motivational aspects of TBLT. Specifically, with respect to competence, Leeming and Harris state that "L2 use will almost always involve errors, but with TBLT, teachers judge performance based on the successful completion of achievable tasks, providing learners with the opportunity to experience mastery, thus satisfying the need for competency" (p. 170). Therefore, TBLT may favor a greater sense of competence by building on learners' judgments that they possess the ability to complete certain tasks, regardless of the errors they may make.

While the idea that TBLT can enhance competence is certainly appealing, this hypothesis has yet to be systematically tested in different contexts and with students at different proficiency levels. So far, few studies have approached this topic, with the exception (to the best of our knowledge) of two recent articles that utilize Bandura's (1997) self-efficacy framework from social cognitive theory (SCT), rather than SDT. While these two theories differ in some ways (see Greguras & Diefendorff, 2009; Harris & Leeming, 2022; Leeming & Harris, 2021), *competence* (from SDT) and *self-efficacy* (from SCT) both build on the learner's perception that they possess the ability to perform a given task. For example, Nhat et al. (2023) compared speaking self-efficacy levels of intermediate-level Vietnamese learners of English enrolled in PPP, TBLT and TSLT (Task Supported Language Teaching) courses. Importantly, this study was carried out when all the courses were offered online during the COVID-19 pandemic. While TBLT and TSLT are similar in their focus on a syllabus designed around real-world tasks, TSLT places a greater emphasis on accuracy through explicit pre-task instruction of specific structures needed to complete the task (Chen & Dan, 2024). Most importantly, TBLT and TSLT are more aligned in their goal of successful communicative task completion than that of PPP. Results of their study confirm that students in the TBLT and TSLT classes displayed greater speaking self-efficacy than those in the PPP course. However,

their findings do not mirror the more complex panorama depicted in Harris and Leeming (2021).

The latter authors, utilizing SCT, compared the evolution of oral proficiency and oral self-efficacy (or beliefs about the learner's ability to complete a task) in L1 Japanese learners of L2 English enrolled either in a PPP or TBLT course throughout one academic year. Results showed no significant difference between both groups on either measure, with proficiency and self-efficacy developing equally across groups. However, longitudinal data in each group displayed diverging trends. Concerning proficiency, learners in the TBLT group experienced a faster improvement from first to second semester, while those in the PPP course only saw increases from the beginning of second semester to the end of the second semester. The authors interpreted this data as evidence that learners who are used to being presented specific grammar contents before producing them in a task were initially at a disadvantage when required to complete a task without the previous presentation. Learners in the TBLT group had gotten used to not expecting any grammatical practice prior to task completion and were therefore relatively comfortable searching their available linguistic repertoire to complete tasks. This initial difference between how learners in both groups approached tasks may have allowed the TBLT group to feel better prepared to complete the test task (i.e., a narration) than the PPP group, resulting in greater oral fluency after just one semester.

Perhaps surprisingly, then, the TBLT group showed slower improvements compared to their PPP counterparts in terms of beliefs about their ability to complete a task. Harris and Leeming (2021) interpreted this result as possible evidence that learners in the TBLT group may have felt less comfortable with the teaching methods used in their course due to a misalignment between their beliefs on how language learning takes place and what they were experiencing in the classroom. This discomfort with the methods may have hindered their sense of competence and led them to downplay their linguistic abilities. Learners in the PPP group were less proficient by the end of the second semester but had a greater sense of overall self-efficacy, possibly due to their familiarity with the methods. Indeed, many participants in the study expressed their preference for PPP rather than TBLT methods because they associate the former with greater proficiency gains. In the present study, we further address differences in self-perceived competence between learners in a PPP and a TBLT course while taking into account possible distinctions between the groups in terms of their Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety (FLCA) levels.

Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety

Anxiety, broadly defined as feelings of uneasiness, is an unavoidable aspect of the L2 learning experience (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014; Teimouri, Goetze & Plonsky, 2019). For example, answering a question in a newly learned language can enhance negative emotions and trigger anxiety. The Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety scale (FLCAS) (Horwitz et al., 1986) was developed to assess learners' anxiety in the specific context of the L2 classroom, especially in situations that entail oral expression during class (e.g., I tremble when I know that I'm going to be called on in Spanish class). The scale has been used in several studies and the effect of Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety (FLCA) on learners' performance has been repeatedly assessed. In a meta-analysis that included 97 studies, Teimouri et al. (2019) concluded that FLCA does negatively impact performance in the L2, with a medium effect size. Importantly, FLCA is highly correlated not only with objective measures of performance such as formal assessments but also with self-perceptions of performance (such as competence).

Harris and Leeming's (2021) findings about self-efficacy development highlight that objective measures of proficiency and subjective impressions of competence may not necessarily align and that perceptions about a learner's ability to complete a task may be affected by negative emotions like anxiety related to an unfamiliar teaching method. Indeed, several studies have shown that anxiety negatively impacts self-efficacy (Erkan & Saban, 2011; Lucchetti et al, 2003; Moore Torres & Turner, 2016) in that learners with higher anxiety levels tend to underestimate their performance and display low confidence in their linguistic abilities. Alternatively, Çubukçu (2008) did not find any significant relationship between anxiety and self-efficacy, attributing differences in performance and perceptions to culturally specific learner characteristics.

Therefore, a study of the impact of specific teaching approaches on FLCA and self-perceptions of competence is relevant. Indeed, it could be hypothesized that learners in courses with more innovative methodologies such as TBLT could feel more anxious than learners in more traditional courses, resulting in lower perceptions of ability and competence in the L2. Clearly, further research is needed to understand different dynamics that influence learners' sense of competence in the L2 classroom

Goals Of The Study And Research Questions

The present study examines learners' perception of oral competence in equivalent online TBLT and PPP beginner Spanish language courses at a large university in California. We study learners' perceptions of oral competence for a range of speech acts (e.g., saying sorry) and contexts (such as studying at a Spanish-speaking university) that are not associated with the specific tasks or explicit learning objectives in their course. In this way, we interrogate how TBLT and PPP approaches may differentially impact learners' self-judgments of competence outside of the contents of the curriculum. In addition, we explore how learners' FLCA levels may relate to their completion of a TBLT or PPP course. Concretely, our goal is to answer the following research questions:

1. Does the pedagogical approach (TBLT vs. PPP) impact learners' perception of competence when completing different speech acts (like introducing themselves) and engaging in different contexts (for example, studying at a Spanish-speaking university)?
2. Do learners experience different levels of anxiety in a TBLT context compared to a more traditional PPP classroom?

METHODS

Context Of The Study

This study took place in a large beginner language program at a public university in California. The program is composed of three successive courses (SPA 1, 2 and 3) with multiple sections offered every academic quarter. By completing SPA 3, the last of the three courses, students satisfy the language requirement of the College of Letters and Sciences. SPA 1, the first course in the series, can be taken in two formats: PPP (SPA 1) and TBLT (SPA 1Y). Learners are generally unaware of the pedagogical differences between the courses and tend to choose the course that best fits their schedule. Once SPA 1 or SPA 1Y is completed, students can enroll in the next course in the sequence: SPA 2. Although both SPA 1 and SPA 1Y are 10 weeks

long, the general structure of the courses differ in light of the different pedagogical approaches used.

SPA 1 is a textbook-based introductory course that follows a PPP model; the syllabus is organized around a progression of grammatical and lexical topics in different thematic units (e.g., university life). SPA 1Y is a TBLT course created in-house around communicative tasks associated with preparing for, and traveling in, a Spanish-speaking country (e.g., passing customs on arrival, ordering food).

Importantly, SPA 1Y was developed by first conducting a needs analysis with first-year Spanish students who overwhelmingly showed interest in travel-related tasks. Once individual contexts and tasks were identified, they were organized to mimic common stages of a trip (from checking luggage to ordering simple meals and buying souvenirs). After the bulk of the content was finalized, grammatical features of each task were discussed and compared with existing SPA 1 curriculum to ensure both a logical progression of linguistic complexity (Ellis et al, 2019) and vertical articulation of the overall language program. To compare the alignment of both courses for the purposes of this study, Appendix 1 specifically displays how and when each grammatical or lexical content is expected to be practiced in SPA 1 and SPA 1Y, respectively.

While both courses entail the use of similar grammatical contents, the order and manner in which they are treated differ (see Sánchez-Gutiérrez, et al., 2022). In SPA 1Y, grammatical structures are embedded in the task and not explicitly presented and practiced as they would be in a more traditional course; students can reference supplementary materials with detailed explanations and ask clarifying questions as needed, but formal grammar instruction is not part of the course. To prepare for each class session, learners engage with short videos (created in house) that illustrate the task. They are asked to infer the context of the interaction (for example, passing customs), the role of each speaker (e.g. traveler and customs agent), as well as specific chunks of language present in the task (ask a question in a formal register about how long the traveler will be staying in the host country). In class, learners review these dialogues and complete a series of activities to deepen their understanding. By the end of the session, they perform the task in pairs, substituting different information as determined by their individual differences and interests (e.g. name, address, destination, etc.). Mastery of the task is measured by the learner's ability to exchange necessary information to complete the task, not necessarily by their target-like production of a specific grammatical form.

In SPA 1, learners prepare for their class session by watching explanatory videos on different grammatical and lexical items (such as the present tense) and completing targeted exercises in the online textbook. In class, they review and practice these items through communicative activities ('what do you do during a typical week?'). It is common for the instructor to explicitly detail features and rules associated with the grammatical form before, during and after communicative partner work. Mastery of the item is often measured through the successful application of the form in a given context, such as fill-in-the-blank or short answer assessments.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, SPA 1 courses met five days per week for 50 minutes while SPA 1Y students had two 80-minute in-person sessions per week, with three days devoted to asynchronous online work on the Learning Management System (LMS). However, during the pandemic (and corresponding with our data collection timeline), both courses were taught fully online and followed the same distribution of synchronous and asynchronous work: two days of synchronous Zoom meetings focused on oral practice and three days of asynchronous work.

While we recognize that the context for the presentation of lexical and grammatical topics can affect our ability to directly compare results from both courses, it is important to emphasize here that this study is comparing reports of competence and anxiety related to the course in general and to the completion of speech acts that are not related to course content. Additionally, these courses are both first-year, first-term Spanish language courses that serve as prerequisites for the second course in the three-part first-year series. We specifically examine data collected during the COVID-19 pandemic, when both courses were taught online and had identical distributions of synchronous and asynchronous work.

Participants

A total of 273 students participated in this study between 2020 and 2021. 165 were enrolled in the PPP course and 108 in the TBLT one. They had an average age of 19.98 with a minimum of 18 and a maximum of 54. 87 identified as male, 182 as female, and four did not select a gender identity. 216 stated that they were L1-English speakers, 21 had Mandarin as their L1, and 36 had various L1s ranging from Russian to Igbo or Tagalog, among others.

Both the PPP and the TBLT course are beginner courses, which means that enrolled learners either have no previous academic experience with the language or are placed in the course after completing a placement test (<https://emersion.ai/>). In order to rule out that learners in the two courses might differ greatly in terms of their motivation, self-assessed proficiency and experience with the Spanish language, linear regression models were run for each of the quantitative questions in the demographic questionnaire with GROUP (PPP vs. TBLT) as a predictor. As evidenced in Table 1, GROUP was not a significant predictor in most of the models. The only model where a significant difference was observed was in their happiness levels related to the course they were taking, with students in the TBLT course being significantly happier than their PPP counterparts. The lower happiness levels in the PPP group were not due, however, to them finding the course more challenging, since both groups found their Spanish courses to be similarly challenging.

Table 1

Participants’ Responses To The Linguistic Background Questionnaire In The TBLT And PPP Groups

Question	Mean		Median		SD		Significance between groups ¹
	PPP	TBLT	PPP	TBLT	PPP	TBLT	
1. How happy are you about this Spanish course? (scale: 1= extremely happy, 5=extremely unhappy)	1.78	1.57	2	1	0.797	0.673	TBLT students significantly happier about their course than PPP students.

¹ Significance was determined through linear regression models, with the Likert-scale result for each question as the dependent variable and course as the independent variable. See Methods section.

2. How challenging was this course for you? (scale: 1= extremely challenging, 5=not challenging at all)	3.13	3.12	3	3	0.849	0.872	No significant difference found
3. How important is learning Spanish for your future professional goals? (scale: 1= extremely important, 5=not important at all)	2.79	2.83	3	3	1.17	1.27	No significant difference found
4. How relevant is learning Spanish for your immediate academic needs? (scale: 1= extremely relevant, 5=not relevant at all)	2.84	3.05	3	3	1.44	1.42	No significant difference found
5. How important is learning Spanish for your personal/social life? (scale: 1= extremely important, 5=not important at all)	3.28	3.38	3	3	1.21	1.29	No significant difference found
6. How important is learning Spanish for your family life? (scale: 1= extremely important, 5=not important at all)	4.11	4.21	5	5	1.25	1.35	No significant difference found
7. Self-assessed written proficiency (scale: 1= not proficient at all, 5=extremely proficient)	2.58	2.65	3	3	0.790	0.857	No significant difference found
8. Self-assessed reading proficiency (scale: 1= not proficient at all, 5=extremely proficient)	3.08	3.04	3	3	0.834	0.906	No significant difference found
9. Self-assessed listening proficiency (scale: 1= not proficient at all, 5=extremely proficient)	2.43	2.38	2	2	0.925	0.914	No significant difference found
10. Self-assessed speaking proficiency (scale: 1= not proficient at all, 5=extremely proficient)	2.44	2.51	2	2	0.829	0.932	No significant difference found

Instruments And Procedures

Participants completed a three-part questionnaire on Qualtrics distributed every term that the course was offered during a one-year period to both the TBLT and PPP students (2020-2021). The questionnaire includes (1) a demographic section, (2) a perception of oral competence questionnaire, and (3) the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (Horwitz et al., 1986).

Demographic Questionnaire

The questionnaire was designed to collect basic demographic data, such as age, as well as three other types of data: (1) general opinions of the course (items 1 and 2 in Table 1), (2) motivational factors to enroll in the course (items 3 to 6 in Table 1), and (3) self-assessed proficiency levels (items 7 to 9 in Table 1). The objective was to observe whether students enrolled in the two versions of the course would differ significantly in any of these aspects. As evidenced in Table 1, the student population in both groups was similar on most variables except enjoyment levels, as the TBLT students liked their course significantly more than the PPP group.

Perception Of Oral Competence Questionnaire

In this questionnaire, students were asked how comfortable they felt completing seven speech acts, and how prepared they felt to function and interact in three Spanish-speaking contexts. For each of these speech acts and contexts, presented in Table 2, students had to assess their level of competence, operationalized through asking how comfortable they would feel performing said speech acts or functioning in the different contexts on a scale from 1 (extremely uncomfortable) to 5 (extremely comfortable).

Table 2

Speech Acts And Contexts Included In The Perception Of Competence Questionnaire

Speech Act	Contexts
Greeting someone	Functioning in a Spanish-speaking university
Saying goodbye to someone	Functioning in everyday interactions in a Spanish-speaking country
Apologizing to someone	Interacting with Spanish speakers in your community in the US
Requesting something from someone	
Thanking someone for something they did for you	
Asking for help	
Complaining about something	

Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS)

In the FLCAS, developed by Horwitz et al., (1986), participants are asked to indicate their level of agreement with 33 statements on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Statements tap into different aspects of foreign language classroom anxiety such as fear of expressing themselves orally in front of the class or anxiety at the thought of completing tests in Spanish. Twenty four of the statements are phrased so that a higher score indicates high anxiety (e.g., I never feel quite sure of myself when I am speaking Spanish). Nine items, however, are phrased in the opposite way (e.g., I don't worry about making mistakes in Spanish class) and need to be reverse-coded.

Data Analysis

Perception Of Oral Competence And FLCAS Data

Linear regression models were run that looked at the effect of the course (TBLT vs. PPP) on each of the speech acts and contexts as well as on the FLCAS. The parameters of these models were the following:

- Outcome variable (one per model):
 - Models 1-7: SPEECH_ACT, Likert-scale data (scale of 1-5) about comfort with each speech act (one per model: greeting, goodbye, apologizing, requesting, thanking, asking for help, complaining).
 - Models 8-10: CONTEXTS, Likert-scale data about comfort with each context (one per model: Spanish-speaking university, country, community).
 - Model 11: FLCAS, the sum of the answers to all FLCAS Likert-scale questions. Sum ranged from 33 to 165.
- Predictor: COURSE, coded as a binary categorical variable—0 for the PPP course (reference level) and 1 for the TBLT course.

RESULTS

Self-Perception Of Oral Competence In Specific Speech Acts

The results of separate analyses for each speech act reveal that PPP learners did not feel more confident than TBLT learners with any individual speech act. Alternatively, TBLT learners' comfort levels were significantly higher in the speech acts of apologizing ($p < 0.006$), requesting ($p < 0.001$) and complaining ($p < 0.03$). Both groups felt similarly comfortable when greeting someone, saying goodbye, thanking a person and asking for help (see tables 3-9).

Table 3

Estimates For The Greeting Model (Model 1)

Greeting someone	Estimate	Std. Error	t value	Pr(> t)	Significance
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(Intercept)	3.89	0.1	38.49	<2e-16	***
courseTBLT	0.25	0.16	1.54	0.12	
R2	0.009	Adjusted R2	0.005		

Table 4

Estimates For The Saying Goodbye Model (Model 2)

Saying goodbye to someone	Estimate	Std. Error	t value	Pr(> t)	
(Intercept)	4	0.1	39.55	<2e-16	***
courseTBLT	0.12	0.16	0.75	0.46	
R2	0.002	Adjusted R2	-0.002		

Table 5

Estimates For The Apologizing Model (Model 3)

Apologizing to someone	Estimate	Std. Error	t value	Pr(> t)	
(Intercept)	3.4	0.09	35.86	<2e-16	***
courseTBLT	0.41	0.15	2.75	0.006	**
R2	0.03	Adjusted R2	0.02		

Table 6

Estimates For The Requesting Model (Model 4)

Requesting something	Estimate	Std. Error	t value	Pr(> t)	
(Intercept)	3.07	0.08	37.36	<2e-16	***
courseTBLT	0.43	0.13	3.32	0.001	**
R2	0.04	Adjusted R2	0.04		

Table 7

Estimates For The Thanking Model (Model 5)

Thanking someone	Estimate	Std. Error	t value	Pr(> t)	
(Intercept)	3.88	0.09	40.48	<2e-16	***
courseTBLT	-0.02	0.15	-0.12	0.91	
R2	4.98e-05	Adjusted R2	-0.004		

Table 8

Estimates For The Asking For Help Model (Model 6)

Asking for help	Estimate	Std. Error	t value	Pr(> t)	
(Intercept)	3.38	0.09	37.96	<2e-16	***
courseTBLT	0.14	0.14	1.01	0.31	
R2	0.004	Adjusted R2	7.128e-05		

Table 9

Estimates for the complaining model (Model 7)

Complaining about something	Estimate	Std. Error	t value	Pr(> t)	
(Intercept)	2.65	0.08	31.7	<2e-16	***
courseTBLT	0.29	0.13	2.16	0.03	*
R2	0.02	Adjusted R2	0.01		

Self-Perception Of Oral Competence In Spanish-Speaking Contexts

Regarding their perceived readiness to address challenges they may encounter in the Spanish-speaking world, TBLT learners reported feeling more prepared ($p < 0.04$) to interact with Spanish speakers in their community (Table 12), but no differences were observed between groups in the other two contexts (see Tables 10 and 11).

Table 10

Estimates For The Spanish-Speaking University Model (Model 8)

Functioning in a Spanish-speaking university	Estimate	Std. Error	t value	Pr(> t)	
(Intercept)	2.38	0.09	26.08	<2e-16	***
courseTBLT	0.28	0.15	1.96	0.051	
R2	0.01	Adjusted R2	0.01		

Table 11

Estimates For The Spanish-Speaking Country Model (Model 9)

Functioning in everyday interactions in a Spanish-speaking country	Estimate	Std. Error	t value	Pr(> t)	
(Intercept)	2.62	0.09	29.74	<2e-16	***
courseTBLT	0.26	0.14	1.82	0.07	
R2	0.01	Adjusted R2	0.01		

Table 12

Estimates For The Spanish-Speaking Community Model (Model 10)

Interacting with Spanish speakers in your community in the US	Estimate	Std. Error	t value	Pr(> t)	
(Intercept)	2.96	0.08	35.91	<2e-16	***
courseTBLT	0.26	0.13	2.02	0.04	*
R2	0.02	Adjusted R2	0.01		

FLCAS

The self-reported levels of classroom anxiety, as indicated through FLCAS, showed no significant difference between PPP and TBLT groups. Both groups expressed feeling “mildly anxious” with an average of 97.16 in PPP and 95.89 out of 165 in TBLT (see table 13).

Table 13

Estimates For The FLCAS Model (Model 11)

	Estimate	Std. Error	t value	Pr(> t)	
(Intercept)	97.164	1.341	72.475	<2e-16	***
courseTBLT	-1.275	2.131	-0.598	0.55	
R2	0.0013	Adjusted R2	-0.002		

DISCUSSION

Research Question 1

Learners in the TBLT course reported higher levels of competence than learners in the PPP course on several speech acts and real-life immersive contexts. Overall, our results suggest that TBLT approaches may empower learners more than PPP when it comes to their sense of general communicative competence (Bryfonski & McKay, 2019; González-Lloret & Nielson, 2015). Importantly, our findings mirror those of Nhat et al (2022), who also compared PPP and TBLT courses during the emergency online transition at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and found that students in TBLT courses presented higher levels of oral self-efficacy than those enrolled in PPP classes.

Due to the inherent reliance on real-world tasks in a TBLT course, it is not entirely surprising that TBLT learners felt significantly more prepared to interact with Spanish speakers in their communities. However, SPA 1Y is designed around tasks associated with travel in Ecuador and there is no deliberate incorporation of tasks directly related to the university or greater community of California. Therefore, this result suggests that engagement with real-world contexts and tasks in the classroom could make the connection with similar tasks in local communities more salient and accessible to learners. The result also suggests that learners in the PPP course have not yet made this important connection and feel more reluctant to interact with community members, despite having the same basic level of instruction as the TBLT learners. This result should be explored in more depth in future studies as it bears on contexts with varied demographics to see if TBLT learners feel more or less empowered to interact in contexts outside of the classroom.

It is noteworthy that TBLT students report being more comfortable with the idea of performing three speech acts that may feel a little embarrassing or uncomfortable as a non-native speaker: complaining, requesting, or apologizing. Alternatively, there were no differences between groups when it came to performing more emotionally neutral (greeting, saying goodbye) or even positive (thanking) tasks. Finally, learners in both groups felt similarly

comfortable asking for help, a speech act that is practiced repeatedly in class, as students often ask their peers or instructor for help with vocabulary or grammar.

Complaining, requesting and apologizing could be classified as *dispreferred speech acts* in Levinson's (1983) terminology. As explained in Taguchi (2022),

Since dispreferred acts often cause feelings of discomfort and unease, they tend to involve longer, more complex forms than their preferred counterparts, and are featured with marked linguistic devices such as hesitations, accounts, and prefaces (p. 1)

In this context, learners, especially at lower proficiency levels, tend to avoid performing such acts or feel less comfortable performing them (Glaser, 2009). It is thus relevant that, based on our data, TBLT approaches seem to help L2 students develop a sense of competence in performing such dispreferred acts. While TBLT and PPP may be comparable when it comes to everyday preferred speech acts, TBLT could offer a better format to allow learners to explore dispreferred speech acts.

Research Question 2

Results in our study where learners in the TBLT course show greater competence in several speech acts compared to their PPP counterparts contradict Harris and Leeming's (2021) findings. The authors hypothesized that learners in the TBLT course may have felt less confident about their speaking abilities than their PPP counterparts due to their lack of familiarity with, and potential anxiety related to, the teaching approach. However, our study not only shows that learners in a TBLT course can report higher levels of competence on many specific tasks than learners in a more traditional PPP course, but also demonstrates that TBLT courses do not necessarily correlate with a higher level of anxiety, as hypothesized in Harris and Leeming. Indeed, no significant difference was found between the levels of FLCA reported by learners in the PPP and TBLT course. Furthermore, learners in the TBLT sections expressed being overall happier about the class they were taking than those in the PPP course.

In an attempt to interpret why these studies present contradictory trends, it is important to note that the learners who participated in Harris and Leeming's study were at an intermediate level, while those in ours were beginners. This difference may be key since, in the latter case, the TBLT course was the first language course they were taking at the university, which means they could not compare it with any previous one. Learners at an intermediate level, alternatively, had likely taken multiple language courses by the time they enrolled in the TBLT course, resulting in a greater contrast between the pedagogical format they were used to and the more innovative TBLT approach. This seems to indicate that introducing learners to a TBLT approach early on in their language learning path may be a good way to avoid a potentially negative initial response to an unfamiliar approach. However, this hypothesis would need to be further explored in future research on TBLT instruction.

CONCLUSION

This article presents evidence to support the adoption of TBLT at the introductory L2 level. Overall, TBLT learners felt happier with their course and more empowered to perform both preferred and dispreferred speech acts. This suggests that TBLT is a powerful pedagogical

framework to help learners feel more comfortable and engaged in multiple communicative contexts. Indeed, this approach not only promotes the development of oral competence among learners but also facilitates connections with contexts outside the classroom. These connections might in turn motivate learners to see beyond the language requirement and pursue further study and engagement with a language. As program coordinators and instructors confront the possibility of lower enrollments and perceptions of the relevancy of L2 proficiency (Copley & Douthett, 2020; Looney & Lusin, 2019), TBLT offers a flexible pedagogical framework with personalized, context-specific content to align with the needs of learners, instructors and programs alike. In turn, this could help mitigate issues of attrition in both language classes and other related university programs, such as study abroad and community-engaged initiatives.

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Appendix 1

Course Calendar For SPA 1

Week and topics	Context of communicative activities	Grammar and vocabulary contents
Week 1 The classroom and introductions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Introductions ● Create an online profile 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The alphabet ● Numbers ● Interrogatives ● Grammatical gender and number ● Llamarse ● Nationality
Week 2 Physical descriptions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Describe yourself and your friends 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Descriptive adjectives ● Ser vs. estar ● Professions
Week 3 Daily routines	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Create and compare schedules ● Learn more about your classmates 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Regular verbs in the present tense ● Days of the week, months, hours
Week 4 Daily routines (continued)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Interview a classmate about what they like and what they have to do during the week 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Tener que + infinitive ● Gustar
Week 5 The family	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Make a family tree ● Discuss future plans 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Possessive adjectives ● Family vocabulary ● Ir a + infinitive

<p>Week 6 The family (continued)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Compare members of your family 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comparatives • Irregular verbs in the present tense
<p>Week 7 Review week: Physical descriptions and daily routines</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Describe people and their routines 	
<p>Week 8 What are you doing?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Describe what you and your classmates are doing at the moment. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Present continuous • Por vs. para
<p>Week 9 How are you doing?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Describe how you are feeling • Talk about current and future plans 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ser vs. estar • Tener que, querer, gustar, gustaría, ir a + infinitive
<p>Week 10 Final review week</p>		

Course Calendar For SPA 1Y

Week and topic/	Tasks	Grammar and vocabulary contents
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<p>Week 1 Preparing for a trip abroad</p>	<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. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Quiero /Me gustaría + infinitive ● Ser, Gustar ● Llamarse ● Ir a + infinitive ● Days of the week, months, hours ● Professions ● Nationality
<p>Week 2 The day of the flight</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Check-in your luggage ● Find your seat on the plane ● Order food on the plane 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Interrogatives ● Food vocabulary
<p>Week 3 Arriving at the destination</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Go through customs ● Complete immigration questionnaires ● Compare public transportation options to arrive at your final destination ● Take a taxi and give them directions to your destination 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Postal address ● Personal information ● The alphabet ● Numbers to 100 ● Grammatical gender and number
<p>Week 4 A weekend out of the city</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Plan a weekend in the countryside ● Book a hotel room ● Check-in at the hotel 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Comparatives
<p>Week 5 A weekend in the city</p>	<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 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Verbs in the present tense ● Tener que + infinitive ● Por vs. para

<p>Week 6 Review week and midterm exam</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Preparation and practice of the different tasks for the midterm 	
<p>Week 7 Inviting friends for dinner</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Buy food at the supermarket ● Follow a recipe to make a dish for dinner 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Food vocabulary ● Tener que + infinitive
<p>Week 8 Having dinner at a restaurant or at a friend's place</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Order food at a restaurant ● Describe your food preferences, allergies, intolerances, etc. ● Give compliments about the food 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Food vocabulary ● Descriptive adjectives ● Ser vs. estar
<p>Week 9 Preparing for the trip back home</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Write a postcard to your friends ● Buy souvenirs for your family at a local market 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Physical descriptions ● Verbs in the present continuous (estar + gerund) ● Family vocabulary
<p>Week 10 Review week</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Preparation and practice of the different tasks for the final exam 	