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# *English language teachers' stated beliefs and practices regarding task-based language teaching and listening*

Marc Jones
Tokyo Kasei University, Japan
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2004-1809
*tk1307@tokyo-kasei.ac.jp*

Abstract

Literature on both task-based language teaching (TBLT) and listening in language teaching generally as well as in English language teaching (ELT) is lacking in description about what teachers do and to what extent they apply theory or research-based evidence to their classroom practice. The current study consists of 7 interviews conducted face-to-face, by internet video telephony and through asynchronous text messaging with English language teachers around the world. Interviews focused on teachers' listening pedagogy, their understanding of task-based pedagogy and the use of materials in teaching. A phenomenological analysis of what participants said in interviews is taken to explain reasons for the author's understanding of the data, less in the hope of a generalizable set of findings but more toward insight into what teachers do, their ideas about authenticity, their understanding of TBLT and its various frameworks, use of theory and how research is connecting and failing to connect with working English language teachers in various contexts.

*Keywords*: teacher beliefs; interview; task-based language teaching; listening

## 1. Introduction

There has always been tension between what teachers know from theory and research about second and foreign language (L2) learning and teaching, their

beliefs about how instruction should proceed and the practices they in fact engage in in the classroom. The paper addresses this important issue in the case of task-based language teaching (TBLT) and in particular listening. It reports the findings of an interview study in which seven teachers from around the world were asked to express their opinions with respect to what they believe in these areas and what they actually do during L2 lessons.

## 2. Literature review

It is important as a profession to understand how teachers develop their pedagogical knowledge because it grows within us as a profession. We start with the collective knowledge of our profession as a whole; this is not only developed through professional accreditation in the rank and file but also through engagement with the experiential knowledge of others, either through collegial discussions (Richards & Farrell, 2005) or reading research. However, how widely teachers read research is debatable, and likely context-dependent (Anwaruddin & Pervin, 2015; Borg, 2009; McKinley, 2019). Due to the immediacy of the Internet compared to traditional publishing, there is, unarguably, more access to the knowledge of others as well as greater access to avenues where knowledge can be shared. There is a growing number of websites, podcasts and video streaming channels from which teachers may gain knowledge. With such an interconnected resource infrastructure, it may be argued that previously canonical texts become less relevant. Cormier (2008) uses Deleuze and Guattari's (2013) rhizome metaphor to describe the interconnected, rapid spread of knowledge and ideas in an educational context: "The rhizome metaphor, which represents a critical leap in coping with the loss of a canon against which to compare, judge, and value knowledge, may be particularly apt as a model for disciplines on the bleeding edge where the canon is fluid and knowledge is a moving target" (2008, p.1). With the frequent changes in technology influencing and/or causing the frequent changes in language teaching and learning, the rhizome is a suitable metaphor for the development of teachers' knowledge and cognition, both individually and collectively, in that the rhizome is neither hierarchical nor stratified (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013), but radial, tangential, growing from whence it came, in all directions.

With the greater marketization of language education (Gray & Block, 2013) there is an increase in the number of teachers wishing to develop their skills further in order to be more marketable. This leads to teachers undertaking courses, reading more books and also making use of Internet resources. Due to the Internet being more financially accessible and requiring less of a time commitment, it may be the case that we are seeing the slow transformation of the academic publishing model, much like we have witnessed the transformation of

the music industry. However, whereas artists, labels, publishers and distributors saw diminished profits after the advent of peer-to-peer file sharing, academics themselves see no diminished earnings from academic publishing because they had already been working for free. While costs have normally been borne by readers paying for access to single papers, the rise of open access publishing sees academic departments hit with considerable article processing charges (APCs). However, there are preprint servers and university repositories which can be used to make non-open access articles available (Quintana & Heathers, 2017), and it is these avenues that are more likely to attract practitioners because they are free, and the user interfaces of these servers and repositories are often more accessible than journal websites that have various encryption layers. Unfortunately, these are not often well publicized outside universities. Another option available to practitioners is OASIS database (Marsden et al, n.d.), which summarizes paywalled research outputs.

It may be the case that "the explosion of freely available sources of information has helped drive rapid expansion in the accessibility of the canon and in the range of knowledge available to learners" (Cormier, 2008, p. 2). However, one caveat is that not everything is vetted and we do still value peer-reviewed publications; however, there is a friction between the knowledge produced and constructed by "lay" practitioners, henceforth referred to as *folk wisdom*, and that by researchers (and researcher-practitioners) in peer-reviewed publications generally intended for an academic audience, henceforth referred to as *academic knowledge*. This friction occurs in the syntheses of the research findings and personal evaluations of these constructions by lay intermediaries that can result in a message being received with distortions, inaccuracies or generalizations not present in the original reports.

Brumfit (1991) states that "language teaching has been particularly open to the claims of inspired outsiders which may or may not have generalizable value" (p. 135). It may be the case that the Internet will exacerbate this condition, though it provides affordances for classroom teachers to participate in Communities of Practice (CoP) (Lave & Wenger, 1991) and become teacher-researchers who produce as well as consume academic knowledge and dialectal knowledge (Emke, 2018). Teachers share their ideas and experiences on many Internet sites, and in a study with Austria-based teachers "English-language teachers seemed particularly likely to read research in Internet-based sources compared with other groups" (Kostoulas et al., 2019. p. 317). Cosgun and Savaş (2019) also found that Turkish teachers in their survey stated that they kept up to date with classroom practices from internet resources. While much of the Internet-based information is folk-wisdom, it is grounded in the reality of classroom teaching experiences, while some academic knowledge is rooted only in

abstract theoretical terms and the language of its dissemination makes its relevance to practitioners difficult to see (Anwaruddin, 2015; Borg, 2009).

One of the sites of conflict here is the access to academic journals, not only physically, but also regarding the relevance to the classroom context (Swan, 2018). However, lines that are drawn between researchers on the one hand and teachers or practitioners on the other are frequently imaginary. As McKinley (2019) points out, in Japanese universities, most researchers are also practitioners; therefore, arguments about researchers divorcing themselves from classroom experience may be ill-informed. The danger of drawing such non-existent distinctions is that "no matter how accessible research options become, if teachers themselves do not perceive a need to engage with research or professional benefits associated with this engagement, then they are unlikely to take any steps towards doing so" (Kostoulas et al., 2019. p. 309). However, much that is of relevance is buried deeply in a mass of superficial information, so that it requires a significant amount of time to evaluate whether the material is useful to one' teaching context or not. This time factor increases when using audio resources such as podcasts or Internet video.

This is particularly seen in both the TBLT literature and the proliferation of materials on the Internet, where TBLT can be seen as contradictory because task-supported language teaching (TSLT) is frequently confused with TBLT. Here, I shall state that my own interpretation is that Long (2015) and Skehan (1998) espouse TBLT, with Ellis (2003) supplementing TBLT with TSLT, and that Willis (Willis, 1996; Willis & Willis, 2007) and Nunan (2010) are TSLT, with synthetic language syllabi in place. This is only a methodological convenience, however; curriculum choices may not always be made by teachers, and where in-depth needs analysis (as espoused by Long, 2015) is overlooked by administrators, or is simply regarded as impractical or uneconomical, a mixture of TBLT with elements of TSLT is almost inevitable.

How teachers actually teach listening is also mysterious due to the lack of empirical research based on large-scale observations. Instead, what is available is analysis of teachers' stated beliefs and practices (Emerick, 2019; Graham, Santos, & Francis-Brophy, 2014; Jones, 2016), case studies of particular contexts (Flowerdew & Miller, 2005) and Siegel's (2014) study of how ten teachers conducted listening instruction based upon audio recordings of their lessons. Unfortunately, evidence-based articles to inform listening are extremely thin on the ground as open access or even in the open. There is a clear gap in the literature and, in particular, a lack of insight into how listening instruction is conducted by those following a task-based language teaching (TBLT) approach.

The literature on teachers of task-based learning is somewhat limited. Aside from Beretta and Davies' (1985) review of Prabhu's Bangalore Project

where teachers' views are documented, there is very little available. One exception is that of Andon and Eckerth (2009), which undertook an exploration of four masters-level teachers' cognition with regard to principles of TBLT. One of the similarities between Beretta and Davies (1985) and Andon and Eckerth (2009) is that teachers are likely to diverge from the theoretical framework laid out for them in order to teach according to their own cognition. It may, therefore, be stated that TBLT belongs with what Ur (2013, p. 470) terms "situated methodologies." Although Ur criticizes TBLT, it is clear that due to teacher mediation and divergence, as well as the potential to choose from different TBLT/TSLT models, it is still as much a "situated methodology." However, this brings a divergence from what Long (2015) terms "methodological principles" (MPs) (pp. 302-303).

A lack of communication between researchers and teachers means that researchers do not understand how often divergence from the MPs happens; the absence also means teachers can find it difficult to gain knowledge from the ongoing research into TBLT and TSLT. One cause of this may be the cost of access to the literature on TBLT, which is largely in paywalled journals and books which may be prohibitively expensive for individual teachers. An example of this is John Benjamins charging $54.00 US or €36.00 for their TBLT series volumes. Another would be Wiley charging $47.99 US minimum for Long (2015). Additionally, there are conferences on TBLT, though for many teachers, the costs of hundreds of dollars for conference fees alone before flights and accommodation are considered, make these untenable choices. What teachers do have available are Internet-based resources. Unfortunately, many of these are unvetted, and therefore searching for something worthwhile for one's professional development can be time consuming due to the need to evaluate resources as one finds them.

Conversely, the International Association for Task-Based Language Teaching (IATBLT) does have some limited resources made available on its website (n.d.). The Japan Association for Language Teaching (JALT) also has a Task-Based Learning Special Interest Group (n.d.), which publishes a journal which is open to both members and non-members, with practical applications as well as research articles. Also, while some academics make preprints and archived versions of papers available through institutional repositories, this is not common knowledge. Therefore, publications go unread by the people upon whom they could have the greatest impact: the very teachers that could undertake the classroom interventions and bring about greater efficacy in learning. This is true of both TBLT scholars and listening scholars largely publishing in paywalled journals and presenting at prohibitively expensive conferences, without attempting to engage classroom teachers where they are and in what they read. Is there any wonder that, as McKinley (2019) states, "the reality we increasingly face is one where TESOL practitioners do not read or use applied linguistics research to inform teaching" (p. 1).

Guidelines regarding how listening can be taught abound in theory and in teaching materials. Outside of the commercial language-teaching materials field, the theory behind how listening may be taught falls under bottom-up processes and top-down processes. Bottom-up processes refer to work at the micro-level, such as single phonemes/sounds, words and lexis, and intonation groups, while top-down processing takes a macro-level and meta-level approach by thinking of the whole "text," its genre and form, and also whether similar texts have been encountered previously. One development of top-down processing is metacognitive strategy instruction (Vandergrift, 1999), or thinking about how one listens to and processes a text. However, Goh (1998) states that less proficient listeners listen using more bottom-up decoding strategies, while more proficient listeners use more top-down cognitive and meta-cognitive strategies. If this is the case, clearly a one-size-fits-all method cannot be applied to the language classroom due to variance in learners' interlanguage (Selinker, 1972) and therefore the state of their interlanguage phonology which they use to parse spoken input. Commercial materials often claim to follow revolutionary approaches but are often "one or more of the following: topic extensions; exemplification of grammar; exemplification of functional or lexical items of language; lead-in to a learner speaking activity" (Ableeva & Stranks, 2013. p. 206). Clearly, there appears to be a mismatch between the commercial materials which teachers have ready access to, and the academic research which should be informing it, which was one of my motivations in undertaking the current study.

Flowerdew and Miller (2005) describe different approaches to listening, one of which is a task-based approach where "students are asked to listen to what are described as 'authentic' situations and to 'do something' with the information (...). The process students employ in finding a successful outcome to the task is more important than being able to understand all the spoken text presented to them" (p. 14). Clearly this approach is suited to learners being able to parse texts for information, but it does not state how or whether this develops the overall listening skill because there is no mention of form-focused instruction to develop L2. However, a *discrete-item approach* is examined, which is similar to the presentation of language, as Ableeva and Stranks (2013) describe. It is likely that similar activities are used as explicit focus on form (Long, 1991), though not predetermined by the teacher but based on observed difficulties faced by learners while decoding the listening text.

Additionally, TBLT and listening/phonology scholars have thus far followed differing paths. The literature on listening in TBLT is thin on the ground. Of the small amount present, what are labelled as listening "tasks" are not the "task as workplan," as defined by Ellis, nor the "task as communicative act," as advocated by Long (2015), but "task as examination question," frequently with

multiple choice answers to choose from (e.g., Brunfaut & Révész, 2015). One of the clearest examples available in how a TBLT approach can be used with reactive focus on form (Long, 2015) is hidden in a conference presentation by Bruzzano (2018), a PhD student at Leeds University. She advocates reaction to learner difficulties with the text. This provides an affordance for addressing differences between the phonological phenomena in speech samples and learner preconceptions of how words sound based on learned citation forms or overreliance on phoneme-grapheme correspondences learned in L2 literacy skills.

With such a lack of both depth and clarity in how listening is approached within TBLT, there appears to be little difference between how perceptual phonology development is considered and accounted for between TBLT and the orthodoxy that Field (2008, p. 8) refers to as the "comprehension approach" (CA). However, while the CA is put forth in commercially available materials for practitioners, TBLT is an approach that claims to offer theoretical support from SLA, psycholinguistics, neurolinguistics and educational research (Long, 2015).

While the literature on listening pertaining to "the task-as-workplan" (Ellis, 2003. p. 5) is lacking, the literature on assessment and testing of listening does have potential to affect pedagogy through the washback effects of tests (Alderson & Wall, 1993). Long (2015) states that standardized tests themselves may be considered tasks; however, for many language learners they are only used as a gauge of progress. While, they can be used to quantify listening progress for learners, it is only as *simulacra* of tasks (i.e., poor replicas with little similarity to tasks with an achievable communicative outcome) rather than *simulations* of them. Examples of these simulacra may be listening to what a third party has been instructed to purchase, choosing details from a preset list as a multiple choice item, or selecting paraphrases.

If all we are concerned with teaching is top-down strategies, then learners will always have an approach toward incomplete, selective listening when approaching texts and situations. If the phonology is addressed, at least for receptive purposes, there is at least some hope for learners in being able to approach a text or situation in a similar way, as an L1 listener. Unfortunately, due to the prevalence of the CA (Field, 2008) at the expense of bottom-up skill development, we promote a deficit approach to learning language, where teachers who lack sufficient phonological knowledge avoid it, in turn neglecting development of learners' phonological inventory with which they approach listening. This leads to poor decoding and over-reliance upon selective listening, which eventually becomes habitual along with the feeling that texts can only be "managed," or "handled," in relation to the small amount of a text that can be parsed. However, I believe that if we can solve the problem of approaching phonology for listening, the following outcomes are that:

- teachers can develop greater knowledge of phonology teaching;
- teachers use this knowledge to facilitate learning inside and outside their classrooms;
- learners can approach texts while aiming to understand rather than manage a lack of understanding;
- learners approach texts with the aim of actually listening and attending to the text.

## 3. The study

### 3.1. Research questions

While the above may be a utopian vision, I am sure that I am not the first teacher-researcher to have such ideas. Therefore, it is necessary to see whether we are already approaching a shift in the nexus of theory and practice. I have less of a research question and more of a research exploration: My intent is to find out whether teachers who self-report that they teach through a task-based methodology actually do so, and using what framework. Further to this, if the task is paramount, how is phonological form focused upon? Additionally, upon what knowledge and theory do teachers base their classroom practices?

### 3.2. Methodology

While my starting point was that of an early career researcher who is familiar with the listening literature, I did not wish to enter the interviews with preconceptions about "the right way to teach listening" but to understand the extent to which teachers used TBLT frameworks to inform their listening pedagogy. My reasons for this are manifold. The primary reason is my being part of the community and wishing to see language teachers represented and representing themselves within the literature (and academia) that forms part of our collective knowledge (e.g., Bullock & Smith, 2015), as opposed to being represented by academics while being de-facto excluded from participation in academia.

To find participants, I solicited teachers on Twitter (2019) because it is used by language teachers as a place to conduct and undertake informal continuing professional development as well as enquire about more formal opportunities such as courses. Initially, responses came but not so many, perhaps due to my requirement for interviews. The reason that I chose interviews as opposed to the questionnaire with post-interview model, was that I wanted an open-ended, reactive approach to the information participants provided. Questionnaires can bring about a state of "going through the motions" among participants,

particularly when multiple measures are taken for constructs to ensure validity. It also brings about temptation toward "abstract empiricism" (Mills, 2000. p. 50), where participants construct scores are examined but the participants and their situation in a community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991) remain unexamined. Of course, not all of the questions were asked ad-hoc; I wanted to know how participants approached listening pedagogy and what task-based framework they had adopted. As will become clear below, even these initial questions had the potential to be problematic.

The frameworks that I had in mind prior to the interviews were those of Long (2015), Ellis (2003), or one of these two possibly informed by Skehan's (1998) and Robinson's (2003) work on task complexity. Other than these, I relied on Nunan's (2010) and Willis' (1996) frameworks, which are often referred to as TSLT with overarching predetermined linguistic syllabi. For the sake of methodological semantics, I operationalized TBLT to refer to:

- language teaching with a realizable task resembling a simulated "real world" interaction;
- with an objective or outcome which would normally not be adjacent to language learning or assessment;
- and with no predetermined linguistic item usage as the target outcome or teaching focus.

By contrast, TSLT was operationalized to refer to:

- language teaching with a realizable task resembling a simulated "real world" interaction;
- with an objective or outcome which may be adjacent to language learning or assessment;
- and with predetermined linguistic item usage as the target outcome or teaching focus.

I was also curious about how strategy-based instruction (Oxford, 2013; Siegel, 2014; Vandergrift & Goh, 2012), other top-down approaches, especially CA (Field, 2008), as well as bottom-up approaches, such as "the discrete-item approach" (Flowerdew & Miller, p. 10-12), interact with TBLT and TSLT approaches.

In contrast to Andon and Eckerth (2009), I explicitly mentioned TBLT and listening, though I did not specify particular TBLT frameworks or how frequently TBLT may be used in conjunction with other approaches. This provided me with both a risk and opportunity of gaining results beyond that which I had expected at the outset which could expand the scope of the exploration, albeit possibly making it too unfocused. I leave it to the reader to judge whether it is sufficiently focused.

I interviewed 7 teachers of English, of whom 5 are men, 2 are women, over the space of three months between April and June 2019. I have given all participants pseudonyms. A short description of the participants follows:

1. *Harry* is a university teacher in Australia, teaching EAP at a university. He also has experience teaching in Vietnam. He is a senior teacher with a varied teaching load, and he teaches 2 days a week.
2. *Gary* teaches EAP at a private university in Japan which also uses a CLIL approach. The main focus for listening in his lessons is English for lectures and presentations.
3. *Fred* holds a CELTA and teaches EFL to adults in Germany and had prior experience in adult education and state school education before entering ELT.
4. *Taiba* holds a CELTA and teaches adults freelance through language schools and on the internet, and has two years consistent teaching experience.
5. *Douglas* is an MA holder with Higher Diploma in TEFL and now studying for a DipTESOL to develop further because he spent 10 years out of the classroom as a salesperson for an ELT publisher. He mainly teaches EAP or BE, with a focus mainly on reading, writing and speaking. He works in Mexico.
6. *Matthew* is a high-school teacher in Nigeria. He teaches large classes of students' whose first language is Yoruba.
7. *Maura* is an Italian freelance English teacher with MA and Cambridge DELTA qualifications. She teaches EAP at a university architecture department and also pre-sessional courses at British universities as well as teaching learners of all ages privately and in schools.

The vast majority of interviews were conducted over Zoom (Zoom, 2019), with the exception of Gary's in-person interview at his office, Taiba by Skype (Skype, 2019) and Matthew through direct message on Twitter (2019). All interviews were audio recorded with the exception of Matthew's and Taiba's interviews. I took notes during each interview and also transcribed salient information. I decided not to use software to collate notes because of the small sample size. A follow-up e-mail containing further information was received from Fred after an initial draft of this article was sent to participants for approval, which I believe vouches for the reliability of representation of participants' views.

I have taken a phenomenological position where I "try to get as close as possible to what people have experienced" (Brinkmann, 2013. p. 37) and have taken a small sample by necessity: all 7 participants were volunteers. However, as Brinkmann (2013) states, it is advisable to have "fewer interviews that are thoroughly analyzed" (p. 59). There may be issues for some readers who have a positivist mindset or who may be more accustomed to quantitative studies.

However, I am not intending to generalize from the interview data, but to provide information from working teachers, which may provide possibilities, ideas and potential for classroom work. This may also provide researchers with information regarding a variety of working teachers' knowledge and application of TBLT and/or TSLT in listening pedagogy.

## 4. Results

### 4.1. TBLT frameworks

While the teachers all work in very different contexts, a common factor was lack of familiarity with TBLT frameworks, with Matthew claiming that his "knowledge is superficial" regarding theoretical frameworks. Maura stated that she had read some TBLT literature in preparation for her DELTA, as had Gary and Harry, although Harry added the qualifier "but it has been a while." Douglas' favored framework is Willis' (1996) because it is based on what's needed and is also a reflective process, although he is "not married to a method." However, he appeared less familiar with other frameworks such as Long (2014), Skehan (1998) or Ellis (2003). Maura also prefers the Willis (1996) framework for reasons of practicality in the classroom. Taiba and Matthew did not admit familiarity with the academic frameworks but stated that they followed a task-based approach by considering what their students needed to do, and provided opportunities to participate in simulations of these tasks.

### 4.2. Listening: Top-down and bottom-up

With regard to top-down (TD) and bottom-up (BU) listening, there was very little experience with teaching bottom-up decoding, although this is understandable with the university EAP teachers Harry, Gary and Maura, whose students are required or expected to have threshold scores for standardized tests and who are able to cope in general settings for communication but are required to develop their English skills for academia. Also, most teachers claimed to have only a basic knowledge of TBLT at best, and few could state what type of theoretical framework they drew upon for their pedagogy. The exceptions here are Douglas and Maura, who both claimed use of Willis' (1996) framework. Whether this is task-based or task-supported is a different argument. The most salient point here is that researchers working within TBLT need to work harder in connecting with practitioners, and disseminating theory and research in user-friendly materials in order for their recommendations to be carried out in classrooms.

Most of the teachers actually did not focus on any bottom-up listening but worked mostly on top-down skills, in common with findings in Jones (2016). This

is likely an outcome from a combination of habits gained from initial teacher education and a lack of explicit bottom-up activities or tasks in commercial listening materials, which are usually found in the "pronunciation" section rather than the listening section of a textbook. Furthermore, the activities and tasks in Gary's textbook and the implicit task in Fred's film club of discussing and reacting to the film with peers actually require bottom-up skills in order to summarize and paraphrase effectively. It is a separate issue, though, whether the bottom-up skills required may be assumed to have been already developed in the case of Gary's EAP course and assumed by Fred to be implicitly developed with repeated practice through pre-listening tasks and the considerable exposure to language in his courses.

The explicit instruction of linguistic items was eschewed by Fred, though it was provided to students for independent work outside the classroom, though most of the other teachers stated that it was useful. However, whether this instruction was predetermined (Focus on FormS or FonFS), or provided reactively at the point of need (Focus on Form or FonF) (Long, 1991, p. 44) was not always clear. Some of the problems that Douglas' learners face are the lack of vocabulary shortcuts, pragmatics in English use can be complicated and the stress timing of the language can be difficult to listen to. As FonF he teaches individual sounds (often for pronunciation) and also sentence stress. However, when teaching listening explicitly he focuses on BU skills as well as TD skills as well as teaching key words in the same semantic field. He also stated that communication breakdowns can occur and students do not always know how they can repair these breakdowns.

Gary's university course mirrors or simulates target tasks, such as giving the general gist of a ten-minute lecturette. He uses a textbook with accompanying DVD to teach the course and he states that "[The book] does the job for you," regarding text selection and task design, with students being taught to get used to the pace or speed of naturalistic speech. The book that he uses addresses Field's (2008) "micro-listening" ( p. 96) for bottom-up decoding. This is used as form-focused instruction to enable more skillful decoding of the ten-minute lecturette. However, because this is predetermined, it is what Long (1991) would term FonFS, and then categorizes Gary's methodology as TSLT.

However, this is not to say that there is no FonF (Long, 2014) in Gary's class, simply that FonFS and FonF may both be used, which leads us to a situation of tasks being decided in a predetermined way by materials developers, assessed as sound by administrators, and set as the syllabus for teachers, who personalize the delivery and staging of the tasks and in-situ pedagogy. Most of the teachers stated that clarification of the listening text was part of their teaching and therefore, at a minimum, we may assume that such kinds of implicit focus on form is part of general listening pedagogy. It may therefore be considered that TSLT and TBLT are not mutually exclusive and that aspects of TSLT may become part of teachers'

repertoires when teaching TBLT, or more likely the case, that aspects of TBLT are used to make the most of teaching affordances within a TSLT syllabus.

### 4.3. Materials and authenticity

The reason that Maura is drawn to TBLT is that it promotes "real life English," and an example of this is that teenagers can listen and learn to find out information for themselves. She also said that TBLT lacks research on young learners. The thing that Harry likes most about TBLT is that it is contextualized although there are also institutional obstacles to TBLT, such as examinations.

Authenticity was discussed by many of the participants, in particular Harry and Fred. Harry stated that authenticity was used to motivate learners, to provide a reason to listen, in line with Ryan and Deci's (2017) self-determination theory (SDT). This is echoed by Fred, who opines: "Your normal textbook is boring, but if you give them [authentic material] made by a TV company who wants to engage people, it will attract learners." Furthermore, Maura commented: "I tend to choose authentic or semi-authentic texts and task-based is the best suited way to teach decoding because you have to do something with it because you're receiving input, (...) I think you have to interact with a text and that is oral and written because that's the way you engage with a text as a learner."

Regarding listening, it appears that a lot of teachers are interested in authenticity in materials and tasks, with Harry, Fred and Maura mentioning it explicitly in their interviews and Gary alluding to it. However, in the TBLT literature, authentic materials are not advocated. Long (2015) recommends "elaborated texts," which provide additional information about language items, such as vocabulary or grammar structures, in order that learners can adequately understand them. Willis and Willis (2008), conversely, promote using what is at hand, which may be authentic or may be commercially-published materials. However, the nature of listening instruction requires clarification, according to Douglas, who went on to say that clarification of part of a listening text is a type of language input. Harry, despite a desire for authenticity, also uses a coursebook for his course. He stated that he often uses a project-based approach to TBLT. He also admitted that there was a lot of repetition and also combined student needs with the learning outcomes and assessment outcomes for the course he teaches. One way he reconciled the use of a third-party produced coursebook and his use of TBLT was as follows:

> Most of our lessons we are bound by a coursebook. So I work around the edges of that by making tasks as authentic as possible and often making them authentic involves some kind of task.

Fred uses authentic materials in a flipped classroom approach with a film club he had run for eight years at the time of interview, and also with the listening texts that he emails his other students weekly. These are implicit tasks, such as "watch a film and talk about it with peers," an activity which is a regular occurrence for many L1 speakers but perhaps not for L2 speakers in their L1 environment. Whether this is authentically representing "real life" for L2 users is unlikely, but it may be argued that it is a scaffolded way to achieve a simulated version of a typical L1 task.

Linked to this authenticity is also the notion that authentic texts or authentic tasks are more motivating, as suggested by Maura and Harry. Maura posited that authentic or semi-authentic texts were more motivating, while Harry stated that more authenticity in tasks was more motivating. Both of these aspects can be linked to SDT (Ryan & Deci, 2017); however, it could be that authenticity in texts and tasks simply serves as a way of harnessing and creating directed motivational currents (DMCs) (Dörnyei et al., 2014), which onvolve a short term goal or interest as a highly motivating factor, whether intrinsic or extrinsic.

### 4.4. Learner autonomy in listening

Learner autonomy with listening was mentioned by both Fred and Gary, with Gary stating that he wished to have learners engage in self-selected listening for homework and eschew teacher-prescribed listening in the classroom in order to focus on speaking, and Fred also stating that he wanted learners to watch videos outside of class time in order to prepare to converse with other learners in the class. While learner autonomy is welcome, because classroom time is limited, listening instruction may not be gained in other teachers' classes, particularly for learners who have only one teacher or one class per week. This is an important issue for Gary, who believed that "Japanese students have a complex about listening." Obviously this is an area that teachers must be aware of and balance the need for output with instruction in how to listen more effectively and how to develop receptive phonology in order to decode the stream of speech more effectively, which will also aid conversation skills.

### 4.5. Teacher development and research access

Fred, Maura and Taiba mentioned independent teacher development during their interviews. Both Fred and Taiba mentioned social media platforms and websites as sites of professional learning, and Maura stated that she did a lot of reading in her own time but that most of this was of practical rather than theoretical nature. As Emke (2019) states, social media platforms can be seen as

places to communicate with a community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991) as well as an assemblage between the human and the machine, in that there are algorithmic factors present in the information available and found, and that "tools exist only in relation to the interminglings that make them possible" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013. p. 105). However, while social media are being used by academics, applied linguistics research is not supported by the tools that teachers such as Fred and Taiba are using. Even if this was the case, highly theoretical work may even be eschewed in favor of work with clear classroom application. Taiba remarked that she gained a lot of her teaching knowledge through independent learning, such as an unnamed book about listening and course materials such as a popular business English textbook, an IELTS listening textbook and the British Council's kids website (n.d.).

Additionally, it is significant to note that Fred mentioned specific names in his interview of mainly teacher trainers, Kieran Donaghy and Nik Peachey, an educationalist, Ken Robinson, rather than language teaching researchers, Stephen Krashen excepted. While practitioner experience is important in teacher development, and a transmission of effective practice is useful, actual language acquisition research went unmentioned in my interviews with Fred and Taiba. I interpret this as language acquisition researchers not connecting with the people who can bring about the most change by implementing the research. As Mehradi (2014) comments on the Iranian ELT context, "the fact that university researchers are encouraged but also expected to publish in prestigious journals (that are not even known to teachers) strengthens the divide between researchers and practitioners" (p. 28). In particular, Matthew stated that he had very little access to research literature; therefore it may be assumed that there are others like him in similar contexts who wish to engage in evidence-based practices but have no access to the evidence base. Therefore, neither TBLT research nor listening research literature connect with newer teachers (cf. Borg, 2009) nor does it reach those working outside higher education, who may defer to the internet presence of teacher educators and education theorists. Fred remarked:

> To me the emphasis in language teaching is too focused on an academic study of English and ignoring the massive elephant in the room which actually is how we learn our mother tongue (...) which is by listening and hearing, seeing and massive exposure over time.

However, Edwards (2005) found that teachers who contributed to her co-edited volume may only be extrinsically motivated to conduct research by factors such as career progression and obligation for those working in higher education, as assignments for qualifications, or for publication in books, which would add to their CVs. Thus, while it appears that there is a large number of

teachers unengaged with research, there is a minority who are, although reading the research is difficult due to access and time restraints. However, engagement with continuing professional development is still present. Fred and Taiba both stated that they use Internet-based resources promoted through social media for their professional development. This would be an ideal way for researchers to disseminate research. There are many language researchers using Twitter (2019) already to promote their articles and books to other academics; however, shorter practitioner-focused outputs appear very few and far between.

## 5. Discussion

It is true that research is disseminated at conferences by researchers working in TBLT and listening researchers. However, at the rate of hundreds of US dollars for a weekend, this is time spent away from work that is unlikely to be reimbursed, and thus the cycle of disconnection between researchers and practitioners continues. While McKinley (2019) states that many TESOL researchers are also teachers, it is not true that all teachers/practitioners are also researchers, and are unlikely to have research budgets to spend on developing their practice. Additionally, if teachers/practitioners are keen to bridge the research-practice divide, it is extremely costly to access publications, not only journal articles but also books, in particular edited volumes. This means that people unaffiliated with universities are essentially prevented from providing scholarly contributions regarding their own settings in the journals where academic research is published, impoverishing the general academic discourse due to a lack of grounding in general reality beyond university settings.

Recommendations for academics publishing on listening pedagogy and/or task-based pedagogy are to ensure that preprints are made available where possible, and also publicized for any paywalled research outputs. Providing a summary on the OASIS database (Marsden et al, n.d.) will also assist practitioners in gaining greater insight than an abstract alone may provide. It is also the case that some academics are providing YouTube summaries of their papers, which may yet prove useful for disseminating research to those who would benefit from it most, although it can be difficult to discover new information when browsing because of the number of videos on the site. However, if primary research is made available through open access journals and books, access to it will be allowed not only to those in affluent institutions but provides an equitable access to scholars in the global south, who have valuable contributions to make to the field but are largely invisible in both the listening and the task-based language pedagogy subfields.

Strategies for teaching language were rarely mentioned explicitly by the participants, though when they reported their practices, it became clear that

top-down strategies were taught more often than bottom-up strategies. While this appears to conform to the status quo, it is worth mentioning that several of the teachers work in higher education, which means that it could be expected that students have already acquired a general ability of bottom-up decoding but need to be able to gain information from top-down strategies while they continue to develop bottom-up decoding abilities further.

Additionally, one of the ramifications of using authentic listening texts in classroom instruction is that learners engage with listening more and make more effort to learn, thus raising the probability of language acquisition and/or skill acquisition. However, whether teachers' perceptions of what motivates learners to listen and what learners actually report as motivating correlate is unclear and not based on empirical evidence. Therefore more research is required into this aspect of L2 listening motivation.

While attempts have been made to interview a diverse array of working teachers, there are a small number of teachers who volunteered to be interviewed and that I had time to interview. It would be useful for similar studies to take place in order to see whether my findings hold true. It is also the case that, while I have attempted to be objective, I am still biased toward open access to information in order to increase the collective knowledge of our field and profession.

## 6. Conclusion

Not many teachers show a deep knowledge of the different TBLT frameworks, though there is some awareness of the literature, perhaps because of lack of communication between researchers and teacher educators on the differences between "weak" TSLT and "strong" TBLT approaches. This may be because "strong" TBLT is not supported in the assessment criteria for lesson observation for teaching assessments so novice and/or early-career teachers do not gain sufficient input on the approach to be able to use task-based approaches with their students.

Researchers, of both listening and task-based language teaching, need to do more to connect with the people who are best positioned to implement their research findings. This may mean reaching out to teachers more, and to make the case that there are clear benefits for learners. This includes doing more to research the contributions of TBLT outside university settings, which may involve partnerships between private language schools and academia. If this were possible, it might also be possible to research not only adult language learning beyond university undergraduate populations, but also non-compulsory language classes for children and examine the effects these have and how TBLT may be effective and/or problematic for young learners.

Clearly, a major problem for rank and file teachers keen to improve their knowledge of the evidence base that can inform their classroom practice is accessing the relevant research. This is not a new phenomenon (Borg, 2009), but the rate of change is glacial at best. This is equally true of the research on listening as of the TBLT literature. Indeed, while the sample of teachers was small, and entirely sourced from social media, mention of research outputs disseminated through the Internet, such as Twitter (2019) threads and blog posts appeared to be key ways that teachers sought out information. Alternatively, summaries of articles on websites such as ELT Research Bites (n.d.), given the domination of English in applied linguistics or OASIS Database (Marsden et al., n.d.), if used more widely have the potential for a wider impact. For too long, research has been kept in proverbial walled gardens to the detriment of those it would benefit most. As Matthew stated, he does not have access to a lot of books or articles in his teaching setting in Nigerian higher education, making this an issue for less wealthy countries which might be able to provide cutting-edge, evidence-based education were the required information easy to share or access. Additionally, both Fred and Douglas mentioned that access to research was difficult and that they preferred following informed practitioners on social media to develop ideas further.

Are teachers using a task-based approach to teach listening? If we take into account the tenets of Long's (2015) and Skehan's (1998) frameworks, not entirely. Language teachers are not undertaking detailed needs analyses (Long, 2015) or are using predetermined language (Long, 2015; Skehan, 1998) in their lessons. However, are teachers making moves from TSLT toward more "real-world" task types rather than purely pedagogical task types? It appears so, with the caveat that all of this comes from self-report rather than lesson observation. It is also interesting that teachers seek "practical" ways to implement TBLT, and that TSLT offers a bridge toward the MPs of Long (2015).

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