

Individual Differences and Task-Based Language Teaching

Reviewed by

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This book shifts attention from external factors of Task-Based Language Teaching (e.g., task design, classroom context) to learner-internal variables, specifically individual differences (IDs). These encompass cognitive abilities, affective states, sociodemographic characteristics, and teacher-related factors that shape how learners and educators engage with and benefit from task-based instruction. This work masterfully bridges theoretical insights with practical applications, positioning itself as an essential resource for advancing personalized language pedagogy. The volume is composed of seven sections: an introductory overview, affective differences, cognitive differences, conative differences, sociodemographic differences, pedagogical perspectives and a concluding synthesis. The chapters explore diverse aspects of individual differences, offering a systematic investigation of how learner and teacher characteristics interact with task-based learning.



Section 1 sets the intellectual foundation, with Shaofeng Li (Chapter 1) arguing that the historical focus on external factors in TBLT research has overshadowed the critical role of learner-internal variables. Li contends that understanding individual differences—such as anxiety, aptitude, motivation, and teacher beliefs—is vital for optimizing task performance and learning outcomes, thereby providing a compelling rationale for the chapters that follow.

Section 2 explores affective differences, investigating the emotional dynamics that shape

task-based learning (Chapters 2, 3, and 4). In Chapter 2, Hyejin An and Shaofeng Li investigate anxiety in TBLT, synthesizing 35 studies to reveal its disruptive impact on learner engagement and performance. Their findings indicate that high-anxiety learners benefit more from recasts than metalinguistic feedback, particularly in low-complexity tasks. They advocate for task designs that reduce affective barriers, such as using familiar topics or computer-mediated communication to ease pressure. Chengchen Li and Jean-Marc Dewaele, in Chapter 3, examine task enjoyment, drawing on positive psychology to demonstrate its role in enhancing motivation and sustaining involvement. Their factor analyses of enjoyment scales show that tasks fostering social connection, like collaborative storytelling, elevate learners' emotional investment. In Chapter 4, Angela Donate and Ronald P. Leow explore task complexity, task features, and anxiety at low L2 proficiency levels, highlighting how complex narrative tasks increase anxiety and reduce performance compared to simpler tasks. Their study underscores the need for simplified task structures to support novice learners. These chapters collectively emphasize the creation of supportive classroom environments that mitigate anxiety while amplifying positive affective states, offering educators strategies like low-stakes tasks to foster engagement.

Section 3 delves into cognitive differences, examining how learners' mental abilities influence their language learning (Chapters 5 and 6). Masako Ishikawa and Andrea Révész, in Chapter 5, investigate written languaging, language aptitude, and task outcomes, focusing on how reflective writing enhances learners' metalinguistic awareness. Their experimental study demonstrates that learners with higher aptitude, as measured by tests like the Modern Language Aptitude Test (MLAT), produce more accurate and complex output when engaging in

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written languaging tasks. This suggests that tasks requiring explicit reflection can leverage cognitive strengths, particularly for advanced learners. In Chapter 6, Hyejin An and Shaofeng Li examine the effects of planning type, working memory, and anxiety on argumentative writing tasks among 108 EFL students. Their findings reveal that extended planning time benefits learners with lower working memory capacity, reducing cognitive load and improving morphosyntactic accuracy. These chapters highlight the importance of tailoring task complexity to learners' cognitive profiles, advocating for differentiated instruction that accommodates varying aptitude and memory capacities.

Section 4 explores conative differences, illuminating their influence on learner engagement and teacher practices in TBLT (Chapters 7 and 8). Yoon Namkung and YouJin Kim, in Chapter 7, review learner motivation and engagement, synthesizing studies to show how intrinsic and extrinsic motivation drive task performance. Their analysis reveals that tasks with personal relevance, like goal-oriented projects, enhance effort and engagement, particularly when aligned with learners' future aspirations. In Chapter 8, Phung Dao, Noriko Iwashita, Mai Xuan Nhat Chi Nguyen, and Jonathan Newton investigate the impact of teachers' and learners' beliefs on TBLT, showing how these beliefs influence instructional practices. Their review of 38 studies finds that teachers' positive beliefs are linked to successful task implementation, while learner skepticism may limit engagement. They stress the need for teacher training to align beliefs with TBLT principles and improve learner participation. These chapters underscore the interplay between motivational drivers and belief systems, offering strategies to enhance task relevance and classroom acceptance.

Section 5 explores sociodemographic differences, focusing on how age and cultural background influence TBLT outcomes (Chapter 9). Rhonda Oliver and Tatiana Bogachenko, examines task-based learning across young learners, adolescents, and adults, revealing that younger learners thrive in interactive tasks like information-gap activities. The authors advocate for age-sensitive task design, emphasizing the need to align tasks with learners' developmental

stages and cultural contexts to maximize engagement and learning.

Section 6, under pedagogical perspectives, turn the focus to teachers, examining their pivotal role in TBLT implementation Chapters 10 and 11. In Chapter 10, Jane Willis provides practical advice for teachers on adjusting tasks to suit learners' individual differences, using real classroom examples. She explains how task choices can improve student engagement and communication effectiveness. Willis highlights the value of "real-life" tasks that connect with learners' interests, mentioning role-plays as an example that helps build confidence in remedial beginners. In Chapter 11, Laura Gurzynski-Weiss, Lara Bryfonski, and Derek Reagan explore teacher IDs, such as experience, training, and beliefs, and their impact on task adaptation. Their cross-site study of teachers adapting a Task Bank reveals how experienced educators adjust tasks to provide additional linguistic support or cultural relevance, tailoring instruction to learners' needs.

The book culminates in section 7 by Rod Ellis, who weaves together the findings from the preceding sections and charts future research trajectories in Chapter 12. Ellis calls for a nuanced understanding of how IDs interact with task features and instructional contexts, advocating for dynamic, context-sensitive approaches to TBLT scholarship and practice. His conclusion not only consolidates the volume's contributions but also inspires continued exploration of this evolving field.

To conclude, *Individual Differences and Task-Based Language Teaching* significantly advances TBLT scholarship by illuminating how learner-internal factors—such as anxiety, aptitude, motivation, and teacher beliefs—shape task performance and second language acquisition. Its eleven empirical and synthetic chapters, organized around affective, cognitive, sociodemographic, and pedagogical dimensions, provide robust evidence for tailoring tasks to diverse learner profiles (Donate & Leow, 2024) and extending planning time for students with lower working memory (An & Li, 2024). However, while the volume sheds light on learner-internal variables, its limited exploration of within-task fluctuations in IDs underscores the need for longitudinal, multi-method studies to

capture dynamic learner responses across task phases. In addition, it falls short in integrating these strands into coherent pedagogical frameworks, such as structured task sequences or adaptive feedback models, to guide differentiated instruction. Nevertheless, this volume is essential for applied linguists and educators, offering a strong foundation for creating inclusive, learner-centered TBLT environments. Future research should focus on tracing real-time interactions between individual differences and task features, including complexity and feedback modality, and on developing practical pedagogical tools that enable teachers to apply these findings effectively in classroom practice

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