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Deciphering Task-Specific Language in TBLT: A Register Analysis Approach to Enhancing Task Design and Assessment

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This study sought to inform the notion of "task" in Task-Based Language Teaching and Task-Based Language Assessment by describing, comparing, and contrasting the specific language used in different task types through a methodology used in Corpus Linguistics. Previous studies of tasks in TBLT have used the Complexity, Accuracy, and Fluency (CAF) framework to analyze tasks. While this framework has been helpful in finding out the relationship between various factors in the performance of a task, it has been criticized for not providing much information on the specific language used during these tasks by Crawford and Zhang (2021), who have proposed using a Register Analysis (Biber et al., 1999) methodology to break down specific linguistic structures and functions associated with a particular task. This paper performed such a study on description, negotiation, and narration tasks in the ACTFL test, as found in the NICT-JLE Corpus. It was found that each task type has specific grammatical structures characteristic of it and that these grammatical structures were directly connected to the communicative goal of the task. For example, description tasks contain more prepositional phrases (e.g., in the box) than narration tasks, since prepositional phrases are needed for the communicative goal of describing scenes and situations. In contrast, negotiation tasks contain more verb phrases with personal pronouns (e.g. I would like, I want to etc). Such linguistic descriptions of tasks can help educators investigate, analyze, and evaluate student performance on tasks and give insights into task design and implementation. Such analysis, for example, could give insight into the type of language needed to complete a task or the kind of language students will likely use in order to complete a task.

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