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FEATURE ARTICLE

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# Selecting and adapting tasks for mixed-level English as a second language classes

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English as a second language teachers often find themselves teaching classes of heterogeneous students who have very divergent English language skills, abilities, and learning needs. One effective approach to address some of the challenges teachers face when teaching heterogeneous, mixed-level classes is task-based language teaching (TBLT). TBLT begins with a needs analysis to determine the types of real-life tasks learners need to accomplish, and then classroom tasks are developed to meet the learners' language use needs. This article provides teachers with information on three task-based language teaching frameworks to guide their selection and design of classroom tasks. The task frameworks illustrate how to select and modify the instructional content, learning process, and products to match students' language proficiency levels and needs. Numerous examples of task modifications and ideas for adapting authentic resources are presented.

## 1 | INTRODUCTION

Unlike the more homogeneous learners in a typical English as a foreign language class, learners in an English as a second language (ESL) class usually present a wider range of backgrounds, experiences, learning and literacy needs, language skill levels, and learning goals. Mixed-level classes of heterogeneous students tend to be the norm in ESL contexts, so teachers face the challenge of balancing and addressing the complex needs of these diverse learners. Unfortunately, many commercially produced instructional materials are of limited use to ESL teachers who teach mixed-level classes, particularly those who teach adult immigrants in needs-based settlement classes where instruction is learner-centered and task-based. Settlement classes are designed to help immigrants successfully adjust to life in their new country. These particular classes are both needs-based and learner-centered because they do not have a rigid, preset curriculum but are instead structured to

  
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address the students' linguistic and broader settlement needs (e.g., their health, well-being, and integration into society). A needs-based settlement class begins with a language needs analysis, and the topics and tasks identified by the newcomers enrolled in the class become the focus of the lessons. The task-based lessons not only teach students how to carry out real world tasks, but also have the students undertake the tasks.

Task-based language teaching is "characterized by activities that engage language learners in meaningful, goal-oriented communication to solve problems, complete projects, and reach decisions" (Pica, 2008, p. 71). This teaching approach is an effective means of addressing some of the challenges instructors face when teaching needs-based mixed-level ESL classes. Needs-based settlement classes require instructors to design their own materials using authentic resources in order to help their students complete genuine communicative tasks that they have expressed a need to accomplish in the real world. The focus on real-world tasks that are "important to students obviates the need for … teachers to contrive artificial lesson content" (Long, 2015, p. 162) and provides a meaningful space to optimize language learning (Van Gorp & Deygers, 2013).

> Real-world tasks are *activities people think of when planning, conducting, or recalling their day. That can mean things like brushing their teeth, preparing breakfast, reading a newspaper, taking a child to school, responding to e-mail messages, making a sales call, attending a lecture or a business meeting, having lunch with a colleague from work, helping a child with homework, coaching a soccer team, and watching a TV program.* *(Long, 2015, p. 6)*

With respect to the language classroom, Skehan (1998, 2014) characterizes tasks as activities in which there is a primary focus on meaning, a goal to be met, a real-world relationship, and success is evaluated in terms of an outcome. Similarly, Samuda and Bygate (2008) define a pedagogical task as "a holistic activity which engages language use in order to achieve some non-linguistic outcome while meeting a linguistic challenge, with the overall aim of promoting language learning, through process or product or both" (p. 69). A broader definition of a classroom task is found in Willis and Willis's (2007) suggestion that "the most effective way to teach a language is by engaging learners in real language use in the classroom … by designing tasks—discussions, problems, games and so on—which require learners to use language for themselves" (p. 1). In the context of language testing, Bachman and Palmer (1996) define a task that can be employed to assess language use as "an activity that involves individuals in using language for the purpose of achieving a particular goal or objective in a particular situation" (p. 44). The overlapping characteristics in these definitions are that tasks are functional activities that engage learners in goal-oriented, meaningful language use.

The purpose of this article is to demonstrate how three task frameworks (Skehan, 1998; Bowler & Parminter, 2002; Lynch, 2009) can be used by ESL teachers to guide their selection and design of classroom language tasks for classes with mixed levels of students. These frameworks offer suggestions for adapting instruction, modifying instructional materials, and providing additional supports to meet learners' needs. Skehan's (1998) theoretical framework illustrates how code (linguistic) complexity, cognitive complexity, and communicative stress can be adjusted to accommodate diverse learner levels and needs. Bowler and Parminter's (2002) bias and tiered tasks represent two ways of adapting reading and listening activities by varying response difficulty and levels of support. And Lynch's (2009) framework offers text- and task-based options for grading/leveling listening tasks for learners of differing proficiency levels. Table 1 provides an overview of the modification components in each of the frameworks.

**TABLE 1** Task adaptations

| Task framework | Modification components |
|---|---|
| Skehan (1998) | *Code (linguistic) complexity* is influenced by the language required to complete the task:<br>• grammatical complexity<br>• vocabulary frequency<br>• redundancy<br>*Cognitive complexity* refers to the thinking skills required to complete the task. It is impacted by the following:<br>• familiarity and predictability of topic, genre, and task<br>• processing load caused by information organization and computation<br>• clarity of information given<br>• information type<br>*Communicative stress* involves the conditions under which the task is to be completed:<br>• time limits and time pressure<br>• speed of presentation<br>• number of participants<br>• length of text<br>• type of response<br>• opportunities to control interaction |
| Bowler & Parminter (2002) | *Bias tasks*<br>• responses of varying difficulty<br>*Tiered tasks*<br>• varying levels of support for learner responses |
| Lynch (2009) | *Grading/levelling the text*<br>• input<br>• support<br>*Grading/levelling the task*<br>• process<br>• output |

Each of the three frameworks contributes unique yet interrelated ideas that capture aspects of the task processing load and/or the task response demands. Skehan's (1998) cognitive framework is the most comprehensive of the three because he identifies the numerous sources of difficulty underlying communicative listening, speaking, reading, and writing tasks, making this the most complex framework. Adjusting the various sources of difficulty in the tasks' content, process, and product/response enables the tasks to be appropriately leveled for learners. Bowler and Parminter's (2002) framework, which was designed to support student success when reading and listening, includes response modifications to simplify reading and listening tasks and ways to support students' responses to "long, complex text" (p. 59). A key contribution of Bowler and Parminter's framework to multilevel lesson planning is the idea that separate lessons using different materials do not need to be created for the different proficiency groups in the class; rather, the addition of supports for the lower proficiency learners allows all the students to work with the same authentic reading or listening texts and tasks. Finally, Lynch's (2009) framework focuses on options for adjusting/grading authentic listening texts and tasks to increase accessibility and learner listening success. Both Lynch's and Bowler and Parminter's frameworks include the notion that by adding supports, tasks can be appropriately leveled for learners. However, because dealing with long,

difficult texts may cause lower proficiency students to become frustrated, Lynch provides some solutions for grading/simplifying texts. Figure 1 summarizes a variety of task adjustments that can be made to reduce both the processing load and response demands for lower proficiency learners. These adjustments, which are based on the three frameworks, are described in the subsequent sections of this article.

Because students in needs-based settlement ESL classes typically express the desire to develop language relevant to healthcare, all of the examples in this article demonstrate how tasks in a module on health can be modified for mixed-level classes using Skehan's (1998), Bowler and Parminter's (2002), and Lynch's (2009) frameworks. Numerous examples of mixed-level tasks that correspond to the components are included to illustrate ways in which tasks may be adapted so they are suitable for learners with varying skill levels and needs. Familiarity with and use of the three task frameworks will assist teachers in planning for task-based instruction and increase their ability to effectively engage all learners in their mixed-level classes in "purposeful and functional language use" (Ellis, 2009, p. 222).

## 2 | TASK FRAMEWORK 1

Skehan (1998) identified three main factors that affect task difficulty: (1) code (linguistic) complexity, which refers to the complexity of the language required to complete the task; (2) cognitive complexity, or the thinking skills required to complete the task, which include cognitive familiarity and cognitive processing factors; and (3) communicative stress, or the conditions under which the task is to be completed. Although task complexity is inherent in the task (Skehan, 2014; Long, 2015), difficulty is impacted by combinations of these factors and "the abilities individual learners

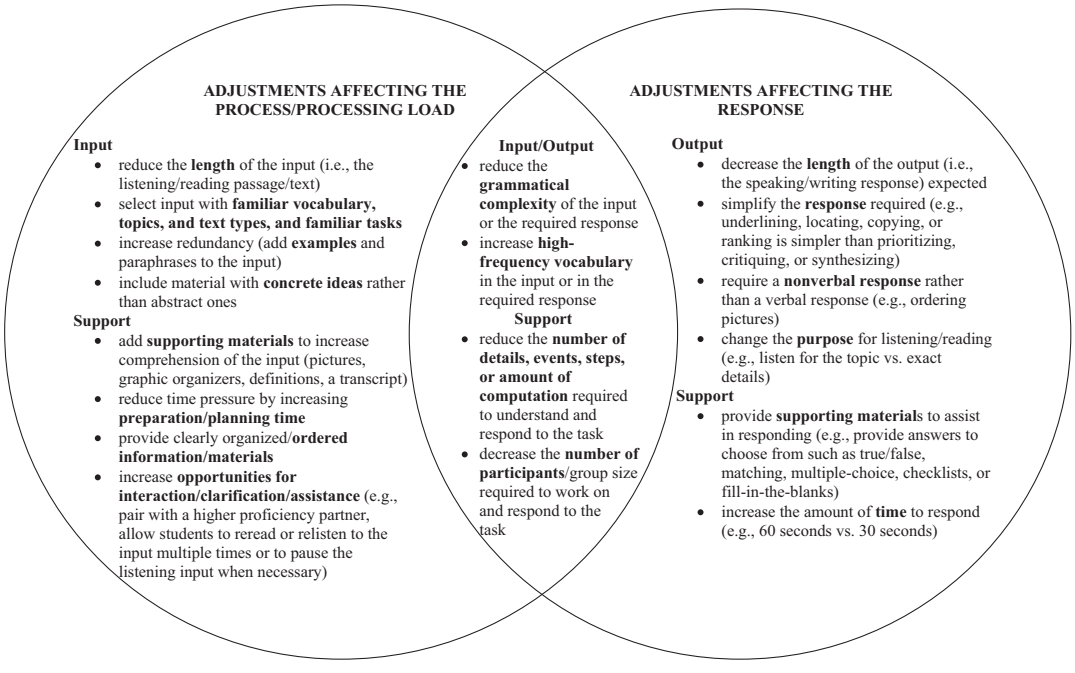


**FIGURE 1** Task adaptations for lower proficiency learners described in this article (based on Skehan [1998], Bowler and Parminter [2002], and Lynch [2009])

bring to the table" (Long, 2015, p. 234). To ensure a pedagogic task is at an appropriate difficulty level for students, teachers can manipulate a task's linguistic complexity, cognitive complexity, and/or communicative stress.

## 2.1 | Linguistic complexity

Linguistic complexity is influenced by factors such as grammar, vocabulary frequency, and redundancy. Tasks may require simple or complex grammatical structures, which will vary in difficulty depending on the learners' language proficiency. The vocabulary that is required to complete the task may vary according to the frequency with which it is used. For example, the word *vocabulary* is used much more frequently than its synonym, *lexis*; an easy way to assess word frequency is simply to paste a text into VocabProfile on the LexTutor website (www.lextutor.ca/). Word frequency "is useful for teachers to be aware of when deciding whether to withhold or provide focus on form of varying degrees of explicitness" (Long, 2015, p. 231). Redundancy can also affect task difficulty, because the use of paraphrase, synonyms, and examples can make texts more comprehensible.

In a mixed-level class, linguistic complexity could be adjusted for lower and higher proficiency students in the following ways. In a task in which learners are required to complete a medical form, lower proficiency learners could fill in a short, simple questionnaire that asks for only basic personal or familiar information, such as name, address, phone number, and health insurance number. The vocabulary frequency for this task could be modified for higher proficiency students by increasing the number of questions on the form and requiring learners to provide more detailed personal information such as whether they have a history of heart disease, allergies, neurological problems, and which medications they currently take. If the task is to read online health information, redundancy could be adjusted by requiring lower proficiency learners to read a short, simple web page (with examples) on preventing heart disease to determine the purpose, main idea, key information, and some details. A more difficult version of this task would be having learners read a more complex, detailed report on minimizing the risks of cardiovascular disease without the redundancy found in the easier text.

## 2.2 | Cognitive complexity

The second factor in Skehan's (1998) framework, cognitive complexity, can be manipulated by adjusting the familiarity and processing load of the tasks. Depending on the learners' backgrounds and experiences, certain topics, genres, and tasks will be more familiar to them than others. As a result, cognitive complexity can be increased or decreased by changing the topic, the predicted language patterns, or the order in which certain elements occur in a conversation or text. Because learners will be better acquainted with certain discourse genres or text types, they will usually find more familiar ones easier to process. For example, learners are likely to be more familiar with prescription labels or recommended dosage labels on over-the-counter medications than with health insurance policies. Learners' degree of familiarity with a task will also affect task difficulty. The more familiar they are with a certain type of task, the easier it becomes. A second contributor to cognitive complexity is the degree of cognitive processing required, which is impacted by information organization, clarity of information given, information type, and amount of computation or number of steps required to complete the task. In the next subsections, I discuss ways to modify instruction to meet diverse learners' needs by

varying cognitive familiarity and cognitive processing factors that impact the cognitive complexity of tasks. Examples of each are provided.

### 2.2.1 | Cognitive familiarity

#### Familiarity of topic

Familiarity of the topic and its predictability typically make a task easier. If the task is to describe health symptoms, lower proficiency learners may be asked to briefly describe some basic symptoms of the flu, which are likely to be somewhat familiar to them. To increase the task difficulty, a less familiar topic that could be given to the higher proficiency learners would be to have them describe stroke symptoms.

#### Familiarity of text type or genre

Text types or genres influence task difficulty depending on the degree of exposure learners have had with them. For example, if the task is to report an injury or illness, higher proficiency learners could be asked to complete a workers' compensation injury report form (e.g., https://my.wcb.ab.ca/rr2/public/worker/create). A different genre or text type that could be used to make this task easier for lower proficiency learners would be to have them report an illness on a simple workplace timesheet, which would likely be more familiar to them than a workers' compensation injury report form.

#### Familiarity of task

Because learners may be more familiar with one type of task than another, teachers can level the task so it is more appropriate for particular groups of learners. For example, if the task is to give health advice to others, lower proficiency learners could simply give oral instructions to a friend on how to avoid frostbite in the winter. A less familiar task for higher proficiency learners would be to use PowerPoint to develop and present a session to their coworkers on occupational injury prevention.

### 2.2.2 | Cognitive processing

#### Information organization

Tasks can be made more challenging or easier depending on how the information is presented and organized. For instance, it is easier to write an accident report or to narrate a picture story when presented with details sequenced according to the time in which they occurred rather than scrambled ones. If lower proficiency learners are asked to narrate a picture story, they could be given a set of pictures that are chronologically sequenced. Teachers could organize the information for this task to make it more difficult for higher level students by requiring them to first unscramble the pictures and then tell the story.

#### Information type

Information type also influences cognitive processing load and, therefore, task difficulty. Concrete ideas are easier for lower proficiency learners to process than abstract ideas, and contextualized information is much easier to process than information that is decontextualized. Learners at a beginner level could read a passage about a famous soccer goal keeper and identify the parts of the player's body that were physically injured in a soccer game. Learners with higher English proficiency could read a report about a famous soccer goal keeper and infer the

effects of mental stress on the player, which would require cognitive processing at a more abstract level.

#### Clarity and sufficiency of given information

Tasks that provide clear, sufficient information reduce the processing load and, therefore, tend to be easier for learners, whereas if information is less explicitly stated and students need to make inferences from the input, tasks will be more difficult. For example, in a reading task requiring students to identify cold or flu symptoms, lower proficiency students could be asked to read a text and to identify a few key words and common expressions that describe symptoms of the common cold. Higher level learners could be asked to read a text outlining both cold and flu symptoms. They could then read a description of one patient's symptoms and decide whether they were caused by a cold or the flu. This would require them to understand key information and specific details in a simple, short text related to everyday situations.

#### Amount of computation or number of steps

Other ways in which teachers can manipulate the cognitive processing load of a task are by varying the amount of computation or the number of steps required to complete the task. In the following example, the amount of computation required affects the difficulty involved in selecting a bottle of painkiller for a particular ailment. Higher level learners may be given three bottles of painkiller. They could then determine which painkiller was most appropriate to treat a strained muscle and then determine the cost per tablet. This requires learners to compare facts and information in order to make suitable choices. To reduce the amount of computation required for lower proficiency students, teachers could reduce the number of bottles provided and have learners focus solely on the cost of the tablets, thus making the task less complex. Another means of increasing cognitive processing would be to differentiate the number of steps in a task: Less proficient learners might be required to give directions to get to a local health clinic from a map with the route already clearly marked, whereas more proficient learners might be required to give directions using an unmarked map. The use of an unmarked map increases the cognitive processing load and, therefore, the complexity of the task because the higher level learners would have to first determine a route and then give directions.

## 2.3 | Communicative stress

Task difficulty is also affected by communicative stress, which refers to the performance conditions under which the task is completed. Performance conditions include the number of participants/group size, time limits and time pressure, speed of presentation, length of text used, type of response, and opportunities to control interaction. A discussion of how these performance conditions can be modified to impact the communicative stress in tasks designed for mixed-level classes follows.

### 2.3.1 | Number of participants

Tasks with fewer participants tend to be easier to accomplish than tasks with many participants. For example, it is usually easier to reach a consensus in a smaller group than in a larger group. If the task is to design a balanced meal for an adult using America's Food Guide, to modify the task the number of participants could be adjusted to make this task easier or more difficult. Lower

proficiency learners could work in pairs to design a balanced meal for either an adult male or a female, and the higher proficiency learners could work in groups of four.

### 2.3.2 | Time limits and time pressure

Time limits can easily be modified to vary the difficulty of the task and, therefore, accommodate different learner skill levels. For example, teachers can modify a task by providing lower proficiency learners with a longer period of time to complete a task. Beginning learners could have 5 minutes to design a balanced meal for an adult male or female, whereas higher level students might have to design a balanced meal for two individuals in the same length of time.

The speed of presentation could also be manipulated to make a task more or less challenging. For example, lower level learners could be given 3 minutes to present their meal for an adult male or female, whereas higher level learners would have the same time in which to present their meals for both an adult male and an adult female. For each presentation, the listeners in the class could be provided with a food group checklist and be asked to determine whether the presenter's meal(s) is balanced. Another example where time pressure is leveled by adjusting the speed of presentation follows: Lower proficiency learners could be asked to leave detailed messages on a health clinic's answering machine in 30 seconds, whereas higher proficiency learners would have only 15 seconds.

### 2.3.3 | Length of text used

Adjusting the length of text is another easy modification for teachers to make. For example, a reading or listening passage can be adjusted for lower proficiency learners by reducing the amount of text that learners are required to process. In a task in which learners read a text to learn about healthy lifestyles, lower level students could read a short, simple summary of an article on a familiar and personally relevant topic, whereas the higher level learners could read a longer, more complex descriptive article.

### 2.3.4 | Type of response

Some tasks require more challenging responses than others. For example, underlining, locating, and copying are simpler responses than prioritizing, critiquing, and judging. The type of response can be easily adjusted for mixed-level classes. In a task where learners interpret information contained in a caloric expenditure table, the lower level learners could rank the physical activities according to the number of calories burned per half hour. The task could be made more difficult for higher level learners by asking them to calculate the approximate number of calories they burn each day.

### 2.3.5 | Opportunities to control interaction

Tasks can be made easier for lower proficiency learners if they have the opportunity to ask for clarification or repetition and to receive assistance from higher proficiency partners. Alternatively, learners can be provided with opportunities to control interaction. For example, when answering a series of questions about a listening passage on healthy living, lower proficiency learners could be allowed to listen to the recording several times. To increase the task difficulty for higher proficiency learners, they could be permitted to hear the recording played only once.

As demonstrated in the examples above, it is quite easy to adjust the difficulty of tasks for learners with varying skill levels and needs by manipulating linguistic complexity, cognitive complexity, and communicative stress.

## 3 | TASK FRAMEWORK 2

A second framework that can be used to adapt reading and listening activities for mixed-level classes is Bowler and Parminter's (2002) strategy of bias and tiered tasks. Because teachers typically do not have time to modify listening and reading texts, Bowler and Parminter suggest that task response demands can be simplified (i.e., bias tasks) or supports can be added (i.e., tiered tasks) to assist the lower proficiency learners in successful task completion without the need to change the text. "Two key communicative teaching principles" (Bowler & Parminter, 2002, p. 59) guide the development of bias and tiered tasks: First, when completing reading or listening tasks, it is often unnecessary for students to understand every word; and second, the addition of task supports increases students' chances of successful task completion. In effect, the added supports increase the accessibility of the texts and tasks, thereby making more complex authentic texts and tasks suitable for use in multilevel classes.

Bias tasks require responses of varying difficulty and tiered tasks provide varying levels of support for learner responses. The examples in this section clarify the main differences between these two task types.

### 3.1 | Bias tasks

A bias task could be structured as follows (see Table 2). Whereas learners with lower proficiency answer questions about a reading passage on America's Food Guide (e.g., what are the five food groups?), learners with higher proficiency formulate questions for the answers provided. The tasks are complementary, so when the groups have finished their tasks, learners can pair up with a partner from the other group (A–B) for peer feedback. This type of feedback tends to be very motivating, particularly for less proficient learners.

**TABLE 2** Bias reading/writing tasks

| Task A. Low proficiency | Task B. High Proficiency |
|---|---|
| Q: What are the five food groups? | Q:_____? |
| A:_____ | A: Fruits, vegetables, grains, protein foods, and dairy |

### 3.2 | Tiered tasks

Examples of two types of tiered tasks are described below. In the first example, all learners are provided with the same reading passage, no matter what their language proficiency level is. All learners are also required to answer the same questions about the passage; however, learners in the different proficiency levels receive varying degrees of support to assist them in answering the questions. For example, the less proficient learners could be asked to match the answers to the questions, the mid-level learners could answer multiple-choice questions, and the high-proficiency

learners could answer open-ended questions. Because the learners all have the same questions, the answers are the same for all three proficiency levels. After the learners in each level have completed the questions, they can be paired up with a partner from a different level to check their answers.

An example tiered task to go with the sample text below would be to provide all of the students (low, mid, and high proficiency) with varying levels of support so they could answer a series of questions based on the passage.

*Sample text (written for this example)*

> Stress is the feeling we have when our brains and bodies react to demands, challenges, or threats (Nordqvist, 2015). Everyone experiences stress now and then. Stress can be good or bad. Good or healthy stress can be beneficial. For example, feeling a bit of stress before you take a test can motivate you to study harder. When people feel overwhelmed by the demands of work, school, family, or other daily responsibilities, they experience unhealthy stress. Stress is unhealthy when it is caused by unpleasant, unpredictable, uncontrollable events. How people cope with stress is often related to their age. Middle-aged people usually have learned to deal with stress better and they tend to experience less stress. Some people believe that if you have a "Type A" personality you will suffer more stress (Scott, 2017). Type A people are very competitive, impatient, and time-conscious. People with a "Type B" personality are more laid back, even-tempered, and accepting of failure. These characteristics make them less vulnerable to stress.

The less proficient learners would be required to match the answers to the following questions:

*Questions*

1. Which age group is less stressed?
2. Describe a Type A personality.
3. Why do Type B personalities have less stress?

*Answers*

**a** They are highly competitive, impatient, and time-conscious.
**b** They are middle-aged.
**c** They are laid back, even-tempered, and accepting of failure.

The mid-proficiency learners would be given three-option multiple-choice answers to assist in answering the same questions.

**1.** Which age group is less stressed?

- **a.** seniors
- **b.** middle-aged
- **c.** youth

**2.** Describe a Type A personality.

- **a.** easygoing
- **b.** uncontrollable
- **c.** competitive

**3.** Why do Type B personalities have less stress?

**a.** They are even-tempered.
**b.** They are competitive.
**c.** They are unpleasant.

The high-proficiency learners would not be provided with any additional support, so they would just be given the open-ended questions to answer:

**1.** Which age group is less stressed?
**2.** Describe a Type A personality.
**3.** Why do Type B personalities have less stress?

Upon completion, students are asked to form cross-proficiency groups to check their answers.

A second type of tiered task is the dual-choice gap-fill task (see Table 3). The more proficient learners are provided with a reading or listening passage in which they are required to fill in a number of blanks. The less proficient learners are given the same passage and are required to choose between two possible answers for each blank. Like the previous tiered task, all learners are working on the same activity; therefore, it is possible for the answers to be corrected as a class.

An understanding of bias and tiered tasks can assist teachers in modifying the difficulty of their classroom tasks and providing a series of supports to better meet the goals and needs of the heterogeneous learners in their mixed-level classes. The use of these tasks can also reduce teacher preparation time because the same authentic reading and listening texts can be selected for use with all learners in the class, mitigating the need to prepare separate lessons for the higher, middle, and lower level groups.

**TABLE 3** Dual choice gap-fill

| Directions | |
|---|---|
| 1. Select a listening or reading passage—for this gap-fill example, a public domain video titled "Budget-Stretching Healthy Meals" was chosen. It is available from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services on its Health.gov (n.d.) website (https://health.gov/dietaryguidelines/2015/workshops/).<br>2. Choose key words to delete.<br>3. Provide the answer and one option for each deleted word.<br>4. Give the missing word list only to the less proficient learners.<br>5. Play the passage and have students fill in the blanks with the correct word.<br>6. Then have learners from cross-proficiency groups pair up to check their answers. | |
| *Example task* | |
| What are the missing words? | Word list for less proficient: |
| To get the most value for our money, we _____ fruits and vegetables in season. | enjoy/buy |
| That way, we're not tempted to buy items on _____ and off our budget. | impulse/credit |
| And instead of buying pricier _____ servings, we buy value packs on sale. | family/single |

## 4 | TASK FRAMEWORK 3

A third framework, by Lynch (2009), provides options for adapting listening texts and tasks for learners at different proficiency levels. Modifications can be made to the text itself or to the task.

Texts can be made easier by adjusting the input or the accompanying material. Tasks can be simplified by adjusting the task process or output. Examples of grading or leveling texts and tasks so they are more suitable for learners of different proficiency levels follow.

The input can be simplified by modifying the listening text (e.g., by adapting the script so that it contains a limited "number of unfamiliar items" [Lynch, 2009, p. 97]) or by selecting easier listening passages. Learners will also be able to understand a listening passage more easily if they are given supporting materials such as an outline or a list of vocabulary to study in advance. The task may be leveled by changing the process or purpose for listening. For example, listening for the main idea would be an easier task than listening for specific details. The output can also be leveled to increase or reduce the response demands. "A non-verbal response such as matching" (Lynch, 2009, p. 97) or completing a checklist would be less difficult for learners than a verbal response, such as writing a summary of the text.

The following example demonstrates how a sample listening passage (created for this article) might be leveled to accommodate learners.

*A Guide to Eating Right*

> According to Health Canada (2011), eating the right amount and type of food will help meet your body's needs for vitamins, minerals, and other nutrients. To promote your overall health and vitality, eat at least one dark green and one orange vegetable each day. This will help you get enough vitamin A and folate. Some dark green vegetables that contain folate include asparagus, broccoli, and romaine lettuce. Orange vegetables such as carrots, pumpkin, and sweet potatoes are important sources of beta-carotene, which the body converts to vitamin A. Orange-coloured fruit like apricots, cantaloupe, and mango are also important sources of vitamin A. One orange fruit can replace one orange vegetable. Eat vegetables and fruit with little or no salt, sugar, or fat. Most fruit and vegetables are low in calories. When they are fried or served with butter or creamy sauces, they become high sources of fat and high in calories. Steam, bake, or stir-fry vegetables instead of deep-frying them. To increase your fibre intake, choose to eat vegetables and fruit rather than drinking juice. By following these healthy eating tips, you will reduce your risk of obesity and getting certain types of diseases such as heart disease and cancer.

There are a number of modifications to this passage that would make listening easier for lower proficiency learners. For example, teachers could record a modified version of the passage, deleting unfamiliar names and references and replacing less familiar with more familiar vocabulary and expressions. Teachers could also reduce the length of the listening passage, or they could use the original text but pause frequently between sentences to check for learner comprehension. After shortening the same healthy eating text by deleting unfamiliar names and references, and substituting less frequent terms with more frequent words, the passage is easier for lower proficiency learners to comprehend:

~~According to Health Canada (2011),~~ Eating the right amount and type of food will help meet your body's needs. ~~for vitamins, minerals, and other nutrients. To promote your overall health and vitality~~ Eat at least one dark green and one orange vegetable each day. This will help you get enough vitamin A and B9~~folate~~. Some dark green vegetables that contain ~~folate~~ B9 include asparagus, broccoli, and romaine lettuce. Orange vegetables ~~and are important sources of beta-carotene, which the body converts to vitamin A~~ fruit are also important sources of vitamin A. ~~One orange fruit can replace one orange vegetable.~~ Eat vegetables and fruit with little or no salt, sugar, or fat. Most fruit and vegetables are low in calories. When they are fried or served with butter or creamy sauces, they become high sources of fat and high in calories. Steam, bake, or stir-fry vegetables instead of deep-frying them. ~~To increase your fibre intake,~~ Choose to eat vegetables and fruit

rather than drinking juice. By following these healthy eating tips, you will reduce your risk of obesity and getting certain types of diseases ~~such as heart disease and cancer~~.

Learners can also be provided with supporting materials to help them better understand a text. Key visuals such as an outline or a graphic organizer (see examples in Jiang & Grabe, 2007) could enhance their understanding. Or they might be given a list of key vocabulary for prelistening discussion. Alternatively, they might receive a full transcript with only a few words missing. For the sample listening passage above, key vocabulary items (e.g., *vitamins, sources, fat, deep-frying, obesity, calories*) might be presented and discussed beforehand to support learners' comprehension of the listening passage. Learners could then insert these terms into blanks in the transcript as they listen to the passage.

To level the listening task process using this same text, teachers might have lower proficiency learners listen for very general understanding. For example, they might be asked a global question such as "What is this passage about?" in response to which they would simply have to state, "This passage is about healthy eating." Meanwhile, the higher level learners might be asked to make judgments or inferences based on information in the text. For example, they could be asked to decide if they are healthy eaters and to justify their responses.

Finally, the listening task can be leveled by modifying the output or responses required as learners listen to a passage. For example, using the same text, lower proficiency learners may be asked to simply check off, in a given list, the types of vegetables that were mentioned. Or they may be required to sequence a list of ideas in the order in which they were stated. Depending on their language proficiency, learners could match words to pictures or to definitions, fill in gaps in the transcript, or answer open-ended comprehension questions.

By grading the input or the task process or output, teachers can design tasks that are particularly suited to the varying language proficiency levels and needs of students in their mixed-level classes.

## 5 | CONCLUSION

Developing familiarity with and using Skehan's (1998), Bowler and Parminter's (2002), and Lynch's (2009) frameworks for adapting tasks can make planning for task-based language teaching more efficient and ESL instruction more effective in mixed-level classes. The practical suggestions outlined in this article can assist ESL teachers in modifying their instruction to better meet the diverse learner needs and skill levels in their classes. Providing learners with appropriately leveled classroom tasks will make instruction more meaningful for the learners and help to support them in achieving their language learning goals.

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