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The Role of TBLT in Promoting Success in Adult L2 Learning

Masashi Otake

Abstract

This literature review investigates the efficacy of Task Based Language Teaching (TBLT) in achieving a high level of proficiency in adult L2 learning. First, the learner variables that trigger successful adult L2 learning are identified and classified into two categories: cognitive and non-cognitive variables. Then, the possible roles that TBLT play on these variables are examined. This paper maintains that even though TBLT cannot directly stimulate people's cognitive variables, it presumably promotes two non-cognitive variables for successful adult L2 learners: explicit learning, and extremely high motivation. In addition, TBLT temporarily surrounds the learners with L2 input, which is similar to the immersion experience that all the successful adult L2 learners have had. These findings suggest that when certain conditions are met, TBLT offers what the successful adult L2 learners have done in the process of achieving their high proficiency. This paper concludes that it is possible for adult learners to achieve a practical, high-level L2 competence through TBLT.

Introduction

With the increasing professional opportunities due to globalization, many second language (L2) learners are aiming for a high level of L2 fluency. Their pragmatic objectives are to be able to negotiate deals, persuade others, and resolve disputes to name a few. The focus of language teaching has been shifting from accuracy to fluency (Brumfit, 1984), and Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), especially the strong form of CLT, Task Based Language Teaching (TBLT), has gained the worldwide attention of researchers and analysts. (Van den Branden, Bygate, & Norris, 2009).

In TBLT, the learners discover new language structures by themselves through the use of the language in 'meaning negotiation'. They exchange knowledge and ideas with others

to solve pedagogical tasks. While engaging in these tasks, the learners' focus shifts from the meanings of words to their language structures in order to make their meaning negotiations more smooth and effective (Ellis, 2003; Long, 2014). The proponents are not only SLA researchers, such as Ellis (2003), Skehan (1998b), and Long (2014), but also teachers and educationalists, such as Prabhu (1987), Willis (1996), and Nunan (1989). These TBLT advocates suggest TBLT nurtures learners' practical high-level of L2 competence for not only everyday basic language use, but also for educational and professional language use, which many current adult learners are aiming for in their L2 learning (Long, 2005).

This literature review, therefore, aims to investigate the relationship between TBLT and the learner variables that successful adult L2 learners possess in order to predict the efficacy of TBLT in achieving a high level of proficiency in adult L2 learning. The research questions are the following: (1) What are the learner variables that trigger successful adult L2 learning? (2) Does TBLT promote the development of these variables? In order to answer these questions, the remainder of the paper will, first, review TBLT and discuss what L2 learning success is. Then, the focus will fall on the cognitive and non-cognitive variables that several empirical studies on successful adult L2 learners have discovered. Finally, the paper will discuss the possibility of TBLT and address whether TBLT promotes adult L2 learning in terms of these variables.

What is TBLT and adult L2 learning success?

Many SLA researchers believe L2 learning happens when learners are richly exposed to the target language and engage in meaningful interaction. TBLT approaches create such an environment and elicit learners' implicit incidental L2 learning. The tasks in TBLT provide opportunities for learners to engage in meaningful communications, and to elaborate their linguistic structures, while its focus-on-form instruction accelerates the development of their grammar ability (Ellis, 2014; Long, 2014). The criteria of TBLT tasks that TBLT proponents all agree with are the following: meaning based, goal oriented, outcome-evaluated, and authentic (Skehan, 1998a). When it comes to "authenticity," it does not need situational authenticity, but at least it needs interactional authenticity. In other words, tasks themselves do not have to mirror what they do in real life, but they have to be able to prepare the learners for the language use in real life (Nunan, 1989; Ellis, 2003; Long, 2014).

TBLT supporters have slightly different conceptions of TBLT pedagogy, especially on pedagogical interventions (Skehan, 1998b; Robinson, 2001; Ellis, 2003; Long, 2014). TBLT

proponents all agree on the importance of learners paying attention to their language forms during meaning negotiations, but how to attract the learners' attention on these language forms differ for several researchers. Ellis (2003) and Long (2014) maintain learners' attention to forms are mainly induced by instructors' weak intervention using focus-on-form instructions. Focus-on-form instructions are just-in-time grammar instructions that immediately shift the learners' attentions to linguistic forms whenever they make errors in meaning negotiations (Ellis, 2014; Long, 2014). On the other hand, Skehan (1998b) claims that learners' attentions to form should be implicitly induced by manipulating task characteristics and conditions. Robinson (2001) possesses a neutral position in which manipulating tasks characteristics and conditions and teachers' interventions with focus-on-form instructions are both essential.

Both Ellis (2003) and Long (2014) believe that teachers' explicit or implicit focus-on-form instructions bring efficiency and accelerate the learners' attainment of the target linguistic forms. Long says, without teachers' interventions, learners might not be able to notice their errors in their interlanguages because some erroneous forms that learners make do not hinder their communications. Ellis focuses on explicit intervention of focus-on-form instruction. He argues that explicit instructions promote learners' learning in two ways. First, explicit instructions, especially negative feedback, allow learners to clearly notice the gaps between their linguistic forms and others' forms, which in turn promotes modification of their output and accelerates their mastering the target language structures. Second, explicit instructions help teachers clearly understand which linguistic forms learners are trying to master and their progress. Long stresses implicit intervention of focus-on-form instruction, especially recasts, where teachers repeat or reformulate learners' linguistic errors in their utterances. Long argues that recasts focus on conveying only necessary information about the target language in context, which promote learners' form-function mapping efficiently and promote learners' noticing correct forms. Recasts also provide motivation and attention to the fact that their messages are at stake and they already understand some portions of the message.

On the other hand, Skehan (1998b) believes manipulating task complexity induces learners' attentions implicitly and brings great progress in the learners' language performance. Skehan's (1998b) trade-off hypothesis argues learners' attentional resources are provided from only one resource pool, and fluency, complexity and accuracy cannot develop at the same time. He argues that without teachers' interventions, learners' attentions on each aspect of linguistic performance can be manipulated by controlling task conditions and characteristics. For example, providing more familiar topics and clearly structured tasks improve learners' accuracy

and fluency, and providing more interactive tasks augments their accuracy and complexity (Skehan & Foster, 1997). In terms of teachers' interventions, Skehan (1998b) believes that teachers' interventions hinder learners' automatization, in which learners' spontaneous noticing of gaps and restructuring their own interlanguages control their L2 acquisition.

Robinson (2001, 2005) stands between these interventionists and noninterventionists. Like Skehan (1998b), Robinson (2001) believes that manipulating task complexity can improve learners' language performance, but his concept of learners' attention deployment on language fluency, complexity and accuracy is different from Skehan's (1998b) understanding. Robinson's (2001) 'Cognition Hypothesis' argues that there are multiple attentional resource pools, and learners' language complexity, accuracy, and fluency never compete as long as attention resources are provided from different pools. According to Robinson (2001, 2005), task complexity is manipulated in two dimensions: resource-dispersing and resource-directing. In the resource-dispersing dimension, task complexity is manipulated by controlling the amount of the attentional resource from each attentional resource pool, and in the resource-directing dimension, task complexity is manipulated by directing learners' attentions to a specific attentional resource pool and controlling the competitions of these attentions. Robinson (2001, 2005) believes that increasing complexity in the resource-directing dimension stimulates learners' attentional and memory resources and leads to noticing gaps between target input and learners' output, which develops their L2s. In addition, Robinson (2001) claims teachers' focus-on-form instructions are essential. It compresses a long period of time that is needed for learners to be exposed to the target language input extensively and to notice the gaps between their input and interlanguages.

As mentioned above, unlike the basic concepts of TBLT tasks, there is no consensus on the pedagogical interventions in TBLT. Further investigation of how L2 learners' automatization of input processing happens will help expose the efficacy of teachers' interventions in TBLT. The following section will define adult L2 learning success.

Adult L2 learning success can be defined in numerous ways because every L2 learner has a different concept of L2 learning success based on his or her future L2 needs. In the difficulty of conceptualizing L2 learning success, the concept of the success this paper adopts is the one commonly used in several empirical studies focusing on their successful adult L2 learning participants: near-nativeness or nativelikeness. (Birdsong, 1992; Ioup, Boustagui, Tigi, & Moselle, 1994; Moyer, 1999; Bongaerts, 1999; DeKeyser, 2000; Abrahamsson, & Hyltenstam, 2008). The nativelikeness described in these studies was measured in two

different dimensions: (1) L2 production features and (2) L2 knowledge.

L2 production features are measured and analyzed by several different methods, such as error analysis, obligatory occasion analysis, frequency analysis, interactional analysis, conversation analysis, and so on (Ellis & Barkhuizen, 2005). In the studies that depicted the adult L2 learners achieving near-native level of proficiency, the qualitative coding of data and the quantitative analysis of learners' complexity, accuracy, and fluency are often adopted. Qualitative data are normally gathered through naturalistic observation, open-ended interviews, introspection/retrospection, field notes, and life-stories. In the analysis of learners' complexity, accuracy, and fluency, accuracy was measured by examining the number of errors, complexity was measured by counting the number of subordination, and fluency is measured by calculating the rate of production and the number and length of pauses and false starts (Ellis & Barkhuizen, 2005).

Explicit and implicit language knowledge that L2 learners possess is also often measured to analyze L2 proficiency. In this measurement, L2 proficiency is believed to be the accumulation of linguistic building components that the learners possess. In Purpura's (2013) conceptualization of language knowledge, grammatical knowledge plays a key role. He argues that form-meaning mappings occur in grammatical knowledge, which allows learners to use L2 at a pragmatic level. According to Purpura, several empirical studies provide the evidence of this process. That is, the learners' knowledge of grammatical form interacted with their knowledge of the semantic meaning, which conveyed literal and pragmatic meanings in the learners' utterances. The Grammaticality Judgment Test (GJT) focuses on learners' grammatical knowledge to measure adult learners' L2 proficiency and has been administered in several studies (Johnson & Newport, 1989; DeKeyser, 2000; Ellis, 2009). GJT examines learners' knowledge of syntax and morphology, and the examinees are asked to distinguish between grammatical and ungrammatical sentences. The following section will introduce the empirical studies that depict the adult L2 learners' near-nativeness or nativelikeness from these two dimensions and examine the learner variables that presumably caused their success.

What variables contribute to adult L2 learning success?

This paper categorizes the learner variables found in the L2 learners who have attained a near-native level of proficiency into two types: cognitive variables and non-cognitive variables, adopting the definitions from Farkas's (2003) study. According to Lee and Shute (2009), Farkas's definitions of cognitive and non-cognitive variables have been adopted in many

studies in economics and sociology, as well as in psychology and education. According to Farkas, cognitive variables are the traits, behaviors, and skills that are measured by objective test scores, and non-cognitive variables are ones that are assessed by more subjective rating systems, such as surveys or observations. According to Hall (2011), there are several different cognitive and non-cognitive variables that allegedly influence L2 development, such as age and aptitude for cognitive variables, and motivation, attitudes, personality, learning styles, and learning strategies for non-cognitive variables. This paper, however, will only focus on the variables that were observed in successful adult learners who have achieved near-native or native-like L2 proficiency. The subsequent sections will describe these cognitive and non-cognitive variables that presumably affected adult L2 learners' success.

According to several researchers (Schneiderman & Desmarais, 1988; Ioup et al., 1994; DeKeyser, 2000; Abrahamsson & Hyltenstam, 2008), some of the successes of adult L2 learning are attributed to a cognitive variable: high language-learning aptitude. Language-learning aptitude is human's innate linguistic information processing ability indicated by the scores of aptitude tests (Doughty, 2014).

Language-learning aptitude was originally theorized by Carroll and Sapon (1959), and it consists of four factors: phonetic detecting, syntax comprehension, memorization, and inductive learning. Carroll's 'Modern Language Aptitude Test' (MLAT) has since played an increasing role in assessing adult language-learning aptitude (Abrahamsson & Hyltenstam, 2008). The updated version of Carroll's model, Hi-LAB (High-Level Language Aptitude Battery) was introduced by Doughty, Campbell, Mislevy, Bunting, Bowles and Koeth (2010). This model takes into account the understanding of the human memory system: working memory and long-term memory. It can predict adult learners' L2 acquisition especially at the advanced level.

DeKeyser (2000) and Abrahamsson and Hyltenstam (2008) both investigated how language-learning aptitude works in L2 learning. DeKeyser tested Bley-Vroman's (1988) Fundamental Difference Hypothesis, which posits that child language acquisition happens implicitly by simply accessing Universal Grammar (UG), whereas adult language acquisition instead needs learners' focuses on the linguistic structures of the L2 inputs. DeKeyser did a replication study of Johnson and Newport (1989) and tried to find the relationship between learners' language-learning aptitude and their L2 proficiency as well as the aptitude differences between adult and child L2 learners. DeKeyser administered a grammaticality judgment test (GJT) and the Hungarian adaptation of the MLAT to 57 Hungarian learners of

English. All the participants had been the residents in the United States at least for 10 years, and their age at arrival was from 1 to 40. As predicted in his hypothesis, DeKeyser found that the 5 out of 6 adult L2 learners who achieved near-native proficiency possessed high aptitude. In addition, he found a significant correlation between the learners' aptitude and their L2 proficiency. Yet, he could not find any correlations between child learners' aptitude and their L2 proficiency. DeKeyser concluded that reaching an exceptionally high level of L2 proficiency after puberty needed activation of language-learning aptitude. Conversely, child L2 learners attain a high level of L2 proficiency only by activating innate implicit language-learning mechanism.

Abrahamsson and Hyltenstam (2008) also investigated the role of language-learning aptitude on attaining L2 proficiency and the relationship between learners' ages and the scores of the test in a different language. In the experiment, GJT and MLAT were administered to 42 near-native Swedish speakers whose L1 is Spanish and assessed the correlation between their L2 proficiency and language-learning aptitude. Their average length of residence in Sweden was 25 years. The result confirmed DeKeyser's (2000) finding. The near-native adult L2 learners had a higher language aptitude score than the near-native child L2 learners. However, unlike DeKeyser's study, Abrahamsson and Hyltenstam found a correlation between child L2 learners GJT scores and their aptitude test scores. Based on the fact that language aptitude was activated during the children's early L2 acquisition, they concluded that language aptitude is essential not only for adult learners, but also for young learners for their L2 learning.

Both DeKeyser (2000) and Abrahamsson and Hyltenstam (2008) found the necessity of high language-learning aptitude for adult learners to attain a high level of L2 proficiency, and the finding of Abrahamsson and Hyltenstam suggests the importance of language-learning aptitude in any L2 learning. Besides language learning aptitude, no other cognitive variables were found in the studies that depict adult learners' high level L2 proficiency. However, DeKeyser (2000) and Abrahamsson and Hyltenstam (2008) instead found several non-cognitive variables that allegedly contributed to the high level of proficiency of adult L2 learners in their studies.

Non-cognitive variables, which are measured not by test scores, but by subjective rating systems, such as surveys or observations, can also play key roles in learners' L2 attainment. The studies on achievement of near-native level or native-like proficiency by adult L2 learners have observed three of these variables in successful learners (Ioup et al. 1994; Moyer, 1999;

Bongaerts, 1999; DeKeyser, 2000; Birdsong, 2007; Abrahamsson & Hyltenstam, 2008). One of them is explicit learning. Explicit learning is an extraneous non-cognitive activity, which according to Ellis (1994), is “a conscious operation where the individual makes and tests hypotheses in a search for structure.” DeKeyser and Hall (2009) maintain that it is indispensable for adult L2 learners, since it compensates for the implicit learning ability that adults have lost after puberty. The explicit grammatical rules these learners receive in their learning provide shortcuts, and it accelerates the speed of their L2 learning. The subsequent sections will describe how explicit learning becomes effective comparing the studies of Ioup et al. (1994) and Schmidt (1983).

Ioup et al. (1994) described two cases of attainment of near-native L2 proficiency in their study. Both learners, Julie and Laura, are English speaking L2 learners of Arabic, who were chosen for this case study because native speakers could not recognize them as non-native. Julie came from Britain to Cairo, Egypt when she was 21 years old, and had since then been living there for 26 years. She had never received any formal language instruction of Arabic, but constantly communicated with her Egyptian husband and two children in Arabic. In the first four months after coming to Cairo, she kept a diary about her Arabic learning and also received continuous explicit feedback from native speakers when she made errors in communication. Laura, who was American, had been living in Morocco for 10 years. She had received many years of formal instruction in Arabic. She started learning Arabic when she was an undergraduate and continued studying it until a Ph.D. Program in the U.S. She moved to Cairo in the middle of the program to pursue the acquisition of spoken Arabic and had been an Arabic teacher since then. She also had been married with an Egyptian man for 10 years. When comparing these two learners, Julie showed higher fluency than Laura, even though both of them had achieved an exceptionally high level of proficiency. Ioup et al. (1994) attributed Julie’s success to her explicit learning, specifically grammar-focused self-teaching with native speakers’ immediate feedback. Compared to Laura, who had kept taking formal language classes to improve her L2 skills, Julie had actively engaged with native speakers in informal settings. She also received error feedback from native speakers whenever she made errors in everyday conversations. This was further enhanced by her self-study, as she kept learning notes on the learned grammatical structures, especially morphological variations.

Schmidt’s (1983) case study of an adult L2 learner also describes the efficacy of explicit learning on adult L2 learners. Schmidt (1983) conducted a three-year longitudinal case study of Wes, a 33-year-old Japanese man who achieved high English communication skills in only

three years without any formal language instructions. Wes had moved to Hawaii because of his profound interest in and great affection for Hawaii and Hawaiian people. The comparison of this study with Ioup et al.'s (1994) case of Julie provides an insight into the role of explicit learning. Like Julie, Wes also constantly interacted with native English speakers and received error feedback from them. However, Wes's language had little accuracy in grammar. Unlike Julie, who always listened to the feedback she received and made tremendous efforts in acquiring unseen linguistic elements of the target language, Wes ignored the feedback he received from native speakers, which resulted in his inability of attaining the L2 accuracy that native speakers could not recognize as nonnative. This comparison shows that explicit learning may become more effective when the learners are actively involved in grammar-focused self-study and try to internalize the feedback they receive from native speakers.

The study of Ioup et al. (1994) and Schmidt (1983) depict two other non-cognitive variables that helped promote the success of the adult L2 learners: immersion experiences and extremely high motivation for acquiring the target languages. In the study of Ioup et al. (1994), Julie immersed herself in an Arabic speaking community for 26 years and her motivation was being able to communicate effectively with her husband, two children and people in the community in Arabic. In the study of Schmidt (1983), Wes lived in Hawaii for three years, and his motivation was also becoming part of the Hawaiian community.

A short or long period of immersion experience of adult L2 learners who attained a near-native level or native like proficiency has been observed in several studies (Ioup et al. 1994; Moyer, 1999; Bongaerts, 1999; DeKeyser, 2000; Birdsong, 2007; Abrahamsson & Hyltenstam, 2008). The immersion experiences that these studies describe are mostly studying abroad and immigration to other countries. The efficacy of immersion experience on adult L2 proficiency development was focused in the study of Lindseth (2010) and Tschirner (2007).

Lindseth (2010) studied the improvement of the oral proficiency of adult German learners during a semester of studying abroad in Germany. The use of two specific advanced level grammar structures by 38 graduate students, who were majoring in German, were assessed by a well-known oral proficiency interview offered by ACTFL (ACTFL OPI). This interview was conducted by the professional ACTFL raters. As a result, 31 students improved their L2 proficiency after the one-month immersion experience including two students who reached an advanced level and seven students who improved their L2 proficiency by at more than one sublevel on the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines for Speaking.

Tschirner (2007) also investigated the efficacy of immersion experience. His study investigated not only the effectiveness of immersion experience on improving learners' oral proficiency, but also how to maximize the immersion experience. Tschirner's (2007) study assessed the oral performance of 15 adult American learners of German before and after the four-week intensive immersion program in Germany. Two different instruments were used to measure the learners' oral proficiency: the Simulated Oral Proficiency Interview (SOPI) for the pretest and the Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI) for the posttest. The learners were also asked to fill in questionnaires to provide their biographical information and the head teacher provided written, detailed comments to each student. The study showed that at the end of the program, 11 of 15 participants improved their oral proficiency by at least one sub-level on the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines for Speaking. Tschirner (2007) also found out the five following components that maximize people's immersion experience: understanding how to develop oral proficiency; intensive speech instructions with many opportunities to interact with different native speakers; homestays that provide large amounts of language input and speaking opportunities, and extremely high motivation. The only drawback of Tschirner's (2007) study was that two different instruments were used to measure oral proficiency: the SOPI for the pretest and the OPI for the posttest. He argued that he administered different tests because of the practical, scheduling and cost reasons. Even though Tschirner (2007) maintained that the scores of these two tests are highly correlated, it is problematic to compare the different test scores to observe the progress during the immersion program because they are not exactly the same measurements.

Even though both Lindseth (2010) and Tschirner (2007) discovered the efficacy of immersion experience on improving learners' oral proficiency, neither of these studies nor other studies delved deeper into what elements in immersion experience stimulate the learners' L2 development. However, Long's (2014) Interaction Hypothesis, and Robinson's (2001, 2005) Cognition Hypothesis corroborate the reasons immersion experiences accelerate adult L2 learning. Long's (2014) interaction hypothesis contends that, in addition to comprehensive input, modifying their interlanguages in meaning negotiation facilitates learners' L2 acquisition. As Tschirner (2007) mentioned, effective immersion experiences provide a lot of meaning negotiation opportunities in the interactions with native speakers. Robinson (2001, 2005) and Robinson and Gilabert (2007) argue that increasing task complexity in the resource-directing and resource-dispersing dimensions provides more opportunities of interactions and meaning negotiations in learners, which promotes their

noticing of new language forms. According to Robinson and Gilabert, learners experience a lot of task complexity in both resource-directing and resource-dispersing dimensions when they are exposed in the L2 environment. Tschirner argues that the ideal immersion experiences provide the learners with such an environment, where they engage in large amounts of speaking and interaction opportunities. As these theories suggest, immersion experiences promote adult L2 development.

The third non-cognitive variable is motivation. According to Skehan (1989), the exact nature of motivation is uncertain, and there is no consensus on the definition of motivation among SLA researchers. Moyer (1999) also mentioned the difficulty of measuring motivation and the scarcity of studies on the relationship between motivation and ultimate L2 attainment. Despite the ambiguity in SLA research on motivation, what is known about it is depicted as the crucial factor for attaining a near native level of or native-like L2 proficiency in many studies (Ioup et al. 1994; Moyer, 1999; Bongaerts, 1999; DeKeyser, 2000; Birdsong, 2007; Abrahamsson & Hyltenstam, 2008). Particularly, the studies of Bongaerts (1999), Birdsong (2007), and Moyer (1999) indicated the importance of motivation on attaining a near-native level of L2 pronunciation by adult learners.

Bongaerts (1999) conducted three experiments in his study: two with Dutch learners of British English and one with Dutch learners of French, aiming to find if adult L2 learners can achieve the L2 pronunciation that is indistinguishable from that of native speakers, and to discover what factors helped the learners achieve such a high-level of attainment. The first study compared the English pronunciation between three groups of participants: 5 native speakers; 10 adult Dutch learners of English whose proficiency levels are highly advanced according to English as a Foreign Language (EFL) experts; and 12 adult Dutch learners of English in different levels of proficiency. All participants were asked to do the following two tasks: (1) to talk about their recent holiday experiences and (2) to read 10 English sentences and 25 words. Then, four linguistically inexperienced native English speakers rated the accents in these speeches and reading samples. The result showed that the judges could not tell the pronunciation differences between the highly advanced L2 learners and the native speakers. The same results were found in the experiments conducted on the supraregional accent of British English and standard French; the judges could not distinguish the sounding differences between the highly advanced L2 learners and the native speakers. In this study, Bongaerts discovered the three common variables in the learners who achieved a near native level of pronunciation skills: receiving a large amount of L2 input from native speakers after

entering university, taking intensive perceptual and pronunciation trainings for acquiring accurate pronunciation of the target language, and exhibiting extremely high motivation in attaining native-like pronunciation. One drawback of Bongaerts's (1999) study is the lack of scrutiny. The participants' pronunciations were not analyzed at the segmental level, which made the accuracy of the result skeptical.

Birdsong (2007) reexamined Bongaerts's (1999) study. He replicated Bongaerts's study and analyzed successful adult L2 learners' pronunciations in both sentence level and segmental level. Twenty-two English speaking adult learners of French, who had experienced immersion in the French speaking countries, were assessed on the durations of their French vowels, voice onset time of their plosives and the sentence level pronunciations of three passages from French literature. He also investigated the relationship between the productions of the two levels. The recorded read-aloud of adult learners of French were compared with the ones of native French speakers who had grown up in France. The result showed 2 of the 22 participants achieved an exceptionally high-level of pronunciation in both segmental and sentence levels, and their pronunciation was indistinguishable from the native French speakers. He also found that the sentence level production predicts the segmental level production but not vice versa. Finally, he found that both of the successful learners who achieved near-native level of pronunciation in segmental and sentence levels had had formal phonetic trainings, had spent more than 20 years in France, and had been highly motivated in acquiring proper French pronunciation.

The studies of Bongaerts (1999) and Birdsong (2007) found the effect of high motivation of adult L2 learners on attaining a near-native level of L2 pronunciation, but they did not directly test the effect of motivation in their studies. Moyer (1999), instead, focused on the correlations between phonological proficiency of adult L2 learners and extrinsic variables: motivations, the starting ages of immersion and receipt of instruction, and the types and the amounts of instruction and feedback. Moyer found the negative correlation between the participants' phonological performance and the starting ages of immersion and receipt of instructions and the positive correlation between the participants' phonological performance and the amount of phonological instructions on stress, rhythm and intonation. While no correlations were found between the participants' phonological performance and other extrinsic variables including their motivations on acquiring the language, Moyer found one of the participants who achieved extremely high scores in all the pronunciation tasks and was rated as native-like by the all the four judges exhibited an exceptionally high motivation in

learning the German language.

Moyer also found there are two other non-cognitive variables that were mentioned earlier behind this participant's L2 success: explicit learning and immersion experience. He not only had an extremely high interest in Germany and the German language, but also self-taught through communication with his German friends, and had joined a one-year exchange program in Germany at the age of 22, which, according to him, brought rapid growth of his German skills. Successful learners' explicit learning and immersion experiences were also discovered in the studies of Bongaerts (1999) and Birdsong (2007). In Bongaerts's study, the successful learners had taken intensive perceptual and pronunciation trainings and had immersion-like experiences, in which they had received a massive L2 input from native speakers on a daily basis.

In the previous sections, the studies that had portrayed the adult L2 learners who attained a high-level of L2 proficiency were reviewed and the cognitive and non-cognitive variables that presumably caused a high-level of L2 competence were examined. The subsequent section will focus on the relationship between these cognitive and non-cognitive variables and TBLT.

Does TBLT enhance the learners' cognitive and non-cognitive variables and promote their L2 learning?

A cognitive variable, language learning aptitude, and non-cognitive variables, explicit learning, immersion experiences and extremely high motivation were identified as the stimulants that have been described in the previous studies as ones that could trigger adult L2 learning success. Whether or not TBLT can promote these learner variables will be discussed further.

The cognitive variable, which was allegedly contributed to adult L2 learners' high proficiency, was language-learning aptitude. Language-learning aptitude is, however, believed to be an innate fixed talent for learning languages in many researchers (Abrahamsson & Hyltenstam, 2008). If it is not developmental or does not fluctuate under external influences, the role of TBLT in successful language learning is uncertain. Since there were only a few studies that focused on the development or fluctuation of language-learning aptitude, it is hard to understand the mechanism of language-learning aptitude. The study of Harley and Hart (1997), which sought the relationship between the language-learning aptitude of 65 11th grade French learning students in immersion programs and the ages of first language exposure, could not find the evidence of the development of language-learning aptitude.

McLaughlin (1990), however, claims that language-learning aptitude is developmental because he believes people's prior successful language-learning experiences unconsciously influence the following new language learning. Doughty (2014) also argues that at least one component of language-learning aptitude, working memory, is developmental and can be trained. If the language-learning aptitude or a part of it is developmental as McLaughlin and Doughty claim, there is a possibility that TBLT can influence its development.

In addition, TBLT also might have a possibility to trigger the activation of language-learning aptitude. Carroll (1964) investigated the contributions of motivation, instruction qualities, time and intelligence on learners' language aptitude in one-week intensive language course and in a yearlong extensive language course. He found that when learners' motivation is low or the quality of instruction is low, their aptitudes were not activated. However, when they consider that the language courses are beneficial or entertaining, the learners were more motivated and their language learning aptitude started to make effects. Carroll's (1964) findings suggest that if TBLT stimulates learners' motivation, TBLT might also be able to stimulate adult L2 learners' language learning aptitude. Further research on aptitude development and activation is needed to discover the role of TBLT on promoting language-learning aptitude. In the subsequent section, the roles of TBLT on non-cognitive variables will be investigated.

Non-cognitive language learner variables discussed in this paper were explicit learning, immersion experience, and extremely high motivation. Firstly, TBLT provides effective explicit learning. In the study of Ioup et al. (1994), Julie received corrective feedback from native speakers whenever she made grammatical errors in everyday conversations. This is what TBLT's focus-on-form approach offers to the learners. As mentioned earlier, in the focus-on-form approach, a just-in-time grammatical instruction is given whenever the learners need it in meaning negotiation (Ellis, 2000; Robinson, 2001; Long, 2014). Focus-on-form instructions help develop the learners' language abilities because the learners become psycholinguistically the most susceptible to new forms when learners' attention is shifted from meanings to linguistic elements due to perceiving problems in comprehension and production (Prabhu, 1987; Long, 2005).

Secondly, when it comes to immersion experiences, there are no studies on the explicit relationship between TBLT and immersion experiences. However, TBLT provides similar learning environments to what actual immersion experiences offer during class periods. According to Révész (2009), TBLT aims to create the environment where the learners engage in implicit and explicit learning, receive rich exposure to the target language, and meaning

based communication. This notion matches with the five components that Tschirner (2007) argued for maximizing people's immersion experience. In addition, Long's (2014) Interaction Hypothesis and Robinson's (2001) Cognition Hypothesis suggest TBLT can create an immersion-like environment. The input and output processing through interactions with peers and instructors in classrooms expose the learners in comprehensive input and promote them meaning negotiation and output modification, which accelerate the learners' L2 acquisition. TBLT learners can also engage in many cognitively demanding tasks in both resource-directing and resource-dispersing dimensions. It provides them with ample opportunities of interactions and meaning negotiations with teachers and other learners in the target language, which allows them to notice new language forms and promotes their L2 complexity development. What TBLT lacks when compared to the actual immersion experiences are the quality and the quantity of input the learners receive. Unlike actual immersion experiences, the quality of the input that TBLT provides is not as high as that of the input that actual immersion experiences offer. TBLT learners receive native level input only from teachers and from the students who grew up abroad unlike being surrounded by real natives in the actual immersion experiences. The amount of the L2 input that TBLT learners can receive is limited, and it is normally only the time in the classroom. On the other hand, in the actual immersion experiences, learners receive the L2 input for a long period of time, sometimes all day long. Even though these differences from actual immersion experiences exist, TBLT still provides immersion-like experiences to its learners, which possibly accelerates their L2 attainment.

Finally, TBLT positively works on learners' motivation. According to Krashen's (1982) Affective Filter Hypothesis, negative affective factors, such as negative emotions, low self-confidence, and anxiety become psychological obstacles and hinder language learners' full absorption of available comprehensible input. However, TBLT adopts needs analysis, which eliminates these negative affective factors during the task design and helps teachers avoid psychological obstacles that hinder the learners' L2 attainment in the classroom. TBLT's needs analysis also takes account of learners' present or future communicative needs or interests (Long, 2014), which stimulates the learners' motivation and interests in the L2 development (Robinson, 2001; Tamponi, 2004). In the following studies, Chen and Brown (2012) have found the efficacy of TBLT on the learners' motivation.

Chen and Brown (2012) investigated whether or not task-based computer-mediated communication (CMC) approach facilitates adult English learners' motivation toward ESL writing. Six adult learners (18 to 33 years old) who study in the ESL program at a university

were assigned a task: to create informative websites using CMC tools. Their perceptions of their progress in English writing and the motivation for improving it were analyzed. The data was derived from the participants' interviews, observation notes and finished websites. The study found that the CMC supported TBLT facilitated the learners' motivation. The learners mentioned that relaying the knowledge they had in writing articles on the website made them feel like being actual professional web journalists. Since they had to open their websites to the public, they not only perceived the task as an authentic, purposeful, and meaningful activity, but also made tremendous efforts to improve the quality of their writing in order not to "lose face". In addition, many learners often visited the websites that the other students made, even though it was not the requirement of the task. Chen and Brown (2012) mentioned that this fact indicates how much many of the learners were intrinsically motivated in this task. They concluded that the task removed the learners' anxiety and generated their high motivation. The result of this study clearly demonstrates the efficacy of TBLT on motivation. It reduced the learners' anxiety and increased their motivation. However, there are limitations in this study. First, the sample size was small, which compromised the validity. The number of the participants was six, which was too small to generalize the findings to a bigger group of people. Second, the tasks were mediated through the computer, and there was a possibility that the learners were simply interested in computer-based activities, compromising the construct validity. In spite of these limitations, this study still deserves attention, as few studies have focused on the relationship between TBLT and L2 learners' motivation.

Conclusion

The aim of this paper was to investigate the roles of TBLT approach in promoting success in adult L2 learners. For the first research question, multiple cognitive and non-cognitive variables that promoted success were indicated in the reviewed studies. When it comes to cognitive variables, language-learning aptitude allegedly played a role in promoting a high level of adult L2 proficiency. As for non-cognitive variables, three different variables were identified as the stimulants for successful adult L2 learning: explicit learning, immersion experiences, and extremely high motivation. Then, for the second question, the possible role of TBLT on each variable was discussed. For the cognitive variables, even though TBLT cannot directly stimulate people's language-learning aptitude, it may be able to activate the aptitude by stimulating the learners' motivation for learning L2 (Carroll, 1964). On the other hand, TBLT presumably promotes two of the three non-cognitive variables of the successful adult

L2 learners: explicit learning, and extremely high motivation. When it comes to immersion experiences, TBLT also offers immersion-like experiences in which the learners only receive low quality L2 input. These findings suggest that over all, TBLT offers what the adult L2 learners who have achieved a near-native level of proficiency have experienced in their life. Provided that the tasks are always given in the areas of learners' needs and interests, effective feedback is provided instantly from instructors, and the target languages are meaningfully and constantly used by both instructors and learners in the process of accomplishing these tasks, it is possible for adult learners to achieve practical high-level of L2 competence through TBLT.

In addition, the studies reviewed above proved that explicit learning, immersion experience, and extremely high motivation were often observed together in the successful L2 learners who achieved a high level of proficiency (Ioup et al. 1994; Moyer, 1999; DeKeyser, 2000; Birdsong, 2007; Abrahamsson & Hyltenstam, 2008). This finding implies explicit learning, immersion experiences, and extremely high motivation might interact with each other to stimulate adult L2 learners and promote their L2 to a high level. In future studies, whether or not these three non-cognitive variables interact with each other and how TBLT promotes this interaction need to be investigated.

As Ellis (2003) and Gonzalez-Lloret and Nielson (2015) mentioned, the studies on the evaluation and the efficacy of TBLT program are scarce and the existing studies on the evaluations of TBLT programs are mostly qualitative and only focus on the experience and perception of the learners on the gained language skills (McDonough & Chaikitmongkol, 2007; Towell & Tomlinson, 1999). The efficacy of TBLT on promoting success in adult L2 learning also should be further discussed in future research.

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