

Use of Task-Based Language Teaching in Contemporary English Teaching Materials for Early Language Teaching in Finnish Schools

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April 2025

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Number of pages: 26 pages

This thesis studies the use of Task-Based Language Teaching in contemporary English teaching materials for early language teaching in Finnish schools. Early language teaching is a recent phenomenon in the Finnish language education system, which is why little research exists on the English learning materials that have been published after the introduction of The Curriculum Basis for Grades 1-2 A1 Language of 2019 by the Finnish National Agency of Education. Moreover, little analyses exist on the contemporary English teaching materials from the perspective of Task-Based Language Teaching in the Finnish language education. The purpose of this thesis is to determine whether the use Task-Based Language Teaching in English teaching materials meets the criteria set in the current curriculum for language teaching and provide data that could be used in the future development of English Teaching Materials. I have selected two different English teaching materials for early language teaching. The materials will be analysed according to Littlejohn's Task Analysis Model (2011), which describes tasks appearing in learning materials. Based on the findings of the analysis, Task-Based Language Teaching seems to meet the criteria of the current curriculum for language teaching, and it could be used in future development of English teaching materials. However, it is crucial to focus on developing teacher's materials, due to the teacher's significant role in language teaching. Future research could be conducted on a larger scale to cover more materials and tasks and possibly compare them to older materials.

Key words: Task-Based Language Teaching, Early Language Teaching, Finnish education system, study material analysis, task analysis

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1 Introduction

The introduction of The Curriculum Basis for Grades 1-2 A1 Language of 2019 (henceforth: VOPS 2019) was a significant change in the Finnish education system in terms of foreign language teaching. The change meant that students as young as first graders would begin their studies of English Foreign Language as part of the Early Language Teaching thing. Naturally, publishers strive to meet the requirements set by the Finnish National Agency of Education with new English teaching materials, aiming for engaging, communicative and fun exercises. In this paper, I analyse exercises in recently published English learning materials for Finnish elementary-level first grader from the viewpoint of TBLT. Through the analysis, I aim to gather data about the contemporary materials and determine, whether TBLT is an ideal way to meet the criteria set by the Finnish National Agency of Education. Additionally, the data may be used in development of future English learning materials for early language teaching. This study is relevant because little research exists on the usage of TBLT in Finnish EFL teaching materials and the introduction of early language teaching is a relatively recent phenomenon.

The paper consists of six sections. The background section (2) introduces relevant terms, sources and studies that function as the base for this paper such as TBLT, VOPS 2019 and studies regarding TBLT by Butler et al (2017) and a task analysis by Littlejohn (2011). Methods section (3) explains the methods used in the analysis, that is, how Littlejohn's analysis is employed in the analysed materials. In the analysis section (4), I study tasks in two English teaching materials, *Skylight 1* and *Get Ready! 1*, determining their characteristics such as the doers of the tasks and the nature of the input and output therein. The discussion part (5) explores the analysed tasks more thoroughly, that is, the number and distribution of the tasks, their cognitive properties and entertainment value. This part also discusses how the materials meet the criteria of Finnish National Agency of Education and suggestions by Butler et al. Lastly, the conclusion part (6) of the paper summarises the main points the paper.

2 Background

Early language teaching is a relatively new phenomenon in the Finnish education system. By spring 2020, all elementary level first grade students had begun their A1 language studies (Finnish National Agency of Education 2019). Even though study material analyses have been conducted in the past, hardly any analyses on English teaching materials exist that have been conducted post VOPS 2019. Moreover, the number of analyses on the usage of Task-Based Language Teaching in the contemporary English teaching materials in the Finnish education system is virtually non-existent. Considering these matters, the relevance of this paper is significant.

Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) is a well-researched topic in SLA studies, since it is strongly related to Communicative Language Teaching, also known as CLT (R. Ellis: 2003). CLT aims to develop L2 functional competence through communicative events that learners participate in (Savignon 1990: 210). Due to the meaningful, less structured and more creative nature of CLT, the typical CLT tasks include activities such as games, problem solving and role play (Dörnyei 2009: 276). Many theoreticians have later replaced CLT with TBLT, one reason being that more accurate term to describe the heavily task-oriented nature of the SLA school of thought (Samuda and Bygate 2008). Numerous definitions for a "task" exist, but I will utilise three definitions and apply them in the identification. The first definition is provided by Richards and Rodgers (2014, 174) defines task as an activity or objective that uses language, e.g. giving directions or presenting an idea in English. The second way to classify something as a task is to consider something opposite to a task. In other words, a task is something that is not a mechanical exercise, rote learning or PPP (presentation, practice, production) (Bland 2015: 108), but something that uses language in a more engaging or meaningful way such as games, role play or planning. Thirdly, tasks are something that focus on meaning rather than form (Ellis 2003: 9-10). It is crucial to acknowledge the subjectivity of terms such as "more engaging" or "meaningful", since every language learner is an individual with their own preferred learning methods.

TBLT challenges the idea of more "conventional" teaching methods such as mechanical exercises and rote learning (Bland 2015: 108) that include methods such as drilling and memorisation. TBLT has an advantage over the conventional teaching methods, because TBLT is more likely to enthuse learners to engage with the materials, which in turn results in

more efficient language development (Bland 2015: 108). In the context of early language teaching, tasks for children should meet certain criteria to enable successful language development. These include an appropriate level of challenge, support for active, playful and creative learner participation, encouragement to take risks and integrate different language skills (Legutke, Müller-Hartmann and Schocker-von Ditzfurth 2009: 38–43). These criteria will be considered in the discussion of the results of the analysis.

Some engaging exercises may involve moving, which may make tasks more engaging and help students focus. Total Physical Response (TPR) activities possess numerous features that benefit young language learners such as lowering the affective filter (see Krashen & Terrell's affective filter hypothesis 1983) and building self-esteem and confidence (Xie 2021: 296). Additionally, TPR may facilitate vocabulary learning by connecting a word to an action, which may help deduce the meaning of the language (Xie 2021: 296). Movement may also help learners, who are struggling with sitting still for extended periods of time.

Thus, implementation of tasks in the English teaching materials is a great way to fill the criteria of the current curriculum for early language teaching. The criteria of VOPS 2019, include a great emphasis on speaking skills and social interaction skills (Inha & Huhta 2019: 80). Additionally, the studying methods and the learning environment aim to endorse activities such as engaging and versatile interactions with other learners (Inha & Huhta 2019: 80) as well as encouraging learner's curiosity, desire to experiment, playfulness and imagination, encouraging learners to employ their language skills regardless of their skill level (VOPS 2019: 29).

The Curriculum Basis for Grades 1-2 A1 Language of 2019 (VOPS in Finnish) is essentially adding to and refining the original curriculum of 2014. VOPS includes several changes, but I will focus on two items in my thesis: emphasis on playful and interactive learning (VOPS 2019: 10-11, 15-16) and practical language skills and interaction (VOPS 2019: 8-9, 12-13). The reason I have chosen these key changes is because they fit the nature of TBLT, which focuses on engaging and interactive areas of language teaching.

Tasks in teaching materials have been researched in the past. Butler et al. (2017) explores activities in government-approved textbooks, to offer ideas for designing tasks and curriculum development in Asia. Butler et al. made two findings. First, they discovered that only a small

part of the activities included tasks. Second, they found that the tasks were adjusted for different grade levels by changing the language features, but not by increasing the difficulty of thinking required from students, which may lead to fewer opportunities of meaningful language to develop language skills (Butler et al. 2018: 288).

Littlejohn (2011) discusses how to analyse tasks in teaching materials. Task analysis can be used to develop English learning materials in future. I will employ Littlejohn's model to classify the tasks and their features and to analyse them more thoroughly according to the aims of VOPS 2019 and the suggestions by Butler et al. The model is explained in more detail in the following section.

3 Materials and Methods

The materials employed in the analysis is *Skylight 1* (Otava 2024) and *Get Ready! 1* (Edukustannus 2025). *Skylight 1* (henceforth: SL1) resembles significantly other conventional study materials, i.e. exercise books. The material has been divided into six parts, which include an introduction, three units that are further divided into three chapters with a particular theme. Moreover, the material includes additional exercises, and a unit dedicated to annual festivities. I will focus on the chapter five of the unit two, I have a T-shirt, which is about clothes. I will provide the instructions in English with each analysed task. The second analysed material in this paper is *Get Ready! 1* (henceforth: GR1). This language teaching material is significantly different from *Skylight 1* in sense that the material includes few “conventional” exercises. Instead, most of the exercises resemble games and the exercises do not proceed in a linear order. Unlike with the previous learning study material analysis, I will analyse teacher’s material instead of student’s material. This is because the student material has little exercises to analyse, which would be insufficient to provide versatile data. Moreover, *Get Ready! 1* seems to be more reliant on the teacher than *Skylight 1*, that is, most of the tasks are led by the teacher. Regardless, the analysis should function similarly to the previous analysis by examining the tasks in the teacher’s material. I will analyse the tasks in “activity suggestions” section (“toimintavinkit”, as in the original language) of lesson one, since those activities have significantly more task-based features than other exercises in the material.

Because of space limitations, I will focus on a single chapter from each book. Littlejohn’s task analysis model consists of the following questions (2011: 189):

1. What is the learner expected to do?
 - Turn-take
 - Focus
 - Mental operation
2. Who with?
3. With what content?
 - Input to learners: form, source, nature

- Output from learners: form, source, nature

The first question is employed to analyse turn-taking determines the role of learners in the classroom discourse. For example, are learners expected to provide answers that are either scripted or unscripted, e.g. drills or free writing, or are they expected to not take an interactive role, e.g. listen to the explanations by the teacher (Littlejohn 2011: 190). Focus determines what learners are expected to focus on in a task: language meaning, form or both (Littlejohn 2011: 190). Mental operation denotes what mental actions a task demands from learners, such as less demanding actions like deducing language meaning or more demanding processes such as hypothesising (Littlejohn 2011: 190). Additionally, I will also observe other possible requirements in the task, e.g. movement, planning or creativity. The purpose of the question (2) is to analyse participation in the tasks, that is, to ascertain whether the learners are to work individually, in pairs or larger groups (Littlejohn 2011: 190). Lastly, question (3) provides information about the input received and the output produced by the learners. In other words, the question determines whether the used language is written or spoken and how extensive it is, e.g., individual words or complete sentences. Moreover, the question reveals whether the source of input and output is produced with the aid of the material or by learners themselves (Littlejohn 2011: 190). Lastly, the question explains the nature of the task, e.g., grammar explanations or personal information (Littlejohn 2011: 190). Besides these points, I will also describe other qualities of the tasks, i.e., is the task a game or a role-play. However, to conduct the analysis on a small scale of a BA thesis, some compromises in framing must be made. Nevertheless, the task identification will be accurate enough to identify more engaging exercises that at least resemble tasks. Now that I have explained how the analysis will be conducted, I will move on to the actual analysis part of the paper.

4 Analysis

In this section, I will analyse two materials in their separate subsections. First, I will include a brief description of the material. Second, I have attached screenshots of the Littlejohn's Task Analysis sheet to provide data about the characteristics of the tasks. Lastly, I will analyse some of the tasks in more detail. I have also included a table that provides data about the number of the tasks appearing in three chapters of the material.

4.1 Skylight 1

Using Littlejohn's (2011) model, I have formatted a table that thoroughly describes each exercise classified as a task in the chapter. The table consists of three sections. Section (I.) describes what learners are expected to do covering things such as turn-taking, focusing meaning or form and mental operation. Section (II.) covers who learners are working with. Lastly, section (III.) describes the contents and nature of the tasks such as the input to learners and the output produced by them. The table includes nine tasks. Additionally, I have included another table that provides data on the number of the tasks on three different chapters of the material.

1	Task Analysis Sheet SL1											
2	Task Number		T1	T2	T3	T4	T5	T6	T7	T8	T9	
3	I. What is the learner expected to do?											
4	A. Turn-take											
5	Initiate							X	X	X	X	
6	Scripted Response			X					X	X		
7	Not required		X		X	X	X					
8	B. Focus on											
9	Language system (rule/form)											
10	Meaning		X	X	X	X	X					
11	Both system and meaning							X	X	X	X	
12												
13	C. Mental operation											
14	Decode semantic meaning			X		X	X					
15	Select information											
16	Hypothesize											
17	Retrieve from long term memory		X	X	X							
18	Repeat			X	X	X	X		X	X	X	
19	Apply general knowledge											
20	Research											
21	Express own ideas/information							X	X	X	X	
22												
23	II. Who with?											
24	Learners individually simultaneously		X		X	X	X					
25	Learner to whole class											
26	Learners in pairs/groups			X				X	X	X	X	

SL1 Littlejohn's (2011) Task Analysis Table 1

28	iii. With what content?										
29	A. Input to learners										
30	a) Form										
31	Extended discourse: written										
32	Extended discourse: aural										
33	Words, phrases, sentences: written										
34	Words, phrases, sentences: aural			X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
35	Graphic		X	X	X	X					
36	b) Source										
37	Materials		X	X	X	X		X	X		
38	Learners			X				X	X	X	X
39	Outside lesson								X		X
40	c) Nature										
41	Fiction							X			X
42	Non-fiction		X	X	X	X			X	X	X
43	Song						X				
44											
45	B. Expected output from learners										
46	a) Form					N/A					
47	Words, phrases, sentences: oral		X	X			X	X	X	X	X
48	Words, phrases, sentences: written										X
49	b) Source										
50	Materials			X			X		X	X	
51	Learners		X	X				X	X	X	X
52	c) Nature										
53	Fiction							X			X
54	Non-fiction		X	X		X			X	X	X
55	Song						X				

SL1 Littlejohn's (2011) Task Analysis Table 2

SL1 Exercises	Chapter 4	Chapter 5	Chapter 6	In Total
Total Exercises	18	21	19	58
Tasks	7	10	7	24
Task %	39%	47.61%	36.84%	41.37%

SL1 Number of Tasks

In brief, the table shows that some tasks involved initiating while some required none. The tasks primarily focused on the meaning of the language. Tasks involved various types of mental operation, but repeating and expressing own ideas was involved in most of the tasks. Tasks were completed either individually or in pairs or groups. Input in tasks was mostly aural and non-fiction in nature and the source was in the materials. Non-fiction oral output was produced either using the material or by the learners themselves. Next, I will analyse some of the tasks in more detail.

4.1.1 SL1 Task 1

Exercise five (5) is a game in which learners are to roll the dice and say the number indicated by the pip as well as the corresponding piece of clothing. After the utterance, one button is coloured. The goal is to be the first player to have one row of four buttons coloured. The learners are to produce scripted answers to each other, i.e. numbers from one to six and six different pieces of clothing. The focus is on the meaning of the language since they only focus

on what the numbers and pictures signify. The mental operation in the exercise is repetition of the new vocabulary and revision of the numbers. The non-fictional input to the learners is the pictures in the material, as well as the input by other learners taking part in the game. Output provided by the learners is speech in the form of single words. This task allows the learners to practise new vocabulary and revise numbers in the form of speech with other students, which also develops pronunciation and listening skills. Additionally, the students learn social interaction skills.

4.1.2 SL1 Task 2

Exercise eleven (11) is a singing game about the theme vocabulary involving "Total Physical Response". The singing game is an adaptation of another singing game known as "Head, Shoulders, Knees and Toes". Similarly to the previous tasks, this task does not require an interactive role by the learners. Instead, they listen to the audio and sing along with it. The focus is on the meaning of the language, since the input is in the form of audio which is why learners can only deduce the meaning with the help of the song and the Total Physical Response. Mental process in the task is deducing meaning of the words with the help of Total Physical Response as well as repetition. As with the earlier Total Physical Response task, this task is similar in the sense that each student acts individually, but the task is completed with the whole class. However, the task could be modified so that the learners may play together during the song. The input for the learners is the song played in the exercise. The output by the learners is speech in the form of singing and playing according to the song. This exercise allows the students to practise vocabulary and pronunciation in the form of listening, singing and playing.

4.1.3 SL1 Task 3

Exercise thirteen (13) is a role-playing task in which the learners get to describe their character to their partner. The learners are to colour one button after describing their character. Alternatively, the learners may colour two buttons if they used colours in their character description, which may encourage them to use their language skills to the best of their ability. Turn-taking in the exercise is initiating, in other words, they provide unscripted answers to their partner. Focus is on both the meaning and the form of the language, since they must apply their language knowledge extensively, i.e. understand meaning of the words and how to produce correct language. Thus, the learners focus on meaning, e.g. words they

use, and form, e.g. word order. Mental operation in the task is broader than in the previous tasks, since this task challenges the learners to apply their language knowledge along with the recently learnt items while using ideas of their own. This task differs from the previous tasks in the areas of input and output. Input is provided by the learners themselves, since they use their own language knowledge in the exercise and listen to speech of other students.

Moreover, the input is fictional in nature. However, some of the input may also be provided by the materials and the teacher if, for example, the learners need help in the task. Output by the learners is supposed to be unscripted answers in the form of speech. This task allows a more extensive and creative opportunity for communicative language use due to the freedom it allows for the learners, developing areas such as communication, grammar, pronunciation and listening.

4.1.4 SL1 Task 4

Exercise fourteen (14) is a communication exercise about describing one's clothing to the partner. In this task, the learners take an interactive role, producing either scripted, (the exercise prompts the "I have a/an X" structure") or unscripted speech. Focus is both on the meaning and the form, since they must know what the clothes and colours are in English but simultaneously must pay attention to the form of the speech. However, mental operations are less broad than in the previous exercise, since this exercise is closer to repetition than exercise thirteen. Nevertheless, this task allows for less directed language use, since the learner may produce language using their own information that may be learnt outside school. Input is provided both by the materials and the learners. The output by the learners is in the form of either scripted or unscripted speech. Nature of the task is giving personal information, and the task develops language skills such as listening, speaking and grammar.

4.1.5 SL1 Task 5

Exercise eighteen (18) is a game played in pairs or groups. The learners are to choose a tile and say the clothing in English out loud. They may alternatively choose a speech bubble and form a sentence, e.g. "I have a/an X". After each utterance, players colour one tile and the winner will be the one with the most coloured tiles at the end of the task. The performance in the task is determined by language competence only, which is different from the previous game

tasks. The learners take an interactive role, providing either scripted or unscripted answers. Focus is again both on the meaning and form, similarly to the previous exercise. Furthermore, the mental operation is very similar to the previous exercise, being mostly repetition, while still allowing for usage of own knowledge. Input is provided both by the material and the learners. Output is in the form of speech and its nature is applying the use of learnt items and structures, developing vocabulary, listening, speech and grammar.

4.1.6 SL1 Task 6

Exercise twenty (20) is a drawing exercise, which involves designing a personal school uniform and presenting it in English to a partner or a group. This task involves taking an interactive role and providing unscripted answers to other learners. The focus is both on the meaning and form of the language, similarly to the previous three tasks. Mental operations are broader, since this task demands planning and designing and allows for autonomy, involving some repetition. The source of the input are the learners themselves. The linguistic output produced is unscripted speech as well as drawing and possibly some words if decided by the learner. The task requires creative thinking, which develops speaking skills. The nature of the input and output are both non-fictional and fictional, since the creativity of the learners may produce both fictional and non-fictional output. Additionally, this task enhances non-linguistic skills such as designing and presenting.

4.2 Get Ready! 1

I have provided a table that is identical to the one I used in *Skylight 1* analysis, but with fewer tasks. The table includes four tasks. Additionally, there is a table that provides data regarding number of the tasks in two chapters and their "Activity Suggestions" sections.

1	Task Analysis Sheet GR1				
2	Task Number	T1	T2	T3	T4
3	I. What is the learner expected to do? -----				
4	A. Turn-take				
5	Initiate				
6	Scripted Response		X		
7	Not required	X		X	X
8	B. Focus on -----				
9	Language system (rule/form)				
10	Meaning	X	X	X	X
11	Both system and meaning				
12					
13	C. Mental operation -----				
14	Decode semantic meaning		X		X
15	Select information				
16	Hypothesize				
17	Retrieve from long term memory	X	X	X	
18	Repeat		X	X	X
19	Apply general knowledge				
20	Research				
21	Express own ideas/information				
22					
23	II. Who with?				
24	Learners individually simultaneously	X		X	X
25	Learner to whole class				
26	Learners in pairs/groups		X		

GR1 Littlejohn's (2011) Task Analysis Table 1

28	III. With what content? -----				
29	A. Input to learners				
30	a) Form				
31	Extended discourse: written				
32	Extended discourse: aural				
33	Words, phrases, sentences: written				
34	Words, phrases, sentences: aural		X	X	X
35	Graphic	X	X	X	X
36	b) Source				
37	Materials	X	X	X	X
38	Learners		X		
39	Outside lesson				
40	c) Nature				
41	Fiction				
42	Non-fiction	X	X	X	X
43	Song				
44					
45	B. Expected output from learners				
46	a) Form			N/A	
47	Words, phrases, sentences: oral	X	X		X
48	Words, phrases, sentences: written				
49	b) Source				
50	Materials		X		X
51	Learners	X	X		
52	c) Nature				
53	Fiction				
54	Non-fiction	X	X		X
55	Song				

GR1 Littlejohn's (2011) Task Analysis Table 2

1	GR1 exercises	Clothes	Summer & Hobbies	Clothes - Activity Suggestions	Summer & Hobbies - Activity Suggestions	In Total
2	Total exercises	17	21	6	8	52
3	Tasks	4	16	4	6	24
4	Task %	23.50%	76%	67%	75%	46%

GR1 Number of Tasks

To sum up the table, most of the tasks required no turn-taking and the focus was on the meaning of the language. Mental operations required were mostly retrieving from long term memory and repeating. Most of the tasks were completed individually with other learners. The form of input was aural and graphic, and the source was mostly the materials. Input was non-fictional in nature. Output was oral and non-fictional in nature, and its source was either the materials or learners themselves. Next, I will analyse the tasks in more detail. The tasks are from the “activity suggestions” section of the chapter, since those exercises have significantly more task-based features than other exercises in the material.

4.2.1 GR1 Task 1

In this task, teacher thinks of one student. Learners are to determine the student in question by asking the teacher what the student wears, e.g. “Red socks?”. Should the inquiry be correct, all students that do not wear the specific piece of clothing sit down, i.e. this task resembles a “Guess Who?” game. Turn-taking in this task can be both initiative and providing scripted answers to the teacher, since the learner can freely choose the piece of clothing they wish to enquire about. Thus, the output by the learners may not be visible on the board, for instance. The focus is on the meaning of the language and the mental operations required are selecting information, repetition and retrieving from long term memory: observing and using the language based on the environment, repeating learnt vocabulary and revising colours from previous lessons. This task is intended to be completed with the whole class collectively. The input to learners may be in the written or graphic form, which effectively means that the clothing words may be shown on the board in the written form, as pictures or both. Also, the input the learners receive is the teacher’s answers, even if it is just a “yes” or a “no”. The source of the input can be received from the materials or the learners themselves and the nature of the input is non-fictional. The expected output from the learners is orally produced words or phrases, its source can be either from the materials or learners and the nature of the output is non-fictional. This task targets language speaking skills and develops listening skills as the learners listen to each other’s and teacher’s output. Since there is also the movement element, i.e. sitting down, it may facilitate learning by allowing students to combine an action to the utterance.

4.2.2 GR1 Task 2

This task is a game of tag with a language learning element. Players caught by the tag are to crouch and wait to be rescued. A free player can save the crouching player by engaging in a scripted discourse. This task requires students to give scripted responses to each other. The focus can be on both the meaning and form of the language, since the learners must utter the agreed scripted output correctly, but they may also need to know what the pieces of clothing are in English. The mental operation required is mostly repetition. Non-fictional input is received from other students in the oral form. Output produced by the students is like the input. Both input and output are short, scripted sentences and phrases. This task develops speaking and listening skills. However, the intensity of the game may compromise focus on learning, since the students may be excited to continue the game without paying too much attention to the form and meaning.

4.2.3 GR1 Task 3

This task requires students to film a play with a scripted conversation. Focus is both on the form and meaning, but it is likely that the focus is heavier on the form, since the task includes scripted speech. However, the “play” aspect the task may allow for versatile and creative language use besides the script, which may have the focus more on the meaning rather than form. There are a few mental operations that may be involved in the task: repetition, retrieving from long term memory and possibly expressing own ideas or information, if the learners wish to apply non-scripted language use. The input in the task can be aural or oral, in other words, the scripted dialogue may be in a written form or as speech by the teacher, for instance. Learners also receive input from other students involved in the play. The source of the non-fictional input may come from the materials and the students themselves. The non-fictional output is mostly in the oral form, but it may also be written down so that the learners remember what to say, since the task involves uttering complete sentences. The source of the output can be both the materials and the learners. This task enhances speaking and listening skills. Additionally, students have a chance to apply and experiment with their language skills, e.g. retrieving items from previous lessons or applying elements they have learnt elsewhere, making this task quite scalable.

5 Discussion

In this section, I will discuss the observations of the analysis further and compare the findings to the criteria of VOPS 2019 and suggestions from Butler et al. First, I will focus on number and distribution and the cognitive properties of the tasks according to the suggestions of Butler et al. in the sections 4.1. and 4.2. Sections 4.3. and 4.4. focus on the entertainment value and communicative properties of the tasks based on the aims of VOPS 2019.

5.1 Number and distribution

Based on the analysis, the number of tasks is relatively high in the clothing-themed chapter of SL1 with almost half of the exercises being tasks. This is notable in several aspects. First, the analysed material promotes engaging language learning, which is something that the current curriculum demands. The data provided by this analysis is opposite to the results in Butler et al.'s analysis, which concluded that task made up only a small part of the exercises (Butler et al. 2017). Based on these findings, one could think what would be the appropriate number of tasks in one chapter. The curriculum states no fixed percentage or number of engaging exercises that must be included in learning materials. However, the number of tasks appearing in SL1 seems plausible for a few reasons. First, the amount and distribution of tasks should keep the learners interested. In other words, learners may be better motivated to complete each exercise, because they may consider at least some of tasks as rewards and eagerly want to engage, for example, a game played with a partner. However, it is crucial that the exercises are not completely task-based since the learners should also be acquainted with more conventional PPP learning methods, since it is possible the materials they have in future may not be as task-based, e.g. in higher grades. Also, some concepts may be easier to teach more conventionally. For example, grammar might be difficult to teach without any PPP methods.

Regarding GR1, however, the consideration for number and distribution is different due to the difference in its contents compared to SL1. Overall, GR1 seems to stress on more engaging exercises, many of them being games played on a smartboard as well as the teacher's extra materials that utilises task-based learning. Considering this, it seems that GR1 includes a great number of tasks per chapter.

Butler et al. highlighted that the number and distribution of the tasks is worth considering in developing EFL materials (2017, 293-294). Based on the analysis, the number and

distribution of the tasks appears to be sufficient. That is, the materials provide both engaging and less engaging exercises, which helps students to maintain their motivation through the lesson as well as be acquainted with the more conventional exercises that await in future. Thus, there appears to be no reason for adjustments in this field in developing EFL materials for young learners. However, teacher's role is crucial in the affective area of language learning, which is why publishers should also focus on designing teacher's materials. Next, I will proceed to discuss the cognitive properties of the tasks in the following section.

5.2 Cognitive properties

In this part, I will observe cognitive properties of the task. That is, what is the challenge like in the exercises, and do they get progressively more demanding? In the beginning of the clothing themed chapter of SL1, the tasks are less challenging since the mental operations required is rather narrow, mainly demanding operations such as repetition and using long term memory (Swell et al. 2022, 867-868). However, the tasks begin to get more challenging starting from task 6 (exercise 13), requiring more extensive language use and communication such as applying the recently learnt items into discussion with a partner, focusing both on meaning and form as well as expressing own ideas. The progressive increase of challenge can be effective in several ways. First, it is crucial that the learners begin with cognitively less demanding tasks when the theme is still unfamiliar to them to build up confidence and skill to use the new items in their language use. In other words, this effectively means that the level of challenge corresponds to the expected skill level of the learners. Furthermore, one crucial thing in appropriately challenging tasks is that it allows for making mistakes and provides a feeling of success. Errors have been proven to be crucial part of the language learning progress (Ellis 1994, 51) Also, if the tasks were insufficiently challenging, the interest and motivation would most likely be lost and hinder language learning process. Even though cognitive properties of the tasks are crucial, the entertainment value of the tasks is relevant especially with learners of young age. I will discuss the entertainment value in the next paragraph / section.

The cognitive properties of the tasks in GR1 are quite different from the tasks in SL1. Overall, the tasks in GR1 seem to be cognitively less demanding. No analysed tasks involved initiation and often, the tasks included scripted language use. However, one of the analysed tasks allowed for more cognitively challenging language use. That is, the task that involved filming

a dialogue. Even though the task included scripted input and out, it also offers and opportunity for experimental and creative language use, which can positively help in learning the target language. Thus, the exercise may involve broader mental operations, but it is dependent on the learner's skill level. Additionally, the use of filming allows learners listen to their own speech, which may help e.g. identifying errors.

Increasing cognitive challenge is to be considered in developing EFL materials (Butler et al. 2017, 293-294). Based on the analysis, the tasks progressively become more challenging in SL1. In GR1, the analysed tasks do not progressively increase in the level of challenge apart from task 3, the filming exercise, which may provide an opportunity for broader mental operations.

To determine what should be considered in the development of future early English teaching materials, attention must be paid both to the suggestions by Butler et al. and the requirements of VOPS 2019. The increase in cognitive challenge exists, yet it is subtle enough for early EFL learners. VOPS 2019 states that learning in the first grades should be getting to know the language (Opetushallitus 2019, 29), which is why the level of challenge should not be excessively high. However, the raise in challenge exists but on a suitable level for young learners.

5.3 Entertainment value

As was mentioned in the Background section, VOPS 2019 encourages engaging and entertaining language teaching. Thus, it is crucial to observe the entertainment value of the tasks and analyse benefits of each task type. Overall, the tasks in the chapter could be considered engaging, since they involve other peripheral things besides the formal learning, such as movement, communication, games, music, autonomy and creativity. Motivation is a key factor in language learning, that can facilitate or impede language learning process (Dörnyei 2005, 65).

GR1 included several tasks that involved moving and TPR, whether it is walking back and forth to complete the exercise or running in a game of tag. The tasks in GR1 did not include TPR, but moving around may help students to concentrate, since they will not have to be sitting still for long periods of time.

There were three game tasks in the analysed chapter in SL1. Games possess features that may facilitate language learning. First, games are objectively motivating in nature due to, e.g. competition and can be used to rewind mid class. In language learning contexts, games require learners to use the TL. Also, language games usually promote communicative language learning, since the games are usually played in pairs or groups. Even though the games focused on communication, the games seemed relatively repetitive in nature. Nevertheless, implementation of three games in one chapter should keep the students motivated and entertained throughout the lesson.

In GR1 analysis, two of the analysed tasks were games. The games were different in nature; one was a slow-paced guessing game while the other was a fast-paced tag game. Both have their own pros and cons in language learning and entertainment contexts alike. The guessing game's slow tempo allows for more focus on the actual language use, since learners have time to think thoroughly. In other words, they may observe objects their surroundings for language. Furthermore, they have time to focus on their output to produce language correctly, to name some examples. Even though slow-paced, the guessing game builds up suspense, making the game more objectively more exciting. The tag game involves more action since there is movement involved, which can provide entertainment value to the task. However, this may come with a cost of less attention paid to the language use, as was mentioned earlier. At any rate, the fact that GR1 has different types of games is worth noting, since it can please a wider range of learners.

The entertainment value is relevant to consider, because of the requirements of VOPS 2019 as well as in the suggestions by Butler et al regarding affective matters. Based on the analysis, the entertainment value has evidently been a crucial point of focus in the development of the analysed materials, both providing different takes on the area. SL1 focuses on the affective matters in a way that the tasks retain traits of TBLT and textbook learning while adding entertaining elements such as games, while GR1 focuses more on the affective area with the tasks mostly being games. The existence of different approaches to affective matters in language learning adds diversity to early language teaching, which may help language teachers to choose a material that suits their teaching and their students. Consequently, it would be safe to assume that the entertainment value in EFL materials for first grade students should similarly be considered in development of English learning materials in future.

5.4 Communication

Most of the tasks involve communication, which is relevant in numerous ways. First, communicative language learning is one of the aims of VOPS 2019, which realises in the analysed material. Furthermore, communicative tasks are especially useful with young A1 language learners, since their other language skills, such as reading and writing, may still be undeveloped at the early grades. More importantly, many early language learners wish to be able to communicate in the target language (Bland 2015, 11). Heeding learners' wishes is part of learner-centred learning, which endorses motivation (TEAL Center 2010, 1). Additionally, real time communication is closer to real language use than conventional drilling that does not promote real language use. Furthermore, some tasks involved initiation, which tests learners' language skills. However, these tasks appeared after tasks that required no turn-taking or scripted responses, which is applicable in terms of progressive increase in difficulty.

The communicative tasks in GR1 were limited to mostly two tasks. One of the tasks is the tag game and the other the filming exercise. Even though the tag can objectively be an amusing way to learn language, it may undermine the active focus on the language use due to the hectic nature of the game. However, the filming task has potential to be very effective in communicatively for several reasons. First, the focus is on the dialogue itself, requiring learners to focus both on the form and meaning of the language, since there is no rush and the pressure of being filmed may encourage to pay closer attention. Second, the task allows for versatile language use, like I have mentioned earlier. Thirdly, the opportunity to listen to the dialogue afterwards is something that no other analysed task offered.

Overall, both materials meet the communicative aims of VOPS 2019. The tasks involve mostly simple and scripted dialogues that could be used by young learners. However, some of the tasks leave room for more advanced language use such as providing own responses and experimenting with language. Thus, TBLT fits the aims of VOPS 2019 in the communicative area.

6 Conclusion

In this paper I explored the usage of Task-Based Learning in the contemporary English learning and teaching materials for first graders in Finland. The thorough analysis of the tasks allows us to better understand how the materials aim to meet the criteria set by Finnish National Agency of Education. Additionally, the analysis highlights factors that are worth considering in future early English language education material development.

The analysis was based on the requirements of VOPS 2019 and the suggestions Of Butler et al. in their TBLT learning analysis (2017) such as number of the tasks, cognitive challenge, affective aspects and focus on communication and engaging learning. To sum up the findings of the analysis, we can see that the tasks vary in terms of who are they completed with, what mental operations they demand of the learners and other factors such as creativity and opportunity for experimental language use. However, they all focused on communication at least on some level and aimed for engaging and fun learning by the means of discussions with other students or games. Both examined materials strived to meet the criteria with different approaches. *Skylight 1* entails TBLT without compromising conventional workbook learning, whereas *Get Ready! 1* focuses on affective learning with a plethora of games. Reflecting the findings to VOPS 2019 and Butler et al., we can conclude that the criteria and suggestions were adequately met. The materials consisted of a great number of tasks, there was variation in the cognitive level of the tasks, tasks possessed great entertainment value and focused on communication. Thus, I can conclude that TBLT fills the criteria of the current curriculum for early language teaching in Finland and could also function effectively in future, possibly focusing on the development of teacher's material for more versatile and engaging exercises. Even though the research provided valuable data on a rather recent subject, future research is suggested. For instance, due to the limitations of this study, a more extensive study could be conducted with a greater variety of contemporary English teaching materials, more tasks analysed and possibly some comparison to the older English teaching materials.

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