# 9th grade English books' contribution to creating and encouraging interaction in the classroom

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Tiivistelmä – Abstract

Oppilaiden rohkaisu englannin kielen käyttöön monipuolissa vuorovaikutustilanteissa on kirjattu vuoden 2016 perusopetuksen opetussuunnitelman perusteisiin. Tämä tutkielma selvittää, kuinka tavoite on näkyvissä 9. luokan englannin kielen oppikirjoissa.

Tutkielman aineistona oli yhteensä neljä eri englannin oppikirjaa eli kaksi tekstikirjaa ja kaksi työkirjaa kirjasarjoista Scene ja On the Go. Analyysimenetelmänä oli sisällönanalyysi. Kaikki tehtävät, jotka sisältävät oppilaiden välistä vuorovaikutusta, jaettiin kymmeneen eri kategoriaan. Kategoriat perustuvat vuorovaikutuksen laatuun, esimerkiksi keskustelutehtäviin ja yhteistyötehtäviin. Tutkielmassa pohditaan ja annetaan esimerkkejä jokaisen kategorian tehtävätyypeistä.

Tutkitusta aineistosta löytyi paljon erilaisia vuorovaikutustehtäviä. Yleisimpiä tehtävätyyppejä ovat parikeskustelut, vuorotellen sanominen, käännöstehtävät ja erilaiset pienet esitelmät, joihin kuuluu sekä kirjallisten tuotosten esittely että omin sanoin aiheesta kertominen. Vuorovaikutus on kirjoissa tärkeässä roolissa ja siihen kannustetaan monipuolisilla tehtävillä sekä sanallisilla vinkeillä ja muistutuksilla, joita löytyi molemmista kirjasarjoista. Paritehtävät ovat hyvin yleisiä. Ryhmätehtäviä kirjoissa on jonkin verran. Kaikki paritehtävät eivät kuitenkaan ole yhtä vuorovaikutteisia, sillä joissain tehtävissä parit eivät varsinaisesti keskustele toistensa kanssa, vaan pelkästään lausuvat tai luettelevat sanoja tai tehtävien vastauksia. Kirjoissa on myös esitelty jonkin verran erilaisia kommunikaatiostrategioita, kuten sanatonta viestintää sekä puuttuvien sanojen kuvailua eri sanoin ja elein. Lisäksi tulokset kertovat, että yhdeksännen luokan Scene-kirjasarjassa on lähes kaksikertainen määrä suullisia tehtäviä verrattuna On the Go -sarjaan. Tutkimus antaa tietoa suullisen kielitaidon harjoittelun roolista peruskoulun lopulla. Löydökset myös osoittavat, minkälaisia lisätehtäviä opettajat voisivat tarjota tasapainottamaan kirjojen tarjoamia tehtäviä.

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# 1. Introduction

Interacting with other people is an essential part of language learning. Interaction in the target language supports the development of one's language proficiency (Muho & Kurani, 2011). For some students the classroom may be the only setting and opportunity to interact in the target language (Some-Guiebre, 2020, p. 497). Consequently, a notable amount of time is reserved for peer interaction in many foreign language classrooms (Sato & Ballinger, 2016, p. 1). The present study is interested in educational materials that are used in English classrooms in Finland. Comprehensive school textbooks in Finland are based on the guidelines set by National Core Curriculum (hereafter NCC). The NCC (2016) mentions several times that one of the aims for English teaching is to encourage students to use English in versatile interaction. This objective has an important role, especially in lower secondary school from 7th to 9th grades.

The present study focuses on the analysis of textbooks used in 9th grade. It investigates how the objective set by NCC is visible in educational materials, and it aims to give insights on interactive activities in the English classroom. The material analyzed in the research, i.e. the data, includes the tasks and activities in two English textbooks and two workbooks. The analysis method used is content analysis. The study searches for opportunities, provided by the material, to interact in English and the ways of encouraging the students to do so. The focus is on interaction between students that is facilitated by different tasks and activities. Some previous studies have been conducted on the oral activities that Finnish textbooks offer, for example by Lainejoki (2021) and Hietala (2013). Their studies focus on practicing communicative competence. However, the present study aims to evaluate how utilizing different types of activities can encourage peer interaction. The task instructions guide peer interaction along with the teacher, and interesting topics or ways to work can have a positive effect on student communication. Tasks and activities in textbooks have not previously been studied from the perspective of encouragement. The present study analyses different types of interactive activities and discusses their potential to encourage students to interact using the English language. The results of this study can help understand how task design facilitates interaction in the classroom and show the current role of oral activities in Finnish lower secondary schools.

The thesis is divided into five sections. The next section presents the literature review concerning tasks and contents of textbooks in general. It reviews multiple sources on pair and group work and peer interaction. On top of that, previous research on communicative tasks in English textbooks are introduced. Section 3 introduces the research aim and questions, followed by the data and methods of the research. The results are in section 4, which is divided into five subsections according to

different types of tasks, and the sixth subsection discusses other interesting findings from the data that promote student interaction. The last part of the thesis, section 5, contains the concluding discussion. The references are at the very end, in section 6.

## 2. Literature review

The literature review explains the background of the present study in four subsections. It introduces the general structure and contents of textbooks. Furthermore, it presents previous studies on textbooks and considerations on factors that can make a task encouraging.

### 2.1 Task types in textbooks

Different aspects of textbooks are commonly studied topics in linguistics. English textbooks contain a vast number of different kinds of activities and exercises that aim to teach different aspects of the language. Nguyen and Le (2020) state that textbooks should include pair, group and individual activities, which develop both the language use and the skills of language learners. They also claim that good textbooks alternate between form-focused and meaning-focused tasks as well as tasks which include both (Nguyen & Le, 2020). For instance, the tasks that focus on both aspects allow students to write sentences or discuss their ideas and information with other students (Nguyen & Le, 2020). This way the tasks improve the skills to convey a meaningful message but also apply grammar and linguistic knowledge previously learned in class. According to Long (1990, p. 35), tasks are split into two types: target tasks and pedagogic tasks. Target tasks are activities that relate to real life situations, and a learner may benefit from such exercises outside of the classroom. On the other hand, pedagogic tasks are problem-solving activities, which are simpler and completed working as a group (Long, 1990, p. 35). Pedagogic tasks and form-focused tasks concentrate on grammar and structure, and they require a limited number of steps and decisions to complete the task (Çelic, 2016; Long, 1990). Instead, meaning-focused tasks are similar to target task. Both emphasize communication, simulate real world situations, and develop learner autonomy as they practice useful skills for the future (Çelic, 2016; Long, 1990). Both form-focused and meaning-focused tasks can include interaction in the target language.

### 2.2 Contents of textbooks

Nguyen and Le (2020) list some requirements for tasks in textbooks that make them successful for language learning. Such tasks should develop the students' language skills and communicative abilities, encourage interaction in the classroom, develop learner autonomy and give clear instructions (Nguyen & Le, 2020). The four communicative skills, which are listening, reading, speaking, and writing, should all be practiced equally (Nguyen & Le, 2020). According to Nguyen and Le (2020), using both activities that train each skill separately and activities that exercise more than one of these skills at the same time are interesting to learners and facilitate communication. In order to give

autonomy to learners, textbooks should be learner-centered encouraging students to learn independently using their prior knowledge, predicting, discovering, experiencing different types of activities, and thinking about the learning process (Nguyen & Le, 2020). Measuring and reflecting on their own progress also supports learner autonomy (Nguyen & Le, 2020). Gómez-Rodríguez (2010) reminds that the balance between the types of practice that textbooks offer should be evaluated. Sometimes the book contents are not sufficient, and in order to develop communicative competence the teachers need to provide additional material, such as activities featuring real life situations and authentic language, problem-solving tasks, and further interaction (Gómez-Rodríguez, 2010, p. 339).

Tomlinson (2012) suggests that a textbook with text-driven approach activates and encourages students. A text-driven textbook presents an engaging text, either written or spoken. It is followed by different types of activities related to the text, which activate the minds of learners, stimulate engagement with the text, explore features of the text, and encourage producing personal responses (Tomlinson, 2012). The books analyzed in the present study, as well as many other modern English textbooks in Finland, follow the text-driven approach. In the following, the general structure of the textbooks is described. The books usually consist of many units. Each unit contains text and exercises that are related to the text or its theme in several ways. Some tasks explore the meaning and structure of the text, while some others exercise the new vocabulary presented in the text. Listening and writing tasks often extend on the topic or theme of the unit, and oral exercises encourage students to think and talk about it. Often a unit also introduces a new part of grammar which is used in context in the text. It is explained briefly in the unit, and there are several exercises to practice its use, for instance fill in the gaps and multiple-choice exercises. The text and exercises can be split into two separate books, which is often the case in Finnish comprehensive schools. The second book, often called workbook, provides more practice, often in the form of written exercises, while the textbooks mainly contain oral exercises.

## 2.3 Interaction in the classroom

Tasks that require verbal communication have a significant role in establishing student interaction. While there are several studies on different aspects of textbooks of English as foreign language (Ayu & Indrawati, 2018; Hietala, 2013; Lainejoki 2021; Vuorela 2019), few studies focus on encouraging factors. Nguyen and Le (2020) state that it is important to evaluate how tasks in textbooks encourage interaction in the classroom, because encouragement helps students to complete assigned tasks. In the following, the main aspects of activities that encourage student interaction will be discussed.

Working in pairs or small groups is a common way of practicing interaction in a foreign language. Long (1990, p.37) lists five pedagogic benefits of pair and group work. As the first point, Long (1990, p. 37) states that group work offers increased opportunities for language practice. As students discuss in small groups, they have more time to express their thoughts rather than in a discussion with the whole class. Long (1990, p. 37) reports that group work improves the quality of speech and allows students to practice wider speech repertoire. It can be achieved, for example, by different kinds of discussion tasks or practicing and modifying example conversations. As the third benefit, Long (1990, p. 38) notes that instruction can be individualized through group work as students can work at their own pace and with different materials. Hence, students can be grouped according to their skills or interests. This allows differentiation of teaching for different groups of students. Long (1990, p. 38) suggests that group work can also offer a more relaxed and intimate setting, which is beneficial especially for shy or unconfident students. The threshold to communicate in a foreign language is usually lower in a small group than with the whole class. The last advantage of group work according to Long (1990, p. 38) is the motivation that stems from all the other benefits mentioned and the variety it adds to a lesson. Therefore, working in a group is thought to be encouraging for students.

Furthermore, Long (1990) also discusses the benefits of group work from a psycholinguistic view. Group work improves the comprehension abilities of students because the input can be adjusted to their individual proficiencies better than among the whole class, and there are more opportunities for meaning negotiation (Long, 1990, p. 38). Previous studies report that grammatical accuracy does not decline in the discussions of unsupervised small groups (Long, 1990, p. 38). Group work also includes more meaning negotiation and corrections and completions of others than teacher-led learning, and the members of a group were rarely found to correct each other erroneously (Long, 1990, p. 38). After all, it is important to note that not all group work is valuable (Long, 1990, p. 39). It needs to be appropriate for the learners' skills and backgrounds, well-designed and meaningful. In addition, some students may prefer working alone and find it more beneficial and time efficient for them. Working together may require more time than independent tasks. Pair and group work may not always function, for example, if the classroom environment is does not feel safe or the relationships and dynamics between the group members are problematic. Therefore, having a variety of tasks, including individual work, is important.

Peer interaction differs from teacher-student interaction, and it has a unique role in learning a foreign language (Sato & Ballinger, 2016, p. 1). Evidence suggests that students feel more comfortable during

peer interaction, which leads to more target language production and processing (Sato & Ballinger, 2016, p. 5). Moreover, learners are more likely to tell their peer if they do not understand something compared to not understanding teachers or native speakers (Sato & Ballinger, 2016, p. 3). Storch (2007) suggests that students should be encouraged to work in pairs, and the possible benefits of it should be explained to the students. The opportunities to engage in learning processes that pair work offers facilitate learning a language (Storch, 2007). While different sources agree on the importance of peer interaction, it is debated whether pair work or group work is more beneficial. Fernández Dobao (2016, p. 33) states that pair work is often preferred over group work by teachers and students. Pair work affords more practice than group work while also forcing both participants to speak (Fernández Dobao, 2016, p. 33). Negotiation and problem solving in small groups sometimes happens among a few members of the group while the rest are quiet. However, Fernández Dobao (2016, p. 57) argues that it does not mean that the silent members do not benefit from the interaction regardless. The present study does not focus on the differences between pair and group work as it considers any peer interaction in English important.

As suggested by Long (1990), working and discussing in pairs or small groups can be encouraging. Discussion tasks usually present one or a few questions regarding a topic, and students are asked to share their opinions with their pair or group members. Wolf (2013) investigates how students perceive self-selected topics compared to textbook-assigned topics. The participants report having more knowledge, confidence, and interest in discussing topics they can freely choose (Wolf, 2013). The results support allowing students to choose their own topics, but the study did not consider how well students performed discussing these different topics. However, textbook-assigned topics were not perceived more difficult than self-selected topics (Wolf, 2013). This suggests that giving students freedom to choose their own topics does not cause them to choose easier issues to discuss. Although self-selected topics appear to encourage students to communicate more, it should be noted that some discussion topics in textbooks target to practice a specific aspect of the language or use vocabulary specific to a topic. Therefore, a combination of both assigned and self-selected topics is beneficial for interaction and learning.

Nevertheless, if the assigned topics are carefully designed, they may be as encouraging. Minalla (2023) argues that personalized activities in the classroom can encourage students. Personalized tasks incorporate the students' own experiences, opinions, and feelings. Such tasks often help the students learn more (Minalla, 2023). Classroom activities related to the daily life of students aim to connect the inside and outside of the classroom contexts (Minalla, 2023, p. 410). Moreover, Muho and Kurani

(2011, p. 51) argue that enjoyable and initiative lessons include opportunities to discuss and initiate topics and give responsibility to the students. Learning material that is not relevant to the students is difficult to relate to their experiences and does not prepare them to communicate effectively in real life situations (Minalla, 2023, p. 411). Therefore, educational materials aim to be relevant for the learners. The language is related to students' interests and cross-cultural topics in many textbooks (Gómez-Rodríguez, 2010, p. 339). Schneider (2005) attempted to make teaching grammar more relevant to the students through connecting it to a relevant issue at the institute at that time. The class examined their grammar topic in quotations and official statements regarding the issue and discussed the choices the writers had made (Schneider, 2005). Teaching grammar through relevant and recent topics helps students to experience the grammar topic in authentic discourse context and understand its ideological implications (Schneider, 2005, p. 304). The sources agree that topics can have a positive effect on classroom interaction, which is also important regarding the present study.

## 2.4 Previous studies on English textbooks in Finland

This section introduces two studies that share the same topic and similar context with the present study. The studies concentrate on practicing oral skills in Finnish upper secondary school English textbooks. Both studies are master's theses.

Hietala (2013) studied how many oral activities are offered in 16 English textbooks and what aspects of oral skills they focus on. Hietala (2013) found that most oral tasks focus on vocabulary and forming correct utterances. Instead, important aspects of oral communication, such as communication strategies and culture-specific discussion manners, receive little practice (Hietala, 2013). Hietala (2013) concludes that the tasks and activities in the textbooks are not sufficient to reach communicative competence. A more recent study on the same topic was conducted by Lainejoki (2021). The thesis analyzed English and Russian textbooks used in upper secondary schools. The aim was to investigate how oral, especially communicative skills are taught. Lainejoki (2021) states that the number of oral activities is higher in the first English textbooks but decreases in the later textbooks of the same series. The biggest task categories were vocabulary, discussions, and translations (Lainejoki, 2021). Over 600 oral activities were found, and the English textbook series was deemed quite communicative (Lainejoki, 2021). In comparison, the study by Hietala (2013) found about 200 oral activities. Lainejoki's (2021) findings differ from Hietala's (2013) results because the analyzed books are newer and the NCC for upper secondary schools has been revised after Hietala's study was conducted, placing more importance on communicative skills.

# 3. Present study

First, section 3.1 introduces the aim of the study and the research questions. Then, the chosen data, data collection and methods of analysis are explained in subsections 3.2–3.3.

## 3.1 Research Aim and Questions

The research questions of the present study are:

1. What kinds of tasks 9th grade English books utilize to encourage students to interact in English?
2. Are there any differences between the book series?

The research aims to categorize the interactive activities in 9th grade textbooks and workbooks and present the number of tasks in each identified category. The answer to the first research question explains the different interactive tasks that the books offer. The second question aims to compare the number of tasks and the emphases of the book series.

## 3.2 Data

The data of the study are tasks and activities related to interaction in English. The tasks can require any kind of interaction in the target language. The data were collected from two 9th grade English book series from two different Finnish publishers, which are Sanoma Pro and Otava. In Finnish comprehensive schools the English books are often split into two books, designed to be used simultaneously, thus this study will analyze four books. The books chosen for this research are On the Go 3 Textbook (Daffue-Karsten et al., 2018), On the Go 3 Workbook (Daffue-Karsten et al., 2018), Scene 3 Texts (Hiitti et al., 2019), and Scene 3 Exercises (Hiitti et al., 2019). The book series were chosen because they are rather recent, widely used in schools and based on the National Core Curriculum of 2016. The 9th grade was chosen because it is the last shared compulsory grade for every student. It can be assumed that the 9th grade English lessons offer plenty of useful activities and guidance regarding one's needs to use English in the future.

The data were collected by reading the books and locating all the tasks related to interaction. All the interactive activities were documented and categorized in a spreadsheet. 10 different categories of task types were found. Such types can be, for instance, discussion questions, dialogues, and games. A total of 529 tasks were found and analyzed. The task types and results of the data collection are presented in section 4. In addition, other material related to interaction, such as communication tips, were noted. The notes on other features that relate to interaction are presented in subsection 4.6.

**3.3 Methods of analysis**

The present study is qualitative. The data is studied through content analysis. Content analysis is a research technique used for making replicable and valid conclusions, and it aims to offer new insights and increase understanding of the studied phenomena (Krippendorff 2019, p. 24). Content analysis emphasizes drawing inferences, which aim to answer the research questions (Krippendorff, 2019, p. 37). It can be seen as a repertoire of research methods for all kinds of verbal, pictorial, symbolic and communication data (Krippendorff, 2019, p. 23). The intention is categorizing the data into clear and comprehensive form (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2009, p. 100). Content analysis is a common method to study textbooks. For example, previous studies discussing tasks in English textbooks by Hietala (2013), Ayu and Indrawati (2018), and Vuorela (2019) perform content analysis. Denscombe (2014, p. 285) suggests that content analysis is most suitable for straightforward and simple communication. Hence, it is a suitable method for textbook studies. Content analysis can reveal hidden aspects that the text is communicating (Denscombe, 2014, p. 284). In this study the analysis searches for implicit ways to encourage and motivate students to interact. The analysis has potential to demonstrate what choices have been made to create educational and motivating tasks and activities.

Answering the first research question requires analyzing the different kinds of tasks and activities that create interaction. The interactive activities found are categorized and discussed in the results section. In addition, the number of different interactive tasks is investigated, and the results are presented in a table. The table shows the tasks that appear more frequently and allows easier comparison between the two book series, making it beneficial for the second research question as well. The second research question is concerned with possible different emphases and task preferences between the book series. The comparison examines whether the series have similar approaches to supporting interaction.

# 4. Results

The textbooks, Scene 3 Texts and On the Go 3 Textbook, and the workbooks, Scene 3 Exercises and On the Go 3 Workbook, contain a variety of different tasks that can be used to create interaction in the classroom. The majority of the tasks analyzed in the present study are intended to be completed in pairs. Some activities are designed for small groups, while some others are completed independently and then presented to others.

All interactive tasks found in the data were divided into categories. The numbers of activities in different categories are presented in section 4.1. Sections 4.2–4.5 analyze different task types in more detail and consider what effect they have on interaction in the classroom. The last section 4.6 presents other features of the books that support interaction.

## 4.1 Task categories

The tasks were sorted into 10 wider categories, although the books contain many small and specific activities. The division is based on the kind of interaction the tasks require. The categories identified in the analysis are discussion, interview, saying in turns, reading a dialogue, translation, collaboration, task revision, presenting, asking the class, and games (see Table 1).

Discussion tasks offer everyone opportunities to talk about different themes. In interview tasks students ask each other questions and answer them in turns. The category saying in turns includes shorter tasks, for instance, tasks that only require the students to read a sentence or invent a few words on a given topic. However, tasks in which the pairs read out loud a written conversation are in their own category: reading a dialogue. In translation tasks the students translate orally a text or a sentence from English to Finnish. Collaboration tasks require the students to work together in order to complete the task. In task revision tasks the students share their answers on a written task they have done independently and compare their answers. Presenting tasks include both telling something in one's own words and creating a work individually, which is then presented to others. Asking the class tasks allow students to have many short interactions with other students in the class. Games are dice games that are often used to revise what has been learned previously.

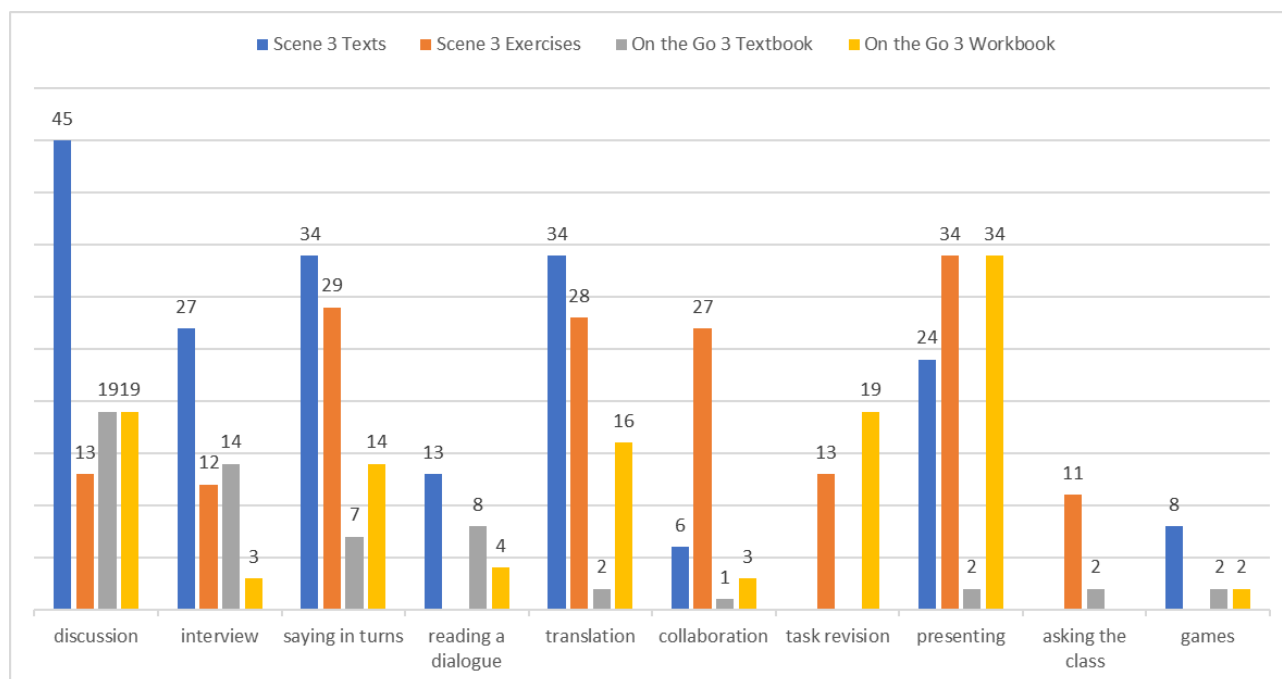*Table 1: the number of tasks in each book and category*



Table 1 shows that Scene 3 Texts has notably more discussion and interview tasks than any other book. It has a heavy emphasis on communication as it contains a large number of oral tasks. Scene 3 Texts has 191 interactive tasks in total. Scene 3 Exercises elaborates on the communicative focus, as it contains 167 interactive tasks. On the other hand, On the Go 3 Textbook contains 57 interactive tasks. The number is noticeably smaller compared to the other textbook, Scene 3 Texts. On the Go 3 Workbook contains 114 interactive tasks. It is worth mentioning that some of the presenting tasks in On the Go 3 Workbook are optional as they are related to optional extra texts. As a matter of fact, On the Go series seem to offer many choices and optional tasks so accommodate different learners and allow autonomy to the students which, in turn, can encourage them.

Table 2 represents the total number of tasks in each category. Discussion, saying in turns, translation and presenting tasks are the most frequently found tasks in the present study.

*Table 2: the total number of tasks*
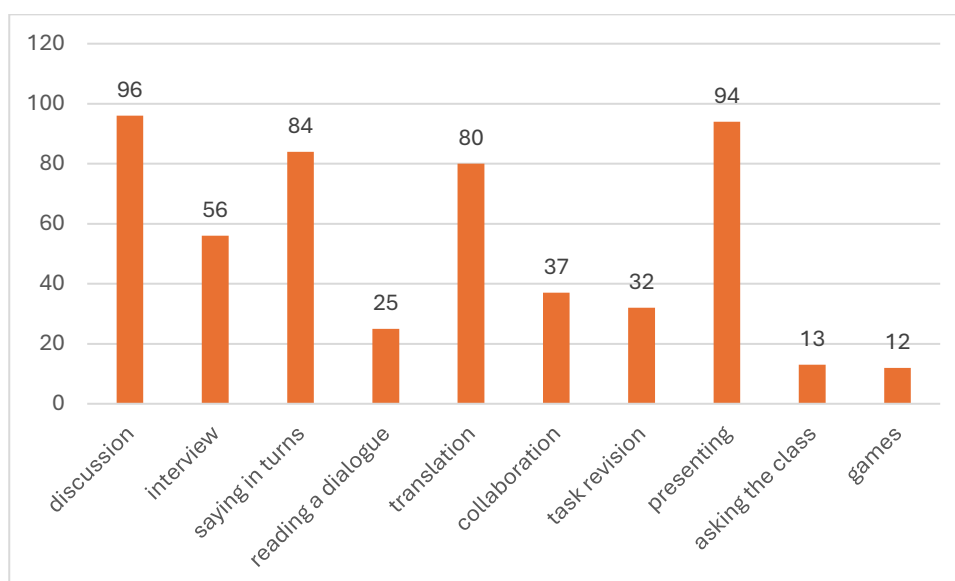


The results suggest that the distribution of tasks maintain a balance between shorter and longer and more controlled and less controlled utterances. Hence, discussion, interview, collaboration and presenting tasks usually involve more opportunities to talk freely, and the categories saying in turns, reading a dialogue, translation and task revision contain short speaking turns that are often structured by the task design. Asking the class and games are the least used task interactive task types. It could be that such tasks are reserved for special occasions as they are notably different from the everyday classroom work and the limited number of them maintains their special status.

## 4.2 Discussions and interviews

This subsection introduces tasks that afford longer conversations. The tasks focus on communication and conveying meaning. Such tasks often allow sharing opinions and experiences. Three different types of discussion tasks were identified.

In each book discussion tasks appear frequently (see Table 1). Discussion tasks usually present specific topics or questions to discuss with one's partner. The topics for discussions are usually hobbies, daily topics in students' life, discussing themes of the unit and sharing own opinions. A similar task is an interview, which usually offers questions that the students ask and answer in turns. The questions have similar themes to the discussions, such as personal experiences and opinions, but also questions about the texts in the textbook units. The task type also appears frequently in every book analyzed in the study. Interview tasks were split from discussion tasks to their own category

due to the large number of them. Furthermore, a third type of speaking tasks was found, one that concerns negotiation. In such tasks the students are required to make arguments and find an agreement to complete the task. Negotiations train both communication and cooperation skills. Negotiation tasks are included in the discussion category in Table 1, since only four were found in the analysis. All of them are from Scene 3 Texts. One example of such is a task in which the students negotiate and make a list of things in order of importance. Another example from Scene 3 Texts is an activity where the students negotiate with each other and divide a list of household work equally among them.

In summary, the books contain plenty of activities that allow students to talk about their opinions and experiences. This is in accordance with the NCC, which states that students should be encouraged to participate in age-appropriate conversations, also concerning their own opinions (NCC, 2016, p. 349). Opportunities to talk about personal and meaningful topics can be encouraging. Familiar and relevant topics can encourage students to communicate more, as mentioned in the literature review, for instance by Schneider (2008) and Minalla (2023). All these task types allow students to speak more freely and use the vocabulary they have learned.

The selection of topics for discussions and interviews is wide throughout the books and they aim to be relevant for the students. As discussed in the literature section, Wolf (2013) suggests that self-selected topics may be favored by the students. However, the analyzed books have diverse discussion topics which ensures that each student has something interesting to discuss during the school year. On top of that, the topics of discussions and interviews in the books appear carefully designed to suit the target group. The topics are related to the learners' daily lives, which is beneficial, as suggested, for example, by Minalla (2023).

## 4.3 Collaboration

This section focuses on activities that require collaboration between students to complete an assigned task. Such activities offer an open environment for interaction. Collaborative tasks are marked in their own category in Table 1.

Creating a presentation in a small group is an activity that appears in both book series. Common topics for presentations in both book series are countries, celebrities, or famous historical people, and traveling. However, a traditional presentation is not the only creative product a group can make. There is a variety of ways to present the final product. In addition to a slideshow and a poster, some tasks

encourage to make a video or a podcast. A pair or group can also write a dialogue and act it in front of the rest of the class. It can be a roleplay of a real-life situation, such as going to the doctor's office, but it can also be, for example, imaginary interviews of famous people or conversations between the characters of the textbook. Such tasks appear in each book, although noticeably more in Scene 3 Exercises. On the other hand, some of the tasks in the presenting category (see Table 1) in On the Go 3 workbook can be completed as pair or group work, which compensates for the small number of tasks in the collaboration category. However, in the book the tasks are often presented as autonomous activities, and therefore in the present study they are separated to their own category, which is discussed in section 4.5.

While the tasks discussed above combine teamwork and presenting skills, not all the creative tasks are meant to be presented. Some tasks mainly focus on collaboration. For example, the students search for information online and write a text together, or they write a story according to some instructions, such as using prepositions in each sentence. Scene 3 Exercises has an activity to create a game in a group, which then will be exchanged with another group and played.

A different kind of collaborative activity is combining information to complete a task. Both students have one text with gaps and another text that is complete. They read their texts to each other and fill the gaps. The task type appeared only twice, and both were in Scene 3 Exercises. In some other tasks from Scene 3 Exercises the students create exercises for each other, usually a crossword or a dictation. They also help each other to memorize new vocabulary by quizzing each other. There are also activities in which one student gives the other instructions, such as what to draw on a scenery. In addition, both series have a few activities that ask to go around the class and ask something from the peers. This activity allows speaking briefly with multiple people, which can be a refreshing change from the usual pair work.

Lastly, board games can also be collaborative and interactive activities. Games do not appear often in the books, but they can be assumed to be motivating for the students. Scene 3 series has 8 games, while On the Go 3 series has 4 games in total. However, it should be noted that the series' additional materials for teachers often contain more games that can be used as extra activities for revision. The games in the books are played in small groups. In most games the players throw a dice and move accordingly on the board, which is printed on one or two pages of the book. Each square has either a sentence to say in English or a small task, such as listing three things on a given category. Students either negotiate whether the answer is accepted or one of the students acts as the judge and has the

correct answers provided by the teacher. Games can also create interaction outside the guided utterances since students may talk about the progress, such as who might win.

## 4.4 Reading, repeating and translating

This section analyzes the following categories from Table 1: saying in turns, reading a dialogue, translation, and task revision. While all off these task types are oral tasks, they appear somewhat less interactive compared to the previous task types.

All the books have multiple tasks in which the pairs speak in turns. Some of the task instructions, for example "Continue the sentences using the words from the vocabulary in English. Say it to your pair. Change roles." and "Read a sentence to your pair. Your pair says it in Finnish. Change roles.", give the impression that the students wait for their own turn to speak, but they do not react to what the other student says in English. Therefore, the tasks appear less interactive than discussion tasks, for instance. Some of the tasks placed in the saying in turns category were difficult to categorize as they do not fit properly in any other category. Some tasks simply ask to list a few words, often belonging to a given category. The tasks often focus either on acquiring vocabulary or practicing pronunciation. Scene 3 Texts has many tasks in which one participant says a word and the other replies with another word that they associate with it. On the Go 3 Textbook has listen and repeat tasks, which practice the pronunciation of new words. Nguyen and Le (2020, pp. 693–694) argue that very controlled activities, such as repetition and substitution, help encourage peer interaction but do not prepare students for real-life interaction.

Another frequent activity, especially in Scene 3 Texts, is a task where one student combines sentences from given beginnings and endings and the other student translates them. Furthermore, translating tasks appear in every book analyzed. Often in these tasks one of the pairs reads a word or a sentence in English, either a given sentence or completed by themselves, and the other is asked to translate it to Finnish. In Scene 3 Texts, each written dialogue is meant to be read with a pair, then translated to Finnish, and then edited by switching the underlined words to create a different story. Translating orally may be faster and less tedious than writing the translations. In addition, the pairs can help each other when needed and negotiate on the meaning. On the Go 3 Textbook does not explicitly ask to read or translate the texts but the teacher may ask the students to do that.

Some of the activities in both workbooks have two parts, the first of which is a written task, such as fill in the gaps, and the second part asks to read their answers with the pair in turns. Such tasks are in the task revision category (see Table 1). They offer opportunities to discuss the answers with another student. On one hand, the second part feels unnecessary as the task has already been completed by every student on their own. On the other hand, it may be beneficial to have some time to think about the answers before speaking and there is an opportunity to negotiate the answers with a peer. Peer revision and feedback on longer written tasks have been studied often, and the results suggest that active participation in peer revision has a positive role in the classroom as it improves students' written texts and enhances their knowledge (Attan & Khalidi, 2015; Dang et al., 2022). It can be assumed that revising small tasks is also beneficial, although it has received less attention from researchers. Adding a peer revision to written tasks, which are traditionally done in isolation, affords more interaction and pronunciation practice. Nevertheless, some simple written tasks are assigned as pair tasks, although it does not seem to bring additional value to the task. Especially in On the Go 3 Workbook many tasks have a symbol communicating that the task is pair work, although some of them could be completed alone as efficiently. Storch (2007) notes that some students are reluctant to participate in pair work on grammar-focused tasks, and pair work on such tasks does not guarantee better accuracy compared to individual work. However, the study acknowledges the importance of opportunities to use the target language that pair work provides (Storch, 2007).

## 4.5 Presenting

The category called presenting (see Table 1) contains tasks that allow speaking openly, using one's own words. Some of the tasks combine written and oral aspects. This section focuses on those tasks.

In both Scene 3 books there are many activities, in which one student explains a word without saying the word itself, and the pair tries to guess the word. The task is used to learn new words, which are usually presented on the previous page of the book. Some of the task instructions also allow acting the words as a pantomime. This task type is usually used as a warmup activity. Furthermore, Scene 3 Exercises contains 21 "show and tell" activities, in which a student can introduce something meaningful or interesting to the others, such as an object or a person. The task allows students to use their own voice while communicating information on a topic of their choice.

While section 4.3 discusses group presentations, the books also contain presentations and other projects that each student creates independently. These tasks are included in the presenting category.

The category contains tasks that a student completes alone, and then presents the final product, such as a poster or a video, to the other students. Therefore, the tasks contain an interactive element, although the students work on their own. Such tasks appear especially in On the Go 3 Workbook. It has over 30 independent tasks, although some are optional. The tasks are intended to be presented to the pair or class once completed. The tasks offer from two to three options to choose from, and they often require searching for information and creating a written text or a poster. Sometimes recording a video is also an option. The activities are, for example, writing a film review, introducing a person, making a quiz, or creating an imaginary dialog. The task design is similar to group work activities that were discussed earlier. Scene 3 Exercises includes a few tasks that are completed independently, and then presented to others. Such tasks are writing a speech and creating a voice recording or a video. Furthermore, both workbooks have speech writing activities. Some example topics are introducing an invention, accepting an award, or arguing one's opinion. While some topics in both book series are imaginative, some are especially useful for the students' future. For instance, both series have activities related to working life, such as recording a job application video and roleplaying a job interview with a pair. Especially work-related tasks can be encouraging because students are likely to perceive them as useful for the future. Instead, the topics that are more imaginative may be encouraging due to the creativity they allow.

## 4.6 Further notes on promoting interaction

According to the NCC, the students' initiative in communication, use of compensation strategies, and engaging in meaning negotiation should be supported (NCC, 2016, p. 349). Non-verbal communication is not a common aspect in textbooks, as Hietala (2013) found only a few activities concerning them in one textbook series and none in the other. Lainejoki (2021) noticed the same. However, compensation strategies in general were present in their data. Some notes and activities involving communication strategies were also found in the present study. For example, On the Go 3 series encourages twice to describe a word if one does not remember it. It also touches on non-verbal communication and filler words, and it has activities to explore their use. Scene 3 Texts has a small note on one page reminding the students something along the lines that it is not so important how something is expressed, but the important thing is trying. It also encourages to use facial expressions and gestures. Scene 3 Exercises has an activity that involves giving new names to objects and explaining the objects in question using gestures, synonyms, comparisons, and descriptions.

Both series have also other small features that support student interaction. On the Go 3 Workbook has small information boxes on speaking, such as "answering questions in few words can make the speaker appear uninterested". This note was connected to a practice job interview. Another example comes from an activity in which the pairs should argue their opinion, and the information box reminds the students to justify their arguments and be polite. In addition, On the Go 3 Textbook teaches ways to interrupt a conversation and return to the topic. Scene 3 series uses speech bubbles to show examples on how to do the task with a pair. Examples can aid in initiating the activity and encouraging to speak. Scene 3 Exercises has suggestions and encouraging words for preparing to present in front of the class. It also reminds how to be an active listener.

Both series have self-reflection tasks. On the Go 3 workbook has one self-reflection especially on communication skills. Some of these tasks are done by discussing in pairs, while others independently. The self-reflection can be either in Finnish or English. It was also noted that the task instructions for all the tasks, regardless of the type, are given in Finnish, except for On the Go 3 textbook. Instructions in English can orient the students to speak in English, but the instructions being in the students' native language ensures that they understand what they are asked to do. Some task instructions in Scene 3 Exercises give students the choice to either complete it orally with another student or written alone. Doing tasks orally may be less tedious and therefore encourage students to work together, while also improving their interaction skills. In all the books the task instructions focus explicitly on pronunciation only in the simple saying tasks. This suggests that conveying a meaningful message is the main goal of many tasks. In addition, both Scene 3 and On the Go 3 verbally encourage the students to help their pair in some tasks, such as guided pair dialogues. In conclusion, both books contain great pieces of information and encouragement on different aspects of interaction.

# 5. Concluding discussion

This study is interested in the activities that English textbooks and workbooks use to encourage interaction among students. Oral tasks in two textbooks and two workbooks were analyzed. The data of the study, which are the tasks containing interaction between students, were categorized and counted. The numbers of tasks in each category were presented in Table 1 and Table 2. The data was analyzed using content analysis.

The first research question covered the ways English textbooks and workbooks encourage interaction in the classroom. The research found that peer interaction in the English classroom is encouraged through the vast number of oral tasks. The books include both form-focused and meaning-focused oral tasks, and pair, group, and individual activities, which is important for a textbook, as stated by Nguyen and Le (2020). Some tasks support learner autonomy, such as collaborative group projects and independent presenting tasks. The books also contain occasional self-reflection tasks, which also contribute to autonomy (Nguyen & Le, 2020). All the books analyzed contain numerous pair tasks. Especially the textbooks contain a large number of them. The preference for pair work has been noted in previous literature, too, for instance by Fernández Dobao (2016). The books contain a notable number of tasks that allow talking about opinions and expressing oneself. The topics and themes are appropriate and relevant for 9th grade students. The importance of this has been discussed, for example, by Gómez-Rodríguez (2010) and Minalla (2023). The present study found that some tasks allow students to prepare before starting to speak. Examples of these are task revision and presenting the final product of a task. While discussions, interviews and collaborative tasks allow free expression, in many other tasks the interaction is brief, and it is guided by the task design. For example, some tasks help acquire new vocabulary and others focus on grammar. The analysis reveals that interactive tasks are used to practice several skills. The results demonstrate the schoolbooks support the important role of interaction in English classrooms. In addition, the frequent presence of oral tasks may help students to feel more confident when speaking English, which can lead to more interaction. Tasks that include topics relevant to the students appear more encouraging and, fortunately, they are also very frequent in both book series.

The second research question examined the differences between the book series. Scene 3 series contains 358 interactive tasks in total, while On the Go 3 series has a total of 171 interactive tasks. Scene 3 books contain almost double the number of interactive activities. Especially the textbook heavily emphasizes peer communication and oral language. On the other hand, On the Go 3 Textbook revolves around different texts and offers a vast selection of them. There are a lot of discussion tasks

and questions related to them. However, most of the task types are quite equal and used in both series. This suggests that some task types, such as discussions, translations, and presentations, both group and individual, are generally preferred in education and they are familiar to the students. Similarities also suggest that students receive mostly equal English practice regardless of the book series that is used in their class.

Both Hietala (2013) and Lainejoki (2021) state that discussion tasks are the most common oral tasks in English textbooks. The present study also found discussions to be the most common task type, with 96 tasks in total across all the books. It is closely followed by presenting tasks, which contain a few different kinds of tasks as explained in section 4.5. Also, saying in turns and translation tasks are very common (see Table 2). The results are similar to the previous studies, although the categories are slightly different and the present study investigated lower secondary school books, while the previous studies are from the context of upper secondary school.

The study offers updated information on the emphasis of interactive tasks in lower secondary schools. The books analyzed in the present study were found to support the aim set by National Core Curriculum. The activities offer versatile peer interaction in the target language. The findings provide insights for educators who are interested in promoting peer interaction in their language classrooms. The results can suggest what kind of practice could be beneficial as an addition to the activities provided by the books. For instance, the groups using On the Go 3 books could benefit from additional collaborative tasks. On top of that, educators should note that assigning a task as a pair task does not automatically make it improve the interaction between students. Although the books aim to encourage students to interact, sometimes extra attention is needed from the teachers.

The present study is limited to only theoretical assessment of encouraging tasks and features of the chosen books. The research could be developed further by examining the students' perceptions of each task type found in this study. Students could be asked to assess how the different task types facilitate interaction in the classroom and whether the task structure is encouraging and motivating in their opinion. Another way to develop the study further is to observe students working on the tasks in an authentic classroom setting. This could reveal how the peer interaction changes depending on the task type. Another limitation of the study is the categorization of the tasks. The categories identified in the present study may not be the most accurate, as some specific tasks were difficult to categorize and having over 10 categories could have been too many to analyze in a study of this size.

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