PRACTICING ORAL SKILLS
IN FINNISH UPPER SECONDARY SCHOOL EFL TEXTBOOKS

Master's Thesis

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Tiivistelmä – Abstract

Kieltenopetuksen painopiste on siirtynyt kielioppikeskeisestä virheettömyyden tavoittelusta kommunikatiivisen kompetenssin kehittämiseen. Tavoitteena on, että kielenopiskelijasta kasvaa kielenkäyttäjä, joka pystyy tilannekohtaisesti valitsemaan sopivan lähestymistavan ja kulttuurisidonnaisten käytöstapojen puitteissa viestimään kohdekielellä onnistuneesti. Tämän tavoitteen osana myös suullisen kielitaidon tarve ja sen opettamisen tärkeys on noussut keskustelunaiheeksi.

Tässä tutkimuksessa selvitettiin suullisen kielitaidon harjoittelua lukion englannin *Open Road*- ja *ProFiles*-oppikirjasarjoissa. Tavoitteena oli selvittää, kuinka suuri on suullisten aktiviteettien osuus kaikista aktiviteeteista, ja mitä suullisen kielitaidon osa-alueita korostetaan. Lisäksi haluttiin selvittää, mikä on drillien, harjoitusten ja tehtävien osuus suullisista aktiviteeteista. Tutkimuksen teoriapohjana toimivat aiemmat tutkimukset kommunikatiivisen kompetenssin ja suullisen kielitaidon rakenteesta ja osa-alueista, ja se suoritettiin sisältöanalyysin keinoin täydentäen kvalitatiivisia tuloksia kvantitatiivisin yhteenvedoin.

Tutkimustulokset osoittivat, että suullisen kielitaidon harjoittelussa painotetaan sujuvaa tuottamista. Muut suullisen kielitaidon osa-alueet, kuten kommunikaatiostrategiat, sanaton viestintä, tilanteenmukaiset viestimistavat ja kulttuurisidonnaiset tekijät jäävät kirjasarjoissa lähes täysin huomiotta. Luonnollisen puheen ennakoimattomuutta ja yllätyksellisyyttä tai epäröintiä, korjauksia ja tarkennuksia ei myöskään juuri harjoitella.

Useissa suullisissa aktiviteeteissa pyritään tuottamaan formaalia, kirjakielistä puhetta täydellisin lausein ja monimutkaisin sivulauserakentein, vaikka todellisuudessa suullinen viestintä rakentuu siten vain erityistapauksissa (esim. juhlapuhe). Luokittelu sisällön perusteella osoitti, että vaikka enemmistö suullisista aktiviteeteista on jaoteltavissa molemmille sarjoille yhteisiin luokkiin, molemmista kirjasarjoista löytyy myös painotuksia, joita toisessa sarjassa ei esiinny lainkaan.

Asiasanat – Keywords Oral skills, oral activities, textbooks, content analysis
Säilytyspaikka – Depository Kielten laitos

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1 INTRODUCTION

> The efficacy of communication depends upon using language to demonstrate one's willingness to relate, which often involves the indirectness of politeness rather than the direct and 'efficient' choice of language full of information.
>
> Byram 1997:3

The ultimate goal of learning a language is to be able to successfully communicate with it. In order to reach this goal, in both oral and written communication, one needs various skills in different aspects of language, e.g. grammar, syntax, semantics and phonetics. The goal of being able to effectively use a language has at times been lost in the excessive emphasis on grammar and faultless output, but since the early 1990s, foreign language teaching has been focusing more on developing communicative skills (Littlewood 1992:10, Salo-Lee 1991:1-3, Kaikkonen and Kohonen 2000:8). Learning to interpret a new language is also, through communication, the gate to understanding different people and different cultures (SUKOL).

It was already pointed out twenty years ago that social intercourse today is mainly based on oral communication even in working life (Salo-Lee 1991:1). In addition to meetings and telephone conversations, informal and oral-like language is used in written forms of communication such as text messages and e-mails. In preparing individuals for international contacts and intercultural learning formal language education plays a crucial role (Kaikkonen and Kohonen 2000:7). It can even be stated that skills in achieving goals in social life rest mainly upon one's communication skills (Rickheit, Strohner and Vorwerg 2010:15).

The core of successful communication is in “establishing and maintaining relationships” (Byram 1997:3). In other words, successful oral communication is much more than just the ability to combine words into meaningful, coherent utterances. One also needs to know what to say and to whom, in what circumstances, and how to say it (Hymes 1972:277, Richards et al. 1985:49, Alptekin 2002:57). In addition, one should be familiar with general manners and courtesies in the target language in order to communicate acceptably within the culture.

Even though all this is known on theoretical level, formal language education is constantly criticised for offering insufficient practice in oral skills. Upper secondary school offers a course in

oral skills, but it is an optional course. As the Finnish Matriculation Examination does not test oral skills, their practice is suffocated by the practice of aspects that are tested, i.e. reading and listening comprehension, grammar and writing compositions. What is more, oral communication is often experienced as a difficult and unnerving way of communicating in a foreign language. The present study analyses two EFL textbook series of upper secondary school to see whether, and to what extent, the textbooks offer the kind of practice in oral skills that is needed to successfully communicate orally based on the current theoretical understanding. The study leans on theories of communicative competence and oral skills, and the data is analysed by content analysis.

The study consists of five chapters. After the introduction, chapter 2 introduces the theoretical background of the study, including key terminology, some observations about the use of textbooks in language classrooms, the guidelines for teaching oral skills in Finnish upper secondary school and, finally, an overview of previous studies made on this subject. In chapter 3 the methodology of the study is explained and research questions formulated. Findings of the analysis are reported in chapter 4, and chapter 5 closes the study with discussion.

2 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Chapter 2 will first introduce the key terminology of this study. I will then observe the role of textbooks in teaching oral skills, identifying three main activity types used in textbooks. The following sections of the chapter will then present the aims and expectations of teaching oral skills in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (the CEFR) and the National Core Curriculum for Upper Secondary School (the NCC). Finally, the chapter closes with an overview or previous studies on textbooks and oral skills.

2.1 Key concepts

Before determining the concepts having to do with oral communication, the decision to address English as a foreign language instead of a second language needs to be validated. The role of English in the Finnish school system has gone through significant changes as the language has become more and more commonly used both in business life and in leisure time (media from television to the internet, music, advertising, games etc.). In general, Finnish learners of English encounter and use the target language outside the classroom radically more than other foreign languages taught at school. In most Finnish families, English is also the second language children learn, studies beginning from the 3rd grade of basic education (Tilastokeskus 2012). Some quarters therefore prefer addressing English as a second instead of a foreign language. Another way of outlining the matter would be to talk about two national languages, Finnish and Swedish, and refer to all other languages as foreign (Numminen and Piri 1998:7). From a typological point of view, Finnish and English are dissimilar languages, so linguistically English is a foreign language for Finnish learners (cf. what is said about Finnish and Swedish in Alanen 2000:187-188). In addition, the present study is about formal language learning and not language acquisition taking place in a natural environment, a factor that is sometimes seen as the distinction between foreign and second language definitions (Elomaa 2009:19). Furthermore, the NCC places English under foreign languages. In keeping with unambiguous terminology and avoiding any possible confusion with the second national language (Swedish), this study also addresses English as a foreign language (EFL).

All foreign language teaching focuses nowadays on developing students' communication skills (Littlewood 1992:10, Salo-Lee 1991:1-3, Kaikkonen and Kohonen 2000:8). This is the case at least on a theoretical level, as communication skills are highlighted in the NCC (2003:101-103). Even though language and communication as phenomena are related, for two reasons, they are not

synonyms (Littlewood 1992:9). Firstly, language does not only provide us with the ability to communicate but also affects our understanding of the world. Secondly, we do not only communicate through language but also with non-verbal signs and facial expressions. Nonetheless, it is specifically the need and the will to communicate that causes language development in children acquiring their first language and, hopefully, in students learning a foreign language.

It should be noted that communication skills and communicative competence are needed both in writing and speaking. An emphasis on communication skills does thus not equal an emphasis on oral skills. Furthermore, oral skills do not simply contain the ability to produce sentences. The following sections will define the terminology relevant to the present study and establish what is meant with *oral skills* and how do they relate to *communicative competence*.

2.1.1 Communicative competence

I have stated that foreign language teaching focuses on developing **communicative competence** and that oral skills are a crucial part of being able to communicate in a foreign language just as well as in one's first language. In order to give an accurate idea about the standing of oral skills in language competence, I will first introduce communicative competence and then narrow down the perspective to oral skills. This section presents an outline of how communicative competence can be defined.

Chomsky (1965) grouped knowledge of language into *competence*, referring to theoretical knowledge of grammar and other aspects of language, and *performance*, referring to the practical application of that knowledge in use. His view was criticised by Campbell and Wales (1970) and Hymes (1972) for not leaving any room for sociocultural knowledge of appropriateness. Hymes' main attention was on first language acquisition and he launched the term *communicative competence* in this context, focusing on communication within a community of native speakers using one language. He replaced the Chomskyan distinction between competence and performance with the following four questions defining language as means of communication:

1. Whether (and to what degree) something is formally possible;
2. Whether (and to what degree) something is feasible in virtue of the means of implementation available;
3. Whether (and to what degree) something is appropriate in relation to a context in

which it is used and evaluated;

4. Whether (and to which degree) something is in fact done, actually performed, and what its doing entails.

(Hymes 1972:281)

As the questions show, theoretical correctness (Chomsky's *competence*) is only the first step in evaluating communication, and the actual performance (Chomsky's *performance*) is the last step. Between them, there are the questions related to sociocultural possibilities and appropriateness.

Hymes' ideas were transferred into foreign language teaching and the concept of sociolinguistic competence was the basis for the development of communicative language teaching (Byram 1997:9). The importance of sociocultural knowledge shows outside classrooms, as one hardly ever needs to prove knowledge of a language system by, for example, producing a sentence that is grammatically correct but completely absurd in regard to the context; instead, that knowledge is used to communicate in the language and, through communication, to achieve a goal that can be anything from finding out the route to the railway station or catching up with a friend to giving a testimony or taking marriage vows (Widdowson 1978:1-3).

After Hymes' research, the **components of communicative competence** have been defined in various ways. A threefold model consists of grammatical, sociolinguistic and strategic competence (Canale and Swain 1980:28-30). Grammatical competence, related to Chomsky's idea of competence, refers to knowledge of grammar, morphology, syntax and other aspects of language. Sociolinguistic competence includes sociocultural rules and rules of discourse. The third component, strategic competence, refers to both verbal and non-verbal communication strategies that relate to either grammatical or sociocultural competence. An alternative threefold model of communicative competence defines the three components to be linguistic, sociolinguistic and pragmatic (CEFR 2001:13). In this definition, linguistic competences refer to knowledge of language as a system, i.e. lexical, phonological etc. knowledge. Sociolinguistic competences, in this model of communicative competence, mean the sociocultural conditions for using a language, and pragmatic competences refer to the functional use of the two previous competences. This categorisation of the CEFR sees each of the three main competences to consist of various elements and thus addresses each category as a set of competences (plural) instead of calling them three single competences.

Another way of looking at it would be defining communicative competence as a four-part concept consisting of knowledge of grammar and vocabulary, knowledge of rules of speaking (e.g. starting and ending a conversation, choosing appropriate topics), knowing different speech acts (such as requests, apologies and invitations) and knowing how to use language appropriately (Richards, Platt and Weber 1985:49). In other words, communicative competence is "the ability not only to apply grammatical rules of a language in order to form grammatically correct sentences but also to know when and where to use these sentences and to whom" (Richards, Platt and Weber 1985:49). More concise definitions describe communicative competence as an ability to use language to communicate efficiently and appropriately (Tiittula 1992:9, Rickheit, Strohner and Vorwerg 2010:25-26). In the 21st century, the focus of communicative competence has been on relationships instead of the individual speaker, and the aim has been to understand skilled social interaction in different contexts (Greene and Burleson 2003).

All the definitions of communicative competence above highlight other aspects of communication than grammatical accuracy. The focus on communicative competence can thus also be seen as disregarding grammar, "an 'anything-goes-as-long-as-you-get-your-meaning-across' approach" (Savignon 1997:7). The focus on appropriate communication is, however, not pushing grammar aside. Knowledge of the culture and present conditions of the language area, important as they are, need to be accompanied by sufficient skills in pronunciation, vocabulary and grammar in order to achieve communicative competence (Yli-Renko 1991:35).

Communicative competence is the overall goal of all language education. It is, however, a broad goal, as it includes communicative skills of a wide range, including both written and oral communication in everyday situations (Yli-Renko 1991:35, Savignon 1997:14-15). As the definitions above indicate, communication takes place not only orally but also in writing. The adjective in the term oral skills stresses that "a spoken form of language is used as opposed to a written form" (Richards, Platt and Weber 1985:202). Oral skills can thus be seen as one component of communicative skills, a kind of sub-skill. Furthermore, a distinction can be made between oral skills and *speech communication skills*[1] as follows: while oral skills are language specific abilities to orally communicate through the target language, speech communication skills include all communicative language use in which speech is present (Hildén 2000). A person can thus have oral

1 My translation of Hildén's Finnish term *puheviestintätaidot.*

skills in different languages, and they are all included in the person's speech communication skills. Figure 1 is my demonstration of the relations between the three terms in a hierarchy.

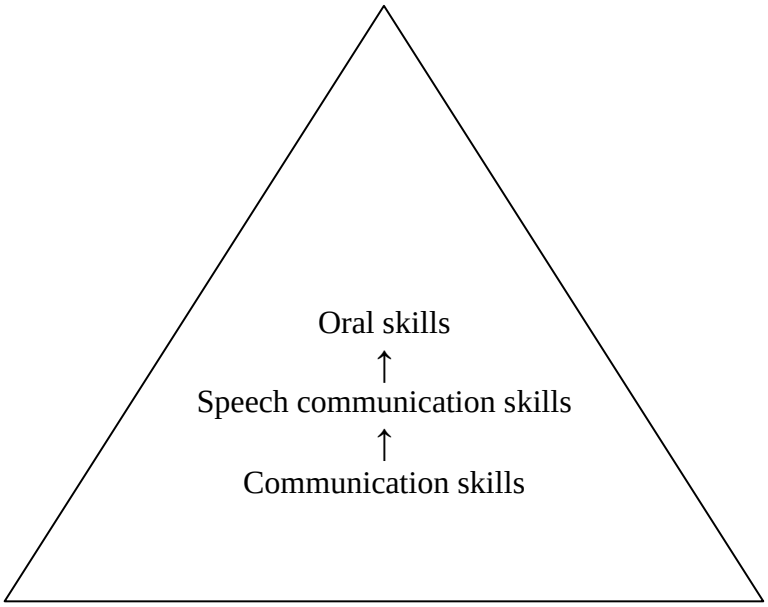


Figure 1: The hierarchy of terminology related to oral skills

In this section, I have introduced the concept of communicative competence with its various definitions and demonstrated the relationships between communicative competence, speech communication skills and oral skills. Before moving on to define oral skills more thoroughly, oral communication and how it differs from written communication must first be defined. The next section reviews the distinctive features of oral communication.

2.1.2 Oral communication

To define and assess language skills, a stand must first be taken on their nature, that is, whether competence in a language is an unbroken unit or whether it is the sum of different skills (Huhta 1993:78). Research has suggested knowledge of a language to be a single unit (see Oller 1979, for example). If there are language skills that can be separated, which is the view of most researchers today, we must define what they are and how they relate to each other (Huhta 1993:78-81). Even though dissecting language skills can be artificial knowing that all the elements combined are what makes language competence, there are idiosyncratic features in oral communication. There is thus also knowledge that is required specifically in oral communication.

Traditionally four basic language skills have been distinguished. These four skills are speaking and writing, sometimes referred to as active or productive skills, and reading and listening, also known as passive or receptive skills (see Widdowson 1978:57 and Richards, Platt and Weber 1985:160, for example). Speaking and listening can also be categorised to language skills that are expressed through the aural medium, whereas reading and writing are expressed through the visual medium (Widdowson 1978:57). Classifications into active or passive and productive or receptive skills can be seen as misleading for three main reasons (Widdowson 1978:57-69). Firstly, they do not tell anything about how language is used in communication, but only indicate how language is manifested. Secondly, speaking requires both receptive and productive participation in a conversation, since everything that is said is in some way connected to what has been said before. Thirdly, in a conversation, speaking includes using gestures and facial expressions in addition to just producing sounds with the vocal organs, and thus speech is expressed and interpreted through visual medium as well. In other words, processes of producing and understanding spoken language include, in addition to the motoric processes in the speech organ, sensory processes of interpreting gestures and facial expressions that accompany speech (Dufva 2000:79).

Oral communication is thus more than just speaking sentences out loud, and the boundaries between language skills are not as clearly defined as it would seem at first glance. Oral communication and spoken language do nonetheless differ from written communication in many ways: they simply do not function with the same rules. This fact is often neglected in teaching and assessing oral skills in classrooms (Tiittula 1992:9). The “same language” is used for both speaking and writing in the target language, even though the differences between the two are multifold enough to make them two different varieties of a language (Jokiniemi 1992:137). Special characteristics of oral communication are not discussed in language classrooms, and both teachers and students assess oral skills based on the standards set for written communication (Salo-Lee 1991:14, Tiittula 1992:9). The understanding of a language is thus largely based on the written language, and spoken language is seen through written language (Tiittula 1993:63). This is curious because in everyday contacts in our first language, we tend to be reserved towards people who speak like books, that is, literary language (White 1985). Based on everyday experience, it makes no sense then to educate students to speak in a way that alienates them from native speakers of the target language.

One way of differentiating oral communication from written communication is by pointing out a check-list of seven clear differences between the two mediums (Tiittula 1992:11-15). First of all,

spoken language is produced with voice (instead of graphic signals) and received through auditory input (instead of visual). Secondly, spoken language (in first language acquisition) is acquired effortlessly in everyday interaction with others, without knowingly distinguishing different genres (how to tell a joke or a fairytale) while written language is explicitly taught and learnt. Thirdly, the most common use of spoken language is everyday communication, whereas messages meant for the public and/or meant to be conserved are written. Furthermore, spoken language is dynamic and disappears quickly. In everyday speech, a speech act is only heard once. It remains in the short-term memory of the receiver for a while, after which it disappears. Speech, unless taped, does thus not exist as a static object in the way written texts that can be copied or sent forward do. In addition, spoken language is interactive and usually takes place one on one (except for telephone conversations). Moreover, the participants share the context in which language use happens. Lastly, non-verbal communication is also present in the situation.

Another distinctive feature of oral communication is usually the **social interaction** present in the situation where language is used (Salo-Lee 1991:5). Spoken language has always a "creator", a formal subject, so that the speaker is present in the situation and known by listeners, while in written language, the author of the text can be both geographically distant and context-wise irrelevant to the reader (Dufva 2000:83).The presence of others in spoken communication affects the output and the speaker observes reactions that are awakened in others. Reacting to what someone is saying with back channel cues allows listeners to participate and indicate to the speaker that their message is understood (Jokiniemi 1992:137, Tiittula 1993:65). The most common form of oral communication is discussion (everyday conversation), an essential part of which is giving feedback as a listener (Salo-Lee 1991:9, Tiittula 1992:27,104, Meddings and Thornbury 2009). Discussions have their own rules in how the participants begin, respond, proceed and end them, and the knowledge of these rules is as important as the knowledge of grammatical structures and vocabulary (Salo-Lee 1991:9). One person alone cannot determine the course of a conversation, but it is a result of co-operation, where the roles of the speaker and the listener(s) are taken in turns (Jokiniemi 1992:138).

Oral communication can be separated from written by its different purposes. The functions of spoken and written language are largely different, as the former is **interactional** and the latter transactional (Brown and Yule 1983:10-11). This distinction means that oral communication mostly focuses on building and maintaining social relationships, while written communication mainly aims at transmitting information. It could also be suggested that spoken language draws attention to the

message and the meaning that is being conveyed, while written language draws attention to structures and matters of form (Olson 1994). Both spoken and written languages have various registers that share common and intertextual features depending on the text type (Dufva 2000:79, Tiittula 1992:11-12). There are obviously cases in everyday life in which spoken language resembles written language (e.g. an address written down in advance) and cases in which written language has characteristics typical of spoken language (e.g. text messages, literary dialogues). Furthermore, oral language can also aim in transmitting information (a lecture) and written language can equally serve as a medium in social contacts (chatting on the internet).

A further characteristic of oral communication is its **dialogic nature**. In a conversation, the participants are not only expected to produce speech but also to listen, process and react to what others say (Tiittula 1992:38). Listening comprehension is thus an element related to oral skills: in order to react soundly to what others say, one needs to be able to process and interpret their sayings. Spoken articulation, unlike written language that is linear, is not divided into clearly separate units but is a continuum or a flow of speech (Dufva 2000:80). The context in which the conversation takes place alongside with the topic and the roles of the participants help one to interpret what the others mean, and even though the message that is actually said can be very incomplete, the shared context, expectations and topic provide listeners with sufficient information to interpret the message correctly (Tiittula 1992:31). On the other hand, the more the message includes strange sentence structures, unordinary word choices or foreign pronunciation, the more difficult it is for the listener to interpret (Pridaux 1984:45).

Another feature of spoken language is the **low density of packing information** (Brown and Yule 1983:7). In other words, in written language, complicated syntactic structures allow the inclusion of massive amounts of information into relatively brief sentences. Spoken language is thus not as economical as written language. Speakers do not speak in complete sentences, but express meanings in *idea units*, "short phrases and clauses connected with *and, or, but, that,* or not connected by conjunctions at all but simply spoken next to each other" (Luoma 2004:12). This is likely to be related to the fact that there is time to think and modify written language, whereas spoken language output is immediate. Spoken language must also be kept simple enough for the listener to be able to follow (Jokiniemi 1992:137). Immediate output affects the production in two ways (Brown and Yule 1983:6-7). Firstly, it does not give a chance to build complex subordinated clauses or adverbial modifications, hence the information is less densely packed in simpler

sentences. Additionally, spoken language in general uses non-specific words and phrases such as *they, it, sort of, like this, somebody,* and *somehow* instead of specific names.

The idea units of spoken language, used instead of complete sentences, consist of **topicalisation** and **tails** (Luoma 2004:15). Topicalisation frontals the important theme of an idea unit regardless of the standard written language word order. In other words the main topic is expressed in the beginning of an idea unit: *Joe, his name is* (Quirk and Greenbaum 1980). As for tails, they are noun phrases in the end of a clause, repeating a pronoun that has been used earlier: *He's a smart fellow, that Joe.* In a way a tail is thus "the mirror image of topicalisation" (Luoma 2004:15).

Oral communication is **dynamic and fast** by its nature. In casual communication, this feature manifests itself in two ways (Tiittula 1992:19). First of all, there is no time to plan one's sayings in advance. Secondly, unlike in written communication, errors cannot be erased and corrections cannot be made unnoticed. The time to plan what to say and how to say it being very short, mistakes are inevitable (Jokiniemi 1992:137). Indeed, pauses, corrections and restarts as well as mispronunciations, mixed sounds and wrong words said in inattention are an inseparable part of oral communication in foreign languages as well as in the first language (Salo-Lee 1991:7, Tiittula 1992:19). In fact, self-correction is a sign of very good language competence (Hill 1998). Strangely, in the first language, if the listeners notice errors in the first place, they forgive the speaker as they understand the message despite the errors and, in addition, believe that the errors are caused by inattention, not lack of knowledge (Luoma 2004:19). In foreign languages, then again, similar errors receive special attention. This is even though many of the errors are typical of both native and foreign language speakers. As for teaching English for Finns, regarding the dynamics of oral communication, it should be noted that the silent and cautious nature of Finns as both speakers and listeners can be mistakenly interpreted as hesitance, while, in reality, it is merely the Finnish way of communication that reflects in the output of foreign languages (Salo-Lee 1991:18).

Spoken language is **emotional** and it is coloured with exclamations and exaggerations. The non-verbal range of oral communication also allows the speaker to support their message with visual signs and to emphasise or even exaggerate though body language (Jokiniemi 1992:137-138). The messages conveyed through words and through non-verbal communication can also be contradictory, in which case the message sent by non-verbal means is usually interpreted as what the speaker actually wants to say (Vilkko-Riihelä and Laine 2012:103). These kinds of contradictions do not exist in written language.

In addition to the fast production and interpretation of oral communication, as already stated earlier in this section, spoken language also **disappears quickly**. The sound waves produced and heard attenuate quickly, after which the phrasing and the message of what was said rest on memory (Dufva 2000:82). The existence and disappearance of spoken language can be characterised by pointing out the following three observations (Tiittula 1992:11-17). Firstly, spoken language remains in the short-term memory of the listener for a while, but no "evidence" is left of what was said. Oral language, unless taped, thus only exists for the time it is being produced, whereas written language in the form of letters, e-mails, text-messages, books, newspapers etc. can be studied and analysed indefinitely; copies can be taken and notes made. Moreover, taping or transcribing spoken language violates it by taking it out of context and away from the people who were originally involved. In addition, transcriptions are abusive towards spoken language, since they change the state of language from spoken to written.

Despite the factors described above that separate spoken language from written language, the latter is favoured in teaching due to two important factors (Brown and Yule 1983:1). Firstly, during the history of language teaching, the interest has mainly been on the study of written language. Grammarians and dictionary-writers have studied and described it, and consequently the rules of written language of English, for example, are well known and compiled into grammar books. It is thus possible to unambiguously say whether or not a written sentence in English is grammatically correct or incorrect, and how an incorrect sentence should be modified in order for it to be correct. Secondly, over a relatively short period such as a century, written language does not change remarkably. Nor does it change greatly depending on where it is written. As for the study of spoken language, it can be concluded that the interest in conducting research is rather a new phenomenon in the history of language teaching. The rules and generalisations are significantly more difficult to define, as both the context and the physical location have a great effect on spoken output. As errors, slips of the tongue and colloquialisms are a natural part of oral communication in both first and foreign languages, it is problematic to decide which (if any) errors should be corrected. In addition, spoken language develops and changes in a much faster pace, and thus books or other efforts to describe it are always somewhat outdated.

As the definitions above show, oral communication consists of much more than just speaking. "Speaking" alone can thus not stand as a skill that should be acquired in foreign language teaching. Speaking does not necessarily even require any audience; one can just talk to oneself. Yet at least one other person is needed to *discuss*, to *communicate*, to *have a conversation*, to exchange

information and messages orally. That is also the actual aim of foreign language teaching: to enable students to *communicate* with, not just speak, the target language. The ability to speak in a foreign language, that is, produce meaningful utterances and pronounce them out loud in an understandable manner, is just one part of being able to orally communicate in that language. The next section moves on to define what other skills are needed in that process, i.e. what are the components of oral skills.

2.1.3 Oral skills

Section 2.1.2 explained why merely speaking in a foreign language is not sufficient as "oral skills". Defining what is meant by the term is challenging, because numerous factor affect the impression of a person's oral skills in a language (Luoma 2004:1). This section aims in itemising the building bricks of oral skills. As the components of oral skills are defined, the different features that should be acknowledged and practiced when focusing on oral skills in the textbooks of English are also named.

One very simple way of defining oral skills is to consider them to include the abilities to receive and produce language and use it appropriately, functionally and easily as a mean of communicating messages orally (Salo-Lee 1991:2). If one compares this definition to those presented of communicative competence in chapter 2.1.1, the resemblance is obvious, only here the appropriate use of language is defined to be oral. This definition does not, however, answer the question of what is needed to receive and produce language.

The first thing needed to orally communicate is obviously sufficient **vocabulary and knowledge of grammar** in order to produce meaningful sentences and to understand those of others (Bygate 1987:1). The role of grammar and vocabulary has been largely studied and their significance in language and communication is commonly recognised. This section focuses on factors that are particularly related to oral skills, hence grammar and vocabulary will only be covered by pointing out some issues relating to their status specifically in oral skills.

As explained in section 2.1.2, there are clear grammar rules for written language. In oral communication, output of native speakers includes ungrammaticalities, slips of the tongue and incomplete sentences. It seems hypocrite to demand flawless speaking from students, when the model they receive from native speakers is not flawless. Grammar rules of written language cannot

thus be applied to oral language as such. The concept of grammatical correctness in spoken language could even be completely replaced with the concept of appropriateness with advanced students (Brown and Yule 1983:22). As for vocabulary, distinctions into colloquial and literary or formal and informal expressions do exist, and some examples even appear on textbooks. Upper secondary school students already have experience of writing a CV, a job application or a letter of complaint, so they are probably familiar with some basic formal style vocabulary. Formal vocabulary is, however, seldom mistakenly brought in conversational situations. The problems in this area are more likely in using conversational language in formal situations, which is not the interest of this study.

An obvious factor in oral skills is **pronunciation.** In learning a new language, one must certainly learn to pronounce the language so that their output will be understandable. Finnish learners of English cannot pronounce English based on the Finnish alphabet, assuming that in most cases, one letter is pronounced as one phoneme. Pronunciation can also refer to many different items in speech: individual sounds, volume, speed, pausing, stress and intonation, to name a few (Luoma 2004:11). When talking about the correctness in pronunciation of a foreign language, the term usually refers to the manner of producing individual sounds, stress and intonation. The problem lies in choosing the objective in pronunciation. The number and distribution of native speakers of English has created countless accents and dialects just among the speakers of English as first language. In addition, English is widely used among non-native speakers as a common language of business all around the world. There are then several standards for native-like speaking or fluent foreign language competence. Which should we choose as the appropriate model of spoken language? Even though most learners acquire a comprehensible and efficient pronunciation, very few can achieve a native-like pronunciation in all respects (Luoma 2004:10). Furthermore, in can be questioned if it is even desirable to sound like a native speaker. There are several reasons for the learner to want to be recognised as a non-native speaker (Luoma 2004:10). Firstly, a foreign accent can be a question of identity. Secondly, a foreign accent makes good language skills noticeable in a foreign speaker, whereas good language skills of a native speaker would be taken for granted. Thirdly, being recognised as a non-native guarantees forgiveness in possible cultural or politeness violations. Some might even question if teaching pronunciation is any more important than teaching appropriate handwriting (Brown and Yule 1983:3), but this brings us back to the notion that in writing, there are clear rules of correctness that, in spoken language, are either lacking or very different from those of written language. Comprehensible pronunciation can nevertheless be named as a *sine qua non* of oral communication.

Fluency in speech is commonly mentioned as an aim in teaching oral skills, and it is also one of the criteria in assessment. Hesitation and self-corrections are, however, a natural part of oral communication (Salo-Lee 1991:4). Syntactic structures in speaking are thus much more flexible than in writing. In fact, "perfect" spoken language, that is, clearly articulated, formal, complete sentences that sound very unnatural can be what makes foreign language speakers stand out from native speakers and alienates them (Brown and Yule 1983:21). The need for accuracy and fluency also varies in different communicative situations; for a tourist in a coffee shop, it is sufficient that the messages are understood (Jaakkola 2000:151). In addition, fluency is easily affected by listeners: lack of eye contact or other ways of expressing approval causes the speaker to feel insecure (Salo-Lee 1991:7). Furthermore, Finnish speakers of foreign languages are used to requirements of accuracy in expression even in their first language and a normal communicational context is experienced as a public appearance (Yli-Renko 1991:32). For these reasons it is crucial that, when practising oral skills of English, the main emphasis is on fearless communication that includes corrections and pauses instead of flawless, mechanical speech. Oral fluency does not mean grammatically flawless or uninterrupted speech, but a fluent speaker knows when to hesitate, pause, correct oneself and interrupt others (Sajavaara 1980:132). These perceptions imply that fluency in oral communication could be defined, firstly, as self-confidence gained by the observation that all speakers, in first and foreign languages, stumble over or forget their words now and then, leave sentences unfinished and correct their sayings and word choices and, secondly, as the courage to use these possibilities only existing in spoken language.

As mentioned in section 2.1, the most common form of spoken language use is an everyday conversation, which has its own rules. There are thus two sets of **strategies** having to do with **interaction** that a language student should learn (Jokiniemi 1992:140). First, oral skills must thus include means of *starting* (greetings and courtesies), *maintaining* (eye contact, back channel cues, questions) and *ending* (signalling that there is nothing to add, intonation, saying goodbye) a discussion. In addition, the means of signalling the intention to talk with *initiatives* (*well, you know, it occurred to me that..., listen*), *interrupting* others (changing the role from listener to speaker), *preventing interruptions* (keeping the role of the speaker) and signalling the *end of an address* (looking at the next speakers, intonation, nodding) are needed in conversations. Knowledge and practice in these strategies also helps in achieving fluency in speaking (Yli-Renko 1991:32).

An essential part of oral communication is **non-verbal communication**. One approach is to consider it to consist of eight elements: facial expressions, gaze, gestures and other bodily

movements, posture, bodily contact, spatial behaviour, clothes and appearance, non-verbal aspects of speech and smell (Argyle 1988:1). Non-verbal communication varies between cultures and the difficulty of adopting non-verbal features of a foreign language is recognised, as "cultural differences in NVC [non-verbal communication] are a major source of friction, misunderstanding, and annoyance between cultural and national groups" (Argyle 1988:49). Another way of defining non-verbal communication is to include in it, in addition to facial expressions and gestures, symbols (such as a wedding ring), signs and signals (in clothes and hair) and body movements (Karjala 2003:57). Even silence is communicating, meaning for example reflection, anger, tiredness, astonishment etc. Prosody (intonation, stress, pauses) and paralinguistic factors (pitch, volume, rate of speech) can also be seen as non-verbal ways of affecting *how* things are expressed (Tiittula 1992:43-44).

The multidimensional nature of oral communication can also be defined as the "triple reality of speech", that is, language, paralanguage (e.g. tongue clicks) and kinesics (e.g. communicative gestures and postures), the latter two being insufficiently dealt with in foreign language classrooms (Poyatos 2002:103-132). This approach assumes that the non-verbal speech acts are likely to cause problems for learners, as they are not acknowledged in teaching. In addition to paralanguage and kinesics, the triple reality of speech includes in non-verbal dimensions of communication proxemics (distances between people), chemical, dermal and thermal reactions (blushing, tears, sweating), and body-adaptors and object adaptors (cosmetics, clothes). Students, even though they have experience of using non-verbal communication in their first language, tend to eliminate it when they talk a foreign language, and the multidimensional nature of oral communication is only adopted after experiencing authentic situations of oral communication in the target language (Salo-Lee 1991:18). Byram (1997:14) criticises Poyatos' view for assuming that non-verbal communication of a foreign culture could be taught in school in the first place. According to Byram, the learner might, firstly, not be able to control the non-verbal dimensions of communication as they are unconscious and, secondly, not be willing to give up a part of their own personality by adopting the non-verbal communication of others. Learning a new language does change the identity of the learner, but the change is from a monolingual to a bi- or multilingual person, making one a member of a new society communicating via the new language (Kalaja 2011:118). Adopting linguistic manners from a new language does hence not mean giving away something of one's own identity, but widening it.

The sub-skills of oral skills can be presented as a four-part model of functions of oral production (Hyltenstam and Wassén 1984). First, the *directive function* aims in getting the other person to do

something. It can be mediated through giving an order, asking for help, making an appeal, urging, advising or asking a question. Learners of a foreign language should learn different ways in which the same message can be expressed in different situations. In addition, they should understand that the approach they choose is dependant of the context. The second part is the *informational function.* Students have to be able to tell, for example, about themselves and their backgrounds. The *expressive function,* i.e. how to express anger or pleasure, should also be practiced when learning a language, even though its presentation in a formal classroom might feel difficult. Lastly, the *function of managing contacts* refers to the fact that the topic of a discussion is not always even relevant, but that what matters is the existence of a discussion. This last aspect, according to the four-part model, should be more practiced in formal language education.

Oral skills do not only include production, but also **listening and participating** in what others say. As mentioned in section 2.1.2, feedback from listeners shows the speaker that they are understood and encourages them to continue. This feedback, in addition to eye contact, can be affirmative sounds and words (*really, indeed, aha, mmm, oh*), gestures (nodding) and facial expressions (smiling, rolling one's eyes, raising one's eyebrows). The one-on-one nature of oral communication also allows listeners to ask for precisions or explanations immediately in case of misunderstandings. Listeners use feedback to signal four different things (Allwood 1988:91-92). Firstly, feedback can be given to encourage the speaker to continue and to ensure the continuation of communication. Smiling and nodding could be non-verbal signals of encouragement, and verbally it can be expressed with *Really, Keep going, Tell me more, What happened then, Mm, Yes?*. Secondly, feedback can signal whether or not the speaker has been heard. *Sounds good, Mm, I'm listening* or *Come again, I didn't catch that, Excuse me, What's that now* let the speaker know if they can move on or if repetition is needed. Thirdly, feedback tells if the message is understood: *I see, I get it* or *I'm not sure if I understood correctly*. Finally, listeners can also reveal the emotions and attitudes raised by the message. *You're right, I agree, That's true, Exactly* and *That's not how I see it, I'm not sure if I agree, Are you sure about that, Yes but...* indicate whether or not the others agree and how they feel about the topic. As for the speaker, they should be able to interpret the instant feedback of the listeners and to adapt their sayings according to the feedback, for example, to explain further if the message seems to be misunderstood or forge ahead if the topic seems very familiar to the listeners. The speaker can also ask for feedback through expressions such as *You see?, (Am I) Right?, You know?* (Salo-Lee 1991:10).

The **dialogic nature** of oral communication, as explained in section 2.1.2, indicates that those involved in a discussion cannot assume they may speak endlessly without being interrupted. Comments made by other participants may overlap and someone else might take the floor while one pauses to paraphrase. The course of the conversation might even suddenly change due to questions asked or anecdotes told. To some extent, oral communication is thus unpredictable as it follows the train of thoughts of the participants. Knowing how to get the attention of others when joining in a conversation or interrupting someone in order to ask a question or make a comment, as well as providing others with chances to do the same, is also a part of oral skills. A polite conversationalist participates but does not dominate, and invites others to participate as well.

The notion of a polite conversationalist brings us to the knowledge of s**ociocultural appropriateness** highlighted in defining communicative competence (see section 2.1.1). In order to speak with others effectively and appropriately, one must be aware of the culture specific manners of speaking. Finns have been taught not to interrupt, while Italians wish to engage in a conversation in a form of a reply to what has been said as soon as they possibly can (Lewis 1999:36). Moreover, the distance between people having a conversation, both physical and mental (expressed, for example, by whether or not the speakers are on first-name terms with each other) vary between different cultures. In addition to the rules of speaking, there are rules concerning the content of conversation. All cultures have taboos and unacceptable topics that should be avoided. Two people communicating through a shared first language usually share this sociocultural knowledge implicitly, but people learning to speak a foreign language must familiarise themselves with this knowledge explicitly.

Regardless of the dynamic and unpredictable nature of oral communication that, even in native speakers' output, includes hesitance, self-correction and errors both in word choices and in pronunciation, foreign language learners are expected to learn to speak flawlessly. The expectation for learners to speak a language like a perfect native speaker rises from the assumption that a bilingual can speak both their languages perfectly, and that the same result could be obtained through foreign language learning, but the idea is ignorant to the literature showing that few, if any, bilinguals have equal, perfect mastery over their two languages even in linguistic, far less sociolinguistic competence (Byram 1997:11). The notion of a perfect native speaker in itself is very problematic, considering that the regional and sociocultural accents and dialects combined with questions of personality and individuality result in countless manners of speaking, all equally native as they are different. The expectations of native-like language skills in a foreign language are thus

completely unreasonable (Kaikkonen 2000:51). Learners themselves can set their own goals as they wish, but a native speaker's competence cannot be set as a general objective for all in language teaching.

Viewing the learner as “an incomplete native speaker” causes two kinds of problems (Byram 1997:11-12). Firstly, the target is impossible and thus inevitably causes failure. Secondly, it if were possible, reaching native-like skills would cause “linguistic schizophrenia”, where one has to abandon one language to be accepted as a native speaker of another. According to this view it would also mean parting from one's own culture and adopting a new cultural identity. As already mentioned earlier in this section, however, learning a new language does not fade out any part of the learner's identity, but enriches it (Kalaja 2011:118).

In this section I have outlined the sub-skills of oral skills. To recapitulate, I have included to oral skills:

- grammar and vocabulary,
- pronunciation,
- fluency (confidence),
- non-verbal communication,
- choosing context-suited approaches to make a point,
- giving (listener) and interpreting (speaker) feedback through words and gestures,
- means of joining in, interrupting and inviting others to participate in a conversation, and
- politeness rising from sociocultural awareness.

To verify this list, it could be compared to another list of skills required in oral communication, compiled by Nunan (1991:7). This list includes in oral skills

- comprehensible pronunciation
- knowledge of stress, rhythm and intonation patterns
- skills in taking short and long speaking turns
- management of interaction
- skills in negotiating meanings
- skills of listening
- knowing how to know and negotiate purposes of conversation

- use of suitable conversational formulae and fillers

Apart from non-verbal communication that is not mentioned in the latter list, the two seem to consist of similar items.

The different skills explained in this section imply that the sub-skills of oral skills could be divided into three main categories: skills in production, skills in comprehension and skills in interaction. Alternatively, these skills of oral communication could be categorised as motor-perceptive skills and interaction skills (Bygate 1987:5). The challenge is in ensuring that students not only learn *about* these skills, i.e. gain theoretical knowledge of them, but that they also learn *how* to use these skills in practice.

This section concludes the chapter of defining terminology relevant to the present study. Now that the nature of oral communication and oral skills has been explained, I move on to examine the role of textbooks in the teaching of oral skills and to identify the different activity types used in them to practice oral skills.

2.2. Role of textbooks in teaching oral skills

Textbooks have more power over what happens in the classroom than anything else (Neuner 1994:8, cited in Karjala 2003:50). The power of textbooks is based on how they highlight certain things while deemphasising others and thus have a strong impact on what is thought to be valuable and important in learning a language (Luukka et al. 2008:64). Textbooks dictate the objectives, methods and social aspects ("chalk and talk", working in pairs or in groups) of teaching, and they instruct when to use other teaching aids such as tapes or CDs (Karjala 2003:50, Luukka et al. 2008:64). Even though no law orders us to use textbooks in teaching, few teachers choose to produce or collect and adjust their own teaching materials without a textbook. Still, teachers have the power to choose which activities offered in the textbook are made use of in class and which are left out. No amount or oral activities in the book results in fluent oral skills if they are not used.

Attitudes towards textbooks are much more critical than attitudes towards other literary work (Lappalainen 1992). Unlike some sources (e.g. Kauppinen 2006:203) state, textbooks receive plenty of criticism. The most obvious problem of textbooks in teaching oral skills is probably the artificial separation of different language skills. Activities in textbooks are usually named to be either

listening, writing, grammar or speaking activities. In real life, skills cannot be practiced or used separately from each other. Grammatical knowledge and vocabulary is needed in order to speak coherently (Littlewood 1992:15), and no knowledge of grammar rules is of any good if one does not have enough vocabulary and knowledge of social situations to help oneself use grammatical rules to produce output and participate in communication.

> For many learners the kind of communication just described [fixed items and patterns] is too rigid and restrictive to constitute a goal in itself. They want to learn to use the language creatively, in order to express personal meanings and understand the unpredictable language that others speak directly at them. For this they have to gain access to the underlying system of the language, so that they cannot only use set phrases or insert alternative words into fixed patterns, but also make choices within the grammatical system itself. (Littlewood 1992:17)

Yet textbook exercises tend to separate these areas and instruct the learner to practice only grammar by adding the correct suffix into a blank in the middle of a sentence, or to practice only vocabulary by joining a word with the right translation. In reality, when communicating in a language, the deeper the understanding of a language system is, the more fluent and varied the output is in the target language (Littlewood 1992:20). A deeper understanding of a language can only be achieved if different language skills are integrated and they complement each other instead of being separate instances.

A lot of thought has been put on how to bring authentic teaching materials to language classrooms. The balance between authentic language and comprehensible input suitable for the learner's age and conceptual skills causes three major issues for the teaching oral skills in textbooks (Karjala 2003:56-60). Firstly, both vocabulary and grammar skills of the learner are significantly more limited in a foreign language than in the first language. The material in textbooks should still be authentic and, in addition, correct. Secondly, dialogues are simplified and fictitious, no mistakes are made and no pauses taken to decide how to express something. In sharp contrast to the real world outside classrooms, textbook conversations never contain cursing or vulgarism. Thirdly, background “hubbub”, surprising events and misunderstandings are all tidied up from textbook dialogues. That is why textbook dialogues can be called “dialogues of minimised chaos” (Karjala 2003:60). What is more, situations of oral communication in textbooks are often forced. A common text type is an oral interview with closed question-answer -patterns that do not allow real interaction between

participants (Alanen 2000:192). The model of speaking given in the books is thus very unrealistic and unnatural.

Textbook dialogues that seemingly represent spoken language are significantly influenced by written language in many ways (Tiitula 1992:9-17). First of all, dialogues are *printed* in textbooks. Transcriptions change the essence of spoken language as they turn it from action happening in real time into static, written text. Additively, textbook dialogues are often first written and only then recorded on the CD accompanying the textbook. Consequently, textbook dialogues are but written language that is read out lout on CD or by students. As chaotic and incoherent transcribed discussions seem, as unnatural are often the textbook dialogues that are first written and the read out loud. Furthermore, spoken language is practiced in written language in exercises such as "Fill in the missing parts of the discussion", and thus written language often gets to function as a starting point for learning spoken language. This may lead to focusing on matters that are relevant in written language and neglecting the essential features of spoken language (e.g. intonation) that do not show in writing. When focusing on informal speech style, textbooks have two major problems (Alanen 2000:192-193). Firstly, the style is only partially acknowledged in vocabularies. With many informal expressions and slang words, the style and appropriate situations of use are not shown through. Secondly, slang is constantly changing and often bound to a certain geographical area or to a certain group of people. Slang words are thus not shared even in one communications culture, much less between different ones.

Another problem with textbooks as signposts in teaching oral skills has to do with their relation to the curriculum. When the national curriculum is updated, publishers renew their textbook series and market the latest editions as "meeting with the latest curriculum" (Luukka et al. 2008:64). It is a common assumption that textbooks scrupulously appreciate the national core curriculum and thus by teaching the textbooks, teachers follow the curriculum. There is, however, no supervising board that would select the textbooks that are in accordance with the curriculum. The Finnish National Board of Education does not inspect textbooks anymore, so the publishers themselves are responsible for quality control, alongside with teachers who choose which textbooks they use (Kauppinen 2006:204). In addition, the guidelines of the national curriculum are quite broad, so the writers of books have plenty of freedom in choosing what they feel is interesting and important and, on the other hand, what is not worthy of teaching. It is thus not justifiable for teachers to simply assume that textbooks convey all the essential matters of a course - rather, each textbook offers its

authors' view of what is important. Regarding the present study this means that, even though the importance of oral skills is highlighted and there is even a whole course dedicated to them, textbooks do not necessarily provide students with sufficient activities in oral skills either in number or in versatility. Should that be the case, the teacher needs to turn to other resources in the teaching of oral skills.

Many of the problems with textbooks indicated above can be explained with the fact that textbook series are not immune to the market economy system. The publishers need to design and publish materials that appeal to the possible buyers and earn profit (Karjala 2003:60): a good textbook should appeal to students with its themes and layout, enable studying both in a classroom and independently, be accurate in its contents and present the information in a manner suitable for the target group. It should also be competitive in price, although in Finnish upper secondary school, the book expenses do not affect the schools' budgets, as students buy the books themselves. In addition, publishers are often in a hurry to bring new series in the market. It is difficult to make a textbook that would please different kinds of teachers and different kinds of learners (Karjala 2003:60). After all, textbook authors and publishers have to compromise in many respects.

It is nevertheless understandable that, despite their defects and problems, both teachers and students are keen on using textbooks. Textbooks explicitly divide the language into smaller sections, label the areas of language competence and offer an all-set grouping on how and in what order matters should be taught. As this study does not aim to take a stand on whether or not, and to what extent, textbooks should be used, we now move on to introduce the different activity types, used as basis in the analysis of this study, in textbooks.

2.2.1 Activity types: drills, exercises, tasks

Activities in Finnish textbooks of English are usually referred to as exercises both by authors and by teachers using them. The notion of *drill* is usually understood quite unambiguously, but *exercise* and *task* are often used interchangeably in schools, without making any distinctions. There is no agreement in research or language pedagogy to the definitions of these two concepts (Ellis 2003:2). There are some studies that also seem to use *activity* as a fourth, separate label. The present study uses it as an umbrella term including all the different activity types in textbooks. This subsection introduces various criteria for the terminology concerning textbook activities in order to clarify the difference and define the basis for the categorisation of activities in the analysis.

Drills, strongly associated with the audio-lingual method and also called mechanical or pattern practice, focus on repetition in a more or less controlled manner (Wong and VanPatten 2003:403). In the audio-lingual method, the "mechanical habit formation" was seen as the basis of developing language skills; in other words, students could not build their own expressions before all the necessary structures had been drilled (Wong and VanPatten 2003:404). In addition, all errors needed to be strictly avoided, since repetition of errors would lead into generalisation of errors. A stereotypical example of a drill could be asking students to change sentences from singular to plural or to change the tense from present to past.

Drills can be further classified into three types: *mechanic drills*, *meaningful drills* and *communicative drills* (Paulston 1976, cited in Wong and VanPatten 2003:405-406). The difference between these three types of drills lies in how controlled they are and whether or not there is a fixed right answer (Kivilahti 2012:24). Mechanical drills, such as conjugating verbs according to person in German, can be completed without even knowing the language and there is only one acceptable answer, while meaningful drills require that the student understands the question in order to produce the only acceptable answer (Wong and VanPatten 2003:405-406). One example of a meaningful drill would be asking students about the location of objects in the classroom:

- Where is Nina's pencil case?
- It is on her desk.
- Where is John's book?
- It is in his bag.
- Where is Steve's drawing?
- It is on the wall.

Etc.

As for communicative drills, they can be defined with two notions (Wong and VanPatten 2003:406). Firstly, they do not hold right or wrong answers except for grammatical (in)correctness. Secondly, in communicative drills, students are expected to bring forward information that is not known before the drill, for example, their own opinions or assumptions. A communicative adaptation of the meaningful drill above could thus include questions such as "Where do you think Nina keeps her pencil case at home?".

As the three-folded classification of drills shows, efforts have been made to update the concept of drills to measure up to the requirements of communicative competence (Kivilahti 2012:24). The role of drills in language teaching are still strongly criticised and studies have been made indicating that not only do the drills not help learners to learn a language better, but in some cases they might even hinder learning (Wong and VanPatten 2003:417).

To define *exercises* and *tasks*, the easiest way is by stating the differences between them (see also Ellis 2003 and Kivilahti 2012:31-33). I thus begin by defining tasks and then define exercises by comparing the differences between these two types of activities.

According to a broad definition of *task*, activities such as making airline reservations, borrowing books, making a hotel reservation, filling out a form and painting a fence are tasks, i.e. a "piece of work undertaken for oneself or for others, freely or for some reward" (Long 1958:89). In other words, tasks are all the little things people do in their everyday lives. This definition can, however, be criticised for being non-linguistic, for concerning non-linguistic matters and for including examples (painting a fence) where no language use is needed in order to for the task to be completed (Nunan 1989:5). In teaching a foreign language, it seems unnecessary to include activities that do not necessitate language use in the term *task*, since the overall goal is for learners to be able to use the target language (Ellis 2003:2).

Tasks are primarily concerned with conveying meanings (Ellis 2003:3). In other words, "[A task is] a piece of classroom work which involves learners in comprehending, manipulating, producing or interacting in the target language while their attention is principally focused on meaning rather than form." (Nunan 1989:10). The aim is thus not to produce a specific, predetermined answer, but to engage learners in interacting in the language in order to complete the task. Students have some information to begin with, and they have an objective to reach, but they themselves get to manipulate the ways in which they achieve the goal (Prabhu 1987, as cited in Ellis 2003:4). The two defining characters of a task are thus 1) the need to use the target language in order to achieve an objective and 2) focus on meaning while using the language (Bygate, Skehan and Swain 2001). An additional, important criterion for a task is its relation to the real world (Skehan 1996, as cited in Ellis 2003:4). As mentioned in section 2.1.1, outside classrooms, we are hardly ever asked to prove our language skills by producing grammatical, yet contextually absurd sentences or even less by conjugating a verb in all persons and tenses – both activities probably familiar to all language students. Tasks should be the type of activities that one might encounter in real life, such as

negotiating meanings and problem-solving activities.

Moving on to differentiate between *task* and *exercise*, if the focus in tasks is primarily on conveying meanings, exercises are form-focused (Ellis 2003:3). Even though attention must be paid to both meaning and form in both activities, the basic difference between a task and an exercise is whether the activity aims in developing linguistic skills through completing the activity (a task) or if linguistic skills are a prerequisite for completing it (an exercise) (Widdowson 1998). As certain linguistic skills are a prerequisite for completing an exercise, hence there is a correct answer in exercises that learners should know. To clarify, let us consider a common textbook activity, a gap-fill vocabulary exercise. Students are to fill in missing words or phrases into sentences taken from the text. There is a Finnish clue under the blank line, and in order to complete the exercise, students need to either already know the vocabulary needed or look for the correct answers in the text. Either way, there is usually only one acceptable answer as the gaps must be filled "based on the text", as the instructions often state. Both types of activities thus aim to practice a language, but their focus and means to achieve the goal are different.

The difference between tasks and exercises could also be defined as that of pragmatic and semantic meaning, i.e. using a language in a context in tasks or focusing on "the systemic meanings that specific forms can convey irrespective of context" in exercises (Ellis 2003:3-6). Accordingly, when learners want to complete a task, they need to function as language users and engage in language processes similar to real-life activities, where the learning takes place incidentally through the task. By contrast, in exercises, learners function as language learners instead of language users, and the learning is intentional. Tasks still provide learners with the ability to choose what forms to use and allow them to focus on form whenever needed. The mention of real-life activities in this definition includes authenticity as a criterion for a task. Activities such as telling a story based on given pictures or finding differences in two pictures are thus not very good, as learners will hardly encounter them in their lives outside classrooms.

Three different activity types used in language textbooks have now been established. The last sections of chapter 2 examine the role and importance of oral skills in the two documents that hold the highest authority in instructing language teaching and assessing in Finland, the CEFR and the NCC.

2.3. Guidelines for teaching oral skills in Finland

I suggested in section 2.2 that many (wrongly) assume that textbooks thoroughly follow the NCC and that sticking to the textbook would thus result in following the curriculum in teaching. The NCC, being the highest national "authority" in upper secondary school education, sets overall guidelines for the teaching of all subjects in Finnish upper secondary schools. In addition to the NCC, the CEFR affects language teaching today in Finland as well as in other member countries of the European Union (Harjanne 2006:15-16). The CEFR was compiled to support European cooperation in education, culture, economy, science and industry, to integrate language education and to promote intercultural and interlingual communication (CEFR 2001:1). Even though the NCC highlights communication in language teaching, it has not clearly stated earlier how communication skills should develop during upper secondary school (Opetushallitus 2003). The expected progress in communication skills can, however, now be presented based on the CEFR (Opetushallitus 2003), and there is a Finnish application of it as an appendix in the NCC (2003:234-251).

The two documents, the NCC and the CEFR, are thus the two main signposts in teaching foreign languages in Finland. The present section introduces what is said about oral skills in these documents since, by studying their contents regarding oral skills, the official role and importance given to them in foreign language teaching is revealed. I begin by introducing the CEFR, since it has also affected the current NCC, and knowing the CEFR language scales helps to understand the Finnish application.

2.3.1 Common European Framework of Reference for Languages

The CEFR provides European countries with a common basis for planning core curricula, examinations, textbooks and other aspects of language teaching (CEFR 2001:1). As mentioned in section 2.3, it complements the NCC by describing explicitly what learners need to learn to be able to use a language for communication and what skills and knowledge help in making that communication effective (Opetushallitus 2003, CEFR 2001:1). As the framework is a very large and thorough description, I only try to summarise its main contents here and, after introducing the origins and aims of the framework, focus merely on what is relevant to the present study, i.e. the teaching of oral skills.

The aims of the CEFR (2001:1) can be presented as three-folded. Firstly, by setting common goals for learning contents and outcomes, it promotes the transparency of different European language

syllabuses and qualifications. International co-operation in language education is thus strengthened, and difficulties caused by different education systems can be overcome. Secondly, mobility in Europe is eased with common, objective criteria that enable the recognition of national degrees and qualifications abroad. Thirdly, it ensures that the teaching of languages meets with the actual needs and expectations of the learners by providing the educational organisers with the possibility to review their practices and coordinate their work.

The CEFR is built on the overall aims of the Council of Europe, and as for language policy, these aims can be expressed in three main points (CEFR 2001:2). First, the valuable diversity of languages and cultures of the European Union should be protected and this diversity should be seen as a source of mutual understanding instead of a communicational barrier. Secondly, communication and interaction between Europeans with different first languages can only happen through better knowledge of European languages. Thirdly, the modifications in national language education curricula can lead to rapprochement between member states of the EU.

The approach to language use and language learning adopted in the CEFR is holistic and action-orientated (CEFR 2001:9), taking into account that functioning in the society includes cognitive, emotional and volitional resources in addition to linguistic ones. The action-orientated approach assumes that language learners become language users, and thus the same set of language proficiency scales can be applied to both language learners and language users (CEFR 2001:43). Language use is described as follows:

> Language use, embracing language learning, comprises the actions performed by persons who as individuals and as social agents develop a range of **competences,** both **general** and in particular **communicative language competences.** They draw on the competences at their disposal in various contexts under various **conditions** and under various **constraints** to engage in **language activities** involving **language processes** to produce and/or receive **texts** in relation to **themes** in specific **domains,** activating those **strategies** which seem most appropriate for carrying out the **tasks** to be accomplished. The monitoring of these actions by the participants leads to the reinforcement or modification of their competences.
>
> (CEFR 2001:9)

Knowledge and skills in a language are thus described through two broad domains of general competences and communicative language competences. General competences are individual, but not language-specific; they are called upon for all kinds of action, including language use.

Communicative language competences are what allow a person to use specific linguistic means in action.

At its simplest, the CEFR language scale is six fold. Language learners and users are divided into three groups: basic (A), independent (B) and proficient users (C). Each group is further divided into two subcategories (A1, A2, B1 etc.). Table 1 presents the structure of the scale in a simple form.

Table 1. Common Reference Levels: global scale (CEFR 2001:24)

Proficient User	C2	Can understand with ease virtually everything heard or read. Can summarise information from different spoken and written sources, reconstructing arguments and accounts in a coherent presentation. Can express him/herself spontaneously, very fluently and precisely, differentiating finer shades of meaning even in more complex situations.
	C1	Can understand a wide range of demanding, longer texts, and recognise implicit meaning. Can express him/herself fluently and spontaneously without much obvious searching for expressions. Can use language flexibly and effectively for social, academic and professional purposes. Can produce clear, well-structured, detailed text on complex subjects, showing controlled use of organisational patterns, connectors and cohesive devices.
Independent User	B2	Can understand the main ideas of complex text on both concrete and abstract topics, including technical discussions in his/her field of specialisation. Can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible without strain for either party. Can produce clear, detailed text on a wide range of subjects and explain a viewpoint on a topical issue giving the advantages and disadvantages of various options.
	B1	Can understand the main points of clear standard input on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, etc. Can deal with most situations likely to arise whilst travelling in an area where the language is spoken. Can produce simple connected text on topics which are familiar or of personal interest. Can describe experiences and events, dreams, hopes and ambitions and briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans.
	A2	Can understand sentences and frequently used expressions related to areas of most immediate relevance (e.g. very basic personal and family information, shopping, local geography, employment). Can communicate in simple and routine tasks requiring a simple and direct exchange of information on familiar and routine matters. Can describe in simple terms

Basic User		aspects of his/her background, immediate environment and matters in areas of immediate need.
	A1	Can understand and use familiar everyday expressions and very basic phrases aimed at the satisfaction of needs of a concrete type. Can introduce him/herself and others and can ask and answer questions about personal details such as where he/she lives, people he/she knows and things he/she has. Can interact in a simple way provided the other person talks slowly and clearly and is prepared to help.

In addition, there are separate reference levels for the four traditional language skills: oral production, written production, listening comprehension and reading comprehension. Furthermore, there are sub-scales to describe different actions in these four categories. In oral production, these scales include sustained monologues (e.g. describing experience), public announcements and addressing audiences (CEFR 2001:58-61). The scale of overall oral production is found in table 2. Sub-scales of oral communication can be found in appendix 1.

Table 2. The CEFR Overall oral production scale (CEFR 2001:58).

C2	Can produce clear, smoothly flowing well-structured speech with an effective logical structure which helps the recipient to notice and remember significant points.
C1	Can give clear, detailed descriptions and presentations on complex subjects, integrating sub-themes, developing particular points and rounding off with an appropriate conclusion.
B2	Can give clear, systematically developed descriptions and presentations, with appropriate highlighting of significant points, and relevant supporting detail.
	Can give clear, detailed descriptions and presentations on a wide range of subjects related to his/her field of interest, expanding and supporting ideas with subsidiary points and relevant examples.
B1	Can reasonably fluently sustain a straightforward description of one of a variety of subjects within his/her field of interest, presenting it as a linear sequence of points.
A2	Can give a simple description or presentation of people, living or working conditions, daily routines, likes/dislikes, etc. as a short series of simple phrases and sentences linked into a list.
A1	Can produce simple mainly isolated phrases about people and places.

Completely separated from oral production, the CEFR (2001:73-82) also provides scales for interactive activities and strategies, including spoken interaction. These spoken interaction scales include

- overall spoken interaction
- understanding a native speaker interlocutor
- conversation
- informal discussion
- formal discussion and meetings
- goal-oriented co-operation (organising an event, for example)
- transactions of goods and services
- information exchange
- interviewing and being interviewed

The overall spoken interaction scale is found in table 3. While admitting that spoken production and spoken interaction are different actions, and good skills in spoken production (such as giving a speech) do not automatically indicate good skills in spoken interaction, it seems peculiar to divide these two into completely separate categories. After all, as stated multiple times already, language education aims first and foremost in developing communication skills that are used to interact with others.

Table 3. The CEFR Overall spoken interaction scale (CEFR 2001:74).

C2	Has a good command of idiomatic expressions and colloquialisms with awareness of connotative levels of meaning. Can convey finer shades of meaning precisely by using, with reasonable accuracy, a wide range of modification devices. Can backtrack and restructure around a difficulty so smoothly the interlocutor is hardly aware of it.
C1	Can express him/herself fluently and spontaneously, almost effortlessly. Has a good command of a broad lexical repertoire allowing gaps to be readily overcome with circumlocutions. There is little obvious searching for expressions or avoidance strategies; only a conceptually difficult subject can hinder a natural, smooth flow of language.
B2	Can use the language fluently, accurately and effectively on a wide range of general, academic, vocational or leisure topics, marking clearly the relationships between ideas. Can communicate spontaneously with good grammatical control without much sign of having to restrict what he/she wants to say, adopting a level of formality appropriate to the circumstances.
	Can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction, and sustained

	relationships with native speakers quite possible without imposing strain on either party. Can highlight the personal significance of events and experiences, account for and sustain views clearly by providing relevant explanations and arguments.
B1	Can communicate with some confidence on familiar routine and non-routine matters related to his/her interests and professional field. Can exchange, check and confirm information, deal with less routine situations and explain why something is a problem. Can express thoughts on more abstract, cultural topics such as films, books, music etc.
	Can exploit a wide range of simple language to deal with most situations likely to arise whilst travelling. Can enter unprepared into conversation on familiar topics, express personal opinions and exchange information on topics that are familiar, of personal interest or pertinent to everyday life (e.g. family, hobbies, work, travel and current events).
A2	Can interact with reasonable ease in structured situations and short conversations, provided the other person helps if necessary. Can manage simple, routine exchanges without undue effort; can ask and answer questions and exchange ideas and information on familiar topics in predictable everyday situations.
	Can communicate in simple and routine tasks requiring a simple and direct exchange of information on familiar and routine matters to do with work and free time. Can handle very short social exchanges but is rarely able to understand enough to keep conversation going of his/her own accord.
A1	Can communicate in simple and routine tasks requiring a simple and direct exchange of information on familiar and routine matters to do with work and free time. Can handle very short social exchanges but is rarely able to understand enough to keep conversation going of his/her own accord.

The taxonomic structure of the CEFR means that the complexity of using a language is divided into separate components, which causes two main problems (CEFR 2001:1-2). Firstly, communication takes place though the whole composition of a person. The knowledge and skills that are presented separately in the framework all function together, forming the unique way of communicating by each person. Secondly, the cultural surroundings and social relations affect the identity of each communicator. The CEFR does, however, also provide means to describe partial qualifications (for example listening comprehension without speaking) in cases where only limited language skills are required.

Here I have introduced the leading principles of the CEFR concerning oral skills. The next section presents the contents regarding oral skills of the NCC, the highest national authority in planning and executing upper secondary school education.

2.3.2 National Core Curriculum for Upper Secondary School

The current NCC took effect in 2005. It describes the overall content of all courses taught in upper secondary school as well the values and attitudes that form the basis for teaching. The **general objectives** of upper secondary school education state as follows:

> In terms of study skills, emphasis must be placed on the ability to co-operate with other people in different groups and networks. Skills and abilities to be promoted as being necessary for co-operation comprise *self-expression skills, including the second (non-native) national language and foreign languages*, the ability to take other people into account and the ability to revise one's beliefs and actions as required. Co-operation, *interaction and communication skills must be developed* by means of different forms of collaborative learning. (NCC 2003:24, italics added)

In addition, students of upper secondary school should know their own cultural heritage and identity and, while appreciating those of others, be also able to communicate in foreign languages with people coming from different cultural backgrounds (NCC 2003:27-28). Upper secondary school is to encourage students in multicultural interaction and international contacts (NCC 2003:28).

In **objectives for teaching foreign languages**, the importance of intercultural communication is emphasised:

> Instruction in foreign languages will develop students' *intercultural communication skills*: it will provide them with skills and knowledge related to language and its use and will offer them the opportunity to develop their awareness, understanding and appreciation of the culture within the area or community where the language is spoken. In this respect, special attention will be given to European identity and European multilingualism and multiculturalism. Language instruction will provide students with capabilities for independent study of languages by helping them to understand that *achievement of communication skills requires perseverance and diversified practice in communication*. As a subject, each foreign language is a practical, theoretical and cultural subject. (NCC 2003:100, italics added)

In other objectives, the knowledge of how to use a language to *communicate* in a manner characteristic of the target cultures is mentioned alongside with familiarity with one's own strengths and development needs as *communicator* (NCC 2003:100, italics added). These objectives support the view that language education nowadays focuses on communication skills; indeed, *language skills* are mentioned but a few times, whereas *communication skills* and the role of students as

communicators is emphasised. These statements still do not take a stand on the mediums through which communication takes place, i.e. oral and written language.

In the NCC, the objectives in teaching are set by identifying four basic language skills, listening, speaking, reading and writing (presented in more detail in section 2.1.2), and naming the objectives for these four skills separately. The objectives are expressed through levels of Language Proficiency Scale, the Finnish application of the CEFR. Table 4 summarises the system in which Language Proficiency Scale expresses language skills. It should be noted here that the division between levels is by no means clear, and that moving from one level to another is not a simple jump from one box to another. Rather, the development takes place progressively, and the stages overlap.

Table 4. Levels of language competence according to the Finnish Language Proficiency Scale (NCC 2003:234-251).

C1	Managing a variety of demanding language use situations	C1.1 First stage of fluent proficiency
B2	Managing regular interaction with native speakers	B2.2 Functional independent proficiency
		B2.1 First stage of independent proficiency
B1	Dealing with everyday life	B1.2 Fluent basic proficiency
		B1.1 Functional basic proficiency
A2	Basic needs for immediate social interaction and brief narration	A2.2 Developing basic proficiency
		A2.1 First stage of basic proficiency
A1	Limited communication in the most familiar everyday situations	A1.2 Functional elementary proficiency
		A1.2 Developing elementary proficiency
		A1.1 First stage of elementary proficiency

The target level of competence depends on the language syllabus, that is, how long a language is studied during primary, secondary and upper secondary school. For Finnish students, English is always an A-language, meaning that studies have begun in elementary school (NCC 2003:101). Whether English is an A1- (the first foreign language studied at school) or A2-language (the second foreign language studied at school) makes no difference in the objective competence levels. The Finnish labelling of foreign language teaching into A-, B- and C-languages, based on the age in

which studies have started, has nothing to do with the A-, B- and C- skill levels in the CEFR and the NCC, and the two systems do not correlate with each other. Table 5 demonstrates the expected learning outcomes in English in upper secondary school.

Table 5. Levels of Language Proficiency Scale to be achieved by upper secondary school students in English (NCC 2003:101).

Language and syllabus	Listening comprehension	Speaking	Reading Comprehension	Writing
English, A	B2.1	B2.1	B2.1	B2.1

Finnish students of English should thus reach the first stage of independent proficiency in all four language skills in upper secondary school. Here we only focus on the parts that are relevant to the present study, that is, oral skills, presented as “speaking” in the Language Proficiency Scale.

For speaking, the level of proficiency B2.1 is characterised with five points (NCC 2003:246). Firstly, a student on this level can accurately describe their experiences, impressions and opinions in a variety of topics and is capable of actively taking part in most practical and social situations, including a fairly formal discussion. Even though self-expression is not always completely elegant linguistically, the student can regularly interact with native speakers without unintentionally amusing or insulting them. Secondly, the student is able to produce speech with even tempo, the number of longer pauses having reduced. Thirdly, the student's pronunciation and intonation are clear and natural. Furthermore, the student has the ability to use diverse language structures and varied vocabulary including idiomatic expressions. The ability to react appropriately to the formal requirements of a situation is also developing. Finally, the student has good control over grammar with only occasional errors that, in general, do not impair understanding.

Here I have reviewed the expectations and aims set for the practice and development of Finnish students' oral skills in English in upper secondary school. The last section of chapter 2 will introduce some earlier studies conducted on textbooks and oral skills.

2.4 Previous research on textbooks and oral skills

Textbooks have been the subject of systematic research for only the last few decades (Elomaa 2009:30). In the early 2000, few studies had still been published on textbooks in English (Tomlinson 2001:69). Much of the research on teaching materials today is done in graduate level in the form of master's theses. The role of English as a global language makes critical EFL-textbook analyses important even today (Lähdesmäki 2004:273).

The studies on textbooks can be divided into three main categories (Johnsen 1993:28). First, there are studies of **ideologies** behind textbooks. Studies on gender roles in textbooks are an example of this category. The second research category is the **use** of textbooks. Studies on how suitable textbooks are for disabled learners fall into this category. The third area of textbook research is their **development**, meaning the multi-phased process textbooks go through beginning on planning and writing and ending in distribution.

Textbooks studies around the world include various approaches. In the United States, the main interest in textbook research seems to be on how cultural and ethnical minorities are represented and sexism (Ndura 2004:144), whereas Korean English textbooks are studied to find out how they contribute to raising “a sense of globalisation” and “ a sense of Korean national identity” (Yim 2003, cited in Keisala 2010:28). In English textbooks, pragmatic information (Vellenga 2004) and speech acts of request (Usó-Juan 2008) have been studied, and EFL teaching has been analysed for use of metalanguage (Fortune 2005, Berry 2004).

In Finland, textbooks have been analysed for different aspects. Studies have been conducted on cultural knowledge required for intercultural communication (Takala 1991), learners' backgrounds influencing language learning (Sajavaara 1980) and the importance of authentic input (Kaikkonen 2000). Studies on the MA level have concerned gender roles in society and in relation to each other (Piironen 2004, Laakkonen 2007, Saarikivi 2012), moral values, attitudes and ethnical aims (Varrio 2006, Keisala 2010), taboos (Keturi and Lehmonen 2012), aspects of culture and cultural varieties (Hälikkä 1989, Aho 2004, Pohjanen 2007, Lamponen 2012, Varis 2012), pragmatics (Pursiainen 2009, Luomala 2010) and grammatical and lexical items (Tikkanen 1980, Pellikkä 1988, Ylisirniö 2012). In her recent study, Kivilahti (2012) focused on writing activities in English and Swedish textbooks for grades 7-9. The analysis revealed that while textbooks seemingly include many writing activities, they in fact practice other aspects of language than producing text. In her study,

Kivilahti states that the emphasis on communicative competence only materialises in oral skills in teaching materials, but not, for example, in writing skills. Kaukonen (2010) had similar findings in her study of writing activities in French and English textbooks. However, these textbook analyses have mostly been conducted on basic education textbooks. Upper secondary school textbooks have been studied noticeably less, perhaps because most language teacher students expect to work in basic education. In addition, as can be seen from the list, studies on oral skills are conspicuous by their absence. The present study thus fills a clear gap in the field of English textbook analyses.

As for studies on oral skills, it seems that after the aim of developing communicative competence became general, the nature of oral skills was studied in the 1970s and 1980s, but the issue then became less interesting. Studies of oral skills of English in the 1990s and 2000s have mainly concentrated on the assessment of oral proficiency (Huhta and Tarnanen 2011) or, in MA theses, material packages providing teaching materials for a certain matter or course (see e.g. Rovasalo 2008 and Konttinen 2012). There are studies providing criteria for assessing oral skills (Takala 1991, Luoma 2004) but no analyses on existing materials for teaching them. Attitudes towards oral skills, both those of teachers and of students in upper secondary school, have been analysed, though. Yli-Renko (1991), Romo (1991), Huttunen et al. (1995) and Tattari (2001) all found that both teachers and students see the practice of oral skills as highly important, though particularly teachers feel doubtful about testing it. Though oral skills are seen as important, both their teaching and their testing remains unsystematic. These studies name the Finnish Matriculation Examination to be the main reason for neglecting oral skills in upper secondary education. As the Matriculation Examination does not include a test in oral skills, there is pressure in upper secondary English classes to focus on language skills that are tested, i.e. written skills, reading comprehension and listening comprehension. Korpela (2007), in her study, noted that should pupils have the power to decide about the contents of textbooks, they would wish to include more activities that encourage them to communicate in English.

Some textbook analyses on oral skills have been conducted in other languages than English or as comparation between two languages. A study of a French textbook series *Voilà!* by Tyrväinen (2011) showed that even though the distribution of oral activities in French textbooks meets with the emphases in the NCC, the activities are mostly mechanical, and only a small portion of the oral activities consists of truly communicative activities. In her study of German textbooks, Pasanen (2007) found that pronunciation in grades 7-9 of basic education and in upper secondary school is practiced far less than grammar or other language skills. Liljavirta (2000) found out that small talk

and non-verbal communication are very poorly noted in upper secondary school German textbooks. Pänkäläinen (2004) studied the dialogues of Finnish Second Language textbooks and came to the conclusion that the dialogues are not meant as examples of real life communication but aim in teaching Finnish structures and vocabulary. Salo (2006), comparing foreign language textbooks of Swedish and English, reported that the different language skills were variously practiced in the books, and the activities of speaking, listening, reading and writing were included in all textbooks. However, the communication goals of the activities were unclear, as they consisted of independent sentences with no shared context. Huhta et al. (2008) obtained similar findings regarding texts and vocabulary activities in Swedish and English textbooks: students are asked to produce little text of their own, and mostly independent words and sentences instead of coherent, context-suited texts.

After familiarising myself with previous textbook analyses I wanted to find out if the emphasis on communication skills shows in oral activities of textbooks. Additively, I wanted to study whether oral activities, similarly to written ones in Kivilahti's (2012) study, in fact focus on other language skills even though named oral. The next chapter gives more thorough reasons for the nature of the present study.

Chapter 2 has outlined the theoretical background of the study. I have established the relevant terminology, observed the role of textbooks in the teaching of oral skills and presented activity types used in textbooks. In addition, I have explained what is said of oral skills in the CEFR and the NCC. Lastly, I have reviewed some previous studies of the field. Moving on, chapter 3 will now introduce the research design.

3 RESEARCH DESIGN

Chapter 2 explained the theoretical background of the study. The present chapter will introduce its methodological framework. The chapter opens with defining the purpose of the present study and the research questions. The data of the study is then described, and the chapter closes with the presentation of the research method used, that is, content analysis.

3.1 The justification and focus of the present study: oral skills in textbooks

Various studies, both in Finland and internationally, highlight the importance of instant interaction skills. A working group of the Ministry of Education (Opetusministeriö 2006) still finds that this particular area of language competence is the most problematic for Finns, and that oral skills are the Achilles heel of Finnish foreign language users. There is thus inconsistency between the aims and expectations and the results of our foreign language education. Since textbooks have an apparent role in foreign language teaching, it is reasonable to observe if there is also inconsistency between the principles and reality of practicing oral skills in teaching materials.

No law orders us to use textbooks in teaching. Even though only few teachers choose to work without textbooks and they are one of the most important aids in language learning, they are also seen as frustrating and restricting (Lähdesmäki 2004). On the one hand, attitudes towards textbooks are much more critical than attitudes towards other literary work (Lappalainen 1992). On the other hand, working without textbooks means extra work for teachers, as they have to look for and collect the materials to be used in class from different sources and, in many cases, adjust them to fit the context and the level of learners. Putting aside all possible problems they may have, textbooks are used daily in most EFL classrooms. Over 98% of language teachers mention textbooks as the most important source for teaching materials (Huhta et al. 2008), and the practice of different language skills is largely based on the materials that the textbooks have to offer. More critical studies on textbooks are needed in order to provide publishers and teachers with knowledge of how to further develop teaching materials and teaching (Kauppinen 2006:210). The NCC and the CEFR highlight communicative competence, and as for written communication, the realisation of these expectations and aims has already been studied (see section 2.4). The lack of studies on teaching oral communication indicated in section 2.4 leaves a niche that the present study aims to address. What is more, new national curriculum for upper secondary schools is expected in 2016, and new textbooks will then be written and brought into the market. It is important to review the currently

offered material in order to see whether or not the principles and aims of practising oral skills become concrete in textbooks, and what kind of improvements could possibly be made for new series.

The aim of the study is to analyse the type and share of oral activities in upper secondary school EFL textbooks. If textbook activities are built on the four traditional language skills presented in 2.1.3, a view supported by research (Salo 2006) and by the data of this study (see section 3.3), then by an average of one in four activities in the books should offer practice in oral skills. Depending on the emphasis of a specific course, the number can be lower or even higher in some of the textbooks, and especially in the textbook for oral skills course (course 8). Naming an activity to be oral alone does obviously not mean it offers valuable practice in oral skills. Thus the oral activities of textbooks also need to be analysed based on their content and the true amount of oral skills needed or acquired on completing them. The next section presents and explains the research questions.

3.1.1 Research questions

As stated above, the aim of this study is to analyse how oral skills are presented and practiced in two upper secondary school English textbook series. These two textbooks series are the *Open Road* and the *ProFiles*. Through the analyse we can consider whether the way these textbooks instruct students in oral skills could have something to do with the inconsistency between aims and results of teaching oral skills, mentioned in section 3.2. The textbooks will be analysed in order to answer the following three research questions:

1) What is the share of activities practicing oral skills in the total number of activities?
2) Which aspects of oral skills are practiced?
3) What kind of activities are used to practice oral skills?

As is evident from the research questions, the study is three-fold. The first research draws attention to the general share of activities focusing on oral skills in comparison to the total number of activities. Research question 2 focuses on finding out how (if at all) different sub-skills of oral skills, listed in section 2.3 of this study, are practiced. In other words, research question 2 aims at finding out where the focus in practicing oral skills is. Research question 3 will be about categorising the activities used in practicing oral skills to see if they are tasks, focusing on

communicating meanings, exercises or drills focusing on form (see section 2.2.1 for more detailed definitions), and on presenting the share of each activity type.

3.2 Data: the *Open Road* and *ProFiles* textbook series

Textbooks and teaching materials of English have a special status worldwide compared to other foreign languages, because English is taught as a second or foreign language widely. Publishing the materials is thus also a very profitable business. Since there is some competition in the publishing of English textbooks, a lot of effort, financial as well, is put on designing and marketing them (Lähdesmäki 2004:273). Still, no single textbook can meet with the needs of all different student groups, and teachers need to use their expertise in selecting and modifying materials to suit for each individual group (Tomlinson 2001:66). It is the teacher who decides which parts of a textbook are used and what kind of material outside textbooks is brought into class.

In Finland, two publishing houses have outlasted others in the textbook business: Otava and SanomaPro (originally WSOY Oppimateriaalit, later WSOY Pro and, after purchasing Tammi Oppimateriaalit, SanomaPro). These two are also the ones producing upper secondary school English textbooks at the moment. In practice this means that upper secondary school English teachers in Finland have a choice between two textbook series if, firstly, they want to use a textbook in the first place and, secondly, wish to choose a series planned for Finnish learners.

The data of the present study consist of the two currently offered textbook series for upper secondary school: the *Open Road 1-8* (Otava) and the *ProFiles 1-8* (SanomaPro). After consulting the publishers, these two series were chosen because they are the ones that are being marketed to secondary schools at the moment. Including the previous series, the *Culture Café* (Otava) and the *English United* (SanomaPro), was considered, but the publishers declined to provide materials since the two series are going out of use and being replaced by newer products. As analysing products that are no longer used does not make much sense, it was decided that the data would only include the newest series available. What is more, due to their novelty and the fact that they have been published after the revision of the NCC in 2003, the *Open Road* and the *ProFiles* series can be expected to reflect the current pedagogic views of practicing oral skills and acknowledge the emphasis on communication skills in the NCC.

In the *Open Road* series, published in 2008-2010, the textbooks are organised into 2-6 themes. Each theme includes a few texts and activities. Teachers are thus given the opportunity to choose the texts that are the most interesting and best suited for each group (Kustannusosakeyhtiö Otava 2013). In addition to texts and activities sorted by their themes, each book has *Travel Guide*, *Highway Code* and *Service Station* section. *Travel Guide* contains tools for self-assessment and suggestions for different learning methods in specific language skills. *Highway Code* is the grammar section of the book, i.e. all the information and exercises having to do with grammar are placed in one section in the end of the book. *Service Station* is a revision package including an A/B translation activity and a crossword puzzle to revise the vocabulary of each text of the book, as well as multiple choice questions, fill in the missing word -activities and Finnish-English translations of the vocabulary and grammar practiced earlier in the book. Course book 8, that is, the oral skills course book, focuses on word stress and phrasal verbs in *Highway Code*, whereas *Service Station* section has vocabulary activities precisely like the previous books: fill in the gaps, fill out the crossword, translate into English. No Travel Guide is included in book 8. The activities of the book are divided into four categories: listening comprehension activities, "toughies", activities suitable for the language portfolio and activities meant to be used as homework, concerning grammar. In oral skills course book, the four categories are listening comprehension activities, communication strategy activities and grammar activities (all in *Service Station* section). Only a minority of all activities are, however, marked with such symbols. Most activities are merely marked with an alphabet. According to the publisher, the practice of oral skills is a natural part of each course (Kustannusosakeyhtiö Otava 2013).

The *ProFiles* textbooks are, similarly to the *Open Road*, divided into units. Each book has four units except for the book for course 8, which is completely differently organised. Each unit includes two or more texts and accompaning activities. After the units, there are *ThinkTank* (learning tips), *KnowHow* (grammar) and *BackTrack* (revision) sections that are very much like *Travel Guide*, *Highway Code* and *Service Station* in *Open Road*. The activities in the *ProFiles* textbooks are labelled *Kick Start* (warm up), *Text Wise* (reading or listening based on the text), *Phrase Bank* (idiomatic language), *Word Power* (vocabulary), *Chat Room* (oral), *Hear Say* (pronunciation), *Sound Bite* (listening) and *Note Pad* (writing) activities. All activities are marked to represent one of these categories. The publisher mentions that there is plenty of both written and oral practice in the series (SanomaPro 2013).

The activities included in the data of the present study are those found in the main body of the textbook series. Activities of *Travel Guide, Highway Code* and *Service Station* in the *Open Road* as well as *ThinkThank, KnowHow* and *BackTrack* in the *ProFiles* are thus excluded from the analysis. This is simply because the activities of *Travel Guide* and *ThinkThank* are mainly self-assessment and learning strategy practices, and the activities in *Highway Code* and *KnowHow* are explicitly focusing on grammar. The revision sections also explicitly focus on vocabulary and grammar structures and, in addition, the correct answers to the revision activities are provided in the books.

In both textbook series, each book is designed for an individual course, and there are thus eight books in both series for the eight upper secondary school English courses. Furthermore, both series follow the NCC with the course themes, so that textbooks for course 1 deals with everyday life and personal relations, course 2 is built around communication and leisure etc. (see appendix 2 for the complete NCC course descriptions).

3.3 Research method: content analysis

The guiding principle in the analysis of the present study is **content analysis**. The aim of content analysis is to organise the data into a summarised and comprehensive form by using different kinds of content categorisations (Tuomi and Sarajärvi 2009:100), and to draw valid inferences from the content of the data (Krippendorf 2004:18). Instead of strict rules, there are various possibilities for organising and describing the data, and each researcher can develop their own system for categorisations that suits best for the data in question (Eskola and Suoranta 2008:187).

Depending on the objectives, content analysis can be either **quantitative** or **qualitative** (Huckin 2004:14-15, Julien 2008:120). Quantitative content analysis calculates the frequency of appearance of certain keywords or expressions, i.e. describes what is in the data. Qualitative analysis focuses on interpreting and explaining the findings in addition to describing them, i.e. attempts to explain why the findings are what they are. Most studies conducted by content analysis use the two approaches complementary to each other (Huckin 2004:16). Today, content analysis has developed into a "repertoire of methods of research" (Krippendorff 2004:17), and it can even be argued that content analysis, as a loose framework, includes all qualitative methods of research (Tuomi and Sarajärvi 2009:91).

Content analysis can further be divided into **conceptual** and **relational** analyses (Huckin 2004:14-15). In conceptual content analysis, the data is coded according to specific concepts, the goal being to determine the frequency of those concepts, while relational content analysis not only identifies the concepts but examines their mutual relations. In addition, content analysis can be labelled **inductive** or **deductive** (Eskola and Suoranta 2008:151-152), the former analysing the data without presumptions of a theoretical framework and the latter adopting a certain conceptual point of view that guides the analysis.

Another way of identifying content analysis is to name three main categories: *aineistolähtöinen* **(data-driven)**, *teorialähtöinen* **(theory-driven)** and *teoriasidonnainen* (no established equivalent in English; **theory-bound** used as unofficial translation (Kivilahti 2012:68)) content analysis (Tuomi and Sarajärvi 2009). Data-driven content analysis is not built on predetermined research items. Rather, it is used to formulate a hypothesis or a theory from the data. In contrast to data-driven analysis, theory-driven analysis counts on a pre-set hypothesis that is tested in the process. Lastly, theory-bound analysis is placed in between the two previous categories. The theoretical background is the leading idea of the analysis, but it is not as determining as in theory-bound analysis. Neither does the analysis test a pre-set hypothesis, but reveals if the findings meet with the theory (Saaranen-Kauppinen and Puusniekka 2006).

The present study relies on theory-bound content analysis in finding out whether the textbook activities of oral skills meet with the theoretical aims and ideals. The research aims in identifying items relevant to the study and classifying them under categories, so the approach of the study relies on qualitative content analysis more than quantitative. In other words, different oral activities are identified and categorised into the tree types of drills (presented in section 2.2.1) and exercises on the one hand, and tasks on the other hand, based on the features introduced in 2.2.1. Furthermore, the activities found are analysed based on their contents and categorised based on their language focus. In other words, the actual focus of the activities named oral is examined. The activities truly focusing on oral skills are thus separated from "pseudo-oral" activities that, in fact, focus on other language skills.

As stated earlier in this section, many studies made by content analysis use a combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches. Presenting the findings of a study in a classified form is the simplest way to organise them. The findings can be presented in tables, and this manner of presentation is quantitative analysis (Tuomi and Sarajärvi 2009:93). The present study completes

quantitative analysis with quantifying the findings in order to offer a different perspective (Tuomi and Sarajärvi 2009) and to allow a more detailed description of the data (Saaranen-Kauppinen and Puusniekka 2006). Hence the frequency of all oral activities and the share of different activity types are also presented as tables. The quantitative approach shows the role of oral exercises in textbooks in unequivocal numbers.

Chapter three has outlined the methodological framework of the present study. The focus of the study has been explained and three research questions have been formulated. In addition, data of the study has been described and content analysis as research method introduced. Chapter four now moves on to present the findings of the analysis.

4 ANALYSIS

The present chapter answers the research questions formulated in section 3.1.1. Starting with the *Open Road*, both textbook series and each research question are addressed in separate sections. The first question about the number of activities practicing oral skills compared to the total number of all activities is answered quantitatively.

In order to answer the second research question, the different focuses (vocabulary, translation, discussion, etc.) of oral activities in the two textbook series were analysed and nine activity categories were identified. In other words, **nine main categories** could be named based on the content of oral activities, i.e. whether the focus is on, for example, vocabulary, discussion, pronunciation etc. Placing the oral activities in the data into these content-based categories reveals the aspects of oral skills that are emphasised in practicing oral skills. The nine categories identified in the two textbook series are (in alphabetical order): 1) activities focusing on **conversation strategies** (active listening, interrupting, etc.), 2) **discussions** and exchanging ideas, 3) activities focusing on **non-verbal aspects** of oral communication, 4) giving **presentations**, speeches or detailed descriptions of a given topic, 5) **problem-solving** and negotiation, 6) **pronunciation** and spelling, 7) **role-plays**, 8) **translation** activities from Finnish to English and 9) activities focusing on **vocabulary** and structures introduced in texts. With each textbook series analysis, these categories will be illustrated with examples from the data, and the shares of each activity category will also be noted.

The third research question concerning the type of activities used to practice oral skills is answered by identifying the different activity types in the textbooks, i.e. categorising the activities into 1) drills, 2) exercises and 3) tasks. Activities identified as drills will further be categorised into mechanic, meaningful and communicative drills. As was the case with the activity categories, the analysis of activity types will also be completed with quantitatively reporting the shares of drills, exercises and tasks.

4.1 *Open Road*

4.1.1 Number of oral activities

In the introduction of the data in section 3.2, it was explained that the books have different ways of categorising activities. In most of the activities of the *Open Road* textbooks, the focus or the language skill practiced is not mentioned. In other words, textbooks of the series do not introduce any of the activities as oral, but it is up to the users of the books to decide, based on the instructions of each activity, which language skill it focuses on. In the present study, activities that included instructions to talk, act out, retell, describe, explain, ask and answer with one's partner or discuss were counted as oral activities. Activities that aimed at producing spoken output in Finnish were not included. Furthermore, activities with unclear instructions as to whether they should be carried out in writing or orally (“Translate the sentences into English” or “Answer the questions”) were not included, as it was interpreted that word for word translations and other similar activities are usually done in writing even though the instructions would not explicitly ask to do so. Table 6 is a summary of the number and percentage of the included data coming from the *Open Road* textbooks in comparison to the total number of activities in the series.

Table 6. The data from the *Open Road* series in numbers.

Book	Total n:o of activities	N:o of activities that practice oral communication	The % of oral activities of the total
Open Road 1	98	22	22.4
Open Road 2	84	21	25.0
Open Road 3	99	21	21.2

Open Road 4	93	20	21.5
Open Road 5	87	17	19.5
Open Road 6	99	17	17.2
Open Road 7	87	18	20.6
Total 1-7	**647**	**136**	**21.0**
Open Road 8	75	65	86.7
Total	**722**	**201**	**27.8**

In general, oral activities constitute approximately one fifth of all the activities in each textbook of the *Open Road* series. Course book 8 is obviously a special case as the whole course is aimed at practicing oral skills. The special nature of course 8 is also why the total is first counted without the data of course 8. As including the numbers of the oral skills course would skew the numbers and percentages, those of course 8 are provided separately.

The aims in the NCC (2003:103-105, see Appendix 2) separately mention oral skills in almost all courses. Course 1, based on these aims, should introduce basic oral communication strategies and emphasise discussion and expressing opinions. Course 2 still emphasises oral communication, and courses 3-7 aim in practicing spoken and written communication as well as reading and listening comprehension on an increasingly demanding level. In the *Open Road* textbooks, the amount of oral activities is slightly higher in the first two books, but the changes in numbers are not significant except perhaps for course 6, that focuses above all on understanding demanding language material. The number or oral activities in *Open Road 6* is accordingly smaller.

The number of oral activities in the *Open Road* seems to follow the emphasis of the NCC in different courses, even though the differences in numbers between the textbooks are not all that significant. All in all, oral activities are given a share of one fifth of all activities, though course 8 is an exception: nearly 87% of the activities in the book practice oral skills. As stated above, the number of activities including oral communication here includes all activities that instruct students to complete the activity orally. The number of activities including oral communication is thus not the number of activities that aim primarily at practicing oral skills. Answering the second research question, that is, analysing the sub-skills of oral skills that are practiced is hence a very important part of the analysis. I will next move on to analyse which aspects of oral skills are practiced.

4.1.2 Aspects of oral skills practiced

It was established in section 2.1.3 that oral skills include much more than just accuracy in grammar and vocabulary and comprehensible pronunciation. Indeed, all three are important prerequisites for effective oral communication, but much more is needed for skilled oral interaction. Confidence to hesitate, pause and self-correct, non-verbal communication, communication strategies and reacting in different contexts and giving and interpreting backchannel cues are among the most important oral sub-skills. It is probably difficult to create classroom activities that offer practice in all these areas, and with foreign language learners, it might also be too much to ask to pay attention to all these sub-skills simultaneously. However, awareness and practice is needed in the different areas of oral communication. Analysing the focus of the oral activities included in the data reveals whether the various sub-skills are practiced in oral activities.

In order to recognise the focus and aim of different oral activities in the *Open Road* series, all oral activities in the data were categorised by content. Out of the total 201 activities in the series 191 could be placed under one of the nine main category groups explained above. In addition to the nine categories, the books include individual activities such as reading aloud and explaining the meaning of idiomatic expressions. As these activities only appear once or twice in the series, there are no separate categories for them, but they are mentioned here as single activities. I will now present the categorisation of oral activities in the *Open Road* series with demonstrative examples from the data. The categories are presented in alphabetical order, as they were introduced in the beginning of chapter 4.

Conversation strategies

No activities of this category were identified in the *Open Road* textbooks.

Discussions

The present study separates **discussions**, where the aim of the activity is to express and exchange ideas of, experiences of and feelings about a given topic, from problem-solving and negotiation activities, in which some kind of an outcome needs to be reached by compromising. Instructions to discussion activities are varied: some activities include specific questions that should be covered in the discussion (example 1), while some activities only offer some keywords as possible points to consider in completing the activity (example 2):

(1)

Discuss in pairs.

1. Have you experienced any kind of discrimination yourself?
2. Have you witnessed any discrimination?
3. What kind of people are usually the most prejudiced? Why?
4. What do you think of mixed marriages?
5. What kind of people might employers feel prejudiced about?
6. Is there racism in Finland?

(*Open Road* 4:36)[2]

(2)

2 Weird and wonderful?

Circus performers lead a life of their own. Discuss in small groups how you think their lives might differ from ours. Use the following clues:

- daily routines
- working hours
- travelling
- rehearsing
- finding employment
- career development
- sleeping
- eating
- spare time
- family and friends
- ways of staying in touch with other people
- dating
- having children
- accidents
- health risks
- old age

(*Open Road* 8:76)

Sometimes a secretary is needed to keep track of what a group talks about and then to report it to the rest of the class (example 3), while other discussions are not instructed to be shared with the whole class afterwards:

[2] Permission to copyright obtained the 10 April 2013

(3)

4 Sharing questions

Discuss the following economy-related questions in small groups. For each question, one of you should act as the secretary (a different student each time) and note down your group's conclusion. You may be asked to report your ideas to the class.

1. Are, as we are often told, the best things in life free?
2. Have you considered your financial future? In what ways can you help secure your future comfort and prosperity?
3. Are welfare benefits the most effective way to help people, or do they just encourage laziness? Would it be better to get rid of them to encourage people to look after themselves?
4. What effects is the globalisation of the economy having in different parts of the world?
5. How can we as consumers act in ways that might affect and improve the world we live in? Do we have a responsibility to try?

(*Open Road* 8:129)

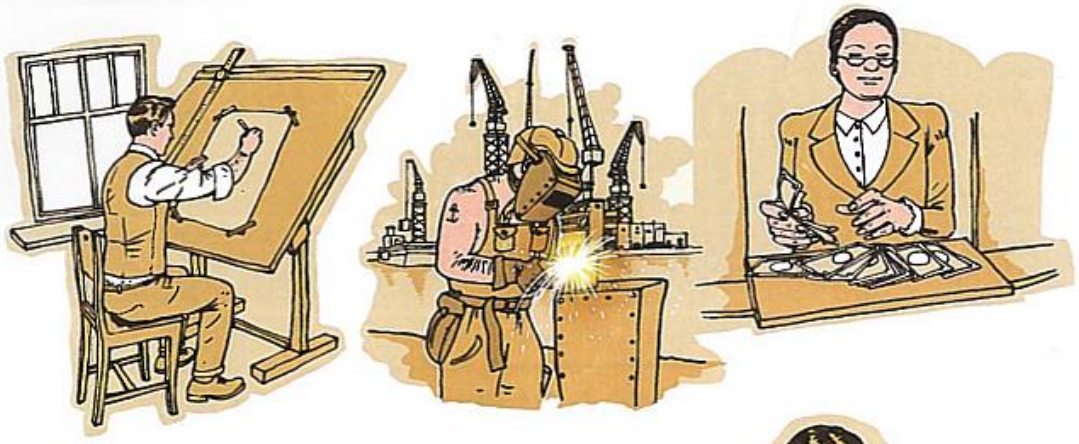
Most discussion activities bring together vocabulary and themes from the text they appear next to with students' experiences and thoughts about the themes, but discussion is also used as a way to process the text (example 4):

(4)

A. A moment of epiphany

Discuss.

1. What apprenticeship did Henry's father choose for him? How did Henry feel about it? What other options might there have been for Henry? What would have happened to Henry if his father had chosen differently?



2. What was Henry's moment of epiphany? When did it happen? How long did it last? In what ways was it and wasn't it like a prayer? What did he have to do afterwards?

3. How is this biscuit tin different from the one Henry made?

(*Open Road* 5:34)

Many discussion activities have concrete questions for students to consider, and they are required to give reasons. This is probably done to ensure that students come up with things to say and that the discussion is not limited to "yes" or "no" answers to the questions. Still, some of the questions do

invite simple “yes” or “no” as answers (example 1, questions 1, 2 and 6). Moreover, following the questions makes the discussion artificial and might restrict students from bringing up related thoughts of their own. Lastly, there is the problem of how to make sure that all students participate equally and no free riders appear. Regardless of these possible problems, examples 1, 2 and 3 still do provide students with possibilities to formulate their output as they wish and to express their own thoughts as well. This is important in practicing oral skills, because real-life communication does not include translating given sentences with pre-determined word choices. Instead, language users have the freedom to use their own words and, in addition, compensation strategies in case a certain word is forgotten or not known. The focus of the example activities is on expressing meanings in interaction with others, and thus these activities focus on practicing conversational skills. As for example 4, even though the instructions tell students to discuss, it actually involves retelling the content of the previous text. The questions test reading or listening comprehension, and they are answered orally and together or by taking turns with a partner. The activity hardly involves any discussion, because the answers to the questions are not matters of opinion or even interpretation.

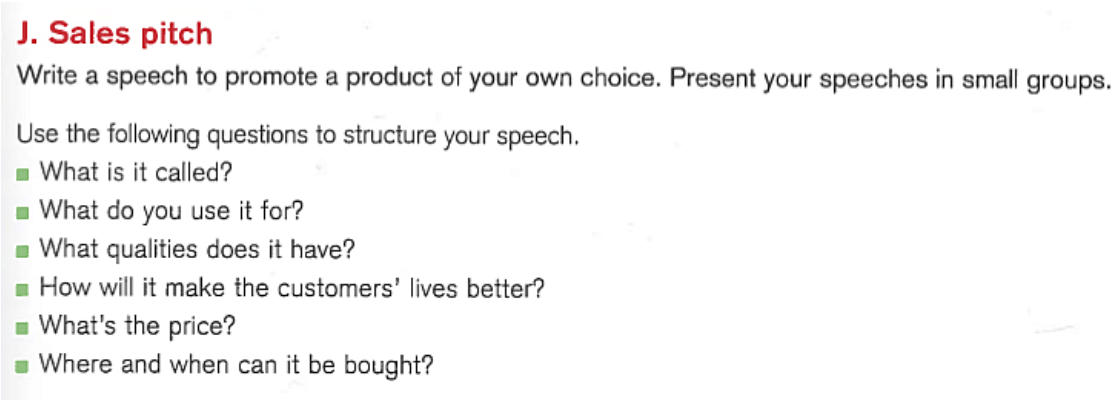
Non-verbal aspects

No activities of this category were identified in the *Open Road* textbooks.

Presentations

By a **presentation** is meant an activity that includes innovative planning or searching information of a certain matter, gathering the found information into a slideshow or a speech and presenting the findings. Presentation category thus also includes prepared debates and speeches. Typically, a presentation is done in groups so that each group member first works on their own and then presents the results to the rest of the small group (example 5):

(5)



J. Sales pitch

Write a speech to promote a product of your own choice. Present your speeches in small groups.

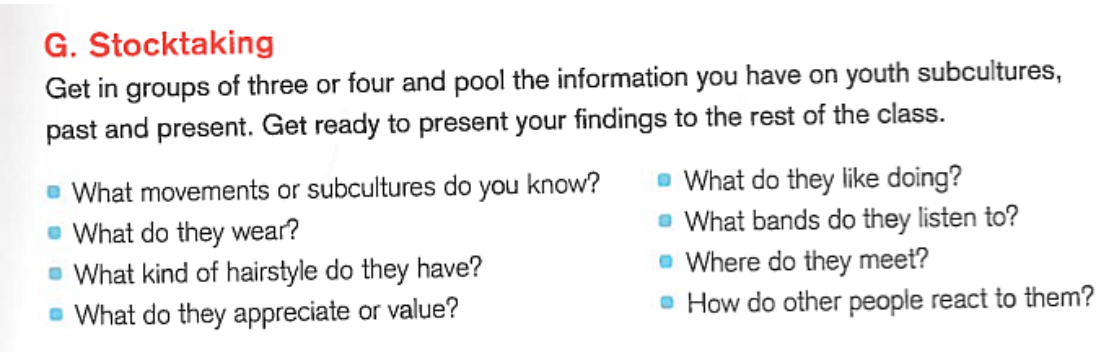
Use the following questions to structure your speech.

- What is it called?
- What do you use it for?
- What qualities does it have?
- How will it make the customers' lives better?
- What's the price?
- Where and when can it be bought?

(*Open Road* 3:105)

Alternatively, a presentation can be put together as a small group instead of individual work, and then presented to the other groups in class (example 6):

(6)



G. Stocktaking

Get in groups of three or four and pool the information you have on youth subcultures, past and present. Get ready to present your findings to the rest of the class.

- What movements or subcultures do you know?
- What do they wear?
- What kind of hairstyle do they have?
- What do they appreciate or value?
- What do they like doing?
- What bands do they listen to?
- Where do they meet?
- How do other people react to them?

(*Open Road* 2:33)

A larger project (example 7) includes more research done by individuals in a group, analysing and drawing conclusions in the group and then presenting the findings to other groups:

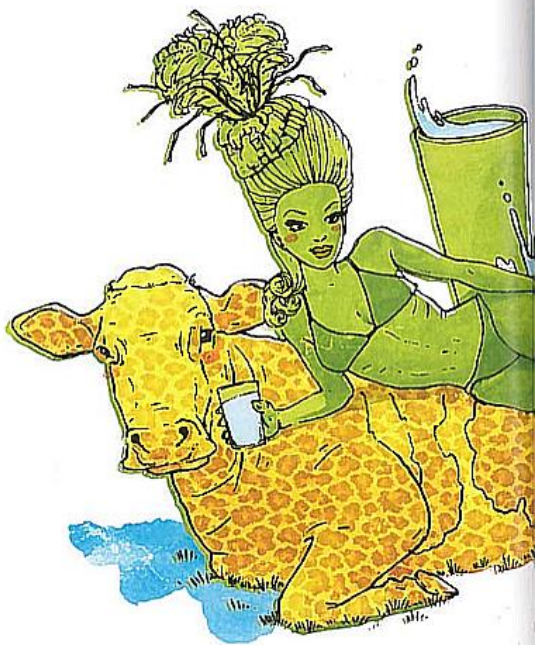
(7)

Group 4: Advertising

A. Discuss

1. Start off by getting a large piece of blank paper. Think of a product that people of your age group might buy. Then imagine that you have to produce an advertising campaign for that product, which targets your age group. Where and how will you advertise your product? Brainstorm ideas on your piece of paper.
2. Did you use any of the following techniques in your campaign?
   - celebrity endorsements
   - stereotyping
   - making fun of certain groups (e.g. dads or old people)
   - "beautiful" models
   - sexual images and/or nudity
   - linguistic techniques (puns, alliteration etc.)
   - product placement
   - projecting an image of success and happiness
   - making the consumer feel inadequate, and suggesting your product could help them be better
3. Are the techniques you suggested only typical of adverts for your age group, or are they universal techniques?
4. Do these techniques work?
5. Think now about real adverts you have seen. Can you think of specific examples of adverts that use the same techniques you suggested?
6. Are these advertising techniques just harmless fun, or might they have a negative effect? Are you concerned about the objectification of women in adverts, images of reckless behaviour, or the pressure adverts might create for young children who want to be liked and accepted?

celebrity endorsement	julkkiksen suositus
pun	sanaleikki
alliteration	samalla tavalla alkavien sanojen käyttö
product placement	tuotesijoittelu
inadequate	riittämätön
objectification	esineellistäminen



50

(*Open Road* 6:50)

B. Plan

Now it's time to get started with your media research project. You'll be conducting your research individually, but first you'll need to plan that research together in your groups.

Your task is to research (English-language) (TV) advertising in order to draw conclusions about how advertisers try to target consumers.

You should now agree together on a research plan in which you will all participate. Decide how you will divide the workload equally.

C. Research

By now each member of the group should have a clear idea of what they will be researching. As you conduct your research, you might want to search for clips or images to include when you present the results of your research. If you do, make sure they are brief and relevant, and make sure you're able to explain why you chose them – what does each one reveal about the advertising techniques that have been used?

You should conduct your research before the next Media Watch lesson. Make sure you take good notes, so that you can contribute to your group's conclusions.

(*Open Road* 6:51)

Part 3

For this final part, you'll begin by considering the results of your research. Then you'll have the chance to present your group's conclusions.

A. Prepare

Start off by sharing your research results and decide what you'll present to the others. You should consider the three following questions:

- What did we find during our research?
  – What does this suggest about the mass media and how we should approach it?
- What is the best way to present our conclusions to the others?

B. Present

Your group will now present the results and conclusions of your research to the rest of the class. Each of you should take part in the presentation.

(*Open Road* 6:52)

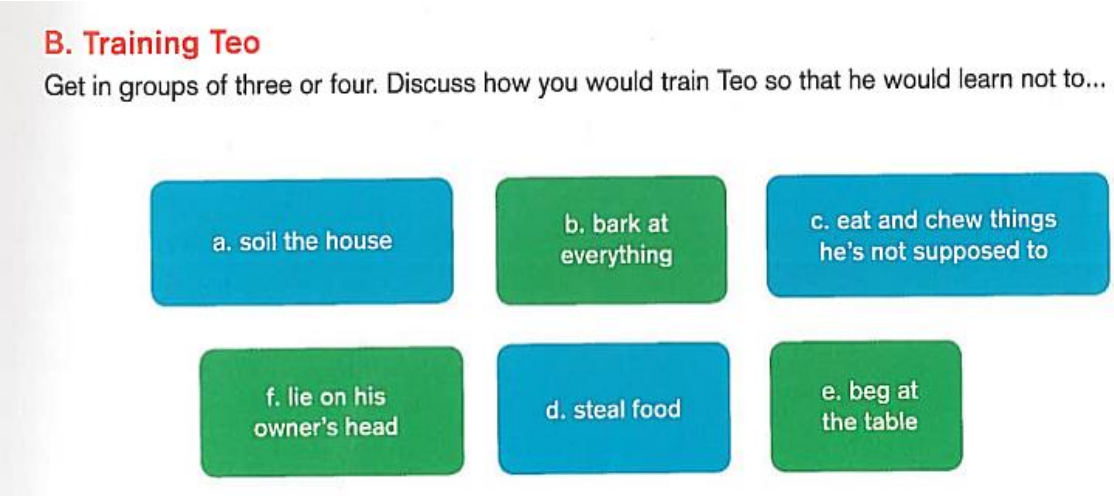
Giving presentations or speeches is a specific form of oral communication differing greatly from everyday conversations. As they are often written beforehand, the language of speeches and presentations can have features of formal speech. In many cases, purely informal spoken language

is unsuitable for the context of a presentation. Textbook activities aiming at giving a presentation include instructions for the phases of preparing a presentation (example 7), but the instructions on how to actually give the presentation are insufficient or, in this case, non-existing. Practicing speeches and presentations offers a natural situation for also practicing giving and interpreting backchannel cues, for example, as well as different aspects of non-verbal communication from paralinguistic factors to body language. At the very least, some guidance in how to start, proceed and end a presentation should be given, if the purpose is to develop skills in this area of oral communication instead of showing existing skills, whatever their level might be. That being said, the instructions for the process of doing research and planning the speech or the presentation are quite detailed. Perhaps the focus is purposely on practicing how to do research and how to prepare a presentation instead of its actual delivery. As important as acquiring skills in those aspects is, if giving the prepared presentation is of secondary nature compared to the working process, the activity does not really focus on practicing oral communication.

Problem-solving

Problem-solving and negotiation activities are closely related to discussion activities. Here, through discussion, negotiation and compromising, students need to reach a consensus on a given problem, such as which candidate to hire for an imaginative corporation or how to furnish a classroom. Example 8 demonstrates a casual problem-solving task that relates to the pleasant topic of training a pet. Some of the students completing the activity might have insights into the topic and thus talk from experience, and even if one has no personal experience, most likely, every student knows someone who owns a dog:

(8)



(*Open Road* 2:21)

Problem-solving activities might also relate to matters that are more unfamiliar for upper secondary school students. An activity of the category can involve financing a larger-scale project or solving third-world problems, or it can otherwise seemingly require expertise that upper secondary students are likely to have (example 9):

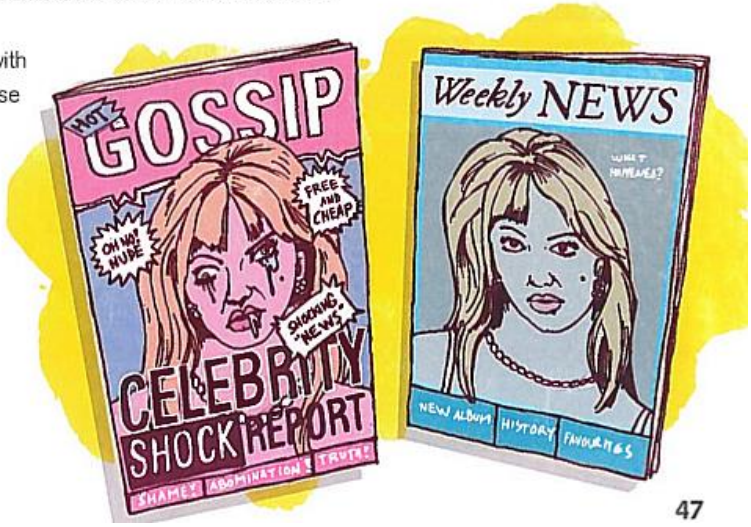
(9)

H. Press photography

You are at an editorial meeting and need to decide on some issues involving your (online) newspaper. Work in groups and discuss the questions until you reach an agreement.

1. Make a list of the five most important qualities for your newspaper.
2. What will your front page look like? (Will it have text or advertisements? How big will the headlines be? Will there be photos? What photos?)
3. What are the qualities of a good press photo?
4. What's your group's stance on retouching press photos?
5. What's your stance on buying photos from paparazzi?
6. Would you publish the following photographs? Why or why not?
   - a murder suspect
   - victims of a traffic accident
   - photographs taken without permission inside a crime victim's home
   - a drunken president
   - a celebrity having fun in public with somebody other than their spouse
   - underage criminals
   - a nude celebrity in their home

Give reasons why or why not.



47

(*Open Road* 5:47)

Discussion and problem-solving activities share the same problems in how to ensure equal contribution by all students and how to formulate the instructions and given questions or problems so that they leave room for students' own opinions. An ideal problem-solving activity is not black and white but invites different views and forces students to consider different approaches, yet not too difficult or complex for them to not know where to start. Problem-solving activities in the *Open Road* series are matters of opinion, so there are more than one possible solutions to the activities. What is important is that students can give reasons for their views and reach an understanding in their group.

Pronunciation

The *Travel Guide* -sections of the *Open Road* books, not included in the data of the present study, all include theory and activities regarding **pronunciation**, i.e. pronunciation, like grammar, is found in a separate section in the back of the books. Still, the first two books of the series as well as the

oral skills course book also contain some individual activities related to pronunciation among the other activities. In *Open Road* 1 and 2, these activities have to do with spelling (example 10) and word stress (example 11), and the same matters are revised in *Open Road* 8:

(10)

H. Spelling bee

Now it's your turn to practise. Work with a partner and spell your name (first name and surname) and your address to each other.

Then choose names from the list below and spell them to each other. Do not say what you are spelling – just spell the names letter by letter. The one who is listening has to write down what he/she hears. Do you get the same thing?

After your partner has got the name right, say a few words about it – who that person is, what he/she is like, your opinion of the book/film/game etc.

FYI

If you have the letters Å, Ä or Ö in your name, it is often best to treat them as A or O when you spell your name to an English-speaking person. Since these letters don't exist in English, they are just likely to confuse the listener. So, if your surname is *Kökkölä*, spell it like *Kokkola*.

(*Open Road* 1:13)

(11)

4 Outrunning animals

As you know, not all the words in English have equal stress. You stress the words that carry meaning. Listen to the sentences and then read them aloud stressing the right words.

1. Scientific evidence supports the notion that humans evolved to be runners.
2. Several characteristics unique to humans suggested that endurance running played an important role in our evolution.
3. Most mammals can sprint faster than humans – having four legs gives them the advantage.
4. But when it comes to long distances, humans can outrun almost any animal.
5. Because we cool by sweating rather than panting, we can stay cool at speeds and distances that would overheat other animals.
6. On a hot day, a human could even outrun a horse in a 26.2-mile marathon.

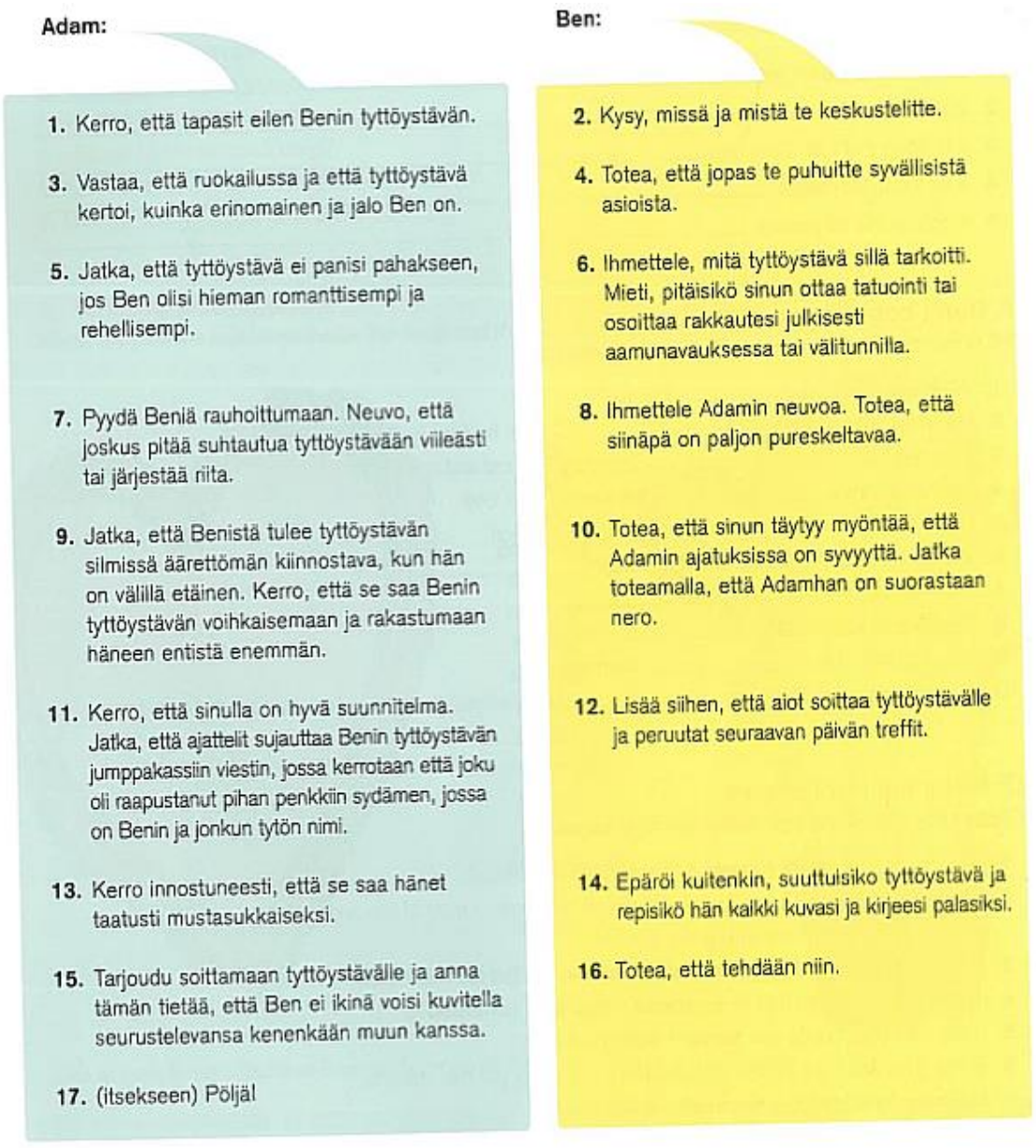
endurance running	kestävyysjuoksu
mammal	nisäkäs
panting	läähätys

(*Open Road* 8:33)

Role-plays

The category of **role-playing** includes two different variations of the activity. Firstly, there are traditional A/B -dialogues completed in the roles of given people, where the Finnish clues tell a student more or less precisely what to say and his/her partner has the correct translations (example 12):

(12)



Adam:

1. Kerro, että tapasit eilen Benin tyttöystävän.
3. Vastaa, että ruokailussa ja että tyttöystävä kertoi, kuinka erinomainen ja jalo Ben on.
5. Jatka, että tyttöystävä ei panisi pahakseen, jos Ben olisi hieman romanttisempi ja rehellisempi.
7. Pyydä Beniä rauhoittumaan. Neuvo, että joskus pitää suhtautua tyttöystävään viileästi tai järjestää riita.
9. Jatka, että Benistä tulee tyttöystävän silmissä äärettömän kiinnostava, kun hän on välillä etäinen. Kerro, että se saa Benin tyttöystävän voihkaisemaan ja rakastumaan häneen entistä enemmän.
11. Kerro, että sinulla on hyvä suunnitelma. Jatka, että ajattelit sujauttaa Benin tyttöystävän jumppakassiin viestin, jossa kerrotaan että joku oli raapustanut pihan penkkiin sydämen, jossa on Benin ja jonkun tytön nimi.
13. Kerro innostuneesti, että se saa hänet taatusti mustasukkaiseksi.
15. Tarjoudu soittamaan tyttöystävälle ja anna tämän tietää, että Ben ei ikinä voisi kuvitella seurustelevansa kenenkään muun kanssa.
17. (itsekseen) Pöljä!

Ben:

2. Kysy, missä ja mistä te keskustelitte.
4. Totea, että jopas te puhuitte syvällisistä asioista.
6. Ihmettele, mitä tyttöystävä sillä tarkoitti. Mieti, pitäisikö sinun ottaa tatuointi tai osoittaa rakkautesi julkisesti aamunavauksessa tai välitunnilla.
8. Ihmettele Adamin neuvoa. Totea, että siinäpä on paljon pureskeltavaa.
10. Totea, että sinun täytyy myöntää, että Adamin ajatuksissa on syvyyttä. Jatka toteamalla, että Adamhan on suorastaan nero.
12. Lisää siihen, että aiot soittaa tyttöystävälle ja peruutat seuraavan päivän treffit.
14. Epäröi kuitenkin, suuttuisiko tyttöystävä ja repisikö hän kaikki kuvasi ja kirjeesi palasiksi.
16. Totea, että tehdään niin.

(*Open Road* 1:28)

The category also includes more open-ended role-plays where students are asked to take the roles of certain characters and act out, for example, an interview or a discussion between the characters. Instructions of more open-ended role-plays can include, for example, keywords or topics that should be covered (example 13):

(13)

2 Reported criminal behaviour

You are a crime reporter and your partner is a convicted criminal.
With the help of the text, act out this dialogue in English.

A. Crime reporter
B. Convicted criminal

A. Kerro lyhyesti artikkelisi aiheesta (uhrien valinta), kysele taustoja.

B. Kerro, että olet aseistautuneesta ryöstöstä vankilassa, keksi taustoja.

A. Kysy, montako uhria haastateltavallasi oli ja miten hän valitsi ne.

B. Kerro, että uhreja oli viisi (kolme miestä, kaksi naista) ja miksi valitsit juuri nämä uhrit.

A. Kysele, millaisia tilanteet olivat ja mikä oli saalis ja vastustelivatko uhrit.

B. Kerro, että uhrit olivat harhailleet sivuteillä, olivat näyttäneet eksyneiltä, eivät olleet tietoisia ympäristöstään eivätkä määrä-tietoisia liikkeissään, helppoja hyökkäyksen kohteita.

A. Kiitä haastattelusta ja kysele vangin tulevaisuudesta.

B. Kiitä, että sait olla mukana ja kerro tulevaisuudestasi.

58

Open Road

(*Open Road* 8:58)

Role-plays with minimum instructions can merely provide students with suggested ways of starting and continuing the conversation or simply the topic of conversation (example 14):

(14)

F. In a future world

Choose a role and discuss the following in groups.

At long last science has succeeded in inventing an elixir for ever-lasting life. Now people can lead a healthy life for as long as they choose. You are discussing the product's imminent launch on the market.

Roles:
- a doctor
- a theologian
- the pharmaceutical company's CEO
- ordinary citizen(s)

Questions to consider:
- questions concerning the individual (quality of life, lifespan questions)
- ethical questions (who should be able to buy it, Westerners vs. people in developing countries, death at a chosen time)
- possible problems (population explosion, energy questions)
- financial questions (health care, medical expenses)
- societal questions (immigration, taxes, media, transportation)

imminent	piakkoin tapahtuva
pharmaceutical	lääke-
CEO	toimitusjohtaja
lifespan	elinkaari

(*Open Road* 6:32)

These role-play activities simulate an actual discussion in providing participants with roles and some main points to bring up in the conversation. However, the example activities do not really have a clear start or an ending: there are no greetings or introductions, for example. The instructions do not encourage students to start the conversation with appropriate phrases, and they are thus likely to start talking from thin air, beginning with the first sentence or keyword given. Likewise, the role-plays probably end with the last keywords or sentences given, since there are no instructions to signal the end of the conversation. The focus in these role-plays is thus on formulating messages accurate in vocabulary and grammar instead of context-suited language use. There is still room for interaction, and role-plays that only provide students with keywords or suggested topics do also have, to some extent, the unpredictable nature of an actual conversation. Moreover, students can decide for themselves how to formulate utterances. As for the content, where the strict A/B activities (example 13) mainly invite students to translate the Finnish sentence into English, the more open-ended content clues (example 14) leave room for students to formulate their sayings in their own words and focus on matters that they find interesting. Delightfully, a minority of the role-plays in the series are A/B dialogues with complete Finnish sentences that students are merely expected to translate, and the majority consists of different kinds of more open-ended activities with

just keywords guiding the discussion. That being said, there are also role-play activities that actually involve reading comprehension (example 15):

(15)

(*Open Road* 2:39)

Here, the answers are based on the previous text. The student are thus expected to repeat what they had read in the text instead of actual oral communication.

Translation

Translation activities are activities where students are given a Finnish sentence that they are to translate, word for word, in English (example 16). The differences between translations and A/B - role-plays are that, firstly, there are no "roles" to be taken in completing translation activities. Instructions do not guide students to act out conversations between two given characters. Secondly, when most role-play instructions consist of keywords, translation activities consist of complete sentences that students are expected to translate word for word:

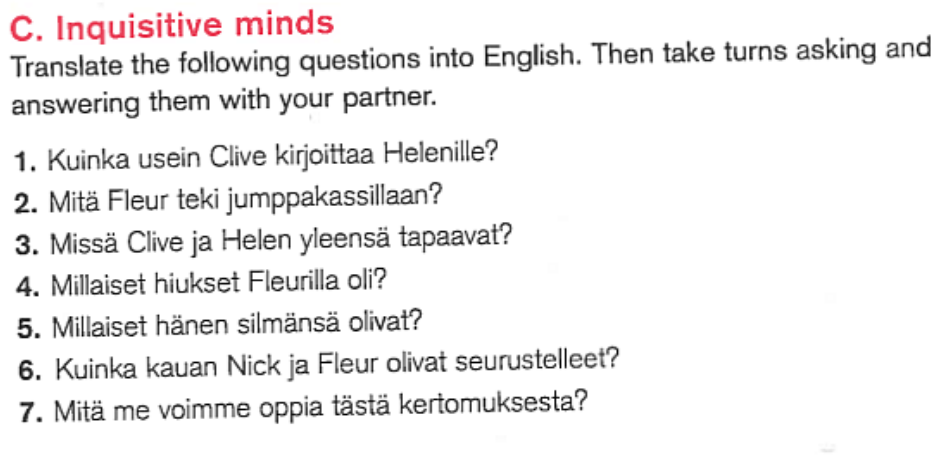
(16)

(*Open Road* 3:27)

It is obvious that literal translations are expected, since the Finnish sentences are somewhat forced but translating them word-by-word makes the English sentences fluent: *Eikö se tosiasia, että […] tee elämästä hankalaa?* sounds foreign in Finnish, but *Doesn't the fact that […] make life difficult?* makes more sense. Most of the translation activities in the *Open Road* textbooks consist of

questions that, after translating, students are asked to answer. The answering part makes the second part of completing the activity somewhat communicative, as the answers are not given to as translation but students get to express their own thoughts of the topic. This is, however, not the case in all translation activities, as the questions often concern the topic of a text recently studied (example 17):

(17)



C. Inquisitive minds

Translate the following questions into English. Then take turns asking and answering them with your partner.

1. Kuinka usein Clive kirjoittaa Helenille?
2. Mitä Fleur teki jumppakassillaan?
3. Missä Clive ja Helen yleensä tapaavat?
4. Millaiset hiukset Fleurilla oli?
5. Millaiset hänen silmänsä olivat?
6. Kuinka kauan Nick ja Fleur olivat seurustelleet?
7. Mitä me voimme oppia tästä kertomuksesta?

(*Open Road* 1:26)

In this case, the activity involves yet again retelling the content of the text orally, and thus it does not include actual oral communication but repeating what has been heard or read. In addition, the instructions in example 18 imply, though not clearly, that students should first translate the sentences in writing and then read the written sentences out loud to a partner who then answers based on the text. With this method, the activity consists of written translation, reading aloud and answering reading or listening comprehension questions.

Vocabulary

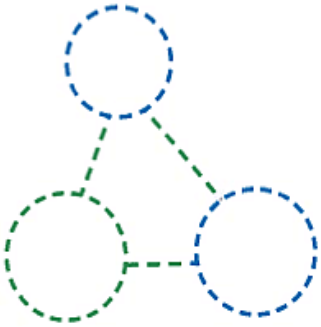
Frequently, oral activities in the series are related to the text they accompany. These activities rehearse the **vocabulary and structures** introduced in the text, including phrasal verbs and idiomatic expressions as well as grammatical patterns. Most texts are followed by an activity asking students to explain the content of the text with the help of pictures, keywords, questions or Finnish clues (example 18):

(18)

B. Digging deep

Explain in English how the following things are related to becoming fossilised.

1. a glacier crevasse
2. cheese and milk
3. the final location
4. a volcanic eruption
5. mud, deep water, ash-fall
6. a final meal of shellfish and seeds
7. an even gait
8. winning the lottery
9. 200 000 – a million years
10. gold



(*Open Road* 6:79)

Another variation of this activity type is to give students sentences to complete based on the text (example 19):

(19)

B. Finish it off

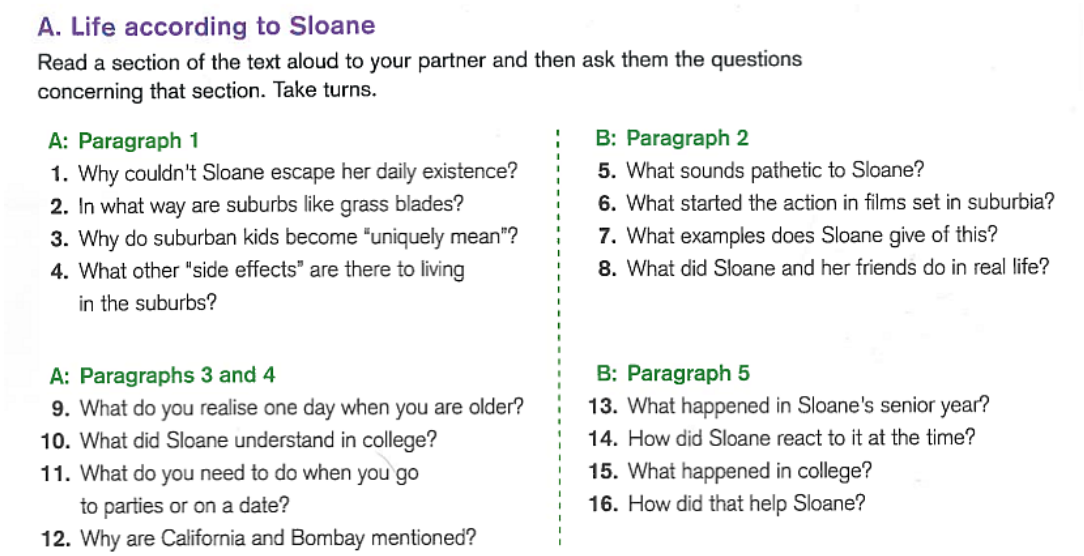
Continue the sentences in your own words so that they are in keeping with the text.
Take turns with your partner.

1. Nick offered Fleur ice-cream to…
2. Fleur wanted Nick to…
3. Some boys thought that Fleur wasn't…
4. The message in Nick's third letter was…
5. When Fleur got Nick's letter she…
6. Nick's letter made Gilda…
7. Nick wrote a letter to Gilda in which he…

(*Open Road* 1:25)

Optionally, an activity in this category can include questions concerning the content of the text that students need to ask and answer together (example 20):

(20)



A. Life according to Sloane

Read a section of the text aloud to your partner and then ask them the questions concerning that section. Take turns.

A: Paragraph 1

1. Why couldn't Sloane escape her daily existence?
2. In what way are suburbs like grass blades?
3. Why do suburban kids become "uniquely mean"?
4. What other "side effects" are there to living in the suburbs?

B: Paragraph 2

5. What sounds pathetic to Sloane?
6. What started the action in films set in suburbia?
7. What examples does Sloane give of this?
8. What did Sloane and her friends do in real life?

A: Paragraphs 3 and 4

9. What do you realise one day when you are older?
10. What did Sloane understand in college?
11. What do you need to do when you go to parties or on a date?
12. Why are California and Bombay mentioned?

B: Paragraph 5

13. What happened in Sloane's senior year?
14. How did Sloane react to it at the time?
15. What happened in college?
16. How did that help Sloane?

(*Open Road* 4:46)

Clearly, these activities focus on vocabulary. Students work on the vocabulary they have encountered while listening and/or reading a text. Answering content questions or repeating main story lines also tests students' level of understanding of the text. Moreover, these activities include oral skills, since students are asked to work together and explain meanings or complete sentences out loud instead of writing. However, in these examples, students are to *retell* what they have heard or read in the text. In fact, the activities are about listening or reading comprehension, only instead of answering questions concerning the text in writing, they do it orally. The examples also restrict students' spoken output quite significantly, as they have to formulate their output to match the beginning of a sentence or to formulate an answer to a predetermined question. The completion of this type of activities is thus very predictable: students take turns in saying out loud one sentence at a time. No real interaction can take place in these activities, since students are told to take turns with the questions or sentences. As a way of practicing the vocabulary of a certain text, the activities do force students to use the vocabulary and structures they have encountered in the text. They do not, however, practice oral skills. What seems to be, based on the way the activities are completed, a category of oral activities is thus, in fact, a set of vocabulary activities where oral skills are completely secondary.

Summary

Oral activities in the *Open Road* textbooks have now been identified and categorised by content. To sum up, the analysis revealed that discussion activities provide students with opportunities to communicate more or less freely on a given topic, but strategies of negotiation and conversation, for example, how to agree or disagree with what others say or how to interrupt are not taught. Presentation projects give insufficient instructions is delivering the presentation. The focus is thus on the process of making a presentation instead of the art of giving one. As for problem-solving, these activities are similar to discussions in that they provide students with opportunities to freely communicate, but not to use communication strategies. Students thus complete the activities with their current knowledge of those strategies without necessarily developing any new ones. Pronunciation activities placed among the other activities instead of their own section at the end of the books offer practice in spelling and in word stress. Role-plays in the *Open Road* data, delightfully, mostly consist of keyword clues instead of complete Finnish sentences to be translated, even though some pure translation activities are also included in the series. Finally, the problem with vocabulary-centred activities is their lack of opportunities for communication due to their nature of repeating the studied texts. In fact, these activities, even though completed orally, are not activities practicing oral communication but listening and reading comprehension activities. Table 7 is a summary of the activity categories identified in the series.

Table 7. Oral activity categories and their shares in the *Open Road* series: numbers and percentage.

	Open Road 1	Open Road 2	Open Road 3	Open Road 4	Open Road 5	Open Road 6	Open Road 7	Open Road 8	Total	%
Conversation strategies	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Discussions	3	6	7	8	9	3	3	16	55	**28.8**
Non-verbal aspects	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	**-**
Presentations	-	2	2	3	-	1	2	10	20	**10.5**
Problem-solving	6	5	3	1	2	2	-	8	27	**14.1**
Pronunciation	1	1	-	-	-	-	-	3	5	**2.6**
Role-plays	4	2	3	1	1	4	-	10	25	**13.1**
Translation	-	1	2	1	-	-	3	-	7	**3.7**
Vocabulary	6	4	3	6	5	7	8	13	52	**27.2**
Total	20	21	20	20	17	17	16	60	191	100

As can be seen, discussion activities are the biggest category in the series, but there is also a great number of activities that focus on practicing the vocabulary of a certain theme. Together, discussion activities and vocabulary activities cover 56% of the identified activities. As noted above, the category of vocabulary-centred activities is not really one of oral communication in the first place, and thus 27% of the oral activities identified and analysed in the series are not oral at all. After these two big categories there are problem-solving activities and role-plays. Even though the shares of these two categories are significantly smaller than those of discussions and vocabulary activities, it is delightful that three of the four biggest categories in the series are those analysed to provide most opportunities for actual oral communication instead of, say, translation. The three small categories in the series are presentations, translations and pronunciation activities. As for presentations, there are as many activities of this sort in textbook 8 as there are in books 1-7, so including the oral skills textbook could be said to skew the numbers. The low number of translation activities is pleasing since, as stated before in this section, they hardly provide any practice in oral communication situations taking place in life outside language classrooms. The low number of pronunciation activities then again could be seen as peculiar or even alarming if there was not a separate section

for these activities at the back of each book. Instead of wondering about the low number of these activities, one might ask why these five activities in particular were placed with the other activities instead of their own section.

Now that the activity categories and their shares have been analysed, the next section will answer research question three by further categorising the oral activities by type, i.e. the activities will be divided into drills, exercises and tasks.

4.1.3 Types of activities used

Section 2.2.1 established the characteristics and the main differences between drills, exercises and tasks. To recapitulate, drills can be further divided into mechanic, meaningful and communicative drills. Exercises are form-focused activities where language skills are a prerequisite for completion. Learning, in exercises, is intentional, and students act as language learners. As for tasks, they are focused on conveying meanings, and students act as language users. Learning takes place incidentally when completing a task, and language skills develop through completion instead of being its prerequisite. Using this categorisation, oral activities found in the *Open Road* textbooks were placed under the three activity types. The drills were furthermore categorised into mechanic, meaningful and communicative ones.

Drills

In section 2.2.1 of the present study, a mechanic drill is characterised by saying that even without knowing much of the target language, a student in capable of completing one. Example 22 introduces a mechanic drill where students are merely asked to read aloud:

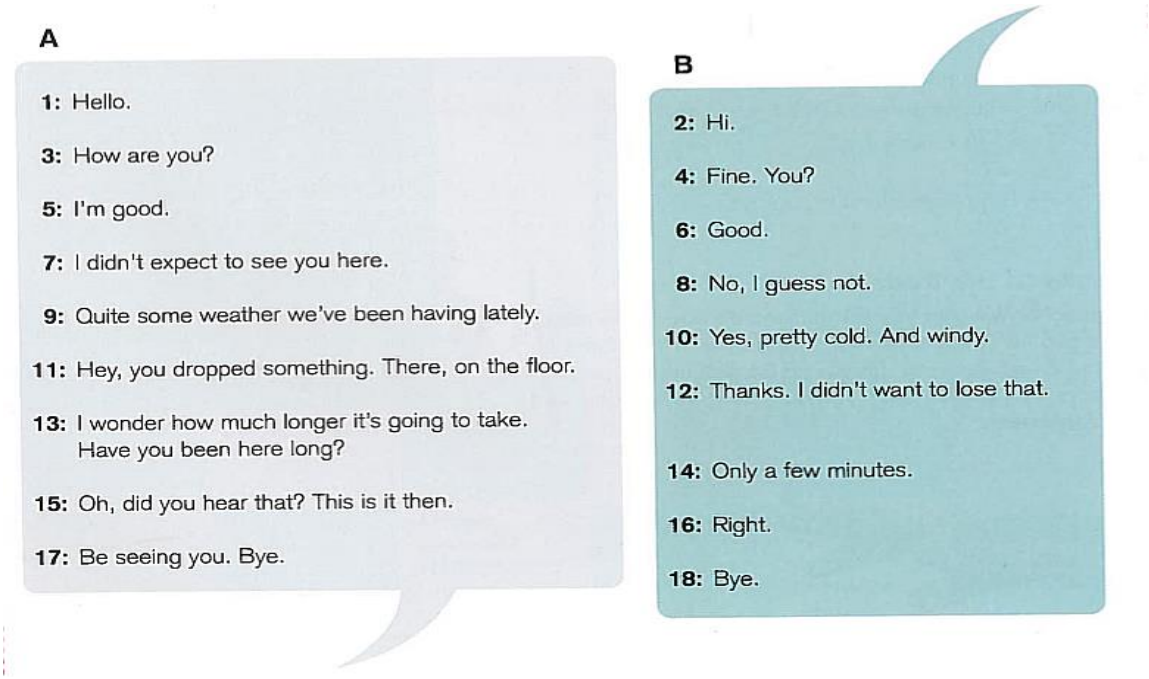
(22)

Warm up

Act out the same dialogue in four different situations, varying your tone accordingly. Then choose your favourite and perform it to the class.

Situations and roles

1. A and B are workmates who meet in the waiting room for the company doctor. They had a big row at work in the morning.
2. A and B are workmates who meet at a bar. A is interested in B but B is not into A. They are waiting for the band to start.
3. A and B are secret agents on a covert mission in a hostile country. They are waiting for a phone call from the headquarters.
4. A is a teacher who sees a familiar face on the train; B is an 8-year-old pupil. The train is standing on the platform and is not moving; everybody is waiting for an announcement.

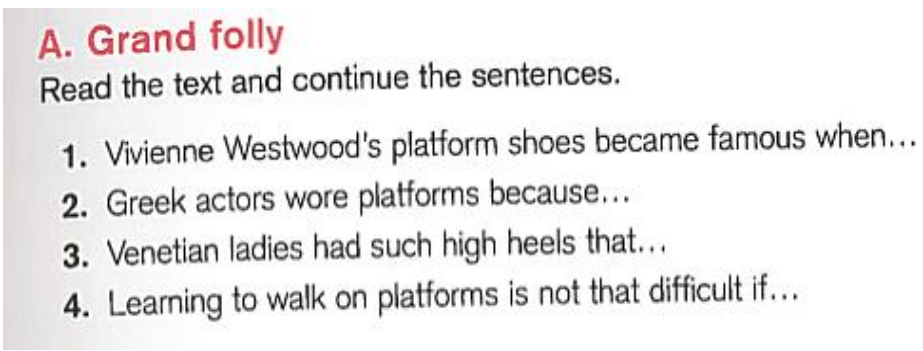


(*Open Road* 8:80)

Both the language of the dialogue and that used in the descriptions of the different situations is very simple indeed, especially for an upper secondary school English student. Anyone literate can read the dialogue. Anyone literate with a little knowledge of English pronunciation can read it fairly well, and anyone who, in addition, understands or is translated the part of the instructions about the tone can complete the drill exemplarily. No production of their own is expected from students.

Drills in the textbook series are typically mechanic or meaningful drills that are used to process a related text passage. In example 21, the focus of the meaningful drill is on strict repetition of a related text. The square brackets indicate the continuation given to each sentence in the text:

(21)



(Open Road 1:35)

The endings to the sentences are fairly easy to find, as the sentences are almost identical in the text and in the drill. Again, the ability to read alone is almost enough to complete the drill.

Communicative drills in the series consist of activities that ask students to continue given sentences based on their own opinions or experiences. Again, very little production is involved, but students are asked to bring up their own thoughts, as example 23 demonstrates:

(23)

E. Live and let die

Take turns continuing the sentences with your partner.

1. The most ridiculous movie scene that I've seen is...
2. The most gripping action scene involves...
3. What I find most thrilling in a film is...
4. A classic horror movie should have at least...
5. The most touching movie moment is...
6. The scariest scene was in the film...
7. The hottest leading male is...
8. The characters that made the biggest impression on me were...
9. The best movie script ever was...
10. Romantic comedies...
11. I'll never forget the costumes in...
12. Most American films...
13. Most soundtracks these days...
14. I would give an Oscar to...
15. A road movie touches me if...
16. Blockbusters...
17. Sequels tend to be...
18. Animated cartoons are...
19. The biggest flops in movie history include...
20. The perfect movie for a date should...

(*Open Road* 5:24)

In the example, just the name of the film or a scene description of a few words is sufficient to complete the sentence. Students do get to express their own thoughts, but only as long as they fit to the given beginning of a sentence.

Exercises

The exercises in the series vary in how much freedom they give students to formulate messages in their own words. Some exercises simply ask for translation (example 24):

(24)

F. Join the CMAA!

Translate into English the following extract from the advert of the Chinese Martial Arts Academy which offers training courses in China.

1. Kiinalaiset taistelulajit vaativat sekä fyysistä että henkistä omistautumista.
2. Akatemiamme tarjoaa yhden parhaista ympäristöistä maailmassa oppia lisää tästä jännittävästä urheilusta.
3. Valmentajamme ovat kaikki huipputason ammattilaisia, jotka ovat voittaneet lukemattomia mestaruuksia.
4. Tyypillinen harjoitteluohjelma sisältää voima-, koordinaatio- ja joustavuusharjoittelua sekä aseharjoitusta ja kiinan kielen oppitunteja.
5. Pääset myös kokemaan ruohonjuuritasolla, millaista elämä Kiinassa on.
6. Kokeile! Tämä ohjelma voi olla elämäsi palkitsevimpia kokemuksia.

(*Open Road* 2:67)

The language of the sentences to be translated is partly vocabulary of a specific theme. The "hidden agenda" of the exercise is, however, on processing the text by asking and answering the questions. In order to translate, students need to scan the text again to find all the words.

Other exercises only give keywords and leave the exact choice of words to students (example 25):

(25)

A. Antti in your own words

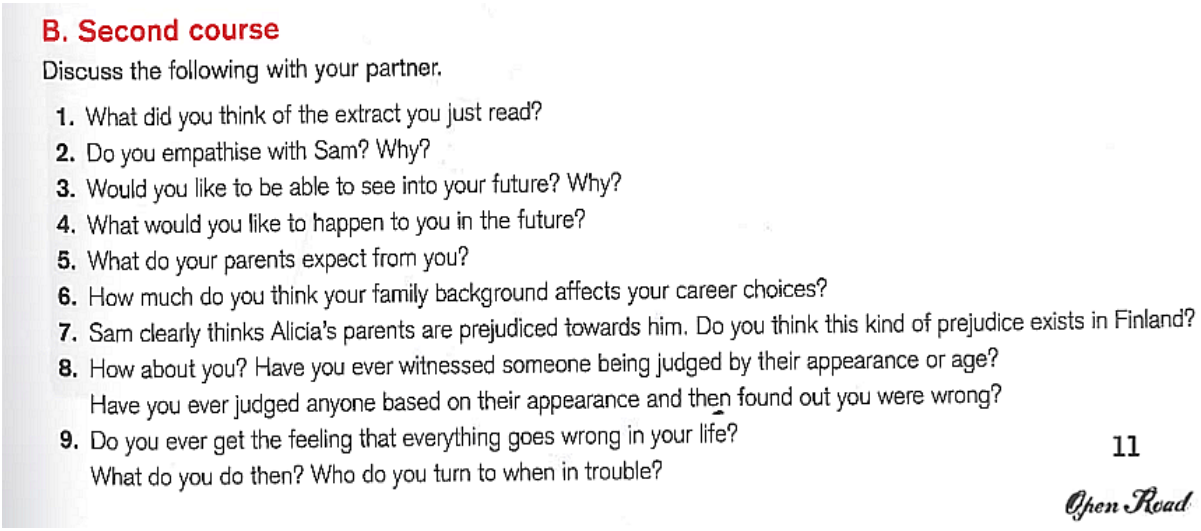
Tell your partner in your own words in English what you know about Antti.
Explain how the following things are related to him and his life.

(*Open Road* 2:65)

Again, students retell the content of a text passage, but here no translation is expected. Instead of answering simple questions, students get to tell the story lines more or less with their own words, depending of course on whether they choose to look up the keywords in the text and read what is said or whether they feel that they can retell the story by heart.

Ask and answer -activities, both based on a given text or one's personal opinions are the most common type of oral exercises in the *Open Road* series (26):

(26)



B. Second course

Discuss the following with your partner.

1. What did you think of the extract you just read?
2. Do you empathise with Sam? Why?
3. Would you like to be able to see into your future? Why?
4. What would you like to happen to you in the future?
5. What do your parents expect from you?
6. How much do you think your family background affects your career choices?
7. Sam clearly thinks Alicia's parents are prejudiced towards him. Do you think this kind of prejudice exists in Finland?
8. How about you? Have you ever witnessed someone being judged by their appearance or age? Have you ever judged anyone based on their appearance and then found out you were wrong?
9. Do you ever get the feeling that everything goes wrong in your life? What do you do then? Who do you turn to when in trouble?

11

Open Road

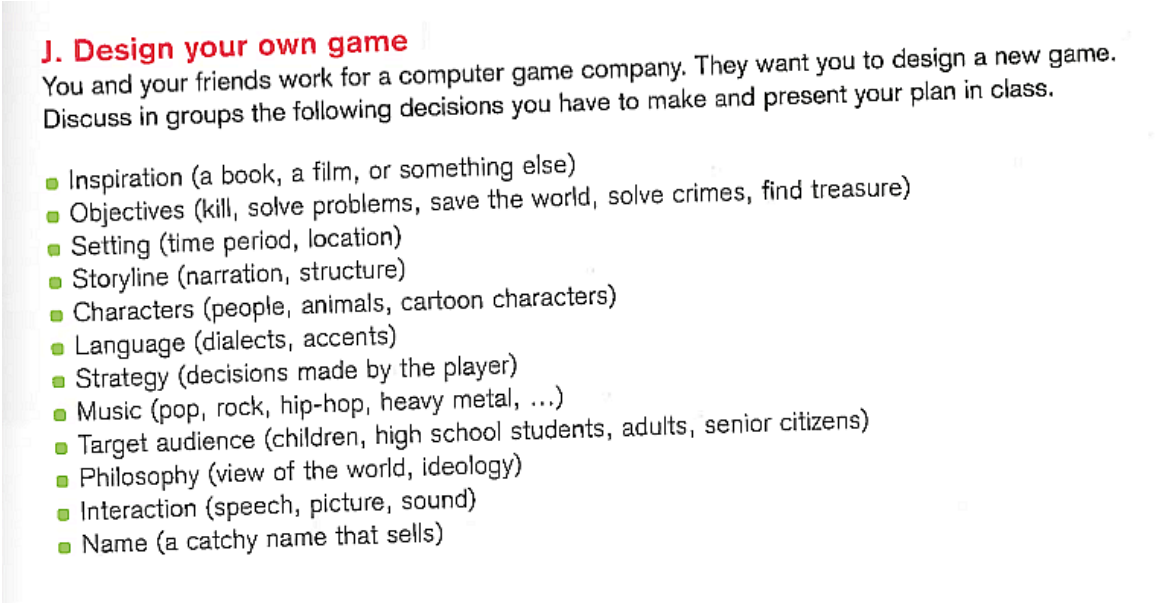
(*Open Road* 3:11)

Even though the exercise only poses questions for students to ask, it is more communicative, since the answers to the questions are matters of opinion and not found in any text. In an ideal situation, the exercise in example 26 would encourage students to actually discuss these matters more freely. Still, in reality, as there are strict questions given, most students are likely to content themselves in answering the questions to the letter and then move on: "I don't want to see into my future because I like surprises."

Tasks

Tasks in the series are all problem-solving or negotiation activities, or research projects. Problem-solving tasks go from dividing housework to planning new products (example 27):

(27)



J. Design your own game

You and your friends work for a computer game company. They want you to design a new game. Discuss in groups the following decisions you have to make and present your plan in class.

- Inspiration (a book, a film, or something else)
- Objectives (kill, solve problems, save the world, solve crimes, find treasure)
- Setting (time period, location)
- Storyline (narration, structure)
- Characters (people, animals, cartoon characters)
- Language (dialects, accents)
- Strategy (decisions made by the player)
- Music (pop, rock, hip-hop, heavy metal, ...)
- Target audience (children, high school students, adults, senior citizens)
- Philosophy (view of the world, ideology)
- Interaction (speech, picture, sound)
- Name (a catchy name that sells)

(*Open Road* 1:79)

The example above demonstrates the nature of tasks: students have the power to decide how they want to approach the subject, as long as they are able to reach the goal of the task: in this case, plan a new product to present to others. Learning, both about language and about the subject in question, takes place incidentally as the focus is on making shared decisions or gathering information instead of focusing on form.

Summary

Tables 8 and 9 present quantitative results of this part of the analysis. In the activity type analysis, also the activities that could not be placed into the nine main categories by content in section 4.1.2 were included. Thus the total number of activities categorised into drills, exercises and tasks is the same as the original number of oral activities identified in the data, that is, 201 activities.

Table 8. Three main activity types in oral activities in the *Open Road* textbooks by number and percentage

	Drills	Exercises	Tasks	Total
Open Road 1	1	13	8	22
Open Road 2	2	11	8	21
Open Road 3	1	14	6	21
Open Road 4	3	10	7	20
Open Road 5	1	15	1	17
Open Road 6	2	11	4	17
Open Road 7	5	11	2	18
Open Road 8	8	33	24	65
Total	**23**	**118**	**60**	**201**
Total %	**11.4**	**58.7**	**29.9**	**100**

As explained in 2.2.1, drills have been strongly criticised and it has even been pointed out that they can impede learning. In that regard, the relatively low number of drills in the total number of oral activities is a positive result. Still, there is at least one oral drill in every book of the series, and in *Open Road 7*, there are more drills (5) than there are tasks (2) in oral activities. As for the share of exercises and tasks, the fact that there are almost twice as many exercises as there are tasks in the series is regrettable but not surprising. After all, the analysis of the focus of activities already revealed that most oral activities focus on repetition of vocabulary and structures introduced in a given text. Interestingly, the number of tasks seems to decrease from course 1 to course 7, even though students' language skills and thus also their capability of completing more open-ended activities assumably increase. As for textbook 8, that of oral skills, the number of exercises triples (33) from the number in textbook 7, and the number of tasks becomes 12-fold from 2 to 24, whereas the number of drills only increases by two. On the other hand, mechanic drills are the biggest sub-category of drills in the series, and mechanic and meaningful drills together cover most of the drills by far, as can be seen from table 9.

Table 9. Mechanic, meaningful and communicative oral drills in the *Open Road* textbooks by number and percentage

	Mechanic drills	Meaningful drills	Communicative drills
Open Road 1	1	-	-
Open Road 2	1	1	-
Open Road 3	-	1	-
Open Road 4	-	3	-
Open Road 5	-	-	1
Open Road 6	-	2	-
Open Road 7	2	-	3
Open Road 8	6	2	-
Total	**10**	**9**	**4**
Total %	**43.5**	**39.1**	**17.4**

Most of the drills included in the series are mechanic or meaningful drills that allow very little and very restricted production from students. Only four communicative drills are found in the series. Furthermore, oral skills textbook only contains mechanic and meaningful drills. In other words, even though the overall number of drills is rather low, that number mainly consists of very restrictive drills that hardly allow any production from students.

Section 4.1 has answered the three research questions of the present study concerning the *Open Road* textbook series. It was discovered that in textbooks 1-7, 21% of all the activities practice oral skills. The categorisation by content revealed, however, that one of the seven main categories actually focuses on vocabulary and not oral skills. Other categories also include individual activities that are not truly practicing oral skills. In book 8, the number of oral activities is naturally much higher, 86.7%. Almost 60% of all oral activities are exercises, and the number of tasks is only a half of the number of exercises. Of the activities 11% are drills, and most them are mechanic or meaningful drills. Now that these results have been reported, I move on to answer the same research questions concerning the *ProFiles* textbook series.

4.2 *ProFiles*

4.2.1 Number of oral activities

The analysis of the *ProFiles* series can be considered an easier process than the analysis of the *Open Road*, since the activities in the books are already categorised based on their content. In other words, it can be seen from the labels attached to the activities which activities are meant for practicing oral skills. Activities labelled as oral practice were counted in the data of the *Profiles* series in this study. In sharp contrast to the *Open Road*, where the analysis revealed seemingly oral activities that actually practiced other aspects of language, it could be presumed that the activities aiming, for example, at practicing vocabulary related to a text are not included in the number of oral activities in the first place.

Similarly to the analysis of the *Open Road* series in section 4.1, the numeric information concerning the *ProFiles 8* is dealt with separately, since including the numbers from the course targeted specifically at practicing oral skills would skew the total share of oral activities. Table 10 is a summary of the number and percentage of oral activities in the *ProFiles* textbook series.

Table 10. The data from the *ProFiles* series in numbers.

	Total n:o of activities	N:o of activities that practice oral communication	The % of oral activities of the total
ProFiles 1	85	11	12.9
ProFiles 2	98	13	13.3
ProFiles 3	78	13	16.7
ProFiles 4	86	13	15.1
ProFiles 5	99	12	12.1
ProFiles 6	97	16	16.5
ProFiles 7	93	13	14.0
Total 1-7	**636**	**91**	**14.3**
ProFiles 8	87	82	94.3
Total	**723**	**173**	**23.9**

As can be seen, oral activities have a share of some 14% of all activities in the *ProFiles* series, except for book 8, where oral activities form over 93% of all activities. The NCC course descriptions (2003:104) say that while the first two courses specifically mention different oral skills practiced, course 3 involves both oral and written communication equally. Furthermore, learning goals of course 6 emphasise understanding of demanding language material and, additionally, written expression. Interestingly enough, leaving book 8 aside as a special case, the share of oral activities is the highest in books 3 and 6, while their share in books 1 and 2 is smaller, even though the differences are not very noticeable.

Now that it has been established that the average share of oral activities in the *ProFiles* textbook series is 14%, the oral activities identified in the data must be categorised by content.

4.2.2 Aspects of oral skills practiced

As explained above, the *ProFiles* textbooks provide the reader with symbols that indicate the purpose of each activity. Consequently, the results of placing the oral activities found in the series into the nine main categories seem partly different from the results in the *Open Road*. All oral activities from the *ProFiles* textbooks 1-7 could be placed under the nine categories introduced in the beginning of chapter 4. In addition, book 8 contained three more activity categories: reading aloud and answering text-based questions, activities practicing idiomatic language, and retelling activities. As these activities only occur once, no separate category exists for them. In order for research question 2 to be answered for the part of the *ProFiles* series as well, the nine categories will now be illustrated with examples of the textbooks in question.

Conversation strategies

A category unique to the *ProFiles* is that of **conversation strategies**. The textbooks include activities that introduce, for instance, strategies of hesitation, disagreeing and active listening. The majority of these activities focusing on conversation strategies is placed in book 8, but a couple of activities of this category are also found in the other seven books. Example 27 introduces hesitation strategies and how to signal the intention to keep on speaking:

(27)

LEARNING TIP

Hesitating in style

Everybody has to hesitate sometimes when they speak, especially when they are speaking a foreign language. The most important thing to remember is not to hesitate in silence. It's hard on your listeners, and someone else could steal your turn to speak. Instead, give yourself a bit of extra thinking time by filling in the gaps in your speech with little words like these:

Erm... Well...
You know... You see...
How can I put it...
Let me think... Hmm...

Work in groups of three or four.
Take turns choosing a subject below (or one of your own),
and speak on it non-stop for one minute. And, erm, don't hesitate in silence.

fast food

speaking English

team sports

FRIENDSHIP

your favourite type of music

silence

body language

sleep

(*ProFiles* 1:90)[3]

Example 28 includes both explicit information and practical examples of the target matter, that is, disagreeing more or less strongly:

[3] Permission to copyright obtained the 9 April 2013

(28)

LEARNING TIP

Disagreeing in style

Even if you don't agree with someone, you shouldn't express your disagreement too directly. Instead, try to disagree politely by using expressions which soften your opposing viewpoint.

Yes, that's quite true, but...
I'm not quite sure I agree with you.
Well, you have a point there, but...
Perhaps, but I don't think that...
I see what you mean, but...

If you know someone very well, you can disagree more directly by using expressions like these:

You must be joking!
You can't be serious!
Come off it!
Don't be silly!
Don't be daft!

Work with a partner. Have a mini-debate on the following statements.
Toss a coin to decide who will be *for* and who will be *against* each statement.
The expressions in the Learning tip box will help you express your opinions.

1 People with a high IQ are wiser than others.
2 Intelligence tests are useless.
3 Intelligent parents make intelligent children.
4 Intelligent people are more likely to be happy and successful in life.

(*ProFiles* 3:14)

Example 29, focusing on active listening, also provides students with both information and examples of the topic. In addition, culture-specific information of communication patterns is explicitly explained:

(29)

2 H

LISTENING ACTIVELY

Speak Easy

In the Finnish speaking culture, silence is golden. Finns usually listen quietly and don't interrupt the speaker. You've probably noticed that this isn't the way in the English speaking culture, where interacting with questions, comments and other fillers is considered a sign of interest and encouragement.

Listen to the short dialogue between two friends, Chris and Tina, who meet at a party. Underline the different words and phrases Tina uses to show that she is interested in what Chris is saying.

Tina Hi, Chris! How are you?
Chris I'm fine. How about you?
Tina Oh, not so bad.
Chris Hey, I finally got that puppy I was telling you about.
Tina Really? The Bichon?
Chris Yes.
Tina Ooh, what have you called him… or is it a she?
Chris He's a he, and we've decided to call him Socrates.
Tina Socrates! That's original. How did you come up with that?
Chris He looks so, kind of, old and wise already. D'you want to see a picture?
Tina Yes please.
Chris There you go. Pretty cute, huh?
Tina Oh, he's gorgeous. How old is he?
Chris Six months.
Tina Aah, only half a year. Is he house-trained yet?
Chris Not exactly. He keeps leaving a few little messages for us around the house.
Tina Does he? Sarah must be doing the morning walks, right?
Chris No, *I* am actually.
Tina Are you? But you don't like getting up early, do you?
Chris No, but we've trained him to sleep later in the mornings.
Tina Smart puppy.
Chris Yep, he's already starting to live up to his name.
Tina Hey, by the way, talking about names…

Now read the dialogue aloud with a partner, using the right intonation.

"Wisdom begins in wonder." (Socrates)

PARTY TALK

You've been invited to a party and soon start to mix and mingle sociably. You already know the other guests, so formal introductions aren't necessary.

The teacher will give each of you a slip of paper with instructions. Find the first person you want to talk with and follow the instructions on your slip. Exchange slips with your speaking partner each time before finding a new person to talk with.

Interact with at least four different people. Don't forget to be an active listener and don't let the conversation become too one-sided.

(*ProFiles* 8:31)

All three examples above provide students with topics or situation descriptions, but the contents of the discussions depend on what students decide to bring up. Furthermore, example 29 offers the unpredictability of an authentic oral communication situation, as each student only knows their own "role" and what to talk about, but the reactions of others come as a surprise. The focus in these activities is not on conveying a given message, but in communication itself: the point is not *what* is being said, but *how* it is being said and how others *react*. Paying attention to communication strategies is a very important part of practicing oral skills. Outside language classrooms, students will hardly ever need to communicate in a foreign language in classroom-like situations: with a friend, each holding some sort of instructions or other information in hand and acting accordingly. If the cliché of learning for life and not for school is true, then we language teachers should provide students with opportunities to practice language use in situations that they will encounter in life and not only in language classes.

Discussions

Discussion activities include activities that instruct students to exchange their experiences of, ideas of or feelings about a given topic. Discussions are controlled to a varying degree. Example 30 demonstrates a discussion activity that gives specific questions for students to talk about:

(30)

Discuss the following topics in a group of two to four students.

1. How would you feel if your parents told you that the family was going to move to another town? Would you have any alternative but to go with them?
   What would be the hardest thing to adapt to?
2. Have you ever moved to another town? If so, what was the experience like?
   What are the things, if any, that you still miss about the old place?
3. If you could move to another part of Finland to live, study or work, where would you choose and why?

(*ProFiles* 1:64)

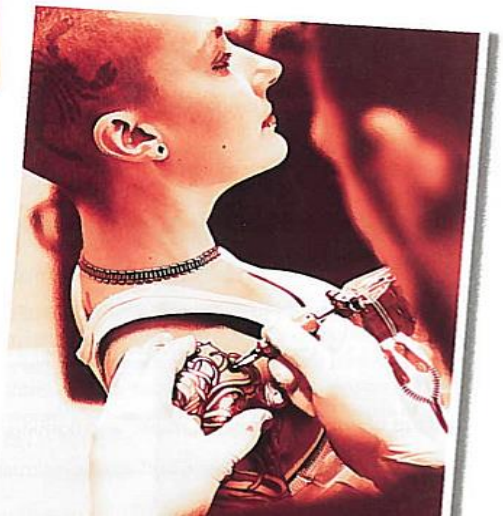
Like in the *Open Road* series, the use of specific questions is a double-ended sword. On the one hand, it ensures that students know what to talk about and have something to say, even if it is merely answering the given questions. On the other hand, following a set of questions makes the

conversation artificial and limits the content of the discussion to answering the questions asked. In addition to activities such as example 30, where students discuss by answering given questions, there are also activities that merely suggest topics for discussion (example 31):

(31)

The following items all came up in the dialogue. Work with a partner and talk about your own experiences of, or attitude towards, some or all of them.

museums	sushi	tattoos
punctuality	shopping for clothes	Japanese culture
eating out	decorating your home	Shakespeare



If you can think it, we can ink it.
(Slogan used by tattoo artists.)

(*ProFiles* 5:17)

Using keywords as suggested topics invites more free train of thoughts and offers students the opportunity to focus on points of view that are meaningful. Still, keywords taken from a recently studied text might also encourage students to repeat ideas from the text instead of discussing their own thoughts about the matter.

Non-verbal aspects

The second oral activity category unique to the *ProFiles* series is that of **non-verbal aspects** of oral communication. In other words, the activities in this category provide practice in body language and gestures (example 32):

(32)

There are sure to be situations where you don't know the exact English word or expression for what you want to say. One way around this is to get your message across with non-verbal language such as gestures, mime and facial expressions.

Take turns with a partner reading through the Topic-based vocabulary *Health and well-being* on p 131.

The teacher will give you some of these words on a slip of paper.

Your task is to mime the words to your partner, without saying anything. Your partner has to guess which word you're after.

(*ProFiles* 8:22)

Similarly to activities practicing conversation strategies introduced above, the activities practicing non-verbal communication bring some of the characteristics of real-life oral communication into classroom practice. Even when communicating in first language, let alone in foreign languages, one forgets words every now and then. It is a natural part of communication. Conveying this piece of information to foreign language learners is crucial, because flawless and continuous speech is often seen as an ideal in oral communication. As no-one can speak without ever needing to resort to non-verbal communication or other compensation strategies, it is important to raise awareness about the matter and practice the strategies in language classrooms as well.

Presentations

The category of **presentations** consist of activities that aim at students giving a speech or debating. These activities are mainly found in the last two books of the series. Example 33 is a typical debate activity in the series:

(33)

DEBATE

Work in groups of four. Choose a topic for debate. Two of you are for and two against. Before starting the debate, take five to ten minutes to formulate your arguments. Try and use some of the debating phrases, all of which appear in the panel debate.

Topics

- People should be allowed to sell an organ to make money.
- It should be compulsory to carry an organ donation card.
- It is acceptable for infertile couples to go to developing countries to "buy" a baby.
- Euthanasia is justified in certain cases.

Debating phrases

There's no denying the fact that...
That proves my point.
I can't go along with that.
Let's face it.
That's a matter of opinion.
But I'm sure that...
I find that (un)acceptable.
I'll give you that, but...

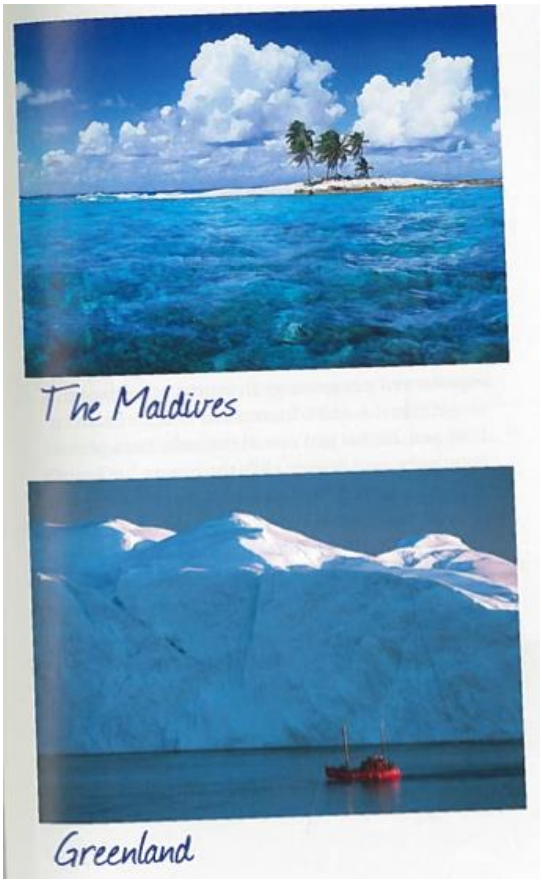
(*ProFiles* 6:58)

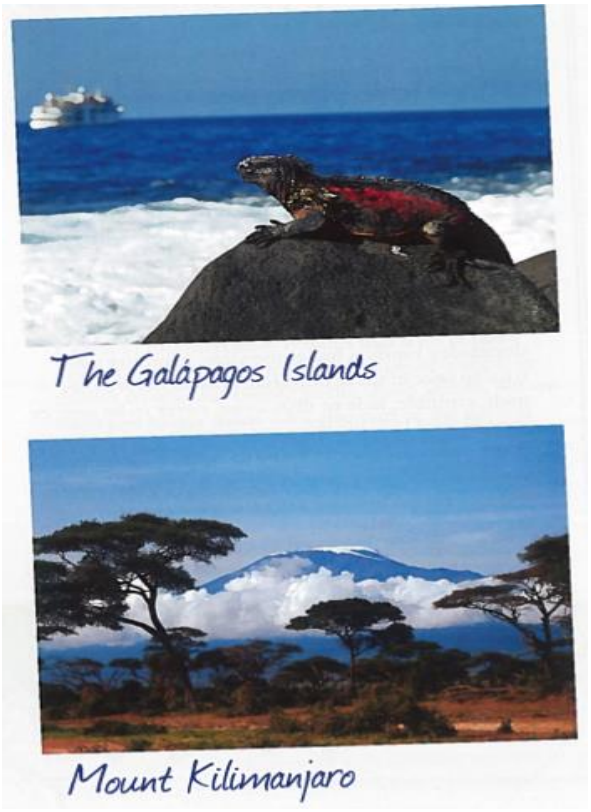
In addition to short debates, the category includes activities aiming at students giving a speech or a presentation to others (example 34):

(34)

4 E Chat Room

Work in small groups. Having read the article, go back to the photos in exercise 4A (p 43). Now take the roles of conservationists and take turns delivering a short speech convincing the others not to visit the destination you previously promoted, giving some reasons why.





(*ProFiles* 7:48, pictures: *ProFiles* 7:45)

The aim in these activities in usually to give a short speech to a few other group members or, in debates, to have the debates in small groups and without the roles and procedures of an actual debate. This will probably release anxiety or nervousness related to publicly speaking or presenting something in front of the whole class: in groups of four to six people and with the other groups simultaneously working on their own, there is not as much pressure and attention on one speaker. That being said, working in small groups might also change the nature of giving a speech even into *too* informal and relaxed talking: as stated in 4.1.2, giving a speech or a presentation is a specific sub-skill in oral skills, and it differs quite greatly from everyday conversations. It might be good, even once or twice, to practice speaking in front of, or at least to, the whole class. After all, a classroom of peers is most likely not the biggest or scariest audience students will ever face.

Problem-solving

The *ProFiles* textbooks also include **problem-solving** activities. This category consist of activities where students, by discussing, have to reach an understanding on, for example, prioritising health

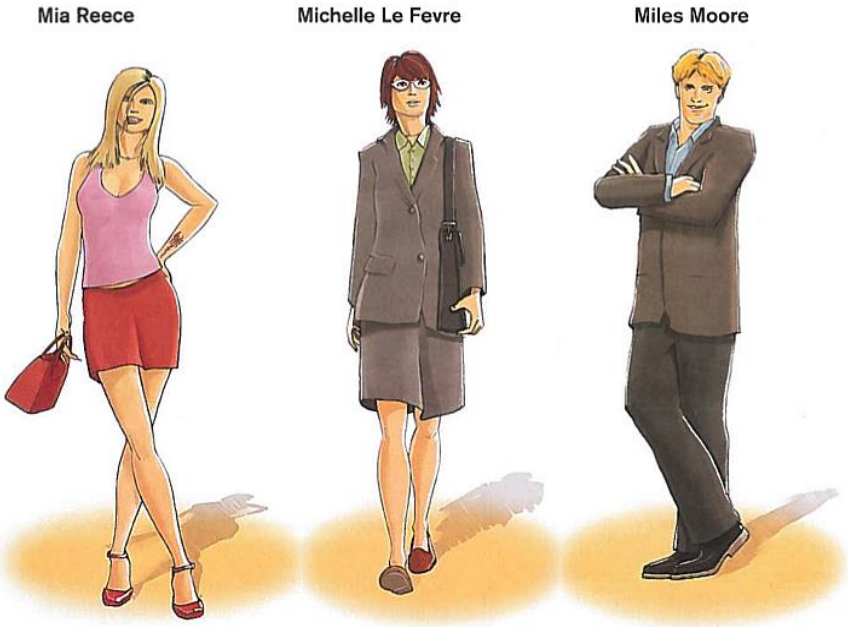
care patients, spending a given budget or coming up with new inventive uses for everyday items (example 36):

(36)

(*ProFiles* 3:14)

Example 36 demonstrates a casual, inventive activity where students get to use their imagination. In example 37, then again, students need context knowledge of applying for a job, what kind of qualities are valuable in the job market, etc.:

(37)



Work in threes. Each of you should choose a different candidate and present him or her to the others. Make your candidate sound as attractive as possible. Then reach agreement on which candidate you're going to choose for the job.

(*ProFiles* 3:86)

Whereas the two previous example activities are imaginative, there are also problem-solving activities that are meaningful to students in that they relate to their everyday lives (example 38):

(38)

Work in groups of three. You've decided to spend a Friday evening in front of the TV with your friends. Look through the TV listings and try to reach agreement on the programmes you're going to watch throughout the evening, giving reasons to support your choices. The phrases below will help you.

How about…
Why don't we…
I'd prefer (to)…
I'd rather (not)…
I'm interested in seeing… / I'm keen on seeing…
There's no way I'm going to…

to turn on/off the TV
to turn up/down the TV
to watch TV
to change channels

(*ProFiles* 2:101)

In addition to everyday problem-solving, some activities also invite students to discuss their ethics and moral values in problems that they can only solve on a theoretical level (example 39):

(39)

Health care is a subject which is frequently in the news and often the subject of debates. For example, controversy often arises when it comes to making a decision about who should be entitled to receive treatment first.

Form groups of three or four and try to reach a consensus on who should be prioritized in each of the following cases. Give grounds for your opinions.

1 During an epidemic, the flu vaccine is often given according to certain priority groups. Who should be first in line to get a flu shot?

- **A** Michelle, 6 months pregnant
- **B** Patty, a 17-year-old high-school student
- **C** Harris, a 19-year-old conscript
- **D** Chris, a 35-year-old nurse
- **E** Ashley, a three-year-old preschooler

2 Who will be prioritized when it comes to life-saving, but expensive, cancer treatment?

- **A** Darren, 6 years old
- **B** Theo, university student, 21
- **C** Clare, a 45-year-old doctor
- **D** Julia, a pregnant newly-wed, 28
- **E** Terry, 24, a disabled army officer

3 Who should be the first to receive a new heart?

- **A** Martin, a 2-year-old child
- **B** Melanie, a mother of three small children
- **C** Quentin, a 61-year-old cancer researcher
- **D** Dean, a 25-year-old ice-hockey pro
- **E** Finn, a 13-year-old boy with cerebral palsy

(*ProFiles* 6:51)

Problem-solving requires students to involve in a discussion in order to reach the goal of the activity. In addition to just talking about the topic, compromises are needed in making shared decisions with all the members of the group.

Pronunciation

No activities of this category were identified in the *ProFiles* textbooks.

*Role-play*s

In the category of **role-plays** there is some variation in the instructions given to students. Firstly, there are a few very strictly guided role-plays, where students are given complete Finnish sentences to say in English. The difference between these strictly guided role-plays and translation activities is that in translation activities, also known as A/B activities, one's partner has the "correct" translation to his/her Finnish clue. In role-plays, even if there are complete sentences and students are to translate them word by word, there are no "correct answers" available. Example 40 illustrates a strictly controlled role-play where the lines are more or less identical with a studied text passage:

(40)

8 F 

AN INTERVIEW WITH GILBERT GRAPE FOR THE ENDORA EXPRESS

Take the part of either Gilbert Grape or the reporter and act out the interview in English. You don't have to translate word for word, just interpret the dialogue freely. Read it through first before you begin.

Reporter Gilbert, olet syntynyt Endorassa. Miten kuvailisit kotikaupunkiasi?

Gilbert No, tämä on pieni paikka, jossa on paljon yli 65-vuotiaita maanviljelijöitä, eikä paljon muuta – ei ainakaan meille nuorille.

Reporter Et vaikuta kovin innostuneelta… Mikä saa sinut pysymään täällä? Onko sinulla täällä paljon kavereita?

Gilbert No, muutamia. Suurin osa luokkakavereista on häipynyt. Ai miksi asun yhä Endorassa? Perheeni vuoksi.

Reporter Perheestäsi puheen ollen, sinullahan on 18-vuotias pikkuveli, eikö totta?

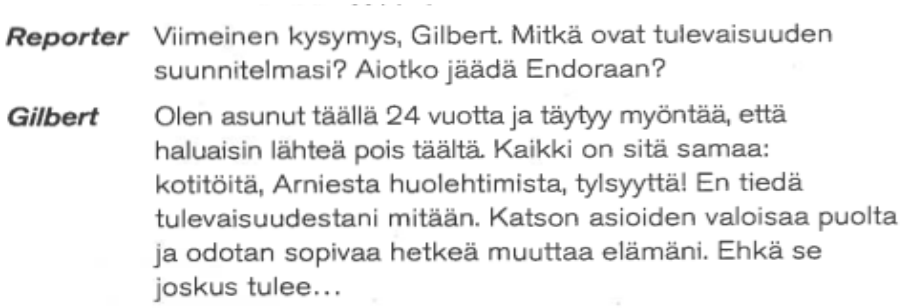
Gilbert Kyllä, hänen nimensä on Arnie. Hän on hieman…no, jälkeenjäänyt.

Reporter Olenkin kuullut hänestä, mutta nyt haluaisin kysyä sinulta Bryersin kaksosista, Timistä ja Tommysta. Tunnetko heidät?

Gilbert Joo, he ovat kavereitani. He ovat identtisiä kaksosia, mutta nykyään erotan kumpi on kumpi.

Reporter Hehän loukkaantuivat kamalassa auto-onnettomuudessa, joka melkein tappoi heidät. Onneksi he selvisivät.

Gilbert Niin, täällä ihmiset näkevät parhaat puolet asioista, myös Tim ja Tommy. He ovat iloisia tyyppejä, vaikka ovatkin pyörätuolissa.



Reporter Viimeinen kysymys, Gilbert. Mitkä ovat tulevaisuuden suunnitelmasi? Aiotko jäädä Endoraan?

Gilbert Olen asunut täällä 24 vuotta ja täytyy myöntää, että haluaisin lähteä pois täältä. Kaikki on sitä samaa: kotitöitä, Arniesta huolehtimista, tylsyyttä! En tiedä tulevaisuudestani mitään. Katson asioiden valoisaa puolta ja odotan sopivaa hetkeä muuttaa elämäni. Ehkä se joskus tulee…

(*ProFiles* 1:82)

It must be admitted that the instructions in example 40 do encourage students to use their words instead of word for word translation. Still, activities merely focusing on translation do obviously not create authentic situations for oral communication. Translating written sentences from Finnish into English is not oral communication just because translations are done orally instead of writing. What is more, example 40 includes long passages from the text the activity is related to, and thus students are likely to end up merely reading the text out loud.

More open variations of role-plays include dialogues instructed with Finnish keywords or English descriptions of a situation (example 41):

(41)

Now work with a partner and act out the following situations. Take turns being the person who complains, and try to reach a satisfactory conclusion each time. Remember to use the polite phrases on the previous pages to get the best possible outcome.

1 At the airport

There's a long queue at security control. Your plane leaves in half an hour. You manage to spot a member of the ground crew and ask her to explain what's happening.

2 On the plane

You ordered a vegetarian meal when booking online. You're given a beef curry for lunch. Complain to the flight attendant explaining why you can't eat the food she has served.

3 At your destination

You arrived at your destination, but your luggage didn't. All the things you need for your weekend away are in your suitcase. Go to the lost luggage desk and make a complaint.

4 In your hotel room

The young couple in the room next door are having a party – at 4 am!
You haven't slept a wink. Knock on their door and ask them politely to stop the racket.

5 In a restaurant

You've eaten a superb three-course meal and are in good spirits.
When the bill arrives, your heart sinks. The meal should've cost €25, but the waiter gives you a bill for €45. Ask for an explanation.

(*ProFiles* 2:23)

Example 41 mentions communication strategies in the instructions. Students are asked to use polite phrases that have been studied before in order to reach the best possible solution in a conflict situation. The given situations are simple enough, but students are to build the dialogue on their own. It is an authentic-like situation for oral communication, as one student's output will be somewhat unpredictable to the listener and the other must react in real time instead of translating a reply printed in the book. Moreover, the focus in completing the activity is, as the instructions say, on "reaching a satisfactory conclusion" instead of using vocabulary of a given theme or correct use of certain grammatical structures. Students' attention is on using polite phrases, i.e. on using context-suited language in a given situation.

Translation

In **translation** activities of the *ProFiles* series, similarly to role-plays, students are given an imaginative situation and a character to play, but in translation activities, the communication is based on Finnish-English translations and the other person has the "right answer" (example 42):

(42)

Rebecca and Sue have just been to a christening and are now discussing the name the baby boy was given. Choose one of the roles. Then cover the other side of the page and act out the dialogue.

Some of the expressions in exercise 3D will help you.

Rebecca	*Sue*
Minulla ei ole aavistustakaan, miksi he päättivät nimetä poikansa Edwardiksi. Se on niin vanhanaikainen nimi. Poikaparka ei pääse siitä ikinä eroon.	I have no idea why they decided to call/name/christen their son Edward. It's such an old-fashioned name. The poor guy will be stuck with it for good. / The poor guy will never get rid of it.
Maybe it has something to do with the study they've just conducted / that has just been conducted in the (United) States. It appears that the name Edward is associated/connected with intelligence.	**Ehkä se liittyy tutkimukseen, joka on juuri tehty Yhdysvalloissa. Vaikuttaa siltä, että nimi Edward liitetään älykkyyteen.**
Niinkö? Entä jos hänen ystävänsä kutsuvat häntä sen sijaan Ediksi tai Eddieksi? En ymmärrä miksi niin monilla ihmisillä on tapana stereotypioida muita nimen perusteella.	Really? How about if / What if his friends call him Ed or Eddie instead? I don't understand why so many people have a habit of stereotyping others based on their names.
Like it or not, your name is part and parcel / an essential part of your image. We tend to judge some names more positively than others, that's all.	**Pidätpä siitä tai et, nimesi on olennainen osa imagoasi. Olemme taipuvaisia arvioimaan toisia nimiä positiivisemmin kuin toisia, siinä kaikki.**
Entä jos Edward ei täytä vanhempiensa akateemisia odotuksia? Entä jos hän vain haluaa korjata autoja tai jotain?	And what if Edward doesn't meet his parents' academic expectations? What if he just wants to repair cars or something?
Then he's free to do that. I'm sure his parents will love him just the way he is. Then again, if he doesn't like his name, he can always change it.	**Sitten hän on vapaa tekemään niin. Olen varma, että hänen vanhempansa rakastavat häntä juuri sellaisena kuin hän on. Toisaalta, jos hän ei pidä nimestään, hän voi aina muuttaa sen.**
Kuka haluaa nähdä sen vaivan, että vaihtaa nimensä? Kaikki se paperisota!	Who wants to go to the trouble of changing their name? All that paperwork!
Well, according to the study not very many (people do). What would you call your baby then?	**No, tutkimuksen mukaan ei kovinkaan moni. Minkä nimen sinä sitten antaisit lapsellesi?**
ehdota jotain nimeä	*kommentoi ehdotusta*

(*ProFiles* 3:28)

Let it be noted that the correct translations in example 42 do include some alternatives with word choices. Still, it is implied that these sentences can only be expressed in English in the ways provided in the "correct" answers. What is more, since the lines are written down in order to be translated, the language of this dialogue is written instead of spoken language. Finally, no

interaction can really take place between students completing the activity, since they can see what the other is going to say and know to wait quietly until the other has finished his/her line.

Vocabulary

Contrary to expectations, even though activities in the *ProFiles* textbooks are categorised based on their aims and content, the identification of the aims of activities marked with the symbol of oral practice reveals that there are vocabulary-focused activities in the oral category, too. This category consists of activities such as word explanations (example 43):

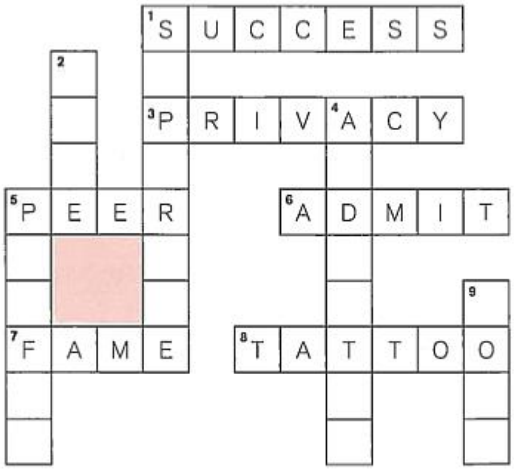
(43)

TALKING CROSSWORD

Student A should use the crossword on this page.
Student B should turn to page 196.

You and your partner both have the same crossword but half of the words are missing in each version. Give each other clues so that you can fill in your missing words.
Help each other with spelling where necessary.

Number 1 across is a noun which…
It's a kind of / sort of…
This is similar to / means the same as…
It's the opposite of…



(*ProFiles* 1:75)

When it comes to word explanations, even though the focus in self-evidently on vocabulary, skills in using synonyms and explaining meanings are useful and needed in oral communication, as foreign language speakers might not be familiar with certain words that they would like to express. Thus word explanation games implicitly practice oral communication skills as well, and to be precise, compensation strategies.

Another vocabulary-centred activity in the *ProFiles* data is continuing given sentences according to the text or based on one's own opinions (example 44):

(44)

Continue the following sentences with your partner.

1 When I surf the net, I usually...
2 My friends and I communicate on the net by...
3 In my opinion, social networking...
4 If I didn't have access to the net at all, ...
5 My worst experience on the net was when...
6 Proper virus protection is important because...

(*ProFiles* 2:112)

The aim of the activity is to make students use vocabulary related to a studied text, in this case vocabulary about technology. As they are only allowed to complete given sentences, even though students express their own thoughts, their output is very restricted by the instructions of the activity. Asking an upper secondary student to complete sentences with a couple of words ("When I surf the net, I usually... go to Facebook", for example) is not in accordance with their language skills.

Thirdly, the *ProFiles* series also has vocabulary activities where students are asked to retell the content of the studied text with the help of, for example, Finnish or English keywords, or pictures (example 45):

(45)

Work with a partner and take turns saying anything or everything you can about each of the following items which appeared in the text. Feel free to improvise!

Harold Holt, PM	overfishing	the Australian character
Sydney	Australia and Belarus	men in shorts and knee-socks
the boomerang	people on camels	reasons to visit Australia

(*ProFiles* 4:43)

Completing given sentences and retelling a text are clearly more ways of processing the vocabulary of a studied text than practicing oral skills. As stated in the analysis of the *Open Road* series in section 4.1.2, completing sentences according to one's own thoughts involves very little actual oral

communication, as the structure of expressions is already decided based on the beginning of the sentences. In example 44, students are expected to orally complete sentences that, due to the subordinate clauses among other things, are more written than oral language. In example 45, even though students are given the permission to improvise, the instructions could as well be "what was said in the text of the following", as students hardly have any previous knowledge or opinions of one Harold Holt. As stated several times already in the present study, retelling the content of a text is not practicing oral skills. Instead, it is listening or reading comprehension.

Summary

Now the oral activity categories in the *ProFiles* textbook series have been identified and illustrated. It was discovered that the *ProFiles* series has two activity categories that do not exist in the *Open Road* series: those focusing on conversation strategies and on non-verbal aspects of oral communication. Practice in these areas of oral communication is very important indeed, as they are an inseparable part of authentic oral communication, but often not very visible in classroom practice. Discussion activities and problem-solving, as well as presentations and role-plays were found to be very similar in the two series. Both series also include some oral translation activities, even though they provide non-existent practice in oral communication. In the *ProFiles* textbooks, no pronunciation activities were identified in the data, but there is a separate section for practicing pronunciation at the end of each book. Finally, the *ProFiles* textbooks also include oral activities that in fact practice vocabulary and structures of a studied text passage, even though the series has its own, separate category (*WordPower*) for vocabulary activities. Table 11 is a summary of the oral activity categories in the *ProFiles* textbooks in numbers and percentages.

Table 11. Oral activity categories and their shares in the *ProFiles* textbook series by number and percentage

	Pro Files 1	Pro Files 2	Pro Files 3	Pro Files 4	Pro Files 5	Pro Files 6	Pro Files 7	Pro Files 8	Total	%
Conversation strategies	1	1	1	-	-	-	-	12	15	**10.5**
Discussions	3	1	5	5	7	7	6	12	46	**32.2**
Non-verbal aspects	1	-	-	-	-	1	-	2	4	**2.8**
Presentations	-	-	-	1	-	1	3	3	8	**5.6**
Problem-solving	-	2	2	1	2	1	-	4	12	**8.4**
Pronunciation	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	**0.0**
Role-plays	3	8	3	2	1	3	3	10	33	**23.1**
Translation	2	-	1	-	1	-	-	-	4	**2.8**
Vocabulary	1	1	1	4	1	3	1	9	21	**14.7**
Total	11	13	13	13	12	16	13	52	143	

Discussions and role-plays are the two biggest oral activity categories by far in the *ProFiles* series, covering over 55% of all oral activities. After them, there are the vocabulary activities. Due to the categorisation of all activities presented by the publisher, and the fact that there is a separate category for vocabulary activities, it was assumed that this particular category would not be strongly represented in oral activities. Yet, even though vocabulary activities are only half as common as discussions in the series, they are the third largest oral activity category. Activities on conversation strategies and problem-solving fall to the middle categories alongside with vocabulary activities. Speeches and debates, translation activities and activities on the non-verbal aspects of speaking are the minor categories that together cover approximately 15% of oral activities. *ProFiles* 8 affects the total number and percentage especially in the category of conversation strategies, where 12 of the 15 activities are found in textbook 8.

Research question three about the share of drills, exercises and tasks is still to be answered for the *ProFiles* data. The next section will address this issue.

4.2.3 Types of activities used

In order to answer research question three concerning the types of activities used in practicing oral skills, all the oral activities identified in the *ProFiles* series were placed under the tree activity types, that is, drills, exercises and tasks, just like in the analysis of the *Open Road* series in section 4.1.3. Furthermore, activities identified as drills were further categorised into mechanic, meaningful and communicative drills.

Drills

Drills in the *Profiles* textbooks are almost completely polarised into mechanic drills, such as spelling (example 46):

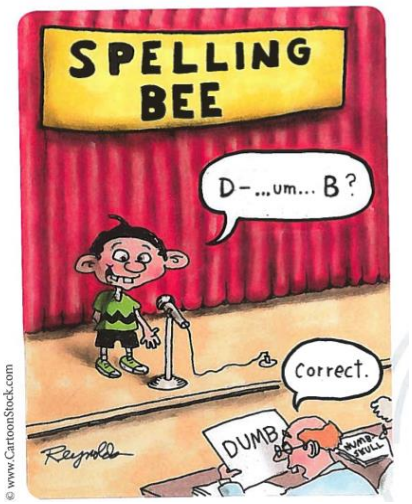
(46)

SPELLING BEE

First take turns with a partner reading out the Topic-based vocabulary *Money and the economy* on p 138. The teacher will then give both of you a different list of words.

One of you spells a word from his/her list without saying the word beforehand. The other writes the word down and then explains it in English. Take turns until you have spelled and explained all the words correctly.

Consult the English spelling alphabet on the inside back cover before you begin.



(*ProFiles* 8:94)

Even though the second part of the activity is more likely an exercise (word explanation), spelling out given words or writing a word down as someone else spells it is purely mechanic drilling that, with reading ability, can be performed with the help given in the inside back cover of the book and not knowing anything about the target language. However, a communicative drill has also made its way into the series (example 44):

(44)

Continue the following sentences with your partner.

1 When I surf the net, I usually…
2 My friends and I communicate on the net by…
3 In my opinion, social networking…
4 If I didn't have access to the net at all, …
5 My worst experience on the net was when…
6 Proper virus protection is important because…

(ProFiles 2:112)

Accordingly to the description of a communicative drill in section 2.2.1, students are to bring up previously unknown information, e.g. their own thoughts, ideas or opinions, but their output is extremely limited by the given beginnings of the sentences to be completed.

Exercises

The various exercises in the *ProFiles* series include, among other things, translation, word explanations and guided discussions (example 45):

(45)

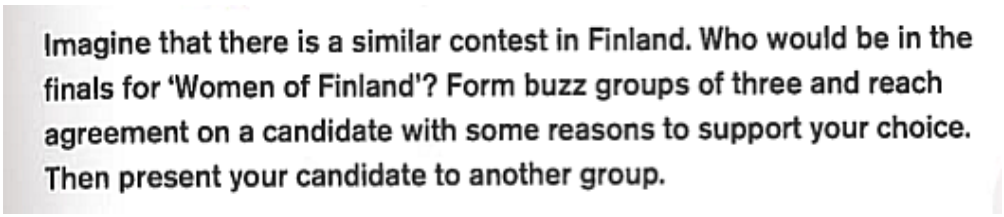
(*ProFiles* 3:61)

The detailed questions make this an answering activity where students are likely to strictly answer the question, and should they have no experience an issue addressed, the discussion remains non-existent. For example, a group might answer to question 2 that nothing surprised them and leave it to that.

Tasks

All tasks in the *ProFiles* textbooks are either presentations or discussion or problem-solving activities (example 46):

(46)



(ProFiles 2:91)

As definitions of tasks demand, there is a goal to be achieved. In this case, it is to think of a Finnish woman earning an honorary title and giving reasons for the chosen candidate. Students can approach the task any way they like and the different candidates in different groups are likely to be from very different fields of expertice. There are no right or wrong answers but only matters of opinion.

Summary

Examples have now been given of drills, exercises and tasks used in the *ProFiles* series to practice oral skills. The information can be seen in numbers in table 12.

Table 12. Three main activity types in oral activities in the *ProFiles* textbooks by number and percentage

	Drills	Exercises	Tasks	Total
ProFiles 1	-	8	3	11
ProFiles 2	2	7	4	13
ProFiles 3	-	11	2	13
ProFiles 4	-	11	2	13
ProFiles 5	-	11	1	12
ProFiles 6	-	13	3	16
ProFiles 7	-	10	3	13
ProFiles 8	3	64	15	82
Total	**5**	**135**	**33**	**173**
Total %	**2.9**	**78.0**	**19.1**	100

Of the oral activities in the *ProFiles* series 78% are exercises. Tasks cover 19% of the remaining activities, and about 3% are drills. Perhaps surprisingly, the majority of the drills are to be found in the oral skills textbook, while the share of exercises and tasks remains somewhat stable throughout the series. Only one communicative drill was identified in the *ProFiles* data, and the four other drills are mechanic. In other words, no meaningful drills were identified in the series. These results in numbers can be seen in table 13.

Table 13. Mechanic, meaningful and communicative oral drills in the *ProFiles* textbooks by number and percentage

	Mechanic drills	Meaningful drills	Communicative drills
ProFiles 1	-	-	-
ProFiles 2	1	-	1
ProFiles 3	-	-	-
ProFiles 4	-	-	-
ProFiles 5	-	-	-
ProFiles 6	-	-	-
ProFiles 7	-	-	-
ProFiles 8	3	-	-
Total	**4**	**-**	**1**
Total %	**80.0**	**-**	**20.0**

Drills thus form a minority among the three oral activity types in the *ProFiles* textbooks. Taking into consideration the criticism drills have received, this is a positive finding. That being said, the majority of the oral drills are mechanic drills, i.e. the most restricted form of drills that allow very little if any output from students themselves. Mechanic drills identified in the *ProFiles* series could indeed be completed almost with no English language skills at all.

The analysis of the present study has now been reported and all three research questions have been answered on behalf of both textbook series. Before moving on to discussion, the newt section will shortly compare the two textbook series analysed.

4.3 Establishing similarities and differences

To summarise the findings of the analysis, I will now conclude by discussing the main similarities and differences between the two textbook series that were analysed.

In answering research question one concerning the number of oral activities in comparison to the total number of activities in the textbooks analysed, it was calculated that in the *Open Road* textbooks 1-7 of the activities 21% are oral. In *Open Road* 8, of the activities 86% are oral. In the *ProFiles* series, in books 1-7, of the activities 14.3% on average are oral, while in textbook 8, oral activities cover 94.3% of all activities. Further statistical tests were attempted but then found irrelevant and unreliable due to the relatively low number of cases in the analysis. Based on the basic tabulations made, the share of oral activities in the *ProFiles* is thus slightly smaller than in the *Open Road* series. However, the categorisation of the activities revealed that the number of oral activities in the *Open Road* series also contains a large portion of activities that, in reality, do not focus on oral skills. If the numbers were recalculated after answering the second research question, excluding pseudo-oral activities from the data, the results would seem different.

When looking at the quantitative results obtained in individual books 1-7, in the *Open Road* series, oral activities have the highest share of all activities in *Open Road* 2 (25.0%) and *Open Road* 1 (22.4%). Oral activities have the lowest share in *Open Road* 6 (17.2%). In contrast, in the *ProFiles* series, oral activities have the highest share in *ProFiles* 3 (16.7%) and *ProFiles* 6 (16.5%). The lowest shared of oral activities are in *ProFiles* 5 (12.1) and in *ProFiles* 1 (12.9%). As for the share of oral activities in each textbook, there is thus no consistency between the two series. Of course, textbook 8 is a special case in both series. Further statistical analysis would have produced more reliable points of comparison, but as stated above, attempted statistical hypothesis tests were found unreliable due to the low number of cases in the data.

Answering research question two by categorisation of oral activities in the two series in sections 4.1.2 and 4.2.2 showed that the *Open Road* and the *ProFiles* textbooks have six categories in common: those of discussions, role-plays, vocabulary-centred activities, problem-solving, presentations and translations. Moreover, the quantitative analysis revealed that discussion activities are the largest category in both series, covering around 30% of oral activities in general. Surprisingly, the pseudo-oral category of vocabulary-centred activities is among the three largest categories in both series. Particularly unexpected this finding is in the *ProFiles* series, where the

activities are categorised based on their focus, and a separate category exists for vocabulary activities. Of the six shared categories, presentation and translation activities are among the smaller categories in both series.

In addition to the six similar oral activity categories, one category is unique to the *Open Road* series and two to the *ProFiles*. The former is that of pronunciation: in the *Open Road* series a few pronunciation activities are among the other activities, even though there is a separate section for pronunciation in the end of each book. In the *ProFiles* textbooks, no activities of this category were identified. Instead, all pronunciation activities in the *ProFiles* series are found at the back of the books. Furthermore, the categories of conversation strategies and non-verbal aspects of oral communication only exist in the *ProFiles* series. Non-verbal activities are the smallest category in the series, but conversational strategies have a share of some 10% of all oral activities.

In order to answer research question three, the oral activities in the two textbook series were categorised into drills, exercises and tasks. The categorisation showed that in both series, exercises are the most common activity type in practicing oral skills. Over a half of all activities are exercises in both series, and in the *ProFiles*, the share is as high as 78%. Tasks are the second largest category in both series, with a share of 30% in the *Open Road* and 19% in the *ProFiles*. Finally, drills are the smallest category. The sequence of activity types is thus the same in the two series, but the proportions vary. As for drills, 11.4% of all oral activities in the *Open Road* were identified as such, and the shares of mechanic and meaningful drills are both around 40%, while the remaining 20% consist of communicative drills. The percentage of drills for the *ProFiles* is only 2.9%, out of which nearly all drills, however, are mechanic. No meaningful drills were identified in the *ProFiles*, and only one drill was identified as communicative.

Some of the main similarities and differences between the *Open Road* and the *ProFiles* series have now been recapitulated. This section closes the analysis of the present study. The last chapter will close the study with a discussion.

5 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study focused on oral skills in Finnish upper secondary school English textbooks. The aim was to find out, firstly, how much room is given to oral activities in textbooks in comparison to the total number of activities and, secondly, what aspects of oral skills are practiced in textbook activities. In addition, the aim was to find out what activity types are used in practicing oral skills. In the theoretical background of the study, I introduced several ways of defining communicative competence and oral skills as its sub-skill. The methodology of the study was based on content-analysis, and the data consisted of the two latest upper secondary school English textbook series, the *Open Road* and the *ProFiles*.

The analysis of the data showed that various categories can be identified in oral activities based on their focus. Some activities identified as oral at first were, after the analysis, discovered to focus on other matters. Furthermore, the analysis showed that exercises are the most dominant activity type in oral activities, and even though there are tasks, some drills still exist in textbooks as well. The majority of oral activities focus on formulating accurate utterances. Discussion or problem-solving activities seldom include instructions on the course of the conversation, but the focus is on the topic. In other words, *what* is being said is emphasised instead of *how* it could or should be said.

As there are no previous studies identical to the present one, the results cannot be compared to any previous findings as such. Still, as many studies have been conducted on foreign language teaching and language textbooks in upper secondary school, some observations can be made of the results of this study in comparison to previous ones. The present study confirmed earlier findings that oral skills are being taught unsystematically (Yli-Renko 1991, Romo 1991, Huttunen et al. 1995 and Tattari 2001). Activity categories in the two textbook series analysed are not identical, and the *ProFiles* series contains some information about conversation strategies and cultural aspects of speaking whereas the *Open Road* series completely neglects such aspects. The assumption that the lack of an oral test in the Finnish Matriculation Examination makes the practice of the different aspects of oral communication feel unnecessary seems accurate based on the analysis made: the majority of oral activities are discussions and there are many role-plays and problem-solving activities as well, but the focus is usually on vocabulary instead of communication strategies, culture-specific manners in discussion or the overall structure of these “units”, including appropriate ways of starting, maintaining and ending the discussion etc. Instead of practicing aspects of oral communication that are vital in order to successfully interact with others, the focus,

in oral activities as well, remains on matters that are tested in the Matriculation Examination, i.e. vocabulary, accuracy and even translation. Furthermore, the findings of the present study were similar to finding in analyses of textbooks in other foreign languages. Similarly to French textbooks (Tyrväinen 2011), only a minority of oral activities truly include communication and interaction, while most oral activities are quite mechanical. In both textbook series of the present study, exercises are the biggest activity type by far. As language skills are a prerequisite for completing exercises, oral exercises mostly include more or less mechanic repetition of skills that students already have instead of acquiring new ones through completing the activity. Moreover, like in German textbooks (Liljavirta 2000), small-talk and non-verbal communication are poorly, if at all, noted in textbooks. Non-verbal aspects of speech are completely neglected in the *Open Road* series, and in the *ProFiles*, only a couple of activities are targeted at practicing them. What is more, non-verbal aspects practiced are limited to miming and gestures. As pointed out in section 2.1.3, non-verbal communication includes much more: facial expressions, posture, bodily contact and spatial behaviour, for example. As for small-talk, nearly all discussion activities in both textbooks analysed give students specific questions to talk about. The discussions thus never start or end with small-talk and polite phrases, but assumably students start the discussion by reading out the first question printed in the book, and the discussion ends "by itself" when no-one has anything left to comment on the last question. The lack of opportunities to practice small-talk in English textbooks is actually very surprising, considering how well-known the clichéd difference between the silent Finns with yes-or-no -answers and the fluently small-talking English is.

The analysis of the study was conducted by one person alone. The categorisations of the data are thus based on a single view. Identifying the nine main categories and placing the oral activities into them was reasonably easy, since the instructions of the activities, in most cases, are quite unambiguous and explicit. In other words, the instructions usually tell to act out the dialogue, take the roles of x and y, translate the sentences, discuss, plan a presentation etc., and the activity categories were formed based on the instructions. Furthermore, the analysis was kept transparent with examples from every category identified. Even though the categorisation of the activities was rather simple, the reliability of the study could have been increased with a second opinion on categorisations (Kalaja, Alanen and Dufva 2011:21). Then again, all analyses and categorisations, regardless of the study, are affected by the researcher(s) views, and a second version made by another researcher might always produce alternative classifications. Studies like the present one are always subjective. After all, analysing activity types is not all black and white, but there are several

options in approaching the matter. In fact, alternative ways of categorising the data could result in very interesting findings and produce useful results for further discussion of the matter.

In addition to the categorisations made by only one person, the differences in how activities were organised in the two series also affected the analysis: while activities in the *ProFiles* series had been categorised into oral activities, listening comprehension, vocabulary activities etc. by the authors, the *Open Road* series had no categorisation whatsoever. The analysis of the *Open Road* textbooks thus started with sifting out the oral activities, while the *ProFiles* textbooks offer this information for the reader. In this study, the two textbook series were deliberately analysed separately in order to build a coherent overview of each series on their own. That being said, narrowing down the research material from two complete textbook series or dividing the workload for a team of researchers would definitively produce more detailed and further analysed results for both two series and each individual textbook. Activities in both series were still categorised using the same categories in order to produce reliable and comparable information. Quantitative analysis was used to complete and illustrate the tendencies in the qualitative content analysis.

As the theoretical background of the study in chapter 2 showed, there is plenty of information and knowledge of oral skills on a theoretical level. The relation between that theoretical knowledge and its realisation in foreign language textbooks has still been studied very little. In order to develop the teaching of oral skills, teaching materials should be analysed more thoroughly. This study did not consider, for example, the completion mode of oral activities at all. It would be interesting to analyse which activities are completed in pairs, which in groups, and how do these factors affect the completion and usefulness of the activities. Moreover, the effect of all activities greatly depends on how they are executed in language classrooms. Observation studies are thus needed on how oral activities are used and realised in language teaching.

It seems obvious that even though the role of oral skills in language competence is largely recognised, the teaching of those skills is still not up-to-date. In order to improve the materials offered to support language learning, the current material should be more thoroughly analysed for its strengths and weaknesses. A new NCC coming in a couple of years, now would be the eleventh hour to revise the current textbooks before new ones are published. Analysis of the currently used materials could provide valuable information also for the writers of new textbooks. Oral skills taught in language classrooms should be the same skills we use every day in interaction with others.

As long as most aspects of authentic oral communication are very much neglected in foreign language teaching, the goal of communicative competence remains unattainable.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1

The CEFR sub-scales of oral communication.

Table A. Sustained monologue: Describing experience. (CEFR 2003:59).

C2	Can give clear, smoothly flowing, elaborate and often memorable descriptions.
C1	Can give clear, detailed descriptions of complex subjects. Can give elaborate descriptions and narratives, integrating sub-themes, developing particular points and rounding off with an appropriate conclusion.
B2	Can give clear, detailed descriptions on a wide range of subjects related to his/her field of interest.
B1	Can give straightforward descriptions on a variety of familiar subjects within his/her field of interest. Can reasonably fluently relate a straightforward narrative or description as a linear sequence of points. Can give detailed accounts of experiences, describing feelings and reactions. Can relate details of unpredictable occurrences, e.g. an accident. Can relate the plot of a book or film and describe his/her reactions. Can describe dreams, hopes and ambitions. Can describe events, real or imagined. Can narrate a story.
A2	Can tell a story or describe something in a simple list of points. Can describe everyday aspects of his/her environment e.g. people, places, a job or study experience. Can give short, basic descriptions of events and activities. Can describe plans and arrangements, habits and routines, past activities and personal experiences. Can use simple descriptive language to make brief statements about and compare objects and possessions. Can explain what he/she likes or dislikes about something.
	Can describe his/her family, living conditions, educational background, present or most recent job. Can describe people, places and possessions in simple terms.
A1	Can describe him/herself, what he/she does and where he/she lives.

Table B. Sustained monologue: Putting a case (e.g. in a debate). (CEFR 2003:59)

C2	No descriptor available
C1	No descriptor available
B2	Can develop an argument systematically with appropriate highlighting of significant points, and relevant supporting detail.
	Can develop a clear argument, expanding and supporting his/her points of view at some length with subsidiary points and relevant examples. Can construct a chain of reasoned argument: Can explain a viewpoint on a topical issue giving the advantages and disadvantages of various options.
B1	Can develop an argument well enough to be followed without difficulty most of the time.
	Can briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions, plans and actions.

A2	No descriptor available
A1	No descriptor available

Table C. Public announcements (CEFR 2003:60).

C2	No descriptor available
C1	Can deliver announcements fluently, almost effortlessly, using stress and intonation to convey finer shades of meaning precisely.
B2	Can deliver announcements on most general topics with a degree of clarity, fluency and spontaneity which causes no strain or inconvenience to the listener.
B1	Can deliver short, rehearsed announcements on a topic pertinent to everyday occurrences in his/her field which, despite possibly very foreign stress and intonation, are nevertheless clearly intelligible.
A2	Can deliver short, rehearsed announcements on a topic pertinent to everyday occurrences in his/her field which, despite possibly very foreign stress and intonation, are nevertheless clearly intelligible.
A1	No descriptor available

Table D. Addressing audiences (CEFR 2003:60).

C2	Can present a complex topic confidently and articulately to an audience unfamiliar with it, structuring and adapting the talk flexibly to meet the audience's needs. Can handle difficult and even hostile questioning.
C1	Can give a clear, well-structured presentation of a complex subject, expanding and supporting points of view at some length with subsidiary points, reasons and relevant examples. Can handle interjections well, responding spontaneously and almost effortlessly.
B2	Can give a clear, systematically developed presentation, with highlighting of significant points, and relevant supporting detail. Can depart spontaneously from a prepared text and follow up interesting points raised by members of the audience, often showing remarkable fluency and ease of expression.
B1	Can give a clear, prepared presentation, giving reasons in support of or against a particular point of view and giving the advantages and disadvantages of various options. Can take a series of follow up questions with a degree of fluency and spontaneity which poses no strain for either him/herself or the audience.
A2	Can give a short, rehearsed presentation on a topic pertinent to his/her everyday life, briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions, plans and actions. Can cope with a limited number of straightforward follow up questions.
	Can give a short, rehearsed, basic presentation on a familiar subject. Can answer straightforward follow up questions if he/she can ask for repetition and if some help with the formulation of his/her reply is possible.
A1	Can read a very short, rehearsed statement – e.g. to introduce a speaker, propose a toast.

APPENDIX 2

Upper Secondary School English course contents as instructed by the NCC for courses 1-7 (NCC 2003:103-105) and by *Nuorille tarkoitetun lukiokoulutuksen opetussuunnitelman perusteiden 2003 muuttaminen* (2009:3) for course 8.

COMPULSORY COURSES

1. Young people and their world

The course links language instruction in general upper secondary education with basic education and will reinforce students' command of vocabulary and basic structures according to their needs. Themes and situations are related to everyday life, personal inter- action and human relations and language will be colloquial and informal. The cross-curricular theme entitled 'safety and well-being' offers perspectives for dealing with the course topics. The course will place emphasis on discussions, expression of opinions and key strategies of oral communication.

2. Communication and leisure

On this course, students will practise oral communication in different ways and they will reinforce and expand their command of structures. Themes and situations are related to leisure time and interests and services used in connection with these. The cross-curricular themes to be emphasised in treatment of the course topics are 'safety and well-being' and 'communication and media competence'. Students will practise their writing skills by means of communicative assignments. Their command of oral communication strategies will be enhanced and attention will be paid to confidence of expression.

3. Study and work

Themes and situations used on the course are related to studies and working life and the course involves practising oral and written communication typical of these. In addition, students will practise understanding and use of language as required in formal situations. The cross-curricular theme entitled 'active citizenship and entrepreneurship' offers perspectives for dealing with the course topics.

4. Society and the surrounding world

The course will place emphasis on speaking and reading comprehension at a relatively demanding level. The course is based on texts related to societies in Finland and the target countries. The cross-curricular theme entitled 'active citizenship and entrepreneurship' offers perspectives to deal with the course topics. Students will practise various strategies for reading comprehension. Students will practise their written expression by writing texts suit- able for different purposes.

5. Culture

The course will deal with culture in a broad sense. The cross-curricular themes 'cultural identity and knowledge of cultures' and 'communication and media competence' offer perspectives for dealing with the course topics. Students will prepare a relatively extensive project on their chosen topic and make a presentation about it.

6. Science, economy and technology

The course will place emphasis on understanding demanding language material. The themes covered include different branches of science, technological achievements, different forms of communication and economic life. The cross-curricular theme to be emphasised in treatment of the course topics is ’technology and society’. Students will continue to practise reading strategies and polish their written expression by writing texts suitable for different purposes.

SPECIALISATION COURSES

Specialisation courses focus on diverse development of language skills.

7. Nature and sustainable development

The course will provide students with capabilities to understand and use language relating to nature, the natural sciences and the theme of sustainable development.

8. Puhu ja ymmärrä paremmin

Kurssilla harjoitetaan puheviestinnän strategioita ja suullisen kielen käyttöä eri tilanteissa kullekin kielelle asetettujen tavoitteiden mukaisesti. Puhumisen harjoittelun aiheina ovat ajankohtaiset tapahtumat ja muiden kurssien aihepiirit. Puhumista harjoitellaan kyseisiin aiheisiin liittyvien vaativien tekstien ja puheen ymmärtämistä harjoittavien materiaalien avulla.