

The teaching of interactional English skills in a Finnish upper secondary school:

Tasks providing affordances for learning

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## *Table of Contents*

1. Introduction.....	1
2. Teaching, learning and interaction.....	3
2.1 The role of interaction in the curricula.....	4
2.2 Sociocultural theory and language learning.....	6
2.3 Interaction in the sociocultural framework.....	10
2.4 The role of interaction in modern constructionism .....	16
2.5 Interaction as the basis of task-based language teaching.....	18
3. Research methodology and data.....	23
3.1 A qualitative case study.....	23
3.2 Collecting data through observation in a classroom .....	24
3.3 Data .....	26
4. Analysing the tasks .....	28
4.1 Closed tasks .....	30
4.2 Open tasks .....	37
5. Discussion .....	47
6. Conclusion .....	58
References.....	60

## 1. Introduction

The teaching of interactional English skills has been an integral part of Finnish second language education already for a while now. It has been emphasised and stressed on many different levels of official guidelines for teachers and educational institutions to take instructions from. This is one of the main reasons this subject should be studied: are the methods and techniques as effective as they should be? It could be said however, that the teaching of interactional English skills is facing an age of transition in Finland and possibly elsewhere in the world. This is the case especially in Finland because of the curriculum change, which took place in autumn 2016, and is slowly being incorporated into the school system over several years.

This thesis examines how the teaching methods of one teacher in an upper secondary school English language class manages to promote interactional language skills. These skills could be considered a very practical skillset for English language used in, for example, holiday trips to English speaking countries or even other countries where one can manage with English. The course in question is a mandatory course for the students in the upper secondary schools nationwide, also in this specific institution. The writer of this thesis has a background in pedagogical studies and teacher training, some substitute work and also, a keen interest in education. These are some of the reasons why this subject has been chosen for a thesis.

This study began by contacting the teacher, who was enthusiastic to be included in this case study and was already known to the writer of this thesis to be open to different types of pedagogies. This teacher was also known to include different types of tasks and methods to maximise learning in her classes and to provide variation in the lessons. Thus, possibly providing an interesting and varied survey into the tasks and exercises used in a second language classroom. The school in question is also a rather modern school, where new technology and methods are applied into the teaching.

This case study utilises a sociocultural conceptual framework, where the foci is not on individual learners but rather on the whole atmosphere of the classroom and its affordances, and the combined forces of the students and the teacher. This sociocultural framework, i.e. the theories presented in this thesis, have been influenced by the works of Vygotsky. It is crucial to study the

importance of interactivity in learning because as Vygotsky (1962) betokened, there are many phases to form speech. According to Douglas et al. (2008), we can make the assumption that Vygotsky's idea works in both ways and the more talk there is in the classroom the more the students probably think (p. 5). However, it cannot be said that this is always the case, since some students can be quieter than others but through interaction the students share ideas and are made to think. Learning is not as simple as it might appear and the research behind it advances every year.

Some of this research is presented in section 2. along with the sociocultural theory. Ellis (1997) argues that tasks promoting interactional and conversational language use are beneficial for language learners (p. 209). These kinds of tasks aids fluency and provide learning affordances for the learners to use the language in a spontaneous and natural setting (p. 209). According to Ellis (2008), for these reasons studying tasks and especially oral or interactional tasks can be seen as a useful area of research (p. 819). The findings provided by studies into the use of tasks may be implemented into a curriculum later in the future.

This study was conducted as a case study with a small amount of observations as the research data from which the information backing the possible claims are found. As Travers (2001) states: observations are used to interpret what takes place in the studied setting or group and making contemporaneous notes of those instances (p. 2-3). This method and the methodology behind it is further discussed in the methodology and data section of this paper. The research question of this study is: what kind of tasks are used by a teacher in an English second language classroom and how do those tasks benefit the learners in the classroom and provide affordances in learning and enhancing their interactional English language skills? Working towards the data analysis, there is a concise amount of historical and present theories which are the foundation of the issues discussed in this thesis.

## 2. Teaching, learning and interaction

The practice of teaching is intensified and justified by understanding the pedagogy behind it, although, the knowledge of theoretical framework of said pedagogies strengthens it even more as stated by Robertson (2014 p. 188). This section will attempt to cover theories of sociocultural theory, constructivism, communicative language learning (CLL), second language acquisition (SLA) and task-based language teaching (TBLT) as relevantly as possible. These theories are closely related to second language learning and education and were born in the minds of scholars such as Piaget and Vygotsky. Sociocultural learning has been the foundation for teaching and learning for a long time, but it is also the target for modern education. The other theories which have been developed after the sociocultural theory supplement the modern understanding of language learning today.

Before venturing into the learning theories, it is worthwhile to first take a look into the curricula and guidelines, which also affect the work of teachers in Finland. Many separate guidelines, such as the The Finnish Core Curriculum and the local curricula are created by the Finnish National Board of Education to provide a structure and a common ground for all teachers practicing in Finland. On a European Union level there is The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, which has been created to compose the same assessment possibilities for all EU countries. The Curriculum for English teaching in Finnish upper secondary schools focuses on providing the students with language skills to prosper in a global world (FNBE, 2015).

After presenting the sociocultural theory, which can be thought to be the foundation of modern language learning and on which the research still relies on, this section also presents the theories which have been developed slowly since the 1960s (Ellis, 2008, xix; Thoms, 2014, p. 725). These theories have since then been divided into various learning and teaching theories supporting the modern school systems in the western world. This is the case for second language acquisition, for example, which is presented in section 2.2. It reached a new focus after the middle of the 1990s, after which the sociocultural theory and interaction have been more closely associated with second language learning (Ellis, 2008, p. xxi).

## 2.1 The role of interaction in the curricula

In an organised society, education policies define the educational system (Jyrhama et al., 2016, p. 33). The Finnish education system is regulated by various legislations and guidelines, which provide the teachers in Finland with something to rely on. It is sensible to take these guidelines into account when researching or studying second language teaching in Finland because they affect the teaching of second languages in many ways. First and foremost, the teachers in Finland follow The National Core Curriculum, which is created on a governmental level to affect all the educational institutions in Finland. The Core Curriculum is renewed on a national level approximately every ten years, previous one done in 2004 and the new edition replaced the old during the year 2016.

The National Core Curriculum is the guideline for the work of the teacher studied for this thesis, as well and The Finnish National Board of Education allows the teachers to interpret the guideline relatively loosely, yet they should achieve the goals set out for them. In the Core Curriculum, it is stated that the Curriculum is based on the concept of learning which demands the students to take initiative and to think for themselves (FNBE, 2014, p. 6.) The Finnish school system also grants plenty of learning affordances, for example, considering the English culture and language, which is pivotal in getting the students to reach the skillsets they need in upper secondary English classes (Scott, 2016, pp. 52-55).

All the educational institutions follow The National Core Curriculum as a guideline, however, all the different levels of institutions have their own curricula which provide more specific guidelines regarding that specific level of education. Additionally, the local education administrations create their own curricula based on the National Core Curriculum, which they edit according to the needs that the local level possibly has. These local level curricula are done in collaboration with the local schools and institutions. Also, in addition to these two larger scale curricula, the schools prepare their own curricula to specify their goals for the next ten-year span of the curriculum.

When considering education, the curricula are at the centre of the persisting, but also daily, issues regarding it (Null, 2011, p. xvi). Null argues that there are two reasons for this: firstly, the curriculum is about what should be taught, and secondly it combines the thought, actions and purpose for

education (2011, p. 1). There are also other fundamental functions for the curriculum, such as the fact that *why* something is taught and what the government, society, and especially the national board of education want to achieve in general education (Null, 2011, pp. 2-3). The curriculum can be, more than anything, an ethical code for teachers (Null, 2011, p. 3).

In this thesis, the focus is on the Upper Secondary School Curriculum and the local equivalent in the designated school where this study has been conducted. Many of the English language teachers in this school have had their part in creating the curriculum for the next ten years and have possibly been the ones creating the former one as well. The teachers in Finland are also expected to follow the curriculum to the best of their abilities but they are allowed freedom in their teaching methods where they see fit. Some of the teachers might keep up with the current research and proved methods, for example the theories and methods listed in the previous section, but we have to assume that they base their knowledge of teaching methods to something other than their own imagination.

A curriculum is a design for learning and acts as a commonly agreed set of ideas which are then transformed into teaching and learning in the classroom (Scott, 2016, p. 46). The new curriculum is focused on the teachers planning the lessons jointly with their students, or at least allowing the students to have some kind of opinions on the lessons (Jyrhama et al., 2016, p. 61). The National Core Curriculum allows the local curricula to designate how much and from whom they want to allow these opinions to affect the lessons (Jyrhama et al., 2016, p. 61). The key factors lie in the interaction between the teacher and his or her students according to Jyrhama et al. (2016, p. 66).

The goals for second language studies in Finnish upper secondary schools are, according to the curriculum: to be encouraged in the language use in different environments, to enhance language studying skills and use this skills in other language studies, to understand the necessity of language studies and to be able to plan own personal future with the language (FNBE, 2015, pp. 113-114). The emphasis is also on how the language could be used in its native environment and how the students can accomplish that level of linguistic and communicative skill (pp. 114-115).

The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) is a central guideline for teachers working in the European Union. The guideline is published by the Council for Cultural Co-operation, Education Committee's Modern Language Policy Unit based in Strasbourg. The developers of curricula in the EU use it for guidance in the development process as well as for the creation of examinations, assessment criteria and teaching materials (CEFR, 2004). The CEFR is also taken into account when the Finnish Board of Education and the teacher in the field are developing new curricula.

For the teaching of interactive skills in the classroom, the Framework provides some instructions for the qualitative aspects of spoken and interactive language use. For example, the CEFR prepares teachers with some help as to what the learner should be able to do in the different levels of proficiency for skills having to do with reception, production and interaction. At a basic level, the learner should be able to interact in simple ways with the topics, handling subjects familiar to the learner and provided that the speaker will repeat what has been said when needed. On a more advanced level, the learner/speaker can express themselves with fluency, coherence and flexibility, in any subject possible with the speakers' own thoughts and ideas coming up in the interaction. (CEFR, 2004, pp. 25–26.)

## 2.2 Sociocultural theory and language learning

In the aftermath of the Russian Revolution in 1917, L. S. Vygotsky developed the core of sociocultural theory which even today has a major impact in how we understand language education and learning (Lantolf, 2000; Scott & Palincsar, 2013; Van Lier, 2004). According to the sociocultural theory, the social dimension in interaction between humans surpasses the individual dimension, meaning that learning, for example, happens mostly during and because of social interaction rather than on an individual mental level. Authentic language learning happens during social interaction between individuals according to this theory (Lantolf, 2000, p. 1). It should be pointed out, that naturally, individuals may also learn languages on their own.

Originally partly criticised by Vygotsky (Kozulin, p. *lv*), the theory of child language and thought by Piaget influenced the works of Vygotsky greatly in the end (Liu & Luton, 2011, p. 99). Piaget fundamentally realised that the difference between an adult's thought to that of a child is qualitative and not quantitative as it was thought to be before his ideas. Meaning of course, that a child merely thinks differently than an adult and that the essence behind this theory is that children are not miniature adults (Vygotsky, 1974, pp. 9-10). Vygotsky saw that the essence of the human psychology is in the mediation of action by cultural tools and designs (Engeström & Sannino, 2010, p. 6). According to van Lier (2007), Piaget and Vygotsky have had a great effect on the study of language learning (p. 49).

A holistic approach on language development in second language acquisition has become available through a sociocultural approach to language development, based on the works of Vygotsky (Ohta, 2000, p. 53; Ellis, 2008, p. 523). The analyses of interaction in second language learning from a Vygotskian point of view consider how learners receive interactional competence. This includes the learning of vocabulary, syntax and pragmatics. For Vygotsky, learning was, and still is, a socially situated operation, as mentioned in the paragraph above. An individual learns communication and language through interacting with another individual, and not only with the physical world, by processing the learned accomplishments in interaction individually after the interaction has passed. (Jarvis, 2006, p. 34; Ohta, 2000, pp. 53-54).

Interaction in second language learning is essential because it mediates the L2 learning (Lantolf, 2000, p. 1-2; Ellis & Shintani, 2014, p. 15). The language learning becomes apparent through social interaction and what is learned is then internalised by the learner and can be possibly used also in the future (Ellis & Shintani, 2014, p. 15). The zone of proximal development (ZPD), originally presented by Vygotsky (Lantolf, 2000, pp. 16-17), is constructed between the teacher and the student by a task which the student, who is a novice, cannot complete without the assistance of the teacher (Ellis & Shintani, 2014, p. 15). Although, the extent of the ZPD has not been agreed on by all the researchers in the field of language learning (Lantolf, 2000, p. 18).

ZPD has since, however, been used in research, according to Ellis (2008), in an examination of a native English-speaking tutor giving oral feedback on written compositions of two English second language learners (p. 272). This study by Nassaji and Swain in 2000, employed ZPD to measure the

need for assistance on one of the subjects in the study (pp. 272-273). The study showed, that using the ZPD of the learner provided an effective way of helping the learner and enabling faster language learning (p. 273). According to this example study, the interaction occurring in the relationship between a teacher (a mentor) and a learner (a novice) can be done efficiently through mediated learning (p. 274). Mediated learning meaning, in this case, learning happening through and with others (Ellis, 2008, p. 270).

Vygotsky has emphasised in his theory that language is a way to accomplish social interaction and to manage the mental activity of an individual (Ellis, 2008, p. 525). Thus, learning a new language involves the learning of using language to mediate language learning. Mediation can mean either that the learner is conducting social interaction to learn or using his own private speech to learn (p. 525). The interaction which originated in social activity can be processed and internalised into inner or private speech in the mediated mind of the learner (pp. 525-526). These learned models from relationships and the cultural community are then personally used to regulate the behaviour of a person.

The tools we use to achieve our goals in a relationship with another individual, or to just modify that relationship, are called symbolic and physical tools. Lantolf (2000) describes these two different types of tools, which are used for social interaction and have been created over generations of culture and are modified by the change in the cultural atmosphere effective at different times, as artefacts of human culture (p. 1). The symbolic artefacts are essentially language and arts which we humans use to create a mediated relationship with others. Vygotsky thought that these symbolic and physical tools help us understand the social and mental activities of humans. (Lantolf, 2000, pp. 1-3; Donato, 2000, pp. 27-28; van Lier, 2004, pp. 12-13.)

Van Lier (2004) warns his readers about the problems with the sociocultural theory. How it is not clear-cut or uncontested in the field of education and the concentration of the different approaches to sociocultural theory change depending on the different schools of thought and tradition in education (p. 13). Social constructivist approach to learning, for example, is very closely related to sociocultural theory but still a slightly different kind of approach (p. 13). The sociocultural theory is an old theory which has been around for decades and the approaches to how it should be utilised in language learning varies depending on the scholar.

It is thought that language learning happens through communication and interaction but according to van Lier (2004) it is not always that easy to establish language learning that straightforwardly (p. 133). The setting of the learning environment often dictates how and where language learning happens. The common classroom is the base for second language learning, where the students sit in rows of desks. This usual setting is, however, sometimes broken by the teachers when they want to achieve a more ecological learning environment (pp. 133-134). It all comes down to the teacher and how he or she manages that classroom environment.

Second language learning especially demands certain adjustments from the classroom and the teacher if an ecological and creative learning environment is to be established. When beginning to learn a second language (L2), the learner faces the whole aspect of a new language with which there has probably been only a few encounters before the actual learning period. L1 language, however, is learned through childhood in small amounts at first and in certain phases of development, which makes it a different type of language learning compared to second language learning. Even though the L1 language of an individual may affect his learning of a second language, as one might confuse the rules and filter the new language through L1, it is still essential to know a language in order to learn a new one. (van Lier, 2004, pp. 134-135.)

To further understand the learning environment, van Lier connected the idea of affordances to language learning from the field of psychology (Thoms, 2014, p. 726). Thoms (2014) mentions that the term was initially explained as: "something that the environment offers the animal, what it provides or furnishes either for good or ill" (p. 726). In his own study, Thoms defined the term as: "any discursive move (or series of moves) involving teacher and/or student that was intended to clarify the student contributions to the unfolding talk" (2014, p. 729). In the case of language learning, affordances are what the learning environment, a classroom with a trained teacher in this case, provide for the learners of a language. The mere environment is not enough for learning affordances to emerge, for interactive relationships between the learner and the environment are needed (Thoms, 2014, pp. 726-727).

Affordances are now a known concept in the field of language studies, according to Thoms (2014), but has been acknowledged to be difficult to operationalise in empirical studies (p. 727). Thoms' own study (2014), attempted to utilise the concept in an empirical study where a college level Latin

American literature course was studied from an ecological perspective (pp. 727-728). The study showed, that by reformulating the utterances of the learners and providing them for the whole audience in the class by whole-class discussions, a teacher can create a classroom culture rich in affordances for learning (p. 739). The teacher-learner interactions appeared to be beneficial for learning.

### 2.3 Interaction in the sociocultural framework

Interaction is an important medium of learning in a classroom and through this process the learners become exposed to the target language (Gündüz, 2014, p. 1150). Therefore, research has begun to move into the direction of how to better understand interaction in a classroom. The researchers have noted that the more proficient speakers or language users attempt to 'help' the novices in language learning when they work together on assigned tasks. The focus has been in understanding how the situated interactional learning situations in the classrooms help the language development, or second language acquisition, of individuals (Ohta, 1997, pp. 51-52). Ohta (1997) also says that the research has shown that interactive collaboration may lead to co-assisted language development (p. 52).

Considering Vygotsky's theory about mediation, presented above, the primary means of mediation according to the theory is verbal interaction (Ellis, 2008, p. 526). According to Ellis (2008), some scholars have presented the idea of L2 acquisition happening in interaction, not as the result of interaction, which would mean that the L2 learning process is almost always shared between individuals (p. 526). When placed into a classroom context, a teacher can fine-tune the support which the students need through interactive discussion and mediate learning (p. 526). This is also sometimes referred to as scaffolding, which means that one speaker assists the other in speaking and interacting when the other cannot perform it alone (p. 527).

Language research does not always accommodate an interactional setting as it is usually concentrating on grammar and prosody, according to Selting & Couper-Kuhlen (2001, p. 1). It is important to consider the natural habitat of a language and how it is used in this habitat. Language is wholly different when written as opposed to spoken language, where at least two individuals use

other means than words and sentences to carry out messages (pp. 1-3). When thinking of competence and performance with language use, the fact that interaction is so much different than written language must be considered. Especially for L2 learners the spoken language and interactional language skills are important and challenging in different ways than written text and grammar (Selting & Couper-Kuhlen, 2001, pp. 4-5; Ellis & Shintani, 2014, p. 15).

Interaction is a sequence of linguistic productions known to both the speaker and the listener because interaction can be understood as a collaborative endeavour where the speakers rely on common knowledge of that specific language community in order to interact together (Ellis & Shintani, 2014, pp. 5-6). Badio & Ciepiela (2013) state that interaction is a multimodal tool for communication between individuals (p. 9). According to them and Ellis (1999, 2008), interaction is commonly understood as either intrapersonal or interpersonal, which can be connected to sociocultural theory and its ideas of inner speech and speech (Badio & Ciepiela, 2013, p. 9).

Intrapersonal interaction is something that happens inside the head of an individual as a type of private speech. In other words, the meaning for a response comes from the prior knowledge of what an individual has in his or her head to benefit the situation and carry on with the interaction (Ellis & Fotos, 1999, pp. 1-2). Interpersonal interaction, which is not to be confused with interlanguage theory, refers to social behaviour and communication between individuals which happens often in an oral form (Ellis & Fotos, 1999, p. 2; Ellis & Shintani, 2014, p. 7). Vygotsky had already noticed how these two are connected in the mind of an individual and how the relationship between word and meaning is associative (Vygotsky, 1962, pp. 119-121).

For Vygotsky, the individual assisting the learner was an adult, a teacher or a mentor. More recent studies have shown, however, that there are benefits to peer interaction in learning situations regardless of a teacher or mentor being present or not (Ohta, 2000, p. 55; Ellis & Shintani, 2014, p. 15), and this body of research is substantial and continuously growing (Nassaji, 2012, p. 1). The collective effort these peers provide for a groupwork is much more effective for learning when it is done as so, collectively, instead of attempting to do it individually. Even if they are novices in the subject they are learning (Ohta, 2000, p. 55). Ellis (1997), has already established this fact prior to the research by Ohta. He states that interaction serves as one of the primary ways and with its help, the learners construct their interlanguages (p. 173).

Ellis (1992) claims that interaction is closely connected to second language acquisition and that the problem with the sociocultural and SLA theories lies in the way they connect (p. 17). It is important to ascertain the correct kind of interaction with the specific kind of tasks which will then jointly enforce second language acquisition (p. 18). According to Ellis, the teacher should provide the L2 learner with sufficient strategies, and that the L2 learner should himself attempt to create more linguistic resources, to be able to interact more fluently (p. 19). This is called an 'incorporation strategy', which means that the interactions in the classroom provide the L2 learners with conversational building blocks with which to build new utterances in future interaction (p. 28).

The second language acquisition theory studies how language learners acquire a new language as explained by Ellis & Shintani (2014, p. 1). While this theory is relatively new, it answers some unanswered questions about L2 learning, such as how interaction helps learning (Ellis & Shintani, 2014, p. 7; Ellis, 2008, p. 5). In the everyday interaction transpiring between teacher and the students in classrooms there are quick pedagogical decisions made by the teacher every moment. This is called practical discourse and it appears in real life as the interactive situations between teacher – student to be teaching per se (Ellis & Shintani, 2014, p. 1; Ellis, 2008, pp. 6-7). This happens more with experienced teachers as Ellis & Shintani note (2014, p. 2).

The process of giving instructions has been studied in the field of education and language learning. Vygotsky presented an idea about how a word is a concept and how every word relates not only to its meaning but to a whole group of objects and generalisation (Vygotsky, 1986, p. 212). Liu & Luton (2011) continue to fathom this idea by explaining how word meaning then represents something abstract to every individual, or in other words, the meaning differs between individuals (p. 92). Therefore, the choice of words that the teacher prefers to use when instructing the students is fundamental. If there is a common understanding and experience about how the teacher conducts his or her classes, the students have an easier time comprehending the correct instructions.

Explicit instructions did not have a significant effect on language acquisition in the Reinders (2010) study. The reasons behind this could be the lack of rule presentation, lack of feedback and or negative evidence, which were not used during the study (Reinders, 2010, p. 160). Further conclusions of the Reinders (2010) study were, that the dictations by the teacher and collaborative pair work resulted in lower scores in the grammar tasks than individual treatment of the task (p.

144). The findings of his study would support the idea that instructions and planning by the teacher might have a significant effect on learning, and in some cases and in some tasks the collaborative pair work method could be beneficial for learning, but individual learning can also be beneficial. One of the most interesting findings in the Reinders (2010) study was that collaborative and individual treatments of the language tasks proved to be superior to the teacher dictation treatment, which would support the use of collaborative tasks in the teaching of interactional language skills (p. 186).

Second language acquisition research, such as Philp et al. (2014), has also studied how peer interaction works in the classroom and what its benefits are (p. 3). Peer interaction is communicative activity between learners who share a common goal in a task with the teacher being only minimally involved (p. 3). Peers on the other hand are understood as equals in the level of skill, age or learning group and that they are L2 learners (p. 3). In the case of this study, for example, the peers are the students in the classroom working towards similar goals. In peer interaction, the role of the teacher is to successfully manage the interaction happening in the classroom and assist the students where assistance is needed (p. 3).

Some of the key elements in second language acquisition are input, output and interaction, according to Reinders (2010, p. 45). Input means that the language learner is provided with language learning data, which the learner can process and use for learning (p. 45). Often, when thinking of the school-context, the teacher in a classroom is the one producing and inputting this linguistic data (p. 46). It should be noted, however, that the input is a much more complex mechanism than the mere presentment of learnable data for the L2 learners as the learners have their own personal input preferences and learning skills (p. 46). Input is also not the only source for language learning as it is more of a language learning tool.

In addition to input, the learners of a second language need output, which is what the learners can produce in the target language (Reinders, 2010, p. 52). Interaction is what produces the learners with comprehensible output to use (p. 52). By interacting with the language in a learning environment, the learners are constantly repeating, reformulating, and expanding their target language with the help of the teacher thus helping them with future input and output (P. 53). Reinders also points out, that while interaction is useful, conversational success does not necessarily result in learning (p.54).

Other criticism towards the input-output model according to Ellis (2008) and Liu & Luton (2011), include the assumption that language acquisition is something that happens solely in the head of learners and, also, that interaction would simply be a source of input (p. 271; p. 91). The issues lie in the presumptions that learning processes pre-exist in the minds of people, waiting to be activated (p. 272). The research foci of SLA have moved in recent years from morphosyntactic aspects to pragmatic aspects in second language acquisition (p. xx). As stated in the introduction to this section, the interest towards more sociocultural apprehension of L2 learning is growing and the psychological and cognitive lines of enquiry have been connecting within the research by SLA scholars (pp. xx-xxi).

What seems to be important for interaction in classrooms is initiative to use the target language. According to Weaver (2007), initiative in classroom interaction has influence in how students perform tasks and on L2 learning (p. 159). This can also be called willingness to learn, which pre-task planning and opportunities for learning i.e. affordances influence (p. 160). Sometimes the initiative to interaction rises when the learner is in a familiar and controlled environment, for example in the foreign language classroom (p. 164). Interaction anxiety and lack of initiative for it can be possibly remedied by leading into an interactive oral task by allowing some preparation for the task at hand and generally promoting interaction all the time (p. 165).

A 2010 study by Martin-Beltrán presents information how dual immersive interaction in education can provide substantial benefits for the students (p. 254). In this case the dual immersion would consist of English L2 and Finnish L1 but perhaps also a third language. This type of teaching provides the students with a learning space where they can utilise two or more languages as academic resources, also the idea of dual immersion education stresses the use of interaction as a learning method from a sociocultural perspective (p. 254). This study and its findings may substantiate the importance of teacher – student interaction and the significance of the oral language capabilities of the teacher providing the affordances in the classroom.

Before venturing more into the interaction concurring in classrooms, a rather relevant aspect to notice in the classroom context are the historical location and sociocultural roots of the classroom. The teacher – student relationship and discourse are different in individual locations. Because the sociocultural background on an interactional level can vary quite much, the learning accomplished

is unique to individual events and locations (Wortham & Jackson, 2008, p. 7). A basic example of this is the historical heritage of a school system and how, for example, students are organised into pre-constructed groups (pp. 12-13). All this may also have a major effect on the interaction in classrooms. Interaction as a social practice shapes and constructs learning within the classroom but all of this demands pedagogical scaffolding for the students to benefit with acquisition as much as possible (Ellis, 1999, p. 21 & van Lier, 2007, p. 60).

According to Thoms (2012), the research on classroom interaction has focused on teacher – student interactions and the triadic interaction sequences IRE and IRF, which were originally coined by Sinclair and Coulthard (1975) (p. 11). These sequences are formed by initiation-response-evaluation and initiation-response-feedback (p. 11). Originally, the widely used sequences were carried out mostly by the teacher and the students participated only in the “response” section of the sequence (p. 11). More recent research has shown, however, that the IRF sequence can lead to further interaction and discussion in the students when the third part of the sequence is changed into follow-up questions (p. 13).

Scaffolding is a form of pedagogical planning and interactional process van Lier (2007) explains (p. 59). In a classroom scaffolding means that the students have some sense of predictability and variability to present the students with challenge and continuity (van Lier, 2007, p. 60). Scaffolding can happen also in pair- and group work according to Ellis (1999), and according to some studies presented by him, the scaffolding in a small group can lead to ‘novice’ and ‘expert’ being fluid conceptions (p. 22). This means that the learners in a group can effectively help each other in a situation where a need for assistance is realised, even when one of the learners is less proficient than others (p.22). This happens because of the mutually oriented work towards a common goal whilst attempting to complete a language task as described by van Lier (2007, pp. 60-61).

Considering the focus of this thesis, the process of pedagogical scaffolding can be of assistance to the learners since it allows the teacher to set a list of shared rules in the classroom, or in other words, common ground for everyone involved, i.e., task-familiarity, which will be discussed further in section 2.5 (van Lier, 2007, pp. 59-60). van Lier (2007) adds that applying the method of scaffolding in teaching means that the planning starts at the curricula level and moves into tasks and finally into the interactional work done by the learners (p. 60). The process of scaffolding can

be thought as having three dimensions: planning over a long period of time; planning the particular task; moment-to-moment interactional work (pp. 60-61). van Lier (2007) also emphasises that the processes at the microlevels of scaffolding should lead to possible beneficial changes at the macrolevel of planning e.g. in the curricula (p. 61).

#### 2.4 The role of interaction in modern constructionism

The theory of constructivism, in basic terms, assumes that an individual learns through his own personal experiences which are already embedded in his own mind with the help of activities. With the help of these experiences, the individual constructs new knowledge based on what is already there, in the mind. With the help of various tools, this process can be further refined (von Glasersfeld, 1995, p. 333; Jonassen, Peck & Wilson, 1999, p. 3). Meyer (2008) warns educators and scholars not to think of constructivism as a replacement for a larger field of philosophy even though it has proved popular amongst teachers and notifies his readers to think critically about the theory. The constructivist theory is, as stated by him, only a theory about how ideas come to being (pp. 333-334).

Constructivism provides educators and scholars with an alternative perspective to comprehend educational experiences. Jonassen (1999) was probably already ahead of his time in arguing how technology today can help students to learn more and faster than ever (pp. iii-iv). What he did not know, is that how much technology has already progressed concerning educational means and be used to enhance interactional language learning. In the learning institution included in this case study, there is high-grade technology, presumably to help the teaching and learning. Jonassen (1999) immediately points out that the constructivist idea of learning means that the learning itself does not come from the teachers or from technology or books. It comes from the students themselves and the other factors, like technology, are there just to help them (Jonassen 1999, pp. iii-iv, Peck & Wilson, 1999, p. 2).

Piaget, one of the pioneers behind the constructivist learning theory, said that individuals can also gather new knowledge collectively. The learning environment provides the challenges which the

individual must confront. Some of these learning environments are schools and the collective mind can be the family of an individual or his peers in the school community (Keengwe, Onchwari & Agamba, 2014, pp. 888-889). For active construction of knowledge, the student needs the culture of his community to provide him with the cognitive tools to help develop learning. These tools are language, culture and adults. One of the most effective tools a learner has is still the teacher in the classroom who facilitates the learning of an individual within the zone of proximal development, which refers to the capabilities of a learner and how the teacher observes and understands the mediated learning happening in the individual (Keengwe, Onchwari & Agamba, 2014, p. 889; Lantolf, 2000, p. 17).

The constructivist learning environment provides the students with manipulated surroundings which promote collaboration and conversation (Keengwe, Onchwari & Agamba, 2014, p. 889). During all this learning in this kind of an environment, the teacher works as a mentor and a guide to help nudge the students into the correct directions. Yet this is something that Meyer (2008) criticised in his article: a constructivist teacher cannot perhaps always know the right direction of the mind-set towards which the teaching and learning should move to and this might have consequences in the future (p. 340). Liu and Matthews (2005) warn of similar issues as Meyer, that the problem with constructivism lies in the epistemological relativism of it. The teacher might have certain understanding what morality is and what the truth is about something and this affects the teaching and moves it into a certain direction whether intended by the teacher or not (pp. 386-387).

According to Wortham & Jackson (2008), constructionist approaches to education can be influential since they can assist teachers in understanding the changing and constraining educational outcomes in education (p. 1). In educational constructionism, institutional learning is constructed either between a teacher and a student or between a student and a student. In this case, the learned content relates to the collaborative accomplishment of classroom activities and tasks (p. 1). The role of collaborative classroom tasks is vital for the students to realise the gaps they have in their language learning with the help of another student. This happens when they attempt to express their meaning in another language but stumble in finding a correct phrase or a word to clarify their meaning. In these cases, the collaborative work between students can be helpful (Kupetz & Kupetz, 2014, p. 45).

Wortham & Jackson continue to further support the idea of constructionism because learning can happen through interactional collaboration in the classroom (2008, pp. 5-6). Learning is constructed from multiple resources such as a lecture, a presentation and other helpful tools relevant to the subject desired to be learned. These tools together form a united learning environment which the students utilise with the help of the teacher, thus learning new things. Wortham & Jackson mention the peripheral importance of talk in this equation (p. 6). These constructivist learning theories have allowed for new learning theories to emerge, such as task-based language teaching, which is based on the constructivist learning theory and the communicative language teaching methodology (Hismanoglu & Hismanoglu, 2011, p. 47).

## 2.5 Interaction as the basis of task-based language teaching

Task-based language teaching (TBLT) has been developed for over 30 years in order to help students with their second language learning and to provide teachers with tools to assist them with. In the first decade of the twenty-first century, e.g. Alcon-Soler & Garcia Mayo, 2009; Mackey, 1999, 2007; Mackey & Gass, 2006; Shehadeh, 2001, the research for task-based language teaching and learning has been showing positive results for second language acquisition as stated by Robinson (2011 p. 3) and Garcia Mayo (2007, p. vii). In a Vygotskian perspective, task-work provides an environment for social, interactional and collaborative learning for the students trying to learn L2 or L3 languages, because interactive task-work makes them think and speak at the same time in the foreign language (Robinson, 2011, p. 4). Hismanoglu & Hismanoglu (2011) also state that TBLT has been subsumed into L2 teaching because it can provide the L2 learners with possibilities to use the target language in action (p. 46).

What is then understood by tasks? According to Bygate, Skehan & Swain (2001), tasks are classroom activities, which involve comprehending, manipulating, producing and interacting with the target language (p. 9). Essentially, the target language is used communicatively by the second language learners (Hismanoglu & Hismanoglu, 2011, p. 48). Reinders (2010) adds, that tasks are always activities in which a learner uses the target language for a communicative purpose, or more generally, a structured language learning endeavour (p. 65). Ellis (2008) and Skehan (2014) state that tasks focus primarily on meaning and the linguistic resources of the learner, which then

together are used to reach a communicative outcome (p. 818-819; p. 1). A distinction is made by several scholars (i.e. Ellis, 2008; Reinders, 2010) between tasks and exercises, that tasks focus on meaning and exercises on form.

Tasks can be further categorised as communicative and non-communicative or rather: reciprocal or non-reciprocal (Reinders, 2010, p. 66). This depends on how the tasks are structured and what are the form and content of the tasks. Reciprocal tasks demand an exchange of information between the learners and the latter does not (p. 66). Furthermore, tasks can be divided between open- and closed tasks. Open tasks can have an endless continuum, but closed tasks have a stricter setting which always have predictable endings and structures (p. 66). According to Reinders (2010), it has been argued that closed tasks can in fact lead to more negotiation between the learners because of the clear common goal of the groupwork (pp. 66-67).

Ellis (2008), provides another two possible classes of tasks: focused and unfocused tasks (p. 819). Focused tasks focus on one grammatical or linguistic aspect whereas unfocused tasks do not focus on any one particular aspect of the language. Some scholars such as Skehan & Foster (1997), have studied the effectiveness of tasks and task-types and criticise the findings that closed tasks would lead to more efficient learning (p. 187). According to them, open tasks could be more beneficent because of the more personalised approach available for the learners (pp. 187-188). What matters more, are task-repetition and task-familiarity (p. 188). Skehan & Foster emphasise that what matters the most, is the fact how well and thoroughly the task has been planned in advance (p. 188).

Open tasks could prove difficult to incorporate into the curriculum as readymade sets and guidelines on how to utilise them in teaching as the 2007 study by Berben et al. shows (p. 56). In the study the researchers tested how a multilingual group task functions in separate classrooms taught by different teachers (pp. 32-33). The goal of the task was to produce a radio news bulletin and the study showed how the different teachers utilised the given task rather differently and had different outcomes (p. 61). The task in the study was an open task with the possibility for creativity and

initiative to provide the pupils with learning affordances. Berben et al. suggest that the realisation of the task and how the familiarity of the task are important (p. 61).

Skehan (2014) constructs tasks from three phases: pre-task, during-task and post-task (p. 8). The pre-task phase is also known as task-preparedness, where the teacher can in many different ways prepare the students for a task and allow for a more focused learning outcome (p. 8). Skehan mentions that especially task familiarity is a major factor in task preparedness (p. 8). Task-processing, which occurs during a task, demands optimal task-conditions (p. 8). This means that the interaction and the support come hand in hand during the task to help the students process the task effectively. Post-task activities are also important according to Skehan, but what is also important is that the students know there is going to be a post-task activity (p. 8).

The construction of tasks through interaction can sometimes make the tasks predictable for the learners of a language (Ellis, 2008, p. 822). Sociocultural theory emphasises that the task activities vary depending on the specific goals and motives of the learners doing the task (p. 822). This means that according to sociocultural theory the tasks, even when well planned, do not always go according to plan and the learners attempting to accomplish the tasks can do something to change the planned course of the task made by the teacher (pp. 822-823). Ellis adds, that the most important aspect in task-based teaching research points towards task-in-process, where the learning actually happens (p. 823). Ellis (2008), has also argued that with the help of SLA, teachers can evaluate their pedagogic practices (p. xxiv). He also adds that teachers should attempt to study L2 acquisition to further enhance their teaching methods but warns that the theory does not provide any readymade recipes for language pedagogy (pp. xxiv - xxv).

Robertson (2014) argues that the issues regarding task-based language teaching lie in the lack of theoretical framework for the method (p. 188). She suggests to teachers to implement Task-Based Language Learning as a pedagogy but to enforce it with the theoretical framework of Expansive Learning Theory. Both Task-Based Language Learning and Expansive Learning Theory are deeply connected to sociocultural learning theories because they usually demand the students to use their

communicative skills in order to make progress. Connecting task-based teaching to expansive learning theory aids teachers in finding specific intentionality and focus on the language tasks they use (pp. 188-189). Expansive Learning theory can provide teachers with an understanding on how and why prior knowledge is altered through a cyclical sequence into new knowledge (p. 190). This knowledge is then transferable to others.

Expansive learning theory draws on the ideas of Vygotsky, Leontiev, Ilienkov and Davydov and has surfaced from the creation of the activity theory and it is a sociocultural learning theory (Engeström & Sannino, 2010, p. 1; Robertson, 2014, pp. 189-190). This theory focuses on communities as learners which create and modify culture (Engeström & Sannino, 2010, p. 2). Expansive learning theory criticises participation and acquisition themed approaches because of the conservatism of these theories and the lack on input in the idea of creation and modification of culture (p. 2). According to Engeström & Sannino (2010), expansive learning theory explains learning in the way that learners learn new things which do not exist yet in the mind of the learner (p. 3). The learners construct a new idea or object and collectively apply this new idea into practice (p. 3).

The very central idea of expansive learning comes from the conceit that learning is collective (Engeström & Sannino, 2010, p. 8). The collective learning occurs when individuals begin to question the existing order and logic of activities and form collectively new ideas which encompass all the members of the collective effort (p. 8). This idea of expansive learning should be understood as a process of constructing and resolving successively evolving contradictions (p. 9). Engeström & Sannino (2010), illustrate that the collective first begin questioning and analysing “the problem”, then modelling a new solution and testing it, then executing it and lastly reflecting on the process and generalising the new solution and knowledge (p. 9). Robertson (2014) adds, that this new knowledge may lead to new social practices and theories (p. 190).

According to Robertson (2014), Learning in expansive learning theory is divided into three stages: Learning I, II and III. In Learning I, the learning happens basically through causal connection whereas in Learning II, the individual learns to understand cultural patterns in behaviours, rules in a context

and the expectations that come from following the previously mentioned norms. Sometimes the behaviours, rules and expectations may clash with each other and the individual is faced with a dilemma regarding a choice between two norms where neither seems the right one. When an individual begins to question these choices between rules or norms, he can trigger Learning III, which means that the individual has learned to create an alternative for these pre-set norms made by others. (p. 190).

In this section, the background information about the guidelines and precepts were introduced with a collection of language teaching and learning theories and more recent fields of study. The focus being in task-based language teaching and the affordances it may or may not provide English language teaching in Finland and in the case of this study. In the next section, there will be information about how this study was conducted and on what methodology that research work was based on.

### 3. Research methodology and data

This thesis presents a qualitative case study which has been conducted through observation as the data collection method. Qualitative research attempts to usually provide an understanding of human behaviour and because of this deep involvement of human phenomena, interaction and discourse, there is reason to explain further some of the various critical elements which impact a qualitative research (Lichtman, 2013, p. 17). Qualitative research does not attempt to generalise the studied subject and phenomena to other human groups and the collected data usually takes the form of words, not numbers (p. 247).

In qualitative research, the approach to reach some kind of results or hypotheses demands an inductive approach to the research. There might not always be hypotheses because of the sweeping nature of the research but still in qualitative research the direction of the research takes the researcher from specifics to the general idea of things (Lichtman, 2013, p. 21). Because of this a researcher conducting a qualitative research is usually collecting data long before beginning to make any assumptions or hypotheses of the subject at hand, making the research a rather nonlinear one. Qualitative researchers try to simply study how something appears to them and understand the phenomena behind it. This is one of the reasons why a holistic approach in qualitative research is important. The researcher must understand why something happens while thinking of the people presented in the data as humans who have physical, social and mental features.

#### 3.1 A qualitative case study

A case study attempts to delve deeper into a specific case or sometimes several cases. According to Lichtman (2013), a case study focuses on a certain setting or a project or even a technique (p. 90). That means that in a case study the scholar recognises an entity which to study and can because of this, decide on a case study approach to the subject in question. In this study, however, that setting is the upper secondary classroom and the technique or methods used by the teacher teaching in that classroom. A case study has not always been seen as an absolutely scientific approach in research (Lichtman, 2013, p. 91), which could be because of the difficulty to generalise some of the studied phenomena and results to other similar entities which have been studied as a case. Still a

qualitative case study does not attempt to generalise, only to generate rich data which is as detailed as possible, of the case being studied (Lichtman, 2013 p. 92; Gagnon, 2010 p. 2).

Simons (2009), continues to further illustrate what case studies are by stating that in a case study, the data is often unstructured, and the analysis is qualitative in nature (p. 19). She continues to explain that the aim of a case study is to concentrate on the one case and attempt to understand it rather than be able to generalise those findings as also stated by Lichtman above (Lichtman, 2013, p. 92; Simons, 2009, p. 19). A case study is fundamentally an empirical inquiry, where the boundaries between the phenomenon and the context are not always evident (p. 20).

For this study, the case was decided on the upper secondary classroom because of the knowledge that in this particular classroom of this particular teacher there might be encompassing data to be gathered. The reason for the choice of upper secondary level education lies within the interests of the writer of this thesis, that how can a teacher in an upper secondary classroom influence the students to use their second language in an almost authentic situation simulated by the teacher. I also have long-lasting experience of the teaching methods of the teacher in question, and therefore decided to study now, as a novice researcher, how these methods help the students to accumulate practical language skills.

### 3.2 Collecting data through observation in a classroom

Observing an upper secondary school classroom has been a window into the mind of a teacher, especially since the classes of teachers are not often studied or observed in any way, especially not by other teachers nor researchers. Sometimes parents do attend in the classrooms when they are interested in what the teacher is teaching their children, but these occasions are rare in nature. It is important to acknowledge what kind of a class is being observed, however, because the focus of a mathematics classroom can be very different from a language classroom. Wragg (1999) states that the arrangement of the classroom furniture can vary plenty as well, not necessarily having anything to do with what the teacher wants, but how the classrooms are divided amongst the teachers or courses (p. 6). In a mathematics class, the desks of the students are often in single file as opposed to a language class such as the one that was observed for this study, which had the desks arranged in pairs, possibly to promote pair work.

Observation was chosen to be the method of investigation for this thesis for a simple reason: it is a more holistic approach, where the researcher can experience the actual situation in a classroom and make immediate remarks from it. According to Fine (2015), the use of observation as a methodological technique gives insight into the culture and structure of a community (p. 530). In this case, of course, that community is the classroom, its students and the teacher. This technique is inexpensive for a researcher, but it allows for great personal growth and learning (p. 531). The only major downside is, that the results may be slightly biased depending on the researcher conducting the observations. Although in the case of this thesis, an approach as unbiased as possible was taken.

It has been interesting to witness what a teacher really does in the privacy of the classroom, especially because the classroom is a rather private place for many teachers according to Wragg (1999, p. 2). Although he adds, that the observation of classrooms, if done correctly, can benefit both the observer and researcher and the person teaching the class. The intended focus for this study was very clear from the beginning: to concentrate the observations on the tasks that the teacher provided for the students and how they worked. The focus of the observation was also on whether the tasks had the effect that the teacher most likely meant for them to have, and if the students actually did the tasks correctly or if the tasks were meaningful at all. Brown (1995) says that a meaningful-use task is in the most basic term an authentic appliance of learned skills in the classroom (p. 22). The teacher can harness these types of tasks in order to promote authentic language skills or to test if the students know how to use the language in situations in which they might find themselves in.

According to Brown (1995) observation has been used as a type of critique of the work of the observed teacher and, for analyzing teaching style and methods of a teacher (p. 22). In the 1990s, however, the observation practices in the classroom have changed dramatically with the teacher, who is being observed, commenting freely about what he or she thinks the observers should be particularly observing and what is not relevant in the study. This has been implemented into this study by allowing the teacher to read through the observation notes and make corrections where corrections are in order in the opinion of the teacher. Data collection method is observation because as a teacher, I can understand the “culture” and the methods that the teacher uses in the classroom. We are, in a way, on the same level (Lichtman, 2013, p. 224).

### 3.3 Data

As mentioned earlier in this thesis, the observations to collect data for this study took place in an upper secondary classroom. Ellis (1997) argues that the study of classroom learners needs to focus also on the classroom not just what the learners happen to be doing at the time (p. 169). The data consists of seven separate classes, which were randomly selected but took place in the same course with the same students and teacher over the period of five weeks. The students were, at the time, second graders in the upper secondary school, which means that they were approximately seventeen or eighteen years old, and the English language course in this level of education was the sixth in number for them, so all in all they were probably very accustomed to the teaching and learning processes of an English language class in this Finnish school. It is, however, interesting to take notice in the fact which was mentioned by the teacher in the beginning of this course that she did not know most of the students prior to this course, so in some way her teaching methods might have been new to the students.

The English language course observed is the sixth and final mandatory course for the students in Finnish upper secondary schools. The course is called ENA6 Science and Technology, with its themes closely related to these subjects. The course title is ENA6, in which the EN part means English language and A refers to the level or depth of language learning. A is the most demanding level for upper secondary students to learn a subject and it practically means that the students must study most of the courses and most likely will attend the matriculation examination for the subject. The physical timetable for the classes were two 08:15 mornings and one late afternoon beginning at 14:30.

The physical space, mentioned also earlier in the methodology and data section, was almost the same for all the observed classes: the desks of the students were always in three double rows and naturally the amount of attending students varied (sometimes because of the matriculation exams taking place at the same time) but even with full attendance, the classroom was rather loosely filled. The exact number of students on the course was twenty-four, but as said earlier, the attending number of students varied. The teaching situation in general was always casual and that could be because of the teacher being very casual with the students and allowing them to sometimes chat in

low voices during these observed classes. There is no recollection that even for once the teacher would have had to silence even one of the students.

The researcher in this study remained a postmodern observer throughout the observed sessions, which means that he virtually did nothing but observed the students and the teacher from the back of the class but they all were conscious more or less of the presence of the researcher. In the beginning of the course, when the observations began, the students were informed, for ethical reasons, that they will be observed for an indefinite number of classes during this course, but the researcher will remain in the background without disturbing their learning. The teacher of the course was contacted before the course even began to ask for a permission to conduct a study in the course and what the study includes. For the purposes of the study, the researcher also tried to keep in mind that this class was no doubt a formal and stable group and had a rather strict set of rules for people who gather regularly for work, as classes usually do (Lichtman, 2013, p. 223-231; Corbin & Strauss, 2015, pp. 120-121).

It is essential to understand, that despite all the former information, the processes of creating field notes can be very different for every researcher and also derived on the case. According to Corbin & Strauss (2015) the process of analysing a researcher's own field notes reveals the analytic line of thought which took place during the observations. The style and length of these field notes also vary from researcher to researcher. The particular phase that the research is in at the time of the observations or the prime intentions of the researcher can affect the type of observations taking place. For the sake of validity and transparency, the observation notes were sent to the teacher of the observed classes and she was asked to, if possible, read and comment the observations if she wishes to do so.

In the next section, which presents the analysis of this case, these observations are subdivided into tasks, which appeared to be most relevant for this study.

## 4. Analysing the tasks

In this section, the findings and observations from the case study are presented. There will be some extracts from the data, when relevant, and those extracts will be analysed while keeping in mind, what the initial objective of this study was: to find and describe the methods which the teacher used in order to promote interactional language skills. According to Mayo & del Pilar, the second language task research studies how teachers use the sequence of various tasks to promote second language learning and development i.e. provide the students with affordances for learning (2007, p. 7). A generic approach to the analysis is taken, and possibly a few different types of tasks or themes will be found from the data to represent the teaching methods of the teacher. Other relevant information about the setting and the general atmosphere during the observations were already introduced in the data section of this paper.

The analysis of this study focuses more on the ecological aspect of second language learning. Peng (2011) explains that the ecology in L2 learning refers to how language and learning are formulated in the social interactions between the students, the teacher and the learning environment (pp. 315-316). The foci are on the sociocultural perspectives of second language learning and affordances which could both be crucial for effective language learning. The zone of proximal development (ZPD), which was introduced in the theory section, acts as the cornerstone of language learning and where the learner should be to effectively learn new things. Classroom affordances, however, may enhance language learning when the affordances are suited to the needs of the group (Peng, 2011, p. 316).

One of the other key theories concerning this study is the theory of task-based language teaching (TBLT), which was also presented earlier in this thesis. According to Hismanoglu & Hismanoglu (2011), TBLT is focused on communicative i.e. interactive tasks which in turn enhance the practical use of language inside and outside of the classroom (p. 46). As the research in L2 learning has been moving to a direction, where the conceptualisation of tasks is no longer as important as the arrangement of tasks and how the tasks perform in the classrooms (Hismanoglu & Hismanoglu, 2011, p. 47), does this thesis' analysis also focus more on task-performance. Important aspects in

the analysis considering tasks are also how the teacher executes the tasks and how the students appear to benefit from them.

Reinders (2010) also emphasises that tasks can be a necessary tool for the teacher to promote real-life communication skills in the students as the tasks are affordances for real-life instances for language use (p. 71). The more chances the students get to use the language in the classroom in various communicational situations, the more possibilities they have to utilise the learned material outside the classroom (p. 71). Reinders (2010) also indicates, that the tasks have an ability to make use of certain linguistic forms, and to encourage interaction and the negotiation of meaning (p. 71). The variation in the task-types is crucial for diversity in the linguistic skillsets of the learners.

A pattern may be seen from the tasks presented below, which appears to be that the teacher wants to allow the students to help themselves to learn and take responsibility in learning English collaboratively. The level of English proficiency in Finland is generally understood to be rather high, which could be one of the reasons that the teacher can permit the students to take control of their own learning. Another noticeable aspect is that the teacher used plenty of prefabricated tasks which were in the course book. This is, of course, easier for the teacher and can help unburden a possibly already heavy workload. There is also variety in the tasks, however, and some of the example tasks from the research notes were completely made by the teacher herself and these tasks appeared to have been connected to the course themes.

The English language proficiency is relatively high in Finland, as mentioned above. Yet according to Gündüz (2014), there could be various reasons for the teacher to be using only English (L2) in her instructions for the students and why, at times, she uses only Finnish or the combination of both (p. 1159). Sometimes the teacher can feel that it is necessary to promote the use of English in the specific task about to be implemented (p. 1159). This is a controversial issue because some of the researchers in the field of language learning argue that the teacher of an L2 classroom should be using as much of the target language as possible and some research has proven that to be effective (pp. 1159-1160).

The interaction provided by the teacher in the target language can act as affordances for learning, as stated above. Still, the affordances that the classroom environment provides may come from the

students themselves as well (Thoms, 2014, p. 729). As already stated in the theory section of this thesis, the learners in the classroom need to interact with their learning environment in order to yield more meaningful learning from it. According to Thoms (2014), the affordances in a classroom can be the initiations for class discussion to present opportunities for the students to build their knowledge and meaning-making abilities (p. 729). The teacher can also aid the students and reformulate their utterances when the comments given by students were not comprehensible to the others in the class for various reasons (p. 729). Essentially, the teacher in the classroom can rephrase a long answer or, for example, utter a response by a student more loudly.

The tasks and exercises found in the observation notes are further thematised under different subheadings in this section. The subsections include open tasks and closed tasks and under these sections it is also worthwhile to note that all the tasks below are reciprocal in nature. An attempt has been made to reveal all the tasks connected to sociocultural learning, task-based learning or constructive learning from the data, and to present it here in the analysis section. From some of the tasks the connection to sociocultural learning and other learning theories presented in the theory section of this paper can be seen. These connections are further discussed in the discussion section, which is situated after the analysis section.

In the following extracts from the personal field notes, there are descriptions about what the teacher is doing with the class of upper secondary students. Because the subject of this thesis is focused on interaction and interactional language skills, the focus in this analysis is on oral tasks. It should be pointed out, that these tasks are only a small sample from a complete course of compulsory English, where plenty of different types of tasks, exercises and listening comprehensions took place. With the help of these descriptions, there is analysis on how these kinds of activities work and how they could be justified by the aforementioned theories.

#### 4.1 Closed tasks

This section presents some of the closed tasks which were observed in the classroom. These tasks were chosen for this study, since it has been argued by some earlier studies, that closed tasks may provide more learning affordances through interaction than open tasks (Ellis, 2008, pp. 820-821).

More often than not, oral language tasks are closed tasks, according to Skehan (2014), since the structure of a closed narrative structure usually contain a context, some development of events and an ending (p. 225). The closed tasks may provide the learners with a more predictable goal and outcome because there usually is only one possible solution to the task (Reinders, 2010, pp. 66-67).

Ellis (2008) continues to further discuss the features of closed tasks by arguing that implementational variables such as planning, and participant role have a role in tasks (p. 821). With closed tasks, also task repetition and familiarity, as mentioned earlier in section 2.5, may have a significant impact in task-preparedness for students (p. 821). With closed tasks, such as the tasks presented next, in this section, the familiarity can be more easily achieved, since the learning outcomes are more planned and structured. Here is the first extract from the observation notes from the first assembly of the class, which presents a task, where students get acquainted with the course themes and have an opportunity to practice interaction with each other in English:

Example (1) observation note 12.02.2016

*The first task on the course is for the students to form groups of three or four and play a language game provided by the book. The game requires the students to use their selling and buying skills with the objects that they are selling being very imaginary (a rocking chair that you can go to space with and more, takes a lot of explanation and sales pitching). The teacher explains the rules and purpose of the game in English at first but then decided to explain it again shortly in Finnish as well, so everyone absolutely understands it. The teacher also adds that it is a pleasant way to begin a new course by playing a casual game.*

The teacher might have added the Finnish explanation to the task because, as she said, she had no prior knowledge of some of the students or their language proficiency in English. Tweed (2014) also mentions how students are learning a language for various reasons and with different skillsets and these factors may affect the learning (p. 10). Some of the students discussed the game in Finnish, at first, but one group, for example, discussed it purely in English. It could be said that this was a very interactional task to begin the course with because it requires the students to talk in English to each other and try to make themselves understood by the others. They also seem to need convincing

skills in this task, since they are “buying and selling” as the teacher stated. In a task-based learning situation such as this, it is possible that some of the groups talk mostly Finnish, unless the teacher wants to take close control of the learning outcomes.

Still, it should also be said that the purpose of the game was to get the students accommodated with the course and get to know each other through a learning situation. Although, a closed yet reciprocal task like this usually can promote the use of English in an efficient way, if the students do the task properly but there lies the problem with tasks such as these. There was some great explaining done by some of the students anyway and if one stumbled slightly with his or her explanation, the others attempt to help that student. Some of the students used words or phrases that could have possibly steered from their personal lives and experiences or hobbies. Here the teacher could have provided more affordances for learning by reformulating the responses of the students to further clarify their messages and essentially get more out of the task (Thoms, 2014, p. 739).

In the next example (2), the students had an opportunity to practice work-related talk and interaction with the help of an interview task. The task in example 2 seems to fall somewhere in between the closed and open categories but has been situated in the closed category because the interview done in this task by the students was a predetermined one with a clear purpose, structure and outcome (Reinders, 2010, p. 66). The interview questions required specific answers from the students, which made the task more of a closed task, where there was not much room for imagination or freeform interaction after all.

Example (2) observation notes 15.02.2016

*The next task is to act out an interview in close connection with the text. This task is provided in the students' course book. It is said in the instructions by the teacher that the text doesn't provide direct answers, so the use of imagination is required from the students.*

In example 2 the task was a short one, even though it may be fruitful for the purposes of this study. An interview can be a very social and authentic situation to practice in a classroom, especially

worthwhile when done in a second language. This might prepare the students for an employment application abroad which could take place in the future of the students. It is also important to keep in mind that the students in Finnish upper secondary schools have plenty of chances to practice work-related language and can practice English interviews in many of the courses, be those compulsory or not.

The interactions in this task were reduced to a point where the predetermined structure steered the students to plainly shuffle through the task at hand. One could compare this task to a classic “A – B” pair work handout, which seems to be fairly common in English language classrooms in Finland, where two students work together to ask and answer to each other. The learners doing this type of task do not necessarily reach the ZPD, since they are more than likely capable of doing the task without the teacher and further assistance. Although the discussion with the help of the handout could lead to conversation and affordances.

In example 3, the teacher seemed to have designed the task herself. The task also appeared to be planned to fit the course theme, which was a space and science theme. After the task, the teacher also explained shortly to the students how this video was related to the theme of the day’s class.

Example (3) observation notes, 24.02.2016

*The teacher shows the students a video of Stephen Hawking and a separate commentator explaining facts about black holes. She then asks questions about the video in Finnish making sure the students understood the English explanations in the video.*

Space is an always ongoing science research subject, and naturally a current topic since the science behind it keeps progressing every year. The teacher had decided to include this informative video possibly because she wanted to secede from the usual course book outline, and this method is something also the teacher training in the University of Oulu guides new teachers in doing to raise awareness and enthusiasm for the subjects in the students. This type of task is connected to task-based teaching since it requires the students to answer the questions made by the teacher in their own words and on how they interpreted the English commentator and Mr. Hawking on the video.

This task is a closed task even though it could be an open task as well depending on the questions or follow-up exercises raised by the teacher. In the case of this task, the questions were specific to which the teacher expected answers of a certain type, which makes this task a closed task. This task also required no clear need for peer interaction as did many of the other tasks in this study (Philp et al. 2014, p. 17). This happened because of the teacher deciding not to include a peer interaction task after the video but decided to only do a follow-up session by having a whole class discussion.

According to Thoms (2014), several recent studies have shown how foreign language learners, at least in the college level, can benefit plenty from the affordances provided by literature and cultural topics (p. 724). Other research, according to him, have shown that the actions of the teacher may affect the learning outcomes when handling these two topics (p. 725). Considering these facts, the teacher may have provided the students with the necessary learning affordances needed to make the most of the task in example 3. By asking the questions after the video, the teacher may have tried to receive confirmation whether the students listened to the video or not.

In the next example, example 4, the teacher allowed the students to mainly work by themselves in groups promoting peer-interactive work. The task in example 4 was a grammar task and the teacher provided the instructions in Finnish, and the students mostly discussed in Finnish amongst themselves. She may have allowed this because the grammar handled adjective comparisons, which could be considered one the easier subjects in upper secondary grammar. Using L1 is common during grammar tasks, according to Fotos (2005), because the often-complex grammar problems are easier to comprehend in the L1 (p. 666).

Example (4) observation notes, 24.2.2016

*In the grammar section of today's class, the teacher shortly explains what the grammar is about, and tells the students to work together on this, since they teach each other a lot when they work together. She then forms small groups from the students in order to promote her idea and encourage the students to discuss the task as she wanted them to.*

This grammar task in example 4 provides an interesting view into the possibilities of task-based language teaching, when it is addressing grammar. While the goal of the grammar tasks provided in the course book was not to promote discussion per se, the teacher decided to create some conversation about it anyway. Byrd (2005) mentions how teaching grammar has evolving for a long time but is always looking for its place in the classroom (p. 545). She continues to emphasise how the contexts of the grammar exercises or tasks are important and the learning of grammar should come directly from these contexts (p. 546). Grammar tasks have been concentrating too much on the grammar rules acting by themselves and not in the everyday context (p. 546).

A discourse-based approach to grammar exercises would place meaning and interaction at the forefront of this task (Byrd, 2005, p. 547). The key factor in this task is, however, that the instructions and the discussion were mostly in Finnish. This may affect the affordances for learning to use the learned grammar rules and vocabulary in spoken interactions. In this task the teacher did not provide any follow-up questions, which could have been in English and provide more affordances for the students to collectively think on the task at hand in the target language. This may have happened because the time ran out and the class was dismissed before moving on to the post-task phase.

This type of approach is also known as communicating about grammar, according to Reinders (2010), and may provide great outcomes and affordances when an immediate post-test is provided by the teacher (p. 67). This post-test could be done in the follow-up or post-task segment of the task. Although some research has found that a delayed post-test, for example during the following lesson can be more beneficial for learning grammar (p. 67). Reinders continues to argue how interaction, when included in a task like in example 4, may provide affordances for fluency and motivation (p. 67).

In the next example (5), the teacher allowed the students to mostly work by themselves at first. At the pre-task phase she did provide instructions and during the task she circled the room providing assistance where needed, which could be especially beneficial because of the task handled grammar. Post-task, as is clear from the example, the teacher provided some questions for further inquiry on the participial phrases because as pointed out earlier in this thesis: post-task activities

are important and that the students know there is going to be a post-task activity (Skehan, 2014, p. 8).

Example (5) observation notes, 21.03.2016

*The next exercise is a 'participial phrases' or 'constructs' grammar exercise, in which the students attempt to find all the participial phrases in a news article. The exercise is provided in the course book. The students also have to think in Finnish with their partners what the phrases mean.*

*The teacher then asks the students to think about how some example sentences could be turned into participial phrases and then asks in turns from individual students how they would do it.*

According to Ellis (2008), this type of task is a focused task, because it focuses on one grammatical aspect of the language (p. 819). It is also a closed task since it requires the students to find the correct phrases from the text and only discuss those and this is also the case in the example phrases provided by the teacher after the news article (Reinders, 2010, p. 66). The follow-up questions after the task itself allow for a more open treatment for the after-task feedback.

In this task, the teacher again provides a possibility, an affordance, for the students to apply their language in a meaningful and possibly topical task involving a newspaper article. The students were, as instructed by the teacher, using both English and Finnish during this task. The teacher also utilises the IRF sequence and uses follow-up questions after the initial task to allow the students to elaborate on their answers (Thoms, 2012, p. 12). This way the students had more chances to get involved in the class discussion and the teacher may have perhaps triggered the ZPD of the students and meaningful learning may have occurred.

According to Thoms (2012) the important thing to note in this type of classroom interaction is that the follow-up questions in the IRF patterns may allow for a more natural interaction to commence (p. 13). When this natural interaction between the students and the teacher takes place where the roles are not as unequal as they usually are in the classroom, then the discussions can be more real in nature (p. 13). This type of learning is also connected closely to sociocultural language learning and allows for the task and the follow-up questions to provide more affordances for the students to

learn (Thoms, 2014, p. 727) unlike in the example tasks 1 and 2. The follow-up questions especially, since they allowed the teacher to reformulate the responses and bring as many of the students as possible to the discussion (Thoms, 2014, p. 729).

This task, according to Reinders (2010), allowed the students to be included in what is called task-essentialness (p. 67). This term refers to the use of a particular structure in the language in order for the students to be able to complete the task (p. 67). Reinders (2010) emphasises that a clear feedback or follow-up moment after the task is crucial for maximum learning outcomes (p. 67) and as already discussed here, that is what the teacher did. What has appeared to be important in these type of closed tasks is that there is a prior knowledge of the structure and that it requires communication between the learners and the teacher (p. 68).

These closed task examples from the observation data have provided us with an insight into task-based language teaching with closed tasks. Some of the tasks included peer-interaction and some whole-class discussion. There are also remarks of teacher reformulations and pre-task and post-task phases. What could be said about the tasks in this section is that all the tasks were handled differently by the teacher. In examples 3, 4 and 5 she included only Finnish instructions and no post-task discussions and reformulations but in tasks 1 and 2 she used mostly English. It is also worthwhile to note, that these closed tasks, as the definition of closed tasks says, seem rather strict in structure and limited in terms of interaction.

## 4.2 Open tasks

In this section, there are a few examples of oral open tasks from the observed classroom sessions. As already presented in the theory section of this paper, open tasks are, according to Reinders (2010), tasks which have a prominent feature in being very freeform and with no predetermined goal for the learners doing the task (pp. 66-67). In other words, the teacher employing such tasks gives the students some freedom in utilizing their L2 language as well as they can to discuss the tasks in question. While some research has found that closed tasks promote more negotiation between learners, there are also competing views how open tasks, when utilised correctly, can in fact be very lucrative in creating affordances for discussion.

In the next task in example 6, the task was provided by the course book and with a somewhat complex theme. In small groups they had think how to tackle these problems using L2 in the process. The problems in the task have been put into the context of Finnish economy, which might make it slightly easier for the students to approach, since it involves them to think about their own country, of which they probably know more about than of other countries' economic problems. Finally, the teacher asked the students about their immigration policy that they thought about together during the task. The students then responded their opinions on the matter and the teacher asked more follow-up questions from them.

Example (6) observation notes 15.02.2016

*The political theme continues with the next task that the teacher explains to the students. She tells the students to form groups of three to four in order to do the exercise. In the task itself, the students must think-tank some classical economic problems which usually have political consequences.*

This type of task appears to be a constructivist task in nature, according to Jonassen et al. (1999 p. 5), and these types of tasks can be very effective for learning, however, there are some problems here as well. The task itself was connected to Finnish economy and politics and it demanded the students to think of modern issues and practice their English and vocabulary while they were at it. The context of Finnish economy probably helped the students in some way since they are more than likely accustomed with their own country. This type of task may demand considerably from the students since they should have initiative to use the vocabulary in the book, search the internet with their tablet computers and encourage and help each other when struggling with the task or a sentence.

Again, such as in the closed tasks before, this open task in example 5 could have been handled differently by, for example, including a more thorough follow-up session after the initial task (Thoms, 2012, p. 13). The teacher, in this case, included only a short feedback, although she did move amidst the groups and offer insight and help where she noticed issues and because of this probably decided a thorough follow-up was not necessary. Perhaps she noted how the task was somewhat demanding and would have required more build up and time in order to yield maximum

learning outcomes. Although, according to Philp et al. (2014), the peer interaction in this task provided the students with an affordance to use the language in a more experimental way, which could provide great learning outcomes (p. 17).

The next task in example 7 and in it the students delve into a subject which seems to be closer to their personal lives. The students worked on this task in pairs and some of the students tended to speak more Finnish than English about the subject in hand, but they were still discussing the task. After the task, the teacher asked some follow-up questions and she asked the students, for example, if they have seen movies with time-traveling in them.

Example (7) observation notes 24.02.2016

*The teacher asks the students to do an exercise from the book, as a warm up, in which they speak to each other in pairs about how the world has changed since their parents were teenagers, i.e. the same age as the students are now. The students work in pairs. Some of the students tend to speak more Finnish than English about the subject in hand, but they are still discussing it. After the task, the teacher asks the students if they have seen movies with time-traveling in them.*

The teacher conducted this exercise in extract 7 to get the students accustomed with the new text and subject in the course, which is science fiction time-traveling and the physics and science that are connected to it. The students worked in pairs, most of them with the person sitting with them at the same table and seemed to discuss the task at hand at length. Some of the students used Finnish as well when they began to struggle. At times, the teacher encouraged them to use English to the best of their abilities as she sometimes did, at least during the classes which were observed. If the tasks were more planned out beforehand, the interactions between the students could have been more meaningful, although the authentic context was there (Douglas, Frey & Rothenberg, 2008, pp. 39-40). More planning and structuring could have, on the other hand, deprived the task of its open form.

Even though the learning purposes were predetermined in this task, the answers and the students to give had to come from their own experiences and lives, which makes the learning outcomes

somewhat undetermined. These factors define this task as an open task according to Reinders (2010 pp. 66-67). The answers were very varied, and it seemed everyone had their own piece to say to their partners and from the point of view of an outside observer, the students seemed profoundly interested in this subject. For an unknown reason the students appeared to be discussing a portion of the task in Finnish, even though the teacher circled around the classroom supervising and at the same time encouraging them to discuss in English.

It is crucial for tasks such as the task in example 7, to be able to encourage the students to peer interaction and feedback (Philps et al., 2014, p. 37). This feedback can then help the students to learn even more effectively (p. 37). This also connects with the idea of sociocultural L2 learning as stated by Lantolf (2000) and tasks such as these will help the students reach self-autonomy with the assistance of another learner (Philps et al., 2014, p. 42). Although it has been questioned whether the sociocultural learning between two 'novices' is actually as beneficial as learning with a master, more recent studies have shown that the comfort and commonality between the learners learning together may lead to different types of benefits in learning (Philp et al., 2014, p. 47). The benefits in the case of example 7 may be the possibilities for the students to discuss something they all share, i.e. the parents, in a small group and usually with a person they already know well.

In the example task 7, the teacher also included a feedback session after the initial task and, also, engaged the students by asking an in-context question but in a casually engaging way, which led to a short discussion about time-travel films. From an ecological language learning perspective, the insights and inputs by the students are pivotal in the tasks presented to them and in the following discourse (Thoms, 2014, p. 726). The affordances which these feedback sessions offer to the students, may influence decisively how the oral language skills are constructed by the students, i.e. learning by scaffolding (p. 726).

In the next task in example 8, the teacher wanted to include a conversation task before the text in the book chapter they were going through at the time. This type of task allowed the students to think about a classic topic which could be discussed outside of the classroom as well. The teacher allowed the students to think in pairs about this subject for a short while before asking the follow-up questions in a whole-class discussion.

Example (8) observation notes, 21.03.2016

*The teacher asks the students to think in pairs that what makes a good driver and especially what kind of qualities does a good driver need. All this is related to the text because the subject of the text has something to do with driving and drivers. After that, the teacher asks the students what they think of older people driving cars, is it safe?*

This reciprocal pair task allows the students to use their language very freely although in a context set by the teacher. The task in example 8 is also an open task, as stated by Reinders (2010), because it has no predetermined goals (p. 66). The only goal in this task seems to be in getting the students talking and using their language, which they have learned in and out of the classroom and get used to the words and ideas presented in the course materials. The subject of 'driving' may have also been rather topical for the students at the time, since most of the young people in Finland acquire their driver's licenses at that age. By discussing how the students feel about older people driving, the teacher is also implementing a task-based approach where the students can argue with or against their peers in the target language (Hismanoglu & Hismanoglu, 2011, p. 49).

As in example 7, in this example the discussion material came from the lives of the students themselves and provided an open task environment. The answers of the students seemed to steer into similar directions, since it appears they had conjoining ideas about the qualities of a good driver. The follow-up question again provided more depth to the conversation because with it, the teacher provided a controversial subject for discussion and it seemed to raise interest in the students. Thoms (2014) comments, that from an ecological language learning perspective, the learner should hold some agency over the learning situation (p. 726), and in this case the teacher provided the students with affordances for it. What is important in these cases is that the students utilise these situations to the best of their abilities, because the affordances do not trigger actions, rather provide a place for them (p. 726).

According to Philp et al. (2014), the interaction between peers develops language learning but demands support from the teacher (p. 51). This is the case especially when learning oral language skills during tasks, as some studies have shown, the peer tasks almost always requires a feedback session from led by the teacher to maximise the learning affordances of the task (p. 52). A 2007

study showed how peers repairing each other may lead to incorrect language constructs (pp. 52-53). Although in peer interaction repair can be important as well, there appears to be a clear necessity for a final feedback in the learning situation coming directly from the teacher (p. 53).

For the task in example 9, the teacher had decided to give all the instructions in English, which could provide for some great learning affordances. Again, the students discuss something that is at least in some way connected to their personal lives outside of the classroom. This task also demanded a prior knowledge with the vocabulary, but it seemed that the students did not experience much difficulty with the words or the task in general.

Example (9) observation notes, 29.02.2016

*The next chapter from the book includes a warm-up again. The students discuss in English with each other about what kind of gadgets they need in their life and how could they live without them if they had to. Basic electrical gadgets and appliances are listed in the warm-up page of the book. The students also have to explain in English how two of the listed gadgets work. After the students are done working together, the teacher asks them in English that which of the gadgets they would be willing to give up.*

The task in example 9 is a reciprocal and an open task (Reinders, 2010, p. 66). It demands communication from the students amongst themselves and, also, interaction with the teacher. This task was provided by the course book and functioned as a warm-up for a section in the book which addressed technology and inventions. This task presents the students with affordances to use the language first in the context of their own lives and then they must apply the language explain more precisely how specific inventions work. While electrical gadgets are very much intertwined within the everyday lives of modern students, Peng (2011) emphasizes how language learning from an ecological perspective also lie within the cultural context (pp. 315-316). This task has also provided an ecological approach to the meaningful learning context of the students and has allowed the students to socially construct meaning from the possibly new and foreign words.

Philp et al. (2014) argue that when tasks are more personal in nature for the learners, the language they produce in interaction whilst accomplishing the task is more fluent (p. 127). Narrative tasks or decision-making tasks are more cognitively demanding and require more from the learners since these types of tasks usually handle unfamiliar subjects (p. 127). As in the previous task, the argument of Thoms (2014) also applies in this task: the learners should hold some agency over the learning situation (p. 726). In the task in example 8, the teacher has allowed for it to happen, but the only issue remains whether the students actually made use of the situation.

In the final example from the data, in example 10, the task is a very open ended and the only limit is the students' imagination. The pre-assigned questions seemed to be only there to help the students get started with the conversation, but it led to some great discussion. Especially the twist about what their conversation partners would say about the same matters provided this task a more uninhibited style.

Example (10) observation notes, 14.3.2016

*The next task then is a group task, where the students try to know what their fellow students think in small groups. They read through pre-assigned questions from the book and think of how they would answer them themselves and then think how their partner would answer them. This task may prepare the students for deeper casual conversation in English as the teacher also encourages the students to add some humor into the assumptions they make about each other.*

In the task in example 10, the students had to for example, discuss their fears, while other students had to guess what are the things that their partner fear or loathe the most. The teacher tried to encourage the students constantly to use their imagination and just to say what comes to mind. According to Reinders (2010), this type of task is, again, an open task with no definite outcome (Reinders, 2010, p. 66). The students had quite a lot of freedom in how they answered the questions provided in the book exercise. A task-based approach can also be seen in the way that the task is consciousness-raising (p. 67).

In the case of the example task 10, a reference to the 2007 study how peers repairing each other may lead to incorrect language constructs is justifiable (Philp et al., 2014, pp. 52-53). It is justifiable because in this task the students were allowed to discuss rather freely amongst themselves, even though the teacher did, as during most of the tasks, wander around and provide assistance to those in need. No whole-class discussion feedback was provided by the teacher, but she did provide instant reformulations and feedback for some of the students during the discussions. Reinders (2010) also points out, that tasks, where the members hold different pieces of information in order to complete the task, can lead to more negotiation (p. 68).

This section of the thesis has attempted to exhibit and present some of the tasks found during the observations into the upper secondary English language classroom. The tasks gathered here have been assorted into two different types of tasks: open or closed tasks. This assortment provides insight into two different possible structures of a task and allows for clarification on how these two rather different task types help the teacher to create variation in the tasks for affordances and allow the students to take initiative in their own learning. The relevance of these two types of tasks on learning has also been discussed in this section. For the purposes of equal treatment of both types of tasks there are five examples from both categories of tasks.

All of the example tasks appeared to provide learning affordances for the students and the teacher seemed to have planned ahead when and where to utilise certain tasks. It seems that half of the tasks were taken directly from the teaching material, half were also made up by the teacher herself, albeit possibly with the help of the teaching material. All the example tasks applied interaction between the students and sometimes with the teacher. It could be seen directly from the beginning of this study, in the first example, that the students were well accustomed with the teaching methods and the task-based approach, because the first task did not seem to surprise them in any way. The students merely completed the task, some students being slightly more focused and communicative than others.

As Hismanoglu & Hismanoglu (2011) explain it: the task-based approach to language teaching provides an almost natural context to a language learning situation in a classroom (p. 4). At least in examples 1, 2, 7, 8, 9 and 10, the students utilise language, which in out-of-school context may also be useful. In examples 3 and 6, the students can utilise especially work-related talk. Example 4, was

an intriguing case of utilising interaction to a grammar problem and requires oral explanation from the students about the grammar task. The tasks appear to follow a task-based approach. Also, the teacher whose classes were studied for this thesis, stated in an interview made for an earlier 2015 thesis, that she actively implements interactive English language skills in her teaching.

Robertson (2014), states that task-based language teaching as a pedagogy believes in engaging the students in real language use (p. 189). This appears to be what the teacher is doing. She is constantly refining the readymade tasks from the material as in examples 1, 2, 4, 6, 7, 9 and 10, or creating tasks from her own materials as in examples 3 and 8. The three-phase cycle pre-task, task and post-task is also visible in the tasks and a crucial part of the meaning making in TBLT pedagogy (p. 189). The teaching seems to follow the ideas of expansive learning as well, where the collective (or cooperative) efforts of the students help them in meaning making.

The tasks in this study were focused on cooperative learning, which seems to be the main convention to teach oral language skills in the classroom today. Ning (2013) found in her study, that cooperative learning can bring about much needed social skills and certainty in the target language (p. 558). Ning utilised peer-interactive tasks in one of the groups in the course she conducted the study in, and concluded, that compared to the other group which was more traditionally teacher-led, the students acquired more interpersonal and social skills (Ning, 2013, p. 564). The findings of Ning's study would support the task-types used by the teacher in this study and the allocation of more peer-interactive tasks for the students, thus increasing their readiness for outside of the classroom interactional English language skills.

An earlier study into cooperative learning and peer-interaction and their benefits in the English L2 classroom by Gömleksiz (2007), noted that cooperative learning in the classroom can be beneficial but requires strict planning and strategy from the teacher (p. 616). It is also important for the students to realise that they need help from each other to accomplish the tasks rather than trying to accomplish them on their own (pp. 616-617). Gömleksiz came to the conclusion, that English L2 learners benefited greatly from the cooperative environment because it enhanced their performance in learning (p. 620). A classroom, where cooperative or peer-interactive learning is utilised, provides the students with great learning affordances.

It could be said that the teaching allowed for learning I and II of the expansive learning theory, but whether it reached the stage III of learning, where the students could think for themselves individually or as a group, cannot be confirmed (Robertson, 2014, p. 190). Although it is entirely possible that at least some the students reached this part as well. From observing the English course, it could also be said that the constructionist learning theory applied to the learning happening during the course, since the students appeared to be sometimes assisting each other. Although, whether the students actually constructed new meaning from the direct feedback from other students or the teacher cannot be said without further study of the phenomenon.

Yet considering the ZPD theory of Vygotsky, the appliance of these theories in the teaching of interactional English language skills in the course have possibly allowed for great development in the English prowess of the students. It may have also been enforced by applying the use of peer-interaction in the completion of tasks during the course. It has not yet been accurately proven how peer interaction happens and what are the precise benefits of it. (Philp et al., 2014, p. 139). This is the case possibly because the peer communication tasks are more complex in nature than other tasks (p. 139). The teacher was involved in peer interaction by framing the task at hand, i.e. giving out instructions, and by providing the key language input (p. 191). For example, the teacher presented the tasks and pointed out how the students should use this or that specific structure to say the utterances they need to say to complete the task.

The next section contains more explicit discussion about the analysis, the tasks from the data, and the phenomena discussed in this thesis with the inclusion of the curricula aspects in the Finnish education system These findings and analyses are then compared and discussed together with some of the earlier and new research presented in this study.

## 5. Discussion

Teaching and learning methods have been researched for decades using different types of research tools, technology and schools of thought. This thesis has presented a small and focused view into this area of research and a study closely related to this specific case. This section presents some discussion and afterwards a short conclusion on this case, but also reasons for why this case study was conducted in the first place.

The children in Finland are constantly under the influence of the English language which is all around them in books, television shows, the internet and in countless other sources. They live through some of these English oriented sources and that way educate themselves unknowingly all the time. Basically, that means in a classroom context that the students in Finland can apply English in various ways and that is exactly what was perceived in the classes observed for this thesis. The students have a surprisingly practical skillset to utilise the English from all around them to help in the tasks provided by the teacher, which is possibly something the teacher acknowledges in planning these activities.

Väljjarvi (2012) points out that the reason for creativity and personal learning in Finnish schools is behind the resolution by the Finnish education system to not use standardised testing to evaluate the students (p. 2). The evaluation happens always on an individual level and the task for the teacher is to assess his own students on their academic prowess and social development. The Finnish National Board of Education insists that curriculum, teaching and learning are the driving force in Finnish schools rather than testing (pp. 2-3). For these reasons, the arena for teaching interactive language skills is so open in Finland and has also allowed the teacher in this case study to conduct interactive learning situations in her classes.

The benefits of teaching interactional English language skills from a sociocultural perspective can be massive from the point of view of spoken language. According to Brown & Brown (2014), an advanced speaker can apply idiomatic sentences and phrases into interaction and make cultural references and use colloquial language (p. 63). As was seen in this study, the structure of the lessons and the body of learning material attempted to provide the students with affordances to first get

accustomed to the subject at hand, and only then proceed to oral and interactive tasks, which may demand some familiarisation of the subject. Thus, it can be said that the tasks rely much on the context of the previous tasks and learning material.

Carless (2003) emphasises that in task-based teaching and learning, the students are supposed to be able to use the new language in an authentic context and in a meaningful way, or in other words, learn by doing something concretely (p. 490). While teaching styles and methods can have an influence on the learners and how they learn according to Jarvis (2006), he also adds that these two things, style and method, should be understood as separate phenomena (p. 29). The teaching style is the art of teaching by the teacher and the methods are the science behind the teaching, the pedagogy, which the teacher has learned through studies (pp. 29-30). The way a teacher should embody his or her learner didactic skills are not usually concretely in the curricula, but it is presumed that the teachers will naturally use the best methods they know to teach their subjects (pp. 30-31).

The tasks in the analysis section were chosen for this thesis as the data, because the starting point of this thesis was a Vygotskian perspective emphasising that a great amount of learning happens through dialogue and interaction, where the learner may socially construct meaning (Branden et al., 2007, p. 10). As Ellis (2008) and Skehan (2014) state: tasks focus primarily on meaning and the learners attempt to solve a communicative problem together and these activities can somehow be compared to real-world activities (p. 818-819; p. 1). The tasks gathered from the observations seem to support these ideas.

In the observations presented in the previous section, there are a few different types of tasks but in almost all of them there is a clear demand for initiative, which is needed to utilise the task completely, as discussed in section 2.3. The teacher allowed the students the freedom to do this on their own and there could be a couple of reasons why she executed the tasks in this way. In his study, Reinders (2010) noticed that explicit instructions allow for a slightly enhanced intake of the target language when teaching language tasks, but he also points out that the difference between explicit and implicit instructions on the tasks in his study were minimal (pp. 132-138). That could mean that in some cases, the teacher does not necessarily need to give very explicit instructions all the time in second language classrooms but that might depend on the task type.

With the varying task-types, open and closed, the teacher can possibly create ever changing learning environments and therefore affordances for learning. Albeit the open tasks may provide a more freeform setting for students to utilise their oral language skills as diversely as they can and will, the closed tasks may be better from an all-round perspective. Skehan (2014) argues that a closed narrative structure usually consists of a pre-determined context and a logical development of events leading to a satisfying ending for the task (pp. 225-226). Thus, the possible arbitrariness in the process of the task from the perspective of the students is minimised (p. 226). This may provide the teacher a more controlled task-environment for specific learning outcomes.

A more controlled task does not necessarily correlate more learning affordances, however. Open tasks, such as the ones included in this thesis, may in fact lead to more learning affordances because they allow for more freedom and creativity for the learners. While the 2007 study by Berben et al. suggest that the realisation and the familiarity of a task are important (p. 61). Skehan & Foster (1997) found 10 years earlier how these factors affect the task but emphasised that with planning an open task can be made to offer as many affordances as possible (p. 187-188). For example, in example task 6, the task could have been planned out slightly more and there could have been more preparation for the task, which would have led to more learning affordances.

With the closed tasks, the need for initiative is not as visible as in the open tasks but is naturally also needed. According to Weaver (2007), the closed tasks allowed the students to more easily realise their roles and responsibilities (p. 184). The closed tasks in this study did not require much role-playing from the students and appeared to include less interaction in the L2 compared to the open tasks. That would suggest that the realisation of the task and familiarity are more easily reached with closed tasks. In the case of this study, for example in the example tasks 4 and 5, the students mostly discussed the tasks in Finnish, even though a closed task could have also been handled with the interaction happening in English.

The realisation of a task and its meaning can be different between students. According to the activity theory, the same small-group task can be realised in various ways depending on how the members of group work together to reach the target of the task (Lantolf, 2000, p. 41). Activity theory also states that the approach to reach the target by the group and its members can be better than the external demands and unnecessary interference of the teacher. This way the students can, perhaps,

learn more efficiently through uninterrupted open task work. The teacher might sometimes get frustrated by the lack of students following the guidelines provided. However, allowing the students to find their own way, might in fact make them question the tasks provided and that is not necessarily a bad thing (Lantolf, 2000, pp. 41-43).

The tasks in this case study usually demanded more from the students than from the teacher but a question remains whether the teacher should have initiated more repair and reformulations in the students' answers and utterances. The focus of the tasks included in this study were solely peer interaction tasks, where the teacher weighed in with instructions and guidance either before, during or after the task. According to Philp et al. (2014) these types of tasks which were included in this thesis are very common (p. 1). The evaluation for the usefulness of peer interaction tasks continues and it is often compared with the usefulness of whole-class interaction with the teacher involved (Philp et al. 2014, p. 1).

Thoms (2014) argues that teacher reformulations during and after peer interaction tasks can be crucial for creating openings for learning affordances (p. 729). In addition, Skehan (2014) emphasises, that the reformulation and feedback from the teacher are necessary to maintain a focus on form, when the students are completing interactive language tasks (p. 2). In the end, peer-interactive tasks may be the best solution for enhancing the communicative language skills of students without sacrificing too much of the correct form of the language (p. 2). This can also be supplemented with a variety of different types of tasks to support the peer-interactive tasks. Some of the tasks, like the task in example 6 in this study, could have benefited from supporting tasks.

In the case of this thesis, the teacher did fluctuate between providing English or Finnish instructions for the students. These decisions were naturally affected by the different learning outcomes sought by the teacher at the time of specific tasks. When the teacher did provide English instructions, the tasks were often to do with pure peer-interaction, as in the open task examples 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 but the instructions were only partly in English in the closed task examples 1 and 2. The decisions behind the chosen instruction language may have been affected by how demanding the tasks were, and not surprisingly the instructions especially during the grammar tasks were in Finnish.

The more demanding the task, the more it might prove to improve language learning and provide affordances, according to the study by Reinders (2010, p. 207). It also retells the facts that the second language learning theories are telling: the more challenging the learning process, still within the ZPD of the learner, the more it benefits the learner in acquiring acquisition (p. 207). This has also been noticed by Philp et al. (2014), that interaction between peers benefits greatly from the misunderstanding which lead to correcting one another whilst completing tasks in the classroom (p. 20). In these instances, the learners realise how and what they did not know by trial and error and peer feedback (p. 21). Using the target language for a communicative purpose can lead to learners producing more complex and accurate language forms (p. 37).

Skehan (2014) and Robinson (2011) also support the idea of task complexity (p. 4; p. 2). Robinson argues that task complexity is what drives performance and increases accuracy (2011, p. 2). Skehan adds that more complex tasks focus on speaker fluency rather than on accuracy, however, the more concrete familiar information the task consists of, the more the performance increases in accuracy (p. 3). For example, in the example task 8, the word material in the task itself is challenging, but it could be said that the young students today are interested in new technological gadgets and may perhaps already know quite a bit about them, even when the English name for an item eludes them. The issue remains in how to recognise and knowingly generate specifically difficult tasks (Skehan, 2014, p. 6).

Findings by Reinders (2010), Skehan (2014) and Robinson (2011) would support the idea of utilising more challenging and freeform open tasks in second language education. As can be seen from the example tasks 6, 7, 8, 9, and 10, the open tasks allow for a rather sophisticated approach for the students to use the target language. While these could prove challenging for language learners in earlier learning stages, the students in Finnish upper secondary schools can apparently pass these tasks without much difficulty. Some scholars have found that by adjusting some aspects of the classroom and, for example, the instructions provided by the teacher, the classroom environment could be steered into providing much more learning affordances.

Ohta (2000), for example, argues that the partners doing tasks could change every now and then (pp. 54-57). Some partners as in Ohta's study of university level Japanese class, the students help each other in different ways. In the study, Ohta noticed that the slightly more advanced of the two

students doing pair work helped the other one in a translation task but the type of help did not culminate perfectly, as can probably be expected. The less proficient student had problems with forming a sentence during a translation task from English to Japan. The more proficient student helped the other by adding missing particles and verbs to create a better constructed sentence, which did not, however, translate as accurately as the task required. (pp. 60-63)

These types of situations took place at least in example tasks 1 and 2, where the more proficient student could be of help to the more novice individual but if the help proves to lack consistency and accuracy, there might be problems in learning the intended thing. In Ohta's study, both students made mistakes in the end and failed to correct each other sufficiently. If a teacher decided to go through with this method, he or she must acknowledge the issues with peer learning and attempt to fix this by assisting more during the peer work or correcting the mistakes right after the work is done. The study, however, concluded with findings supporting peer work, since the two students had helped each other, and the less proficient student had effectively become more independent in translating sentences to Japan than she was at the beginning of the task. (Ohta, 2000, pp. 75-76.)

The nature of effective assistance in the zone of proximal development fluctuates depending on different factors, such as the nature of the task, the learning goals and the developmental level of the students, and whether the helper is an expert or a peer (Ohta, 2000, p. 76; Roebuck, 2000, pp. 79-80). According to Philp et al. (2014), the language proficiency of the learners working together in groups or with the teacher working as a moderator influence how the learning outcomes unfold (p. 84). The English language proficiency was rather high in the course studied for this thesis, and even though the learners shared a common L1, the learning may have been effective because of the repair possibilities which are better understood in L1 (p. 84).

The problems in peer interaction may also come from the social goals of the students which then collide with the learning goals (Philp et al., 2014, pp. 90-91). For example, the students at times began discussing task-irrelevant matters during the tasks or may not have repaired the talk of their peers for a wide variety of reasons which depend on the social context of the learners (pp. 90-91). Sometimes the learners may find it easier to discuss issues with their learning with their peers rather than the teacher and making mistakes is not thought of as problematic (p. 91). Most importantly, it seems, that peer interaction provides language learners with affordances for interaction between

equals in the target language (p. 101), which would again support the use of peer-interactive tasks, be those tasks open or closed.

Also, as presented by Ellis (2008), some scholars have found that including small-group work into tasks even such as in example 4, the negotiation in the classroom increases (p. 820). But also adds, how some scholars have criticised the fact that this type of required information exchange task might merely make the students discuss simple lexical items in a mechanical way (p. 820). According to Philp et al. (2014) designing tasks in a certain way might prove extremely beneficial especially in the case of peer interactive tasks (p. 128). The tasks should also be sequenced in a certain way, where the task-order during a class would provide for maximum language use and attention to form (p. 128). The main purpose of doing this would be to stretch the linguistic abilities of the learners as far as possible, as could be done especially in the open tasks without the tasks being too overwhelming (p. 137).

One of the problems with peer-interactive tasks is that the students do not always engage each other and may not consider the responses of their partners. This was the case in an earlier study from 2002, where second language students attempted to accomplish an interview task with a native speaker (Ellis, 2008, p. 823). The problem was, that the students did not really engage with the native speaker to ask further questions nor receive any follow-up questions (p. 823). This appeared to be the case in some of the example tasks in this study as well. For example, in example task 2, although it was already a closed task, it would have allowed for some freedom in the interaction between the students, but the structure allowed the students to avoid further discussions and the overall discussion stayed at a somewhat limited level. This task in example 2 could have been improved by a whole-class discussion, where the teacher would ask the students to contribute their ideas on how to answer the interview questions and then the whole class could reformulate those ideas where possible as in the 2014 study by Thoms (pp. 738-740).

The same problem seems to usually persist in tasks, where the students are allowed freedom to either continue and develop the discussion on their own, like in all the open example tasks in this thesis. In these cases, the research again points towards task-planning and teacher supervision (Ellis, 2008, p. 823). However, the students usually conduct the tasks as they have been instructed, and

thus, possibly leaving out natural authentic conversation, which would have possibly happened without a strict plan made ready for them (p. 823). With that it could be concluded that there can be such a thing as too much instruction when considering open interactive tasks, where the students should be discussing the subject as freely as possible.

In addition, Ellis (1999) has stated that even if interaction would not be necessary in the case of L2 acquisition it is almost definitely beneficial for the learners (p. 30). The nature of effective assistance during interaction in the ZPD fluctuates depending on different factors, such as the nature of the task, the learning goals and the developmental level of the students, and whether the helper is an expert or a peer (Ohta, 2000, p. 76; Roebuck, 2000, pp. 79-80). This would also support the use of interactive tasks in teaching L2. Teaching a second language can happen without interaction being a part of the process but all the research presented in this thesis are swaying in favour of interaction, peer-interaction and task-based language teaching, despite the critique presented by some scholars.

As has been discussed in this section, many factors or variables affect the performance of tasks. These implementational variables were, for example, planning, participants role, familiarity and supervision. These variables and task-design all affect the outcomes of tasks, whether these tasks are open or closed. The affordances these two different types of tasks provide for the L2 learners cannot be pinned down easily, and as Ellis (2008) states: the affordances of tasks should not be conceptualised as specific parameters with pre-planned properties (p. 821). All the tasks are, in a way, individuals, whose properties and possible affordances depend very much on the context and in the way, they are utilised in the teaching.

Task-based language education has been seen to have great potential for second language classrooms according to Branden et al. (2007) but is very dependent on the professional skills of teachers (p. 5). In Finland the level of education for teachers is high, since a higher university degree is needed. Although a study found that implementations of task-based cooperative learning in Chinese schools proved problematic, because of the varying educational views of teachers (p. 5). A strict guideline for the teachers regarding task-based teaching was moulded by these teachers into what they saw was best at the time (p. 5). A peer-interactive task may change instantly into

something else, when the teacher decides to utilise the task in a different way than what was originally intended (p. 5). In the case of this study, there was no predetermined guideline for these tasks available.

In the grammar tasks in examples 4 and 5 the tasks were closed tasks with a great deal of the interaction happening in L1. Grammar tasks in TBLT and cooperative learning prove often problematic, as Fotos (2005) suggests, because the task must usually be handled in L1 in order to provide affordances for the learning and understanding of the grammar rules (p. 666). This may lead to too highlighted L1 results and a disregarding of the L2 vocabulary and communicational aspects of the language (p. 666). In the cases of these two examples, the teacher possibly knew how traditionally going through these types of tasks, the learning affordances could be somewhat limited and decided to include at least some conversation and peer-interaction into the tasks.

Fotos (2005) suggests that with the way the grammar rules are presented to the students, the teacher can perhaps provide more affordances for interactive English language skills (pp. 666-667). Especially methods that would increase the form-meaning relationships and encourage processing of the learned rules can be seen beneficial (p. 667). Byrd (2005) argues in similar lines how grammar teaching sometimes focuses too much on the rules individually, for example verb tenses, nouns and questions may have their own sections in books or in different courses altogether (p. 546). In English conversation, however, these three grammar rules are very much connected to each other and should perhaps be treated together (p. 546).

For the issues raised by Fotos (2005) and Byrd (2005) the answers may lie in correct utilisation of a mixture of closed and open grammar tasks, which would support each other. According to Byrd (2005), the reasons for studying English can vary a lot for students, which could prove problematic for allowing the students to build their knowledge of grammar more freely with open tasks (p. 551). Especially in upper secondary schools the reasons for learning English can be very much in attempting to receive a good grade from the matriculation exam, and for that you need proper grammar skills. In universities these same students may then alter their focus on interactional

language skills, because those skills are then needed in order to be accomplished and progress in the studies (p. 551).

Ellis (2008) mentions how open tasks, when situated in between closed tasks, which are thematically similar, can be very effective for peer-interaction (p. 821). Adding some more freeform questions to a task such as in example 3 could give the students more freedom to utilise their second language making it an open task, but it is difficult to argue how the learning experience could then change. Yet this could be a way to utilise open tasks in grammar and allow for the open tasks to have a type of supporting role in grammar teaching. This way the students could possibly include the necessary grammar forms in peer-interaction and from that to other general interaction in the L2. According to Ellis (1997), learners may unconsciously, or even consciously, repair or make variations in their speech during open tasks when their speech partners do not understand their first utterance (pp. 209-210). This then in turn may lead to learning new forms of speech in the target language.

During the task in example 6, the teacher did not encourage the students to utilise the tools at their disposal, yet it could have made the task even more meaningful and effective for their learning. As such the task remained slightly tenuous. Using an e-learning method and utilising the tablet computers here might have provided diversity for different type of learners because e-learning can create more opportunities for flexibility and initiative, but the students do not necessarily discover this by themselves (Keengwe, Onchwari & Agamba, 2014, p. 888). The utilisation of technology could also have provided the students with a more constructive learning experience, where they would have gathered the information and constructed new knowledge more autonomously (Jonassen et al. 1999, pp. 5-6).

The beginning of the English course showed how the teacher had orienteered herself for a task-based language teaching perspective and wanted to promote peer-interaction in the classroom. The example 1 in the closed task section shows, how the starting point for the course was to learn by interacting with each other. Even though it appeared that not all the students were immediately speaking English to one another but as discussed in the analysis section, the purpose of the task was

possibly to only chart the dynamics and peer-interaction between the students. Yet the task in example 1 shows again, how the instructions affect the outcome of tasks in TBLT.

In summary, when comparing the tasks from both categories analysed in this thesis, the closed tasks appear to provide the learners with more familiarity and thus leading to more task-preparedness, which simplifies the need for initiative to interact in the target language. The open tasks, however, can provide learners with more affordances to completely adopt the use of their L2 in the context of the tasks and reach possibly tremendous learning outcomes. These learning outcomes depend on many other factors as well, as has been discussed in this section. For example, the instructions, reformulations and follow-up questions provided by the mentor, the teacher, who remains in a pivotal position regarding second language acquisition in the classroom.

All those factors aside, the task-based language teaching method appears to be one of the strongest candidates for teaching interactional English language skills for students in upper secondary schools. The tasks may be designed and redesigned into simulating real-life interactions in the second language, from which the students may possibly learn the necessary language skills for the global life or career they may have in front of them in the future.

## 6. Conclusion

This thesis has attempted to present a complex case study conducted in a Finnish upper secondary school conducted by a single researcher and because of this it is only a one holistic encounter of one person with this case. The research focused on one course, one group and one teacher, who were studied for this case. That makes this case a strict case and the results cannot be easily generalised (Fine, 2015). The conclusions achieved here can, however, be compared to other similar case studies and new research which could provide new information on variations in methods and tasks.

Yet it should be acknowledged that exactly the same results could not possibly be achieved under other circumstances since the teachers in Finland have plenty of free will to practice their teaching in the ways they see fit. The tasks also fluctuate depending on many factors as has been shown in this thesis. The national curricula and the guidelines provided by the European Union also only guide the teachers into a certain direction and towards similar goals still allowing them to remain unrestricted. The Finnish National Curriculum and the local curricula, however, emphasise the importance of the matriculation examinations in the final year of upper secondary education. Whether a teacher follows these guidelines in detail or not does not necessarily matter.

The writer of this thesis is studying to be an English second language teacher and that fact may have some effect on the conclusions of this study. The background and personal interest of the researcher also affected the decision to study this particular subject. An unbiased, objective approach was however taken always when possible during this case study. Some of the problems in teacher training today are, as Tweed (2014) points out, that even though teachers have usually studied SLA and L2 learning and teaching extensively during their studies in Universities, they might not be so inclined to keep up with the latest studies and findings during their everyday working life (p. 10). Yet, teachers often do reflect on their work and attempt to deduce what worked in the classroom and which things did not (p. 11).

In this thesis there are findings supporting the use of task-based language teaching and peer-interaction to provide learning affordances to English second language classrooms. The tasks presented in the analysis section, even though separated into two task-categories, show how these

two task types are utilised in upper secondary school teaching. In the discussion there was a critical view on how the two task types managed in providing the students with outside of the classroom interactional English language skills. The discussion also attempted to show, how earlier research has argued for the benefits of TBLT and peer-interaction in providing the learners with practical language skills for a global world where English acts as lingua franca. Utilising interaction in L2 classrooms can be seen as a modern way of teaching language and it provides, with the help of a teacher, practical discourse in the classroom for the learners, thus leading into real-life communicational language skills.

To further study the teaching of interactional English language skills in Finnish upper secondary schools, there would have to be a more extensive look into separate schools, courses and teachers. These new observatory sessions could be then filmed on camera and the filmed material could be analysed and compared with findings from on-site observations. Those observations possibly being participant observations, where the researcher/s would test some predetermined tasks both open and closed and compare the findings. Combining these two data gathering methods the study could expand and acquire validity.

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