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Communicative Language Learning in English

Kommunikativ Språkinlärning i Engelska

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Introduction
According to Den nationella utvärderingen av grundskolan 2003 (NU-03) English is a very popular subject among students and the students are highly motivated to learn the subject (p. 42). Furthermore, NU-03 mentions that when the students got the question about what they did not like about English as a subject, the outcome was that they did not think that there was anything bad about the subject. However, the students thought that they would benefit from learning more English in school (p. 44). Since the outcome of these questions show that students have a positive attitude towards English in school, this may facilitate teaching students the language.

In Det Flerstämmiga Klassrummet by Olga Dysthe (1996) it is mentioned that when viewed from a historical point of view speech has been part of the everyday life of human beings for at least two million years, while writing was a late phenomenon. Dysthe argues in her work that speech is the primary of the two (p. 79). In language classrooms speech has become a bigger and more important part. This is due to changes in the Swedish school where grammar-translation has changed to a more communicative way of teaching. According to Ulrika Tornberg (1997) in Språkdidaktik there has been a movement in language teaching from emphasising teaching towards emphasising learning, and therefore, we argue, that the focus has shifted from a teacher centred approach to a learner centred approach in the language classrooms (p. 25). Dysthe mentions that over time students have been looked upon as empty boxes that teachers should stuff with knowledge and this is one of the foundations to traditional teaching approaches (p. 46). Nowadays, according to Ingrid Carlgren and Ference Marton (2001) in their book Lärare av i morgon it is assumed that students have knowledge and perceptions about the world surrounding them, correct or not, which should be used as a starting point when teaching. If the students are challenged at their own level of knowledge they get the opportunity to learn more and to develop (pp. 224-25).

In Keep talking by Friederike Klippel (2003) the author argues that sometimes during second language teaching real communicative situations come about spontaneously, for example when discussing yesterdays TV programme. Since foreign language teaching should help students achieve some kind of communicative skill in the foreign language, situations where real communication occurs should be taken advantage of (pp. 3-4). According to the Lpo94 it is through conversations, reading and writing that every student gets a chance to develop his
or her means of communicating and thereby gains confidence in his or her ability to use the language (pp. 9-12). Using different kinds of exercises in language teaching is a good complement to what Klippel (2003) refers to as the traditional foreign language teaching lessons, to help making lessons more interesting and lively (p. 3).

**Aim**
The aim of this dissertation is to look at the concepts of communicative language teaching and task based language teaching. How are these concepts discussed by pedagogical researchers? Furthermore the dissertation will analyse how three exercises, chosen by the authors of this dissertation, fit into task-based language teaching.

**Previous research on Communicative Language Teaching**
In 1948 the Swedish School Commission published a report suggesting changes in the Swedish School. Tornberg argues that one of many tasks that the School Commission had to carry out was to replace German with English as the main foreign language. Furthermore, English was to be a compulsory subject from year 5. In addition, the teaching method in classrooms changed from the grammar-translation method, to a new method called the audio lingual approach (p. 33). The audio lingual method was developed in the United States after the Second World War and has its foundation in behaviourism where imitation and repetition are key words. The audio lingual approach focuses on the structural part of the language and how to use the rules of which the language is composed. (http://www.sil.org/lingualinks/LANGUAGELEARNING/WaysToApproachLanguageLearning/TheAudioLingualMethod.htm)

According to the audio lingual method language teaching is a pattern of habits. These habits are developed in the classroom, for example through repetition or students reading texts out loud together (Tornberg, p. 35). This method considers determined speech and writing tasks essential as well as important to the building up of the language piece by piece. According to Tornberg, this determined and structured view would prevent students from making any mistakes along the way. Tornberg argues that the audio lingual method does not allow learners to develop a language of their own. However, Tornberg continues by arguing that the audio lingual method does create a classroom environment where the students get the
opportunity to talk as well as listen, read and write (pp. 35-36). Furthermore, Tornberg argues that the audio lingual method allows the students to develop new linguistic habits by using the target language since using their mother tongue could interfere with the learning process itself. Tornberg continues by mentioning that today there is an emphasis on the usage of the target language in classrooms for students to be able to hear and speak the foreign language (p. 37).

Carter and Nunan (2001) write in *Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages* that the communicative language teaching was developed in the 1970s and there was a shift of focus in the language teaching. From having focused on English as a system the focus was now on English as a tool for communication (p. 2). After the change of focus, authors, curriculum designers and teachers of English started to choose content that matched the learners’ communicative needs (p. 2). Carter and Nunan argue that the shift was made due to observations of learners’ problems in transferring the grammatical formations learned in class to communicative perspectives outside the classroom. This led to the change in the linguistic study from grammatical competence to “communicative competence” (p. 36). Furthermore, Carter and Nunan claim that this was the beginning of the communicative approach which uses different exercises and materials such as role-playing, jigsaw tasks and information-gap activities. Carter and Nunan continue by mentioning the fact that the students learning a second language were expected to learn the form of the target language while communicating (p. 36).

The term competence was not applied to foreign language teaching to begin with. The European Council was the initiators of the development of the term competence in foreign language teaching (Tornberg, p. 40). The European Council mentions that language is a way to communicate and the best way of learning to communicate is to actually communicate. Moreover, the European Council mentions the stress of using the language in a communicative context (p. 41).

The Lpo94 states that in the Swedish school system today teachers should strive for balance in their teaching. When teaching a second language it is important to integrate all the different elements of a language. It is fundamental to take into consideration that there should not be a specific order of how the different elements are taught (Skolverket, p. 14). Skolverket mentions that language learners do not benefit from learning first the elements of grammar,
then the elements of communication and so forth. Instead, the teacher should aim to integrate
the different elements when teaching and thereby the students are given the opportunity to
develop a versatile language (p. 13).

Dysthe (p.46) and Jonas Aspelin (2003, p. 22) discuss the importance of having a dialogical
classroom and of creating learning through dialogues. To make it possible to achieve learning
through dialogues, the teacher has to consider why it is profitable to use dialogical teaching
approaches and what could be attained through these approaches. According to Lpo94 it is
through conversations, reading and writing that every student gets a chance to develop his or
her means of communicating and thereby gains credence to his or her ability to use the
language (pp. 9-12).

Tornberg mentions a study carried out under the name ”The Good Language Learner” where
criteria have been identified regarding what characterises successful language learning (p. 22).
One of the criterions show that there needs to be a general interest for the communicative
form of the language among language learners. An active participation in tasks as well as a
consciousness of their own competence is also looked upon as an essential factor of good
language learning (p. 23). Tornberg argues that there has been a shift in Swedish language
classrooms concerning language teaching since the 1970s where the focus moves from
teaching to learning (p. 25). In addition, Tornberg argues that the idea of communicative
competence is one of the things that have had a large impact on modern language teaching in
Sweden (p. 39).

According to Tornberg, Chomsky began to use the term competence frequently in the mid
60s. Chomsky refers to the term competence as the speaker’s knowledge about the language
where he/she is able to produce and develop an understanding for how to use the
grammatically correct language (p. 40). Tornberg continues by arguing that this theory has
later been elaborated by Hymes, who argues that Chomsky’s view of competence is far too
unrealistic. Hymes claims, that Chomsky takes away language from a social context due to an
excessive emphasis on grammatical correctness. Hymes continues by arguing that there are
also social rules in a language as well as grammatical ones. In addition, Hymes argues that
these two elements need to work together (p. 40).
In *How Languages are Learned* Patsy M. Lightbown and Nina Spada (2003) mention the distinction between the traditional instruction environments and communicative instructional environments (p. 92). The first instructional environment has its primary focus in grammar translations and audio-lingual tasks. The centre of attention is on the language itself rather than on the information that is carried by the language. In this sort of learning environment the educator is aiming for the students to gain knowledge of the grammatical rules of the language along with the vocabulary of the language. The students are often set to pass an exam instead of using the language in everyday interaction (p. 92). Furthermore, Lightbown and Spada mention the characteristics of a communicative instructional environment. In this type of learning environment the focus is naturally to learn the language; however, the teaching method has its emphasis on interaction, conversation and language use rather than learning about the language itself. In a task-based classroom environment with the aim of communication, the topics are most of the time of a general interest to the student. An example of such a topic is replying to a classified advertisement (p. 92). The notion of task has turned out to be a significant part in classrooms where language is taught. In addition, this notion has had a strong influence on education policy in ESL and EFL settings. Task-based language teaching involves various principles. For example, these principles bring up the emphasis of learning the target language through interaction in the target language as well as the use of authentic texts in the learning situation. Another principle of task-based language teaching is the opportunity for the students´ to not only focus on the language itself but also on the actual learning process itself. Furthermore, task-based language teaching entails the students´ own experiences as a part of language learning. Nunan refers to this idea as experimental learning. This idea entails the students´ personal experience, which conveys into learning experience (p. 12. 2004). In addition task-based language teaching bring up the relationship between language learning inside the classroom with language learning outside the classroom (p. 1).

Nunan mentions that in classrooms where task-based language teaching is applied it is necessary to distinguish of the type of task that is intended. Nunan refers to these tasks as target tasks and pedagogical tasks. Nunan´s definition of a target task is the use of the language in the world outside the classroom while a pedagogical task takes place inside the classroom (p. 1). A target task may involve things that occur in everyday life such as asking for directions, making a reservation or buying a pair of shoes (p. 2). A pedagogical task takes place in the classroom and may involve an activity that is carried out as a result of
understanding the language. An example of a pedagogical task could be drawing a map while listening to a tape. The pedagogical tasks are more defined in terms of what the teacher wants the students’ to do in class compared to the target tasks that occurs outside the classroom. (p. 2-3). Nunan offers his own definition of pedagogical tasks. Nunan states that a pedagogical task involves students in understanding, producing and interacting with one another in the target language. These elements are carried out along with that the students are trying to work out the form of the language in terms of grammatical features, in order to express meaning. Nunan continues by arguing that definitions of communicative language teaching emphasize focus on meaning rather than form. However, Nunan argues that meaning and form are highly interrelated and therefore the form of the language should not be put aside. Nunan argues that without the grammatical knowledge the speaker would be unable to express different communicative meanings (p. 4). However, in the communicative language setting the tasks differ from grammar centred tasks in that students have the opportunity to use different language structures in order to complete a task. This means that there is not a specific answer to how they students go about completing the task in terms of the use of grammatical features. Moreover, in a content based instruction there is a shift of focus towards the subject matter, which pupils are learning through the medium of the second language. Furthermore, Lightbown and Spada argue that the centre of attention in these classrooms may occasionally be on the language as a whole, although the stress is on using the language as an alternative to talking about it (Lightbown & Spada p. 92). Moreover, Lightbown and Spada point out that the language the teacher chooses to use in the classroom is not used to instruct a certain characteristic of the language, instead it is used to guide the students to employ the language in different milieus (p. 92). Additionally, Lightbown and Spada state that the students’ achievements of using this particular form of instruction is assessed by what they actually can do using their second language as an alternative to focusing on grammatical elements (p. 92).

Lightbown and Spada mention that the communicative approach has its foundation in innatist and interactionist theories of language learning. (p. 95) The concept of innatism was introduced by Plato, where the belief is that not all knowledge is gained from experiences and senses. Plato argues that the mind is born with ideas and knowledge (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Innatism). The definition of interactionism is:
A theory that language acquisition is based both on learners’ innate abilities and on opportunities to engage in conversation, often those in which other speakers modify their speech to match the learners’ communication requirements (Lightbown & Spada, p. 176).

The communicative approach stresses the communication between teacher and student as well as the communication among students themselves, either in groups or in pair work. According to this theory there should only be focus on grammatical forms when there is a need for clarification of meaning concerning language or communication (p. 95). This would lead to the supposition that students will take responsibility for their grammatical development themselves.

Lightbown and Spada mention points that characterise a communicative instructional setting in a classroom environment. The authors also point out that in this particular learning environment error correction is limited i.e. meaning is emphasized over form (p. 95). In addition, Lightbown and Spada claim that there is also a limitation of contact with proficient and native speakers when applying communicative instructional settings in the classroom. Lightbown and Spada mention that in this sort of setting, as in the traditional instructional setting, it is often the teacher who is the only proficient speaker. In addition, students are exposed to the interlanguage of their peers. The interlanguage phenomenon frequently includes errors which in most cases would not occur in a milieu where the interlocutors are native speakers. In this particular setting there occurs little pressure concerning accuracy when using the target language (p. 95). The emphasis is put on comprehension more so than on production, especially in the early stages of learning. In addition, Lightbown and Spada state that in a communicative language setting there is a wide variety of communication types brought into the classroom. These different discourse materials can be introduced to the learners through stories, role playing and authentic materials such as newspapers, television broadcasts and fieldtrips (p. 95).

The main priority in a language classroom is to create an atmosphere where meaningful and real communication occurs rather than having the students practice the second language for the sake of it. J.C. Richards and W.A. Renandya mention diverse ways of teaching a second language. There are three main approaches to this idea and these approaches are Communicative Language Teaching, Task-based language teaching and Content-based instruction (p. 93). Communicative Language Teaching emphasises the need to make
communication the primary focus in the language classroom which includes teaching materials as well as classroom activities where communication is the centre of attention. Task-based language teaching stresses the use of tasks that facilitate meaningful communication and interaction in the classroom. In addition, content-based instruction focuses on real-world content. Furthermore, this idea highlights the importance of the understanding and communication of information through language as the key for second language learning (p. 93).

Communicative Language Teaching, also referred to as the P-P-P approach, has its foundation in traditional teaching methods such as Audiolingualism and the Structural-Situational Approach (p. 94). The P-P-P approach refers to Presentation, Practise and Production and this approach is commonly used in communicative language classrooms (http://www.englishraven.com/method_PPP.html).

In the 1980s the P-P-P approach was gradually substituted by teaching methods that focused on communication rather than grammatical features. The P-P-P approach has a communicative focus, however, error correction is an important part of this method (http://www.englishraven.com/method_PPP.html). Early models of Communicative Language Teaching often used functional units of organisation and practised to swap grammatical features. Today, emphasis is on the unit of task rather than on the unit of function or practise (Richards & Renandya, p. 94). A unit of task refers to an activity where students use their own available language resources which in the end lead to a real outcome. Examples of a unit of task can involve playing games or sharing and comparing experiences. In a unit of task the students are to take part in different processes within the task such as negation of meaning, paraphrasing and experimentation. If students take part in these units of task the results lead to successful language development (p. 94).

David Beglar and Alan Hunt (1999) mention the analytical syllabus and argue that this notion is a non-interventionist and experimental approach which aims to immersing students’ in real-life communication (p. 96). According to Beglar and Hunt this particular approach supplies students with examples from the target language which are organised in terms of the purpose for which people use language. In addition, Beglar and Hunt claim that this approach assumes that the analytical ability of the learner will be equal to the student’s ability to come to the right conclusion concerning the grammatical and lexical usage (p. 96). The notion of analytic
syllabus contains hardly any explicit explanations regarding the formal features of the language. Ronald V. White argues that the analytical syllabus in general characterises the stress of self-growth as well as self-realisation in the individual learner (p. 96). This particular view has its foundation in progressivism. The core of progressivism is the dialogue between students and teacher as well as the dialogue between the students themselves. According to White, progressivism is an educational system where the dialogue functions as a way to stimulate new ideas, opinions and perceptions (p. 96).

Jack C. Richards (1999) mentions the current interest of task-based teaching approaches. In task-based teaching approaches the pupils engage in meaningful interaction as well as completion of tasks. Richards argues that even students’ grammar needs are determined by task-based approaches where the core is task performance rather than pre-determined grammar syllabus (p. 153). Over the years there has been a movement from the grammar focused instruction to a task focused instruction approach. This change is supported by diverse findings concerning second language acquisition. Peter Skehan argues that the P-P-P theory has been discredited (p. 154). The idea of a strict focus on form where learners acquire language through automation does not carry a great deal of authority in the linguistic world any longer (p. 154). Furthermore, Richards states that according to Nunan the core component in fluency-based pedagogy is the task-based approach. He offers this definition:

[T]he communicative task [is] a piece of classroom work which involves learners in comprehending, manipulating, producing or interacting in the target language while their attention is principally focused on meaning rather than form. The task should also have a sense of completeness, being able to stand alone as a communicative act in its own right (Richards, p. 154).

Moreover, Richards argues that the idea of successful language learning is dependant on immersing students with tasks that entail negotiation of meaning as well as meaningful communication. Richards argues that this perception is the core of language teaching and this leads to teaching materials being produced with this particular concept in mind. These materials consist of discussion-based material, role-plays or communication games (p. 154). Richards argues by promoting the task-based work in language teaching that the students will not only develop communication skills, they will also develop an acceptable standard of performance through task-based work. Furthermore, Richards states that the intention with
task-work is not to advocate a development in a non-standard form of the English language. Instead it is looked upon as a part of a process where linguistic competence as well as communicative competence is developed (p. 155).

Richards mentions that according to Skehan there occurs a strong and a weak form in a task-based approach. Skehan suggests that the strong form sees the task as a central part of teaching and as the core to the acquisition process. The weak form on the other hand sees tasks as a very important element of language teaching but set in a more complex pedagogical context (p. 155).

Discussion skills are often underdeveloped in classrooms where English is the second language. There are a number of valid reasons why this may occur. Among these reasons large class sizes, the students´ proficiency as well as time issues play a big part (Richards & Renandya, p. 225). The consequence of the reasons above may lead to teachers not attempting to apply discussions in classrooms. Another reason for teachers not wanting to hold classroom discussions could be that teachers have negative experiences from earlier attempts. In order for discussions to take place, teachers choose to apply guided discussions which characteristically provide a framework in which students need to operate. Using guided discussions as a method signifies that students get their discussion in-put just before the discussion takes place and from there students can for example be given roles to play and then the students can follow a route through the discussion that is already determined. Helping tools such as wordings are often also provided (p. 225).

Green, Christopher and Lam (1997) argue that the approach where students are guided through the task leaves them with a sense of security. In addition, it may also avoid communication breakdown. However, there is very little learner involvement since the topic has been forced upon the students. This may lead to learners not thinking it is necessary to engage actively in the task which in turn can lead to a poor development of linguistic skills (p. 225). When a subject is forced upon students it is referred to as an objective and non-heuristic approach. Since the topic of discussion is already defined there is little personal involvement from the students as well as an ignorance of students´ own experiences, values and knowledge that learners might want to bring into the discussion. Therefore, Green, Christopher and Lam argue that this method decreases both the learners´ cognitive and interpersonal factors which are crucial to any discussion in order for it to become meaningful (p. 225).
In the 1970s educators began to question whether they were working towards a communicative approach in the right way. In classrooms it was observed that students could create correct sentences during lessons although outside the classroom in a communicative context the students faced troubles. In addition, it was observed that being able to communicate was far more than knowing and mastering linguistic features. It was not enough knowing linguistic rules if the rules could not be used in communication with others (Larsen-Freeman, p. 122). Larsen-Freeman claims that according to Hymes communication entails more than linguistic competence; it also entails communicative competence. Hymes argues that communicative competence is about knowing when and how to say what to whom (p. 122). These ideas are the core of the shift from a linguistic approach to a communicative approach that occurs in the late 1970s and early 1980s.

Larsen-Freeman reviews the principles of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). The aim is to allow learners to communicate in the target language. The teacher serves as a tool in the students’ cognitive development. Furthermore, one of the main tasks for the teacher is to encourage as well as establish situations where communication arises. During these situations the teacher operates as an advisor and supervises the students’ performances (p. 129). The outcome of a less teacher centred approach would be that students are more engaged and responsible for their own learning. In a CLT classroom, activities are often carried out in small groups to make sure that students get enough time to interact with one another in a communicative way. Larsen-Freeman suggests that one of the benefits of Communicative Language Teaching is that students feel as though they are actually learning something concrete and the motivation will increase towards learning a second language since the students can make use of the language itself (p. 131). Furthermore, it gives students a chance to share their own ideas and views with one another on a regular basis. Moreover, Larsen-Freeman argues that a sensible use of the students’ native tongue is permitted in the classroom where Communicative Language Teaching is applied. However, the target language is to be used as often as possible, not only during communicative activities but also when providing explanations of the activities or homework given to the students. According to Larsen-Freeman this will lead to learners becoming conscious of the target language’s use as a tool for communication and not only as a subject which is being studied.
In *Läsa på främmande språk* Bo Lundahl (1998) argues that discussions regarding texts which are carried out in groups of students can be a good way of getting most students involved in the discussion and in that way getting all students to communicate in English (p. 176). Lundahl argues that there are also risks with working in this fashion. One risk could be that the students might ask each other questions in order to control how much their peers have learnt, another risk can be that some students are not interested in discussing the text or a third risk that the students mostly communicate in Swedish and talk only about the book when the teacher is around. Lundahl claims that this type of work does not function in all sorts of classes (p. 176). Furthermore, Lundahl argues that an obvious requirement in order for group discussions to work is that the students find the discussions meaningful and beneficial. The students have to realize how they can benefit from discussions and that they themselves are responsible for the discussions to show results. The students have to feel an eagerness to express their feelings and thoughts in order to promote a meaningful conversation (p. 176). Lundahl argues that students’ language develops through interaction with others, by applying among other things discussions and role play. In discussions in a second language classroom, language usage ought to be as free as possible. However, to attain this free usage in the long run, it might be necessary for teachers to develop a certain structure concerning the discussion topics when used in classrooms with students of lower proficiency and students in the beginning of their language learning. It may be a good idea to start with topics that everybody is familiar with and within time the teachers can and should lead the discussions towards topics regarding the learners own thoughts, feelings and opinions (p. 176).

The section on previous research brings up the establishment of Communicative Language Teaching in language classrooms. Moreover, the term communicative competence is highlighted as well as the idea of a task-based teaching approach which emphasises meaningful interaction among students along with negotiation to complete a task.

**Method**

**Selection**

For this dissertation we have chosen texts dealing with communicative language teaching and task-based language teaching. We have thoroughly read the texts in depth and focused on how
these concepts have been looked upon by different researchers. The authors of these texts come from a wide range of universities around the world.

**Collecting of data**

We have chosen to use some texts which we have encountered during our teacher training, other texts we have found when we have been looking more closely at the subject. Some of the authors were already known to us through previous literature studies.

**Procedure**

After having read a variety of previous research concerning communicative language teaching and task-based language teaching we chose to put together three tasks of our own in order to see how they fit in when applying task-based language teaching.

**The tasks**

The tasks we have chosen are tasks that we argue would promote communication between students since the students need to use English in order to complete the tasks. Furthermore, the tasks were chosen because we consider them to consist of topics which are on an appropriate level for the students. They are not too advanced nor too easy. The three tasks have a framework set by us. However, we thought that the tasks still gave the students the opportunity to freely express their own thoughts and feelings. Our hypothesis with these three tasks was that when the students were exposed to the tasks they would communicate in the target language.

The first communicative exercise is an exercise that we call “talk about a friend”. This task involves the students working with a peer and talking about given topics. Some of the topics are closely connected to the students’ own experiences while some of them give the students opportunities to use their imagination. The chosen topics in this task are: “a fun trip that I have made”, “a person I would like to be for a day”, “if I was invisible I would…” Firstly, student A picks one of the given topics and tells student B about his or her chosen subject, secondly student B talks about his or her chosen subject. This takes approximately 5-10 minutes. The last part of the task is when student A tells the rest of the class about what student B just told him or her and vice versa. When the students tell the rest of the class about
their peer, the teacher should ask some questions about what the student has just told the class. In this way spontaneous conversations might take place.

The second task is an information-gap activity, which means that the participants of the exercise are forced to exchange information to be able to find a solution to the task. We have chosen to call this exercise “comparing pictures”. This task involves a student working with a partner. For this task we have prepared pictures that are similar to each other, however in these pictures there are some differentiating objects. The aim for the students is to find the differences between their pictures. Student A looks at his or her picture without showing it to student B and then student A and student B take turns asking each other questions about their pictures. The students who are working together are not allowed to show each other their pictures.

The third task is called “make up your own ending” and is a group assignment. In this task the students and the teachers start out by reading a text together, a text with an open ending chosen by us. In groups of 3-4 the students then make up their own endings for the text and write them down as a script. The script should later be dramatized in front of their peers.

**Analysis**

In task-based learning the task itself is the core. Nunan (2004) mentions that in a TBLT classroom the natural process of acquisition is to be emphasised rather than the emphasis being on form-focused exercises (p. 21). The author of *A Framework for Task-Based Learning*, Jane Willis compares TBLT with the PPP-approach. However, Willis argues that a TBLT lesson is a reversed version of the PPP-approach. This means that the students in a TBLT lesson start with the task and when the task is completed the teacher makes necessary corrections and adjustments to the students’ presentation (http://www.longman.com/teaching-tips/task-based-learning.html).

Previous research of language acquisition shows that language learning is no longer a habit of formation. Nunan mentions (2004) that in a communicative language classroom the central part is that language is to be looked upon as a tool for communication rather than sets of grammatical and lexical features to memorize. (p.7) Furthermore, Nunan mentions that within
the notion of CLT the idea of a task became established and gained recognition within the curriculum. (p.10)

In a task-based language classroom the notion of experimental learning is an important foundation. The notion of experimental learning involves the learner’s own experiences in order to kick off the actual learning experience itself. In the first task where students talk about themselves to a peer the topics were chosen to get the students’ minds going. The topics of the task are connected to students own experiences and every day matters in order to engage the students’ intellectually. Nunan(2004) mentions that this type of engaging learning occurs when students are participating in pair or group work.(p.12) The idea of task-based learning is built upon creating situations and occasions where the students can explore the target language through meaningful exercises and activities. Furthermore, learners are encouraged to use whatever language knowledge they boast in order to complete a task. This way the students acquire language in a natural way and they will also find the teaching and learning of other features of the language such as grammar more natural and purposeful. (p.14) In the task-based learning approach the learning should be focused towards the students rather than a teacher directed learning.

As a part of TBLT pedagogical tasks both information-gap exercises and role plays are applied in order to acquire the target language. The information-gap exercises are mainly focused on the communicative language use between the students. This type of communication is needed between the students in order to complete the task. The students exchanging information and negotiating with one another, using the target language that they already master, fits in with the principles of TBLT. Since the students are using the language they already master the language acquisition evolves more naturally. This may be due to the fact that the focus is not on grammatical correctness. Instead the centre of attention is to get the message across to their peer. If students get the opportunity to with their own language knowledge complete a task, the motivation for learning the target language may increase. When the students see that they can make themselves understood, they are more likely to speak more and from that other aspects of language learning i.e lexical and grammatical features, will come more naturally.

The third task that is a role play task where a great deal of communication is taking place among the students. Since the task is based on the students making up the bigger part of the
exercise the outcome will most likely be an engaging lesson where most students contribute. Nunan (2004) that in a TBLT classroom where this type of exercise occur the students will take part more actively, if the task designed in a way where the focus is on the students and what they can do themselves in order to complete the task. If this type of task was designed where students need to repeat an already made-up dialogue the students will most likely not be as communicative engaged in the exercise. (p.58) In addition, Nunan gives an alternative to scripted role plays. Nunan mentions that the role play can be wholly improvised.

Since task number one consists of topics that are easy for students to talk about and that are on a basic level it helps to prevent communication breakdown in most cases. According to Green, Christopher and Lam communication breakdown can be prevented if the teacher offers the students structured tasks with set framework (p. 225). During our teacher training and throughout our education we have noticed that some students feel nervous and uncomfortable when talking about themselves. Since the students in this task talk first about themselves and then about a peer, we argue that the students are the centre of attention but that they still have the opportunity to dissociate themselves because somebody else is doing the talking. Therefore the students do not necessarily feel as though they are being exposed. A variation to this task could be to let the students themselves choose topics that they would like to talk about for forthcoming lessons containing this task.

Lundahl writes that according to Nunan it is important to use the student’s own knowledge and experiences as starting points when applying the communicative approach (p. 12). Previous research show that when you know a lot about a subject it is more likely that you are willing to participate in a discussion regarding that subject. Furthermore researchers claim that familiarity and knowledge affect how much a person contributes to a certain discussion (Holmes, 1998, p. 46). Something which can be seen as both an advantage and a disadvantage concerning this exercise could be the set framework which is put in place when the teacher decides the topics. A positive point of view is that the students cannot get away with saying that they cannot come up with a topic to talk about. The negative aspect is that the students do not get to influence the set-up of the task and so there may be less personal involvement on the students’ part. A possible set-back to this task could be that when giving the students opportunities to discuss on their own they do not take advantage of the opportunity given to them. Instead they choose to ignore the task and talk about something else. As a result of this,
when it is time to sum up the answers to the task the answers are short because there has been
little said between the students about the topic. To inspire the students to use longer answers
and to avoid the students being taciturn the teacher can prepare the students in advance that
questions will be asked.

According to Ur the most natural and efficient way for learners to practise talking English is
to come up with some problem or circumstance through oral interchange or ideas, i.e.
discussing (p. 2). In a classroom where a dialogical teaching approach is put into practice it is
important to create a meaningful learning situation for the students. Dysthe writes that she
views learning as a forum where both an individual cognitive process and a communicative
process takes place (p. 221). We argue that within the communicative part the individual
cognitive process takes place. As an example of this one can look at the meaningful learning
that takes place when students get the opportunity to work in small groups. Michael Swan
argues that it is easier to learn about a language, i.e. to learn the grammar, than it is to actually
use the language (1998, p. 151). This is also shown in encounters with students of English
where it can be noticed that the students’ knowledge about the grammar structure of the target
language is developed and on a rather complex level. The students know many of the
grammatical rules because the rules have been drilled into them, but they cannot apply the
rules when they use the language. We argue that this is a serious problem and when teaching a
second language it is important to make the grammar part of the English lessons. This can be
achieved through discussions and through other ways of communication. It can be hard for
students to understand why, you as a student, should speak English to your peers, during
English lessons in school, when all of you know Swedish. Therefore it is important that the
teacher shows the students the importance of using the language to be able to acquire the
target language. It is essential to motivate the students to use their language in order to
enhance their communicative abilities and to perform the task. According to Ur students’
motivation and performance depend on their level of interest and satisfaction of the given task
(p. 15). Therefore it is crucial to find out what makes the tasks interesting. The constructivist
view of knowledge is all about connecting understanding with the students’ own experiences.
Hence the teacher must not confuse knowledge with information. Information is something
which does not call for understanding while knowledge does. Information is quantity and
knowledge is quality. That is why the teacher has to create an environment which promotes
constructive knowledge. The constructivist approach strives for participation from the
students and this approach wants the students to construct their own knowledge. Aspelin
writes that knowledge becomes valuable when it feels valuable (p. 22). Ur argues that when students are given a communicative task it becomes more purposeful for them to use their second language and therefore a communicative task is more interesting (p. 12).

The usage of framework when it comes to setting up a task has both advantages and disadvantages. The advantages are that when teaching younger and weaker students as well as beginners of second language learning the learners may need structure in order to maintain a discussion in the target language. Providing the learners with tasks with set frameworks gives the learners a sense of security and also makes the task easier to survey, i.e. that the task is narrowed down and easier for the learner to comprehend (Green, Christopher & Lam, p. 225). The disadvantages on the other hand can be that since the topics are brought upon the students they may not feel the necessity to participate in an active manner. Considering that the topic is defined and structured there is little room for spontaneous learning situations. This may lead to the lack of meaningful discussions. When it comes to communicative language teaching the teacher’s role is to aim for the target language to be maintained in the second language classroom. The teacher ought to act as a tool in the students’ language development. According to Ur it is more difficult to get learners to communicate freely than it is to get the students to find the correct answers to a task with structured framework (p. 2).

**Final words**

Before we carried out this scientific study we both used tasks as supplements in our language teaching. However, after this study we are in favour of using tasks as tools in foreign language learning rather than using the tasks as complements. We argue that using TBLT to teach a foreign language is effective due to this method creating student involvement. Furthermore, the tasks become more engaging for the students and the usage of the language become more meaningful when the task is the centre of attention. We argue that due to students engaging in tasks it will most likely lead to successful language learning.

We argue that if the teacher uses the target language during his or her lessons the students will be exposed to the target language being spoken and therefore it may be more natural for the students to communicate in the target language. It would be interesting to look into how teachers’ usage of the target language influences the students’ acquisition of a second language. This could be dealt with in future research.
Works cited


**Electronic resources**

Http://www.englishraven.com

Http://www.cambridge.org/us/esl/nic/support/ideas/reading3.htm

Http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Innatism

Http://www.sil.org/lingualinks/LANGUAGELEARNING/WaysToApproachLanguageLearning/TheAudioLingualMethod.htm