

# A Comparative Analysis of English Vocabulary Input in EFL Textbooks for Young Learners

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**Klarić, Antonia**

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SVEUČILIŠTE U ZAGREBU  
UČITELJSKI FAKULTET  
ODSJEK ZA UČITELJSKE STUDIJE

Antonia Klarić

A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF ENGLISH VOCABULARY INPUT IN  
EFL TEXTBOOKS FOR YOUNG LEARNERS

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izv. prof. dr. sc. Lovorka Zergollern-Miletić

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## Summary

Teaching and learning vocabulary is one of the most significant components in textbooks. The topic of this thesis discusses the importance of teaching vocabulary in learning a foreign language, presented through research done on a series of EFL textbooks. The aim of this paper was to present the findings from the comparative analysis of the series of EFL textbooks used in Croatia in teaching English to young learners. The research consisted of an analysis of the chosen series of textbooks *New Building Blocks*, grade 1 to grade 4. The paper touched on the following topics: the difference between the terms *mother tongue*, *first language* and *second language*; approaches to Second Language Acquisition; the usage of textbooks in the classroom. The introductory part sets a theoretical framework, presenting theoretical views on the mentioned topics. Teaching vocabulary is a topic that has preoccupied many theorists, as well as practitioners, and research on vocabulary acquisition has a long tradition in the field of applied linguistics, given that vocabulary is an inseparable part of any language learning. Informed with a framework considering SLA, the author of this paper used a qualitative analysis of the content of a series of textbooks with the aim of collecting relevant data. The findings show that the vocabulary presented in the series of textbooks mostly equips learners with incidental vocabulary learning, so they need further improvements to create optimal learning opportunities for vocabulary retention.

**Keywords:** *vocabulary, SLA, foreign language teaching, EFL textbook*

## Sažetak

Učenje i poučavanje vokabulara jedna je od najznačajnijih sastavnica udžbenika. Tema ove teze proizlazi iz važnosti poučavanja rječnika u učenju stranoga jezika, a razrađena je kroz istraživanje serije udžbenika za učenje stranoga jezika. Cilj ovoga rada bio je predstaviti rezultate komparativne analize serije udžbenika za učenja stranog jezika koji se u Hrvatskoj koriste u nastavi engleskog jezika u nižim razredima osnovne škole. Istraživanje se sastojalo od analize odabrane serije udžbenika *New Building Blocks*, od 1. do 4. razreda. Rad se dotaknuo sljedećih tema: razlika između pojmova *materinski jezik*, *prvi jezik* i *drugi jezik*, pristupi usvajanju stranog jezika, te korištenje udžbenika u učionici. Uvodni dio rada postavio je teorijski okvir, to jest, predstavio je teorijske poglede na spomenute teme. Poučavanje vokabulara tema je koja zaokuplja mnoge teoretičare, ali i praktičare te istraživanja o usvajanju vokabulara imaju dugu tradiciju u području *primijenjene lingvistike*. Upoznata s okvirom koji uzima u obzir usvajanje stranog jezika, autorica ovoga rada pristupila je kvalitativnom analizom sadržaja seriji udžbenika s ciljem prikupljanja relevantnih podataka. Rezultati istraživanja pokazuju da vokabular predstavljen u seriji analiziranih udžbenika uglavnom poučava učenike usputnim učenjem rječnika, tako da su potrebna daljnja poboljšanja pri učenju/poučavanju, kako bi se stvorile optimalne mogućnosti usvajanja vokabulara.

Ključne riječi: *vokabular, usvajanje stranog jezika, poučavanje stranog jezika, udžbenik stranog jezika*

## 1. Introduction

“One of the oldest findings in educational research is the strong relationship between vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension”. Research on vocabulary acquisition has a long tradition in the field of applied linguistics. Vocabulary can be defined as “words we must know to communicate effectively; words in speaking (expressive vocabulary) and words in listening (receptive vocabulary)” (Dwyer & Neuman, 2009, p. 385). Vocabulary knowledge is often perceived as an essential tool for foreign language learners. Having a limited vocabulary in a foreign language significantly impedes the ability to communicate in that language successfully.

Wilkins’ (1972, pp. 111-112) well-known claim that "without grammar little can be conveyed, without words nothing can be conveyed" clearly shows the importance of learning the vocabulary of a particular language, which one wishes to communicate. Learners must acquire vocabulary to develop competences such as listening, speaking, reading and writing. Vocabulary is an inseparable part of any language learning, so learning vocabulary plays an important role in mastering those four basic skills in English too.

Today, it has been accepted that vocabulary teaching should be included in the syllabus and taught on a well-planned and regular basis. Many authors, such as Lewis (1997), stress that language teaching should focus on the vocabulary because language consists of grammatical lexis, not lexicalized grammar. That means that lexis has a central role in creating meaning, and grammar plays a secondary role in managing meaning. Based on that principle, what could be concluded is that it is important for teachers to spend more time helping learners develop vocabulary, and less time on grammatical structures. Hiebert and Kamil (2005) propose that a word has two forms, oral and print. They state that *oral vocabulary* is the set of words for which we know the meanings when we speak or read orally. *Print vocabulary*, on the other hand, consists of those words for which the meaning is known when we write or read silently. This is closely connected to the receptive/productive forms. Receptive forms are the ones that we can only understand or recognize, while productive forms include the vocabulary we use while we speak.

The topic of the thesis stems from the author's experience in learning foreign languages and the awareness of the importance of teaching vocabulary in learning a foreign language. This thesis consists of a theoretical part that includes basic theoretical principles,

while the second part of the paper presents the results of a study conducted on a series of primary school textbooks.

The thesis introduces the aspects of teaching vocabulary and describes the differences between some basic terms used when explaining second language acquisition, which are often misused, such as *mother tongue*, *first language* and *second language*. The next chapter deals with the history of linguistic approaches to second language acquisition, basic cognitive and psycholinguistic mechanisms and models in second language acquisition, and lastly, with the role textbooks have in teaching languages in a classroom.

The second part of the thesis is based on the research conducted by the author of the thesis, beginning with the method. The research findings are divided into first-glance and close-glance evaluation, based on the depth of examination. The discussion will compare theoretical knowledge and research results in order to reach concrete conclusions regarding the representation of the vocabulary in the series of textbooks presented.

In the last chapter of the thesis, the main conclusions of the research will be presented in accordance with general theoretical knowledge.

## **2. Teaching vocabulary**

There are several aspects of lexis that need to be taken into account when teaching vocabulary. The list below is based on the work of Gairns and Redman (1986):

- I. Boundaries between conceptual meanings: knowing not only what lexis refers to but also where the boundaries are that separate it from words of related meaning (e.g., cup, mug, bowl)
- II. Polysemy: distinguishing between the various meanings of a single word form with several but closely related meanings (head: of a person, of a pin, of an organization).
- III. Homonymy: distinguishing between the various meanings of a single word form which has several meanings that are not closely related (e.g. a file: used to put papers in or a tool).
- IV. Homophony: understanding words with the same pronunciation but different spellings and meanings (e.g. flour, flower).
- V. Synonymy: distinguishing between the different shades of meaning that synonymous words have (e.g. extend, increase, expand).
- VI. Affective meaning: distinguishing between the attitudinal and emotional factors (denotation and connotation), which depends on the speaker's attitude or the situation. A socio-cultural association of lexical items is another important factor.
- VII. Style, register, dialect: Being able to distinguish between different levels of formality, the effect of different contexts and topics, and differences in geographical variation.



- VIII. Translation: awareness of certain differences and similarities between the native and foreign languages (e.g. false cognates).
- IX. Grammar of vocabulary: learning the rules that enable students to build up different forms of the word or even different words from that word (e.g. sleep, slept, sleeping; able, unable; disability).
- X. Pronunciation: ability to recognize and reproduce items in speech

The aspects mentioned above imply that the final goal of vocabulary teaching must be more than just covering a certain number of words on a word list. The basic steps in successful vocabulary teaching are to identify the difficulties that students could be faced with. Thornbury (2002, p. 27) proposes some factors that make some words more difficult. They are as follows:

- I. Pronunciation: research shows that words that are difficult to pronounce are more difficult to learn.
- II. Spelling: sounds-spelling mismatches are likely to be the cause of errors, either of pronunciation or spelling and can contribute to a word's difficulty. Words that contain silent letters are particularly problematic: foreign, listen, headache, climbing, bored, honest, cupboard, muscle, etc.
- III. Length and complexity: long words seem to be no more difficult to learn than short ones. However, as a rule of thumb, high-frequency words tend to be short in English, and therefore the learner is likely to meet them more often, a factor favoring their "learnability".
- IV. Grammar: also problematic is the grammar associated with a particular word, especially if it differs from its L1 equivalent. Remembering whether a verb like enjoy, love, or hope is followed by an infinitive (to swim) or an  $\pm$ ing form (swimming) can add to its difficulty.
- V. Meaning: when two words overlap in meaning, learners are likely to confuse them. Make and do are a case in point: you make breakfast and make an appointment, but you do the housework and do a questionnaire.
- VI. Range, connotation, and idiomaticity: words that can be used in a wide range of contexts will generally be perceived as easier than their synonyms with a narrower range. Thus, put is a very wide-ranging verb, compared to impose, place, position, etc. Likewise, thin is a safer bet than skinny, slim, slender. Uncertainty as to the connotations of some words may cause problems too. Thus, propaganda has negative connotations in English, but its equivalent may simply mean publicity. On the other hand, eccentric does not have negative connotations in English, but its nearest equivalent in other languages may be deviant. Finally, words or expressions that are idiomatic (like make up your mind, keep an eye on....) will generally be more difficult than words whose meaning is transparent (decide, watch).

What may be concluded from the list above is that words that can be used in a wide range of contexts will be perceived as easier than their synonyms with a narrower range, making them less difficult for learners to acquire. While there are many proposed theories and concepts regarding the aspects of teaching vocabulary, the most relevant ones for this study were listed.

### 3. Mother tongue, first language, and second language

Jelaska (2005) states that the term *mother tongue* means the first language that a child adopts in its life. However, since there are some controversies concerning the term *mother tongue*, which occurred due to some social and cultural changes, experts usually use the term *first language*. Jelaska explains that it denotes the first language that an individual adopts, but it cannot refer to a language that became the main language of communication. Like the term *first language*, the term *second language* takes on more meanings. It can be viewed as the developmental language, indicating the second language spoken by the child. However, when we look at the second language from the point of view of language mastery, Jelaska (2005) adds that it represents the language that the individual is less proficient in. It is important to highlight the difference between the terms *foreign language* and *second language*:

The term *second language* refers to a language in which instruction in other school subjects is carried on or serves as a common language for speakers of diverse language groups, as English does in India or French in Guinea. Second-language instruction begins early, often in primary school, and emphasizes a command of the spoken language and practical use. By contrast, foreign-language instruction takes place mostly in secondary school and stresses reading knowledge and a receptive command of the language (<https://www.britannica.com/topic/foreign-language-instruction#ref1083735>).

Medved Krajnović (2010) indicates that *second language acquisition* refers to the unconscious learning of an official language in a natural environment of the area the individual is in. Medved Krajnović adds that *foreign language acquisition* refers to a formal approach to language in an institutionalized environment where the language being learned is not fully present, such as primary or secondary schools.

#### 4.1. Early linguistic approaches to SLA

Many theories and approaches to teaching have been proposed during the history of learning and teaching foreign languages. These theories, influenced by developments in the fields of linguistics and psychology, have contributed to the emergence of many approaches to teaching second and foreign languages. Many researchers such as Lightbrown and Spada (1993), Towell and Hawkins (1994), Laufer and Nation (1999), Maximo (2000), and Read (2000) have realised how the acquisition of vocabulary is essential for successful use of the second language, and that the knowledge of vocabulary holds an important role in the formation of spoken and written texts.

### **4.1.1. The Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis**

As Towell and Hawkins (1994) state, one of the first attempts to account for SLA's phenomena was the Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis. The mentioned theory was built based on structural linguistics and behaviourist psychology. Structural linguistics “set about providing detailed linguistic descriptions of particular languages from a collection of utterances produced by native speakers” (Towell & Hawkins, 1994, p. 17), while behaviourist psychology “held that the ability to perform in a first language represented a set of habits which had been acquired by linking language forms with meanings via reinforcement and reward” (Towell & Hawkins, 1994, p. 17). Due to the influence of behaviourism, linguists grounded their work during the 1950s and 1960s on the interpretation of language as a learned behaviour or habit. In the preface to Lado's book, Charles Fries argues that learning a foreign language differs from learning the mother tongue and that the basic problem lies not in the characteristics of the new language but in the habits acquired in the mother tongue. Learning a foreign language is therefore perceived as the development of new habits (Lado, 1957). The contrastive analysis deals with linguistic comparison by identifying the content that should or should not be learned when acquiring another language, and to predict which areas would be the cause of mistakes in learning a foreign language. In a contrastive analysis, all language levels are compared in order to detect the similarities and differences. “Combined with error analysis, contrastive analysis gains significantly greater value as an auxiliary discipline in preparing the teaching process of foreign language acquisition. The developmental role of applied linguistics, which, in addition to many other areas, includes problems of foreign language teaching must be emphasised“ (Prebeg-Vilke, 1977, p. VIII). However, Medved Krajnović (2010) claims that the contrastive analysis of the 1960s lost the theoretical support in the behaviourist conception after Chomsky (1959) stressed that language acquisition is not forming language habits, but that it is a creative process.

### **4.1.2. Krashen's theory of SLA**

What is also worth noting is Krashen's interpretation of acquisition and learning, in which he first refers to a spontaneous process without intentional focus on certain language structures. At the same time, he refers to a conscious learning process that involves a focus on rules, vocabulary, or grammar structures that are being done (Medved Krajnović, 2010). Krashen's theory of second language acquisition consists of five main hypotheses:

- the Acquisition-Learning hypothesis;
- the Monitor hypothesis;
- the Input hypothesis;
- the Affective Filter hypothesis;
- the Natural Order hypothesis.

The first hypothesis, the *Acquisition-learning hypothesis*, claims that there are two ways for adult second language (L2) learners to obtain knowledge of a language. One is by consciously focusing on the ‘rules’ of the language, and another is through intuitively acquiring knowledge of the language, similar to how children learn their first language. According to Krashen (1981), only the second way leads to real fluency in the L2. The *Monitor hypothesis* explains the relationship between acquisition and learning. When a learner speaks the L2 spontaneously, it is impossible to think of all the language rules fast enough to sustain the interaction. According to Krashen (1981), the monitor's role is to correct deviations from “normal” speech and give a speech a more “polished” appearance. The *Input hypothesis* explains how second language acquisition takes place. In this hypothesis, Krashen (1981) explains how learners improve and progress along with the “natural order” when they receive second language input one step beyond their current linguistic competence stage. The *Affective Filter hypothesis* explains Krashen's view that several affective variables play a role in second language acquisition. These variables include motivation, self-confidence, anxiety, and personality traits. Krashen claims that learners with high motivation, self-confidence, a good self-image, and a low level of anxiety and extroversion have greater chances of success in SLA. However, low motivation, low self-esteem, anxiety, introversion, and inhibition can form a “mental block” that prevents input from being used for acquisition. The last hypothesis Krashen mentioned is the *Natural order hypothesis*, which suggests that the acquisition of grammatical structures follows a natural order, which is predictable.

#### **4.1.3. SLA - Methods of teaching vocabulary**

Among many proposed theories of teaching a language, more specifically of teaching vocabulary, it can be said that in the early linguistic approaches to second language acquisition, the three of the main methods of teaching languages were: *Grammar-Translation Method*, the *Direct Method*, and the *Audio-Lingual Method*.

In the *Grammar-Translation Method*, translation was used to help students read and understand foreign language literature (Larsen-Freeman, 2000). It was believed to be an efficient way of learning vocabulary and grammatical structures. The mastering of the grammatical rules and vocabulary knowledge was emphasised. By focusing on the rules of the grammar of the target language, students would recognize the features of two languages that were considered to make language learning easier. While both Ellis and Ur perceive translation as a useful tool in an EFL environment (Ellis R. , 1992; Ur, 1996) the method received criticism among researchers. Interference of one language with the other was considered to be the major downside of translation in FL instruction. On the other hand, the role of translation was further elaborated in the 2008 policy document

“... which certainly recognised the need to improve language teaching and the range of languages taught, but also stressed that ‘[t]he media, new technologies and human and automatic translation services can bring the increasing variety of languages and cultures in the EU closer to citizens and provide the means to cross language barriers’” (Pym, , Malmkjaer, & Gutiérrez-Colón Plana, 2013, p. 2)

Positive sides were constantly pointed out by a number of experts, primarily the development of awareness of similarities and differences between two languages and two cultures.

The following method of teaching languages was the *direct method*.

The Direct Method emerged at the end of the 19th century. “Its name came from the priority of relating meaning directly with the target language without the step of translation” (Zimmerman, 1997, p. 8). Classes taught using the *Direct Method* are taught in the L2. Groups are relatively small and intense and involve a series of question/answer interactions. As Zimmerman (1997) states, the Direct Method aims to include lexical items relevant to the students and help students acquire words through visual aids. However, “critics argue the learning environment is impractical, and the method entails overgeneralizations of communication similarities between learners’ NL and their TL” (Zimmerman, 1997, p. 8), NL being learners' native language, and TL being the target lanugage.

The developers of the *Audio-Lingual Method* were structural linguists. Around the period of World War II, second language learners' problems were perceived to be the result of the clashes between the grammatical structures of different languages. “Vocabulary learning in the audio-lingual classroom consists of oral drilling of the target vocabulary, with an emphasis on acquisition as a process not unlike forming a habit” (Zimmerman, 1997, p. 10). Boers ad Lindstromberg (1947) argue that, because the developers of audiolingualism were concentrated on the behaviourist view of learning as a habit, they believed that learners would

be able to produce any given target pattern automatically if the pattern was repeated often enough.

## **4.2. Vocabulary acquisition and learning – cognitive and psycholinguistic approaches**

In the last twenty-five years, cognitive linguistics has emerged as a powerful approach to the study of language, conceptual systems, human cognition, and general meaning construction. McCarthy (1984) claims that the purpose of vocabulary learning should include remembering words and the ability to use them in a wide range of language contexts when needed. Ellis' (1994) research suggests that the *knowledge aspect* (both breadth and depth) requires more conscious and explicit learning mechanisms, whereas the *skill aspect* involves mostly implicit learning and memory. Researchers within the field of psycholinguistics also touched on this issue and explored unconscious/implicit and conscious/explicit learning (Medved Krajnović, 2010). As the name denotes, the first excludes, and the second includes awareness of what is being learned. It is important to add that implicit knowledge can turn into explicit and vice versa. Explicit knowledge becomes implicit when we achieve their automation due to the frequent use of certain language forms (Medved Krajnović, 2010).

### **4.2.1. Basic cognitive mechanisms in SLA**

#### **Attention**

Several positions have been recognized concerning attention and learning in SLA. For example, the *Competition Model* is based on the premise that “learning takes place in the absence of attention, that is, learning is automatic (does not consume attentional capacity), learning is implicit (does not require intention), and repetitive exposure to input is sufficient for learning to take place” (Lightbrown & Segalowitz, 1999, p. 48). However, there are some contrary beliefs. Although Schmidt (1992) does acknowledge that a person can register information without focal attention or awareness, they see attention as essential for learning. Schmidt (1992) defends his view by stating that while registration of information can occur without attention, the effects do not last long and have no effect on longer-term learning.

The role attention plays in learning is still under debate among researchers. For example, Nissen and Bullemer (1987) conducted research in which participants had to press buttons to specify a target's position appearing on the computer screen. Nissen and Bullemer (1987) established that implicit learning was reduced significantly when participants performed a

concurrent tone counting task. They concluded that the implicit learning required attentional capacity since a secondary task disrupted that required attentional capacity.

## **Memory**

There are three particularly relevant theories concerning memory: *Dual Coding Theory*, *Trace Theory*, and *Levels-of-Processing Theory*. According to *Dual Coding Theory* (DCT) “mental representations are associated with theoretically distinct verbal and nonverbal symbolic modes and retain properties of the concrete sensorimotor events on which they are based” (Clark & Paivio, 1991, p. 151). In DCT the researchers stated that the association of verbal information with a mental image facilitates recall. The *Trace Theory* of movement rules was first outlined by Chomsky (1973). It investigates how repeated encounters with an item, such as a linguistic expression, strongly entrench its memory traces. The *Trace Theory* is seen “as a proposal that NP, when moved, leaves behind a "trace" that it binds. Traces are then subject to two conditions: that either they be properly bound, or they be obliterated. An NP "properly binds" a trace when it precedes and commands it” (Lightfoot, 1976, p. 559). The last theory concerning memory is the *Levels-of-Processing Theory* proposed by Craik & Lockhart in 1972, stating that it is more likely the information is to be committed to long-term memory if the information level is mentally processed at a deeper level. Concerning lexis, “deep processing is believed to occur when the learner actively performs a relatively complex mental operation concerning the lexical information” (Boers & Lindstromberg, 1947, p. 12). Performing such mental operation is called *elaboration*, as Boers and Lindstromberg (1947) suggest. The researchers listed two types of elaboration, *semantic* and *structural*:

- I. *Semantic elaboration* refers to any mental operation about the meaning of a word or phrase. For example, semantic elaboration can be promoted by (mentally) connecting a new item with ones already known, embedding the item in a meaningful scenario, and/or associating it with a mental image.
- II. *Structural elaboration* refers to any mental operation about the formal properties of a word or phrase. For example, structural elaboration can be promoted by recognition or noticing features such as affixes, peculiarities of spelling, and salient sound patterns (e.g. repetitions as in rhyme).

## **Fluency**

“Fluency refers to performance in speaking or reading that is rapid and smooth” (Lightbrown

& Segalowitz, 1999, p. 51). There are at least three component cognitive abilities of fluency that can be identified:

- I. the ability to rapidly retrieve from memory appropriate linguistic knowledge and speech routines as they are needed
- II. the ability to perform smoothly in the face of competition from potentially distracting ongoing, unrelated events (external noises, intrusive thoughts)
- III. the ability to perform without disruption when confronted with related but unexpected events

#### **4.2.2. Basic psycholinguistic models in SLA**

“In order to effectively facilitate the acquisition, a second language teacher needs to choose the appropriate teaching techniques in order to make the input learners receive as comprehensible as possible” (Cergol, 2007, p. 25). Cergol continues by stressing how the comprehensible input chosen in teaching a foreign language should be observed and determined by the effect psycholinguistic and processing factors have on acquiring L2.

“Psycholinguistics, as a science of studying human language, gained real momentum after the publication of Noam Chomsky’s book *Syntactic Structures* in the year 1957” (Kannan & Kavitha, 2015). While the cognitive approach to acquisition and learning vocabulary is focused mainly on how language reflects the working of the mind, the psycholinguistic approach to vocabulary is aimed at understanding how individuals store words in their mental dictionary, how they retrieve those words, and how their level of proficiency in each language affects lexical processing. A mental lexicon concept was proposed by psycholinguists who argue that words have a way of existing in mind. “Successful word reading is a match between the input letter string and a word representation. As part of this process, phonological units, including individual phonemes associated with individual letters, are also activated” (Hart, Perfetti, & Van Dyke, 2001, p. 129).

Another model important for the area of psycholinguistics is the *Cohort Model*. In psycholinguistics and neurolinguistics, it is a model of lexical retrieval first proposed by William Marslen-Wilson in the late 1970s. The model describes how words are retrieved from the mental lexicon when an individual hears or sees linguistic input.

According to the Cohort Model, a word is recognized via a successive reduction in the number of possible word candidates as each new phoneme is perceived. When only one candidate remains in the cohort of



possible words, the word is recognized. For example, the spoken word /krpkadara/ (i.e. CROCODILE) will be recognized once /krpkad/ is perceived, since there are no other words in English that begin in that way. The word cannot be recognized any earlier since the phoneme string /kruka/ could be the beginning of CROCKERY instead of CROCODILE. Therefore, the /d/ is the "recognition point" of /krpkadara/ (Hambly & Taft, 1986, p. 261).

### **4.3. Using textbooks in the language classroom**

Textbooks still play a significant role in teaching second and foreign languages by providing ready-made materials used by both teachers and students. Given that there has been a debate on the role of textbooks in teaching by many educators and researchers, it is understandable that there is extensive literature on the usage of textbooks in EFL classrooms and the evaluation of textbooks. Hutchinson and Torres (1994) state that textbooks can be of use as a tool serving teachers and an instrument of alterations and modifications. "The textbook can introduce changes gradually within a structured framework enabling teachers and learners to develop in harmony with the introduction of new ideas" (Hutchinson & Torres, 1994, pp. 333). Furthermore, the structure of textbooks gives the teacher the possibility to focus his/her attention on the new content and procedures. Torres (1990) indicated that introducing an English for specific purposes textbook (ESP) meant that teachers were spending less time scouring for materials and producing visual aids and were free to concentrate on lesson planning and understand the subject matter. "This resulted in better planned lessons, a more creative methodology, and more useful materials adaptation and supplementation" (Hutchinson & Torres, 1994, p. 333).

However, researchers such as Littlejohn (1992) observe that teachers and learners are placed in the subordinate role and are dependent on writers of materials. Littlejohn furthermore explains how "the precise instructions which are better-planned reduce the teacher's role to one of managing or overseeing a pre-planned classroom event" (Littlejohn, 1992, p. 83). Having recognized the interactive nature and the individuality of the teaching and learning process, Hutchinson and Torres (1994) conclude that it would be safe to expect that textbooks would cease to exist and be replaced with materials compiled from the joint work of teachers and students. "And yet the textbook not only survives, it thrives" (Hutchinson & Torres, 1994, p. 316).

Textbooks and other teaching materials have been continuously developed and modified to meet the needs of learners. Parrish (2004) describes how the benefits of using a textbook can

be seen in adjusting learner's needs or expectations of having something concrete to work from and take home for further study and practice. By considering the constant new findings in ESL, it is evident that textbook materials have dramatically improved in recent years. Nevertheless, with that in mind, selecting an appropriate textbook has not become any easier for most teachers.

## 5. Study

In our study, as we stated in the Introduction, we set out to analyse a series of EFL textbooks produced in Croatia. The series of EFL textbooks chosen for our study is published by one of the well-known textbook publishers in Croatia, Profil-Klett.

### 5.1. Method

This study focused on analysing the series of textbooks *New Building Blocks*, grade 1 to grade 4. Figure 1 shows the details of selected textbooks.

Title	Publisher	Grade	Year	Authors
<i>New Building Blocks 1</i>	Profil Klett d.o.o.	1 <sup>st</sup> - primary education	2020	Kristina Čajo Anđel Daška Domljan Ankica Knezović Danka Singer
<i>New Building Blocks 2</i>	Profil Klett d.o.o.	2 <sup>nd</sup> - primary education	2020	Kristina Čajo Anđel Daška Domljan Ankica Knezović Danka Singer
<i>New Building Blocks 3</i>	Profil Klett d.o.o.	3 <sup>rd</sup> - primary education	2020	Kristina Čajo Anđel Ankica Knezović
<i>New Building Blocks 4</i>	Profil International d.o.o.	4 <sup>th</sup> - primary education	2014	Kristina Čajo Anđel Daška Domljan Paula Vranković

Table 1: *Sample of textbooks*

As stated on the Profil Klett official web page, *The New Building Blocks* series is intended to achieve a positive attitude and motivation for learning English. The series was written, keeping in mind the specific students whose first language is Croatian, and was piloted and

developed in a Croatian school. Furthermore, although the textbooks have been around for 20 years, they offer a modern approach to students and teaching English (<https://www.profil-klett.hr/nbb>, 2020).

Prior to our study, we had read the textbooks through multiple rounds of reading. This activity produced the data which were subsequently sorted. The reasons for selecting the series of textbooks mentioned above are as follows:

- I. The series of textbooks from grade 1 to grade 3 is designed and written according to the new Curriculum.
- II. The series of textbooks have been published by a well-known publishing house that caters to learners studying EFL in primary and secondary schools and is a member of the European Education Publishers Group
- III. The analysis of these textbooks can be useful for other teachers and researchers.

In this study, Nunan's (Nunan, 1999) framework for the classification of tasks was used to analyse the textbooks' types of tasks. In his framework, Nunan classified tasks into different groups according to the strategies supporting them. He divided tasks into five major groups, consisting of subgroups that made a list of twenty different task types. These types of tasks and their sub-groups are the following:

- I. Cognitive tasks: classifying, predicting, inducing, note-taking, concept mapping, inferencing, discriminating, and diagramming
- II. Interpersonal tasks: co-operating and role-playing
- III. Linguistic tasks: conversational patterns, practicing, using context, summarizing, selective reading/listening, and skimming
- IV. Affective tasks: personalizing, self-evaluating, and reflecting
- V. Creative tasks: brainstorming

## **5.2. Findings**

The textbooks we analysed, New Building Blocks 1, 2, 3 and 4, are designed to meet the emotional and cognitive development of young school children, and systematically develop the long-term motivation to learn and encourage the development of communication skills in a foreign language. The findings have been divided into two levels of the analysis based on the depth of evaluation. First-glance evaluation involves an overall presentation and analysis

of the textbook related to its design, table of contents, and distribution of units, lessons, and sections. On the other hand, close-evaluation examines separately and analytically the treatment of the four basic skills: reading, writing, listening and speaking, as well as the assessment practices provided in the textbooks.

## 5.2.1. First-glance evaluation findings

### 5.2.1.1. General organization of the textbooks

When we look at the contents pages of the respective textbooks, it can be noticed that the textbooks are divided into six units, with each unit consisting of four lessons and a *Now I can* section. In *New Building Block 4* we can find a different section, the *Let's check* section. While the example below is from the textbook for the fourth year of study, this division can be applied to every textbook in the series.

UNIT	TOPIC	LANGUAGE IN FOCUS	PAGE
<b>LET'S START!</b>			
<b>ENGLISH IS FUN!</b>	My first English words	a chocolate, a sandwich, juice, a doctor, a cowboy, a clown, a balloon, a skateboard, a bus. What's this? This is...	6
<b>UNIT 1 DO YOU SPEAK ENGLISH?</b>			
Lesson 1	Greetings	Hi! Hello! Goodbye! Bye!	8
<b>HELLO AND GOODBYE</b>		What's your name? My name is... Who's this? This is my friend. This is our teacher.	
Lesson 2	Feelings	How are you? I'm happy / sad / hungry / sleepy.	10
<b>HOW ARE YOU TODAY?</b>			
Lesson 3	Friendship	Please. Thank you. Sorry. I'm bored. I'm busy.	12
<b>WE ARE FRIENDS!</b>			
Lesson 4	Actions	Up and down. Turn around. Touch the ground. Hop. Stop.	14
<b>UP AND DOWN</b>			
<b>NOW I CAN!</b>	Project work		15
<b>FOR MY PORTFOLIO MY MEMO</b>	Self-evaluation		
<b>UNIT 2 LET'S GO TO SCHOOL!</b>			
Lesson 1	School things	a schoolbag, a book, a notebook, a pencil, a pen, a pencil case, a sharpener, an eraser	16
<b>MY SCHOOLBAG</b>			
Lesson 2	Crossing the road	a bike, a car, a bus, a lorry	18
<b>IN THE STREET</b>	Vehicles	red, yellow, green	
Lesson 3	Objects in the classroom	a window, a door, a chair, a desk, the floor, a board, a bin	20
<b>IN THE CLASSROOM</b>		Jump! Draw! Read! Sleep! Sit! Hide!	
Lesson 4	Classroom language	Stand up! Sit down! Close the door! Open the window! Write your name! Count to ten!	22
<b>TEACHER SAYS</b>			
<b>NOW I CAN!</b>	Project work		23
<b>FOR MY PORTFOLIO MY MEMO</b>	Self-evaluation		
<b>UNIT 3 GOOD MORNING!</b>			
Lesson 1	Morning activities	This is my family: mum, dad, brother, sister, grandpa, grandma	24
<b>TIME TO WAKE UP</b>	Me and my family	Wake up. Wash your face. Brush your teeth. Eat your breakfast.	
Lesson 2	Breakfast	What's for breakfast? bread, butter, jam, honey, cornflakes, milk, tea, cheese, an egg, an apple	26
<b>WHAT'S FOR BREAKFAST?</b>		Open the fridge. Cook the egg. Cut the cheese. Mummy, daddy, a mouse, He sees... He pulls... She calls... Nothing happens... Help! I like carrots.	
Lesson 3	Me and my family		28
<b>THE BIG CARROT</b>			
Lesson 4	Morning activities	Get up! Make your bed! Drink some tea! Eat an egg! Wash your face! Brush your teeth!	30
<b>THE MORNING CHANT</b>			
<b>NOW I CAN!</b>	Project work		31
<b>FOR MY PORTFOLIO MY MEMO</b>	Self-evaluation		
<b>UNIT 4 ANIMALS</b>			
Lesson 1	Farm animals	a dog, a cat, a duck, a cow, a pig, a sheep, a horse, a hen, I'm a cat.	32
<b>QUACK-QUACK!</b>		one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten	
Lesson 2	Numbers	ten little ducklings.	34
<b>TEN LITTLE DUCKLINGS</b>			
Lesson 3	Animals	a bat, a frog, a parrot, a butterfly	36
<b>UNCLE PHIL'S MAGIC HAT</b>	Numbers	Six parrots. How many bunnies? Five.	
Lesson 4	Wild animals	a lion, a tiger, an elephant, a zebra, a bear, a crocodile. Three elephants.	38
<b>A FUNNY ZOO</b>			
<b>NOW I CAN!</b>	Project work		39
<b>FOR MY PORTFOLIO MY MEMO</b>	Self-evaluation		
<b>UNIT 5 COLOURS</b>			
Lesson 1	Colours	yellow, pink, orange, green, brown, black, white, red, blue, a tree, grass, the sun, the sky, a flower	40
<b>SPRING COLOURS</b>	Numbers	What colour is the sun? Yellow. The sun is yellow.	
Lesson 2	Colours	a cherry, a lemon, a banana, a basket, an ice cream, antface. What's yellow? Bananas are yellow. I like cherries. I don't like lemons.	42
<b>MISS LEMMON'S BASKET</b>	Food		
Lesson 3	Colours	a caterpillar, a butterfly	44
<b>A HUNGRY CATERPILLAR</b>	Food	He walks... He eats... He wakes up...	
Lesson 4	Favourite colours	What's your favourite colour? My favourite colour is...	46
<b>THE COLOUR SONG</b>			
<b>NOW I CAN!</b>	Project work		47
<b>FOR MY PORTFOLIO MY MEMO</b>	Self-evaluation		
<b>UNIT 6 TOYS</b>			
Lesson 1	Toys	I've got... Have you got...? a toy shop, a car, a helicopter, a scooter, a bike, a plane, a doll, a computer game, building blocks, a teddy bear, a skateboard, a ball, a balloon	48
<b>IN A TOY SHOP</b>			
Lesson 2	A birthday party	a clown, a birthday card, a birthday cake	50
<b>A PRESENT FOR GREG</b>	Friends	Happy birthday! Let's have a party! Blow out your candles! What's this? Is it a helicopter? No. Yes. How old are you? I'm seven.	
Lesson 3	Toy friends	pretty, cute, funny, the moon, a kite	52
<b>RONNIE IN TOYLAND</b>		This is... She is pretty. He is cute. He is funny. Let's dance! Let's play! Let's fly!	
Lesson 4	Activities with toys	Let's drive a car! Let's ride a bike! Let's fly a kite! Let's kick a ball! Let's play with a doll!	54
<b>THE TOY SONG</b>			
<b>NOW I CAN!</b>	Project work		55
<b>FOR MY PORTFOLIO MY MEMO</b>	Self-evaluation		
<b>THE FINAL RACE</b>			
<b>THE GOODBYE SONG</b>	Final revision		56
<b>APPENDIX</b>			
<b>THE LETTERS Q W X Y</b>	New letters	Q, X, W, Y	58
<b>MERRY CHRISTMAS!</b>	Holidays: Christmas	Santa Claus, a sleigh, a reindeer, a Christmas tree, a Christmas present, a Christmas stocking, snow, a snowman, Merry Christmas! Happy New Year!	60
<b>RONNIE AND THE EASTER BUNNY</b>	Holidays: Easter	Easter, Easter Bunny, a chocolate egg	62
<b>SYMBOLS</b>			
			
LISTEN	POINT	REPEAT / SPEAK	SING
			
SAY A CHANT	ACT OUT	ACTION TIME	VIDEO

Figure 1: *New Building blocks 1, Content page*

The first page of every unit contains an introduction to the topic, with new vocabulary highlighted in the bottom corner of the page (and in *Vocabox* in *New Building blocks 4*). In each textbook, the unit's first lesson starts with a listening section and then moves on to a vocabulary and grammar section. The final section of the lesson presents practice materials.

After each lesson, there is a supplementary part for students' self-evaluation to assess their knowledge of the current topic. Language in focus and aims and outcomes are listed in the table of contents (in *New Building Blocks 1,2, and 3*). Although they are described and listed in the contents section, they are not labelled inside the units or lessons. Words/sentences from *Language in focus* are found in the units as small boxes providing tips to learners. There is consistency between the book's table of contents and what is actually contained as sections in the book.

### 5.2.1.2. Visual representation of tasks

Symbols	1 <sup>st</sup> grade	2 <sup>nd</sup> grade	3 <sup>rd</sup> grade	4 <sup>th</sup> grade
Number of symbols in the textbook	8	10	14	4
Types of symbols in the textbook	Listen, point, speak/repeat, sing, say a chant, act out, action time, video	+ read and match	+ colour, circle, tick, write, project work	Listen, speak, culture corner, language lab, Vocabox

Table 2: *Number of symbols used in each grade*

Symbols are used as a visual representation for types of tasks in the textbook. The number of symbols introduced in the textbook increases from the 1st grade, where there are eight symbols in total, up to the 3rd grade, where there are fourteen symbols in total. The number of symbols decreases in the 4th grade, with only four symbols in total. The symbols introduced in the fourth grade are Culture corner, Vocabox, and Language lab. When it comes to textbook characters, the main characters introduced at the beginning of the textbook remain the same throughout all four years: Ronnie, Elliot, uncle Phil, and others. The consistency allows learners to acquire new vocabulary more easily, since they are building up from something already familiar to them, which the title of the textbook suggests.

### 5.2.1.3. Other sections in the textbooks

Apart from the sections dedicated to developing skills, vocabulary, and grammar, the textbooks contain sections dedicated to holidays, and self-assessment, which is presented through portfolios, memos, and different project works after each unit. Those tasks are divided into two parts: one demonstrating reproductive skills and the other demonstrating

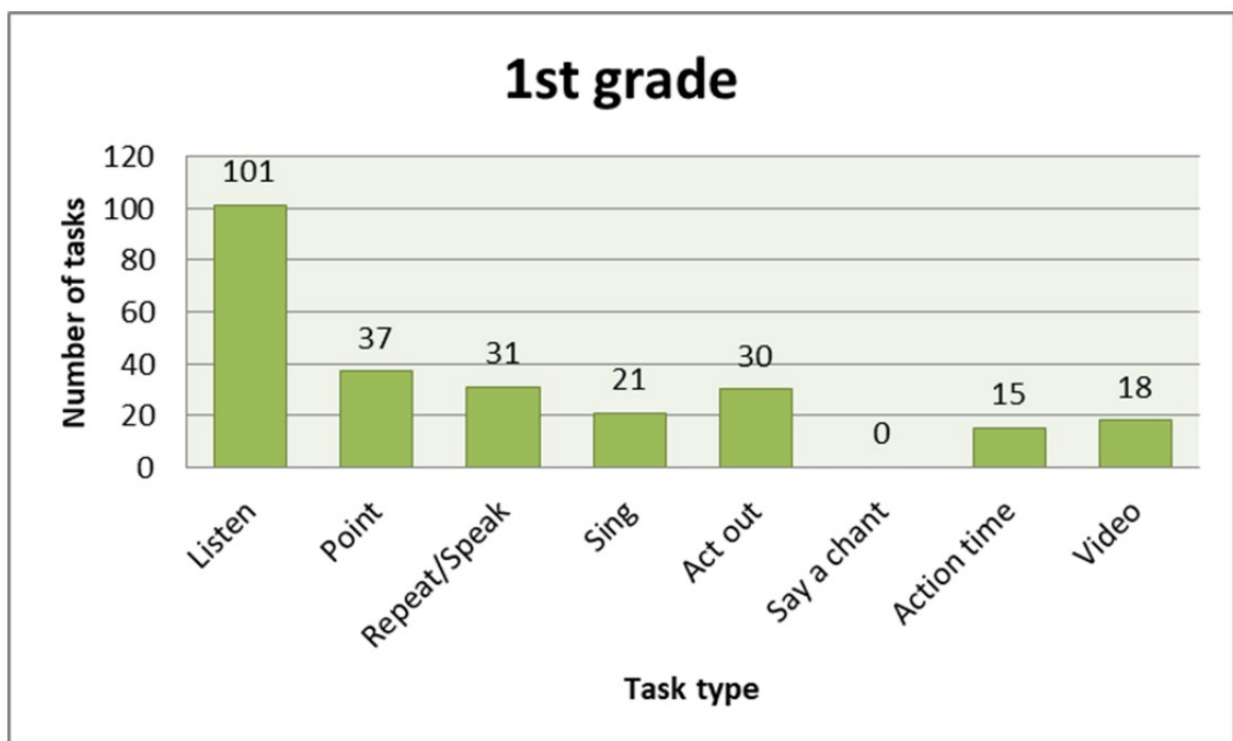
productive skills. The length and difficulty of tasks are consistent with the year of learning. In *New Building Blocks 1, 2, and 3*, there is a mind map at the end of each unit, consisting of the vocabulary highlighted in the unit. The mind map has only visual representations of the vocabulary introduced in the unit.

The practices revolve mainly around vocabulary and grammar. While listening skills are excluded, speaking, reading, and writing skills are present in different forms and difficulty levels, in line with a particular level of knowledge and development. In the textbooks, there are no guidelines as to how the self-assessment would be done. The answer key for students to assess themselves does not exist, thus allowing freedom of choice for teachers to guide students in their self-evaluation.

### 5.2.2. Close evaluation findings

#### 5.2.2.1. Distribution of language skills

The sections' overall analysis devoted to skills in the textbooks showed an imbalance between listening and the other skills. Furthermore, by comparing the number of listening tasks to the number of speaking tasks, and the number of writing tasks to reading tasks through all four grades of learning, the productive skills received greater attention than the receptive skills by the end of the fourth grade.



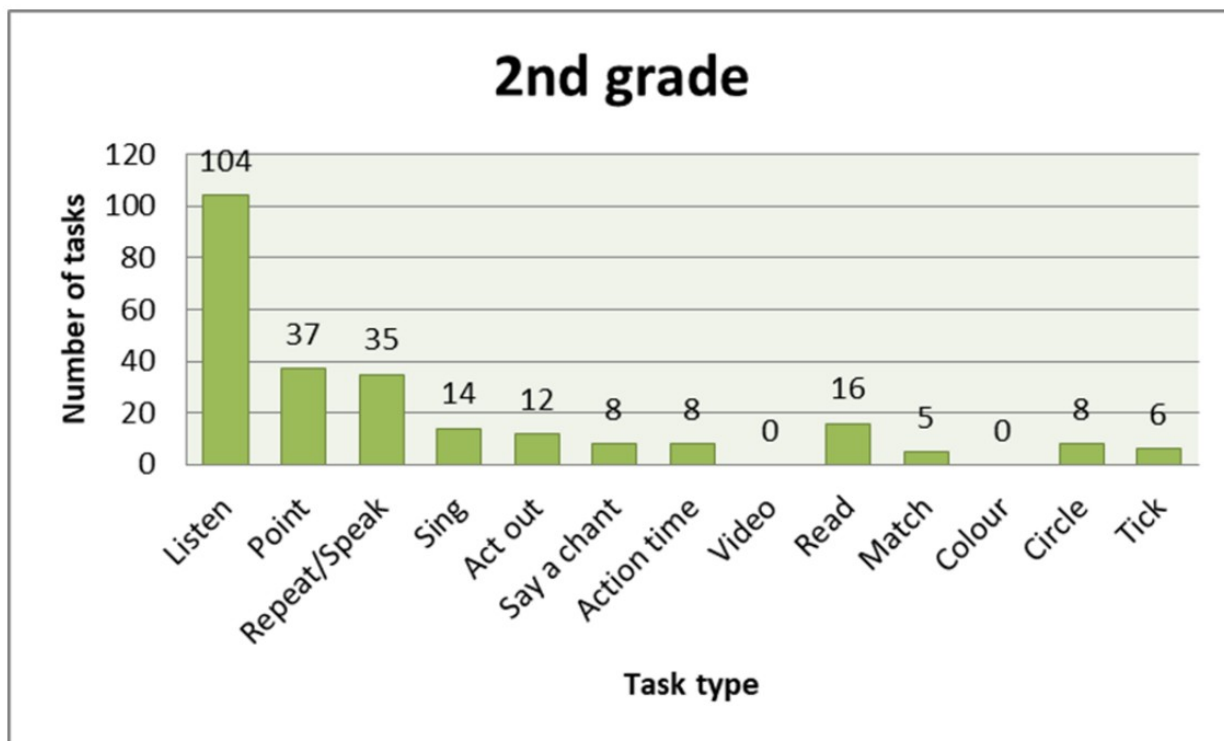
Graph 1: Distribution of task types in *New Building Blocks 1*

In *New Building Blocks 1* the emphasis is placed on listening skills, while tasks developing speaking skills are used in a smaller amount. Total physical response (TPR) was incorporated in both listening and speaking tasks.

This task-based language teaching (TBLT) can be either input-based or production-based. (Ellis, 2003). An input-based task aims to promote development by directing learners' attention to L2 input through listening or reading without requiring them to produce in the L2. However, L2 production is not prohibited in an input-based task as learners may respond to the input they receive through production. Ellis, drawing on Prabhu's (1987) work, suggested that a TBLT course for beginners would have to be based on input-based tasks as they lack the linguistic resources to engage productively in meaning-focused language use. The textbook series follows that pattern, and because of it, it can be seen from the graph that tasks promoting listening skills were present in the largest amount. Listening tasks are at a suitable level for the learners concerning the Common National Framework and the National Curriculum. No Croatian is present. Croatian is L1 for most language learners in Croatia.

Speaking tasks are based around repetition and are incorporated into different songs and games. In most cases, speaking tasks are very structured and controlled. The input is provided through pictures, and students usually have to point and repeat after the speaker. Although *Say a chant* tasks are included in the textbook's contents page, there are none presented in the lessons.

Since young learners are not yet in a developmental stage in which they could comprehend reading texts in English, there are no reading tasks present in the textbook. The same can be applied to writing tasks.



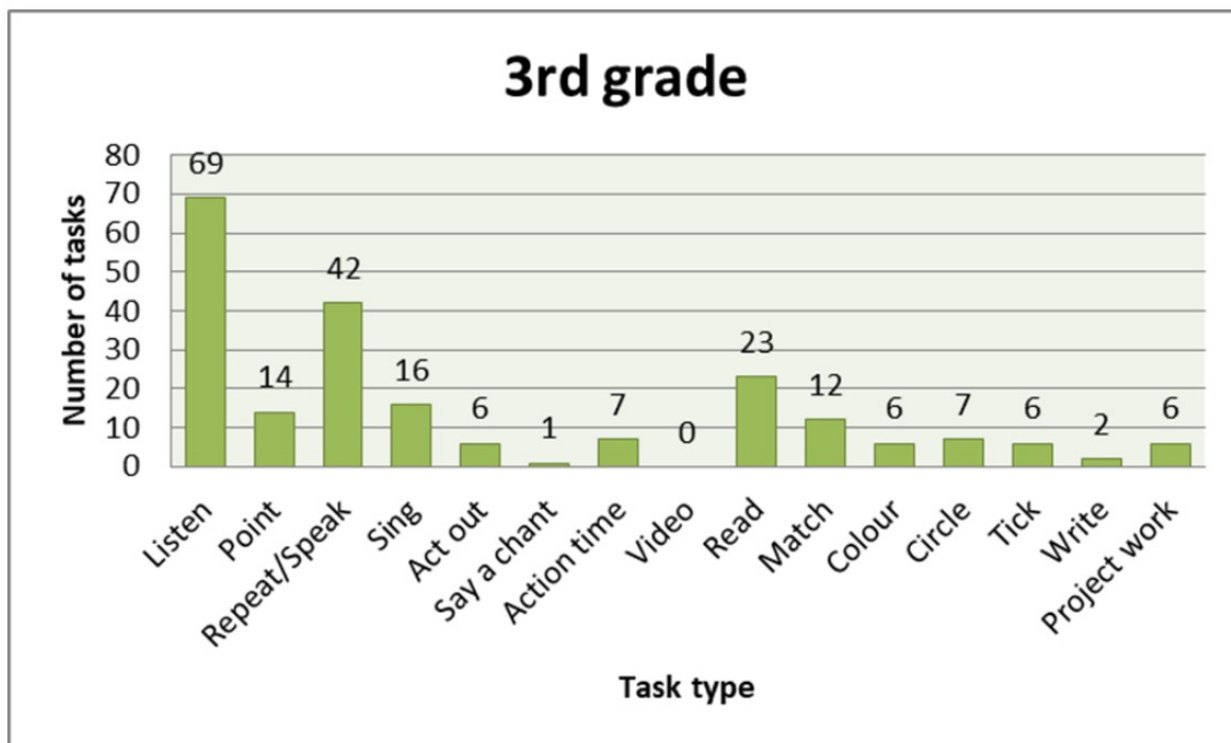
Graph 2: Distribution of task types in *New Building Blocks 2*

In *New Building Blocks 2*, the distribution of types of tasks generally remains the same. The difference in the listening tasks lies in the fact that there are pre-listening questions that are absent in *New Building Blocks 1*. Speaking tasks are still mostly developed through repetition and singing. The two skills that are introduced explicitly in the second grade were reading and writing skills.

Reading tasks and listening tasks are at a suitable level for the learners with regards to Common National Framework and the National Curriculum. The tasks used in the reading section required from students to provide a selected response and do not involve them in producing long answers. Reading tasks are also connected to speaking tasks, where students had to act out a dialogue.

When it comes to writing tasks, they are introduced through ticking the correct answer, circling the correct answer, and matching the words. A few tasks required a more developed writing skill, such as writing a letter to the teacher, which is presented in the last unit of the book.



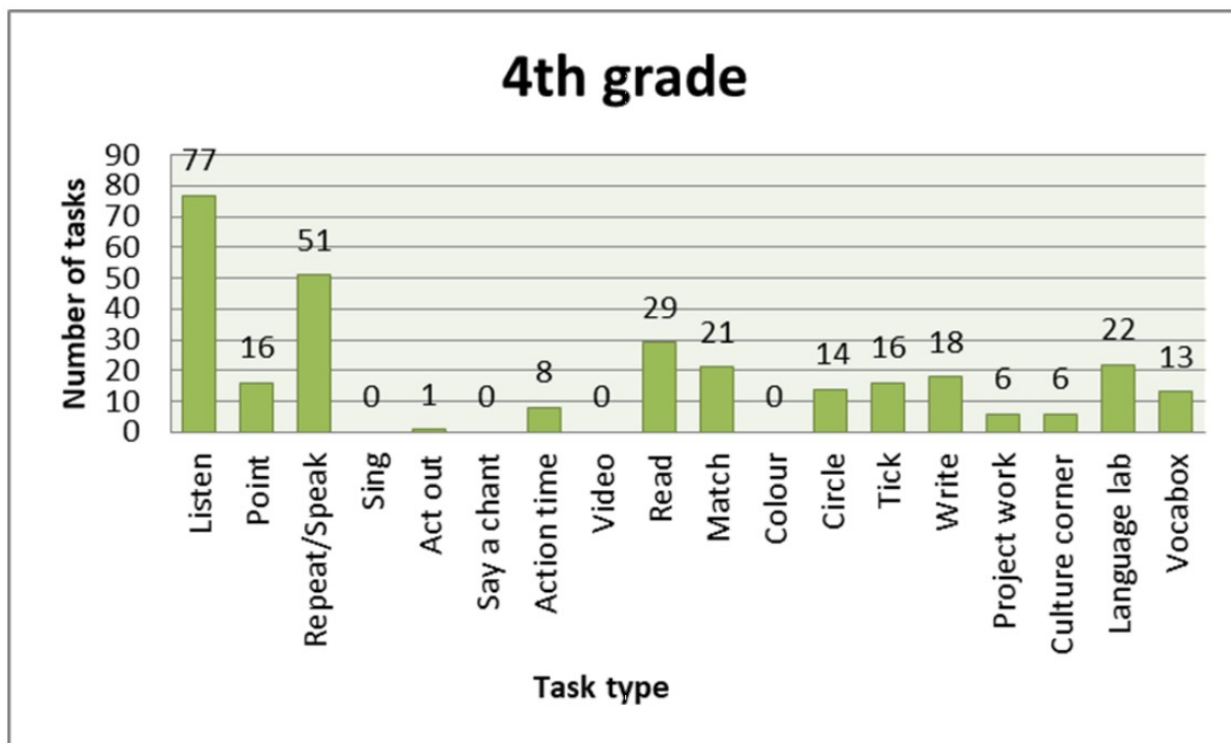


Graph 3: Distribution of task types in *New Building Blocks 3*

In *New Building Blocks 3*, the number of listening tasks began to fall, while the number of reading tasks began to rise. There are more texts in quantity in the textbook, and they are longer than in *New Building Blocks 2*. All the reading tasks are at a suitable level for the learners regarding Common National Framework and the National Curriculum.

In the third grade, speaking tasks begin to become more open-typed. There are fewer tasks with pointing and repeating, and more tasks such as “Look at the pictures and tell the story” (Čajo Anđel & Knezović, *New Building Blocks 3*, 2020, p. 47) that allow students to produce sentences on their own and practice speaking in a natural setting. When the input is provided, it is mostly in the form of instructions or with written dialogues as models in which learners substituted words to perform the dialogues.

What can be seen from the graph is that writing tasks are represented in various types. The writing tasks are still mostly concentrated on matching, circling, and ticking the correct answers, but they are present in a larger amount than it was the case in *New Building Blocks 2*.



Graph 4: Distribution of task types in *New Building Blocks 4*

In *New Building Blocks 4*, the distribution changes of types of tasks changes. While the listening and speaking tasks are the dominant ones, there are many more reading and writing tasks as well. The execution of tasks also changed.

Listening tasks are longer and more complex, and there are more pre-listening tasks than in *New Building Blocks 3*. Similarly to reading tasks, listening tasks included mostly selected-response items, and the tasks involving production by the students required only limited responses. The tasks mostly comprise of asking questions and giving answers which are already selected.

Writing tasks begin to take up a larger amount of space on page spreads. They mostly involve matching the words from the texts, filling out the blanks, and circling the correct word. Longer writing tasks are mostly concentrated in the *Project time* part of the textbook.

Since speaking tasks were found mostly at the end of each lesson, it could be concluded that in the fourth year of learning, the emphasis is placed on the development of reading and writing skills among young learners. The largest difference in this textbook considering speaking tasks is the fact that there are no singing tasks. The speaking tasks' content was mostly concrete, allowing students to express themselves regarding the content they are familiar with and connect with. Students' vocabulary and sentence structures to fulfil the tasks

came from lexical items and grammatical structures they had encountered in the previous lessons. In this way, students were asked to use familiar vocabulary or grammar to perform the tasks.

### 5.2.2.2. Analysis of topics and activities development

Topics	1 <sup>st</sup> grade	2 <sup>nd</sup> grade	3 <sup>rd</sup> grade	4 <sup>th</sup> grade
Abilities			+	
Adjectives		+		+
Alphabet	+ just QWYX	+		
Animals	+	+	+	
Asking for/giving directions				+
Celebrations	+		+	
Classroom	+		+	
Clothes		+	+	
Colours	+	+		
Commands		+	+	+
Days of the week			+	
Describing people		+	+	
Feelings	+			
Free time activities		+	+	
Furniture		+	+	
Greetings	+			
Holidays	+		+	
Imperatives				+
Love				
Magic		+	+	
Meals	+	+	+	
Months			+	
Numbers	+	+	+	
Parts of the day			+	
Personality			+	
Pets		+	+	
Possessions		+		
Possessive case				+
Prepositions				+
Pronouns				+
Relationships	+	+	+	
School subjects				+
Seasons			+	
Talents/skills			+	
Telling the time			+	
The present continuous				+
The present simple				+
There is/there are				+
Toys	+			
Verb to be				+
Weather		+	+	
Wishes			+	

Table 2: Topics presented in New Building Blocks 1,2,3 and 4

The table above shows the order in which the topics are introduced and presented in this series of textbooks. It is clear that New Building Blocks series of textbooks meet the expectation of teachers about the relevance of the subject and content of the book to students' needs as young learners. The first occurrence of the topic is marked with a red +.

In New Building Blocks 1, there are twelve topics in total. The topics are well presented and contained authenticity in topic and subject content, with the dialogues exemplifying real-life situations. Most of the topics are concrete, and students can relate to them. The first lesson is called *Hello and goodbye*, and the topic is *Greetings*, which serves as an introduction to the language. From the group of strategies for discovering the meaning of a new word in the analysed textbook, only two determination strategies were found: guessing meanings from context and analysing available images or gestures.

In New Building Blocks 2, there are 16 topics in total. The topics are well presented and contained authenticity in topic and subject content, with the dialogues exemplifying real-life situations. There are five topics from the previous textbook that are recycled and expanded: *Alphabet, Animals, Colours, Meals, Numbers, and Relationships*. Those topics revised the vocabulary previously learned in year 1, and added new words and sentence structures. As can be seen from the table, there are many new topics presented in year 2 of learning: *Adjectives, Clothes, Commands, Describing people, Free time activities, Furniture, Magic, Pets, Possessions, and Weather*. While most of the topics are still concrete, the number of abstract topics is increasing.

In New Building Blocks 3, there are 24 topics in total. The topics are well presented and contained authenticity in topic and subject content, with the dialogues exemplifying real-life situations. Of 24 topics, 15 are recycled and broadened with new meanings and vocabulary. The emphasis in the third year of learning is on the revision of previous material learned and the acquisition of new material through different activities. In year 3, there is a larger amount of abstract topics introduced.

In New Building Blocks 4, there are 12 topics in total. Of 12 topics, two are recycled: *Adjectives* and *Commands*. The topics are well presented and contained authenticity in topic and subject content, with the dialogues exemplifying real-life situations. The majority of the topics presented are abstract. In the fourth grade textbook, we find many strategies for discovering the meaning of a new word. A strategy for using word lists was also found with an analysis of the available images or gestures and guessing the meaning from the context.

This is also expected because textbooks for that learning level contain more complex assignments than the first-grade textbook. As in the first grade, the most common strategy is the strategy of analysing available images or gestures.

The development of topics follows the emotional and cognitive development of young school children. The textbooks systematically develop long-term motivation to learn and encourage the development of communication skills in a foreign language. From the first lesson, the focus is on the adoption and development of communication competence. The themes and semantic areas are carefully tailored to the age and interests of the children. The contents of the textbooks and the activities create a stimulating environment for language interaction, and the variety of activities allows a balance between different sensory needs of children and different ways of learning.

During our research, it was found that all activities in the analysed textbooks contained an incentive to develop vocabulary learning strategies. All activities offer vocabulary learning in a straightforward language context. As expected, initial learning focuses on learning the basics vocabulary relevant to younger school-age students.

### **5.2.2.3. Analysis of self-assessment sections**

Self-assessment sections were included at the end of each unit in all four textbooks. Although these sections were labelled as self-assessment, guidelines as to how the learners would be able to assess themselves do not exist, and the teachers' book does not contain answer keys. It was left entirely on the teacher to decide how self-assessment would work in the classroom.

In *New Building Blocks 1*, the self-assessment task is concentrated on a single page spread and contains simple tasks for assessing knowledge. The emphasis is placed on productive skills in the form of drawing and on memorizing vocabulary with the help of visual representations in mind maps. The self-assessment section is divided into *Now I can* and *My memo* parts. In the *Now I can* part, students are encouraged to make a poster based on the topic they have covered in the unit's previous lessons. With this productive type of task, students can relate what was learned in the unit to something they are familiar with or something that interests them, such as "Draw an animal you like. Create a poster!" (Čajo Anđel, Domljan, Knezović, & Singer, *New Building Blocks 1*, 2020, p. 41).

In *New Building Blocks 2*, the tasks were expanded with shorter writing sections and some speaking sections. The layout from the *New Building Blocks 1* remained the same, only in the *Now I can*, the drawing task was substituted with *For my portfolio*, which was based on practicing writing skills and revising the vocabulary and sentence structures from the previous unit. The *My memo* part was further developed by including the direct questions to the learner about the vocabulary learned, such as "What are the animals doing? What is she doing? What are they doing?" (Čajo Anđel, Domljan, Knezović, & Singer, *New Building Blocks 2*, 2020, p. 60)

In *New Building Blocks 3*, the self-assessment part begins to have a more complex look. In addition to *For my portfolio* and *My memo*, learners have the ability to do some project work to find out about the topic from the unit even better. In *Ronnie's window to the world*, learners have the opportunity to experience research-based learning and promote their critical and creative thinking. An example of that can be found in the task regarding exploring the weather: "What's the time in your hometown? What about London, New York City and Sydney? Find these places on the world map and compare times." (Čajo Anđel & Knezović, *New Building Blocks 3*, 2020, p. 40) In that same part, teamwork is introduced in the textbooks series, which follows young learners' cognitive development. *Ronnie's report card* allows students to practice their speaking skills while answering questions about the unit's lessons. Each self-assessment section ends with a short writing task in which learners can tick all the things they can talk about and say in English.

In *New Building Blocks 4*, there was a shift in the way of presenting self-assessment. *New Building Blocks 4* introduces *Let's check* part, which comprises some type of a game that students can play in teams to check their knowledge. Another novelty is the *I can speak English* part, which is an upgrade to the writing tasks from *New Building Blocks 2* and *3*. Although *Project time* remains the same, the tasks are more complex and require more preparation. For example, at the end of unit 1, students are encouraged to make a film of their favourite fairy tale. They were given guidelines to help them in their execution of the task, such as: "Give your film a title. Name the main characters and the actors that play them. Write the dialogue for the scenes. Make a film poster." (Čajo Anđel, Domljan, & Vranković, *New Building Blocks 4*, 2014, p. 21). In *New Building Blocks 4*, one part of the self-assessment section was based on solo and team research on each unit's topics and writing skills development. The other part was based on reproductive skills, mainly speaking, through different games and tasks.

## 6. Discussion

The results suggest a significant role of textbooks for the development of vocabulary learning. The series of textbooks *Building Blocks* is designed to meet the emotional and cognitive development of young school children and systematically develop the long-term motivation to learn and develop communication skills in a foreign language. The results have confirmed that the authors of the analysed textbooks comply with the recommendations for teaching foreign languages to young learners who need a foundation in auditory and oral skills in order to become proficient users of the English language. The way in which the vocabulary is developing is spiral and ascending. The scope and depth of the content gradually increases from year to year, from class to class. What a young learner learns in the first grade is repeated, expanded and deepened in the second grade - in this way, throughout the schooling, knowledge is gradually upgraded, abilities are developed and attitudes, values and skills are acquired. This is accomplished by recycling and reusing topics and adding new meanings and structures to them. The vocabulary is developing not only through topics and tasks, but also through instructions. Different strategies are used to achieve development.

The topics in the series start from concrete and move to abstract as the learning progresses. Regarding the abstract topics, *love* and *magic* are represented the most. Frequency plays a central role in language acquisition, processing and use. All the listening and reading tasks were mostly adapted or developed specifically for pedagogical purposes, with careful attention to the grammatical structures and lexical items to correspond to each unit's vocabulary and grammar goals. The tasks are mostly closed type, most often requiring simple repetition or reproduction of a text and, as such, do not offer many possibilities for learners to develop their creativity and productivity. The results also reveal that the tasks encourage reading skills development in combination with listening, speaking, and writing. Reading is taught implicitly, supporting the theories about young learners needing a holistic approach to language and lacking the ability to analyse language.

The textbooks include a significant amount of small group or pair work where one would expect learners to decide how they will work and upon what. Closer examination of those kinds of tasks reveals that the main requirement is some type of repetition. Self-assessment sections were included at the end of each unit throughout the series. Although these sections were labelled as self-assessment, there were no guidelines for how the learner should self-assess.

## 7. Conclusion

The inspiration for this thesis and research was the awareness that, although teaching and learning vocabulary in foreign language learning has been extensively researched, further research might provide new and useful findings. In the first part of the thesis, the emphasis is placed on theory, which introduces the reader to the basic linguistic terms related to vocabulary, and reveals the existing views on vocabulary acquisition and learning. At the beginning of the thesis, we introduce the best known theoretical settings that explain the possible contexts in which a particular language assumes different statuses - from being the mother tongue to being a foreign language. Further on, we provided an explanation of the difference between language acquisition in a natural environment, acquisition through learning in a particular institution, and language acquisition as a combination of formal learning and non-formal acquisition. Several theories supporting the claim that the acquisition of vocabulary is essential for successful use of the second language are listed and briefly explained. The acquisition of vocabulary is then viewed through models and principles of cognitive linguistics and psycholinguistics. Memory, attention and fluency are highlighted as important mechanisms in second language acquisition. Another important model is a mental lexicon containing information regarding a word's meaning, pronunciation, and syntactic characteristics.

The second part of the paper is an analysis of the research conducted by the author. To collect the necessary data for the analysis, a series of textbooks from the first to the fourth grade is used. The close-evaluation of textbooks revealed that, as stated in the introduction to the series, textbooks do meet the emotional and cognitive development of young school children and are a useful tool in developing the long-term motivation to learn and develop communication skills in a foreign language. It is clear from the findings that the vocabulary contained in the textbooks is developing not only through topics and tasks, but also through instructions, making learning more efficient. Throughout the series, frequency plays a central role in language acquisition, processing, and use. Overall, the series of textbooks delivered what it was promised, thus becoming an effective and well thought out tool for English teachers and (English) learners.

From a researcher's perspective, we hope to have contributed to the field of SLA with an analysis of a series of textbooks. Our study has provided evidence of the vocabulary input contained in a series and has given empirical evidence on the lack of open type tasks, limiting



the possibilities for learners to develop their creativity and productivity. Our research has also found out a lack of guidelines on self-assessment, which could be of use to both teachers and learners. Although the latter was not our primary goal, we hope that the results we have provided could be helpful to the authors to the series of textbooks, and/or to some future textbooks writers.

This research has opened space for new research and analysis, intending to recognize the role of textbooks in learning and acquiring vocabulary.

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## Izjava o izvornosti završnog/diplomskog rada

Izjavljujem da je moj diplomski rad izvorni rezultat mojega rada te da se u izradi istoga nisam koristila drugim izvorima osim onih koji su u njemu navedeni.

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a large, stylized 'L' followed by a cursive 'm' and a small flourish.

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(vlastoručni potpis studenta)