

**Individual variation in the upper primary school classroom-analyses of written production in EFL by ten young learners in the Baltic States, Russia, and Sweden****Stellan Sundh**

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ABSTRACT

In language learning classrooms there is great variation in language proficiency which is a challenge for the language teacher. Several factors can explain these individual differences such as the learners' cognitive skills and the amount of exposure (Muñoz 2008), the learner's personality (Ortega 2009: 193-196), and the factor "openness to experience" (Verhoeven and Vermeer 2002). These individual differences are possible to identify and describe by linguistic analyses of the vocabulary and the structural complexity in the texts. In the present study, ten 12-year-olds' written production is described. The production by two young learners who produced a long and a short text respectively and from five different regions in the Baltic Region was investigated. The results show that production by the writers of long texts and the writers of short texts show great similarities no matter the educational, language, or cultural background of the young learner.

1. Background

Teachers experience great individual variation in learners' language proficiency at an early stage in the classrooms when teaching English as a foreign language (EFL). At the same time, teachers are expected to meet the needs of the individual learner, evaluate progress and provide effective feedback to ensure that learning is at appropriate levels and challenging. To work in this way and to fully understand the learner's progress which seldom is linear, teachers are expected to see the learning through the eyes of their learners and realize what the learners know about the subject taught. By studying learners' production teachers can gain an understanding of learners' weaknesses and strengths in the subject they teach and understand how to plan the teaching in the most effective way (Hattie 2012). It is therefore of significance to provide results from investigations of different learners' outcomes. On the one hand, analyses of production by learners with difficulties show the need for appropriate teacher feedback whereas on the other hand, descriptions of production by learners who have reached far function as good examples and contribute to teachers having high expectations of their learners.

Today when children encounter English in many different contexts outside school, they have the opportunity to acquire words and structures even before formal teaching starts at school. At this stage, the children's second language acquisition is influenced by many factors and when formal English learning starts at school the individual learners quite rapidly proceed in their learning to develop their interlanguage at their own pace. Experienced language teachers are fully aware of this phenomenon and the challenges they are faced with when meeting the needs and requirements of the individual learners in the classroom. This diversity in language proficiency among young learners in a class is thus recognized but not yet fully researched and described. There is therefore a need to have linguistic and concrete evidence of this variation with comparisons from an international perspective to identify the span in language proficiency among young learners in countries with various cultural, educational, and language contexts.

In most countries in Europe, the teaching of English as a foreign language (EFL) starts at the age of 6, 7, or 8 with some minor variation (Enever 2011; Murphy 2014). Comparisons of learners' production are especially interesting in countries where English starts to be taught at an elementary level and the young learners have had instruction for quite the same number of years in the various school systems. Although the number of years of instruction is the same, the differences in language proficiency in the classrooms are huge and become challenges for teachers to face particularly when the individual differences are considerable and they are to adapt the teaching and the material to the different needs. As for young learners, the emphasis is primarily on listening and speaking whereas writing and reading come later. At the stage when the learners start to produce texts, the learners' writing in EFL becomes concrete evidence of these differences since written texts provide a clear picture and accessible data of the actual language proficiency level.

2. The Individual Learner and Second Language Acquisition

In an EFL classroom of young learners, there are thus great differences in language proficiency which are explained by many reasons. Skehan (1991) provides an overview of four fields of research that are relevant to discuss when studying differences between individual language learners. Firstly, it is a matter of aptitude which is closely related to the first language learning ability. Secondly, the learner's motivation is a key factor to explain the variation between individuals. Thirdly, the attempt to identify taxonomies of learner strategies is highlighted, and finally, learner styles are given attention as a means to explain the differences. However, these factors can be questioned, for instance, the view that learners have specific learning styles. The idea that learners' learning styles explain learners' different achievements is regarded as a modern urban legend in an overview of recent research in the field (Kirschner & van Merriënboer 2013).

Even though language learners tend to experience similar teaching at schools and are exposed to the English language in the same ways in their spare time, investigations on learner differences among young L2 learners more and more



point at the variations in learning outcomes (Murphy 2014; Mihaljevic Digunovic 2016). It is even claimed that one of the truisms in most schools is “that the year of schooling reflects the spread of capabilities more than anything else” (Hattie 2012: 109). This would imply that in year 6, there would be six years of spread in the learners’ capabilities in a class at school. One of the important tasks in a teacher’s work would consequently be to become aware of the learners’ possible different proficiency levels in a class.

Nevertheless, age is an explanatory factor of individual differences identified in the context of instructed language learning settings. According to a Spanish study where the age factor in language learning was examined there seem to be two additional factors that interact with age: the learners’ cognitive skills and the amount of exposure (Muñoz 2008). Even the relationship between the learner’s personality and the attraction to and success in foreign language learning has been investigated in several ways (Ortega 2009: 193-196). An example of another study with this interest is a Dutch study on 69 sixth-graders learning Dutch as L2. The results of this study show that a personality factor such as “openness to experience” was strongly associated with the attained communicative competence (Verhoeven and Vermeer 2002).

Research on learners’ differences has turned to be more contextualized, taking into account the specific settings where learning takes place and what tasks the learners are assigned to complete. With this approach in research learners’ differences are studied in more situated and complex ways (Nizgorodcew 2012). An example is a longitudinal study on the lexical development of very young Polish learners of EFL, and in this study, the conclusion is that contextual factors, and in this case parental involvement, affect second language acquisition (Rokita 2007). In addition, in a study on young English learners of French, the results point to the crucial role that individual differences play in SLA for young learners. These findings about the outcomes in the first stages of language learning “contradict the widely held view that language learning is easy for all younger learners” (Courtney, Graham, Tonkyn & Theodoros 2017). The fact that there is a wide variation in learning outcomes with young learners is also highlighted in a study on possible predictors of the outcomes of young learners’ second language acquisition (SLA). In this study, the factors that play important roles in progress in L2 are claimed to be L1 literacy and motivation (Sparks, Patton, Ganschow, Humbach. & Javorks 2006).

This variability in language learning and how three important factors interact are discussed in a study on native English speakers learning an artificial language. One of the three factors investigated was individual differences, and the other two factors were exposure conditions and linguistic complexity. The factor labeled exposure conditions was highlighted since when several tasks and tests were used one of the findings was that exposure conditions were detrimental to the results on the grammatical test (Tagarelli, Ruiz, Vega & Rebuschat 2016). The tasks thus play a noteworthy role when identifying the individual differences in learners’ written production since the degree of

variation depends on the different types of tasks. The individual variation in L2 production can be more visible and striking in tasks that are more cognitively demanding since then the learners have to focus both on the language and the content planning. In cognitively simple tasks the attention can be more devoted to the language produced and then with less individual variation in the language produced (Robinson 2001).

Finally, research on individual variation in young learners’ production is to be placed and discussed from a broad perspective. Dörnyei (2005) identified three common features in his research on individual differences in second language acquisition which are relevant to include in the discussion. Firstly, the significance of context (both in terms of the learning processes and the individual learner’s background and situation) is put forward, and thereby the emphasis is on qualitative rather than quantitative research methods. Secondly, learners’ differences should be treated as complex and not as isolated traits. Thirdly, these individual differences should be related to research on processes in second language acquisition.

3. Analyzing Language Proficiency in Young Learners’ Written Production

The teaching and learning of the skill of writing in second language learning are relevant to discuss, particularly when it comes to young language learners. With a focus on communicative and situational skills, it may be argued that more attention is needed for the two skills listening and speaking. Writing in L2 may have an important role to play, however, as a facilitator in language acquisition. Writing in itself has three distinct features which in addition make writing useful for linguistic investigations: (1) writing is carried out at a slower pace than speaking, and (2) writing results in a long-lasting document. Both of these features can facilitate cognitive processes and interaction which in turn stimulate language acquisition. (3) There is a demand for more distinct and precise language use in writing which then as a consequence provides evidence of the individual learner’s explicit knowledge of the language as there is, at least to some extent, time for reviewing and revising (Williams 2012).

The collection of data, such as a language corpus of written production, provides useful material for studies of the complexity in syntax besides other areas such as vocabulary. This complexity in learner language was investigated in a study on Swedish learners’ writing in English and the results show that the most reliable indicators of syntactic development from junior high school to senior high school are how many subordinate clauses per main clauses that are used and the normalized frequencies of adverbial and relative clauses (Johansson & Geisler 2011). The complexity of the language used is thus an indication of progress in language learning.

Vocabulary is an important dimension in young learners’ learning of EFL and their lexical knowledge is an indication of their achieved overall language proficiency. On top of that and for very young learners, the acquisition of vocabulary is a concrete means of learning the language and thereby often a factor that is



motivating and stimulating. The quality of lexical knowledge is significant and generally recognized as an important aspect in the assessment of the level of language proficiency. This is confirmed by several studies which show that there is a correlation between not only word length but also text length and a high grade at school (Hultman & Westman 1977; Melander 1996).

In an experimental study with 750 participants, they were to combine novel words with objects as referent alternatives. In this way, the participants' apprehension of word length and the relative complexity of the objects was investigated in several experiments. The words were 1, 3, or 5 consonant-vowel syllables, and the last syllable of all the words ending in a consonant to better approximate the phonology of English (e.g., "nur," "nobimup," "gugotobanid"). The purpose of the study was to explore whether a tradeoff between length and complexity is present in words with a bias for longer words to refer to more conceptually complex meanings. The results indicate the tendencies in language use that word lengths are not only systematically related to usage as regards both frequency and contextual predictability but also to meaning (Lewis & Frank 2016).

4. Research Questions

The purpose of the present study is to investigate the language proficiency in written production in EFL by a limited number of 12-year-olds in five countries in the Baltic region. Two categories of texts were selected: production by learners who wrote short texts and production by learners who wrote long texts. In this way, a qualitative description is provided of the variation in written language proficiency in EFL by young learners which English language teachers in upper primary school are faced with in their profession. The three research questions to be answered are:

What are the differences in terms of the use of vocabulary and language structures in EFL in the production by five writers of long texts and five writers of short texts from five different countries?

To what extent is word length characteristic and related to the lengths of the texts? What are the lengths of the words used in the productions by these ten young learners?

What linguistic structures and types of nouns, verbs, and adjectives are used by the ten young learners?

5. Material and Methods

5.1. Data collection

In the present study, data from BYLEC (Baltic Young Learners of English Project) was used. The data in the BYLEC project was collected in two parts. The first part (Part 1) was completed for nine months in 2015/2016 and the second part

(Part 2) for nine months in 2016/2017. Six universities in the Baltic Region cooperated by recruiting school teachers who teach English to 12-year-olds and collecting the data. The collection in the language corpus was completed in 2018 and is available at Uppsala University.

The first step was the collection of the extra-linguistic variables of the 12-year-olds. These variables were gender, age, L1, other languages used outside school, years of English studied at school, time spent abroad, extra lessons of English taken in the spare time, experiences and habits of using English in computer games and on the Internet, and the use of English outside and after school. The learners' texts were organized with their profiles as in the following example: SE-A-1 (country, school, student), and then this system was used when the six texts written by the learners were organized (SE-A-1-1; SE-A-1-2, SE-A-1-3 and so forth).

Instructions for the writing of the six texts were provided and distributed to the school teachers. The topics of the six texts were (1) *My best friend*, (2) *My pet*, (3) *A place I like*, (4) *An adventure/a journey of my dreams*, (5) *My favorite website/computer game/app* and (6) *Me in the world in the future*. The topics are descriptive but the last one (Text 6) also provides the opportunity to discuss issues of the future and a preferred lifestyle.

In Part 1 of the project (2015/2016), 450 young learners with their teachers in five countries were engaged in the collection of the data with support from the university partners.

Part 2 of the project (2016/2017) was completed with 700 other learners who also produced six texts. A university partner and schools in Poland joined Part 2 of the BYLEC project which added one country to the investigation of the data of BYLEC Part 2. (For further details about the collection of the data of BYLEC, see Sundh 2016.)

5.2. Participants

In the present investigation, only data from Part 1 of BYLEC was used. In addition, only the young learners who had completed all six texts in the BYLEC project were considered in the selection procedure of the ten young learners for the present investigation. The texts by the young learner in each country category who had used either the lowest or the highest number of words in his/her production of the six texts were selected for the present analyses. The written production by these ten young learners is thus the language investigated.

In what follows, Table 1 shows the number of words the respective learner of either long texts or short texts of each country category used in the six texts.

| Writers of short texts | | Writers of long texts | |
|------------------------|-----------------|-----------------------|-----------------|
| Learner | Number of words | Learner | Number of words |
| EE-A-16 | 311 | EE-A-27 | 2205 |
| LT-B-1 | 324 | LT-A-1 | 1300 |
| LV-B-19 | 142 | LV-D-11 | 1840 |
| RU-D-3 | 271 | RU-D-28 | 748 |
| SE-A-8 | 589 | SE-A-20 | 1568 |

Table 1. The ten young learners and the numbers of words in their six texts selected from the BYLEC-data and used in the present investigation



Information about these ten young learners' backgrounds is useful when analyzing their use of the English language. They were all born in 2003 and thus from 12 to 13 years old when the project BYLEC Part 1 was carried out. In Table 2, some further extra-linguistic variables are provided.

| Student | Sex | Year born | L1 | Years studied English | Travelled abroad | Use of English after school | Take extra lessons after school |
|---------|-----|-----------|-----|-----------------------|------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------------------|
| EE-A-16 | M | 2003 | EST | 3 | Yes | Yes | No |
| EE-A-27 | M | 2003 | EST | 3 | Yes | Yes | No |
| LT-B-1 | F | 2003 | LIT | 4 | No | No | No |
| LT-A-1 | F | 2003 | LIT | 4 | Yes | No | No |
| LV-B-19 | M | 2003 | RUS | 6 | No | No | No |
| LV-D-11 | F | 2003 | RUS | 6 | Yes | No | No |
| RU-D-3 | F | 2003 | RUS | 6 | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| RU-D-28 | F | 2003 | RUS | 9 | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| SE-A-8 | F | 2003 | SWE | 6 | Yes | Yes | No |
| SE-A-20 | F | 2003 | SWE | 6 | Yes | Yes | No |

Table 2. The ten young learners' background variables.

Table 2 shows that the group of participants consists of seven girls and three boys. The Latvian and Russian learners all have Russian as their L1 whereas the Estonian, Lithuanian, and Swedish learners have Estonian, Lithuanian, or Swedish as their L1 respectively. The years of studies of English range from three to nine years, eight of them had been abroad, and six of them had used English after school "the last five days" according to the question asked in the questionnaire. Only the two Russian learners take extra lessons in English in their spare time.

When asked in the questionnaire about "Something else you would like to tell us about yourself and your English", the following three quotations by three of the participants illustrate their common use of English in their spare time and their positive attitude to the English language.

- (1) "I watch a lot of Youtube clips in English." (EE-A-27)
- (2) "I attend optional English classes at school. I like also speaking in English with friends." (LV-D-11)
- (3) "I love English. I think it is my hobby. It's a very interesting language. I love to read English books, watch English films and my favorite English youtuber is Zoela..." (RU-D-28)

5.3. Data analyses

The 60 texts produced by the ten learners were analyzed from different perspectives. Firstly, the distribution of words for word length number is presented. Secondly, a presentation is provided of the most frequent nouns, verbs, and adjectives. Thirdly, there is a description of each of the ten learners' written production with a focus on the structures and vocabulary used. These presentations are qualitative with discussions of selected vocabulary, adjectives selected in pre-modifications of nouns,

and the complexity in sentence structure such as coordination, subordination, and relative clauses.

5.4. Methodological considerations

The texts were first typed with the help of the handwritten raw data and with all their spelling and grammatical errors. In the present analysis, the spelling errors were corrected to avoid the spelling errors having a too great influence on the analyses with the help of the tool Wordsmith. Since the texts are short and the data to analyze is limited, a qualitative approach is used, and no means such as normalized figures and other statistical calculations are applied in the presentation of the results.

6. Results

In the following section, the ten learners' uses of vocabulary are presented. Firstly, the overall tendencies are presented regarding types, tokens, and the lengths of the words used. Secondly, the most common types of nouns, verbs, and adjectives in each of the ten young learners' texts are described. Third and finally, descriptions of each of the ten young learners' texts are provided when it comes to structural complexity and vocabulary.

6.1. Vocabulary: The length of the words

The results show that all the young learners used between 74 and 607 types of words in the texts. The texts are of highly different lengths and the variation here is between 142 and 2,205 words. It is thus clear that the data provide evidence of great individual variation when the young learners who wrote short and long texts are compared. There is a difference when it comes to the young learners' uses of words and the length of the words about the length of the texts.

| | EE-A-16 (short text) | EE-A-27 (long text) | LT-B-1 (short text) | LT-A-1 (long text) | LV-B-19 (short text) | LV-D-11 (long text) | RU-D-3 (short text) | RU-D-28 (long text) | SE-A-8 (short text) | SE-A-20 (long text) |
|-----------------|-------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|
| Tokens in texts | | | | | | | | | | |
| Types in texts | 143 | 607 | 167 | 350 | 74 | 577 | 130 | 272 | 195 | 382 |
| 1 letter | 32 | 217 | 29 | 120 | 22 | 135 | 20 | 72 | 84 | 212 |



| | | | | | | | | | | |
|------------|----|-----|-------|-----|-------|-----|-------|-----|-------|-----|
| 2 letters | 72 | 395 | 69 | 286 | 41 | 347 | 50 | 151 | 125 | 376 |
| 3 letters | 50 | 476 | 64 | 236 | 14 | 388 | 62 | 167 | 130 | 328 |
| 4 letters | 69 | 474 | 72 | 304 | 29 | 367 | 57 | 164 | 128 | 323 |
| 5 letters | 38 | 287 | 20 | 135 | 18 | 184 | 36 | 71 | 59 | 187 |
| 6 letters | 27 | 146 | 25 | 113 | 10 | 130 | 24 | 68 | 25 | 114 |
| 7 letters | 11 | 129 | 18 | 50 | 5 | 106 | 10 | 28 | 24 | 53 |
| 8 letters | 7 | 59 | 10 | 42 | 2 | 89 | 10 | 17 | 5 | 20 |
| 9 letters | 7 | 52 | 9 | 21 | 2 | 51 | 3 | 15 | 12 | 17 |
| 10 letters | 1 | 23 | - | 11 | 1 (1) | 38 | 2 (0) | 3 | 9 (5) | 2 |
| 11 letters | 2 | 12 | 3 (3) | 2 | 1 | 21 | - | 6 | - | - |
| 12 letters | - | - | - | 2 | - | 10 | - | - | - | - |
| 13 letters | - | - | - | 1 | - | 4 | 1 | - | - | - |
| 14 letters | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 1 | - | - |

Table 3. The length of words and their frequencies (tokens) in the ten learners' six texts

As can be seen in Table 3 above, words with more than ten letters tend to turn up more often in production by writers of long texts in all country categories except Sweden.

| EE-A-16 (short) | EE-A-27 (long) | LT-B-1 (short) | LT-A-1 (long) | LV-B-19 (short) | LV-D-11 (long) | RU-D-3 (short) | RU-D-28 (long) | SE-A-8 (short) | SE-A-20 (long) | |
|--------------------|-------------------|-------------------|------------------|--------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|--|
| 3.74 | 3.90 | 3.82 | 3.79 | 3.46 | 4.26 | 3.88 | 3.76 | 3.47 | 3.41 | Mean word length |
| 2.01 | 2.07 | 2.10 | 2.01 | 2.05 | 2.39 | 1.96 | 2.02 | 1.96 | 1.77 | Standard deviation of mean word length |

Table 4. The mean word length with the standard deviation

Since the occurrence of long words is an indication of a higher level of language proficiency it is of interest to study this trait more closely. The results in Table 3 show that generally there are more instances of long words in production by writers of long texts. The mean scores of word length are however not higher in long texts than in short texts and it is therefore relevant and of interest to look at the types of words used across the country categories to see whether there are some similarities or differences in the distribution. The topics in the tasks are

important for the choice of words but it is worth looking at the learners' choices of these long words and in this case the 66 instances of words with 10 letters or more. Table 5 below shows the types of long words identified in production by writers of short texts in comparison with writers of long texts and thus provides a concrete picture of the lexical quality in the two types of texts. Only types of words used at least by two young learners are included in the presentation below:

| Short texts: | Long texts: |
|--------------------|--|
| <i>interesting</i> | <i>attractive, comfortable, everything, information, interesting, travelling</i> |

The distribution above shows the differences in lexical quality by the young learners who wrote short versus long texts. The long words used by more than one young learner are all common in the English language.

6.2. Vocabulary: the learners' preferences of types of nouns, verbs, and adjectives

Nouns

| EE-A-16 (short) | EE-A-27 (long) | LT-B-1 (short) | LT-A-1 (long) | LV-B-19 (short) | LV-D-11 (long) | RU-D-3 (short) | RU-D-28 (long) | SE-A-8 (short) | SE-A-20 (long) |
|--------------------|-------------------|-------------------|------------------|--------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| home | games | game | game | cat | time | friend | future | gymnastics | home |
| friend | game | cat | life | games | dog | future | sea | game | friend |
| game | room | journey | uncle | eyes | family | family | family | kids | room |
| house | computer | sea | day | family | computer | pet | dog | room | school |
| computer | cat | | cupcake | room | game | pets | | friend | family |

Table 5. The most frequent types of nouns in the ten learners' six texts



Verbs

| EE-A-16 (short) | EE-A-27 (long) | LT-B-1 (short) | LT-A-1 (long) | LV-B-19 (short) | LV-D-11 (long) | RU-D-3 (short) | RU-D-28 (long) | SE-A-8 (short) | SE-A-20 (long) |
|--------------------|-------------------|-------------------|------------------|--------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| like | was | is | is | is | is | will | is | love | is |
| live | like | like | go | like | are | do | will | like | like |
| play | is | will | will | play | can | can | can | do | have |
| will | can | see | have | have | have | like | go | go | do |
| | will | | did | | like | does | like | have | go |

Table 6. The most frequent types of verbs in the ten learners' six texts

Adjectives

| EE-A-16 (short) | EE-A-27 (long) | LT-B-1 (short) | LT-A-1 (long) | LV-B-19 (short) | LV-D-11 (long) | RU-D-3 (short) | RU-D-28 (long) | SE-A-8 (short) | SE-A-20 (long) |
|--------------------|-------------------|-------------------|------------------|--------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| favourite | free | interesti ng | favourite | big | interestin g | favourite | interesting | big | best |
| old | big | Baltic | best | funny | free | best | big | best | white |
| | old | sleeping | small | | best | small | funny | speedy | beautiful |
| | | yellow | amazing | | happy | | good | | famous |
| | | | | | popular | | beautiful | | funny |

Table 7. The most frequent types of adjectives in the ten learners' six texts

6.3. A survey of the ten learners' English language

In what follows, the results of qualitative analyses of the ten 12-year-olds' written productions are provided. Each learner's profile in terms of the use of sentence structures and vocabulary is described. The focus is here on what the learners can do and what structures they actually have in their texts and thus not on the errors of various kinds in the texts.

6.3.1. Production by the writers of short texts

The Estonian boy (EE-A-16)

The language consists of simple sentences with four coordinated or subordinated sentences using *and*, *but*, or *because*. Nouns are pre-modified with adjectives of size or color or other common words such as *good* and *favorite* (three instances). Verb phrases are simple with one verb such as *is*, *like*, *walk*, and *live* and five instances of complex verb phrases using *will have*, *'ll do*, and *I'd like* are used. Contractions of verb forms thus occur.

The Lithuanian girl (LT-B-1)

The texts consist of simple sentences and four instances of coordination and subordination, either with *and* (1) or *because* (3). There are three instances of pre-modified noun phrases with the adjectives *interesting*, *famous*, and *different*. The verbs used are common and simple, such as *are*, *is*, and *like*. In the context of describing the future, there are instances of constructions with *will* and *won't*. In the description of computer games, the learner turns into a spoken style by writing passages such as *Well sorry, this game cannot play over the phone*. When writing about the journey of her life the following complex construction turns up: *the most interesting journey*.

The Latvian boy (LV-B-19)

The language used in this writing is simple sentences which are most frequently introduced by *I* or *it* and then followed by simple verb constructions such as *like*. No clear punctuation is used consistently and verbs are not always declined as in the following example: *I will be*. The periphrastic do-construction is not in use as in *I do not have* and *I do not play*. Many sentences

are incomplete and no subordination is found. There is one pre-modification of a noun phrase: *yellow eyes*.

The Russian girl (RU-D-3)

The texts have short sentences and often with words and structures of English adopted from the instructions of the six tasks such as *my favorite website*. In addition, questions from the instructions are used in the running text and then completed with short answers. Some passages are difficult to understand such as *Do you like your pet because pets can you say about your pets playing?* There are no pre-modified noun phrases and only simple verb constructions except for one instance: *I can see*.

The Swedish girl (SE-A-8)

The texts consist of simple sentences and ten coordinated ones with *and* or *but*. Furthermore, constructions with *because* are found in six instances. The following sentence illustrates the frequent use of *because* in the production: *I want to fly to Turkey because it is very beautiful there*. Noun phrases are pre-modified with *best*, *big*, *black*, *favorite*, *longer*, *perfect*, and *special* in 11 instances. The verb phrases are simple but also constructions with periphrastic do such as *don't know* and *don't like* and with the modals *must* and *can*.

6.3.2. Production by the writers of long texts

The Estonian boy (EE-A-27)

Overall the language used shows a high degree of accuracy (for instance with the distinction *there was/were*) and a colloquial style (*pretty good*). Noun phrases are modified with adjectives such as *beautiful*, *complete*, *decent*, *huge*, *nice*, and *random*. Complex verb phrases are frequent with periphrastic-do, conditional constructions and are used to discuss the future of express modality. Sentences are frequently coordinated with *and* or *but*, and *because* and *so* occur frequently to express a causal relationship. Relative constructions are used as in *a cat whose name is Pätü*, *In Tibia you are a guy/girl who comes through a portal*, and in several instances with *that* as in *a safety rope that you had to hold onto* and *I like games that you have to buy*. The texts have a fluent and relaxed tone with questions



either addressed to the reader *Because isn't that easier to find things when they are on the ground, not in cupboards?* or more rhetorical *How can you climb up a fall?* There is a personal tone and topics are introduced with phrases such as *Before I start to talk about my life in 2014 I should ... Ok so back to my life, maybe I'm just blind, and as I mentioned before.* They are also linked as in conversation with a discourse marker *Well I can't play games on maximum settings.*

The Lithuanian girl (LT-A-1)

The texts consist of simple and short sentences. They are in some places coordinated with *and* or *but*. *Because* and *so* occur more than ten times in subordinations. Common and recurrent adjectives are used in the pre-modifications of noun phrases and they are *amazing, best, big, favorite, funny, and small*. There are two instances of relative clauses which are here illustrated by the example *I work with people who will decorate cupcakes*. Regarding verb phrases, they show complexity with the use of the progressive form as in *we have been waiting*, the use of periphrastic *do*, and to express the future as in *we won't get/we will have*. A common reoccurring quantifier is *a lot of*.

The Latvian girl (LV-D-11)

In these texts there are expressions to indicate a personal standpoint such as *in my opinion* (3), *for me/as for me* (2), *I know, but now I want to conclude my ideas, I should say* and to structure the text with the help of *firstly-secondly-finally*. Linking devices such as *for that reason, without doubt, that all told, however, certainly* besides subordination with *because* and *so* are used in all six texts. The verb phrases are simple forms in the present and the past tenses and with a few instances of the progressive form. Nouns are pre-modified with adjectives such as *comfortable, creative, difficult, fantastic, interesting, and special*. There are four relative clauses and the following example illustrates this use: *they are very clever animals who understand people*.

The Russian girl (RU-D-28)

The texts consist of both simple sentence structures and more complex ones such as causal subordination with *because*, coordination with *and but*, questions, conditional constructions *if he runs away I will cry*, and relative clauses *about the car that will fly*. There are nouns pre-modified with adjectives and then instances with long adjectives such as *breathtaking* and a few instances when two or three adjectives are used in the pre-modification as *the small pretty nose* and *very beautiful, amazing, and picturesque place*. It is a personal tone in the text signaled by *I think* (six instances) and sentences ending with the comment *I don't know*. Furthermore, the texts have questions addressed to the reader *Why do I like it?* and *Cool?* and comments on the content to emphasize something as in *He loves smiling. Yes, smiling!* The verb phrases are simple and in complex verb phrases the learner adheres to one modal, namely *can* (seven instances), and to discuss the future, *will* and *won't* (12 instances)

The Swedish girl (SE-A-20)

The texts consist of simple, subordinated, and coordinated sentences. When it comes to verb constructions, there is frequent use of the progressive form (or only the-ing form) as in *we often sit on McDonald's* and constructions with periphrastic *do* as in *don't know* and *doesn't like*. Complex verb phrases also turn up in constructions such as in *I would like to* and *I have never been*. When it comes to sentence complexity there are many examples of clauses that are subordinated with the help of *because* and *so*. There are two instances of relative clause constructions. Noun phrases are pre-modified in a few instances with adjectives of color, size, and other types such as *weird* and *kind*, and not seldom in combinations with intensifiers such as *real* and *a lot*. There are a few examples of expressions that seem to be adopted by the learner as whole phrases: *I love her to the moon and back* and *that sounds cool*.

7. Discussion

The results presented above are useful for teachers since teachers must see the learning through the eyes of the learners. A way of developing the teaching is to move the attention from how EFL is taught and instead focus on how EFL is learned. It is only after having understood how learners learn and how they use their English, for instance in writing that teachers efficiently can plan and decide how to teach English (Hattie 2012: 103).

The linguistic analyses of the ten learners' production show what the primary school teachers in English have as a challenge. The learners have reached very different points in their interlanguage development and the individual teacher is to face groups with this heterogeneity and meet the demands of the learners' different needs. The texts analyzed thus provide data to understand the different stages in 12-year-olds' development of their interlanguage of EFL. Since the role today for teachers is to see the learning in progress and evaluate it (Hattie 2012: 173), the data provides useful data to provide concrete examples to illustrate young learners' production of different qualities and language proficiency levels.

It may be assumed that the results with the highly different levels of language proficiency are dependent not only on the educational and cultural context of the learners' learning of EFL but also on the young learners' attitudes and motivation. Learners who are interested in language studies and in addition are exposed to the language in their free time are likely to have a higher level of language proficiency and are likely to produce long and more structurally complex texts.

8. Conclusion

The results show differences in terms of the use of vocabulary and language structures in EFL in the two categories: production by five writers of long texts and production by five writers of short texts from five different countries. The five writers of short texts from five different countries used simple sentences and simple verbal and syntactical structures in similar ways. Correspondingly, the writers of long texts in the five countries showed a similar kind of complexity in their language



use in their syntactical structures, pre-modifications of nouns, and in their verb phrases.

The lengths of the words used in the productions by these ten writers are also useful when describing the differences between the two categories. Young learners who have reached a higher level in their language proficiency tend to use more words that have ten letters or more. The long texts by the Swedish young learner, however, did not show this tendency. In other respects, the country of origin and the learners' different cultural, language, and educational backgrounds did not seem to play a major role in their use of structures and the choice of their most common types of words.

The results in the present study provide examples of the diversity of vocabulary in use in writing in an upper primary school classroom which is in line with previous research that show that word length is an indication of the level of language proficiency. The results are in line with previous studies when it comes to describing language proficiency and that text lengths, word length, and complexity in language use, such as pre-modified noun phrases and complex verb phrases, are useful indicators of the level of young learners' language proficiency in EFL.

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