



How can I use elements from Derewianka's Snail Model, focusing on the text structure for personal recounts and text participants, to support learners' linguistic progression?"

Profession Essay

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## Introduction

### Aim

The aim of this project was to find out, how one could use elements from Derewianka's Snail model, focusing on the text structure for personal recounts, text participants and describers to support learner's linguistic progression.

To answer the question, I developed a plan for four teaching units. This plan was put into action over four 45-minute sessions in a class of 15 students from 5th to 6th grade at the Kaj Munk Skole, a Danish primary school in Germany.

The plan involved that the learners would produce a written personal recount at the end of the units. Furthermore, they were to give peer feedback. Based on those data and an interlanguage analysis of one of the learner's written outcomes, combined with my observations in class, I will assess the success of the teaching.

The detailed lesson plan is attached to this essay. It includes an action, activities of reconstruction, transformation, construction and reflection as suggested by (Jensen & Jacobsen, 2020).

### Relevance

Within the common goals for the subject English it is stated that students after their final year have to be able to understand and write long and coherent texts of different purpose in English. The students reach this level of linguistic competence throughout several years of education. Starting with being able to understand and write short text about everyday situation after year 4, progressing to being able to write short texts within different genres after year 7 (Undervisningsministeriet, 2022). Therefore, it is of relevance that I, as a future teacher, learn how to create a teaching unit which will help my students to reach this goal.

Both the Danish Ministry of Education and Cummins argue that a learner develops linguistic competence by practicing, using language and reflecting. This way the interlanguage moves to be more precise and complex. Within this process, learners will create errors, which can be seen as trying out a hypothesis (Cummins, ERIC Institute of Education Sciences, 1999) & (Børne- og Undervisningsministeriet, 2022). The session plan I constructed to create situations in which hypothesis about language are made by learners. Based on this, planning and executing the session plan in order to learn how to create situations of learning for students, is of significant relevance.

## Method

To gain insights into the learner's linguistic progression, I will be analyzing the written outcome of one of them. Here I will make use of a term introduced by Selinker, the interlanguage analysis. The interlanguage has characteristics of the previously learned languages, some of the target language and some characteristics such the omission of function words and grammatical morphemes that seem to be general and to occur in all language systems. Interlanguage is systematic but also dynamic and evolving as the learner receives more input and revises his hypothesizes about the target language (Lightbown & Spada, 2013).

Furthermore, I will draw from feedback given through the students afterwards. The students are to give a peer review of the written outcomes, based on a feedback form I constructed. Combined this will give me the information I need to assess the success of the project.

Finally, I will also make use of the observations I made within the class. When teaching I took the role of a participator but also an observer. On one hand the students saw me as a teacher, in my natural habitat, on the other hand they knew that I would use the time with them to gain insights into something (Østergaard, 2018).

## Theory

### Cummins Four-Part Distinction (BICS&CALP)

Cummins introduced the distinction between interpersonal communicative skills (BICS) and cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP) in 1979. BICS refers to conversational fluency in a language. CALP refers to a learner's ability to understand and make use of concepts and ideas that are academically relevant both orally and in written modes (Cummins, [www.researchgate.net](http://www.researchgate.net), 2008). It refers to the academic registers of school language, being more abstract, less personal, context reduced and subject

specific. In order to ensure all learner's development of sufficient CALP, language teachers need to build bridges between BICS and CALP. Language teachers are to provide extensive opportunities to carry out projects where investigating different fields and the learning of subject related content and language development are combined (Jensen & Jacobsen, ucviden.dk, 2020). When those circumstances are given, learners can move from language which is not cognitively challenging and contextual (Area A) through contextual language which is rather cognitively challenging (Area B) to language which is reduced in context, without non-verbal communication and cognitively challenging (Area C). This way CALP is established (see figure 1).

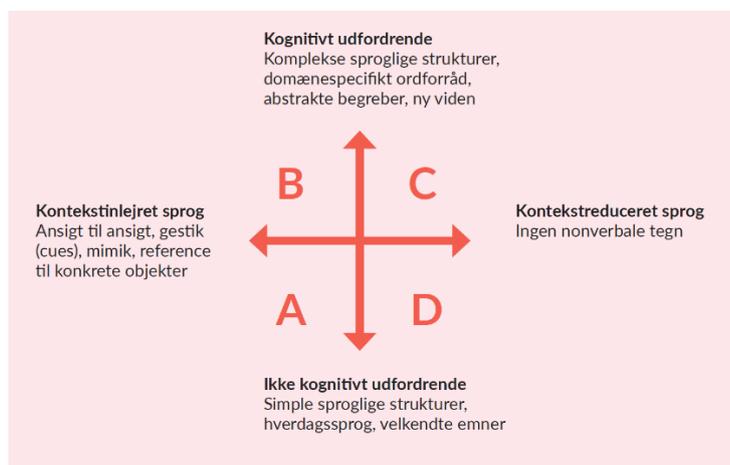


Figure 1- Cummins four distinctions illustrated as a quadrant (Jensen & Jacobsen, Tidsskrift for lærerudvikling, didaktik og teknologi, 2020)

## The Snail Model

The snail model is a tool for planning and assessing teaching sessions. The model consists of five different stages: action, re-construction, transformation, construction and reflection. The action stage is where the teacher creates an experience which is relatable to the learner's daily day. It should only require the use of BICS and be used as foundation for linguistic development. The re-construction stage is meant to give the participants the possibility to re-construct the experience through tasks which create a bridge between the shared experience and the academic context. The teacher is meant to scaffold and stretch the learners' language actively. Specific language resources are consolidated and a move towards more specific, complicated language resources is initiated (Jensen & Jacobsen, Tidsskrift for lærerudvikling, didaktik og teknologi, 2020).

The re-construction stage is followed by the transformation. Here the class gets even deeper insight into relevant language resources as well as meta language through de-constructing a model text. This enables them not just to complete the following task but also use the newly gained knowledge in future challenges (Jensen & Jacobsen, *Tidskrift for læremidler, didaktik og teknologi*, 2020). We can here see a movement within Cummins four distinctions from area B to area C. In this stage we find the first sights of CALP as learners' existing knowledge is transformed to new knowledge and they get new domain specific knowledge which enables them to use their new insights.

The fourth stage is the construction. Here the learners construct, at first with the help of the teacher, their own texts. Here the learners have now got a clear idea of what is expected and how they should structure the text. Through different task they will gradually move from co-construction to constructing a text on their own (Jensen & Jacobsen, *Tidskrift for læremidler, didaktik og teknologi*, 2020).

In the last stage language is used as reflection. The learners get a reflection scheme which is clearly defined based on pre-set criteria. Now they can give feedback to their peers' or their own texts. The teacher obviously gives them feedback as well.

### The Register Model

Each time we communicate in a specific situation our language choices and patterns of meaning change along with the register. The register is a situation in terms of three factors: the field, the tenor and the mode. Whenever the register varies, the three factors do as well. The field describes the subject-matter for example mathematics or English. To succeed in school, learners need to acquire field specific resources. When using the Snail Model for teaching a subject, the language will gradually be changed from more familiar, everyday language towards more abstract language needed for academic success. Like the transition from BICS to CALP (Derewianka, 2015).

The tenor describes the relationship between the participants of the context. When using the Snail mode, the teacher will adopt different roles as e.g. a guide or an expert. The students will also take different roles. As gradually building more knowledge in the field, they might move from apprentice role more towards an active participant or independent learner role. The tenor also changes when the nature of the relationships within the class differs. The tenor of each encounter is created through the interpersonal language choices. The language to evaluate is e.g. very different to when one is negotiating (Derewianka, 2015).

The channel of communication within a situational context is called the mode. It can be either oral, written or multimodal. It is often seen as a continuum where each of the different modes has a different role in the learning process (Derewianka, 2015). At one end of the continuum, we find the oral interaction which fosters free-flowing, exploratory exchange (Gibbons, Scaffolding Language Scaffolding Learning, 2015) of ideas. At the other end we find the more reflective written mode.

The three factors help a teacher with planning with this model. They tell us what language resources the students will need to succeed and what tasks or materials we need to involve to foster their success.

## Analysis

In the following I will analyse how I made use of the different stages within the Snail Model throughout my teaching units. Each stage will be looked at separately.

### Action/meaningful experience

To create a shared experience in which the students would be able to refer to, I took the class for a walk through the neighbourhood. We looked at the different building styles and the student pointed out some of the more present buildings, the town hall, an old mill as well as the police station. This intro required very little CALP, as suggested, or language in general but the students made use of their senses, especially the tactile and the visual. Their task was to observe the surroundings and remember the different styles of buildings we could find. The task was used to create an out-of-school-context, where the focus was not on literature or texts, but something they would be able to recognize from their daily life.

### Re-Construction

When arriving back at the school, we started to recount the experience orally. I asked the students what they remembered or saw, describing the different buildings. While some of the students struggled to describe the buildings, I helped them to stretch their language, by introducing new words, but also through not using the IRE pattern, asking open questions, providing scaffolding, and slowing down the dialogue when needed (Gibbons, Scaffolding Language, Scaffolding Learning, 2015).

After that, I had prepared a sorting game, where the students faced the new words again, this time written down on colored cards (see appendix 1) I had prepared. I split the class up into groups of two and handed out a sheet with different categories to each group (colors, quality, shapes & sizes, materials and thing or place). Now they had to sort the words into the right categories and write them down according to which category they belonged to (see appendix 2).

Now I introduced more complex language. I explained the terms text participant and describer and together we analysed some sentences we created which described the buildings. Here we moved from area A within Cummins' Four-Part Distinctions in the direction of area B, with a higher cognitive challenge due to complex language structure, abstract terms, and new knowledge (Cummins, ERIC Institute of Education Sciences, 1999). The students learned how to create noun groups in order to describe and recount an experience. Although we moved in the direction of more academic language, the task was still relatable to the experience, making it a bridge between the created situation and the new learned language.

### Transformation through de-construction

For this stage I created a model-text, which was a recount of an experience in New York City. The text gave the students an insight into a very different neighborhood/area, introducing them to a different culture. Also, they got introduced to new language related to the topic personal recounts and neighborhood. In this stage we moved from area B closer to area C within Cummins' Four-Part Distinctions. Existing knowledge gets transformed into new knowledge and the students gain the ability to use the new knowledge as they get introduced to domain-specific terms (Jensen & Jacobsen, Tidsskrift for lærere, didaktik og teknologi, 2020). After reading the text, we used sentences to find the noun groups and split them up into information before and after the thing or place. For this, we marked the different parts with colors and discussed what makes them part of the category. Also, I introduced the class to the different stages within the genre personal recount through finding the different stages within the text.

### Construction

Within this stage, the students were asked to write a personal recount of our shared experience. Having learned about the way to construct descriptive sentences and the general structure of a personal recount they moved into an expert position. They got 30 minutes to write in class. I was giving advice and helped them with some language, as it turned out that they had difficulties writing whereas their oral communication was better than I had expected it to be. At this stage, we started running out of time. Hence, there was not the option of working more gradually in the construction process.

### Reflection

Due to a lack of time I had to cut out some of the features I wanted to do. It was planned that the students should peer-review the written outcomes based on some criteria I had pre-set. Through analyzing the texts based on pre-set categories they could have reflected over the language, meta-language and the new structures they had learned. Acting within the role of an expert (Jensen & Jacobsen, Tidsskrift for lærere, didaktik og teknologi, 2020). However, with only little time, I chose to let the students give oral

feedback on what they had learned and how they liked the sessions we had together. Again, I was eager to stretch their language and offer scaffolding. Through asking open questions, I offered them space and opportunity to use the language they acquired.

I got oral feedback from the teacher which was accompanying me throughout the whole project. Also, I did an interlanguage analysis of one of the students' texts and of course read all the others. Sadly, some of the texts were not living up to my expectations. I will elaborate on this in the discussion.

## Discussion

The overall goal of the project was to find out, how one could use elements from Derewianka's Snail model focusing on text structure for personal recounts, text participants and describers to support learner's linguistic progression. The progress was meant to be measured based on an interlanguage analysis and the feedback given by the students as well as my observations from class.

Within the analysis I found that the learner did not use any paragraphs which are an important and rather obvious part of what I tried to teach the class about the genre. However, she stuck to the general idea and topic throughout the whole text which is very good as it is the first time, she produces a personal recount. Although the different stages are very short, I found that the writer has kept to the overall structure of the text genre. The overall structure of this genre starts with an introduction. In L1 we can identify that. It is only one sentence long, but it gives us a quick orientation about what is to follow.

Also, I found that the learner showed a varied use of circumstances. Already in the first sentence, she used two in order to describe the "when" and the "where". To start with she uses the prepositional phrase "Last Week" and in the end she used the prepositional phrase "in Kappeln", giving a great orientation for the reader. In the final sentence she used "because it was funny and cool" in order to express the "why" (cause) of her feelings.

When looking at the text participants and describers, I found that she did very well. She showed the ability to use them. She used a variety of nouns which were only introduced to her a session earlier. Also, she used pre-modifiers and post-modifiers to describe the different buildings and objects giving the reader a good impression of how the objects she described look. I find this quite impressive.

One could argue that the analysis gives the impression, that the model was used successfully. The learner, who had never been exposed to the focus topics, learned the main elements throughout only four lessons.

Also, I would argue that the first three to four stages were executed after plan and made an impact on the learners' linguistic progression.

From my observations in class, where I particularly looked on how the vocabulary changed throughout the lessons, I also got interesting insights. I was able to identify, that all the students integrated the new words into their vocabulary very quickly. After they had heard me say them, had written them down into a sheet and read them on e.g., the cards, they tried to use them. Where a yellow brick building was described as a stone house on our walk through the neighborhood, they newly introduced terms were used after the sorting game at the latest.

The same happened e.g., to what they described as "tree mølle" when we first saw it. In the end they described it as old wooden mill. Of course, these progresses weren't made at the same speed by all the learners. Some of them had a slightly harder times than others. The sentence structure some of the students used was not always correct, they chose a wrong word of the new ones in-between or sometimes they had to look through the sheet to find the word they wanted to say. However, I tried to give them the time they needed and the help they needed, being it from their notes or from my side. Also, errors which are made through trying out hypothesizes can be a sign of learning (Lightbown & Spada, 2013) .

The self-reflection and the evaluation of the peers would have created meta view on the learned (Jensen & Jacobsen, Tidsskrift for lærere, didaktik og teknologi, 2020). It would have been a different way of focusing on the learned. However, we were not able to work on stage five as I had planned. The peer-to-peer feedback would have been an important point in the measurement of the success of the project. Also, I only analysed one of the written outcomes. Of course, this cannot give a complete overview.

## Conclusion and Outlook

After looking at the different arguments within the discussion part and the analysis, which gave an impression on how I tried to integrate the focus topics into the model, I find that the project was partly successful. The learner whose text I analysed showed important linguistic competences within the focus topics. However, some of the other texts were not as structured.

The execution of the lesson plan and the lack of time for the last stage, showed however that the classroom environment is rather unpredictable. Some of the tasks just took much longer as I expected them to be,

and I was not able to make cuts in some situations. I felt that these would have endangered the learning outcome. One could therefore argue that more time is needed for a project like this.

One difficulty I faced was, that I hardly knew the linguistic level of the class. Only through phone call with the teacher I got a vague overview. If I would have had the chance to teach the class before and would have been aware of their linguistic level and the different learners' needs, this project would have been executed more successfully.

I did observe and analyse however that there was a clear progress made within the vocabulary used to describe and recount as well as the use of text participants and describers.

In order to answer the research question, I would conclude that the way I used the Snail Model showed great potential. With more experience and a little more time, the model can potentially be a very effective way to develop the learners' linguistic competences and move their language from BICS in the direction of CALP.

When using the model again, I am very sure to be able to take learning out of the mistakes I made this time. Rather planning a little less/lesson and having some extra. Also, I found that more time is needed to teach learners about genre specific structures.

Although I didn't reach all the aims I set, I took very good learning for myself from this project.

## Appendix

### Appendix 1 – Colored Cards



### Appendix 2 – Sheet

**In groups – sorting game**  
Sort the words from the cards into different piles of colour, quality, shapes and sizes, materials and things or places. Write the words under the correct heading.

Colours	Quality	Shapes and sizes	Materials	Things or places

### Appendix 3 - Interlanguage analysis

#### General comments

The learner did not use paragraphs, which is a pity because there were paragraphs used in the modal text we worked with. The handwriting is readable and clear. The overall meaning with the text is clear as well. The sentences are understandable and the ideas behind them are recognizable. Based on the focus areas of the teaching unit, where we worked with participants and describers, she did very well. She showed the

ability to use those. As she is a young and unexperienced learner and English is her third language, she did very well. Some of the mistakes she does, are transfer errors from Danish and German. "We go a walk" derives from direct translation from "vi går/gik en tur". The same accounts for "there after" which derives from "derefter". The other mistakes made are intralingual. For example, does she simplify her language when using the tenses of "to be". I think those intralingual mistakes can easily be worked on if the right feedback is given.

### *Text type*

The writer has never written a personal recount before. The task was to recount and comment on an event the writer had experienced seven days before writing this text. The text does give a recount of what happened that day out of the perspective of the writer. It is recognizable as a personal recount.

### *Overall organization and coherence*

#### *Text level*

The learner sticks to the general idea and topic throughout the whole text which is very good as it is the first time, he produces a personal recount.

Although the different stages are very short, I found that the writer has kept to the overall structure of the text genre. The overall structure of this genre starts with an introduction. In L1 we can identify that. It is only one sentence long, but it gives us a quick orientation about what is to follow.

After that, the writer is recounting what happened on the walk. Although she does not use paragraphs to mark the different events, she uses a paragraph to divide her comment from the rest of the text.

She still follows the overall structure. In L8-L9 we can identify a short comment. "I liked it because it was funny and cool" is her comment on how it went.

She is very explicit throughout the whole text, not leaving holes which the reader cannot fill.

#### *Paragraph level*

Sadly, the writer does not use many paragraphs to graphically divide the text into parts. The only paragraph I found was to separate the comment or from the rest of the text.

I have to say that there is no coherence on paragraph level as the writer does not make use of paragraphs. Hence, I cannot comment on paragraph openers etc.

In terms of topic sentence, one could maybe argue in favor of the writer. If we look at the text as a paragraph, the topic sentence is used correctly.

### Cohesion

The writer makes use of some text connectives to extend meaning. In L2 she uses “first” to start a sequence of events and mark a signpost within the text. In L3 she uses “There after”. Again, this is signing the start of the following sequence and helping the reader to understand that we are moving on. One could argue that “There after” is a danicism but I will comment on this later. It should of course have been “After that”. In L6 she uses “Then”. Again, she is using it to give the reader a sign that she is moving on to the next event.

Overall, she uses text connectives very well.

She uses pronouns quite well. In this very short text, she manages to use “it” correctly three times whereas she could only have used it two times more. I would argue that the pronouns always have a clear referent.

The articles are used correctly most of the time. Only ones in L5 she uses “a” instead of “an”.

### Expressing ideas

#### *Processes*

The writer is using twelve verbs throughout the text. All of those could be described as rather simple with little to no variety. Ten of these are used in present tense. Half of the times the present tense is the correct form. Based on those numbers I would argue that the writer is using simplification, simplifying the language, in order to avoid taking a risk. Obviously, this does not create great flow of reading, the meaning of her words is clear though. In L1 she sadly ignores an obligatory context. “Last week” creates an obligatory context for using a past tense. In the last sentence she does use the past tense correctly (“it was fun”). Maybe they have not tackled the different tenses or just started to do so. I guess “to be” would be the first one to learn about.

### *Noun groups*

She makes use of a variety of nouns which we have been using within the unit I taught. She is also using the describers or in her case pre-modifiers and post-modifiers to describe the different buildings. In class we talked about the fact that describers can be put in front of a participant. She does use this feature very well. Her use of adjectives is correct and gives the reader a good impression of how the objects she describes look. Also, she uses the singular and plural correctly.

### *Circumstances*

She has a varied use of circumstances. Already in the first sentence, she does use two in order to describe the “when” and the “where”. To start with she uses the prepositional phrase “Last Week” and in the end she uses the prepositional phrase “in Kappeln”. This gives a great orientation for the reader. In the final sentence she uses “because it was funny and cool” in order to express the “why” (cause) of her feelings.

### *Vocabulary*

Overall, I would argue, that appropriate vocabulary is being used. The writer has only started to learn English 2 years ago, so I cannot expect the largest variation. However, I would argue that she is using the right words to explain her thoughts. What I am very fond of is that she is using the vocabulary we have been focusing on in class. She uses “bricks”, “town hall” and “police station” which are quite exact words and new to her before the teaching unit.

### *The interpersonal meta-functions*

As the writer is a young learner, I will only comment on how well she did inform the reader. I believe she did well in informing the reader about the events of that day. She does set the time and place in the first sentence. Following that, she goes from one event to the other, commenting a little on what she observed. In the end she even gives us a short comment on how she liked it and why. Based on the characterization of a personal recount, she did really well on this behalf.

### *Sentence grammar*

First of all, I am aware of the fact that the class has not been focusing on grammar to much so far. However, the subject-verb agreement is correct in all the sentences. Also, the word order is correct throughout the text.

### Spelling and punctuation

The writer spelled all the simple words correct. Only with the new words (mill, police station, building, bridge) she seems to have issues. In terms of punctuation, she does well. She does use capital letters wherever it is needed. As the language level of the writer suggests, she only using one complex sentence. Here she should have separated the independent from the dependent clause. Other than that, she only uses simple sentences.

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