

**UNIVERSITY OF TARTU  
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH STUDIES**

**COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF ACTIVITY  
INSTRUCTIONS OF THE STUDY MATERIALS STEP  
BY STEP 1 AND STEP BY STEP 3  
BA thesis**

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## ABSTRACT

The motivation to write this thesis comes from the wish to comparatively analyze the study materials of different skill levels suggested to students of English as a foreign language in Estonian schools. The aim of this thesis is to comparatively analyze how the study materials *Step by Step 1* and *Step by Step 3* meet the required language proficiency levels of their respective learners. The research question for this paper is “In which ways do the activity instructions of the study materials *Step by Step 1* and *Step by Step 3* compare and contrast in reference to their respective language proficiency level?”

The thesis consists of an introduction, which presents the background of the thesis and its purpose, the literature review of background knowledge on written instruction language, the comparative analysis of the study materials and the conclusion, after which the references and appendices follow. The materials used for the analysis are the *Step by Step 1* and *Step by Step 3* workbooks and the Companion volume of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. For the methodology, the two workbooks are introduced, the chosen activity instructions are presented and comparatively analyzed, and finally conclusions are presented.

**LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

1. SS1 – Step by Step 1
2. SS3 – Step by Step 3

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## INTRODUCTION

When I started my full-time job as an English teacher, I was given three younger classes to teach: two Estonian year 2 groups and one year 5 group. There were many study materials which I was offered to use for them, but I eventually chose a mostly oral introductory course for year 2 and the *Opportunities* materials for year 5. After a year of teaching, I decided I wanted to take new study materials for the following year, as I did not feel comfortable with the current ones. After looking at the different ones I could use, I ended up choosing the Step by Step materials, specifically *Step by Step 1* (SS1) for the younger groups and *Step by Step 3* (SS3) for the older group. As the new year started to progress, I noticed some aspects in which the study materials for the two courses differed from each other, and in some ways were quite similar in their overall presentation. From there, I decided I wished to study these materials further, as my BA thesis project.

Next came the decision which study materials to use for the research – either the student’s books or the workbooks. The student’s books are mainly meant for use in the classroom with a teacher present to guide the study process, while the workbooks can be used both in class and at home individually. The latter started to interest me in how the activity instructions were formatted to suit the more individual form of study – how and if the student would be able to complete the activities without the help of a teacher by following the activity instructions.

When writing this thesis and analyzing the study materials, the knowledge that I gain from it will aid me in my career as a teacher. When I assign activities to my students from their workbooks, I will be able to analyze how they can understand the instructions for those activities and if the instructions are in accordance with my students’ skill levels in English. In addition to this, when I prepare materials for my students by myself and have the need to write activity instructions myself, I will have the knowledge of how the instructions should

be written, what language level they should rely on and how my students will be able to understand them and use their comprehension to complete the activities.

The purpose of this thesis is to comparatively analyze the study materials of *Step by Step 1* and *Step by Step 3*, looking specifically at the wordings of activity instructions of the workbooks of both study materials. For both of the study materials, the tasks of lessons at the beginning, middle, and end of the materials will be analyzed so as to also analyze the progression of the activity instructions from the start to the end of the course. As the purpose of the thesis is to analyze the wordings of the activity instructions, a few activity instructions from the chosen lessons will not be taken into account, such as single-word instructions which can be found within other activity instructions, and instructions which repeat with the exact same wordings in many different lessons.

The aim of this thesis is to comparatively analyze how the study materials *Step by Step 1* and *Step by Step 3* meet the required language proficiency levels of their respective learners. With this aim, the research question pertains to the same topic: In which ways do the activity instructions of the study materials *Step by Step 1* and *Step by Step 3* compare and contrast in reference to their respective language proficiency levels?

For the language proficiency levels, the thesis will rely on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages companion volume, in which the descriptive scales for reading instructions are pointed out and explained in detail.

To answer the research question, the thesis will start with the literature review, in which previous studies into the background of the language of written instructions will be provided, in addition to the discussion of the relation between the different language levels presented in CEFR and the wording of the instructions that the speakers at the corresponding language levels can understand. After the literature review, the second chapter will contain the comparative analysis. The chapter will start with individual introductions to both study

materials and language proficiency level goals, after which the methodology of the study will be presented. Following the methodology will be the analysis of chosen activity instructions from both materials, along with the comparison and contrast of them. The conclusion will then follow to discuss the findings of the similarities and differences of the study material activity instructions.

## **CHAPTER ONE: Background of written instruction language**

The aim of this literature review is to highlight and analyze the findings and conclusions of previous studies in relation to the topic of reading instructions, which is defined in the Companion volume of the Common European Framework of Reference (2020: 58) as a specialized form of reading comprehension, concerned with reading for the purpose of retrieving information. The literature review will start with an introduction to foreign language learning. The main body of this literature review consists of three topics. The discussion will start with how written activity instructions are different from oral instructions, after which the topic of what is needed to best understand written activity instructions will be developed. Lastly, the development of written activity comprehension for younger learners will also be addressed.

In the field of education, the study materials that students use in a classroom setting are curated for their specific learning proficiencies and needs. A textbook is used as an in-class material by the teacher to introduce new topics or review existing knowledge, and a workbook is primarily given to students as a way of consolidating their knowledge in a largely individual manner. Osborn (1984: 4) observes that workbooks are given by teachers for three different purposes: firstly, the activities provided in workbooks help students practice the knowledge being taught in class; secondly, with the help of a workbook, the student is able to review their knowledge at home individually; and thirdly, the workbook can be a useful tool to integrate past learning with current learning. It can therefore be suggested that the written instructions given in the workbooks need to be understandable for students for different purposes, both in the classroom and at home. The activity instructions need to also provide comprehension for students of a wide variety of skill levels. It is

expected of the students to possess and apply the ability of functional reading to the text providing instructions.

In foreign language lessons, the activities students are presented with can be divided into size-based groups: discussions in large group settings, often involving the entire class; group work, in which the class is divided equally into groups ranging from three up to five or six students; pair work, where two students work together to complete activities; and individual work, in which the student must complete given activities alone. Language learners are expected to be able to perform activities together with other learners, so as to consolidate the studying done in a classroom setting. In addition to these multi-learner activities, language learners can also benefit from working through materials discussed in class individually, taking as much time as needed and using their preferred study techniques to consolidate their learning. In this way, autonomous and self-regulated learners can develop, which Nilson (2013: 12) defines as a skill fostering responsibility and self-examination in the student, in addition to the student developing their skills while individually monitoring their language learning progress and the ability to adjust based on their goals for the target language. This individual learning is important in both a classroom setting and at home, as in the classroom the student has the opportunity of inquiring additional instruction from the teacher, while at home the learner is able to develop self-study techniques. As Harmer (2015: 97) states, one of the goals of teaching is the learner becoming independent in their language study and not needing a teacher for their self-improvement.

The process of young learners becoming self-regulated is a long one, starting in the classroom and extending to the home, where the completion of assignments in an individual setting plays the main role in the growth of self-regulation. Smith, Kettle and Alford (2021:

621) point out that children, for whom a foreign language is new, these self-regulation skills are only just developing as well. It is the role of the teacher to design activities and assignments that help develop both language and cognitive skills in the classroom and at home, keeping in mind that parents might not be able to aid their child in their foreign language study.

Previous studies have discussed how written activity instructions differ from that of oral activity instructions, such as Purcell-Gates (1989: 290-291) presenting that written language uses different word order to convey information, and that written language is not able to rely on gestures and expressions common in oral instruction. From the latter, it is important to note that written instruction needs to provide all necessary information on the page without the opportunity to express further aid or context. In his presentation of reading comprehension strategies, Willingham (2006-2007: 40) agrees that written instruction based language is limiting in its form, as the student is not able to ask for clarification of phrasing and vocabulary, which can be done and is somewhat encouraged in spoken instruction based language. Through the written form, a student is expected to comprehend the required activity instructions by themselves, without the guidance of their teacher or peers. As stated previously, this individual approach to language acquisition is important to help facilitate the development of self-regulated learning.

Schallert, Kleiman and Rubin (1977: 3) have presented in their research that there are three distinct differences in written and oral language: the first being the type of information the learner receives, being either auditory through oral comprehension or visual through reading comprehension; the second difference is that while written language is permanent and the learner is able to continuously come back to the text, oral language is not permanent and the learner must comprehend the information in a short amount of time; the

third difference is that oral language makes use of prosodic features which written language lacks, which can add context to the provided information. These differences also pertain to activity instructions – the instructions that the teacher gives the students orally are different from the written instructions the students will encounter in their individual learning through study materials such as a workbook.

When the instructions are given orally by a teacher, there is an opportunity to see how students react to the wording and rephrase it if the students seem to be unable to understand. This is not possible in written instructions, which makes the wording of them of great importance. It is also integral that these activity instructions be provided to the learner in their target language, both in a classroom setting and while developing independent learning. The self-regulated learner requires the ability to understand the instructions when they are working independently to complete assignments.

On the topic of what is needed to best understand written information, Kim and Van Dusen (1998: 355) have pointed out that previous knowledge of the topic greatly affects the reader's comprehension of a text. When a learner has prior knowledge of the topic they are performing activities in, they are more likely to use their memories to create associations between topics. Through prior knowledge, self-regulation can be developed as well, as the student individually recalls previous topics and manages their own knowledge and understanding of the current topic. Banditvilai (2020: 48) also accentuates the necessity of prior knowledge, especially in foreign language learning, as in many cases, students do not have comprehensive knowledge of the target language and must rely heavily on their knowledge of the current topic the tasks are meant for. When a student encounters vocabulary or phrases that are unknown to them, they are expected to be able to recall the topic they are currently studying and use their existing knowledge to figure out the meaning

of the instructions. As McGrath (2016: 151) has summarized, the clarity of the language of instructions is one of the key characteristics of study materials made for individual language learning. When the learner has difficulties in understanding the instructions, either due to a higher language level or a cognitive difficulty, examples can also be used to facilitate the completion of the assignment. As expressed by Smith, Kettle and Alford (2023: 622), the completion of these independent assignments, with the language used in the activity instructions relating to the learner's target language level, completing these activities and reading their instructions can help a young learner develop their self-regulation skills with the final goal of being able to perfect their language skills without the need of a teacher.

Willingham (2006-2007: 41) upholds Banditvilai's thoughts, affirming that a student's ability to recall previous information enriches their reading comprehension. The comparison and contrast of previously retained knowledge with the current topic comprehension requirements can help the student gain a fully rounded understanding of what they are reading. It is also integral to keep in mind the language level of the learner, as the materials and the vocabulary used in them need to be in accordance with their current skill level. Osborn (1984: 11) affirms that the vocabulary level used in workbook activity instructions should correspond with the instructions in the rest of the study materials. The level of activity instructions is recommended to be at a slightly lower level than the activities themselves, for example if a student is at an A2 level, the instructions should be at an A1 level.

The widely used scale of language levels can be found in the Common European Framework of Reference for Language (CEFR), which divides language learners' proficiency in the target language from level A1 to C2. These descriptive scales, however, have been developed for adults and what they should be able to do at a specific level of

language proficiency. The level of the cognitive development of a person is not taken into account, which can be problematic in the case of children as their levels of cognitive development are different from those of adults.

The CEFR scales start at a pre-A1 level, where the learner has had a very short time in studying the target language. When presenting the levels for the reading comprehension skill, CEFR has brought out the individual skill of reading instructions (see Appendix 1), where the pre-A1 level requires the use of short and simple instructions to facilitate comprehension, especially if these instructions are used in a familiar context, encouraging the student to use their previous knowledge of the topic.

At an A1 level, there is not much change that can be seen in the scale from a pre-A1 level, although the omission of the familiar context use may show the learner's progression in their language ability. When moving up to an A2 level, there is much that is added to the learner's ability descriptions. What is to note is the description of not using a continuous text format to present information to the learner of this skill level, as short and simple instructions are still favored. The use of examples to facilitate comprehension carries over from the pre-A1 level, and step by step instructions are added to the use of images as examples.

At a B1 level, the change comes in the form of the continuous text format being added to what the learner is expected to understand, although it may be used when the learner has previous knowledge of the topic. Carried on from the previous skill levels, the use of short and simple instructions can also be found in the B1 descriptions; however, they are not used together at this point, which could show the progression in language acquisition through either using simple yet long instructions or short instructions with more complex

wording. The need for facilitation in the form of examples and images has been omitted at the B1 level.

The main difference between the B1 level and the B2 level skills is the addition of long and complex instructions in the higher level skill, replacing that of the short and simple instructions. This shows the growth in language learning from the A1/A2 levels, as the learner is at this point able to comprehend difficult instructions, although it is added that the ability to reread will benefit the learner at this level, as well as the instructions being based in a topic the learner is familiar with.

The highest levels on the CEFR scale, the C1 and C2 levels, require the learner to understand, as in the B2 level, long and complex instructions, with the addition that the topic the instructions are referencing can be a new topic for the learner. The learner should be able to comprehend what they are reading without the need of previous knowledge.

For younger learners, the level of their cognitive development should also be taken into account and therefore the scales are more suitable for the teacher to check whether the students are progressing naturally in their skills. The CEFR scales can still be used when the instructions the younger learner receives in their study materials are evaluated; however, it should be noted that the familiar contexts that the younger learner faces every day might be different from those of an adult learner. For example, taking into account the B1 level in the CEFR scale, a younger learner might not interact with a manual for electrical equipment, but they may instead be more familiar with instructions dealing with toys they play with. Many examples however can be applied for both younger and adult learners, such as the CEFR scale's pre-A1 level examples of 'no parking' and 'no food or drink' – these instructions can be used and understood by all ages.

When focusing specifically on young learners, the same methods that older learners are taught with do not always work well. Previous studies, such as Hahl, Lehtovuori and Pietarila (2024: 2) have summarized, have shown that children respond well to visual and kinesthetic ways of learning, especially if the activities they are engaged with are fun for them. When focusing on the written assignments, these skills can be brought to use through activities such as drawing, coloring and picture-based activities. It is important to keep in mind the language level of these activity instructions, as they cannot become too difficult for the child to comprehend when learners read them individually. Prior knowledge gained from the classroom can help gain comprehension skills in these types of activity instructions – if the student engages in activities where the instruction has been *draw* or *color*, then they may be able to apply that prior knowledge to their individual activity completion at home. The vocabulary used in picture-based activities should also use the descriptive scales of the Companion volume of the CEFR as guidelines, as well as keeping in mind the language level of the used vocabulary, that the level of the vocabulary is consistent with the level of language the student is expected to achieve in the course.

In developing the skill of reading written activity instructions in younger learners, there are a few methods that have been presented in previous studies. Huang (2022: 61) expresses how bringing in real-world examples in instructions can help in developing comprehension of the given task. When teaching younger learners, this could be showing them pictures of familiar places around their hometown as examples in the instruction to aid in developing the corresponding vocabulary; another way could be to ask the student to write sentences about their own family members to consolidate a topic, using phrases such as *your mother* and *your father* in the instruction. This gives students the opportunity to relate what they are doing in their language classes with what is done around them in their everyday life. Similarly, aligning activity instructions with deliberately used everyday phrases in the

activity instructions can also boost the student's comprehension level and their ability to complete the activity.

This literature review has summarized the findings of several previous studies on the topic of the specialized form of reading comprehension that is reading instructions. It has been found that there are a few ways to analyze how written activity instructions are different from oral instructions. The main findings of the differences are the use of different word order to convey information to the student in a simpler way within written activity instructions, while oral activity instructions make use of gestures and tone to convey meaning. As oral activity instructions are given in class, they provide the opportunity to ask for clarification, while written activity instructions provide the student with the chance to individually progress in their language learning and thus develop self-regulated learning.

On the topic of what is needed to understand written activity instructions, the literature review has found that previous knowledge and the student's language level are the two main factors for comprehension. The written activity instructions that make use of the student's previous knowledge also aid in the student's self-regulated learning. The CEFR language scale has been found to be of importance to comprehension, as following the descriptions of the intended language level aids in the facilitation of reading instructions.

As the final topic in the literature review, the main findings of what is needed for younger learners' comprehension of activity instructions are that examples are important ways to present instructions to the student, as also highlighted in the CEFR language scale. The younger learner is aided with images and examples of how to complete the task, as well as through providing everyday situations for the context of the activities.

## **CHAPTER TWO: Comparative analysis of the instructions in Step by Step study materials**

For the comparative analysis, two workbooks have been chosen: *Step by Step 1* (SS1), which is meant for younger students pursuing an A1 level at the end of the course, and *Step by Step 3* (SS3), which is for older students ending with an A2+ level at the end of the course. The workbooks of both study materials will be analyzed in the chapter, presenting activity instructions from different parts of the workbooks with explanations of their use in context of their respective units, and comparative analyses of the instructions following their descriptions. After both workbook activity instructions are analyzed and compared, a conclusion will follow to summarize the findings of the comparative analysis.

### **2.1. Materials**

The workbook SS1 by Maris Niine and Kristi Tork-Sarapuu is produced for studying English as a foreign language, with either the first or second language of the student expected to be Estonian. The SS1 study materials are the second edition in the Step series, being preceded by the introductory course, which is meant to give a short introduction to English phonetics and common vocabulary, the latter being expanded on in SS1.

Depending on the time at which English is introduced as a subject, the SS 1 study materials are usually taken in the primary years of education in Estonia, these being grades 1-3, where the students are in the age group of 8 to 10 years old.

As for the language proficiency level, the SS1 study materials are directed at achieving an A1 level in all receptive and production skills, in which reading comprehension is also at an A1 level. CEFR states that the A1 level of proficiency requires the student to be able to follow very simple reading instructions. As contrast, the pre-A1 level adds to this that illustrations simplify understanding of instructions.

The study materials consist of a pupil's book, which is used to build the reading comprehension, oral comprehension and oral interactions skills, and the workbook, which

builds mostly on the written production and partially on the written interaction skill. SS1 is divided into 80 lessons, starting with an introductory lesson which will not be counted into the beginning lessons for the purpose of the analysis.

The study materials SS3 by Mari Peets and Maris Niine are produced for studying English as a foreign language, with either the first or second language of the student expected to be Estonian. The SS3 study materials are the fourth edition in the Step series, being preceded by the introductory course, SS1 and SS2. The SS3 study materials are taught in basic school in Estonia, around the age group of 12 to 13 (forms 5 to 6).

The language proficiency level for the SS 3 study materials is A2, which is expected to be achieved in all comprehension, production and interaction skills, in which the reading comprehension skill for the activity instructions is also at an A2 level. CEFR states that the A2 level of proficiency requires the student to be able to follow short and simple instructions, for the aid of which examples can also be provided.

The study materials consist of a pupil's book, which is used to build the reading comprehension, oral comprehension, and oral interaction and production skills, and the workbook, which builds on the written production, written interaction and oral comprehension skills. The workbook of SS3 is divided into 12 units, which all contain 4 lessons, coming to a total of 48 lessons, which, similarly to the SS1 workbook, focuses mostly on the written production skill, though a handful of listening activities are present in the workbook as well. Although the number of lessons is less than that of SS1, the capacity of the lessons is larger than that of the previous study materials.

## **2.2. Method of the study**

The study of the workbooks of SS1 and SS3 contains firstly short descriptions and analyses of the activity instructions themselves, after which the instructions will be compared and contrasted within both the individual workbooks as well as the workbooks

together. The analysis contains study into noun and verb use, the length of the instruction sentences and the use of pictures and examples for the aid of comprehension.

The analysis of the SS1 workbook will be divided into three parts: lessons 1 to 5, lessons 40 to 45 and lessons 76 to 80. The first five lessons will be analyzed to see what a student is expected to understand at the beginning of the study year, with only the knowledge from the introductory *Step by Step* materials expected as a basis. From those lessons, the instructions have been chosen from activities which resemble each other, through which the instruction language can be comparatively analyzed. Lessons 40 to 45 will be analyzed to see what the student is expected to have learned by the middle of the course. From these lessons, the activity instructions have been chosen again to resemble each other through use of similar sentence structures and vocabulary. The last five lessons will be analyzed to see what knowledge the student is expected to finish with by the end of the course. The activity instructions have been chosen to contain more than one word instructions and have similarities to previous instructions to be able to compare them. The companion volume of CEFR describes the language level containing an understanding of very short instructions which are accompanied with illustrations. As the study materials pertain to an A1 level, both the A1 and pre-A1 level requirements will be taken into account for the analysis.

For the analysis of the SS3 workbook, the activity instructions are chosen from the self-evaluation tests at the end of each unit, specifically those of units 1, 7 and 12. These self-evaluation tests were chosen as the types of activities found in the tests are a summary of activity types found in the corresponding lessons of the units. The units were chosen, similarly to the SS1 study material, to analyze the progression of the instruction language at the start, middle and end of the course. The choice of activity instructions from the units has only excluded the fourth activities in each respective self-evaluation test, as these activities mostly contain crossword puzzles. The companion volume of CEFR requires an

understanding of short instructions which are expressed in a simplified manner and can be accompanied with illustrations or step by step instructions. As the study materials pertain to an A2 level, both the A2 and A1 level requirements will be taken into account for the analysis.

### 2.3. Analysis of the instructions in the workbooks of SS1 and SS3

The first five lessons of SS1 encompass the phrases *I can see* and *have/has got*, which is mirrored in the pupil's book and workbook activities. The activities in the workbook are presented with pictures of familiar vocabulary words, which the student is expected to use to either form sentences with the new phrases and familiar vocabulary or read through existing sentences and finish them.

All the instructions that form the corpus of the present study have been provided in Appendix 2. The activity instructions for the first units are short and use words the student would be familiar with from the classroom setting. In the third exercise of the first lesson (figure 1), the first two illustrations are used in an example sentence to show the student how they are meant to do the exercise.

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LESSON ONE

PUPIL'S BOOK

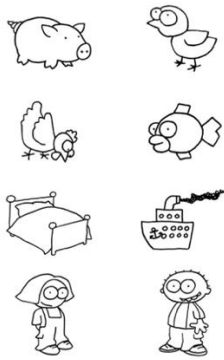
**EXERCISE 3** Look and write.

*I can see a pig.*  
*I can see a chick.*  
*I can see a pig and a chick.*

I can see a hen.  
 I can see a fish.  
 \_\_\_\_\_

I can see a bed.  
 I can see a ship.  
 \_\_\_\_\_

I can see Mel.  
 I can see Tom.  
 \_\_\_\_\_



5 Workbook 1

← BACK

Figure 1. Exercise 3, Lesson one (SS1) (Niine, Tork-Sarapuu 2019: 5)

This helps visualize the task for the student if the exercise is to be done individually at home or to aid in the explanation of the task in the classroom, as stated in the CEFR pre-A1 level language proficiency. The third activity in the third lesson (*What can you see? Write.*) also uses this technique, presenting the student with images to help guide the sentence writing process. Again, the word *write* is used in the activity instruction, with the expectation that the student is familiar with the verb and the action it is asking to fulfill. In the task, the beginnings of many of the sentences are given to aid in writing full sentences. The given words decrease with each sentence as the student is expected to be able to write more by themselves as they progress through the task, until they need to write two full sentences by themselves.

The previous activity instruction contained a question to help the student in understanding what answers they are expected to write. The activity instruction in the fourth lesson (*What has Tom got? Write.*) follows a similar pattern of asking a question with the intended new phrase and the action the student has to perform with it. This makes the understanding of the activity instructions easier, as the student is now familiar with the word and will know what to do without visual aid. In the given exercise, the phrase is written for the student to read and a picture is given with familiar vocabulary words for the student to fill into the gaps of the sentences, where the first letter is given to facilitate the task. This helps the student identify the words in the picture that they are familiar with and focus on the written forms of the words.

The fifth lesson activity instruction follows the pattern as seen previously, with using the verb *write*. The student is now familiar with the verb *write* and the new verb *find* is presented to them (*Find and write.*). The activity instruction is illustrated with pictures and lines leading from children to objects and animals, helping the student visually to understand what the word *find* means. The activity instruction is again short and has the aid of

illustrations to facilitate the understanding of the meaning of the task, as stated in the CEFR pre-A1 and A1 language proficiency requirement. Both verbs, according to the Cambridge Dictionary, are at an A1 level of comprehension, which could be suitable for the SS1 study material language level.

In SS3, the self-evaluation test of Unit 1 covers the topics of present simple, past simple and translation. For the first activity (*Write the name of the tense.*), the continuing use of the imperative verb *write* in SS3 as in SS1 fosters a sense of familiarity in the student as they begin with the new study material. The sentence is short and contains no use of additional clauses, helping the student concentrate on the meaning of tense in the context of the unit, meaning to write either present simple or past simple in the exercise. This is in accordance with the CEFR level of A2, where the student should understand short and simple instructions or commands which are not presented to them in a long text format. As the two tense forms are not presented in the activity instruction as examples, the student is expected to remember individually which two tenses the unit has covered. Examples, as provided in the CEFR scale, should also be present in an A2 level instruction, which is not provided in the given activity.

For the second activity (*Fill in the gaps with the correct form of the verb.*), as with the previous one, the two tense forms are not given in the activity instruction, and the student is again expected to rely on previous knowledge of what they have studied during the unit to complete the exercise.

The third exercise in the self-evaluation test is a new type of exercise which did not exist in SS1, where all of the exercises were based only on the English language, though the student should be familiar with the verb *translate* from their classroom study (*Translate into English.*). The verb itself, according to the *Cambridge Dictionary*, is a B1 level verb, which shows the progression of which vocabulary is used in the higher level workbook. The

activity instruction itself is short and simple and follows the descriptors for an A1 and A2 language level.

In the middle of the SS1 workbook, the types of activities do not deviate much from the previously analyzed ones – the majority of activities still contain images for visual aid and many mirror the activities at the beginning of the book. In the second exercise of Lesson 40, the activity instruction in contrast to the beginning of the book is a longer and more complex sentence. The single verb *write* has become the phrase *write the questions*, and the student is expected to know how to form full questions at this point in the course. Another difference with the previous tasks is that there is no example given for the student, meaning they need to understand by themselves the meaning of the task and what they are expected to do.

In Lesson 43, another longer activity instruction can be found, which, as the previous one, utilizes the verb *look*, the word being an A1 level word according to the *Cambridge Dictionary*, giving the student a familiar start to the task, as well as using the familiar words such as *answer* and *questions*. When utilizing familiar words, the activity instruction becomes easier to understand for the student, making them use their previous knowledge to construct the meaning of the new task, while introducing new words such as *around* to add a point of difference to the task.

While the activity instructions in lessons 40 and 43 are rather different from the activity instructions of lessons 1 through 5, exercise 2 of lesson 44 mirrors the latter more than the former, the second part of which utilizes the imperative forms *draw* and *write*, both verbs the student is familiar with in the middle of the course, to help the student familiarize themselves with the task. The question *What is missing?* gives the student a chance to learn new vocabulary, the task utilizing the help of pictures to illustrate the meaning of the word *missing*.

When moving to the Unit 7 self-evaluation test in the middle of the study material of SS3, an interesting difference can be seen in the activity instructions. The Unit 7 self-evaluation test contains the topics of past simple, past continuous and translation. For the first exercise, which is similar to the second exercise of the first unit in SS3 (see Appendix 2), the difference between these activity instructions is that when in unit 7, the two tenses that should be used in the exercise are stated in the activity instruction, in unit 1 the tenses are not given and the student is expected to know which ones to use. The fact that this change comes later in the study course, where the student is expected to have progressed in their English skills, could show that the tenses are seen as more challenging for the student, and therefore are given in the activity instruction, which could help the student focus more on the tense differences rather than remembering which structures to use. According to the CEFR scale, this aligns with the A2 level requirement of being able to follow by example. This also mirrors the SS1 study material, where the activity instructions develop over the course of the workbook along with the student's skill level.

The second exercise in the self-evaluation test uses both of the past simple and past continuous tenses again, this time in a longer activity (*Make sentences using the past simple and past continuous.*). In the given activity instruction, the student would be familiar with the word *sentence* and would be able to understand what is needed to be done. After having completed the first activity, the student would also be familiar with the tenses and their differences, as well as how they are used together in a sentence, from which they are expected to produce full sentences by themselves.

The third exercise in the self-evaluation test is identical to the first unit's one, where the task is to translate sentences from Estonian to English. The activity instruction is also identical, which should now be familiar to the student and as they have read it and utilized it previously.

The ends of the SS1 and SS3 workbooks are intended to illustrate how the student has progressed over the course of the materials, the activity instructions mirroring both the beginning of the workbook and the middle.

Moving to the last few lessons in the SS1 workbook, in lesson 79, the second activity instruction (*Look at the picture and write.*) uses the familiar verb *write* for the action, which has been used throughout the workbook to create a sense of similarity in all the activity instructions. At the end of the workbook, unlike the beginning, the student is asked to write full sentences without the help of examples that are given at the beginning of the task, unlike that of the first lessons where the student only needs to finish sentences.

In lesson 78, a similar activity instruction as in lesson 4 is given. The similarity of these two activity instructions is that the student is asked to look at an image and be able to use their vocabulary to complete sentences. The main difference is that the activity instructions vary in their difficulty – in lesson 4, the second part of the instruction is only *write*, whereas in lesson 78, the sentence is made longer, though the meaning stays the same. This shows the student's development in their knowledge of English, as they are able to understand and put into practice longer and more complex sentences.

In the last lesson of the workbook, lesson 80, the first exercise is also similar to the first couple of lessons – the imperative verbs used in the activity instruction are ones the student is familiar with and therefore will not need any additional help to understand what is expected to be done. The difference between the activity instruction in lesson 80 compared to that of the first five lessons is that no example is given to the student before they need to complete the exercise by themselves, meaning they are expected to understand the activity instruction fully.

For the last unit of the SS 3 workbook, Unit 12, the exercises are once more similar to the previous units' exercises. The Unit 12 self-evaluation test consists of the topic of all

tenses studied over the course of the SS3 study materials. The second activity instruction is identical to the first activity of Unit 1, where the student is asked to write the name of the tense behind different sentences. The activity instructions are the same, with both not utilizing examples of which tenses to use in the exercise. Again, the student is expected to use their previous knowledge to know which tenses the activity requires to use. As this is the last unit, the difference in the activities is that where the first unit only uses the present and past simple, this exercise utilizes in addition the present perfect, present and past continuous and the will and going to future tenses.

The second activity is similar to that of the second exercise of Unit 1 and the first exercise of unit 7, where the student is expected to fill in gaps with different tenses. However, the activity instruction varies slightly from the previous ones. Compared to the previous two units' activity instructions, the unit 7 activity instruction utilizes the word *tense* instead of *correct form of the verb* or the specific tenses to be used. This shows that the student has progressed during the course and should at this point be able to make use of various different tenses, as well as knowing in which sentences to use those tenses.

The final activity of the unit 7 self-evaluation test uses tenses once more, this time in a longer activity. The activity instruction is short and uses words the student would at this point be familiar with, making use of the noun *tense* again. The activity instruction also gives the student the necessary parts of speech to make the sentences (George/play/rugby), as well as every tense the student has studied over the SS3 course.

#### **2.4. Discussion**

In the workbook of *Step by Step 1*, the activity instructions for the exercises the students need to complete are similar to each other in the way of using the same imperative verb forms, facilitating an understanding of the exercise meanings. It can be seen at the beginning of the workbook that the activity instructions are shorter than those of the middle and end of the workbook, showing that the student is only at the beginning of the course. As

the student evolves over the course of the lessons, so do the activity instructions, becoming longer and using less examples to help illustrate the instructions. These activity instructions match the language proficiency requirements of the pre-A1 and A1 levels of CEFR.

In the workbook of SS3, the activity instructions for the activities the students need to complete are similar to each other in the way of using short and simple sentences with familiar verbs, which coincides with the CEFR language level proficiencies of an A2 level. The activity instructions rely heavily on students' previous knowledge of the given topics, as the student is often expected to recall which tenses they need to use for each activity.

While the study materials of SS1 and SS3 are meant for different age groups and language proficiency levels, there are certain similarities which can be seen in their activity instructions in their respective workbooks.

Firstly, both SS1 and SS3 utilize short imperative form sentences to introduce to the student what they are meant to accomplish in the given exercise. Both workbooks heavily use the verb *write* in many of its activity instructions, as well as simple vocabulary such as *sentence* and *answer*. These are common words with which the student would be familiar with from the start of their study of the English language, and therefore can be used in all of the workbooks.

From this, the comparison can be drawn of the SS3 workbook using similar words to the Step 1 workbook, and further elevating the difficulty level of the activity instructions with longer sentences and no example use before the exercise. This coincides with the CEFR language proficiency levels, as an A2 level is similar to an A1 level in the usage of short and simple sentences, while elevating the difficulty of presentation through not giving many examples.

Differences also come in through the different activities the students are given in the respective workbooks. Since the SS1 workbook is meant for younger students, the activity

instructions often include the verbs *draw* and *colour* and use pictures to help illustrate the perhaps unfamiliar words used in the activity instructions, which leans into the A1 language level requirement of using illustrations to simplify understanding. These instructions also coincide with younger learners gravitating more towards tasks requiring a playful tone and them responding well to visual and kinesthetic ways of learning. In contrast, the SS3 workbook activity instructions do not utilize any pictures for visual aid, as the students are expected to understand without the help of images at this point in their studies, which reflects the higher A2 level of proficiency, though starting to resemble more of a B1 level on the CEFR scale, which details a lack of images and longer continuous instruction forms.

In the SS3 workbooks, the students are also expected to rely far more heavily on previous knowledge than that of the SS1 students – the activity instructions for SS3 workbooks do not contain many examples and do not give the student the help of reminders of which topics have been studied in the unit. In contrast, the SS1 workbook, especially in the first lessons, poses questions in the activity instructions which directly reference the topics of the lesson, meaning the student receives the extra help from the task description as a reminder of what they need to write.

As another difference, it can be seen that the SS1 workbook activity instructions change more in their difficulty level throughout the book than that of the SS3 workbook activity instructions. This could be attributed to the first Step by Step course being focused more on teaching the student vocabulary, which the activity instructions show in becoming longer and more complex over the course of the lessons, whereas the SS3 study materials focusing more on the grammatical side of English, the workbook activity instructions showing this through continued use of the word *tense*.

A limitation of this research is the insufficiency of research into Estonian students and their written activity instruction comprehension, which could add a layer of

understanding if students from different countries gain comprehension skills in different ways or paces. A topic that could be further researched is how images are used in developing comprehension skills in foreign language learners, especially younger learners, and if the use of images and written language together can have a positive impact on comprehension. Another topic that may be further studied is how the current topic of activity instructions could be applied to students at higher levels of language proficiency.

## CONCLUSION

The aim of this thesis was to comparatively analyze the activity instructions of the study materials *Step by Step 1* and *Step by Step 3*, as well as analyzing how they convey information to the student as well as how they meet the required language proficiency levels of their respective learners.

The literature review summarized the findings of several previous studies on the topic of reading instructions through three main topics: the differences between written and oral instructions, what is needed for understanding written activity instructions, and lastly what is needed facilitate younger learners' comprehension.

The literature review found that the main differences in spoken and written activity instructions are the use of different word order, the use of spoken language features such as gestures and tone in oral activity instructions, and the ability of students to ask for clarification for oral activity instructions. Written activity instructions were found to aid in the development of self-regulated learning. For the topic of what is needed to understand written activity instructions, the literature review found that the main components are previous knowledge as well as the student's language level and the level of the instructions being in accordance with the CEFR language scale. For the third topic of the literature review, it was found that examples and illustrations are what helps younger learners' understanding of activity instructions, with the use of images also corresponding with the younger learners' need for fun in their lessons. Providing everyday situations for the context of activities also helps in aiding younger learners' in their comprehension of written activity instructions.

The second chapter of the thesis focused on the comparative analysis of the chosen study materials SS1 and SS3. The chapter provided introductions to both of the materials,

explaining the language levels that are required for each as well as a methodology of the analysis.

The comparative analysis found that in both SS1 and SS3 workbooks, the activity instructions matched the language proficiency requirements of the A1 level for SS1 and A2 level for SS3. It was also found that the SS1 activity instructions had a larger difference between the first and last lessons, while the SS3 activity instructions mostly stayed the same. It was deduced that this could be attributed to the SS1 course being more vocabulary focused and the SS3 course being more grammar focused, giving the SS1 course the opportunity to present new vocabulary throughout the activity instructions. It was also found that both SS1 and SS3 make use of similar vocabulary in their activity instructions, having SS3 elevate the difficulty level of the instructions with longer sentences and no examples before the activities.

The differences that the analysis found in the SS1 and SS3 activity instructions were that for SS1 and the younger students, the activity instructions often contained the verbs *draw* and *color* and used pictures to illustrate unfamiliar words, this providing the A1 CEFR scale example of using illustrations to simplify understanding. In contrast, SS3 activity instructions did not utilize any images for visual aid, as the students were therefore expected to comprehend without the help of many examples. This reflects the higher A2 level that the SS3 study materials pertain to, starting to build towards the B1 level.

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## APPENDIX 1

### The illustrative descriptor scale for communicative language activities. Reading comprehension: reading instructions (CEFR 2020: 58)

#### Reading instructions

Reading instructions is a specialised form of reading for information, and again concerns written or signed text. Key concepts operationalised in the scale include the following:

- ▶ topic of instructions, from routine prohibitions on simple notices and simple directions to detailed conditions and complex instructions on something unfamiliar, possibly outside their area of expertise;
- ▶ degree of contextualisation and familiarity;
- ▶ length, from a few words/signs to detailed and lengthy, complex instructions in continuous text.

	Reading instructions
C2	<i>No descriptors available; see C1</i>
C1	Can understand in detail lengthy, complex instructions on a new machine or procedure, whether or not the instructions relate to their own area of speciality, provided they can reread difficult sections.
B2	Can understand lengthy, complex instructions in their field, including details on conditions and warnings, provided they can reread difficult sections.
B1	Can understand instructions and procedures in the form of a continuous text, for instance in a manual, provided they are familiar with the type of process or product concerned.
	Can understand clearly expressed, straightforward instructions for a piece of equipment. Can follow simple instructions given on packaging (e.g. cooking instructions). Can understand most short safety instructions, (e.g. on public transport or in manuals for the use of electrical equipment).
A2	Can understand regulations, for example safety, when expressed in simple language. Can understand short instructions illustrated step by step (e.g. for installing new technology).
	Can understand simple instructions on equipment encountered in everyday life – such as a public telephone. Can understand simple, brief instructions, provided they are illustrated and not presented in continuous text. Can understand instructions on medicine labels expressed as a simple command (e.g. "Take before meals" or "Do not take if driving"). Can follow a simple recipe, especially if there are pictures to illustrate the most important steps.
A1	Can follow short, simple directions (e.g. to go from X to Y).
Pre-A1	Can understand very short, simple, instructions used in familiar everyday contexts (e.g. "No parking", "No food or drink"), especially if there are illustrations.

**APPENDIX 2**The selection of instructions provided in SS1 and SS3

<b>Step by Step 1</b>	<b>Step by Step 3</b>
<b>Lessons 1-5</b>	<b>Unit 1</b>
3.1. Look and write.	1. Write the name of the tense.
3.3. What can you see? Write.	2. Fill in the gaps with the correct form of the verb.
4.2. What has Tom got? Write.	3. Translate into English.
5.1. Find and write.	
<b>Lessons 40-45</b>	<b>Unit 7</b>
40.2. Look at the answers and write the questions.	1. Fill in the gaps using the past simple or past continuous.
43.2. Look around and answer the question.	2. Make sentences using the past simple and past continuous.
44.2. What is missing? Draw and write.	3. Translate into English.
<b>Lessons 76-80</b>	<b>Unit 12</b>
78.2. Write the correct sentences.	1. Write the name of the tense.
79.2. Where do they sit at school? Look at the picture and write.	2. Fill in the gaps using the correct tenses.
80.1. Match, write and colour.	3. Make sentences using different tenses.

## RESÜMEE

TARTU ÜLIKOOL  
ANGLISTIKA OSAKOND

**Rebekah Ujuk**

**Comparative analysis of activity instructions of the study materials Step by Step 1 and Step by Step 3**

**Step by Step 1 ja Step by Step 3 õppematerjalide tööjuhiste võrdlev analüüs**

Bakalaureusetöö

2024

Lehekülgede arv: 38

Antud bakalaureusetöö eesmärgiks on analüüsida ja võrrelda kahe õppematerjali tööjuhiste sõnastust ja viia kokku nende keeleoskustaset Euroopa keeleõppe raamdokumendi sõsarväljaande tasemete kirjeldusetega. Õppematerjalideks on valitud Eesti koolides kasutatavad *Step by Step 1* ja *Step by Step 3* töövihikud selleks et uurida, mida on oodatud õpilaselt õppematerjali individuaalsel kodus kasutamisel. Töö uurimisküsimuseks on Mille poolest on sarnased ja erinevad õppematerjalides *Step by Step 1* ja *Step by Step 3* kasutatavad tööjuhised, arvestades nende sihtrühma keeleoskustasemega?

Bakalaureusetöö on jagatud neljaks põhiosaks. Esiteks on sissejuhatus, milles tutvustatakse bakalaureusetöö tausta ning eesmärki. Lisaks leiab sissejuhatuses põhjenduse õppematerjalide valikule.

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Teine peatükk sisaldab võrdlevat analüüsi kahe töövihiku põhjal, alustades mõlema õppematerjali lühikirjeldusest ning liikudes edasi valitud tööjuhiste analüüsile. Teine peatükk sisaldab lisaks kokkuvõtet võrdlevast analüüsist. Töös selgus, et mõlemas töövihikus on kasutatud sarnaseid sõnu, mis sobituvad oodatud keeleoskustasemetega. *Step by Step 1*, mis on mõeldud noorematele õpilastele, sisaldab lihtsaid ja lühikesi juhiseid, mis muutuvad töövihiku lõpus pikemateks ja keerulisemateks. *Step by Step 3* ehitab oma sõnavara üles *Step by Step 1* töövihikule, kasutades sarnaseid võtteid kuid tõstes keeleoskustaset. Erinevuste poole pealt on leitud et *Step by Step 1* kasutab juhiste illustreerimiseks pilte ja näiteid, mis on kooskõlas A1 keeleoskustasemega. *Step by Step 3* ei kasuta pilte, kuid näiteid võib siiski leida paaris juhises, mis omakorda näitab kõrgemat keeleoskustaset.

Bakalaureusetöö lõpeb kokkuvõttega, mis toob välja peamised punktid esimesest ja teisest peatükist. Lisades on välja toodud raamdokumendi tasemete kirjeldav skaala ning töövihikute tööjuhiste koondtabel.

Märksõnad: inglise keel, õppematerjalid, tööjuhised, keeleoskustase, juhiste lugemine

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