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1. Cover Letter

The following cover letter attempts to provide a theoretical backing for the decisions made during the development of my *summarizing* pedagogic task (PT), which is part of a series of PTs designed to coalesce into a wider task syllabus based on the Task Based Language Teaching (TBLT) approach, popularized by the extensive work of Michael Long, N. S. Prabhu, Rod Ellis, and many others. This task syllabus is designed to help teach conversational English to Korean middle or high school students between the ages of 13 and 19, ideally in an informal context outside of the standardized classroom, such as in an English conversation club or communicative learning-based private English cram-school. For the purposes of this assignment, the following hypothetical teaching environment was constructed:

> *My students would be a small group (~10 students) of Korean public high school students aged 14~19. They would be L1 speakers of Korean with oral English proficiencies ranging from novice high to advanced high. Since this is a conversation club, it is optional and separate from their regular English classes and thus focuses on different goals. It is also not graded or evaluated formally. One activity that is frequently repeated is a Zoom/Skype session with another English class in Taiwan. Students are likely to have a relatively large mental lexicon (given the amount of emphasis that is placed on vocabulary memorization in their regular English classes), and better reading and listening skills than speaking and writing skills.*

Based on the pedagogic task types described by Long (2014, pp. 241–244), the task described in part two of this paper, ***Materials Development,*** can be classified as follows. This task involves both a "one-way" section, where students are to focus on visual and auditory input, take notes, and generate short summaries by themselves, and a "two-way" section, in which students are placed in pairs or small groups to compare their notes and compile a final product that will be presented to the whole group. In addition, this is a "convergent" pedagogic task that involves students in the process of working together and combining their ideas into a shared conclusion—additionally, this shared conclusion is not constricted to

any one correct final answer, so the ending of this pedagogic task can be classified as "open." Elements of "information-gap" (Pica et al., 1993) and "decision-making" (Prabhu, 1987) type tasks are visible in this pedagogic task, as it asks students to compare their own notes with a partner to see what important points were missed or considered unimportant, while also encouraging students to strategically combine their personal notes into a shortened, concise final summary that must be approved by all members of the pair or group. Finally, this task can be described as an "unfocused task" (Ellis, 2009), as it is not focused on any one linguistic feature or grammar point, and is instead designed to help naturally draw out and practice the kinds of grammar, vocabulary, phrases, and communication strategies that students both *need* and are *developmentally ready* to apply at their individual stage of learning.

The overall purpose of the *summarizing* pedagogic task is to help familiarize students with one area of skill required to effectively and confidently *talk about their favorite movies, TV shows, webtoons, books, etc. in English with a friend*—a target task that was chosen based on a hypothetical needs analysis (NA) of the students in the above constructed context. Because this task is designed for a class that does not actually exist, some assumptions must be made about the needs and wants of the participating "students," their parents, other faculty, and administrators; however, a recent study of the perceived needs of Korean middle school students in an EFL classroom conducted by Park (2015) can provide valuable insights on why a target task centered around describing one's favorite media may be especially effective in the classroom.

Firstly, Park (2015) found that while the Korean government has for many years *mandated* the active use of communicative language teaching (CLT) in all public school EFL classrooms, washback from the high-stakes College Scholastic Ability Test (CSAT) leads the majority of teachers to severely violate these government curriculum requirements, instead choosing to focus almost entirely on teacher-centered reading and listening activities designed to help students score as highly as possible on the English section of the CSAT. Pushback on these violations is virtually non-existent among parents and administrators, indicating that underlying cultural and structural biases that favor cram-style traditional teaching methods must be combatted if one hopes to employ a TBLT syllabus in the Korean school

system. However, students expressed a strong desire for lessons focused on communication *alongside* exam preparation classes, as tasks such as "engage in simple daily conversation," "sing English pop songs," and "deliver a speech or give a presentation in English" earned the top spots on their list of desired skills (p. 296).

Specifically, the discourse type of "narrative task" was chosen as the target task for a few reasons. Firstly, among the 35 *topic preferences* that Park (2015, p. 271) asked Korean middle school students to rank, "narrative stories" and "movies" ranked 5th and 7th respectively (beat out only by topics related to Korean culture, historical sites, foreign cultures, and music). Given the fact that discussions of favorite media is likely to come up in conversations among friends, especially as two speakers are first getting to know each other's interests, narrative tasks can be a deceptively ordinary yet surprisingly difficult discourse topic to master, given the level of mental structuring, lexicon depth and organization, and syntactic complexity required for success (Skehan, 2009). Especially since part of this paper's constructed context involves a recurring activity in which students communicate in English with other EFL students in Taiwan through Zoom, discussions of favorite media are likely to arise as students look for enjoyable and familiar topics to discuss with their new friends. With the above hypothetical needs analysis in mind, the rationale behind the design of the following pedagogic task can now be explored in depth.

The pedagogic task described in this paper follows a 3-stage "task cycle," a style of weaker-form TBLT that involves a pre-task, main task, and post-task phase, each designed to serve specific purposes. To begin, the *summarizing* pedagogic task is opened with a pre-task that involves the teacher playing a short movie summary video to the class—specifically, a clip from *Frozen 2* that was written to be purposefully confusing and unclear. The teacher will ask students to share their thoughts on the video: *Was it easy or difficult to understand this summary? Was it too fast, or too mixed up? Do you think this was a good summary of a movie? What information do you think you'd need to tell a good summary of a story?* The purpose of showing this video and asking these questions is threefold; it is meant to introduce the day's topic of *summarizing media*, raise students' awareness that summarizing plots is more difficult than one might expect, and also bring to the foreground the students' own established schematic

understandings of what goes into a good oral story summary. Because pre-tasks have been shown to help prime students to participate more easily in main tasks by "help[ing] identify ideas and their inter-relationships," the teacher should guide students towards answers such as characters, genre, mood and tone, plot structure, and memorable scenes as important parts of a story summary, which are to be addressed in the main task section of this pedagogic task (Skehan, 2009, p. 527).

Throughout the design of the main section of this paper's pedagogic task, which features the watching, analysis, and summarizing of a plot-heavy music video, much thought was put into how the complexity of the task can be properly tailored to match the level of the students, while also providing appropriately elaborated (but not simplified) input and materials. *Task* complexity in TBLT is defined as "inherent, unchanging qualities of a task that make it more or less challenging than another task" (Long, 2014, p. 232), and this differs from Peter Skehan's definition of *linguistic* complexity as part of his trifecta of language performance, i.e. Complexity, Accuracy, and Fluency (CAF). According to Skehan's (2009) interpretation of the Levelt Model in regards to CAF, some aspects of the main task's input material are likely to raise the *task* complexity, such as the abstract nature of the lyrics, unfamiliar story, large quantity and rapid delivery of information, and many low-frequency words and collocations. Skehan's Trade-Off Hypothesis would suggest that while asking students to summarize the unaltered music video may lead to oral productions of higher linguistic complexity, it is unlikely that enough mental resources would remain for students to dedicate an appropriate amount of attention to accuracy and fluency, thus leading to overall unsatisfactory (and perhaps even affectively distressing) results. Therefore, a variety of changes were made to the input and class materials to help reduce its task complexity and increase the students' likelihood of success.

In the first part of the main task, students will be shown a short music video with a clear story progression but rather complex plot—thus, strategies such as repetition and planning should be utilized by the instructor to ease the cognitive load placed on the students as they watch and take notes. Playing the video multiple times, while asking students to focus on different tasks during each watch ("during the first round, just watch and listen; during the second round, take some notes," and so on), will help students

increase their familiarity with the story and its characters, which has been shown to improve students' fluency in subsequent oral narrative description tasks (Ellis, 2009). In addition, during the second watch, the instructor will pause between each thematic section of the music video for about a minute, allowing students a moment to collect their thoughts and take notes—this will lower the amount of cognitive multitasking students have to do, as they now no longer need to try and split their attention between taking notes of previous scenes while simultaneously trying to take in new plot. Finally, individual planning time will also be provided to students immediately following the final watch of the video. Strategically applied planning time has been shown to improve utterance complexity, particularly in the realm of improving the student's "capacity to mobilize less frequent words" (Skehan, 2009, p. 515). As discussed above, this may be especially helpful for the notoriously difficult video narrative task, since they often contain many non-negotiable lexical items that students need to be able to use effectively in order to provide a comprehensible summary. Because the ideal amount of planning time has been shown to be between five and ten minutes, students will only be given about five minutes to organize their notes and plan their talking points before meeting with their partner (Bui & Skehan, 2018).

Alongside strategies used to reduce the complexity of the pedagogic task's video input, this pedagogic task is also designed to use an elaborated printed handout, with the purpose of providing students a sense of structure and redundancy without reducing students' access to new, difficult lexical items. Firstly, the handout is designed to reflect the elements of a "good" summary that were discussed in the pre-task—it is split into clear sections, including characters and exposition, rising action, climax, and resolution. Elaborating task material to provide students with a predetermined macrostructure can have a "positive impact on fluency and accuracy" by allowing students to "operate within helpfully limiting parameters" (Skehan, 2009, p. 519). In other words, by relieving students of the added mental task of organizing and prioritizing new information into their own structure, it can be argued that this newly freed cognitive processing power can be directed towards other linguistic aspects of the task at hand.

In addition to structure, the elaborated handout also features the lyrics of the song written out in its entirety, which is accompanied by a word bank that corresponds to particularly uncommon or archaic

words found in the song (e.g., "with child[1]; 1. pregnant; 임신하다"). As argued by Long (2014), *elaborated input* such as this is vastly preferred over simplified input, because "elaboration improves comprehensibility [...] while retaining unknown linguistic items, meaning that learners are exposed to, and can learn, them" (p. 306). In addition, a level of helpful *redundancy* is achieved through the "provision of synonyms of low-frequency lexical items" in slightly different forms (such as the original archaic version of the word, a more commonly used modern version of it, and the Korean translation), and through the segmentation and repetition of input (p. 252).

The final part of this pedagogic task's main-task section involves students forming pairs or small groups to compare their answers and write a final summary together—a decision made based on the many beneficial influences that *dialogic communication* has shown to have on linguistic performance in tasks. Skehan (2009) discusses dialogic tasks in depth, arguing that they can assist students in a myriad of ways. For example, students are provided brief moments for online planning of their next utterance as their partner speaks; the interlocutor can provide a student with useful scaffolding and priming opportunities that can be applied in spontaneous speech; opportunities are increased for students to provide each other negative feedback; and the list could go on. With interactionist theories at its core, dialogic tasks also give students the opportunity to "notice the gap" between the information they recorded during the one-way task section compared to their partner (Long, 2016). These moments of "cognitive comparison" will help students consciously think about not only what information (including lexical items, content, and even structural and organizational choices in their individual summaries) they've skipped over or misused, but also *why* they did not include this information and *how* they can utilize it in subsequent utterances.

Finally, careful consideration was put into how this pedagogic task can be designed to help students excel in the post-task phase and beyond. At the start of the task, students will be warned that their final written summary of the music video, which should be completed with a partner and take approximately ½ ~ 1 page, will be presented out loud to the class as a post-task activity. When students are made aware that the language that they are practicing will ultimately be used in some sort of high stakes post task, such as performing in front of a group or transcribing their own speech, accuracy in

students' utterances has been shown to increase as they feel pressure to focus more on form to present a more impressive final product (Foster & Skehan, 1997). Thus, to wrap up this pedagogic tasks, students will be asked to share their final works to the group—the instructor should use their best judgement to decide if students should be forced to present without looking at their notes, or (if they seem particularly terrified by the idea) allowed to read out loud their final summaries. While not ideal, linguistic crutches such as reading out scripts can be addressed and weaned off over time if this pedagogic task is repeated multiple times throughout the semester. Because the "repetition of similar tasks is more likely to provide a structural context for the mastery of form-meaning relations," especially when tasks of the same discourse type (such as narrative tasks) are repeated (Bygate, 2009, p. 253), this task was designed to allow any music video, movie summary, or other media to be inserted in place of the chosen music video. Instructors interested in implementing a task similar to the one described in this paper are highly encouraged to not let this task become a one-off activity—teachers can even turn to their students as reliable sources for new, popular, relevant, and enjoyable material to feature in this activity.

In conclusion, the rationale for the following pedagogic task, as outlined in this cover letter, is designed to show that while at first glance, a task-based lesson plan may be hard to distinguish from other more popular methods, many decades of work have gone into building a robust empirical foundation that supports TBLT as one of the most effective language teaching approaches to date. Every good task syllabus starts with a student-centered needs analysis, as demonstrated above in my hypothetical analysis of the needs and wants of Korean high school students learning English conversational skills. Then, a three-stage task cycle can be devised, which allows the teacher many opportunities to adjust the complexity and effectiveness of a task through the use of pre-task contextual priming, post-task presentations, repetition, planning time, elaboration, and dialogic communication. When applied with sufficient preparation (along with a healthy dose of flexibility to cope with the dynamic nature of a classroom), a language teacher can feel assured that they are simultaneously helping their students improve their linguistic complexity, accuracy, and fluency, while making the activity feel fun, motivating, and relevant to their students—a feat that many other methods still struggle to accomplish.

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2. Materials Development — *Summarizing* Pedagogic Task

2.1. Target task: Recommend your favorite movie/tv show to a friend;

Pedagogic task: Summarizing.

2.2. Pretask

The teacher will display this video of Olaf summarizing Frozen in 2 minutes on the board. It can be replayed if students request it, but it is not crucial that students understand it fully. As many students are likely to be confused by the fast pace of the video, the teacher will ask students if this was a good or not very good explanation, and discuss why or why not (students are likely to say it was too fast, too little details, the listener may not know context, etc… if students are not participating, these are the kinds of answers that the teacher should suggest to the class to get ideas flowing). (Start conversation in English, but if students seem overwhelmed, maybe switch to Korean to decrease cognitive load). Teacher will guide the conversation into what makes an understandable movie or media summary. Things to mention are characters, genre, mood and tone, plot structure, memorable moments or lines, etc. These important aspects of a summary should be written on the white/blackboard and referred back to throughout the activity as things students should take mental (or physical) notes of during the main task.

2.3. Main task

The teacher will display this short music video about a Pumpkin Cowboy on the board. The teacher will explain that the class will be watching the video multiple times throughout the activity, and that our main objective is to be able to understand, break down, and clearly summarize the characters, genre, and plot of the story. The teacher should also say that the final result of this task will be creating a written summary with a partner, which will be presented orally to the entire class.

The teacher should state that a handout for notes will be provided soon, so students shouldn't take notes yet. The video will first be played without subtitles and students will just watch the whole thing through, likely relying a lot on visuals to get a general idea of the story. Then the teacher will pass out this handout with the English script (that has been elaborated with a word bank that corresponds to marked words or phrases that are rarely used/outdated/formal, etc.). The script is visually split into four sections:

characters and exposition, rising action, climax, and resolution. The teacher will explain that the video will be played again, and that students should take notes on each section using the boxes ON PAGE 3. The students should NOT write on the lines on page 1 and 2 yet. The students will be given ~5 minutes to read through the script, look over the words in the word bank, and ask any necessary questions about what they need to do during the activity. The teacher should check in with the students and ask if they found the video too hard to follow; if so, the video may be slowed down or paused more frequently, or played twice during the handout activity instead of once.

The video can now be replayed, and should pause for ~1 minute between each section to allow students time to take notes and collect their thoughts on page 3. After the video is finished, students will then be given 10 minutes to individually summarize each section of the story using the blank lines under each section on pages 1 and 2. Each summary should only be 2~3 sentences long. Students should be reminded to consider the different elements of a summary that was discussed before, such as the characters, genre, flow of the plot, and a memorable scene.

In the final part of this activity, the teacher will pair up students so they can compare each other's results, then work together to determine which parts one person wrote down, and the other didn't. If the number of students is uneven, one student may join a pair to form a group of 3. They will discuss why they felt some parts were or weren't necessary to include, and work to come up with their own final oral summary of the scene. One (or both students) may write down this summary on PAGE 4 of the handout, and may use any of the "useful phrases" provided on page 4.

2.4. Post task

When all pairs have finished their final summaries, the teacher should guide the students' attention back to the front of the class; the teacher will explain that one person from each group will now present out loud their final summary (ideally, the person who did not write down the final summary should be the one to speak. If neither student in the pair wants to present, the teacher will volun-tell one of them to speak). The teacher should also instruct the other students to pay attention to the structure, content, and language used by the presenter, and think about how the presenter's summary is similar or

different from their own. Each presentation should take ~2 minutes, and the teacher should work to maintain a casual, low-stakes atmosphere in the classroom. If the students are nervous, the teacher can start by giving their own brief summary about the plot of the music video as an example.

2.5. Beyond the task

This task is designed to be reusable, with any music video, movie summary, etc. able to replace the Pumpkin Cowboy video used in this example. By repeating this task multiple times throughout the semester (or even turning it into a fun weekly activity), students will become increasingly familiar with the format, and thus less reliant on linguistic crutches that were provided in this example, such as a heavily elaborated handout, writing down final summaries, watching the video multiple times, etc. Teachers are encouraged to elicit media suggestions from the students, which will help increase the relevancy of the task and turn it into a way students can showcase their interests, which will likely improve engagement and motivation.