Communicative Activities in Saudi EFL Textbooks: A Corpus-driven Analysis

Ahmad Al Khateeb
King Faisal University, Saudi Arabia

Sultan Almujaiwel
King Saud University, Saudi Arabia

Abstract—This paper investigates the speaking and communication tasks in EFL textbooks in Saudi Arabia by means of corpus analysis. This analysis explores the extent to which the speaking tasks provided in Saudi EFL textbooks are communicatively incompetent, and is important due to the unsatisfactory, limited levels achieved by many learners of English at most educational stages, specifically primary, intermediate, and secondary. The reason for the poor oral skills among many EFL learners is due to the absence of authentic language learning tasks in a wide range of situations. The techniques used to detect the range of communicative tasks are based on sketching and retrieving the n-grams of *in pairs* and the verbal collocates *say, talk, tell, ask, and discuss* in a span of \( n = 2 \leq 2 \). The experimental analysis driven from the intended textbooks shows that speaking tasks lack reasonable distributions of everyday communication examples and speaking/communicative situations.

Index Terms—speaking tasks, communicative competence, intercultural competence, Saudi EFL textbooks, corpus-driven analysis

I. INTRODUCTION

Language textbooks are an essential part of the language learning process itself. In fact, textbooks are regarded as the second core requirement when learning English as a second/foreign language (ESL/EFL) after a teacher/instructor (Riazi, 2003). By the same token, Hutchinson and Torres (1994) emphasize the role of textbooks in innovating and modernizing language learning. Furthermore, within textbooks, there are normally a number of speaking and communication tasks which are carefully designed to promote language learners’ ability to express ideas, opinions and feelings in meaningful and skillful ways. Speaking is one of the productive skills and a communication tool, which is composed of systematic verbal utterances for the sake of delivering specific meanings and exchanging thoughts through language (Mart, 2012).

In the same vein, the communicative language teaching (CLT) approach is seen as a stimulus for creating or fostering speaking and communication skills in a target language (Celce-Murcia, 2001; Nunan, 2004). CLT also puts the emphasis on English language teachers’ and stakeholders’ (instructors, material developers, syllabus designers) responsibility to prepare language learners well to ensure they can speak effectively and communicate meaningfully with their target audience through the use of well-grounded tasks designed in a way that reflects reality and current issues based on real-life situations (Celce-Murcia, 2001; Reiser & Dempsey, 2012).

Due to the prominence given to relevant speaking and communication tasks in ESL/EFL textbooks in general and in the Saudi context in particular, this research aims to extract and classify the kinds of tasks (or activities) which are included in EFL textbooks in Saudi Arabia, and examine whether there are differences between them in the textbooks given. It was decided to investigate the nature of speaking and communication tasks in an entire series of EFL textbooks used in general education across three stages: primary, intermediate and secondary. The textbooks selected fall under the categories of beginner, intermediate and advanced levels. Through corpus-driven analysis, the focus will be on the status of tasks currently used and will also explore how other common communicative-oriented tasks would conform, specifically discussions, role-playing, problem solving, simulations, information gap and brainstorming, storytelling, interviews, story completion reporting, playing cards, picture narrating/describing and finding the difference (Oradee, 2012).

The objective is to compare the status and category of such tasks with other task types internationally used to help improve language learners’ speaking and communication skills such as imitative, intensive, responsive, transactional, interpersonal and extensive monologue-related tasks (Nunan, 2003). It takes the quantitative analysis approach. Canale and Swain (1980) showed the positive effect grammar knowledge has on speaking and communication skills in the target language. Vocabulary is also considered an important aspect of learners’ speaking and communication ability since words are the building blocks for literacy development (Silverman, 2007).

To the best of the researchers’ knowledge, a very limited number of studies have investigated this phenomenon since speaking is a skill often overlooked by many language teachers and instructors. This may be because it is time-
consuming and requires high-level linguistic competence and verbal proficiency along with other personal characteristics such as self-confidence. Therefore, this research addresses three questions:

- What are the communicative competencies/proficiencies served in Saudi EFL textbooks?
- How are they distributed? And to what extent are EFL textbooks used in Saudi schools covering speaking tasks?

II. REVIEWING THE LITERATURE

A. An Overview of Speaking Teaching/Learning

The domination of English as a second or foreign language (ESL/EFL) is undoubtedly increasing worldwide. Yet, when it comes to its use, the English language remains a hurdle for many learners, particularly in settings that require speaking and oral communication. Numerous theoretical perspectives have become supportive of the teaching and learning of speaking and the spoken genre. Two of the principal voices in this field belong to Vygotsky and Bruner, particularly in terms of so-called scaffolding and the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) (Lantolf & Appel, 1994; Lantolf, 2000). According to the Vygotskian’s socio-cultural theory, human cognitive development is a socially positioned activity which allows mediation to occur (Vygotsky, 1978a). Mediation underlines the assumption that knowledge is processed through negotiation and the facilitation of others to develop cognitive and problem-based learning abilities (Swain & Lapkin, 2002). Scaffolding is a joint mutual engagement of action that aims to achieve collaboration and interaction (Wood, 1988). Machado (2000) confirmed the constructive role of peer-to-peer and expert-to-novice (with the expert often the instructor) scaffolding during the practice stages of spoken tasks. Indeed, scaffolding contributes to the establishment of meaning and dialogue with the self and others (McCarthy & O’Keeffe, 2004), and the aim of speaking practice is to improve learners’ oral production along with maximizing their linguistic skills.

In traditional methodology approaches such as the grammar-translation method, there is a clear emphasis on reading texts, which are translated from the first language to the second language and vice versa. However, Bygate (2009) shows that speaking can also be a channel between learners and instructors through which learners can practice language by using imitation for language development. This means that speaking is the avenue to articulate emotions, ideas, requests and apologies in order to illustrate the various functions of language. Talley and Hui-ling (2014) reported that learners should be informed that speaking and communication are of greater importance than simply having knowledge of the grammar when conversing with other learners. Having a conversation is often considered synonymous with developing one’s speaking skill. Furthermore, speaking is a socially oriented process aimed at creating meaning through the phases of producing, receiving, and processing information. In this regard, Gilakjani (2016) highlighted speaking as the pathway to interact with others everywhere and every day.

The term “speaking” can be defined in various ways, depending on whether the focus is on its form, in other words the grammar, or whether it is understood more broadly by its communicative function apart from its syntactic or prosodic features. Chaney and Burk (1998) argue that speaking is the development of sharing meaning by using verbal and non-verbal symbols in different settings. In fact, speaking is a demanding skill as it involves vowel reduction, elision, slang, and idioms along with other phenomena such as stress, intonation, and rhythm, all of which can make the production of good spoken language difficult to process (Lazaraton, 2001).

Speaking remains a crucial skill, as shown by Leong and Ahmadi (2017), since it cannot be separated from other language skills and contributes to helping learners to enhance their lexical, grammatical, and writing skills. Furthermore, practicing speaking in language learning classes usually adheres to the following stages: preparation, presentation, practice, evaluation, and finally extension. It seems that speaking usually seeks a balance between fluency and accuracy. Fluency relates the use of linking words and phrases in sentences to ensure that language production is coherent, whereas accuracy focuses on the precision of which the language is produced, including grammatical structure and pronunciation (Hedge, 2000). Cognitive complexity has also been considered as a determiner for uttered spoken production (Robinson, 2001). Yuan and Ellis (2003) emphasize the role of deliberate planning prior to speaking as a promoter of accuracy and complexity. Furthermore, engagement in small talk in the target language to create a sense of social communication is a practical step for the development of spoken interaction (Shumin, 2002). The reason for this is that such interactional negotiations can result in valuable output/speaking; i.e., explaining views, defending opinions, or contributing ideas to certain phenomena.

In the field of teaching and learning, speaking involves numerous cognitive processes that are more than simply expressing words, but also include conveying meaningful messages orally (Leong & Ahmadi, 2017). Speaking tasks may result in negative side effects, as second/foreign language learners may feel nervous when speaking in the target language. Sources of this anxiety when speaking in the target language include the fear of criticism by others in contexts such as in-class participations and also a lack of confidence in their ability to communicate with others, also known as communication apprehension (Yalçın & İncecağ, 2014). For that reason, Richard-Amato (1996) proposed four strategies for language learners wishing to enhance their speaking abilities in English: learners should carefully think about what they are going to say beforehand; learners should consider the structures they will use in advance; learners should not be too worried about making mistakes; and learners should use repetition, gestures, synonyms, and definitions when they are not understood by others.
B. EFL Textbooks and Culture

A textbook (or coursebook) is a guide map used for the study of a particular subject. A textbook represents the crucial component of the teaching process and functions as a standard model for classroom practice (Nunan, 1988). Richards (2014) also considered the coursebook as the main resource used by numerous language teachers worldwide, with the analysis of textbooks affording instructors the opportunity to make a decision regarding appropriate and inappropriate materials. English as a foreign language (EFL) textbooks direct L2/FL instructors through various stages of pedagogy to achieve their educational and linguistic goals. As far as the tasks in textbooks are concerned, Granger (1998) states that textbooks should be based on authentic native English. Teaching materials may include events, incidents and actions that embody certain experiences, as this will help learners to construct cognitive and linguistic knowledge. A textbook that includes a teacher’s guide and student’s workbook save instructors’ time, since these resources contain various ideas for the incorporation of the text into classes and the kinds of supplementary tasks or homework that can be given, as well as a sample of tests and quizzes (Nordlund, 2016).

The analysis of EFL textbooks has become an integral part of the process of teaching and learning English as a foreign language. The purpose of textbooks analysis is to examine the effects of the teaching materials, including tasks and how suitable they are for learners (Tomlinson et al. 2001). This was supported by Ellis (1997), who drew attention to the value of predictive analysis (before the implementation) and retrospective analysis (after the implementation) of the course. Generally speaking, effective textbooks feature specific qualities: stimulating learners’ interest, recappping previous learning, preparing for what will be learned later on, explaining new content, providing clear and relevant strategies for learning, providing learning tasks, and supporting learners to monitor their progress (Richards, 2014). Furthermore, Harwood (2010) highlights two fundamental issues related to the analysis of EFL textbooks: the authenticity of the language used and the representation of the content provided.

One of the critical issues relevant to EFL textbooks is culture. Nieto (2010) defines culture as a joint worldview of common history, geographic location, language, social class, and religion. It is also seen as mutual agreement between the members of a certain society who share similar values, rules, role expectations, and meanings. Accordingly, Aldera (2017, p. 221) formulated his thoughts on culture as “the relationship between its beliefs, values, behavior, and communication” and also as “a collective achievement of the arts and manifestations of the human intellect”. Such textbooks should reinforce the root culture among learners, so to avoid any kind of division of local culture. Gray (2010) found that reaching a consensus on the amount of cultural content to be included in textbooks should be decided by the locals as well as considering learners’ backgrounds and their native norms and values. Prodromou (1992) supported the so-called cross-cultural approach in EFL textbooks, which emphasizes a comparison and contrast between the native “local” culture and the target “other/international” culture. Several EFL textbooks which are widely used have been criticized for the language used in general and for speaking tasks in particular (Nordlund, 2016). Such criticism extends to describing speaking tasks as lacking in authenticity and naturalness (Tyler, 2012) and also lacking in satisfactory models for spoken grammar and realistic language use (Gilmore, 2007).

Not only does the lack of authenticity and naturalness affect the quality of speaking tasks, but there are also other factors that have an impact on tasks aimed at improving oral skills. There is no doubt that there is a constant need to explore factors that affect the teaching and learning of speaking and the potential ways that low-level English language learners can enhance their spoken language abilities. Ur (1996) argued that there are several factors that cause difficulties in the practice of speaking and communication; these include lack of motivation, unwillingness to accept personal mistakes, and unequal opportunities for participation among learners. Motivation plays a key role in overcoming such difficulties. Littlewood (1998, p. 53) confirmed that motivation is “the crucial force which determines whether a learner embarks on a task at all, how much energy he devotes to it, and how long he perseveres”. Dil (2009) also found that anxiety and unwillingness during the process of speaking in English are considered among the biggest constraints affecting the learning of speaking and communication in English.

Al-Seghayer (2014) identified four constraints affecting English language teaching and learning in Saudi Arabia. Such constraints include: beliefs constraints, such as an inadequacy in learners’ preparation in English; curriculum constraints, such as limited learning materials; pedagogical constraints, such as inappropriate teaching methods; and administration constraints, such as limited local and international partnerships with specialized centers. Similar factors have been observed by Tuan and Mai (2015), whose findings showed that lack of topical knowledge, use of mother tongue (first language), and low or limited participation are all issues that have a negative impact on learners’ speaking ability. This is consistent with the work of Gani et al. (2015), who found that successful students put most emphasis on four areas to enhance their speaking skills: stating ideas and opinions, making requests and questions, responding to other people’s perspectives, and supporting their arguments.

C. Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)

CLT has become a major language teaching approach due to the fact that it centers on speaking and communication practice. Consistent with socio-cultural theory, CLT is regarded as a social tool and a meditational technique to help individuals to practice speaking and communication (Vygotsky, 1978b). Larsen-Freeman (2000) stated that the CLT approach seeks to develop meaning among language learners as well as their competence in using linguistic knowledge in real-life situations. This approach considers linguistic competence as a sub-component, along with the ability to
convey meaning appropriately according to various social settings. Initially, CLT started as a theory of communication, but later became incorporated as an approach in EFL textbooks. Since 1988, Nunan has asserted that CLT should be reflected not just in syllabus plans, but also in classroom tasks, classroom interactions and tests. From a CLT perspective:

language learning success is to be assessed neither in terms of accurate grammar and pronunciation for their own sake, nor in terms of explicit knowledge of the rules, but by the ability to do things with the language, appropriately, fluently and effectively’ (Cook, 2003, p. 36)

CLT emphasizes the use of communicative language, including knowledge of language functions and appropriateness of expressions, for authentic tasks (Johnson and Johnson, 1998). In light of this view, there is a focus on authenticity, spontaneity, and using functional language so as to augment learners’ communicative fluency (Chambers, 2012). This argument is supported by Wong (2005), who advocated that a CLT approach contributes to practice and participation in a second or foreign language in realistic speaking contexts, and also argued that patterned practice and explicit grammar knowledge should be minimized. In view of that, the approach aims to boost learners’ communicative competence and performance (Richards and Rodgers, 2014), and learners are expected to be accountable for initiating, responding, managing, and negotiating during conversation (Talley and Hui-ling, 2014).

As far as speaking skill is concerned, Nunan (2003) suggests six categories of speaking performance in ESL settings: imitative, intensive, responsive, transactional, interpersonal, and extensive. The last three categories aim to establish dialogue and monologue (interaction) with instructors and peers. This indicates that rote learning, which includes imitation and memorization, should be minimized, and further concentration should be placed on extended monologues and communication. It is supported by Pourhosein Gilakjani (2016), who confirms that speaking is the pathway to interacting every day and everywhere. Informative speaking and communicative tasks are those socially oriented and meaningful tasks which focus on input, production, and information processing/feedback (Talley and Hui-ling, 2014). Accordingly, it is suggested to design various types of interactive communicative speaking tasks, including small-group or team-based oral work, full-class discussion, in-class debates, and individual or group reflection.

The designing of tasks should be based on three criteria: authenticity of topics, language level, and cognitive needs of learners. Current ESL textbooks may have also more problem-based, information-gap, role-play, or opinion-exchange tasks. Speaking tasks should focus on cultural elements, as culture is the carrier of language; they should be designed based on what is known as a cross-cultural approach (Prudomou, 1992). Gray (2010), in his analysis of ESL textbooks, has found that some textbooks are mostly lacking in cultural elements for speaking and communicative tasks. Such cultural elements need to be determined by instructors and local learners and by considering their needs.

Speaking tasks should also achieve linguistic competence along with intercultural competence (Byram, 2009; Yang & Fleming, 2013). As a result, speaking demands a communicative approach that targets successful integration of implicit and explicit learning tasks, along with teaching methods, into the EFL textbook. In EFL communicative settings, it is strongly recommended that learners be placed in situational transactions and role-play tasks; consequently, learners are expected to deal with others through output, that is, speaking (Crookall & Oxford, 1991). This output is usually composed of unified words, phrases, and sentences so as to achieve meaningful discourse. Thus, the changes in such environments may affect humans’ thought processes, which are reflected in the development of language acquisition involving communication and its relevant speaking skill.

The notion of communicative competence has been extensively described by Canale and Swain (1980) in their influential model. They argue that communicative competence comprises four categories: grammatical competence, referring to learners’ knowledge of various linguistic aspects; sociolinguistic competence, which involves several linguistic uses in their social contexts; discourse competence, which implies the ability to use language adequately for forming meaningful utterances; and strategic competence, the ability to navigate and deal with communication properly. Weir (1990) contends that communicative language consists of language competence, strategic competence, and psychological mechanisms.

Furthermore, the communicative approach has put significant emphasis on target language learning and culture, i.e. “foreign language learning as enculturation” (Alptekin, 2002). As stated earlier, Krashen (1993) clarified that learners construct expectations based on their actual experiences, which are often formed by local cultures. Accordingly, Alptekin (2002) argues that communicative competence is based on authenticity and representation of reality; nevertheless, this is encompassed by two challenges: teaching the English language is always inseparable from its main culture, leading to minimizing the role of the native language culture, and there is a constant preference for monolingual native speaker norms.

In fact, the role of teaching the English language has been dramatically transformed, from its limited focus on linguistic competence to communicative competence, and finally to intercultural competence (Yang & Fleming, 2013). Byram (2009) invented the model of intercultural competence, which consists of knowledge, attitudes, skills of discovery, skills of interpreting, and critical cultural awareness. Several studies have found that intercultural communicative competence (ICC) is effective for the development of linguistic choices (Borghetti, 2013). Reid (2015) indicates that ICC can be enhanced through actual practice-related tasks which clarify identity and other comparable aspects of culture. Although ICC in the national curriculum is considered crucial, Europublic (2006) found that such
materials, and the tasks included, are designed according to the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR), with less emphasis on the development of ICC.

III. TOOLS OF PROCESSING EFL TEXTBOOKS: WHICH OF WHICH?

Saudi EFL textbooks analyzed in the present study were designed in 2016 onwards. EFL is taught from the 4th grade. The number of textbooks designed for the Saudi K-12 schools from the 4th grade to the 12th grade is 57, each of which is provided in print and in a readable and searchable PDF format. The latter allows for resaving the files in other formats in order to process them in any computer software tools built for processing. Tables 1, 2, and 3 show the titles of the textbooks, the number of pages, and the basic statistics of words.

| Series type | Series name | No. of books | Size in pages | Size in words |
|-------------|-------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| Exercise book | Smart Class | 6 | 799 | Tokens: 120,803 |
| Student book | Get Ready | 6 | 567 | Types: 4185 |
| | We Can! | 3 | 322 | Type/token ratio: 3.46 |

Table 1: PROCESSED EFL TEXTBOOKS OF PRIMARY SCHOOLS (LAST THREE GRADES)

| Series type | Series name | No. of books | Size in pages | Size in words |
|-------------|-------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| Work/grammar | Full Blast | 6 | 1062 | Tokens: 453,960 |
| Student book | Life Off | 6 | 922 | Types: 11,820 |
| | | | | Type/token ratio: 2.60 |

Table 2: PROCESSED EFL TEXTBOOKS OF INTERMEDIATE SCHOOLS (THREE GRADES)

| Series type | Series name | No. of books | Size in pages | Size in words |
|-------------|-------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| Not specified | Traveller | 12 | 1363 | Tokens: 957,974 |
| | Flying High | 12 | 860 | Types: 25,959 |
| | Mega Goal | 6 | 552 | Type/token ratio: 2.71 |

Table 3: PROCESSED EFL TEXTBOOKS OF HIGH SCHOOLS (THREE GRADES)

The stand-alone corpus processing tools found in the literature and applications of corpus linguistics are as follows: Sketch Engine (Kilgarriff, Rychly, Smrz, & Tugwell, 2004), aConCorde (Roberts, 2014; Roberts et al., 2006), AntConc (Anthony, 2014), WordSmith Tools (Scott, 2012), and IntelliText (Sharoff, 2014). These tools are open sources, except the web-based Sketch Engine and IntelliText tools. The ACPTs (version 4.6) were being enhanced further, but they are still a mishmash computationally (Almujaiwel & Al-Thubaity, 2016).

In processing Saudi EFL textbooks for the purpose of the present study, we use GraphColl (version 1.0.0). It has built-in LancsBox tools (Brezina et al., 2015), which are also used to extract the collocates that identify the types/topics of the nodal item in pairs in the speaking tasks. For the purpose of this study, the technique used to detect the communication tasks in the Saudi EFL textbooks was to process all 57 files by detecting the phrase in pairs. This phrase is used in textbooks in all the tasks that ask learners to use English practically (See appendices 1, 2, and 3 for the top 30 results of the key word in pairs). Any symbols and pronunciation marks were removed from the texts in the Saudi EFL textbooks, via R programming language, in order to gain better results of the word frequencies relevant to the speaking tasks. This justifies the absence of the apostrophes as in “I’m” and “Andy’s,” which are “I’m” and “Andy’s” in the original texts. After these steps, the data were regarded as solid enough to be thoroughly analyzed, and will be discussed in the next section for the purpose of answering the questions formulated in this article.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The results were extracted by GraphColl tools (appendix 4), allowing for the detection of the collocates that are relevant to the task of in pairs designed to practice speaking skills in the Saudi EFL textbooks. These verbal collocations are say (Table 5), talk (Table 6), tell (Table 7), ask (Table 8), and discuss (Table 9), which were found to be associated with the node in pairs in a span of $n = 2 \leq n \leq 2$ (Table 4). The next step was to detect the content words collocated with those verbal collocations in order to identify the types/topics of speaking activities. As shown in Table 4, the collocate say is ranked at the top, which means it has the strongest association of the various collocates (2559.0). A comparison of the target verbal collocations indicate that there are more occurrences of say, talk, and ask than discuss and tell in this type of corpus of EFL textbooks.

| Target verbal collocations | Stat |
|---------------------------|------|
| Say                       | 2559.0 |
| Talk                      | 1675.0 |
| Tell                      | 849.0  |
| Ask                       | 1502.0 |
| Discuss                   | 935.0  |

Table 4: RESULTS OF THE RELEVANT KEYS COLLOCATED WITH THE TASKS WITH INSTRUCTIONS IN PAIRS
As demonstrated in Table 5, the majority of tasks related to the collocate *say* in fact deal with skills irrelevant to speaking and communication, such as listening and reading. Other tasks seem to concentrate more on linking saying with other general skills, such as drawing or coloring something and repeating the basic phrases: *hello, goodbye,* and *sorry*. The main topics of such tasks are concerned with food, computer numbers, and names.

Generally speaking, primary EFL textbooks appear to focus on tasks which are centered on memorization, repetition, and drill-and-practice. Bygate (2009) argued that such behaviors may result in learners’ gaining improved speaking competence. Consequently, it is evident that using communication tasks from the early stages of learning English is crucial to enhancing a learner’s speaking performance.

| Collocates | Stat | Collocates | Stat | Collocates | Stat |
|------------|------|------------|------|------------|------|
| listen     | 773.0| listen     | 18.0 | Food       | 8.0  |
| read       | 203.0| read       | 18.0 | letter     | 8.0  |
| what       | 184.0| photographs | 12.0 | phrases    | 7.0  |
| sentences  | 59.0 | Draw       | 12.0 | may        | 7.0  |
| how        | 57.0 | Word       | 11.0 | refuse     | 7.0  |
| why        | 53.0 | Verb       | 11.0 | names      | 7.0  |
| words      | 37.0 | chant      | 10.0 | alphabet   | 6.0  |
| when       | 34.0 | Yes        | 10.0 | sentence   | 6.0  |
| something  | 33.0 | Sorry      | 10.0 | fish       | 6.0  |
| no         | 33.0 | numbers    | 9.0  | three      | 6.0  |
| hello      | 27.0 | whats      | 9.0  | computer   | 6.0  |
| again      | 25.0 | might      | 9.0  | story      | 6.0  |
| where      | 23.0 | pm         | 9.0  | anything   | 6.0  |
| which      | 21.0 | must       | 9.0  | all        | 6.0  |
| who        | 20.0 | please     | 8.0  | whatever   | 5.0  |
| things     | 19.0 | colour     | 8.0  |

The second target verb in this analysis is *talk*. As shown in Table 6, there are various collocations. In alignment with this analysis, it is clear that there are tasks which have tackled authentic topics that are relevant to the learners and their past and future experiences. Those topics include holidays, free time, career, and shopping, and the tasks place the emphasis on talking about specific events, situations, feelings, places, issues, habits, dreams, and pictures. Yet, most of the tasks demonstrated the least frequent collocates. Gilmore (2007) and Tyler (2012) claim that speaking tasks will lose meaningfulness when naturalness in language use and authenticity are disregarded.

The analysis has shown that several speaking-related tasks in intermediate and higher-level EFL textbooks focus on requesting EFL learners to talk about, and sometimes to describe, things such as a picture and house. The analysis has also exposed the need for more opportunities to keep learners engaged in interactive speaking situations.

| Collocates | Stat | Collocates | Stat | Collocates | Stat |
|------------|------|------------|------|------------|------|
| about      | 871.0| Friends    | 10.0 | issues     | 7.0  |
| Your       | 92.0 | Them       | 10.0 | pictures   | 7.0  |
| Time       | 44.0 | Jobs       | 10.0 | places     | 6.0  |
| things     | 42.0 | Riting     | 10.0 | clothes    | 6.0  |
| past       | 41.0 | Shopping   | 9.0  | habits     | 6.0  |
| future     | 25.0 | Work       | 9.0  | travel     | 6.0  |
| him        | 23.0 | Or         | 9.0  | space      | 5.0  |
| people     | 22.0 | Saudi      | 8.0  | nature     | 5.0  |
| experiences| 21.0 | Animals    | 8.0  | peoples    | 5.0  |
| how        | 20.0 | family     | 8.0  | dreams     | 5.0  |
| something  | 19.0 | someone    | 8.0  | careers    | 5.0  |
| school     | 16.0 | events     | 7.0  | free time  | 5.0  |
| imaginary  | 13.0 | situations | 7.0  | ailments   | 5.0  |
| food       | 12.0 | feelings   | 7.0  | holidays   | 5.0  |

The third target verb is *tell*. The collocates of this verb are much fewer than of the previous two verbs (only 17 collocates). The data have shown that relevant collocates refer to sound speaking and communicative tasks that involve telling stories/news to friends or other people, but occur at low frequencies (ranging between 32.0, 7.0 and 8.0). Such task types encourage learners to tell others about a certain experience or tell a story to their friends and/or general audience. Such tasks also seem to motivate the learners to speak at the limited level of short conversation and small talk, without it being necessary to interact. In the same sense, Talley and Hui-ling (2014) agree with the usefulness of speaking tasks which are personally oriented and give learners the opportunity to play the following roles: listener, performer, interacter, and negotiator.
The collocate *tell* and its tasks with the statistics of frequency (within)

| Collocates | Stat |
|------------|------|
| what       | 59.0 |
| him        | 45.0 |
| story      | 32.0 |
| them       | 21.0 |
| taught     | 20.0 |
| people     | 13.0 |
| anyone     | 13.0 |
| his        | 13.0 |
| friend     | 12.0 |
| something  | 9.0  |
| stories    | 8.0  |
| more       | 8.0  |
| truth      | 8.0  |
| news       | 7.0  |
| her        | 7.0  |
| someone    | 7.0  |
| their      | 6.0  |

The most frequent collocations of the fourth target verb, *ask*, are shown below in Table 8. Such tasks comprise the following: asking about specific information, asking for advice, asking for clarification, etc. Those tasks have been identified as situational yet infrequent across the textbooks (with low frequency statistics: 27.0, 22.0, and 6.0, respectively). In line with Nunan (2003), such tasks could also promote transactional and interactional types of speaking tasks and communication skills.

| Collocates | Stat  |
|------------|-------|
| about      | 112.0 |
| questions  | 102.0 |
| teacher    | 45.0  |
| him        | 37.0  |
| me         | 32.0  |
| what       | 31.0  |
| how        | 29.0  |
| something  | 29.0  |
| information| 27.0  |
| someone    | 27.0  |
| friend     | 25.0  |
| when       | 25.0  |
| advice     | 22.0  |
| permission | 22.0  |
| again      | 21.0  |

The collocate *discuss* is the fifth target verb in this research, as presented in Table 9, and is considered the least frequently occurring verb. The results show that it is included in tasks which tackle issues related to the engagement of EFL learners in speaking and communication including discussing ideas and sharing opinions, feelings, plans and habits and habits. In this regard, Oradee (2012) suggests that communicative competencies could be achieved through discussion, problem-solving, and storytelling. Nonetheless, such tasks remain inadequate, as their frequency did not exceed 28.0, compared to, for example *say* (773.0) and *talk* (871.0).

| Collocates | Stat |
|------------|------|
| Plans      | 28.0 |
| Future     | 27.0 |
| Ideas      | 19.0 |
| Opinion    | 10.0 |
| Photographs| 8.0  |
| Habits     | 8.0  |
| Problems   | 7.0  |
| Pictures   | 7.0  |
| World      | 6.0  |
| Feelings   | 6.0  |
| Technology | 5.0  |
| Issue      | 5.0  |

V. Conclusion

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Corpus-driven analysis has shown that the collocate *say* has the highest level of frequency, compared to the collocate *discuss*, which has been found to be the lowest. It has been found that a few tasks are constructed based on a communicative and situational basis. Most speaking tasks seemed to be distributed randomly, without fully taking into account the scenes of situational performance and also without considering the logical consequences of the English-world ontology. Furthermore, based on the Saudi EFL textbooks that have been investigated, it was evident that there is a need for the inclusion of more communicative tasks to ensure EFL learners to interact and communicate their ideas with peers in English and a wide variety of topics. Lastly, the data also revealed that the majority of tasks are built as one-way rather than reciprocal.

APPENDIX

| Preceding words                          | Node     | Subsequent words                                                                 |
|------------------------------------------|----------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| and repeat Then talk in                 | pairs    | Hello My names Salim This is                                                    |
| He a book Talk in                       | pairs    | SA chooses a photo from                                                         |
| Greetings Listen and say in             | pairs    | Listening speaking practise formulaic language                                  |
| you Read and say in                     | pairs    | Listen and match are thanks                                                     |
| Read and say in                         | pairs    | Listen and say Listening reading                                                |
| short simple questions Read in          | pairs    | Ask and answer Listen and                                                       |
| questions Read and say in               | pairs    | Read and draw Write Lesson                                                       |
| Read and say in                         | pairs    | Read Listen and find Read                                                       |
| Read and say in                         | pairs    | Lesson Read and match Write                                                      |
| Read and say in                         | pairs    | Lesson Read and write Reading                                                    |
| school Read and say in                  | pairs    | I have Its my calendar                                                          |
| Read and say in                         | pairs    | Reading understand and complete short                                            |
| say Read and say in                     | pairs    | Listen draw and write a                                                         |
| you Read and say in                     | pairs    | Listen and match Writing reading                                                |
| complete Read and say in                | pairs    | I m late No you                                                                 |
| b Read and say in                       | pairs    | a Read Listen and number                                                        |
| Read and say in                         | pairs    | Mum please pass me some                                                         |
| simple questions Listen Say in          | pairs    | Listen and find Read and                                                         |
| and Read Say in                         | pairs    | Wheres the Thank you Its                                                        |
| to Read and say in                      | pairs    | go on a picnic make                                                             |
| check Read and say in                   | pairs    | a Read and complete Lesson                                                       |
| number Read and say in                  | pairs    | understand short monologues                                                      |
| questions Read and say in               | pairs    | Where are you going Im                                                          |
| colour Read and say in                  | pairs    | a Revision Read and find                                                        |
| routine Read and say in                 | pairs    | Ask and answer I have                                                           |
| Read and say in                         | pairs    | understand specific information Speaking                                          |
| b Read and say in                       | pairs    | What animal did you see                                                          |
| do Practice the talks in                | pairs    | Practice with actions Unit My                                                   |
| hands Practice and do in                | pairs    | Unit My Body PM                                                                 |
| say Practice the talks in               | pairs    | Act out the talks in                                                             |

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TABLE 11.
TOP 30 RESULTS OF CONCORDANCE IN INTERMEDIATE SCHOOLS’ EFL TEXTBOOKS

| Preceding words                              | Node  | Subsequent words                  |
|----------------------------------------------|-------|-----------------------------------|
| your name B Talk in                          | pairs | Hi Im Whats your name             |
| I cant A Talk in                             | pairs | Look at the picture find          |
| and repeat B Talk in                         | pairs | C Listen and repeat D             |
| and repeat D Talk in                         | pairs | How old are you Im                |
| each colour B Talk in                        | pairs | Point to different objects in     |
| at the board Talk in                         | pairs | Read the text Write Speak         |
| you Not bad Talk in                          | pairs | peak Talk in pairs A              |
| in pairs peak Talk in                        | pairs | A Listen and repeat Whats        |
| Then read it out in                          | pairs | GUESSING GAME Find the clock     |
| Find the clock Talk in                       | pairs | B Read again and complete         |
| favourite player athlete B Talk in           | pairs | D Use the notes below             |
| SCORE GUESSING GAME Talk in                 | pairs | Student A Read the cards          |
| at Science B Talk in                         | pairs | about your best friend Whos       |
| has got peak Talk in                         | pairs | Look at the pictures and          |
| check your answers Talk in                   | pairs | about your daily routine peak     |
| doesnt B Now talk in                         | pairs | Yes very much Its OK              |
| questions A Talk in                          | pairs | peak Write sentences about what   |
| Amal Julie Kelly Talk in                     | pairs | about the chores you do           |
| the week Then talk talk                     | pairs | When What Who with Whats         |
| Spot the differences Talk in                 | pairs | Look at the two houses            |
| her favourite peak Talk in                   | pairs | Ask each other about the          |
| not Im tired Talk in                         | pairs | Take turns to ask for             |
| your house flat Then talk talk               | pairs | Where do you live I               |
| out there peak Talk in                       | pairs | Whats your dream house like       |
| to Paul please Talk in                       | pairs | Student A Look at the             |
| Speak Stand up Talk in                       | pairs | What colour is What does         |
| that please a Talk in                        | pairs | I dont understand c               |
| the answers below Talk in                    | pairs | Ask and answer personal questions |
| PM Work in                                   | pairs | Student A points to something     |
| PM Talk in                                   | pairs | Ask and answer questions about    |

TABLE 12.
TOP 30 RESULTS OF CONCORDANCE IN HIGH SCHOOLS’ EFL TEXTBOOKS

| Preceding words                              | Node  | Subsequent words                  |
|----------------------------------------------|-------|-----------------------------------|
| and read B Talk in                           | pairs | as in the example Male            |
| surname NOTE B Talk in                       | pairs | as in the example Hello           |
| Zealander Moroccan B Talk in                 | pairs | Where are you from Im             |
| eight nine B Talk in                         | pairs | Whats your phone number for       |
| nine NOTE C Talk in                          | pairs | How old are you Im                |
| B Read then talk talk                       | pairs | about objects in your classroom   |
| High School SPEAK Talk in                    | pairs | Exchange personal information     |
| shoes and they have about                   | pairs | Men like cars and their           |
| words SPEAK GAME Talk in                     | pairs | Student A go to page              |
| shoes Mohammed has Hana has                  | pairs | of shoes This is Hana             |
| are quite expensive I have                  | pairs | of shoes High heels are           |
| possible PRACTICE SPEAK Talk in              | pairs | Read the advertisement below Imagine|
| a b SPEAK Talk in                            | pairs | Make plans for today or           |
| about nine SPEAK Talk in                     | pairs | Student A Use the prompts         |
| you do Then talk talk                       | pairs | as in the example and             |
| a friend SPEAK Talk in                       | pairs | SUMMER JOB SURVEY STUDENT B       |
| lets go SPEAK Talk in                        | pairs | Make plans for today Read         |
| check your answers Talk in                   | pairs | Think about how often you         |
| about yourself then Talk talk                | pairs | Ask and answer questions Sun      |
| show you SPEAK Talk in                       | pairs | about your likes and dislikes     |
| the study SPEAK Talk in                      | pairs | Go to page POSSESSIVE PRONOUNS    |
| for False SPEAK Talk in                      | pairs | about your as in                  |
| usually Its usual SPEAK Talk in              | pairs | Discuss the weather in the        |
| your house flat SPEAK Talk in                | pairs | Ask and answer questions using    |
| SPEAK Talk in                                | pairs | Student A Imagine you have        |
| few PRACTICE SPEAK Talk in                   | pairs | Student A go to page              |
| SPEAK ROLE PLAY Talk in                      | pairs | Student A Imagine that you        |
| the sentences SPEAK Talk in                  | pairs | Read about Andys problem below    |
| the situations and talk in                   | pairs | Complete the dialogues            |
| in brackets SPEAK Talk in                    | pairs | about a day out Last              |
Figure 1. Extracting the collocates say, talk, tell, ask and discuss associated with in_pairs by GraphColl.jar (Brezina et al., 2015) version 1.0.0.

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Ahmed Abdulateef Al Khateeb has received a PhD from the University of Southampton, Graduate School of Humanities, Modern Languages, United Kingdom in 2015. He is currently working as an Assistant Professor of Modern Languages and Applied Linguistics and the Head of English Language Department at King Faisal University, Al-Ahsa, Saudi Arabia. Dr Al Khateeb research interests include technology-enhanced language learning (TELL), technology-mediated intercultural exchange/communication for language learning (telecollaboration) and neuro/cognitive Linguistics. He has widely published in scholarly journals in the area of social networking tools and English language learning and teaching. He has also published an edited chapter (Designing a Wiki-Based Course for Enhancing the Practice of Writing Skills in the 21st Century: Moving from Theoretical Grounding into Practical Knowledge) in an eminent book by IGI: Engaging 21st Century Writers with Social Media, 259 – 279.

Sultan Almujaiwel is an Associate Professor of Corpus and Applied Linguistics at King Saud University, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. He is going to be a Visiting Scholar at UC Berkeley (USA) from January 7, 2019 to July 31, 2019. He teaches and conducts research on various aspects of corpus-based discourse analysis and corpus-linguistic methods, with an interest in how large/small-scale natural language data are used in applied linguistics and social sciences. His recent publications include articles on corpus processing tools for corpus linguistics and language teaching published in GSLATE 2016, a quantitative inquiry into the keywords between primary and reference Arabic corpora (co-authorship) published in the Journal of Quantitative Linguistics, and on the grammatical construction of function words between old and modern written Arabic, which was a corpus-based analysis published in Corpus Linguistics and Linguistic Theory.