An Analysis of the English Textbooks in Turkish Primary Schools with Regard to the Processability Theory

Cihat Atar

Sakarya University, Turkey

https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5879-3432

Abstract

The Processability Theory suggests that teacha bility and learn ability of a language is constrained by what learners are ready to acquire. This means that what is presented to the learners should be in line with their level and readiness. Textbooks are one of the fundamental resources of language learning and teaching, and in this sense, analyzing them is very significant for ensuring that they are appropriate for the target learner group. Accordingly, this study aims to find out whether the stages of different morphosyntactic structuresin 5 English textbooks are sequenced according to the developmental stages offered bythe Processability Theory and whether these 5 textbooks complement each other from the 2nd grade to 4th grade. The 5 English textbooks that are currently being used in public schools in Turkey at primary school level were selected. Textbook Analysis as a part of Document Analysis was undertaken, and the morphosyntactic structures provided in the units of these textbooks were analyzed. The findings suggest that the textbooks follow the stages suggested by the Processability Theory in general; however, there are some incompatibilities as well. The sequential development from the 2nd grade to the 4th grade is in a complementary fashion in that they tend to focus on later stages of morphological development as grade increases except for Primary School Just Fun English 3 (Tıraş, 2018) which was found to present a few morphosyntactic structures that are slightly from higher stages for the expected developmental stage while most of the structures of this textbook conforms to the developmental stages of the Processability Theory as well.

Keywords: Textbook analysis, The Processability Theory, Teachability

Introduction

Textbooks are an essential part of English language teaching (ELT). Most of the teachers follow textbooks in their lessons, and they are often used as syllabiasmost teachers simply follow whatever the textbooks present. Textbooks also provide benefits such as providing activities, tasks, listening and video recordings and many visuals. Moreover, as textbooks are usually prepared by a group of experts and stakeholders, it may be argued that they usually have some certain level of quality. On the other hand, if teachers were expected to prepare their own materials all the time, this would not only be time consuming, but also, most teachers would have significant problems as they are not familiar with materials design and development. Hence, it may be argued that textbooks are very significant components of ELT classrooms and thus, their quality should be checked carefully.

In his studies in 1998, Pienemann offered a hierarchy of language processability by which learners' current states of second language development can be diagnosed. The Processability Theory (PT) aims to explain the developmental stages in second language learning, and it is an empirical framework supported by a sufficient body of research (e.g. Keßler 2007; Lenzing, 2008; Pienemann and Keßler, 2007; Wang, 2011) although there are some studies critical of PT (Peker and Toprak Celen, 2020) which suggest some amendments to this theory. Still, PT is a well-supported theory which offers implications for the field of ELT.

Knowing learners' current state of proficiency is significant as it provides teachers with insights into whatthey are ready to acquire in the second (L2) or foreign language (FL) at a specifictime. Providingmaterials to learners in accordance with their developmental stage is important, and the design and development of textbooks requires a sequencing of lexical and grammatical items (Guo, 2018). This is also in line with the i+1 principle of Krashen (1982) as it implies that sequences in learning should be known so that they can be ordered depending on order of acquisition (Guo, 2018). These suggestions in the literature provide implications for materials design and the language a teacher uses in the class. However, as suggested by Cook (2008), many of the common English textbooks do not take PT into consideration, and they provide too complex structures considering what students can process at a certain level. Also, as suggested by Lenzing (2008), the design of curricula does not consider how learners acquire a language specifically in textbooks for early and low English language teaching levels. Accordingly, there is a gap in textbook analysis studies from a PT perspective especially in primary school textbooks. To the knowledge of the researcher, there are no PT studies on the 5 textbooks (Tan, 2018; Akkabak et al., 2019; Tıraş, 2018; Tan, 2019; Akseki et al., 2019) analyzed in this study. Hence, the goal of this study is to analyze the 5 textbooks used in public primary schools in Turkey from a PT perspective by focusing morphosyntactic structures. The research questions are as follows:

• Are the morphosyntactic structures in the textbooks in line with the morphological development hierarchy of PT?

• Do these textbooks complement each other as grade increases throughout the primary school level?

Review of the Literature

PT argues that human mind is limited in short term memory and processing, and in this sense, the language structures that require a higher processing cost can be used later in L2/FL learning. For example, for plural marker -s, the only feature unification is the addition of the plural marker to the noun; however, in a sentence that has subordinate clauses, the processing cost is much higher as the speaker has to consider person markers, argument structure, number, auxiliaries and so on (Pienemann et al., 2005). The processability hierarchy proposed for morphological development for L2 English can be represented as follows (Pienemann, 1998):

Table 1

Processability hierarchy: Morphological development for L2 English (taken from Tang, 2019)

Stage	Processing procedure	Morphology		Example
5	S-procedure	SV agreement (=3sg –s)		**She plays** football on Mondays.
4	VP-procedure	tense	be + V-*ing*	She **is watching** TV.
		agreement	have + V-*ed*	I **have ordered** a new book.
3	NP-procedure	NP agreement		I have **ten bananas**.
2	category procedure	plural –*s* (on nouns)		They're **monkeys**.
		possessive pronoun		It is **your** kite.
		simple past –ed		I **cooked** fish.
1	word/lemma	single words/formulas		**Many thanks!**

In the first stage, the focus is on individual words and some formulaic usages (e.g. Thank you). In the 2nd stage, categorical relations such as plurality, possessive pronouns and the past tense are observed. In this stage, the learner still works at the word level although s/he can add some morphosyntactic structures. In the next stage, the learner can get out of the word itself, and s/he can create noun phrases (NP) paying attention to agreement. In the 4th stage, the learner can use verbs, and s/he can achieve agreement with regard to features such as aspect (have V-ed) and modals. In the final stage, the learner can form full sentences in which s/he can match various features throughout a sentence with regard to subject-verb agreement (SV agreement).

As for the review of the previous literature, the review suggests that there are very few L2/FL studies analyzing textbooks from a PT perspective (Flyman Mattson, 2019; Keßler, 2007; Lenzing, 2008; Tang, 2016; 2019; Wang, 2011; Zipser, 2012), and there are no studies that assess the 5 textbooks in focus in this study. So, this study will be a contribution to this gap.

Lenzing's work (2008) is a ground breaking study in the application of PT in the evaluation of ELT textbooks. It aimed at checking the developmental sequence of L2 acquisition predicted by PT against 2 textbooks for early English education in Germany. The study found that they did not reflect the developmental sequences. Following the PT approach as undertaken by Lenzing (2008), Tang (2016; 2019) undertook an extensive study to investigate the English textbooks used in China from a PT perspective. The findings of the studies showed that the textbooks in focus were partially compatible with the learning outcomes suggested by PT. The textbooks generally followed stages 1-2 according to the hypothesized learning sequence of PT (Pienemann, 1998); however, they showed variation in later stages, and deviations were observed in intermediate and high level textbooks. It was argued that this may be due to the theme-based guidelines adopted in the textbooks.

Some researchers suggested potential answers to why textbooks are not prepared in line with the stages offered by PT in some respects. DeKeyser (2015) suggested that automaticity can be a factor. Some structures may be given in earlier stages as they tend to be used in an automatic way. To exemplify, gerunds may be quite complex structures for beginner level learners, but some basic structures such as "I like reading books" can be used and understood by them thanks to their frequent exposure to it. In line with this, Swain and Lapkin (2002) suggested that learners may use developmentally later morphological structures thanks to frequency of input. Despite these issues, as pointed out in Table 1 above, PT accounted for these issues by providing "formulas" in stage 1, and in this sense, it should be kept in mind that learners can use some complex structures even in stage 1 when they are formulaic or very frequent structures.

To sum up, no previous studies have applied the PT approach to the assessment of English textbooks used in Turkey, and it is also not common in other contexts. There is also a huge gap in the analysis of the primary school context. Hence, this study will be a contribution to the literature by investigating all the 5 textbooks used in public primary schools from the PT perspective of morphosyntactic developmental stages.

Materials and Methods

This study firstly aims to evaluate the 5 English textbooks (Akkabak et al., 2019; Akseki et al., 2019; Tan, 2018; Tan, 2019; Tıraş, 2018) that are currently being used in Turkish public primary schools from the PT perspective individually in terms of morphosyntactic development. As the second goal, this study aims to see whether these textbooks start with the initial stages of PT and move forward in the following grades. To achieve this goal, Textbook Analysis as a part of Document Analysis was undertaken to investigate whether the sequencing of morphological topics are in line with the developmental order offered by PT (Pienemann, 1998). Document Analysis involves the examination of a document (i.e. a textbook) to come up with conclusions (Bloor and Wood, 2006).

The analysis was undertaken on 5 English textbooks used in public primary schools in Turkey. One of them (Tan, 2018) is for the 2nd grade (when English language teaching starts in public schools in Turkey), and there are 2 textbooks for the 3rd (Akkabak et al., 2019; Tıraş, 2018) and 4th grades (Akseki et al., 2019; Tan, 2019). These textbooks are provided to students for free, and they are used in public schools. The textbooks start from the beginner level and by the 5th grade, students are expected to have a proficiency level of around A2. The overall analysis of the textbooks suggests that they focus on vocabulary learning, communication and themes rather than grammar. Grammar topics are usually studied as a byproduct of some other topics and themes.

The Textbook Analysis was undertaken in three steps. Firstly, specific morphosyntactic structures presented in teaching objectives and units were identified. Then, they were analyzed with regard

to the developmental stages (Table 1) offered by (Pienemann, 1998). Finally, the results of each textbook were summarized in a table considering the processability hierarchy, which answers the first research question, and the textbooks were investigated from the 2nd year to the 4th year in a holistic to see whether they complement each other, which answers the 2nd research question.

Results and Discussion

Below, firstly the analysis of each individual textbook with regard to the morphological development stages of PT (Table 1) will be provided, which answers the 1st research question. Then, the 5 textbooks will be compared to track whether the textbooks complement each other throughout the primary school level, which answers the 2nd research question.

Here is the result of Tan (2018) which is used in the 2nd grade.

Table 2 Ordering of Morphological foci in Tan (2018)

Unit	Morphosyntax	Stage
1	Words/formulas	1
2	Possessive Pronouns	2
4	Words/formulas	1
4	Plural –s (on nouns)	2
4	NP-Agreement	3
5	Words/formulas	1
5	NP-Agreement	3
6	Words/formulas	1
6	Possessive Pronouns	2
9	Words/formulas	1
10	Words/formulas	1
10	VP-Agreement	4

The analysis of Tan (2018) shows that most of the morphosyntactic structures provided in this textbook are in the 1st and 2nd developmental stages. The textbook makes use of words/formulas stage frequently by focusing on individual words (e.g. Unit 1), numbers (Unit 4), colors (Unit 5), body parts (Unit 6), and "I like followed by a noun" structure (Units 5, 9, and 10). These show that the textbook successfully focuses on words and formulas in accordance with PT

in beginner levels (Pienemann, 1998). The textbook also presents 2nd stage morphological items such as possessive pronouns (in Units 2 and 6) and plural –s on single words (Unit 4). It should be noted that the possessive pronouns in especially Unit 2 is like formulaic structures as well since it tends to focus on the structures such as "My name is…", "What is your name?". Considering these, despite the few 3rd stage items (NP-Agreement in Units 4 and 5) and the 4th stage Verb-agreement (i.e. modals: "can"), the textbook follows the hierarchical order suggested for morphological development in line with students' level (i.e. beginner). So, it may be suggested that Tan (2018) is organized considering the morphological development of English morphology, and specifically its focus on word level structures are appropriate considering teachability and learnability in this introductory level textbook (Lenzing, 2008).

Table 3 summarizes the analysis of Akkabak et al. (2019) used in the 3rd grade.

Table 3 Ordering of Morphological foci in Akkabak et al. (2019)

Unit	Morphosyntax	Stage
1	Words/formulas	1
2	Words/formulas	1
2	Possessive Pronouns	2
2	NP-Agreement	3
3	Words/formulas	1
3	VP-Agreement	4
4	Words/formulas	1
5	Words/formulas	1
5	NP-Agreement	3
6	Words/formulas	1
6	Possessive Pronouns	2
7	Words/formulas	1
8	Words/formulas	1
9	Words/formulas	1
10	Words/formulas	1
10	NP-Agreement	3

The analysis the 3rd year English textbook Akkabak (2019) shows that it focused on words/ formula level the most, and its structure revolves around the presentation of lexical and functional

items. In this sense, it may be argued that it is quite appropriate considering the PT morphological development hierarchy for beginner level learners. Focusing on stage 1 features may help students to focus their short term memory on making meaning with the language rather than occupying the short term memory with feature unification across phrases and sentences (Pienemann, 1998; Pienemann et al., 2005). Some instances of this are greetings (Unit 1), toys and games (Unit 5), my house (Unit 6), my city (Unit 7) and giving directions as chunks (Unit 8). There is only one morphological structure from stage 4 which is the modal "can". This 4th stage item is against the PT morphological hierarchy as it is not expected in beginner level. This is also observed in 3rd grade textbooks as will be mentioned below. One explanation for this may be because of the focus on functions, frequent items (e.g. colors, numbers and so on) and communicative aspects (e.g. greeting). Consequently, the textbook may prioritize themes over morphological complexity. Tang (2019) also reported this in the analysis of ELT textbooks in China. That study reported that as the textbooks were theme-based, they sometimes introduced structures from higher stages depending on the themes. Although this is against PT hierarchy, it may be argued here that this is not an unacceptable move as there may be various other factors for choosing grammar topics (Cook, 2008). Especially, depending on learners' needs (e.g. English for specific purposes), some structures may be given prominence.

The following table summarizes the findings from Tıraş (2018) that is used in the 3rd grade.

Table 4 Ordering of Morphological foci in Tıraş (2018)

Unit	Morphosyntax	Stage
1	Words/formulas	1
2	Words/formulas	1
	Possessive Pronouns	2
3	Words/formulas	1
	VP-Agreement	4
	Words/formulas	1
5	Words/formulas	1
	NP-Agreement	3
	SV-Agreement	5

	Words/formulas	1
6	NP-Agreement	3
	SV-Agreement	5
7	Words/formulas	1
8	Words/formulas	1
	VP-Agreement	4
9	Words/formulas	1
	Words/formulas	1
10	Plural –s (on nouns)	2
	NP-Agreement	3

The analysis shows that Tıraş (2018) provides many stage 1 instances (e.g. greeting in Unit 1, basic adjectives in Unit 3, and weather in Unit 9) which are suitable for learners' level. There are also various stage 2 and 3 structures such as possessive pronouns, plural -s on nouns, and NP-agreement. However, this textbook presents higher stages strikingly more than the 2nd grade and the other 3rd grade textbook. Especially, structures on SV-agreement from stage 5 can be challenging (Pienemann, 1998) as learners have beginner level proficiency. Then, it is suggested here that although Tıraş (2018) successfully sticks to the PT hierarchy by providing many low level morphosyntactic structures, it also provides instances that may be high according to PT considering target students' proficiency level.

Table 5 summarizes the analysis of the 4th grade Tan (2019).

Table 5 Ordering of Morphological foci in Tan (2019)

Unit	Morphosyntax	Stage
1	Words/formulas	1
2	Words/formulas	1
3	Possessive Pronouns	2
	VP-Agreement	4
4	Words/formulas	1
	VP-Agreement	4
6	NP-Agreement	3
7	Words/formulas	1
	VP-Agreement	4

8	Words/formulas	1
	Possessive Pronouns	2
	SV-Agreement	5
9	Words/formulas	1
	SV-Agreement	5
10	Words/formulas	1

When the results are checked, it can be suggested that the stages are in line with the students' level as it ranges between stages 1 and 4. They do not seem to move in a linear fashion, however, it tends to focus on stages 1 and 2. The morphological structures such as possessive pronouns (which is the focus of the unit) in Unit 3 and Unit 8, and prepositions in Unit 6 are quite appropriate for the target level (Pienemann, 1998). There are several morphological structures from stage 4 that are "like plus gerund" structure in Units 4 and 7, and the modal "can" in Unit 4. The use of a stage 4 structure may seem inappropriate from PT hierarchy; however, other selection criteria for grammar such as frequency and saliency of the meaning may be at work. As argued in the 2nd year textbook Tan (2018), "can" is a very frequent modal, and it has a salient meaning. Moreover, with regard toautomaticity (DeKeyser, 2015) and frequency of input (Swain and Lapkin, 2002), it is not expected to lead to big problems especially considering that there is only one item from stage 4. In this sense, it can be seen as acceptable in the beginner level. There is also a 5th stage SV agreement regarding the verb "to have" in Units 8 and 9. This will be discussed in detail below.

Table 6 summarizes the analysis of Akseki et al. (2019) used in the 4th grade.

Table 6 Ordering of Morphological foci in Akseki et al. (2019)

Unit	Morphosyntax	Stage
1	Words/formulas	1
2	Words/formulas	1
3	Possessive Pronouns	2
	VP-Agreement	4
4	VP-Agreement	4
5	Words/formulas	1
6	Words/formulas	1

7	Words/formulas	1
	VP-Agreement	4
8	Words/formulas	1
	VP-Agreement	4
9	Words/formulas	1
	Possessive Pronouns	2
	SV-Agreement	5
10	Words/formulas	1

The analysis of the morphological structures suggests that the textbook is in general appropriate for the students as it focuses on stage 1 and varies between stages 1 and 4. The textbook often provides content based on words and formulaic uses in stage 1 (e.g. Unit 5 "My day" and Unit 7 "Jobs"). Another observation worth mentioning is that it first introduces possessive pronouns (stage 2) in Unit 3 and then, in Unit 9 it provides possessive pronouns again, but this time together with the verb "to have" for possession. This is also observed in Tan (2019) (in Units 3, 8, and 9). This shows thatthe textbook presents topics in i+1 fashion (Krashen, 1982). It presents the stage 4 structure "like plus a gerund" in Units 4 (e.g. I like coloring books, p. 49) and 7. It also introduces the modal "can" in Unit 3. As discussed above, these structures do not seem to be very problematic considering their frequency and saliency in interaction.

One final observation that is worth mentioning, which seems to be against PT hierarchy, is the inclusion of stage 5 items in Tıraş 3rd grade (1998), Tan 4th grade (2019) and Akseki et al. (2019) 4th grade textbooks. A close analysis shows that these 4 instances of stage 5 structure (SV Agreement) has only one single focus, which is the verb"to have". In line with PT, SV agreement proves to be difficult for learners, and although it may seem easy from the perspective of teacher (i.e. you simply add an –s or use "has" when the subject is he/she/it or a singular subject), students tend to have problems in acquiring it (Pienemann, 1998). This is due to the non-linear organization of sentences in human languages. In other words, the third person –s marker is not a simple addition of a morpheme to a verb. It is a structure that goes out of a phrase and requires feature unification regarding person and number with

the noun phrase as the subject (Pienemann et al., 2005). This explains why it proves to be challenging for students, and that is why is suggested to be postponed in language learning (Pienemann, 1998). However, still the textbooks may have introduced this structure due to frequency of its use in daily life (Swain andLapkin, 2002). Tang (2019) on the other hand suggested that 3rd person -s should not be presented as an obligatory structure in the beginner level textbooks or the beginning units of textbooks. Hence, it may be suggested here that especially beginner levels textbooks should focus on this structure as a formulaic expression and teach it as a chunk in a limited context.

In accordance with the 2nd research question that aims to investigate whether the 5 textbooks complement each other as grade increases throughout the primary school, the textbooks have been evaluated together. The summary of the findings has been presented below. Each "+" in the table indicates an instance of that specificstage.

Table 7 Occurrences of PT Morphological Items in the 5 Textbooks

Textbooks	Stage 1: Word/lemma	Stage 2: Category p.	Stage 3: NP-procedure	Stage 4: VP-p.	Stage 5: S- p.
Tan (2018)	++++++	+++	++	+	
Akkabak (2019) et al.	++++++++++	++	+++	++	
Tıraş (2018)	++++++++++	++	+++	++	++
Tan (2019)	+++++++	++	+	+++	++
Akseki et al. (2019)	++++++++	++		++++	+

Looking at the 5 textbooks together, it may be suggested that morphological complexity increases from the 2nd grade to the 4th. As seen in the 2nd grade Tan (2018), most of the units present stage 1 morphosyntactic structures, and there are few instances above stage 2. In the 3rd grade Akkabak et al. (2019) and Tıraş (2018), stages 1 and 2 still dominate; however, it can be seen that there are more structures from stages 3 and 4. Tıraş (2018) even introduces structures from stage 5. When the 4th grade textbooks Tan (2019) and Akseki et al. (2019) are investigated, it may be suggested that they include more and more structures from stages 4 and 5. While the stages 4 and 5are rare in the textbooks in the 2nd and 3rd grades (except for Tıraş, 2018; however, it only presents the verb "to have" as discussed above under Akseki et al. 2019), they increase in number in the 4th grade. Considering all these results, it may be suggested that there is a move along the morphology development hierarchy of PT (Pienemann, 1998). When the results are compared to some other studies in the literature (Lenzing, 2008; Tang, 2016; 2019), it can be suggested that the textbooks in this study complywith PT more. They not only stick to the developmental stages in a general sense, but also complement each other throughout the primary school level. This may be due to the fact that the textbooks in this study are more recent. As they have just been prepared, the developers of them may have had the chance to follow the cutting-edge issues in ELT.

While, Akseki et al. (2019) exposed students to stage 4 structure "like plus gerund" more often, both 4th grade textbooks directly focused on "like plus gerund structure". It could have been better if they had first introduced "like plus a noun" (e.g. I like books) in initial units, which is a stage 1 morphological item, as it works at word/lemma level. One hierarchical organization that is expected to be beneficial in Akseki et al. (2019) is regarding possession. The textbook successfully introduces possessive pronouns first (stage 2), and then, it revises it again which is followed by possession in the form of the verb "to have" that is a stage 4 structure. These recurring structures are presented in a constructive way, and the textbook increases morphological complexity by adding the features of later stages (Pienemann et al., 2005) in the next recurring instances (e.g. introducing possessive pronouns at stage 2 first, and then introducing verbs used for showing possession at stage 4). This also increases the exposure to the morphological structure by providing frequent communicative input (Krashen, 1985; Krashen, 2016; Shintani and Ellis, 2011; Sugiharto, 2016).

Conclusion

This study has set out to evaluate the 5 textbooks individually considering the stages of the morphosyntactic structures they provide in their units. Then, the 5 textbooks from the 2nd grade to the 4th grade have been analyzed and synthesized to investigate whether they complement each other throughout the primary school level. The analysis of the textbooks has shown that their focus on word level structures (stage 1) is appropriate considering teachability and learnability in these beginner level textbooks. In this sense, these textbooks are expected to provide students with the input that is suitable for their current developmental stage. The findings regarding the modal "can" (stage 4) and 3rd person –s marker (stage 5) seem to be deviant considering the PT morphosyntactic hierarchy. This is probably due to the theme based nature of the textbooks, and also there are other selection criteria for grammar such as frequency and saliency of the meaning. "Can" is a very frequent modal, and its meaning is salient. In this sense, it can be seen as acceptable in beginning levels. As for the 3rd person –s, regarding the PT hierarchy, it is suggested that this structure may prove to be problematic although it seems to be a simple structure as discussed in Results and Discussion above. On the other hand, a close analysis has shown that these instances of stage 5 structure have only one single focus, which is the verb "to have". In this sense, it may be seen as a formulaic expression. Hence, it may be suggested here that when the textbooks introduce this structure, they should focus on it as a formulaic expression, and teachers should limit their expectations regarding its smooth use by students.

The holistic analysis of the 5 textbooks at primary school level suggest that, with the exception of Tıraş (2018) with the stage 5 structure, they complement each other from the 2nd grade to the 4th. The analysis has shown that the complexity of morphological structures increased in the 3rd and 4th grades textbooks, which suggest that they work in a constructive way and build upon each other hierarchically. This is a worthy finding in that these textbooks were mostly prepared by different researchers, but still they lead students throughout the morphosyntactic development hierarchy.

As for the limitations, this study is limited to the study of only morphological structures. Syntactic structures may also be studied from a processability perspective. Also, the analysis was undertaken on the focal topics in each unit. However, quite naturally, the units of the textbooks may delve into some other topics in units, and different morphological structures may also be used incidentally. These incidental usages were not taken into consideration due to time and space limitation, but also, as these instances are incidental, they are not presented in a patterned way. This would make the study of them unreliable and random. Finally, this study provided a sketch of the primary school English textbooks in public schools in Turkey. Further studies can investigate the textbooks in levels other than the primary school, and also textbooks in different contexts and countries can be investigated.

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Author Details

Cihat Atar, *Sakarya University, Turkey,* **Email ID:** *cihatatar@sakarya.edu.tr.*