DESCRIPTION OF SEQUENCING OF GRAMMAR LEARNING ACTIVITIES IN A SAMPLE COURSEBOOK: SPRING 6

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ABSTRACT

Recently, various premises have underpinned the primary education in Turkey. Among these premises, one of the most striking was implementing the teaching of English as part of the primary education in 1997. With the introduction of English at the primary education level, the need for appropriate coursebooks and a new curriculum emerged. The Ministry of Education published some materials to meet this need, the last of which is the "English Language Curriculum for Primary Education" in 2006. New coursebooks were written and published in light of this curriculum. This study aims to analyze the grammar activities in a coursebook named Spring 6 for sixth graders in public schools. The analysis has been based on the terms of Batstone's three ways of sequencing grammar learning activities, which are; noticing, structuring, and proceduralizing.

Key Words: *Grammar, Noticing, Structuring, Proceduralizing*

ÖZET

Son zamanlarda Türkiye'de ilköğretim düzeyinde yabancı dil öğretiminde önemli gelişmeler yaşanmıştır. Bu gelişmeler içerisinde en çok dikkat çekenlerden birisi 1997 yılında yabancı dil olarak İngilizce öğretiminin ilköğretim düzeyinde uygulamaya konmasıdır. İlköğretim düzeyinde yabancı dil öğretimiyle beraber bu gereksinimi karşılayacak uygun ders kitaplarına ve müfredata gereksinim duyulmuştur. Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı bu gereksinimi karşılamak için bir takım çalışmalar yapmıştır. Bu çalışmalardan birisi de 2006 yılında yayınlanan M.E.B. İlköğretim İngilizce Dersi (4, 5, 6, 7 ve 8. Sınıflar) Öğretim Programıdır. Bu müfredat kapsamında yeni ders kitapları yayımlanmıştır. Bu çalışma ilköğretim okullarında okutulmakta olan Spring 6 adlı kitapta yer alan dilbilgisi

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etkinliklerini incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. İnceleme, Batstone'un farketme, yapılandırma ve yordamsallaştırma olarak adlandırdığı dilbilgisi etkinliklerinin sıralanmasının üç yolu bağlamında yapılmıştır.

Anahtar Sözcükler: *Dilbilgisi,   Farketme,   Yapılandırma, Yordamsallaştırma*

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INTRODUCTION

When taking into consideration how different teaching English to young learners is when compared to adults (in terms of age, needs, learner profiles and interests) one should think that there's no need to include grammar in a young learner classroom. Cameron (2001:96) thinks that grammar does indeed have a place in children's foreign language learning, and that skillful grammar teaching can be useful. In order to understand whether grammar teaching is essential or not in the foreign language pedagogy, it is necessary to focus on what is understood by the term 'grammar', especially by looking at different views of scholars in the field.

Batstone (1994: 224) approaches grammar as a dynamic; as a resource which language users exploit as they navigate their way through discourse. He also points out that:

> *"Grammar consists of two fundamental ingredients -syntax and morphology- and together they help us to identify grammatical forms, which serve to enhance and sharpen the expression of meaning. … A study of grammar (syntax and morphology) reveals a structure and regularity which lies at the basis of language and enables us to talk of the 'language system'.*
> *Just as it would be impossible to describe language without seeking out this underlying framework, so it would be impossible to learn a language effectively without drawing on grammar in some way." (ibid:4)*

Some scholars like Ur and Hedge (in Ellis, 2005:84) view grammar teaching as the presentation and practice of discrete grammatical structures, but Ellis (ibid.: 84) thinks that such an understanding constitutes an overly narrow definition of grammar teaching. He points out that presentation and practice might take place separately in grammar lessons, and sometimes learners can discover grammatical rules for themselves without presentation and practice provided to them. He also gives a definition of grammar in the same study as below:

"Grammar teaching involves any instructional technique that draws learners' attention to some specific grammatical form in such a way that it helps them either to understand it metalinguistically and/or process it in comprehension and/or production so that they can internalize it" (ibid:84).

Paul Nation accepts grammar teaching as part of the language-focused instruction, which he lists as four strands of a balanced language course. These strands include meaning focused listening and reading, language-focused instruction, meaning-focused speaking and writing, and fluency development activities.

A number of scholars like Canale and Swain (1980) suggest that grammar competence[1] is one of the constituents of communicative competence, such as discourse competence, sociolinguistic competence, and strategic competence. This view supports the idea that well-grounded grammar knowledge has a significant role in becoming fluent in the target language. This understanding approaches grammatical rules as one of the fundamental aspects of speaking skill, and supports the idea that grammar teaching should not be ignored while teaching this skill.

In addition to the point of views mentioned above, another perspective on exploring grammar in the classroom is the distinction between teaching grammar as a product, process and skill. Product approaches segment the target language into discrete items, in order to present each item separately. and the assumption behind these approaches is that learners have an ability to learn a language in parts, and language is analyzable into a finite set of rules -- which can be combined in various ways to make meaning for communicative purposes. (Cuesta, 1996: 103; Crookes and Long, 1992: 28). Secondly, the process approach explicitly aims 'to develop the skills and strategies of the discourse process, constructing tasks which learners can use to express themselves more effectively as discourse participants'(Batstone: 1995: 74). This process approach is sometimes referred to as the task-based approach. The last approach is the teaching of grammar as a skill. This approach 'aims to help learners make the leap from the careful control of grammar as a product, to the effective use of grammar as a process. When we teach grammar as a skill, the learner is required to attend to grammar, while working on tasks which retain an emphasis on language use (ibid:52)'. These three approaches to grammar teaching are summarized in the following figure:

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[1] *Grammatical competence is an umbrella concept that includes increasing expertise in grammar (morphology, syntax), vocabulary, and mechanics, (Scarcella and Oxford, 1992:141).*

Table 1: Three Approaches to Teaching Grammar (Batstone, 1995:53)

TEACHING GRAMMAR AS PRODUCT	TEACHING GRAMMAR AS PROCESS	TEACHING GRAMMAR AS SKILL
helps learners to notice and to structure by focusing on specified forms and meanings	gives learners practice in the skills of language use, allowing them to proceduralize their knowledge	carefully guides learners to utilize grammar for their own communication

When it comes to the place of teaching grammar and young learners, Cameron (2001:98) lists several starting points:

- *grammar is necessary to express precise meanings in discourse;*
- *grammar ties closely into vocabulary in learning and using the foreign language;*
- *grammar learning can evolve from the learning of chunks of language;*
- *talking about something meaningful with the child can be a useful way to introduce new grammar;*
- *grammar can be taught without technical labels (e.g. 'intensifying adverb')*

The main focus in teaching grammar to young learners is on building up the grammatical awareness rather than cognitive grammatical knowledge. There has been a shift from the traditional cognitive approach of grammar teaching, and this shift is that now the focus is on language use and not language knowledge (Legutke, et.al. 2009: 69). Teubner (in Legutke ibid.) summarizes the reasons for the necessity of an approach which advocates a more explicit teaching of grammatical awareness for young learners, as follows:

- *Children of primary school age have the cognitive requirements necessary for awareness.*
- *Children confuse many things without awareness.*
- *Using awareness in English classes in primary school as a learning aid (especially for the weak students) is very essential.*
- *Many students need support leading to awareness, and they want this support.*

One significant way of raising grammatical awareness (in both children and adults) is by presenting grammar activities in a sequenced way, as Batstone (ibid.) suggests.

SEQUENCING OF GRAMMAR LEARNING ACTIVITIES

Batstone suggests sequencing of grammar learning activities in three stages; noticing, structuring and proceduralizing.

NOTICING

Noticing, the first phase of learning grammar, is defined by Ellis (2003:346, 2005:49) as a cognitive process that involves attending to linguistic form in the input learners receive and the output they produce. The process between the input and output relationship is a long way, and a learner does not acquire a structure at once. There are certain processes that the learner should go through, one of which is the noticing process. Noticing takes place when a student becomes aware of a specific structure and works on the relationship between form and meaning. Hedge (2000: 146) similarly points out that 'after items have been noticed and the relationship between form and meaning interpreted, these items become part of intake into the learning process.

There are some requirements for noticing to be enhanced. One of them is that the learner should find the new language significant (Batstone, op.cit.:40). It shouldn't be understood that each grammar structure is noticeable at the same level at all times. Depending on the occasion, grammar might be less or more noticeable. When comprehension depends on a certain form or expression being understood, it is more likely for this form to be noticed and become intake. The language teacher should keep this in mind and be realistic while making his decisions on how noticeable a language item is. For example, the third singular 's' does not have an indispensable role in comprehending a sentence where it takes place, and it is less likely to be noticed by the students when compared to other grammatical items. In such a case, a more explicit teaching of this structure is needed.

Successful noticing activities have some features in common and Cameron (op.cit: 109) emphasizes that these kinds of noticing activities will usually

- support meaning as well as form;
- present the form in isolation, as well as in a discourse and linguistic context;
- contrast the form with other, already known forms;
- require active participation by the learner;

- be at a level of detail appropriate to the learners – a series of noticing activities may 'zoom in' on details;
- lead into but not include activities that manipulate language

Activities like 'listen and notice', and 'presentation of new language with puppets' are the ones that can make noticing more probable. In a listen and notice activity, the students are expected to complete a table or a grid according to a text they listen to. The important point in such an activity is that the missing information should be the grammatical pattern or item that the teacher wants to be noticed by the students. The activity below is a good example of this kind of listen and notice activity taken from Halliwell's (1992: 44) book 'Teaching English in the Primary Classroom' which is also cited by Cameron (op.cit. : 115).

Figure 1: Listening Grid (from Halliwell 1992: 44)

Activity **2**
Listening grid
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Here is another activity suitable for your 'core'. It too is intended to provide active response to new language. For this activity, the children have to mark on a matrix or grid the information read out by the teacher. The example below is practising prepositions. The teacher has so far read out:

'The cup is on the table.'
'The cat is under the chair.'
'The girl is in front of the tree.'

Language focus in this example: Describing where things are.

STRUCTURING

Structuring takes place when a learner brings the new grammar structure or pattern into his internal grammar. The learner's internal grammar is reorganized by the new coming pattern. Batstone (ibid.: 59) points out that 'once having noticed something about the grammar, learners have to act on it, building it into their working hypothesis about how grammar is structured. They do this, …, through the processes of structuring and restructuring'. In structuring, controlled practice around form and meaning and active involvement of the learner are essential. He also makes a distinction between activities which have learners working around target grammar (which has been carefully structured for the learner) and activities which require active structuring by the learner. In other words, structuring by the learner means a great deal of active involvement by the learner. In structuring activities:

- *learners should manipulate the language, changing form in order to express meaning;*
- *learners can be given choices in content that require adjustments in grammar to express meaning;*
- *there will be limited impact on spontaneous use – most of the results of structuring work are still internal (Cameron, ibid.: 109).*

As could be understood from the features above, structuring activities mainly focus on accuracy rather than fluency. Teachers should pre-plan and make sure that there is sufficient practice of the particular form in the activities or tasks. Some of the language practice activities that offer structuring opportunities are suggested as questionnaires, surveys and quizzes; information gap activities, helping hands and drills and chants (ibid.116-118). It might be beneficial to exemplify structure activities by commenting on the drills. Thornbury (2006: 71) defines drill as the repetitive oral practice of a language item, whether a sound, a word, a phrase or a sentence structure. There are different kinds of drills, such as imitation, substitution, and variable substitution drills. Imitation drills involve simply repeating the prompt:

Teacher: She is reading the newspaper.
Student: She is reading the newspaper.

In substitution drills the students need to substitute the prompt, making any necessary adjustments, as in:

Teacher: She is reading the newspaper.
Student: She is reading the newspaper.
Teacher: He
Student: He is reading the newspaper.

Teacher: We
Student: We are reading the newspaper.

What makes variable substitution drills unique is that the prompts are not restricted to one element of the pattern:

Teacher: She is reading the newspaper.
Student: She is reading the newspaper.
Teacher: He
Student: He is reading the newspaper.
Teacher: The book
Student: He is reading the book.

Thornbury (ibid) points out that drills in communicative language teaching are more than tools to reinforce good language habits. They are used with the purpose of developing accuracy, or as a form of fluency training, i.e., in order to develop automaticity. A communicative drill has much more to offer in language classes than the drill examples above, because it has an information gap element (in addition to being repetitive and focusing on a specific structure). A good example of such an information gap activity, which also reinforces structuring, is as follows:

Figure 2: Find Someone who Activity (Rinvolucri, 2005:37).

Completion sheet: Past simple active and passive (You need 1 per student)

Name(s)	Find a person who...
....	was conceived in December
....	was born at home
....	was born in June
....	was breast-fed
....	liked carrots as a child
....	was looked after for three months by a grandmother or an aunt
....	was sent to kindergarten at the age of 2
....	was an only child
....	was sent to school at 5½
....	was forced to eat fish
....	was made to clean his/her teeth
....	had more than 15 cousins
....	was dressed-up for Sundays/feast days
....	was spanked for stealing apples/yams/grapes
....	disliked birthdays
....	was given a bike at the age of 6
....	was often made to stand in the corner
....	was caught smoking at 7
....	was sent away for holidays

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PROCEDURALIZING

Proceduralizing is helping the learner to reach a stage of making grammar which is ready to be used fluently in communication. Proceduralization requires sustained practice in using grammar when the reins have been loosened and when learners are negotiating their own meanings. (Batstone,op.cit: 73). What makes activities for proceduralizing different from any normal communicative activities is the emphasis put on grammar as well as effective communication. According to Cameron (op.cit. 109,118), this can be done by gradually adjusting task pressures, and by decreasing the time allowed. For example, as the grammar forms are becoming automatised, teachers can help push proceduralization forwards. In other words, attention to accuracy can gradually be relaxed as it becomes automatic. She suggests dictogloss activity as a good example of proceduralizing activities:

> *"The basic idea of Dictogloss is that the teacher reads out a text several times, the pupils listen and make notes between readings, and then reconstruct the text in pairs or small groups, aiming to be as close as possible to the original and as accurate as possible. During the collaborative reconstruction, learners will talk to each other about the language, as well as the content, drawing on and making their internal grammatical knowledge… Younger children might be given the words of a rhyme or chant on little cards. Their reconstruction task would be to the cards in the correct order. This would probably lead to them repeating the rhyme many times over as they try to work out the order. They would need to pay attention to the form of words and the word order to complete the task, so that accuracy would be required at a level above spelling" (ibid. 119,120)*

DISTRIBUTION OF ACTIVITIES IN 'SPRING 6' IN TERMS OF NOTICING, STRUCTURING AND PROCEDULIZING

The new curriculum revised in 2006 suggests a new approach in language teaching and learning "to the extent that the Turkish national education policy and curriculum allows". The best seems to adopt a topic-based approach, where topics are selected in a cross-curricular manner. The goals and objectives should be set on a functional-notional and skills-based model" (English Language Curriculum for Primary Education, 2006:24). The study is based on the analysis of the activities in the coursebook Spring 6 (Şilit and Arslantürk, 2008a), which is designed compatible with this curriculum proposal. The book aims to 'help learners learn English in a communicative way with the help of a variety of functional and communicative exercises and activities' (Şilit and Arslantürk, 2008b: 10). The reason for analyzing Spring 6 instead of any of the other coursebooks used in different grades in the state primary schools is

that sixth grade is at the middle of the English language teaching process in primary schools. Teaching English starts at 4th grade and ends at the 8th grade in primary schools. The book consists of 16 units. The names of the units, such as 'Family', Hobbies and Interests' and 'Hygiene' reflect a topic-based approach, as stated in the curriculum. This perspective makes it easier to implement a skills-based approach in the book. There are no specific grammar notes or sections in the book, but this does not mean that there is no place for grammar teaching. Grammar teaching is distributed among the activities without naming them as grammar activities. In this study, firstly, the grammar activities or activities which also address developing a grammar structure have been identified and counted. After this identification process, they have been classified in terms of Batstone's approach on sequencing grammar activities, which are; noticing, structuring and proceduralizing. The researcher has labeled the activities according to the features of noticing, structuring, and proceduralizing, as mentioned before in the study. There are a total of 75 activities addressing grammar structures. The distribution of the activities can be seen in the chart below:

Chart 1: The distribution of the grammar activities in Spring 6
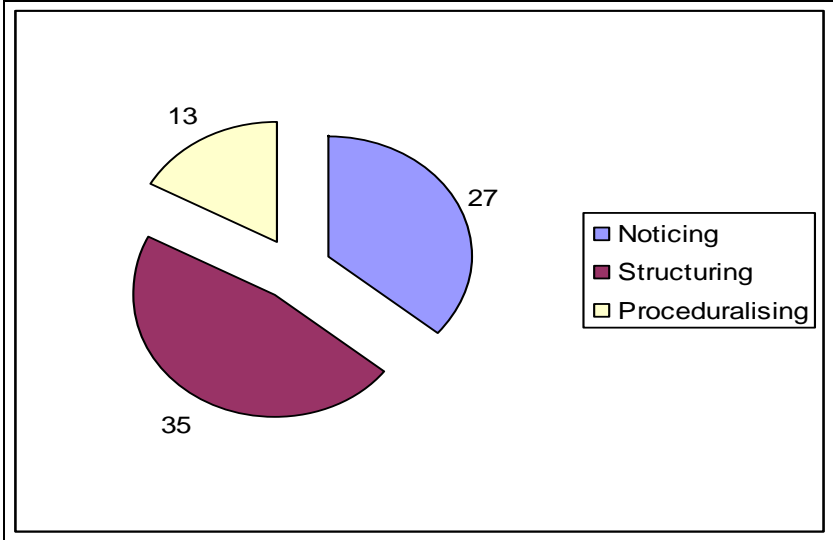
Of these activities, 35 are noticing activities. An example of the noticing activities in the book is as follows:

Figure 3: Family tree activity (pp. 12-13)

In the activity above, the grammatical focus is on 'have got - has got' structures and possessive nouns. There is no direct explanation for the students that the grammatical focus is on these structures. This is the strategy implemented in the book all through the noticing activities.

The number of structuring activities is 27. Unlike noticing activities, it is possible to find a direct instruction regarding the grammatical structure and controlled practice around form and meaning. As mentioned before, there are two types of structuring activities; activities which have learners working around target grammar (which has been carefully structured for the learner), and activities which require active structuring by the learner. Most of the structuring activities in the book belong to the first group, which are the ones structured for the learner. So it is not very common to find a learner's active involvement in these activities. For instance, the activity below is a good example of the ones structured for the learner:

Figure 4: A letter to Ted activity (pp.15)

C. Writing

a. Fill in the blanks with *have got, has got, haven't got* or *hasn't got.*

Dear Ted,

You are lucky. You (1)____*have got*____ a big family.

There are only seven people in my family; my father, my mother, Uncle Jack, Aunt Kate, Aunt Jenny, Sandy and me.

I (2)_____ any brothers or sisters, but my mother (3)_____ a brother. Uncle Jack is married. His wife's name's Kate. Uncle Jack and Aunt Kate (4)_____ a daughter. My cousin's name is Sandy.

My father (5)_____ a brother, but he (6)_____ a sister. Aunt Jenny is 18 and she is a student at university.

We (7)_____ a big house with a small garden, but we (8)_____ any pets.

Love, Sam

The last group of activities is proceduralizing activities. 13 out of 75 grammar activities belong to this group. Many of these activities do not offer an explicit opportunity for proceduralization, and the students are not negotiating their meanings. However, some of the activities let the students use the grammatical knowledge that has already entered the internal grammar through noticing and structuring. The activities below are examples of this kind:

Figure 5: **'Describing an animal' and 'Writing a paragraph about the animal' activities. (pp. 97)**

d. Choose an animal from Part Aa. Describe it using the information in the chart, but don't say its name. Your classmates try to find out which animal it is.

It is _____
It has got _____

Is it a _____?

Yes it is.

D. Writing

Now write a short paragraph about your animal.

Use the ideas:

♦ What is it like?   ♦ Where does it live?   ♦ What does it like / dislike?

Activity 'd' is a speaking activity, and activity 'D' is a writing activity (focusing on the same points, both in terms of meaning and form). The students

are expected to describe their animals to their classmates. As Cameron (op.cit.: 119) points out, the production of a description to the whole class is a useful proceduralizing activity, because it will justify attention to getting forms exactly right through rehearsing and writing down a text.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

To ensure that children have the opportunity to use a wide range of language, teachers must include a variety of task types, based on games, stories, collaborative problem-solving or information-gap activities, which will provide (wherever possible) a context and audience for the production of spoken and written language (Brumfit et.al., 1991: 7). This commonly accepted and shared point of view of Brumfit doesn't contradict with the idea of teaching grammar in the teaching of young learners, as many practitioners or coursebook writers (including the authors of the Spring 6) believe. The authors of Spring 6 (op.cit.) emphasize that 'children do not tend to learn grammar rules or correct usage; they tend to use the language, and communicate with the language freely without worrying about grammar rules. They also say that in order to create a natural atmosphere in the classroom, the book 'offers a great variety of games, puzzles, songs, chants, and bodily-kinesthetic activities, such as drawing and coloring and so on.' There are 375 activities in the book, and only 75 of these address developing grammar structures, directly or indirectly. This percentage clearly shows that there is not sufficient focus on form and meaning through grammar activities in the book. When considering the cognitive development of the sixth graders and the time passed since English teaching was first introduced to them at the 4th grade, it is appropriate to focus on grammar even directly. As stated before if grammar teaching is neglected in English classes in primary schools, it would be impossible for the students to learn and use the language effectively. In terms of teaching grammar as product, most of the noticing activities do not carry main features of successful noticing activities such as presenting the form in isolation, contrasting the form with already known forms and being at a level of detail appropriate to the learners. Many of the noticing activities in the book do not help the students notice the relationship between form and meaning, so it is difficult for the students to make the grammar items presented in the book become part of intake. It is easy to understand that the authors aim to teach a grammatical form in the units but it less likely for these forms to be noticed and become intake because comprehension does not depend on these forms or structures.

Structuring activities in the book, which also reflect teaching grammar as product like noticing activities, do not provide sufficient chances for students to manipulate the language and change form in order to express meaning. However, most of these activities focus on accuracy rather than fluency, which

is a feature of structuring activities. When taking the number of structuring activities into consideration, it is not easy to say that there is sufficient practice of particular forms in the book. This insufficiency may lead to a delay in the students' becoming accurate and fluent user of the target language.

The proceduralizing activities in Spring 6, which reflect the understanding of teaching grammar as process rather than product, are not of adequate number. Only 13 proceduralizing activities throughout the book can not help the students reach a stage of making grammar which is ready to be used fluently in communication. More chances of proceduralizing should be provided to the students in order to reach this aim.

As mentioned before, grammar has a place in teaching English to young learners, and it "can" be easily adapted to meet the needs of the learners when implemented into the programs by policy-makers, coursebook writers or teachers as the decision-makers and material designers (Cameron, et.al. :96, Gordon,2007: 118). When thinking about coursebooks, such as Spring 6, as they are provided to millions of students by the Ministry of Education, it is essential to place more focus on form and meaning through grammar activities. A balance must be found between these activities in terms of noticing, structuring and proceduralizing, depending on the needs of the learners. The quality of the grammar activities in coursebooks is as important as the quantity of them. In other words, they should carry the features of successful noticing, structuring and proceduralizing acitivities such as supporting meaning as well as form, being at a level of detail appropriate to the learners, providing a great deal of active involvement by the learners and help learners gain grammatical competence.

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