

THE MISSING GAP BETWEEN SPOKEN GRAMMAR AND ENGLISH TEXTBOOKS IN TURKEY¹

Cemal KARAATA

Asst. Prof. Dr. ,Fatih University Faculty of Education Department of English Language Teaching,
cemal98@hotmail.com

Adem SORUÇ

Ph.D. Candidate, Yeditepe University, Faculty of Education Department of English Language Teaching
adem_soruc@hotmail.com

ABSTRACT: The discrepancy between written and spoken grammar of English has been largely identified through corpora studies. The noted differences are significant enough to be incorporated in writing ELT textbooks though some recent studies (Timmis, 2005; Cullen and Kuo, 2007) show there is not adequate interest among textbook writers in this respect. This study evaluates English textbooks used in Turkish primary and high schools from a spoken grammar perspective. 18 textbooks have been examined intensively using a checklist of spoken grammar features, both qualitatively and quantitatively. The present study indicates that spoken grammar features are generally not encountered in textbooks adequately except for ellipsis and lexico-grammatical units. A number of suggestions are offered for more adequate and comprehensive incorporation of the noted features into the textbooks, especially into those designed for students aiming to learn English to be able to communicate.

Keywords: corpora studies, spoken grammar, written grammar, spoken grammar features, textbook evaluation

TÜRKİYE'DE BASILAN İNGİLİZCE DERS KİTAPLARINDA KONUŞMA DİLİ GRAMERİ İLE İLGİLİ
GÖRÜLEN EKSİKLER?

ÖZET: Söz varlığı çalışmaları sonucunda İngilizce'nin yazılı ve sözlü dilbilgisi arasındaki farklar büyük oranda saptanmıştır. Bu farklar, İngilizce ders kitaplarının yazımında önemli bir rol oynayacak kadar önemli olmalarına rağmen, son zamanlarda yapılan bazı çalışmalar (Timmis, 2005; Cullen ve Kuo, 2007) bu bağlamda ders kitabı yazarları arasında yeterince ilginin uyanmamış olduğunu göstermektedir. Bu çalışma, Türkiye'de ilköğretim okullarında ve liselerde kullanılan İngilizce ders kitaplarını sözlü dilbilgisi açısından incelemektedir. 18 ders kitabı içerdikleri sözlü dilbilgisi özellikleri açısından nitel ve nicel olarak bir kontrol listesi temel alınarak incelenmiştir. Bu çalışma, bir cümle içinde anlamı bozulmadan bir ya da birkaç sözcüğün atılması (ellipsis) ve kendi başına anlamı olmadığı halde daha büyük söz öbekleriyle birleştiklerinde anlam ifade eden sözcük-dilbilgisel birimler (lexico-grammatical units) haricinde sözlü dilbilgisi özelliklerine rastlanmadığını ortaya koymaktadır. Makalede, daha yeterli ve kapsamlı bir şekilde bu özelliklerin ders kitaplarında (özellikle de İngilizce'yi iletişim amaçlı öğrenenlere yönelik ders kitaplarında) yer alması ile ilgili bir takım öneriler sunulmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Söz varlığı çalışmaları, sözlü dilbilgisi, yazılı dilbilgisi, sözlü dilbilgisi özellikleri, ders kitabı incelemesi

INTRODUCTION

Over the past decade the amount of corpus studies and the interest in the grammar of spoken English has burgeoned. Thanks to this growth, we are now more informed than ever before about how native speakers (NSs) interact with

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each other and what kind of spontaneous NS speech they have. Indeed, this curiosity has culminated with the publication of the two major studies which are Longman Grammar of Spoken and Written English (Biber et al., 1999) and the Cambridge Grammar of English (Carter and McCarthy, 2006), among many others.

About a decade ago, Timmis (2002) implemented a study consisting of 600 teachers and learners from 45 different countries. In the main analysis, he arrived at a conclusion that two thirds of the participants deemed that teaching and learning spoken grammar forms were important. More recently, Cullen and Kuo (2007) drew attention to the fact that English as a Foreign Language (EFL) textbooks published in the United Kingdom since the year 2000 cover features of spoken grammar inadequately and even that some common syntactic structures are ignored or confined to advanced levels. They claim that the link between the corpus studies and pedagogical practice is disregarded and there is a missing link between the two.

Similar to Cullen and Kuo (2007), this study conducted a content analysis on 18 general EFL textbooks published in Turkey both by the Ministry of National Education (MoNE) and by the publishing houses which the MoNE has approved and allowed (henceforth when we use the term 'published' we mean both published directly by the MoNE or by approved Turkish publishing houses). The main impetus of the present study is to unveil whether there is such a disregarded insight in the published EFL textbooks in Turkey. The research we report on here was our attempts;

- a) to find out qualitatively whether the fact Cullen and Kuo (2007) arrived in the UK is true in Turkey by selecting and evaluating 18 EFL textbooks published by the MoNE in Turkey
- b) to test quantitatively whether textbooks published for primary and high schools cover Spoken Grammar Features of English (SGFE) adequately.

Spoken Grammar and Textbooks

It is not rare in academic circles that it takes time for scientific findings to be used in practice. Practice is not always consistent with theory and this is frequently the case for corpus studies and English Language Teaching (ELT) practices. Despite the growing number of studies on spoken grammar, and specifically for that of English, the application of the knowledge derived out of these studies cannot always be observed in a concrete and well-established fashion.

In a recent study (Timmis, 2005: 117), it is claimed that the corpus findings about spoken grammar have been relatively slow to filter through to ELT practice. In Turkey, some textbook writers still think – in terms of behaviourist perspective – that learning is enhanced by making stimulus response connection and by creating new habits through reinforcement and practice. Their pursuit of behaviourist view results in 'monitor overusers' (Krashen, 1988: 15) who think and try to remember the written rules before and whilst speaking. One interesting example is that when first year students attending the Department of American Culture and Literature at a Turkish university are asked why they prefer not to go to the offices of their English-speaking professors to talk with them, they reply that they are anxious about making mistakes and not being able to answer accurately if the professor asks something. They also state that they feel more comfortable when they write emails to their English-speaking professors because they find time to *monitor* their written output. This is one example that shows how years of intensive instruction based on written grammar leads to incompetency in speaking.

Closer examination of the available textbooks published in Turkey reveal that one of the reasons for the inefficacy of most learners in speaking or in conversation with both NSs and non-native speakers (NNSs) could be that they are constantly exposed to audio-lingual drills (mostly based on written grammar) in the textbooks or in classes. Most of them try to recall the target prescriptive grammar rules during interaction or before beginning to speak, which shows the need for SGFE to be taught not only as a starting point but to arouse attention and awareness of descriptive and pedagogic grammar rules and SGFE. Without communicative tasks including spoken grammar

forms, most of the learners both in Turkey and in similar contexts around the world would probably have “a hesitant, overcareful style of speaking because of their overconcern with correctness and constant rule-searching” (Krashen, 1988: 16).

Moreover, the published textbooks fail to serve the needs of students in that a majority of students in Turkey are intensively taught written grammar or prescriptive grammar rules (the high-stakes tests like SBS, UDS and LYS-5, all standardized public tests of English in Turkey have a great backwash effect in this) and as a result, they speak “like a TV announcer, always complete sentences with perfect grammar and they sound bookish” (Goh, 2009: 308). It should be admitted that by solely following written grammar rules there is the jeopardy of “producing speakers of English who can only speak like a book because their English is modelled on an almost exclusively written version of the language” (McCarthy and Carter, 1995: 211). The lack of SGFE in published textbooks substantiates that “language pedagogy that claims to support the teaching and learning of speaking skills does itself disservice if it ignores what we know about spoken language” (McCarthy and Carter, 2001: 57).

In Timmis’s study (2005: 122), it has been persuasively stated by learners that they feel themselves more native like, find more interesting to know “how native speakers speak to each other”, and find “useful to know the ellipsis and vague language and to perceive its meaning”. Exposure to only written data leads learners to the misconception that some structures such as heads, tails, flexible clause construction, unusual word-orders, double-negatives, etc. which are quite common and intelligible in spoken language, are deviations from the standard language and errors to be corrected. On the other hand, it is argued that an NS model will serve a complete and suitable starting point and it is up to teachers and learners to decide to what extent they will approach to teaching an SGFE model (Kuo, 2006: 213). As long as learners approximate the NS model and are subjected to these spoken grammar features, it is expected that they will comprehend how, where, and when to use or not to use these forms during speech. What they need is to be challenged with a myriad of spoken grammar activities with different patterns of classroom interaction.

Though the noted recent studies have stressed and pointed to the gap and need of spoken grammar forms in textbooks, writers have a lingering attitude towards the model and its application in EFL materials. One of the reasons for this might be the stance of ELF (English as a lingua franca) supporters who assert that NNSs will never come into contact with NSs in their life and that English is not the language of only NSs anymore. They hold that as long as ‘intelligibility’ is maintained, NS model is unnecessary and some minor grammatical and pronunciation mistakes can be disregarded. However, Kuo’s (2006) research exposed the notion that being ‘intelligible’ is insufficient, and Mumford (2009: 142) strengthened this by hypothesizing that an NS model can be supported from the point of view of ‘fluency’ or ‘economy’ in speech. Nonetheless, to the knowledge of the researchers, hardly any study was implemented on the presence of SGFE over textbooks other than that of Cullen and Kuo (2007), whose study focused merely on the *availability* of spoken grammar forms in textbooks published in the UK. They only specified and ticked on the available SGFE in the textbooks without specifying in-depth the number of the occurrences of each SGFE. In brief, there was a need of a study which would look into both the *availability* and the *frequency* of SGFE. The study discussed in this article has addressed this need, and is, in one sense, the replication of Cullen and Kuo’s study (2007) in a Turkish context. In another sense, it takes that study a step further in specifically investigating the frequency of SGFE, which is also another major factor never to be neglected in designing and writing ELT textbooks.

METHOD

In this study, a content analysis method has been carried out. 18 EFL textbooks published by the Turkish MoNE were selected and put in an order (Table 1) with regard to the type of school in which they are taught. Textbooks on

the list are referred as T1, T2, T3 and so on. Textbooks were chosen from all grades of the formal education; hence, all levels from beginner to advanced were included to be able to work out the occurrences of SGFE. The first ten books are taught in primary schools, whereas the following four books (T11-T14) are used in high schools, and the last four (T15-T18) are used in Anatolian High Schools (special state schools which admit high-level students through a rigorous exam and where English is taught much more intensively²).

Table 1. List of Textbooks Published and/or Approved by MoNE

Name of the book	Publishing House	Page Number
T1 Time for English Grade 4	MoNE Publ.	156 pg
T2 English 4	Biryay Publ.	165 pg
T3 My English 5	Pasifik Publ.	174 pg
T4 Time for English Grade 5	MoNE Publ.	57 pg
T5 Spot On 6	MoNE Publ.	199 pg
T6 My English 6	Pasifik Publ.	166 pg
T7 Build up your English Grade 6	Cemre Publ.	152 pg
T8 My English 7	Pasifik Publ.	160 pg
T9 Spot On 8	MoNE Publ.	245 pg
T10 My English 8	Pasifik Publ.	187 pg
T11 Unique 9	Pasifik Publ.	122 pg
T12 Breeze 9	MoNE Publ.	137 pg
T13 Unique 10	Pasifik Publ.	122 pg
T14 An English Course for Turks 10	MoNE Publ.	168 pg
T15 New Bridge to Success Grade 9	MoNE Publ.	202 pg
T16 New Bridge to Success Grade 10	MoNE Publ.	107 pg
T17 New Bridge to Success Grade 11	MoNE Publ.	112 pg
T18 New Bridge to Success Grade 12	MoNE Publ.	118 pg

As the first step of the analysis, the SGFE to be looked for in the textbooks were determined and specified through the review of the noted corpus studies. These features were also discussed with an NS who holds a TESOL certificate and teaches English to Turkish students at a Preparatory School. Throughout the study, the SGFE to be checked are headers, tails, ellipsis, vague language, placeholders, lexico-grammatical units, and quasi-grammar. Needless to say, these SGFE do not cover all such features, but those most indicated in our literature review. The SGFE analyzed in this study are defined and exemplified below:

a) Headers direct the listener to what the speaker is saying about and they are fronting devices which allow the listener to have more processing time (Cullen and Kuo, 2007: 366).

The white house in the corner, does she live there?

A funny beginning, is that what we want in a story?

b) Tails are found at the end of the clauses and reminder of what has been said or what is important (Cullen and Kuo, 2007: 367).

It makes you wonder, you know, all this unemployment.

It was a good book, this.

² This system will soon come to an end in the Turkish education system and all high schools will be “Anatolian High Schools”

c) **Ellipsis** is the omission of elements which are precisely recoverable from the linguistic or situational context (Biber et al., 1999). It takes place when subjects and verbs are omitted and “reduces the degree of grammatical encoding required” (Cullen and Kuo, 2007: 369).

Been anywhere nice? (Have you ever been anywhere nice?)

We in business? (Are we in business?)

d) **Vague language** is not exactly clear, but NSs employ it to be more polite and friendly, and to make a less definite statement.

I have to talk to director or teacher or *someone like that*.

It has cost *around* 50 pounds *or so*.

e) **Placeholders** are sometimes found in the middle of the phrases, and they are used when the speaker does not remember or know the target vocabulary, which stimulates the listener to hold the place.

I need a *thingummy* for the slide projector.

I gave it to *whatsisname/whatsisface* in the accounts department.

f) **Lexicogrammatical units** “are fixed in the sense that they cannot themselves be grammatically modified (e.g. through inflection or change in person or number) but which can combine with other structures to form larger syntactic units” (Cullen and Kuo, 2007: 369).

Single lexemes: really, actually, in fact, indeed, well, Mm, right, also, of course, anyway, basically

Short phrases: I mean..., You know..., It’s just like..., and things like that, or something, a bit or a little bit, a bit better

g) **Quasi-Grammar** seems actually incorrect in terms of written grammar, but it is usual and correct in spoken grammar.

There *is* lots of cars. (There is + plural noun)

He will invite *less* people to the party. (less + countable plural noun)

The second step was to count, record and evaluate fastidiously the number of the occurrences of each spoken grammar feature page by page through a checklist using the conceptual analysis method. The main focus of the method was to analyze the number of the SGFE within texts or dialogs. Firstly, three textbooks, one from each level (primary school, high school and Anatolian High School), were evaluated simultaneously by the two researchers. During this evaluation, it was found that the inter-rater reliability was 91.2%. Where the two researchers had difficulty in determining either in putting a certain phrase or chunk of language into a type of SGFE or deciding whether such a phrase was a form of spoken grammar of English or not, the help of the NS colleague was asked for. After the pilot analysis of these three books, the rest of the textbooks were shared and evaluated separately. As an additional step to enhance the reliability of the study and to make a comparison between different publishing houses, three books for the same grade by three different publishing houses were analyzed. During the whole procedure, we did not have any prejudice about whether such features were involved in lower level or upper level books. Although, at first, we assumed counting the forms would make us spend hard times, it was subsequently revealed that only lexico-grammatical units and ellipsis (with very few negligible exceptions of vague language and headers) were encountered in textbooks. These features of spoken grammar were calculated, collected and recorded on a chart below (Table 2).

Table 2. The Checklist and Number of Occurrences of SGFE in Each Textbook

	T1	T2	T3	T4	T5	T6	T7	T8	T9	T10	T11	T12	T13	T14	T15	T16	T17	T18
Headers	-	-	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Tails	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Ellipsis	3	6	21	2	7	20	10	16	9	9	26	10	14	-	36	11	23	32
Vague language	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	-	-	-	-	-
Place holders	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
LG units*	10	39	55	21	94	13 3	31	17 5	13 7	15 3	18 8	89	90	21	32 9	12 0	54	13 0
Quasi-grammar	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

* LG units: lexico-grammatical units

RESULTS

The thorough content analysis revealed various results which may pave the way to inspiring implications for teaching purposes, especially for textbook writing. The most obvious result is that among the target SGFE, lexico-grammatical units and ellipsis are much more conspicuous in comparison with others. Actually, among the 18 books reviewed, headers were encountered only in two books (T3 and T11) with the occurrences of 2 and 1 respectively. Vague language was encountered only in one book (T13) and only twice. On the other hand, tails, placeholders and quasi-grammar were not encountered at all in any one of the textbooks. A second result is that lower level books (T1, T2, ...T10) include less spoken grammar features compared to higher level books (T11, T12, ...T18), which can be seen natural. As the level of the books increases, the range and frequency of SGFE also increase.

The study also revealed that the books followed in Anatolian High Schools (T15, T16, T17, T18) include more spoken grammar forms. One reason might be the one cited above (the level of the books), whereas another might be the more communicative stance of the textbook writers while preparing these books for such special English-intensive schools.

One word of caution is warranted here. The number of the lexico-grammatical units and ellipsis found in the textbooks should not lead us to assume they have been well established in those textbooks. For instance, in T11, out of 188 lexico-grammatical units, 26 are 'OK', 30 are 'Hello', and 16 are 'Thank you'. Of 329 lexico-grammatical units in T15, 130 of them are 'Oh', 'Well', and 'OK'. This shows that the number of occurrences does not always show a comprehensive coverage of SGFE.

As a further finding of the study, an obvious inconsistency in the usage of the features has been observed in the same-grade textbooks published by different publishing houses (T6-T7-T8 for 6th graders; T13-T14 for 10th graders) (Table 2). That is, though these books are for the same level, the occurrences of SGFE are quite different from each other, which shows that the use of SGFE has not been taken as a base for textbook writing.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study has clearly demonstrated that while writing textbooks, the corpus-based findings about spoken grammar are not taken into consideration adequately enough, at least in the EFL textbooks published and used in Turkey by the MoNE. Almost all of the textbooks (n=18) used in state schools published by the Turkish MoNE have been examined with the aim of determining the role of SGFE in these textbooks.

If our aim is, as English language teachers to non-native learners, to enable our students to be able to interact with NSs and NNSs of English in real-life contexts, then one major task of us is to make the differentiation between "what *can* be said with what *is* routinely said in actual discourse" (McCarthy and Carter, 2001: 55). Through years of instruction with deterministic (prescriptive) grammars accompanied with massive amount of drills based on written grammar of English, many of our students in Turkey just turn into English language users who sound bookish and redundant with a stilted style of speaking.

The suggestion of separating written and spoken grammar cautiously (McCarthy and Carter, 2001) is very much important especially in EFL settings where spoken input is scarce. Since students do not receive enough spoken input in such contexts, but rather are exposed to materials designed mainly based on written grammar, it is of utmost importance that teachers create activities and exercises through which their students can learn, or at least, have and show the awareness of the differences between spoken and written grammar. In this respect, the design of the textbooks published by the MoNE bears great importance when millions of students who attend Turkish state schools are taken into account.

As a result of this study, we have the following suggestions to both the Turkish MoNE and the ELT/EFL textbook writers. In the first place, textbook writers should incorporate SGFE much more than they do now, both quantitatively and qualitatively. What we mean by this is they should employ all types of SGFE in a balanced manner. The frequency and range of SGFE should both be brought about, which is of vital importance to promote the speaking skill of EFL learners. As a second important suggestion, it has been noticed in the textbook analysis that SGFE are more salient in dialogs, hence dialogs including SGFE comprehensively and consistently should be used more than the usual trend.

A noteworthy finding of the study was that books which were written for higher level students displayed more SGFE in the analysis. As an implication of this result, a systematic gradation should be followed in textbook writing

for different levels, beginning with core SGFE with fewer occurrences continuing with a wider range of SGFE and more occurrences. The listening materials accompanying the textbooks are also not that much adequate in exemplifying SGFE. They are very important in exemplifying SGFE and hence should be designed carefully.

In textbooks, activities such as random words, selective listening, dictation, dialogs and role plays should and can all be utilized from a point of view to enhance SGFE. The point is not to create SGFE specific activities, but to base the available activities on the use and teaching of SGFE. In this way, it is hoped that students will develop an awareness of SGFE, if not they can always use them with their full capacity. Textbook writers should incorporate both the spoken and written grammar features of English (especially in books written for students of a certain level of proficiency, i.e. intermediate and above) and design awareness raising activities to show the differences between the two. Doing this will provide students with a wide range of grammar choices and they will come to a level where they will be able to use the two codes appropriately and distinctively.

There is one point to be handled cautiously here. As McCarthy and Carter (2001) and Leech (2000) point out, the two grammars are not always different; rather, much grammar overlaps between the two. Therefore, textbook writers should display the similarities as well as the differences and should not misguide the learners to the false idea that speaking skills are learnt only through 'spoken grammar' and written language only from 'written grammar'. Textbook writers should also indicate the frequency of the grammar forms common to both spoken and written grammar in the textbooks. For example, 'moreover' and 'furthermore' as a conjunction are more frequently used in written language whereas in spoken register 'what's more' is preferred dominantly.

In what follows are more specific suggestions for Turkish context. Firstly, Anatolian High School students are those who have the greatest chance in Turkey among others to go and live in English-speaking countries, so it might be reasonable to incorporate significantly more SGFE in textbooks written for these schools. This suggestion can be generalized for any special group which needs more interaction with English-speaking people (whether they are native or non-native) anywhere in the world. Secondly, there is a gap between the books for the same grades, which shows there is not a cooperation and consensus among the publishers. Therefore, when MoNE allows different publishers to publish books for the same grade, the Ministry should have them come together and reach to a consensus before they begin to prepare their textbooks (actually this is valid not only for SGFE, but also for all elements of any textbook). Further, the aid of an NS editor and a linguist trained specifically in corpus linguistics of English is highly recommended in the preparation of the textbooks published by the MoNE. Another point not to be missed is that the textbook writers are appointed from experienced teachers of English by the Ministry. Since they are themselves NNSs, besides the NS aid proposed above, it might be a good idea to provide these textbook writers with a basic training of SGFE and a fundamental knowledge of how to use corpora for teaching purposes.

However hot debated and sociolinguistically controversial the NS model is, if not encouraged, "L2 learner should be allowed to follow a native-speaker phonological or grammatical model" (Kuo, 2006: 220). This can be regarded at least as a starting point for mainstream students, and at best as an ideal for students who will most probably go and live in English-speaking countries for either academic or business purposes. After these forms are taught to second/foreign language learners, they should decide whether to use the forms in conversation with NSs or NNSs. Goh (2009: 309) notes that NS models are beneficial in an input poor environment and that learners assert NS models are crucial, empowering and motivating. It is hoped that by incorporating SGFE adequately and effectively in textbooks, the language teaching profession will take a step towards turning grammar teaching into a 'liberating force' (Cullen, 2008: 221) and enabling foreign language learners to become better international communicators. Though this study has been carried out in a Turkish context, the results and suggestions might be of relevance and use especially for similar countries found in the Expanding Circle as defined in the Concentric Circles Model (Kachru, 1990), like China, South Korea, Hungary, Poland, etc. where the spread of English has reached and where English is a foreign language restricted to the school environment and is not easily available outside the classrooms (Michieka, 2009: 352). To take the current study further and complement it, a new study should be conducted to

learn the opinions of English teachers on the extent of spoken grammar forms and features to be included in EFL textbooks.

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