An Evaluation of the Presentation and Practice of Grammar in Grade 9 English Language Textbook

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Abstract: Language textbooks should equip learners with an understanding of and ability to use grammar so that they will be able to create their own utterance and use the language in a variety of pedagogical and social contexts. It is therefore of paramount importance that both form and meaning must be tangent as closely together as possible. The purpose of the study was to evaluate the presentation and practice of grammar in grade 9 English Language textbook and thereby seek information about how well form and meaning are taught together. The presentation and practice activities were described qualitatively in line with the purpose. The findings of the evaluation show that most of the presentation of grammar is not clear, detailed and contextualized. The practice activities are mechanical, form focused and decontextualized. Based on these findings, the paper concludes that the textbook is not likely to equip students with an understanding of and ability to use grammar to communicate their own ideas.

Introduction

Efforts have been made to improve the teaching of English at all school levels in our country. One of these efforts involves developing syllabuses and textbooks that reflect the current theories and practices of teaching English as a foreign language. The first set of textbooks was developed and introduced to the school system in the 1996/97
academic year. The authors (see Galgalo, 1996) noted that the secondary English component (Grades 9 and 10) of English for Ethiopia is written primarily to meet the need for a comprehensive English language course that will provide students with the language required in a learning situation where English is the medium of instruction. They also note that the course provides students who leave school after grade 10 with the language skills they will need at work and in the community. It also prepares those students who will proceed to grades 11 and 12 where, in accordance with the official education and training policy, the English course will focus on the language needs of tertiary education.

Another set of textbooks was developed in 2002 E.C. apparently to make the teaching of the language more efficient and subsequently develop students' linguistic and communicative skills.

Despite such efforts and others students' English language proficiency has steadily been declining. Thus, most, if not all, students who join universities can barely express themselves in English, write grammatically correct sentences, or comprehend what they read. One of the main reasons for this can be the way the textbooks present the target language. In this regard, Brazil et al (1980), Levis (1990) argued that the problems with many textbooks is that they are too contrived and artificial in their presentation of the target language. They further point out that many scripted textbook language models and dialogues are unnatural and inappropriate for communicative and cooperative language teaching because they do not adequately prepare students for the types of language that they will have to use in the real world. Harmer (1991:257) also says that textbooks can also have adverse effects on teaching for a number of reasons. They tend to concentrate on the introduction of a new language and controlled work. A teacher relying too heavily on the textbook will often not be encouraged to provide enough input and output practice.
This can be the case in Ethiopian schools, where teachers heavily rely on textbooks as sources of presentation and practice of English language. Therefore, they can significantly enhance or hinder students’ learning of the language depending on the way they teach the language.

Evaluation of textbooks is, therefore, crucial to ensure that textbooks reflect the needs of the students and the aims, methods, activities and procedures proposed in the teaching program. Sheldon (1988) also noted that evaluation would provide a sense of familiarity with a book’s content thus assisting educators in identifying the particular strengths and weaknesses in textbooks already in use. He added that this would go a long way in ultimately assisting teachers with making optimum use of a book’s strong points and recognizing the shortcomings of certain exercises, tasks and entire texts. Dickens and Germaine (1992) further say said that without information obtained from an evaluation, say, a textbook, it is hard to plan for something that is actually better, that is designed to bring about desired improvements. They add that evaluation can identify areas for curriculum improvement including modifications to learning materials. Evaluation can raise awareness of the need for change and also where change can take place.

Given the above possible adverse effects of textbooks and justification for their evaluation, this study focused on the following research issues:

- Whether the presentations of grammatical structures are in such a way that the students can learn the form and use together, and
- Whether practice activities require students to formulate rules and manipulate form or whether they give situations and topics as contexts for practice

Following Widdowson (1978:98), usage or form is used here to refer to a performance which makes evident the extent to which students demonstrate their knowledge of linguistic rules and forms. Use, on the
other hand, refers to the other aspect which makes evident the extent to which students demonstrate their ability to use their knowledge of linguistic rules.

**Review of Related Literature**

*Approaches to Foreign Language Teaching*

Different approaches to foreign language teaching have been introduced at different times. Each approach brought in its wake changes in syllabus design, teaching materials and procedures. This part of the chapter discusses some of the approaches focusing on how they address the issue of English grammar teaching. Following Richards and Rodgers (1986:16), approach is used here to refer to theories about the nature of language and language learning that serves as the source of practices in language teaching).

*The Structural Approach*

Different approaches to the nature of language teaching explicitly or implicitly inform current methods in language teaching. The first and most traditional of these is the structural approach, which views that language is a system of structurally related elements for the coding of meaning. The target of language learning is seen to be the mastery of elements of this system (Richards and Rodgers 1986:17).

The means of inculcating a language structure includes pattern practice and structural drills. Materials featured sentence-based linguistic rules with exercises asking students to transform one sentence pattern into another. Freeman (2001) also wrote that the common practice is to present and practice language items to demonstrate how the rules of the language can be manifested through sentences. There has been less concern with demonstrating how such rules can be realized for communicative purposes as use. Widdowson (1990) indicated that for most teachers, and materials
following structural approach, most of the time are spent on a variety of mechanical drills, from repetition to substitution on to transformation drills.

However, it is contended that linguistic knowledge alone does not lead learners to use the language communicatively. Students understand the structure but not its function (Cunningsworth, 1984). Widdowson (1978) argues that the acquisition of linguistic skills does not seem to guarantee the consequent acquisition of communicative abilities in a language. Tarone and Yule (1989) also argue that concentrating on developing only grammatical competence will not provide the learner with the ability to produce sentences or utterances, which are appropriate to the context of use, or to interpret the appropriacy of such utterances.

Larsen-Freeman (2001) wrote that it is not uncommon for students to be able to supply the correct form in a practice exercise but then be unable to transfer that ability to immediate communicative use outside class. Dubin and Olshtain (1986) also said that as a result of emphasis on linguistic form at the expense of meaning and communication, many students were capable of producing perfect sentences in practice sessions but this ability would break down where real communication was necessary. Widdowson (1978) also indicated that students and especially those in developing countries, who have received several years of formal English teaching, frequently remain deficient in the ability to actually use the language and understand its use in normal communication.

The observations and criticisms generally show the inadequacy of structural approach to equip students with the capability to use or comprehend the target language effectively. This necessitates the need for alternative approaches and methods that can bridge the gap between knowledge about the language and the ability to use that knowledge to communicate meanings.
Communicative Approach or Communicative Language Teaching

Observations of learners’ inability to transfer their linguistic knowledge of the language learned in class to communicative contexts outside the classroom led language teaching theorists and practitioners to embrace a new approach to language instruction that initially focuses on language use rather than formal aspects of language (Freeman 2001). One of the approaches is the communicative language teaching or popularly known as the communicative approach (CA). This approach aims at:

- making communicative competence the goal of language teaching, and
- developing procedures for the teaching of the four language skills that acknowledge the interdependence of language and communication.

Thus, for many, CA sees language ability as being developed through activities which actually stimulate target structure. In other words, it argues that class time should be spent not on explicit grammar teaching and drills or controlled practice but on activities, which require learners to do in class what they are likely to do outside. For example, Harmer (2001: 84) pointed out that the ‘what to teach’ aspect of the communicative approach stresses the significance of language functions rather than focusing on grammar and vocabulary. The ‘how to teach’ aspect of the communicative approach is closely related to the idea that language learning will take care of itself and that plentiful exposure to language in use and plenty of opportunities to use it are vitally important for a student’s development of knowledge and skill. The same author indicates that activities in communicative language teaching typically involve students in real or realistic communication, where the accuracy of the language they use is less important than successful accomplishment of communicative task they are performing.

Although there appears to be a consensus among scholars regarding the importance of communication, whether or not to teach grammar
has been a controversial issue. Some argue that communication is the goal of language instruction and the syllabus should not be organized around grammar items but should be content-based, meaningful and discourse-based rather than sentence based. In other words, they perceive communicative language teaching as a departure from grammar in favor of focusing on the meaning only.

However, it is argued that such concentration on communication to the exclusion of grammar teaching is not sufficient to bring learners to the levels of proficiency that many now require for effective English use.

Spada and White (1991) also contend that communication alone does not necessarily lead learners to high degree of accuracy or high level of development. It is quite possible that the L2 learner, even though exposed to certain structures, will fail to perceive them in a naturalistic input. Just as teaching grammatical forms in isolation fails to develop the ability of learners to use form communicatively, a purely communicative method is equally inadequate because of the neglect of grammar instruction. This kind of situation is for the learner to become fluent and successful in terms of message communication but to produce consistently inaccurate grammatical and phonological forms of the language (Fotos 1998; Tarone and Yule 1989).

The arguments against the avoidance of grammar teaching suggested that, while communication is essential for language development, this development necessarily requires attention to form. Teaching grammar may well be necessary for many learners to achieve accuracy as well as fluency in their acquisition of a second or foreign language. There has been an increasing awareness of the need to teach grammar and of the importance of grammar in the development of communicative ability (see Nunan 1989; Savignion 1991; Ellis, 1993).
The criticism against both structural approach and strong version of communicative language teaching suggested that both communication or meaning and form are not mutually exclusive. That is, exclusive focus on one and the exclusion of the other cannot produce learners who are able to use the language accurately and fluently. In other words, knowledge of grammar, being an indispensable part of communicative competence, is essential for communication. Communication cannot exist without structure and therefore within a communicative classroom a balance between form and meaning should be strived for (Green and Hecht 1992; McDonough and Shaw 1993; Spada and Lightbown 1993).

Littlewood (1981) also attempted to reconcile non-communicative and communicative activities by suggesting that such things as drill and controlled practice have a valid place in the language class as they can provide learners with the necessary prerequisite skills for more communicative language work.

Similarly, Pica (1992) contends that opportunities to hear comprehensible input are simply not enough to insure their successful language acquisition, but learners need opportunities to produce comprehensible output as well. Therefore, learners must have opportunities to produce comprehensible output during interaction involving meaningful content. Green and Hecht (1992) also argue both use and usage are essential elements of communicative competence. So, attention to one and neglect of the other is mistaking the part for the whole. They therefore say that a balance needs to be found between times devoted to the learning of explicit rules (without which many learners feel frustrated) and time devoted to the communicative use of language.

It has also been pointed out (see e.g. Littlewood 1981: 78) that students should be provided with practice activities that involve both form and meaning. Learners must produce the correct form of the new
item. Structural practice may still be a useful tool when a teacher wishes to focus attention sharply and unambiguously on important features of the structural system. A further step is providing links between structure and functions and therefore to contextualize the language and ask learners to practice response. It is, therefore, suggested that interactive grammar exercises should complement rather than replace traditional activities. Exercises requiring fill-in answers, completions, transformations, or a combination of items can also be used in conjunction with interactive exercises that place instruction in a more meaningful, communicative model. Harmer (1991) noted that the use of the foreign language in communicative tasks and situations can satisfactorily exist side by side with formal instruction where the new language is being introduced and practiced.

One way of helping students practice the language meaningfully is creating situations or topics as contexts that may relate to the students’ experience. Ellis (1993: 647) indicated that for practice to be of any real benefit, it may be necessary to ensure that it takes place under real operating conditions by providing opportunities for learners to produce the target structure. Gibbson (1989) pointed out that learners should be placed in real or realistic situations that call for the use of language studied at presentation stage.

On the basis of the preceding discussion, it can be concluded that a combination of different options and activities is more effective than an exclusive use of a given option or procedure. In other words, for students to grasp the form, (i.e. the way each grammatical element is written and pronounced) meaning and use of grammatical structures, (i.e., enabling students to use the new language to make their own ideas) it is important to provide them with explicit grammar instructions and practice opportunities that are based on contexts and situations.
The Role of Textbooks in EFL Classroom

Textbooks are essential components of EFL (English as a Foreign Language) classrooms. As noted by Hutchinson and Torres (1994: 315), the textbook is an almost universal element of English language teaching and no teaching -learning situation is complete until it has its relevant textbook. Sheldon (1988:237) also wrote that textbooks not only represent the visible heart of any English language teaching program but also offers considerable advantages for both student and the teacher when they are used in the EFL classroom Haycroft (1998) suggested that one of the primary advantage of using textbooks is that they are Psychologically essential for students since their progress and achievement can be measured concretely when we use them. Harmer (1991:257) also wrote that where a textbook is involved, there are obvious advantages for both teacher and students. Good textbooks often contain lively and interesting material. They provide sensible progression of language items. Good textbooks also relieve the teacher from the pressure of having to think of material for each class.

Other theorists have also identified more advantages of textbooks with respect to both students and teachers. For example, Sheldon (1988) pointed out that students often harbor expectations about using textbooks in their particular language classroom and believe that published materials have more credibility than teacher-generated materials. It is indicated that textbooks are generally sensitive to students' 'need' and are efficient in terms of time and money and involve low lesson preparation time, whereas teacher-generated materials can be time, cost and quality defective. In this way textbooks can reduce potential occupational overload and allow teachers to spend their time undertaking more worthwhile tasks.

Despite the aforementioned advantages of textbooks, there are researchers who do not favor their use. Alwright (1982), for instance, argued that textbooks are too inflexible and generally reflect the pedagogic, psychological and linguistic preferences and biased of their
authors. Subsequently, the educational methodology that a textbook promotes will influence the classroom setting by imposing external language objectives and learning constituents on students. In this way textbooks determine and control the methods, processes and procedures of language teaching and learning.

Others (e.g Levis 1990) argued that the problems with many textbooks is that they are too contrived and artificial in their presentation of the forget language. Cuthcart (1989), and Yule, Mathis, and Hopkins (1992) also contend that the scripted unauthentic language found in many textbooks does not lend itself to communicative practice but instead can lead to an oversimplification of language and unrealistic views of real-life situation. Harmer (1991:257) also says that textbooks can also have adverse effect on teaching for a number of reasons. They tend to concentrate on the introduction of a new language and controlled work. A teacher relying too heavily on the textbook will often not be encouraged to provide enough input and output practice. Textbooks tend to follow the same format from one unit to the next. This similarity of format generally involves a rigid sequence.

**Methodology**

As indicated by Cunningworth (1995) in evaluating a textbook or an aspect of language it deals with, it is necessary to identify any significant omission in it or locate any important weakness or a match between what the textbook contains and the requirements of the learning / teaching situation. For this we need in-depth evaluating which is penetrating in its approach and has its own agenda. We need to examine how specific items are dealt with, particularly those which relate to students’ learning needs, syllabus requirements, how different aspects of language are dealt with.

Accordingly, the study used in-use evaluation method to examine the presentation and practice of grammar in grade 9 textbook. Such evaluation can be made quantitatively using checklist or qualitatively.
Quantitative method provides numeric data that shows the presence or absence of some elements or the frequency of their presence. Although this may have its own advantage, the data it generates cannot give a complete picture of what is actually done and to what extent this meets the objectives of the material. Qualitative method can give an in-depth, text based features of the aspect teaching material under evaluation and thereby show the strength and weakness of that aspect. As noted by Richards (2001) qualitative approaches are more holistic and naturalistic than quantitative approaches and seek to collect information in natural settings for language use and on authentic tasks.

The study, therefore, opted to use the qualitative method to analyze the grammar aspect of the book so as to provide a clear picture of the lessons.

It is obvious that the books appear to introduce a change that involves all aspects of English. However, this study was intended to explore the extent to which the change is being implemented in one aspect, namely grammar. This was because, as noted by Dickins and Woods (1992), when we say someone knows language, it means that the person has acquired the ability to produce grammatically accurate sentences in the target language together with an ability to use those forms meaningfully.

A further motivation behind the interest in grammar stemmed from the belief that students at school or tertiary level may be disadvantaged if they have inadequate knowledge of grammar. This, however, does not mean that the other aspects are not as important as grammar. Rather, it is hoped that the results of the study on the grammar aspect can give an insight into the state of the other aspects.

Grade 9 is the beginning of secondary education as per the current education policy of the country. After completing grade 9 and grade 10 students will either pass to preparatory schools or join technical and
vocational programs. Therefore, the English lessons they get in grade 9 and 10 has considerable impact on their future. Taking this into consideration, the study chose to focus on grade 9 textbook.

Discussion of Results

As mentioned earlier, the current study focused on the evaluation of the presentation and practice of grammar in grade 9 English language textbook. In doing so, the study sought to establish if the teaching of grammar as presented in the book fosters both form and meaning or emphasizes one at the exclusion of the other. It also sought to establish if the presentation and practice of grammatical items are based on the use of contexts, situations or topics. Therefore, the results of the analysis are presented as follows.

The book comprises 12 units and each unit contains at least two language focuses under which different grammatical items are presented. On page 9 of the textbook, the language focus section introduces the simple present tense. However, there is no explanation of the form and meaning of the tense probably it was dealt with at earlier grades. Even if this is the case, it would be essential to check if students are able to use the language correctly and meaningfully. However, this is not done.

Instead, the book provides two practice exercises. In the first one, students are instructed to copy the following paragraph and fill in the gaps to complete it.

*I am Pedro. I _____ 13 years old and I ______ secondary school. It ___ a big school. I _____ with my parents and brothers. At the moment, my cousin, Rosa _____ with us because her parents _____ a long way from the school.*

This paragraph is taken from the reading text found on pages 7-8. Students can simply pick the missing verbs from that paragraph to
complete it. Therefore, students’ completion of the paragraph with the correct verbs cannot show their mastery of the form and meaning of the tense or their ability to use the tense to express their ideas.

In addition, the language focus introduces simple present but the 5th blank space is filled in with present continues tense. This is confusing as no attempt is made to show students why present continuous tense is used in that instance, while present tense is used in the others.

In the 2nd exercise, students are instructed to complete the following sentences and questions

The verb ‘to be’

*I am in this group.*  *I am not in this group.*  *Am I in this group?*

| You are in this group. | You __________. | ________? |
| He __________. | He __________. | ________? |
| She __________. | She __________. | ________? |
| We __________. | We are not in this group, | ________? |
| They __________. | They __________. | ________? |

Present simple

*Do I speak Konso?*  *I don’t speak Konso.*  *I speak Konso*

| ________? | You ________. | You __________. |
| ________? | He doesn’t speak Konso. | He __________. |
| ________? | She ________. | She __________. |
| ________? | We ________. | We __________. |
| ________? | They ________. | They __________. |

In the first exercise, students practiced writing affirmative and negative sentences and then converting them into questions. The second part also involves asking and answering questions. Students can do this
following the example even if they do not know that Konso is a language.

As mentioned earlier, the language focus introduces the present tense. However, it includes one exercise that contains present continues tense. In the exercise, students are instructed to first write affirmative sentences and then change it to negative sentence and a question using the following example.

\[ I \text{ am writing a letter. I am not writing a letter. Am I writing a letter? } \]

Students then write the same sentences and questions that begin with the pronouns you, he, she, we and they. Therefore, this exercise involves writing grammatically correct sentences that do not show students ability to use the new language in meaningful way. In short, the two tenses are not presented and practiced in a way that enables students to master their forms and meanings.

The Second language focus we see on page 33 of the book introduces expressing, obligation or necessity. It then explains when must, have to, don't have to, should and need are used as follows.

- Must and Have to are used to express obligation. Must is self imposed and it comes from you, the speaker, \textit{you must arrive home by ten o'clock}.
- Have to suggest an obligation from a third person. \textit{Mother says we have to wash the dishes this evening}.
- Should is used to express moral obligation. \textit{You should write to your grandmother}.
- Need is used for necessity need to means it is necessary
- Negative statements in the present tense take two forms: don't need to or need. \textit{I don't need to read this book. I needn't need to read this book}. 
As can be seen above, the explanations and the examples are not based on contexts and situations and therefore they do not make the meanings of the modal verbs clear. In addition, the examples do not show the meanings adequately. For example, it is not clear why the speaker says *I don’t need to read this book. I needn’t need to read this book.* To make this clear, there should be something such as the following that shows why the speaker says this.

*I have read this book and I remember the story, so I do not need to read it again*

Alternatively, the meanings of the verbs would be clearer if a situation were used. One of such situation can be an imaginary clinic where a physician tells a patient what he/she must do, mustn’t do, has to do and need and need not do. This would help students to understand how the modal verbs could be used in the real world.

The section presents ‘must’ and ‘have to’ as if they were always the same and can be used in the same way. However, this is not true. Murphy (1994:62) shows this as follows.

We use ‘must’ when we give our personal feeling; ‘have to’ is, on the other hand, impersonal. We use ‘have to’ for fact, not for our personal feelings. ‘You have to do something because of a rule or the situation.

- You can’t turn right here. You have to turn left. (because of the traffic system)
- My eye sight is not very good. I have to wear glasses for reading.
- George can’t come out with us this evening. He has to work.
Following the presentation, there are two practice exercises. The first one instructs students to match the model verbs with their definitions. This may help to make students to talk about the modal verbs but it cannot encourage them to use the verbs in a meaningful way. The second exercise presents sentences and instructs students to choose the best option. Two of these are

1. *My mother told me to be home by 9 o'clock. I must/can go now.*
2. *On Saturday and Sunday mornings, we mustn't/don't have to get early.*

The exercise is meant to check students’ understanding of the meanings of the modal verbs. However, they do not make students use the modal verbs to create their own sentences. To do this, students should be asked, for example, to say what they mustn’t, must, can, can’t do when they are in the library, in class or laboratory. Such exercises can help to establish that the presentation and practice have enabled students to grasp the form, meaning and use of the grammatical items.

The third language focus in unit one introduces *making sudden decisions*. This is followed by presentation which explains that the ‘will’ future is often used to describe a sudden spontaneous unplanned decision. This is followed by the following examples.

*What shall we do this afternoon?*
*I know, we’ll go to the foot ball match.*

The example does not show that the decision to go to football match is made suddenly since the second sentence begins with ‘I know’ and this implies that the speaker has already made the decision. The meaning of the item could be clear if it appeared in context or if there was a sentence that shows something that prompts sudden decision has happened. The following example illustrates this.

*Sara: My father has just given me 500 birr.*
*Hawi: Really!*
Sara: Yes. I will buy a pair of shoes. We’ll also have lunch together.

This shows that the two decisions are made suddenly without prior plan as the speaker did not expect to get the money.

On page 26, may, might and going to are presented in the form of explanations that are followed by the following examples.

*We use going to show that we have a clear plan in mind to do in the future.*

Example

I’m going to visit my sister next weekend.

He’s going to buy some new shirts.

The book continues with presentation of ‘may’ and ‘might’ as follows.

*We use ‘may’ when we want to show we are uncertain about something.*

Example

Nigist may come with us.

‘Might’ means almost the same as could and may but we are not as certain as when we use ‘could’ or ‘may.’

The example used to show the meaning of ‘may’ is inadequate and it does not provide enough information to show that Nigist’s coming is uncertain. Therefore, students are unlikely to use it correctly and appropriately. The following examples taken from Murphey can be contrasted with the examples in the text book.

We use ‘may’ and ‘might’ to talk about possible actions or happenings in the future.

A. I haven’t yet decided where to spend my holidays. I may go to Ireland (=perhaps I’ll go to Ireland).

B. Anne may not come to the party to night. (= perhaps she will not come.)
C. There might not be a meeting on Friday because the director is ill. (= perhaps there will not be a meeting.)

In each example, there is additional information that can help to understand the meanings of the target items.

Following the presentation, students are asked on page 27 to write six sentences using the following words given in a table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I</th>
<th>He</th>
<th>She</th>
<th>You</th>
<th>We</th>
<th>They</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>is</td>
<td>am</td>
<td>are</td>
<td>are</td>
<td>are</td>
<td>am</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>going to</td>
<td>visit</td>
<td>travel to</td>
<td>write to</td>
<td>stay with</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hawassa</td>
<td>visit</td>
<td>travel to</td>
<td>write to</td>
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<td>Friend</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The following example is given and students are asked to do the same.

*We are going to stay in Aksum with our cousins*

Students are then instructed to rewrite the sentences using ‘may’ or ‘might’ following the example.

*We may stay in Aksum with our cousins.*

This practice exercise requires students to produce grammatically correct sentences using the model example. However, it does not make them use the new item in a meaningful way. It would be sensible if students were asked to talk or write about the things they have planned to do next weekend, during their next vacation or after class. This, however, is not done in the book.
Moreover, it is not clear why students are asked to rewrite the sentences substituting ‘be going to’ with ‘may’ and ‘might.’

On page 29, the book presents ‘going to’ and has/have. An attempt is made to present the language in a context in the form of pictures, which appear to show the meaning of ‘be going to,’ present continuous tense and present perfect.

The pictures are presented in three sets and in each set there are three pictures. The first three pictures appear to show the meanings of ‘be going to’. Present continuous tense and present perfect tense as the following are written under each.

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{She is going to sow the seeds in the pot.} \\
\text{She is sowing the seeds in the pot.} \\
\text{She has sown the seeds in the pot.}
\end{align*}
\]

Under the second set of pictures, the following are written.

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{He is going to transplant the seedlings into the pot.} \\
\text{He is transplanting the seedlings into the pot.} \\
\text{He has transplanted the seedlings into the pot.}
\end{align*}
\]

Under the third, students are given ‘harvest the beans’ to write sentences similar to the examples.

The use of contexts is recommended to present and practice new grammatical items. If used effectively, they can make the meanings of the grammatical items clear and enable students to use them to make their own meaningful sentences. To do this, contexts should be simple and clear. In addition, the language used to teach the new language should be simple and familiar to the students.

However, the pictures used in the book do not seem to be adequate in showing the meanings of the tenses. For example, the pictures used to show the meaning of ‘be going to’ do not clearly show that the persons in the pictures are going to sow the seeds, transplant the seedlings and harvest the beans. Firstly, it is not possible to show the meaning of ‘be
going to’ using a picture as it cannot show what somebody has planned to carry out sometime in the future. To make students practice ‘be going to ….’ in meaningful way; one possibility is using their own or fictional time table. Based on the time table, students can say what they are going to do. Another way is asking students to write about their future plans.

Similarly, the pictures used to show the meanings of present continuous tense and present perfect tense do not do so clearly. For example, it is not clear whether the persons in the picture are sowing the seeds and that in the second is transplanting the seedlings into pots. The pictures used to show the meanings of present perfect have showed the meaning of present perfect have the same lack of clarity. Instead, pictures that show, for example, a teacher writing on a board, a person washing clothes or reading a book can effectively show the meaning of present continuous tense.

In short, inadequate use of pictures as contexts and the use of the verbs ‘sow’, ‘transplant; and ‘harvest; which can be unfamiliar and difficult for a number of students make the practice activity ineffective and form focused.

On page 30 of the book, present perfect tense is presented with the following explanation.

The present perfect tense is used to describe an action which is finished at sometime in the past but we don’t know exactly when.

This explanation is not always true as it is possible to know when the action happened but the speaker is interested in what has happened rather than when it happened. This can be seen from the following example.

Abebe: I have bought the book you told me about.
Yonas: really? When did you buy it?
Abebe: yesterday.
Hawi: where is Eleni.
Tasew: She has gone out (she’s out now)
Hawi: When did she go out?
Tasew: an hour ago.

As can be seen in these examples, the speakers know when the actions took place but that is not their interest. Therefore, the explanation is misleading.

Page 75 of the book introduces active and passive verbs. Although active and passive verbs are used with all tenses, only simple present active and passive verbs are presented here. Students are first asked to look at the following sentences.

-Mother mixes teff flour and water to make injera.
-Injera is made from a mixture of teff flour and water.

The book then explains that sentence one tells us who does the action. The verb is in the present simple active form. Sentence 2 does not tell us who does the action, but what happened. It is in the passive.

Following this explanation, students are given seven sentences and instructed to change them to passive form. The following are the first four of the sentences.

1. Mother allows the mixture to ferment for several days.
2. Then, she bakes the injera on a clay plate over a fire.
3. She pours the mixture onto the baking surface.
4. She does not roll it out.

Both the explanation and the exercise show that we can use active or passive forms arbitrarily though this is not true. The decision to use either form depends on the topic one writes or talks about. For example, the above four tenses show what the subject does to make
injera. Therefore, the use of active verb is correct and appropriate. When we change the sentences to passive, it means we also change the topic, i.e. we talk about “how injera is made.’ Therefore, students can produce grammatically correct sentences but which are not appropriate in the context in which they are used. The following can illustrate this

*My mother is a very busy person.*

A. *She gets up early in the morning and prepares breakfast for us.*
B. *Breakfast is prepared by her.*
C. *She then cleans the house.*
D. *The house is then cleaned by her.*

Let us assume that these 4 sentences make a paragraph about the topic sentence. All of them are grammatically correct but only sentences A and C are appropriate as well, while the other two are inappropriate. However, the explanation and exercise do not make this distinction clear and therefore students are likely to be concerned about grammatical correctness without paying attention to appropriacy.

The next exercise asks students to work with a partner to describe how to make Ethiopian coffee. It also instructs one of the group members to give an active sentence and the other to turn it into a passive sentence.

According to this instruction, students can do the following.

*Student A: First we roast it.*
*Student B: First it is roasted.*
*Student A: Then we grind it.*
*Student B: Then it is ground.*

All are grammatically correct but the sentences in the passive form are not inappropriate since the instruction tells students to describe ‘*how we make Ethiopian coffee.*’ Therefore, the instruction should ask
students to first write sentences describing how we make Ethiopian coffee and then *how Ethiopian coffee is made*.

On page 77, the language focus section introduces if sentences and gives the following explanation about it:

- We use if sentence and ‘will’ to talk about future possibilities. For example, if I eat healthy food now, I will be healthier when I am older.
- We use if sentences in the present to talk about habits or general truths. For example, If I wake up early, I eat breakfast before going to school.

This is followed by an exercise that asks students to make sentences from the following table

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Condition</th>
<th>Sentence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unless</td>
<td>it rains tomorrow, my parents will be pleased.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As long as</td>
<td>you take enough exercise, you will stay healthy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provided that</td>
<td>you need my help, I will be there for you.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If</td>
<td>you study hard, you will fail the rest.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The language focus here presents type I conditional sentence, which is used to express a real possibility that is likely to happen in the future. Therefore, it is very essential to create a situation that helps students understand the meaning of the item.

For example, Murphy (1994:74) presents the conditional sentence as follows:

*Sue has lost her watch. She thinks it may be at Ann’s house.*

*Sue: I think I left my watch at your house. Have you seen it?*
Ann: No, but I'll have a look when I get home. If I find it, I'll tell you.

In this example, Ann feels there is a real possibility that she will find the watch. So, she says, if I find …., I'll….

The situation used here and the example given are very likely to make the meaning of the conditional sentence clear. However, the book does not make use of any such situation. Firstly, the example used to illustrate the meaning of the sentence lacks accuracy. This is because it is unclear if there is real possibility that the speaker eats healthy food. Second, even if there is a possibility that the speaker eats healthy food, it cannot guarantee healthy life in the distant future. Therefore, the students cannot clearly understand the meaning of the sentence let alone being able to use it.

In the exercise, students are asked to write sentences that begin with ‘unless; ‘as long as’, ‘provided that’ and ‘if’. However, the explanation and the example do not include the first three. Therefore, it is not clear why the other three are included in the exercise. Moreover, the phrases ‘as long as’ and ‘provided that’ mean the same as ‘if’ and thus can be used interchangeably as can be seen below.

- If you take enough exercise, you will stay healthy
- As long as you take enough exercise, you will stay healthy.
- Provided that you take enough exercise, you will stay healthy.

It is also not clear why students are asked to use ‘unless’ since it is not included in the explanation.

Therefore, the exercise does not help to establish that students have mastered the form of the new grammatical item let alone develop the ability to use it to make meaningful sentences.
Page 79 of the book presents comparative and superlative adjectives. It then instructs students to look at the adjectives bitter, sour, greasy, juicy, salty, and tasty and check their meanings in a dictionary and make a sentence for each one. The following is given as example.

*Lemons taste very bitter.*

Following this, the following explanation is given about ‘more’ and ‘most’

All the adjectives above are adjectives of task. When we compare these adjectives, it is more usual to add ‘more’ and ‘most’ before the comparative and superlative forms: bitter, more bitter, most bitter although adding er and est is equally correct: bitter, bitterer, bitterest.

**Example**

*Lemons always taste sour.*
*Lemons taste sourer than oranges. Or*
*Lemons are sourer than oranges.*

In the exercise that follows on page 80, students are instructed to work in pairs to write the comparative and superlative forms of the adjectives already given on page 79 as seen in the following example.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>adjective</th>
<th>comparative</th>
<th>superlative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>bitter</td>
<td>A. more bitter</td>
<td>A. most bitter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B. bitterer</td>
<td>B. bitterest</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The language focus introduces comparative and superlative adjectives. Therefore, it should have made the forms and meanings of the two forms clear by using adjectives that are familiar to students. However, the book uses adjectives whose meanings most students are unlikely
to know. The book makes this clear when it instructs students to look
the words up in a dictionary. Instead, it would be sensible to use
simple adjectives such as tall, short, fat, thin, old, young, etc.

Moreover, the book emphasizes how comparative and superlative
adjectives are written, while ignoring their meanings. The two aspects
could be taught using contexts such as information about the ages,
weight, height etc of real or fictional people.

According to the book it is possible to add

- er or more or–est or most when we write adjectives in
  comparative and superlative forms respectively. According to
  this explanation, it is acceptable to say ‘smaller’ or ‘more small’,
  ‘taller’ or ‘more tall’, ‘faster’ or ‘more fast’ etc. This in contrary to
  the rule, as adding – er or ‘more’ and – est and ‘most’ to an
  adjective depends on the number of the syllables it constitutes.
  Adjectives with one syllable, for example, small ends in –er and
  – est, while adjectives with two or more syllables add more and
  most.

On page 86, students are reminded of modal verbs that are used to
express obligation, necessity and permission. These were covered in
unit one and so three examples are given to refresh students’ memory.
On the next page, students are provided with a context presented in
the form of a conversation between a doctor and a patient. Students
are instructed to complete the context with can, must, have to, or
should.

This is the first context we find in the book which is used to make the
students practice new language in meaningful way. Therefore, their
use of the modal verbs is based on their understanding of the context
rather than manipulation of forms.
The language focus under B6.5 found on page 109 introduces present perfect tense. Below this, the following is given as an example.

Tilahun Gesesse said in his interview

*I have been interested in running since I was a child.*

We have never heard an athlete with the name Tilahun Gessese but we all know the music legend Tilahun Gessesse, who passed away some years ago. So, this may make the meaning of the tense obscure.

Coming to the language aspect, no explanation is made about the meaning of this sentence and why the speaker uses present perfect tense. In addition, the sentence, which appears to have been taken form an interview made with the speaker, is put out of context and so it is very difficult for anybody to decipher why present perfect tense is used here.

Following the example sentence, students are instructed to make similar sentences from the table given on the page. The table contains the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I have</th>
<th>for since</th>
<th>I was a child.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>been interested in music</td>
<td>since</td>
<td>aid famine victims.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>helped raise large sums of money</td>
<td></td>
<td>a long time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>been singing</td>
<td></td>
<td>my first job.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>been a leading star singer</td>
<td></td>
<td>my contribution to music.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>received an award</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
From this table, students may make the following sentences.

1. *I have been interested in music since I was a child.*
2. *I have helped raise a large sum of money for famine victims.*
3. *I have been singing for a long time.*
4. *I have been a leading star singer since my first job.*
5. *I have received an award for my contribution to music.*

Present perfect tense has two uses. One of these is showing an action that began in the past and continues until the present or just ended. For example, if someone started teaching ten years ago and is still a teacher, he can say

- I have been teaching for ten years or
- I have been teaching since 1998.

The second use of the tense is showing an action that has just been completed or completed sometime ago but its effect is still present. For example, if somebody says ‘*I have read this book*’ it means he finished reading the book before the time of speaking but he still remembers the story.

Accordingly, sentences 1, 3, 4 show the first use of the tense and sentences 2 and 5 show the second use of the tense. However, the book does not show this distinction between the two different uses of the tense. It rather presents them as if they were the same.

“Since” and ‘for’ are used with present perfect tense to show an action started in the past and continues until the present as can be seen in the following examples.

- *I have lived here for ten years.*
- *I have lived here since 1998.*
On the other hand, ‘for’ has a different meaning in the two sentences that can be made from the table. These are

- I have helped raise a large sum of money for famine victims.
- I have received an award for my contribution to music.

As can be seen in these sentences, ‘for’ is used to show reason but not duration of time. So, this is another possible confusion.

In the next exercise, students are asked to work with a partner to make similar sentences about themselves using the present perfect tense and the words for or since. Following this instruction, the following explanation is given.

We often use the present perfect tense with ‘for’ or ‘since’ when the action is unfinished, for example.

- I have been waiting to see you for over an hour.
- I have been here since one o’clock.

Firstly, the explanation is about present perfect tense but the first example contains present perfect continuous tense. This disparity between the two is confusing and students may consider both tenses as the same in meaning. In addition, since there is no context or information that shows why the tenses are used here, it is unlikely for students to decipher the meanings of the tenses. In other words, if students are given information about when the speaker started to wait and when he made then utterance, the meaning can be clear.

Secondly, students are vaguely asked to work with a partner to make similar sentences about themselves. However, they are not given any clue or clear instruction that tells them what they should discuss with each other. All the flaws and shortcomings identified here show that the presentation and practice of the tenses are made poorly and thus
cannot help students to understand the form and meaning of each language item.

The language focus under B7.7 on page 132 introduces passive sentences, which is also presented on page 75 under present simple passive sentence and covers how passive verbs in simple present tense are written.

On this page, students are first asked if they can remember the difference between active and passive sentences. They are then instructed to look at the given six sentences and identify which are active and which are passive. All of the sentences contain verbs that indicate future actions. The first two of them are:

- The government will build ring roads around the city.
- Many Skyscrapers will be built.

Therefore, by looking at the forms of the verbs, students can distinguish which one is active and which one is passive without knowing the difference in meaning between the two.

Following the 1st exercise, the following examples are given to show how the first two sentences in example one are changed into the active and the passive forms.

Ring roads will be built around the city.
People will build many new Skyscrapers.

Students are then instructed to change the other four sentences from exercise 1 into the active or passive. They are also reminded that all active sentences can be expressed in the passive.

The examples and exercises tend to focus or emphasize the form of the active and passive verbs as if they are used arbitrarily. This can lead students to use the forms inappropriately. In other words, students
may presuppose that active and passive forms can be used interchangeably as long as they are grammatically correct, while this is not the case.

Comparative and superlatives which are presented on 79 are repeated on page 133 in the same artificial way. Students are first asked to revise the spellings rules for comparative and superlative adjectives and then to work in groups of three to give more examples.

Students are then asked to use the 5 given adjectives in comparative and superlative forms to make sentences about cities in the future using ‘will.’ The adjectives are

*clean*       *noisy*       *crowded*       *busy*       *exciting*

Example: *More people will live in cities than in the country*

The instruction asks students to compare cities using the five given adjectives. The example, on the other hand, compares the number of people who will live in cities and countryside. This could be avoided if students are asked to compare two cities or places in terms of their population, temperature and the like. Moreover, it is vague or confusing to ask students to write sentences such as the following which are entirely meaningless.

*Cities will be the cleanest.*
*Cities will be the busiest.*

Both of these are wrong.

Such problem and confusion would be avoided if a context was used. For example, by providing some real or fictional information about three or more cities, it would be possible to make students practice the
language in a meaningful way. For example, if information about the height of three people is given, students can write:

A. is taller than B.
B. is taller than C.
C. C is the tallest.

Alternatively, it would be meaningful if students were asked to compare two or three places they know using the given adjectives.

To sum up, comparative and superlative forms are presented and practiced twice in the book. However, neither of them presents the item in a manner that helps students master their forms and meanings and ultimately use them.

On 179, students are presented with both, neither and either. The following examples are given to show how they are written.

- Both email and the web use the internet.
- Neither Kasech nor Berihan like (s) ice-cream.
- Either Aret or Almaz will meet you at the bus stop.
- Does either of your parents speak English?

It in both, “either … or” and “neither … nor,” the verb agrees with the noun that comes after ‘or’ or ‘nor.’ So, the verb in the second example should be singular as it follows singular subject. The book, on the contrary, puts ‘s’ in bracket as if it were possible to put the verb either in singular or plural form.
A simple context such as the following could have been used to make the meanings clear.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Tea</th>
<th>Coffee</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abebe</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yeshi</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kedir</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Both Abebe and Kedir like Tea.

Neither Abebe nor Yeshi likes coffee

Both Abebe and Yeshi don't like coffee.

Since the sentences are based on the information in the table, it is easy for students to understand the meanings of both and neither .... nor. either .... or. Based on the context and the examples such as these, it is possible to give short explanations to enhance students’ understanding of the forms and the meanings of the items.

The language focuses on page 184 contains past, present and future. Students are asked how well they know their tenses and then to complete the table in five minutes with the past, present and future forms of the 8 verbs given.

Following this, students are asked to work with their partners to make sentences with each form of the verbs. The following examples are given to illustrate this.

- I went to a party last week.
- I am going to a party today,
- I will go to a party tomorrow.
It appears that students have already been taught the tenses. If this is so, they should be asked to demonstrate their knowledge of the forms and meanings of the tenses. This could be done by asking them to talk about what they are going to do. However, the exercise requires students to practice the tenses in a mechanical and meaningless way. Furthermore, there is no point in asking students to work in pairs since they have nothing to discuss together.

For students to work in pairs there should be, for example, a short passage with verbs given in brackets. The pairs of students can discuss and decide the correct tense of each verb according to the context.

The language focus on page 194 contains past continuous tense and simple past to talk or write about two past events.

The book used time line to make the meaning clear. The time line shows that meal way being eaten from 8:00 PM to 9:00 PM. At 8:30 an uncle left. From this time line, the following sentence is made.

*We were eating our meal last night when uncle left.*

The past continuous tense shows an action that was taking place for a longer time and the simple past shows an action that just happened and these are shown in the time line and example.

So, it can be said the context is appropriate to make the meanings of the two tenses clear. That is the past continuous tense shows an action that was taking place for a longer time and the simple past shows an action that just happened and these are shown in the time line and example.

Contrary to the time line and the example based on it, the book explains that:
We use the past continuous tense when two actions continued for some time together.

It then gives the following example.

*While the deer were grazing, a leopard saw them.*

Firstly, the time line and the first example are about past continuous tense and simple past. On the contrary, the explanation talks about past continuous and says that it is used when two actions were taking place in parallel. Surprisingly, the example that follows the explanation does not show two actions that happened in parallel. The correct example for the explanation should be,

- While the deer were grazing, a leopard was watching them.
- While we were eating lunch, she was doing her assignment.

Therefore, the book creates confusion by giving wrong information about the tenses.

**Conclusions and Recommendations**

The purpose of the current study was to evaluate the teaching of grammar in grade 9 text book and fine out how effectively grammar is presented and practiced in the book.

The evaluation of the textbook generally shows that there is heavy emphasis on the form and rule of the grammatical structures. For example, the presentation of the target structures as presented in the text books shows that there is heavy overemphasis on form, while little attempt is made to teach the use as well. In addition, the book adheres to one way of presenting grammatical items although it is indicated that various ways of presentation are employed. This is contrary to the
principles by which the book was written as well as to the current theory and practice of foreign language teaching.

The analysis of the practice activities also suggests that the book has introduced some changes when compared to their predecessors. However, it should be mentioned that the vast majority of the exercises provide practice in correct sentence construction and concentrate on separate sentences in isolation from a context. Such exercises may not be efficient to help the students develop the ability to use the language. As Celce Murcia (1991) argues grammar is a tool or resource to be used in comprehension and creation of oral or written discourse rather than something to be learned as an end in itself. When learned as a decontextualized sentence level, grammar is not very useful to learners.

Therefore, it is justifiable to recommend that the contents of the textbooks be changed in order to include more contextualized, meaningful and communicative activities that can develop the students’ ability to use the language fluently and accurately. For example, the following typical presentation of a new language item suggested by Atkins et al (1996, p. 50) can be used as reference.

- **Contextualizing**: Revising any previously learned vocabulary or structure for the new lesson. Establishing the context by presenting the new language item in a situation using a number of examples.
- **Concept checking**: Asking a few questions to check understanding. Short answers. Students are not required to use the structure in their answers necessarily.
- **Eliciting**: Eliciting examples of the target structure in context. Getting the students to try to produce the target structure meaningfully.
- **Grammar focus**: Getting students to repeat sample sentences to familiarize students with word order and pronunciation. Focus on other difficulties of form and/or
short, simple grammatical explanation of meaning as necessary.

The change in the contents of the books should also include practice activities. Regarding this, it is recommended that practice activities (both oral and written) should be adequate in number, varied and meaningful. They should require students not only to manipulate forms and write grammatically accurate sentences but also give situations or topics as context for practice.

References


