Processability of English grammar lessons for Ethiopian students' books: Upper grades of primary schools in focus

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Abstract

The study examined the processability of grammatical structures incorporated in grades 3-6 primary school English language students' textbooks currently in use in Amhara Regional State. To meet this objective, document analysis was used to collect data. The grammar lessons collected from four English textbooks (Grades 3–6) were analyzed using qualitative content analysis techniques. The framework used to analyze the data was Pienemann's processability hierarchy. Findings showed that the grammatical lesson presentations in the four textbooks under study were inconsistent with the developmental sequence of the second language English acquisition process due to the material writers' complete reliance on a theme-based approach. Therefore, it is recommended for materials writers to revise the textbooks and rewrite the grammar lessons by balancing the theme-based approach with Pienemann's processability theory.

Introduction

The quality of education determines the learning outcome. According to the World Bank's World Development Report (2018), instruction that lacks quality education is merely a waste of resources. Quality education, according to Carlson (2000), involves quality educational inputs, which include the existence of quality teaching materials (Chonjo, 2018). Students engage more deeply with content when textbooks are of high quality (Allan & Leifer, 2017).

Quality teaching materials are crucial, especially in EFL contexts. According to Hutchinson and Torres (1994), in EFL contexts, teaching materials are the only tools for learning the target language; they are the means that provide students with the only opportunities to understand a skill or language aspect under study. Indeed, an EFL textbook can accomplish what an EFL teacher does; meaning, the textbook can provide pupils with pertinent knowledge of grammar and vocabulary, as a map outlining the many language and cultural components of a structured curriculum, guiding teachers and students through the curriculum, as a resource by providing the teacher with a variety of information and activities

from which to pick, and as a trainer for inexperienced teachers who require helpful directions, encouragement, and direction (Cortazzi & Jin, 1999).

Also, Richards (2001) and Ur (1996) note that EFL textbooks help with programme structure and syllabus, standardize instructions, provide learning sources, act as effective language models and inputs, and provide ready-made texts and tasks. In addition, a textbook can be used as a useful tool for independent learning and self-study, a source of ideas and activities for learner practice and communicative interaction, a reference tool for students, as well as a syllabus and support for less experienced teachers to gain confidence and demonstrate new teaching methods (Cunningsworth, 1995).

In under-resourced Ethiopian classrooms, the textbook is the only source of target language input in print. In Ethiopia, most learners of L2 English have limited access to the target language through natural exposure. Textbooks are the main sources of linguistic exposure to English for L2 learners. In Ethiopia, textbooks are the sole learning source, especially in rural areas without internet access or other materials. Students and teachers rely solely on centrally prepared textbooks. Students can only get learning input from the textbooks. According to Hutchinson and Torres (1994), in EFL contexts in which textbooks are used as the only sources of language classes, it is significant to evaluate textbooks and check their quality. In classrooms where the use of textbooks is inevitable for instruction in the settings of English as an FL (Hutchinson & Torres, 1994), an evaluation of textbooks for the purpose of more efficient teaching and effective learning is a worthwhile undertaking.

In other words, language tasks in textbooks must be evaluated for their effectiveness in facilitating learning (Pikirang et al., 2021). It is a common experience that designing teaching materials that could help to achieve effective English language learning is a dilemma that EFL material writers come across. This conundrum arises from the fact that texts that are overburdened with complex linguistic forms are less important (Wade-Woolley, 1999). Indeed, according to de Jong et al. (2013), teachers are finding it difficult to support and teach English Language Learners (EL) using a given teaching material written for a specific grade level. This issue is particularly evident in Ethiopian primary schools' EFL instruction. This calls for the necessity of matching textbooks to learner needs and making the language tasks have strong theoretical bases (Wade-Woolley, 1999), and one of these tasks is to check the processability of EFL grammar tasks.

Much research on second language acquisition points to the fact that language learning is a developmental process (Willis & Willis, 2001). The idea that language acquisition is systematic for speakers of any language, regardless of whether it is their first or second language, is supported by a substantial body of research (Pienemann, 1998; Larsen-Freeman & Long, 1991).

Therefore, the processing perspective of second language acquisition tries to suit the teaching and learning processes of grammar to the learners' processing capacity of cognition. Processability in this study means the learnability of grammatical structures based on learners' cognitive processing stages. The learning process is explained as a step by step acquisition of grammar in which each step of development is constructed on the mastery of the preceding stages (Glahn et al., 2001). According to Doman (2012), second language grammar and syntax appear to evolve in steps that correspond with the order of first language acquisition. It is described that the occurrence of grammatical components (morphemes and

syntax) follows a predictable pattern known as the natural order of acquisition (Doman, 2012). The processability perspective argues that L2 learners at any phase of development can only construct grammatical aspects that their language processing systems are currently capable of handling (Pienemann, 1998). That is, L2 learners can only learn grammatical items when they are developmentally ready to do so. The processability insight, according to Pienemann (1998), describes how language acquisition occurs in terms of psycholinguistic components for the growth of the inter-language due to constraints imposed by language processing. Pienemann (2005) argues that the influence of educational intervention is constrained by the learner's stage of development at the time. Few studies have evaluated EFL textbooks using processability theory in resource-constrained contexts. For example, Tang's (2019) study focuses on the significance of designing textbooks with an awareness of learners' processing abilities and focuses on the processability perspective of textbook evaluation in EFL settings, looking at how grammatical sequencing in textbooks corresponds with learners' cognitive development. However, EFL textbooks in Ethiopia do not align with learners' developmental stages, potentially hindering effective grammar acquisition. Meaning, since textbooks do not sufficiently address students' cognitive and linguistic abilities, the misalignment can impede effective language learning. This study evaluates the processability of grammar tasks in grades 3–6 textbooks to address this gap.

Theoretical framework

Processability Theory (PT) serves as the theoretical framework of this study. Pienemann (1998, 2005) views language acquisition as a gradual and sequential developmental process. PT provides a theoretical context for the teachability hypothesis (Pienemann, 1984; 1998). It argues that formal instruction should not skip phases of acquisition and that teaching the target language can be most effective if it focuses on structures from the next developmental sequence (Pienemann, 1998, 2005, 2007). Research on second language acquisition indicates that language learning is a step-by-step progress (Willis & Willis, 2001). Studies by Johnston (1985) indicated that language is learned in sequences, which have been defined as "developmental stages," which implies that new linguistic information can only be acquired if the prerequisites have been met beforehand.

The grammar of the English language involves syntax and morphology, where the former deals with the internal structure of words and the latter covers the combinations of words to produce sentences, clauses, and phrases. Grammatical morphemes express grammatical information within a word or phrase, such as case, number, or tense (e.g., the -s in dogs, -ed in worked, or -ing in running (Johnston, 1985)). Syntax refers to the rules of word order and word combinations to form phrases and sentences; it describes how words and sentences are arranged. Word order and grammatical principles, such as subject-verb agreement and the proper arrangement of direct and indirect objects, are covered under syntax (Pienemann, 1998; 2005).

According to Pienemann (1998, 2005), when processing morphological items in English development, learners can go through five stages including lemma access, the category procedure, the noun phrase (NP) procedure, the verb phrase (VP) procedure, and the S procedure. See the table that follows:

Table 1

Morphological development for L2 English as adapted from Pienemann (1998, 2005)

Processing procedure	Morphology	Examples
S-procedure	Third person singular "-s/-es"	He eats.
	Adverb-ly	Ran slowly!
VP-procedure	tense agreement be + v-ing	He *is reading*. She *has*
	have + v-ed	*cleaned* the room.
NP-procedure	Possessive "-s"	Pat's cat
	plural "-s"	*two cats*
Category procedure	Plural agreement: noun +–s	They are *students.*
	Pl"-s" : noun + -'s	The *flowers* arnice.
	possessive pronoun	It is *her* book.
	simple past –ed : verb + "-ed"	She *baked injera*.
	Progressive marking –ing= verb + "-ing"	*He going* home.
word/lemma	single words/formulas	Many thanks!

Stage 1 does not use any processing techniques, and L2 lexical components are retained without any grammatical context. The formulaic phrase "many thanks" or the single word "here" is example of morphologically invariant forms that EFL students can create (Pienemann, 1998, 2005).

At stage 2, learners can recognize the categories of lexical items such as verbs, nouns, prepositions, adjectives, etc. without the ability to comprehend the exchange of grammatical information within a phrase or sentence. It can exhibit different morphological structures, including "simple past -ed" and "plural-s on nouns," which necessitates analysis of the verb category and the noun category of lexical elements, respectively. For example, learners can recognize whether a noun is singular or plural, or countable or uncountable, and then understand that the -s ending marker is linked to a countable noun (Pienemann, 1998, 2005).

At stage 3, L2 students are able to identify grammatical futures that can be exchanged between a noun phrase's (NP) head and modifier. To realize "NP agreement," the phrasal plural marker -s needs to emerge. For example, in 'ten bananas,' the plural feature unifies the noun 'bananas' and its modifier 'ten' (Tang, 2016).

In stage 4, the exchange of grammatical information within a verb phrase (VP) or inter-phrasal agreement occurs (Tang, 2016). L2 learners can choose an accurate auxiliary verb based on their knowledge of temporal, aspectual, or modal aspects (be, have, modal) and then unify these features with the corresponding ones in the lexical verbs (V-ing, V-en, V) (Tang, 2016).

A subject-verb interphrasal agreement happens at the fifth stage. L2 English learners can use the 3rd person singular marker -s in the simple present once they are able to unify the third person singular subject with the associated verb feature information. For instance, in the sentence "She plays football," the verb "play" has the third-person singular marker -s added to it to make it agree with the third-person singular subject "she." Likewise, six phases of development are proposed for L2 English syntactic development. See Table 2 below.

Table 2

Syntactic development for L2 English (adapted from Pienemann, 1998, 2005).

Processing procedure	Syntax	Examples
S-procedure	Cancel inversion	I wonder where she is.
S-procedure	Do second	Why did she say that?
	Aux second	Where are you going?
	Neg-Do	He does not like it.
VP-procedure	Yes/No inversion	Have you seen her?
	Copula inversion	Is she at home?
	Particle shift	Turn the light on.
NP-procedure	Topicalization	Soccer I like.
	ADV-fronting	Later she could study.
	Do-fronting	Do she go home?
	Neg + Verb	She doesn't ask.
Category procedure	Neg + SVO	Not I like banana.
	SVO?	You want coffee?
	SVO	I like banana.

The first (pre-syntactic) stage involves only single words and formulaic statements being produced by L2 learners; learners do not employ any morphological variants of nouns or verbs, for they are limited to producing single components (like "How are you?" or "No") (Tang, 2019). Learners can begin to differentiate between the nominal and verbal items at stage 2. In English syntax, the subject-verb-object (SVO) structure is the standard word order that emerges at stage 2 (Pienemann, 2005).

At stage 3, "ADV-fronting" arises when adjuncts, such as time or place circumstantial adverbials, appear in the starting position, as in the sentence "Later she could read"; by putting the auxiliary do in the first place in the canonical sequence, SVO (you enjoy meat); L2 learners can also generate the structure, such as "Do you like meat?" (Tang, 2019).

At stage 4, L2 learners can construct a question by putting an auxiliary or a copula verb at the beginning of a sentence, for example, "Can you speak English?" and "Are you there?" which cause the subject and the auxiliary, or copula, to be inverted (Pienemann, 2005).

L2 learners can distinguish the topic from the subject in the fifth stage; they possess the ability to perform the inversion operation, which involves putting the copula or auxiliary in front of the patient (Tang, 2019). After learners master placing, for example, a WH-word at the beginning of a sentence, they can generate syntactic structures like "Do-2nd" and "AUX-2nd," e.g., "What do you do on Sundays?" and "Why are you laughing?". They can also unite characteristics such as person, number, and tense. Therefore, by employing the morphological form of do (e.g., does, did), the learners can generate questions like "What does she do?" or "What did she do?" (Tang, 2019).

At stage 6, learners can employ inter-clausal agreement between the verbs in the main clause and the subordinate clause to create an indirect question, such as "I wonder why he

sold that car." (Di Biase et al., 2015). This syntactic phenomenon is known as 'cancel inversion' (Di Biase et al., 2015).

Statement of the Problem

Scholars, for example, Hawkins (2001), who study the acquisition of second languages have focused on developmental issues related to acquiring L2 grammatical characteristics. Long (1990) argues that L2 learners follow predictable structural learning phases, forming mental representations of grammar. The proccessability hypothesis of L2 learning contends that language acquisition involves developing psycholinguistic components.

But on second language acquisition, scant studies have recently been conducted (Keßler, 2006; Lenzing, 2004; Zipser, 2012), examining issues related to processability, or whether or not L2 students can learn the order of grammar items presented in textbooks. Furthermore, an acquisition-based assessment of four Chinese primary-school English textbook series is carried out by Tang (2019). The purpose of the study is to ascertain if the series' grammatical structure sequencing aligns with the L2 learning sequence specified by Processability Theory (PT). The findings indicate that there is some concordance between the PT-based proccessability hierarchy and the order in which the structures are taught as series objectives. The earliest steps of the grammatical item sequencing align with the L2 English learning process as specified by PT. In contrast to their sequencing in PT, certain grammatical components in the intermediate or high stages are presented unconventionally. The theme-based standards employed in the textbooks may be to blame for the irregular grading of such structures. It seems that considerations for L2 development are subordinated to considerations about the usefulness of grammatical elements in a particular context.

Notably, none of the prior studies examined processability in EFL textbooks for primary school students, focusing instead on high school or university learners; instead, they were all concerned with the L2 acquisition of high school or university students. More specifically, no research on the processability of grammatical elements has been done in the Ethiopian setting.

Also, according to this researcher's experience, primary school EFL teachers, learners, and parents are complaining that the tasks, including the grammar lessons, are so difficult that even the teachers cannot understand them. All of these instigated this researcher to examine the learnability levels of the grammar lessons in EFL textbooks. Thus, the main purpose of the study is to investigate the processability of the grammatical items incorporated into the new English teaching materials for upper primary schools (grades 3-6).

Methods

This part deals with the research paradigm, research design, the research setting, and data analysis techniques. Constructivism is served as the study's theoretical foundation since it supported the collection and analysis of data using qualitative techniques. Constructivism is a qualitative technique that focuses on textual data and uses document analysis to gather data (Cresswell, 2009; Dornyei, 2007).

The study aimed to examine the processability of grammatical structures incorporated in primary school English language students' textbooks. To meet this objective, the researcher employed a qualitative descriptive design that is concerned with events that have been naturally occurring, not artificially manipulated.

As with most of the primary schools in the country, primary schools in the Amhara region, particularly in rural areas of the region, have been facing problems related to the quality of English language education because of different factors; one of which is a lack of quality learning materials. The study focused on the newly written teaching materials, which are English language teaching materials published in 2014 E.C. and currently in use in Ethiopia.

Qualitative content analysis was used to gather data from Grades 3–6 English language students' books.According to Bowen (2009), qualitative content analysis helps to collect data through skimming, critically reading, and interpreting documents understudy. Thus, qualitative content analysis was used to collect data.

Based on the processability hierarchy of Pienemann's (1998, 2005), the analysis activities of the grammar lessons in the four textbooks were accomplished in three phases, including tabulating the focus grammatical items, labeling and classifying the focus grammatical structures in accordance with the morphological and syntactic categories, and comparing their sequence with the relevant elements in the processability hierarchy for L2 English, followed by making interpretations. Single words and formulaic sequence (e.g. Hello, How are you?) that appear at Stage 1 of the processing hierarchy were not included in the analysis because they were not relevant to the objective of this study. That is, the study collected grammar lessons from English textbooks beginning from Grade 3, which might not include more chunks and formulaic phrases. These might appear at grade one and two English textbooks.

The researcher tried to distinguish between a first occurrence and a subsequent (2nd, 3rd, or 4th time) occurrence of a grammatical item, and structures that appear for the first time were the focus of this study. That is, the focus of the researcher is the initial occurrence of the structures that are grammatical foci because the order of introduction or sequencing of the structures that are teaching objectives is the only thing that matters in this study, not how often the structures appear in the textbooks.

Results

The textbook evaluation tasks were accomplished in light of processability theory. According to Pienemann (1998, 2005), acquisitions of EFL grammatical aspects do not occur arbitrarily; instead, they follow an orderly pattern, with a given grammatical aspect preceding the other grammatical item, which activates another grammatical aspect again. Thus, the grammatical items included in the four textbooks (English for Ethiopia Grades 3 to 6 Students' Books) were analyzed in light of this assumption. The focuses of this study was primary schools because they are foundations for secondary school and tertiary level education. Primary EFL instruction serves as a base for students' further success throughout their school life (Adams, 1998; McGuiness, 2005). Also, the study does not involve Grades 1 and 2 English text books since they involve phonics, formulaic expressions, words, and

simple sentences, which do not reflect the grammatical intricacies that processability theory requires; they focus on basic literacy and numeracy skills instead of grammatical aspects. Pienemann (1998) notes that language learners can only learn given the grammatical items when they are developmentally ready to do so. So, leareners can have the capability to learn grammar after Grade 3 on wards. The analysis begins with the Grade 3 English for Ethiopian Students' Book (MOE, 2022a), as follows:

Table 3

Sequence of Morphological Foci in English for Ethiopian Grade 3 Student's Book

Lesson	Grammatical item	Examples	Processing Procedure	Stage
1	have and have not	I have a book. She has a laptop.	S-procedure (= 3sg-s)	5
	does not/do not have	Hagos does not have a jacket.	NP-procedure	3
2	a, an, the, zero article	I met a friend. I have an apple.	NP-procedure	3
3	Present continuous	They are playing football.	VP procedure	4
4	Quantifiers	little milk, few students,	NP-procedure	3
5	Countable & uncountable nouns	countable noun (e.g. table) vs. uncountable noun (water)	Category procedure	2
6	Plural Formation	boy-boys,	plural –s	2
7	Simple present tens	She eats orange.	S-procedure(=3sg –s)	5
8	Future tense	Hadja will go to mosque.	VP procedure	4
9	Comparative degree	Fufa is shorter than Ahmed.	Category procedure	2

Source: English for Ethiopian Grade 3 Student's Book (MOE, 2022a).

Nine lessons on morphological aspects of grammar were taken from Grade 3 English student text book and presented in Table 3 according to their order of occurrence in the book. The first lesson introduced in the book aims at helping students accurately use 'has' for a singular subject and 'have' for a plural subject to express what somebody possesses or an individual owns, and the main essence of the lesson is subject-verb agreement. But this is the last or 5th stage, according to the morphological development model of processability theory. Next to this lesson, the textbook involves noun and verb phrases (stages 3 and 4), followed by category procedures (stage 2).

This implies that the fifth stage has been presented in a premature manner before students have mastered the category procedure, the NP, and the VP procedures, which serve as pre-requisites for it. In addition, quantifiers (little, few, some, many, a lot of), which could appear at stage 3 (NP procedure), came before countable versus uncountable nouns and plural formations that might appear at stage 2 (category procedure). Similarly, the present continuous tense (is/am/are +v-ing) stage 4 has been presented in lesson 3, whereas the plural formation (plural marker -s) has been introduced late in lesson 6. Thus, the currently used Grade 3 English Student's Book has the least compliance with the processability theory, which mandates a learning sequence starting from identifying conceptual categories of the English language and then proceeding to learning subject-verb agreement through mastering different phrases, including noun phrases and verb phrases. Table four shows how the syntactic foci have been presented in the Grade 3 English Student Book.

The syntactic foci of a Grade 3 student's textbook begin with VP-procedure or "yes/no and copula inversion" (Stage 4). Then canonical word order (stage 2), sub-clause procedure (stage 6), and Neg do 2nd 5 (stage 5), respectively, come. Next to these, category procedures (stage 2), NP procedures (stage 3), and again category procedures (stage 2), respectively, occur (see table 4).

It is possible to observe that the grammar lessons that could be leveled at the highest stages in the hierarchy, such as yes/no and copula inversion" (Stage 4), sub-clause procedure (Stage 6), and Neg do 2nd (stage 5), occur at the beginning of the textbook, whereas the grammatical structures that could be leveled at lower stages, including the category procedures (Stage 2) and the NP procedure (Stage 3), appear last in the textbook. Indeed, grammar lessons that could help students practice canonical word orders (SVO) (stage 2) appear at the end of the grammar lessons in the Grade 3 English student's book (MOE, 2022a).

Table 4

Sequence of Syntactic Foci in English for Ethiopian Grade 3 Student's Book

Lesson	Grammatical item	Examples from the book	Processing procedure	Stage
1	Asking for & offering permissions	May I go out of the class?	VP-procedure	4
3	Sentence construction	I have a pencil.	Canonical word order (SVO)	2
4	Time conjunctions (before, after, then)	*Before* you go to class, you should eat your breakfast.	S- Procedure	6
5	Have not	*Hagos does not have* a pen.	S-procedure (Neg. do 2nd)	5
6	Simple present tense	She eats banana.	category procedure (SVO)	2
	S + does not + V +O	She doesn't eat banana	S-procedure (Neg. do 2nd)	5
	Do/does +S + V + O	Does she eat banana?	NP-procedure (Do fronting)	3
7	Complete sentences	Dawit is playing guitar.	Canonical word order (SVO)	2

Source: English for Ethiopian Grade 3 Student's Book (MOE, 2022a).

That is, "copula inversion" has been presented too early, and the VP procedural skills have been made to be developed prior to the development of the two successive lower procedures, namely, the category and the NP procedural skills, which go against the PT-based learning sequence (Pienemann, 1998, 2005). Moreover, some lessons that focused on stage 2 or canonical procedures or simple declarative sentences came after the grammar lessons that focused on questions and complex sentences, which involve sub-and main-clauses. But the students can easily comprehend and produce questions and complex sentences if they are exposed to them after having the capacity to produce or construct simple sentences, which is mastering SVO. Next, Grade 4 student's English Book (MOE, 2022b) morphological foci will be analyzed.

Table 5

Grade 4 English for Ethiopian Student's Book Morphological Foci

Lesson	Grammatical item	Examples	Processing procedure	Stage
1	Articles	*a cat*	NP procedure	3
2	Simple present	*He teaches* English.	S-procedure	5

Lesson	Grammatical item	Examples	Processing procedure	Stage
3	Present continuous	He *is painting* a picture.	VP-procedure	4
4	Quantifiers	I have *much money*.	NP-procedure	3
5	Pronouns	Abel is coming. *He* is there.	Category procedure	2
6	Can/should	I *can play* a guitar.	VP-procedure (Aux. + V)	4
7	Nouns	There are *four blue buses* …	NP-procedure	3
8	Expressing likes	I *like getting* up early…	VP procedure (like + gerund)	4
9	Prepositions	There is water *in the glass*.	NP-procedure (prep. phrase)	3
10	Comparatives	Hanna is taller than Hirut.	category procedure(adj. +-er)	2
11	Adverbs o	He *usually cleans* the house.	VP (adv. + V)	4
12	Linking verbs	This pizza really tastes good.	S-procedure (SV agreement)	5
13	Helping verbs	We will walk for ten miles.	VP-procedure (aux. v. + main v.)	4
14	collective nouns	*a herd of cattle*	NP-procedure (NP agreement)	3

Source: English for Ethiopian Grade 4 Student's Book (MOE, 2022b).

Table 5 shows the sequences of morphological foci in currently used English for Ethiopia's Grade 4 Student's Book. Fourteen lessons that focused on morphological aspects of grammar were taken from the textbook, and they were put in the table according to their order of occurrence. The first grammar lesson introduced in the book aims at helping students understand and construct an accurate noun phrase from an article and a noun. The next lesson is about helping learners develop the ability to use simple present tense, where students use a singular verb' for a singular subject and 'a plural verb' for a plural subject, and the main essence of the lesson is subject-verb agreement. Next to this lesson, the textbook involves verb and noun phrases followed by category procedures (see the above table). This shows that the text began with a sentence and then proceeded to a phrase, followed by a lesson that focused on conceptual categories.

These facts demonstrate that the Grade 4 student textbook's morphological items have not been provided in a way that is consistent with the processability hypothesis, which suggests that students may find it difficult to learn and comprehend the textbook's grammatical items. In other words, the grammatical structure presentations contradict the theory put out by the PT (Pienemann, 1998, 2005), according to which a learner can only acquire upper procedural abilities after mastering all lower procedural skills.

Table 6

Grade 4 English for Ethiopian Student's Book Syntactic Foci

Lesson	Grammatical items	Examples from the textbook	Processing procedure	Stage
1	Simple present	My father teaches English.	Category procedure (SVO)	2
2	Present Continuous	He is painting a picture.	Category procedure	2
3	Quantifiers	Do you have any money?"	VP-procedure	4
		I don't have any money.	NP-procedure	3
4	Wh-questions	Where do you go …?	S-procedure	5
5	Using "can" and "may"	Can I use your pen, please?	VP- Procedure	4
6	Interrogative sentences	*Should we protect* soil?	Yes/No inversion	4
7	'Wh…' questions	Where is your birth place?	Aux-2nd = question wh-word.	5
8	"I like… so do"	I like dogs. So does Senait.	So + aux. + S (pronoun)	4
9	verb do' & does	Do we have extra time?	copula inversion	4

Source: English for Ethiopian Grade 4 Student's Book (MOE, 2022b).

In Table 6, 9 different grammatical lessons were introduced, beginning with category procedures—sentences with simple present and present continuous tenses followed using the quantifier "any" with interrogative and negative sentences which require mastery of the VP-procedure or yes/no inversion (yes/no question in which there is an inversion of the auxiliary do and a subject) and the NP procedure, where the negative marker 'not' is placed before a verb. Next, S-procedure (stage 5) has occured.

It is obvious that L2 learners can begin processing the yes/no inversion and questions with wh-words at stages 4 and 5, respectively. L2 learners may fully distinguish the topic from the subject in the fifth stage, when they are able to activate the S-procedure. It is presumed that they possess the ability to perform the inversion operation, which involves putting the copula or auxiliary in front of the patient. It is assumed that after learners have mastered placing a focus element (such as a WH-word) in the first place of a sentence, they will be able to generate syntactic structures such as "Do-2nd" and "AUX-2nd". The students can also trade inter=phrasal information for agreement in the interim. They are able to bridge component barriers to unite characteristics (such as person, number, and tense). Therefore, it is assumed that by employing the morphological form of do (e.g., does, did), the learners would be able to generate queries like "Where do you go in the morning?", "What are you doing in the library?" etc. However, it is crucial to note that L2 learners can access the 4th and 5th stages and initiate the VP and S'-procedures once the NP (stage 3) is automated

Table 7

Grade 5 English for Ethiopian Student's Book Morphological Items

Lesson	Grammatical item	Examples	Processing procedure	Stage
1	Simple present tense	Biazen Speaks English.	S-procedure	5
2	Comparative/ super.	Rahel is *taller* than Rehana	Category procedure	2
3	Present continuous	*I am reading* my notes now.	VP- Procedure (Aux + V-ing)	4
4	Passive voice	The room is cleaned.	VP –Procedure (Aux + V3)	4
5	Nouns	Hirut vs. student	Category procedure	2
6	Simple past	She completed the task.	Category procedure	2
7	'can' & 'could'	She *can speak* English.	VP-procedure (Aux + V1)	4
8	Past habits	I used *to play* with mud.	VP-Procedure (used to + V1)	4
9	Present Perfect	Martha *has bought* a dress.	VP-procedure (have + V3)	4
10	Future Tense	They *will call* us.	VP- procedure (will+V1)	4

Source: English for Ethiopian Grade 5 Student's Book (MOE, 2022c).

Table 7 demonstrates the sequences of morphological foci in currently used English for Ethiopia's Grade 5 Student's Book. Ten lessons that focused on morphological aspects of grammar were taken from the textbook, and they were presented in Table 7 based on their order of occurrence in the book. The first grammar lesson introduced in the book was subject-verb agreement (stage 5), followed by categorical procedure (adding -er or -est to an adjective), which could be leveled as stage 2. The next lessons are about helping learners develop the ability to construct verbal phrases using auxiliary verbs and verb-ing or past participles, which are again followed by categorical procedures that could help students

differentiate proper and common nouns, countable and uncountable nouns, and singular and plural nouns.

Table 8
Grade 5 English for Ethiopian Student's Book Syntactic Foci

Lesson	Grammatical item	Examples	Processing procedure	Stage
1	Simple Present Tense	Bizen speaks English.	Category procedure	2
2	Negative form	Bizen doesn't speak English.	S-Procedure	5
3	Interrogative forms	Do we play together?	NP-Procedure	3
	Negative form	I am not reading my notes now.	S-Procedure	5
	Interrogative form	Is she playing?	VP-Procedure	4
	Interrogative form	Did she complete the task?	NP-procedure	3
	Negative form	He did not kick the ball.	S-procedure	5
6	Modals to ask for permission	Can I have some cookies?	VP-procedure	4
7	Asking questions using how	How much or many?	S-procedure	5
8	Present perfect: Negative	We haven't finished.	S-procedure	5
9	Present perfect: Interrogative	Have you been here?	VP-procedure	4
10	Present perfect: Wh-Questions	What have you done today?	S-procedure	5

Source: English for Ethiopian Grade 5 Student's Book (MOE, 2022c).

According to Table 8, the syntactic part of the grammar lessons begins with the appropriate construction of sentences with the simple present tense (stage 2), followed by the construction of negative sentences (stage 5), in which the auxiliary do agrees with the subject, and the NP procedure, or do fronting (stage 3), in which there is an inversion of a modal auxiliary verb or do and a subject in a sentence. As the table shows, the lessons are observed to focus on stage 4 and stage 5, skipping mostly stage 3 and stage 2. However, children can access the 4th and 5th stages and initiate the VP and S'-procedures if and only if they have mastered the category- procedure (stage 2) and the NP-procedure (stage 3).

Table 9
Grade 6 English for Ethiopian Student's Book Morphological Items

Lesson	Morphological item	Examples	Processing Procedure	Stage
1	The Present Simple Tense	*The sun rises* in the East.	S-Procedure	5
2	The Present Continuous	My parents *are working*.	VP-procedure	4
3	The Simple Past	You *arrived* in England.	Category procedure	2
4	Comparative Adjectives	We need a *bigger* garden.	Category	2
5	Superlative Adjectives	It was the happiest day of my life.	Category	2
6	Present Perfect Tense	I have visited twenty countries.	'VP-procedure	4
7	Verbs with to-infinitives	They decided to start a business.	VP-procedure	4
8	Active and Passive Voice	We are helped by him.	VP-procedure	4
9	Nouns	In the *summer,* we go to the *lake*.	Category procedure	2
10	Adverbs	Kiflu *came late*.	Category procedure	2
11	Comparative adverbs	Kiflu came *later than* Amy.	Category procedure	2
12	Superlative adverbs	Of the three, Kiflu came *latest*.	Category procedure	2

Source: English for Ethiopian Grade 6 Student's Book (MOE, 2022d).

Twolve lessons that focused on morphological aspects of grammar were taken from Grade 6 English text book and shown in Table 9 according to their sequence. The first lesson introduced in the book aims at helping students accurately use singular verbs' for singular subjects and 'plural verbs' for plural subjects to talk about facts, in which the main purpose of the lesson is subject-verb agreement. Next, a verb phrase (i.e., is, am, or are + v-ing) followed by category procedures in which students add the bound morpheme -ed to a regular verb to form past tenses has been presented.

That is, the lesson began with stage 5 and proceeded to stages 4 and 2, respectively. It is also possible to observe that the category procedures that could help students recognize nouns, adverbs, and comparative and superlative forms of adjectives appeared last in the book after the S- and VP-procedures had been presented. These morphological features have been ordered out of the assumption of the PT-based processability hierarchy (Pienemann, 1998, 2005), which argues learners can be successful if they go through five processing steps, beginning from stage 2 up to stage 5, without skipping any intermediate stage when processing syntactic features in English, in order to reach the end of language learning development.

Table 10

Grade 6 English for Ethiopian Student's Book Syntactic Foci

Lesson	Communicative function	Examples	Processing procedure	Stage
1	Simple Present	We live in Ethiopia.	Category procedure	2
2	Negative	I don't ride the bus.	S-procedure	5
3	Questions	Where do they live?	S-procedure	5
4	The Present Continuous	My parents are working.	Category procedure	2
5	Simple Future:	The sun will rise tomorrow.	Category procedure	2
6	Present Perfect Tense	I have visited twenty countries.	Category procedure	2
7	Passive Voice	We are helped by him.	Category procedure	2
8	Conditional Sentences	If you study hard, you will pass.	S-procedure	6
9	Comparative adverbs	Kiflu came *later than* Amy.	Category procedure	2
10	Superlative adverbs	Of the three, Kiflu came latest.	Category procedure	2

Source: English for Ethiopian Grade 6 Student's Book (MOE, 2022d).

The syntactic part of the grammar lessons of Grade 6 English begins with the construction of sentences with the simple present tense (stage 2) followed by the construction of negative sentences (stage 5), in which the auxiliary do agrees with the subject. This is a dramatic skipping from stage 2 to stage 5 skipping stage 3 (NP-procedure) and stage 4 (VP-procedure) that are pre-requisites for the fifth stage. In addition, most lessons focus on stage 2 and then proceeded to stage 6 where students practice cancel inversion. But L2 learners can access the sixth stage after they have mastered all prior processing resources such as the NP and VP processes as well as the Do-2nd" and "AUX-2nd questions. Also lessons which could be leveled as stage 2 are predominantly observed while the NP- (stage 3) and VP- (stage 4) procedures have been completely ignored.

Discussion

The fundamental idea behind PT is that L2 learners can only generate grammatical structures that their language processor is currently capable of processing (Pienemann, 1998). The order in which L2 learners have access to the required processing methods dictates the L2 developmental phases of learning. Processing theory predicts a hierarchy of processing procedures in the morphological and syntactic development of ESL involving a six-stage model of lemma access, category, noun and verb phrase, sentence, and subordinate clause procedures (Bettoni & Di Biase, 2015; Pienemann, 1998; Pienemann et al., 2005). This hierarchy is based on the hypothesis that the processing procedures developed at one stage are a prerequisite for the subsequent stage. Numerous empirical studies, for example, Charters et al. (2012), Dyson (2009), Dyson and Håkansson (2017), Keßler (2007), and Pienemann (1998, 2005) have supported this hierarchy of ESL development. Therefore, in light of this theory, the grammatical items in the four students' English textbooks were investigated.   To begin with the data analysis results of the morphological items in Grade 3, the lessons began with a lesson that required students to unify information subject and verb, that is, subject-verb agreement processing skill, which is considered a fifth stage. So, this lesson has been presented before students have mastered the category procedure, the NP-, and the VP- procedures, which serve as pre-requisites for the fifth stage.

Besides, the noun phrase procedure (stage 3), which requires students to remember diacritical characteristics that are united and exchanged between the head and modifier of a noun phrase, came before a category procedure—countable versus uncountable nouns and plural formations (stage 2). Similarly, the VP procedure -is/am/are +v-ing (stage 4) has been presented in lesson 3, whereas the plural formation (plural marker -s) has been introduced late in lesson 6. All these indicate that the currently used Grade 3 English Student's Book has the least compliance with the processability theory.

To come to the presentations of the syntactic foci of the textbook of the same grade level, the yes/no and copula inversion" (Stage 4), sub-clause procedure (Stage 6), and Neg do 2nd (Stage 5), were found to appear at the beginning of the textbook, whereas the grammatical structures that could be found under the category procedures (Stage 2) and the NP procedure (Stage 3) appeared last in the textbook. Grammar lessons that could help students practice canonical word orders (SVO) (stage 2) appeared at the end of the grammar lessons.

Next to the presentations of Grade 3 morphological and syntactic foci, the presentations of Grade 4 English morphological items were investigated, and the data analysis results showed that the lesson started with a noun phrase (article +noun) and proceeded to subject-verb agreement, followed by noun and verb phrases. After all these, the category procedures came. These demonstrate that the presentations of the Grade 4 student textbook's morphological items were inconsistent with the processability hypothesis, which suggests that students find it easy to learn and comprehend the morphological items if they are, firstly, provided with category procedure followed by noun and verb phrase, and if they are exposed to the SP procedure last.

The process of acquisition is seen as the progressive building of a mental grammar, where each developmental step is predicated on the comprehension of the phases that come before it (Glahn et al., 2001). According to Pienemann (1998, 2005), learners can go through

five processing steps to process morphological items in the English language before they reach the end of the target language learning development. These steps include lemma access, the category procedure, the NP procedure, the VP procedure, and the S-procedure, in which students differentiate, firstly, the conceptual categories such as verbs, nouns, adjectives, quantifiers, articles, etc., and more specifically, countable and uncountable nouns, plural and singular nouns, and so on. By mastering conceptual categories, students can learn phrases such as noun phrases, adjectival phrases, verbal phrases, adverbial phrases, and prepositional phrases. If they are able to identify and construct the correct phrase, they can proceed with sentence construction and write or speak a sentence in which their subject agrees with their verbs.

Also, the different syntactic foci of the same grade English student textbook were presented in such a way that the category procedures began the lesson and yes/no inversion (yes/no question in which there is an inversion of the auxiliary do and a subject) took place, followed by the NP procedure, where the negative marker 'not' is placed before a verb. Next, S-procedure (stage 5), appeared. It is also found that stage 3 has apparently been skipped, although learners can access the 4th and 5th stages and initiate the VP and S'-procedures after they master this.

Next to the grade 4 English syntactic foci, grade 5 morphological foci were analyzed, and the analysis revealed that subject-verb agreement (stage 5), categorical procedure (adding -er or -est to an adjective) (stage 2), verbal phrases, categorical procedures, etc. were presented in this order. Similarly, the syntactic foci of the same grade textbook begin with sentence constructions (stage 2), followed by the construction of negative sentences (stage 5), in which the auxiliary do agrees with the subject, and the NP procedure, or do fronting (stage 3), in which there is an inversion of a modal auxiliary verb (do) and a subject in a sentence. Stage 4 and stage occurred repeatedly while stage 3 rarely appeared.

Finally, the morphological items of the grade 6 English student book were presented, beginning with a lesson on subject-verb agreement (stage 5) and proceeding to verb phrase (is, am, or are + v-ing), followed by category procedures in which the bound morpheme -ed could be added to a regular verb to form past tenses. That is, the lessons began with stage 5 and proceeded to stages 4 and 2, respectively. It is also crucial to note that the category procedures that could help students recognize conceptual categories such as nouns, adverbs, and comparative and superlative forms of adjectives appeared last in the book. These imply that the grammar lessons in the Grade 6 English student's textbook have not been presented in a learnable manner. For example, learners could not successfully learn subject-verb agreement before they had developed all the previous processing resources—the VP procedure, the NP procedure, and the category procedure—at that point. Similarly, the syntactic part of the grammar lessons of Grade 6 English began with stage 2) proceeded stage 5, which showed a dramatic skipping from stage 2 to stage 5 leaving stage 3 (NP-procedure) and stage 4 (VP-procedure) that are pre-requisites for the fifth stage. In addition, most lessons focus on stage 2 and then proceeded to stage 6 where students practice cancel inversion.

Generally, these findings revealed that the ordering of the grammatical structures in the four textbooks was contrary to the L2 learning sequences as stipulated in PT. In all four textbooks, both the morphological and syntactic foci were not presented in stages, starting

from stage 1 to stage 5 or 6. The findings imply that the authors of the four students' textbooks did not use a processability perspective as a framework, and they did not take learners' developmental readiness into consideration when writing the teaching materials.

Theme-based textbook writing may be the reason for the deviant grading of the morphological items that appear in the four student textbooks. For example, the morpheme third-person singular -s (stage 5) occurred as a first lesson in all Grades understudy (Grades 3 up to 6) grammar lessons, which can be associated with the theme-based approach. That is, the third-person singular is introduced prior to the other stages, such as stage 4, stage 3, stage 2, and stage 1, or it appears too early in the initial parts of the morphological aspects of the grammar lessons of the four textbooks. The early introduction of the third-person singular, -s, may be associated with the early occurrence of a related theme or topic. The themes used as the first units of Grade 3, Grade 4, Grade 5, and Grade 6 were "My school," "people and their work," "Holidays," and "traditional games", respectively. Each grade level student was expected to talk about their respective topics or themes. The grammar sections of each of the four textbooks were about simple presents.

In the Grade 3 English textbook, the thematic area used for unit one was "My schools," where the speaking, listening, reading, vocabulary, writing, and grammar lessons were drawn from. All these sections of the unit invite students to use simple present tense. In addition, the grammar lesson presented as an independent part of the lesson was the "simple present tense". Similarly, the first unit of grade 4 English text book required students to talk, read, listen, and write about "people and their work", which let them use the simple present tense forms of verbs. Most importantly, the grammar section of the same unit is the "simple present tense". The same is true for Grades 5 and 6 English textbooks. In all four grade levels, the grammar sections on simple present tense invited students to add the morpheme -s to a verb to construct a sentence with a third-person singular subject, such as he, she, it, Abebe, etc.

Conclusion

In this study, the grammar lessons in four English student textbooks currently being used in upper primary schools in the Amhara Region have been evaluated using an acquisition-based theory. Particularly, processability theory (Pienemann, 1998, 2005) has been used, as a framework, to assess how the grammar lessons are presented in the four textbooks. The evaluation has shown that the grammatical structure sequencing in these textbooks is inconsistent with the developmental sequence of the L2 English acquisition process, as stated in processability theory. The reason for the exclusion of learnability or sequencing considerations might be the complete reliance of material writers on a theme-based approach that focuses on the utility of grammatical forms within a given theme. Consequently, it is recommended that if students are needed to learn grammar effectively and enhance their English grammar knowledge, it is crucial to revise the materials and make a balance between the communicative demands of learners and grammatical sequencing of the materials. That is, it is suggested that policymakers and material writers should use grammatical sequencing in addition to a theme-based or content-based approach to enhance students' effective learning of the English language. Future researchers on the processability

of grammar can further investigate this issue by incorporating other methodological approaches, for example, the frequencies of the grammatical items under study.

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