Ἐχεις μοι εἰπεῖν, ὦ 
Σώκρατες, ἃρα 
διδακτόν ἢ 
ἀρετή; ἢ οὐ 
διδακτόν ἀλλ’ 
ἀσκητόν; ἢ οὔτε 
ἀσκητόν οὔτε 
μαθητόν, ἀλλὰ 
φύσει 
παραγίγνεται 
τοῖς 
ἄνθρωποις ἢ 
ἄλλω τινὶ τρόπῳ.
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The scope of the MEJER is broad, both in terms of topics covered and disciplinary perspective, since the journal attempts to make connections between fields, theories, research methods, and scholarly discourses, and welcomes contributions on humanities, social sciences and sciences related to educational issues. It publishes original empirical and theoretical papers as well as reviews. Topical collections of articles appropriate to MEJER regularly appear as special issues (thematic issues).

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THE PRESENT APPROACH TO GRAMMAR TESTING IN EFL COURSE BOOKS

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ABSTRACT

Since the aim of English language school program is to learn English for communicative purposes, this research aims to analyze the methodological features of some EFL course books used in Albanian secondary schools in order to probe into the main present approach to grammar testing and make methodological proposals for English language teachers for an effective grammar testing, teaching and learning, referring to recent research of foreign language acquisition. It is concluded that the EFL course books offer a structural approach to grammar testing, as most of the activities focus on the comprehension of the form and meaning of target structures. Including a variety of data options and operations can help teachers in assessing their learners holistically, focusing not only on the form of the target structures and the reading skills, but also on its meaningfulness and use and the other communicative skills.

Keywords: grammar testing, approach, course book, operations.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. The aim of the study

Testing is one form of assessing learners’ foreign language knowledge and competence and it is widely used in the world, including Albania. In our country, it is usually a decisive means in assessing learners’ language knowledge and competence, because of the relatively large (30-35 students) and mixed ability foreign language classes. Since the aim of EFL school program is to learn English for communicative purposes, it is important that course books provide teachers and learners with available practice materials for tests as to help them in the communicative language learning and teaching process.

Undoubtedly, the course books are the most pervasive tool for classroom-based foreign language learning as they support and facilitate teaching and learning process by including a carefully planned and balanced selection of language content and providing readymade texts and tasks with possible appropriate level for most of the class, which save time for the teacher (Ur 1999). Besides, the course books provide teachers and learners with a rubric called ‘Self-assessment’, ‘Self Check’ or ‘Progress Check’. As it is known, this rubric includes different tasks which focus on
the target language items presented in certain units of the course book. As such, it supports teaching and learning: it helps teachers to check their learners’ achievements in learning a FL; moreover, it helps learners themselves to know and recognize the standards they are aiming for.

This research aims to analyze some English language textbooks used in Albanian secondary schools in order to probe into the main present approach to grammar testing and make methodological proposals for English language teachers for an effective grammar testing, teaching and learning, referring to recent research of foreign language acquisition. The selected English course books may be used in other countries abroad or may have characteristics in common with other English course books; therefore the findings and the methodological proposals can be significant to other teachers of English as a FL abroad who use them in teaching and learning English communicatively. Moreover, the findings and the methodological proposals can be significant to teachers of other foreign languages who notice the same deficiencies in their foreign language course books and who view testing as a decisive means in assessing their learners’ language knowledge and competence. This study is limited to the selected course books published by Express Publishing.

1.2. The approaches to grammar teaching and testing

As teaching and testing are closely interrelated, it is obvious that the development of different theories and approaches of language learning and teaching has also affected the history of language and grammar testing. Under the influences of the theoretical and empirical developments in other sciences as well, there have been three general approaches to language and grammar teaching:

- **Focus on forms** represented by grammar-based methods (grammar-translation, audio-lingual, oral and situational, silent way, total physical response, presentation-practice-production) (Richards, Rodgers 2001); it emphasized the role of grammar in language learning.

- **Focus on meaning** approach represented by communication-based methods (communicative, notional-function, content-based, task-based) (ibid.); based on the assumption that learners are able to acquire the language implicitly, it focused on an exposure to meaningful communication.

- **Focus on form** (focus on forms and meaning) approach draws learners’ attention to linguistic forms in the context of meaningful communication.

As Larsen-Freeman (2009: 522) noted, the pedagogic approach to the teaching of grammar differs in various parts of the world, depending on the pedagogic traditions. In Albania, language teachers (of native and foreign one) have always believed in the efficacy of explicit grammar instruction (Kaçani 2013: 146); as a result grammar has had a very important place in language teaching, learning and testing learners’ language skills.

As far as testing grammar is concerned, there have been two main approaches to language and grammar testing: a structural approach and a communicative one...
(Hedge 2000, Larsen-Freeman 2009, Purpura 2004). Over time, in the world, assessment of grammatical ability has changed depending on what language teachers have chosen to assess under ‘grammar’ and the ways in which these assessments have been carried out (Purpura 2004: 4). For example: in Grammar-translation Method, grammar was assessed through the ability to recite rules or to provide an accurate translation; whereas in Audio Lingual Method, through the ability to infer a rule from examples of the target language (ibid., Larsen-Freeman 2000, Richards 2001).

Traditional linguistics, considering the language as a formal system and mental phenomenon, isolated from the communicative context, led to a structural approach to language testing. It provided language teachers with a wealth of information about grammatical forms and the rules that govern them what served as a basis for syllabus design, materials preparation and classroom assessment for several decades. As Larsen-Freeman (2009: 533) has noted the traditional approach to assessing grammar has defined grammatical knowledge ‘in terms of accurate production and comprehension and then assessed through the four skills’. Testing is typically done by means of isolated sentences, using techniques such as sentence unscrambling, fill-in-the-blanks, error correction, sentence completion, sentence combining, sentence transformation, table completion, picture description, elicited imitation, judging grammatical correctness and modified cloze passages (ibid.). Such techniques are not considered thoroughly effective in testing learners’ FL knowledge and competence because, as Larsen-Freeman has noted, ‘such formats test learners’ grammar knowledge, but they do not assess whether they can use grammar correctly in real-life speaking or writing’ (ibid.).

Hymes’ theory of communication (1972) has had a great impact on foreign language teaching and assessment: shifting the emphasis of language classrooms from a formal grammatical focus to a communication-based one. The contemporary linguistics, considering the language as a functional system and social phenomenon, has led to an integrative (Larsen-Freeman 2009: 533) or communicative (Hedge 2000: 378) approach to language testing. It has offered a language description that takes into consideration its different communicative contexts. Grammar, in the communication perspective, stands not only for form, but also for meaningfulness and pragmatic appropriacy. Language proficiency, as McNamara and Roever (2006, cited in Larsen-Freeman 2009: 533) has noted, is not seen in terms of knowledge of structures (which could best be assessed using discrete-point items), but in terms of the ability to integrate and use the language knowledge in performance, which could best be assessed through the production and comprehension of written texts and through face-to-face interaction. Clearly, grammar viewed as one component of the communicative competence (Canale & Swain 1980, Hymes 1972) can be tested only if the learner (language user) is included in a communicative context. This communicative context (including the aim of communication, the context of the communication and the co-communicator) must be comprehensive for him/her in order that he uses the target grammar appropriately to the given context of communication.
Based on these arguments and evidence, attention has been given to improve test compilation for testing grammar communicatively. Rea-Dickins has suggested a task-based approach to the communicative testing of grammar, within which there are at least five factors that make a grammar test communicative (1991: 125):

- the contextualization of test items: a test should not comprise a number of de-contextualized single sentences
- the identification of a communicative purpose for the test activity
- the identification of an audience to whom the communication is addressed
- instructions to the test taker that focus on meaning rather than on form
- the opportunity for the test taker to create his/her own message and to produce grammatical responses as appropriate to a given context

Weir (1993, cited in Hedge 2000: 378) has given a summary of operations where learners can be involved in testing their language knowledge and competence; for example: comprehending the main message, understanding certain details, guessing meaning of the new words from the contexts etc. These activities ask learners not only just to use correctly the linguistic structures, but also appropriately to their communicative contexts.

Evidences of this improvement are some well-known standardized examinations, such as TOEFL and TOEIC, which no longer include a separate section of the test that deals with grammatical structures explicitly; they are integrated in the materials of reading, listening, writing and speaking. What about the course books? Do they provide FL teachers and learners with practice materials for testing grammar within a communicative curriculum?

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1. Research Materials

The selected English language course books (firstly published by Express Publishing in 2008) are presented in Table 1. They are commonly used in teaching English in public Albanian secondary schools. Further information about the selected course books has been summarized in Table 1. The same book levels have purposefully been chosen as to minimize the effects of other related factors (Celce-Murcia 1991).

The examples that are used to illustrate the methodological options in the course books are taken from one sample section of each course book appended at the end of the research so as to make it more comprehensible to a wider audience, including people interested not only in teaching and learning English but also other foreign languages.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nr.</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Authors</th>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Section</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Click On (Student’s Book)</td>
<td>Virginia Evans</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Self-assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Neil O’Sullivan</td>
<td></td>
<td>1-5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Access (Student’s Book)</td>
<td>Virginia Evans</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Self Check 1-10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
With the purpose to unearth the methodological options utilized in the above selected course books related to grammar testing, the course books have been analyzed using two sets of Ellis’ system of methodological options employed in grammar practice books (Ellis 2002): data and operations. The data options involve the provision of text containing exemplars of the target structure. Data options are subdivided in terms of source, text size and medium. Source refers to whether the data provided consists of authentic materials (texts from a real-life context) or contrived materials (a pedagogic context i.e. the author has devised the sentences to illustrate the grammar point). Text size concerns whether the data consists of discrete sentences or is continuous. Finally, the text comprising the data can be written or oral. The operations refer to the activities in the course books. They are classified according to whether they involve production (to produce sentences containing the target structure), reception (to perform some activity to demonstrate learners have understood sentences containing the target structure), or judgment (to identify whether sentences containing the target structure are grammatical or ungrammatical). Production activities can be controlled [to operate on a text (usually discrete sentences) in a way that involves producing the target form e.g., substitution, gap-filling, sentence completion, transformation, insertion, jumbled sentences] or free (to construct their own sentences using the target structure). Reception activities can be controlled (students are able to control the speed to process the sentences containing the target structure) or automatic (students are required to process sentences in real time). Finally, judgment tasks can involve judgment only (stating whether a sentence is or is not grammatical) or correct (trying to correct the sentences judged to be ungrammatical).

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The methodological features of the selected course books related to grammar testing are summarized in table 2.

Referring to data options, all the course books provide tasks that include contrived written texts and discrete sentences focusing on the target structures of the respective units. For example: exercise 5, 7 in Click On, p. 24 which ask learners
to put the verbs at a certain tense form; similarly exercise 5 in Blockbuster, p. 22; exercise 3, 4 in Access, p. 20; exercise C, D, E in Access (Teacher’s), p. 98; 4, 5 in Wishes, p. 40. The last four exercises (D, E in Access, 4, 5 in Wishes) ask learners to practice certain determiners in discrete sentences. The use of contrived written texts and discrete sentences focusing on the target structures, characteristic of an structural approach to testing, is not considered effective in testing learners’ FL knowledge and competence as it does not assess their ability in using the target structures correctly in real-life communication (Larsen-Freeman 2009: 533). What is more, as language is context-sensitive i.e. an utterance is fully intelligible only in its context (Weaver 1996), continuous texts opposed to discrete sentences are needed to check learners’ awareness of form, meaning and use of the target structure.

Besides the above exercises, Click On and Access (Teacher’s) provide authentic, continuous and oral texts (respectively exercises: 9, 10, 11, p. 25; E, F, H, p. 99-100) giving the learners opportunities to work on the language used in real-life communication. As Thornbury (2008: 73) has noted, nowadays, course book writers generally adopt simplified authentic texts which ‘retain their flavor’. But this seems not to be thoroughly true when referring to language or grammar testing. Only two from six selected course books make use of authentic texts.

What is more, Click on and Access (Teacher’s) have an advantage in presenting data in oral and written form what can help teachers in checking learners’ language proficiency in both written and oral speech.

Table 2. The methodological features of the selected course books

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nr.</th>
<th>Course book</th>
<th>Data options</th>
<th>Operations</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Source</td>
<td>Text size</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Authentic</td>
<td>Contrived</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Click On</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Access</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Access (Teacher’s)</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Blockbuster (SB)</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Blockbuster (WB &amp; GB)</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Wishes</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nr.</th>
<th>Course book</th>
<th>Operations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Controlled Free Controlled Automatic Judgment Correction only</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Click On</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Access</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3. Access √ √ √ (Teacher’s)
4. Blockbuster √ (SB)
5. Blockbuster √ (WB & GB)
6. Wishes √

Referring to operations, controlled production activities are widely used, generally including discrete sentences; for example: gap-filling (exercise 5, 7, 8 in Click On, p. 24-25; exercise 5 in Blockbuster, p. 22 and in Access, p. 20), transformation (exercise 5 in Wishes), jumbled paragraphs (exercise 9 in Click On, p. 25). Free production and controlled reception activities are only used in Click On and Access (Teacher’s), but they are less in number comparing to the previous mentioned activities; for example: exercise 9, 10 in Click On, p. 25; H, I in Access (Teacher’s), p. 99-100. All the course books do not provide any automatic reception and judgment activities. Therefore more free production, reception and judgment activities are needed to be included in order to give teachers and learners more opportunities to check the use of the linguistic structures not only in terms of correctness, but also meaningfulness and appropriateness in communicative contexts.

4. CONCLUSIONS

Analyzing and comparing the methodological features of some English language textbooks related to grammar testing, it is concluded that these books offer a structural approach to grammar testing as most of the activities focus on the comprehension of the form and meaning of target structures. Choosing to use sample tests like those included in Blockbuster and Wishes means checking the learners’ knowledge of the target structures focusing more on their form than on their meaning and use. That is because of the inclusion of the controlled production exercises that contain contrived and discrete sentences. If teachers strictly use only such tests for assessment purpose, they may feed their students’ belief that the form of the language is more important than the other aspects, or that grammar is concerned with just the form of the language. Therefore their learners may focus more on the grammatical form than the grammatical meaningfulness and use. Unlike Blockbuster and Wishes, Click on and Access sample tests include authentic continuous texts (besides contrived and discrete sentences) giving learners opportunities to focus not only on the form of the target structures, but also to their appropriate meaning and use. This is their advantage. Furthermore, they [Click on and Access (Teacher’s)] give learners opportunities to integrate language and communication skills. But they lack: judgment tasks which contribute to testing a deeper comprehension of the target structure; automatic reception exercises which check learners’ ability to process sentences in real time, as in real-life communication; for example listening to a text and answering the questions...
[focusing on, as Weir (1993) suggested, comprehending the main message or understanding certain details] included in the listening material immediately after the text.

Referring to recent research of foreign language acquisition, a structural approach to grammar testing does not enhance their language or grammar acquisition for communicative purpose. Including a variety of data options and operations can help teachers in assessing their learners holistically, focusing not only on the form of the target structures and the reading skills but also on its meaningfulness and use and the other communicative skills. This is the current challenge to ESL/EFL teachers when using only this format of assessment. Otherwise, teachers need to find and use other effective techniques (see Nassaji & Fotos 2011) and formats (see Hedge 2000, Purpura 2004) in order to respond to the communicative model of grammar teaching and testing. However, FL teachers’ decision on how to test grammar has to be taken individually, based on their testing goals and situation and professional judgment. What is recommended is a simultaneous and supplementary focus on both accuracy and fluency of language use.

Since this study is limited to the above selected course books, future study can be carried out by covering a larger number of EFL course books including different publishers in order to have a wider view of the present approach to grammar testing in EFL course books all over the world.

REFERENCES


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APPENDIX

Wishes (student’s Book), p. 40

Blockbuster (Workbook & Grammar Book), p. 167

Blockbuster (Student’s Book), p. 22

Progress Check 1

1. Fill in the blanks below. (Students are asked to fill in the blanks with appropriate words or phrases.)

2. Choose the correct verb form.

3. Choose the correct preposition.

4. Choose the correct word.

5. Choose the correct question.

NAME: ___________________  DATE: ____________

CLASS: ___________________  SCORE: ___________

(Time: 15 minutes)

1. Circle the correct answers.

2. She usually has friends at the weekends.

3. He is very easy to understand.

4. She has never been to New York City.

5. They never keep it when they get it.

6. The audience related the speaker’s stories to their own experiences.

Now I can ...

1. Talk about how people spend their leisure.

2. Express preferences.

3. Talk about personal emotions and languages.

4. Talk about their future plans.

5. Talk about what they did during the weekend.
THE KINDS OF PRINCIPALS TEACHERS PREFER: A CROSS-NATIONS STUDY

Angeliki Lazaridou

THE KINDS OF PRINCIPALS TEACHERS PREFER: A CROSS-NATIONS STUDY

Click On (Student’s Book), p. 25

Communication

Reading

Let’s Sing

Test 8 (Module 8)

Grammar

10 Use the video to write a short article about "Fairy in the Wood". Here's an example:

"Fairy in the Wood"

Fairy in the Wood

Once upon a time, in a far-off country, there was a magical forest. In the heart of this forest, there lived a beautiful fairy named Lila. Lila had magical powers and could control the elements.

One day, Lila decided to take a walk through the forest. As she walked, she came across a cute little bird. The bird was lost and didn’t know where it was going.

Lila decided to help the bird and showed it the way home. From that day on, the bird and Lila became good friends.

And so, Lila continued to live in the magical forest, always helping those in need.

Access (Teacher’s resource pack & tests), p. 98

Writing in narrative

Put in the missing sentences. Then, in pairs, read the following:

"Fairy in the Wood"

LECT 8 (Module 8)

Grammar

10 Use the video to write a short article about "Fairy in the Wood". Here's an example:

"Fairy in the Wood"

Fairy in the Wood

Once upon a time, in a far-off country, there was a magical forest. In the heart of this forest, there lived a beautiful fairy named Lila. Lila had magical powers and could control the elements.

One day, Lila decided to take a walk through the forest. As she walked, she came across a cute little bird. The bird was lost and didn’t know where it was going.

Lila decided to help the bird and showed it the way home. From that day on, the bird and Lila became good friends.

And so, Lila continued to live in the magical forest, always helping those in need.

Fill in a, an or some.

20 banana

21 orange juice

22 bread

23 onion

24 ice cream

25 cheese

26 cherries

27 milk

28 rice, please

29 eggs do you want?

30 milk, please.
Access (Teacher’s resource pack & tests), p. 99-100

Everyday English

F. Choose the correct response.

1. Is that to eat-in or takeaway?  
   A. A coke, please.  
   B. Here you are.  
   C. Thank you.  
   D. Takeaway, please.

2. Enjoy your meal.  
3. Can I take your order?  
4. Would you like anything to drink with that?  
5. That’s £3.50.

G. Translate sentences 30-33 from Ex. F.

Reading

H. Read the email below and mark the statements as T (true) or F (false).

Dear Mandy,

How are you? I hope you’re well. It was my birthday last Saturday. I was really sorry you couldn’t come to my party. We had a great time!

I decorated my house with colourful balloons and we all played some great party games such as ‘Simon Says’.

My mother made pizza, ham and cheese sandwiches, chicken and a tuna salad. The highlight of the party, though, was my birthday cake. It was a delicious chocolate cake.

Talk to you soon,

Lizzy

e.g. Mandy’s birthday was last Saturday.

38. Lizzy decorated the house with balloons.  
39. ‘Simon Says’ is a party game.  
40. Lizzy cooked the food.  
41. There was more than one salad.  
42. Lizzy doesn’t like chocolate.

Writing

I. Write an email to a friend to tell (him/her) about your birthday party last Saturday (80 words). Write about:
   - decorations  
   - games  
   - food

Use the email in Ex. H as a model.

Listening

J. Listen to two people talking about a recipe and complete the missing information.

**Pizza Crackers**

e.g. Salt Crackers

1. Spread the pizza sauce with a  
   2. Put pepperoni and on top.  
   3. Sprinkle with mozzarella cheese.  
   4. Put in microwave oven for about minutes.