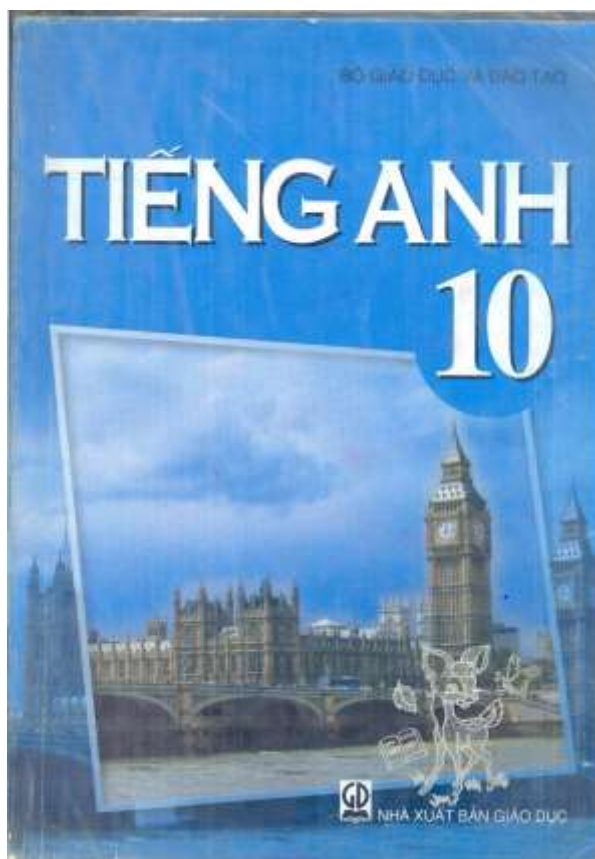


The Current State of the Art in the Teaching of Grammar At Vietnamese High Schools

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Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 Vol. 13:3 March 2013



Abstract

This paper analyzes the importance of teaching grammar in EFL classrooms and seeks the appropriate answers to the questions of when, what and how to teach grammar at Vietnamese high schools. In this paper, second/foreign language teaching methodologies in the last several centuries will be briefly reviewed in chronological order with a special focus on the role of grammar and grammar teaching. Secondly, the development and the current state of the art of grammar teaching in the world as well as in Vietnam over the last thirty

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years will be investigated. Finally, the paper will end with the predictions and recommendations for future directions.

Keywords: grammar, ESL/EFL, Vietnam

1. INTRODUCTION

Over the past several decades, there have been numerous breakthroughs in the field of English language teaching methodologies as English as a second and a foreign language (EFL/ESL) because the view of language teaching changed at different times. One of the major changes is a shift in the role of grammar from a dominant role in traditional classrooms to a marginal status, and back to a position of renewed importance in communicative language teaching (CLT) (Celce-Murcia, 1991). Since the emergence of CLT in language teaching, such questions as “Should grammar be taught?”, “When should grammar be taught?”, “What grammar should be taught?”, and “How should grammar be taught?” have been tackling English language teachers all over the world including Vietnamese high school teachers. Although there are a considerable number of research studies which seek to find the answers to these questions, no consistent answers have been offered to ESL/EFL teachers.

The purpose of this study is not to overstate the role of grammar, but to discuss and clarify some conceptions such as whether grammar is taught in class or what, when and how it is taught. The paper also aims to report on the “State of the art” of the role of grammar and grammar teaching in ELT with the special reference to the Vietnamese context.

2. BRIEF HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The past several decades have witnessed different methodological approaches to language teaching. As acknowledged by Celce-Murcia (1991), the major approaches have differed regarding whether grammar is taught explicitly in the ESL/EFL classroom. In this part, five significant approaches related to the different positions of grammar in language teaching will be surveyed in a chronological order: (a) Traditional Approach; (b) Audiolingual

Approach; (c) Cognitive code approach; (d) Comprehension Approach and (e) Communicative Approach.

Traditional Approach

It has been noted by many grammarians that, for more than 2,000 years, studying a second/foreign language primarily contained grammatical analysis and translation of written forms (Hinkel & Fotos, 2002).

Before the sixteenth century, Greek and Latin were widely taught with the focus on grammar and the grammar translation instruction was developed for the analysis of these classical languages. This method divided the target language into eight parts of speech (nouns, verbs, participles, articles, pronouns, prepositions, adverbs and conjunctions). The unit of the analysis was the sentence and the students' roles were to be able to recognize and classify the words in a sentence into the part of speech (Burns, 2009).

In the sixteenth century, due to political changes in Europe, Latin was gradually displaced by such "modern" languages as English, French, and Italian. These languages entered the curriculum of European schools and were taught using the same categories and basis procedures that were used for teaching Latin (Richards & Rogers, 2003).

By the 19th century, this approach became "standard" in learning a foreign language and known as the Grammar Translation Method which dominated second/foreign language teaching. In the Grammar Translation Method, the goal of second/foreign language study is to enable students to read its literature and develop their minds (Larsen-Freeman, 2000). This method views language learning as the analysis of language (mental exercising of learning), memorization of grammar rules and bilingual wordlists, which are followed by the application in translation exercises (Richard & Rogers, 2003). In this way, grammar is taught deductively and explicitly- that is, grammar rules are first presented with examples and then practiced through translation exercises. It can be seen that grammar plays a dominant role in traditional classrooms. In this method, grammar is perceived to govern all parts of language and the comprehension of correct grammar is seen the priority of language learning.

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Audiolingual Approach

The Audiolingual Approach was introduced by structural linguistics in the United States in the 1960s (Larsen Freeman, 2000; Richards & Rogers, 2003). This method views language learning as mechanical habit formation (Celce-Murcia, 1991) and good habits are formed by minimizing learners' errors. In order to prevent students' errors, students need to memorize dialogues through mimicry. Certain key structures selected from dialogues are used as the basis for students' pattern drills such as repetition, backward build-up, substitution, transformation, and question-and-answer (Larsen Freeman, 2000). These grammar items are sequenced and graded following the principle from simple to complex ones (Richard & Rogers, 2003). However, teachers give little or no provision of explicit grammatical explanation and students have to induce the rules from the examples given. In other words, grammar is taught inductively, which is different from the Traditional Approach; however, the focus of instruction in this approach is still sentence-oriented (Celce-Murcia, 1991).

Cognitive Code Approach

In the late 1960s, the behaviorist features of the Audiolingual approach were rejected by the prominent American linguist, Noam Chomsky who introduced the concept of Language Acquisition Device or more recently called Universal Grammar, and the theory of Transformational Generative Grammar. According to Chomsky, language is not a product of habit formation (Larsen-Freeman, 2000), but a cognitive, psychological process that goes on in the brain (Burns, 2009). He believed that human beings are born with a deep Universal Grammar which contains the principles governing all human languages. In this light, when a person learns a new language, the universal Grammar is used to help him generate the language and use transformation to create particular sentence structures in that language.

The Chomsky's theory gave rise to the Cognitive Approach in the early 1970s. In this approach, grammar is taught both deductively (grammatical explanations or rules are presented before being practiced in exercises) and inductively (learners are exposed to examples of grammatical structures, from which they discover or induce language rules and principles on their own). So, the Cognitive Approach marked the return of explicit grammar which was avoided for a long time. Like the Traditional Approach and Audiolingual Approach, the focus of instruction in Cognitive Approach is still at the sentence level.

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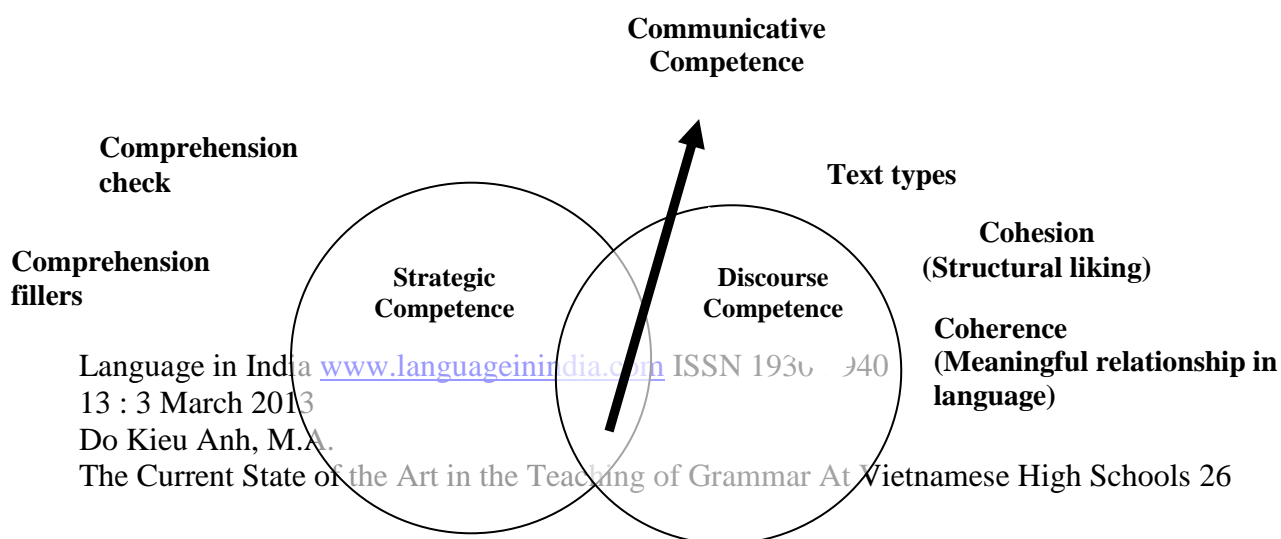
Nevertheless, grammatical errors are no longer considered as unacceptable or bad habits that must be minimized or prevented. Actually, errors in this approach are viewed inevitable and teachers might provide students with appropriate peer or self-correction activities for the error analysis and correction (Celce-Murcia, 1991).

Comprehension Approach

This approach appeared in the U.S during 1970s and 1980s and was based on the hypothesis that language learning should start first with understanding and later proceeds to production (Winitz, 1981, cited in Larsen- Freeman, 2000). In this approach, the focus is on meaning, not form (structure, grammar). Some practitioners of this approach just present grammar inductively by carefully sequencing and lexical items. Others even argue that all facets of grammar instruction are pointless or “peripheral and fragile” (Krashen, 1993, cited in Cowan, 2008). According to Krashen’s Natural Approach, grammar instruction merely helps students monitor or become aware of the forms they use (Krashen & Terrel, 1983, cited in Celce-Murcia, 1991) so it should be excluded from the classroom. In view of that, error correction is viewed unnecessary because learners can gradually correct them on their own when they are exposed to more complex, rich, and meaningful input (“*i+1*” input) in the target language.

Communicative Approach

Communicative language teaching (CLT) first appeared in the 1970s and since then it has dominated second/ foreign language teaching methodology. The goal of CLT is to develop students’ communicative competence which consists of four components:



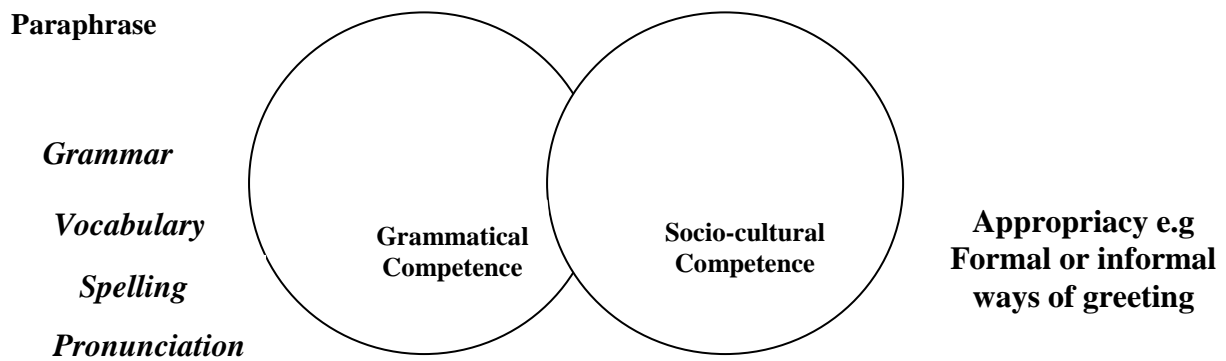


Figure 1: Canale and Swain's model of communicative competence
(Canale & Swain, 1980, cited in Chan, 2010)

According to Canale and Swain's model, grammatical competence is one component of communicative competence, so grammar instruction is part of language teaching. In this view, CLT has marked the returning of grammar instruction in the second/foreign language classroom. Grammar instruction in CLT is important but just as an indispensable tool to achieve communicative goals. While the traditional approaches regarded grammatical mastery as the ultimate learning objective, grammar in CLT is just as a means to the end and always put into context for the sake of social functions (Nunan, 1991). However, among the supporters of this approach, there has been some debate on when, how and to what extent grammar should be taught in CLT.

3. THE DEVELOPMENT IN THE AREA OVER THE LAST THIRTY YEARS AND THE CURRENT STATE OF THE ART

Since the advent of CLT approaches, the question of why, what, when and how to teach grammar have been confronting ESL/EFL teachers. There has not been consistent advice offered to teachers over the last thirty years and these issues are far from resolved (Celce-Murcia, 1991). This part will survey some current debate on these issues.

Should we or shouldn't we teach grammar?

On the one hand, some authors (e.g., Hughes, 1979; Genesee, 1987, cited in Ellis, 2006) argued that learners are able to develop the proficiency needed for fluent communication without any formal instruction in the L2 teaching. It was also suggested by Corder (cited in

Ellis, 2006) that learners had their own “*built-in syllabus*” for learning grammar, and hence grammar teaching was not necessary. This view coincides with Krashen’s theory of L2 leaning, the Input Hypothesis that rejected the value of teaching grammar. As acknowledged by Krashen (1981, p.6, cited in Burns, 2009), “language acquisition does not require extensive use of conscious grammatical rules, and does not require tedious drills”. Therefore, he concluded that grammar instructions are pointless or “peripheral and fragile” (Krashen, 1993, cited in Cowan, 2008) and should be excluded in language teaching.

On the other hand, Krashen’s minimalist position has been questioned by recent research (e.g. Doughty and Williams, 1998; Norris and Ortega, 2000, cited in Burns, 2009). In recent years, there has been common agreement that grammar instruction results in substantial gains in L2 proficiency. As shown by Master (1994, cited in Cowan, 2008), students’ accuracy in the use of articles, a notoriously difficult grammar point, can be increased by grammar teaching. Similarly, Cardierno (1995) and Doughty (1991) (cited in Ellis, 2006) have argued that learners’ accuracy in the use of past tense and relative clauses can be improved by explicit instruction. This argument is further supported by a great number of studies such as Carrol and Swain (1993), Fotos (1993), Lightbown (1991), Lightbrown and Spada (1990), and Nassaji and Swain (2000) (cited in Cowan, 2008). It is obvious that recent research findings overwhelmingly support the grammar instruction in the ESL/EFL teaching.

WHEN should we teach grammar?

As pointed out by Ellis (2006), there are two competing answers to this question. The first one is that we should teach grammar in the early stages of L2 acquisition. This way is believed to ensure students to develop correct habits in the first place. Besides, as explained by many teachers, beginners can not engage in meaning-centered activities due to their lack knowledge of L2. Moreover, grammar instruction facilitates learning by providing learners with “hooks” which they can grab on to (Lightbown, 1991, cited in Ellis, 2006). For these reasons, grammar should be initially taught to help students develop a basis for the real learning that follows (N. Ellis, 2006, cited in R. Ellis, 2006).

The other answer is that the teaching of grammar should be delayed until learners have developed a basic communicative ability. As acknowledged by Hughes (1979, cited in Ellis, 2006), students are able to learn grammar naturally from exposure to communicative input. This viewpoint is further supported by the research on immersion programs which shows that learners in such programs can develop their proficiency without formal instruction in L2 (Genesee, 1987, cited in Ellis, 2006). Ellis (2006) is also against teaching grammar early and he explained that learners rely on a memory-based system of lexical sequences to make utterances. This lexicalized knowledge provides the basis for the subsequent development of the grammatical competence. In this light, grammar should be taught after learners' basic communicative ability has been developed.

WHAT grammar should we teach?

Although there is a broad selection of grammatical models to choose from: structural grammars, generative grammars, and functional grammars, traditionally syllabuses have been based on structural or descriptive grammars. While structural syllabuses traditionally put more emphasis such aspects of grammar as sentence patterns or tense paradigms (Lado, 1970, cited in Ellis, 2006), now more attention has been given to the meanings conveyed by different grammatical forms in communication. As a result, modern descriptive grammars which detail the form-meaning relationships of the language (Ellis, 2006) have strongly influenced teaching practice.

HOW should we teach grammar?

Should we teach grammar in separate lessons or integrate it into communicative activities?

According to Long (1988, 1991, cited in To *et al*, 2006), form-focused instruction has two basic types: “*Focus on forms*” (grammar is taught in separate lessons) and “*Focus on form*” (grammar is integrated into a curriculum consisting communicative tasks). There is an argument on which type is most effective in grammar teaching. As acknowledged by DeKeyser (1998, cited in Ellis, 2006), grammar should be taught separately because students learn grammatical structures gradually through “*the automatising of explicit knowledge*”.

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However, this thought is argued by Robinson (as cited in Nassaji and Fotos, 2004) that the aim of language teaching is to help learners able to use the language for communication purposes, so grammar and communication must be integrated. This viewpoint is further supported by Larsen-Freeman and Long's (1991) teaching language approach with a focus on form. According to this approach, grammar items should not be taught separately and in isolation of communication activities. Instead, teachers should draw students' attention to grammar form during communication tasks. Besides, as pointed out by Savignon (1991), learners seem to focus best on grammar when it relates to their communication needs and experience. In this light, grammar should be integrated in communication activities. It cannot be denied that existing research strongly suggests that grammar should never be taught as an end in itself but put into context for the goal of communication.

Should we teach grammar deductively or inductively?

There is also a debate on whether grammar instruction should be *deductive* or *inductive*. On examining this question, it is necessary to demonstrate what is meant by the term *deductive* and *inductive* instruction. In deductive instruction, grammatical explanations or rules are presented and then applied through practice in exercises. In inductive instruction, learners are exposed to examples of grammatical structures before discovering or inducing language rules and principles on their own.

On the one hand, there is abundant evidence that explicit grammar teaching called deductive instruction is effective in promoting second language learning. For example, Norris and Ortega (2000, cited in Ellis, 2006; Cowan, 2008) asserted that explicit teaching results in better and longer-lasting learning than implicit teaching. In fact, grammatical rules and structures in English textbooks nowadays are presented and then practiced in such kinds of activities as memorizing dialogs, reading simplified texts, doing transformation exercises. In other words, explicit/deductive grammar teaching is utilized in most English textbooks.

On the other hand, implicit grammar instruction is considered to have more benefits than explicit grammar instruction. According to a great number of researchers, grammar should be taught implicitly for the following advantages:

- Suits the natural language acquisition process (Brown, 1999).
- Helps learners have opportunities to come across, perceive, and use the structures in form-meaning relationships (Nassaji and Fotos, 2004).
- Leads learners to discover rules by themselves (Brown, 1999) and fosters discovery learning (Cross, 1992; Stern, 1992; Tennant, 2005).
- Creates mental effort and actively plays a part in learners' reasoning learning process, which produces cognitive depth, great motivation, and self-reliance (Harmer, 1991; Thornbury, 1999; Shortall, 2002; Mackey & Gass, 2005).
- Fits the cognitive development of language learners (Cross, 1992). (It will engage learners, avoid metalinguistic discussion, and minimize any interruption to the communication of meaning [Doughty & Williams, 1998].)
- Offers teachers opportunities to understand what students can do and what they need to explore further (Tennant, 2005).
- Creates more motivating learning, which makes students think, form, and test their assumptions about the new knowledge, leading to powerful insight about the target structures.
- Fosters learner autonomy in learning language (Carter, Hughes & McCarthy, 2000).

(cited in Ngo, 2009, p.132)

It is now generally accepted that either explicit or implicit grammar instruction is better than no grammar teaching at all (Cowan, 2008, p.32). It is the teacher who will choose the appropriate approach for their teaching context. When teachers make decisions, they should take learners variables such as learning styles, ages and educational background and instructional variables into consideration (Celce-Murcia, 1991). For example, inductive approach is better for intermediate or advanced students. Explicit grammar instruction should be limited for young learners; however, this works well for adults.

4. THE DEVELOPMENT AND THE CURRENT STATE OF THE ART ON THE TEACHING OF GRAMMAR IN VIETNAMESE HIGH SCHOOLS

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A DAY IN THE LIFE OF...

A. READING

Before you read

Work in pairs. Ask and answer questions about your daily routine, using the cues below.

Example: what time you often get up

A: *What time do you often get up?*

B: *I often get up at six.*

– what time you go to school / have breakfast / lunch / dinner / go to bed

– what you often do in the morning / afternoon / evening

While you read

Read the passage and then do the tasks that follow.



Thanks to the economic open-door policy or *doi moi* pursued by the Government of Vietnam in 1986, foreign language, particularly English has been given the status as “a key to its regional and global participation” (Le, 1999). English is now a compulsory subject from primary education to higher education in Vietnam and one of the six national examinations that students have to pass in order to get the High School Education Certificate. According to Utsumi & Doan (2008), there is a shift in teaching and learning

practices on a continuum that ranges from the traditional method to communicative language teaching (CLT) in Vietnam. Whatever method is employed by teachers, grammar still plays a central importance in English teaching in Vietnamese high schools.

E. LANGUAGE FOCUS

- Pronunciation: /ɪ / - /i: /
- Grammar and vocabulary:
 1. The present simple
 2. Adverbs of frequency
 3. The past simple

Pronunciation

- Listen and repeat.

/ɪ /		/i: /	
hit	kick	heat	repeat
bit	click	beat	read
little	interest	meat	eaten

- Practise these sentences:
 1. Is he coming to the cinema?
 2. We'll miss the beginning of the film.
 3. Is it an interesting film, Jim?
 4. The beans and the meat were quite cheap.
 5. He's going to leave here for the Green Mountains.
 6. Would you like to have meat, peas and cheese?

Grammar and vocabulary

Exercise 1. Complete the blanks in the passage. Use the correct present simple form of the verbs in the box. (There are more verbs than needed and you will have to use some verbs more than once.)

be	play	take	run
fish	go	say	catch
worry	give up	like	realise

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Fishing (1) _____ my favourite sport. I often (2) _____ for hours without catching anything. But this does not (3) _____ me. Some fishermen (4) _____ unlucky. Instead of catching fish, they (5) _____ old boots and rubbish. I (6) _____ even less lucky. I never (7) _____ anything – not even old boots. After having spent whole mornings on the river, I always (8) _____ home with an empty bag. "You must (9) _____ fishing!", my friends (10) _____ "It's a waste of time". But they don't (11) _____ that I (12) _____ not really interested in fishing. I'm only interested in sitting in a boat, doing nothing at all.



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This is not surprising because the quality of English teaching in Vietnam is assessed by the pass rate of students in public examination. Currently, Vietnamese high school students have to take the two most important English examinations administered Ministry of Education and Training (MOET): the school final examination and the university entrance examination. Both are grammar-based and norm-based (Le, 1999), and have ignored listening and speaking skills. Under the pressures from the schools, the students' parents,

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Vietnamese teachers spend a great deal of time teaching grammar in classrooms in order to help students pass these examinations.

The 2006 - 2007 academic year witnessed the introduction of new English course books (*Tieng Anh 10, Tieng Anh 11, Tieng Anh 12*) and the reformed language teaching methodology towards the communicative approach at high school level. In these new course books, there are five parts in each unit: Reading, Speaking, Listening, Writing, and Language Focus respectively. Vietnamese high schools are required to follow this sequence strictly, so grammar is always taught after students have done four skills work. In this way, grammar is not integrated into language skills but taught in a separated lesson. Moreover, the grammar points in these textbooks are presented out of context. Students are given isolated sentences, which they have to internalize through exercises involving repetition, manipulation and grammatical transformation. These kinds of exercises are mainly tested in all examinations at high school level. Therefore, it is clear that prescriptive grammar remains common and a reliable resource for Vietnamese high school teachers to draw on.

Regarding the ways grammar taught in Vietnamese high school classrooms, the Grammar Translation and PPP (Presentation- Practice- Product) are the dominant educational paradigms. The Grammar Translation method is still utilized by a great number of Vietnamese high school teachers who were trained before 1986. The following is the typical traditional grammar lesson in Vietnam:

1. The teacher writes down the name of the grammar point on the board.
2. The teacher presents the rule and structure.
3. The teacher gives examples (in English) to illustrate the rule given.
4. The teacher gets students to make up their own sentences using the rule they have just been given.
5. The teacher gets students to do some translation from L2 (English) to L1 (Vietnamese) and vice versa. Very often these are only at sentence level and are disconnected and de-contextualized.
6. For homework the teacher often gets students to learn the grammar rule by heart and make some further sentences with them.

This method is widely used because it helps Vietnamese teachers get straight to the point and save time. It is believed that many rules can be more simple and quickly explained and elicited from examples owing to the Grammar Translation method. These teachers also believe that using Vietnamese to teach grammar is the best way to help students fully understand the grammatical rules and use them correctly. Another reason for teachers using this method is their limited ability of speaking English. This is not surprising because a great number of English teachers at Vietnamese high schools are the former teachers of Russian. Although these teachers of Russian were trained to become teachers of English, they have barely benefited from the two years of retraining in terms of English language skills and new teaching methodology (Pham, 2001). These teachers lack confidence in speaking English and prefer the Grammar Translation method in which they can confidently use Vietnamese to teach.

If the Grammar Translation is widely used by the teachers who were trained before 1986, the PPP (Presentation- Practice- Production) approach is employed by fellow teachers. These teachers believe that this is a way to teach grammar communicatively. This is an example of PPP lesson taught in a Vietnamese high school classroom and the grammar structure to be taught here is ‘*had better*’ taken from Lesson 8 of Tieng Anh 11.

Teacher’s and students’ activities	On – board content
<p><u>Presentation:</u> Use the dialogue in page 66</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Teacher reads the dialogue.- Students find five things the doctor and Bill ask John (not) to do.- Teacher writes the sentences on board.- Students read the examples after the teacher.- According to the situation, find out the meaning and the form and <u>the use</u> of the structure.(students do with the teacher’s help.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- <i>You’d better take off your shirt.</i>- <i>You’d better not move.</i>- <i>You’d better stay a few days for observation.</i>- <i>You’d better stay here for a week or two.</i>- <i>You’d better not be worried</i>
<p><u>Practice:</u> <u>Controlled practice:</u> ‘LOOK AND SPEAK’</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Practice making pieces of advice using the pictures provided.- The sentences are written on board and in students’ textbooks.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- <i>He’d better get up early and do morning exercise.</i>- <i>She’d better get into a non – smoking.</i>.....- <i>You’d better not smoke in the cinema.</i>- <i>You’d better not fish here.</i>

<p>Guided practice:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Set a situation ‘at the doctor’s office’ - Some cue words are provided. - Group work. - Students ask for and give advice. - <u>Teachers listen, helps and correct the grammatical mistakes.</u> 	<p>.....</p> <p>“At the doctor’s office”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Cold</i> : - <i>drink ginger tea</i> - <i>stay in bed</i> - <i>go out</i> - <i>Headache</i>: - <i>take aspirin</i> - <i>rest in bed</i> - <i>stay up late</i>
<p><u>Production:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Group work: the class is divided into groups of fewer than 10 students each. Teacher assigns the work: each group must have a ‘secretary’ to record everything, all the members of the group have to take turn to express their own problems and the others have to give advice using structure ‘<i>had better (not)</i>’ - Go round to offer some help if necessary and to make sure that the students use English in their conversations. 	

(To et al., 2006, p.59)

The PPP procedure is criticized that it is teacher-centered and does not reflect the nature of teaching and learning as it sees learning as straightforward (through 3 stages) and teaching as rigid (Lewis, 1993, cited in To, et.al, 2006). However, it is still a widely used method of teaching English grammar at high schools in Vietnam (To, et.al, 2006, p.60). Whether the Grammar Translation method or the PPP lesson structure is used, grammar is taught deductively and explicitly at Vietnamese high schools.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS AND PREDICTIONS

5.1. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE TEACHING GRAMMAR IN VIETNAMESE HIGH SCHOOLS

Grammar has dominated the English syllabus and will continue hold a central place in English teaching in Vietnamese high schools. These followings are my own recommendations for teaching grammar in Vietnamese high schools.

Should or shouldn’t we teach grammar?

Vietnamese teachers should teach grammar because grammar competence is one component of communicative competence which is the goal of language learning. However, they need

to make decisions about to what extent conscious teaching and learning of grammar is useful in their own classes. They should take six major variables that determine the importance of grammar in language teaching as proposed by Celce-Murcia (1991, p. 471) into their consideration:

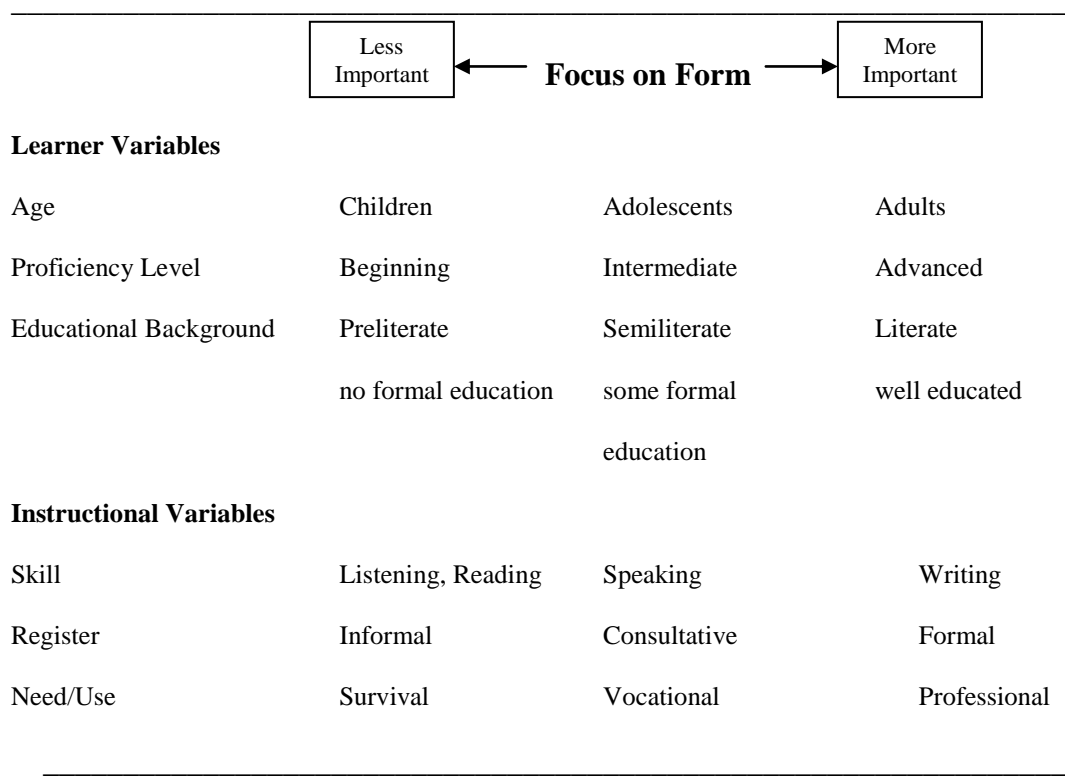


Figure 2: Variables That Determine the Importance of Grammar

From this grid, we can see that some focus on form is necessary for Vietnamese high school students who are at Pre-Intermediate proficiency level and grammar teaching needs more attention in writing skill than others.

What grammar should we teach?

Grammar in most Vietnamese high school textbooks (*Tieng Anh 10, Tieng Anh 11, Tieng Anh 12*) is presented out of context. Therefore, prescriptive grammar remains common among Vietnamese teachers. However, with the prevalent teaching and learning a language for communicative purposes, teachers should teach descriptive grammar which details the form-meaning relationships of the language. In other words, they should expose students to authentic language that used in real English-speaking context.

When should we teach grammar?

Vietnamese teachers are supposed to decide whether grammar should be taught before, during or after communicative activities. According to Burns (2009), teaching grammar “at the point of need” is the most effective approach. It means that teachers need to determine the appropriate time for teaching grammar. Grammar teaching could happen beforehand when students need grammar in preparation for particular skills work. It might occur during the skills work in order to facilitate students’ task completion. Otherwise, grammar will be taught after an activity to strengthen students’ knowledge of key patterns. Under certain circumstances, teachers will choose the appropriate time for grammar instruction.

How should we teach grammar?

Firstly, Vietnamese teachers should integrate grammar teaching with the teaching of other skills since the integration leads to effective learning for Vietnamese students.

Secondly, Vietnamese students should be provided with opportunities for both inductive and deductive learning of grammar.

Thirdly, PPP is a good method to copy when teachers first start their teaching. However, not every lesson has to follow the PPP pattern. Vietnamese can use a variation of the PPP method- the Deep-end Approach (Test-Teach- Test) or Task-based teaching and learning (TBTL) to teach grammar.

Additionally, Vietnamese teachers are supposed to teach grammar forms and structures in relation to meaning and use so that students could use linguistic forms accurately, meaningfully and appropriately. At the Pre-Intermediate level, high school students need to know that a single form can express a variety of functions, and different forms can be used to perform a function. For example, when the teacher introduces the form “*If..., ... will...*”, the following functions should be mentioned: plan (*If the weather is nice, we’ll go for a picnic*), advice (*If you lie down, you’ll feel better*), warning (*If you do that, you’ll be in trouble*), and promise (*If you pass the exam, I’ll give you a new bike*). Likewise, the function of *warning* could be expressed by different forms: *You’d better not do that; If I were you, I wouldn’t do such thing; If you do that, you’ll be in trouble; Don’t do that, or you’ll be in trouble.*

Last but not least, Vietnamese students should be encouraged to become “*active explorers of language*” (Nunan, 1998). Vietnamese teachers can supply the students with opportunities to work out rules, principles, and applications for themselves. In order to do this, besides explicit grammar instruction demonstrated by the textbooks, Vietnamese high school teachers can exploit implicit grammar instruction in which students can formulate rules from meaningful and natural language. This kind of instruction is appropriate for high school students because their English proficiency level is Pre-Intermediate. Besides, a great number of the grammar points in the textbooks are recycled and taught at primary and secondary schools. Therefore, this discovery learning motivates and encourages students’ deeper processing and storing the target language, and more importantly develops learner autonomy in learning language.

5.2. POSSIBLE NEW DIRECTIONS

The development of language teaching approaches and methods over the last centuries has reflected the importance of grammar in second/foreign language teaching methodology. The 21st century is the millennium of Information and Communication Technology (ICT), the role of grammar in language teaching might be redefined due to the application of ICT into education. However, grammar teaching has never left the classroom and will remain its position in language teaching. There will be a balance between form-focused and meaning-focused activities, fluency and accuracy activities in language classrooms, Prescriptive grammar rules that bear no relation to the real life language might be no longer taught. They would be taken place by descriptive grammars which detail the form-meaning relationships of the language. Besides, grammar instruction will be better integrated into communicative activities. Grammar will be taught both deductively/explicitly and inductively/implicitly, depending on learner variables, the learning context and the socio-cultural context. Therefore, teachers need to be more flexible to make decisions about when, to what extent they should teach grammar appropriately under certain circumstances.

In conclusion, several decades have witnessed the shift in the position of grammar in language teaching. In traditional classrooms, grammar plays the central role which governs all teaching process and a key factor for learners to access foreign language literature. Then,

Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940

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grammar moved to a marginal status in earlier communicative classrooms which give the priority to oral skills. In recent years, grammar have come back to a position of “*renewed importance but with diminution*” when compared with its position in traditional approaches (Celce-Murcia, 1991). If grammatical mastery was the ultimate learning goal in traditional classes, grammar now is important but just as an indispensable tool to achieve communicative goals (Nunan, 1991). However, the issue of what, when and how one should teach grammar to language learners is still controversial. It is the teacher who will find ways of effectively integrating grammar teaching into their context.

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Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940
13 : 3 March 2013

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