
RESEARCH

THE PLACE OF GRAMMAR IN THE GENERAL EDUCATION ENGLISH CURRICULUM AND THE PROBLEMS OF TRANSLATING GRAMMAR CONTENTS FROM CURRICULUM TO TEXTBOOKS

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Abstract: This paper is concerned with two important issues which seem to have been neglected in foreign language curriculum development and textbook writing research: the place of grammar in a modern foreign language curriculum and the problems of translating grammar contents designed in the curriculum to textbooks for effective learning and teaching. Two specific questions raised for exploration in this study are: (1) What is the place of grammar in the Vietnamese Ministry of Education and Training (MoET)'s 2018 General Education English Curriculum (GEEC)?", and (2) What are the main problems textbook writers often experience in translating grammar contents from the GEEC to textbooks? These questions constitute the foci of the paper and will be addressed in detail throughout.

Keywords: grammar, role, MoET's 2018 GEEC, problems, curriculum, textbooks

1. Introduction

In any curriculum, syllabus or content of teaching plays an essential, if not an indispensable, part. In the General Education English Curriculum of Vietnam (GEEC), the syllabus part takes up the largest textual space: 37/54 A4-size pages (see Bộ Giáo dục và Đào tạo [MoET], 2018b). The GEEC syllabus is an integrated, multi-component one consisting of experiential contents which comprise (general) themes and (specific) topics, communicative competences/functions realizing through the four communicative skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing, and linguistic knowledge elements consisting of phonology/pronunciation, vocabulary and grammar. This paper focuses on the place of grammar as an element of MoET's (2018) GEEC syllabus and the problems of translating the items of this element specified in the GEEC syllabus to textbooks for effective learning and teaching in the classroom. The paper is organized around four main parts. Part one deals with the place of grammar in the GEEC syllabus. Part two looks at the selection, distribution, and grading of grammar contents in the GEEC syllabus. Part three discusses some specific problems the writers of an English textbook series have experienced in translating the grammar contents specified in

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the GEEC syllabus to their textbooks. And Part four gives a résumé of the paper and makes some suggestions for further research.

2. The Place of Grammar in the GEEC Syllabus

Throughout the history of foreign language teaching, the teaching of grammar, although viewed differently in different methods and approaches, has generally been given a proper status (cf. Tonkyn, 2002; Ellis, 2002). In the grammar-translation method, the main aim is to inculcate an understanding of the grammar of a foreign language and to enable the student to write the foreign language accurately by regular practice in translating from his or her native language. Grammar thus occupies a predominant status in the syllabus and sizeable space in the textbook. A textbook written in the grammar-translation tradition often provides detailed and systematic descriptions of the grammar of the foreign language based on traditional categories with written exercises, especially translation exercises accompanied by bilingual lists of vocabulary. The work of the teacher who follows this teaching method is to enable students to memorise grammatical rules, translate texts from their mother tongue into the foreign language, complete all the written exercises in each lesson, and cover all the lessons in the textbook in a given period of time. Grammar of the foreign language is taught explicitly and deductively with elaborate explanations in the native language (see Rivers, 1970; see also Brown and Lee, 2015).

In the direct method, students learn to understand a foreign language by listening to it and to make themselves understood in the foreign language by speaking it as much as possible. The ultimate aim is to develop students' ability to think in the foreign language, whether conversing, reading or writing. In this method, more attention is paid to pronunciation of the foreign language. Grammar thus is relegated to a secondary status in the syllabus, and the space reserved for it in the textbook is naturally modest. It is taught implicitly and inductively: students learn grammar largely through practice; they are encouraged to draw their own structural generalisations from what they have been learning by an inductive process (Rivers, 1970, p. 19; cf. Diane-Freeman, 2003, p. 28). When grammar is taught more systematically, at post-intermediate or advanced level, it is taught in the foreign language with the use of the foreign language terminology.

In the audio-lingual method, the main aim of teaching is to enable students to communicate in a foreign language in listening and speaking first as the foundation on which to build the skills of reading and writing. There is no translation between first and second languages, and there is little or no analysis of grammatical rules (Brown & Lee, 2015, p. 20). One of the most important tenets characterizing the audio-lingual method is "teach the language not about the language" (Rivers, 1970, p. 39; see also Larsen-Freeman, 2003; Richards & Rodgers, 2014). This is, to a large extent, like the direct method where the learning of a foreign language is thought to be like the acquiring of a first language: children do not need to memorize rules in order to use their native language, and the rules necessary to use the foreign language will be figured out or induced from examples. Also like the direct method, grammar is not given a predominant status in the audio-lingual syllabus, and the space reserved for it in the textbook is accordingly limited. Grammar is taught in patterns with lots of repetitive practices and exercises in simple conversations; it is taught by inductive analogy rather than deductive explanation: students have to discover the rules of grammar for themselves after they have become acquainted with enough examples.

In Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), the general goal is to develop communicative competences which, it is now widely accepted, consist of "linguistic

competence”, “socio-linguistic competence”, “discourse competence”, and “strategic competence” (Canale & Swales, 1980, Canale, 1983/2013). In the CLT approach, fluency and accuracy are generally seen as complementary principles underlying communicative techniques (Brown, 2000, p. 267; Brown & Lee, 2015). Grammar thus is just one of the many components in the syllabus and in the textbook contributing to the total development of communicative competences. Students can learn grammar from functions, situational contexts and from the roles of the interlocutors (Diane-Freeman, 2003, p. 128). Since the development of the early model of CLT by scholars of Council of Europe in the early 1970s such as van Ek and Alexander (1975), Wilkins (1976) and many others, a number of CLT variants have been developed, some give pride to grammar, while others relegate it to a secondary status or even an almost “zero” position evident in English textbooks written in the 1980s and early 1990s such as *Streamline English* [Departures, Connections, Destinations, Directions] by Hartley and Viney (1982), *Functions of English* by Jones (1987), *Meanings into Words* [Intermediate and Upper-intermediate] by Doff, Jones, and Mitchell (1984), and *Person to Person* [Book 1 and Book 2] by Richards and Bycina (1985).

The GEEC is a communicative curriculum. Its syllabus is an integrated and multi-graded one designed in both horizontal and vertical dimensions. Horizontally, it is organized around four aspects: (1) experiential contents consisting of “chủ điểm (themes)” and (2) “chủ đề (topics)”, (3) “năng lực giao tiếp (communicative competences/functions)” stated in terms of the four language skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing, and (4) “kiến thức ngôn ngữ (linguistic knowledge)” consisting of pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar. Vertically, these four aspects of content are delivered throughout the ten grades (from Grade 3 to Grade 12) in a way that new learning is introduced, consolidated and extended to affirm the spiral nature of the Curriculum. “The purpose of the horizontal and vertical design is to enable textbook writers and teachers to see more clearly the body of linguistic knowledge and the levels of language skills needed for each grade and each level of education” (Hoang, 2022, p. 13). Thus, it can be seen from the GEEC syllabus that grammar is a legitimate, but not a predominant, element in the total English language learning and teaching in Vietnamese general education.

3. Grammar Contents in the GEEC Syllabus

3.1. The Term “Pedagogical Grammar” and the Choice of Grammar in the GEEC Syllabus

What is “pedagogical grammar”? The question is simple, but the answer appears to be fairly complex. The reason is that like many scientific concepts, the term “pedagogical grammar” is an overloaded one: it is understood differently by different scholars. Within the literature available on the topic in English, pedagogical grammar can refer to a grammar of any language that is written for teaching and learning purposes: for teachers and students as a first, a second or foreign language, at any level of proficiency: primary, intermediate, or advanced. In terms of types, pedagogical grammar can be a traditional grammar, a structural grammar, a transformational-generative grammar, a functional grammar, a communicative grammar, a pragmatic grammar, a theoretical grammar, a practical grammar, a prescriptive grammar, a descriptive grammar, and so on (for detail, see Corder, 1973; Rogova, 1975; Crystal, 1987; Greenbaum, 1987; Chalker, 2000; Tonkyn, 2000; Candlin, 2001; Derewianka, 2001; Larsen-Freeman, 2002; Celce-Murcia, 2002).

The fact that pedagogical grammar is so multivalent a concept suggests that choosing a sort of grammar suitable for the teaching and learning of English as a foreign language in

Vietnamese schools is never an easy task for any syllabus designer. Pick traditional or structural grammar, for example, and the syllabus designer is criticized for being backward and anachronistic, not keeping up with the current communicative movement in foreign language teaching and learning; pick functional, pragmatic or communicative grammar and the syllabus designer is criticised for being dreamy and unrealistic. Either way, it seems, the syllabus designer cannot win even though we well recognise that the ultimate goal of learning a foreign language is communication. In their design, the GEEC syllabus designers seem to have chosen a sort of what we would like to refer to as “traditional-structural” English grammar. There are several reasons for this choice, but two seem to stand out. Firstly, traditional-structural grammar is the kind of grammar Vietnamese teachers and students are most familiar with: in their mother tongue Vietnamese they both are acquainted with concepts and categories such as noun, verb, adjective, sentence, simple present, simple past, etc. And secondly, the real-life needs of most of Vietnamese school students of English as a foreign language (at least at the present time) are not so much the development of communicative skills as the development of language accuracy for passing tests and examinations which are largely traditional grammar-based.

3.2. Grammar Contents in the GEEC Syllabus

It should be noted that the GEEC (*Chương trình giáo dục phổ thông: Chương trình môn tiếng Anh*) is only one of the 27 subject curricula recognised in the Total General Education Curriculum (*Chương trình giáo dục phổ thông: Chương trình tổng thể*) (see Bộ Giáo dục và Đào tạo [MoET], 2018a; see also Hoang, 2022, p. 3). And as can be seen in 2, grammar is just one of the several elements in the design of the GEEC syllabus. The specification of its contents, therefore, must meet at least two conditions: (1) it must be realistic; i.e. it must be designed in a way that both teachers and students can teach and learn it effectively; and (2) it must match the stages of the educational development; i.e. in terms of grammatical competence, it must be designed in a way that upon finishing the primary level, students will have achieved Level 1, upon finishing the lower secondary level, students will have achieved Level 2, and upon finishing the upper secondary level, students will have achieved Level 3 as specified in *Khung năng lực ngoại ngữ 6 bậc dùng cho Việt Nam* (6-level Foreign Language Proficiency Framework of Vietnam) (VNFLPF) (see Bộ Giáo dục và Đào tạo [MoET], 2014). To meet these requirements, grammar contents of the GEEC syllabus are organised into two categories: “general contents” and “specific contents”.

3.2.1. General Contents

Grammar contents designed for each level of the general education are stated generally in the GEEC as follows:

Primary level. The grammar content introduced at the primary level includes items and structures which serve to develop students’ grammatical competence at the VNFLPF Level 1.

Lower secondary level. The grammar content introduced at the lower secondary level consolidates and extends the grammar items and structures already introduced at the primary level. They include items and structures which serve to develop students’ grammatical competences at the VNFLPF Level 2.

Upper secondary level. The grammar content introduced at the upper secondary level consolidates and extends the grammar items and structures already introduced at the primary and lower secondary levels. They include items and structures which serve to develop students’ grammatical competences at the VNFLPF Level 3.

3.2.2. Specific Contents

Specific grammar contents are the specifications or realizations of the general contents. They are designed vertically. This means that grammar items have been selected to be used in teaching to three pre-determined levels of achievement from Grade 3 to Grade 12. The purpose of this vertical design is based on the idea that new learning is introduced, consolidated and extended in a cyclical manner to affirm the spiral nature of the curriculum (see Hoang, 2022, p. 13). Table 1 represents the list or inventory of the grammar items selected for ten years' learning of the GEEC.

Table 1

Grammar Contents in the GEEC Syllabus

Grade 3

- Present simple tense
- Present continuous tense
- Simple sentences
- Demonstrative pronouns: *this/that/these/those*
- Sentences with *There is/There are*
- Wh-questions: *what, where, who, how, how old, ...*
- Interrogative questions (*Yes/No* question)
- Imperative sentences: *Stand up, please. Don't talk, please, ...*
- Modal verbs: *may, can*
- Personal/impersonal pronouns: *I, you, he, she, it, we, they*
- Possessive adjectives: *my, your, his, her, its, our, their*
- Nouns (singular and plural): *pen(s), book(s), chair(s), ...*
- Descriptive adjectives: *big, small, new, old, ...*
- Quantifiers: *a lot, many, some, ...*
- Conjunctions: *and*
- Articles: *a/an, the*
- Prepositions (of place): *in, at, on, ...*
- ...

Grade 4

- Present simple tense (consolidation and extension)
- Present continuous tense (consolidation and extension)
- Past simple tense
- Simple sentences
- Wh-questions
- Interrogative questions (*Yes/No* questions)
- Modal verbs: *can, would*
- Personal/Impersonal pronouns (consolidation and extension)

- Conjunctions: *and, but, or, because*
- Prepositions: *with, near, behind, next to, opposite, by, ...*
- ...

Grade 5

- Past simple tense (consolidation and extension)
- Future simple tense
- Wh-questions
- Interrogative questions: (*Yes/No* questions) (consolidation and extension)
- Modal verbs: *should, could, would*
- Simple descriptive adjectives
- Adverbs (of manner): *fast, hard, well, ...*
- Adverbs (of frequency): *always, usually, often, never, ...*
- Prepositions: *by, on, ...*
- ...

Grade 6

- Present simple tense (consolidation and extension)
- Present continuous tense (consolidation and extension)
- Future simple tense (consolidation and extension)
- Past simple tense (consolidation and extension)
- Simple sentences
- Compound sentences
- Modal verbs: *should/shouldn't, might*
- Wh-questions
- Interrogative questions (*Yes/No* question)
- Imperative sentences: positive/negative
- Nouns: countable/uncountable
- Adjectives
- Comparatives and superlatives of adjectives
- Possessive cases
- Possessive pronouns: *mine, yours ...*
- Indefinite quantifiers: *some, any, ...*
- Prepositions of place, time, ...
- Adverbs of frequency
- Conjunctions: *because, ...*
- Articles: *a/an, the*
- Conditional sentence (Type 1)
- ...

Grade 7

- Present simple tense (consolidation and extension)
- Present continuous tense (consolidation and extension)
- Past simple tense (consolidation and extension)
- Future simple tense (consolidation and extension)
- Simple sentences
- Modal verbs: *should/ should not*, ...
- Interrogative questions (*Yes/No* questions)
- Comparisons of *like*, (*not*) *as ... as*, *different from*, ...
- Possessive pronouns: *mine*, *yours*, *his*, ...
- Indefinite quantifiers: *some*, *lots of*, *a lot of*, ...
- Prepositions of place, time: *in*, *on*, *at*...
- Conjunctions: *although*, *however*, ...
- Articles: *a/an*, *the*, *zero article* (consolidation and extension)
- ...

Grade 8

- Present simple tense (consolidation and extension)
- Past continuous tense
- Present simple tense with future meaning
- Verbs (of liking) + gerund (*V-ing*)
- Verbs (of liking) + to infinitive
- Wh-questions
- Interrogative questions (*Yes/No* questions)
- Types of sentences: simple/compound/complex sentences
- Conditional sentence Type 1 (consolidation and extension)
- Reported speech: reported statements and reported questions
- Adverbs of frequency
- Comparative adverbs
- Prepositions of place, time
- Countable and uncountable nouns
- Possessive pronouns
- Articles: *a/an*, *the*, *zero article* (consolidation and extension)
- ...

Grade 9

- Past continuous tense (consolidation and extension)
- Past simple tense with *wish*
- Modal verbs with *if*

- Modal verbs
- Phrasal verbs
- *Suggest + V-ing* structure
- Gerund following *like, dislike, love, enjoy, hate, ...*
- Infinitives (verb + *to*-infinitive)
- Question words before *to*-infinitive
- Reported speech
- Adverb clauses of causes, results, concession
- Relative pronouns
- Relative clauses (defining and non-defining)
- Comparative adjectives
- ...

Grade 10

- Present perfect tense
- Present simple and present continuous tenses (consolidation and extension)
- Future simple tense and future with *be going to* (consolidation and extension)
- Past simple and past continuous tenses with *when* and *while*
- Infinitive with *to* and infinitive without *to*
- Gerund and infinitive (for description)
- Passive sentences, passive sentences with modal verbs
- Compound sentences
- Relative clauses: defining and non-defining (extension)
- Conditional sentence Type 1 (consolidation and extension)
- Conditional sentence Type 2
- Reported speech
- Comparatives and superlatives of adjectives
- Adjectives (indicating attitudes)
- Articles
- ...

Grade 11

- Past simple tense and present perfect tense
- Modal verbs: *must* vs. *have to*, ...
- Linking verbs: *be, seem*, ...
- Stative verbs in progressive tense
- Gerund (used as subject, object, etc.)
- Participles and clauses with *to*-infinitives
- Perfect gerund and perfect participle

- Connectors
- Word formation: compound nouns
- Cleft sentences: *It is/was ... that* + clause
- ...

Grade 12

- Present perfect tense (consolidation and extension)
- Past simple and past continuous tenses
- Types of sentences: simple, compound, complex sentences (consolidation and extension)
- Articles (consolidation and extension)
- Reported speech: command, request, offer, advice, instruction
- Relative clauses with *which* referring to a whole clause
- Prepositions after some verbs
- Phrasal verbs (verb + adverbs and verb + preposition)
- Double comparison indicating changing things
- Sentences of cause: active and passive
- Adverbial clauses of condition, comparison
- Adverbial clauses of manner, result
- ...

Table 1 shows that the grammar contents specified in the GEEC syllabus are relatively exhaustive in coverage. They consist of a listing of morphology (parts of speech) and syntax such as nouns (singular, plural, and collective), pronouns (personal, demonstrative, interrogative), verbs (modal, auxiliary, lexical, stative), basic verb tenses (present simple, past simple, present continuous, past continuous, present perfect, etc.), verb forms (participle 1, participle 2, gerund, infinitives), adjectives (descriptive, possessive), adverbs, articles, prepositions; sentence moods (declarative, imperative, interrogative), sentence types (simple, complex, compound), direct (quoted) and indirect (reported) speech, conditional sentences (type 1, type 2), subordinate clauses (adverbial clauses of condition, comparison, result, manner), comparative and superlatives of adjectives and adverbs, and others. These contents reveal the concepts of traditional-structural grammar which Vietnamese teachers of English are supposed to possess. The list of grammar items is assumed to be sufficient for students to achieve, in terms of grammatical competence, VNFLPF Level 1 after they have finished the primary school level, VNFLPF Level 2 after they have finished the lower secondary school level, and VNFLPF Level 3 after they have finished the upper secondary school level. In addition, there are three notable features of the list. Firstly, it is graded in the sense that it provides the grammar items that should be taught in each grade of the ten-year curriculum. Secondly, it indicates clearly which item is taught as an item of new knowledge, and which is taught as an item of consolidation and extension. And thirdly, it reflects the openness and flexibility of the syllabus: it puts the three dots (...) at the end of each grade list to allow textbook writers and teachers to add some more items to or omit some from the list to meet the needs of their students and to suit the diverse teaching and learning conditions of their localities.

4. Problems of Translating Grammar Contents From Syllabus to Textbooks

4.1. Preliminary Observations

Over half a century ago when foreign language textbooks were a rarity, an ideal set of materials a Vietnamese student madly needed to acquire a foreign language were a small dictionary to learn the vocabulary of the foreign language, a basic grammar book to learn the grammar structures of the foreign language, and a reader to read some simple texts in the foreign language. This essential trio is said to be associated with the grammar-translation method whose main activities in the classroom were oral and written translation from the mother tongue (Vietnamese) into the foreign language (English, French, Russian, or Chinese) followed by some vocabulary and grammar structure drill exercises to consolidate and affirm the correctness of the translation. This trio of materials was produced in English-speaking countries, mainly Great Britain and the USA. Curriculum or syllabus was nowhere to be seen and no other materials were available.

With the rapid changes in foreign language teaching over the past few decades, the way that information about a foreign language is organized has changed radically, moving the ideal trio of a dictionary, a grammar book and a reader to the background: now the information about a foreign language is designed systematically and distributed appropriately in curriculum or syllabus and is then translated to textbooks, accompanied by numerous supplementary materials (both printed and electronic) forming what is now commonly referred to as ‘foreign language textbook ecology’ such as teacher’s books, workbooks, audio CDs, pictures, flashcards, puppets, electronic teaching plans, video phonics, teaching demo-videos, e-textbooks, and many others. If one attempts a small research into modern national foreign language syllabi and their corresponding sets of textbooks, one can see that many of them have a multi-component design, consisting of themes/topics or communicative events students need to engage in, communicative competences/functions students need to take part in the topics expressed through communicative language skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing, and key linguistic knowledge elements of pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar students need to achieve communicative functions (cf. Nunan, 2001). One can also see that all these components are rolled into the textbooks, so that instead of concentrating, for example, all the grammar information in one place, all the lexical information in another, and all the phonological information in another, they are spread over the whole course in several course books, interspersed with practice exercises or activities of various sorts. This has enriched the contents of modern foreign language teaching, but at the same time has caused textbook writers lots of problems, one of which concerns how to translate grammar contents from the curriculum syllabus to textbooks. The problems experienced by the writers of the English textbook series “Global Success” can serve the point well. But before we could proceed, it would be useful to take a brief look at this prestigious textbook series.

4.2. The Textbook Series “Global Success”

“Global Success” is a multi-graded English textbook series for Vietnamese school students from Grade 3 to Grade 12. The textbook series is developed by authors of Vietnam Education Publishing House in collaboration with those of Macmillan Education (for the primary level) and Pearson Education (for the lower and upper secondary levels). The textbook series is developed in compliance with MoET’s (2018b) GEEC. Based on the structure of the Vietnamese general education system, the amount of time allocated for each level of the general education specified in the GEEC, and the language proficiency for each level specified in the

VNFLPF – Level 1 for the primary level, Level 2 for the lower secondary, and Level 3 for the upper secondary, the collaborative authors have designed the series into ten textbooks, one for each grade. The total amount of time that the textbook series must cover is 1155 periods: 420 periods for the primary level, 420 for the lower secondary level, and 315 for the upper secondary level.

The textbook series “Global Success” has a multi-component design: all three textbooks at the primary level are organised around Topics, Competences/Functions, Structures, Vocabulary, and Phonics; all four textbooks at the lower secondary level are designed around Topics, Language Focus (Vocabulary, Pronunciation, and Grammar), Communication & Culture, Skills 1 (Reading & Speaking), Skills 2 (Listening & Writing), and Looking Back & Project; and all three textbooks at the upper secondary level consist of Topics, Language Focus (Pronunciation, Vocabulary, and Grammar), Reading, Speaking, Listening, Writing, Communication & Culture/CLIL, and Looking Back & Project.

Each unit of the textbooks of each level differ slightly in their structure which can be presented Table 2 below.

Table 2

Structures of Global Success’s Primary, Lower Secondary, and Upper Secondary Textbooks

Primary level textbooks

Each textbook of the primary level is structured around 20 learning units and four review units, each learning unit consists of three lessons, and each lesson consists of two 35-minute periods. Specifically, a learning unit is designed as follows:

Unit topic (for example, **Unit one – Hello**)

Lesson 1

Period 1

1. Look, listen and repeat: introduces new vocabulary and structures in a stimulating way to provide pupils with visual support for listening, reading and speaking practice.

2. Listen, point and say: provides controlled practice and drill of the target vocabulary and structures.

3. Let’s talk: provides different situations with visual and textual prompts for pupils to use English to practice orally with their peers and their teacher.

Period 2

4. Listen and circle/tick/number: focuses on improving pupils’ initial listening skills.

5. Look, complete, and read: provides pupils with opportunities to use the learned vocabulary and structures.

6. Let’s sing: provides opportunities for pupils to practice using English in authentic context (through singing a song).

Lesson 2

Period 1

1. Look, listen and repeat: introduces more new vocabulary and structures in a stimulating way (e.g. cartoon form) to provide pupils with visual support for listening, reading

and speaking practice.

2. Listen, point and say: provides controlled practice and drill of the target vocabulary and structures.

3. Let's talk: provides different situations with visual and textual prompts for pupils to practice orally English with their peers and their teacher.

Period 2

4. Listen and number/complete/tick: further develops pupils' listening skills.

5. Read and match/complete/tick/write: provides a simple reading text for pupils to initially develop reading skills.

6. Let's play: provides opportunities for pupils to practice using English in real situation (through playing a language game)

Lesson 3

Period 1

1. Listen and repeat: introduces the target sounds for pupils to practice pronouncing them. Through practice, familiarizes pupils with the common association of English letter(s) and sound which pupils might find problematic.

2. Listen and circle/write/complete/tick: develops pupils' ability to recognize and understand the association of the learned letter(s) and the sound which pupils might find problematic.

3. Let's chant: provides opportunities for pupils to practice using English in real situation (through singing a chant).

Period 2

4. Read and circle/complete/write: provides a simple interactive text for pupils to develop reading skills.

5. Let's write: provides pupils with less controlled production writing practice.

6. Project: provides guidance for pupils to do a real-life project effectively and creatively.

Lower secondary level textbooks

Each textbook of the lower secondary level is structured around 12 learning units and 4 review units; each learning unit consists of 7 periods. Specifically, a learning unit is designed as follows:

Topic unit (for example, **Unit one – My New School**)

Period 1 – Getting Started: introduces the topic of the learning unit, usually by an interactive text which highlights the phonological and grammar item(s), and some vocabularies related to the topic which should be taught and extended in the next periods of the unit.

Period 2 – A Closer Look 1: introduces for students to practise the selected phonological items and the new vocabularies related to the topic of the unit.

Period 3 – A Closer Look 2: introduces for students to practise the selected grammar item(s).

Period 4 – Communication & Culture: introduces for students to practice some

everyday language function(s) such as introducing someone, greeting and responding to greeting, complementing and responding to complement, etc., and some culture-related communication activities.

Period 5 – Skills 1: develops students' reading and speaking skills. The topic of the reading text and the topic for speaking are revolved around the topic of the unit.

Period 6 – Skills 2: develops students' listening and writing skills. The topic of the listening text and the topic for writing are revolved around the topic of the unit.

Period 7 – Looking Back & Project: reviews the vocabulary and grammar items learned in the previous periods, and asks students to present the given real-life project related to the topic of the unit.

Upper secondary level textbooks

Each textbook of the upper secondary level is structured around 10 learning units; each learning unit consists of 8 periods. Specifically, a learning unit is designed as follows:

Unit topic (for example, **Unit one – Family Life**)

Period 1 – Getting Started: introduces the topic of the unit of learning, usually by an interactive text which highlights the phonological and grammar item(s) to be taught and some vocabularies related to the topic which should be taught and extended in the next periods of the unit.

Period 2 – Language: introduces for students to practise the selected phonological and grammar items and the new vocabularies related to the topic of the unit.

Period 3 – Reading: develops students' reading skills. The topic of the reading text is related to the topic of the unit.

Period 4 – Speaking: develops students' speaking skills. The topic for developing speaking skills is related to the topic of the unit.

Period 5 – Listening: develops students' listening skills. The topic of the listening text is related to the topic of the unit.

Period 6 – Writing: develops students' writing skills. The topic for writing is related to the topic of the unit.

Period 7 – Communication & Culture/CLIL: introduces for students to practise some everyday language function(s), and some culture-related communication activities.

Period 8 – Looking Back & Project: reviews the vocabulary and grammar items learned in the previous periods, and asks students to present the given real-life project related to the topic of the unit.

It can be seen from Table 2 that a learning unit in the textbook series “Global Success” is an amalgam of various components: communicative events or topics, communicative competences/functions, linguistic knowledge (pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar), communication and culture, and communicative skills. These components run throughout the whole textbook series. But when they interact, they can conflict, causing a lot of problems for the textbook writers. Space does not permit us to discuss them all in detail. In what follows we shall deal exclusively with some of the most common problems experienced by the writers of

the “Global Success” textbook series in translating grammar contents from the GEEC syllabus to their textbooks.

4.3. The Problems of Translating Grammar Contents From the GEEC Syllabus to the Textbook Series “Global Success”

There was, and is considerable confusion about syllabus and textbook. Many school teachers often equate a syllabus or even a curriculum with a textbook. This is not true. It would be more appropriate to say that the textbook is a reflection or a realization of the syllabus. In some similar manner, some scholars of syllabus design often mistakenly think that teachers can use the contents specified in the syllabus as instructional materials. This is not true either. The contents specified in the syllabus are just the identifications of what is to be taught in a course (cf. Wilkins, 2008, p. 75). They are too general for the teacher to use as teaching materials in the classroom. From the contents specified in the syllabus to those that can actually be taught in the classroom, the teacher must use an intermediate product – the textbook. Here we can see some sort of division of labour between the syllabus designer and the textbook writer: the syllabus designer’s task is to identify and make a list of “what is to be taught” in the syllabus, while the textbook writer’s task is to present and detail the list of “what is to be taught” in his or her textbook to make it ready for teaching and learning in the classroom. It should be noted that even when the textbook writer is well aware of his or her own task, he or she still faces with so many daunting problems in translating the contents specified in the syllabus to his or her textbooks. Regarding the translation of grammar items from the syllabus to the textbooks, the problems confronting the textbook writers are numerous, but four seem to be salient: (1) how to select the grammar item(s) listed in the syllabus for each topic unit in the textbook; (2) how to allocate appropriate amount of time for grammar in relation to other elements in a topic unit of the textbook; (3) how to select the most appropriate aspect(s) of the grammar item listed in the syllabus to present in the textbook; and (4) how to present a grammar item in a way that it can serve practical purposes of teaching and learning English as a foreign language.

4.3.1. The Problem of Selecting the Grammar Item(s) Listed in the Syllabus for Each Topic Unit in the Textbook

As can be seen in 3.2.2, the grammar items specified in the GEEC syllabus are graded in the sense that they are selected and listed for each grade in the ten academic years’ learning; but the items listed for each grade seem to be randomly ordered. They are not suggestive in the sense that the item which is put first in the syllabus list does not necessarily mean that it should be selected for the first topic unit in the textbook. Choosing which grammar item in the syllabus for which topic unit in the textbook is the task of the textbook writers. This is not an easy task for them because on the one hand they have to choose from the random list a grammar item that students need in order to achieve some communicative functions so that they can use them to take part in the communicative event (topic) they engage in; and on the other hand they have to ensure that all the grammar items selected for a grade in the syllabus are chosen to fit all the topic units selected in the textbook of that grade. Below is an example showing how the textbook writers of *Tiếng Anh 10* (English 10) of the textbook series “Global Success” have struggled to solve this daunting problem. (Note that two items which are listed as separate in the syllabus are selected for one topic unit, and that two items (14 and 15) which are specified in the syllabus list are not selected in the textbook).

Table 3*Grammar Items in the Syllabus and the Selection of Grammar Items in Tiếng Anh 10*

Grammar items listed in the GEEC syllabus for Grade 10	Grammar items selected for each unit in <i>Tiếng Anh 10</i>
1 Present perfect tense	Unit 5
2 Present simple and present continuous tenses (consolidation and extension)	Unit 1
3 Future simple tense and future with <i>be going to</i> (consolidation and extension)	Unit 2
4 Past simple and past continuous tenses with <i>when</i> and <i>while</i>	Unit 4
5 Infinitive with <i>to</i> and infinitive without <i>to</i>	Unit 3
6 Gerund and infinitive (for description)	Unit 5
7 Passive sentences, passive sentences with modal verbs	Unit 2
8 Compound sentences	Unit 3
9 Relative clauses: defining and non-defining (extension)	Unit 8
10 Conditional sentence Type 1 (consolidation and extension)	Unit 10
11 Conditional sentence Type 2	Unit 10
12 Reported speech	Unit 9
13 Comparatives and superlatives of adjectives	Unit 7
14 Adjectives (indicating attitudes)	
15 Articles	

4.3.2. The Problem of Allocating Appropriate Amount of Time for Grammar in Relation to Other Elements in a Topic Unit of the Textbook

It cannot be denied that grammar is present in all corners of a language, and that one cannot learn a foreign language effectively without learning its grammar". "...grammar is the core of language. Without grammar, we are left with a few words as labels for features of the physical environments" (Rivers, 1970, p. 71). As can be seen in Table 2, grammar is recognised as a legitimate element in the structures of all the ten textbooks of the "Global Success" series, but how to allocate appropriate amount of time for teaching grammar at each level is a big problem for the textbook writers. It requires very detailed and careful consideration of grammar in relation to other elements in a topic unit such as competences/communicative functions (realized in the communicative skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing), vocabulary, and phonics at the primary level; pronunciation, vocabulary, communication, reading, speaking, listening, writing, looking back and project at the lower secondary level; and pronunciation, vocabulary, reading, speaking, listening, writing, communication & culture/CLIL, looking back and project at the upper secondary level. Below is a solution the authors of the textbook series "Global Success" have offered to solve this problem.

At the primary level, the amount of time allocated for the teaching of grammar is not explicitly indicated in the design of the textbooks of all three grades *Tiếng Anh 3* (English 3),

Tiếng Anh 4 (English 4), and *Tiếng Anh 5* (English 5). The grammar element comes under the general heading “Structures” in the book map, but the presentation of grammar contents is dispersed throughout the three lessons of the topic unit, interspersed with other components and activities: phonics, vocabulary, listening, speaking, listening, writing, games, singing and chanting.

At the lower secondary level, the amount of time allocated for the teaching of grammar is explicit in the design of the textbooks of all four grades *Tiếng Anh 6* (English 6), *Tiếng Anh 7* (English 7), *Tiếng Anh 8* (English 8), and *Tiếng Anh 9* (English 9): one period for learning new grammar item(s) which comes under the heading “Grammar” and about one third period for consolidation and extension which also comes under the heading “Grammar” in the “Looking Back & Project” lesson.

At the upper secondary level, the amount of time allocated for the teaching of grammar is also explicit in the design of the textbooks of all three grades *Tiếng Anh 10* (English 10), *Tiếng Anh 11* (English 11), and *Tiếng Anh 12* (English 12): about one third period for learning new grammar item(s) which comes under the heading “Grammar”, and about one third period for extension and consolidation which also comes under the heading “Grammar” in the “Looking Back & Project” lesson.

4.3.3. The Problem of Selecting the Most Appropriate Aspect(s) of the Grammar Item(s) Specified in the Syllabus to Present in the Textbook

In the GEEC syllabus (Table 1), there are grammar items which are specific such as “Prepositions (of place): *in, on, at* [Grade 3], “Possessive pronouns: *mine, yours...*” [Grade 6], “Gerund following *like, dislike, love, enjoy, hate*” [Grade 9]. But there are quite a number of other grammar items which are overloaded, containing many aspects such as “Wh-questions” [Grade 6], “Types of sentences: simple/compound/complex sentences” [Grade 8], “Comparatives and superlatives of adjectives” [Grade 10]. Those grammar items that are specific do not seem to cause any problem for the textbook writers because they do not need any breaking down into smaller items. But it is the overloaded grammar items that cause the textbook writers a lot of problems. Take the item “Reported speech” listed in the Grade 9 syllabus as an example. This is a very complex grammatical category of the English language. The category itself contains quite a number of subcategories, each of which, to be effectively used, involves a number of complex grammatical processes. To solve the problem of the complexity of reported speech, the textbook writers have to decide whether “direct speech” or “indirect speech” should be selected first for presentation in their textbook. If direct speech is selected first, it will involve a general introduction to the category (what it is, what we use it for, and when we use it, etc.) and, when it is put into practice, the change in personal pronouns in terms of “who reported the speech”: from *I* to *you* as in “*I’m going to be a doctor*”, ***I*** said → ***You*** said: “*I’m going to be a doctor*.” If indirect speech is selected first, it will involve not only a general introduction to the category (what it is, what we use it for, and when and how we use it, etc.) but also quite a number of changes such as the following:

(1) Changes in personal pronouns both in the reporting clause and the reported clause: from *I* to *you* as in “*I’m going to be a doctor*”, ***you*** said → ***You*** said that ***you*** were going to be a doctor; from *I* to *he* as in “*I’m going to be a doctor*”, ***he*** said → ***He*** said that ***he*** was going to be a doctor; and from *I* to *she* as in “*I’m going to be a doctor*”, ***she*** said → ***She*** said that ***she*** was going to be a doctor.

(2) Changes in verb forms to realize tenses: from the present simple to the past simple

as in “*I go to school every day*”, *he said* → *He said that he went to school every day*; from the present continuous to the past continuous as in “*He is watching the TV*”, *she said* → *She said that he was watching the TV*; from the present perfect to the past perfect as in “*We have completed our English programme successfully*”, *they said* → *They said that they had completed their English programme successfully*.

(3) Changes in time expression references: from *now* to *then* as in “*I can see her now*”, *he said* → *He said that he could see her then*; from *today* to *that day* as in “*We will finish our work today*”, *they said* → *They said that they would finish their work that day*; from *yesterday* to *the day before* as in “*We completed our work yesterday*”, *they said* → *They said that they had completed their work the day before*, and so on and so forth.

The fact that some grammar items are complex and contain a number of aspects indicates that how to select the most appropriate aspect(s) of the selected grammar item listed in the syllabus to present in the textbook for teaching and learning may cause problems for the textbook writers. Our experience has shown that when encountering a complex, multi-aspect grammar item, selecting which aspect(s) to present in the textbook requires very careful consideration and thorough discussion among the authors before arriving at a final decision.

4.3.4. The Problem of Presenting a Grammar Item in a Way That it can Serve Practical Purposes of Teaching and Learning English as a Foreign Language

Since the advent of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), the discussion of pedagogical grammar has revolved around whether the teaching of grammar should be form-focused or meaning-focused. Those who support the meaning-focused approach to teaching grammar suggest that grammar in textbooks should include purely communicative activities to meet what is referred to as “real-life” needs of the students. This may be true to the context of second language teaching where the use of communicative activities is predicated on abundant out-of-class exposure to the target language. But in the context of what I would refer to as “genuinely foreign language teaching and learning” as Vietnam, this does not seem to be a realistic contention. As mentioned in 3.1, the real-life needs of most Vietnamese students who learn English as a foreign language and, in particular, as a school subject are not so much the development of communicative skills as the development of language accuracy for passing grammar-based tests and examinations (see Pham, 2016; Hoang, 2017; see also Fotos, 2002). This explains in part why the writers of the “Global Success” textbook series have chosen a more form-focused approach to presenting grammar contents in their textbooks. They have presented a grammar point generally in a three-step procedure, starting off with naming the grammar point that is going to be taught (e.g. The present simple), followed by giving rules and its usage (e.g. We use the present simple to talk about actions or events that often happen, or are fixed [at the present time]). This is followed by a practice activity that requires correct use of the target grammar point at sentence level (e.g. Choose the correct answer A, B, or C [where students can learn to use the present simple tense through making the correct choice of the present tense verbs in different sentences]), followed by some guidance on how to use the grammar point correctly in special cases (e.g. Remember! The present simple verbs with *he/she/it* needs an ending *s/es*). The procedure ends with a further practice activity where the target grammar point is practised at discourse level (e.g. Write the correct form of the verbs given in bracket [where students learn to use the present simple tense by practicing using the correct forms of six verbs put in brackets]) (for more detail about this three-step procedure, see Hoang et al., 2022, p. 9).

5. Concluding Remarks

Much has been written generally about the importance of grammar in foreign language teaching, but very little has been written specifically about the place of grammar in a modern national foreign language curriculum and the problems textbook writers experience in translating grammar contents from the curriculum to textbooks. This study is an attempt to fill the gap: exploring the place of grammar in the 2018 General Education English Curriculum of Vietnam and the problems the writers of the textbook series “Global Success” have experienced in translating the grammar contents specified in the GEEC syllabus to their textbooks. To lay ground for the study, we raised two questions for exploration: (1) What is the place of grammar in the Vietnamese Ministry of Education and Training (MoET)’s 2018 General Education English Curriculum (GEEC)?”, and (2) What are the main problems textbook writers often experience in translating grammar contents from the GEEC to textbooks?”

To answer the first question, we devoted the first part of the paper to examining the place of grammar in the design of the GEEC. Our examination brought to light a number of findings of which three seem to be prominent: (1) grammar is a legitimate element in the total make-up of the GEEC; (2) grammar contents are carefully selected and graded for each grade of the ten-year programme (from Grade 3 to Grade 12); and (3) although not explicitly stated, the selection of the grammar contents is based generally on the principle of “from easy to difficult, from simple to complex”. Our study also shows that in the current conception of foreign language teaching, knowledge of grammar is by no means the only, or perhaps the most important, kind of knowledge a student of foreign language needs: it is just one of the three dimensions of linguistic knowledge (pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar) needed to develop the student’s linguistic competence contributing to his or her total communicative competence as conceptualized by Canale and Swain (1980) and Canale (1983/2013) and other scholars.

To address the second question, we discussed four specific problems we as textbook writers have experienced in translating the grammar contents specified in the GEEC syllabus to the series of English textbooks “Global Success”: (1) the problem of selecting the grammar item(s) listed in the syllabus for each topic unit in the textbook; (2) the problem of allocating appropriate amount of time for grammar in relation to other elements in a topic unit of the textbook; (3) the problem of selecting the most appropriate aspect(s) of the grammar item selected in the syllabus to present in the textbook; and (4) the problem of presenting a grammar item in a way that it can serve practical purposes of teaching and learning English as a foreign language in present Vietnamese schools. It seems from our discussion that most of the problems experienced by the textbook writers in translating grammar contents to textbooks are derived from the nature of the multi-component and multi-graded curriculum. A multi-component curriculum can look good and attractive, can convince the evaluator, and can be praised for its comprehensiveness; but when it comes to the actual design of the curriculum syllabus and, in particular, the writing of the corresponding textbooks, many problems emerge. The problems we have discussed in our experience are just some. There may be others that need to be expounded. The solutions we have offered in this paper do not mean that the problems of translating grammar contents from the curriculum syllabus to the textbooks have been solved. There may be other solutions that are more viable.

This paper has been concerned with the place of only grammar in the make-up of the GEEC syllabus. The place of other elements in the curriculum syllabus such as pronunciation, vocabulary, listening, speaking, reading, writing, intercultural information, and the problems

experienced by textbook writers in translating them to textbooks, therefore, should be the topics for further research.

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VỊ TRÍ CỦA NGỮ PHÁP TRONG CHƯƠNG TRÌNH GIÁO DỤC PHỔ THÔNG MÔN TIẾNG ANH VÀ NHỮNG KHÓ KHĂN TRONG VIỆC CHUYỂN DỊCH CÁC NỘI DUNG NGỮ PHÁP TỪ CHƯƠNG TRÌNH SANG SÁCH GIÁO KHOA

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Tóm tắt: Bài viết này đề cập đến hai vấn đề quan trọng nhưng dường như bị lãng quên trong nghiên cứu phát triển chương trình và biên soạn sách giáo khoa ngoại ngữ: vị trí của ngữ pháp trong một chương trình ngoại ngữ hiện đại và những khó khăn trong việc chuyển dịch các nội dung ngữ pháp được thiết kế trong chương trình sang sách giáo khoa để phục vụ cho việc học tập và giảng dạy đạt hiệu quả. Hai câu hỏi cụ thể được đặt ra để khám phá trong nghiên cứu này là: (1) “Vị trí của ngữ pháp trong Chương trình giáo dục phổ thông môn tiếng Anh năm 2018 của Bộ Giáo dục và Đào tạo Việt Nam là gì?”; (2) “Những khó khăn chính mà những người biên soạn sách giáo khoa thường gặp phải khi chuyển dịch nội dung ngữ pháp từ Chương trình giáo dục phổ thông môn tiếng Anh năm 2018 của Bộ Giáo dục và Đào tạo Việt Nam sang sách giáo khoa là gì?”. Hai câu hỏi này hình thành nên trọng tâm của nghiên cứu và sẽ được giải quyết chi tiết và xuyên suốt trong bài viết.

Từ khóa: ngữ pháp, vai trò, Chương trình giáo dục phổ thông môn tiếng Anh, các khó khăn, chương trình, sách giáo khoa