THE METHODOLOGY OF ENGLISH GRAMMAR IN SCHOOL TEXTBOOKS OF ALBANIAN AUTHORS PUBLISHED IN 1990-2010
METODOLOGJIA E GRAMATIKËS SË GJUHËS ANGLEZE NË LIBRAT SHKOLLORË TË AUTORËVE SHQIPTARË NË VITET 1990-2010

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PËRMBLEDHJE

Meqënëse qëllimi i programit shkollor në gjuhën angleze është për të mësuar gjuhën për qëllime komunikuese, ky hulumtim synon të analizojë dhe krahasojë veçoritë metodologjike të disa teksteve të gjuhës angleze hartuar nga autorë shqiptarë dhe të publikuar gjatë 1990 - 2010, për të treguar arritjet që janë bërë në drejtim të të mësuarit të gramatikës dhe për të bërë propozime metodologjike për mësuesit e gjuhës angleze dhe hartuesit e teksteve për një mësimdhënie dhe nxënie efektive te gramatikës duke iu referuar hulumtimeve të fundit të përvetësimit të gjuhës së huaj. Propozimet metodologjike mund të jenë të dobishme në pedagogjinë e gjuhës së huaj në përgjithësi dhe për mësuesit dhe hartuesit e teksteve shkollorë të gjuhës angleze në veçanti. Është konstatuar se librat e fundit kanë më shumë opsione metodologjike se ato të viteve 1990. Megjithatë më shumë punë nevojitet në drejtim të: përshkrimit të cështjes gramatikore, tekstit dhe veprimtarive.

Fjalët çelës: gramatikë, strategji, libri, teksti, veprimtari

SUMMARY

Since the aim of English language school program is to learn English for communicative purposes, this research aims to analyze and compare the methodological features of some English language textbooks compiled by Albanian authors and published during 1990 – 2010 in order to point out achievements made in guiding teaching and learning of English grammatical structures and to make methodological proposals for English language teachers and textbook compilers for an effective grammar teaching and learning referring to recent research of foreign language acquisition. The methodological proposals can be useful to foreign language pedagogy in general and to English language teachers and textbook compilers in particular. It is concluded that the recent course books have more methodological options than those of 1990s. However more work is needed in terms of the three sets of methodological options: explicit description, data, and operations.

Key words: grammar, approach, textbook, text, operations.

Introduction

The course books have gradually become the most pervasive tool for language instruction as they support and facilitate teaching and learning process. They are an unavoidable element of the curriculum because they include a carefully planned and balanced selection of language content and provide readymade texts and tasks with possible appropriate level for most of the class, which save time for the teacher (Ur 1999).

Since 1993, according to the Albanian Ministry of Science and Education, curricula and teaching materials of foreign languages have been in the process of improvement based on the European standards.

The English Language School Program in Albania aims at equipping students with basic language skills and knowledge of the English language so as to enable them to use the language effectively in both written and oral communication.

But effective communication is greatly dependent on grammatical accuracy as grammar competence is part of communicative competence (Celce-Murcia 1991, Hedge 2000).

However its crucial role in foreign language acquisition has been controversial (Nassaji, Fotos 2011). In the history of English language teaching as a foreign language, there have been three general approaches to language and grammar teaching (ibid.): *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), emphasized the role of grammar in language learning. They viewed grammar teaching as an explicit and linear presentation of the rules assuming that language consists of grammatical forms that can be acquired sequentially and additively. The classes were organized based on the analysis of language forms with little focus on language functions and real life communication. Consequently grammar-based methods have been found inadequate in communicative needs of learners. *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, focused on an exposure to meaningful communication. They developed syllabi based on functional use of language emphasizing meaning-based activities. But even these methods have been found inadequate. Some type of focus on grammatical forms is considered necessary to develop high levels of accuracy in the target language (Celce-Murcia 1991, Nassaji, Fotos 2011). *Focus on form* (focus on forms and meaning, grammar and communication) approach draws learners' attention to linguistic forms in the context of meaningful communication. The communicative model of grammar teaching includes three dimensions: form (structure), meaning (semantics) and use (pragmatics: when, where and how to use the form) (Larsen-Freeman 1991). Many authors have developed frameworks for grammar teaching incorporating a focus on form into meaningful communication. Nassaji and Fotos (2011) recommended six input-and output-based instructional options for teaching grammar communicatively, suggesting the need of both implicit and explicit form-focused instructions to promote foreign language acquisition: processing instruction, textual enhancement, discourse-based grammar teaching, interactional feedback, grammar-focused tasks, and collaborative output tasks.

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 English language textbooks compile by Albanian authors and published during 1990–2010 in order to point out achievements made in guiding effective teaching and learning of English grammatical structures and make methodological proposals for English language textbook compilers for an effective grammar teaching and learning referring to recent research of foreign language acquisition. The methodological proposals can be useful to foreign language pedagogy in general and to English language teachers and textbook compilers in particular.

RESEARCH MATERIALS AND METHOD

According to Alter text of Ministry of Education, only foreign course books will be used in teaching English as a foreign language at high school this school year (2012-2013), while in lower levels (primary and secondary school) course books of foreign and Albanian authors will be used.

According to Celce-Murcia (1991), the need and the extent to focus on form changes (among others) according to age and proficiency level. Little explicit grammar instruction is needed to young children and beginners (regardless of age), whereas adolescents or adults' learning may be facilitated by some explicit focus on form.

For the purposes of the study and the above reasons, the English language course books presented in Table 1 are selected. They are used in teaching English in public schools. Further information about the selected course books has been summarized in the table.

The same book levels have purposefully been chosen as to minimize the effects of other related factors. In order to have an in-depth understanding, one single unit from each book has been chosen. The theme selected in all three books is that of present perfect.

Nr.	Name	Authors	Publisher	Publication Date	Level	Unit/ Topic
1.	English 7	I. Stefanllari, G Hadaj, K. Gega, R Stefanllari	ShBLSh Tirana	1993 (1st publication in 1991)	7th class	14 / present perfect
2.	English 8	I. Stefanllari, G. Hadaj, R. Stefanllari	ShBLSh Tirana	1992	8th class	10 / present perfect + for, since
3.	English 1	D. Kristo, E. Agolli, N. Bombaj, M. Rumano	ShBLSh Tirana	1990	9th class	16 / present perfect & present tense
4.	Off we go (St's &Work book)	Z. Lita, S. Balli	ShB "Arberia 07"	2009	7th class	5 / present perfect
5.	A trip to AmBri	V. Tafani, I. Vasquez, Y. Leksi	ShB "Erik"	2008	8th class	3 / present perfect+ for, since
6.	English 9	G. Hadaj	ShB Mediaprint	2008	9th class	4 / present perfect & Pres. Perf. Cont.

Table 1. The selected course books

With the purpose to unearth the methodological options utilized by the authors of the above selected course books, the course books have been analyzed using Ellis' system of methodological options employed in grammar practice books (Ellis 2002). It consists of three sets: *explicit description*, *data*, and *operations*. *Explicit description* refers to whether the course book either provides learners with an explanation of the grammar point (supplied) or whether it requires learners to develop their explanation (discover).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 sentences judged to be ungrammatical).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The methodological features of the selected course books are summarized in table2. Referring to the first set of options, the explicit description, as it is seen in the table, '*English 7*', '*English 8*' and '*English 1*' (of 1990s), providing learners with no explicit grammar description, suggest an inductive approach to grammar instruction. The teacher should have good knowledge of English grammar to provide the necessary explanation in case learners don't. While the more recent course books, '*Off we go*', '*A trip to AmBri*' and '*English 9*', providing explicit grammar description, suggest a deductive approach to grammar instruction. But learners may have different learning strategies or styles. Adopting a methodology which favors either a holistic or an analytical approach of learning, language (grammar) learning will not be equally effective; therefore a single approach is difficult to be recommended. The teacher should vary the approach in order to accommodate all the learners.

Referring to the second set of options, data options, all the course books provide contrived written texts. 'English 7', 'Off we go', 'English 1' and 'English 9' provide a continuous text with examples of the target structure. While English 8' and 'A trip to AmBri' provide a continuous text, but no examples of the target structure; discrete sentences are used to focus on the target structure. But language is context-sensitive: an utterance is fully intelligible only in its context (Weaver 1996). So grammar is best taught and practiced in context. Though authentic texts show how the target structure can be used in real communication, the linguistic load of unfamiliar vocabulary and synthetic complexity can make them impenetrable and incomprehensible. For this reason the approach generally adopted by course book writers nowadays is: simplifying authentic texts in ways which 'retain their flavor' (Thornbury 2008). Therefore simplified authentic texts are needed to be used. What is more, foreign language acquisition support the use of input rich in specific grammatical structures which can be 'noticed', subsequently more learned (Nassaji, Fotos 2011). Continuous text opposed to discrete sentences is needed to develop learners' awareness of form, meaning and use of the target structure. There is no empirical research in testing the advantages of presenting data in oral or written form; however both forms are helpful in learning. Therefore frequent instances of the same form in the input and visual devises (or acoustic devices: added stress or repetition in oral input) are recommended to be used to help learns notice a certain form in written input (bolding, underlining, italicizing, capitalizing, color coding or a combination of these). But the level of the input should be appropriate to learners' level of language proficiency.

Referring to operations, controlled production activities are widely used, generally including sentences isolated from the context. Controlled reception activities are also used (but not widely, more in CBs of 2008), while free activities are few (more in CBs of 2008). 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 learners more opportunities to deepen their understanding of the form-meaning relationship and practice English communicatively.

Coursebook	Explicit Description		Data options						Operations					
			Source		Text size		Medium		Production		Reception		Judgments	
	Supplie	Discov	Authen	Cotriv	Disc. sent	Continu	Oral	Written	Controlle	Free	Controlle	Automatic	Judg only	Correct
1.E 7		√	√			√		√	√	√	√			
2.E 8		√	√	√				√	√					
3.E 1		√	√			√		√	√					
4.Off	√		√			√	√	√	√		√			
5.Am Bri	√		√	√				√	√	√	√			
6.E 9	√		√			√		√	√	√	√			

Table 2. The methodological features of the selected course books

CONCLUSIONS

Analyzing and comparing the methodological features (related to grammar teaching and learning) of some English language textbooks compiled by Albanian authors (during 1990 – 2010), it is concluded that the recent course books have more methodological options than those of 1990s. However referring to the recent research in foreign language acquisition, more work is needed. To accommodate all the learners and help teachers provide the necessary explanation in case the learners don't, it is recommended course books provide grammar explanation. To aid comprehension and facilitate acquisition of a certain form, it is recommended: simplified authentic texts appropriate to the learners' level of language proficiency, input rich in specific grammatical structures which can be 'noticed', continuous text opposed to discrete sentences, frequent instances of the same form, visual and phonological modifications of the input to highlight the target structure. To respond to the communicative model of grammar teaching (focusing on both grammar and communication), more free production, reception and judgment activities are recommended.

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