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## **“THE VIETNAMESE LANGUAGE FOR BEGINNERS”. A NEW TEXTBOOK: TRADITIONS AND INNOVATIONS**

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**Abstract.** The article presents a new textbook of the Vietnamese language for beginners, published in MSLU ("Vietnamese language for beginners: a textbook." In 3 parts). It meets the new requirements that the fundamental changes taking place in Vietnam, Russia and around the world put before teachers of the Vietnamese language. The article reveals the structure of the textbook and the basic principles of teaching on it.

**Keywords:** MSLU, Vietnamese language, teaching foreign languages, textbook, phonetics, grammar, Vietnamese vocabulary, succession.

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In September 2022 Moscow State Linguistic University (MSLU) issued “The Vietnamese Language for Beginners” (Fig. 1). The new textbook appeared several months after the first group of young Vietnamists had been graduated from the University.

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**Fig.1.** Vietnamese language textbook for beginners. In 3 parts. *Author's photo*

MSLU, one of the leading linguistic universities in Russia, the successor of famous Maurice Thorez Moscow State Pedagogical Institute of Foreign Languages has for ninety years been producing highly qualified translators and interpreters, specialists in Oriental languages among them (in 2020 the Chair of Oriental languages celebrated its 30th anniversary), addressed the Vietnamese language in 2017, on RF President Vladimir Putin's recommendation. Then the first Vietnamese group was assembled for the faculty of translation and interpretation.

One of the main problems the Vietnamese teachers in MSLU faced was the absence of current educational and methodical literature on the Vietnamese language and Vietnam in general, which could assist to produce specialists meeting the requirements of the labor market in the third decade of the 21st century. Methodologically excellent Vietnamese textbooks made by previous generations of Vietnamists thirty or forty years ago, do not correspond to the requirements of the current reality. In particular, the last decades have seen great changes in life (and so, in language) being connected with technological progress, perturbations in different life spheres, which could not help reflecting both the vocabulary and grammar of the target language.

Crucial changes in Vietnam, Russia and worldwide impose new requirements for Vietnamese teachers. In particular, it is high time to make a new, current, textbook for beginners instead of the excellent one by the team of authors of the Institute of Asian and African Countries at Moscow Lomonosov State University [Shiltova, Ngo Nhu Binh, Norova 1989], which during more as thirty years has been helping to produce Vietnamists. At the beginning of 2020, a team of authors (E.R. Zubtsova, Hoang Thi Hong Hoa, A.V. Nazimova) began working at a new textbook for beginners. MSLU Directorate decided to assemble a new Vietnamese group for the first course in 2020/21 academic year to test the manual at the lessons and at the same time to correct it taking into account the new problems. The practice has showed that future Vietnamists not only enjoyed the new textbook, but also helped the authors with pieces of good advice. Thus, a first-year student proposed to insert linguistic and geographical commentaries with pictures in the textbook, which help students to get acquainted with new realities of Vietnamese way of life and culture.

Working at the textbook the authors have carefully preserved all the methodological principles of their predecessors, the best ones for the training of many generations of Vietnamists, but they have filled it with a new content, which meets new requirements of today and possibly of tomorrow.

The main changes affected teaching phonetics. In the opinion of many teachers, its explanation in the previous textbooks was too complicated. Phonetics exposed mainly for linguists, with the transcription of all the sounds, was not clear for the majority of students, because usually (with rare exceptions) in Russian universities the Vietnamese language was and is taught as an applied discipline for the further use in various spheres of activity. Students who learned complicated phonetics of tonal Vietnamese, had from the very beginning to rely only upon their ears and abilities to imitate.

Proceeding from practical tasks of teaching I.E. Alyoshina, Associated Professor of MGIMO, developed her universal system of teaching phonetics on the ground of the principle of articulation of every sound, i.e., the teacher articulates sounds and at the same time explains them. The system was so efficient that most first-year students picked up relatively correct pronunciation, later improved during internships and work in Vietnam. Later I.E. Alyoshina transferred her methodology to her successors (E.R. Zubtsova, S.E. Glazunova), who, in their turn, produced several generations of Vietnamists. Many of them achieved great heights in their fields (like A.G. Kovtun, the former Ambassador of Russia in Vietnam).

“Alyoshina’s” system of teaching phonetics has been adopted in the new textbook of MSLU, meant for training of professional translators and interpreters. Phonetical exercises use the principle “from simple to complex”, i.e., sounds and tones are being practiced gradually. For example, first an even tone is being practiced on the sounds simple for the Europeans:

*ma-ma-ma-ma, va-va-va-va etc.*

Then more complex alveolar sounds l, t, n, đ and a falling tone are introduced:

*la-la-la-là, na-na-na-nà etc.* in ascending complexity.

Thus, during the first training month students learn the phonetic structure of the language and pick up the pronunciation practicing a lot of various phonetic exercises from an audio carrier read by a Vietnamese speaker. At the same time, they begin to learn vocabulary and grammar.

The new textbook consists of the Introductory lesson, Introductory phonetic course of 10 lessons, and Basic course of 17 lessons.

The Introductory lesson not only acquaints students with peculiarities of the Vietnamese language and writing, but also gives an idea of the country, as well as prepare students for the training materials both of the Introductory phonetic course and the Basic one.

The Introductory phonetic course explains and practices the articulation of all the sounds of the Vietnamese language, describes and practices tones, introduces Latinized writing *quoc ngu* and the rules of spelling. The articulation of sounds and tones is practiced via phonetic exercises, developed like “vocalization” built on the principle “from simple to complex”. At the same time, the material of vocabulary and grammar is introduced, which allows to improve phonetic skills both with separate words and with simple sentences and dialogues. The training tasks and exercises assist not only to improve the skills got at the lesson, but also to repeat the material covered. Thus, having learned the Introductory phonetic course students possess the initial language base, which makes for the success with the material of the Basic course.

The Basic course gives the systematic study of the normative grammar and basic vocabulary of the Vietnamese language, makes for skills development of written and oral speech. The structure of each lesson is as follows: first, a new grammar material is introduced (the base for all the tasks and exercises), it is followed with a text/texts and dialogues for a given topic with the introduction of the new vocabulary and at last, tasks and exercises which improve the new grammar mostly with the use of passed words and expressions. Beside the new vocabulary and grammar many lessons have linguistic and geographical commentaries and pictures, which permit students to get acquainted with

culture and history of Vietnam. The last lessons consist of exercises which permit to repeat the passed grammar.

The Basic course of 17 lessons contains various topics necessary for both the communication during the first internship in Vietnam (MSLU students get it from the fourth semester), and the mastering of the further program. Beside everyday topics (“Introductions”, “Shopping and Service Sector”, “At the Doctor’s”) there are also topics on both Vietnam and Russia (“Holidays in Vietnam and Russia”, “Physical and Economic Geography of Vietnam” (with dialogues on the geography of Russia) “Political and Economic Order of Vietnam”, “History of Vietnam”, “Russia is my Motherland”, “Moscow is the Capital of Russia”, “Hanoi is the Capital of Vietnam, etc.).

Beside phonetics, the new textbook gives the full scope of grammar, but not in separate fragments as was usually done in previous textbooks for beginners (for example, *càng ngày càng* was given in one lesson, *càng...càng...* - in another, and *lại càng* was not explained at all). A grammar theme is improved with exercises in its entirety, even if the texts and dialogues have but its fragments.

Every text and dialogue are provided with the list of new words and phrases. Vocabularies (words and phrases in bold) are mostly meant for active learning; the rest ones serve either for understanding (in passive) or as a kind of reference material. The general volume of the introduced vocabulary is about 2000 words and phrases. On having completed the material of the textbook, students acquire knowledge and skills to converse freely and translate texts both on everyday topics and some socio-political and geographical ones. Further, it will facilitate learning the material of textbooks for senior courses.

At the end of every lesson there are communicative exercises (to answer questions to the text or dialogues, to use the learnt material in dialogues of their own, to get ready for a conversation on a given topic, etc.). Texts and dialogues, exercises to improve the use of vocabulary and grammar, as well as the audio course supplemented to the textbook assist the teacher to model different communicative situations, making for the development of oral speech.

Designing the lessons of the Basic course the authors made almost no changes into the manual of the Institute of Asian and African Countries at Moscow Lomonosov State University, but they filled it with a new content proper for the realities of the third decade of the 21st century. Thus, the topic “At the Post-Office” has been substituted for “Means of Communication” including the text and dialogues with necessary situational vocabulary of current means of communication (Internet, social networks, messengers, e-mail, etc.).

The texts and dialogues of the basic course have been designed by Hoang Thi Hong Hoa, a native speaker, graduate of the School of international journalism of MGIMO, PhD (History), experienced journalist and translator. The exercises of the introductory phonetic course have been compiled by A.V. Nazimova, then still a talented fourth-year student, now a graduate of MSLU.

The new textbook for beginners is designed for the first, second and early third semesters of the five-year program of the MSLU specialty. The study of its themes creates the lexico-grammatical base for further learning by using the manual for advanced [Glebova, Sandakova, Tyumeneva 2014] during the third, fourth and fifth semesters. At the end of the third course and the early fourth course (the sixth and seventh semesters) “The General Translation” [Alyoshina, Kruglikov 1998] is used as the basic textbook. The training is finished with the textbook for senior courses [Tyumeneva, Glazunova 2014]. Beside basic textbooks students of senior courses use articles and analytical materials from Vietnamese media on different aspects of translation, as well as records of Vietnamese TV and radio broadcasting.

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