

WHAT IS GRAMMAR IN L1 EDUCATION TODAY?

Introduction to EduLing special issue on grammar education

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In recent years, discussions of grammar teaching and its role in language education have increased. In order to improve our pupils' communicative skills, should we teach grammar at all? Or may the pupils learn how to effectively use the language by just practicing it in a wide repertoire of situations? What does "knowing a language" mean? Does it mean knowing how to use it? Or does it also entail how to reflect on it as a basis for such effective language use? In some areas the debate is becoming a new focus of attention and in others it is being fine-tuned (scrutinizing grammar content selection and classroom methodologies). Nonetheless, we could say that the underlying controversy has always been there. One of the questions raised is whether grammar teaching has a direct effect on improving uses: i.e., we teach grammar concepts, and pupils can independently transform such concepts into procedures for adequately using the language. Alternatively, if the distance between both grammar knowledge and language use is to be covered via pedagogic mediation, which would be the "whats" and the "hows" of such mediation?

The latter suggests the need to go beyond a transmissive setting, acknowledging that what we teach is not always necessarily what pupils learn and that learning is a demanding process in need of adequate scaffolding within the zone of proximal development. Nonetheless, such mediation raises another doubt. Some proposals assume that grammar knowledge operates at an implicit level and wonder whether we should make it explicit at all; instead, they defend the manipulation of linguistic data (e.g., sentence combining) and emphasize communicative tasks to enact the

speakers' implicit grammar knowledge and trigger long-lasting effects in communicative language use (see for instance Graham & Perin, 2007).

Others suggest the need to orient such mediation towards the construction of consistent conceptual knowledge via reflective practices (i.e. metalinguistic activity, Camps, 2014) to gain metalinguistic understanding (Myhill, 2019); this should be very important when using the language in a deliberate way. In general terms we could say that this represents a shift from attention to grammar content only (the "what") to considering teaching procedures and learning processes (the "how"), as well as the overarching issue of the general objective of grammar teaching (the "what for") (Dolz & Simard, 2009; Ribas et al., 2014).

What is the volume about and what is its theoretical starting point?

This special issue offers an international overview of research on grammatical learning in schools within the context of L1 education. It is inspired by the three-fold connection between content, teaching procedures, and learning processes as a sine qua non of research on grammar in schooling, which necessarily results in an interdisciplinary approach.

It is the result of the cooperation of researchers associated with the EduLing SIG (Special Interest Group) of ARLE (International Association for Research in L1 Education, former IAIMTE International Association for the Improvement of Mother Tongue Education). This group has contributed to the field with biannual discussion seminars (Tallinn 2014, Setúbal 2016, Białystok 2018) and biannual symposia (Paris 2013, Odense 2015, Tallinn 2017, Lisbon 2019) organized during IAIMTE/ARLE conferences.

This special issue can be treated as a response to the invitation of authors of the special issue *Working on grammar at school in L1 education: Empirical research across linguistic regions* (Boivin, Fontich, Funke, García-Folgado, & Myhill, 2018) to join them and to broaden and enrich our overview of research on grammar learning and instruction in compulsory L1 education. Their call concerned the reviewing of empirical studies in different linguistic regions (namely, Francophone, Anglophone, Germanic, and Hispanic areas). We are now offering individual studies from Czech, Dutch, Finnish, Polish and Spanish educational contexts, following different approaches: three studies are empirical (Camps & Fontich; Van Rijt, Wijnands, & Coppen; Nupponen, Jeskanen, & Rättyä) and two are theoretical and descriptive (Štěpáník; Awramiuk, & Szymańska); besides, they all cover a number of issues that fall around the three main elements of teaching, namely the student, the teacher and the content, the so-called "didactic (or pedagogic) triangle". The understanding of didactic relationships in teaching situations needs the understanding of these elements and of how they interact. This didactic triangle encloses the relationships that are present in learning and teaching situations (see, for example, Camps in preparation; Fontich & Camps, 2014; Krogh, Qvortrup, & Christensen, 2016). One possibility to view the field of grammar teaching is to look at it through the fields of

teachers' pedagogical knowledge. Pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) describes the connection between content knowledge and pedagogical knowledge. Pamela Grossman has elaborated a model that illustrates PCK in L1 education. According to Grossman (1990), teachers' pedagogical content knowledge in mother tongue education consists of a) the teacher's knowledge and beliefs about the purposes of teaching a subject, b) knowledge of students' understanding, conceptions, and misconceptions of a particular topic in the subject matter, c) knowledge of curriculum materials available for teaching the particular subject matter, horizontal and vertical curricular knowledge, and d) knowledge of instructional strategies and representations for teaching particular topics.

These areas have been discussed in the context of teaching metalinguistic awareness (Rättyä, 2013 and 2017). In her research Kaisu Rättyä has reviewed the model in the frame of grammar teaching. According to her, the main parts of Grammar Teaching knowledge are 1) the teacher's knowledge of the student's knowledge, and concepts of grammatical structures and metalanguage, 2) the teacher's critical curricular knowledge and critical reading of learning materials, and 3) the teacher's knowledge of teaching and evaluation methods, and the learning theories behind them.

These knowledge areas relate to the content knowledge of languages and metalanguage, as well as didactic knowledge of learning and students. This perspective has inspired the present volume, with papers exploring teachers' concepts and beliefs (Camps & Fontich; Van Rijt, Wijnands, & Coppen), grammar knowledge of future teachers (Nupponen, Jeskanen, & Rättyä), pupils' preconceptions (Štěpáník), and textbooks and how they convey dominant theoretical models for grammar education (Awramiuk & Szymańska).

Synopsis of each contribution

Anna Camps and Xavier Fontich present the results of a study conducted in Spain concerning a secondary school teacher's conceptualizations of grammar teaching and its relation to writing. The teacher shows awareness of some of the major pitfalls in teaching grammar and a great commitment in making the students reflect, as well as well-oriented (albeit scarcely developed) intuitions on how to proceed in the classroom. The authors defend their positioning of the debate around the concept of metalinguistic activity as a source of grammar learning. Their paper brings new perspectives to the concepts of implicit and explicit grammar—drawing on the concept of metalinguistic activity—distinguishing its specificity from the perspective of teaching and learning, and to teacher training, implying fostering teacher reflection on language and on language teaching.

Jimmy van Rijt, Astrid Wijnands and Peter-Arno Coppen explore current Dutch secondary school teachers' beliefs on the use of modern linguistic concepts and reflective judgement in grammar teaching. They investigate what teachers know, believe and think by conducting a questionnaire among language teachers, comple-

mented by an analysis of frequently used school textbooks. Analysis of textbooks provides more indirect data on teacher beliefs, since in the Netherlands teachers create and review textbooks. The results indicate that some of the concepts of modern linguistics need more attention and the authors discuss why implementing activities aimed at fostering reflective thinking is so difficult.

Anne Nupponen, Seija Jeskanen and Kaisu Rättyä look at the content knowledge of student teachers, but also discuss curricular knowledge and grammar learning materials, as well as teachers' metalinguistic knowledge: knowledge of grammar and metalanguage. They report on a qualitative case study of some Finnish students' views of linguistic concepts related to teaching sentence structures, and their ability to recognize these concepts in mother tongue and foreign language textbooks. Results suggest that such perspective, while still rare in language education, affords stimulating connections among the different languages future teachers will have to deal with in schooling. Putting student teachers from L1 and L2 education together to examine grammar in textbooks from L1 and L2 is an interesting example of the implementation of Finnish educational policy, which emphasises cross-linguistic awareness.

Stanislav Štěpánik considers whether pupil preconceptions of language phenomena are a source of solutions to lingering problems of grammar teaching. Such preconceptions appear often as ill-structured and yet worthless hints for a proper scaffolding by the teacher. Based on concrete examples of grammatical subject matter in Czech, the author suggests that research into pupil preconceptions can guide teaching grammar so that it is functional, communication-oriented and cognitively challenging. It also shows how important it is to reflect the learners' cognitive development, their language intuition, and reasoning about the language phenomena taught.

The paper by *Elżbieta Awramiuk and Marta Szymańska* is devoted to today's grammar education in the Polish context. The authors outline didactic conceptions of grammar instruction which have been pursued by Polish educationalists since 1990, and how theory and programmatic intentions are being transformed and implemented into grade 4-6 textbooks. The study shows some of the difficulties in the reconfiguration of grammar content into schooling. It maintains that, while this approach is less directly related to teachers' pedagogical content knowledge perspective, it concerns the curricula, grammar learning materials and critical knowledge in teaching environments, which form knowledge of the grammar teaching context.

What educational linguistics perspectives are offered in this special issue?

As already mentioned, over the last few years there have been a number of initiatives contributing to grammar education, locating the debate within the dynamic system permanently under scrutiny that emerges from the interplay between teaching methods, learning processes and the specific grammar content, i.e. the didactic triangle (Camps, in preparation; Krogh et al., 2016).

From such a perspective, educational linguists are not only linguists, since the problems they face are not just related to languages but to how to teach languages (in our case, first languages), with research questions that directly apply this niche (Fontich & Camps, 2014); nonetheless, while we need the linguists' input, such input can be reformulated back by educational contributions (Zayas, in preparation). Also, educational linguists are not experts in general pedagogy or psychology, but these disciplines will forcefully illuminate crucial issues on how to conceptualize classroom intervention, such as the role played by interaction (Miller, 2011; Wells, 1999), and how the processes of conceptualization can help us understand pupils' learning problems (Barth, 2001).

In summary, in the ongoing debate in the field of grammar teaching we want to raise awareness of a variety of issues. As we have mentioned, we should keep thinking over what we really understand by grammar teaching, and Boivin et al.'s (2018) special issue of L1 concerning grammar gives a broadened view of the latest research of grammar education in different language areas. The articles in our issue also show that the tradition of grammar teaching varies a lot. For example, the idea of a separate grammar book which is used by both teachers and students (popular in the Netherlands) is not commonly used in Finnish grammar teaching, where the students (7-18 years) never use a separate book or publication for grammar education. Also, when it comes to the data used in articles, we have to note that the number of students, student teachers and teachers (and so on) may vary in different research traditions, which significantly affects the way of constructing knowledge about this issue as well as the necessity of making quantitative and qualitative approaches dialogue.

All researchers must be more aware of the different traditions and changes in the field. There are also tensions between the different ideas, which have triggered intense debates. For example, the question about whether grammar teaching has a positive influence on writing or not might not be solved before we know what is meant by grammar and grammar teaching in different linguistic cultures (see for example Locke, 2010; Myhill & Watson, 2014). Also, the concerns differ from country to country, along with the languages themselves, as do the teaching cultures and attitudes, and even the teachers' beliefs. Anglo-American traditions have been the most widely available through numerous publications, but the awareness of other language areas should and could be increased. This great diversity is our motivation for this special issue.

What common problems emerge from the volume?

The reader will therefore find in this special issue reports from research conducted in various countries, using various methodologies, but all the papers—especially because of their extensive introductions and the meaningful theoretical frameworks—analyze and discuss grammar education through teachers' knowledge and different areas of it. It turns out that we share some dilemmas and we

have common reflections: textbooks and the literature of grammar teaching seem to follow sometimes different paths (Van Rijt et al.; Awramiuk & Szymańska; Nupponen et al.); modern linguistic contributions and teacher preparedness seem to be separate realms (Van Rijt et al.; Awramiuk & Szymańska; Camps & Fontich); there is a gap between theory (the judgments in scientific papers, declarations of teachers) and practice in schools (more proclaimed than realized) (Van Rijt et al.; Štěpáník; Awramiuk & Szymańska; Camps & Fontich); the political situation has a strong influence on school reality (Štěpáník; Awramiuk & Szymańska). Grammatical knowledge and understanding of metalinguistic concepts and their use in practice (reflecting language) are also areas with which teachers and student teachers are concerned (Camps & Fontich, Nupponen et al.; Štěpáník). It is very interesting to learn that we share the same problems.

From the problem of the identification of grammar teaching in a particular learning context to the wide theoretical background, the special issue deals with the newest areas of interests in grammar education, and opens the space for common reflection on solving challenges.

Note about the school system scheme

When educational practices and research on education in different countries are compared, the differences in the education systems should be taken into account. Differences in how the educational jurisdictions organize their school systems may affect, for instance, the academic background of teachers in language education (generally speaking, while for Primary education it is a so-called “generalist education”, teachers of Language Arts in Secondary education come from the Faculties of Linguistic and Literature studies). Therefore, the division of the classes may affect how the teachers (class teacher, subject matter teacher) might be educated and divided into school levels. While in this special issue we will not analyse these countries’ systems, we consider it important to bear these differences in mind. Below, are the frame school system schemes of five countries discussed in this special issue. Figure 1 covers only primary and secondary education. Beyond the scope of the Figure are vocational education and university programmes.

Figure 1. The school system schemes of Czech Republic, Finland, Poland, Spain and The Netherlands

Pupils' age	Czech Republic	Finland	Poland		Spain	The Netherlands
			Before/From IX 2017			
6 years	Basic school – primary level; grades 1–5	Pre-primary education	Pre-primary education	Pre-primary education	Pre-primary education (0-6 years old)	Primary education
7 years		Basic education in comprehensive schools; grades 1-6	Primary school; grades 1-3	Primary school; grades 1-3	Primary education; grades 1-6 (6-12 years old)	
8 years						
9 years						
10 year	Basic school – lower-secondary level; grades 6–9	Basic education in comprehensive schools; grades 7-9; General upper secondary school	Primary school; grades 4-6	Primary school; grades 4-8	Compulsory secondary education; grades 1-4 (12-16 years old)	Junior secondary education: vmbo (lower general sec. education) / havo (higher general sec. education) / vwo (pre-university education)
11 years						
12 years						
13 years		Gimnazjum – lower-secondary level; grades 1-3	Upper-secondary school	Upper-secondary school		
14 years						
15 years	Upper-secondary school	General upper secondary school	Upper-secondary school	Upper-secondary school	Upper secondary education (ibid.)	
16 years						
17 years						
18 years	Upper-secondary education; grades 1-2 (16-18 years old)					

The system in Poland is undergoing reform, which means children of all ages learn in different systems (and use different textbooks). The outgoing educational system was created in 1999, with numerous subsequent modifications introduced over the last 18 years. The recent political developments (2017) have brought significant changes to educational policy, some of them reversing the status quo, such as the abolishing of a regulation lowering the school entry age from 7 down to 6 years, and the restoration of an eight-year primary school and a four-year high school period ¹.

Closing statement

Despite the different perspectives and national contexts, all the papers combine the search for answers to questions about the shape of linguistic education and ways to improve it. Many of the problems we face should then not be faced on a national scale, but on an international level. We believe this special issue will enlarge our

¹ More detailed information can be found at: https://eurydice.org.pl/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Education-System-in-Poland_2017_2018_EN.pdf.

knowledge about the role of grammar in educational systems, as well as influence future discussion related not only to the empirical findings presented in the papers, but also those related to theoretical starting points in grammar education research. This special issue is our modest contribution to building up the panorama of educational practices, research and challenges which grammar teaching is facing in European countries.

Working on this special issue was a very valuable lesson for us, which made us aware of the existence of many differences in the understanding of certain concepts, different educational experiences, as well as reading about the strategies and expectations of readers from different cultural backgrounds. We want to thank all our colleagues, the authors of the papers from this special issue, for their fruitful collaboration, and express our gratitude to Caroline Doktor and Paolo Feytor Pinto for initiating the special issue as coordinators for EduLing SIG so far. Special thanks go to the reviewers for their tremendous effort made while helping us to improve our manuscripts.

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