

FOR WHAT BENEFIT? GRAMMAR TEACHING MATERIALS IN UPPER PRIMARY DANISH L1

KRISTINE KABEL

Aarhus University

Abstract

This article contributes new insights into grammar teaching in Danish L1 by examining the three most frequently used learning materials concerned with grammar in upper primary school in Danish L1. An analysis of the why, what and how in the three materials shows that they state a prescriptive purpose, pay particular attention to spelling and punctuation rules, and suggest a repetitive grammar teaching approach. The analysis also shows that recent pedagogical trends such as process writing and genre pedagogy are not reflected in these popular upper primary Danish L1 grammar teaching materials. Thus, the article sheds light on an under-researched content area in L1 education in Denmark, and it aims to contribute to a qualified debate about the role of grammar teaching and grammar teaching materials in L1 education, in dialogue with existing empirical research.

Keywords: grammar teaching, learning materials, upper primary, Danish L1

1. INTRODUCTION

In L1 education in Denmark, one of the things students are supposed to learn about is language; for example, if one looks into the current most frequently used grammar textbooks for compulsory school, students are asked to identify inflectional morphemes or they are taught sentence grammar in order to support their punctuation. However, the question of why students should learn about language in the L1 school subject is long contested, both in the Scandinavian countries and internationally, as are questions of how and what they should learn (Christensen & Bock, 2011; Hertzberg, 1995, 2014). A pivotal question is whether students in primary and lower secondary school should learn *about* language at all. Hudson (2004) suggests two logical extremes for any educational system regarding the explicitness and form of attention given to language. The teaching can be explicit, meaning that language is sometimes the focus of attention and discussion, “which necessarily involves the use of some kind of metalanguage” (Hudson, 2004, p. 106), or it can be implicit, meaning that the school contributes to students’ language development through a rich linguistic environment. Local national teaching practices in L1 education may fluctuate between the two extremes, they may change over time, or they may include both extremes simultaneously. According to a representative survey of which textbooks or learning materials Danish teachers report using in primary and lower secondary, explicit grammar teaching appears to be highly present in current Danish L1 (Bundsgaard, Buch, & Foug, 2017, 2020). Such presence in general gives rise to further questions. If a metalanguage matters, which linguistic tradition should a school grammar align itself with? What kind of attention should be paid to language? And for what benefit? There are many prevailing answers to these questions. The pedagogical debate about grammar teaching in L1 education and empirical research on grammar teaching renders visible different concepts of grammar and thus foregrounds diverse contributions to disciplinary work (Macken-Horarik, Sandiford, Love, & Unsworth, 2015). At the same time, however, an explicit grammar teaching appears to exhibit what Humphrey, Love, & Droga (2011) describe as a resistance to change, particularly when compared with other content areas within L1 education, a resistance identified by a number of regional L1 researchers (e.g. Fontich & García-Folgado, 2018). Such a resistance manifests itself in, among other things, learning materials that appear to be the same in the 21st century as they were in previous centuries (The English Review Group, 2004).

2. PURPOSE AND RESEARCH QUESTION

Studies exploring grammar teaching in L1 education in Denmark are sparse. However, in a historical analysis of primary and lower secondary Danish in Denmark, Sørensen (2008) shows how, apart from a short period between the 1970s and 1980s (when L1 school grammar teaching seemingly paused), grammar teaching appears to be a constant and dominated by an explicit focus on sentence grammar, speech

parts, spelling and punctuation. In other words, notwithstanding an on-going discussion of the why, what and how, grammar teaching in Danish L1 appears to be primarily explicit and to involve a stable meta-language. The picture Sørensen reveals builds on an analysis of selected learning materials and curricular documents in primary and lower secondary education in the 20th century. This article continues the exploration of grammar teaching in Danish L1 in the 21st century as part of a collaborative mixed methods study on learning materials used in primary and lower secondary Danish L1, which is introduced in this special issue of *L1 Educational Studies in Language and Literature* (Bremholm, Bundsgaard, Foug, & Skyggebjerg, 2017; Foug, Bremholm, & Buch, 2020; Kabel, 2017). The aforementioned representative survey (Bundsgaard et al., 2017, 2020) forms part of the quantitative strand of the mixed methods study, whereas the study reported here is one of a number of textbook studies that form part of the qualitative strand. These latter studies examine the ten most frequently used learning materials revealed in the quantitative strand. This article will examine the three most frequently used contemporary learning materials concerned with grammar in upper primary Danish L1. The article will focus particularly on the explicit reasons these materials give for grammar teaching, the concept of grammar they build on, the levels and aspects of language they attend to, and the ways of working with grammar they suggest. By analysing and discussing the learning materials, this article will shed light on an underexposed yet contested content area in L1 education in Denmark and provide knowledge of the why, what and how in grammar teaching as suggested by these materials. In dialogue with existing empirical research, the article thus also aims to contribute to a qualified debate about the role of grammar teaching and grammar teaching materials in L1 education. The research questions addressed are: 1) What does grammar teaching look like in the three most frequently used learning materials in upper primary Danish L1? 2) How can we understand the grammar teaching practices suggested in these learning materials?

In the first section of the article, I provide a theoretical description of the concept of grammar and review previous research on L1 grammar teaching and written competencies in particular. This body of research provides an important background to answer research question 1 and to frame the discussion of research question 2. I then present the methodology concerning the choice of learning materials and analysis method. Following this, I present and discuss the findings of the study before finally providing some suggestions for further research on grammar teaching practices and the role played by learning materials within these practices in L1 education.

3. THEORETICAL AND RESEARCH BACKGROUND

3.1. *The concept of grammar*

The word grammar is derived from the greek word *grámma*, which means letter or that which is written. Today, the concept of grammar is associated with both written

and oral language and with a metalanguage for different language levels, from the level of the sentence to the levels both below and above the sentence, offering a language with which to talk about the structure of a language. However, there are different L1 school grammar practices involving different concepts of grammar, which in turn align partly with different grammatical theories and traditions (Hudson, 2016). Within linguistics, there is a sharp divide between the language system and language use (Saussure, 1970). This divide is also recognisable within different traditions, where one linguistic tradition concentrates on the language system and aims to develop a formal grammar, and the other concentrates on language use and aims to develop a functional grammar. As part of a formal grammar tradition and linguistic descriptions of languages, structuralism is influential. This is the case in Denmark, where a structural view underpins the dominant linguistic descriptions of the sentence, its speech parts and word material. Here, the term grammar is used to address particular syntactical and morphological aspects of language structure (Diderichsen, 1946; Hansen & Heltoft, 2011). Another international linguistic contribution within a formal grammar tradition is Chomsky's (1957) generative grammar, or later transformational grammar, yet this grammatical theory is most influential in North America, where it has also been reflected within (Elley, Barham, Lamb, & Wyllie, 1975). As part of a functional grammar tradition, Halliday's systemic functional linguistics aims to include language use in the development of a grammatics, or metalanguage, thus building a bridge between what Saussure describes as *la langue* and *la parole* (Hasan, 2014). In systemic functional linguistics, grammar and vocabulary is seen as one unit, as *lexicogrammar* (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004). Halliday uses a trinocular principle to show that language can be described from roundabout to above to below (Halliday, 2002). That is, from the level of lexicogrammar itself to the level of semantics to the levels of morphology and phonology. Within this linguistic tradition, the term *multilevel* grammatics (Macken-Horarik et al., 2015) is used to coin a concept of grammar in which the view from above includes the level of the text and thereby also the social context, since text is viewed as an entity dynamically relating to context.

3.2. School grammar

Bearing in mind that a school grammar might only "pick from" grammatical theory (Macken-Horarik et al., 2015), both *formal-* and *functional-oriented* L1 school grammars can be seen internationally. These school grammars partly align with the concept of grammar and the aspects of language attended to in primarily structural and functional linguistic traditions respectively. Present L1 research identifies national differences in grammar teaching practices, both between English-speaking countries (Myhill, 2018) and between European countries (Pieniżek & Štěpáník, 2016; Rättyä, Awramiuk, & Fontich, 2019). However, it also recognises similarities and has added further facets of the two main L1 school grammar orientations, and it has contributed insights into associated sets of understandings of the why, what and how in

present grammar teaching. According to a recent review of empirical studies on grammar teaching in the L1 classroom in francophone regions, the content in grammar teaching is often unclear and its purpose appears to be to support the students' correct spelling when writing texts (Boivin, 2018). Such a prescriptive purpose, that is, when grammar teaching serves as a means to support correctness in students' written texts, particularly applies when school grammar teaching is based on a structural understanding of grammar (Fontich & García-Folgado, 2018; The English Review Group, 2004). In an overview of research on grammar and written compositions, Hillocks (2008) calls this type of grammar teaching *traditional school grammar* (TDS), and Funke (2018) uses the German term *Schulgrammatik*. In addition to this formal-oriented school grammar, Hudson claims that a more functional-oriented school grammar tradition, based specifically on Halliday's language theory, has "a large and active constituency among teachers and teacher-trainers" (Hudson 2016, p. 290). Scholars working within this field include Christie and Derewianka (2008), Macken-Horarik, Love, Sandiford and Unsworth (2018), and Schleppegrel (2004). The same constituency is recognisable in Denmark (e.g. Mulvad, 2012). With a view to L1 education, Myhill (2018) describes this functional understanding of grammar and the inclusion of the levels above the sentence as follows:

It is more important to *know* how a passive construction alters the emphasis in information conveyed than it is to know *that* it is a passive construction (...) In different contexts, a passive might create suspense by with-holding the agent of an action; it might support the cohesion between two sentences; it might allow a writer to foreground important information at the start of a sentence; it might suggest objectivity by distancing the person responsible for an action and so on.
(Myhill, 2018, p. 11)

This description marks the interrelatedness between levels of language, from (principally) the level of the word, sentence and speech parts to the level of the text and social context.

Summarizing these abovementioned two main L1 school grammar orientations, it becomes evident that, traditionally, a formal-oriented grammar in L1 education involves either legitimising grammar as a means to support correctness in students' writing (Boivin, 2018; Hillocks, 2008; The English Review Group, 2004) or legitimising a decontextualised knowledge of language structure as a worthwhile part of the L1 curriculum in itself. Instruction within this school grammar tradition often concentrates on the level of the sentence and below, which means that the teaching focuses on sentence grammar, parts of speech and morphological aspects of language as well as punctuation and spelling rules. A functional-oriented grammar in L1 education is often associated with a descriptive approach, where grammar teaching serves as a means to support students' meaning-making repertoire in different social contexts (Myhill, Jones, Lines, & Watson, 2012). Grammar instruction within this tradition often concentrates not only on the level of the sentence and below but also, importantly (as emphasised in the quotation above), on the levels above the sentence and on the social context.

In the current article, distinguishing between main linguistic traditions and the associated understandings of the role and content of a school grammar in L1 education contributes to the analysis of the why, what and how in the three most frequently used contemporary learning materials (RQ1) and the discussion of these suggested grammar teaching practices (RQ2).

3.3. Grammar teaching and written competencies

There is a robust international body of empirical studies on the effect of grammar teaching in L1 education on students' written competencies, where *written competencies* covers accuracy of writing, quality of writing, reading competences and metalinguistic awareness. The study by Sørensen (2008) indicate an explicit grammar teaching, which includes work on spelling and punctuation, and which also in turn indicates a presumed connection between such grammar teaching and students' written competencies. It is therefore relevant to consider this connection in more detail.

This section will consider three groups of studies: those that focus on the teaching of 1) a formal-oriented sentence grammar, 2) levels below the sentence, and 3) levels above the sentence—that is, more recent studies concerned with the teaching of a functional-oriented grammar.

In the first group of studies, the results are clear. In their meta-analysis, Andrews et al. (2006) show that an isolated teaching of sentence structure has no assessable effect on the correctness or quality of student writing. Another comprehensive meta-analysis, *Writing Next: Effective strategies to improve writing of adolescents in middle and high schools (2007)* (Graham & Perin, 2007), finds that explicit teaching in formal sentence analysis actually has a negative effect on the quality of students' written texts (for students in grade 5-12). This result echoes another meta-analysis which reveals that grammar teaching might have a harmful effect on students' writing (Braddock, Lloyd-Jones, & Schoer, 1963). A controlled study by Elley, Barham, Lamb, & White (1975) examines two approaches to grammar teaching, both aligned with a formal grammar tradition. This study follows two groups of English L1 students throughout three years of secondary school, one group studying traditional structural grammar and the other studying transformational grammar. Moreover, it follows a group of non-grammar students, studying (among other things) creative writing instead of grammar. The study concludes that there are no significant differences between the three groups concerning students' writing development, examined on 12 parameters, including quality: "English grammar, whether traditional or transformational, has virtually no influence on the language growth of typical secondary school students" (Elley et al., 1975, p. 38). The study also examines the participating students' attitudes, showing that, compared with the other two groups, students in the transformational group develop a more negative attitude towards both writing and English lessons. Hillocks (1986) suggests reasons for the consistent results within this body of effect studies by reviewing research on the writing composition process.

He claims that the study of grammar and “mechanics” is likely to influence only the most concrete levels of writing, the planning and editing of specific sentences. However, as he writes, “such study would have no effect on the higher-level processes of deciding on intentions and generating and organizing ideas. Yet, clearly these higher-level processes give rise to the content, organization, and flavor of individual sentences.” (Hillocks, 1986, p. 226). In other words, an explicit teaching of a formal-oriented, and primarily sentence-oriented, school grammar does not support practice in composition. Along with this, Fontich and Garcia-Folgado (2018) stress that it is a misconception to view grammar teaching as a prerequisite for students’ writing development. This has also been highlighted by Lynch and Evans (1963), who have examined grammar teaching materials in English L1. A recent study in primary schools in Denmark supports this idea by showing that spelling development only minimally correlates with students’ innovative written competencies (Bundsgaard, 2016). This implies that higher-level competences are likely to develop independently of other lower-level competences, such as spelling.

However, a few noticeable studies suggest otherwise. A large-scale controlled study in Finland showed that formal sentence grammar teaching had a positive effect on middle school students’ punctuation (Laurinen, 1955, after Hudson, 2004). Whilst there was no assessable effect after grade 3, the study showed that there was a positive effect after grade 6. The students who were taught about sentence structure were more accurate in their punctuation when they subsequently wrote texts than the students in the control group. It is perhaps important to note, however, that this single study carries less weight than the comprehensive body of studies and meta-studies examining the effects of a formal-oriented school grammar teaching. Another recent study by Fearn and Farnan (2007) compared formal sentence grammar teaching integrated in a writing lesson with the same grammar taught in a traditionally isolated manner. In the experimental group, upper secondary students wrote texts and were then taught about verbs and dependent clauses with the participating students’ own texts as example material. In the control group, students received the same grammar instruction but this was not integrated in a writing lesson. The study examined the effect on three parameters: the number of formal errors in students’ subsequent written texts, the students’ isolated grammar knowledge, and the students’ written competencies, assessed using holistic—including quality—criteria. The study uncovered no differences between the two approaches regarding their effect on correctness and isolated grammar knowledge. However, it did reveal that the teaching of a formal sentence grammar integrated in a writing lesson had a positive effect on the participating students’ written competencies. These results lead to the conclusion: “Shall we teach grammar? Of course. This study does not call into question grammar instruction; it calls into question how we teach grammar.” (Fearn & Farnan, 2007, p. 79). This rhetorical question on whether and how to teach a school grammar, here a formal-oriented sentence grammar, has interesting perspectives, particularly in light of the results from the comprehensive body of effect studies on the teaching of a formal sentence grammar.

Another interesting question to emerge from this study is how students' knowledge of grammar can be assessed and whether grammar teaching in L1 education contributes to valuable ways of knowing in a longitudinal context, notwithstanding difficulties assessing this knowledge (Funke, 2018). This perspective supports a decontextualised knowledge of language structure as a worthwhile part of the L1 curriculum in itself.

Other studies focus on the levels below the sentence. A meta-analysis by Graham and Hebert (2010), *Writing to Read: Evidence for how writing can improve reading*, concludes that teaching primary students explicitly in clusters of letters—for instance, inflectional morphemes—and in sounds in words has a positive effect on their reading skills, specifically their ability to identify and remember single words. This applies to students in grades 1–5. Working with morphemes and phonemes also supports students' reading skills when the work takes place independently of the reading class; the positive effect seems to be more manifest than when students are taught to identify words or parts of words in the reading class alone. The meta-analysis recommends viewing writing and reading as complementary processes with the potential to strengthen one another, a view considered in more depth by Bremholm (2020). Here, additionally, the result suggests a connection between a grammar teaching that focuses on particular morphological aspects of language and students' spelling skills at primary level—albeit an indirect connection mediated through reading - as a number of other studies suggest a connection between students' reading and spelling skills at primary level (Calmar Andersen et al., 2018).

The third group of studies examines a contextualised and explicit grammar teaching in L1 and the effect this has on both the students' written texts and their meta-linguistic awareness. A robust mixed methods study in England in grade 8 (age 12–13) shows how a grammar teaching aimed at supporting students in what is described as a meaning-making repertoire of possibilities has a positive effect on the participating students' written texts (Jones, Myhill, & Bailey, 2013; Myhill, Jones, Lines, & Watson, 2012). The study also reveals that this teaching has a positive effect on the students' meta-linguistic awareness. The study's interventions relied on three assumptions: that writing is a communicative act, that the teaching supports students in viewing language choices as meaning-making choices, and that the teaching encourages them to share their experiences with language in high quality talks around texts written in the L1 lower secondary classroom. The study thus highlights potentials for a grammar teaching that involves an explicit focus on the levels above the sentence and classroom dialogue that allows students to make connections between different ways of using language in different contexts and to recognise meaning-making possibilities. The study also examined the degree to which the participating teachers' grammatical subject knowledge (that is, their knowledge of subject-specific language use and a meta-language to describe it) influenced the effect of the interventions. The intervention had a more positive effect in classes where the teacher's knowledge of a subject-specific language and a meta-language to describe it were secure, compared with classes where the teacher's grammatical subject

knowledge was more insecure. Myhill has claimed that “some subject knowledge insecurity about linguistics (...) can lead to rather narrow, instrumental teaching of grammar.” (2010, p. 178). The same connection has also been suggested by other researchers (Boivin, 2018; Hudson, 2004). The research by Myhill and colleagues suggests that an integrated and functional-oriented school grammar most likely requires L1 teachers to have a secure and subject-relevant knowledge of grammar and of pedagogical possibilities. In their follow-up study, Myhill and colleagues show that this includes a knowledge of how to reach less proficient writers by explicitly targeting challenging grammatical aspects (Myhill, Jones, & Lines, 2018). A number of intervention studies support the mixed methods study, and the follow-up study also explores how incorporating the support of participating teachers can enable student learning in the L1 grammar classroom (when integrated into the writing classroom). Examples are the Australian Grammar and Praxis project (Macken-Horarik et al., 2018) and the Norwegian writing project NORM (2012-16), which, through interventions, supported teachers to be aware of subject-specific writing tasks and, moreover, explored the effect of teaching with a functional perspective on students’ writing across all school subjects (Berge et al., 2017; Matre & Solheim, 2016).

Summarising this section on grammar teaching and written competencies, it appears that a formal-oriented sentence grammar teaching in primary and lower secondary has no positive effect on students’ writing; on the contrary, it may even have a negative effect on the quality of students’ writing (Braddock et al., 1963; Graham & Perin, 2007). Still, an explicit teaching in sentence structure isolated from students’ own writing may have a positive effect on students’ punctuation skills, particularly in upper primary (Laurinen, 1955, after Hudson, 2004). Moreover, an explicit teaching with a focus on words and parts of words may have a positive effect on students’ single word reading skills (Graham & Hebert, 2010), an effect that might be connected to students’ spelling skills. However, to support the composition of written texts, other processes are also important (Bundsgaard, 2016; Graham & Perin, 2007; Hillocks, 1986). According to the third group of studies described in this section, an explicit and descriptive grammar teaching that is integrated into units of writing and includes a focus on levels above the sentence—and thus on how grammatical choices create meaning—may have a positive effect on students’ writing and meta-linguistic awareness (Jones et al., 2013; Myhill et al., 2018; Myhill et al., 2012).

The extent to which these international studies can be transferred to a Danish context is still open for discussion; however, in the context of this article, these studies are considered as a valuable body of research capable of qualifying the discussion about the under-researched topic of grammar teaching in L1 education in Denmark.

4. METHODOLOGY

4.1. Learning materials in the current study

This article is part of the aforementioned collaborative mixed methods study (Bremholm et al., 2017; Fougat et al., 2020; Kabel, 2017), and my choice of learning materials for analysis is informed by the representative survey of learning materials used in primary and lower secondary Danish L1 (*special issue author A et al.*, 2017, 2020). One finding from this survey is that learning materials concerning grammar are more dominant in upper primary (grades 4–6 in Denmark) than in lower primary (grades 0–3) and lower secondary (grade 7–9), the three stages included in the survey and the three stages that make up compulsory education in Denmark. Upper primary school is an important transitory stage for students' literacy development. It is a time when written competencies are challenged, both when students read more complex texts in order to acquire new knowledge within a discipline (Gibbons, 2009; Liberg, Geijerstam, & Folkeryd, 2007; Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008, 2012) and when students write more discipline-specific texts (Christie & Derewianka, 2008; Graham & Perin, 2007). For these reasons, I have selected to analyse and discuss the grammar materials that appear in the top ten learning materials from upper primary L1 education, according to the quantitative strand of the mixed method study (*special issue author A et al.*, 2017, 2020).

Primary and lower secondary Danish L1 teachers are obliged to support students towards 12 competence goals distributed across four content areas, according to the prescriptive section of the National Curriculum for Danish L1 (Undervisningsministeriet [Ministry of Education], 2019). The four content areas are reading, production, interpretation and communication. The low number of competence goals allows L1 teachers in Denmark a certain degree of freedom concerning syllabus and choice of learning materials, though each school decides on which learning materials to buy, which somewhat constrains the individual teacher's free choice. In Denmark, both printed and digital learning materials are developed and produced by private publishers and belong to a commercial market. The top ten list of the most frequently used contemporary learning materials therefore represents the participating Danish teachers' preferences within the range of available materials at each school. The most frequently used contemporary learning material concerned with grammar in upper primary is *Stav 5. Stavning og grammatik for 5. klasse [Spell 5. Spelling and grammar in 5th grade]* (Jensen & Jørgensen, 2015a), part of a system of printed learning materials for students in primary and lower secondary. The two other learning materials concerned with grammar in the top ten are *Stavevejen 3 [Spelling path 3]* (Brandt Jensen & Brandt Jensen, 2015) and *Grammatip [Grammar Tip]* (Ordbogen A. S., 2017)—the latter comprising a word play with *grammar* (in Danish *grammatik*) and *tip*. *Spelling path 3* is a printed resource adjusted to 5th grade and part of system of printed learning materials for primary and lower secondary, while *Grammar Tip* is a digital platform that schools can pay to access.

In addition to the top ten list of the most frequently used learning materials, the quantitative strand of the mixed methods study analyses the content areas covered in all the learning materials used in upper primary school. The areas relevant for this study are *grammar*, *spelling*, and *word and language*. Noticeably, these categories, defined in the quantitative strand, are ascribed in particular to the curricular content area *production*, as this addresses competence goals for writing, spelling skills and language structure. The analysis shows that *spelling* accounts for 20 per cent of the content of learning materials in Danish L1 at this stage of schooling. *Grammar* accounts for 10 per cent, and the affiliated content area *word and language* accounts for 7 per cent. In other words, more than one third of the content covered by all learning materials at this stage of schooling concerns these three presumed associated areas. The prioritising of spelling is also indicated in a small non-representative study which suggests that, on average, students in primary and lower secondary Danish L1 receive 53 minutes of explicit and decontextualised spelling instruction (such as dictation, spelling practice or spelling rules) per week (Mathiasen, 2011).

Along with previous research on grammar teaching materials (Sørensen, 2008), the top ten list of learning materials and the analysis of content in all learning materials affirms that language is highly in focus in Danish L1 and that some form of metalinguage is present (Hudson, 2004). In the next section, I describe the approach used to analyse the three chosen learning materials.

4.2 *Why, what and how*

In this article, I understand grammar teaching in Danish L1 as a set of social practices that influence the teacher's choice of specific learning materials, which, in turn, also influence the social practices that constitute grammar teaching. Thus, an analysis of the why, what and how in learning materials suggests what grammar teaching practices in the classroom may look like. Social practices may be local or global; however, in this article, the quantitative analysis underlying the choice of the three learning materials indicates that the suggested practices are actually recognizable as Danish L1 grammar teaching practices and not confined to, for example, certain schools. The three learning materials are the most popular at this stage of school. However, what actually takes place and is ascribed value in a classroom depends on the interpretation of and use of the learning material (Fougst et al., 2020). On a more concrete level, the analysis undertaken aims to explore what grammar teaching looks like in the chosen learning materials and it therefore focuses on the main pedagogical categories of why, what and how (Elf, Gilje, Olin-Scheller, & Slotte, 2018; Rättyä et al., 2019). More precisely, the analysis examines the legitimations or arguments for grammar instruction stated in the materials, the concept of grammar that emerges in the materials, and thus also the relevant language levels and aspects of language addressed in the materials. The analysis also looks at the examples and language material used (made up or natural usage in professional or student text, one clause or whole text) as well as exercises in the materials. The close analysis of the why,

what and how is informed by the theoretical background presented above. The analysis of the how moreover draws on a framework developed in the quantitative strand of the mixed methods study that aims to categorise learning materials in general (Bundsgaard et al., 2017, 2020; Gissel & Skovmand, 2018). This framework consists of five categories that identify five pedagogical approaches and types of learning materials, from repetitive materials to instructive materials to production-oriented materials. By drawing on this framework, the analysis of the how will draw attention to the examples and language material used as well as the type of pedagogical approach suggested by the exercises.

5. ANALYSIS OF THE THREE LEARNING MATERIALS

This section addresses the first research question: What does grammar teaching look like in the three most frequently used learning materials in upper primary Danish L1? The analysis is divided into three parts that examine the why, what and how respectively.

5.1 A prescriptive purpose

All three learning materials focus primarily on spelling and punctuation rules; however, the most used material, *Spell 5. Spelling and grammar in 5th grade* (henceforward, *Spell 5*), differs slightly from the two other materials in that it assigns grammar an independent role, already expressed in the subtitle: *Spelling and grammar*. However, in almost identical formulations, all three learning materials express reasons for an explicit grammar teaching. In the teacher's guide with a key and comments on the exercises in *Spell 5*, it states:

Many people speak and write good Danish without any knowledge of grammar [...]. But, through an explicit grammar teaching, one can introduce students to a new language world, which they otherwise would not be aware of. The grammar can hereby serve as a significant language tool that can support spelling skills and provide an insight into the structure of language.

(Jensen & Jørgensen, 2015b, p. 63, my translation)

This quotation provides two legitimations for an explicit grammar teaching, 1) that knowledge of the structure of language is important knowledge, a new world, and 2) that such knowledge can support spelling skills. Explicit grammar teaching is thus awarded a prescriptive purpose. Similarly, on the back cover of *Spelling path 3*, it says: "*Spelling path 3* helps you become good at spelling" (Brandt Jensen & Brandt Jensen, 2015, backpage, my translation). On the front page of *Grammar Tip*, the following imperative is written in large font: "Avoid errors. Grammar errors are like a blot on the landscape and send an unfortunate signal about the sender." (Ordbogen A. S., 2017, my translation). These three learning materials formulate an explicit prescriptive purpose, which corresponds with a formal-oriented school grammar

aligned in particular with a traditional structural understanding of grammar (Boivin, 2018; Hillocks, 2008; The English Review Group, 2004).

5.2 The sentence and below

In the analysis of the concept of grammar that emerges and the language levels and aspects of language addressed, similarities between the three learning materials appear. *Spell 5* focuses on the word and the sentence. For example, students are asked to change verbs into adjectives and to identify subject and verb in isolated sentences, marking these two speech parts with either a cross or a circle, a well-known activity in Danish L1 education. Thus, when completing such closed drill exercises, students work with morphology and syntax, in particular with inflectional morphemes, parts of speech and sentence structure. The main aim, evidently, is to support students' spelling and punctuation skills, which corresponds to the legitimation formulated in the teacher's guide. The first exercise in the book, for instance, asks students to inflect substantives in singular and plural, and the second exercise introduces a rule: Some substantives drop the -e in indefinite plural, a rule exemplified with the word *hilsen* [greeting], which has two possible spelling derivations in indefinite plural (Figure 1). In Danish, definite and indefinite are marked in a suffix.

Figure 1. Students are asked to inflect substantives (exercise 6) and a rule is introduced: Some substantives drop the -e in indefinite plural (the blue box and exercise 7).

6. Nogle navneord kan staves med og uden det trykløse -e- i stammen i ental. Skriv begge stavemødder for disse ord i bestemt ental.

en bibel bibelen / biblen et lægen _____
 et anker _____ et teater _____

Navneord
 I navneord, der ender på -el, -en eller -er, kan eller skal -e- bortfalde foran l, n, z, når ordet bruges. Ex: aften, aftenen, aftener, regel, reglen, regler.

7. Nogle navneord kan staves med og uden det trykløse -e- i stammen i flertal. Skriv begge stavemødder for disse ord i ubestemt flertal.

en hilsen hilsener / hilsner _____
 en figen _____
 en kølde _____

Spell 5. Spelling and grammar in 5th grade, 4. edition 2015, p. 2. Paul Erik Jensen & Inger-Lise Jørgensen. © 2001, 2010, 2013, 2015, 2016 Dansk Psykologisk Forlag A/S

The first part of the book consists of similar exercises concerning parts of speech and inflectional morphemes; for example, exercises that focus on verbs and their strong or weak inflections, and exercises that focus on derivational morphemes that changes a verb into an adjective. There are also exercises on compounded words and a few exercises on simple spelling rules, for example, the spelling of numerals.

The final part of the book consists of exercises concerning the structure of a sentence with a focus on parts of speech. As such, these exercises train students to identify subject, verb and object in clauses and compound sentences, and this training serves primarily as a means to practise punctuation, as one heading remarks: “Learn how to put in commas correctly” (my translation), see Figure 2 below.

Figure 2. In this exercise, students are asked to identify subject and verb in order to practise commas.

Lær at sætte komma



Vi så uglen, da den fløj.
x o x o

1. Find udsagnsled og grundled i sætningerne, og sæt komma.

Emma er glad til at spille fodbold fordi hun træner meget.

Martin sagde at Kristian var en god ven.

Talal var meget glad da han kom hjem.

Vejen var våd fordi det havde regnet.

Hvis jeg kan kommer jeg i morgen.

Børnene læste bogen og den var god.

Da vejret var godt tog familien til stranden.

Hunden kommer når jeg kalder på den.

Løverne brødede fordi de var sultne.

Brandmændene kørte hurtigt da der var brand.

Da børnene kom hjem legede de med hvalpen.

Når det bliver mørkt må vi tænde lyset.

Spell 5: Spelling and grammar in 5th grade, 4. edition 2015, p. 47. Paul Erik Jensen & Inger-Lise Jørgensen. © 2001, 2010, 2013, 2015, 2016 Dansk Psykologisk Forlag A/S

In summary, the most frequently used learning material concerning grammar in upper primary Danish L1 selects from a formal grammar tradition and concentrates on the sentence and the levels below the sentence, and it exemplifies how such an understanding provides a basis for exercises aimed at supporting correctness in students' writing. The drill exercises do not explicitly connect to other content areas in Danish L1 or the text types written and read at this stage of school. Accompanying the exercises, *Spell 5* provides very short definitions of speech parts and associated inflections as well as very short descriptions of spelling and punctuation rules. However, as emphasised above, the grammar aspects of language addressed are also assigned an independent role. The two last pages provide an overview of speech parts and inflections, described with both Danish and Latin terminology. The presented

metalinguage in this summarising overview alludes to an understanding of the term grammar as applying primarily to morphological aspects of language structure.

The two other grammar learning materials from the top-10 list, *Spelling Path 3* and *Grammar Tip*, are similar to *Spell 5*. Table 1 provides an overview of the analysis of all three learning materials. In the first part of the book, *Spelling Path 3* focuses on orthography and vowel quality. It then asks the students to complete exercises in which they have to identify subject and verb in short texts and to mark these two speech parts with either a cross or a circle (as mentioned above, this is a well-known activity in Danish L1 in primary and lower secondary). The last part of the book consists of exercises on both unbound and bound morphemes. There are shades of differences between *Spelling Path 3* and *Spell 5*, which include variations in the weightings of syntax, morphology and orthography and in the degree of specialised terms the learning materials employ. *Spelling Path 3* subsumes, consequently, knowledge of grammar under spelling and punctuation rules; for example, it describes what an unbound morpheme is, but this knowledge is subsumed under a rule about the spelling of compound noun, which, in Danish, is written as one word. *Spell 5*, by contrast, assigns this knowledge of grammar an independent role. At the same time, *Spelling Path 3* uses specialised terms from morphology (e.g. unbounded morpheme), which contributes to an overall emphasis in the material on the level of the word, particularly, as in *Spell 5*, on the morphological aspects of language structure.

Unlike the other two learning materials, *Grammar Tip* is a digital system. The teacher assigns exercises to the whole class or to individual students, which they then complete online. There are exercises on dictation (grades 1–9), Danish grammar and Danish spelling (grades 2–9), and there are also reading tests (grades 5–9) and spelling tests (grades 3–9). There are relatively few exercises on Danish grammar, and these only concern spelling; for example, there are drills on the different use of the preposition *af* (of) and the conjunction *at* (that). The learning material focuses on typical spelling errors and provides relevant training exercises. Thus, in *Grammar Tip*, the term grammar works as heading for exercises on orthographic aspects of language.

Table 1. Overview of the three learning materials including the legitimations verbalised (why), the concept of grammar and language aspects addressed (what), and the language material used and the type of pedagogical approach (how).

	Spell 5 (analogue)	Spelling Path 3 (analogue)	Grammar Tip (digital)
Legitimation	Important knowledge Prescriptive	Prescriptive	Prescriptive
Grammar	Traditional L1 school grammar The term <i>grammar</i> seems reserved for parts of speech and morphological aspects of language.	Traditional L1 school grammar An emphasis on morphology, yet subsumed under spelling and punctuation rules	The term <i>grammar</i> solely addresses orthographic aspects of language
Language aspects addressed	Compound sentences Parts of speech Inflectional morphemes Spelling and punctuation	Compound sentences Parts of speech Morphemes (unbound & bound) Spelling and punctuation	Types of spelling errors
Language material	Constructed single words, sentences	Constructed single words, sentences and short texts	Constructed single words, sentences
Pedagogical approach	Repetitive and instructive (parts of speech)	Repetitive and instructive (spelling and punctuation rules)	Repetitive

5.3 A repetitive approach

Spell 5, *Spelling Path 3* and *Grammar Tip* are all distinctly repetitive (Bundsgaard et al., 2017, 2020; Gissel & Skovmand, 2018). *Spell 5* allows students to complete the exercises at their own pace and thereby learn about the aspects of language addressed. It asks students to rewrite word endings, to write numerals, to identify parts of speech, and to put in commas correctly—all of this in identical sets of drill exercises, allowing students to repeat the rules presented. Owing to these reiterating exercises that train specific regularities and rules, the pedagogical approach is repetitive. It is also instructive, due to the very brief definitions and descriptions provided. *Spelling Path 3* is also characterised by a high degree of repetition and minimal description; however, the descriptions provided in this book only concern spelling and punctuation rules. The digital *Grammar Tip* is also a repetitive type of learning material. It offers a range of training exercises from which the teacher assigns specific exercises to the whole class or to individual students; the students then complete these exercises on their own digital devices.

In summary, the three most used contemporary learning materials concerning grammar in upper primary Danish are very similar. They all align with a traditional school grammar tradition in L1 education in which the purpose of an explicit school grammar teaching is primarily prescriptive (Boivin, 2018; Hillocks, 2008; The English

Review Group, 2004). They place importance on syntax, parts of speech and morphological aspects of language. The materials all focus primarily on orthographic rules; in other words, grammar in the three materials is either connected to or subsumed under spelling and punctuation rules, or the word grammar is used solely to denote typical spelling errors. All three materials are distinctively repetitive and, to a certain degree, instructive, and they do not explicitly connect to other L1 content areas.

6. DISCUSSION

This section addresses the second research question: How can we understand the grammar teaching practices suggested in these learning materials? The discussion surrounding this question considers three aspects: 1. the persistence of a traditional school grammar in upper primary Danish L1, 2. possible reasons for this persistence and, 3. suggestions for alternative and more functional-oriented approaches to grammar teaching and the role of learning materials in such approaches.

In recent years, the stable metalanguage and grammar teaching practices in Danish L1 suggested in the learning materials analysed in this article have co-existed with other pedagogical trends. These trends involve process writing, which focuses on both the writing process and on creativity (Hetmar, 2000), and, more recently, genre pedagogy, which focuses on a functional and integrated language teaching (Bock, Christensen, Eggersen, Gøttsche, & Rydén, 2016; Johansson & Ring, 2012; Mulvad, 2009, 2012). However, these parallel trends do not seem to have influenced the current most frequently used grammar teaching materials. It is clear that an isolated grammar teaching that concentrates on the sentence and below dominates in upper primary Danish L1, despite an on-going pedagogical discussion about the role of a school grammar both in the Scandinavian countries and internationally, and despite the comprehensive body of knowledge on diverse approaches to grammar teaching and students' written competencies in L1 education. The grammar teaching practices suggested in the learning materials apparently confirm the point made by among others Humphrey, Love, & Droga (2011), namely, that grammar teaching exhibits a resistance to change, which is also manifest in grammar teaching materials (The English Review Group, 2004). However, it could be argued that teaching practices in the L1 classroom are resistant to change in general. Krogh (2003, 2011) argues that, unlike e.g. national subject curricula, which can change relatively quickly and in dialogue with current educational policy, teaching practices in the classroom, or what she frames cultural practices, change very slowly. Yet, despite this, the focus on the sentence and below, primarily on the level of the word, and the prioritising of spelling and punctuation rules is surprisingly consistent considering the continued dismissal of the benefits of traditional school grammar teaching on students' writing in L1 education. While sentence structure exercises like those in *Spell 5* and *Spelling Path 3* may contribute to students' punctuation skills, particularly at upper primary level (Laurinen, 1955, after Hudson, 2004), and while learning about morphemes

may contribute to students' reading skills (Graham & Hebert, 2010), the question arises: Why does grammar teaching look the way it does in the three learning materials?

One reason may be the presence of a skills view surrounding the L1 school subject, which involves prioritising an explicit teaching of punctuation and spelling rules and contributes to the repeated misconception that a grammar teaching with a focus on the sentence and below is a prerequisite for students' writing development (Fontich & García-Folgado, 2018; Lynch & Evans, 1963). This is the case in other national L1 educational contexts; for example, in England, where a skills view has dominated educational policy since the 1980s and where correctness has been prioritised in compulsory English L1 since the turn of the millennium (Locke, 2010). The corresponding political involvement present in England has not emerged in Denmark, but the legitimations of an explicit grammar teaching in the three grammar teaching materials are recognisable in a broader school context due to their reiteration in L1 grammar teaching materials over many decades (Sørensen, 2008). Such legitimations allow for a practice in which students are taught bits of grammar, punctuation and spelling through a magnitude of isolated drill exercises.

A second reason may be the nature of Danish orthography and its complex phoneme-grapheme relationship, which is highly challenging because of many deviations from a one-to-one phoneme-grapheme writing system, as in English (Elbro, 2005). Therefore, morphematic knowledge of verb or noun inflections (among others) may be one supporting factor in the development of spelling skills (Veber, 2016). This resonates with the above-mentioned Graham and Hebert (2010) meta-analysis that examines L1 teaching of the levels below the sentence, which, when related to other studies, indirectly suggests a connection between a focus on words and parts of words, (word) reading and spelling skills (Calmar Andersen et al., 2018). The difficulties with Danish spelling may therefore explain the dominant grammar teaching focus on morphological aspects and spelling rules, but they cannot explain the lack of attention given to other levels and aspects of language, and even the confining of the word grammar to aspects of orthography (as in *Grammar Tip*).

A third reason may be that familiar ways of teaching are also safe ways of teaching, meaning that actors within L1 education are well acquainted with such drill exercises and therefore choose to produce (publishers) and to buy and use (schools and teachers) such grammar teaching materials.

Moreover, there may be a connection between teachers' subject-relevant knowledge of grammar and their ways of teaching, as suggested by Myhill and colleagues (Jones et al., 2013; Myhill, 2010; Myhill et al., 2012). Boivin (2018) shows that, according to classroom studies in the francophone region, many teachers find it important to contextualise grammar yet only very few teachers actually do this. This underscores the importance of both subject-relevant knowledge of grammar and pedagogical possibilities. However, knowledge of the latter may also be difficult to transform and put into use in the classroom; for example, it may be challenging to include classroom dialogue that helps students notice and share their experience

of the interrelatedness between grammatical choices, text and communicative context—not simply because of the teacher’s uncertainty but also because of their unfamiliarity with such classroom dialogue (Myhill, Jones, & Wilson, 2016, p. 30). The mixed methods study of which this study is a part does not examine what is happening in Danish L1 classrooms. The reasons suggested here to account for the type of grammar teaching suggested in the three most popular grammar learning materials in upper primary Danish L1 make it clear that there is need for further research into grammar teaching practices in the L1 classroom. This research should explore the enactment of grammar teaching and the role of learning materials, Danish teachers’ choice of learning materials (restricted by the available materials at their school) and their beliefs about grammar teaching. A current focused ethnographic and comparative study on grammar teaching practices in lower secondary Danish L1, English L2 and German L3 explores among other the participating teachers’ understanding of and the explicit focus on language in the three school subjects (*Grammar3*, 2018-19). The study does not focus on the relation between learning materials and grammar teaching in the classroom; however, preliminary findings highlight a tendency in some classes to teach grammar solely through digital learning materials, hence outsourcing the grammar teaching to these materials. This practice is based on complex reasons, but it underpins the importance of the quality of learning materials (Kabel, Christensen, & Bock, 2019).

In order to consider alternative—and more functional—approaches to grammar teaching, it is worth considering the studies in this article that question the benefit of students spending numerous lessons working with a traditional school grammar that prioritises spelling and punctuation. If knowledge of language structure is privileged as having a right in itself in L1 education, the study by Fearn and Farnan (2007) may lead us to ask whether this knowledge could be better supported by more production-oriented materials or, moreover, by more explorative teaching approaches than repetitive learning materials provide—in other words, by allowing the students’ own writing to play a pivotal role in such grammar teaching. Another alternative approach would be to pay no explicit attention to language at all. In the introductory part of this article, I referred to Hudson (2004) and his two extremes for any educational system regarding the explicitness and form of attention given to language. In order to support students’ written competencies in Danish L1, an implicit grammar teaching may not be the most beneficial choice. An explicit grammar teaching, however, may only be beneficial to the extent that it takes inspiration from a functional-oriented school grammar tradition and integrates grammar teaching into units of writing—units that can take place within all content areas in the school subject. Two problems present themselves, however, if teachers and students in upper primary Danish L1 (as well as in lower primary and lower secondary) are expected to participate in a grammar teaching with a descriptive purpose, based on an understanding of grammar as involving the levels above the sentence and the social context, aligning with a functional grammar tradition.

The first problem regards the form of appropriate learning materials. In order to support a more holistic grammar teaching, it could be beneficial to integrate a focus on language more consequentially in learning materials aimed at other content areas in L1 education, for example in relation to written tasks within other content areas. However, grammar would then become less visible as a part of the school subject and, as a result, such an approach is likely to be met with resistance and collide with a skills view surrounding compulsory L1 education. Moreover, this approach would collide with practices within other content areas. Should media teaching in the L1 school subject, for instance, also be obliged to integrate aspects of a grammar teaching?

There are currently learning materials for Danish L1 that present a metalanguage that aligns with a functional grammar tradition, primarily materials that build on genre pedagogy (e.g. units of work on writings at dansk.alinea.dk). In these materials, the focus is on the students' written texts. However, these learning materials do not emphasise a dynamic relation between language levels and social context, and they do not provide for a classroom dialogue that allows students to participate and share considerations and meaning-making experiences.

Another option could be to develop a resource book, i.e. a collection of descriptions of language structure including relevant regularities in subject specific language use. Such a resource book could be used when students need a metalanguage to observe and explore language; for example, in relation to written tasks. Diderichsen, who has contested the usefulness of a systematic grammar instruction in primary and lower secondary school, has claimed that such a resource book could be used when students "need a concept" (Diderichsen, 1968, p. 124). With this option, grammar is still visible through a learning material in the L1 school subject.

The second problem regards, again, Danish teachers' subject-relevant knowledge of grammar and of pedagogical possibilities. In other words, it regards teacher education and the opportunities for supporting Danish teachers to acquire a more secure knowledge of subject-specific language use, a metalanguage to describe it, and pedagogical possibilities. In Denmark, the teacher training programme for a Danish teacher (grade 1-6) only allocates 40 ECTS points to the individual school subject, which minimises the student teacher's time and opportunities to acquire knowledge of all L1 content areas and didactics within the entire bachelor's degree programme for compulsory school teachers (not a master's degree programme). It would therefore prove difficult to allow for other approaches to grammar teaching than the repetitive and instructive approaches revealed in the most frequently used materials in upper primary Danish L1. Supporting alternative approaches may require that Danish L1 teachers engage with a skills view in the broader school context and nationally recognizable understandings of the why, what and how of a school grammar that resonates internationally within L1 education. It would also require the development of appropriate learning materials and arguably an educational policy that devotes a sufficient amount of time to the L1 school subject in the complete teacher training programme, including grammar and grammar teaching.

7. CONCLUSION

The analysis and discussion of the three most popular contemporary grammar materials in upper primary in Danish L1 in this article reveal the presence of a traditional structural understanding of grammar and indicate grammar teaching practices that partly align with this tradition, which is also recognizable within L1 education internationally. Grammar in the concerned materials mainly comprises exercises on syntax, parts of speech and morphological aspects of language, and it is connected to or subsumed under spelling and punctuation rules, or the word grammar works as a heading solely for exercises on typical spelling errors. All three learning materials express an explicit prescriptive purpose, despite a comprehensive international body of empirical research that, in general, disputes the fact that traditional L1 school grammar teaching benefits students' knowledge of language structure and written competencies. This article discusses reasons for the persistence of such suggested grammar teaching in upper primary Danish L1 and questions the apparent dominant presence of such grammar teaching in the school subject, as shown by the learning materials and their popularity. Two directions for further research may help to explore and develop the complex grammar teaching practices in Danish L1, which both influence and are influenced by the teacher's choice of specific learning materials. Ethnographic research could contribute valuable insights into teachers' potentially adjacent reasons for grammar teaching than the most typical reasons recognised within L1 education. Such studies could also shed light on the role of learning materials in the classroom and the use of a school grammar metalanguage within the diverse content areas in L1 education. Moreover, it would be valuable to conduct intervening research on the appropriateness of different kinds of grammar materials that align with a functional-oriented school grammar tradition and support teachers to become familiar with alternative approaches to grammar teaching in compulsory L1 education.

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