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Between Linguistics, Language Education and Acquisition Research. Introduction to the Special Issue *Linguistics for Language Teaching and Learning*

The relationship between linguistics and education is strong and has a long tradition. This connection is not merely about a transmission of linguistic knowledge to the context of school education – what really matters is a deep insight into the goals and methods of language teaching and learning. While in foreign language teaching practical issues are beyond disagreement, they have been debated for many years as regards first language teaching and learning. A telling example of this controversy is an international debate over the role of grammar in L1 teaching (Hudson 2004; Locke 2010; Spolsky & Hult 2010; Macken-Horarik et al. 2011; Ribas, Fontich & Guasch 2015).

The knowledge about language in different countries is L1-specific by nature – it depends on the features of a particular native language. Punctuation, by way of example, would be taught differently in languages in which it is related to prosody in comparison to languages where such relations do not exist. However, there are certain problems of language teaching and learning that are universal and apply to the majority of languages taught. In particular, this question arises when

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choosing a model for the study of a given language, the choice of which is initially guided by the adoption of a particular idea of language and research perspective.

Despite the fact that teaching is a natural area of research principally for educators and educationists, linguistics plays its part here. There are many linguistic publications that shed light on how children learn a language, and therefore provide arguments in the debate over the effective language teaching and learning. The problems pertaining to linguistics and education that are of interest to scholars representing the interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary linguistics embrace such questions as the role of grammar instruction in the development of writing skills, ways of raising metalinguistic awareness, the importance of students' language preconception in L1 teaching or teachers' beliefs. Below we present several examples of linguistic investigations of this kind.

The role of grammar in the development of L1 language skills is still unclear. While there are several studies demonstrating that morphological awareness can foster the development of spelling skills (Apel & Werfel 2014; Bowers, Kirby & Deacon 2010; Goodwin & Ahn 2013; Graham & Santangelo 2014), the relation of grammatical knowledge to general writing skills is more controversial. Some researchers claim that there is no significant evidence for the positive effect of grammar instruction on language use (Andrews et al. 2006; Graham et al. 2012). Others, on the other hand, argue with that view as supported by a weak empirical basis and postulate that teaching grammar can beneficially affect writing competence (Myhill et al. 2012; Myhill 2018). However, there is a growing consensus that research into the efficiency of grammar instruction should provide for the effects of a different approach to grammar teaching and the role of a teaching method.

Studies on language acquisition have shown that the traditional teaching of grammar focused on the knowledge of language structures is far less valuable than metalinguistic awareness and conceptualization of the grammar system achieved by students through natural language activities such as writing, speaking, and reading (Fontich 2016; Milian 2005; Ribas, Fontich & Guasch 2014; Unsworth 2002; Uppstad 2006). The above conclusions advocate a claim that the ability to think deeply about the language and how it is used is far more significant than a mere reproduction of grammar content presented by a teacher, and also than the teaching of a series of grammar rules. Metalinguistic activities should always be based on spontaneous linguistic knowledge and students' language experiences, as well as on a multidimensional perspective on language.

L1 speakers know a lot about their native languages, usually without knowing that they know it. Students' implicit knowledge about language and language preconception are a fundamental part of L1 teaching. Research into these topics can guide the teaching of grammar so that it is functional, communication-oriented and cognitively challenging (Štěpáník 2019). Preconceptions of language phenomena are developed at a really early stage. This can be illustrated with an example of invented spelling used by children in pre-school age – a graphic system which is closer to surface phonetics and their linguistic intuition than a conventional system. Children's departures from standard orthography are determined by problems with phonological segmentation and categorization of the sounds heard. In addition, they explain children's conceptualizations of written language as well as its relation to spoken language. There have been a wealth of studies on

the development of early writing abilities that differentiate the factors determining this process (cf. Bourassa & Treiman 2001; Levin et al. 2013; Morin 2007; Sénéchal et al. 2012; Viise et al. 2011; Werfel & Schuele 2012). The analysis of children's writing provides an insight into phonological representations of words. It also reflects preschoolers' strategies of phonological segmentation and the acquisition process of graphotactic, orthographical and morphological rules of a given language. Ignoring students' understanding of and thinking about language may potentially lead to various lasting problems of L1 teaching, also at subsequent educational levels.

The essential prerequisite for functional and effective education is a teacher and their explicit support in language learning. Since teachers' beliefs and language awareness play a major role in the shaping of classroom practices (Watson 2015), we should not underestimate the usefulness of research on this area (e.g. Camps & Fontich 2019; Nupponen et al. 2019; van Rijt et al. 2019). What teachers believe about language and language teaching is crucial for language education.

Language development is a key factor in the acquisition of any knowledge. It is for this reason that linguists investigate how people acquire their knowledge about language and how this knowledge interacts with other cognitive processes. Their carefully-designed classroom-based experiments with children and teachers can help to understand how students learn a language; they may also contribute to the improvement of teacher education and the effectiveness of language education – and thus, indirectly, to general education.

The above-mentioned problems are of interest also to the EduLing SIG (Special Interest Group) of ARLE (International Association for Research in L1 Education), an international group of researchers interested in broadly understood educational linguistics. The present special issue is the outcome of a seminar convened by the University of Białystok and devoted to the question of how linguistic research can assist L1 education, especially in language teaching and learning. On top of that, the volume builds on previous collaborative projects navigated by the researchers working for ARLE (Kerge 2014; Boivin et al. 2018; Rättyä et al. 2019).

The texts collected in this special issue come from four different linguistic circles: Spain, Poland, Portugal and Slovakia. Despite diverse topics and different research perspectives, the idea behind all these studies is one – the improvement of linguistic education with an emphasis on L1.

The volume opens with a paper by **LUDMILA LIPTÁKOVÁ**, who attempts to answer the question of what developmental linguistics can offer to L1 education. The author presents empirical data from language research in Slovak speaking children to illustrate the possibilities of transferring the findings in developmental linguistics into the curriculum of language learning and teaching.

XAVIER FONTICH discusses a general question about whether we should teach first language grammar in compulsory schooling at all. The author pinpoints how important it is that teaching and learning languages at school be based on the learners' metalinguistic activity, and presents a model of intervention (Instructional Sequence) based on examples from the Spanish language while drawing upon international research.

ANA COSTA intends to contribute to the implicit/explicit debate on grammar learning and through an example of acquisition of contrast connectives in Portuguese she discusses the nature of the knowledge involved in grammar teaching and learning at school. The author supports the claim that studies on language acquisition and development are seen as most relevant to grammar teaching and learning, and as such grammar instruction must take into account spontaneous linguistic knowledge, which depends on language learning experiences accumulated throughout a learner's school years.

CRISTINA VIEIRA DA SILVA, ÍRIS SUSANA PIRES PEREIRA & ISABEL SEBASTIAO, using a questionnaire survey, give an account of Portuguese teachers' perceptions on grammar teaching. Teachers' perceptions are shaped by such factors as content knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge, knowledge of the curricula and general educational knowledge. Based on their findings, the authors advocate the need to rethink how teachers are trained and how they build their awareness about the role of grammar teaching in effective student learning.

MARTA KOPCIKOVA provides a theoretical analysis of the relationship between metacognition and its subordinate concept metalinguistics, highlighting the holistic nature of learning. The paper focuses on explaining the role of metacognition and metalinguistics in particular in developing reading skills and provides an instruction of a reading comprehension strategy, applicable for both L1 and FL reading development.

MARTI PALLA investigates Polish preschool children's sensitivity to the generic (e.g., "birds have wings") and non-generic (e.g. "two birds are sitting in that tree") distinction. The aim of her study is to determine the extent to which preschool children are sensitive to one morphological cue in particular.

The reader will therefore find in this special issue the findings from an array of research conducted in various countries and using various methodologies. However diverse they may seem, all the papers theorize, analyze and discuss – at different levels of detail – how linguistics can serve language education. Since grammar learning and teaching are understood here primarily as a process of building awareness of the language used, the discussion revolves around the problems of language acquisition and development (including such concepts as language awareness, or metalinguistic knowledge) as well as of implicit vs. explicit linguistic knowledge. In most of the texts the reader will find more or less overtly formulated questions about effective ways of language teaching and learning; some papers even articulate practical methodological tips. Every single article as well as the entire volume make a contribution to our understanding of language learning and teaching.

Out of all those who deserve acknowledgement we would like to single out all the Authors for their contribution to this volume, and the Reviewers for their comments and constructive suggestions. We deeply believe that the essays collected in this issue may inspire researchers to seek further creative goals, and encourage them to engage in further collaborative projects.

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