Proposal for a special issue titled *Working on grammar at school in L1 education: Empirical research across linguistic regions* (Marie-Claude Boivin, Xavier Fontich, Reinold Funke, Debra Myhill)

Empirical studies pertaining to working on grammar at school and its effects have not been within the focus of L1 research during the last years (e.g., none of the current international large scale studies deals with grammar learning). The reason might be that doubts on the benefits of grammar learning for students are widespread. However legitimate one may consider these doubts to be, they should not lead to neglecting research. A major obstacle to research in the field is the fact that there is virtually no exchange on its findings across diverse linguistic regions. Empirical results which emerged in one country have seldom been recognized in other countries. As a consequence, not only research results but research questions vary across linguistic regions.

The special issue we propose aims at gaining an international overview over empirical research on grammatical learning at school within the context of L1 education (including L1 grammar learning outside of L1 lessons, but not including foreign language learning) and at deepening it by discussing recent approaches. Thus, the special issue is intended to provide a stimulus for L1 research on the subject and a starting point for the dissemination of international research into local research communities.

Contributions to the special issue refer to specific linguistic regions. They start with a thorough review of existing empirical research in the region and their theoretical underpinnings. Each paper will make clear what theory of grammar informs the research, and/or the school curriculum, and the pedagogic rationale for teaching grammar. In the realm of grammar, students’ learning needs may vary across languages according to linguistic parameters, for instance features of the respective orthographic writing system. Thus, the contributions connect research findings and questions to a description of these linguistic features and specify learning needs related to these features. The articles continue by considering future directions for research as they may be seen from a general viewpoint as well as from the viewpoint of the author’s research programme. This includes an exposition of the issues the programme deals with its main results and questions left open.

The special issue is a closed one. We plan to have four contributions:

- French speaking regions (Marie-Claude Boivin)
- English speaking regions (Debra Myhill)
- Spanish speaking regions (Xavier Fontich)
- German speaking regions (Reinold Funke)

Before submitting, authors will circulate their papers among themselves and comment on them. By doing so, we hope to make sure that the contributions to the special issue will relate to each other, thus offering a coherent whole.

The authors will eventually write a short introduction to the special issue which outlines the objectives of the endeavour, explains how the articles relate to each other, and draws out the principal theoretical and professional issues. They will also invite a scholar not involved in the project to write a concluding comment to frame the special issue both for experts and for readers less familiar with the research field.

The time schedule is as follows:

- authors complete their papers before April 2016
- papers circulate and are commented upon before June 2016
- articles are submitted in September 2016, peer review follows
- the authors collaboratively write a short introduction in spring 2017
- if possible, an external invited scholar writes a concluding comment on the paper in spring or summer 2017 (not subject to peer review)
- the special issue is published summer or fall 2017 (articles should be published in one go)
Abstracts

Marie-Claude Boivin

Current research trends and perspectives in grammar instruction: the case of the francophone regions

The article will begin with a brief history of the long-standing tradition of grammar instruction in the francophone regions (cf. notably Chervel, 1977) and an overview of the characteristics of traditional grammar instruction with respect to its aims, its contents and its methods. It will then proceed to present the shift from traditional to new grammar (in the early 1970s in Europe and in the 1990s in Quebec). It will then describe the current views across the francophone regions with respect to the aims, contents and methods of grammar instruction, with a special attention to their theoretical bases as well as their links to writing, reading and oracy. The core of the paper will be the presentation of the current trends of the empirical research in grammar instruction across the francophonie. I will organize the presentation around the three « poles » of Chevallard’s (1985) didactic triangle, namely the « content to teach », the teacher, and the learner, following the research in paying a special attention to the last two poles. Since the beginning of the 2000s, the researchers on grammar instruction have entered the classroom and documented two less known areas in the field, namely the teachers’ practices and knowledge (cf. notably Dolz and Simard, 2009), the students’ learning as it occurs in the classroom, as well as the effects of grammar instruction on the students’ writing abilities. I will conclude the paper by an outline of future avenues for research.

Xavier Fontich

L1 grammar instruction for language use in the Hispanic context: the classroom as context for research

This article presents how L1 grammar instruction has been dealt with in different areas of the Hispanic world. After a general overview of the debate and of some curriculum dispositions (drawing especially from the context of Spain but also referring to Colombia, Argentina, Mexico, and Uruguay), I present in a first part the extent to which the classroom context has been a common focus of interest. Studies fall around the poles of the pedagogic system (grammar content, classroom intervention, and learning processes) exploring issues such as which linguistic concepts might be adequate for school needs and how to best adapt them; the importance of teachers’ processes of mediation; and obstacles students face in building operational grammar knowledge. In a second part I present some studies (conducted in different contexts in Spain and also in Argentina) that consider the latter (learning processes) a cornerstone for research. Adopting Vygotskyan tenets and a cultural and communicative perspective on the study of languages, they draw on “metalinguistic activity” as an insightful notion to better understand both (i) the link between L1 grammar instruction and effective language use, and (ii) the interplay between research and practice. I finish the article signalling some lines for further research, with some considerations around the limits and possibilities of the classroom as a context for research.

Reinold Funke

Empirical research pertaining to working on grammar at school in German speaking regions

The article starts by reviewing quantitative as well as qualitative research on grammatical learning at school in the context of L1 education in German speaking regions. One of its specifics is that its focus has not been on the effects of grammar learning on reading and writing outcomes but instead on the quality of the knowledge which is gained, i.e. the reliability and context-independence of access to knowledge. Research results are reported with respect to four areas: (1) scope of students’ knowledge as measured by indirect and direct methods, (2) effects of different types of grammar instruction on reading and writing, (3) potential contributions of grammar instruction in German lessons to linguistic learning of L2-students, (4) specific characteristics of communicative processes in grammar instruction. In its second part, the article points to questions left open and outlines a programme for future research. It highlights that grammar learning at school should strive to enable students to access syntactic features of sentences they deal with, however in the way it is actually realized it rather presupposes that they have access to it. Two steps research might take to cope with this problem are discussed: Measuring the extent to which students have access to syntactic features directly, i.e. without having students explain these features verbally, and conceiving instructional methods to engage students with exploring syntactic structures in a non-analytic fashion.
Debra Myhill

**Grammar as a meaning-making resource for language development**

This article will begin by briefly outlining the long-standing, and contested, debate in Anglophone countries regarding the place of grammar in the L1 curriculum, and will underline how Anglophone countries in general have not valued grammar in the teaching of L1 (or in L2). It will illustrate how current national policies have re-positioned grammar, with particular reference to England and Australia, and it will review recent research which demonstrates that explicit grammar teaching can support learner outcomes in reading and writing. Drawing on a Hallidayan theoretical framework for grammar, which emphasis grammar as a semiotic resource for meaning-making, the article will offer a theorized rationale for the inclusion of grammar in the L1 curriculum. This argument will be evidenced with data from a series of related studies and will address a) linking grammar and the learning focus for reading or writing in a meaningful way; b) the role of talk in supporting the development of students’ metalinguistic knowledge; c) students’ conceptual understanding of grammatical terms and their relationship to teachers’ practices; and d) the place of teachers’ grammatical subject knowledge in supporting a meaning-rich approach to the teaching of grammar. The article will conclude by signaling key lines of enquiry for future research.