



## MONOGRAPH

Perspectives on the teaching  
of grammar: Curriculum, didactic  
proposals, and classroom practice

## PERSPECTIVES ON THE TEACHING OF GRAMMAR: CURRICULUM, DIDACTIC PROPOSALS, AND CLASSROOM PRACTICE

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The teaching of grammar is a permanently topical subject in the teaching of languages (first, second, and foreign languages). Despite some positions that question its usefulness, at the present time numerous actions in the academic world (publishing special issues and pedagogic materials, holding meetings and debates, etc.) suggest the lively interest, at an international level, in the place of grammar teaching in language education. One of these actions has been the celebration of the *III International Congress on the Teaching of Grammar* (Congram19), which took place in Barcelona in January 2019, with the attendance of more than 250 delegates from thirty countries. This congress constitutes the origin of the special issue that we present.

One of the objectives of the congress is to serve as a meeting point for all researchers and education professionals who, from different perspectives, consider the role of grammar in language teaching, driven by the need to elaborate pedagogic contributions supported by research. From our viewpoint, knowing the approaches on the subject taken in different parts of the world and being able to confront perspectives and intervention methodologies in the classroom and in research contributes to showing the vitality of the field and helps to locate the general map and to understand the particularities that it adopts in the different territories.

Various studies carried out in recent years in various contexts (Spain, the United States, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, Canada, the Czech Republic, Finland, Poland, etc.), in first, second, and foreign languages, coincide in highlighting the importance of the learners' reflective processes. Camps (2020), for example, highlights the need to develop students' metalinguistic competence and their capacity for self-regulation in the use of languages, be it oral, written or multimedia. From this point of view, research on grammar teaching (see, for example, Boivin *et*

*al.*, 2018; Gutiérrez, 2013; Rättyä *et al.*, 2019; Simard & Gutiérrez, 2018) is interested in any visible manifestation of mental activity that students develop in relation to languages and their use as a basis for classroom practice contributions. In this sense, the term “grammar teaching” refers to the pedagogic intervention that seeks to promote reflective activity on the language in a school context.

Beyond the approaches that share as a basis the interest in the reflective processes of the learners, there is a wide diversity of contributions and perspectives. In this monograph we echo this and present six works (five of which originate from Congram19), revealing different views: the conception of grammar revealed by the external evaluation tests in francophone Switzerland (Sánchez Abchi and De Pietro) or the analysis of textbooks of the three curricular languages in the Basque Country (Spain) (Manterola, Díaz de Gereñu and Almgren), metalinguistic activity in collaborative writing in the classroom in Valencia (Spain) (Reig), treatment of the norm and varieties in a language as a reflection on the use or from prescriptive approaches (Parapatics, on Hungarian, and López García, on Spanish in Argentina) or reference linguistic theories for teaching interlinguistic grammar in Greece (Georgiamentis, Klidi and Tsokoglou).

Sánchez Abchi and De Pietro approach the conception of grammar in teaching from the analysis of a sample of institutional evaluation tests that are carried out in the French-speaking cantons of Switzerland, with students between 8 and 12 years old. These tests inform about the expected students’ conceptual and procedural knowledge, which must have been worked on in the teaching process, assuming the modelling value of external evaluative tests. The authors confront the conception of grammar that emerges from the analysis of these tests with the official provisions in force in French-speaking Switzerland and with the pedagogic literature on the matter. In the conclusions, they highlight the difficulties involved in bringing the grammar approaches to the service of communication, present in the official provisions, into the classroom.

Manterola, Díaz de Gereñu and Almgren focus on a sample of materials from the Basque Country (instructional units of 1<sup>st</sup> year of secondary education textbooks – 12-13-year-old students- published by the association of Basque Secondary schools Eki Proiektua) and analyze how the language integration approach (Basque, Spanish, English) advocated in the curricular provisions is presented and how this integration arises in relation to the teaching of grammar. Both units related to the writing of informative texts are selected and the treatment of textual organizers, connectors or linkers in the three languages are studied. The analysis carried out reveals common approaches to the integration of languages in the sample analyzed, especially in relation to the communicative projects proposed. Regarding the text organizers, the treatment is diverse, both from the terminology adopted and from the proposed activities. This reflects, according to the authors, the difficulty of integrating the teaching of grammar at all levels of the text structure, which makes it difficult to adopt interlinguistic pedagogic approaches.

Reig offers a complementary look, from the perspective of classroom research, and in relation to informative texts. The focus of her research is students’ metalinguistic activity, specifically 4<sup>th</sup> year Secondary (15-16 years), in a collaborative writing situation in Subject Catalan, within the framework of an instructional sequence in which there is no explicit teaching of grammatical

notions. The analysis of the conversations of two working groups allows the author to differentiate between different types of metalinguistic sentences, depending on whether they deal with linguistic, textual or discursive aspects, always linked to the text being elaborated and the task in progress. In the conclusions, the numerous manifestations of metalinguistic activity during cooperative writing are highlighted, which shows its high reflective potential. Also, the predominance of statements referring to superstructure, grammar, semantic content, and graphic and sound aspects. The difficulties of students to speak about language are also revealed, especially in situations in which there are no explicit activities of presentation and systematization of contents that help them to do so.

The work of Parapatics analyzes the attitudes of teachers in Hungary towards regional dialects and the linguistic practices that they claim to develop with their students in relation to this topic, based on the responses to a questionnaire addressed to teachers. The author notes the divergence between declared intentions and practices and contrasts the results with the approaches of the Hungarian national curriculum, which generally promotes the valuation of dialect variants. The author defends an approach to the study of dialect variants linked to the development of students' metalinguistic awareness in relation to the variation of languages. However, she considers that the insufficient training of teachers and the lack of adequate methodological resources are a serious obstacle in this regard.

Also, the work of López García, from Argentina, tackles the problem of variation, in this case from the Spanish class. From a critical pedagogy, the author carries out an analysis of the historical and geopolitical reasons for what she considers to be a monocentric regulation of Spanish in Argentina and defends the need to teach the language from a pluricentric perspective, which addresses both the standard (as a political linguistic concept) as well as the rest of varieties. For this, she advocates the use of grammatical reflection, based on the metalinguistic apparatus, also for the study of the real data provided by the varieties, as a way to dismantle the representations of social discredit and to strengthen the speakers' linguistic identity.

The latest work, by Georgiamentis, Klidi and Tsokoglou, shifts the gaze towards the relationship between the teaching of grammar and the linguistic theory that supports the approaches of the grammars used as reference in the Greek school system, both for the teaching of Greek as a native language as well as for the teaching of English and German as the main foreign languages. The linguistic analysis of the contents of these grammars allows the authors to verify the divergence of theoretical approaches, which they consider an obstacle to favour interlinguistic reflection in school. The authors find in the universal principles of generative grammar a good theoretical support for their approaches, which they exemplify in relation to the sentence structure, the realization of the subject, and the formation of questions.

The views represented in the articles included in this special issue come from different scopes, routes, and orientation. They constitute a network of paths with confluences, overlaps and divergences, which do not pretend to show definitive solutions, but rather bring us closer to the debate on a complex issue such as the teaching of grammar in the multilingual reality of our classrooms.

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