

Editorial

This first special thematic issue of *Studies in Second Language Learning and Teaching* deals with the learning and teaching of grammar. This seems to be a very fitting topic given the fact that the role of this language subsystem in foreign language pedagogy has never ceased to be a source of considerable controversy and that the teaching of language forms has never been abandoned in the foreign language context. For one thing, even though there is now a broad consensus that teaching formal aspects of the target language is facilitative and may even be indispensable for gaining full mastery of that language, there is much less agreement as to how it should most beneficially proceed. In particular, there are heated debates, often fuelled by staunch allegiance to theoretical positions, concerning the models of grammar that should be adhered to in designing pedagogic intervention, the selection of structures to be taught, the choice of instructional techniques and procedures to be applied, the intensity and timing of instruction, or the nature of the syllabus that should be followed. The contribution of learning and teaching grammar becomes an even more important issue in the foreign language context where the teaching of language forms has always been part and parcel of instruction and the challenge is not to inject elements of focus of form into predominantly communicative activities, but, as Fotos (1998) so aptly put it, to shift the focus from forms to form, by attaching greater importance to meaning and message conveyance in the course of largely code-focused instruction. There is also the crucial question concerning the influence of mediating variables such as individual, linguistic and contextual factors, all of which, most likely in intricate and unpredictable combinations, determine the effects of teachers' attempts to introduce and practice specific linguistic features and learners' attempts to master them in terms of explicit and primarily implicit knowledge.

The present issue brings together six papers related to different aspects of learning and teaching foreign language grammar, written by both prominent

scholars in the field and Polish researchers, which are both theoretical and empirical in nature, and offer crucial insights for pedagogy. In the first of these, Hossein Nassaji reports the results of a study that addressed the effectiveness of oral negotiations in responding to written errors made in two ESL classes, examining the impact of non-negotiated direct reformulation, feedback with limited negotiation (i.e., prompts with reformulations) and feedback with negotiation. In another two research-based papers, Anna Broszkiewicz compares the impact of contextualized practice activities and focused communication tasks on the acquisition of English past counterfactual conditionals, whereas Bielak and Pawlak investigate the utility of Langacker's (1987, 1991) cognitive grammar in teaching English tense and aspect. Simone Pfenninger, in turn, focuses on the role of age in the acquisition of five inflectional morphemes in English by examining the productive and receptive performance of early and late learners in formal instructional settings. The last two contributions are devoted to the discussion of the acquisition of specific aspects of grammar. First, Mercedes Durham compares the rates of complementizer deletion and factors influencing such deletion in e-mails composed by native and nonnative speakers of English, while Terence Odlin explores issues involved in the transfer of collocations in terms of its lexical and syntactic peculiarities in different contact situations. It is my hope that these contributions will, on the one hand, be a source of inspiration for researchers in pursuing new lines of inquiry when it comes to learning and teaching foreign language grammar and, on the other, will provide useful guidelines on how this subsystem can be mastered more effectively. If the two goals can in fact be attained, this special thematic issue can be said to have served its purpose.

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References

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