Editorial

The Department of English and American Studies, the School of Education and the English Linguistics team (Tanja Angelovska and colleagues) at the University of Salzburg in partnership with the Centre for Applied Research and Outreach in Language Education (CAROLE) at the University of Greenwich (Alessandro Benati) organized an International Conference on L2 Grammar Acquisition: *New Research on Processing Instruction, Input Manipulation and Teaching Implications* in July 2016. The event resulted in a variety of instructed L2 (second language) grammar acquisition studies and current contributions to the field. In addition, it gave rise to a very productive research agenda with prominent plenary speakers discussing the role of input in grammar acquisition and instruction. Questions were addressed as to how we can develop a better understanding of how L2 learners acquire grammar and what processing strategies they use when exposed to input (VanPatten, 2015). Similarly, most effective ways to approach L2 grammar instruction in today's diverse language classrooms were sought, thereby challenging traditional grammar-based approaches. This event has borne fruits for this special issue of *Studies in Second Language Learning and Teaching* in carefully chosen papers presented at the event and additional contributions, selected as relevant to the field in many respects.

Participating researchers, colleagues, language teachers and practitioners raised a whole host of more specific questions about how grammatical features in a target language are acquired and taught. Some of them are: Does manipulating input make a difference? How does manipulating input make a difference? What is the role of output? What pedagogical interventions are effective? What is the role of grammar development in reading comprehension? What is the role of transfer in (instructed) L2 grammar acquisition and beyond? What is the role of input continuity in curriculum design and practice? Although these issues have been investigated, the resulting findings are not completely conclusive. Thus, it is not surprising that "grammar instruction has been relatively unaltered

by research findings" (Larsen-Freeman, 2015, p. 263), a fact which carries in itself a plethora of reasons and causes. The contributions to this special issue fill an existing gap in instructed L2 grammar acquisition and focus on questions of how research and/or theory can feed practice and vice versa, thereby focusing on both comprehension and production of L2 grammar. Similarly, another grammar-related important gap with regard to the impact on pedagogy was identified by Collins and Muñoz (2016):

> The ways in which this prior linguistic knowledge may be used to facilitate the learning of new foreign languages (for example, helping students identify sources of erroneous hypotheses about the L3 based on influence from the L2) has not yet had much impact on mainstream pedagogical approaches. (p. 141)

Consequently, some of the papers in this issue respond to this gap and look into the perspective beyond L2 grammar acquisition. Although the papers do not cover all aspects related to instructed L2 grammar acquisition, they explore some of the most recent developments in this area of SLA research and derive practical implications for classroom instruction.

Suitably, this special issue begins with Alessandro Benati's contribution in the form of a comprehensive overview of the role of input, output and instruction in second language acquisition providing examples of several pedagogical interventions to grammar instruction. The effectiveness of *processing instruction, input enhancement, structured output* and *collaborative output tasks* is reviewed and an overall evaluation is provided, which is relevant for both practitioners and researchers.

The collection of papers continues with a second overview paper by Tanja Angelovska expanding on the question of which pedagogical considerations can be made in regard to the role of prior language knowledge beyond instructed L2 grammar acquisition. A discussion of (combinations of) existing theoretical accounts and associated pedagogical aspects, such as *explicit information, negative evidence, metalinguistic explanations, grammar consciousness raising,* and *input enhancement* fittingly adds to Benati's paper. In addition, acknowledging the three phases of input, practice and output, the author illustrates a recently developed method (Hahn & Angelovska, 2017), focusing on concrete examples of how it is applicable in instructed L2 grammar acquisition and beyond.

The next contribution is Anja Steinlen's paper on "The Development of English Grammar and Reading Comprehension by Majority and Minority Language Children in a Bilingual Primary School." She reports the results of a study investigating the minority and majority language children's English grammar and reading comprehension skills tested at two points in time with a year in-between. Apart from filling the gap through addressing minority primary school

children, the added value of this study is a discussion of the relatively unexplored aspect of using children's family language as a resource in foreign language teaching, even at the primary school level.

Simone Pfenninger and Johanna Lendl continue this line of work on L2 grammar acquisition in the primary school context and discuss the impact of perceived L2 English input continuity from primary to secondary school. Using mixed methods, they analyze learners' beliefs, attitudes and self-efficacy through a questionnaire and language experience essays before and after children transitioned to secondary school. The authors articulate important problems associated with this transition referring to such issues as the variety of coherence in curriculum design and practice and mixed ability classes.

In the following paper, a rather different, but equally relevant perspective is addressed within an output-based approach to instructed L2 grammar acquisition and with a focus on writing. Monika Geist fills the existing gap in the studies on noticing grammar aspects in the writing process by L2 English teenagers with L1 German. Her analysis includes an interesting selection of problem-solving strategies that learners apply in L2 writing concerning both areas of morphology and syntax. The results of this study open a new area in research on noticing grammar and suggest relevant implications for teaching.

This concise compilation offers innovations not only in terms of theoretical and methodological refinements, as well as practical implementations, but also in terms of the inclusion of various languages. Thus, the last three papers of this special issue bring into play different language combinations (L1 French-L2 Spanish; L1 English/L1 Dutch-L2 Spanish; and L1 English-L2 German), grammatical features (past tense and aspect, irregular verb morphology and dative clitics) and different theoretical directions, all contributing to advances in experimental research on instructed L2 grammar acquisition.

Besides the transfer phenomenon, the factor of proficiency as relevant for determining transfer in L2 grammar acquisition and beyond has been brought into investigation in some of the papers of this special issue. Four proficiency levels (A2, B1, B2 and C1) were included in the study by José Amenós-Pons, Aoife Ahern and Pedro Guijarro-Fuentes, who examined the process of acquiring L2s that are closely related to the L1 through data on how adult French speakers learning L2 Spanish in a formal setting develop knowledge and use of past tenses in this L2. The focus of their paper "L1 French learning of L2 Spanish past tenses: L1 transfer versus aspect and interface issues" is on the role of transfer and simplification in regard to acquiring mental representations of L2 grammar (Spanish past tenses, i.e., simple and compound past, pluperfect, imperfect and progressive forms). Their results show that L1 influence attenuates progressively as proficiency increases. Another important finding refers to the negative L1 transfer-related difficulties that proved to

be related to grammar-discourse interface issues within the interpretation process of integrating linguistic and pragmatic information. In terms of research-based implications, derived on the basis of their findings, they provide clear recommendations for the teaching of closely related languages. The authors conclude that instruction should not only focus on cross-linguistic contrasts, but it should also prioritize uses requiring complex interface integration, even though such uses pose heavy "burdens" on the level of processing.

The L2 acquisition of Spanish dative clitics in clitic doubling structures by L1 English and Dutch formally instructed, intermediate (B1 and B2 levels) learners was the focus of the study by Maria Angeles Escobar Alvarez. Similarly to the previous contributors, she took into account the role of transfer in the acquisition of new syntactic structures, where dative clitics appear and animate objects are marked by the dative preposition *to*. Using a grammaticality judgement task (GJT), she found that the difficulties L2 learners experienced were not always due to negative L1 transfer, but they were also related to the complexity of the argument structure where the clitic is inserted. Ultimately, a tentative proposal for foreign language teaching is presented. It is based on a gradual acquisition of salient patterns including transitive and more complex argument structures where dative clitics are inserted.

The last contribution to this special issue by Thomas Wagner directly addresses psycholinguistic mechanisms governing the acquisition of L2 irregular verb morphology by intermediate English learners of German as a foreign language (GFL). The main finding of his study refers to the organization of irregular verb morphology in the mental lexicon of intermediate GFL learners and the fact that it might best be captured by the linguistic notion of structured lexical entries, as well as the psycholinguistic mechanism of an analogy-based pattern associator. In terms of implication-based perspectives, Wagner concludes that massive exposure facilitating analogical inferencing is to be called for and states that cross-linguistic focus on forms would be beneficial in order to make foreign language learners aware of both the similarities and differences between the two verbal paradigms.

I am confident that the papers in this volume will influence the future contributions to the field of instructed L2 grammar acquisition in various ways, either by considering complexities and overlapping interactions of associated factors, triangulation of methods involving both off- and online measures, and/or through the inclusion of learners at different ages of acquisition and proficiency levels within wide ranges of language combinations. For now, we should be satisfied with this current collection which gives the first incentives for and attempts at advancing the field of L2 grammar acquisition and beyond, given the importance of the multilingual realities we are surrounded by. I plead for theoretical

and methodological advancements in the field of L2 grammar acquisition and instruction because: (a) "there are intriguing new findings on differential learnability of properties within the same groups of learners" (Slabakova, 2016, p. 7), (b) we need to increase the explanatory power of the current pedagogical options in terms of how the linguistic representations develop in real time, and (c) we have to work out evidence-based and research-led pedagogical implications.

Each paper in this special issue was first reviewed by the guest editor. Then the contributions were submitted to a double-blind review once the authors incorporated the comments and feedback. I would like to thank the reviewers for their time, insights, and attention to detail.

I would especially like to thank the contributors to this special issue for working hard to meet to the given deadlines but, more importantly, for the quality of the work they produced. The last words of gratitude go to the sponsors of this event, the rectorate of the University of Salzburg, and the city and land of Salzburg—without their support neither the event nor the publication of this special issue would have been possible.

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