

# Introduction

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Acquiring the ability to use language(s) competently and in various manners is crucial both for individual development and for functional social and cultural relations, within and across regional and national borders (Byram, 2008). Successful development of what is traditionally called first, second or foreign languages (henceforth abbreviated L1, L2 and FL) is of great importance to meet that end.<sup>1</sup> In relation to this need, as a research field, Language Education (LE) is paramount for the understanding and improvement of human social life and conditions (Council of Europe, 2001). The field of LE is vast and diversified, covering all aspects of language use in educational contexts and learning processes as well as the teaching and learning of specific languages. Being extremely broad, with several emerging subareas, the field is still in a process of self-definition, constantly seeking, as the whole educational field, its identity. Current challenges that need to be addressed are related to societal changes clashing with established research foci. From a critical perspective, language practices cannot be seen as something neutral, but embedded in a socio-historical and political context reflecting current societal power imbalances (Blommaert, 2010; Pennycook, 2010). Although

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<sup>1</sup> We are aware of both the oversimplifications and the ambiguities related to the use of the labels first language (L1), second language (L2) and foreign language (FL), which may overlap and be used interchangeably in this book. Although in constant need of problematizing discussion, they are relevant in relation to many studies of the LE field, especially when considering the contexts of the studies included in this volume.

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continuously approached from new points of view, fundamental matters that interest LE researchers remain the educational context, the teacher, the learner, the subject, and, not least, the processes of language teaching and learning.

*Exploring Language Education – global and local perspectives* was the theme of the first ‘ELE’ conference, which was arranged at Stockholm University in June 2018 and sponsored by the university’s Board of Human Science and the Swedish Foundation for Humanities and Social Sciences (Riksbankens Jubileumsfond). The conference employed a broad scope, aiming to reflect a variety of perspectives on LE and brought together scholars working in different areas of the field from many parts of the world.

With this first ELE conference the organizers wished to call attention to the intersection of the global and the local, in terms of linguistic and cultural diversity, which might inform both research questions and practices within the field. Areas of interest shared by many presenters were multilingualism, Global Englishes, and specific issues related to these topics, where experienced tensions between research and practice seemed to be mutual. Yet, it also became evident how different regions and communities are contingent on local prerequisites and circumstances, leading to a number of particular challenges and assets when it comes to language education. There were unfortunately few presentations from the important area of Literature in LE (Hall, 2015), although the reach of the conference encompassed this field. We see that future conferences and volumes could have a lot to gain by widening the perspective and giving literature, verbal art and learning through fiction more visibility.

The ELE conferences will continue to offer a platform for researchers and teachers to share ideas and engage in new knowledge that develops at the different interfaces with other research fields, such as, for instance, sociolinguistics, gender studies, pedagogy and literature studies.

This book offers a selection of papers presented at the conference, focusing on some specific thematic areas of global relevance (the multilingual classroom and English for academic purposes, young learners’ extramural learning of English, and the learning, teaching and assessment of languages other than English) but

clearly zooming in on the Western context, specifically Sweden and the United States. The work presented in this volume has an approach to LE that is informed by applied linguistics, SLA and pedagogy; for the sake of representativity, it is desirable that future publications emanating from the ELE conferences will be influenced by proponents also of other research traditions and paradigms.

A natural point of departure for a publication on global and local perspectives of language education is to try to capture both the general and the context specific. As for general issues, the fields of SLA and linguistics are two important foundations of LE; in the case of context specific problems, a variety of theories and methods are thinkable. This book comprises five chapters; two conceptual and three empirical studies, the latter focusing on specific contexts. Together they represent different parts of the broad array of research directions that can be discerned under the large umbrella of LE, but are linked to each other by similar linguistic and educational approaches. Two of the plenary speakers at the conference, Nina Spada and John Levis, contribute in the volume. The content of their presentations is laid out in the first chapters, which are followed by reports on work from other presenters at the conference; Amanda Brown and colleagues, Gudrun Erickson and colleagues, and Liss Kerstin Sylvé. The common ground of the five chapters is constituted by recurrent discussions of a fundamental thematic cluster: the interplay of the languages of the learner's repertoire, including the target language, and the complexity of their respective roles in language teaching and learning.

Through the two keynote speakers, the connections between L2 pedagogy, LE, SLA and linguistics are brought to the fore. The following three empirical chapters, although focusing on diverse contexts and conditions for language teaching and learning, all circle around the notions of input and use of the target language and the position of this in relation to other languages, the majority language of the community where the language is learnt or the L1s of the learners. Generally, the work presented in this volume tends to be located at the interface between LE and SLA, especially the studies by Sylvé and Brown et al., who measure aspects of linguistic knowledge. The role of attitudes in language

learning is also an aspect of relevance for all three empirical studies of this book. One of the major focus points in the book is the role of the teacher, both as researcher and as participant; see for instance Spada's discussion of the relevance of LE research to the practitioner, Brown et al.'s study involving teacher-researchers, and Erickson et al.'s study based on a teachers' questionnaire.

One aim of this book is to emphasize the importance of informing the field of language teaching and language teacher training with input from research within Applied Linguistics, LE and SLA. The selection of papers aims at offering insight into some currently discussed issues in the Swedish as well as in the international context, for example the role of target language input and the attitudes toward the target language, translanguaging in the multilingual classroom, and the teaching and learning of languages other than English. The three research projects presented in empirically based chapters are concerned mainly with these issues, which should all be of relevance to language teachers, teacher trainers, and students.

The relationship between the field of SLA and L2 pedagogy is not straightforward, however. The extent of which SLA is relevant to L2 pedagogy is raised and discussed by Nina Spada in the first chapter of this volume, *SLA research and L2 pedagogy: An uneasy relationship*. While the main focus of SLA research is on the learning process and on the factors that contribute to how and to what extent second or additional languages are learnt, L2 pedagogy is concerned with theory and practice more directly related to the teaching and learning of languages. The strong focus on the learner and the interlanguage may in some cases make SLA research appear of little relevance to teachers, in the sense that implications for teaching may not be obvious.

Particularly relevant to language teaching, Spada claims, are *Instructed SLA* and *Classroom research*. Nonetheless, as argued, a gap remains between research and L2 pedagogy. Spada contemplates several possible reasons for this. From the teachers' perspective, time is often a factor. Also, teachers may find research reports too technical, and scepticism among teachers towards the relevance of research is sometimes manifested. From the researchers' perspective, one problem may be a lack of contact with the

classroom and hence little understanding of teachers' questions and concerns. Another issue is related to the channels that most researchers tend to publish through. As pointed out in this chapter, professional journals or teachers' newsletters are not the kind of channels that lead to publishing credits in academia and the publication outlets that researchers aim at are often not available outside university libraries. If teachers get access to research publications, the style and the text genre make the work hard to approach for someone who is not a researcher in the field. Also, the author notices, research of interest to the researcher may be too generic and distant from the specific classroom situation of the teacher. But, as argued by the author, teachers and researchers share the common goal of making L2 learning and teaching as successful as possible and both groups have many things to learn from each other. Suggestions are therefore made about how to bridge the potential gap between them and examples of research that may reduce it are given. Researchers are invited to develop a better understanding of teachers' concerns in order to take on teacher-relevant research endeavours. The local rather than the general should then be emphasized in order to achieve significance. Teachers are encouraged to invest in professional development, to be able to take informed decisions about what research questions are relevant in their contexts, and to participate in research projects. The chapter ends with a discussion of how alternative views upon the role of the teacher in research can complement each other. The following four chapters are concerned with different aspects of second or foreign language teaching and learning, all relating to the conceptual frame laid out in the first chapter, but at the same time building on autonomous research about debated factors in non-native language learning, such as input, multilingualism, proficiency and attitudes, to mention some of the connecting points between the chapters.

In Chapter 2, *Teaching pronunciation: Truths and lies*, research about L2 pronunciation is presented and discussed by John Levis. Pronunciation and its role for communication is a linguistic area that has been neglected for years in both L2 research and teaching. It is however experiencing a revival – and a legitimate one considering its importance in language teaching, being an

inevitable task for learners of a new language. One indication of the growing visibility of research on pronunciation in L2 teaching and learning is the current increase in journal publications, books and conferences on the topic, as pointed out by the author. The chapter is structured around what is referred to as four truths and four lies about pronunciation teaching and learning. These eight statements frame an overview ranging from communicative aspects of pronunciation and teaching to a final discussion of the social aspect of accent and its relation to identity. The four lies can be said to be based on opinions related to an idea that not only does pronunciation not *need* to be taught but, moreover, it *can* not be taught. On the contrary, it is claimed by Levis, pronunciation is unavoidable and essential, and teaching pronunciation works. The lies and the truths are connected to fundamental questions that should be of interest to teachers and learners as well as researchers: Is pronunciation important for oral communication, or is it enough to master vocabulary and grammar in order to communicate successfully, for example? As Levis convincingly argues, both pronunciation and listening comprehension are important components of successful communication, and an intelligible pronunciation, in combination with grammar and vocabulary, is essential. A question related to teaching and learning goals is whether an adult learner can ever achieve the pronunciation of a native speaker. As pointed out in the chapter, there is a social aspect of the varieties of pronunciation of all speakers, first- as well as second-language speakers, that needs to be considered in the teaching of pronunciation. It is through a combination of pronunciation, lexical and pragmatic competence that L2 speakers get access to (the language of) the community and are allowed to further improve their linguistic abilities.

For decades, a hot topic in applied linguistics has been the question whether language learning is best accomplished with the use of the target language only, or by using also the students' L1 (or rather, the majority language of the specific society) in the classroom. On the one hand, use of the target language only would compensate for a potentially low degree of input outside the classroom and it would give students maximal opportunity to use the language in question. On the other hand, exclusive target

language use may have the effect of raising students' anxiety. Using a language the students are more proficient in may help as a means to ask questions, to translate or explain, and it may promote students' explicit linguistic knowledge. Independently of what research says about the pros and cons of comparing languages, a binary contrastive approach is problematic considering contexts where not all learners share the same L1, which probably goes for the majority of classrooms all over the world. This reality has justified a third way (see e.g., Cummins, 1998), namely multilingual language use in the classroom, an approach that is advocated by, for example, the proponents of translanguaging or other similar concepts such as heteroglossia in the classroom (Cenoz, 2013).

The third chapter, *Multilingual versus monolingual classroom practices in English for academic purposes: Learning outcomes, student attitudes, and instructor observations*, by Amanda Brown, Robert James Lally and Laura Lisnyczyj, reports from a study on the language choice in multilingual classrooms of English for Academic Purposes (EAP). There are few experimental studies on the effect of L1 vs. L2 use and there is no consensus in the frequently discussed issue of language choice in the language classroom. This study, which contrasts a monolingual and a multilingual pedagogy, empirically investigating their effects on students' learning outcomes as well as their attitudes towards classroom language use, is therefore a welcome contribution. The participants of the study were two researcher-practitioners and 50 international undergraduate students drawn from four EAP courses at a large university in the United States. However, as a whole, the classes were highly diverse linguistically and culturally, containing students with a range of different L1s; some groups were more heterogeneous than others. Two courses were instructed by the two researcher-practitioners with the standard monolingual English-only pedagogy. Two comparable courses were taught by the same instructors using a multilingual approach, where students were given agency in their choice of language for the learning activities. The data – student surveys, researcher-practitioner journals documenting the pedagogical content, and students' target language performance – were collected longitudinally. Qualitative

and quantitative analyses were conducted on students' attitudes and their development of writing and speaking.

No statistically significant differences in learning outcomes between multilingual or monolingual conditions were found, neither were significant differences found between groups with few different L1s and groups where many different L1s were represented.

The student survey responses indicated a complex picture of attitudes toward classroom language practices, and a pedagogical reflection in relation to the multilingual classroom is conducted at the end of the chapter together with a discussion on research methodology. Students' attitudes in relation to target language only vs. multilingual classroom language practice is surely a topic worth looking into further in future research. The study is timely and represents a topic that concerns teachers in the linguistically heterogeneous classrooms of current times (cf. chapter 1 on the relevance of classroom research for teaching practice).

Another research study from the field of English as an L2 is reported in the next chapter, *Very young Swedish children's exposure to English outside of school*, by Liss Kerstin Sylvén. This is a study of young children's exposure to English in Sweden, a country where English is officially a FL and referred to as such in education policy documents. However, as the author argues, it may rather be considered an L2 due to its vast presence and extended use in society, especially among younger generations. Little is known however about how much English very young children encounter in Sweden, which is why exposure was here investigated among 7 preschool children (ages 3–5 years) and 13 primary school children in grade one (ages 7–8 years). This type of knowledge, dependent upon local language ecologies, is highly relevant to English teachers in primary school (cf. chapter 1). More specifically, the author examined both how much English the children were exposed to and through which activities this exposure occurred. This was done through interviews with the parents and language diaries kept by them. Furthermore, the level of receptive vocabulary knowledge among the children was measured with *the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test*, PPVT-4 (Dunn & Dunn, 2007), and – for the older group – oral production of



vocabulary was also examined with a picture description task. Despite the fact that the children had not yet started with any formal instruction in English, the findings indicate that none of them were complete novices in English. In fact, some of the children had an unexpectedly high amount of exposure of English and also surprisingly advanced levels of proficiency, although varying. The chapter also offers a close-up study of two children in their first school year: One child with a large amount of exposure to English and another whose exposure to English seemed to be restricted to about one hour per week. This study contributes to the body of studies indicating that the role of English in Sweden has, in practice, moved beyond that of a FL. The chapter ends with a discussion on pedagogical implications and suggestions of possible future studies.

With the final chapter of the volume, while still in the Swedish context, the focus shifts to a group of languages with very different conditions than English in Sweden. In *Attitudes and ambiguities – teachers' views on second foreign language education in Swedish compulsory school*, Gudrun Erickson, Camilla Bardel, Rakel Österberg and Monica Rosén report on a study of the situation of second foreign languages (SFLs). SFLs here refers to foreign languages encountered after English; in the Swedish compulsory school these can be studied within the subject *Modern languages*. A large number of teachers of French, German and Spanish participated in the study through an extensive questionnaire. The study focuses on three areas: teachers' professional satisfaction, teachers' use of the target language in the classroom, and the curricular status of Modern languages. These areas correspond to three levels of education, namely the individual, the pedagogical and the structural level, and they are connected to some frequently discussed issues in the current professional and policy-related debate in Sweden. As a background to the study, the authors point to the challenging conditions for SFLs, in particular in comparison to English: The attitudes, motivation and proficiency levels among the students are far from the same, a perception shared by the respondents in this study. The questionnaire – piloted and pretested – is grounded in previous research and reports, and based on conceptual considerations from the fields

of teacher cognition and pedagogical content knowledge, the Common European Framework of Reference, as well as Swedish regulatory documents for language education. The chapter offers an insight to the complex field of SFLs, depicting a number of problems regarding different aspects of SFL education, for example the non-compulsory status of the subject Modern languages, or the low degree of target language use in the classroom. Despite these problems, the authors point out that the study conveys a genuine commitment among the respondents regarding their profession and the learning and development of their students. The study gives empirical insight to some of the themes Spada discusses in chapter 1.

To summarize, this book explores some current challenges of LE seen from different contexts in the Western part of the world, and from a perspective at the interface of the SLA field. The three chapters based on empirical studies investigate local problems and practices related to attitudes, proficiency, multilingualism and language use, raising questions that are applicable also in other contexts than the ones reported on. We wish to emphasize that all chapters have pedagogical implications and hope that the volume will inspire future research into matters of relevance for language teachers as well as for the research community, and for future conferences that will further explore the variety of themes relevant for LE, sketched out in the beginning of this Introduction. The editors are proud to make the volume easily accessible to teachers, researchers and students, both through its Open Access format, and considering the selection of content which will hopefully be of interest to all categories of readers, be they in one or more of these roles.

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