GRAMMAR INSTRUCTION IN THE HISPANIC AREA: THE CASE OF SPAIN WITH ATTENTION TO EMPIRICAL STUDIES ON METALINGUISTIC ACTIVITY

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In Memoriam: Antoni Fontich Ambatlle (1933-2016).

Abstract

Grammar instruction is an unresolved issue in the Hispanic area, having long been approached from within the disjunction between rhetoric (teaching how to use language, especially writing) and grammar (teaching the grammar content). Over time grammar instruction has generated an intense debate around two positions: direct instruction on grammar content, versus instruction devoted to prompting reflection on grammar and language use. There has been an insistent and recurring tendency towards the former, a situation that still prevails. More recently, however, certain research trends in Spain, albeit a minority, have crystallized in a research trajectory on metalinguistic activity, opening up new possibilities for rethinking instruction based on grammar reflection to support writing. Within such a trajectory, innovative ways to promote grammar reflection within language use are explored, and metalinguistic activity becomes the focus of research and pedagogy. Crucially, some of the empirical studies developed within this trajectory suggest that grammar knowledge may not be a condition for reflection about language but its consequence, leading to a consideration of metalinguistic activity as a promising avenue for rethinking the debate on the role of grammar instruction.

Key words: grammar, writing, metalinguistic activity, Hispanic area, instructional sequences to learn grammar, case study

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1.   INTRODUCTION

In the Hispanic area, the problem of grammar instruction is a long way from being solved. In the case of Spain, Camps (2005) maintains that there has been a notorious gap between grammar instruction and the teaching of language use (specifically writing). This author and her colleagues have drawn on Charolles and Combettes (2001), who stated that a feature of the western tradition of language teaching was an initial disjunction of rhetoric (oral and writing skills) and grammar in classical studies about language, with long-lasting repercussions on theoretical research as well as teaching. Indeed, the situation in the Hispanic countries mirrors the case of Spain (Rodríguez-Gonzalo, 2012). Against this background and without interruption, grammar has been the basic content of instruction in this area from the mid-nineteenth century (when the laws on compulsory schooling in both Hispanic-America and Spain were first promulgated) up to the present day, the assumption being that it guarantees improvement in the use of language, especially in normative/literary writings.

An historical analysis reveals a steady tension between two opposing and uneven perspectives: direct grammar instruction versus instruction oriented towards prompting students' reflection on grammar and language use. While never fully overcoming the grammar-writing gap, the latter perspective contributes remarkably by showing the benefits of reflection. Such contributions have been made by outstanding linguists (through pedagogic conferences and handbooks), as well as by teacher educators (e.g., from the "Normales"—the schools for teacher education under the Spanish Republic during the 1930s), and so on. Even so, this historical analysis reveals a persistent tendency towards school practices based on direct instruction and rote learning.

A first general question we can ask is why this appears to be so. That is: Why do we come to the twenty-first century on terms that are similar to those of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries? A second and more concrete question refers to whether research (under no matter what theoretical persuasion) at the present moment brings points of reference to overcome it. Answering the first question is a highly demanding task that is beyond this paper. However, we can, indirectly, sketch a possible answer if we explore the second question and focus on some empirical studies conducted in Spain during the last two decades. These studies focus on students' metalinguistic activity (how to foster it in the classroom and how to analyze it). While they are not by any means representative, they do represent a robust and emerging research trajectory that has metalinguistic activity as its backbone, thereby opening up a promising avenue for rethinking the debate about grammar instruction.

Details about empirical studies on metalinguistic activity (Section 4) will follow a general overview about grammar instruction in the Hispanic area and a description of the case of Spain, presented in Sections 2 and 3.

2. GRAMMAR INSTRUCTION IN THE HISPANIC AREA: A HISTORIC OVERVIEW

As noted above, grammar was regarded historically as an object of instruction in the Hispanic area. This persistence is underpinned by a major assumption: the equation of "language" and "grammar". Until the 1980s and 1990s, this identification was left unspoken within curricular dispositions for compulsory schooling in the Hispanic area, due to a general misguiding conception and instruction of languages (Flórez, 1960, 24; see Agudelo, 2014, 1). This was the case in Spain, Argentina, México and Colombia, among other countries. The following bullet points present several ideas that locate this misconception within the institution of the school itself, as well as among the benefits attributed to grammar instruction.

- *Teaching language is teaching grammar and the reverse*

Grammar is seen as a guarantee for improving language use, an idea which leads to identifying language education with grammar instruction. This idea can already be found at the very beginning of compulsory schooling in the nineteenth century, and has its roots in a long tradition that goes back to the Middle Ages (with the Latin grammarians Donatus and Priscianus) and the Renaissance, and that affects both Spain and Hispanic-America. It is assumed that the learners of grammar, once taught, will automatically turn it into tools with which to handle their own language use. As the Venezuelan linguist Andrés Bello maintained, grammar was regarded as the art of speaking and writing correctly: "Since language is the means by which men [sic] communicate to other men [sic] what they know, think and feel, it goes without saying that grammar is of the utmost usefulness" (Bello, 1847, Introduction, XX). In Argentina, a century later, Alonso & Henríquez-Ureña (1964) claimed that "the goal of grammar instruction is to let the pupils learn to speak and write their own language with correction, according to their thinking, and with efficiency" (18). This idea has persisted for decades up to the present time, and underpins the production of teaching materials, as is shown by Agudelo (2014) in the Colombian context.

- *Grammar as a first step towards other languages*

On the other hand, as highlighted with regard to the French school by Chervel (2016) and Balibar (1985), a school is a place where different linguistic subjects meet (e.g., Rhetoric and Prosody, as well as classical and foreign languages). This means the school has an impact on the learning objectives as well as on the content. In this respect, grammar plays a propaedeutic role in many countries, in introducing concepts and procedures necessary for the learning of Latin and foreign languages. This idea is already found in the eighteenth century in the writings of Spanish pedagogues, such as Ballot (1796) who stated that "the knowledge of the language of one's nation ought to be our first study, not only to speak with correc-

tion and purity, but to foster the learning of Latin" (2). This notion spans a lengthy period of time, despite the claims of a number of linguists such as the Argentinean Costa-Álvarez (1928), who maintained that "it is time to make a tabula rasa of these latineries" (8) and considered that "grammar ought to explain Spanish itself, its own forms, and not Latin forms through Spanish" (8). In this respect, it was still possible during the 1960s to encounter opinions such as those of the Spanish linguist Fernández-Ramírez (1960), who asserted that "the study of the vernacular grammar constitutes a magnificent introduction to the study of dead and living languages that students may have to undertake" (57).

- *The importance of the* Real Academia Española[1] *and its works for school*

The *Academia* was always explicit in stating the pedagogic commitment of its works on grammar and orthography, and this had already had an impact before the launch in 1857 of the so-called Ley Moyano (the first educational law in Spain). By then schools had already been recommending or prescribing the *Academia* contributions since the 1780s (the *Academia* grammar being from 1771) (García-Folgado, 2013). This tendency became general in 1857, when use of the *Academia* works became compulsory in all primary and secondary schools (Encinas, 2016). A similar situation prevailed in Argentina, where works that adapted academic contributions were widely used (García-Folgado & Toscano, 2012). In this country, under the regulations of the "Consejo Nacional de Educación"[2], created in 1881, the grammar texts of the *Academia* became compulsory (Toscano, 2012; Lidgett, 2015). This was due not only to the prestige of the *Academia*, but also, in great measure, to a political rationale since it was "the State who sets the pace, the approval, and even the parameters to approach grammar instruction at school" (Agudelo, 2014, 5).

Submission to the *Academia* framework was aimed at achieving a model for linguistic prescription and terminological uniformity: "The grammar doctrine that we follow is that of the *Real Academia* (...), not because we believe it is perfect, but because it is the only one by which we can achieve uniformity in the terminology and the doctrine" (Henríquez-Ureña & Binayán, 1927, IX; quoted in Toscano, 2012). Furthermore, school curricula also reproduced the transmissive instructional model embedded in these texts. However, Chile stands as an exception since it adopted the pioneer work of Andrés Bello, who, while acting as a normative grammar, also held linguistic and pedagogic positions of great modernity (e.g., the arbitrariness of

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[1] *Royal Spanish Academy, founded in 1713 (inspired by the Italian and French academies) and put under royal protection since 1714. One of its aims is to preserve the unity of the Spanish language, with the creation of 22 more Academias in 1870 under the panhispanism movement, which emphasized the cultural kinship of the Spanish-speaking people.*

[2] *National Education Council, government educational institution for the newly created autonomous city of Buenos Aires. It was chaired by Domingo Faustino Sarmiento, former President of Argentina (1868-74) and father of Argentinean free compulsory state schooling.*

language, the interplay of synchrony and diachrony, an inductive approach to language teaching, and so on) (Bello, 1847; see Wagner, 2006).

- *The theoretical basis of school grammar*

Another factor that enhances language-grammar identification is the linguistic approach that underpins grammar instruction. A first general approach is prescriptive and orientated towards a correct mastering of language. This idea appears in the definitions of grammar by the *Academia* (i.e., "The art of talking and writing correctly") and up until the *Esbozo de una Nueva Gramática de la Lengua Española (First Draft for a New Spanish Grammar),* in 1975 (see Garrido, 2010). It also appears in the work of Bello (1847), and in the studies of the so-called "traditional grammar" (which includes all studies that preceded Saussure's contributions), all of which were normative in nature. While there was a shift in the mid-twentieth century from prescriptivism to descriptivism within the models of structuralist linguistics, attention to the system remained the same (see Otañi & Gaspar, 2001). This has had a profound impact in curricular dispositions and in pedagogic material (see Coronas, 2014; van der Aalsvoort & Kroon, 2015).

- *Grammar instruction as a guarantee to preserve the unity of the language*

Grammar instruction was also highly regarded as a guarantee to preserve the unity of the language, an idea of remarkable relevance in the postcolonial context of the creation of the Hispano-American states during the second half of the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century. With regard to the Argentinean case, Sardi (2006) maintains that "grammars used to work as mechanisms with a function to establish what language ought to be taught, how that language was conformed, what was allowed and what forbidden" (70). In general terms, this idea also works in the rest of the Hispanic area and means rejection of the general dialectal varieties (e.g., those of Colombia, Argentina, etc.) as a reference for an educated model that could also distinguish the elites in opposition to the allophone communities.

The claim for peninsular Spanish as a model for school use is also underpinned by an ideology that sees the unity of language as a feature of a true nation. Such an ideology found common ground throughout Europe during the nineteenth and early twentieth century. It also supported the creation of *Academias* in different Hispanic countries after 1870 and was a Leitmotiv in the *Congreso Literario Hispanoamericano* (Hispano-American Literary Conference) celebrated in Madrid in 1892. This conference aimed at "establishing the basis for a great literary confederacy, formed by all the nations that on this side and that side of the sea speak Castilian, in order to keep their patrimonial language unique and unscathed, as an element of progress and fraternal link" (from the Call of the Conference, Núñez de Arce et al., 1893, 1). The conclusion of this event (as well as later reports about it) further advocated for the study of grammar which, as one of the factors to pre-

serve the unity of the language, should "essentially be the same" everywhere (Fabié, 1893, 254).

While the former ideas constitute a general background against which we can understand the role of grammar instruction, a number of ground-breaking works put them under scrutiny with regard both to its content and to its pedagogy. Amado Alonso, the Spanish linguist who settled in Argentina, claimed ironically that grammar still taught in the majority of schools "matches with the astronomy that imagined the Earth as a still disk suspended in the middle of the Universe" (Alonso, 1943, 95), also noting that, while such ideas within astronomy had long since been rejected, this was not quite the case within grammar.

In this respect, a number of works covering a span of several decades have advocated for grammar instruction based on reflection and the engagement of learners in a variety of challenging activities (Caso in 1891, Lenz in 1912, Castro in 1922, Seco in 1930, Galí in 1931 and 1935, Fernández-Ramírez in 1933 and 1960, etc.; see Álvarez-Méndez, 1987, for a review). The idea underpinning all these works is the necessary link between reflection about language (from a rhetoric perspective) and language learning. Grammar is regarded as a scientific discipline that cannot teach the individual how to speak appropriately and that in some cases leads to the dismissing of grammar instruction at school: Lenz (1912) maintains that "nobody learns their mother tongue according to the rules of grammar" (22). However, the vast majority of such writings accept grammar as a valuable tool for analysis and reflection, beyond an a priori idea that makes it the basis for correct language use.

According to Laura Brackenbury, whose contributions had a deep impact in Spain, "the Science of Grammar possesses unique claims to a place among school subjects" (Brackenbury, 1908, vi). She believed that it was of the utmost importance to "guard against the stultifying confusion between Grammar (a Science) and Language (its subject-matter)" (3), and noted that grammar was "an instrument of special value to the teacher, in so far as it affords him [sic] unique opportunities of getting his [sic] pupils to *think*" (3, italics in original). Asserting that "Language is always with us" (4), she maintained that the aim "in every grammar lesson is to make the child think here and now, and, to the extent that we accomplish our aim, the child is being trained to a habit of analytical thought" (4). Positions such as Brackenbury's, which can be found repeatedly in a number of twentieth century texts in both Spain and Hispanic-America, constitute a rich substrate for understanding contemporary ideas, such as those presented in Sections 3 and 4.

3.   GRAMMAR INSTRUCTION IN SPAIN IN THE LAST TWENTY-FIVE YEARS

In the last twenty-five years, the approach to grammar instruction in Spain has been very unequal among the different regions. Some communities have two official languages (e.g., Catalonia, Valencia, the Basque Country, etc.), which has been a significant issue in the debates on the role of grammar within the implementation

of bilingual programmes (Vila, 1998), as well as in programmes integrating official and foreign languages (Ruiz-Bikandi & Tusón, 2008) and syllabuses for pre-service teacher education (Guasch & Milian, 2004). Also, various linguistic trends in the twentieth century have had a different impact in the faculties in charge of pre- and in-service teacher education (Bravo, 2014). Furthermore, a new curriculum implemented in 1990 was flexible in its design (Coll, 1992), which meant that each educational jurisdiction had to fine-tune a first official layout (a so called "first level build-up") and transform it into a wide range of different laws, strategies, recommendations, intervention models, and pedagogic material (the "second and third level build-ups"). Several studies have indicated the tensions and failures within such a process of implementation (Camps & Sempere, 1997; Díaz-Alcaraz, 2000), suggesting that important differences may have occurred in the way curricular content (including grammar in language education) was approached in each community and in each age group.

Since an exploration of the resulting complex and sometimes fragmented context is beyond the scope of this study, various contributions to grammar instruction made by researchers and practitioners will be presented here instead (see Section 4, below). These individuals, who have had a sustained interest in grammar instruction, have explored a number of issues, such as curriculum proposals, models for classroom intervention, analysis of textbooks, etc., and have also conducted empirical studies on the process of grammar learning underpinned by Vygotskyan tenets. Although they do not in any way represent a general trend in Spain, the outcomes of these studies, as will be argued below, can be seen as promising avenues for research.[3] These studies are conducted under a research trend that focuses on the fundamental concept of "metalinguistic activity", which is located within the pedagogic system, i.e., in the interplay between the grammar content and the process of teaching and learning this content. In the lines that follow, we will describe how such a focus emerges during the last two decades against a background dominated by the communicative approach.

3.1 Locating grammar within a communicative approach

During the 1980s and especially in the 1990s (parallel to the new curriculum reforms), the communicative approach to language education became a dominant discourse in Spain, following a disaffection for formal linguistics. This discourse was underpinned by the evolution of language sciences, in which the duality of "use-communication" became the guiding principle to explain "linguistic structures with regard to particular occurrences in specific contexts of use" (Vila, 1994, 44), in so far as "there is only a language if there is a speaker who has something to tell to a

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[3] *See Otañi & Gaspar (2001) for research conducted in Hispanic-America that shares a similar perspective; see also Rodríguez-Gonzalo (2012).*
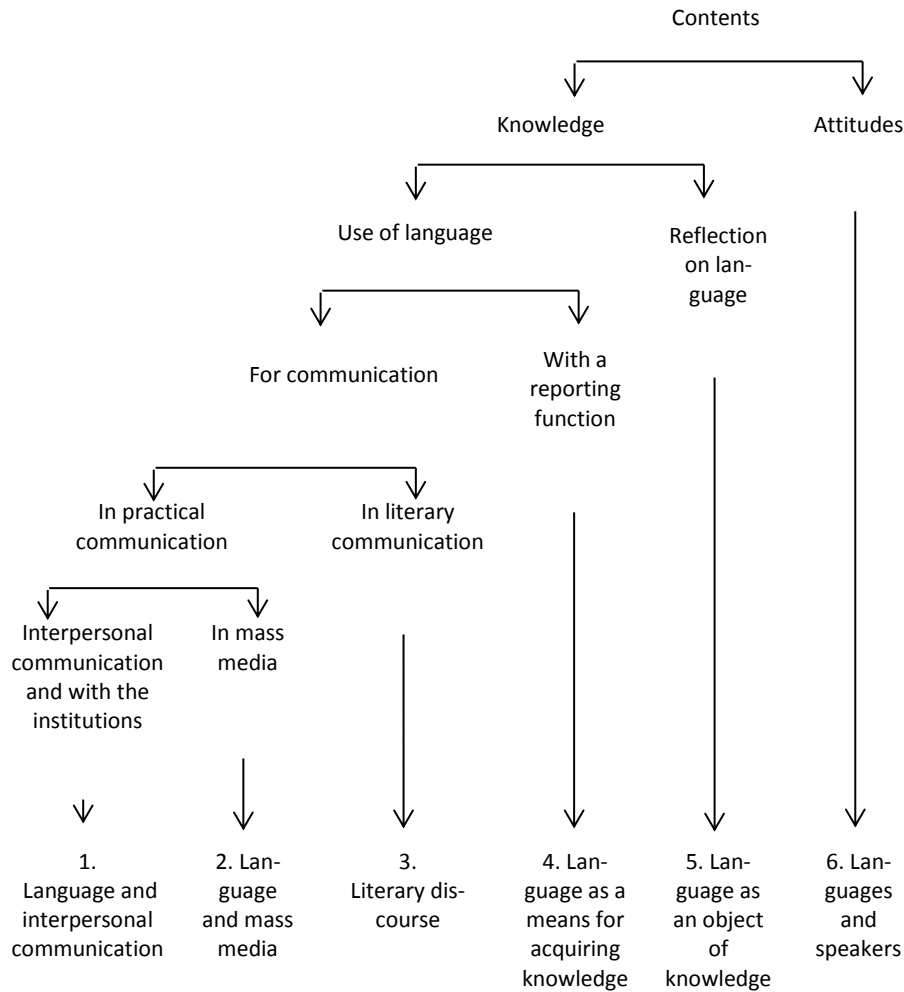
concrete addressee and, therefore, chooses the most economic and efficient procedures so that her intention can be identified" (51).

Assuming this perspective, Lomas and Osoro (1994) felt it was urgent to implement "school tasks oriented towards the domain of expression and comprehension of language uses, both verbal and non-verbal, which characterize human communication" (11). They highlighted the importance of exploring the theoretical sources that could inform the work and the decisions of those who were teaching language, and referred to domains such as philosophy of language (e.g., Searle's "Speech Act Theory", etc.), linguistic anthropology (e.g., ethnography of communication, sociolinguistics, etc.), text linguistics (i.e., text types as supra-sentence units), cognitive studies, and so on. They also maintained that formal linguistics could no longer serve as a reference for language education.

Nevertheless, they defended the importance of "metalinguistic and meta-communicative reflection about the formal characteristics of languages, as well as the pragmatic values involved in the uses" (11). In practice this meant the rejection of decontextualized grammar instruction inspired by the models of formal linguistics, and fostering the idea that grammar instruction ought to be dealt with by being embedded in the teaching of language use (see also Castellà, 1994, and Lomas, 2002).

An innovative pedagogy for grammar was developed under the auspices of the communicative discourse that located grammar issues within discourse genres: e.g., syntactic parallelism in popular poetry, stage direction adjectives in theatre, word choice in summaries, connectives in reports, etc. (see Zayas, Rodríguez-Gonzalo, & Martínez-Laínez, 1994, and Zayas, 1994). A ground-breaking new text-oriented layout for grammar content was also proposed (Zayas & Rodríguez-Gonzalo, 1992), which fostered connections among concepts that within a sentence-based approach had usually been explored separately (e.g., the notions of pronoun and hypernym with regard to thematic progression). If the challenge at school was "to show the role grammar plays in fostering communicative competence" (Zayas & Rodríguez-Gonzalo, 1994, 25), a space for grammar notions needed clarification; it was not to be juxtaposed but rather was, as Zayas, Rodríguez-Gonzalo, Martínez-Laínez, Ferrer, & Lluch (1990) pointed out, to be embedded into the teaching of language use, including an epigraph such as number 5 in the following figure (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Curricular proposal for language education (adapted from Zayas et al., 1990)

Contents

Knowledge   Attitudes

Use of language   Reflection on language

For communication   With a reporting function

In practical communication   In literary communication

Interpersonal communication and with the institutions   In mass media

1. Language and interpersonal communication   2. Language and mass media   3. Literary discourse   4. Language as a means for acquiring knowledge   5. Language as an object of knowledge   6. Languages and speakers

3.2 Approaching the process of grammar learning: raising questions

Empirical studies did in fact show the limitations of students being able to draw on their grammar knowledge in the context of writing (Camps, Guasch, Milian, & Ribas, 2000); they also showed the poorly-articulated grammar concepts of students (Notario, 2001). But since no suggestions as to how to overcome these problems were to be found in the dominant communicative approach, they simply remained ignored. Therefore, regardless of how clear the advocacy for approaching grammar embedded in writing might have been, the communicative discourse failed to produce any fundamental thinking as to how the problems raised by such

an approach to grammar could be solved, thus effectively suffocating any possibility for debate. This can be seen in the lack of articles written on the role of grammar in teaching, in language teaching journals published between 1990 and 1999 (Notario, 1999), despite some efforts for further exploring this field (such as an international conference devoted to grammar instruction celebrated in 1995; see Mantacón & Zaragoza, 1995).

Authors such as those mentioned above moved towards a framework that could enable new ways of approaching these problems. This framework had been articulated since the late 1980s and during the 1990s (e.g., Camps, 1986 and 1998; Camps & Ferrer, 2000), and clearly advocated two ideas that did not fall into the premises of the communicative discourse: the need to explore the grammar system in itself, and the need for a pedagogy based on students' activity in manipulating linguistic data at both sentence and text levels. These two ideas were already anticipated in the pioneering work of Camps (1986), and were to be developed over the following years.

First, Camps (1986) refers to the need to address grammatical teaching, not only in relation to language use but also in itself, temporarily detached from the incessant flow of communication. It means focusing on the system in a broad sense (i.e., integrating attention to form, to meanings, and to uses), and it responds to the idea that grammar notions can barely be articulated in pupils' minds if approached only randomly whenever they appear in language use. In order to be able to access the grammar notions, pupils ought to build them up based on a system of relationships among them. Underpinning this idea is Vygotsky's (1962) claim that "A concept can become subject to consciousness and deliberate control only when it is a part of a system" (92). In the current debate on grammar instruction in the international arena, this issue is a focus of controversy (see Fontich &Camps, 2014, and Fontich, 2016).

Secondly, Camps (1986) maintains that it is of the utmost importance to engage the learners in activities involving manipulation of linguistic data:

> Grammar instruction will be based on the discovery of how language works by means of operating upon texts and sentences in several ways: *Comparing* elements that have the same meaning, the same form, etc.; *Establishing* links through different criteria: agreement, semantic compatibility, etc.; *Including* or inserting clauses; *Recognizing* elements that are equal or different; *Classifying*; *Compounding* texts, sentences; *Segmenting* syntactical groups and words with different criteria; *Recomposing* with elements that result from segmentation; *Changing* the order; *Deleting* and suppressing; *Completing* and amplifying; *Substituting* one element for another one: nominalising, pronominalizing, etc. (47, italics in original)

This position resonates with the benefits of activities such as "sentence combining" (see Andrews, 2010) and with Vygotsky's (1962) claim that "The turning points at which a general principle becomes clear to the child cannot be set in advance by the curriculum" (101). According to Vygotsky, "The child is not taught the decimal system as such; he [sic] is taught to write figures, to add and to multiply, to solve problems, and out of all this some general concept of the decimal system eventual-

ly emerges" (102). This suggests that grammar knowledge will not be a precondition for this activity of manipulation but its consequence. Indeed, Camps et al. (2000) consider this activity as the permanent source of knowledge of language, "which contributes to build it and to activate it" (104). These works argue that interaction is a basic feature of this activity.

3.3 Expanding the debate: from a text-level-only focus to learners' metalinguistic activity

While some advocates of the communicative approaches defend the need for operating on a text level (e.g., Castellà, 1992), Camps and Ferrer (2000) highlight the risk of dismissing the sentence as a domain to be reflected upon. They argue that operating at sentence and text levels is equally important and that the debate should also embrace classroom methodology. They claim that the sentence is misleadingly seen as inherently attached to a transmissive pedagogy and suggest that an active methodology is also possible. Experiences such as those of Milian (2004) about the very concept of "sentence", Fontich (2006) about transitivity, Casas (2014) about the values of "present tense", or Delgado (2014) about definitions, show the possibilities and benefits of teaching grammar notions on a sentence level when supported by interaction and manipulation of linguistic data. In this respect, these works maintain that methodology is also a part of the content to be taught.

Grammar reflection would be underpinned by a conception of language as an organic unity of formal, semantic, and pragmatic elements in constant interaction (see van Lier, 2004, and González-Nieto, 2013). Bernárdez (2000) suggests that between sentence and text there might be a continuum of different degrees of complexity. This would be underpinned by a general principle according to which the sentence results from a number of organizing principles (conveying meanings such as agent, theme, addressee, experimenter, cause, locative, etc.) that operate upon simple mental images, whereas the text "results from the same principles upon more complex images" (814). In this regard, while Bosque (2015) considers that compulsory education should be focused on "a basic descriptive grammar along with a normative grammar" (chapter 4), the importance of the teacher being informed of the contributions of the different disciplines is highlighted. Linguists coming from different traditions (pragmatics, text linguistics, discourse analysis, cognitive linguistics, and generative grammar) lay claims to the relevance that linguistics holds in language education (see Escandell, Bernárdez, Tusón, Cuenca, & Bartra, 2000; González-Nieto, 2013).[4]

Eventually, a methodology that prompts students' metalinguistic activity becomes a major focus, not only in grammar instruction but also in research. The assumption is that scrutinizing students' metalinguistic activity triggered by manipu-

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[4] *See Giovanelli & Clayton (2016) for a similar perspective within the Anglophone context.*

lation activities and by discussion leads to a better understanding of what hinders and what enhances the learning process. Thus, it also allows for exploring new activities in accordance, in which respect, as Camps (1986) suggests, grammar reflection moves from the periphery of language education to the centre:

> Understanding the written language implies the necessity of establishing hierarchical relationships between a series of elements that appear in a linear fashion, giving them a global meaning, and writing implies the mastering of language use as decontextualized from the real context. Both features can also be fostered in the oral (...). In such an approach, grammar, albeit not the only aspect in language education, stops being a marginal discipline that we do not know how to integrate in the class of Language Arts, *and becomes its backbone*. (162-63, italics added)

3.4 Integrating methodology and content

The aforementioned ideas resonate with Vygotskyan tenets, according to which learning does not stem from the teachers' knowledge but from the learning activities through which the teacher engages the pupils. Hence, the activity appears as a sort of interface between teaching and learning, consisting of a process of "performance before competence" (Cazden, 1997, 309), in which "social relations are internalized with other-regulation, becoming self-regulation" (Miller, 2011, 228). Learning is the result of the internalization of semiotic tools appropriate to self-regulation.

From this perspective, such semiotic tools can, in grammar instruction, be located within sentence or textual levels: we can use graphics to indicate the link between elements so that we can better understand the notion of "agreement" and solve normative requirements (see Nadeau & Fisher, 2011, about silent agreements in French); and we can also use graphics to represent the lexical transformations while the text unfolds, so that we can better understand how to avoid losing the referent in the thematic progression (see Zayas, 1994). Thus, "since learning is mediated by tools, the kind of thought made possible by the learning process is shaped by the kind of tools available" (French, 2010, 209). This suggests that the teacher needs to administer the most adequate tools with regard to the learning objectives.

Nevertheless, according to Vygotsky (1962) the most important semiotic tool for self-regulation is language itself, in the form of social interaction. Miller (2011) emphasizes that the crux of the matter of language as a tool for self-regulation is social activity. It originates in interaction with others but "*culminates* in an inner dialogue" (197, italics in original). Ultimately, "the social other is not out there but is part of the *social interaction with oneself*" (197, italics in original). From this perspective, grammar instruction should aspire to integrate interaction in its methodology. Therefore, as Camps (2000) asserts, we cannot possibly consider that "methodological options are a cosmetic and external issue that only affects the way we present the content" (116).

With regard to the teaching content, various authors also highlight the difficulty of creating a corpus of grammar notions and procedures for schools, due to a context of rapid evolution and expansion of linguistic studies and the lack of development of some of the most recent contributions (Camps, Guasch, & Ruiz-Bikandi, 2010; González-Nieto, 2013). Castellà (1994) maintained that such a corpus or "pedagogic grammar" should be procedure-oriented and eclectic, the latter implying the tendency to take "a theoretical base and enrich it with ideas and contributions from other theories" (Cuenca, 1994, 30). In this respect, Camps (1986) warned against adopting a top-down and simplified version of a whole model (cf. Desclot, 1977, for an adaptation for Subject Catalan of a standard Chomskyan model). This resonates with the need for setting up processes of transposition (see Bronckart & Plazaola, 2000), i.e. of selection, transformation, and eventual reconfiguration of scientific contents in order to elaborate school contents, not in a top-down fashion but in a bottom-up trajectory according to school needs.

Studies about transposition in textbooks reveal a reification of the gap between grammar and discourse (Milian, 2000), the enduring presence of formal grammar notions (Coronas, 2014), the unnecessary proliferation of metalanguage (Macià & Solà, 2000), and the mismatch of grammar terms due to different linguistic traditions in Catalan and Spanish (Brucart & Rigau, 1997), which should make us cautious when trying to introduce new terms. Torralba (2014), focusing on verb tenses in primary schools, and Martí (2015), concerned with basic syntactic notions, reach similar conclusions.

In sum, the ideas examined so far seem to be underpinned by questions such as the following (see Fontich, 2013): "What does 'knowing a language' mean? Does it mean 'knowing how to use that language'? Or does it *also* mean 'knowing how to turn it into an object to reflect upon at certain moments (e.g., in repairing writing errors, in using a dictionary)'?" We have so far seen some ideas that will be at the core of a research trajectory: the need to include as a focus of attention both sentence and text level issues; the need to explore grammar not only embedded in writing but as a system in itself, temporarily detached from language use; and the need to consider methodology as important as grammar content itself.

4. A RESEARCH TRAJECTORY ON GRAMMAR LEARNING AND INSTRUCTION: EMPIRICAL STUDIES ON METALINGUISTIC ACTIVITY

In recent years, contributions to grammar instruction made by researchers and practitioners in Spain (in Barcelona, Valencia, the Basque Country, and Navarra) have brought new insights into research on grammar instruction. These contributions have been led by the *Grup de Recerca sobre Ensenyament i Aprenentatge de Llengües* (GREAL, Research Group on Teaching and Learning Languages) at the Autonomous University of Barcelona, and converge around the following five objectives: (1) describe the learning process in writing; (2) explore students' grammar

concepts; (3) develop a model for grammar instruction; (4) scrutinize the process of grammar learning within such a model; and (5) analyze the interplay between teachers' concepts and writing-grammar instruction.

Figure 2 indicates the chronological emergence in recent years of objectives (1) to (5), which have oriented a number of studies related either to writing or to grammar, and which have their connecting link in the fundamental concept of metalinguistic activity. Thus, these objectives respond to a final and general goal, that of elaborating a theoretical frame that accounts for metalinguistic activity as a social and cognitive activity underpinning the learning process of writing and grammar.

Figure2: Research trajectory of GREAL group (adapted from Camps & Fontich, in preparation)
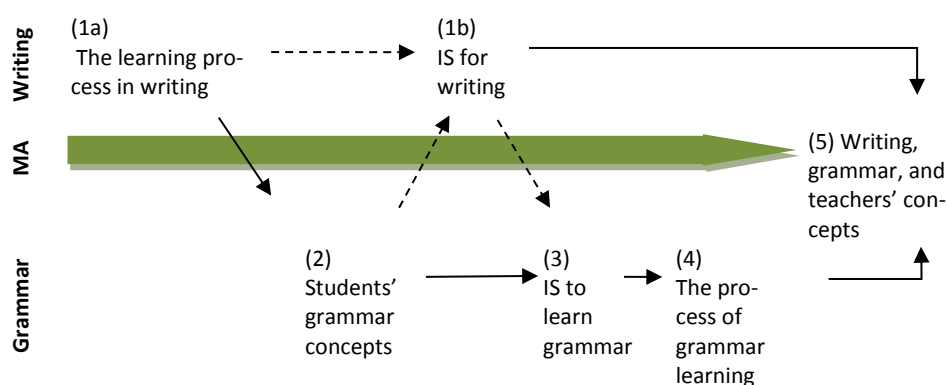
Note. IS: Instructional Sequences; MA: Metalinguistic Activity.

In the following paragraphs we present some empirical studies conducted within the research trajectory presented in Figure 2. Some of these explore pupils' or teachers' reflections outside the classroom and others within the classroom. Among the latter, some describe how grammar learning occurs within regular tasks, while others explore the process of grammar learning within specific instructional sequences.

These studies adopt the tenets of case study as an adequate frame for exploring the meaning of complex social settings, such as classroom culture, through a number of qualitative procedures (e.g., classroom observation, semi-structured interviews, tasks of identification and defining in small group, etc.). Case studies enable the adoption of an interpretative epistemology, in which reality is a process constructed by individuals interacting with their social worlds, rather than an objective phenomenon waiting to be discovered, observed, and measured as in quantitative research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). This resonates with Geertz's (2000, 5) perspec-

tive on culture as a "web of significance", for which an experimental method in search of law is not needed but rather "an interpretative one in search of meaning".

Additionally, these studies assume that case studies help in exploring the interplay of micro levels (e.g., what students and teachers do in a classroom) and macro levels (e.g., what an institution, including the teacher through her scheme of work, sets up), which, according to van Lier (2004), are tightly interwoven and yet autonomous levels. Van Lier also maintains that while the micro-level is "facilitated by the larger structures within which it unfolds" (148), it can be neither predicted nor controlled by them: i.e., while the pedagogical game has its rules and constraints it has in addition "its unpredictable and variable aspects" (149), within which the learning opportunities emerge.

This resonates with a phenomenon labeled the "ratchet effect", according to which each generation inherits the cultural capital of previous generations and at the same time transforms it according to the challenges of new situations and the idiosyncrasies of the new learners (Tomasello, 2000). In this respect, case study is considered an adequate tool with which to explore the emerging processes of grammar learning, since it allows for unpacking the obstacles that learners may encounter as well as for making eventual adjustments in the content and the teaching, which are meant to be put anew under scrutiny in the form of analysis of new instances of metalinguistic activity.

(1a) Describe the learning process in writing

The various studies exploring the process of writing in different discursive genres have confirmed that the process of collaborative writing triggers a highly dynamic metalinguistic activity. In all cases the writing is carried out in groups of three or four students, and is audio-taped and observed by the research team. The researchers are interested in describing the content of the students' metalinguistic activity, and the extent to which this activity can be related to the (real or simulated) communicative situation which was thought to favor attention to discursive features. The outcomes indicate that metalinguistic activity underpins discourse-elaboration, as related to grammar choices according to rhetorical constraints (e.g., the need to fine-tune ideas).

Some of these studies are explicitly framed within instructional sequences in which a number of measures have been taken: drawing on pupils' motivation for writing; setting up a clear goal; raising awareness of the discursive parameters; introducing grammar activities temporarily detached from the writing process to scaffold pupils' attention to linguistic choices in writing, etc. This is the case for Camps et al. (2000), which analyses the collaborative talk of secondary students (12- to 15-year-olds) engaged in writing argumentative texts in the Subject Catalan in three schools. Some students focus on the topic of discrimination against women and have to reply with a real letter to a controversial "Letter to the Editor" pub-

lished in a well-known newspaper, or to write a text to be published in a magazine for young readers. Other students, after studying the functioning of advertising agencies, are meant to act as (fictitious) advertising agents and to write argumentative texts supporting their campaign.

Contrariwise, other studies do not pursue any kind of modification of the regular classroom practice through the implementation of an instructional sequence. This is the case of Milian (2005a and 2005b), based in two late primary school classrooms (11- and 12-year-old students) and aimed at exploring the process of writing in regular activities about language and natural science underpinned by writing-across-the-curriculum assumptions. This study focuses on the writing of a scientific report on kaleidoscopes addressed to younger pupils in the school.

Initially inspired by the seminal works on the process of writing with regard to the interplay among semantic units, lexical units, discursive parameters, and correction (e.g., Matsuhashi, 1981; Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1987; Cosnier, 1988; Kerbrat-Orecchioni, 1998, etc.), these studies develop the theoretical-methodological concept of "attempted text". Attempted texts emerge within the discussion in which pupils engage and in which attention is focused simultaneously on the content and on the linguistic forms to shape this content. These linguistic forms are an object of a negotiation process within which the suggestions for writing the text (i.e., the attempted texts) have two characteristics: they are oral, but also have the features of written texts (complex syntax, high degree of formality, etc.).

Thus, "attempted texts" are somehow "written texts still in the air" and are therefore an object of a dynamic process of observation and reformulation before eventually becoming the written text. "Reformulation" refers to the modifications of the text during the writing process, with the meaning of ''transforming the text being built while being built'' (Camps et al, 1997, 20). According to Milian (2005a), while reformulation in a textual-analysis perspective is a phenomenon that contributes to semantic cohesion, a different perspective on reformulating emerges when the whole process of dynamic discourse-building is considered. This stresses "the importance of factors contributing to discourse reformulation by discourse participants in the process of uttering their own words" (337). Discourse production ceases to be an individual activity and becomes "dependent upon the reactions of discourse partners in a 'continuous rebuilding' to fit both the speaker's intentions and the listener's expectations and the social context of the interaction" (337). This means that attempted texts undergo a constant and dynamic process of reformulation.

Camps, Guasch, Milian, & Ribas (2007) set up a number of features of the emergence of attempted texts in the process of reformulation. First, it is anticipated by expressions such as "we could say", "let's put", etc. and is conveyed in a slower utterance that has another intonation: a higher pitch and a more regular tone, sometimes with a descendent code, although more often with an abrupt ending. Secondly, it coincides with a change in the register: while utterances referring to planning are somehow addressed to the participants in the collective writing,

attempted texts are addressed to an absent addressee and consequently have a more impersonal tone, a more elaborated syntax, and a more precise lexical choice. And last, in bilingual contexts the language in which attempted texts are uttered may not coincide with the language of participants.

Reformulation manifests itself in different degrees of explicitness. Camps et al. (2000) show that there might be a simple reformulation of the attempted text with no explicit metalinguistic reasoning (attempted texts in bold): "218 X -**this** advert which we are presenting **to**... → 219 O: **The** advert we are presenting **in**...". Sometimes there seems to be a certain degree of consciousness of the changes operated: "457 O: **to the people mentioned above as smoking people**... I don't know. What do you think? → 458 X: **Smoking people**, no, **to the smokers**. I mean, **to the people**, no, **to the smokers**". Occasionally, some reflections are supported by specific and appropriate metalanguage (in italics): "383 X: because the price is fairly **high** → 384 O: Let's say it with *academic words*, or... **elevated** or...".

These works produce empirical evidence about the emergence of metalinguistic activity in the context of writing. Camps et al. (2000) maintain that the pupils with more ability in operating changes on a procedural level are those who are also more able to verbalize these changes. According to these authors, this suggests a connection between procedural and verbalized levels of metalinguistic activity, even though it has not proved possible to establish a clear causality between them. In any case, these studies serve as a departure point for developing a model of instructional sequence for writing that allows for further research on metalinguistic activity.

(1b) Develop instructional sequences for writing

The model of instructional sequence for writing pursues the acquisition of linguistic and discursive knowledge within a frame that encourages collaborative working, makes the teaching objectives explicit, involves students in real communicative tasks, and reflects upon language in a process that integrates "doing" and "learning-by-doing". The different actions carried out along the sequence become meaningful with regard to the initial objectives raised by the teacher and shared among the participants. Going well beyond isolated tasks, the model seeks to establish an overarching learning activity which is meaningful for students in presenting the tasks tied to communicative and learning objectives. Interestingly, this frame allows for research into the learning processes.

The model of instructional sequences for writing integrates two kinds of activities: an activity involving text production with its own communicative and discursive objectives; and an activity involving learning specific content referred to in the discursive genre as the object of teaching and learning. The meaning given by Leontiev (1978) to the concept of activity as an *intentional human action* is adopted. It has roots in the following approaches:

- Project work, which emerged in the early twentieth century within the pedagogical renewal movement known as the New School. The main interest of project work is the motivation of the learner to become involved in the proposal as well as the central attention to the learning processes, referring to which Dewey (1980) claims that "the quality of mental process, not the production of correct answers, is the measure of educative growth" (183);
- Mediation of social interaction, together with the situated uses of language (discursive genres), as a guide to the actions undertaken by participants in the project. This conception of knowledge building is underpinned by the parameters of sociocultural theory (Vygotsky, 1962; Bakhtin, 1986; Miller, 2011);
- Cognitive psychology postulating metalinguistic activity and the role played by social interaction in triggering this activity (Karmiloff-Smith, 1992; Gombert, 1992), as well as cognitive and socio-cognitive processes in writing (Flower & Hayes, 1989; Bereiter & Sacardamalia, 1987; Nystrand, 1986; Prior, 2006);
- Participant implication in the intentional actions related to the goals and the outcomes of the activity, highlighted by activity theory (Leontiev, 1978; Engeström, 1987);
- Contributions from language sciences, further widening the object of study to language use beyond a sole description of the system of language, adopting sociocultural approaches to the concept of language itself, as well as to the concept of grammar (see Fontich, 2016, for a synthesis).

Subsequent studies that scrutinize the learning processes within instructional sequences convey empirical evidence about the dynamism of metalinguistic activity and consider it beneficial for improving writing. This is the case with Rodríguez-Gonzalo (2014 and 2015) and Abad (2015) in the Subject Spanish at late secondary level, who respectively describe the writing of a piece of autobiographical text by a group of 15- and 16-year-old students, and the writing of critical reviews by 14- and 15-year-old students.

Nonetheless, a remarkable finding, shared in differing degrees by all of them, has been the low capacity that students show for explicitly exploring grammar issues after years of grammar instruction. This sparks off an interest for exploring students' grammar concepts.

(2) Explore students' grammar concepts

Research on a number of students' grammar concepts (e.g., subject, pronoun, adverb, noun, lexical category, syntactic function, tense, word, etc.) conducted over a span of a decade in Spain (see Fontich, 2010, for a synthesis) shows how grammar knowledge stems from a low-structured alluvial-like process of sedimentation. This results in poorly-articulated knowledge which mixes pragmatic-based intuitions and memorized morphosyntax-based definitions. Likewise, it has also been observed that students have difficulty in retrieving grammar concepts in situations other than the ones in which these concepts were learned. These results are con-

sistent with those of studies conducted in other contexts (such as England or Canada; see Guasch, 2013, for a synthesis).

The objective of these studies (such as Camps, Ribas, Pérez, Milian, & Castelló, 2001, on the personal pronoun; Notario, 2001, on the concept of "subject"; or Casas, 2014, on the concept of present tense) is not to unpack the eventual effects of school instruction. Rather, it is to inquire into how pupils' concepts are, at a given moment, on the assumption that these concepts affect subsequent processes of teaching and learning. This means that they are exploratory in nature.

They also integrate multiple methodological procedures: open production (e.g., writing the continuation of a story, defining a list of items), conditioned production (e.g., combining a list of sentences, completing a list of unfinished definitions), identification (e.g., highlighting specific elements in a text), analysis (e.g., stating a list of features of specific elements in a text), and semi-structured interviews based on the interview-about-instances technique. Interviews are deemed the central procedure, since they allow for reaching a deep understanding of pupils' capacities for reflection and the extent to which this reflection is conveyed using common or scientific language.

These studies suggest that there are three main kinds of obstacles in the construction of grammar knowledge (see Camps, 2014).

- *Obstacles related to content*

These obstacles refer to the complexity of "structure of knowledge" itself (i.e., its epistemology) (see Barth, 1987), and in this respect, Camps et al. (2001) explore the plurifunctionality of linguistic forms and highlight the learning difficulty that it entails. Specifically, they show the complex nature of the concept "personal pronoun", which can be explored from three different and complementary perspectives: enunciative, textual, and syntactic (Table 1).

Camps and her colleagues developed their exploratory study in relation to the activities of definition and identification, with two groups of secondary students (13- and 14-year-olds) in the Subject Catalan who had not yet studied the concept of "pronoun" in their regular lessons. First, pupils had to complete a task of definition that involved completing three sentences: "A feature of pronouns is...", "The difference between a pronoun and an article is...", and "We need pronouns for...". Results showed an overwhelming majority of answers that established a connection with the notions of "substitution" or "reference". A task of identification of pronouns within a text was then provided, in which some pupils tended to highlight the words that immediately preceded the conjugated verbs. This indicated that some pupils relied on a linear criterion, according to which any element immediately before the verb was a (personal) pronoun. These first results suggested a mismatch between declarative and procedural knowledge (see Fontich, 2016).

Table 1.Plurifunctionality of the category "personal pronoun" (adapted from Camps et al., 2001)

Perspective	Functions	Links with other lexical categories
Enunciative	Deictic function in relation with the participants in the discourse	Demonstratives, time and place adverbs
Textual	Function of (anaphoric, cataphoric) cohesion	Other pronouns, articles, lexical substitutes (hypernym, hyponym), elision...
Syntactic	Substitution within the frame of the sentence	Noun Phrase, sentences, adverbs, adjectives...

Nonetheless, analysis of the interviews revealed that while some of the pupils relied quite heavily on some of the previous definitions of pronoun based on the ideas of substitution and reference, these ideas often appeared to be misleading. For instance, some considered adjectives as pronouns because they could *refer to* how a person was, which revealed the difficulty of separating language from reality or, following Garton and Pratt's (1989) metaphor, the difficulty in focusing alternatively on the glass in the window (i.e., the language system) and the landscape beyond the window (i.e., the reality to which the language refers).

Also, a pronoun "jo" (nominative first-person pronoun in Catalan) was not highlighted by a pupil because this word could not possibly *substitute* for a noun, since any noun replacing it would immediately convert the noun-verb first-person agreement into a third-person agreement. While this pupil was a low achiever, s/he seemed able intuitively to grasp the deictic nature of first-person pronouns. However, s/he remained attached to the idea of "substitution" as a main feature of pronouns, thereby suggesting the endurance of simplified school definitions. Last, an important number of pupils highlighted the verbs of the text since these allowed them not to *refer to* the (personal) pronoun (i.e., the subject) and therefore were seen as *substitutes* for the noun. These pupils seemed to conflate the notion of "substitution" and a feature of some pro-drop languages (such as Catalan and Spanish) in which the pronoun, acting as a subject, is only uttered in such cases as misunderstanding or emphasis.

While some point out the need to connect grammar concepts traditionally approached in isolation (see Zayas & Rodríguez-Gonzalo 1992, and Coronas, 2014, in Section 3 above), these results suggest the importance of also helping the pupils to distinguish among concepts through their own specific properties.

- *Obstacles related to the teaching processes (i.e., methodological obstacles)*

A second obstacle refers to the teaching methodology which, in grammar instruction, seems to be based on providing ready-made definitions with scarce inductively-guided processes of reflection. Notario (2001), focusing on the morphosyntactic

concept of "subject", shows the extent to which a methodology based on memorizing simple definitions can become a barrier. The study (with 15- and 16-year-old secondary school pupils) had two objectives: to explore the extent to which students in their last year of secondary school could define the concept of "subject"; and to explore how this declarative knowledge was put into practice. After a number of tasks of definition and identification, a semi-structured interview was set up.

The analysis showed that definitions based on morphosyntactic features (e.g., agreement between a Noun Phrase and a conjugated verb) were scarce and that the vast majority of the pupils described the subject from a unique semantic perspective as "the doer of the action". Nonetheless, when identifying the subject in a sentence, the perspective taken was mainly pragmatic (conflating subject and topic) and linear (when as a general rule the subject is the first element in a sentence).

Again, this suggests a gap between declarative and procedural knowledge. Notario (2001) wonders whether this gap might be fostered by the simplicity of grammar content initially provided. In her view, initial grammar content (conveyed in examples and definitions) is often based solely on prototypical characteristics of a given grammar content (e.g., verbs of action; the subject of a verb refers to the "doer" of the action; the subject appears at the beginning of the sentence, etc.). She maintains that content needs gradually to be made more complex and approached in a reasoned way—otherwise it can become an actual barrier for learning.

This author also speaks of "fossilization" and Gonzalvo and Camps (2003) confirm that this kind of knowledge does not evolve during years of school. Thus, it not only reifies the declarative-procedural gap but also fosters the lack of transference of grammar concepts into reflection on language use. These studies maintain that a methodology based on activities that use experimentation and reasoning might well provide increasingly more articulate knowledge, beyond formulaic and excessive simple definitions (see also Milian, 2010; Coronas, 2014; Torralba, 2014; Martí, 2015).

- *Obstacles related to the ways of reasoning that are accessible to students*

Camps (2014) maintains that the teaching of grammar strives to induce students to go beyond the spontaneous concepts inherent in language use and to gain the ability to take language as an object of observation and analysis through scientific concepts. She considers that the process of abstraction involved is one of the most important obstacles to grammar learning. One of the many forms in which such an obstacle emerges is the tendency to overlap language and reality, thus effectively showing incapacity to overcome what Barth (1987) labels a "level-zero" of abstraction.

Camps et al. (2001) consider that for pupils "substitution" as a feature of pronouns has the meaning of "being in the place of" some character in a narration and even of a real person, and suggest that pupils might assign to pronouns the capaci-

ty to represent an extralinguistic rather than a linguistic entity. This is confirmed by the difficulties that pupils have in identifying non-human referents, such as prepositional phrases or subordinate sentences; in this respect, a pupil considers "girl" a pronoun since it is in the place of the name of any girl.

Casas (2014) also explores the recognition of the retrospective meaning of the present tense among third and sixth graders (8- to 9- and 11- to 12-year-old pupils respectively). She confronts pupils with non-canonical usages of this verb tense (e.g., "In 1969, humankind reaches the Moon") and explores how the pairs recognise and justify the mismatch between the time of the situation and the time of the utterance. The former refers to the time of the events narrated, in the past, anchored by the temporal codifiers; the latter refers to the time when the events are narrated, which is expressed in the present tense. While all the third graders believe that the verb is in the past (i.e., they do not perceive that the verb is morphologically in the present form), some of the sixth graders stumble upon the dilemma between the information conveyed in the verb morphology and the temporal modifiers that anchor the sentences in the past. These outcomes lead us to think that in the early years, grammar notions will only become meaningful when put in relation to each other and to the language in use.

An important controversy in language education is whether or not grammar instruction has a positive impact on improving students' texts (see Andrews 2010). However, a general conclusion of the studies presented above is that grammar instruction does not even guarantee grammar learning. This suggests the need for a research trend devoted to designing a model for teaching grammar, and to exploring how this could be addressed in the classroom.

(3) Develop a model for grammar instruction

A model for grammar instruction is based on project work, the mediation of social interaction, and cognitive studies on metalinguistic activity, and is directly inspired by its counterpart for writing (see above in this section "(1b) Develop instructional sequences for writing"). The teacher organizes cycles of activities aimed at a twofold objective: a learning objective (e.g., to reach a deeper knowledge on connectives in argumentation, to further understand the concept of transitivity, to explore the extent to which certain forms are declining in speakers' informal uses, etc.), and a "doing" objective (e.g., to elaborate pedagogic material about connectives or transitivity, to organize a public conference on language variation, etc.).

In this respect, such a model for grammar instruction lays out an initial phase devoted explicitly to setting up objectives and differing possibilities for achieving them; followed by a second phase of observation and manipulation tasks; and a third phase of metacognitive discussion through which material output is produced (e.g., a report, pedagogic material, an oral presentation, a video, etc.).

In addition, the instructional mode for grammar instruction is further underpinned by a number of assumptions (Milian, 2014), three of which are presented

here. The first is that grammar constitutes an organic unit of morphosyntax, semantics, and pragmatics (van Lier, 2004), which means that the three layers are connected among them: e.g., certain *pragmatic* needs may lead us to non-prototypical *meanings*, with *morphosyntactic* consequences. Thus, the sentence "Al final del partido llovieron todo tipo de objetos sobre el árbitro" (*At the end of the match, all kind of objects rained over the referee*) (see Fontich, 2013) responds to a will to conceal the agent of the action, for which the impersonal verb in Spanish "llover" (*to rain)* is conjugated in the third person plural (while a prototypical use only admits the third person singular) and is used as a synonym of "lanzar" (*to throw).*

The second assumption is that pupils ought to be engaged in reflective activities of observation and manipulation of linguistic data within inductive and interactive settings, guided by the teacher. These (metalinguistic) activities are conceived as the permanent source of grammar knowledge.

Finally, a third assumption is that grammar knowledge equals a wide plethora of concepts and procedures, resulting from operations embedded within a three-fold route: attention to language use, to the grammar system, and to inter-intra-linguistic variation. In the following paragraphs examples of instructional sequences within each of these three routes are provided.

- *Language use*

Rodríguez-Gonzalo's (2015) instructional sequence (with secondary 15- and 16-year-old pupils) aims at helping the students to expand their repertoire of past-tense uses and to move from an oral system (which is mainly restricted to *perfecto simple* and *imperfect*—both similar to past simple but with opposite mood values: finished and unfinished respectively), to a formal written system (which combines absolute and relative forms including *pluscuamperfecto*—similar to past perfect, conditional expressing future tense in the past, etc.), as exemplified in the following sentence (verb tenses in bold): "**Fui** al cine el domingo; **había quedado** con Luis y Alfredo en el parque como **hacía** siempre; **llovía;** nos **reuniríamos** después de la película" (*I **went** to the cinema on Sunday; I **had agreed to meet** Luis and Alfredo in the park, as I always **used to do**; it **was raining;** we **would meet** after the film)* (see Table 2).

They are meant to write an autobiographical piece of text about a summer vacation while also elaborating a number of grammar (pedagogical) materials about the different values of the past tenses in the so-called narrated world. In addition, the writing task is split in three segments: planning, peer-revision, and revision of one's text.

Table 2. Absolute verb form and relative verb forms in the narrated world (Rodríguez-Gonzalo 2015)

Absolute verb form	Relative verb forms		Value	Meaning
FUI al cine el domingo (*I **WENT** to the cinema on Sunday*) (*something **HAPPENED**, simple past*)	**HABÍA QUEDADO** con Luis y Alfredo en el parque (*I **HAD AGREED TO MEET** Luis and Alfredo in the park*)	*Pretérito pluscuamperfecto*	Anteriority	Something **HAD HAPPENED** before
	LLOVÍA (***IT WAS RAINING***)	*Pretérito imperfecto*	Simultaneity	Something **USED TO HAPPEN / WAS HAPPENING** at that time
	como **HACÍA** siempre (*as I always **USED TO DO***)			Something always **WAS / HAPPENED** like that
	Nos **REUNIRÍAMOS** después de la película (*we **WOULD MEET** after the film*)	*Condicional simple*	Posteriority	Something **WOULD HAPPEN** afterward

- *Concepts of the grammar system*

Fontich (2014a, 2014b, and 2014c) aims at exploring a number of sentence-level concepts and procedures (transitivity, predicate, verb semantic profile, left-dislocation, complementary distribution, etc.) that are traditionally approached within pedagogic materials from a formal viewpoint and rote learning of prototypical definitions (see Coronas, 2014; Méndez-Navarro, 2012). A semantic-pragmatic layout is now also taken into account, as well as classroom interaction.

Some of the tasks of the instructional sequences (with secondary school pupils aged from 13 to 16) are based on the operation of identifying elements within a sentence, something deemed of the utmost importance in text revision processes. This operation is approached in the activity of verb classification according to verb complements; it also inspires the elaboration of pedagogic material as well as an oral exposition with real addressees (e.g., undergraduate students in a Faculty of Education).

- *Inter-intra-linguistic variation*

Camps & Fontich (2006) designed a sequence in an early secondary school setting (pupils aged 12 and 13 years) in which the pupils are engaged in exploring a concept that receives little consideration in grammar instruction: linguistic change. The pupils are expected to act as real researchers, exploring unanswered questions for

which novel research procedures have to be designed. Adopting scientific reduc-tionism they focus on a single pronoun, deemed by some studies as recessive in oral Catalan: "hi" (which has sometimes a locative meaning similar to the French "y", although it can also be a dative pronoun, a lexical source pronoun, etc.). Or-ganised in large and small group discussions, pupils try to work out the best proce-dures for disentangling whether speakers of this language use this pronoun. Taking into account the observer paradox, they design a survey with a number of (indirect) questions and tasks (e.g., the translating of sentences from Spanish—in which the target pronoun does not exist—into Catalan). The whole experience (from the re-search question to the design of the study and the research outcomes) is presented to younger pupils in the school and to a group of teachers.

Similarly, Guasch, Gràcia, & Carrasco (2006) (see also Guasch, 2013, and Milian & Camps, 2006) design an instructional sequence with secondary school pupils (aged 13 and 14) with the objective of exploring the different linguistic strategies of three languages (Catalan, Spanish, and English) when setting up "action" and "background" in narrative. Texts are manipulated so that all past tense is expressed in a single form in each version (e.g., all tenses in past perfect), in order to turn the expression of the past into an element to reflect upon. Fostering small group dis-cussions, the sequence aims at raising pupils' awareness of the lack of isomorphism among languages.

Such a model of grammar instruction opens up the possibility of exploring com-plex aspects in detail during the process of grammar learning in the classroom (Mil-ian, 2014).

(4) Scrutinize the process of grammar learning

Data generated within the interventions (e.g., dialogues in small groups) constitute the focus of subsequent studies, oriented towards a better understanding of the learning and teaching processes triggered by the intervention itself. In Spain, while the learning process within the classroom has long been a focus of attention (see Coll, 2008, and Castro, Prat, & Gorgorió, 2016), in the case of grammar, research of this kind is underexplored. The results of these studies may eventually, in a bot-tom-up manner, make us alter some aspects of the model or the specific instruc-tional sequence, which will give way to other interventions intended to be put un-der renewed scrutiny (see Milian, 2014). Thus, a recursive process is presented in which theory and practice appear not as autonomous entities but as interwoven moments of dialectic process of "praxis" (in Vygotskyan terms; see Lantolf & Poehner, 2014).

This perspective has implications with regard to how educational research is conceived. It challenges the distribution of work in which academics are meant to create pedagogic knowledge and practitioners are meant (uncritically) to bring this knowledge into the classroom, and instead defends the synergy between academ-ics and practitioners (Egan, 2009), on the assumption that they all stand as re-

searchers within communities of practice (Pea, 1993), albeit located in different points within a continuum (Schön, 1983; Pollard, 2008). At one end there would be an action-research process that would be contingent upon pupils' feedback within a classroom; and at the other, a research oriented towards conceptual change within specific discourse communities, based on a well-articulated data collection and a thorough analysis and interpretation of these data underpinned by well established theories (Griffiths & Tann, 1992).

- *Learning grammar in the process of writing*

With regard to the writing-grammar interplay, Rodríguez-Gonzalo (2015) shows the limitations of identification and definition tasks: while they are successfully completed, students seem incapable of relying on this knowledge in the task of writing. The study contrasts the dialogues collected in three different moments within the writing process: first draft, peer-revision, and revision of one's own text. In the first draft the majority of the students (60%) do not incorporate any past tense other than the *perfecto simple* (similar to past simple) and the *pluscuamperfecto* (similar to past perfect).

Contrariwise, in the final revision of one's text this figure is inverted and reaches 61%, suggesting that peer-revision provides an adequate learning context to improve an individual's learning. Interestingly, in spite of their final improvement, peer revision reveals that students have a low capacity in improving their peers' texts. While they identify those parts of the text in which new tenses could be introduced, they feel incapable of taking actions that could lead to re-organizing somebody else's text.

In conclusion, the relationship between the conceptualisation of past tense verb forms (finished-unfinished mood, anteriority-simultaneity-posteriority, relative-absolute forms, etc.) and the reflective use of them (in writing) is not direct, nor does it happen spontaneously as shown by the results on the use of the verb tenses when planning and writing the first draft of a text. To encourage the transfer of theoretical knowledge to reflective knowledge, instructional situations are needed in which the teacher shares control with the students, such as writing in the classroom or peer revision of texts following instructions.

- *Learning grammar focusing on the concepts of the grammar system*

Fontich (2014b) shows some of the problems of identifying elements within a sentence, and the fact that semantic-pragmatic knowledge might underpin pupils' approach to formal features. The sentence that is the target of reflection is *"Dalí va pintar aquell retrat de Lincoln"* *(Dalí painted that portrait of Lincoln)* and is what we could call a prototypical sentence with the semantic structure "someone does something" (someone *paints* a portrait), with two arguments: the agent, repre-

sented by the subject (Dalí), and the theme, represented by the direct object (that portrait of Lincoln).

Nonetheless, this simplicity is only superficial. One complex aspect of this sentence is that the noun at the core of the direct object (portrait) is an eventive noun. This kind of noun behaves similarly to the majority of verbs; unlike a noun like "table", "portrait" also has a semantic structure. This means that there is a relationship between "portrait of Lincoln" and "to portray Lincoln": in both, what is portrayed is the complement, the complement of the noun "portrait" in the former and the direct object of the verb "to portray/paint a portrait" in the other. This is a sentence in which the morphosyntactic and semantic perspectives seem to overlap.

We can see that the students in this group (see Dialogue 1) do not get involved in a thoughtful, well-argued discussion. This is an exchange with a strong disputative component, using Mercer's terms (2000). However, from a grammatical standpoint, it is an interesting dialogue.

Dialogue 1. Eventive nouns and verb complements

1.   Sònia: Dalí painted this portrait of Lincoln when he was young | so
2.   Joana: of Lincoln is IO [indirect object] || it's IO
3.   Sònia: of DO [direct object]
4.   Joana: it's IO! | of whom! <4>
5.   Sònia: it's DO!
6.   Jordi: it's DO | Joana
7.   Joana: (p) ah | right

The students show clear disagreement about the phrase "of Lincoln". What might explain this confusion is the fact that "portrait" is an eventive noun (see above). Also, we might think that the reason why they attach such importance to "retrat/retratar" (*portrait/to portray)* instead of "pintar" (*to paint)* might be the possible comparison between "pintar un retrat" (*to paint a portrait)* and "fer un retrat" (*to make a portrait).* In the latter, we have a light verb: "fer" (*to make).* Light verbs are characterized by having no semantic structure; in this sense, they are the opposite of eventive nouns. We could interpret here that the students are not "observing" the structure "pintar un retrat" (*to paint a portrait)* but the paraphrase "fer un retrat" (*to make a portrait)*, which is semantically equivalent to "retratar" (*to portray).*This suggests that behind pupils reflections there might always be "a part of the truth"; thus we ought necessarily to overcome first impressions that misguidedly let us think they are completely disoriented.

- *Learning grammar reflecting on inter-intra-linguistic variation*

Both Camps and Fontich (2006) and Guasch (2013) indicate the difficulties involved in creating significant exchanges in dialogues between pupils and the teacher. Assuming the inter-linguistic contrast can benefit from small group interaction, pupils

are set up in small groups while the teacher walks around and occasionally joins ongoing discussions: in spite of her willingness to scaffold pupils' reflections, her brief interventions are intrusive and disruptive and prevent them from collaboratively creating coherent arguments. As a result teacher's and pupils' interventions are closer to parallel monologues than to dialogic exchanges.
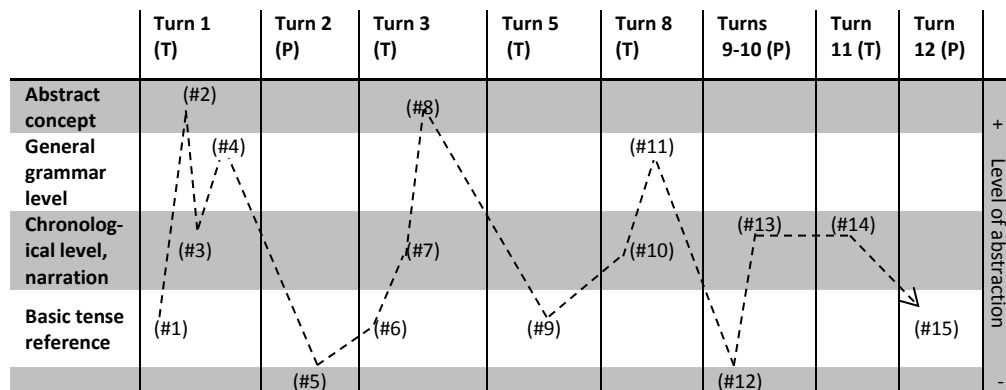
Furthermore, as Milian and Camps (2006) show, no matter what language is explored, pupils experience some difficulty in overcoming basic levels of abstraction when trying to work out which elements convey the meaning of tense in a narrative (in bold in Dialogue 2):

Dialogue 2. Verb tense in narration

1.   Teacher: look in the text for any word or expression that indicates **when things happen (#1)**, that is, which express **temporality (#2)**; look at the tenses ['tiempo' in Spanish, which also refer to 'time'], **they indicate the tense ['tiempo'] (#3)**. What could we say **that indicates** tense **['tiempo'] (#4)**
2.   Pupil 1: **now (#5)**?
3.   Teacher: **now,** what else?, which express **now, before, tomorrow, past (#6)**, right?, there are some kinds of word that **indicate present, past, future (#7)**, right?, do you understand the concept of **temporality (#8)**?
4.   Pupil 2: yes
5.   Teacher: ok, so your composition, start reading it and underline all those words that you feel express… that give the idea of **when the events occur (#9)**
6.   Pupil 2: ok
7.   Pupil 3: let's see, the words that…
8.   Teacher: that express **when (#10)**, that give **an idea of tense** ['tiempo' in Spanish, see turn 1] **(#11)**
9.   Pupil 2: tense, bloody hell, like **years, years (#12)**
10. Pupil 1: like how is it, no, **how, why (#13)**
11. Teacher: not how, nor what, nor what for, that is, the question is **when (#14)**
12. Pupil 1: **at the beginning, years ago (#15)** in the city of New York

As Figure 3 shows, the terms being used are located in different levels of abstraction, although not in an increasing progression (i.e., according to the logics of content) but drawing on a great dynamism which reflects students' difficulties and the teacher's attempts to help. Figure 3 shows that students do not overcome low levels of abstraction (e.g., turns 2, 9-10, and 10) and that the teacher cannot avoid misunderstandings. The authors also notice that while the teacher's attitude invites pupils to take part in an open discussion, this ends up being a far too demanding and irritating task for the pupils, who seem to expect clear-cut information from the teacher.

Figure 3. Dynamism of the abstraction process within interaction (adapted from Milian & Camps 2006)

	Turn 1 (T)	Turn 2 (P)	Turn 3 (T)	Turn 5 (T)	Turn 8 (T)	Turns 9-10 (P)	Turn 11 (T)	Turn 12 (P)	
Abstract concept	(#2)		(#8)						+
General grammar level	(#4)				(#11)				Level of abstraction
Chronological level, narration	(#3)		(#7)		(#10)	(#13)	(#14)		
Basic tense reference	(#1)		(#6)	(#9)				(#15)	
		(#5)				(#12)			-

Note. T—teacher; P—pupils.

(5) Analyze the interplay between teachers' concepts and writing-grammar instruction

A number of studies focused on teachers' conceptual thinking in grammar instruction have been conducted. They expose the results of a survey of 94 primary and secondary school teachers in the area of Barcelona as well as interviews with a reduced number of them (Bastons, Comajoan, Guasch, & Ribas, in press; Fontich & Camps, 2015; Fontich & Birello, 2015; Fontich, in preparation). The assumption is that re-thinking grammar instruction requires an exploration of the particular models in which teachers' concepts are rooted so that these concepts can undergo a coherent evolution (Fontich & Camps, 2015). This is because teachers' concepts are seen as statements that guide classroom practices and are therefore regarded as a domain of the utmost importance for fostering educational change (Watson, 2015). Indeed, they are underpinned by research on grammar instruction that show the coexistence of differing concepts of what grammar is, how it should be taught, and how it relates to writing. This coexistence is due to the diverse theories and models developed during recent decades, sometimes in a contradictory fashion (González-Nieto, 2013). Studies on teachers' concepts are keen to explore the extent to which this diversity underlies teachers' approach to language education.

The results show that two ideas coexist in teachers' grammar concepts: (a) knowing grammar equals knowing how to use one's language, and reveals this through language production and understanding, i.e., it is an *implicit knowledge* (which fits with the idea of "linguistic competence"); and (b) grammar is seen as a declarative knowledge tightly connected to spelling norms. Furthermore, regarding grammar instruction, teachers connect grammar to spelling norms in writing; but since these norms are learned by heart without comprehension of the teacher's

grammar explanations, they are not transferred into improving spelling in texts, and thus grammar instruction is seen as a waste of time. This leads them to an apparently unsolvable contradiction: what students know is not a result of grammar instruction; and what they are taught does not become knowledge at hand. This contradiction can be overcome in the domain of grammar-for-improving-writing. Some of them tend to define writing as an innate ability to structure one's thoughts that can also be attained through reading (*implicit learning* disconnected from *explicit instruction*).

However, teachers also refer, in different levels of explicitness, to the possibility of making a text opaque so that attention can be focused on grammar. They consider this reflection beneficial (sometimes arguing with examples of their own personal and professional experience) but also time-consuming and demanding. The studies interpret that they are referring to the need for, and the likelihood of promoting, metalinguistic activity, which can be interpreted as a potential anchor that may help teachers to shift the focus from the "implicit/explicit" dichotomy to explicit reflection on language fostered by adequate tools. For this shift to happen, assistance might usefully be provided to teachers to help them (1) to crystallize their intuitions about the relevance of metalinguistic activity within grammar lessons and grammar for improving texts, and (2) to design cycles of activities devoted to engaging students in this activity.

5.   TOWARDS A MODEL FOR GRAMMAR INSTRUCTION BASED IN METALINGUISTIC ACTIVITY

In the present text, we have maintained that the problem of grammar instruction in the Hispanic world is far from being solved and that some of the reasons are common issues that are deeply rooted in history (e.g., the gap between teaching grammar and language use, the tendency to conflate grammar and language, etc.). Indeed, when we focus on specific educational jurisdictions, we find country-specific conditions that help us further fine-tune our understanding (e.g., language diversity, educational policies, etc.).

In Spain, as shown by innovative studies (which nevertheless still have a limited impact on current practice and research), attention to metalinguistic activity opens up possibilities, in a double sense, for a shift in the debate about the role of grammar instruction in Language Arts: it places the need to explore the complexity of the learning processes at the centre of attention, and also integrates theory and practice through the adoption of case studies. In sum, metalinguistic activity stands as a social and cognitive activity underpinning the learning process of writing and grammar, and at the same time connecting both poles, as indicated in Figure 4.

Figure 4. Metalinguistic activity in the interplay of writing and grammar (adapted from Camps 1998)
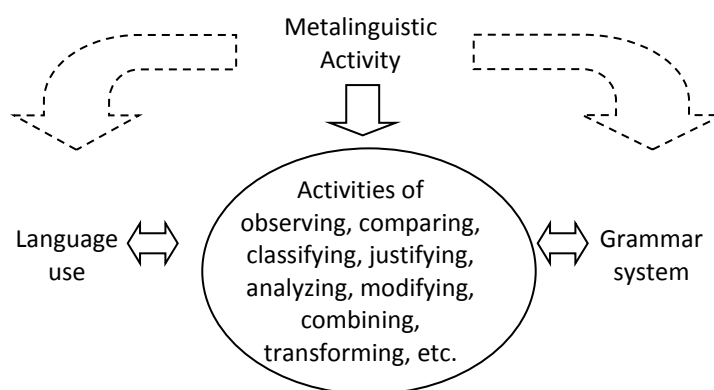
These studies conceive grammar learning from the perspective of metalinguistic activity, which is seen as a process that unfolds within *human activity* (Camps, 2000; see also Milian, 2014; and Fontich, 2016). Humankind conceptualizes the world's objects and processes through *linguistic activity*; since language itself is a part of the world, humans from the first years of life therefore also become involved in an activity of conceptualizing language through language: they become involved in a process of *metalinguistic activity*. Furthermore, drawing on seminal works on metalinguistic development (Karmiloff-Smith, 1992; Gombert, 1992) and on Vygotskyan ideas about spontaneous and scientific concepts (Vygotsky, 1962; Miller, 2011), these studies consider metalinguistic activity to be observable as a continuum of different levels (Figure 5): a procedural level, a verbalized level relying on spontaneous concepts (experienced-saturated and with a low explanatory capacity), and a verbalized level relying on scientific concepts (as being part of a system).

These authors define explicit metalinguistic activity in the sense of "observable" activity and consider it the key focus of research in grammar learning. In Figure 5, while #1 applies to actions students perform with regard to grammar reflection in the context of writing (e.g., correcting verb tenses in a paragraph), #2 and #3 refer to what students *also say* while carrying out these actions (e.g., while working in peer collaboration in the classroom).

Figure 5. Levels of metalinguistic activity (adapted from Camps, 2000)

Explicit metalinguistic activity

#1. Non-verbalized,
procedural

Verbalized

#2. With common lan-
guage

#3. With meta-
language
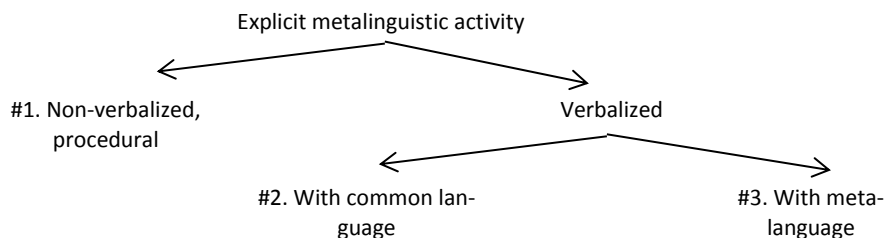
The studies presented in the second half of the present paper consider meta-
linguistic activity as highly suitable for attaining a robust theoretical understanding
of the role of grammar in the context of writing. Relevant conclusions on a number
of key issues are reached:

- reflection has a two-way directionality (from #1 to #3 and the other way
around);
- these levels do not represent development levels, as they may emerge alterna-
tively within the same individual's reflection;
- a misuse of metalanguage (#3) can lead to misconceptions, which may consti-
tute obstacles for drawing on grammar knowledge in the context of writing;
- common language (#2) can convey well-directed (albeit incomplete) grammar
reasoning;
- verbalized levels (#2 and #3) may not be triggered naturally by a procedural
level (#1) (i.e. raising capacity for verbalized reflection only by writing may not
be possible);
- promoting activities of discovery and classification while students interact
seems a key condition for valuable metalinguistic activity, as the permanent
source of knowledge of language and writing;
- interaction on its own may not be sufficient, and guiding students towards
rules of interaction is of utmost importance.

Metalinguistic activity is a promising and yet still ill-defined concept. At the present
time, the perspectives to further explore it are diverse (Camps et al., 2010; Ribas,
Fontich, & Guasch, 2014; Fontich, in preparation): they include, among others, such
actions as integrating researcher and practitioner spaces on a common ground
from which to explore, develop, and contrast the model of intervention; translating
the research outcomes into pedagogic material; developing an integrated language
curriculum for Language Arts (including official and foreign languages); articulating
an approach based on metalinguistic activity over a lengthy period (a term, an aca-
demic year, a cycle); and adopting metalinguistic activity as a conceptual anchor for
setting up a common ground for a debate on grammar instruction on the interna-
tional arena. This allows for searching out new and more finely-tuned arguments in
favor of grammar reflection as a guiding principle in teaching grammar. It also al-

lows for rethinking the rich contributions of the past that as yet have never been fully accepted.

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