



## Editors' note: Multilingualism and teaching grammar in the foreign language classroom

*Nota editorial: Multilingüismo y enseñanza de la gramática en el aula de lenguas extranjeras*

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### Abstract

This special issue addresses various dimensions of multi- and plurilingualism alongside the pedagogy of teaching grammar in the foreign language classroom. The monograph assembles contributions on positive language transfer from L2 to L3, specifically between Romance languages; effective methodologies for grammar instruction; and a historical investigation of grammar teaching. The articles hold significant relevance for researchers in multilingualism, grammar pedagogy, and the historical development of language instruction, and offer valuable insights that language instructors can apply in their own classrooms.

**Keywords:** Multilingualism; Grammar; Language Transfer; Intercomprehension; Language Education

### Resumen

Este número especial aborda diversas dimensiones del multi- y plurilingüismo junto con la pedagogía de la enseñanza de la gramática en el aula de lenguas extranjeras. La monografía reúne contribuciones sobre la transferencia lingüística positiva de L2 a L3, concretamente entre lenguas románicas; metodologías eficaces para la enseñanza de la gramática; y una investigación histórica sobre la enseñanza gramatical. Los artículos son de gran relevancia para investigadores en los campos del multilingüismo, la pedagogía gramatical y la evolución histórica de la enseñanza de lenguas, y ofrecen valiosas ideas que los profesores de idiomas pueden aplicar en sus propias aulas.

**Palabras clave:** Multilingüismo; Gramática; Transferencia Lingüística; Intercomprensión; Educación Lingüística

## INTRODUCTION

In our global and interconnected world, encountering multiple languages through travel, migration, and exposure to different media has become commonplace. As our society evolves, there arises a need to redefine the conventional archetype associated with foreign language learners, shifting away from the established portrayal of L2/LE students and acknowledging the increasing prevalence of individuals engaging with an L3 or additional languages ( $L_n$ ). This paradigm shift signifies that learners can no longer be viewed as solely monolingual individuals studying a foreign language; instead, they demonstrate plurilingual competence stemming from their exposure to multiple languages prior to the language they are learning. It's crucial to recognize this internal linguistic repertoire, irrespective of the proficiency level in each language. This recognition is underscored by the Pluralistic Approaches (Candelier et al., 2010), which represent contemporary teaching methods developed in response to the increasing social multilingualism in Europe and the subsequent rise in plurilingual competence among citizens and language learners.

This shifting sociocultural and linguistic paradigm inherently demands changes within the realm of teaching and learning. As the Council of Europe puts it, “the aim of language education is profoundly modified. It is no longer seen as simply to achieve ‘mastery’ of one or two, or even three languages, each taken in isolation, with the ‘ideal native speaker’ as the ultimate model. Instead, the aim is to develop a linguistic repertory, in which all linguistic abilities have a place” (Council of Europe, 2020, p. 123). This calls for the development of novel methodologies that specifically cater to students' plurilingual competence and the departure from the traditional reliance on the concept of the “native monolingual” as a primary reference point in both assessment and teaching methodologies in the foreign language classroom. Therefore, language teaching should focus on enabling students to actively employ their already acquired language repertoire – own native language(s) and previously learned foreign language – to access an L3 or  $L_n$ , including lexical, pragmatic, grammatical, and phonological prior knowledge (Doyé, 2004).

It is known that a person does not keep languages and cultures “in strictly separated mental compartments, but rather builds up a communicative competence to which all knowledge and experience of language contributes and in which languages interrelate and interact” (Council of Europe, 2020, p. 123). Therefore, some features of previously acquired languages can be borrowed for a newly learned

foreign language. This interaction is called language transfer and can be positive and facilitate the acquisition of the new foreign language or negative and impede this process. Hence, the studies on the nature of language transfer are crucial for the development of students' multilingual competence and could be considered a starting point for a monograph dedicated to this area.

This special issue opens with an article from the distinguished invited author, **Jim Cummins**, who holds the position of Professor Emeritus at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto. Professor Cummins is internationally recognized as a leading specialist on language development, bilingualism, language transfer, and literacy development in linguistically diverse educational settings, amongst other areas. In the article, he reflects on the role of formal grammar teaching in the education of multilingual learners from (im)migrant backgrounds, a demographic often confronted with adverse academic outcomes due to socio-economic disadvantage and discrimination against their community. Professor Cummins advocates for the inclusion of six sets of instructional strategies into school language policies. These encompass scaffolding comprehension and production of language, reinforcing academic language across the curriculum, engaging students' multilingual repertoires, maximizing literacy engagement, connecting with students' life experiences, and affirming students' identities. He also analyzes how the teaching of grammar can be aligned with and reflected in school language policies according to these proposed instructional strategies.

The articles by **Fatiha Sadouki** and **Lourdes Barquín Sanmartín** present examples of language transfer and its repercussions for the classroom of English and Spanish respectively. **Fatiha Sadouki** has analyzed language transfer between French and English in the group of Arabic L1 and French L2 students who study English as L3. Drawing on the students' written production, she demonstrated that French L2 facilitates the acquisition of English L3 due to their typological similarities. These findings can be useful for English tutors to apply efficient teaching strategies promoting positive language transfer from French.

**Lourdes Barquín Sanmartín** has conducted research on the acquisition of Spanish L3 by British students with English L1 and French L2. She has emphasized the necessity to adopt the pluralistic approach in teaching L3 relying on learners' multilingual background. She has revealed that the most efficient sequential order of languages for British learners of French and Spanish would be English (L1), French (L2), and Spanish (L3). This advantage is due to the linguistic proximity

between French and Spanish. Also, she mentions that the declarative nature of knowledge acquired in foreign languages like French contributes to this advantage.

Both articles advocate the proactive use of previously acquired languages when learning L3 by encouraging the positive transfers between languages and minimizing the negative ones. This approach reflects the principles of plurilingual education.

In the third article **Yury Panchenko** describes the history of teaching Spanish grammar in the schools of the USSR using the Present Subjunctive Tense as an example. He has analyzed the ways of its explanation, the methods of its introduction and corresponding systems of exercises in the official textbooks of Spanish for Soviet schools. As a result, he has found that during the Soviet period in Russia there was a shift from a traditional paradigm to a communicative one. Although this article does not refer directly to the problems of multilingualism, it adds an interesting historic perspective on teaching grammar in the USSR, a field that has not yet been sufficiently explored.

The topic of teaching grammar is developed further in the interview with **María Pilar García Mayo**, full professor of English Language and Linguistics at the UPV/EHU and director of the consolidated research group *Language and Speech*, conducted by **Carolina Grau Montesinos**. Dr. García Mayo has emphasized the importance of teaching grammar to help students foster their communicative competence in L2. She has pointed out that one of the most efficient approaches to teaching grammar is its integration into communicative teaching. One of the pedagogical frameworks which contributes to such integration is form-focused instruction. This framework helps catch the students' attention on the formal aspect of the target language in a communicative context. Based on the results of various investigations carried out by her research group, Dr. García Mayo has explained different efficient techniques that contribute to organizing form-focused instruction in the classroom and reflected on the skills that are crucial for a modern language tutor.

The special issue ends with **Theodora Marin's** review of the book "Policy and Practice for Multilingual Educational Settings: Comparisons across Contexts" edited by Siv Björklund and Mikaela Björklund. This book presents a vast linguistic panorama, unifying results of various research studies conducted in Spain, Slovenia, Denmark, Finland, Poland, Cyprus, Sweden, the USA, and other countries. This vast linguistic landscape offers insights into learners' language ideologies, attitudes, practices, and identities. The book also examines aspects of teacher training

in multilingual contexts, as well as multilingual approaches in language policy. The book presents multilingualism as a complex, dynamic phenomenon and explores topics also addressed by the contributors to this special issue.

This special issue brings together diverse perspectives on the role of grammar teaching within the broader framework of multilingual and plurilingual education. The articles and review included in this monograph demonstrate the importance of moving beyond monolingual norms and embracing the rich linguistic repertoires that learners bring to the classroom. By addressing themes such as positive language transfer, historical shifts in grammar pedagogy, and the integration of grammar instruction into communicative approaches, the contributions encourage educators and researchers to rethink established models and adopt methodologies that reflect the realities of today's multilingual societies. Ultimately, the volume underscores the need for language education to support the development of flexible, dynamic linguistic competence that draws on all of a learner's languages and experiences.

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Panchenko, Y., & Barquín Sanmartín, L. (2025). Editors' note: Multilingualism and teaching grammar in the foreign language classroom. *Bellaterra Journal of Teaching & Learning Language & Literature*, 18(2), e1358. <https://doi.org/10.5565/rev/jtl3.1358>

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