

Editorial

Language Practices in English Classrooms: Guest Editors' Introduction to the Special Issue

Pia Sundqvist ^{1,*} , Erica Sandlund ², Marie Källkvist ^{3,4}  and Henrik Gyllstad ³

¹ Department of Teacher Education and School Research, Faculty of Educational Sciences, University of Oslo, P.O. Box 1099, Blindern, NO-0317 Oslo, Norway

² Department of Language, Literature, and Intercultural Studies, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, Karlstad University, SE-651 88 Karlstad, Sweden

³ Centre for Languages and Literature, The Joint Faculties of Humanities and Theology, Lund University, Box 201, SE-221 00 Lund, Sweden

⁴ Department of Languages, Faculty of Arts and Humanities, Linnæus University, SE-351 95 Växjö, Sweden

* Correspondence: pia.sundqvist@ils.uio.no

1. Introduction

English is taught in classrooms across the globe to learners of all ages, from very young learners in primary school to older learners who have reached retirement and occupy their time in the so-called third age by studying English. Further, depending on the national and societal context, as well as researchers' preferred theoretical approaches to teaching and learning, English is described as a foreign language (EFL), a second language (ESL), or an additional language (EAL) in the literature. In this Special Issue, we present eleven papers on the topic of language practices in English classrooms, with language practices being the common core of all contributions. In our Call for Papers, we welcomed both empirical and conceptual papers with different theoretical frameworks and methodologies, as long as the focus was on language practices in the English classroom, regardless of preferred label for English. We were interested in studies on language practices in English classrooms with learners of different ages and in different contexts. Further, we invited studies investigating practices in classrooms at all levels of education, including those that are linguistically homogenous, as well as language practices in classrooms that are more linguistically diverse (multilingual English classrooms). Moreover, we encouraged the submission of papers that study the beliefs or ideologies underpinning the practices of teachers (or learners), as long as these were discussed in relation to classroom practices. We took a broad approach to methods, including qualitative studies (e.g., linguistic ethnographies, conversation analysis, interviews, or video-based language research), quantitative studies (e.g., analyzing language practices using quantifiable measures, including classroom-based testing and assessment practices, and intervention studies), and mixed-methods studies (e.g., studies that draw on both survey data and qualitative classroom data). We also welcomed theoretically oriented papers offering a solid conceptual discussion targeting classroom practices and the teaching/learning of English, including language policy.

After initial editorial decisions on abstracts where authors were invited to submit full papers, and the subsequent peer review of submitted papers, a total of eleven contributions—including ten empirical studies and one review article—were selected for the present Special Issue. The research detailed in these contributions spans national contexts, from Scandinavia to Central Europe and the United States, South America and Asia. In addition, and in line with our overall goal, contributions focus on a variety of educational levels, learner age groups, and educational contexts: from primary school to higher education; from formal instruction environments to language learning and use in tutoring; and study abroad experiences, as well as digitally mediated learning settings.

Focal areas examined in the different studies comprise *skills* (listening comprehension, comprehension of English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) lectures, speaking



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and social interaction, vocabulary, and formulaic language), *beliefs* (about teaching practices), *practices* (pedagogical translanguaging in education, grammar, language play, informal/formal/extramural language), *teaching* (literature/literary analysis), and *outcomes* (assessment). Together, the papers in this Special Issue document current practices, showcase innovative approaches to the study of English language teaching and learning, and highlight pathways forward. Below, we present each individual contribution briefly in relation to the overarching thematic areas that emerged.

2. Contributions

Teacher beliefs and teacher cognition emerged as a theme in some of the contributions. In France, EFL teaching has been a compulsory subject taught by primary school class teachers for two decades. Whyte et al. (2022) examined questionnaire data from teachers ($N = 254$), connecting participants' beliefs and reported practices. The study revealed a three-part division of teachers and teaching that could be tied to grammar-oriented teaching, communicative-language teaching, and teachers who were described as skeptical. While there was no correlation between the age of the participants and their teacher beliefs or teaching practices, those who offered a wider range of classroom activities tended to have more in-service training and higher English proficiency. In the context of Germany, Rovai and Pflingsthorh (2022) focused on pre-service EFL teachers ($N = 40$) and their conceptualizations of what it means to be a "good" or "bad" teacher. Further, they also explored the participants' evaluations of existing differentiation approaches designed for accommodating learner needs, e.g., anxiety and confusion about lexis and grammar. Their findings revealed general agreement amongst the participants regarding supporting the needs of individual learners, but the pre-service teachers' knowledge regarding how to do so was, not surprisingly, incomplete.

A similar theme relates to language use in the English classroom. In a study set in Iran, Gheitasi (2022) investigated a group of 11 primary school learners' (aged 9–11) use of language play, with a focus on formulaic sequences. Based on video recordings from 16 lessons, all episodes involving language play were analyzed qualitatively, and instances of formulaic sequences were identified. The results showed that despite the participants' young age, there were several examples of language play, e.g., playing with sounds. Language play served several purposes in the student group and offered opportunities for the participants to interact with English in a low-stress environment. Another study that also examined learners' oral language use was carried out by Kunitz et al. (2022) in Sweden. This study is unique in that it is a bottom-up approach to pedagogical research and a study in which researchers collaborated very closely with practitioners. The focus was on designing a speaking task for secondary-school students that would elicit meaningful, co-constructed talk. Oral interaction was analyzed using conversation analysis, and the results revealed that the problem-based task used was effective, and that the implementation of open-ended problem-based tasks could support the development of learners' interactional competence. The authors also found that the use of artifacts could help students make their reasoning "tangible and visually accessible" (p. 1).

Moving on from the theme of language use to the theme of accuracy and grammar in the classroom, in an interview study by Schurz et al. (2022), lower secondary English teachers from three countries—Austria, France, and Sweden ($N = 20$)—were asked about their students' engagement in extramural (out-of-school) English and the effect this appeared to have on teaching and learning in the classroom. The implicit learning environment that Swedish students encountered extramurally seemed to extend to the classroom, where explicit instruction was less common than in the Austrian and French samples. This finding appeared to go hand in hand with Swedish teachers reporting a more positive impact of extramural English on learning than Austrian and French participants, especially in terms of grammar. At the same time, gaps in language areas not (fully) developed through extramural English seemed to be more intentionally addressed in the classrooms in Sweden.

Remote teaching replaced classroom teaching during the pandemic, a phenomenon that deserves explicit attention in light of the challenges brought about by COVID-19. This timely topic in language education is addressed by [Malabarba et al. \(2022\)](#) in their study, which closely analyzed interactions between an English tutor and an adult learner, mediated via video conferencing. The authors examined so-called *simultaneous start-ups* and their interactional resolution. The findings showed how the tutor withdrew from overlapping talk to secure the learner's interactional space and opportunities for practicing English. Additionally, the study revealed the relevance of uncovering the fine-tuned detail of multimodal interactional practices in managing a learning space.

The theme of EMI appeared in two of our contributions, authored by [A. Siegel \(2022\)](#) and [J. Siegel \(2022\)](#). In the former study, [A. Siegel \(2022\)](#) took a closer look at the perspectives of 25 short-term exchange students from Japan who were enrolled in EMI courses at a university in Sweden, centering on their attitudes about language use practices in the classroom with the help of a questionnaire; a focus group interview was also conducted with four of the participants. The results showed that the rate of speech, turn-taking, and background knowledge hindered the participants' learning and participation. The study sought to raise the awareness of language practices in EMI courses to support the learning experiences of short-term exchange students. In the latter study, [J. Siegel \(2022\)](#) argues that key challenges in EMI in higher education involve the varying levels of second language (L2) speaking and listening abilities among both teachers and students. In an exploratory study, Siegel examined the relationship between, on the one hand, the main ideas of two EMI lecturers in Sweden over the course of six lectures (content intended to be taught and learned) and, on the other hand, the main ideas that EMI students reported learning in the same lectures. Among other things, so-called keyword analysis revealed that students in fact may not have taken in the teachers' intended main ideas.

One contribution to this Special Issue is linked to the specific theme of L2 English vocabulary instruction. In a qualitative observational study comprising 29 lessons from Norway, [Granum Skarpaas and Rødnes \(2022\)](#) targeted vocational L2 English classrooms specifically. Technical vocabulary is crucial for vocational students' language development, and this study found that vocabulary work in the classroom had a strong presence within vocational orientation (VO) instruction across whole-class instruction as well as group, pair, and individual work. As expected, most targeted words related to work practices and vocational content knowledge. While many instances of L1–L2 translation tasks were observed, target items were not practiced across the four language skills and rarely utilized in productive tasks.

While technical vocabulary is central for vocational students, developing disciplinary literacy in literature courses is central for novice EFL student teachers at the university level. This is addressed by [Thyberg \(2022\)](#), who investigated two oral exam formats used in higher education in Sweden. The data comprised observation notes from so-called *Socratic seminars* and *Thought–Question–Epiphany (TQE) seminars* and were analyzed using qualitative content analysis. The findings revealed that most students used disciplinary conventions and displayed contextual awareness, and they could support claims with textual evidence. While the Socratic seminar format generated lively discussions, its sole focus on questions hindered students in preparing textual evidence for specific literary elements in the analysis. In the TQE seminar, some teachers reported disliking the forced inclusion of an epiphany, but the format did allow for them to identify significant quotes in advance and to expand on interpretative ideas.

Finally, [Prilutskaya \(2021\)](#) provides a timely systematic literature review of empirical studies of classroom applications of translanguaging across the world with a view of presenting the current state of the art regarding the affordances of translanguaging pedagogy and the contexts and research methodologies used. The review closes by identifying areas where pedagogical translanguaging in English language teaching remains unexplored.

3. Final Words from the Guest Editors

Little did we know that a pandemic would coincide with our original Call for Papers for this Special Issue. Considering the state of flux globally in education—at all levels—in 2020 and 2021, we were at first surprised at the large number of initial submissions, but relieved to witness the high-quality research that emerged thanks to the incredible efforts among scholars in those difficult times. All contributions that were ultimately accepted, after having undergone careful review processes, meet the high standards we set for this Special Issue on language practices in English classrooms—from primary school to higher education. We are greatly indebted to all our contributors and reviewers.

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