

Educational Linguistics: A Short Introduction

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As a term, educational linguistics was introduced in the 1970s by Bernard Spolsky (1975). The intention was to navigate a crisis of identity taking place within the American Association for Applied Linguistics (AAAL) during its early days (Hult 2008: 11). This crisis was based in the immense width of the field, at the time encompassing such a wide range of topics that “because it is everything, it is nothing” (Buckingham 1980, quoted in Hult 2008: 11).

To solve this identity crisis, a thematization of the sub-fields in accordance with their connection to practice became necessary. While applied linguistics had previously had a strong connection to the field of education, the stricter thematization of the educational linguistics field would allow researchers to benefit from the broad nature of applied linguistics while still benefitting educational practices through the narrowed scope. Educational linguistics is described as being framed by two key concepts: a problem-centred approach and a global outlook (King & Hult 2011: XVII). In essence, educational linguistics provided a theme through which researchers could make use of their full transdisciplinary methodological and theoretical repertoire to explore a problem in practice (Hult 2008: 13).

Transdisciplinarity became a central concept in the formulation of educational linguistics, as it both emphasised the thematization as the lynchpin of the field and the problem-centred approach. The global outlook of the field can be seen from the conceptualisation of transdisciplinarity being distinct from inter- or multidisciplinary as the latter would “... imply that one still retains the disciplines as the locus of intellectual activity, while building bridges between them, or assembling them into a collection; whereas the real alternative is to supersede them, creating new forms of activity which are thematic rather than disciplinary in their orientation” (Halliday & Webster 2004: 176).

The new field is described as broad enough to also include the newly focal social and ethical implications of linguistics when applied in an educational setting. Spolsky (2008: 3) draws on examples regarding language policies in previous colonies and the misuse of standardised language testing as a means of controlling migration to show the importance of these considerations for research in educational contexts. These areas were identified as additions to previous understandings of the linguistics field, which started to appear once applied linguistics (and sociolinguistics) became more prominent parts of the field during the 1960s (Hult 2008: 12).

In summary, educational linguistics appeared as a counter-reaction to the widening scope of applied linguistics. Hinging on the importance of the educational context as a thematic limitation, it was intended to allow researchers access to a truly transdisciplinary array of perspectives, methods, and approaches while remaining aimed at a clearly defined target. The use of a problem-oriented approach would then serve to further narrow the efforts of the researchers within the field, while simultaneously aligning them with the current needs of actual practitioners in the educational context.

Moving on into the 2000s, educational linguistics has developed into a sprawling field of endeavours tackling problems in the educational context. Summarising the thematization of the current field is a difficult task, as it includes studies of language being learned, language being used for teaching, language being used to govern the educational situation through policy, and many other aspects. Hult (2010) provides the summarising statement “language (in) education”, which serves as a functional definition within a sentence and indicates both the thematization and the width of the focus on language as it appears in different roles throughout the context.

A different take on the understanding of the field would be through “definition by implication”, as done in Hornberger’s (2001) reflection of 25 years of educational linguistics at the University of Pennsylvania. As the thematization is the one given aspect of a research project within educational linguistics, in combination with the problem-centred approach, further definition can be arrived at contextually through looking at which projects identify themselves as taking place within educational linguistics. By allowing the definition to be implied by the research included under the term, a spatially and temporally situated definition can be arrived at. This introduction will now turn to the contents of this special issue, and showcase how educational linguistics at Linnaeus University, Sweden has been actualised by the contributing researchers.

Educational linguistics in this issue

The initially striking feature of the collection of texts presented in this volume is that they are written in either Swedish or English, rather than one or the other. This is due to the Center for Educational Linguistics at Linnaeus University being open to researchers from both the Department of Languages and the Department of Swedish, leaving the language of the articles up to the authors, while also following the guidelines of *HumaNetten*.

This inclusion of researchers from different departments is further noticeable in the topics including languages commonly taught as foreign languages in Swedish schools, the acquisition of Swedish as a second language, and the use of language in traditionally non-language content subjects and higher education disciplines. The selection of topics and

methodology mirrors the demands for transdisciplinary efforts inherent to the field from its inception. This special issue presents research into the role of language within school subjects, and thus transcends the limitations of linguistic research on language subjects towards linguistic research on language in educational settings. In addition, in terms of research methods, from discourse analysis to computational logging methods to interviews to psycholinguistic data collection, the width of the applied repertoire shows the importance of the thematization as a uniting factor of the pieces.

One reason for the importance of the thematization proposed by educational linguistics is the permanence of learning connected to language throughout a human life. This special issue has elected to present its contents in order of the age groups concerned, from young children of pre-school age to adults studying at university. Partially this principle of indexation is intended to provide an intuitive distribution of content for the reader, but it also serves as an emphasis on the role educational linguistics can play in our understanding of life-long learning.

Annika Andersson, Hanna Lindfors, and Kristina Hansson present a study of how Arabic-Swedish bilingual preschoolers perform on a Swedish language proficiency test which has a monolingual norming sample. The study contributes to our understanding of which aspects of second language are more challenging and which are less demanding to learn for this group of bilingual preschoolers and concludes with suggestions regarding how tests could be adapted to reduce bias of cultural background and language status (first or second language).

Ewa Bergh Nestlog explores multimodality in texts written by primary school pupils within the subject of geography. The focus is on how the pupils verbally express themselves regarding the texts they have produced. The aim of the study is to contribute to our understanding of how the pupils interpret, move through and create meaning based on their own texts, emphasizing the importance of both the multimodality of the texts and the design of the teaching practice.

Maria Lindgren applies systemic functional linguistics (SFL) in interactions with two children in order to explore how SFL functions as a medium of grammar instruction. The materials explored are texts and drawings produced during interactions with the researcher, in combination with observations regarding the interactions. The study shows how children can make use of abstract grammar to make changes in their meaning-making, and the influence of noticing these linguistic mechanisms.

Sofia Svensson, Alejandra Donoso, and Gudrun Svensson look at how homework is used as a venue for collaboration with the parents, and focus on how translanguaging could be applied to allow for schools to collaborate with migrant parents. Their study emphasises the importance of epistemic justice in parental collaboration, and contributes to our understanding of how translanguaging homework could facilitate the

exchange. The paper highlights the importance of reciprocal sensitive listening in the interaction.

Jenny Uddling and Kristina Danielsson present a study on the development of subject-specific language in a linguistically diverse physics classroom. The paper describes that the teacher and the students were engaged in activities that increased students' opportunities to express sound in a more subject-specific way. However, some observations indicate practices that might constitute a hindrance for learning the content.

Marie Källkvist, Henrik Gyllstad, Erica Sandlund, and Pia Sundqvist explore translanguaging in an English-as-a-foreign-language (EFL) classroom through a case study of classroom interaction. The paper maps language use in the classroom, aiming to developing an in-depth understanding of English-Swedish translanguaging practices with 14-15-year old students. The results show that Swedish is used for specific purposes in EFL lessons, highlighting how these language practices are perceived by students of migrant backgrounds.

Karin Rehman and Päivi Juvonen explore the expressed values of a history teacher regarding language developing practices in their subject teaching at an introduction program in an upper-secondary school. The study reveals the teacher as having a key role in the realisation of policy, and discusses the results of an interview with the teacher from a perspective rooted in epistemic justice and inclusivity practices.

Christina Rosén and Christine Fredriksson present a study on the attitudes towards process-oriented writing amongst upper-secondary German language students. The research questions concern the influence of process-oriented writing and corrective feedback on foreign language students' writing proficiency and attitudes to text production. The paper contributes to our understanding of what influences accuracy in text production, and has implications for the design of both research and teaching on the topic.

Rakel Österberg, Alejandra Donoso, and Enrique Sologuren contribute a paper on motivations behind the improvement of writing skills amongst students of Spanish at a university level. The study explores the learning experience as a function of the initial conditions experienced by the student, and how the motivation to acquire and maintain proficiency in Spanish is connected to the self-motivation model. The results suggest a complex relationship between factors influencing multilinguals' motivations to acquire and maintain language proficiency in a heritage language.

Sergej Ivanov, Annelie Johansson, and Christian Waldmann present a study on academic writing, which makes use of keystroke logging to explore the writing process and digital source use of a university student of computer science. The paper has implications for the planning of teaching activities related to academic writing, and contributes to our understanding

of how different types of digital sources are used at different stages in the writing of an academic report by a novice academic writer.

This special issue aligns with understandings of educational linguistics advanced by Spolsky, Hult and Hornberger and intends to add the Swedish context to the global accumulation of our understanding of how language is a medium in all types of education everywhere always. Focusing on problem-oriented questions related to the current practice of the surrounding society's educational contexts, the research presented here provides new insights aimed at supporting teachers and other educational actors in their choices. While the thematization has occasionally moved beyond the school into social interactions and the home, the theme of language (in) education (Hult 2010) remains apparent.

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