Editorial

Rod Ellis

This is the first issue of *Language Teaching for Young Learners*. The aim of the journal is to provide a forum for research articles relating to the teaching and learning of foreign/ second languages for young learners where 'young' is defined as including both children and adolescents. The main focus is on language teaching in elementary and high school classrooms but we also welcome articles reporting research on technology-assisted language teaching and on tutorial language teaching contexts involving young learners.

The journal invites submissions in five categories. **Survey articles** provide researchers, teacher educators, and school teachers with up-to-date information on research concerning the teaching of second/foreign languages. **Original research articles** report empirical studies of the teaching and assessment of second/foreign languages and also of in-service and pre-service preparation courses. **Practitioner research articles** report studies carried out by teachers investigating their own teaching in their own classrooms. **Brief reports** present descriptions of teacher-education programmes, innovation projects, and small-scale research studies. In addition, the journal publishes **Book reviews** of published books and teacher education materials are also welcome. Submission guidelines can be found on the journal's web page at <https://www.benjamins.com/catalog/ltyl>.

A major motivation for starting the journal was the recent increase in the number of countries introducing the teaching of a foreign language (typically English) at elementary school level. For example most Asian countries now introduce English as a subject in elementary schools. Often this raises considerable problems, not least because often there are few teachers trained to teach language at this level and also because the merit of an early start in language learning is uncertain. Large scale projects such as Muñoz (2006), for example, have failed to demonstrate any advantage for an early start. It seems essential, therefore, that elementary school language programmes are thoroughly researched to provide information of both what happens in these programmes and whether they are effective in enhancing language learning. Only when there is a large body of research conducted in different instructional contexts will it become clear what advantages an early start affords and what conditions are needed to ensure that it is successful.

In this first issue, two articles focus on elementary school learners. Gorman and Ellis report a study of the effects of metalinguistic explanation and written corrective feedback on 9–10 year old children's use of the Present Perfect Tense in their written compositions. The role of both metalinguistic explanation and written corrective feedback remains controversial, with some researchers (e.g. Truscott, 2007) advocating its abandonment for all learners and other researchers (e.g. Ferris, 2013) arguing in favour. This divergence of opinions has led to a large body of research investigating what effect metalinguistic explanation and written corrective feedback have on language acquisition. By and large this research has reported a positive effect but just about all the studies to date have focused on adults. Gorman and Ellis's study failed to find any advantage for either metalinguistic explanation or direct written corrective feedback on the children they investigated. However, it would be very premature to conclude that such instruction is of no value to children. Clearly, more research is needed.

In the second article involving young children, Oliver and Azkarai examine patterns of interaction when 9–12 ESL learners of mixed proficiency performed communicative tasks with both other learners and native-speaking children. This article is of special interest as task-based teaching would seem to be ideally suited to young learners. Again, though, the majority of studies investigating task-based interaction to date have involved adult learners. The results of Oliver and Azkarai's study are encouraging because they show that the children interacted in highly collaborative manner. This study also adds to a strand of task-based research investigating the effect that task-type has on interaction. It found that task-type and learner proficiency interacted to influence the degree of collaboration. For example, a one-way task worked best when the L2 children were of high proficiency and were responsible for communicating the information to a native-speaking child. With lower-proficiency L2 learners, it was the two-way task led to a high level of mutual participation. Oliver and Azkarai noted some similarities between their results and those reported for adults but also some differences, pointing to the importance of researching task-based instruction with children.

Newton and Nguyen investigated older children – Grade 11 students in a Vietnamese high school. Like Oliver and Azkarai, they focused on the performance of interactive tasks. They were interested in whether the language-related episodes where the children dealt with problems that arose as they performed the tasks in pairs enabled the children to deal successfully with the same language issues in a performance of the same tasks in front of the whole class. They found that language related episodes occurred frequently in the pair-work and that when they were resolved correctly they led to more accurate use of the problematic items in the public performance. This article provides a number of insights of value to teachers – the advantage of combining pair-work and public performance in task-

based teaching, the useful role that the learners' L1 can play in resolving language problems in pair work, and the opportunity that a public performance of a task provides for teacher feedback.

The lead article in this issue is a survey article. Our aim is to regularly publish such articles in the hope that they will provide researchers with the background information needed to research young learners. Butler reviews a wide body of research relating to the teaching of vocabulary to young learners. It serves as a good model of the kind of survey article we are looking for. It takes a broad perspective by synthesizing information from a range of relevant fields – in this case first-language acquisition, child development, and education. It also draws on the research surveyed to propose a number of recommendations for vocabulary instruction. In this way, the article illustrates the kind of interface between research and practice that we hope the journal will support.

The three research articles and, to a large extent, the survey article focus on the teaching and learning of English as a second/foreign language. We hope though to receive articles that report research on other languages. We also hope that in future we will receive articles on very young learners (i.e. pre-schoolers) as we know that in many countries language teaching and learning begins before children enter elementary school.

References

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Biographical note

Rod Ellis is currently a research professor in Curtin University, Perth Australia. He is also a visiting professor at Shanghai International Studies University and an Emeritus Distinguished Professor of the University of Auckland. He has recently been elected as a fellow of the Royal Society of New Zealand. He has written extensively on second language acquisition and task-based language teaching. His most recent book is *Reflections on Task-Based Language Teaching* (2018) published by Multilingual Matters.