

BOOK REVIEW

Maria del Pilar García Mayo (Editor). *Learning Foreign Languages in Primary School: Research Insights*. Bristol; Blue Ridge Summit: Multilingual Matters, 2017. 304 pp. pp. £34.95 (pbk).

Reviewed by Janet Enever (University of Reading)

This volume is a welcome contribution to the growing range of publications focusing on research into early foreign language learning in schools that has emerged since the turn of the 21st century. This collection of papers edited by Maria del Pilar García Mayo, a well-established researcher in the field, covers a wide range of themes, many of which are authored by highly ranked international scholars. As such, this volume makes a significant contribution to second language acquisition (SLA) research, particularly the under-researched field of young children learning foreign languages in public schooling.

As García Mayo indicates in the introduction, research in early foreign language learning in school contexts can now be viewed as a distinctive field, set apart from research with reference to older / adult learners. A number of recent publications serve to confirm this, including journal special issues (e.g. Butler, Sayer & Huang, 2018; Enever & Lindgren, 2017; Sayer & Ban, 2013) and research overviews (e.g. Butler, 2015; Nikolov & Mihaljević Djigunović, 2011).

All the papers in this volume report on research conducted in primary schools (ages 6–12), with 11 of the 12 papers focused on learners of English as a foreign language, reflecting the growing global trend for early introduction of English in schooling. Chapter 2 is an exception, focusing on early exposure to Esperanto, French, German and Italian through a language awareness approach. The remainder of this review will present an overview of each of the twelve chapters, together with a discussion of the volume's contribution to the field of research in early foreign language learning.

Chapters 1–3 reflect the global nature of research in primary foreign languages research today, introducing three studies from China, England and Spain. In Chapter 1, Zhao and Murphy investigate the word retrieval abilities of ten-year olds learning English in a Chinese primary school. Drawing on sophisticated testing and analysis procedures they were able to establish that the participants' English vocabulary size and L1 lexical accessibility were significant predictors of the children's ability to rapidly access English words. In Chapter 2 Tellier and Roehr-Brackin explore the potential for developing young children's metalinguistic awareness supported by an explicit focus-on-form. Adopting a quasi-experimental

approach, groups of nine-year old children in England were introduced to German, Italian or Esperanto (an invented language) as starter languages, while in the second phase of the study all children were introduced to French. Analyses indicated that the groups exposed to an explicit focus-on-form when learning the starter languages achieved more highly in learning French during the second phase. Muñoz continues the theme of metalinguistic awareness in Chapter 3, arguing for the benefits of a specific focus on the development of cross-linguistic awareness. Her investigation of bilingual Catalan / Spanish children learning English compared the cross-phase learning experiences of children moving from their final year of primary school to the first year of secondary school. She identifies the stronger focus on grammar and form-focused activities in the secondary school, proposing that the promotion of both phonological and cognate awareness might be of particular value in raising the cross-linguistic awareness of these older children. As ever, with small-scale studies, research on a larger scale is needed to explore these issues further.

Chapters 4–7 together provide much-needed insights into the large-scale initiatives for the introduction of Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) that have so rapidly developed in some regions of Spain in recent years. In Chapter 4 Llinares reports on an important longitudinal study investigating the integration of language (English) with subject content (natural science and citizenship lessons) in primary CLIL classrooms. Results revealed that complex clauses were used more frequently in the science lessons, while expressions of attitude were found to be more varied in the citizenship classes. Given the continuing growth of CLIL at primary level in a number of European countries, this seminal study highlights the need for further research on interaction in CLIL classrooms. The following two chapters investigate the negotiation of meaning in CLIL contexts with Lázaro Ibarrola and Hidalgo exploring this process during collaborative tasks and Azkarai and Imaz Agirre investigating the impact of both gender and age on this process. Interestingly, Lázaro Ibarrola and Hidalgo found that children made extensive use of strategies such as repetition, acknowledgement and utterance completion, yet instances of comprehension checking were very limited. In contrast, Azkarai and Imaz Agirre found that neither the gender nor the age of learners had much impact on the extent to which they engaged in negotiation of meaning, noting only that boys in year 4 used their L1 more frequently, particularly when working in matched gender pairings. They suggest that this limited effect may be accounted for by individual differences in personality. Following the theme of CLIL in primary classrooms Pladevall-Ballester and Vraciu compare the use of L1 and L2 during oral communication in Chapter 7. Encouragingly, their findings indicated that as L2 proficiency improved, so the use of L1 decreased, offering a possible justification for the use of L1 in early foreign language learning.

Continuing with the central theme of the volume – exploring processes of foreign language development in the primary school years – Chapters 8 and 9 investigate oracy development, whilst Chapter 10 focuses on writing development. In Chapter 8 Butler, Liu and Kim investigate oral narrative development, comparing L1 and L2 development (English/Chinese). They found initial differences in oral narrative ability across the two languages, but with cognitive maturity the children gradually acquired more linguistic devices and strategies to overcome such challenges. Turning to the question of syntactic complexity and accuracy, in Chapter 9 Bret Blasco investigated longitudinal development in the upper primary years (ages 10–12 years) when Spanish children had studied English for 430 hours. Findings revealed that simplification and the use of formulaic sequences were common in the early stages, but by the end of the two-year study all learners were developing abilities in constructing sentences employing a subject-verb-object structure, with the more fluent learners showing an increasing ability in the use of subordinate clauses. In Chapter 10 García Hernández, Roca de Larios and Coyle report on an intervention study in Spain, focusing on the development of successive writing drafts through the use of reformulation strategies in collaborative writing. Through an analysis of recorded oral interactions during task completion, together with text reformulations, the researchers developed a classification of strategies used collaboratively by the learners in refining their written texts.

The final two papers in this collection address significant themes much in need of further investigation. In Chapter 11 Pinter and Zandian highlight the importance of fostering intercultural awareness in a study of school children in Iran. The use of an innovative questionnaire design facilitated an assessment of the suitability of using a questionnaire with this age group (10–12 years), alongside the actual data collection process. Findings indicated that children were enthusiastic about meeting people from other cultural backgrounds, but also expressed some negative feelings towards newcomers. The authors conclude by emphasising the need for materials that reflect children's everyday experiences, which may contribute to promoting greater intercultural awareness. Finally, Chapter 12 focuses on the topic of assessment. Here, Nikolov explores techniques for the introduction of diagnostic tests, reviewing teacher and learner responses and feedback in a large-scale Hungarian pilot study of an assessment framework. Analysis revealed that most tasks were familiar to children. Children's responses to tasks indicated that they were very capable of evaluating the tasks and their own learning while teacher feedback documented a wide range of opinions and practices, reflecting both positive and negative experiences. In conclusion, Nikolov emphasises the potential value of diagnostic tasks for learning, noting that teachers need to be familiar with the task types and their potential, in order to be able to effectively scaffold learning.

In conclusion, I had just one minor quibble with this volume, I sometimes missed a clear sense of cohesion across the collection. A more systematic grouping of similar research themes might have overcome this difficulty. However, that said, this volume is packed with rich findings, revealing many new research directions for the reader to explore. This is surely a *must-read* for teachers and researchers in many parts of the world.

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Address for correspondence

Janet Enever
Department of English Language & Applied Linguistics
University of Reading
United Kingdom
j.h.enever@reading.ac.uk

Biographical note

Janet Enever is visiting professor, Department of English Language and Applied Linguistics, Reading University; visiting professor, Stockholm University and professor emerita, Umeå University, Sweden. She currently acts as international consultant for the Uruguayan public education authorities advising on the national curriculum for foreign languages. She is also Series Editor for the Multilingual Matters book series, 'Early language learning in school contexts'. Her research interests focus on early language learning, language policy, globalisation and language learning, and language teacher education.