



New insights into early language learning

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Symposium format:

- **Symposium Multimodal**

Symposium mode:

- **Hybrid**

Sub-theme:

- **LANGUAGE TEACHING AND LEARNING:** teacher education, curricula and education, classrooms, instruction, task-based learning, EAP, study abroad, (virtual) exchanges, materials and methods

Short abstract in English:

In the past decades, understanding of language and language learning has moved from psycholinguistic, formalist, and monolingual views to sociolinguistic, dialogic, and multilingual ones, which has led to quite radical reconceptualizations of language and language learning. The early foreign language learning context with the simultaneous language and literacy development invites novel research methodological approaches that take account of this reconceptualization. In recent research, there are indications of new approaches to tackle the complexities of early language learning. Among others, participatory approaches and designs that challenge epistemological positions, e.g. children as co-researchers, have gained ground. Other methodological innovations include the use of visual and multimodal methods in researching with children. This symposium invites papers that have adopted more participatory and multimodal approaches to researching primary school aged children as learners of foreign languages with a special focus on how the empirical study informs the development of pedagogical practices, including learning materials.

Argument:

The aim of this symposium is to discuss innovative approaches to researching early language learning (ELL). ELL is defined here as foreign language teaching in the first years of primary school. Thus far ELL research has mainly followed the well-trodden paths of SLA and largely focused on overall learning outcomes and their connection to various learner or teaching related factors such as motivation and attitudes, language learning aptitude and metalinguistic awareness (e.g. Costley et al. 2020), environmental factors (e.g. Pfenninger & Singelton 2019), and teaching methods and materials (e.g. Wilden & Porsch 2020). In many of these studies, the ultimate goal has been to find out whether an early start has advantages, what can be achieved in classrooms with limited time available and to identify successful ELL pedagogies (e.g. Enever 2020; Wilden & Porsch 2020).



In the past decades, research-based understanding of language and language learning has moved from psycholinguistic, formalist, and monolingual views to sociolinguistic, dialogic, and multilingual ones (DFG 2016), which has led to quite radical reconceptualizations of language and language learning. We argue that the ELL context with the simultaneous language and literacy development invites novel research methodological approaches that take account of this reconceptualization. In recent research, there are indications of new approaches to tackle the complexities of ELL. As to research design, participatory approaches (Kuchah & Pinter 2021) and designs that challenge epistemological positions, e.g. children as co-researchers (Prasad 2021), have gained ground. Other methodological innovations include the use of various visual and multimodal methods in researching with children (Inözü 2018).

This symposium invites papers that have adopted more participatory and multimodal approaches to researching primary school aged children as learners of foreign languages with a special focus on how the empirical study informs the development of pedagogical practices, including learning materials.

- Costley, T., Gkonou, C., Myles, F., Roehr-Brackin, K. & Tellier, A. (2020). Multilingual and monolingual children in the primary-level language classroom: individual differences and perceptions of foreign language learning. *The Language Learning Journal* 48(5), 643–655.
- DFG= The Douglas Fir Group. (2016). A transdisciplinary framework for SLA in a multilingual world. *The Modern Language Journal* 100, 19–47.
- Enever, J. (2020). Editorial. *Language Teaching for Young Learners* 2(2), 157–161.
- Inözü, J. (2018). Drawings are talking: Exploring language learners' beliefs through visual narratives. *Applied Linguistics Review*, 9:2-3, 177–200.
- Kuchah, K. & Pinter, A. (2021). Researching Young Language Learners in School Contexts: Setting the Scene. In K. Kuchah & A. Pinter (Eds), *Ethical and Methodological Issues in Researching Young Language Learners in School Contexts*, 1–26. Bristol: Multilingual Matters Ltd.
- Pfenniner, S. & Singleton, D. (2019). Starting Age Overshadowed: The Primacy of Differential Environmental and Family Support Effects on Second Language Attainment in an Instructional Context. *Language Learning* 69(1), 207–234.
- Prasad, G. (2021). Reframing expertise: Learning with and from children as co-investigators of their plurilingual practices and experiences. In K. Kuchah & A. Pinter (Eds), *Ethical and methodological issues in researching young language learners in school contexts*, 106–125. Bristol: Multilingual Matters Ltd.
- Wilden, E. & Porsch, R. (2020). A critical analysis of the German public debate about an early start in primary foreign language education. *Language Teaching for Young Learners* 2(2), 192–212.