

***Early Instructed Second Language Acquisition:  
Pathways to Competence***  
**Edited by J. Rokita-Jaśkow and M. Ellis (2019)**  
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This book deals with the multi-faceted phenomenon of instructed L2 acquisition by young (i.e. 6–13 years old) and very young (3–6 years old) learners, that is, children attending primary school and children before the onset of compulsory schooling, respectively. It consists of twelve chapters organised in three parts, each of which focuses on different aspects of early Instructed Second Language Acquisition (ISLA): (1) early language learning in compulsory instruction; (2) pathways to developing early L2 oracy and literacy; and (3) pathways to understanding relationships in early foreign language learning and teaching.

Part 1 shows how the implementation of good policies on the one hand (Chapter 1) and principled practice on the other (Chapter 2) are of the utmost importance in making early ISLA most productive. Policy and principled practice should be seen as two sides of the same coin. New legislation fostering early ISLA can be of little use if teachers are unaware of which educational practice is most effective in a classroom of young learners. However, having qualified teachers requires the existence of appropriate specialisation programmes, which in turn can only be implemented by government decisions. In Chapter 1, Rokita-Jaśkow and Pamuła-Behrens discuss the problems posed by this vicious circle, which is rooted in a

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complex political and pedagogical tangle. They show how educational practice contributes substantially to forming a supportive language education policy, and how such policy in turn affects educational processes and outcomes. In particular, they look at the challenges posed by the Polish context, where current young learners' teachers work long days – with little spare time that can be devoted to in-service training. In Chapter 2, Sandie Mourão focuses on the importance of principled practice in teaching the L2 in the context of pre-primary early language learning. She shows an example of good practice in Portugal, consisting of the introduction of English language areas, that is, contexts where teacher-led instruction alternates with child-initiated play. Provided that the resources used are motivating enough for children, it would seem that such a practice can lead to children spontaneously practising the L2.

Part 2 deals with the development of language skills in the areas of speaking and reading. It is divided into two subparts. The first subpart focuses on speaking in English as a foreign language, and explores the learning processes at play in three different contexts: a bilingual immersion school with children aged 4–5 years (Chapter 3), a Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) programme with children aged 8–9 years (Chapter 4), and a setting with children in sixth grade (age 12) where English is taught as a subject by a specialist teacher (Chapter 5). Specifically, in Chapter 3, Teresa Fleta analyses the acquisition of some English grammatical structures and discusses the issue of common developmental stages across young learners. She identifies a set of acquisitional patterns which differ significantly from L1 developmental stages, and shows how a context of massive L2 input leads to the activation of implicit learning mechanisms. In Chapter 4, Lázaro-Ibarrola and Azplicueta-Martinez look at the differences between children's interaction with adults and with peers in terms of negotiation of meaning strategies. The first subpart concludes with Chapter 5, by Małgorzata Szulc-Kurpaska, which looks at how the L1 and the L2 are used in the classroom, examining the similarities and differences between teacher and learner talk. The second subpart is centred on reading and includes three longitudinal studies of the development of literacy. In Chapter 6, Renata Šamo presents a study of two twins aged 10 years, having Croatian as L1 and learning English as a foreign language in the same school in Croatia. The aim is to look at the strategies used to understand a text in the L1 and in the foreign language and to assess the role of individual differences. In Chapter 7, Ruiz de Zarobe and Zenotz offer insights into the phenomenon of teaching critical reading to Spanish children aged 10–12 learning English as L3. Finally, in Chapter 8, Kolb and Brunsmeier show how extensive reading can be encouraged by the use of multimodal

digital story apps, and report on the results of a study conducted in an after-school club in Germany.

The chapters in Part 3 share a focus on extralinguistic aspects, such as attitudes, motivation and behaviour, which can have an impact on the learning and the teaching process. In particular, the first two chapters focus on the role played by parents in encouraging very early L2 learning, looking at the motivations behind their choice and the expectations – sometimes too high – they have about learning outcomes. In Chapter 9, Barbara Loranc-Paszyk reports that the key motivation for enrolling children in bilingual primary schools is to maximise exposure to the L2. This often leads parents on the one hand to overload the role of schooling in the attempt to offer as much L2 input as possible, and on the other hand to underestimate the importance of good practice at home – with consequences that inevitably frustrate parents and discourage children. In Chapter 10, Joanna Rokita-Jaśkow shows how a fruitful interaction between parents and teachers is not only possible, but also necessary in order to avoid wrong expectations on the parents' side, and to optimise the role of education on the teachers' side – with teachers helping parents to effectively structure foreign language practice at home. Chapter 11, by Weronia Król-Gierat, deals with children with special educational needs and examines their self-concepts and attitudes towards the difficulty of learning a foreign language. Such attitudes are compared with children's learning outcomes and the perceptions of their teachers. In the final chapter, Guz and Tetiurka investigate the difficulties in establishing a fruitful collaboration between teacher and children in an early years foreign language classroom by examining some types of verbal and non-verbal behaviour which can inhibit successful learning.

The topic of this book is undoubtedly a challenging one, requiring investigation in a number of linguistic and non-linguistic domains which all add important pieces to the puzzle of early instructed L2 learning. This volume has the merit of providing a broad picture of the phenomenon, examining several components and thus bringing together research from different fields, such as linguistics, politics and pedagogy. The three interim introductions which open each part of the volume are helpful in guiding the reader through the key aspects dealt with in the contributions that follow, giving a cogent and coherent presentation of the issues at stake and offering accessible interpretive cues also to less specialised readers. There are of course other areas in which the effects of early ISLA are worth exploring or could be taken a step further. For example, a well-established area of research in bilingualism has been investigating the cognitive advantages of bilinguals compared to monolingual peers, and more research points to the fact that such advantages are shared in different types and contexts of

bilingualism – including different types of languages, acquisitional settings and age of exposure to the two (or more) languages. It would be interesting to have a section that assesses the potential of early ISLA in terms of cognitive abilities, both general (e.g. the ability to switch from one task to another) and linguistic (e.g. the ability to make inferences), comparing the results with those found in other bilingual populations.

The findings of the different chapters of the book are well discussed in the Afterword, which captures all the relevant generalisations. In this regard, the editors are right in warning readers that the research presented in the volume does not easily allow for generalisability, and that care should be taken in extending results to contexts other than those in which the studies were conducted. However, one might also wish to find a brief discussion of which factors – among the several pinpointed throughout the book – are assumed to be responsible for variation and which ones are taken to lend themselves nicely to possible generalisations. For example, the umbrella term ‘early instructed second language acquisition’ actually includes a wide age span of children (on the whole ranging from 3 to 13 years old), to such an extent that a distinction is made between ‘early’ and ‘very early’ ISLA. One might thus wonder what role such a distinction plays. A discussion could have been included in the Afterword comparing the findings of the studies on early young learners and those on very early young learners, and pointing out more explicitly to what extent the learning process is common in both groups and in what respects it differs.

Overall, this volume is a valuable piece of work which makes a significant contribution not only in the field of second language acquisition through research that straddles the boundaries of a variety of disciplines, but also in many aspects of real life, enabling teachers, parents and institutions to make informed decisions that can render second language learning as productive as possible for young learners.