

THE BELIEFS OF PRIMARY EDUCATION TEACHERS REGARDING WRITING AND GRAMMAR INSTRUCTION

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Abstract

This paper presents the results of a study on the beliefs of eight primary-education teachers in Catalonia (Spain) regarding writing instruction and its relationship with grammar instruction. The declared practices of four second-grade primary teachers and four fourth-grade primary teachers from six different educational centers of the Barcelona metropolitan area were analyzed through a semi-structured interview, which was analyzed following a mixed-method approach. The results of the analysis show that teachers' beliefs about teaching writing revolve around how to manage the writing tasks in the classroom and that their beliefs about the relationship between teaching writing and grammar are based on sentence grammar (as opposed to textual grammar). These beliefs are considered evidence of epistemological and methodological obstacles to teaching writing and grammar in an integrated way.

Keywords: grammar instruction, teacher beliefs, teacher cognition, primary education, writing instruction

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Research on writing and grammar instruction

The study of the relationship between writing and grammar instruction and, consequently, the research on how teaching grammar at school can have an impact on writing, has been the focus of current and past research. In a recent volume that investigates such relationships in the Anglophone, Francophone, Germanophone, and Hispanophone regions, researchers argue that the old debate regarding the impact of teaching grammar on writing needs to be reconsidered (Boivin et al., 2018). They argue that it needs to evolve from a simplistic examination of arguments in favor of or against grammar instruction—“the shibboleth of grammar education”, (Boivin et al., 2018, p. 4)—to a more complex examination of the different issues involved in teaching and learning grammar and writing, such as situated teaching practices, structural differences in the languages being learned, teacher training, and research methodology (see Van Rijt & Coppens, 2017 for a review of positions on grammar instruction and experts’ views). One of the main issues that researchers in the different areas agreed upon was the importance of teacher training and education as a variable that could contribute to accounting for the way grammar and writing are taught. Regarding research traditions in the study of the relationship between writing and grammar teaching, there is, mostly in the Anglophone region, a “contested history,” as studies have provided different types of evidence for the relationship (Myhill, 2018).

On the one hand, meta-analysis studies have evaluated different classroom interventions and observed that some lead to better writing learning than others. For instance, Koster et al. (2015) (37 studies, 10 types of writing instruction interventions) showed that the most effective interventions were goal setting, strategy instruction, and text structure instruction¹. Conversely, grammar instruction was shown not to be as effective for writing instruction in this meta-analysis. These results are partly similar to the meta-analysis by Graham et al. (2012) (115 documents, 13 types of writing instruction interventions), which found that all interventions, except grammar instruction, had positive-size effects.² Nevertheless, the authors themselves clarified the results highlighting three methodological problems:

¹ *The 10 types of writing instruction strategies were the following: strategy instruction, text structure instruction, peer assistance, evaluation, goal setting, feedback, grammar instruction, revision, prewriting activities, and process approach.*

² *The 13 types of writing instruction were the following: strategy instruction, adding self-regulation to strategy instruction, text structure instruction, creativity/imagery instruction, teaching transcription skills, grammar instruction, prewriting activities, peer assistance, product goals, assessing writing, word processing, extra writing, and comprehensive writing programs.*

There are several reasons, however, to be cautious in interpreting this finding [grammar instruction with a significant effect size]. First, grammar instruction was the control condition (not the experimental condition) in all four studies that tested this treatment. Second, the comparison condition to which grammar instruction was compared varied considerably, as did the obtained effects. Third, the overall quality of studies assessing grammar instruction was low. Additional and better research is needed to test the effectiveness of such instruction (p. 11).

In short, while there are indications that the effect of grammar instruction in writing instruction can be low, it is necessary to conduct further research in a methodologically adequate way. A second reason to doubt the results pointing to the limited effect of grammar instruction in writing instruction is that research studying the effect of grammar often does not specify how the concept of grammar and its instruction are characterized; for example, whether or not grammar is contextualized within a writing task.

For such methodological reasons, it is worth noting that other research projects focus more on classroom practice and include more detailed analyses that provide evidence in favor of including grammar in writing instruction. For instance, in the monograph devoted to the teaching of grammar by Boivin et al. (2018), Myhill (2018) reviewed the contribution of grammar instruction to writing (and to other sorts of teaching interventions), concluding that grammar instruction is potentially enriching for the instruction of reading and writing. Specifically, Myhill (2018) mentioned current and past controversies regarding the role of grammar in school curricula and showed how in English-speaking countries, they tend to mention grammar instruction, albeit in an ambivalent way, focusing excessively on prescriptivism. In contrast, Myhill defended a functional approach to writing-related grammar instruction. In this sense, for Myhill, grammar is relevant to learn how to write because the choice between different grammatical aspects defines meaning, and learners often need to make grammatical decisions during the writing process. Thus, current research on pedagogic grammar has focused the debate on the relationship between grammatical knowledge and the command over language use, assuming that the grammar teaching-learning process must allow the users to improve their communication skills, including their writing competence, which inherently requires a degree of metalinguistic reflection (Casas & Comajoan, 2017).

As is the case in other geographical areas, the teaching of grammar in Spain remains controversial in the sense that, despite the introduction of text-based approaches that distanced themselves from sentence-based approaches, two main issues remained, namely, how to integrate grammar content (e.g., morphosyntax) in texts and discourse, and how to evolve from changing grammar content to changing the methodologies to teach grammar (Camps & Fontich, 2019; Fontich & García-Folgado, 2018).

Prior research on the instruction of writing in Spain has shown that overall three main practice profiles are implemented in schools (Fons-Esteve & Buisán-Serradell,

2012; Tolchinsky, Bigas & Barragán, 2010): instructional, situational, and multidimensional.³ The instructional profile (34% of teachers) focuses on explicit instruction of the code and on learning products and tends to aim at the homogenization of the students' profiles. The situational profile (37% of teachers) emphasizes autonomous writing and situational learning. Finally, the multidimensional profile (29% of teachers) is a combination of different factors. The detailed characterizations of each profile do not mention grammar directly, probably because the study focused on the first years of study (pre-school and first grade) and on the general practices used in reading and writing instruction. However, the fact that no reference is made to grammatical aspects is remarkable, taking into account the intense debate on the role of grammar in writing instruction that characterizes research on writing worldwide.

1.2 *Research on teacher cognition (teacher beliefs)*

The study of teachers' beliefs or teacher cognition is central to educational research because they have been proven to have an impact on practice, although the extent of this impact is not yet clear (Borg, 2003, 2006, 2019; Gaitas & Alves Martins, 2015; Pérez Pietx, 2016; Rietdijk et al., 2018). While earlier definitions of teacher cognition described nearly dichotomous typologies to explain teachers' beliefs and practices (e.g., communicative and non-communicative teachers), recent studies show that both beliefs and practices are multidimensional. The multidimensionality of research on teacher cognition is fully addressed by Borg (2019), who adapted his former definitions of the topic to current methodological and epistemological discussions. Thus, Borg (2019) defined teacher cognition as follows: "Inquiry which seeks, with reference to their personal, professional, social, cultural and historical contexts, to understand teachers' minds and emotions and the role these play in the process of becoming, being and developing as a teacher" (p. 1167).

For instance, in a study based on a questionnaire with 255 primary education teachers in Portugal, Gaitas and Alves Martins (2015) found that beliefs can be classified as code-based or meaning-based. When connecting classroom practices with beliefs, they observed that some practices associated more closely with one specific type. On the one hand, code-based beliefs are those that consider the importance of letter-to-sound correspondence, individual writing, explicit spelling and grammar teaching, and copying models. On the other hand, meaning-based beliefs consider the importance of a diversity of printed materials in the classroom, stimulating students to write even if they do not know how to write correctly, allowing students to select their own writing topics, and writing in pairs or small groups. In fact, Gaitas and Alves Martins (2015)—similar to Fons-Esteve and Buisán-Serradell's (2012) and

³ The data in Fons-Esteve and Buisán-Serradell (2012) and Tolchinsky, Bigas, and Barragán (2010) were extracted from over 2000 questionnaires handed out to P5 (pre-school) teachers and first-grade primary teachers from different regions in Spain.

Tolchinsky, Bigas, and Barragán's (2010) multidimensional profile and Ríos and Fernández's (2016) study—also noted that 75% of teachers valued both types of focus: “these results question whether meaning-based beliefs and code-based beliefs are incompatible, and reinforce the idea that, albeit apparently contradictory, the two positions do seem to coexist” (p. 500).

The relationship between, on the one hand, the teachers' knowledge about writing and grammar instruction and, on the other hand, the practices they carry out in their classroom is particularly complex (Borg, 2019; Phipps & Borg, 2009), as evidenced by studies in compulsory education environments, especially in the Anglophone area as a result of curricular changes and the introduction of grammar in the curriculum in the United Kingdom (Department for Education, 2014). For instance, Bell (2016), in a case study at a school in North-West England where teachers were studied over a period of 10 months, highlighted the complexity of teachers' beliefs about learning and teaching grammar and that teacher beliefs has a clear impact on their teaching practices. In a similar way, Dean (2016) studied 8 primary school teachers in England in a period of 15 months and showed how the teachers' epistemological stances towards grammar influenced their teaching and contributed to adopting new practices regarding the teaching of grammar and writing. For instance, a prescriptivist perspective of grammar, focusing on correctness and often related to a limited knowledge about grammar and grammar teaching, were barriers to effective teaching. Furthermore, teachers who participated in the study gained confidence in how they taught grammar and became more aware of the gap between their beliefs and their practice. However, the results also showed that teachers often misunderstood concepts directly related to teaching, such as “teaching grammar in context”, which in turn resulted in teaching practices that matched their beliefs and were a barrier to pedagogical change.

Research on secondary schools has also explored if the relationship between English teachers' conceptualisations of grammar teaching and their beliefs about how teaching grammar may benefit their students' writing development. For instance, Watson (2015a) interviewed 31 teachers three times each over the course of a year-long project and studied their beliefs about writing in general and grammar in particular. The results indicated that their initial conceptualisations of grammar teaching tended to reflect a prescriptive and traditional model of grammar, but that they also evolved with time, moving from an approach focused on prescriptivism to one on rhetorics (that is, more contextualized, based on choices and contextualization rather than on rules) (cf. Lefstein, 2009).

Previous research on writing and grammar instruction in Spain regarding teachers' conceptualizations of the teaching of grammar and writing has showed that there is tension between teacher beliefs, the language curriculum, teacher training, and teaching practices. Fontich and Birello (2015), following a questionnaire study answered by 94 primary and secondary school teachers in Spain, found that teachers' beliefs about writing and grammar can be placed in a continuum that goes from those who believe that writing and teaching can only be taught in a formal and direct

manner to those who believe that teaching needs to be fully situated and be based on students' production in specific written texts. Bastons et al. (2017) showed how a sample of primary and secondary school teachers in Catalonia (Spain) had quite homogeneous ideas concerning the way grammar should be instructed to improve writing, but such homogeneity was lost when it came to considering the procedures to carry out such instruction in the classroom. Finally, Camps and Fontich (2019), in a study of a secondary school teacher in Spain, highlighted that the teachers' conceptualization regarding grammar and writing can be an obstacle for the renewal of grammar-for-writing practices, but "at the same time can offer anchoring points for this renewal" (p. 28), in the sense that it can promote reflexive metalinguistic activities in the classroom.

Previous studies investigating teachers' beliefs in Spain about the teaching of writing and that of grammar have focused on the study of secondary school teachers and mostly have followed a qualitative methodological approach (Fontich & García-Folgado, 2018). The current study, in contrast, investigates the beliefs of primary school teachers and adopts a mixed-method approach. More specifically, the current article seeks answers for the following research questions: 1) What are teachers' beliefs regarding writing instruction in primary school? 2) What relationships are established between the teaching of writing and that of grammar?

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 *Participants*

The data for the study come from two projects that investigated teachers in 13 primary and 5 secondary schools in Catalonia, which focused on studying teacher performance in the classroom in order to see how their teaching of writing could be improved, and at the same time how the students' writing skills in socioeconomic complex disadvantaged environments could be enhanced. To participate in the current project, a call was made to the 13 primary education establishments that participated in the two larger projects within which this study was framed. All schools were public and in the Barcelona metropolitan area, and most of them were in areas with low socioeconomic status. Eight teachers from six of the thirteen schools volunteered to be interviewed for the current study: four of the teachers taught in second grade (7–8-year-old students) and the other four in fourth grade (9–10 years old). All the teachers were female, and most were experienced teachers, ranging from 6 to 39 years of experience. All of them were multilingual and taught in Catalan and Spanish, and half of them were also foreign language (English or French) specialists (Table 1).

Table 1. Description of the participants in the study

Teacher ⁴	Teaching experience (years)	School	Grade	Additional information
Anna	17	A	2 nd	Foreign language (English) specialist, 8 years teaching at school A
Martina	-	B	2 nd	Foreign language (English) specialist
Valentina	6	B	4 th	First year as a primary-school teacher (formerly an early childhood teacher specializing in English language teaching)
Carlota	39	C	2 nd	30 years working at school C
Natalie	30	C	4 th	Foreign language (English and French) specialist, 8 years teaching at school C
Alba	10	D	4 th	6 years working at school D
Agnes	30	E	4 th	-
Duna	30	F	2 nd	30 years working at school F

The schools where the participants taught were all Catalan public schools that received a high number of immigrant population since the early 2000s, mostly from Latin America and Morocco. Population in Catalonia in the first decade of the 21st century increased in approximately 1 million, with people from abroad, which had a clear impact in schools (Bretxa, Comajoan, & Vila, 2017; Vila, 2020; Vila, Lasagabaster, & Ramallo, 2016). One clear impact was the increase in language diversity at schools, which until that moment had mostly functioned in Catalan and Spanish, both coofficial languages of Catalonia, and in one foreign language (mostly English). In the majority of the schools where data were collected, students do not have Catalan as their first language and, often, their families have a low socioeconomic status. The main language of instruction of all schools, mandated by law since 1998, is Catalan, with a minimum of three hours per week devoted to the teaching of Spanish. In all schools in Catalonia, teachers are generalists, that is, they teach all subjects in the curriculum except for the foreign language, music, and physical education, for which there are specialists in most schools. All participant teachers in this study taught all subjects (including Spanish and Catalan language) and those who were foreign language specialists additionally taught English or French (Table 1).

Catalan primary schools follow the 2015 national curriculum, which is competence-based. The curriculum gives prominence to writing, but explicit grammar instruction is almost absent, and when it is mentioned, it is in connection with communicative goals, as in the following excerpt: "The contents related to the functioning of the language and its learning must be introduced and exercised in order to improve communication, avoiding a grammaticalist treatment of language teaching" (Departament d'ensenyament, 2017, p. 39, emphasis added).⁵ The curriculum does

⁴ Pseudonyms are used to refer to the participants in the study. The years of experience for Martina were not obtained due to a misunderstanding during the data collection procedure.

⁵ Translated by the authors of the article. Original in Catalan: "Els continguts referits al funcionament de la llengua i el seu aprenentatge cal introduir-los i exercitar-los amb la finalitat

not specify how grammar teaching is related to the teaching of writing and gives leeway to the schools regarding the methodology to teach language and communicative competences. When referring to linguistic structures that are common in the three languages that are taught at schools (Catalan, Spanish, and a foreign language), the curriculum gives autonomy to teachers, and it states that they need to agree on what features will be taught and in what language, and that the approach they follow needs to emphasize the development of skills and avoid “unnecessary repetitions that are often the hallmark of grammar teaching” (Departament d’ensenyament, 2017, p. 41). Despite the fact that the emphasis is on communication and competences, the curriculum lists “basic grammatical categories” in the contents for most levels, providing the categories (articles, nouns, verbs, etc.), but without a definition or specific information on how they need to be contextualized. This type of curriculum is in high contrast with other national curricula, such as the current one in the United Kingdom and in other areas, which focus on (or mandate) explicit grammar instruction (Boivin et al., 2018).

2.2 *Instrument for data collection*

To investigate the participants’ beliefs on the subject in question, an open semi-structured interview was designed. Interviews have been widely used as a data-collection technique in many qualitative research projects to collect information about the systems of beliefs and representations in the field of language teaching (Fons, 2013; Fons-Esteve & Buisán-Serradell, 2012; Guasch & Ribas, 2013; Pérez Peitx, 2016; Ríos & Fernández, 2016). To answer the two research questions in the current paper, we focused on two of the seven sections of the interview, namely, the practices in which the teachers engaged to guide the children when they teach them how to write and the role grammar instruction plays in that process (see the two sections and their questions of the interview in Appendix 1). The interviews were conducted in October 2017 and took an average of 40 minutes, during which questions were asked to allow the teachers’ beliefs to emerge.⁶ The interviewers were several members of the research team, and none of them were authors of the current article.

2.3 *Data analysis*

The analysis of the data from the interviews was based on content analysis, a research technique aimed at formulating reproducible and valid inferences from data that can be applied to a different context. Content analysis constitutes an appropriate technique to objectively, systematically, and qualitatively describe the implicit

de millorar la comunicació, defugint un tractament gramaticalista de l’ensenyament de les llengües” (p. 39).

⁶ *All interviews were carried out in Catalan. The illustrative segments of the interviews were translated into English for the current article.*

and explicit content from interview databases (Varguillas, 2006). Therefore, the aim was to extract units of analysis from specific contexts to be coded afterward. These codes become keywords that identify the general ideas behind each subject's statements (Huber & García, 1990). However, one of the complexities of qualitative research lies precisely in analyzing a large information corpus. Therefore, the interviews were transcribed and subsequently analyzed individually by each member of the research team, using the Atlas.ti software.

Initially, a list of categories about writing instruction and learning was established, based on prior literature on writing instruction (see Appendix 2). The list of starting codes contemplated relevant aspects such as meaningful and contextualized learning or the presentation of quality classroom activities. As the analysis of the interviews progressed, new codes were added (*emerging codes* in Appendix 2), which were discussed and agreed upon among the members of the research team. Finally, the most productive codes and those that were considered most useful to trace the teachers' beliefs regarding the subject matter were identified and further analyzed (*focused codes* in Appendix 2). More codes emerged in the *Grammar and writing* category than in the *Guiding during the writing process* category. This is explained by the initial imbalance in the starting codes proposed by the research team and the number of questions regarding each topic in the interview. The final number of codes in each category is displayed in Table 2.

Table 2. Codes for the analysis of the writing and grammar categories

Guiding during the writing process	Grammar teaching
1. Task management	1. Grammar contents
2. Assessment of writing task	2. Use of metalanguage
3. Correction	3. Prescriptive approach
4. School genres	4. Deductive approach
5. Guidelines	
6. Structure	
7. Text types	

A summary of the two categories (*Guiding during the writing process* and *Grammar teaching*) and each code within with specific examples follows for the sake of understanding how the data coding was carried out.

The category *Guiding during the writing process* referred to the activities that teachers design and implement in a structured and conscious manner in order to guide learners in writing tasks. Such guidance can take many shapes, such as model presentation, examples, and guided writing situations. The type of guidance provided by the teacher varies according to the functions of texts (Borzzone et al., 2011). Within this category, the code *Task management* referred to the type of organization the teacher implements for the students in order to address writing assignments in different formats (whole group, small groups, pairs, etc.) and the establishment of student roles within cooperative teams (spokesperson, coordinator, and so on)

(Mayordomo & Onrubia, 2015). The following is an instance of an interview segment with the *Task Management* code, in which Alba referred to the fact that the students managed writing collaboratively:⁷

(1) In addition, since they are already used to working in cooperative teams, the student who acts as the spokesperson when he sees that maybe that day that is not working, he raises his hand and tells me: “look, today I do not feel like it” and then we have to motivate him: “Let’s see how we can do that.” We have to motivate him to continue the task. (Alba, School D, 4th, turn 576)

The code *Assessment of writing task* refers to how teachers valued the guiding provided by themselves in the writing tasks. Such assessment can refer to the process of writing, to the final written product, as well as to the difficulties or enjoyment generated by the writing task. In the following excerpts, assessment is about the process (2) and the emotions generated, not only in the teacher, but also in the children (3):

(2) Then all together we do the reading [of the text we have written] and we say: “This sentence was not necessary” and we mark it in the grid, but we need a lot of time to do it this way. (Alba, School D, 4th, turn 422)

(3) I liked it a lot [to carry out the writing task]. I had a great time, but I think they did too. (Valentina, School B, 4th, turn 444)

The *Correction* code referred to the feedback provided by the teacher both in the process of text writing and in the final result. Such feedback tended to focus on prescriptive rules, especially on spelling, which were done by the teacher (4) or collectively (5):

(4) [When I correct I pay attention to] the words that would not be acceptable at all, those that were in capitals when it was necessary after a period, capitals if there were proper nouns because they wrote the name of a child or whatever... I correct this, a few, a few basic spelling rules. (Alba, School D, 4th, turn 306)

(5) We also do group corrections because they often also like it. And also somehow they get used to constructive criticism. We read the text aloud and we ask questions: “What do you see here?”, “How would you have written it?” “How do you think it could be improved?” “Who would write it in a different way”? (Agnes, School E, 4th, turn 114)

The code *School genres* refers to oral or written discursive forms that are stable within one community, in this case the school community (Bakhtin, 1997). Thus, school genres are textual genres that are promoted at school as content knowledge. In the following quote, Duna explicitly referred to the school genres they were learning in the classroom:

(6) We have worked on the informative note, we are working on the letter, and before we worked on the cooking recipe. (Duna, School F, 2nd, turn 125)

⁷ See Appendix 3 for the original quotes in Catalan. The translations were done by one of the authors of the article. For each quote, we include information about the participant, the school where they taught, the year (2nd or 4th grade) (Table 1), and the turn within the conversation.

The code labeled *Guidelines* was used for the types of assistance provided by the teacher during the writing process. They can be oriented toward the subprocesses of writing (planning, writing, and revision) or toward the use of different techniques or strategies (e.g., brainstorming, models, revision guides, guided questions, etc.), as in the following excerpt:

(7) We brainstorm... yes, we also refer a lot to the guidelines that we have previously worked on. We follow the guidelines with them. Since we have some schemas that we give them as a model [students] keep them in their folder to consult them. They refer to them. However, this is still difficult to do in fourth grade. (Agnes, School E, 4th, turn 98)

The *Structure* code was used to mark all the references in the interviews about the overall organization of information in a text, such as thematic organization or the hierarchical relationships between the different parts of the text. In the following example, Alba referred to how she taught the structure of a text in a collaborative writing situation in the classroom:

(8) I write what they tell me and if I have to do a paragraph, I draw it [the teacher makes the noise of a pen on a piece of paper], I make a square and I tell them: "I will write here the first part," and this way we structure the text. (Alba, School D, 4th, turn 348)

Finally, the *Text type* code was used for any reference to text typologies that appeared in the interviews, which were mostly references to narrative, descriptive, expositive, argumentative, and dialogic texts (cf. Adam, 1992). For instance, in the following example, the teacher refers to the argumentative type explicitly:

(9) For example, let's say that one day we had to debate whether they wanted animals at the zoo or not. Then this is what we did so that they would end up doing an argumentative text. (Natalie, School C, 4th, turn 381)

The second category that was coded in the interviews was *Grammar teaching*, which was used for all mentions related to the linguistic systems of Catalan and Spanish and their teaching, and to a lesser extent to the foreign language being taught. Within this category, four codes emerged.

Grammar contents coded for all references to the concepts of the linguistic system, focusing on form (mostly, morphosyntax) or functions (integrating morphosyntax, semantics, and pragmatics) (Fontich & Birello, 2015). In the following example, the teacher refers to the explicit grammar content she teaches in the classroom:

(10) We work on the sentence. We work on the elements of a sentence, whether a person carries out an action or several people. Then, here we work on agreement, singular and plural, masculine and feminine. (Agnes, School E, 4th, turn 377)

Use of metalanguage was the code for all references to linguistic terminology. The use of metalanguage is part of reflective activity about language, and it is often an indicator of the knowledge and beliefs about the linguistic system and its teaching (e.g., prescriptive or descriptive views on language and its teaching). For instance, in (11), the teacher explicitly referred to terminology for grammar categories:

(11) They have to hear them and they have to know them [the different grammar categories], and they are in the books and maybe, let's see, what is a noun?, they have been hearing it since the first cycle [1st and 2nd grade]. (Agnes, School E, 4th, turn 462)

The code labeled *Prescriptive approach* referred to the type of grammar teaching focusing on rules, appropriate spelling, morphosyntax, and vocabulary, mostly at the sentence level and with an emphasis on standard language. Example (12) shows an instance of the prescriptive approach adopted by the teacher when she isolated the linguistic features and grammar from the writing task:

(12) What we are doing now, it is as if we had broken down the language into different sections. So, there is the written expression part and then there is another session about Catalan that we leave it for grammar things. (Valentina, School B, 4th, turn 236)

Finally, *Deductive approach* referred to the teaching of grammar that starts from a general linguistic or communicative notion and derives a linguistic rule from it, rather than the opposite approach (inductive):

(13) I try, if we are working on the adjective, I say, where will be find a text in which there are a lot of adjectives? (Natalie, School C, 4th, turn 779)

3. RESULTS

A frequency analysis of the codes in the interviews provide evidence of two trends (Table 3). First, codes referring to teachers' beliefs about teaching writing (315) were twice as many as those about grammar and grammar teaching (153). Furthermore, the detail that the teachers provided regarding writing teaching was much higher than the specific information about grammar, a fact that is attested in the larger number of codes for the category related to the teaching of writing (7 codes for *Guiding during the writing process* vs. 4 codes for *Grammar teaching*). Second, within each of the two categories, codes were not uniformly distributed, but rather one in each category was much more common than the rest. In the case of *Guiding during the writing process*, teachers mostly referred to how they managed the writing tasks (34%), as opposed to how they assessed them (15%), or how they provided feedback (13%). In the case of grammar teaching, the most common code was the one that indicates that teachers mostly focused on grammar contents (62%), which together with beliefs about use of metalanguage (16%) and prescriptive practices (14%), suggest that they implemented an approach that focuses on forms rather than communication and texts.

Table 3. Frequency of codes in the interview data (raw frequencies and percentage within category)

Guiding during the writing process			Grammar teaching		
Code	Freq.	%	Code	Freq.	%
Task management	106	34%	Grammar contents	95	62%
Assessment of writing tasks	47	15%	Use of metalanguage	24	16%
Correction	42	13%	Prescriptive approach	22	14%
School genres	33	10%	Deductive approach	12	8%
Guidelines	33	10%			
Structure	31	10%			
Text types	23	7%			
Total	315	(100%)	Total	153	(100%)

4. DISCUSSION

The current study attempted to answer two main research questions: 1) What are teachers' beliefs regarding writing instruction in primary school? and 2) What relationships are established between the instruction of writing and that of grammar? Overall, the results of the study show that the knowledge that teachers have about grammar is eclectic and diffused (Watson, 2015a, 2015b), that teachers do not usually consider the connection between teaching writing and grammar, and that they are not fully aware that understanding grammar may be a resource to teach how to write or practice writing in a more effective manner (Bell, 2016; Camps & Fontich, 2018).

Regarding the teachers' beliefs about writing instruction, the results showed that teachers mostly focused on how they managed writing tasks while they guided students in the writing process, that is, how they provided aids that they considered would assist learners in their writing. Such guiding included several types of help, such as providing examples and models/situations of guided writing, which has been the focus of previous research (e.g., Gaitas & Alves, 2015; Rietdijk et al., 2018; Pérez Peitx, 2016). Teachers, when asked how they build the writing process, explain, above all, how they organize the classroom (Ríos & Fernández, 2016). For instance, one of the 4th-grade teachers in this study referred to how she managed cooperative teams in her classroom to organize writing tasks (see Example 1). Group work (in pairs or groups) and, to a lesser extent, cooperative work were assumed by some of the teachers participating in the current study. In cooperative work, each member of the group assumes a role and this dynamic regulates the functioning of the classroom and how knowledge is built. Peer interaction with the support of adults has been studied extensively and previous research has showed that interaction is of great value in the teaching-learning of writing and grammar (Mercer, 2000; Mercer & Howe, 2012; Wegerif, Mercer & Dawes, 1999), as it may bring out the metalinguistic activity necessary for the construction of linguistic knowledge (Camps & Fontich, 2019; Casas & Comajoan, 2017). However, the results of the current study show that

teachers were not fully aware of the potential of interaction as a means for metalinguistic thinking and knowledge building, but rather seemed to understand cooperative work as a way to organize teams and assign roles.

In addition to focusing on how to manage writing tasks, teachers also referred to other beliefs. The fact that *Assessment of writing task* was the second most common code in the category about teaching writing suggests that they paid attention to how writing tasks were implemented in their classrooms. They mostly valued the duration of the tasks or the emotional impact writing tasks had on their students and on themselves. It is a subjective dimension that goes beyond the epistemic or social function of writing and mostly values the enjoyment of tackling writing tasks at school (Boscoli & Gelati, 2019). In this respect, it is remarkable that teachers in the current article focused on subjective aspects of the writing tasks that were related to whether both learners and the teachers themselves enjoyed the tasks or not. Previous research has extensively studied the aids oriented to the subprocesses of the teaching of writing (planning, textualization, and revision) (Graham et al., 2012; Graham et al., 2019) as well as the use of various techniques and strategies to promote writing (such as the use of rubrics, examples, and models), but not so much the appreciative component of the teachers with respect to the tasks they propose. Thus, the results from this study should be considered in further research that examines how the subjective views of teachers and students are related to beliefs about motivation, self-efficacy, and how this relates to the learning of writing (cf. Brindle et al., 2016).

The third most frequent code in the data was connected to correction, that is, the corrections made by teachers during or at the end of the writing process. The type of feedback provided by the teachers in this study often focused on normative and orthographic aspects and relegated textual aspects to a marginal position, as was the case in the teacher studied by Camps and Fontich (2019). These results reveal a traditional conception of the teaching-learning of grammar (based on prescriptivism) and are connected to Wilson's (2019) claim that focusing task correction on linguistic matters (e.g., morphology, lexicon, or spelling) does not meet the parameters of the written composition process. Furthermore, the discrepancy between the complexity of learning-teaching to write and the type of feedback provided, in addition to the fact that teachers value writing tasks positively, may contribute to inconsistent teaching practices as those adopted by some of the teachers in the current study.

In short, the results regarding the first research question indicate that participating teachers believe that guiding the writing process for primary school children mainly represents three actions: managing, assessing, and correcting. Other related aspects also emerged, but they did so less frequently (e.g., guidelines, school genres, structure, and text types). Interestingly, such less frequently mentioned ideas might be considered evidence of greater adaptation to the teaching-learning of the writing process (Chartrand, Émery-Bruneau & Sénéchal, 2015; Dolz-Mestre & Abouzaid, 2015; Santolària, 2017), a notion that was lacking in the conversations with the teachers.

Regarding the second research question, the results showed that there was a tension between teaching writing and teaching grammar in the sense that they were seldom connected, as witnessed in previous studies of primary and secondary teaching (Bell, 2016; Boivin et al., 2018; Camps & Fontich, 2019; Myhill, 2018; Watson, 2015a, 2015b). The data from the study add to the body of research showing that teachers identify grammar teaching with the teaching of grammar contents. Some of the grammatical contents mentioned by the teachers were sentence/phrase, singular/plural (more often than *number*), masculine/feminine (more often than *gender*), noun phrase, verbal phrase, agreement, and grammatical categories. They are all isolated notions at the sentence level and with little emphasis on the textual or discursive one. Furthermore, they are connected to an approach close to prescriptivism, with its focus on normative use, as witnessed in the frequency of some of the codes in Table 3. This is also evidence that teachers tended to view activities for learning to write disconnected from activities for learning grammar (Bell, 2016) (e.g., in Examples 12 and 13).

The references to use of metalanguage by the teachers are evidence of the time teachers devote to the introduction of metalanguage throughout their teaching practice. For instance, in Example 11, teacher Agnes stated that learners need to “hear” and “know” words that refer to grammatical concepts, and she seemed to justify it because they are also “in the books”, a reference to the high use of terminology in language textbooks (Coronas, 2014; Torralba, 2010; Van Rijt & Coppen, 2017). In general, however, throughout the interviews, the teachers used little metalanguage and it was usually the interviewer who introduced it. This result, again, points to the inconsistency between what teachers consider that they have to teach and their own knowledge of linguistic terminology (Gil, 2017). In this sense, although previous research has investigated how children appropriate new grammatical concepts, the use of linguistic terminology and the didactic transposition by teachers deserves further research (Casas, 2014; Myhill, 2011; Nadeau & Fisher, 2011).

In sum, the ideas that emanate from the interviews show a conception of grammar based on prescriptive grammar, with its emphasis on sentence-level rules and correction. In this sense, such views are distant from what may be considered effective practices when it comes to teaching grammar (Camps & Fontich, 2019; Fontich & Birello, 2015; Myhill, 2018). These results and the professional trajectory of the teachers in this study, which spans from 6 to 39 years of experience, fit within a context of teacher training in Spain that from the early 1990s (since LOGSE, the first education law from the restoration of democracy in 1978 in Spain) emphasized communicative approaches over metalinguistic reflection or grammar instruction (Fontich & García-Folgado, 2018), a fact that may have backfired in the long run. In this respect, in contrast to other areas of Europe (Bell, 2016; Boivin et al., 2018; Watson, 2015a, 2015b), the current Catalan curriculum emphasizes the importance of communication and continues to oppose it to a so-called *grammaticalist* approach as if there were no possible connection between communication and grammar.

5. CONCLUSION

We would like to highlight two of the contributions of this study. First, from a methodological standpoint, a mixed-method approach combining quantitative and qualitative analyses of data from interviews and using the Atlas.ti software has allowed for a more systematic analysis of prior, emerging, and final codes. Second, the results regarding teachers' beliefs about grammar have not been investigated isolatedly but rather in connection to classroom practices by teachers when they teach writing at the primary level. The results have showed that the participating teachers did not particularly intertwine the teaching of writing and that of grammar. This result is made clear in the tensions between the fundamentals of pedagogic grammar—integrating grammar instruction and writing competence—and the grammar concepts referred by the teachers—often circumscribed to sentence grammar using methodological approaches linked to very specific practices unconnected to textual production. This situation begs to reconsider how pedagogic grammar at schools can be implemented and what the consequences of such implementation would be for writing instruction and learning.

We must point out several limitations of this study, such as the fact that the teachers' declared practices could not be verified with their actual practice in the classroom. In this sense, it would be necessary in further research to triangulate data-collection tools (interviews, classroom observations) and even methodological approaches (type of activities, educational sequences, intervention programs), which would provide a fuller understanding of the role of grammar instruction in relation with writing instruction in a larger number of schools. Although the number of participants in the current study was not large, it can represent the starting point for a deeper reflection on the training of educators, in order to rethink what grammar contents should be included in primary education, how to include them, and what for (Fontich, 2017; Watson, 2015a, 2015b).

Once the problem of distancing between grammar and writing has been detected, the didactic implications related to educational policy that derive from the current study are at least two. On the one hand, the initial training of teachers must be rethought and move towards training that incorporates functional or pedagogical grammar and fosters metalinguistic reflection. On the other hand, the primary school curriculum (in Catalonia) needs to be reformulated in favor of the inclusion of the teaching of pedagogical grammar, as has already happened in other European contexts (Bell, 2016; Myhill, 2018). Only by re-examining the relationships between what teachers believe and know, how they are trained, what they do in their classrooms, and what students learn, will we be able to improve the learning of languages for all children.

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APPENDIX 1. QUESTIONS IN THE SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW

Section (topic)	Question
<i>Guiding during the writing process</i>	<p>-How do you start your writing activities? What activities do you do first?</p> <p>-Do you think it is important to spend some time helping students to generate ideas? Why? How do you do that?</p> <p>-Can you give an example of the indications you share with your students before starting a writing activity?</p> <p>-How do you help students to plan their writing tasks?</p> <p>-Do you usually provide models of the type of text they must write? How do you present those models to your students? What activities do you propose?</p> <p>-Do you propose group writing activities in your classroom? What is your objective when you do so? When do you do it? What activities do you usually do in groups? Give an example.</p>
<i>Grammar instruction</i>	<p>-When you teach how to write, do you take grammatical aspects into account?</p> <p>-Explain an activity you carried out in which you think writing and grammar instruction were well integrated.</p> <p>-How do you think grammatical knowledge can be constructed? How should it be considered?</p> <p>-Should grammatical knowledge be only procedural? Should concepts be made explicit? Do you think metalanguage is necessary?</p> <p>-Explain one of the activities to instruct grammar/writing that you use in your classroom and works especially well.</p>

APPENDIX 2. DATA-CODING PROCESS FOR ANALYSIS

Thematic axis	Starting codes	Emerging codes	Focused codes
Guiding during the writing process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Objective -Recipient -Text structure -School genres -Social genres -Instructions -Generation of ideas -Planning -Models -Modeling -Drafts -ICTs -Mid-activity review -Final review -Correction -Evaluation of writing tasks -Qualification -Management of the writing task -Obstacles -Register 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Text type -Guidelines 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Management of the writing task -School genres -Text type -Evaluation of writing tasks -Correction -Guidelines -Text structure
Relationship between grammar and writing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Explicit considerations -Grammar contents -Use of metalanguage 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Prescriptive approach -Text -Deductive approach -Inductive approach -Systematic approach -Non-systematic approach -No information 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Grammar contents -Use of metalanguage -Prescriptive approach -Deductive approach

APPENDIX 3. ORIGINAL QUOTES FROM PARTICIPATING TEACHERS (IN CATALAN)

- (1) A més a més com que ja estan acostumats a treballar en equips cooperatius, el que fa de portaveu quan ja veu que a lo millor aquell dia allò no funciona, ja aixeca el braç i m'està dient: "és que mira és que avui no en tinc ganes" i llavors pues l'hem de motivar: "Aviam com ho fem". L'hem de motivar per continuar la tasca. (Alba, Escola D, 4t, torn 576)
- (2) Llavors entre tots anem fent la lectura [del text que hem escrit] i diem: "Aquesta frase no calia" i ho marquem a la graella, però necessitem molt temps per fer-ho així. (Alba, escola D, 4t, torn 422)
- (3) A mi em va agradar molt [portar a terme la tasca]. Jo m'ho vaig passar molt bé, però jo crec que ells també. (Valentina, Escola B, 4t, torn 444)
- (4) [Quan corregeixo em fixo en] les paraules que no passàriem de ninguna manera, les que no estaven en majúscula quan tocava després de punt, majúscula si hi havien noms propis perquè posaven nom al nen o a qui fos... corregeixo això, quatre, quatre normes ortogràfiques bàsiques. (Alba, Escola D, 4t, torn 306)
- (5) També fem la correcció en grup perquè moltes vegades entre ells també els hi agrada. I també d'alguna manera s'acostumen a la crítica constructiva. Llegim l'escrit en veu alta i fem preguntes: "aquí què veus?", "com l'hauries escrit tu?" "com creus que es podria millorar?" "qui ho escriuria d'una altra manera?" (Agnes, Escola E, 4t, 114)
- (6) Hem treballat la nota informativa, estem treballant la carta i anteriorment havíem treballat la recepta de cuina. (Duna, Escola F, 2n, torn 125)
- (7) Fem alguna pluja d'idees... sí que també fem molta referència a les pautes que prèviament hem treballat. Anem seguint aquella pauta. Com que tenim uns esquemes que donem com a model, [els nens] se'ls guarden a la carpeta per anar-los consultant. Ho van mirant. De tota manera això encara és difícil de fer a quart curs. (Agnes, Escola E, 4t, torn 98)
- (8) El que ells em van dient jo ho vaig escrivint i si he de fer un paràgraf, el dibuixo, [soroll del traç del bolígraf sobre el paper] faig el quadre i els hi dic: "aquí posaré la primera part" i així anem estructurant el text. (Alba, Escola D, 4t, 348)
- (9) Posem el cas d'un dia que havíem de debatre si volien animals al zoo o no. Aleshores això era perquè acabessin fent una argumentació. (Natalie, Escola C, 4t, torn 381)
- (10) Treballem l'oració. Treballem els elements d'una frase, si hi ha una persona que fa una acció o varies persones. Llavors aquí treballem la concordança, el singular i el plural, el femení i el masculí. (Agnes, Escola E, 4t, torn 377)
- (11) Les han de sentir i les han de conèixer [el nom de les diferents categories gramaticals], i en els llibres hi són i potser, a veure, què és un nom?, ho estan sentint des de de cycle inicial [1r i 2n curs de primària]. (Agnes, Escola E, 4t, torn 462)
- (12) Ara el que estem fent, o sigui és com si haguéssim desglossat la llengua en diferents parcel·les. Així doncs, hi ha la part d'expressió escrita i llavors hi ha una altra sessió de català que sí que la deixem més per coses de gramàtica. (Valentina, Escola B, 4t, torn 236)
- (13) Intento, si estic treballant l'adjectiu, dic "on trobarem un text que hi hagin molts adjectius?" (Natalie, Escola C, 4t, torn 779)