Review: Balboni, Paolo E. (2018). *A theoretical framework for language education and teaching*. Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

Sergio Pizziconi
Università per Stranieri di Siena

ABSTRACT

EN
The volume is a reflection on the status of educational linguistics as a field of investigation in its own right. The author's objective is to outline a theoretical framework for language education and teaching that is independent from the cultural features of the context in which the language curriculum is implemented. This goal seems to be intended by the author as a way to organize the many and often fragmentary trends and threads of research in the field and to provide scholars and practitioners with a benchmark against which they can contrast their research and professional practice decisions.

Key words: EDUCATIONAL LINGUISTICS, LANGUAGE EDUCATION, LANGUAGE TEACHING, THEORETICAL PARADIGMS

ES
Este volumen es una reflexión sobre la situación de la lingüística educativa como campo de investigación independiente. El objetivo del autor es trazar un marco teórico para la educación lingüística y la enseñanza de lenguas que no dependa de las influencias culturales del ámbito en el que se aplica el currículo lingüístico. Parece ser que el autor entiende este objetivo como una forma de organizar las numerosas y con frecuencia fragmentarias tendencias y vías de investigación en este campo y de proporcionar a los estudiosos y profesionales un esquema de referencia con el que puedan contrastar sus decisiones tanto en la investigación como en la práctica profesional.

Palabras clave: LINGÜÍSTICA EDUCATIVA, EDUCACIÓN LINGÜÍSTICA, ENSEÑANZA DE IDIOMAS, PARADIGMAS TEÓRICOS

IT
Il volume è una riflessione sullo status della linguistica educativa come ambito di ricerca a sé stante. Il fine dell'autore è quello di individuare una cornice teorica per l'educazione linguistica e l'insegnamento delle lingue che sia scevro dalle influenze culturali del luogo in cui il curriculum linguistico è progettato. L'obiettivo sembra essere inteso dall'autore come un modo di riorganizzare le molte e spesso frammentarie tendenze e direzioni di ricerca nel settore e di fornire a studiosi/e e a praticanti uno schema di riferimento rispetto al quale confrontare le proprie scelte di ricerca e di pratica professionale.

Parole chiave: LINGUISTICA EDUCATIVA, EDUCAZIONE LINGUISTICA, INSEGNAMENTO DELLE LINGUE, PARADIGMI TEORICI

✉ **Sergio Pizziconi,** Università per Stranieri di Siena
sergio.pizziconi@unistrasi.it

This book, entitled *A Theoretical Framework for Language Education and Teaching*, is the type of work that is meant to recap the reflections, arguments, hypotheses, and findings of a long-lasting academic career. It is the result of a "theoretical and epistemological self-reflection" (p. 2) about the status of educational linguistics as an operational science and its academic standing. Paolo Balboni organizes definitions, theoretical background, and inter-disciplinary influences (in the etymological sense of "between disciplines" as opposed to the ideas of multidisciplinarity and of desirable syncretism that interdisciplinarity is supposed to achieve; at this stage, Balboni is only looking for knowledge flows between disciplines) to support a comprehensive approach to linguistic education. The goal is to arrive at a theoretical framework that is universal and non-cultural specific. To this end, Balboni proposes a set of definitions and models that frame the scientific discipline and the concrete practice of language education and teaching. As the author states, the ultimate aim is to provide a global scientific community with theoretical tools to discuss findings, analyze data, and verify hypotheses, which are collected locally.

The first eight chapters of the book comprise the bulk of the theoretical reflection. The first two chapters introduce the overall design of the book. They define the object of study, or put differently, what needs to be theoretically framed and how the framing is enacted. In the first chapter, the words *language* and *education* are defined. The former includes any type of language in which learners can get formal or informal training: L1, L2, foreign language, ethnic language, language of instruction, lingua franca, classical language, and also artificial language; they all determine different contexts for the process of teaching/learning. For the latter term, Balboni proposes two possible roles of the teacher: either a main character who "guides the process" (pp. 21–23) or a stage director who "facilitates the process" (pp. 21–23).

The second chapter moves from the distinction between hard and soft sciences and positions educational linguistics in the area of those sciences that, according to Edgar Morin's (1990) tripartite scheme, deal with *complexity*. The other epistemological paradigms being the *reductionism*, typical of hard sciences and *simplification,* enacted by "soft sciences when they try to work like hard sciences" (p. 26). In order to cope with complexity, Balboni proposes that, for such an operational science as educational linguistics, a set of complex models is necessary to describe the multi-faceted and multi-dimensional process of language teaching/learning. The complexity is also increased because operational sciences are transdisciplinary—as opposed to theoretical sciences that are "monodisciplinary" (p. 34)—and their knowledge base must be capable of shaping specific behaviors, such as "syllabus design, lexical acquisition, comprehension activities and so on" (p. 30).

In Chapters 3 to 8, Balboni proposes a series of these complex models. They will substantiate the eight hypotheses that he collects in Chapter 9 as the description of his theoretical framework and the conclusion to the volume. The models that Balboni presents are either in the form of declarations that is, statements "based on a verb like *is, is made of, has* and the like" (p. 29) or in the form of "procedures, based on the *if... then...* sequence" (p. 29) which shows a declaration and a consequence. In Balboni's design, the fact that declarations can be easily verified or falsified warrants the solidity of his theoretical construct.

Chapter 3 discusses the contribution of language sciences, socio-cultural sciences, neuro-psychological research, and pedagogical and methodological research to the field of educational linguistics. The chapter is a wealth of references to major works in the four scientific areas mentioned above that have been feeding the knowledge base of educational linguistics, which, according to Balboni, needs to be organized in a hierarchical structure: a theory of language education (approach), the way in which theory is translated into an educational process (method), and, finally, the way the educational project is implemented in concrete teaching/learning situations (action). This hierarchical structure is the major contribution to the eight hypotheses Balboni presents in his final framework in Chapter 9. But the distinction between the application and the implication paradigms (pp. 37–39) is also central to the definition of the disciplinary status of educational linguistics. According to Balboni, educational linguistics does not simply apply pieces of knowledge which the sciences mentioned above arrived at. So, for instance, we know from sociolinguistics that more often than the alleged standard, in real situations, speakers use other varieties of the language. We could apply this piece of knowledge in the language class by teaching these other varieties. Conversely, from that very same piece of knowledge, educational linguists start a process in which the other varieties are observed in situation and, finally, decide which varieties, when and how they must be introduced in the course syllabus.

Chapters 4 and 5 discuss general and specific objectives of language education, respectively. Because of the culture-independent design of the theoretical framework, Balboni resorts to a very comprehensive perspective about the general objectives of language education. In Chapter 3, he had already pointed out the

centrality of linguistic and meta-linguistic competencies to develop all other semiotic abilities. Here, he remarks the instrumentality of language to both thought and relations among people. In this sense he introduces the *me-you-world* paradigm, according to which language is crucial for the self-actualization of the individuals (*me*). This only happens when individuals have already undergone both the culturalization process, which brought them to fit in the societal and cultural context they were born into and grew into (*world*), and the socialization process, which brought them to establish relations with other individuals (*you*). The paradigm is rather flexible and encompasses both native and non-native language learning. Moreover, it clarifies that Balboni's design of the framework recognizes variation inherent to the language-learning process at the individual and cultural level. The chapter closes with an application of the paradigm to the issue of ethical language education that is centered around the right to self-actualization of every single learner. The specific objectives of language education are discussed in Chapter 5 with an integrated approach in which linguistic, extra-linguistic (kinetics or gestural competence, proxemic code, based on distance between interlocutor, and objectual codes, that is clothes, status symbols etc.), and socio-pragmatic and (inter)cultural competences are connected to the performance in communicative events. Balboni maintains that if this multidimensional perspective on the aims of language education, which is derived from all of the sciences he listed in Chapter 3, is true, then the educational linguist should help design a language curriculum that trains learners in all these competences and performance instances, namely communicative events. The remainder of the chapter provides readers with copious and well-organized practical examples of these dimensions of language education.

Chapters 6, 7, and 8 analyze the connections between language education and more general semiotic education, literary education, and the training in languages for specific purposes, respectively. Balboni had already clarified the privileged status of verbal languages because of their capability to be used as meta-languages in any field of knowledge. In Chapter 6, he details this primacy by showing how the study of semiotic codes is enriched by notions of text, coherence, cohesion, and the generative power of combination of a short list of smaller units, in the same way that verbal languages are generated from single sounds and graphical signs. Balboni explicitly justifies Chapter 7's focus on the connection between literary education and language education:

> Literature—above all if the traditional canon is widened to include operas, songs and films as forms of poetry and drama—is fundamental to achieve a person's self-actualization which is the final and the highest aim of education, including language education. (pp. 115–116)

It is not clear how wide the extension of the traditional canon is in Balboni's idea: did he mean to also include graphic novels, speeches, TV series, comics, the performance of standing comedians, newspaper articles and cartoons, or even printed or audio-visual advertisements? The way literacy studies are continuing to question and stretch the concept of the literary canon seems to be welcomed by Balboni, who mentions not-so-common examples of literary texts, such as songs and music video clips, and provocatively distinguishes between *Literature* with capital L, and *literature*. The chapter discusses when, how, and what literary texts are to be included in both native and non-native language education. The focus on languages for specific (special) purposes (LSP) in Chapter 7 reaffirms the comprehensive role of language education in any schooling and training system. The specificities of the language used to deal with any type of discipline, whether scientific, technological, humanistic, or even vocational should be of major importance to the educational linguist and to the teacher of the language of instruction, whether it is native or non-native to the learners. Very often it is taken for granted that the linguistic competence, understood broadly, that is acquired in the general language curriculum will be sufficient for learners to talk about the other disciplines studied at school and that their teachers will cope with language issues. However, Balboni points out that language teachers do not consider themselves prepared to tackle issues in subject disciplines they have not been trained in. He also indirectly suggests that the professors of those subject disciplines might not have the meta-linguistic tools to tackle the language of their disciplines beyond definitions of single terms in their own native language let alone in a CLIL context with a language that is an L2 to them. After concisely describing the main features of LSPs, Balboni suggests what language teachers should be able to train their students to do when using language to study a different discipline.

Balboni's quest for a general theoretical framework which is culture-independent and possibly universal should not be interpreted as wishful, naive thinking. On the contrary, it must have been driven by the fear of the senior scholar that the fragmentariness of a plethora of situated studies might hinder the possibility of a more organized and structured approach to educational linguistics and might threaten its very

nature as a field of investigation. Throughout the book, Balboni makes it clear that the way syllabi are designed and implemented must necessarily vary according to culture as well as according to the specific group being trained. He also points out that differences can also be determined at the individual level. Only one example will suffice to show this awareness and the way Balboni means to comprise it in his theoretical framework. In the first flowchart in which he presents the *if... then...* procedure, he writes:

> *If* the approach level points out that each person is unique as far as aptitude, types of intelligence, cognitive and learning style, etc. are concerned, and they have the right to have their peculiar features respected; *then* the method level must provide curricula, syllabi and course organisation models, etc. that make for individual characteristics to be respected; *then* the action level must provide a catalogue of activities that help all students activate their faculty of language, not only the holistic or the analytical ones, not just the introverted or the extroverted ones. (p. 60, emphasis due to the re-presentation of Balboni's original flowchart as linear text)

Balboni also touches on the way the concrete implementation of the language curriculum is affected by teachers' diversity, considering the way their curiosity and personal proclivities may play a role when they cope with literary texts or LSPs. And, finally, he is also aware that "each school system has its own traditions and beliefs about what a non-native language syllabus is and about what to include in a course so that students are ready to face national exams" (p. 99).

Nonetheless, Balboni's idea of a universal and culture-independent theoretical framework shows one way *it should be* according to the scientific evidence used and generated by educational linguistics. In this sense, his framework can work as a sort of benchmark against which every single, specific choice, whether strategical or tactical, can be contrasted to prompt the decision maker to justify diverging solutions. For this reason, this volume can be of some help for the young scholar who is approaching the field of educational linguistics. At the same time, it can serve as a valuable resource for more experienced scholars, who can consult it as a checklist to verify whether their research has taken into proper consideration all the dimensions of the process of language education.

References

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Sergio Pizziconi, Università per Stranieri di Siena
sergio.pizziconi@unistrasi.it

EN	**Sergio Pizziconi** has an Italian doctorate in Linguistics and in Teaching Italian as a Foreign Language and an American Ph.D. in English with an emphasis in Applied Linguistics. He has taught courses in linguistics and composition in both Italian and American universities. He currently works as researcher and professor of English Language and Translation at the University for Foreigners of Siena. His research interests are in cognitive linguistics, languages for specific purposes, and first/second language acquisition and teaching
ES	**Sergio Pizziconi** tiene un doctorado en Italia en lingüística y enseñanza del italiano como lengua extranjera y otro doctorado en Estados Unidos en inglés con énfasis en lingüística aplicada. Ha impartido cursos de lingüística y composición en universidades italianas y estadounidenses. Actualmente trabaja como investigador y profesor de lengua y traducción de inglés en la Universidad para Extranjeros de Siena. Sus líneas de investigación se centran en la lingüística cognitiva, lenguas con fines específicos y adquisición y enseñanza de L1 y L2.
IT	**Sergio Pizziconi** ha conseguito un dottorato di ricerca in Italia in linguistica e didattica dell'italiano a stranieri e un Ph.D. negli Stati Uniti in inglese con enfasi in linguistica applicata. Ha insegnato discipline linguistiche e composizione in università italiane e americane. Attualmente, è ricercatore a TD tipo A di Lingua e traduzione inglese presso l'Università per Stranieri di Siena. I suoi interessi di ricerca sono in linguistica cognitiva, lingue per scopi specifici, e acquisizione e insegnamento di L1 e L2.