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Grammar coming alive: Swedish L1 teachers’ reflections on using authentic texts when teaching grammar

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ABSTRACT
As teachers’ experiences are a prerequisite for developing an understanding of the challenges of teaching, their reflections on the potential of using authentic text in L1 grammar teaching deserves closer attention. This paper presents a focus-group study with six Swedish L1 teachers at upper secondary level during an intervention, in which they adopted contextualized grammar teaching in their classrooms. The results show that, according to the teachers, using authentic texts can create connections between grammar and language in use, which motivates the students to learn grammar. However, due to the complexity that characterizes authentic texts they also seem to complicate the instruction of a grammatical phenomenon. The conclusion of the study is that if the teachers have something to connect the grammatical content to, both manipulated and non-manipulated linguistic materials remain relevant in making a grammatical phenomenon comprehensible to the students.

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Contextualized grammar teaching; authentic texts; L1; teacher reflection; upper secondary school

Introduction
Over the last decades, grammar teaching has been discussed from a wide range of perspectives, both within theoretical linguistics and language education (cf. Clark, 2010). More recently, the academic and pedagogic attention to contextualized grammar teaching in L1 education has increased (e.g., Chatterjee & Halder, 2023; Kabel & Bjerre, 2020; Myhill et al., 2012). Contextualized grammar teaching emerged as a response to what usually is referred to as traditional grammar teaching (Van Rijt, 2020), which can take different forms but is typically associated with labeling grammatical constructions at word and clause level and identifying prescriptive grammar rules in mainly isolated and manipulated examples. This approach to grammar teaching has a long history in L1 education and is still a common practice in Sweden (Strzelecka & Boström, 2014). However, this traditional approach has been criticized for its preoccupation with decontextualized parsing exercises where no connection between knowing the structure of a language and being a user of that language is made (e.g., Lefstein, 2009; Watson, 2015). On the contrary, contextualized grammar teaching draws back from prescriptivism and decontextualized exercises as it is oriented toward writers’ grammatical choices. This means that students learn to draw links between a grammatical choice, its rhetorical effect and meaning through examples in authentic texts (Myhill et al., 2020). As
a result, grammar is not understood as a set of isolated rules that students should memorize, but something that is adaptable to the context of use (Myhill, 2021).

Previous research shows that contextualized grammar teaching can develop students’ metalinguistic understanding by working with authentic texts, that is texts that are created for communicative rather than pedagogical purposes (Myhill et al., 2020; Zuidema, 2012). Authentic texts can therefore be defined as language samples from texts where the target is communication rather than learning a specific grammatical content (cf. Tomlinson, 2017). Myhill et al. (2013) argue that by using authentic texts when teaching grammar, students are offered encounters with “language-in-action, rather than language-for-demonstration” (p. 108). According to Myhill et al. (2013), manipulated examples that are supposed to exemplify a grammar point are usually created out of context and unrealistically simplified. Authentic texts, on the other hand, create a more accurate representation of language in use and can, therefore, support students in learning how grammar operates in a real language context (Myhill et al., 2013; Zuidema, 2012). Rather than condensed simplified forms of language material, authentic texts are also believed to increase students’ interest (Tomlinson, 2017).

However, upper secondary teachers’ experiences of using authentic texts when teaching grammar in L1 education is an area in need of further research. Teachers’ experiences are a prerequisite for developing a coherent understanding for mastering the core challenges of teaching (Guerriero & Révai, 2017). Shulman (1986) stresses the importance of including teachers’ professional reflections on what works in the classroom as their knowledge base (i.e., their pedagogical content knowledge) includes an understanding of students’ needs and difficulties and of fruitful strategies when rearranging content in line with students’ understanding. Due to this special knowledge, teachers can define and describe what constitutes good teaching. Thus, a study focusing on teachers’ professional reflections can provide didactic insights, especially regarding how teachers transform content into meaningful learning. Following Shulman (1987), teacher reflection is conceptualized as “that set of processes through which a professional learns from experience” (p. 19). To contribute to a deeper understanding of the potential of using authentic texts when teaching grammar, it is thus essential to involve teachers.

Therefore, this study explores Swedish L1 teachers’ reflections in an intervention, in which they adopted contextualized grammar teaching in their classrooms. In the intervention, the explicit teaching of grammar was integrated into other content areas within the L1 subject in upper secondary school, more specifically work with a novel, formal speeches, and academic texts. The aim of the present article is to illuminate the potential that teachers see in using authentic text in contextualized grammar teaching. The following research question will be addressed:

- What are the teachers’ professional reflections on using authentic texts in contextualized grammar teaching?

**Background**

Despite the pedagogical benefits of the explicit connection between grammar and language in use (e.g., Myhill et al., 2012), studies still show a strong prevalence of traditional grammar teaching in L1 education (e.g., Watson, 2015). In Sweden, Strzelecka and Boström (2014) conducted a questionnaire study in which they examined Swedish teachers’ perceptions of their grammar teaching. A total of 140 teachers of Swedish participated and more than half of them (57%) stated that they teach with a traditional approach. According to the teachers, this mainly entailed frontal teaching practices followed by students working with individual parsing exercises with isolated sentences in the textbook. These findings are especially noteworthy in relation to Malmberg’s (2020) study of teaching materials in Swedish for upper secondary school. The study shows that teaching materials may induce traditional grammar teaching, as exercises where students should “fill in the gaps”
dominate. The language sample used further consists of decontextualized words or sentences (Malmberg, 2020).

Hudson (2004) claims that this traditional approach to grammar is “fragmentary, dogmatic and prescriptive” (p. 106). A prescriptive approach to language means that grammar is described in terms of language either being correct or incorrect, which is an understanding evident among teachers’ conceptualizations of grammar (e.g., Hudson, 2004; Nygård & Brøseth, 2021). Teaching grammar prescriptively focuses on an isolated and absolute language norm (Wijnands et al., 2021). Thus, grammatical analysis tends to have a deterministic view of knowledge due to the lack of reflectivity in the classroom the approach results in. The parsing of manipulated and isolated sentences using rules of thumb tends to enforce the impression that language can be analyzed deterministically, i.e., that language analysis is very well-structured (Van Rijt, 2020). However, Van Rijt (2020) and Wijnands et al. (2021) point out that in reality, language analysis is more complicated and rather ill-structured, which means that rules of thumb are insufficient when analyzing authentic sentences. Van Rijt (2020) states that this can be an issue for grammar teaching, as students may find it difficult to use their grammatical knowledge when analyzing language in use. When language analysis is presented as ill-structured, grammatical uncertainty is inherent, which require a more reflective pedagogy as students must observe language from a broad perspective (cf. Fontich, 2014; Van Rijt, 2020). Thus, a central issue of traditional grammar instruction is that it does not teach students to cope with grammatical uncertainty, which may lead to students having difficulties in transferring their grammatical knowledge to language in use (Van Rijt, 2020).

As studies have shown that traditional L1 grammar teaching has no beneficial effect on either students’ literacy development or their language awareness (Andrews et al., 2004; Clark, 2010), current research emphasizes a descriptive view of grammar instead (e.g., Myhill et al., 2013; Van Rijt, 2020). Contrary to prescriptivism, Hudson (2004) explains that descriptivism tries to discover and describe patterns of actual language use. Essentially, this implies that a descriptive grammar presents language as it is actually used by speakers and writers in various settings and contexts (Chatterjee & Halder, 2023). Instead of assessing what is correct or incorrect in language, descriptivism allows students to distinguish different linguistic norms within the specific context at hand (cf. Hudson, 2004). When teaching grammar descriptively, authentic texts can be used for students to learn how language in use works (Myhill, 2021). Myhill et al. (2013) show that when using authentic texts in contextualized grammar teaching, students can explore writers’ grammatical choices in a text. Thus, they claim that using authentic texts when teaching grammar links students to “the broader community of writers” (Myhill et al., 2013, p. 108), as the authentic texts can function as models to show how writers make language choices (Myhill et al., 2020).

Theoretical framework

To theorize teachers’ professional reflections, Shulman’s (1986, 1987) concept **pedagogical content knowledge** (PCK) is used. According to Shulman (1986) the key to distinguishing teachers’ knowledge lies at the intersection of content and pedagogy as teachers can transform the content knowledge possessed into forms that are “teachable”. PCK is what differentiates a subject matter expert from a teacher as it “goes beyond knowledge of subject matter per se to the dimension of subject matter knowledge for teaching […] the ways of representing and formulating the subject that make it comprehensible to others” (Shulman, 1986, p. 9, emphasis in original). The pedagogical content knowledge is of special interest in this study as it identifies the distinctive bodies of knowledge for teaching (cf. Shulman, 1987).

To understand how content is processed into forms that are teachable, Shulman presents the process of **transformation**, which concerns how a topic within a subject matter must be transformed if it is to be taught. The transformation entails thinking beyond the subject matter as understood by the teacher into the minds and motivations of students (Shulman, 1987). Teachers’ comprehension and PCK is the foundation for this transformation. As the present article focuses on the teachers’
reflections on using authentic texts when teaching grammar, the following aspects of transform-
ation are of special interest: preparation, representation, and adaptation. Preparation involves teachers’ critical interpretation of the materials of instruction and then structuring and segmenting the material into forms suitable for teaching. In contextualized grammar teaching, this could entail searching for authentic texts that might be useful and analyzing the grammatical components that characterizes the text at hand. Representation concerns how to represent the ideas for the students. This can take the form of analogies, illustrations, metaphors, examples, or demonstrations and they together form a representational repertoire of the content being taught. Once an authentic text is chosen, the teacher could, for example, choose examples from the text that will be suitable to represent the grammatical phenomena at focus. Finally, adaptation and tailoring to students’ characteristics concerns the process of fitting the represented material to the characteristics of the students. This involves adapting the content being taught to students’ conceptions, misconceptions, expectations, motives, interests, and difficulties. The teacher could, for example, find ways to make connections between students’ prior knowledge of language to new, not yet obtained, knowledge. In this study, the teachers’ reflections are understood through the lens of PCK and the process of transformation.

**Empirical context**

Six upper secondary teachers of Swedish as L1 participated in the study (one man and five women). The data for this paper is a subset of data from an educational design research project, involving a collaboration between the author and the participating teachers, who were interested in designing, developing and implementing contextualized grammar teaching through an iterative process. Following the ethical code of the Swedish Research Council (2017), all teachers gave their informed consent to participate in the study. The teachers are part of the same network, so they knew each other before the design project began. Their teaching experience varied, ranging between 9 and 38 years. The teachers are anonymized using pseudonyms throughout the article.

The teaching scheme was created by the author and the six participating teachers. In contrast to Myhill et al. (2013), no connection to writing production was necessarily made in the intervention. Instead, the reading of authentic texts from different communicative contexts in the L1 subject was the point of departure to develop students’ general language awareness (cf. Carter, 2003). In the intervention, the teachers therefore integrated the explicit instruction of grammar into the reading of a novel, formal speeches, and academic texts. The texts used were chosen by the teachers and the researcher. Through joint discussion of the main characteristics of the text used within a certain context, the grammatical phenomenon was also chosen in cooperation. The work with a crime novel (Stina Jackson’s *Silvervägen* [*The Silver Road*]) resulted in a focus on how the author used complex noun phrases and sentence fragments, as these were commonly used by the author to create a rhetorical effect. When grammar teaching was integrated into the work with written formal speeches, for example, Olof Palme’s speech *Därför är jag demokratisk socialist* [*Why I am a democratic socialist*], the focus was on word order and adverbials in general and in sentence initial position specifically. This was chosen since the choice of a fronted sentence part, such as adverbials, alters the rhetorical effect in a clause or sentence (cf. Myhill, 2021). Finally, as information density characterizes academic writing, the grammatical focus when working with academic texts, such as academic essays and encyclopedia texts, was nouns, verbs, and nominalizations. Grammatical constructions such as nominalizations were chosen because they often mean that a text becomes more formal and impersonal compared to congruent realizations.

Inspired by Myhill et al. (2020), authentic texts were the starting point when the grammatical phenomenon were explained, such as examples from the crime novel. In practice, the teaching scheme meant that when a grammatical phenomenon was first introduced by the teachers, the students were initially encouraged to inductively explore and experiment with an authentic text
excerpt or sentence and discuss its characteristics (cf. Haight et al., 2007). In whole class discussions, the teachers then summarized the students’ conclusions, which was followed by a lecture where the grammatical phenomenon that distinguished the text were explained using examples from authentic texts, such as sentences from the novel being read. When a grammatical structure was explained, the instruction also supported students in discussing the connection between a grammatical structure and its rhetorical effect in the text (cf. Myhill et al., 2020). Thus, the instruction of grammar partly concerned what constitutes a syntactically complete sentence and how writers can use sentence fragments to, for example, create intense emphasis. The lecture of the grammatical phenomena at hand was then alternated with group discussions, where the students would be able to apply the grammatical knowledge. These group tasks were recorded during the intervention but are not reported in this study. As an example, during a task when the students worked with a text excerpt from the crime novel, the students were instructed to (1) identify sentence fragments in a selected text excerpt from the novel, (2) describe the function of them in the text, and (3) interpret and explain the rhetorical effect of the grammatical choice(s) in the text (cf. Macken Horarick et al., 2015). This three-step procedure was followed each time they worked with texts. For a complete account of the teaching design, see Strandberg and Lundström (2023).

Method

Data construction

To construct data that highlights teachers’ reflections, focus groups were conducted as they can provide a rich understanding of the participants’ reflections (Krueger, 2014) and generate a collective sense of the topic being studied (Cohen et al., 2011). Also, Shulman (1987) claims that teachers’ reflections are more easily observed via group discussion, in which teachers can explain, and give reasons for, their actions and decisions. The teachers were divided into two groups of three, to provide more opportunities for each teacher to speak (cf. Barbour, 2007). The overall aim of the focus group was to reflect upon the intervention. During the focus groups, the teachers used their own reflection notes and a series of open questions formulated by the researcher as point of departure for the discussions (see Appendix A). In total, the data material comprised of 344 min of audio recorded data. The focus group discussions were transcribed verbatim by the author. As the conversations were in Swedish, quotes presented in the results section of the paper have been translated into English by the author.

Data analysis

To answer the research question, a Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) was carried out (Braun & Clarke, 2022). RTA is an open and flexible approach where the researcher has an active role in the knowledge production through reflexive engagement that aims to synthesize and extract themes from a material. The study used a qualitative approach to theme construction (cf. Braun & Clarke, 2022), where only aspects of the data relevant to the research question were considered. The interpretation shifted between more inductive and deductive modes, as Shulman’s (1987) transformation process provided the lens through which the data was analyzed. The reflexive analysis consisted of six phases of coding and theme development (cf. Braun & Clarke, 2022). First, the transcripts were closely read and re-read while making notes of any initial analytic observations of the teachers’ reflection on using authentic texts. Thereafter, a systematic data coding in NVivo was conducted (QSR International Pty Ltd., 2020), capturing both manifest and latent meanings of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2022). The codes were then examined for broader patterns of meaning and initial theme construction. After a process of review and refinement, three themes were constructed. Coded transcripts were cross-checked in NVivo by the researcher. Finally, the analysis involved selecting illustrative extracts from the transcribed focus group discussions and the weaving together
of theme definitions as well as analytical notes into a coherent narrative. The themes were thus constructed through a recursive process.

The themes presented in the results should be seen as stories about particular patterns of shared reflections across the dataset underpinned by a central organizing concept (cf. Braun & Clarke, 2019). The themes are not a descriptive summary of disparate responses around a topic or domain (Braun & Clarke, 2022), but rather a narrative of shared meaning. The name of the theme is therefore of utmost importance, as it captures what the shared reflections encompass (cf. Braun & Clarke, 2022). In Table 1, an example of the theme construction is presented.

Furthermore, it should be noted that Braun and Clarke (2022) claim that their reflexive and organic approach to thematic analysis means that there is not one accurate way to code data. Thus, multiple-coders and inter-rater reliability are not advocated. Instead, the approach foregrounds reflection with other researchers during the coding process. As a result, the coded data was discussed with three additional researchers during the theme construction. In these discussions, codes and candidate themes were reviewed and interpreted.

In the result section, the themes are presented as an analytic narrative (cf. Braun & Clarke, 2022), and complemented with direct quotations followed by the teacher’s pseudonym to illustrate the findings and facilitate the assessment of the trustworthiness and credibility of the interpretation. When necessary, quotes are explained in relation to a certain teaching situation. In the discussion following the results section, the themes are analyzed and interpreted in relation to previous research and Shulman’s (1987) transformation process.

Results

The reflexive thematic analysis resulted in three themes illuminating teachers’ professional reflections concerning the use of authentic texts in contextualized grammar teaching in their classrooms: (i) Creates connections between grammar and language in use (ii), Complicates the instruction of a grammatical phenomenon, and (iii) Facilitates a descriptive approach to language.

Creates connections between grammar and language in use

The first theme shows that using authentic text when teaching grammar creates connections between grammar and language in use. According to the teachers, the use of authentic texts can represent the interrelationships among the different levels within language, such as connections between grammar and pragmatics. These connections make the purpose of grammar comprehensible because grammar becomes an active part of the course which, as reported by the teachers, motivates students to learn grammar. The reflections concerning this are especially evident when the teachers compare a contextualized approach to grammar teaching through the use of authentic texts to a decontextualized approach where grammar is presented as isolated course content through manipulated examples. When the representational repertoire is based on examples from

<table>
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<th>Data excerpt</th>
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<td>and it was then that I started to explain the predicate […] and then I felt that maybe I shouldn’t have said that. sometimes the excerpt could contain a long noun phrase or a long prepositional phrase, which could contain another phrase as well […] and then the students became confused, but also I … I started thinking like, how should I explain this? Will I confuse them now if I say that there may be those kinds of phrases as well? it’s a challenge to find good authentic text examples that suits the specific student group that you teach.</td>
<td>Expansion of the grammatical content Dealing with grammatical uncertainty among students and teachers</td>
<td>Complicates the instruction of a grammatical phenomenon Challenging to find pedagogical examples</td>
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authentic texts, students can understand that grammar “is something real, something that exists all around them” (Sara). By representing a grammatical phenomenon through authentic texts Alma said that “students start to think that subject and predicate is something that actually exists” and that students “start to understand that grammar can be found within language, it is a part of language […] not just ‘Charlie buys a ball’ and weird sentences like that.” Hence, representing grammar through authentic texts gives a more holistic and authentic perspective to language as students can see that the grammatical phenomenon can be viewed in context and not only as an isolated collection of parts.

The teachers asserted that the experience of a shared context through the reading of an authentic text enabled the students to make connections between a grammatical phenomenon and its function within a text. Thus, the students were able to discover how grammar functions in a range of contexts in which language is used. According to the teachers, using authentic texts as a starting point can help the teachers to connect the smaller components of language, such as words and phrases, to larger contexts, such as the text. For example, Aje pointed out that “the benefit of contextualized grammar teaching is that you don’t separate grammar from pragmatics.” In the following extract, this is further elaborated when he compares the use of authentic texts to a more traditional approach to grammar teaching:

> Instead of telling students that they have to learn that Swedish has nine word classes just because Swedish has nine word classes, the focus is rather on why it is good to know what a noun is. It’s important because it helps us to talk about the function of nouns in the text.

In the reflection above, Aje argued that the text fosters discussions concerning the function a grammatical phenomenon has in the text rather than memorizing terms. Louise had a similar experience when she stated that the connection to the novel activated the functional aspects of grammar. She elaborated this by comparing the use of authentic texts to a more decontextualized approach to grammar teaching: “it’s not just ‘here you have three random sentences’, instead the grammatical content becomes more meaningful when we use examples from the novel […] as it turns into something they could actually use, instead of something they’re only supposed to memorize.” Due to the connection to the shared context, both groups of teachers mentioned that the students seem to appreciate that grammar becomes an active part of the course instead of a decontextualized learning object.

When a grammatical phenomenon is represented through examples from an authentic text that students read, both groups of teachers said that it helped them to connect grammar to a broader context within the L1 subject, which motivated the students to learn grammar. The teachers explained that due to the continuous connection to the text they could more easily engage students during the grammar exercises. Alma said that she feels that when the reading of authentic texts is used as a starting point, grammar ceases to be isolated content and that she feels that the students “have something to attach the grammatical content to.” This can further be seen in the following statement when they reflected on how the students discussed the different effects of sentence fragments within the novel: “the students appreciate the connection to the novel, and I have noticed that they became more engaged when they discovered that everything was connected” (Karolina). For example, the students knew who the subject in the sentence was, as they knew her as the main character from the novel. She further stated that during the enacted grammar exercises, authentic text has been “pedagogically effective as a starting point as the students recognize all the sentences.” As a result, Alma claimed that the students did not question why they were working with grammar to begin with. In terms of instruction, Aje asserted that, as a teacher, “it is very helpful to have something to refer the grammatical content back to.” Along the same lines, Louise pointed out that the connection to the text was very important for the students and went on to say that “one of the students said that it made it [the grammatical content] feel extra important in some way, that the examples came from the book they had been reading.” To use a shared
communicative context in an authentic text can thus be understood as a way to bridge the known, for example, the novel and its characters, with the unknown, the grammatical phenomenon. In terms of transforming a grammatical content into motivations for the learners, the teachers’ reflections show that authentic texts and the connections they can create are pedagogically useful.

Complicates the instruction of a grammatical phenomenon

The second theme captures reflections where the teachers claimed that using authentic texts also complicated the instruction of a grammatical phenomenon due to the grammatical complexity that characterizes authentic texts. The teachers shared reflections where the use of authentic text could lead to an expansion of the grammatical content area which, subsequently, becomes difficult in terms of instruction. When students are supposed to learn to identify a grammatical phenomenon in a text, they first need to discover structural patterns in language. However, as language in use can deviate from these patterns, it can become difficult for teachers to explain a grammatical phenomenon when the instruction only includes examples from authentic texts. Therefore, language in use can, according to the teachers, become too complex to make the grammatical content comprehensible to the students. For instance, the explicit instruction of grammar could deal with what characterizes a noun phrase by using specific examples from the novel. However, students could thereafter find additional examples from the novel that contradict or confuse the previous presented characteristics. Alma elaborated on this experience when discussing how an authentic example from the novel brought on other grammatical concepts than the initial focus intended:

Sometimes the excerpt could contain a long noun phrase or a long prepositional phrase, which could contain another phrase as well […] and then the students became confused, but also I […] I started thinking like, how should I explain this? Will I confuse them now if I say that there may be those kinds of phrases as well?

Thus, the complexity of authentic texts can complicate the instruction of a particular grammatical phenomenon. According to the teachers, this led to the students asking lots of questions which often required additional concepts being explained. When this happened, Sara claimed that she felt that she “didn’t know where to draw the line.” Louise further explained that the authentic examples she used from the novel when explaining noun phrases brought about other grammatical concepts: “you kind of wanted to explain it in a different way, and it was then that I started to explain the predicate […] and then I felt that maybe I shouldn’t have said that.” Hence, the authentic texts tended to cause an expansion of the grammatical content being taught. Both groups of teachers reached the conclusion that when they started to explain additional concepts the students became more confused than was necessary. Sara expressed that “it all became rather messy, both for me and the students.” Louise had a similar reflection and claimed that the instruction became slightly chaotic due to “the mix-up of concepts” the text excerpts from the novel brought about.

Due to this, the teachers claimed that authentic examples are not always suitable for grammatical analysis. For instance, Karolina mentioned that manipulated examples would sometimes have been more pedagogically effective. Aje also asserted that “if you had used manipulated examples, you could have used a more concentrated content.” Similarly, Birgitta stated that when she was explaining the characteristics of an informal text, she “would have liked a shorter text where almost all sentences started with a noun or a personal pronoun, so they really could see the effect.” Aje supported this view when he adds that “there is a point in having examples that are pedagogically simplified so they could start to question the sentences.” Both groups of teachers said that the examples they chose mattered and they claimed that when the grammatical phenomenon was introduced, the students need to see very clear examples. As authentic texts sometimes make the representation unnecessarily difficult, Louise, for instance, said that she thought that authentic examples are not always the right choice. She further stated that in terms of preparation, using authentic text is
very time consuming as teachers initially need to analyze the grammatical components within a text and subsequently select examples suitable for the students. Thus, according to the teacher, the use of authentic texts is an additional workload, compared to using textbooks where the grammatical components are analyzed beforehand. Moreover, Alma claimed that “it’s a challenge to find good authentic text examples that suits the specific student group that you teach.” Both groups of teachers therefore pointed out that teaching grammar in context does not necessarily imply that manipulated examples are excluded when representing a grammatical phenomenon that characterizes a certain text.

**Facilitates a descriptive approach to language**

Although the teachers claimed that authentic texts complicated the representation of a grammatical phenomenon, the teachers’ reflections also displayed that using authentic texts facilitated a descriptive approach to language during instruction, which they claimed was beneficial when teaching grammar. The teachers reported that working with authentic texts is a way to show that grammar is not stative and formal but rather dynamic and constantly changing. According to both groups of teachers, traditional grammar teaching tends to illustrate a simplified and prescriptive view of language using manipulated examples, whereas the use of authentic texts offers a more dynamic representation. These reflections were especially evident when the teachers discussed their experiences of integrating grammar into their work with the novel. For instance, Birgitta said that the students “developed an understanding that language is dynamic” when they discovered that a writer can use sentence fragments to achieve a certain effect. As fictional texts can deviate from prescriptive linguistic rules, the teachers claimed that they could talk about grammar in a more explorative and objective manner. The teachers argued that the benefit of this is that the focus can then be on describing how various grammatical structures can be used in specific contexts. Karolina reported that when analyzing authentic texts, the students “had the chance to contemplate on paragraphs and thus understand that aha! That’s how the author writes, these are the tricks she uses and why.” Along the same lines, Aje asserts that “[the students] start to question things, hang on, why is it like this? It’s about seeing patterns”. This is also explained by Louise in the following extract:

> It’s really nothing new [syntactically incomplete sentences] but the connection to the text, to reach these conclusions, like what effect does it [the grammatical structure] yield in the literary text? That was the most interesting thing to hear the students talk about. Like in this specific text, the author doesn’t violate any linguistic conventions as it is a common feature in fictional texts and she just want to create a certain effect and they realized that there are certain texts where you can use sentence fragments and others where you cannot.

Thus, using authentic texts when representing a grammatical content can show that language does not need to obey a set of static rules, rather that it can encompass linguistic norms in different communicative contexts. The dynamic nature that characterizes authentic texts therefore forced the teachers to take a descriptive approach to grammar as they had to forsake discussions of right and wrong in language. As authentic texts do not necessarily need to obey a grammatical rule, they can illustrate the complexity of language in use, which, according to the teachers, encouraged a descriptive approach to grammar instruction. For example, Louise asserted that “the fact that there is no answer key at the back of the teaching material, generates a different focus than correcting your answers, we [the teacher and the students] are rather kind of forced to discuss the sentences with a different approach.” In the same vein, Sara said that after some time “you became rather relaxed, you realize that you don’t have to know everything because you also learn along the road, you don’t have to have answers to all the questions that students ask.” Thus, the teachers’ reflections show that they partly accepted the fact that authentic texts can create a rather messy instruction (cf. Theme ii) as the teachers over time learned to deal with the uncertainty that the texts brought about.
Discussion

This study has sought to illuminate teachers’ professional reflections on the use of authentic texts when they adopted contextualized grammar teaching in their classrooms. The reflexive thematic analysis of the teachers’ focus group discussions resulted in three separate but interrelated themes that highlight both didactic possibilities and challenges of using authentic texts when teaching grammar in L1 education. On a general level, the results show how complex the process of transformation is when authentic texts are to be used when teaching grammar in the L1 classroom, especially in terms of preparation, representation, and adaptation (cf. Shulman, 1987).

A noteworthy finding is that the reading of an authentic text as a starting point becomes a way for the teachers to adapt the grammatical content to the characteristics of the students’ (cf. Shulman, 1987). The possibility of reconnecting grammar to a shared context that is already known to the students seems to be of particular importance for the students’ response to the grammatical content. In line with Myhill et al.’s (2020) results, the teachers believe that the use of authentic texts allows students to develop an understanding of how all parts of language relate to each other and how grammar can become something that is actively used in the classroom. The results show that in order for the students to be motivated, the teachers highlight the students need to be able to make connections between knowing the structure of a language and being a user of that language (cf. Lefstein, 2009). Whereas Myhill et al. (2013) argue that the use of authentic texts is a way to connect students to a “broader community of writers” (p. 108), the first theme suggests that using authentic texts as the point of departure is rather a way of connecting the students to a larger community of language users. The results indicates that the use of authentic texts can function as a way to move toward a more holistic view of the language, as the text can invite students and teachers to make connections between a grammatical phenomenon and the context it is written or spoken within.

Considering that it seems to be relevant to connect the teaching of grammar to other L1 content areas by using authentic texts, syllabi in the Swedish subject need to support teachers more clearly in making connections between grammar and the various communicative contexts in which students are situated.

However, the transformation of content involves more than adapting it to students’ characteristics, as it also involves representing the content so that it becomes comprehensible to the students (Shulman, 1987). The second theme shows how crucial the representation is if authentic texts are to function as intended when adopting contextualized grammar teaching. The teachers’ reflections on using authentic texts as a starting point highlight the difficulty of relating global linguistic characteristics to specific linguistic patterns within a text (cf. Hudson, 2004), which, to some extent, could be related to the different characteristics of the text in focus. As the novel and the political speeches sometimes deviated from the grammatical structure in focus, the results indicate that these texts were difficult to use when the teachers aimed to represent grammar as a system. For example, the political speeches used did not always follow the word order of Swedish, which became problematic when the teachers tried to represent the V2 rule. Thus, given the reflections presented in the second theme, one can question whether authentic texts can represent a grammatical phenomenon in such a way that it is understandable to the students. If students are expected to learn grammar as a system, which is crucial for understanding how language works (Hudson, 2004), the results show that there are pedagogical benefits of representing grammar in a more accessible way than through authentic examples, so that students learn to discover grammatical structures. As the process of transformation partly concerns thinking through the central ideas within a text or lesson and identifying alternative ways of representing them to the students (Shulman, 1987), it is significant that the teachers request simplified and concentrated examples. Manipulating specific examples from an authentic text with the aim of representing what characterizes a particular grammatical phenomenon can thus be important in building the bridge between the teacher’s comprehension and that desired for the students. In other words, language-for-demonstration (Myhill et al., 2013) can be pedagogically relevant when transforming a grammatical content so that it becomes
comprehensible to the students. It can also be a strategy for dealing with the difficulty that the teachers claim arises in terms of adapting the grammatical content to students’ previous knowledge.

Since Shulman (1987) argues for the importance of multiple forms of representation, a combination of manipulated and non-manipulated examples may be justified to offer students conditions to both learn grammar as a system and learn how grammar can be used to achieve a certain effect in a specific context (cf. Myhill et al., 2013). Hence, the students still retain the more truthful representation of language in use (cf. Hudson, 2004; Zuidema, 2012). Despite using manipulated examples, the connections to the text and the other content areas will not be lost. The starting point can still be a shared context where these connections can be made, such as a novel, but that certain examples from the novel are concentrated or simplified to better represent the grammatical phenomenon that the teacher wants to focus on.

On the other hand, the fact that the teachers request more concentrated examples than the authentic texts offered during the process of transformation, can be understood in relation to the fact that their own comprehensions and PCK of grammar teaching might still fall within a traditional approach. As Hudson (2004) states, changes in attitudes toward language take time. For example, it is possible that the teachers are accustomed to using a teaching material when teaching grammar, where the students are expected to complete individual parsing exercises, with the correct answers presented in a following answer key (cf. Strzelecka & Boström, 2014). If the notion of a “correct answer” prevails, the request for more concentrated examples is therefore relatively self-evident. The fact that authentic examples complicate grammatical representation also raises the question of whether L1 education should use parsing exercises with students, especially since Myhill et al. (2013) point out that constructed examples create a simplified picture of the linguistic reality, which gives the impression that there is only one way of analyzing the sentence and identifying a correct answer. According to Van Rijt (2020), the type of isolated examples that characterize traditional grammar teaching reinforce the image that language analysis is something very well-structured. However, the second theme illustrates that authentic texts make language analysis more realistic as it becomes complicated and ill-structured, which creates a grammatical uncertainty both among the students and among the teachers themselves.

The results further indicate that authentic texts can help the teachers to deal with grammatical uncertainty as the texts seem to force them to have a more objective and exploratory approach to language. Instead of representing grammar through traditional teaching as something absolute, something taught by an authority (Van Rijt, 2020), the third theme shows that authentic texts rather require a more exploratory pedagogy in the classroom, as this implies that the teacher does not have access to either a key or pre-constructed parsing exercises. The theme shows that when an authentic text is used for the teaching of grammar, students can reflect on language variation, rather than memorizing a set of static rules. Considering the shared linguistic context, the teachers claim that students can discuss linguistic norms in relation to different linguistic genres, which initiates a more exploratory and descriptive approach to language (cf. Zuidema, 2012). Van Rijt et al. (2020), however, emphasize the importance of only exposing students to a limited degree of grammatical uncertainty. Considering the reflections within the second theme, the question is whether only using authentic texts when representing a grammatical phenomenon may result in an unlimited degree of uncertainty among students and teachers. Alternatively, a set of well-chosen or partly manipulated examples from an authentic text may be sufficient to make a grammatical phenomenon comprehensible, but at the same time offer analyzes from different perspectives where a single correct answer is not the only outcome. To support teachers during this process of transformation, teaching materials can be a fruitful tool to support teachers in combining traditional grammar teaching with a more contextualized approach, and thus connecting knowledge- and literacy-related rationales of grammar teaching (cf. Van Rijt & Coppen, 2021).

Finally, what actually constitutes an authentic text in language teaching can be problematized. According to Tomlinson (2017), an authentic text is a text used for communicative purposes and not to teach a specific content. As the novel, for example, was not written with the purpose
of teaching what constitutes sentence fragments, it can be described as authentic within the framework of grammar teaching. However, in line with Shulman’s (1987) transformation process, it should be emphasized that all content in a teaching situation undergoes transformation. First, the teacher critically comprehends the content in some way. The representation of a material for the students then follows, which entails that teachers choose examples from the novel that will be suitable to represent the grammatical phenomena in focus (Shulman, 1987). The examples chosen have thus undergone a transformation process by the teachers, as they have selected which examples from the novel that is suitable in this context to explain a grammatical phenomenon, and show what function and effect it has in the literary text. The sentences or text extract have thus been chosen to represent a certain content, which in this case goes beyond the communication of the novel to its reader. The more or less established definition of what constitutes an authentic text is thus partly put to the test (cf. Tomlinson, 2017). Instead of talking about the importance of using authentic texts, grammar teaching in L1 should rather emphasize the importance of a shared linguistic context to begin with and, thereby, connect students to a broader community of language users. Within the shared context, both manipulated and non-manipulated linguistic material can form the basis for analysis and reflection, and the experience of authenticity in terms of meaningfulness and engagement can still be achieved (cf. Van Lier, 1996). Thus, as several researchers have pointed out (eg. Mishan, 2017; Van Lier, 1996), authenticity should not be viewed as a characteristic of the input itself, but of what the teacher and students do with the input; their shared engagement with the text. The development of metalinguistic understanding of language in use could therefore still be possible, even though manipulated examples form part of the representational repertoire.

Conclusions

While it is true that the current study is based on a rather small sample, and that additional data could have deepened the results further, this study has contributed with useful knowledge for teachers and L1 education regarding the use of authentic text within the framework of contextualized grammar teaching. Previous research on using authentic texts when teaching grammar has primarily highlighted the pedagogical benefits offered when connections between grammar and context can be made (cf. Myhill et al., 2013). This study partly confirms previous results in that making connections between grammar and language in use are considered more meaningful, but the teachers’ reflections also show that there are challenges in using authentic texts when teaching grammar in context. Working with authentic texts is not a simple either/or answer. Authentic texts can function as a way to show how grammar works in a range of contexts in which students encounter language. However, the results also show how the manipulation of certain examples for students to comprehend a grammatical phenomenon remains relevant. Therefore, the present study has contributed with a more nuanced perspective of language-for-demonstration and language-in-action in the field of language education. Based on these findings, one could argue that there is still a place for certain aspects of traditional grammar teaching in L1 education, as long as it co-occurs next to a contextualized approach. Regardless of what approach is taken to teaching grammar, teachers and their PCK during the process of transformation is of utmost importance.

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**Appendix A**

- What are your thoughts and experiences of the teaching scheme?
- What are your thoughts and experiences of student participation during the lessons?
- What worked well and why?
- What could have been done differently? Why? How?