

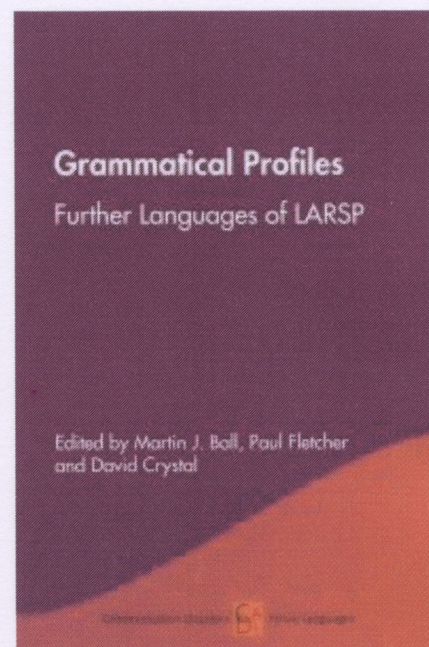
Channel View Publications and Multilingual Matters

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Why LARSP?

This month we published [Grammatical Profiles: Further Languages of LARSP](http://www.multilingual-matters.com/display.asp?isbn=9781788924382) (<http://www.multilingual-matters.com/display.asp?isbn=9781788924382>) edited by Martin J. Ball, Paul Fletcher and David Crystal. In this post the editors explain what LARSP is and where it came from.



(<https://channelviewpublications.files.wordpress.com/2019/06/cover-ball-et-algpfurther9781788924399.jpg>) The questions I'm most often asked about LARSP are about its origin. How did it start? Where did the idea come from? In a word: Why LARSP?

The answer is very simple. It met a basic clinical need and, judging by the papers in this collection, a need that still exists in many parts of the world. It all began a few years after the Department of Linguistic Science was established at the University of Reading in 1965. Nearby was the Royal Berkshire Hospital, and one day Dr Kevin Murphy from the Audiology Unit phoned the

Department to ask if we could help. A speech therapist attached to the Unit was working with a three-year-old child with a language delay, and they were discussing how best to treat her. As I was teaching the course on child language acquisition, I volunteered to go and see what was up. I had never met an audiologist or a speech therapist before!

I was both thrilled and disturbed by what I encountered. After observing a therapy session with the little girl, and making notes, I could see what the nature of the language delay was. It was primarily in her grammar, and moreover in specific grammatical areas. I started to describe to the clinicians the issues to do with her clauses and phrases, her verbs (or rather, lack of them) and prepositions, and the places where speech therapy would be most beneficial...and realized after a few minutes that I had lost my listeners. None of them knew enough about English grammar to be able to take my terminology on board and build on my suggestions. At that time, linguistics and its various branches didn't form a part of any speech therapy training course. That wouldn't happen until after the government report into speech therapy services in the UK in 1972 (the 'Quirk Report').

I said I would write up my observations in a way I hoped would be helpful, and back in the Department drafted a very primitive grammatical assessment procedure. It was clear that it would need to have two dimensions: descriptive, which would identify the grammatical features children acquire; and developmental, which would show the stages through which children acquire them. This, I felt, would meet the clinical need, which was how to get patients from where they are to where they ought to be. In the Department, Paul Fletcher and Mike Garman joined in, and after much discussion and decision-making, and much clinical testing of draft versions, both on children and adults, the chart was finally published in 1976.

What to call it? We had learned that the clinical profession was full of acronyms, and we needed a succinct and pronounceable one. LARSP (Language Assessment Remediation and Screening Procedure) ticked both boxes. But why an L for Language and not a G or GR for Grammar? Well, at the time the study of grammar was felt to be at the heart of the study of language, so it seemed appropriate. But there was a more practical reason. We knew that clinicians would in due course say such things as 'This child has been LARSPed'. Try that sentence out with the L replaced by a G or a GR, and you'll see why we made our choice!

And now there are 34 full and preliminary versions of LARSP in languages other than English. After all, it is not only English-speaking children who have problems learning language – it is estimated that about 5% of children anywhere will struggle. So over time the idea spread. The development happened quite gradually. The first adaptation was for Hebrew, in 1982, and the later '80s then saw versions in Welsh and Dutch. Irish soon followed, and since 2000 there has been a steady accumulation in other languages from around the world. The latest volume adds another twelve versions, for languages as different as Slovenian, from the Balkans, and Inuktitut, which is spoken by the Inuit people of the eastern Canadian Arctic.

It is interesting to see how authors have modified the original acronym to identify their versions. Perhaps the neatest is the label for Welsh – LLARSP. By adding a single letter to the original, this both ties this version to the original and proclaims its new affiliation, as it recalls the pronunciation of the double 'L' in Welsh place names like Llandudno and Llanrwst. For other languages there is

the option of just using the initial letter of the name of the language in front of the original label – this is the option taken for Irish (ILARSP), French (F-LARSP) and Chinese (C-LARSP). Other authors prefer distinct labels – GRAMAT for Dutch, PERSL for Spanish. PERSL is the acronym of the Spanish translation of the full name of the English original – **L**anguage **A**ssessment **R**emediation and **S**creening **P**rocedure. But whatever the label, the adaptations maintain the original nature and purpose of the system: to use a developmentally organised framework to identify gaps in the grammatical repertoire of children at risk of language impairment.