

Sustainably solving socially relevant problems

Comments on Dorte Lønsmann's Kari Sajavaara memorial lecture 2019

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- 1 Applied linguistics
- 2 Doing research on practitioners
- 3 Doing research for practitioners
- 4 Doing research with practitioners
- 5 Transdisciplinarity

Kramsch, Claire, & Perrin, Daniel. (2018). **Transdisciplinarity** in applied linguistics. Introduction to the special issue. *AILA Review*, 33.

1

Applied linguistics (AL)

“[...] an interdisciplinary field of research and practice dealing with practical problems of language and communication that can be identified, analyzed or solved [...].”

AILA (2019). What is AILA, from <http://www.aila.info/about/index.htm>

1.1 Applied linguistics and change

Where language ideologies, policies, and practices provide empirical evidence of social problems,

applied linguists find themselves well-positioned

to scrutinize routinized repertoires, outline alternatives, and develop measures to overcome injustice for a more promising future.

1.2 Applied linguistics and scrutiny

Whether it is about companies neglecting the linguistic diversity needed for coping with local daily businesses while celebrating ELF for global reach,

or refugee programs exploiting the mantra of linguistic integration to recruit low-cost workforce –

work in AL, such as the studies discussed by Dorte Lønsmann, can reveal what calls for change.

1.3 Applied linguistics and action

But how to deal with the ethical problems researchers face when they scrutinize real-world practices and call for action?

What does it mean, from a theoretically informed AL perspective, to contribute to solving practical problems?

And what **measures** must be taken to increase the quality of practically and theoretically relevant research?

>> Answers from three perspectives:

2 Doing research on practitioners

Doing such AL is oriented towards a “quadrangulation of

- disciplinary depth,
- multidisciplinary breadth,
- interdisciplinary integration,
- and transdisciplinary competencies”.

[Klein, 2008, 406](#)

This aspect is covered by the general methodological principle of developing as theoretically and practically adequate as possible a **multiperspective reconstruction** of the interplay between layered structures and situated activity.

It is reflected in specific measures such as:

2.1 *Research measures*

- grasping the complexity of problems, reaching beyond the obvious of, e.g., “the unemployability of refugees”. “Language is not enough” ...
- exploiting disciplinary focus, precise knowledge, and rigorous methods, e.g., of multimodal conversation analysis. “What language do you speak?”
- generalizing the findings through theoretically sound procedures: What do my cases mean in general?
- including research-based → methods of knowledge transformation

2.2 Methods of sharing and transforming knowledge

Making data actionable for practitioners: the good practice story

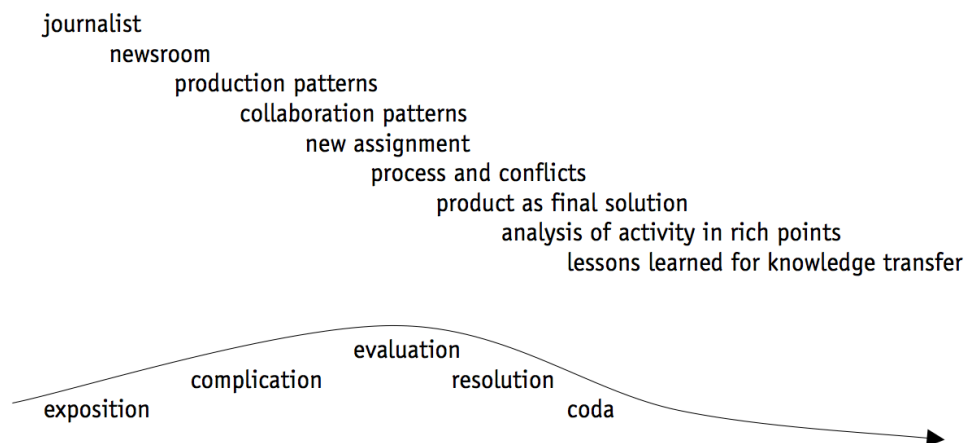


Fig. 3 Visualization of the narrative suspense pattern in good practice stories
Perrin, Daniel. (2013). *The linguistics of newswriting*. Amsterdam et al.: John Benjamins, 265.

3 Doing research for practitioners

Doing such AL is oriented towards solving practical problems sustainably by taking action:

- Science strives for “true” mid-range theories about situated activity;
- practitioners look for “authentic” insights into their practices;
- society at large aims for “prudent” measures for solving practical problems

Kemmis, 1988, p. 46, based on Habermas, 1973

This aspect is covered by the general methodological principle of **sustainably solving problems** instead of shifting them.

It is reflected in specific measures such as:

3.1 *Action measures*

- observing organizational power (e.g., in logistics companies ...)
- putting tacit knowledge (e.g., practitioners' shared expertise of multilingual translanguaging) to use
- motivating practitioners' superiors and policy makers to learn from the ground floor
- →collaborating with practitioners

3.2 Long-term project chain and corpus development

- Reflecting journalists' perspectives on newswriting:
+ Focused Ethnography | the SDA project | 1995–1998
- Learning from experienced writers:
+ Grounded Theory | the OFCOM project | 1997–2000
- Sharing knowledge with experts in the newsrooms:
+ Transdisciplinary Action Research | the TA project | 1999–2001
- Raising awareness for a preexisting world:
+ Realist Social Theory | the IDÉE SUISSE project | 2005–2010
- Understanding emergence in newsflows:
+ DST | the MODELING WRITING PHASES project | 2010–2013
- Shifting the integrative focus to new fields:
+ Argumentation Theory | the ARGUPOLIS project | 2012–2015
- Including visual and numeric literacy:
+ Data visualization Theory | the INDVIL project | 2016–2019

Fig. 2 24 years of sampling data on text production processes in the workplace
Perrin, Daniel. (2013). *The linguistics of newswriting*. Amsterdam et al.: John Benjamins, 154.

4 Doing research with practitioners

Doing such AL *transgresses* and overcomes boundaries on three levels:

- between domains such as science, education, and management;
- between disciplines such as AL and communication studies;
- between institutions such as universities and refugee centers.

This aspect covered by the general methodological principle of integrating (instead of excluding) relevant stakeholders **throughout a project**.

It is reflected in specific measures such as ...

4.1 *Trans* measures

- including all the relevant parties
(truck drivers (“non-linguals”) ≠ warehouse workers ≠ sales staff)
 - overcoming the incompatibility of targets
(“going through that door and entering the warehouse world”)
 - resolving differences in timescales
(“We need you researchers to come up with the right solutions NOW!”)
- fostering communication and mutual learning

4.2 Knowledge transformation

- Successful attempt of making knowledge accessible to others who have significantly different preconditions of understanding it.

Gravngaard, G. (2018). Transforming knowledge. In C. Cotter & D. Perrin (Eds.), *Handbook of language and media* (pp. 489–504). London: Routledge.

Doing transdisciplinarity in applied linguistics

Work as presented by Dorte Lønsmann
is characterized by a threefold connection to practitioners:

It is work “on, for, and with” practitioners.

Cameron, Deborah, Frazer, Elizabeth, Rampton, Ben, & Richardson, Kay. (1992).
Researching language. Issues of power and method. London: Routledge (22).

This means it is transdisciplinary work at its best.

5.1 Focus on practices of language use

- conscious, ±routinized vs. emergent, **socially** creative
- *driven by expertise*, functional, related to roles and organizations
- embodied, multi-semiotic, mediatized
- interacting with context, domain, culture, thus historically bound
- organized in **sequences**, networks, and clusters.

Foucault, 1966, Bourdieu, 1977, Hanks, 1996; Bhatia 2008; Pennycook, 2010; Perrin, 2013, ...

5.2 Combining research frameworks in applied linguistics

■ Ethnography, ■ Grounded Theory, ■ RST, ■ TDA, ■ Dynamic Systems Theory

- ■ real life problems
- ■ change and stability, ■ agency and structure
- ■ practitioners and researchers bring in their knowledge as experts, ■ and they collaborate to learn from each other
- ■ as they learn, they adjust their goals, methods, and findings in cycles
- ■ they produce new, emergent, ■ situated knowledge:

[Perrin \(2013\). Linguistics of newswriting \(84\).](#)

■ “what works for whom under which circumstances”?

[Pawson & Tilley \(1997\). Realistic evaluation. London: Sage \(72\).](#)

5.3 Transdisciplinarity in applied linguistics

- The *trans-* trend in AL e.g. “translanguage”, “translanguaging”
[Garcia, 2009, 45; Wei 2017](#)
- TD as “a total system without any firm boundaries between disciplines”
[Piaget, 1972, 138](#)
- Doing “research on, for, and with” practitioners
[Cameron, Frazer, Rampton, & Richardson, 1992, 22](#)
- “Wicked” real-world problems require **sustainable** solutions
[Brown, Harris, & Russell, 2010](#)
- Sustainable solutions reach social, ecological, *and* economic goals
[United Nations, 2015](#)

How to benefit from the refugees’ competence (The Marwa case)?

