

# Book Reviews

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## Applied Linguistics and knowledge transfer, employability, internationalisation, and social challenges

**Ana Bocanegra-Valle (ed.)**

Bern: Peter Lang, 2020. 344 pages. ISBN 978-3-0343-3714-4

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The overarching aim of this ambitious edited volume is to explore from diverse perspectives how Applied Linguistics can inform and engage with other disciplines and society at large to address social challenges. The growing trend for interdisciplinary degree programmes, calls for more meaningful engagement with institutions outside of the academy, and the ambition of internationalisation, invite a fresh look at the applicability and foci of the work of our field; therefore, the idea behind this book is both timely and welcome.

The introduction sparks interest and sets out clearly the key themes that provide a red thread for the chapters. These are knowledge transfer, internationalisation, employability, and social challenges. Working definitions of the concepts are provided, and connections drawn between them.

The first section comprises four chapters loosely linked by the theme of knowledge transfer. The first, “Linguistic research in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: looking beyond” offers an overview of how linguistic theory informs cutting-edge research in human-machine interaction, biosciences, and artificial intelligence. The chapter inspires thinking about how programmes in Applied Linguistics seeking to recruit could diversify in terms of curriculum content, the potential for the creation of interdisciplinary programmes with strong links to industry, and the role of Applied Linguistics in those programmes.

Chapters 2 and 3 also reference technological advances. Chapter 2 focuses on integrated writing assistants and their impact on how we write. The topic is tackled through the lens of lexicography, and touches on the impact of

digital innovations on related business models, such as the decline in dictionary production. An overview of the types of integrated writing assistants available and their benefits are presented. The author then zooms in on “Write Assistant”, which has been made widely available to Danish school children. While this tool has provided some short-term benefits, the long-term implications for children’s writing processes are unknown, suggesting a fruitful line of enquiry for applied linguists. In chapter 3 we move from writing to pronunciation with a focus on Mobile Assisted Language Learning. The author reports on an empirical study investigating learners’ views on a smartphone app designed to develop the user’s English pronunciation. The role of applied linguists in this type of innovation is also made clear via the recommendations provided by the author as to how such apps could be improved for the various stakeholders.

The final chapter shifts gear and deals with entrepreneurship and innovation, and an innovative competition-styled intervention designed to train these skills. A type of needs analysis was conducted on the genres produced as part of the intervention to understand the language students’ needs, revealing a “stylistic hybridity”. The chapter is a very good example of how language for specific purposes collaborations can enrich the content curriculum.

Part 2 deals with internationalisation and begins with a critical perspective on internationalisation itself. Of particular interest was the call for an inclusive agenda which facilitates an internationalised curriculum at home (thus removing the need for student mobility). The chapter challenges lazy thinking about what internationalisation is and could be. For example, the author underscores the fact that large numbers of students taking part in Erasmus does not necessarily equate to a high level of commitment to internationalisation, or that students who study in a different country will necessarily experience intercultural development. The proposed “internationalisation at home” as a way forward is not only appealing from a social justice perspective, but also offers a way of continuing the project during the current pandemic.

At the same time, student mobility of course remains an important facet of internationalisation, and chapter 2 explores international students’ quality of experience during their time abroad. The author describes her own experience of supporting students in an international mobility programme and the role of service learning in providing linguistic and cultural

experiences. The challenge perhaps is to engage university leadership and policy makers so that this type of mutually beneficial approach is implemented more widely. Chapter 3 also centres on study abroad and reports the results of a mixed methods longitudinal study exploring the impact of Erasmus on identities, language attitudes and uses, and employability. The results of the pre-/post-questionnaire study revealed students' perceptions of a hierarchy of languages with, perhaps unsurprisingly, English at the top. More surprising to me was the decreasing interest in learning the local language, although differences in attitudes were observed depending on the host country context. The final chapter in this section shifts our gaze from the students to academics, and their views on the impact of internationalisation on teaching and research. The challenges and opportunities offered by internationalisation are revealed.

In the final section, four chapters consider how Applied Linguistics can contribute to employability and address social challenges. The first chapter deals with pronunciation and employability and provides an overview of the range of features that can generate misunderstanding or a negative evaluation of the speaker. The chapter begins with the truism: "People judge each other, in part, not only by what they say but also how they speak." The author proposes working to reduce facets of pronunciation that impede intelligibility for a global audience, which is a sensible aim; however, the final suggestion of eliminating stereotyped features (e.g. the trilled /r/ for L1 Spanish speakers) in order to make a better impression on potentially biased listeners perhaps invites challenge from scholars with expertise in sociolinguistics, world Englishes and English as a *Lingua Franca*.

Chapter 2 is a wide-ranging chapter that looks at how Higher Education can function better to provide students with marketable skills and meet business needs as demand for bilingual speakers increases. On the one hand, I appreciated the author's call for curricula based on the projected language needs of students in their future employment. On the other, I wondered about the practicalities given the specificity of language use in different professional contexts. It is also perhaps important to ask why it should be the role of universities and not companies to provide (and fund) job specific language training. The final chapters take a different turn: chapter 3 looks at student attitudes to migration as revealed through their written compositions, while chapter 4 demonstrates how methods in Applied Linguistics (in this case multimodal text analysis) can be applied to questions of gender equality in the professions.

To conclude, I found this collection to be very thought-provoking. The overarching experience of reading the book is to be reminded that as applied linguists, we have a strong role to play in society at large and must reach out beyond the borders of academia. Refreshingly, the book is not English-language-centric in terms of subject matter, and there is a mix of empirical pieces and more reflective and discursive chapters. Perhaps due to the breadth of topics covered and the broad range of intended readers – lecturers, students, policy makers, industry, and the professions – the experience of reading the book from start to finish was a little disjointed. But I imagine most readers will “dip in” depending on their specific interest and will find their time well spent. I also wondered whether some of the ideologies underpinning the book could have been subject to more challenge (e.g. employability agendas and the role of the university in society), and whether questions of social justice could have been pursued more strongly. But on the whole, I recommend this book as a call to action to reassert the societal importance and relevance of Applied Linguistics today.

Received 01 September 2020  
Accepted 07 September 2020

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