Marlies Whitehouse
Henrik Rahm
Séverine Wozniak

Developing shared languages

The fundamentals of mutual learning and problem solving in transdisciplinary collaboration

The ZHAW School of Applied Linguistics is engaged in the study of applied linguistics from a trans-disciplinary perspective. The focus is on real-life problems in which language plays a key role. These problems are identified, analyzed and resolved by applying existing linguistic theories, methods and results, and by developing new theoretical and methodological approaches.

In the series *Working Papers in Applied Linguistics*, the ZHAW School of Applied Linguistics publishes contributions about its own research.

Contact
ZHAW School of Applied Linguistics
Theaterstrasse 15c
8400 Winterthur
Switzerland

Marlies Whitehouse
marlies.whitehouse@zhaw.ch
Tel. +41 58 934 61 69

ZHAW   School of Applied Linguistics

Content

Abstract

In this preview of the introduction of the special issue of the AILA Review (Volume 34, Number 1), we focus on developing shared languages in and across domains and professional settings. The relation and collaboration between researchers and practitioners has long been discussed within and across applied sciences and theoretical disciplines, mainly in the framework of transdisciplinarity (see AILA Review 2018, 31, for a recent overview). However, research approaches claiming to combine theoretical and practical needs and expectations often lack either solid grounding in empirical data or thorough reflection from theoretical perspectives. This special issue aims to take the discussion further by rethinking transdisciplinarity systematically from theoretical and practical angles as the ubiquity of multi-stakeholder discourses necessitates developing shared languages to facilitate communication and mutual learning – with the ultimate goal to sustainably solve socially relevant problems.

From theoretical angles, the contributions explain how and why transdisciplinary research contributes to further developing empirically grounded theories of language use in context in an increasingly digitized and glocalized professional world – and, vice versa, how and why shared languages foster communication across boundaries of domain-specific discourses. From practical angles, the contributions elaborate on potential pitfalls and benefits practitioners can expect from collaborating with researchers from various disciplines. The analyses provided by the contributions in this issue shed light on how shared languages are developed in selected combinations of domains, with their specific settings and genres. Examples include mobile language apps and doctor-patient interactions, executive coaching, corporate communication, and segrationists' language; military communication and police investigations.

1 Introduction

This issue of the AILA Review[1] focuses on transdisciplinarity as key to developing shared languages in and across domains and professional settings. The relation and collaboration between researchers and practitioners has long been discussed in both applied sciences and theoretical disciplines and beyond, mainly in the framework of transdisciplinarity (see *AILA Review* 31, 2018, for a recent overview). However, research approaches claiming to combine theoretical and practical needs and expectations often lack either solid grounding in empirical data or thorough reflection from theoretical perspectives. This special issue aims to take the discussion further by rethinking transdisciplinarity systematically from theoretical and practical angles as the ubiquity of multi-stakeholder discourses necessitates developing shared languages to facilitate communication and mutual learning – with the ultimate goal to sustainably solve socially relevant problems. In the introduction, we present working definitions of our topic's key terms (Part 1 in AILA Review 34/1). We then go through the topics, results, and main interconnections of the six approaches in the papers of this issue (Part 2). Based on the insights from the discussion so far, we set up a framework to systematically analyze three dimensions of developing shared languages: negotiation process, interplay of key drivers, and seizing opportunities (Part 3). In this working paper, we focus on the relevance of the contributions.

2 Defining the key terms

Our topic's key terms include language awareness (Part 1.1 in AILA Review 34/1), comprehensibility (Part 1.2), context awareness (Part 1.3), professional setting (Part 1.4), and transdisciplinarity (Part 1.5).

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[1] This Working Paper represents a shortened version of the introduction of AILA Review 34/1 that will be published here: https://benjamins.com/catalog/aila.34.1

3 Shared languages on complementary grounds: the relevance of the contributions

All contributions in this issue analyze and discuss shared languages in and across domains and professional settings. They differ in focus, and thereby complement each other to a more encompassing entirety, making this forthcoming AILA Review a varied and comprehensive issue. In sum, the six contributions shed light on three main areas of developing shared languages: shared languages in individual communication (Part 3.1), shared languages in organizations (Part 3.2), and shared languages in the public sphere (Part 3.3).

3.1 Shared languages in individual communication

The first pair of contributions focuses on the usage of shared languages in communication with individuals, in particular on individuals who would like to use a foreign language including specialized vocabulary, and individuals who have to use experts' language to thoroughly understand the consequences of their decisions. Silga Svike investigates the challenges, problems and solutions of specialized lexicography in mobile apps as language learning tools (Paper I). Gianni De Nardi, Igor Matic & Felix Steiner develop a strategy of making medical information more comprehensible to laypersons (Paper II). Both approaches identify issues and develop solutions for the individual needs of expert language.

Paper I **Mobile apps as language learning tools:**
Challenges, problems and solutions of specialized lexicography
Silga Svike

This contribution provides an insight into the development and functions of mobile apps – specialized translation dictionaries with Latvian as one of the contrasted languages, together with a dictionary user evaluation analysis based on survey data. The contribution also describes the situation on the Google Play store regarding the range of specialized translation dictionaries with Latvian.

Paper II **Analyzing and optimizing Informed Consent in cooperation with ethics committees**
Igor Matic & Gianni De Nardi & Felix Steiner

This contribution analyzes aspects of comprehensibility in the Informed Consent (IC) process. In specific, the authors focus on three main stakeholders involved in the IC process within the context of human research: (i) ethics committees, (ii) researchers, and (iii) patients. The article describes the underlying concepts of comprehensibility for each stakeholder and presents suggestions on how to establish a shared language considering the complex relationship between these stakeholders.

3.2 Shared language in organizations

The second pair of contributions focuses on ways of overcoming hinderances and constraints in transdisciplinary collaboration, in particular on researchers' collaboration with practitioners in organizations. Eva-Maria Graf & Frédérick Dionne outline the development of a transdisciplinary collaboration between applied linguists and psychologists with coaching practitioners (Paper III). Misa Fujio describes new directions of collaboration between university professors and professional business practitioners (Paper IV). Both approaches map innovative ways to create and foster shared language as common ground for transdisciplinary projects.

Paper III **Knowing "that" and knowing "how": Aligning perspectives for a trans-disciplinary analysis of questioning sequences in executive coaching**
Eva-Maria Graf & Frédérick Dionne

This contribution discusses the design process of a transdisciplinary research project on questioning practices in executive coaching. Arguing that the centrality of questions to enable change for the client in this new helping format has yet to be thoroughly explored, the authors stress the importance of integrating linguists', psychologists' and practitioners' epistemes to obtain results that both further the academic understanding of the phenomenon and are relevant to the actual practice of coaching.

Paper IV **Transdisciplinary in Japanese Business Communication:**
New directions of collaboration between professors and professionals
Misa Fujio

This contribution discusses the challenges and opportunities that transdisciplinary collaborations have been facing in Japan, with a focus on those between business and academia. Revealing the current limitations in transdisciplinary collaborations, the author maintains how applied linguists can contribute to raising language awareness of the corporate side, centering on the power dimension of shared language.

3.3 Shared languages in the public sphere

The third pair of contributions focuses on language with implications on the public sphere, in particular on acting with and reacting to strategic communication. Christopher McKenna analyses the development of institutional racial segregation with everyday language that may have seemed, on the surface, unobjectionable (Paper V). Steven Breunig investigates activities of the US military for engaging in and handling of social media messaging and management in a digitalized mediated world. Both approaches emphasize the pivotal role and impact of accepted shared languages used in public sphere.

Paper V **An invisible operational mortar: The essential role of language in developing and managing tri-segrated movie theaters**
Christopher McKenna

This contribution seeks to apply the principles of speech-act theory developed within linguistics to the studies both of historical segregation in the United States and to the study of business history more generally. Specifically, the article recounts how the development of rather extraordinary business venues – namely, tri-racial movie theaters – in a region where the standard Manichaean Southern racial divide was effectively compelled by the presence of a sizable third ethnic group: Native Americans.

Paper VI **Language workers and the challenge of digitalization: Gaining insight through the social media skill sharing of professional communication practitioners within the US military**
Steven Breunig

This contribution investigates the transciplinary practice of social media skill sharing within the US military for developing themes for research and practice. With the increasing digitialization of communication, in which government agencies rely more and more on social media messaging and management to connect with their multiple stakeholders the learning and development of knowledge and skills for strategic organizational communication becomes an increasingly collaborative effort between practitioners, researchers and industry leaders.

4   Key aspects: Towards a model of developing shared languages

The results of the six papers in this issue suggest that a model of developing shared languages should consider and elaborate on three key aspects. First, shared languages are the result of a negotiation process (3.1 in AILA Review 34/1); second, the interplay of six key drivers shapes the usage and success of shared languages (3.2); and third, shared languages foster communication and mutual learning (3.3) – with the ultimate goal to sustainably solve socially relevant problems.

The authors

Marlies Whitehouse is Treasurer of the International Association of Applied Linguistics. She works at Zurich University of Applied Sciences, Switzerland, where she investigates text production and text reception in finance.

Henrik Rahm is associate professor at Lund University, Sweden. The common denominator for his research is social settings and discourse analyses. Amongst other, he coordinates a transdisciplinary research project in finance.

Séverine Wozniak is associate professor in English for Specific Purposes at Université Grenoble Alpes, France. Her primary research interests lie in the areas of applied linguistics. She is President of Groupe d'Étude et de Recherche en Anglais de Spécialité.