

BOOK REVIEW



APPLIED LINGUISTICS, SOCIETY AND HIGHER EDUCATION: AN INTERDEPENDENT TRIANGLE

Ana Bocanegra-Valle (Ed.). APPLIED LINGUISTICS AND KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER. EMPLOYABILITY, INTERNATIONALISATION AND SOCIAL CHALLENGES (2020), Bern: Peter Lang. 323 pp., ISBN-978-3-0343-3714-4 (HBK) ISBN-978-3-0343-3719-9 (EBK).

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Nowadays, no one can fail to realize the growing importance of applied linguistics in a wide variety of areas of our society. However, selecting the most relevant issues with the aim of shedding light on the intersection between applied linguistics and certain other disciplines is not an easy undertaking. One of the two main strengths of *Applied Linguistics and Knowledge Transfer*, edited by A. Bocanegra-Valle, is found in the pertinence of the issues approached by the research studies included; the second main strength lies in the balance throughout the book regarding the methodology used by each study. In such a rigorous and carefully planned-out framework, knowledge transfer, internationalization and employability, and social changes appear interwoven, with the purpose of illustrating once more the extent to which applied linguistics can contribute to economic growth and social well-being as well as suggesting alternatives to make that contribution more solid.

The volume opens with an introduction by Bocanegra-Valle, which can be viewed as integral because, in addition to the rationale for why the volume was put together, the reader will find here a brief description of the contents of the successive chapters. Each of the three parts of the book encompasses four chapters

focusing on the challenges scholars, researchers, and students face in order to create and maintain effective links with society.

In Part I, entitled “Knowledge Transfer”, chapter 1 opens with a critical discussion of the insufficient impact the advances in linguistic research have had on our society and endorses the view that multidisciplinary research teams are the only option to satisfy the demands of the modern world. Ricardo Mairal-Usón and Pamela Faber focus their attention on three disciplines, namely, artificial intelligence, health sciences, and biology, and offer an insightful account of how linguistics matters are inevitably at the core of each of them. On the basis of evidence from studies carried out in Spain (some of them by the authors themselves), the authors contend that it is essential for linguists to become aware of the fields in which their knowledge is of great value. Furthermore, they urge universities to adapt academic programs to this new reality.

Chapter 2 is devoted to the application of information technologies to the writing and editing of texts. More precisely, Sven Tarp looks at how digital integrated writing assistants, tools that are integrated in text-processing programs, help users when writing texts and facilitate the process of learning a foreign language. After an accurate description of the features of *Write Assistant*, a tool developed by the Danish high-tech company Ordbogen A/S, Tarp presents his reservations about the effect the use of this type of tool might have not only on what learners are asked to learn in order to achieve written communicative competence but also on the development of their cognitive skills. To quote the author, “the machine is there [...] to assist us, but not to take over and replace us” (p. 71).

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In the third chapter, the emphasis is on pronunciation. Jonás Fouz-González analyses the perceptions of sixty-three B2 and B1 English as a foreign language (EFL) learners on the use of pronunciation apps outside the classroom and observes that most participants would have no objection to using these apps. Few studies have examined learners’ perceptions of pronunciation before despite the significant influence they have on the language learning process. Taking into consideration the demanding nature of pronunciation and the reluctance of many learners to participate in class, it is of utmost importance that both researchers and teachers centre their efforts on finding ways to expedite this aspect of learning a foreign language.

The fourth chapter of this first part reports a small-scale study by Carmen Sancho Guinda on student written output in the first stage of the ACTÚA-UPM contest (a competition of business ideas among schools promoted by the Technical University of Madrid). Sancho Guinda aims to identify the communicative weaknesses of university students when promoting their innovations. After her analysis of the data from this corpus-based study, the author emphasizes the need for higher education students to gain expertise in writing concisely, choosing the right terminology, and avoiding inappropriate tones. The author argues that these

objectives can only be reached by close collaboration between language and content teachers.

The opening chapter in Part II, “Internationalisation”, addresses the concept of internationalization in the context of higher education. Elspeth Jones starts by discussing the wrong, traditionally made interpretation of its meaning, which covers aspects solely related to mobility and the delivery of programs in a foreign language. The author moves a step beyond *Internationalization at Home* (Beelen & Jones, 2015), and proposes coining the wider term *Interculturalization at Home*, which requires the incorporation of global, international, and intercultural perspectives into the curriculum and no longer considers foreign language as the main signal of internationalization.

The second chapter provides some of the reasons why university students fail to use the target language most of the time in study-abroad programs, or interact with people from the host country (Kinginger, 2009). Carmen Carracelas-Juncal approaches this issue from her own experience and puts forward service-learning as an option for connecting academic learning with life outside the classroom. The necessary and invaluable evidence the author presents pertains to the thirty students of her course *Inmersión Sociocultural en Pamplona: Aprendizaje Servicio y Comunicación en Español* [Socio-cultural immersion in Pamplona: Service learning and communication in Spanish].

In the third chapter of the second part, student attitudes towards languages and the English language take centre stage. The quantitative study conducted by Vasi Mocanu and Enric Llorca, with 155 participants in different Erasmus study-abroad programs (namely, in Finland, Romania, and Spain), reveals a certain *fetishization* of English, a clear *hierarchy* of languages according to their income value in all three contexts examined, and an increased rejection of the local languages. As this is part of a wider project, the authors expect to be able to clarify the reasons for the students’ attitudes in further studies.

In the last chapter of this second part of the volume, Oana Maria Carciu and Laura-Mihaela Muresan document the views of ten academics from the Bucharest University of Economic Studies on the main features associated with internationalization in their faculty. From the replies to the semi-structured interviews conducted, the authors observed that the process of internationalization was regarded mostly as a bottom-up initiative, relying on academics’ own concerns and engagement in internationalization activities. The authors coincide with Korka (2018) in accentuating the need for “top down” initiatives, that is, initiatives coming from the institution. Only with the combination of the two will the quality of higher education be guaranteed.

Part III, entitled “Employability and Social Challenges”, begins with a chapter which centers on the impact the pronunciation and intonation of foreign language learners can have on listeners. After providing an array of examples of the consequences of not mastering certain features of those two aspects, Martha C. Pennington presents a conscientious description of three strategies that can help

to turn pronunciation into a resource and not a hindrance, and therefore facilitate successful interactions both in personal and job-related contexts.

Chapter 2 draws attention to the long-standing debate about the lack of correspondence between what the university teaches and what the labor market demands. Troy B. Wiwczarowski and Mária Czeller point out that since university classes are the last stop for students before entering the job market, universities must make sure that students master not only foreign language skills but also intercultural and professional communication skills such as presentation, negotiation, and customer communication skills. Assuming this responsibility, the authors claim, inevitably requires a revision of higher education curricula.

Chapter 3 takes up university EFL students' attitudes towards immigration. Considering the increase in levels of immigration to Spain, Penny MacDonald and Llum Bracho decided to analyze a corpus consisting of 150 compositions collected over nine years. The authors identified, on the one hand, a clear correspondence between the information revealed by the media about immigrants at specific points along the period under study and learners' attitudes, and on the other hand, an abundance of negative comments, which invites a reflection on the sources of information learners opt for.

In the last chapter of the volume, Silvia Molina-Plaza and Samira Allani examine the way women engineers present themselves on The Women's Engineering Society (WES) website, which was created to demolish the barriers women face in engineering. The authors analyze the multimodal communicative strategies employed by the engineers to present themselves as competent professionals and build their professional identity. The purpose of the information, provided by the verbal, visual, and aural modes, is threefold: to attract students to technical careers, to invite the audience to active involvement, and to encourage work in partnership. As Molina-Plaza and Allani argue, the integration of channels on this professional website succeeds in presenting a "persuasive message within the engineering community and companies" (p. 308), which is very much needed as women are even today under-represented in the field.

As can be seen from this review, the book looks at the intersection of applied linguistics and other disciplines from a variety of angles. The overall concept of the volume, the three parts dealing with different but equally relevant perspectives, and the well-drafted and meticulously edited individual contributions make for an informative yet critical read. One of the challenges of gathering studies that combine different contexts is to ensure overall coherence, which the editor has achieved by means of a clear, principled structure, enhanced by the editor's introduction to the book and its parts. With respect to its global coverage, the book represents worldwide knowledge advancement in the social projection of applied linguistics, reflected not only by the institutional affiliations of the contributors but also by the research studies referred to in their work.

In conclusion, it must be emphasized that the present volume provides not only a rich overview of the various fields applied linguistics plays a part in but also

an eminently practical resource guide for current or prospective teachers and researchers. For junior researchers, it constitutes a fountain of inspiration for conducting either qualitative or quantitative research, and for established professionals and academics a valuable reference tool. All the merits listed above dictate that the book is in many respects unique as it offers fresh insights into the interdisciplinary nature of applied linguistics and will be of interest to a broad audience.

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