

EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

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Overview of Volume 25

It is a sign of overweening ambition if not hubris to think that all of applied linguistics can fit between two covers. Dynamic even when the *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics (ARAL)* began publication in 1981, applied linguistics has continued to change, grow, and redefine its areas of coverage, even as many other journals have emerged in the intervening 25 years. Writing in the 20th anniversary issue of *ARAL*, my editorial predecessors, Robert Kaplan and William Grabe, provide the historical context for the establishment of *ARAL* and show how it came to fit into the context of applied linguistics as the field evolved from the mid-20th century to the beginning of the 21st. They summarize the key notions that characterize applied linguistics and remark that it “commonly includes a core set of issues and practices that are readily identified as work done by many applied linguists (language teaching, language teacher preparation, and language curriculum development)” along with “several further identifiable subfields of study: bilingual studies, corpus linguistics, forensic linguistics, language contact studies, language testing, language translation and interpretation, language use in professional contexts, lexicography and dictionary making, literacy, second language acquisition, and second language writing research” (Kaplan & Grabe, 2000, p. 5). The variety and diversity of these subfields defy attempts to gather them into a single volume (although some useful recent handbooks have done so; see, for example, Davies & Elder, 2004; Kaplan, 2002); furthermore, at present, topics in applied linguistics are commonly addressed through entire handbooks for particular subfields (Bhatia & Ritchie, 2004; Doughty & Long, 2003; Spolsky, 1999) or even in multivolume sets such as the *Encyclopedia of Language and Education* (Corson, 1997). Hence, this year's volume should perhaps be labeled a ‘selective’ survey, or even a sampling of the field, rather than an exhaustive inventory of all possible endeavors that warrant inclusion within applied linguistics. The present volume features research on some of the perennial concerns of applied linguistics, akin to Kaplan and Grabe's ‘core issues.’

That important qualification noted, the themes discussed herein offer insights into those aspects of language, language learning, literacy, and assessment of language that continue to serve as foci of research, draw attention at scholarly conferences, appear in specialized publications refereed by experts in the field, and

affect issues of language learning, teaching, and use in multiple real-world settings, academic and otherwise. Each chapter helps to illuminate connections between the existing state of knowledge and the many questions that invite (and often require) additional investigation to advance the field. In serving as a major source of bibliographical guidance for specialist readers, this volume of *ARAL*, like the previous 24, aims to illuminate the most promising directions for theory building and research in the areas covered.

Chapters in the first section address some of the fundamental issues in the nature of language learning. Terence Odlin reconsiders the important questions of crosslinguistic and conceptual transfer, and shows that recent research has led to a reconsideration and amplification of the phenomena that may profitably be studied in these domains. In discussing longitudinal research in second language acquisition, Lourdes Ortega and Gina Ibarra-Shea note that some of the chronic limitations of second language research, typically restricted to cross-sectional approaches, have begun to be addressed through use of alternative designs, but that much remains to be done to better describe the temporal course of language acquisition. They describe some recent investigative trends in attempts to capture temporal changes appropriately, though in very different ways. Peter Robinson offers a reevaluation of the definitions and operationalization of aptitude as related to second language acquisition and provides a comprehensive model that reflects multiple streams of research in cognitive psychology, psycholinguistics, and applied linguistics, offering several productive avenues for future investigations.

Papers in the second section relate directly to questions of the psycholinguistic processes implicated in second language learning. Elaine Tarone and Martha Bigelow argue that a near-exclusive focus in applied linguistics on the second language acquisition of highly literate participants has failed to address several key aspects of language learning and set out possibilities for related research, including recent studies done by them and their colleagues, to help fill the gap. The self-report methods most often used as the basis for inferences about language learning processes are reviewed by Gillian Wigglesworth, who shows that typical think-aloud methods, still prevalent, are now usefully complemented by research on learners' task-related discourse and planning strategies, thus bringing activity theory to bear. The recent trajectory of research on language learning strategies is traced by Anna Chamot; her discussion of contemporary investigations shows that, although instruction in language learning strategies remains attractive to many, sound research requires continued careful descriptive study in many different instructional contexts and demands that constraints such as learner goals, proficiency level, and nature of task must be clearly identified to shape pedagogical applications intelligently.

The third section includes four chapters that suggest the breadth of applied linguistics attention to literacy. Reviewing research on acquisition of second language literacy skills, Elizabeth Bernhardt proposes a model of second language reading that includes interactions between background knowledge, processing strategies, and level of second language proficiency as well as the often neglected assessment of first language literacy levels. Brian Morgan and Vai Ramanathan

examine the many possible definitions of critical literacy, particularly those related to the study of English for academic purposes and globalization, and consider what provision of critical literacy instruction might mean in a variety of instructional settings. Tensions between conceptions of literacy as a universal system that transcends individual and local contexts versus those that define literacy as a system of locally situated cultural practices are also discussed by Stephen Reder and Erica Davila; they indicate that current scholarship is making efforts to establish new theoretical ground to recognize these tensions and devise socially responsible models of literacy capable of accounting for intellectual commonalities. Denise Murray surveys recent work on the contribution of computer technology to acquisition of second language literacy and considers implications for the varieties of literacies needed by learners in other domains, making the key point that use of new information technologies facilitate collaboration and autonomy only if instruction is carefully planned to provide related opportunities.

The fourth section addresses language assessment, a topic prominently featured in several past volumes of *ARAL*, and sets out some of the emerging trends. Thom Hudson provides a detailed consideration of issues related to the use of performance scales and criterion-referenced assessment, developments that reflect recognition of the complexity of language use and the need to make test results readily observable; through discussion of three major related initiatives that have used criterion-referenced approaches, he shows that, precisely because of the effort to mirror the complexity of language use, such approaches must also come to grips with sources of variability unrelated to language skill. Reviewing trends in the application of computer technology to language assessment, Joan Jamieson shows that increasing technological power along with more sophisticated conceptions of test quality have created an environment favorable to support progress not only in the efficiency but in the authenticity of language assessments. Penny McKay's overview of language assessment for school-age learners offers examples from several countries of studies on the effects of the standards movement, content-based assessment, definitions of academic language proficiency, new approaches to classroom assessment, and language assessment for young learners.

The chapters in this volume on second language research, language and literacy learning processes, and language assessment, all matters with substantial individual and societal impact, attest to the vibrancy of applied linguistics and its relevance to a range of real world issues. In 2000, Kaplan and Grabe observed that disciplinary acceptance of applied linguistics would only emerge "to the extent that applied linguistics responds to wider societal needs and its expertise is valued by people beyond the professional field" (2000, p. 3). In the tradition of the journal, I hope that these chapters will illuminate important trends and suggest promising directions to investigators who will pursue and eventually publish related research, thus contributing to the currency, coherence, and acceptance of applied linguistics as a discipline.

Procedural Notes

Each year, *ARAL* aims to provide specialist readers with a useful research tool that will assist them in locating and evaluating current research on the topics covered. A 10-year Contributor Index, listing authors, titles, and initial page numbers for Volumes 15–24 appears at the end of this volume. A five-year Author Citation Index for Volumes 20–24 and 10-year Subject Index for Volumes 15–24 are available on the *ARAL* section of the Cambridge Journals Web site: http://journals.cambridge.org/jid_APL. The publisher and editor hope that these multiple channels of access to current sources will assist *ARAL* readers in identifying appropriate sources on topics of interest.

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