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INTRODUCTION

Interdisciplinarity in applied linguistics

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Interdisciplinarity has long been hailed as a defining feature of applied linguistics. Already more than 40 years ago, Brumfit (1980) characterized applied linguistics as an inherently interdisciplinary field, and major professional bodies such as AILA and AAAL continue to describe the field in interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary terms. Bringing together work at the intersection of various areas such as linguistics, psychology, education, sociology, and, increasingly, neurocognitive and computational sciences, applied linguistics has consistently championed the integration of diverse perspectives to understand language-related phenomena. This intellectual orientation has also fostered a methodological diversity that makes the field empirically rich: approaches including, but not limited to, experimental, computational, ethnographic, corpus-based, discourse-analytic, legal-interpretive to arts-based coexist, and increasingly these approaches are combined in innovative ways to yield complementary insights about language-related phenomena in the real world.

Although interdisciplinarity is generally regarded as a strength of applied linguistics, interdisciplinary work is not without its challenges. Depending on its form, it may require scholars to cross distinct epistemologies, terminologies, and indicators of rigor, which can generate tensions and debate among researchers trained in different disciplinary traditions or working within different methodological paradigms. Yet, these tensions can also be productive, prompting researchers to clarify their assumptions, articulate their criteria for research quality, and refine the conceptual frameworks that guide their work. Interdisciplinarity also demands openness to others' perspectives and forms of expertise, while enabling researchers to arrive at insights that they could not have generated independently.

In the 2026 issue of ARAL, our aim was to bring together bold interdisciplinary work that pushes the boundaries of applied linguistics. We believe this issue exemplifies how interdisciplinary thinking can influence and extend our conceptual frameworks and extend the methodological repertoire of the field. The authors adopted varied formats, including position papers, empirical studies, and theoretical analyses, to showcase different forms of interdisciplinarity, ranging from the comparison of disciplinary perspectives in multidisciplinary work, through cross-disciplinary

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borrowing and adaptation, to more integrative approaches that combine theoretical ideas, methodologies, and epistemologies, creating new transdisciplinary spaces.

The issue

The issue opens with four papers that explore intersections between applied linguistics and the digital. The first of these, by Al Hoorie et al., offers an interdisciplinary analysis of how generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) influences motivation in language learning, drawing together perspectives from applied linguistics, educational psychology, and GenAI. Rather than focusing solely on GenAI's benefits, the authors examine its motivational consequences. Using self-determination theory as a theoretical framework, they consider how GenAI can support or disrupt learners' autonomy, competence, and relatedness, and how these shifts may move motivation toward more extrinsic orientations. The paper also highlights risks associated with uncritical GenAI use, including reduced cognitive engagement, decreased critical thinking, and challenges to assessment integrity. Beyond these conceptual issues, the authors discuss methodological implications for researching motivation in GenAI-mediated environments. They outline future directions centered on balancing autonomy with dependence, sustaining motivation, rehumanizing digital learning, and rethinking teachers' roles. The article ultimately calls for renewed theoretical, ethical, and methodological awareness to ensure that GenAI supports sustainable and self-determined motivation.

Continuing with the theme of GenAI, Jones develops an interdisciplinary account of how GenAI voice interfaces produce recognizable social identities through language variation. Bringing together critical sociolinguistics, linguistic anthropology, philosophy, human–computer interaction, and user-experience research, the article examines how synthetic voices become legible as "human," "natural," or "authentic" not simply by sounding like people in general but by sounding like particular kinds of people. Drawing on Silvio's concept of animation and Blommaert's notion of enoughness, Jones analyses meta-pragmatic artefacts surrounding ChatGPT's advanced voice mode and Sesame.ai's hyper-realistic voice interface, including social media discussions on platforms such as TikTok and Reddit. The analysis shows how designers, users, media commentators, and GenAI systems co-produce judgments of authenticity through salient linguistic and semiotic cues, including accent, stance, pitch, and style. The article demonstrates how generative GenAI participates in the circulation of enregistered voices and cultural stereotypes, highlighting the need for applied linguistics to attend to the sociolinguistic and ideological consequences of human–AI interaction.

Lee also adopts a critical perspective in her interdisciplinary analysis of misogynistic digital discourse in post-digital conditions, bringing together applied linguistics, digital discourse analysis, critical discourse studies, platform studies, and online–offline ethnography. Focusing on LIHKG, a popular online forum in Hong Kong, the article examines how users appropriate platform affordances to sustain and amplify verbal aggression against female influencers. Through critical discourse-centered online–offline nexus ethnography, Lee traces how forum features such as upvoting and downvoting, nested quoting, custom emojis, forum slang, trending feeds, and serial threads become affordances-in-practice that enable misogynistic discourse

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to circulate and intensify. A detailed case study follows a 5-year cycle of aggression targeting one female influencer, showing how online attacks can produce offline reputational consequences that recursively generate further online abuse. By analyzing discourse trajectories across digital and physical spaces, the article demonstrates how harmful language becomes normalized through repeated uptake and collective participation. It also shows how post-digital discourse analysis can account for the sociotechnical conditions through which language, platform design, and user agency converge.

In the last piece on the digital, Stokoe et al. analyze what it means for technologies, products, services, and research methods to be described as "conversational." Drawing on six decades of conversation analysis, together with insights from linguistics, discursive psychology, communication training, human–computer interaction, and AI research, the article interrogates the assumptions that underpin contemporary uses of the term "conversational." The authors examine how notions of conversationality are mobilized in domains, such as role-play, communication training, interviews, focus groups, laboratory studies, chatbots, and voice assistants, often without sufficient attention to how interaction actually unfolds. They argue that many technologies and assessment practices rely on normative rather than empirical understandings of what counts as good or natural conversation. By foregrounding the interactional machinery of turn-taking, repair, sequence organization, and institutional talk, the article shows how conversation analysis can offer a rigorous empirical basis for evaluating claims about conversational technologies. The article ultimately cautions that if human conversationality becomes a benchmark based on idealized norms rather than real interaction, even humans may fail the tests designed in their name.

The next two pieces bring applied linguistics into dialogue with healthcare research. Exploring research at this interface, Chalmers and Isaacs examine how avoidable research waste can be reduced through improved reporting quality. Building on earlier work that identified five sources of research waste in applied linguistics, the article focuses on the problem of insufficiently transparent, incomplete, or uneven reporting, which can limit replication, evidence synthesis, and the practical usability of research findings. Drawing on precedents from healthcare, particularly CONSORT and the EQUATOR Network, the authors show how coordinated reporting guidelines can strengthen the quality and transparency of published research. Their survey of author guidelines across leading applied linguistics journals reveals fragmented expectations and the absence of field-wide design-specific reporting standards. The article argues that applied linguistics is well positioned to develop its own consensus-based reporting guidelines through collaboration among methodologists, editors, research synthesists, and practitioners. In doing so, it demonstrates how interdisciplinary borrowing from healthcare research can help applied linguistics enhance rigor, transparency, and impact.

Macqueen's article connects communicative competence and health literacy to examine how measured constructs travel across research, policy, assessment, and practice. Situated at the intersection of applied linguistics, health communication, construct validity, complexity theory, and cultural-historical activity theory, the article conceptualizes constructs as interacting and overlapping spheres of activity in which focal concepts are worked on for different purposes and audiences. Using a narrative inquiry

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approach, Macqueen traces the historical development of communicative competence and health literacy, examines a moment in a health literacy test, and then considers what health literacy looks like in authentic doctor–patient interaction. The analysis shows that although communication is central to shared decision-making in healthcare, it is often weakly represented in operationalized measures of health literacy. By bringing together interactional perspectives, the article demonstrates how applied linguistics can contribute to more dynamic understandings of health communication. It ultimately calls for closer attention to interactional repertoires and the co-construction of knowledge in healthcare contexts.

Moving onto the realm of law, the piece by Römer-Barron et al. exemplifies interdisciplinarity in constitutional interpretation by bringing corpus-linguistic methods to examine how the Appointments Clause of the U.S. Constitution should be understood. The authors investigate whether the U.S. Supreme Court's long-standing interpretation aligns with Founding Era usage of the construction *such* + *noun phrase* + *as*. Drawing on Corpus of Founding Era American English (COFEA) and a large corpus of James Madison's correspondence, speeches, and political writings, they analyze how this construction was used in late-18th- and early-19th-century American English. Their findings challenge 50 years of legal practice, suggesting that the constitutional text does not support the Court's prevailing approach. Instead, the linguistic evidence points to a discretionary qualifier that places interpretive authority with Congress rather than the courts when determining whether Congressional approval is required for federal appointments. The article illustrates how evidence from applied linguistics can inform legal debates.

Jarvis et al. also present research situated at the intersection of law and applied linguistics, drawing additionally on insights from psycholinguistics. The authors examined Recommendation 6 of the Miranda guidelines, which stipulates that an interview should end if a suspect is unable to restate their rights in English and that paraphrasing is the only acceptable indicator of Miranda comprehension. Their discussion is also informed by the *Guidelines for Communicating Rights to Non-Native Speakers of English* (CORG, 2016), which similarly caution that verbatim repetition may occur without genuine understanding. To evaluate this claim, the authors draw on data from two earlier studies: Pavlenko et al. (2019), examining L1 and L2 paraphrasing of Miranda sentences, and Akbary et al. (2023), comparing L1 and L2 performance on paraphrasing and verbatim repetition tasks. Across these datasets, the evidence for a lack of comprehension in repetition was relatively weak and inconclusive. Thus, the authors concluded that Recommendation 6 errs on the side of caution to ensure that detainees genuinely understand their rights. However, they stress that this should not be regarded as a professional standard in forensic linguistics and should not be presented as such in expert testimony.

Keeping with behavioral approaches from second language acquisition while incorporating neuroscience methods, Rodríguez-Gallego et al. examined whether working memory (WM) contributes to learners' development of receptive and productive knowledge of a Spanish L2 feature *grammatical gender agreement*. Participants completed a battery of WM tests along with receptive and productive tasks focusing on gender agreement involving articles and adjectives. Although participants improved on both types of tasks, WM did not significantly predict their gains. In addition to

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the primary behavioral analyses, the researchers conducted a post hoc examination of potential links between WM and neural responses (event-related potentials) during the receptive task. Although WM did not appear to influence the acquisition of gender agreement, the neurocognitive data suggest it may play a role in early processing stages. By analyzing receptive and productive performance together and integrating behavioral and neurocognitive evidence, the study demonstrates the value of adopting an interdisciplinary approach to explore how WM may (or may not) influence L2 development.

Flood et al., another study employing neuroscience methods, offer an example of interdisciplinary work at the intersection of applied linguistics, cognitive neuroscience, and social psychology by examining how second language learners interpret attitudinal prosody. Using a neuroimaging technique functional magnetic resonance imaging, the authors examined how native Japanese speakers processed attitudinal and linguistic prosody in both Japanese and English during a forced-choice task, integrating linguistic theory with pragmatic and neurocognitive approaches. The two prosody types activated partly different neural systems: attitudinal prosody engaged socio-cognitive regions linked to interpreting speakers' intentions, whereas linguistic prosody recruited phonological–motor networks. When processing attitudinal prosody in their L2, learners showed stronger frontal activation, suggesting greater reliance on controlled interpretive and executive processes. Individual-difference analyses further revealed that informal exposure to English predicted increased activation in memory-related regions and more accurate identification of attitudinal cues. Overall, the study demonstrates how interdisciplinary methods can illuminate the cognitive and neural foundations of L2 pragmatic processing beyond what any single discipline could achieve.

The issue concludes with two articles that invite readers to reconsider the conceptual foundations of the field and the assumptions that underpin our ways of knowing. Bagga-Gupta offers a critical and reflexive contribution that challenges the taken-for-granted language of disciplinarity itself. Drawing on decolonial and southern perspectives, the article questions the binaries that often structure discussions of mono-, multi-, inter-, cross-, and transdisciplinary work, and instead proposes an "undisciplinary" orientation to scholarship. Through a think-along, essayistic mode, Bagga-Gupta foregrounds epistemic labor in research and education, particularly as it relates to language, identity, diversity, justice, inclusion, and empowerment. Central to the article is an "E2-S2" stance, which brings together epistemic and existential (E2) work with sustainable and solidarity-based (S2) commitments. By elaborating a Second Wave of Southern Perspectives framework, the article invites applied linguists to rethink the conceptual vocabularies through which language and education are studied. The article ultimately pushes interdisciplinarity beyond the crossing of disciplinary borders toward a more radical reimagining of scholarly knowledge, academic labor, and the worlds that research makes possible.

Finally, Caldwell's piece is a reflective, first-person position paper that documents his efforts to establish sports linguistics as an interdisciplinary subfield within applied linguistics. He outlines how collaborations (joint publications, shared initiatives, and the development of a research network) created the conditions for this area to emerge. The editorial highlights both the opportunities and the challenges involved in building

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a sports-focused applied linguistics community, particularly in light of existing work in sports linguistics and the substantial body of scholarship in communication studies. Caldwell also reflects on his own research trajectory, using it to explain his broader ideas about the intersections between sport and linguistics. Drawing on Bernstein (2000), he examines how his perceptions of disciplinary boundaries and knowledge structures have influenced his efforts to build a new community. The piece concludes by offering insights for others seeking to develop new interdisciplinary communities within applied linguistics.

Concluding remarks

The contributions to this issue demonstrate that interdisciplinarity remains central to applied linguistics not because the field lacks a coherent object of inquiry, but because language-related problems are themselves distributed across social, (neuro)cognitive, material, technological, and institutional domains. Across the issue, interdisciplinarity emerges in multiple forms: in the creation of new fields of application, in the borrowing and adaptation of methods, in the re-examination of constructs that circulate between research and practice, in interventions in public and legal debates, and in critical engagement with emerging technologies and digital infrastructures. Taken together, the articles show that interdisciplinary work requires more than collaboration across named disciplines; it demands close attention to how concepts are translated, how evidence is evaluated, how methodological standards are negotiated, and how knowledge moves across academic, professional, and public contexts. They also remind us that interdisciplinarity is not a neutral or purely additive process, but one that may involve contesting dominant epistemologies, questioning the authority of established constructs, and examining whose knowledge, language practices, and forms of expertise are recognized. For applied linguistics, interdisciplinarity is therefore both an inheritance and an ongoing project, one that enables the field to address complex language-related questions while requiring continual reflexivity about its own assumptions, boundaries, and responsibilities.

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