An editorial interface: A retrospective/prospective account

Srikant Sarangi

This issue of *Journal of Applied Linguistics* (JAL) is effectively (in terms of date of publication) the last issue to appear under this title, although JAL 6.3 predates the publication of this issue: the latter had to be issued at an earlier date in order to coincide with and to honour the work of Ron Scollon who died in 2009. Since that time it has been an unusually long period of gestation, for which an editorial apology is in place, followed by an extended account.

First and foremost, it is fitting to pay tribute to my founding co-editor, Chris Candlin, who passed away on 10 May 2015, prior to the publication of this issue. His death has most certainly created an intellectual and professional void which will prove very hard to fill. Given our three-decades-long companionship I feel his absence on a daily basis although much of the time we collaborated ‘from a distance’. It is a strange coincidence that this delayed JAL issue turned out to be a prospective place-holder to announce this sad news. A more worthy occasion is being earmarked to celebrate Chris Candlin’s generous gifts to the community of applied linguists through this journal and beyond.

As the very final edition of JAL, this issue also marks, retrospectively, the transition in 2010 to the re-launching of JAL under the expanded title of *Journal of Applied Linguistics and Professional Practice* (JALPP) – intended as a point of departure to re-specify the scope of Applied Linguistics. Throughout Chris Candlin has remained an integral part of this transition as evidenced by the inaugural editorial we co-wrote to herald an alternative research-cum-practice agenda for the future of Applied Linguistics (Sarangi and Candlin 2010). The

**Affiliation**

Srikant Sarangi: Danish Institute of Humanities and Medicine (DIHM), Faculty of Humanities, Aalborg University, Kroghstræde 3, DK-9220 Aalborg, Denmark.

email: sarangi@hum.aau.dk

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core idea can be traced to the series of jointly authored editorials (Candlin and Sarangi 2004; Sarangi and Candlin 2003, 2004a, 2004b) as well as to the definitive call for an ‘Applied Linguistics of Professions’ (Sarangi 2005), and more recently, to the interface between organizational and professional practices (Candlin and Sarangi 2011; Sarangi and Candlin 2011). What follows is both retrospective and prospective in terms of the timing of the publication of this issue.1

The shift from JAL to JALPP is not a mere nomenclature or rebranding; it is driven by our genuine passion to chart and consolidate a new terrain of applied linguistic, practice-oriented scholarship. The invitation is to look outside the mainstream applied linguistic concerns and to imbibe what can be called ‘an applied linguistic mentality’, i.e., to take seriously the notions of ‘applied’ and ‘relevance’ underpinned by a sense of commitment and engagement with professional practitioners whose actions and discourses we study. What I elsewhere characterize as the building and sustenance of ‘communities of interests’ between experts (Sarangi 2015) means that our embodied ‘interests’ in studying situated professional practice can become instrumental in generating reciprocal ‘interest’ from the professional practitioners about our findings. In order to optimize uptake of applied linguistic research findings we need to pay attention to the following ingredients, among others: accessible presence, reciprocity of perspectives, joint problematization, negotiation of interpretive procedures and provision of hot feedback. This iterative, reflexive turn in Applied Linguistics synergizes with the increasingly dominant climate of ‘translational research’ and ‘research impact’.

Translationality cannot be taken for granted, even under the banner of Applied Linguistics where many applied linguists may feel too much bounded by their disciplinary practices and by their definitions of research circumference. It is this trend of silo thinking which prompted Celia Roberts (2003) to coin the label ‘applied linguistics applied’. The nuances surrounding uptake of applied linguistic research merit to be a topic of study in their own right rather than being dismissed at worst, or being assumed to be unproblematic at best (Roberts and Sarangi 1999, 2003). By extension, I feel we need to search for a cohort of ‘applied applied linguists’ who reflexively mediate their own research as much as engage in the activity of doing relevant research. The repetition of ‘applied’ in ‘applied applied linguist’ which my spell-checker does not approve of is precisely what I wish to underscore here.

Translationality should not be confused with anticipatory responsibility. Most researchers in the fields of natural sciences, social sciences and humanities carry a sense/burden of responsibility when they embark on their chosen research agenda. Applied linguists are no exception. It is very likely that the translational, applied dimension may constitute one’s good intention but for all practical purposes it can remain dormant instead of being latently mani-
fest. Equally, an overtly explicit metadiscourse about the potential futuristic relevance of one’s research findings falls short of affording translation and generating impact. Quite simply, a performative speech act of relevance does not suffice unless impact is demonstrable and unless claims of relevance live up to positive appraisal by the end users and/or independent agencies.

Since the inaugural edition of *JALPP* in 2010, the linking of mainstream Applied Linguistics with the domain of professional practice, including professional discourse studies, has been and continues to be a particular editorial challenge. As far as Applied Linguistics is concerned, from the outset, our editorial imperative has been to promote an alternative paradigm for Applied Linguistics by positioning the journal outside the fields such as language learning, language acquisition, language teaching and language testing, while fostering connections with other social scientific and humanistic disciplines – theoretically and methodologically. Our efforts align with Halliday’s (2006) plea for a theme-based practical grounding of Applied Linguistics. In housekeeping terms, this has meant excluding a vast number of manuscripts submitted to *JAL/JALPP* which could easily find traditional homes. In recent years, while the volume of submissions has remained high, the challenge has been one of fit within the journal with the new focus on professional practice.

From the perspective of professional practice, there has been a robust tradition of studies of professions on the interface of several human and social scientific disciplines – sociology, education, psychology, anthropology, history, philosophy/ethics, sociolinguistics/discourse studies. Scholars working within many of these contributory disciplines, inclusive of sociolinguists and discourse analysts, do not necessarily see themselves as belonging to the community of applied linguists. Speaking retrospectively as well as prospectively, in my estimation, it will take quite a while to make Applied Linguistics appealing to these cognate disciplines/sub-disciplines and to entice these researchers to become regular readers of and contributors to a journal committed to pursuing professional practice studies from an applied linguistic perspective.

The connective ‘and’ in the new journal title – Applied Linguistics and Professional Practice – will no doubt require critical attention and monitoring in years to come. I strongly believe that the shared goal for both applied linguists, inclusive of sociolinguists and discourse analysts, and professional practitioners must be to inculcate ‘discretionary expertise’ (Collins and Evans 2002) which should comprise:

- discriminating between discovery and usefulness;
- discriminating between different analytical traditions in relation to their focus and usefulness (i.e., to go beyond the idea that by merely applying our analytical framework to professional data we make our work relevant);
• discriminating between variations of professional practice and accounting for such differences in terms of empirical evidence.

The challenge remains with regard to our ability to discriminate across patterned differences in the phenomena under study and to be able to offer an interpretation of such differences for uptake to follow. The connective ‘and’ is paramount in building encircling ties between applied linguists and sociolinguists/discourse analysts on the one hand, and between applied linguists, sociolinguists/discourse analysts and professional practitioners on the other hand as a way of negotiating the epistemology of our professional practices. Elsewhere I suggest that ‘open dialogues between experts belonging to a community of interest, albeit hailing from different communities of practice/discourse/interpretation, are a necessary – but not sufficient – condition for triangulating interpretive preferences, and consequently enhancing translationality of discourse analytic findings’ (Sarangi 2015).

This brings me to the role a journal and its title can play in catalysing a translation/impact agenda. With the inclusion of ‘professional practice’ in the title of JALPP it is hoped that the research findings reported will be readily noticed by the relevant target audience who can then engage through re-interpretation and determine what may or may not be translatable and be made practically relevant. As a matter of reciprocity, the applied linguist practitioner has to rethink their positioning vis-à-vis the ethos and ethics of professional practice studies.

My last word is intended for the authors included in this final issue of JAL, who had to wait considerably longer than usual before their work could be published. While going through the long-winded process of title change, it was anticipated that many of the submissions such as the ones included here would fit better within the now-old JAL tent rather than the new-look JALPP marquee. This is the main reason underpinning the delay – in the hope that the numerous authors in the pipeline do not feel compromised during the transition. The prospective future will tell, in retrospect, if such a transition was timely and worthwhile. For now, Equinox deserves heart-felt appreciation for supporting this alternative Applied Linguistics agenda.

Note
1 Many of the issues touched upon here have been topics of constant discussion over the years between myself and my co-editor, Chris Candlin. On most things we had a deep-rooted shared perspective. In dedicating this editorial to Chris Candlin’s memory and to our longstanding collaboration, I am of course responsible for the claims and omissions made.
References


