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Colloquium

(Re)Examining the research-practice interface: International perspectives, multiple methods, persistent challenges, and novel directions

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1. Introduction

The colloquium, "(Re)Examining the research-practice interface: International perspectives, multiple methods, persistent challenges, and novel directions", organized by Matt Coss (Michigan State University) and Hyun-Bin Hwang (Michigan State University), consisted of six paper presentations[1] and comments from a discussant.

In applied linguistics, the interface between research and practice (broadly construed to include but not be limited to additional language teachers, teacher educators, policymakers, materials designers, test developers, etc.) has gained increasing attention in recent years (e.g., Sato & Loewen, 2022a). Recent calls (e.g., Sato, 2023) have urged applied linguists to both prioritize research which can INFORM and BE INFORMED BY practice as well as to focus research efforts on theorizing and empirically investigating the research-practice link ITSELF. In response to these calls, this colloquium brought together an international team of fourteen applied linguists to offer a state-of-the-art perspective on the research-practice relationship in applied linguistics. Collectively, this team presented findings and outcomes of recent empirical and practitioner initiatives in a wide range of educational contexts. The six presentations in the colloquium highlighted nuanced interfaces between research and practice via diverse collaborations, research methods, and empirical findings. Furthermore, collectively, they offered a more comprehensive portrayal of the current state of the research-pedagogy relationship in our field as well as clear indications for important next steps for applied linguists of all disciplinary traditions and contexts to further improve this relationship going forward.

[1] Although Nguyen, Dao, and Iwashita's presentation was not delivered at the conference due to unforeseen but unavoidable circumstances, we have included their important contribution to this topic here just as we would have if they had been able to deliver the talk as originally planned.

2. Papers

2.1 Be(com)ing an educational researcher in the Global South (and beyond): Boundary-crossing of teacher and researcher identities

Masatoshi Sato and Benjamín Cárcamo presented a recently published study (Sato & Cárcamo, 2024) motivated by three major concerns. First, after decades of academic discussion, the research-practice gap firmly exists today. Second, previous research has exclusively focused on teachers' perceptions of research(ers), when in fact researchers too are a pivotal stakeholder group for a productive and mutually beneficial research-practice relationship. Third, to better understand researchers' epistemological beliefs, which may be partially responsible for the research-practice 'gap', researchers' professional lives need to be examined holistically. Amongst many professional obstacles that hinder active engagement with practitioner communities, Sato and Cárcamo zeroed in on publication culture. They argued that applied linguists are increasingly expected to focus on research productivity as a measure of their professional performance. They hypothesized that this trend may be even more pronounced in the Global South, which has been invaded by publication culture in recent years.

In the study, eight applied linguistics researchers in Chile participated in in-depth interviews. Their average teaching experience at the elementary and high school levels was five years ($SD = 4.44$). Interview data was analyzed using activity theory which focuses on human's goal-oriented activities. Findings showed that multiple factors led to conflicting researcher-teacher identities in researchers' activity systems. For instance, participants' initial motivation to solve classroom issues met intellectualization as an obstacle to conducting practically-relevant research: They pointed out the researchers' tendency to make practical issues theoretical and philosophical. Also, the local society's views on researchers having relatively higher social status prevented them from communicating with teachers. Finally, publication culture was seen as systemic and unwelcome pressure for their profession. The participants all emphasized the importance of an ecosystem in which different stakeholders (e.g., teachers, researchers, universities, and policymakers) collaboratively resolve educational issues.

Sato and Cárcamo proposed several ways of reconciling researchers' professional obstacles to contribute to classroom teaching and make the research-practice relationship more equitable. At the individual level, they invited applied linguists to reflect on their professional goals and balance their theoretical and practical contributions (see Sato, 2023). They also recommended methodological frameworks designed to include practitioners in research, such as practice-based research (see Sato & Loewen, 2022b). At the institutional level, Sato and Cárcamo argued for the importance of including issues related to the research-practice relationship in graduate-level programs so that future researchers will be able to contribute to investigations of pedagogically-relevant issues. Another idea that Sato and Cárcamo shared was to create professional development workshops for researchers in which practitioners train researchers on practitioner-relevant research objectives, methods, and dissemination strategies. At the global level, they called for changes in the higher education industry by providing professional incentives for contributing to making changes in classroom teaching. Specific activities include disseminating research to practitioner audiences, conducting practice-based research, participating in teacher-focused events, setting up a platform in which different stakeholders communicate with each other, and involving practitioners in research agenda setting.

2.2 Extending the research-practice dialogue in second language teaching: What role do teacher educators play?

Mai Xuan Nhat Chi Nguyen, Phung Dao, and Noriko Iwashita's study explored language teacher educators' experience in connecting research and practice. They argued that in their key role as teachers of teachers, language teacher educators (LTEs) play an important part in extending the research-practice dialogue, but to date research on LTEs related to the research-practice relationship is scarce (Yuan et al., 2022). In their study, five LTEs from the UK, Vietnam, Pakistan, and Australia with 7-22 years of teacher education experience participated in in-depth semi-structured interviews. They provided phenomenological descriptions, detailing their experiences in connecting research and practice while working with pre- and in-service language teachers from diverse contexts. Their responses were structured around the following subjective encounters: *I see, I hear, I think, I do, I wish, I imagine, I intend*. Findings revealed that the LTEs thought highly of the benefits of research for their teaching and their teacher learners' learning and development. All of them reported implementing various strategies to emphasise awareness of and use of research in their teacher education materials and assignments. They saw and heard, however, that many of their teacher learners were not active supporters of research due to various personal and contextual factors. They wished and intended to make research a more prominent aspect of their teacher education materials and activities; all emphasising the significance of locally-inspired and practice-based inquiries to strengthen teachers' connection with research. The findings also highlighted variations in the LTEs' experiences, influenced by their levels of research engagement and the characteristics of the teacher education programs they were affiliated with (i.e., university- vs non-university-based).

Nguyen and colleagues concluded by highlighting that LTEs live at the research-practice gap in their everyday work, and more importantly, they consciously perform 'bridging' and 'mediating' roles in much of their practice. They suggested that there is a need for professional development programs specifically designed for LTEs to enhance their skills in bridging research and practice effectively. This could involve training in research dissemination, critical appraisal of research literature, and integrating research findings into teacher education curriculum and instruction (see Dao et al., 2022; Nguyen et al., 2022). Additionally, institutions and policymakers should recognise the importance of incorporating research-informed practices into teacher education programs (Nguyen et al., 2023), and provide resources and incentives for LTEs to do so. This might include funding for research projects, access to professional networks and conferences, and recognition for innovative approaches to integrating research into teacher education. Finally, ongoing dialogue and collaboration between researchers and LTEs is needed to ensure the relevance, accessibility, and applicability of research for teaching and teacher education practices.

2.3 Research-practice interfaces: Co-construction, collaboration, and compromise for curriculum design and pedagogy on a national scale

Emma Marsden and Rachel Hawkes shared their collaborative work at research-practice-policy interfaces in mass state education in French, German, and Spanish for 11–16-year-olds in England. Working over the last five years with linguists, educators, policy-makers, and assessment organisations, they described how they created research-informed curricula, resources, and assessment materials and delivered professional development, funded by approximately £5.2m from the Department for Education (2018-2023). Their presentation described how they worked under the constraints of a government funded initiative that aimed to improve the numbers of students studying languages and the quality of learning and teaching.

Marsden and Hawkes led teams in the selection of context-relevant research on learning, knowledge, processing, attention, and motivation to both identify broadly applicable research-derived principles and to inform a range of decisions, in particular identifying areas where research evidence was lacking, unconvincing, or irrelevant to the context. Given the explicit nature of school-based learning, the students' cognitive maturity, and the limited time available, their work drew largely on skill acquisition theory (Marsden & Hawkes, 2023). Between 2019-2021, multiple series of professional development sessions, seeded by Open Accessible Summaries in Language Studies (OASIS) summaries (Alferink & Marsden, 2024; oasis-database.org), were co-delivered by researchers and experienced teachers to a network of approximately 200 teachers. In the following two years, the teachers who had previously taken part in the professional development, then delivered a 5-session course to over 1,000 teachers. Marsden and Hawkes reported that teachers' attitudes to research and OASIS summaries were very positive. Practitioner-researcher teams also collaborated to develop culturally- and interactionally-rich materials woven around language-driven content laid out in practice schedules that meticulously sequenced lexical, grammatical, and sound-spelling correspondences to be introduced and revisited in meaningful contexts. Over 1,500 resources were produced which have been downloaded almost 700,000 times (LDPresources.org; see also Finlayson & Marsden, 2022) and continue to be adapted by thousands of teachers. Marsden and Hawkes also described how their work led to the first lexical analyses of the high-stakes external examinations (GCSEs) that drive much of the modern foreign language education in English schools. Those analyses (Dudley & Marsden, 2024) in part triggered changes to these exams to better align assessment with curriculum content (Department for Education, 2022; Finlayson et al., under review; Marsden et al., 2023).

The presentation ended by highlighting some of the ethical, practical, and scientific challenges of working on a short-term government-funded project within the constraints of a real-world, national scene.

2.4 What influences EFL teaching practices in Polish secondary schools? Spoiler alert: Not ISLA research

The relationship between instructed second language acquisition (ISLA) research and second language (L2) pedagogy is of interest because one goal of ISLA researchers is to positively influence L2 instruction (e.g., Rose, 2019; Sato & Loewen, 2022b). However, the relationship is sometimes troubled, with teachers resentful of advice from ivory tower researchers (e.g., Medgyes, 2017) and researchers frustrated with a lack of impact (Sato et al., 2022). Dialogues between teachers and researchers have been encouraged (e.g., Paran, 2017); however, it is unclear how many teachers are interested in such engagement. Consequently, it is important to consider what impacts teachers' pedagogical decisions, and how research findings might be (better) disseminated.

Shawn Loewen, Pawel Scheffler, and Karolina Baranowska investigated factors that potentially influenced the pedagogical practices of 131 English as a Foreign Language teachers from 28 secondary schools in Poland. Teachers completed a questionnaire about the factors that impacted their teaching practices. Cluster analysis was used to identify groups of teachers with similar profiles. Results indicated two main clusters. One cluster was favorable to research-related resources, such as publications, conferences, and workshops. A second cluster was less favorable towards research. However, for both clusters, the primary influences on teaching practices were course textbooks and the secondary school exit exam. These findings indicate that research-based evidence has little direct impact on teachers' pedagogical choices. In terms of the research-pedagogy link, Loewen and colleagues interpreted this result as testifying

to the importance of materials designers and course book writers in translating research findings into pedagogical practices.

2.5 Does open-access publishing strengthen the English language teaching-research nexus?

The surge in open access publications in language teaching research has democratized access to scholarly works, directly benefiting practitioners, especially those with limited financial resources. Hall (2023) has recently argued for the necessity of such access for English language teachers. Jim McKinley reported results from a bibliometric study of publications in the leading applied linguistics journal, *System*, a replication of a study conducted by Shepperd et al. (2023), with the goal of better understanding the impact of open access and OASIS summaries (Open Accessible Summaries In Language Studies, see Alferink & Marsden, 2024). The analysis included the number of reads and geographic distribution of the audience for open access articles. The study also examined how articles with OASIS summaries fared against those without in terms of downloads, utilizing data from the publisher and OASIS engagement metrics. Articles were compared based on topic and publication date across parameters such as PDF and HTML views and citation numbers.

Findings indicate that OASIS summaries significantly boost downloads, particularly for open access articles. A notable uptick in readership from diverse global regions, including the Global South, emerged from the data. This reveals the power of accessible summaries to increase the reach and application of research.

Furthermore, McKinley reported on *System*'s publisher's commitment to open access, particularly for the benefit of language teachers, and its influence on the teaching-research nexus (McKinley, 2019). This study underscores that open access and effective dissemination strategies like OASIS summaries are crucial for enriching the field of language teaching. The overarching goal is to ensure that scholarly research does not just exist in academic circles (McKinley, 2022) but also resonates with and informs the practice of language educators worldwide, fostering a more informed and connected educational landscape.

2.6 Pedagogical implications in applied linguistics research articles: A systematic analysis

Hyun-Bin Hwang and Matt Coss presented the final paper of the colloquium. Their study's goal was to ascertain the extent to which the issues identified by Coss and Hwang (2024)–inconsistent provision, low salience, and variable but generally low informativeness of pedagogical implications, as well as no systematic improvement on any of these indices over time–were present and prevalent in high-tier applied linguistics journals (i.e., *Foreign Language Annals, Language Teaching Research, Modern Language Journal*, and *TESOL Quarterly)*.

For this study, a stratified random sample of 25% of all empirical studies published in *FLA, LTR, MLJ,* and *TQ* in 2008, 2012, 2016, and 2020 was taken such that the proportion of quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-methods studies in the total population was maintained. Following Coss and Hwang (2024), each article was then coded for abstract signaling of pedagogical implications (henceforth PIs), total number of PIs per article, and prominence (i.e., salience) and informativeness for each individual PI. The study had four major findings. First, despite explicit requirements in the Author / Submission Guidelines of all four journals, PIs were not included in 24% of the studies. Second, studies were highly inconsistent in their signaling of PIs in their abstracts. Approximately 14% of the studies did not mention that PIs would be included in their abstracts, though they did include them in the main text. Third, approximately 50% of the

studies' PIs were difficult to find–PIs were hidden with no salient indicators (i.e., headings or subheadings). Fourth, the average informativeness level of the PIs was very low for all research paradigms across all journals. Overall, the findings of this study reveal that issues with PIs found in *TQ* reported in Coss and Hwang (2024) are not unique to *TQ* and are instead equally widespread in other highly regarded journals with similar missions.

Based on these findings as well as the well-documented evidence that research in our field is generally not accessible to practitioner audiences for a variety of reasons (Hwang, 2023; Marsden & Kasprowicz, 2017), Coss and Hwang concluded by echoing Sato and Loewen's (2022b) argument that researchers must shoulder the responsibility of ensuring accessibility, relevance, and informativeness of 'use-inspired research' (Stokes, 2011) published in venues including but not limited to *FLA, LTR, MLJ,* and *TQ*. Expanding on Sato and Loewen's (2022b) call, Coss and Hwang further argued that researchers must bear this responsibility in multiple professional capacities: as authors of research publications, reviewers of peers' work, and editors of various publications across the field.

3. Conclusion

To conclude the colloquium, Lourdes Ortega offered the following synthesis of takeaways for applied linguists to deepen our personal and collective efforts to improve the practice-research relationship.

1. **As authors of research:**
    a. Always create and publish accessible (i.e., non-technical) summaries of all research. This can be done on various platforms by various, multilingual, and multimodal means, including via OASIS (see Alferink & Marsden, 2024), Multi'Ōlelo (see Phung et al., 2020), and/or video abstracts (see Bredbenner & Simon, 2019);
    b. Whenever justified, include well-signaled, readily findable, and highly informative (actionable) practical implications for well-specified practitioner audiences in research studies (see Coss & Hwang, 2024, especially pp. 8-9);
2. **As collaborators:**
    a. Find ways to get involved with (local, regional, national) stakeholders to both support existing initiatives and create new initiatives related to improving language education;
    b. Engage with publishers of language course materials, as these materials greatly influence practitioner decisions and priorities, and therefore merit applied linguists' collaboration;
3. **As mentors and advisors:**
    a. Support the identity development of junior colleagues so that they see themselves as both scholars and practitioners with a responsibility to be in community with both research and non-research stakeholders;
4. **As teacher educators and teacher mentors:**
    a. Facilitate collaborations, meetings, and mentorship between more junior and more senior teachers, especially as this relates to these practitioners' varying levels of exposure to and dispositions towards applied linguistics research.

In addition to summarizing these takeaways, Dr. Ortega pointedly noted that even as the colloquium aspired to expand the contextual and methodological foci in the study of the research-practice interface, many contexts, languages, and stakeholders were and are un(der)represented in the colloquium, the

published scholarship on the research-practice relationship, and the field of applied linguistics overall. As such, she challenged both the colloquium presenters and colleagues in the field to expand the circle of focus even more so as to diversify and complexify our understanding of the many contexts in the world in which applied linguistics research and L2 praxis are taking place. By documenting and sharing successes and challenges encountered across diverse and less privileged contexts, we can, collectively, further refine our understanding of what has been done and what we might do next to build on this work and improve the practice-research relationship.

This colloquium represents an important step towards answering the call to establish the practice-research relationship as an area of meta-scholarship in applied linguistics (Sato, 2023). In particular, this colloquium contributed to this infrastructural establishment in two ways: by expanding methods and diversifying foci and stakeholders. Specifically, the colloquium showcased a wide range of research methodologies, including advanced quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods primary and secondary research techniques. Furthermore, the colloquium underscored the importance of developing strong partnerships with a range of stakeholders involved in interfacing research and practice: teachers, teacher educators, government offices, editors, and publishers. The diversity of methods, contexts, collaborating partners, and findings about the relationship(s) between practitioners and researchers serve as further support of Sato's (2023) call in applied linguistics (echoing Levin, 2013 in education) to study the research-practice relationship itself, in all its complexity. As researchers invested in bringing empirical rigor and systematic inquiry to bear to solve real world problems related to language, fundamental to our mission as applied linguists is our obligation to conduct research that is of value to society (see Plonsky, 2024). In this sense, we are ALL stakeholders in the relationship between research and practice in our (sub)disciplines and focal contexts. Therefore, we must continually reflect on whether our actions (i.e., the ways we conduct and communicate research, the topics we study, the contexts and stakeholders we engage with) are in line with our collective values as socially-responsible knowledge contributors and recalibrate our actions when we find these two in misalignment.

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