INTRODUCTION

From the Editor

Rosa M. Manchón

University of Murcia, Spain

The present volume is part of a longer-term project the *AILA Review* editorial team implemented for the three years of our term as members of the *AILA Review* Editorial Board (Ken Hyland, Tadhg OhIfearnain, Razika Sanaoui, and Barbara Seidlhofer) and AILA Publications Coordinator (Rosa M. Manchón), respectively. This plan included the publication of three consecutive volumes representing the state-of-the art in Applied Linguistics in the 21st Century in the domains of applications (2013), methods used in research (2014), and theories informing work in the field (2015). Kalfried Knapp kindly accepted to guest edit the volume on applications (Knapp 2014), and so did Theresa Lillis for the special issue on theories (Lillis, 2015). However, after having contacted applied linguists in literally every corner of the world, we did not succeed in persuading any of our eminent colleagues to guest edit the volume on research methods. We nevertheless decided to go ahead with our plan and I personally became in charge of the project, counting at all times with the invaluable help, generous support, and expert advice of the rest of colleagues in the AILA Review Editorial team. My deepest gratitude to Barbara, Ken, Razika and Tadhg. Having the opportunity of working with them during the three years I have been in charge of AILA publications has been a real honor and a most enriching personal and professional experience.

I would also like to express my gratitude to the colleagues who kindly accepted to contribute to the volume. In alphabetical order: Larissa Aronin, Juan Manuel Hernández-Campoy, Ulrike Jessner, Claire Kramsch, Alison Mackey, and Brian Paltridge. It has been a truly personal pleasure and professional privilege to work with such distinguished scholars and I thank them profusely for their comprehensive and most insightful contributions to this collective project and for making it a reality. My special thanks to those who had to complete their articles in less than ideal personal and/or professional circumstances. Such is the beauty of working with so highly professional and truly committed scholars. Importantly, the crucial contribution of the external reviewers who generously provided expert and timely feedback should also be acknowledged. Finally, the project would not have been

possible without the expertise and generosity of the John Benjamins team and, very specially, Kees Vaes's continuous help and advice.

An overview of the volume

The present volume was planned as a collective, retrospective exploration of where the field, as a research community, currently is, as well as a forward-looking analysis of which future avenues are to be explored in the methods used to answer the questions we pose ourselves in key areas of study in Applied Linguistics. The choice of areas to be covered was based on several criteria, one of them being to avoid overlap with those focused on in the 2013 and 2015 volumes. The 2013 volume on applications included papers on legal linguistics, multilingual and intercultural communication across time and space, language policy and planning, language disorders, and media communication. Although the emphasis was on applications of Applied Linguistics, most of these papers included some reference to research trends and methods in the areas under analysis. The contributions to the 2015 volume on theories will be organized around three themes: production, performance, and participation, and papers will engage with theorizations of linguistic and semiotic activity foregrounding an aspect of one or more of these three overall themes.

The articles in the present volume offer critical explorations of the research methods employed in areas with a long tradition in Applied Linguistics, as well as in strands more recently added to research preoccupations in the field. In the first contribution, Juan Manuel Hernández-Campoy offers a comprehensive overview of past, present, and future developments in research methodology in Sociolinguistics, at all times delving into the analysis of the connection between research methodology patterns and trends, on the one hand, and corresponding developments at the levels of theory and epistemology, on the other. It is followed by Claire Kramsch's exhaustive and impressively wide-ranging analysis of theoretical developments, research trends, and corresponding methodological developments in the study of Language and Culture over the years. In the third article in the volume, Larisa Aronin and Ulrike Jessner provide an equally exhaustive and updated account of how evolving theoretical understandings of the phenomena on Bilingualism and Multilingualism have prompted developments in the research methods used when trying to shed light on these phenomena empirically. Collectively considered, these three contributions provide convincing evidence of a defining, almost criterial, one could say, characteristic of Applied Linguistics research as practised in the 21st century: namely, the close association between theory and research methodology. Or, borrowing Claire Kramsch's words in her

contribution to the volume, the need to “think theoretically” when planning, executing, interpreting, and reporting the research we do.

Alison Mackey’s addition to this collective exploration is a timely, updated, and most illuminating account of research methodology preoccupations, achievements, and practices in the area of Second Language Acquisition, an analysis that is also coupled with a wealth of suggestions for potential future disciplinary developments and innovations. Mackey’s contribution attests to two other characteristic features of research in Applied Linguistics (which are also distinctly evident in the other contributions to the volume). One is the theoretical and epistemological pluralism that characterizes the field, which the contributors to the volume openly and happily welcome. Importantly, as mentioned earlier, they also view this cross-disciplinarity as closely linked to the multi-disciplinary nature of the approaches and methods employed in the scientific exploration of the wide range of language-related problems applied linguists are concerned with. As a result, the second characteristic is the flexibility and innovativeness of the field, always open to pushing methodological boundaries, to borrow Mackey’s own words.

These four contributions are complemented with Brian Paltridge’s Coda, in which he explores what he refers to as “the *why* of Applied Linguistics research; that is, why Applied Linguistics researchers do what that they do, or put another way, what it is that motivates the research that applied linguists carry out”. With this piece, Paltridge adds to a growing tendency in Applied Linguistics research to use reflexive, narrative accounts that, as he also puts it, “provide us with valuable insights into the research histories of applied linguistics researchers”. Paltridge convincingly exposes the benefits that may derive for the field from the availability of these kinds of narratives, and he discusses research methodology issues in their execution, including the use of narrative inquiry and autoethnography.

I very much hope both established and junior Applied Linguistics researchers can benefit from the collective exploration of research methods in Applied Linguistics offered in the present volume. I wish to close with an optimistic prediction for the future of Applied Linguistics research: the contributions to this *AILA Review* volume unmistakably show that, as a disciplinary field of inquiry, Applied Linguistics has been, and continues to be immersed in a search for the best possible ways of implementing theoretically sound research, that is at once ethically and ideologically committed, socially relevant, and methodologically robust, on crucial language-related problems in the world we live in.

References

- Knapp, W. (ed.). 2014. Applications in Applied Linguistics. Modes and domains. *AILA Review* 26: 1–9. DOI: 10.1075/aila.26.01kna
- Lillis, T. (ed.). 2015. Theories in Applied Linguistics: Critical approaches to production, performance, participation. *AILA Review* 28.

Author's address

Rosa M. Manchón
Departamento de Filología Inglesa
Facultad de Letras
Universidad de Murcia
Plaza de la Universidad s/n
E-30071 Murcia
Spain
manchon@um.es