

# Introduction: Reflections on co-production as a research practice in the field of foreign language teaching and learning

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## 1. Co-productive research in applied linguistics

Social sciences have long been engaged in debates surrounding the transferability of research to real-world contexts and the value of scientific knowledge (Becker 2023). Following World War II, the field of education underwent a significant transformation, being recognized as "scientific" and shifting its focus from practical problem-solving to the development of theoretical understandings of learning processes (Levin 2013; Sato et al. 2021). Similarly, research in second/foreign language learning and teaching experienced a shift in the 1990s, transitioning from practical inquiries to more theoretical investigations (Rose & McKinley 2017). Recently, concerns have arisen regarding the division between researchers and practitioners, with scholars such as Kramsch (2015) questioning the purpose of research and cautioning against further intellectualization of the field.

Recognizing "knowledge mobilization" as an interactive, social, and gradual two-way process (Levin 2013: 2), collaborative efforts between researchers and practitioners have emerged, aimed at developing relevant research questions, conducting studies, and implementing findings (cf. Sato & Loewen 2022). In applied linguistics, co-productive research practices have gained prominence, emphasizing close collaboration with language users, educators, and other stakeholders throughout the research process (Bednarz 2013; Bento 2020; Sato & Loewen 2022). "As the prefix co-implies", "coproduction of research entails people from different settings and backgrounds doing research together" and "there is usually an active process of working together with some degree of collaboration and cooperation" (Banks et al. 2019: 5).

When researchers opt for co-productive approaches, the chosen methodology affects all aspects of the process, from planning to reporting, and comes with different demands. Researchers need to be prepared to engage in an ongoing

bidirectional dialogue and negotiation with their research participants, as well as to reflect critically on their own assumptions, biases, and practices. This requires a high degree of reflexivity and an openness to different perspectives and ways of knowing (Grasz et al. 2020).

Moreover, the role of researchers has shifted from that of objective observers to active participants in the research process (Becker 2023). In a co-productive research approach, participants are not viewed as passive sources of data, but as individuals (and/or partners) who co-produce data (and hence knowledge) through their interactions with researchers and have a greater say in the research process, as well as contribute to shaping the research outcomes in meaningful ways (Medyges 2017). For instance, perspectives, experiences, and needs of language teachers and learners may be considered to ensure that the resulting findings are relevant and applicable to the real-world context of language learning and teaching. For future language teachers, co-productive research may provide a valuable opportunity to gain practical experience in research methods and to develop a deeper understanding of the complexities of language learning and teaching. Overall, this involves a reconceptualization of the relationship between researchers and research participants, with the latter being empowered to shape the research process and outcomes in meaningful ways (Altrichter & Mayr 2004; McKinley & Rose 2020; Wulf et al. 2020).

While coproduction is often seen as a panacea to overcome the challenges of conducting research in complex, dynamic social contexts, it is not without its own set of dilemmas, tensions, and questions (McKinley & Rose 2017). These may include issues related to power, representation, and voice, as well as questions about the compatibility of different agendas and perspectives (Guignon & Morrisette 2006). Research participants may have different ideas about the research process, the interpretation of data, and the dissemination of findings. These challenges require researchers to engage in a critical reflection and dialogue with their research participants throughout the research process, and to be open to the possibility of unexpected outcomes and unanticipated types of data.

## **2. Towards a critical engagement with coproduction in Applied linguistics**

Applied linguistics is increasingly acknowledging the need for a deeper understanding of the benefits and challenges associated with co-productive research methods (Brew & Mantai 2017; Desgagné et al. 2001). This special issue responds to that need by investigating the complexities and specificities of coproduction as a research practice within the field. Rather than merely referencing coproduction as a methodological trend, we seek to open a space for substantive (meta-)discussion around its epistemological, methodological, and practical implications.

The contributions presented here engage with a broad range of questions, including how coproduction influences the formulation of research questions, the development of methodological frameworks, and the collaborative generation of empirical data (Christianakis 2010). Particular attention is given to the processes of knowledge mobilization understood as interactive, dialogic, and situated (Levin 2013), as well as to the shifting roles and power dynamics between researchers, teachers, and students (Mercer-Mapstone et al. 2017; Rose 2019). Some papers contribute to a critical reflection on the development of reflectivity and reflexivity within co-productive frameworks, addressing both the promises and tensions inherent in such approaches (Jaffe 2012). The special issue brings together finalized and ongoing research projects that offer methodological insights grounded in case studies, empirical investigations, and literature reviews across diverse areas of applied linguistics.

To provide structure while acknowledging thematic overlaps, the contributions have been grouped into three sections, each emphasizing a particular aspect of co-productive inquiry. These categories are not rigid; indeed, several articles could naturally align with more than one thematic strand.

**The first section** centers on the development of reflectivity and reflexivity within co-productive research practices. Particular attention was given to the capability to decentre and to reflect on one's own conceptions and practices in relation to those of others (Guignon & Morrissette 2006; Scarino 2014). This also involves examining how coproduction can challenge assumptions and biases, open new perspectives and insights and foster a deeper understanding of the complex social dynamics at play in the research process.

**Ulla Fürstenberg, Petra Kletzenbauer and Margit Reitbauer**, in their study on the integration of language and content in higher education (ICLHE), reflect on how cycles of collaborative reflexivity not only enrich the collaborative experience but have also the potential to transform perspectives and practices. They highlight the potential for transformative change in educational practices and professional development through interdisciplinary, collaborative, and reflexive approaches, which are particularly vital in ICLHE settings to foster sustainable communities of practice based on mutual trust. They suggest that universities should ease workload pressures and cultivate positive research cultures to foster cross-institutional and cross-disciplinary collaboration, thereby opening spaces for reflexivity and empowering teacher-practitioners to undertake innovative research that advances both teaching and learning.

**The second section** turns to methodological considerations in co-productive research. Methodological decisions are critically examined when adopting such an approach—for example, the inclusion of multimodal or multilingual data co-produced by different social actors such as language teachers, learners, or student teachers. It is important not only to explain the rationale behind these decisions but also to address their unforeseen consequences. The contributions

also examine how methodological choices, and the surprises they sometimes entail, shape the overall research process and its outcomes.

**Georgia Gödecke's** contribution explores coproduction as a research practice within internal science communication in foreign language teaching, using the German Frühjahrskonferenz zur Erforschung des Fremdsprachenunterrichts (FJK) as a case study. Since 1981, this spring conference has served as a ritualised forum for professors in the field, supporting collaborative knowledge production in a protected academic space. Drawing on five qualitative interviews, the study examines how discourses are shaped, who initiates them, and with what interests. While the format fosters trust, exchange, and shared reflection, it is also marked by restricted participation, hierarchical structures, and limited synthesis. The contribution argues that enhancing inclusivity, interdisciplinarity, and reflexivity could strengthen the FJK as a model for co-productive research in foreign language education.

In their contribution, **Antje Kolde** and **Catherine Fidanza** present a series of six collaborative classroom studies conducted between 2018 and 2024 with Latin students aged 15 to 17 in French-speaking Switzerland. Focusing on the comparison between ancient poetic texts and contemporary cultural forms, including rap, theatre, cinema, and graphic novels, the article illustrates how students progressively assumed co-productive roles within the project. Through sensitive literary reading, oral performance, and creative writing, the boundaries between teacher, researcher, and learner became increasingly fluid. The evolving responsibilities of each participant fostered deeper engagement, critical reflection, and a sense of literary agency. The article demonstrates how co-productive approaches can meaningfully enrich the didactics of ancient languages in secondary school contexts.

The contributions in **the third section** examine how adopting a co-productive research approach reshapes roles, responsibilities, and relationships between those involved. In such an approach, the traditional researcher-participant dichotomy becomes blurred, as participants are positioned as active co-producers of knowledge rather than passive sources of data. This reconfiguration can render roles more fluid and interchangeable, granting participants greater agency and input into the research process. At the same time, it introduces challenges: differing or even incompatible agendas may surface, requiring careful negotiation and navigation to ensure that conflicts are managed while maintaining scientific standards (Sato et al. 2021). These shifts carry consequences that range from heightened engagement and a stronger sense of ownership among participants to tensions that demand resolution. A further consideration concerns authorship: co-productive research raises important questions of attribution and recognition, particularly regarding who determines what constitutes legitimate results and how contributions are acknowledged. This is especially complex when multiple voices, perspectives,

and linguistic repertoires are at play.

**Chitose Asaoka** and **Atsuko Watanabe** propose a self-study approach to professional identities in Japan that are co-produced through the dialogue of three foreign language teacher educators. By analysing the tensions and dilemmas experienced by both novice and more seasoned educators, their study shows how collaborative self-study not only supports the negotiation and redefinition of professional identities but also contributes to the ongoing enhancement of teaching practices. Importantly, the study also highlights differing levels of experience and recognizes that even highly experienced educators may continue to encounter dilemmas and uncertainties that require ongoing reflection and dialogue.

In their article, **Paula Ristea** and **Audrey Freytag-Lauer** analyse the process of co-producing knowledge within a collaborative research project involving two teacher educators in French as a second language (FSL) and two welcome class teachers in a primary school in French-speaking Switzerland. Their study explores how multilingualism in welcome classes can be conceptualized within a collaborative research framework built around a multilingual readers' theatre. Multilingualism is thus approached as an object of knowledge to be co-constructed, with the dual aim of developing teaching practices and advancing research on the role of languages in schools in French-speaking Switzerland. The article sheds light on the dynamics of the partners' roles and shows how reflection on the inclusion of students' multilingual repertoires was carried out jointly.

**Luc Fivaz** and **Martina Zimmermann** explore co-productive research practices in a pedagogical setting. Drawing on a preparatory seminar for Bachelor's theses, their study illustrates how future teachers of foreign languages can be engaged as active participants in the research process. By mobilizing knowledge collaboratively, the authors highlight how coproduction fosters reflection, shared ownership, and the development of scientific competencies among pre-service teachers. The authors illustrate how students, teacher educators, and researchers collaborated through reading, discussion, and writing activities, effectively bridging theoretical concepts with practical applications related to writing a Bachelor thesis in applied linguistics oriented towards learning and teaching in the foreign language classroom. Empirical examples trace the trajectories of two students, highlighting both the benefits and the limits of coproduction.

### 3. Concluding remarks

The contributions in this special issue highlight the importance of taking the applied in applied linguistics seriously, not merely as a straightforward application of theory to practice, but as a dynamic site of negotiation, co-construction, and mutual transformation. Different contributions exemplify how

co-productive inquiry can challenge traditional hierarchies of knowledge production and create meaningful engagement between researchers, educators, and learners.

This special issue also reflects a broader cultural shift within applied linguistics, one that moves away from extractive, top-down models of research toward more participatory and dialogic knowledge practices. Several contributions demonstrate how teachers and learners become agents of inquiry. The question remains to be scrutinized further how embracing coproduction not only increases the relevance and impact of research but also redefines the relationships on which research is built, relationships grounded in shared agency and sustained dialogue.

Ultimately, co-productive research must be understood as more than a collection of methodological tools. It represents a deeper epistemological and ethical stance, one that invites us to rethink roles, question taken-for-granted notions of expertise, and acknowledge diverse forms of knowing. This is particularly evident in the work of authors who explore the tensions around authorship, ownership of data, and legitimacy of voices within multilingual and multimodal research settings. For instance, contributions addressing participatory research with language learners from minoritized backgrounds raise critical questions about who decides what counts as valid knowledge and in which language(s) it can be expressed.

By foregrounding these issues, this special issue contributes to ongoing conversations about what it means to do applied linguistics with rather than on or for others. It invites researchers, educators, and institutions to reflect on the ethical, relational, and practical implications of co-productive research, and to imagine more inclusive and responsive ways of creating knowledge within and beyond the field.

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