Interdisciplinary research

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Introduction

Regarding the fundamental concepts of language teaching, Stern, Stern, Tarone, Stern and Yule (1983) operationalise the word ‘interdisciplinary’. The authors note that language teaching research has certain specific characteristics which make it different from other educational research because its subject matter is language. Hence the research procedures of the language sciences are applicable. It is this interdisciplinary combination of language research with educational and behavioural research that gives language teaching research its unique characteristics and peculiar difficulties.

(Stern et al., 1983, p. 63, italics my own)

The use of the word ‘interdisciplinary’ in applied linguistics research simply implies that research on how languages are taught and learned has pedagogical implications not only for linguistics but also for several other related fields, such as education and behavioural science research.

Despite this important and seemingly straightforward insight, the boundary between ‘disciplinary’ and ‘interdisciplinary’ research is unclear. This has been particularly true in recent years, as the number of calls for cross-cultural, cross-disciplinary or multidisciplinary research has increased. But are all collaborations across disciplines interdisciplinary? Prominent examples of ‘inter-disciplines’ include public health, biochemistry, neuroscience, environmental science, gender studies and cultural studies – each a unique fusion of what had previously been distinct disciplinary formations. However, when examined more closely, research in these areas often fails to productively integrate perspectives from more than one discipline. Often, researchers take up only a single perspective, theory or method rather than constructing novel methods and theories. These concerns beg further interrogation as to what qualifies as interdisciplinarity (Klein, 1990). In the field of applied linguistics, this question is of particular importance. As we investigate how languages work in specific cultural or workplace contexts, we often draw on research outside of linguistics while nonetheless striving to understand the nature of language in a specific context or...
perhaps resolve language-based problems in real-world situations. But does being ‘applied’ mean that we are necessarily doing interdisciplinary research?

**What is ‘interdisciplinary research’?**

By definition, interdisciplinary research involves two or more academic disciplines. Repko and Szostak (2016) define interdisciplinary research as

>a process of answering a question, solving a problem, or addressing a topic that is too broad or complex to be dealt with adequately by a single discipline, and draws on the disciplines with the goal of integrating their insights to construct a more comprehensive understanding.

*(Repko & Szostak, 2016, p. 15)*

They also provide specific criteria for distinguishing interdisciplinary studies from disciplinary studies. Interdisciplinary research should (1) draw on existing disciplinary knowledge while continuously transcending it through integration, (2) use the research process to generate knowledge but freely integrate methods from a single discipline if applicable, and (3) seek to produce new knowledge but through the integrations absent from traditional disciplinary research. Further, interdisciplinary research has a specific, substantive focus, usually on a complex problem or question that cannot be addressed by a single-disciplinary perspective. It entails an identifiable process or mode of inquiry, drawn explicitly from more than one discipline to provide insights. Finally, the outcomes of interdisciplinary research should be pragmatic, insofar as it generates new understandings and meanings. It is a growing field of study with many disciplines and fields of scholars starting to take an interdisciplinary approach *(Bracken & Oughton, 2006; Klein, 2008; Lattuca, 2001; Metzger & Zare, 1999; Porter, Roessner, Cohen, & Perreault, 2006; Rhoten, 2004; Van Noorden, 2015; Varey, 1995).*

Applied linguists draw on linguistic theory to study interdisciplinary fields concerned with language that generate their own theory and seek solutions to language-related problems in the real world. In applied linguistics, the most common interdisciplinary branches are sociolinguistics, historical linguistics, psycholinguistics, ethnolinguistics, computational linguistics and neurolinguistics. Perhaps like many social researchers, we are interested in practical concerns, which play an important role in shaping the kinds of questions that applied linguists address. Such language-related problems can involve language learning, teaching, literacy, policy, planning and assessment, which are of practical concern to a wide variety of social actors, such as language-learners, teachers, academics, lawyers, translators, test-takers and service providers.

For instance, researchers in applied linguists have become involved in interdisciplinary research by exploring the implications of their work for language patterns in the classroom context, such as linguistic ethnography in complementary classrooms *(Creese & Blackledge, 2010)*; interactional sociolinguistics in Chinese heritage language learning classrooms *(Li, 2014)*; and linguistic variation methods with ethnography to study working class children’s use of regional dialects in primary schools *(Snell, 2015)*. Like language teachers, we are interested in form, meaning and uses of language across a range of educational contexts. We are also interested in how language relates to other types of human behaviour, how language is organised and analysed and how its units are discovered and tested. When applied linguists explore how students use language in a specific instructional context, the goal is to generalise patterns of language use in specific social contexts and identify specific implications for teaching and learning.
Applied linguistics studies aim to address language-related questions across a variety of subdisciplines. A subdiscipline is a particular field that shares characteristics with the discipline with which it is associated. For instance, there are several subdisciplines within applied linguistics alone, such as language acquisition, language teaching, literacy, gender studies, language policy, speech therapy, discourse analysis and forensic linguistics. The extent to which each of these qualifies as ‘interdisciplinary research’ remains an open question. Without clearly defining interdisciplinary research, simply juxtaposing different fields or situating research across different topics and calling it ‘interdisciplinary research’ is problematic.

**What we do in ‘interdisciplinary research’**

Traditional academic research took up a single disciplinary perspective to understand questions related to the public’s perceptions of the world, how learning occurs and how knowledge is produced. Disciplinary research has been dominated by this mode of knowledge production, but today many problems are too complicated to be addressed from the perspective of just one discipline. Scholars need knowledge and methodologies from more than one discipline to achieve a comprehensive understanding of complex problems and to generate new knowledge.

Interdisciplinarity is an emerging mode of knowledge formation. How interdisciplinarity affects and contributes to societal development and scientific advancement can no longer be underestimated or ignored. In the field of applied linguistics in particular, where linguists use language theory to study a phenomenon or social interactions in specific social contexts such as classrooms or the workplace, traditional disciplinary approaches are being called into question because it offers a limited view of a social phenomenon.

Applied linguists concerned with the role of language in people’s lives and problems associated with language use take a mediating position between language-related disciplines and subdisciplines (linguistics, psycholinguistics and sociolinguistics) and professional practice. They use theories and principles from language-related disciplines to understand language-related issues and solve language-related problems. Applied linguists conduct research into professional practice and use the results to develop theory. For an example, using grounded theory as a methodological framework to develop a theory (see Hadley, this volume). As such, which other disciplines are integrated in applied linguistics depends on the circumstances.

**The interdisciplinary research process**

Interdisciplinary research operates between or transcends the boundaries of conventional disciplines to merge knowledge, develop common concepts and devise unified methodologies to investigate and solve problems. ‘Interdisciplinarity’ has been variously defined as a methodology, a concept, a process, a way of thinking, a philosophy and a reflexive ideology (Aboelela et al., 2007; Repko, 2008). Truly interdisciplinary research can be distinguished from issues that merely transcend conventional discipline boundaries, for example, by enrolling a range of specialists who bring their own expertise and methodologies to bear on a particular problem. This is multidisciplinary research. As O’Riordan (1999, p. 16) argues, ‘True interdisciplinarity has probably never existed, because the phenomenon involves the unification of concepts that are designed to be conceived as separate entities’. Despite the difficulty, O’Riordan identifies four promising concepts that are inherently interdisciplinary insofar as they ‘embrace both the social and natural sciences’: (1) chaos theory, (2) social learning, (3) dynamic equilibrium, and (4) carrying capacity, which he saw as akin to sustainability.
To help readers evaluate research interdisciplinarity, we summarise methodologies from different disciplinary formations (natural sciences, social sciences, humanities and applied linguistics) and discuss how each engages with learning and knowledge production. Each of these methodologies are essential to, but distinct from, interdisciplinary research approaches.

**How interdisciplinary research is different from disciplinary research**

Because interdisciplinary research involves two or more disciplines, how different disciplinary methods are combined is a fundamental question for those new to interdisciplinary research. One common approach to conducting basic research using an interdisciplinary approach is to consider when to use quantitative or qualitative methods. Quantitative measures and statistical analysis provide evidence that can be expressed in numbers over time to understand the relationships that shape a given phenomenon: for example, statistics in corpus linguistics (see McEnery & Hardie, 2012). In contrast, qualitative methods provide evidence that cannot be measured in terms of numbers alone and instead provide a comprehensive narrative of participants’ voices; for example, Yin (1981, 2017) has established ways of using case study as a research strategy.

**Comparing interdisciplinary research with other methodologies**

Interdisciplinary research is defined as research integrating two or more fields of study (Porter et al., 2006; Repko & Szostak, 2016). Its most important feature is that it examines issues from two or more fields of study, rather than from a single discipline. Interdisciplinary work should thus not prioritise or give preference to any particular disciplinary method or theory (Van Rijnsoever & Hessel, 2011).

**The integration process**

Interdisciplinary research should also have an identifiable process of inquiry that draws explicitly on more than one discipline to provide insights into a specific, substantive problem (Cresse, 2010; Rampton, 2007). ‘Integration’ is essential, as this describes how concepts or theories are modified to bring together different disciplines to study the same problem. By truly integrating elements of competing concepts and theories from across disciplines, researchers can produce a more comprehensive understanding, rather than isolated, scattered and disconnected approaches to the same matter. Many scholars who claim to do interdisciplinary research often fail to inform readers how they approach ‘integration’, what steps they have taken to blend knowledge from multiple disciplines and how they draw on different theories or concepts to improve understanding of their topic.

**Multidisciplinarity**

Another misconception is that interdisciplinarity and multidisciplinarity are interchangeable. In multidisciplinary work, researchers from different disciplines are invited to present their disciplinary perspectives on a problem, but no attempt is made to integrate these isolated views from each discipline to produce a genuine understanding of the topic. Thus, multidisciplinary research often presents insights from two or more disciplines side by side. This reflects how
important integration is to interdisciplinary approaches. Compared with other approaches, interdisciplinarity is more inclusive of disciplinary theories, concepts and methods; it opens up alternative methods of inquiry by integrating disciplinary methods and carefully examining their suitability and usefulness to a particular problem (Nikitina, 2005).

Transdisciplinarity

Transdisciplinarity is likewise mistaken for interdisciplinarity. Transdisciplinary approaches tackle a problem by inviting voices from outside the academy, usually non-academic participants, to participate in research design. An example of this is the research projects funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) under the theme of Translating Culture, which aims to include both academics and non-academics to foster interdisciplinary activity. These projects are expected to create networks between academic disciplines and those outside the academy. Closed networks have been developed for cultivating people in both academic and professional fields, and allowed them to get involved in formulating research questions, design, analysis, and discussion drawing from their disciplinary insights rather than concentrating on single disciplinary and faculty driven research programmes. As Creese and Copland (2017, p. 13) point out: ‘An openness to and curiosity about other ways of doing things is essential. Partnerships between universities and other organisations are also important in ensuring the visibility and impact of the research.’

As with interdisciplinarity, integration is essential. Rampton, Maybin and Roberts (2015, p. 21) describe ‘the multi-dimensional complexity of the problem that motivates the mixing’. There are two approaches in undertaking interdisciplinary research, that is, two modalities of conducting interdisciplinary research (Rampton et al., 2015). One is to study focal problems that are already identified within a discipline, problems that have cross-referencing to other research paradigms or lines of research but have not yet been addressed completely by the disciplinary researchers using the concepts available within their own discipline. Such cross-referencing brings different academic disciplines together to address a problem. Different research paradigms can be used to investigate the same phenomena, allowing researchers to understand alternative ways to study the same phenomenon. The second approach is to create collaborations between academics and practitioners. Such partnerships see co-construction in planning, research design and a commitment to bringing different expertise and experience to the research. It takes on ‘real-world’ issues of social and policy relevance at the starting point by involving insights from non-academic such as public, private or related stakeholders to investigate the problem. However, transdisciplinary scholars typically investigate problems by focusing on local contexts, normally using a case study approach. Transdisciplinary scholars stress team research, the incorporation of participants’ voices and a focus on local contexts, whereas interdisciplinary researchers incorporate theories and methods from multiple disciplines.

The processes involved in interdisciplinary research

Processes of interdisciplinary research

Most interdisciplinary research involves the following four concepts: problem, insights, integration and a comprehensive understanding. When considering a research question, interdisciplinary researchers do not constrain themselves to the theories or methods of a single discipline. Instead, they draw upon sets of theories or methods from different disciplines. Some interdisciplinary scholars look for connections between diverse phenomena, critically evaluating the
unique contributions or insights that different disciplines have made and then integrate these insights to provide a comprehensive picture of the phenomenon. To illustrate the interdisciplinary research process (IRP) model (shown in Figure 9.1), for example, in Slade, Pun, Murray, and Eggins (2018a), we build on an analytical framework for therapeutic discourse using applied linguistic theory to explore nursing handover communication during patient trajectories in hospital settings. The work highlights the importance of effective handovers between and across different stages of a patient’s hospital journey and across nurses’ clinical role changes. By analysing these nurses’ clinical interactions using applied linguistic theory, we aim to investigate effective and ineffective communication practices as they occur in situ to build communication capabilities and skills among clinical practitioners, integrating both theory and methods from the disciplines of applied linguistics and nursing. This research is innovative in its development of new ways of conceptualising and researching the communicative complexity of clinical handovers. This complexity is captured in the detailed analysis of spoken, written and multimodal communication, which occurs in situ in clinical handovers. As a result, we developed a training programme for nurses in Hong Kong to improve handover practices.

In addition, this research also develops participatory methods alongside a systematic analysis of nursing handover communication within and between diverse hospital contexts. Co-locating these two approaches, from applied linguistics and nursing, contributes to our understanding of communicative complexity during handovers while improving clinicians’ capacity to understand handover practices. The focus of participatory methods is to enable nurses to understand and redesign the complexities of their own handover practices. In engaging in this process, nurses can ultimately develop interdisciplinary and team-based competences. The in-depth descriptions of communicative practices discussed above will contribute specific language and discursive understandings to local practice initiatives. The combination of inputs from practitioners (e.g. nurses and hospital staff) and the participatory approach brings new levels of practitioner understanding directly to bear on the methodological and substantive design of the project.

**Defining the problem, identifying the scope and providing rationale for an interdisciplinary approach**

Interdisciplinary research focuses on problems because most problems cannot be solved with theories or methods from a single discipline. Most problems have multiple facets, some of which will already have been studied from disciplinary perspectives. Interdisciplinary researchers administer a diagnostic test to check whether there is more than one legitimate way to look at the problem, and then explore which disciplines are likely to have been involved. Repko and Szostak (2016) provide three guidelines for developing a research question: (1) state the problem in a clear and concise manner; (2) narrow the focus of the problem to a manageable scope; and (3) state the problem in context and explain its importance, drawing on an interdisciplinary approach.

For example, in Pun, Chan, Wang and Slade (2018), we conducted an integrative review of literature on health communication in East Asia in order to state the problem. In the review, we examine how researchers in Asian countries conceptualised the role of health communication. Thirty-eight studies were critically reviewed from Mainland China, Hong Kong, Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan. We narrow the focus of the problem to a manageable scope by exploring how the existing body of research on clinician patient communication in East Asia were classified. We identified that the studies emerged from Asia fall into the following categories: (1) understanding the roles and expectations of the nurse, clinician, patient,
Figure 9.1  Integrated model of interdisciplinary research process (IRP) (adapted from Repko & Szostak, 2016)
and family in clinician–patient consultations; and (2) factors affecting quality of care such as cultural attitudes towards death and terminal illnesses; communication preferences affecting trust, decision making and patient satisfaction; the extent to which patient-centred care is being implemented in practice; and communication practices in multilingual/multidisciplinary environments.

In this review, we then detailed the complexity and heterogeneity of clinician–patient communication across East Asia and explain its importance by considering the local culture in understanding and interpreting medical encounters in East Asia. We conclude by saying that research in East Asia is starting to move beyond a preference for Western-based communication practices. By drawing on an interdisciplinary approach, researchers can further research a specific culturally appropriate model of health communication in East Asia which may significantly improve relationships between clinicians and patients.

After defining the problem, the next stage is to identify the scope of the research, transitioning from a very broad problem to a narrower, specific and focused problem (see Figure 9.2). This sets the inclusion and exclusion criteria for the investigation. It is important to avoid using extensive disciplinary jargon and instead provide a neutral justification for the interdisciplinary approach. If a technical term is essential to the research problem, an explanation should be provided. Personal views should also be avoided. On the whole, interdisciplinary research should remain neutral and objective, open to examining evidence, theories and methods from various disciplines. In some cases, the most interesting problems cannot be investigated due to any number of limitations, such as the amount or scope of work previously done. To address this requires fine-tuning the scope of the problem until a link can be established between the research problem and the literature. For example, in Pun, Chan, Man, Eggins and Slade (2019), in writing the literature review, we define ‘clinical handover’ as the transfer between clinicians of responsibility and accountability for patients and their care. In our review, we observed that prior work has uncovered an explicit link between the quality of handover communication and patient safety. Our research focuses on nurses’ spoken interactions while transferring patients during shift-to-shift handovers. We developed a series of research questions to limit our scope of study, focusing, first, on how effectively nurses manage clinical handovers and, second, how effectively they communicate in terms of the informational and interactional aspects of a patient’s conditions. Because our focus is on nurses’ practices in daily handover communication, we exclude contextual factors affecting handover practices at the institutional level, such as hospital culture, manpower, teamwork and management style.

Figure 9.2  Visualisation of the first and second steps in interdisciplinary research
Once the scope is identified, we shall provide a justification for why an interdisciplinary approach is most suitable for investigating the problem at hand. To justify the process of doing interdisciplinary research, researchers can consider the following: first, researchers decide whether the problem is sufficiently complex to demand multiple disciplinary perspectives. Second, researchers review literature on the problem from each discipline to ensure that no single discipline can provide a comprehensive explanation of the problem. Researchers then determine which disciplines are the most appropriate to explain the problem. Finally, researchers decide how to use the insights, methods or theories from the selected disciplines.

**Identifying relevant disciplines and literature search for interdisciplinary research**

The next stage is to determine which two or more disciplines provide the most important insights (see Figure 9.3). Such selection is important because it reflects how a problem has been investigated. It also reveals the constituent disciplinary parts of the bigger picture of interdisciplinary approach. Researchers therefore identify the relevant disciplines and draw connections with the problem by showing the relationships within each discipline. This process is repeated until a saturation point is reached; at which point they begin an initial literature search. At the beginning, it is best to state the problem broadly until researchers are confident in their understanding. This ensures that the problem is conceived as comprehensively as possible. The researchers then conduct full-scale and in-depth literature reviews (after their initial search) in each discipline, identifying and extracting all relevant theories and insights.

In addition, it is important to map the problem to reflect its disciplinary constituent parts. This allows interdisciplinary researchers to identify how extensively each discipline has addressed the problem. The relationships between these disciplinary components should be made equally important and reviewed as a whole system. Once the problem is seen as a whole, researchers reduce the list to only the **most relevant** disciplines. Note that interdisciplinary

![Figure 9.3 Visualisation of steps involved in identifying insights for interdisciplinary research](image-url)
researchers should not limit themselves to familiar disciplines. The ultimate goal is to develop proficiency in disciplines most relevant to the problem. This means understanding how disciplinary insights, assumptions and theories illuminate and categorise the problem.

For example, in Slade, Murray, Pun and Eggins (2018b), we conducted a literature search on effective clinical handover communication. After identifying nursing and applied linguistics as the most relevant disciplines, we learned that research from around the world has consistently identified poor communication practices in hospitals as a major cause of critical incidents – adverse events leading to avoidable patient harm – and accounts for a significant number of preventable readmissions (41% in USA; 38% Australia). In Hong Kong, patients were most likely to find communication the least satisfying, as revealed by the large-scale patient satisfaction survey commissioned by the Hospital Authority in 2010. With more than 15 million handovers in Hong Kong every year, improvements to handover communication will have dramatic benefits in terms of patient safety and satisfaction. Since effective communication has long been recognised as fundamental to the delivery of quality health care, we focused our attention to explore the clinical communication, which have been studied separately in the areas of nursing and applied linguistics. We integrated both theory and methods from the disciplines of applied linguistics and nursing. In our study, we focus on identify features of the language used in spoken clinical interactions, to address the challenges that communication breakdowns present in this context and to identify ways for clinicians to enhance their communicative practices.

Analysing the problem based on disciplinary insights

This important two-step process requires researchers to make decisions based on their evaluation of each discipline and its insights related to the problem. The first step involves analysing the problem from each disciplinary perspective; the second is to evaluate the insights from each analysis and then make connections to the broader picture. These two steps involve researchers moving from the general to the specific, thinking deductively and applying disciplinary thinking to a particular problem. Throughout this process, researchers will likely identify gaps and develop new research questions based on these gaps. This process is not easy. As Repko and Szostak (2016, p. 20) suggest, researchers can evaluate (1) disciplinary insights using the scope of disciplinary perspective, (2) theories used in generating insights, (3) insights based on the evidence, (4) methods the author uses, and (5) insights based on their implications.

For example, in Pun et al. (2019), as we analysed nurses’ handover practices, the team adopted a socially oriented functional linguistics approach. This describes how people use language in authentic, everyday contexts to accomplish social activities. This approach distinguishes the features of effective and ineffective interactions, and therefore differs from traditional approaches in nursing studies, which focus on the informational exchanges in an interaction. The linguistics approach describes both informational and interactional aspects to identify possible breakdowns where the quality of the patient experience can deteriorate. By analysing the actually recorded handovers it is possible to locate the moments in the interactions where potential misunderstandings occurred. The results will inform the development of materials to improve handover practices.

Integration

Integration is an essential process in interdisciplinary research, in which conflicting disciplinary insights are blended into an interdisciplinary description of the problem (see Figure 9.4). The ultimate goal of integration is to critically evaluate insights from each discipline and
generate a common ground of understanding (e.g. between conflicting concepts, assumptions, ethical positions and theoretical bases). Integration can be messy: it can expose tensions between disciplinary approaches. However, the end product modifies previous insights and addresses these tensions, leading to a more nuanced understanding.

The role of communication in health care has received increasing attention. Yet little research brings together perspectives from professional health care researchers and practitioners with linguists and communication specialists. For example, in Pun, Matthiessen, William and Slade (2017), we recognised the increasing linguistic and cultural diversity of both patients and clinicians. Our research team promotes cross-linguistic, cross-cultural and cross-national research collaborations to study the role of communication in the delivery of safe, effective and compassionate health care. The research team provides a forum for internationally recognised and multidisciplinary health care professionals and communication experts to work together, translating research into education and practice and improving patient safety and the quality of health care practices around the world.

We thematically analyse interviews using Nvivo and a quantitative analysis of the survey data. By identifying recurring factors affecting communication, we explore connections between these factors, contextual factors relating to the hospital and patterns of communication between clinicians and health care professionals. The contextual characterisation highlights the communicative complexity of clinical communication – particularly in the case of Hong Kong, where communicative challenges arise from the use of spoken Chinese in clinical communication, code mixing, practitioner–practitioner communication and the use of English in medical records. We demonstrate that the failure to attend to a patient’s interpersonal needs can result in a failure to comply with treatment and regulations, and patient dissatisfaction.
The findings outline major challenges to effective communication: the absence of information about processes, the pressure of time and the lack of manpower, divergent goals of communication, the way diagnoses and treatment plans are delivered, the subsequent lack of compliance with these plans and how professional roles and hierarchies impact patient experiences.

**Communicating interdisciplinary research**

The final process is to reflect on, hypothesise and disseminate findings after integration. This involves reflecting on the knowledge produced based on a common ground of modified concepts and insights. Researchers should not conclude the study at this stage because such a comprehensive understanding still needs to be tested and communicated to different target audiences. Interdisciplinary researchers should develop more reflective ways of thinking about disseminating their work, as it might address audiences from two or more disciplines.

For example, in Pun Chan, Man et al. (2019), we delivered a three-hour communication training programme for nurses in a bilingual hospital. Our training modules and materials incorporate re-enactments of de-identified interactions, role playing simulations and a framework of communication protocols, checklists and practical communication strategies. The training programme is evidence-based with authentic data from the hospital nursing staff and translates communication theories to impact on the actual practices of nursing staff. Selected participants’ shift-to-shift handover during clinical routines is assessed at one month and at three months after the training. Non-participatory observations and audio-recordings of nursing handovers were conducted followed by semi-structured interviews with the observed nurses. The observations aimed to identify current handover communication practices in the hospital ward. The semi-structured interviews aimed to understand nurses’ perceptions of clinical handovers generally, and their communication practices during shift-to-shift handovers specifically. We first make suggestions about how handover practices could be routinised to improve patient safety and continuity of care. We then explain how our educational module responds to the communication problems we identified in a sample of audio- and video-recorded handovers. After briefly reviewing the interactional and informational strategies we recommend, we conclude by highlighting differences between how the nurses conducted the handovers before and after the training.

**Conclusion**

This chapter explained the definition of interdisciplinary research, its similarities to and differences from multidisciplinarity and transdisciplinarity, and its methodological practices and objectives. The chapter also discussed considerations for the key stages in interdisciplinary research and its potential for applied linguistics.

Interdisciplinary study requires researchers to move away from their own disciplinary boundaries and generate insights based on an integration of different perspectives. Conflicts are therefore unavoidable, whether across or within disciplines. Interdisciplinary researchers should treat conflicts as a positive in their research (Rhoten & Parker, 2004). Conflict is central to the interdisciplinary enterprise: it reveals unanswered questions to complex research problems (Campbell, 2005). Thus, it is very important for researchers at the beginning of their interdisciplinary journey to acquire the skills to identify possible conflicts between insights in their disciplinary research, locate their sources and create a common ground for comprehensive understandings.
This chapter has clarified the goals and processes of interdisciplinary research, providing clearer definitions and examples of its practices. Researchers in applied linguistics should therefore be able to strengthen their tools and skills for investigating complicated language-related issues and understanding their implications for the study of language patterns in different contexts. Interdisciplinary researchers provide an integrative and a comprehensive understanding of complex problems, taking advantage of investigative concepts, expertise, tools and methodologies from different disciplines to produce practical outcomes for the benefit of individuals and society.

References


