EDITORIAL

Extending the Reach of Research: Introducing Open Accessible Summaries at *Language Learning*

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Open science practices, which include efforts to enhance accessibility to data and materials and to improve the dissemination of findings to broader audiences, have been at the forefront of the open science movement worldwide. *Language Learning* is proud to extend its support of open science practices by participating in the OASIS (Open Accessible Summaries in Language Studies) initiative, which aims to make language-related research openly available and easily accessible, both physically and conceptually. As part of the OASIS initiative, *Language Learning* now publishes accessible summaries of all accepted articles, including reviews and syntheses. Written in nontechnical

language, accessible summaries provide information about each study's goals, its design and approach, and its results, highlighting findings that may be of interest to those outside academia, such as language educators. We outline key rationales leading to the development of accessible summaries, describe their core features, and discuss some of their strengths and weaknesses.

Keywords open science; open access; practice–research interface; stakeholders; research dissemination

Introduction

A core principle of open science is to improve access to findings from research, and this principle is driving countless researchers, funders, and policymakers to undertake a range of bottom-up and top-down initiatives to increase the accessibility of research findings (e.g., Marsden, in press; McKiernan et al., 2016; Spellman, Gilbert, & Corker, 2018). *Language Learning* now contributes to this agenda by asking authors of manuscripts accepted for publication to write short, nontechnical summaries of their article. Following a series of other initiatives to make the process and product of research in the language sciences transparent (e.g., Marsden, Morgan-Short, Trofimovich, & Ellis, 2018; Trofimovich & Ellis, 2015), *Language Learning* will publish an accessible summary of every article, including reviews and syntheses. The first five articles with accessible summaries appear in this issue (March 2019). The summaries are openly available as an image as part of Wiley's graphical abstract from the journal's website (see https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/toc/14679922/current) and are included in an appendix within each article. The same summaries are also freely downloadable as a PDF file from the cross-journal, searchable OASIS (Open Accessible Summaries in Language Studies) Repository at https://oasis-database.org.

Several features characterize accessible summaries, as implemented at *Language Learning* in partnership with the OASIS initiative. Critically, accessible summaries are driven by the journal itself, because journals such as *Language Learning* offer a sustainable source of rigorous, peer-reviewed, international research. Another crucial feature is that the summaries are written by authors themselves, with support from the editorial team, which validates their fidelity to the full article. Additionally, unlike the online platforms provided through most academic journals, OASIS offers a publicly accessible, well-networked, and active interface with international, national, and regional professional associations. This can raise awareness of research among a wide range of individuals who might be interested in language sciences, including,

but by no means exclusively, those involved in language education, use, and policymaking. Combined, these features distinguish the accessible summary initiative from others and protect it from problems encountered by intermediary (or brokering) services, which can rise and fall subject to the will of individual enthusiasts and political climates (see Marsden & Kasprowicz, 2017, for a review).

Accessible Summaries at *Language Learning*
Why Accessible Summaries?

Underpinning the OASIS initiative is a set of rationales. Perhaps the most powerful is a desire to address long-documented concerns about generally poor interfaces between researchers in language sciences and those involved in language education and policy (R. Ellis, 2012; Long, 2000; Ortega, 2012) and the wider public (Collins & Ruivivar, 2018). While many complex issues underlie this situation, non-researchers' lack of access to findings from research is perhaps the most often reported (Borg, 2010; Marsden & Kasprowicz, 2017; Nassaji, 2012). In attempts to address this problem, many initiatives from governments, publishers, and researchers have already been put in motion to make the outputs of research freely available. Examples of such initiatives include the European Plan S (European Commission, 2018; https://www.coalition-s.org) as well as directives from major granting agencies such as the National Science Foundation in the United States (https://www.nsf.gov/news/special_reports/public_access) and all major granting agencies in Canada (http://www.science.gc.ca/eic/site/063.nsf/eng/h_F6765465.html). Thus, *Language Learning*'s decision to produce accessible summaries aligns well with other initiatives it has introduced to increase openness in the language sciences (e.g., Marsden, Morgan-Short, Trofimovich, & Ellis, 2018; Trofimovich & Ellis, 2015).

However, although the open access movement is striving to make research reports free at the point of access, the articles themselves that are published in academic journals are usually highly technical, their content is necessarily complex, and their language is (increasingly) highly specialized (e.g., Plavén-Sigray, Matheson, Schiffler, & Thompson, 2017), as frequently observed by those who would like to enjoy a greater engagement with research (see Marsden & Kasprowicz, 2017, for a review of such evidence). Thus, it is helpful to find ways of making journal articles more conceptually and linguistically accessible. This process needs to consider both the highly sophisticated nature of research and also the needs of less experienced readers. This is no mean feat.

Working toward this goal, the OASIS accessible summaries follow a format laid out in guidelines that have been developed in consultation with 16 editors of major journals in the language sciences (Marsden, Andringa, Collins, Jackson, Kasprowicz, & Plonsky, 2018), language educators such as teachers and teacher educators, and an active team of OASIS researchers (see https://oasis-database.org/about). The aims, content, and style of the summaries were trialled among practitioners and researchers and underwent multiple revisions (Andringa & van Beuningen, 2018; Jackson & Martin, 2018). No doubt the genre will evolve, as do all others over time.

Rising to Some of the Challenges

Of course, this initiative poses challenges and has limitations. First, although they are unable to communicate the full nuance of each study's content (e.g., in terms of theory, methods, analysis, and findings), the accessible summaries strive to capture the essence of the problem that the research addressed, the study's basic design and methods, key findings, and one or two points for further reflection, such as the study's limitations or follow-up questions that the findings of research pose. Another key concern raised in research focusing on instructed language learning and across disciplines with relevance to "real world problems" (Brumfit, 1995) is that, even when short summaries of findings are available, readers are unable to ascertain the validity of research findings, including their relevance to readers' own context (Medgyes, 2017; Ortega, 2012). Therefore, accessible summaries include contextual detail such as participants' demographic information and data elicitation methods and materials, in order to help readers to ascertain relevance (for more details about the structure, content, and style of the summaries, see https://oasis-database.org/help). Approximately 600 words in length, accessible summaries clearly provide more contextualized, nontechnical details about each study, compared to existing summary formats such as highlights (https://www.elsevier.com/authors/journal-authors/highlights), which include 3–5 statements restricted to a maximum of 85 typeface characters in length.

An additional concern aired in debates about researcher–practitioner interfaces is that by making research findings available we create "great expectations" (Hatch, 1978; Lightbown, 1985) about the potential usefulness of our research to practice (broadly defined). Some academics are concerned that readers untrained in the nuance and limitations of research may overgeneralize or otherwise misinterpret findings (e.g., Vincent & Wickham, 2013). In view of this concern, the summaries have several characteristics that aim to reduce this risk, including (a) a short section for promoting reflection about the limitations

and context-boundedness of the research, (b) methodological details about context and participants, and (c) specific discourse features such as the use of past reference and determiners (cf. different connotations of "these learners developed" vs. "learners develop") and explicit references to the specific study's characteristics (e.g., "according to these measures").

Finally, by engaging in the accessible summary initiative, *Language Learning* recognizes that "deep engagement" with digests of research is needed before changes in hearts, minds, or behaviors emerge; simply providing summaries is unlikely to be sufficient in most cases (The British Academy & Royal Society, 2018; Nelson, Mehta, Sharples, & Davey, 2017). Thus, we emphasize, the accessible summaries provide but one resource that can be used by intermediary networks (e.g., members of professional associations, special interest groups, policymakers) through hosting the *Language Learning* summaries on the OASIS platform. That is, the accessible summaries constitute one of many sources of information for those engaged in language-related practices. Despite the challenges of simplifying research articles and remaining fully cognizant of the importance of not creating "great expectations," we believe that the limitations mentioned above, among others, should not impede concrete efforts to improve the visibility of rigorous, peer-reviewed research.

Conclusion

Acknowledging that making science more accessible is difficult, *Language Learning* aims to help researchers fulfill a sense of epistemological duty to share the knowledge they establish (Chubb & Reed, 2017). We also hope that this initiative partially addresses our ethical, moral, and social responsibilities to the research participants who provide data and who, directly or indirectly, fund our work. We are grateful to future generations of researchers who will contribute to extending the reach of research in the language sciences by writing accessible summaries for *Language Learning*.

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