THE MULTIʻŌLELO INITIATIVE FOR LANGUAGE RESEARCH COMMUNICATIONS

HUY PHUNG, ANN TAI CHOE, MARIA DIEZ-ORTEGA, MASAKI EGUCHI, DANIEL HOLDEN, ANNA MENDOZA, AND THU HA NGUYEN
University of Hawaiʻi at Mānoa

ABSTRACT

Addressing the need for increasing the visibility and accessibility of language-related research for language teaching professionals and others interested in this research, particularly to address the widening gap between research and practice, Multiʻōlelo (MO) is a research communication project aiming to promote public engagement with language studies; thereby facilitating mutual understanding and support between researchers and various stakeholders such as language education professionals, language policy-makers, and language learners. In this concept paper, we will provide an overview of MO goals and activities, explain the rationales of the initiative, and document what we have accomplished so far, as well as provide a roadmap to realize our vision for a more democratic, participatory model of language research communication.

Keywords: research communication, open science, public engagement

Multiʻōlelo (MO) is a graduate student-led initiative for language research communication based in the Department of Second Language Studies at the University of Hawaiʻi at Mānoa. MO is a multilingual website curating language-related research findings in accessible formats such as text summaries, infographics, short videos and podcasts, in multiple languages. Therefore, MO encourages different forms of scholarship for public access and interaction for interested audiences (e.g., language teachers, undergraduate and graduate students and instructors, and policymakers) around the world. The word 'Multiʻōlelo' is a combination of the English prefix "multi" and the Hawaiian word "ʻōlelo" meaning voice, language, speech, utterance, statement and more. Aligning with recent initiatives in the language field, such as OASIS (https://oasis-database.org/), and bigger Open Science movements in science and academic research (Marsden,

2019; Marsden et al., 2019), the MO initiative aims to address issues of research accessibility, visibility and public engagement with science and academic research. Specifically, MO aims to carry out the following activities with both short-term and long-term action plans. In the short term, MO aims to create a platform for students, teachers, and researchers to communicate and share language research findings while allowing graduate students to learn about research communication and writing for the public. Long-term, MO aims to create a professional platform for language research communication where researchers can increase their research visibility if they choose to address research questions of wider relevance and communicate their findings in an accessible manner, while practitioners can obtain research-driven information for decision making. Practitioners include all individuals who make decisions based on language-related research to inform their practice, including, but not limited to teachers (e.g., speech language pathologists, testing specialists, content designers, counselors). One of the aims of MO is to make language research accountable to language teachers and other practitioners. MO activities revolve around the following targets (3 Es):

- Enable: MO focuses on creating a platform, sample contents, templates, guidelines, and workflow to facilitate a new community of practice on language research communication which connects researchers, educators, policy makers, students, and other stakeholders who share interests and are involved with language issues. Practitioners can also benefit from our podcasts and bite-sized Q&A sessions, in which academic jargons are explained in plain language.

- Engage: Beyond just a repository of summaries of research findings, MO caters to educators, policy makers, parents, and others as research consumers while aiming to engage them in learning about the research process, critically assessing research findings, and using research for their own ends. For example, language teacher educators may use MO resources in their course lectures or assignments in teacher training programs. Teachers, speech language pathologists, and language testing specialists can use MO contents to design activities for professional development at the workplace.

- Evaluate: MO plans to evaluate the impact of the initiative, keeping track of which resources are being used most actively and how they are being used, in order to adapt to the needs of audiences such as language educators, graduate students, and other

members of the public. We also aim to carry out research projects to investigate the impact of certain scholarship forms on research use and engagement to identify the optimal formats for these different uses.

BACKGROUND OF THE MULTIʻŌLELO INITIATIVE

Language Research Visibility and Accessibility

MO aims to address the issues of research visibility and accessibility. Visibility is concerned with making research available to those who would benefit from it most through reaching out to the public and practitioners, engaging with them, understanding their concerns and contexts, and being aware of different stakeholders within language studies. Accessibility mitigates financial, linguistic, and discourse barriers by making research available and understandable to a general audience. Both visibility and accessibility are interdependent as two sides of the same coin. Therefore, we intend to address them together.

Research findings are conventionally available to small circles of researchers and experts who have more privileged access to specialized journals and databases. Most prestigious journals require subscriptions; due to these costs, it is not a viable option for many practitioners if they are not affiliated with a higher education institution or subscribed organizations. This issue is already well documented in the field of language teaching, as many teachers do not have access to journals or receive institutional support (Borg, 2009; Sato & Loewen, 2019).

Even when articles are made public, they are usually written for other trained researchers who have received specialized training and technical knowledge to decipher them. In fact, when Plavén-Sigray et al. (2017) did a corpus study of 709,577 abstracts published between 1881 and 2015 from 123 scientific journals, they observed a 10% rise in scientific jargon (defined as "words which scientists frequently use in scientific texts, and not subject specific jargon", p. 5) across a dozen STEM and social science fields. Readability indices revealed that research articles have become harder to read over time. Such findings carry important implications for language studies. For instance, if a teacher wants to know whether their language instruction practice is best informed by recent research, they may have to go through an excess of journal articles without the disciplinary knowledge to pick out the most credible ones. They may also need to spend efforts in advancing their schematic, linguistic, and discourse knowledge to understand

what is being discussed. To address this issue, publishers and organizations (e.g., in psychology) have recently started to publish easy-to-read abstracts along with the technical abstracts of research articles, indicating that lay structured abstracts are more likely readable than the conventional abstracts (e.g., Psychology; see Stricker et al., 2020). The idea of accessible summaries is relatively new to applied linguistics; one of the laudable initiatives in the language field is the creation of Open Accessible Summaries in Language Studies, or OASIS, in which article authors and their collaborators write open access one-page accessible summaries of their articles (Marsden et al., 2019). However, most of what has been put forward is still written in English and follows a research dissemination model which may not guarantee high engagement from those who should be informed. In addition, one can argue that an extra summary is not necessary because readers already have access to the abstracts.

Since the majority of academic research is published entirely in English, this creates barriers for international scholars and practitioners whose access to research in prestigious journals (as both consumers and producers) is mediated by English language brokers. These include peer reviewers who guide international scholars how to cite other works to frame their arguments—the reviewers having better access to the most current and popular theories due to geographic location (Flowerdew, 1999; Lillis & Curry, 2006). An accessible introduction to this literature can be provided by materials on the MO site, alleviating some of the reliance on these mediators and allowing for a more independent self-introduction to the material. Moreover, it is important to remember that international scholars themselves are already brokers of academic knowledge in their own contexts, liaising with non-academic stakeholders such as language policymakers, curriculum designers, educators, and parents. Thus, research on the effects of a major language policy change or curriculum change, as well as research on language acquisition or language use in society that would make the public aware whether that change is in the right direction, needs to be more quickly accessed by those who need it most, such as teachers of migrants, refugees, and speakers of stigmatized regional languages.

Research Engagement and Models of Research Communication

Even though some forms of research findings are made available through open access journals, lay abstracts, or plain summaries that may facilitate the accessibility of academic research, this does not guarantee that practitioners or lay people will engage with academic

research. For example, researchers have documented that language teachers show low engagement with research in the language field (Marsden & Kasprowicz, 2017). Specifically, Borg (2009) documented that only 15.6% of a total 505 teachers of English from 13 countries indicated that they read research on a regular basis. This number reflects a widening gap between researchers and teachers in terms of research engagement. The gap has been discussed widely in the area of language teaching (McKinley, 2019; Medgyes, 2017; Paran, 2017; Rose, 2019; Sato & Loewen, 2019). Beyond language teaching, researchers also identify the reasons for low engagement with research. For example, jargon can reduce research engagement even when it is defined in the article (Shulman et al., 2020).

Furthermore, a number of initiatives in making research accessible are rooted in the open science movement which may not embrace models suggested in the science communication literature. The assumption that "when research summaries are available, professionals will use them" is still a matter of debate. In science communication, scholars have warned against the one-way model of research dissemination known as 'the deficit model' (Cormick, 2019; Cortassa, 2016; Simis et al., 2016; Suldovsky, 2016). The deficit model assumes that the target audience lacks research-driven knowledge and researchers should keep them informed of their up-to-date findings. A recent report points out that the deficit model is "wrong" and suggests different strategies for different communication goals (National Academies of Sciences, 2016, p. 3). The report highlights that "people rarely make decisions based only on scientific information; they typically also take into account their own goals and needs, knowledge and skills, and values and beliefs" (p. 3). While the deficit model still plays some important role in research communication, a dialogue or participation model can be more inclusive for engaging the public by promoting mutual interaction between researchers and readers.

Research in science communication also provides practical ideas to make research more accessible. For example, Schwabish (2020) provides a multilayered approach to research communication with the inverted pyramid philosophy of sharing research findings. He points out that interaction between means of communication, audience targets, and complexity of information should be considered to achieve the optimal communication goals (also see Baron, 2010; Cormick, 2019). For example, researchers can reach a huge audience via social media to share their research findings, but the information should be simplified and linked to the original research. In a recent study comparing different types of abstracts, the researchers reported that

participants found plain summaries and video abstracts easier to understand and more enjoyable to view/read than graphical and conventional abstracts (Bredbenner & Simon, 2019). Therefore, MO provides an opportunity for readers to easily access academic articles through alternative forms of scholarship.

DEVELOPMENT AND OUTCOMES

Building knowledge of key issues in language research and science communication, MO focuses on prototyping a model of language research communication. The initiative aims to create a crowdsourced multilingual platform that curates language-related research findings in accessible formats via multiple languages and from multiple voices. After several rounds of informal discussion, we presented a proposal of concept at the college-wide graduate student conference to receive feedback and assess if graduate students and faculty were interested (Phung & Reinagel, 2018, see Appendix for Initial Prototype for MO). Subsequently, the proposal was submitted for a small grant to develop a prototype of the platform and test the idea in practice. The initiative was partially funded by the UH IDEAS SEED grants in Fall 2018 and Fall 2019. As a result, we formed a multilingual team consisting of members with various research interests and areas of expertise to pilot some ideas for testing development including creating sample text, infographic, and videographic summaries, as well as to create the website. In addition, we have engaged graduate students at UHM to voluntarily serve as reviewers for MO summaries. Our work was presented at local conferences and in-house meetings, receiving further feedback. We added social media channels (Facebook and Instagram) to reach out to people in other circles.

To date (July 2020), we have published 33 summaries in different languages and formats. There have been more than 7,000 views on the website with 1,500 unique visitors coming from 42 countries and territories. MO summaries have been downloaded 947 times, particularly the Q&A format which explained a field-specific concept (i.e., "translanguaging") in simple language. After one year, we have had summaries in Vietnamese, Spanish, Mandarin Chinese, Italian, Japanese, and English. We also prototyped several mini-projects to standardize the workflow and document the process. As a result, we now have letter templates, a guideline for producing podcasts, a tutorial on making academic infographics, and extra-credit and assignment

templates for graduate courses. Additionally, several professors have already included extra-credit for students in their classes who submit to MO.

MULTI'ŌLELO FOR LEARNING, TEACHING, SHARING, AND CONNECTING

Academic research should not occur in a vacuum. MO breaks down academic silos by transforming lengthy research articles into bite-size formats (e.g., one-page text summaries, infographics, videographics, podcasts, and presentation slides) and in multiple languages, thereby holding the potential for encouraging productive, two-way communication amongst scholars, educators, policymakers, and students who are interested in language-related matters around the world. As a freely available online platform designed for a wide range of audiences, MO can be used for multiple purposes, including but not limited to learning, teaching, sharing, and connecting.

Learning

The fact that scientific texts are filled with jargon and becoming more difficult to read over time (Plavén-Sigray et al., 2017) creates unwanted barriers that may prevent or even demotivate language lovers from retrieving knowledge from the academic community. By delivering research findings in innovative formats that are easily accessible and digestible for a general audience, MO provides a gateway to education for those who are curious about language-related research but who might not necessarily have the budget and time to consume expensive, hard-to-read scholarly works. As we emphasize the importance of multilingualism and two-way communication, our contributors are encouraged to submit works that not only translate and dissect research articles from English into other languages but also the other way around. MO is a user-generated platform with diverse topics pertinent to language teaching and learning, language use and identity, and language policy as examples. As such, we hope to offer our audience an opportunity to gain valuable information which they will find practical and relevant to their own interests.

Teaching

Those of us who have taught content courses to undergraduate-level students in Second Language Studies or Applied Linguistics are well-aware of the fact that most students find reading empirical research articles extremely challenging or less than engaging. While BA instructors are responsible for presenting facts supported by empirical evidence, selecting appropriate materials that their students will find enjoyable to read is an infamous struggle. Most language-related journals and books are designed for readers with some experience and familiarity with the field, but teaching materials that are suitable for undergraduate-level students are rather limited. MO can be the solution to this issue. We ask our contributors to summarize research articles from peer-reviewed journals, and our pool of qualified reviewers in multiple languages ensure the accessibility and accuracy of the contributions. Therefore, aside from being a platform for learning and communication, the variety of bite-size content provided by MO's contributors can be integrated into classroom teaching, making learning more pleasant and motivating for the students.

Sharing and Connecting

Besides sharing the works of others, researchers and graduate-level students associated with different institutions are highly encouraged to share their work on our platform by breaking down complex concepts raised in their own research, as long as their scholarly work has been published in a peer-reviewed journal or an edited volume book. In addition, MO can be a good head start for those who would like to contribute to the field but may not have had the opportunity to publish in a well-established journal. All contributions to MO are considered as a form of professional/community service. MO provides guidelines to contributors for how to add their works published on the platform to their CV. We also encourage our contributors to connect with scholars whose work they have enjoyed reading and whose work they would like to transform into an alternative format; to facilitate this, MO provides an email template that contributors can use to reach out to the original author(s). This is a perfect networking opportunity for these contributors to connect with scholars, as well as for scholars to connect with the general public.

ROADMAP FOR THE FUTURE OF MULTIʻŌLELO

In looking toward the immediate future, the MO team will begin by focusing on attainable goals in line with our mission statement. Our initial next step will be to identify and begin conversations with our intended audiences, as well as expand the scope of current collaborators. As we strongly believe that research communication should be accessible to the general public, we need to make a greater effort to network and make connections with those who would benefit most from our services. In order to carry out this mission, we intend to reach out to the local community, in particular, language teachers and administrators in other universities and community colleges of these islands via social media and in upcoming events, both social or professional. To support continued involvement, we have already drafted a template for submission instruction that instructors of language studies can adopt (or adapt) into their own syllabi, allowing them to support MO either directly or indirectly. Furthermore, to continue expanding our pool of potential contributors, we intend to draft additional sets of clear instructions for interested teachers (such as K-12) to contribute submissions, fostering their own professional learning.

Additionally, we intend to use existing connections with teachers and parents outside of the university setting to better understand how this platform can be useful to them, how these summaries are being understood, and what their interests are. We plan to gather this information using surveys and semi-structured interviews and focus groups. In this sense, outreach toward administrators and teachers in the Hawaiʻi Department of Education (HIDOE) and private schools would be an invaluable resource in expanding the scope of this project and disseminating research findings to the Hawaiian and local community.

In order to keep the MO website relevant to our intended audience, our team will also have to become more diligent about the articles that we choose to host on the site. In addition, in having these discussions, we can explore how accessible the current summaries are for the intended audience as well. It's possible that what the team has found to be appropriate in the language of the current existing summaries may not be as suitable for readers as originally thought.

Our next immediate step is to contact local professional associations, such as Hawaiʻi TESOL and Hawaiʻi Association of Language Teachers (HALT), to foster new collaborations with other professionals in our field and enhance the visibility of our project. Furthermore, we

are planning to reach out to graduate students and faculty from other universities in order to expand the scope of our research expertise and increase the number of submissions.

In addition to those first steps, as MO keeps creating accessible high-quality content that could also potentially be used as teaching materials, we believe that reaching out and connecting with other initiatives in the field of applied linguistics, such as OASIS, could be a beneficial reciprocal relationship. For instance, MO could transform English summaries into different multimodal formats (e.g., infographics, slide shows), or translate the summaries into different languages, both with the idea of disseminating language-related research and engaging a wider audience following the Creative Commons (CC) licenses[1]. Adopting the CC licenses allows the work to be freely shared, adapted, remixed, and repurposed without the need to seek permission from the original creators.

Other future plans with MO include becoming an interactive secure platform for language professionals to interact and keep track of their learning, an idea that resonates with sites like Blinkist (https://www.blinkist.com) or GetAbstract (https://www.getabstract.com/en). This idea will be further explored once we have a large database of users and content, with future projects including the designing self-organizing modules, lessons, or reading lists for users.

Finally, the MO team will continue its efforts to crowdsource and create accessible summaries of language-related research in the multiple languages we currently share, but also other languages as well, while aiming to publish the research in multimodal formats. We hope that, by sharing our initiative with the community, we can empower teachers, students, and other stakeholders by engaging them in MO as readers, contributors, and reviewers.

AUTHORS' NOTE

---

[1] https://creativecommons.org

REFERENCES

Baron, N. (2010). *Escape from the Ivory Tower: A guide to making your science matter* (1st ed). Island Press.

Borg, S. (2009). English language teachers' conceptions of research. *Applied Linguistics*, *30*(3), 358–388. https://doi.org/10.1093/applin/amp007

Bredbenner, K., & Simon, S. M. (2019). Video abstracts and plain language summaries are more effective than graphical abstracts and published abstracts. *PLOS ONE*, *14*(11), e0224697. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0224697

Cormick, C. (2019). *The science of communicating science: The ultimate guide*. CSIRO Publishing.

Cortassa, C. (2016). In science communication, why does the idea of a public deficit always return? The eternal recurrence of the public deficit. *Public Understanding of Science*, *25*(4), 447–459. https://doi.org/10.1177/0963662516629745

Flowerdew, J. (1999). Problems in writing for scholarly publication in English: The case of Hong Kong. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, *8*(3), 243-264. https://doi.org/10.1016/S1060-3743(99)80116-7

Lillis, T., & Curry, M. J. (2006). Professional academic writing by multilingual scholars: Interactions with literacy brokers in the production of English-medium texts. *Written Communication*, *23*(1), 3-35. https://doi.org/10.1177/0741088305283754

Marsden, E. (2019). Open science and transparency in Applied Linguistics research. In C. A. Chapelle (Ed.), *The Encyclopedia of Applied Linguistics* (1st ed.). Wiley. https://doi.org/10.1002/9781405198431

Marsden, E., & Kasprowicz, R. (2017). Foreign language educators' exposure to research: Reported experiences, exposure via citations, and a proposal for action. *The Modern Language Journal*, *101*(4), 613–642. https://doi.org/10.1111/modl.12426

Marsden, E., Trofimovich, P., & Ellis, N. (2019). Extending the reach of research: Introducing Open Accessible Summaries at *Language Learning*. *Language Learning*, *69*(1), 11–17. https://doi.org/10.1111/lang.12337

McKinley, J. (2019). Evolving the TESOL teaching–research nexus. *TESOL Quarterly*, *53*(3), 875–884. https://doi.org/10.1002/tesq.509

Medgyes, P. (2017). The (ir)relevance of academic research for the language teacher. *ELT Journal*, *71*(4), 491–498. https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/ccx034

National Academies of Sciences, E. (2016). *Communicating science effectively: A research agenda*. https://doi.org/10.17226/23674

Paran, A. (2017). 'Only connect': Researchers and teachers in dialogue. *ELT Journal*, *71*(4), 499–508. https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/ccx033

Phung, H., & Reinagel, R. (2018, April). Multiʻōlelo platform: Showcasing multilingual voices in language learning and use. Presented at the 22nd Annual Graduate Student Conference of the College of Languages, Linguistics, & Literature. University of Hawaiʻi at Mānoa, Honolulu, HI.

Plavén-Sigray, P., Matheson, G. J., Schiffler, B. C., & Thompson, W. H. (2017). The readability of scientific texts is decreasing over time. *ELife*, *6*, e27725. https://doi.org/10.7554/eLife.27725

Rose, H. (2019). Dismantling the Ivory Tower in TESOL: A Renewed call for teaching-informed research. *TESOL Quarterly*, *53*(3), 895–905. https://doi.org/10.1002/tesq.517

Sato, M., & Loewen, S. (2019). Do teachers care about research? The research–pedagogy dialogue. *ELT Journal*. https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/ccy048

Schwabish, J. (2020). *Elevate the debate: A multilayered approach to communicating your research* (1st ed.). Wiley.

Shulman, H. C., Dixon, G. N., Bullock, O. M., & Colón Amill, D. (2020). The effects of jargon on processing fluency, self-perceptions, and scientific engagement. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology*. https://doi.org/10.1177/0261927X20902177

Simis, M. J., Madden, H., Cacciatore, M. A., & Yeo, S. K. (2016). The lure of rationality: Why does the deficit model persist in science communication? *Public Understanding of Science*, *25*(4), 400–414. https://doi.org/10.1177/0963662516629749

Stricker, J., Chasiotis, A., Kerwer, M., & Günther, A. (2020). Scientific abstracts and plain language summaries in psychology: A comparison based on readability indices. *PLOS ONE*, *15*(4), e0231160. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0231160

Suldovsky, B. (2016). In science communication, why does the idea of the public deficit always return? Exploring key influences. *Public Understanding of Science*, *25*(4), 415–426. https://doi.org/10.1177/0963662516629750

APPENDIX

Initial Prototype for MO

- Each summary will be reviewed by another reader (proficient in the same language) in terms of accessibility (i.e., whether the readability of the summary is appropriate for a general audience) and accuracy with regards to the content, language, and format.

- The names of the authors and reviewers will be published for transparency and accountability.

- Students whose contribution has published on Multiʻōlelo's website will receive extra credits from relevant courses at the discretion of their instructors

- WordPress can be used as a platform to facilitate the process. Published works can be shared on social media platforms (e.g., Facebook, Instagram) for reaching a wider audience.

- Published works on social media platforms can get 'social' metrics (views, comments, interactions, feedback)

- A tagging system can be used to organize the published works for easier access and retrieval.

The quality of Multiʻōlelo works rely on peer review and crowd-sourced feedback/evaluation. Each work will be reviewed by a 'competent reader' before becoming published and scrutinized by other readers and community.