

EUA CDE 2025

**On, for, and with practitioners -
Fostering transdisciplinary dissertations in times of science criticism**

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Research frameworks:**AL-informed TD research on writing, text production, and literacy**

- Applied Linguistics (AL) and Transdisciplinarity (TD)
- Combining research frameworks

1.1 Applied Linguistics (AL) and Transdisciplinarity (TD)

AL is “[...] an inter- and transdisciplinary field of research and practice dealing with practical problems of language and communication that can be **identified, analyzed or solved** [...].”

AILA (2025). What is AILA, from <http://www.aila.info/about/index.htm>

- TD₁ as “a total system without any firm boundaries between disciplines”
[Piaget, 1972, 138 \(OECD, Nice, 1970\)](#)
- TD₂ as doing “research on, for, and with” practitioners
[Cameron, Frazer, Rampton, & Richardson, 1992, 22](#)

[Kramsch, Claire, & Perrin, Daniel. \(2018\). Transdisciplinarity in applied linguistics. Introduction to the special issue. AILA Review, 33.](#)

1.2

Focus of research: Literacy and the digital literacy shift

“a continuum of learning and proficiency in reading, writing and using numbers throughout life and is part of a larger set of skills, which include digital skills, media literacy, education for sustainable development and **global citizenship** as well as job-specific skills.”

<https://www.unesco.org/en/literacy/need-know>

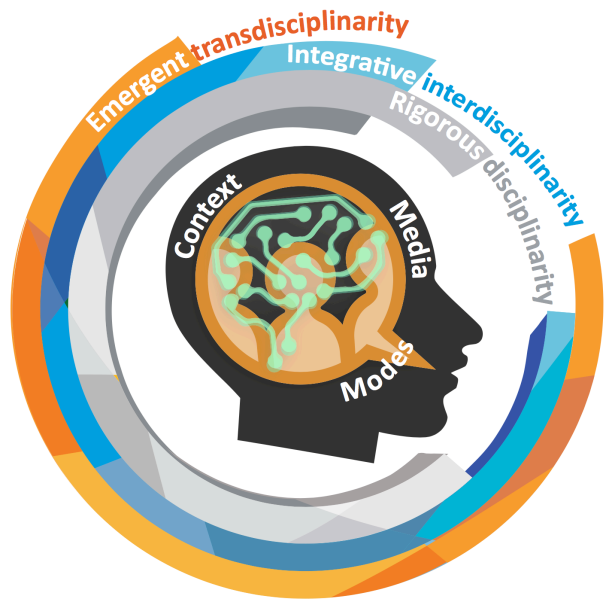


- “Writing by-the-way” is ubiquitous, fragmented, and socially dialogic: “[...] people **synchronize** knowledge, share emotions, and maintain identities from **any location** and **at all times** throughout the day.”

Hicks, Troy, & Perrin, Daniel. (2014). Beyond single modes and media. In Eva-Maria Jakobs & Daniel Perrin (Eds.), Handbook of writing and text production (Vol. 10, pp. 231–253). Boston: De Gruyter.

1.3 The five-phase shift of writing in mediatized public discourse

- 1990 Journalism copies old production patterns to new contexts: **focused writing** for the Internet.
- 2000 Internet presence changes journalistic research practices: focused writing meets **browsing by-the-way**.
- 2010 Social media communities trigger and comment on journalism: before and after focused writing, journalists **write by-the-way**.
- 2020 Community (and brand) management dominate journalism: writing by-the-way and focused writing are **deeply intertwined**.
- 2023 AI tools shift writing in public discourse towards practices of pre-editing, and post-editing, i.e., **prompting and evaluating**.



2.1 Managing Languages, Arguments, and Narratives in the Datafied Society

“In our PhD school, we analyze language and languages used in a world increasingly driven by artificial intelligence.

We focus on arguments and narratives as fundamental modes of human sensemaking through language and their multilayered interplay in educational, professional, and public discourse in the current datafied societies.

Our ultimate goal is to identify **the value humans can add** to artificial intelligence in datafied societies and their increasingly algorithmic practices of language processing.”

<https://www.zhaw.ch/en/linguistics/study/doctoral-programmes/doctoral-programme-2021-2024/>

2.2 Multidisciplinary approach

The courses address their topics at three levels of multidisciplinary:

- By showcasing the most significant theoretical and methodological developments in the field of **applied linguistics** and neighboring disciplines, building on deep and rigorous **disciplinarity**.
- By foregrounding technological developments in general and artificial intelligence (AI) technologies in particular for both language use and language research, in integrative **interdisciplinarity** with **AI research**.
- By focusing on potential human and social values added to AI-driven language use and research, through emergent **transdisciplinary** collaboration with experts from academic and **professional fields**.

Exemplary PhD Thesis

- What are the **reasons for the actual state of texts**, and how can financial analysts reach a different target state if necessary?
- Improving the communicative potential of financial analysts' texts can foster trust building and facilitate **society at large** to take informed decisions in financial matters and to participate in the financial markets, despite low financial literacy.

United Nations Sustainable Development Goals 4.6.1 *Proficiency in Functional Numeracy*

- “I was not aware that writing can be exercised.”

Data set in Appendix D, statements from financial analysts, no. 055

3.1 TD Research Trajectory

Part I – Problem Identification

- 1 Overall Research Question
- 2 Transdisciplinary Framework
- 3 Research Architecture

Part II – Problem Analysis

- 4 Context Perspective
- 5 Product Perspective
- 6 Process Perspective
- 7 Integration of the Results

Part III – Problem Solution

- 8 Diagnosis: Research-Based Approaches for Measures
- 9 Intervention: Coaching, Training, Organisational Development
- 10 Added Value of Research-Based Interventions
- 11 Taking Stock – the Overall Conclusion

References

Appendices

3.2 Exemplary Outcomes | Monograph

“This doctoral thesis identifies and analyses problems of text production in finance from three complementary perspectives (context, process, and product) and explains why solving these problems benefits theory, practice, and society at large. Thereby, it carries out a research project in transdisciplinary collaboration **from the very first to the very last step** and proposes evaluated [...] measures to improve writing in finance.”

Whitehouse, Marlies (2023). Transdisciplinarity in financial communication. Writing for target readers. New Perspectives in Organizational Communication series. Palgrave Macmillan Springer.

3.3 Exemplary Outcomes | Handbook

“Professional literacy is key in professional communication. It enables individual agents and their organizations to exploit linguistic processes and use language products to communicate adequately with and participate successfully in their community of practice and society at large. This handbook explores the characteristics of **professional literacy in and across domains**, which makes it a valuable companion for students, reflected practitioners, as well as for scholars in communication studies and applied linguistics.”

Whitehouse, Marlies, & Mc Kenna Christopher J. (2024, in prep.). Handbook of Professional Literacy. Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter Mouton.

3.4 Exemplary Outcomes | Teaching and professional development

- University master studies

Whitehouse, Marlies. (2022). Analysts and writing. Lecture in: Master Course “Argumentation in Finance, European Studies for Investor Relations and Financial Communication”. 2022-03-23. Lugano.

- Professional education for SBB CFF FFS executives

Whitehouse, Marlies. (2022). Führungskommunikation. Kurs in: “Smart Communication, CAS General Management”, Rochester-Bern Executive Programs. 2022-08-18...19. Murten.

Lessons learnt: The relevance of transdisciplinary PhD research

Combining and extending research frameworks of AL and TD to identify, analyze, **and solve** a socially relevant problem such as dealing with the **digital literacy shift** in **professional domains**.

4.1 Combining the strengths of AL and TD

- Mediating (**AL!**) between the epistemes and knowledge cultures of lay people, language professionals, and language scholars.

Maguire, Kate. (2015). Transdisciplinarity as translation. In Paul Gibbs (Ed.), *Transdisciplinary professional learning and practice* (pp. 165–177). New York: Springer.

- Identifying positive deviants' tacit knowledge (**TD!**) in the practical world and making it available through knowledge transformation.

Polanyi, Michael. (1966). *The tacit dimension*. Garden City NY: Doubleday.

4.2 Doing research with practitioners

Learning to *transgress* and overcome boundaries on three levels:

- between domains such as science, education, and management;
 - between disciplines such as AL and communication studies;
 - between institutions such as universities, NGOs, and businesses.
- Integrating relevant stakeholders **throughout a project**.

Pohl, Christian. (2024). What is Transdisciplinarity?

Retrieved from <https://transdisciplinarity.ch/en/transdisciplinarity/was-ist-td/>

4.3 Doing research on practitioners

Understanding and managing the “quadrangulation of

- disciplinary depth,
- multidisciplinary breadth,
- interdisciplinary integration,
- and transdisciplinary competencies”.

Klein, 2008, 406

→ Develop a **shared language** for mutual learning.

Whitehouse, Marlies, Rahm, Henrik, & Wozniak, Séverine. (2021). Developing shared languages. The fundamentals of mutual learning and problem solving in transdisciplinary collaboration. Introduction. AILA Review, 34(1), 1–18.

4.4 Doing research for practitioners

Starting to co-solve practical problems sustainably
by taking action:

- science strives for “true” mid-range theories about situated activity;
- practitioners look for “authentic” insights into their practices;
- society at large aims for “prudent” measures to solve practical problems

Kemmis, 1988, p. 46, based on Habermas, 1973

→ Including research-based **methods of knowledge transformation**

Gravengaard, G. (2018). Transforming knowledge. In C. Cotter & D. Perrin (Eds.), *Handbook of language and media* (pp. 489–504). London: Routledge.

5 Conclusion

The threefold meaning of a transdisciplinary dissertation in times of increasing criticism towards science includes:

- 1 **Researchers** immerse in networked, multiperspective thinking in a fundamental phase of their career.
- 2 **Professions** and **society-at-large** gain sustainable knowledge based on solid empirical evidence.
- 3 **Academia** benefits from empirically-grounded knowledge and grows its reputation in society-at-large.