

A diamond in the rough: We need open access publishing for books, too

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I have to admit that I agree with everything in the lead article. Andringa, Mos, van Beuningen, González, Hornikx, and Steinkrauss (2024) have made, what I see as, a virtually impenetrable case for diamond open access (OA) journals. My intention for this essay is, therefore, somewhat modest: I seek to build on and extend the many-pronged and well-argued rationale by Andringa et al. (2024) to the context of book publishers and publishing.

1 Why books?

Journal articles, of course, occupy a very special place in applied linguistics as well as throughout the social and natural sciences. Articles are undoubtedly the primary means by which we disseminate new knowledge. They also function as a kind of currency that is accrued for status, career advancement, and even monetary benefit in the form of additional salary and bonuses in some countries. For all the reasons laid out by Andringa et al. (2024), it is entirely appropriate that we prioritize the goal of diamond open access for as many journals as possible. DuJAL is a shining example of how this can be done.

The dozens if not hundreds of books published by and for applied linguists each year also comprise an important part of our scholarly and professional landscape. Books fulfill several important functions. They are repositories of consolidated knowledge, and they provide scholars with a long-format venue to address a given topic in depth.

Books can serve as a convenient and effective reference and/or pedagogical resource. I've also heard that some applied linguists, whose appointments are in humanities or language departments, need to publish books in order to achieve tenure and promotion.

Importantly and most pertinent to the current discussion, many if not all of the arguments in favor of diamond OA journals can be applied to books and book publishers. Andringa et al.'s (2024) statement "Diamond open access should become a strong default option for publication in applied linguistics" pertains just as much to books as it does to journals. Toward that end, I will try to build on a selection of the positions put forth in Andringa et al.'s (2024) piece to the context of the publishing of books. I will also draw on my own recent experience launching a 100% open access publishing house for books, Applied Linguistics Press (ALP). As a diamond open access publisher, ALP seeks to distinguish itself from the dominant model of profit-driven academic publishing which serves and benefits neither the scientific knowledge of our scholarly disciplines nor the scholars within them. You might even say that ALP seeks to be a diamond in the rough of academic publishing.

2 Ethics

The link between research ethics and OS practices may not be immediately apparent. But it's there and it's strong. (a) Not reporting findings that go against the researcher's hypotheses, (b) omitting methodological details to avoid criticism from reviewers, and (c) not sharing data or instruments when allowable are all examples of the connection between researcher openness and (ethically) questionable researcher practices (Isbell et al., 2022; Marsden & Morgan-Short, 2023; Plonsky et al., 2024). (See Plonsky, in press, for further exploration of researcher transparency and ethics as markers of study quality.)

Even more pressing than the three problematic issues listed above, however, is the imperative to provide access to research. As Andringa et al. (2024) put it, "it's time for the field of applied linguistics to realize that our publication decisions are also ethical decisions", a statement which, again, applies to books as much as it does to journal articles. Choosing to publish with profit-seeking organizations which dominate the academic book market necessarily restricts access to those with well-resourced libraries and research budgets, thus excluding the vast majority of humans on planet earth.

Do we write with the intention to only reach a privileged few? Of course not. So why don't we publish more open access books? The answer is simple: Until recently, we had no way to do so. Andringa et al. (2024) claim very rightly that "in order to move to ethical and equitable forms of open access publishing, the first and most important steps to be taken is establishing new, non-commercial Diamond open access journals". The main impetus behind Applied Linguistics Press is to provide such a venue for books (and perhaps other media, eventually). All books published by ALP are 100% freely open

access and downloadable in PDF under the Creative Commons license that Andringa et al. (2024) referred to. There is no cost to authors or to readers (i.e., diamond open access). Language Science Press (LSP) has been operating very successfully with a similar model now for more than a decade, thus providing proof-of-concept for would-be or newer endeavors such as ALP.

3 Fame and fortune

There are several financial angles to consider when building and maintaining a diamond open-access publication venue. The lead article addressed several such issues as they relate to journals, which are often more opaque in terms of finances. Whereas virtually everyone I know in applied linguistics has purchased academic books, I know very few people who have paid for a journal subscription. In any case, I will very briefly address both sides of the ledger in the context of publishing books.

Perhaps influenced by the cost of buying academic texts, students and early career scholars may mistakenly believe that their financial positions can be improved by writing books. This is almost never the case. The for-profit publishers that I've worked with typically pay out royalties in the neighborhood of 5–10% of sales. In some cases, the royalty payments do not begin until those sales reach a given threshold such as 200 copies in each format (hard cover, paperback, e-book). To illustrate, very recently I received the 2023 royalty statement for one of my books which has, to date, sold a modest-but-typical 285 copies. I have made \$0 on this book, however, because none of the formats have reached the minimum threshold. (This might be due in part to the fact that I am happy to send a PDF of the book in its entirety to any and all who express an interest in it.) Suffice it to say that nobody is getting rich. And if they were, it would be from the wallets of colleagues and students. No thank you. (Disclosure: I previously served as series co-editor at a for-profit publisher, a position I resigned from as soon as ALP went live.)

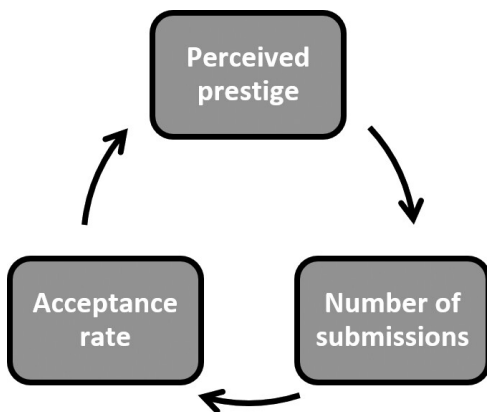
I – and I expect the vast majority of the field – would happily trade our very modest royalty payments for the ability to provide greater access to our work. Of course, this mindset is not entirely selfless; open-access works are also more likely to be read and cited (see Tennant, 2022), thus increasing an author's reach, influence, and visibility in the field. The success and rapid rise in impact-related rankings of *Studies in Second Language Learning and Teaching* (SSLT), a diamond open access journal mentioned by Andringa et al. (2024), can be attributed at least in part to its diamond open access model. I summarize what we might call the accessibility-income trade-off in academic book publishing in Table 1.

I realize that money (and the lack of other options) isn't the only factor authors consider when choosing an outlet for a book. Reputation matters, too. Xu et al. (2023) found evidence of a shared understanding for perceived quality and prestige of different applied

Table 1 The accessibility-income trade-off in academic book publishing

Publishing model	Universal access	Royalties
Diamond OA (e.g., ALP, LSP)	+	-
Traditional (e.g., CUP, Wiley)	-	+

Figure 1 Virtuous circle journal prestige, submissions, and acceptance rate



linguistics journals. Perceptions of higher prestige likely affect the number of submissions received and, consequently, the acceptance rate in a virtuous circle (see Figure 1; see also Andringa, 2022, for a discussion on OA-related and other factors that influence journal prestige). A parallel ‘ranking’ likely exists for book publishers, a condition which maintains the status of the profit-seeking book publishers. Unlike journals, however, book publishers’ submission and acceptance rates and their citation counts, all of which are used as proxies for journal prestige, are not made public. The prestige attached to book publishers must, then, be based on other factors and may be more malleable.

Indeed, publisher status is not fixed or permanent. Submitting and publishing high-quality work to diamond OA publishers like ALP and LSP will raise their visibility and standing. As noted by Andringa et al. (2024), “Senior researchers are in the position and have the moral obligation to be drivers of these changes.” The success of SSLT is almost certainly due in part to submissions from very highly respected scholars. More established scholars are also less likely to need the prestige or whatever royalty payments they might receive from profit-seeking book publishers.

On the other side of the ledger are the costs. It turns out, though, that one can launch a book publisher without any major expenses. I have relied on a combination of free or

very low-cost resources including (a) my own effort and rudimentary software skills, (b) a very skilled graphic designer, Emily Gillo, who has created and donated cover art for three ALP books so far, and (c) an undergraduate intern, Payton Hall, who is paid by a \$1500 grant from my home institution, Northern Arizona University, and whose primary responsibility has been to copyedit and format/typeset ALP books. I am very thankful to NAU and to these individuals for their time and expertise. Additionally, to date, I have personally spent \$12 on the ALP domain (appliedlinguisticspress.org). However, as Andringa et al. (2024) wisely put it, “If journals thrive, they thrive because of our submissions, our reviewing effort, and our editorships.” Likewise, book publishers do not need to have deep pockets to thrive.

The support of and response to ALP, thus far, has been incredibly positive. Despite the lack of any monetary compensation, both junior and more seasoned scholars have submitted proposals/manuscripts (two of which have now been published) and have contributed by reviewing proposals and joining the Advisory Board. Of course, these are roles that we already fulfil pro bono.¹ Thus, it only makes sense, at least in my view, that we perform them in support of a press that seeks to more justly serve the discipline’s members rather than profiting from it.

4 Conclusion and ways forward

I know I’m biased here, but the way forward for book publishing in applied linguistics seems fairly obvious: It’s time to dedicate our expertise and our efforts as authors, reviewers, and editors to book publishers that serve scholars instead of shareholders. In doing so, we will advance knowledge more equitably, more justly, and more efficiently. I envision a future of book publishing in applied linguistics where diamond open access is the norm as well as the preferred and high-prestige approach. The work of Language Science Press and my modest efforts with ALP have shown at the very least that OA book publishing is certainly possible. On so many levels it is also highly preferable.

I may be optimistic, but I’m not naïve. I know we can’t expect sweeping changes in the academic book publishing landscape overnight. I won’t even pretend that major publishers will disappear in the 20 or so years left in my career. Some of them have been around for centuries, and wealthy and powerful corporations are able to dedicate massive amounts of resources to preserving that wealth and power.

But it is ultimately our actions as scholars that determine which presses survive and thrive. In the words of the Scottish historian and philosopher, Thomas Carlyle, “No pressure, no diamonds”. We can proceed both collectively and individually. In coordination with learned societies such as AAAL or AILA, we can put pressure on publishers to serve the field better by, for example, making space in their catalogs for more OA books and by donating to under-resourced institutions. As suggested by Andringa et al. (2024) and successfully exemplified by DuJAL and the Dutch Association for Applied

Linguistics (ANéLA), we can also push those same learned societies to create OS-friendly policies/guidelines and to dedicate organizational resources to OA publishing (see Hui et al., 2023). Such efforts might take the form of agreements with existing publishers or, better yet, the launch of a field-specific press. (If anyone from the current or future AAAL leadership is reading this: I would be more than happy to hand over ALP if/when the necessary infrastructure is available.) If we choose to work with profit-seeking presses, we can also take individual action by negotiating for OA to our work and by resigning from editorial posts and boards of publishers that inappropriately prioritize profit over knowledge generation and dissemination. And finally, of course, we as individuals can contribute to, review, cite, seek funding for, and wholeheartedly promote diamond OA book publishers.

Author contributions

Luke Plonsky: Conceptualization; Writing – review and editing

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The author has declared that there were no conflicting interests.

Statement of technology use

No AI-based generative technology was used in the preparation of this manuscript and the execution of the research that the manuscript reports upon.

Supporting information

None.

Notes

- 1 Many of us with university-based appointments have a portion of our positions dedicated to “service to the profession”. In such cases, reviewing and editing for scholarly publishers is not a free or pro bono service but, rather, one that we are paid for by our institutions.

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