November 5, 2014

Putting resources into practice: a nexus analysis of knowledge mobilisation activities in language research and multilingual communities

Sarah Compton

Available at: https://works.bepress.com/compton/7/
Putting resources into practice: a nexus analysis of knowledge mobilisation activities in language research and multilingual communities

Sari Pietikäinen, Sarah E. Compton & Kati Dlaske

Department of Languages, University of Jyväskylä, Jyväskylä, Finland

Published online: 05 Nov 2014.
Putting resources into practice: a nexus analysis of knowledge mobilisation activities in language research and multilingual communities

Sari Pietikäinen, Sarah E. Compton* and Kati Dlaske

Department of Languages, University of Jyväskylä, Jyväskylä, Finland

(Received 1 May 2014; accepted 12 June 2014)

Recent demand within the academy for language research that bridges different stakeholders renders the social relevance of research a factor in the academic competition for research funds [Curry, M. J., & Lillis, T. (2013). Introduction to the thematic issue: Participating in academic publishing – consequences of linguistic policies and practices. Language Policy, 12, 209–213]. This calls for new means and innovations for designing and carrying out knowledge mobilisation activities, with consequences concerning where, how and with whom this type of undertaking can or should be done. In this paper we, a team of (multilingual) researchers working within the fields of multilingualism, minority language studies and discourse studies, critically reflect on how we engage in knowledge mobilisation through the conceptualisation, development and management of the Jyväskylä Discourse Hub research initiative and its website (www.discoursehub.fi). Drawing on nexus analysis [Scollon, R., & Scollon, S. (2004). Nexus analysis: Discourse and the emerging internet. London: Routledge], a transdisciplinary discourse-ethnographic framework, we employ the three cycles of this nexus analytical framework (engaging, navigating and changing a nexus of practice) to explore the conditions and consequences of collaborative knowledge mobilisation, especially in terms of creating dialogue among different actors and as a way of enhancing social relevance of language research. We conclude by discussing the implications of this kind of partnership for language policy and planning activities in this era of new types of shifts, demands and openings.

Keywords: knowledge mobilisation; nexus analysis; social impact; discourse studies; minority language communities; multimodal–multilingualism

Introduction

Over the last several decades, researchers within the field of language policy and planning have sought to describe and explain the processes of language management by investigating the ways in which de jure and de facto language policies are developed, implemented and evaluated in a variety of domains, at various levels, through a variety of means, and under specific conditions (Cooper, 1989; Kaplan & Baldauf, 1997; Spolsky, 2009). More recently, the focus has shifted to consider also how individuals, institutions and communities ‘on the ground’ engage in language planning efforts and find ways to open up implementational and ideological space within language policies and practices to support multilingualism (Hornberger, 2005; Menken & García, 2010). At present, we see a move within the
academy towards critically evaluating the institutional policies and practices that affect the
types of (language planning) activities that are developed and carried out through our work
(cf. Curry & Lillis, 2013; Englander & Smith, 2013), especially regarding the social relev-
ance of language research.

At least two simultaneous processes seem to figure in these developments. On the one
hand, the changing conditions of the late modern times – characterised by the development
of new communication technologies, novel types of mobility, emerging economies, and
reconfiguration of traditional boundaries and categories of social organisation – create
new challenges and opportunities for language communities and language users relating
to questions of access, inclusion and legitimacy (e.g. Duchêne & Heller, 2012; Pietikäinen
& Kelly-Holmes, 2013). At the same time, new research metrics are being introduced by
institutions and funding agencies to evaluate research activities. A recent trend within
the academy has been a push towards connecting research to practice and policy by brid-
ging different stakeholders and researchers, a request that renders social relevance of
research a factor in the academic competition for research funds (cf. Curry & Lillis,
2013). These demands call for innovative types of knowledge mobilisation, a process of
connecting research to practice and policy (e.g. Cooper & Levin, 2010). Responding to
this call as language researchers requires us to consider where, how and with whom this
type of undertaking can or should be done – and with what effect (Cooper, 1989).

The aim of this article is to reflect on how we, a team of multilingual researchers
working within the fields of multilingualism; minority and indigenous languages; and
critical, multimodal discourse studies at the University of Jyväskylä, Finland, engage in
knowledge mobilisation through the conceptualisation, development and management of
the Jyväskylä Discourse Hub research initiative and its website (www.discoursehub.fi).
Creating and developing this research initiative and its website was no means a straight-
forward process, but rather an evolving rhizomatic journey through innovations, techno-
logical conditions and ideologies of knowledge production. In this sense, the hub
provides us with an example of a research–practice nexus of knowledge mobilisation
and draws attention to the ways in which these activities are not only embedded in but
also potentially change the practices, discourses and ideologies related to knowledge
production.

In what follows, we take the ongoing development of the Jyväskylä Discourse Hub’s
website (hereafter Discourse hub) as our focus of knowledge mobilisation activities. The
website is designed as an interactive, evolving space for researchers, students, language
planners, language community workers, and other speakers and signers in multilingual
and minority language communities to share and develop new ideas, ongoing research
and best practices related to critical discourse studies, multilingualism and minority
languages. In this sense, the website can be seen as a mediational means to engage with
modalities, practices and discourses of knowledge production embedded in wider social
changes (cf. Cooper, 1989; Fairclough, 1992; Scollon & Scollon, 2004). However, as the
website did not evolve on its own, but rather in continuous interaction with various other
knowledge mobilisation activities we have undertaken as part of the Jyväskylä Discourse
Hub research initiative, we will, when relevant, refer to these activities too.

A wider frame inspiring both our research and knowledge mobilisation activities is a
transdisciplinary discourse-ethnographic research framework called nexus analysis
(Scollon & Scollon, 2004; Scollon & Wong Scollon, 2003). It takes situationally and
historically embedded social action (such as knowledge mobilisation and creation of a
website) as a point of departure and sees reflection and potential transformation of practices
around that action as a crucial part of the research, thus making it particularly relevant for
our aims in regard to knowledge mobilisation. Consequently, we start our reflection by briefly introducing nexus analysis before describing some of the conditions for creating the website with the aim of facilitating dialogue among different actors and as a way of sharing and co-constructing socially relevant language research. We then move on to adopt the three key cycles of a nexus analytical framework – engaging, navigating and changing – to reflect critically on our knowledge mobilisation activities, foregrounding the development of the *Discourse hub* website (cf. Scollon & Scollon, 2004, pp. 152–178). In the first cycle, *engaging the nexus of practice*, we describe the website and the central parameters which served as the starting point for its development. Subsequently, in connection to the second cycle, *navigating the nexus of practice*, we analyse material and ideological conditions, choices and consequences involved in the process of developing the website. In conclusion, in relation to the third cycle, *changing the nexus of practice*, we reflect on our knowledge mobilisation activities and practices in the light of social change, paying particular attention to their implications for language research and policy.

**Nexus analysis in the practice of knowledge mobilisation**

Nexus analysis can be used to research the complexity and multiplicity of situated language practices by examining the simultaneous coming together of participants, discourses and interactional normativities at any moment of language use. To capture this idea, Scollon and Scollon (2004, p. 159) use the term *nexus*, which they refer to as

>a point at which historical trajectories of people, places, discourses, ideas, practices, experiences and objects come together to enable some action which in itself alters those historical trajectories in some way as those trajectories emanate from this moment of social action.

We have been applying nexus analysis in various ways in our own research (Compton, 2013; Kauppinen, 2012, 2014; Pietikäinen, 2013; Pietikäinen, Lane, Salo, & Laihiala-Kankainen, 2011). An important aspect of nexus analysis for us is its aim to engage with knowledge mobilisation for social change. The Scollons assert ‘the processes of [social] change are the results of the activities of the researcher in recording the actions, engaging in discourses with the participants, and constructing new courses of action’ (2004, p. 152) throughout each phase of the research process. Thus, researchers are situated within this nexus of research–practice–social change. Similar to many critical approaches to language research (Duchêne, 2008; Fairclough, 1992; Heller, 2011; Pennycook, 2010), this framework also suggests reflections and dialogue across different positions of knowledge production and ways of knowing. With its close links to ethnographic and action research traditions, nexus analysis assumes collaborative co-construction of knowledge and invites thinking about alternative ways for putting research into practice. Designing and carrying out the *Peripheral Multilingualism* project has provided us with the opportunity to do precisely that.

**Materiality of knowledge mobilisation activities: the Discourse hub website and local conditions**

The historical trajectory of the development of the *Discourse hub* website takes us back to the lessons learnt over the last decade leading previous projects. Our work has been for the most part critical in its orientation to language research and related to questions such as multilingualism in minority and indigenous language communities; language ideological
processes; and questions of inclusion, access and inequalities. Adopting a critical orientation, often combined with an ethnographic approach, also means a commitment to social engagement with the individuals, institutions and communities with whom we are working. In this way, knowledge mobilisation has been an essential part of our work as researchers and teachers. In all our activities, the Discourse Studies programme in the Department of Languages at the University of Jyväskylä has served as an academic home and provided needed institutional support and continuity for our knowledge mobilisation activities.

These experiences have shown us how planning knowledge mobilisation activities, including developing and maintaining websites, require long-term commitments, institutional support and various kinds of material resources. Consequently, when writing the grant proposal for the Peripheral Multilingualism project in 2010, Sari (as the principal investigator) foregrounded knowledge mobilisation activities in the plan as well as earmarked funds in the proposed budget to realise them. This aim matched well with the increasing demand by the funding agencies to develop and explicate plans for mobilising research-derived knowledge and for bridging potential end users and stakeholders with researchers. In the research proposal, the aims of the knowledge mobilisation activities were explicated as such:

The project will share its research-related knowledge (…) by organizing out-reach activities which encourage the local community to consider its multilingual practices, and by brokering connections between researchers and policymakers. (…) The project will strengthen the research base and translate the scientific discoveries into meaningful theoretical, methodological and practical breakthroughs that improve our understanding of complex multilingual situations and processes. The project undertakes a range of activities to strengthen capacity building in research as well as community-based organizations, businesses and individuals. This includes creating practical out-reach and knowledge transfer activities. (Peripheral Multilingualism Project Research Proposal, 2010)

Another central goal of the project was to become, as described in the research proposal, ‘a research hub for novel discoveries and approaches related to multilingualism in minority language contexts attracting the best researchers in this area’ (Peripheral Multilingualism Project Research Proposal, 2010). Upon notification in the summer of 2011 that the project had been funded, we set to work to realise these plans within our local conditions. We began brainstorming ideas for the types of spaces and activities that would serve the aims we set forth in our proposal. At the same time, we tried to reflect critically on our current practices and to envision ways of working that would bring together researchers and stakeholders within multilingual, minority language communities with whom we work in our local contexts and also potentially extending a global reach perhaps to work across institutional, geographical and temporal boundaries.

This echoes the first questions that Scollon and Scollon (2004, p. 154) suggest researchers should ask themselves when envisioning future project and activities: ‘What do you wish somebody would do something about? What do you think ought to be changed in the world in which you regularly live?’ Besides initiating various knowledge mobilisation activities, such as seminars, workshops and working with community stakeholders, our tentative starting point was that we wanted to create a space that would facilitate dialogue and sharing best practices and innovations within and across language research and multilingual communities. Given the multilingual–multimodal communicative practices of members of the communities in which we work, we were committed to creating a space that would allow for the inclusion of multiple language modalities – sign languages in particular –
and multimodal semiotic resources (e.g. photographs, video recordings, signs, artefacts and webpages). To realise these goals, it seemed to us that an interactive virtual space like a dynamic website would be a fruitful mediational tool for engaging in various kinds of knowledge mobilisation activities, and one that could potentially reflect our take on knowledge production.

Engaging knowledge mobilisation: virtual circulations

Having decided upon an interactive website as one of the key spaces for sharing and developing knowledge mobilisation activities, the next set of inter-related questions centred on how we would go about developing such a site (i.e. technological affordances and constraints, time and financial commitments) and with whom we wanted to engage (i.e. which communities of practice). Through our work in the Peripheral Multilingualism project, as well as in previous projects, we had engaged in a number of community- and researcher-led initiatives that have contributed to awareness of language practices within minority and indigenous language communities. Additionally, in our collaborative work with parents, educators, administrators, policy-makers, media professionals and community activists, among others, we often received requests for information about the types of activities in which other minority language communities have (un)successfully engaged. Moreover, we often find ourselves asking and being asked similar questions by colleagues, policy-makers and others both within and outside of our respective research areas. These two audiences were at the fore of our minds when envisioning how we would use the website.

Turning to the technology, we wanted to think beyond a static website and move towards a dynamic, interactive space where members of our communities – both academic and others – could contribute to the development and sharing of resources that support our respective aims. This set specific criteria: technological affordances for sharing multilingual–multimodal resources. In addition, we wanted the space to reflect our heteroglossic view of language (cf. Pietikäinen, 2013; Pietikäinen & Dufva, 2014). We wanted the website to be visually appealing and engaging, avoiding rigid imagery with a fixed or hierarchical structure. In this respect, we were looking for an innovative, multimodal genre for facilitating knowledge mobilisation activities corresponding to our ideas and aspirations. Needing an expert with the technical and visual-design skills to create a site that would serve our goals (i.e. accessible, engaging, cool and rhizomatic), we contacted a local web designer, Kristian Hohkavaara, whom we knew to be an insightful and talented graphic designer, especially good in conceptual visualisation, having worked with him on previous projects. Here is how Sari described to Kristian the dual aims of designing the website:

_Tarkoituksena on perustaa tutkimuksen outreachiin liittyen toimivat ja hyvännäköiset www-sivut. Tärkeää on visuaalinen ilme ja helppokäyttöisyys (sekä käyttäjien näkökulmasta että päivityksen kannalta). Yleisöön on sekä toiset tutkijat että tavalliset ihmiset (opettajat, vanhemmat, etc.). [The aim is to create functional and cool-looking www-pages, related to the outreach aspect of the research [project]. The visual appearance and user-friendliness (both from the point of view of the users and from the point of view of updating) are important. The audience includes other researchers as well as laypersons (teachers, parents, etc.).] (Personal communication, October 4, 2012; translation ours)

Additional factors we considered were the amount of time required for the initial development and launch of the site as well as managing the contents and activities...
of an interactive space going forward. Considering the life span of the funded project (2011–2015), we viewed the use of these resources (financial, intellectual and time) as a wise investment. The virtual space will remain after the official project ends – here the impact of our academic institution and our Discourse Studies programme as a hub for continuing to maintain the site is evident. As we were looking ahead to future projects, we saw the development and use of the site as a trial run to see how it develops, how users engage with it and, if successful, how it could serve as another starting point for future research activities. In these respects, our actions were influenced by our previous activities and experiences as well as by ‘anticipating actions [which were] yet to come’ (Scollon & Scollon, 2004, p. 166).

Navigating knowledge mobilisation: anticipations

Having determined the audiences and communities with whom to engage and envisioning an interactive space in which to do so, the next stage of the development process included planning and organising the contents of the site. From the outset, we envisioned the website as a space for stakeholders to

1. share examples of creative uses of language and communicative practices within multilingual minority language communities and
2. build a clearinghouse of research related to core research areas within the field of multilingual, minority language studies.

With these aims in mind, some of the questions we grappled with included: Which language(s) and modalities should be included; what types of resources and materials ‘count’ as examples of creative language use; and what type of research ‘counts’ as belonging to ‘multilingual, minority language studies’? Our critical lens turned inward as we considered how addressing these questions involved processes of categorisation and boundary making (cf. Blommaert, 2010; Heller, 2011; Moore, Pietikäinen, & Blommaert, 2010), processes we ourselves are sensitive to in our own research given the (un)anticipated consequences of these decisions.

Next, we knew that we wanted visitors to be able to contribute materials to the website as well as to share them on social media sites (such as Facebook and Twitter). In addition, we wanted a way for visitors to comment on the materials, thereby creating another space for dialogue. This led us to ask: how should the resources be organized and how should they be visually displayed?

To assist us in navigating these questions, we consulted with Kristian to see how many main sections on the site, or spokes of the hub, would be feasible in the light of our aims and the affordances and user-friendliness of the technology. He suggested a maximum of four. This helped us as we returned to the drawing board to plan and organise the titles and contents for each of the spokes. Imagining how this might be materialised in visual form, we submitted to Kristian a sketch of what we envisioned (see Sarah’s hub drawing in Figure 1).

The final iterations of the spokes came to be

1. creative language lab;
2. multilingualism: modalities and practices;
3. engaging nexus analysis;
Initially, the contents of the *Creative language lab* spoke seemed the easiest to plan. This section includes ‘examples of community and research-led initiatives to increase awareness of language practices within minority and indigenous language communities’ and encourages ‘individuals, communities, and researchers to share their projects related to creative uses of language’ (Jyväskylä Discourse Hub, 2013). The first examples showcased on the site were gathered from our own research contexts (including multilingual storybooks written and illustrated by Sámi children in a variety of languages and a license plate campaign in Texas, USA, that displays the expression ‘I love you’ in American Sign Language). Each showcase includes a short description of the activity, the participants, a video or picture from the activity, and links to the organisations that initiated the activities, where relevant. The showcases are easily shared via *Facebook* and *Twitter* by clicking on the share buttons.

The second spoke, *Multilingualism: modalities and practices*, was initially conceived as ‘a clearinghouse for research that investigates the ways in which language practices change and how languages are managed and maintained in multilingual communities’ (Jyväskylä Discourse Hub, 2013). The contents of this section were a bit more difficult to develop, given the breadth and depth of the research areas that could be included. Our approach in this instance was to focus on the main research areas of each member of our research team. This resulted in choosing to present descriptions of and recommended readings from three core areas: (i) language ideologies, (ii) language in the new economy and (iii) discourse in language education policy. In time, we discovered that this spoke was quite static. This initiated a cycle of change that we will describe in more detail in the concluding section.

The third spoke, *Engaging nexus analysis*, is dedicated to this central theoretical and methodological framework employed by many members of our research team. We are
often asked by colleagues to share what nexus analysis is, how we use it and how others use it. As part of one of our Jyväskylä Discourse Hub research initiatives in 2012, we had compiled a list of academic articles that drew on nexus analysis. This was a reference list that we could share and invite others to submit additional resources to include in the list. In addition, a Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) section would create a space for sharing our reflections on how we understand and apply nexus analysis in our respective work. The fourth spoke, Jyväskylä Discourse Hub, is dedicated to our research team’s activities and initiatives.

Turning to the question of which languages to include on the site, again we returned to the questions of accessibility. In this case, the question of accessibility is deeply rooted in language ideological and language political concerns. Ideally, we thought, the languages used on the site would reflect the diversity of languages and modalities used by the communities being showcased. Practically, however, as we soon came to notice, given the legal and ethical responsibilities in screening the submissions and comments on the showcases, we would need to limit the languages to the (spoken and signed) languages our research team manages. As such, we opted for English and Finnish as the primary languages of the site. The possibility of crowd sourcing was discussed as one way of providing the showcases and research materials in other languages. That option, however, has yet to materialise as we are working through how that would work in practice. The showcase descriptions are written in English (with some translations in Finnish); the languages represented in the videos, written materials and visuals (at the time of writing) include American Sign Language, Catalan, Dutch, Dutch Sign Language, Finnish, Finnish Sign Language, Russian, Sámi and Swedish.

Navigating the rhizomatics of the hub: an alternative way of visualising and organising knowledge mobilisation space

When designing the hub website, the challenge was how to visualise all this in a way that makes sense to others and yet is technically feasible. In the several meetings and email exchanges between the web designer and our team, various alternatives were discussed. Following from our goals of being cutting edge visually and finding a way to organise the website in a way that reflects our views on language and processes of co-construction of knowledge, the key aim was to design a website that did not draw too heavily on hierarchical and rigid organisation and imagery. Instead the goal was to visualise a rhizomatic website with flows, nexuses and circulation. The two key metaphors, *nexus* by Scollon and Scollon (2004) and *rhizome* by Deleuze and Guattari (1987), where drawn on here. The leading idea was a Deleuzian conceptualisation of rhizome, a construct that sees the processes and events to be observed in terms of flow and dis(connections (see e.g. Deleuze & Guattari, 1987; Honan, 2004; Pietikäinen, 2013). Rhizomatic approaches (e.g. multisided ethnography and nexus analysis) aim to trace the changing trajectories and circulations of resources while also making it possible to capture the connectivity and interaction between and across these resources – the end result of which is often processes of contestation and creativity (Pietikäinen, 2013).

A challenge remained to find a way to translate this vision into a workable visuality and organisation of the website in a way that would also work within the technological affordances and constraints. The first version of the site drew on movement as a key visual resource to navigate the page. When clicking on one section of the website, the screen would move vertically or horizontally to another space on the page where the content of that section would be displayed. This captured our view of knowledge mobilisation as dynamic and fluid. The
movement reflected nicely the idea of flows and trajectories related to rhizomatic thinking. At the same time, Kristian pointed out a risk that the website would be inaccessible without the most current internet platforms (e.g. Google Chrome, Internet Explorer and Mozzilla Firefox). This created a tension between wanting the visuality to reflect our aims and also ensuring that the website was accessible to as many visitors as possible.

With these two interests in mind, we set out to test the usability of the website. We contacted colleagues and friends across the world, asking them to test out the functionality of the site. We received feedback from colleagues and friends on four continents (Asia, Europe, North America and South America) in eight polities (Chile, China, Denmark, Finland, Ireland, Sweden, UK and USA) using a variety of electronic devices (desktops, laptops, personal devices and cell phones). In some of their reports, we learned that the site was inaccessible on hand-held devices and some personal devices. It became clear that the question of access was a very real one. Given the number of individuals who rely on personal and hand-held devices to access the internet, we decided to forgo our first choice of a site that incorporated movement and opt for a more standard version.

We returned again to the drawing board to brainstorm alternative ways to visually represent a rhizome in a way that was technically feasible. This proved a challenge. Sari and Kristian had multiple discussions about the idea of a rhizome and what it could mean in terms of the hub design. They turned to the arts and biology as well as to the writings of Deleuze and Guattari (1987) to get ideas and to clarify what rhizome could mean and look like in this context. This was a demanding process whereby Kristian would send various visual ideas to Sari, who then would comment on them. An email from Sari responding to one of Kristian’s ideas illustrates the challenge of capturing visually what we were envisioning as well as explicating why this was important to us:

In early January, we gathered in a classroom at the University of Jyväskylä where Kristian dimmed the lights and switched on the LCD projector to present the new visual design. We gazed at the visual world appearing on the screen (see the screenshot of the homepage in Figure 2). The silence was interrupted with questions about the possible interpretations of the background. We were pondering on whether it could be the case that people who are less familiar with rhizomatic thinking might see only a vast, blue desert; or perhaps convey the feeling that these activities are dry and dead like a desert; or suggest that minority languages are drying up. We were clearly facing a problem of multiple indexicalities here.

To us, the visuality captured beautifully the idea of a rhizome. The light blue background with cracks, lines and veins convey unpredictable crossings and nexuses. Against this background, the four main sections – or spokes – of the hub were positioned symmetrically (but, importantly for us, not in a hierarchical order). To guide the associations and
interpretations of visitors to the website, Kristian had included other visual features like the colour scheme which invites one to ‘click in’ to see the subpages. To reinforce the connection of the web design to the idea of rhizome, we added a hidden quotation, visible only when the cursor hovers over the top of the homepage:

a rhizome has no beginning or end: it is always in the middle, between things, interbeing, intermezzo. The tree is filiation, but rhizome is alliance, uniquely alliance. The tree imposes the verb to be but the fabric of the rhizome is the conjunction, and … and … and. (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 25)

Changing the nexus of knowledge mobilisation

We now turn to consider the third cycle of nexus analysis, changing the nexus of practice, by first reflecting on how our engagement in the nexus of knowledge mobilisation has changed the course of our own actions and then by considering some new cycles that were brought into being. Our awareness of our role as agents of change (cf. Scollon & Scollon, 2004, p. 152) in the nexus of knowledge mobilisation called us to reflect critically upon our own actions and practices throughout the process of planning for and developing the website. Aware of how thoroughly our project was intertwined with questions of gatekeeping and language management in knowledge mobilisation, we discussed at length our choices and policies relating to the contents and languages of the Discourse hub website, the modes of representation (conveying our own views, viz. understandability) and the technological solutions (visually appealing, viz. usability) as described above. Our role as gatekeepers became particularly apparent when we reached out to colleagues to contribute examples of creative language use in multilingual, minority language communities. Two of our colleagues raised this question:

how do we decide which language practices count as creative (and which do not)? Furthermore, is the aim to gather as many examples of a particular type of activity across multiple language
When the website was launched, one of the four main sections carried the title *Multilingualism: modalities and practices*. As explained above, this spoke was dedicated to the presentation of the research areas of the team members. After some time, however, we discovered that this spoke was relatively static. During this same time period, we had engaged in several knowledge mobilisation activities and events one of which being the *Invisible Multilingualisms* seminar organised in November 2013 with the intention, as described in the announcement we circulated on a number of email lists, to bring together researchers, students and language experts and other actors working in changing multilingual settings to discuss and reflect on the ways in which multilingualism may be undervalued and unrecognised in many everyday-life situations at work, at schools and in public service and administration.

To share the insights arising from the talks and discussions of this event, we thought to publish a special issue to which all presenters of the event could contribute. Exploring this possibility further, we concluded that the audiences we wanted to engage and share these resources with would benefit from a genre other than an academic paper. We decided to try something new, and, having the technological means to share these videos on the *Discourse hub* website, we asked the presenters to prepare a short presentation of the core points of their talks which we subsequently video recorded. In discussing where to include these videos on the website, we opted to move the contents of the *Multilingualism: modalities and practices* spoke to the *Jyväskylä Discourse Hub* spoke. We then renamed the spoke to *Discourse knowledge mobilisation lab* which now serves as a space for sharing the knowledge mobilisation activities we are undertaking.

Other cycles which started to take shape at the same time grew out of our reflections on other ways in which to draw on the *Discourse hub* website in planning knowledge mobilisation activities. Here we mention just two of them. First, one of these cycles materialised in a reading group on nexus analysis with participants joining in the sessions both on-site at our university and virtually through Google Hangout and Adobe Connect. The participants are located in nine countries; the reading group sessions take place across eight time zones, from Central Daylight Time to Eastern European Time. The *Discourse hub* website has served as an important resource for the group with several members contributing responses to FAQs under the *Engaging nexus analysis* spoke and submitting additional references drawing on nexus analysis to be included on the website.

A second cycle took the shape of creating an international Discourse Studies Article Writing Programme, a one-year long virtual mentoring programme with experienced mentors on academic writing for early career scholars in discourse studies. By sharing know-how and providing support in writing academic articles for publication within the framework of this programme, we wished to contribute to the development of early career scholars’ abilities to succeed in the increasingly stiffening field of international publishing. Thirty-five applicants in 14 different countries competed for the 11 available spots. Shortly after notifying applicants of the selection decision, Kati (the programme coordinator) received a request from one of the applicants asking if we could forward an invitation to organise an informal writing group for sharing know-how and providing peer support to the others whom we were unable to accept into the programme. Some days later the group had begun to organise itself and has since met for its first session.

In addition, our engagement in the nexus of knowledge mobilisation has brought about some entirely new cycles of knowledge mobilisation, evolving in new directions. In
conjunction with the launch of the Discourse hub website, we sent out a press release on several Finnish and international email lists to make people aware of this new initiative and to invite them to contribute to the development and use of the website. We planned the press release with the intent to encourage contributions to the website. One of the unexpected outcomes of drafting and circulating the press release was an invitation from Bob Kaplan and Dick Baldauf to reflect on how the development of this website serves as a language planning activity by contributing an article (which you are now reading) to Current Issues in Language Planning. This is a case in point that the outcomes of the knowledge mobilisation activities we plan and engage in are often difficult to anticipate.

Discussion

In this article, our aim has been to consider how the conditions of the contemporary times shape our own research practices as researchers in the field of language studies. As Curry and Lillis (2013, p. 210) argue, ‘it is increasingly important to examine both the codified and uncodified policies about research output that regulate the work of multilingual scholars’. One such uncodified policy, as we have shown, is the planning of knowledge mobilisation activities. The development of the Discourse hub website is one of the activities we have undertaken to engage with knowledge mobilisation for social change in the face of the changing conditions and needs in language research and multilingual minority language communities in our contemporary times.

In this context, social change does not denote a linear, unilateral process based on knowledge transfer. Rather, social change encompasses a myriad of interlinked and evolving, often unpredictable, processes and courses of action emerging from various encounters, exchanges and activities in the nexus of practice (cf. Scollon & Scollon, 2004, pp. 139–143, 177–178) – in our case the nexus of knowledge mobilisation. As such, social change is not an end result, but rather a constant companion in the process, starting to take place as soon as the researcher enters the nexus (Scollon & Scollon, 2004, p. 152). Hence, already the processes of conceptualising and developing the Discourse hub website as a space for language researchers and practitioners in multilingual and minority language communities to share and discuss creative practices, new innovations and recent research are cycles in the evolving process of social change. These cycles never would have taken place had not the internet evolved into a technology (cf. Scollon & Scollon, 2004) enabling rhizomatic circulations and the bringing together of different types of knowledge, ideas and experiences across geographical locations and time zones resulting in new actions and practices – in other words, in social change.

What started as a local initiative of a handful of people in the north of Europe has developed into a series of activities and engagements evolving in both time and space. What consequences, ramifications and new cycles of action these initial efforts would have was neither foreseeable from the outset, nor will we ever be able to grasp them fully (cf. Scollon & Scollon, 2004, p. 154). However, as we ourselves are active agents in this nexus of knowledge mobilisation, the cycle of change concerns our own activities and the course of our own actions as much as anyone else’s participation in the nexus.

Acknowledgements

We wish to extend special thanks to Kristian Hohkavaara for his help and collaboration in the development of the Discourse hub website. We thank Bob Kaplan and Dick Baldauf for extending an invitation to contribute this article.
Funding
This work was carried out as part of the Peripheral Multilingualism project (2011–2015) funded by the Academy of Finland (www.peripheralmultilingualism.fi).

Notes
1. The development of the Discourse hub website is one of the knowledge mobilisation activities of our Jyväskylä Discourse Hub research initiative. The research initiative is part of the Peripheral Multilingualism project (2011–2015) funded by the Academy of Finland. The project is an ethnographic, sociolinguistic and critical discourse analytic study on contestation and creativity in multilingual Sámi, Irish, Welsh and Corsican communities (www.peripheralmultilingualism.fi).
2. Kristian Hohkavaara is the founder and director of a graphic design firm (http://www.hohkavaara.fi). He has read the article manuscript and has kindly given permission for its publication with information about his identity and work as well as our collaboration.

Notes on contributors
Sari Pietikäinen is Professor of Discourse Studies at the Department of Languages, University of Jyväskylä, Finland. Working within the fields of applied linguistics, discourse studies and media studies, her research interests include changing multilingualism, indigenous Sámi community and shifting boundaries between languages and their users. Among her recent publications are Multilingualism and the periphery (2013, Oxford University Press) edited together with Helen Kelly-Holmes and ‘Multilingual dynamics in Sámi land: A rhizomatic discourse approach to changing language’ (2013, International Journal of Bilingualism).

Sarah E. Compton is a Langnet research fellow (Finland’s National Doctoral School of Language Studies) and a doctoral candidate in Discourse Studies at the Department of Languages, University of Jyväskylä, Finland. Her research interests lie at the intersections of sign language-in-education policy, multimodal–multilingualism and ethnography. Her work on language policy and planning for sign languages has been published in the International Multilingual Research Journal, the Language Policy Research Network Brief Series and the Sign Language Studies journal.

Kati Dlaske is a post-doctoral researcher in the Peripheral Multilingualism project (funded by the Academy of Finland) and in Discourse Studies at the Department of Languages at the University of Jyväskylä. Her research interests include the impact of the globalised new economy on multilingualism and minoritised language communities, as well as theoretical and methodological questions relating to critical multimodal discourse studies. Her research has been published in Discourse and Communication, Sociolinguistica, Journal of Multicultural Discourses and Critical Approaches to Discourse Analysis Across Disciplines (CADAAD).

References


