



# Postdigital Possibilities in Applied Linguistics

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## The Importance of Firsts

When it comes to our digitalised language practices, we often remember ‘firsts’: our first email, learning to type in a foreign language, or the first conversation we had with a fridge. While these seminal events serve as neat bookmarks in our lives, the truly important moment occurs when these things cease to be novelties. It is the when they become so interwoven into our everyday linguistic activity that we come to depend on them and cannot fathom a world without their presence. Perhaps the postdigital condition, at its most basic level, arrives when these seminal events transcend being mere milestones and become integrated facets of our existence. However, that integration—when something ceases to be a novelty—is very tricky to define and describe. This complexity is particularly evident when trying to theorise about and understand our overwhelmingly digitalised language practices, an important focus of much research in the field of applied linguistics. From here, however, things get a bit complex.

First, our digital language practices are deeply personal, and this makes any unified understanding problematic (see Barton and Lee 2013; Jones and Hafner 2021). Each person’s journey through digitalisation is thus profoundly different. Even the same practice or event can be, and often is, perceived, and remembered, differently. Second, it is a challenge because digitalisation is still progressing at dizzying speed. It has both happened and *happening*: the onset of the World Wide Web, 3G, 4G, 5G, and now even 6G, ChatGPT, and of course talking fridges—all continually evolving and shaping how people read, write, speak, and listen — impacting our relationship with language in every sense. The rate of change makes it almost impossible to pause and meaningfully reflect on how these elements have become so integral to our everyday language practices.

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## Applied Linguistics and Digitalisation

In an attempt to navigate the complexity of digitalisation, applied linguistics and its various subfields—including social semiotics, literacy studies, and sociolinguistics—have occupied themselves since the 1990s in somewhat of a race to understand language and digitality. Much of this research, quite justifiably, emphasised what was ‘new’ about language phenomena enabled by digital media. But while a digital-analog disparity is one of many aspects of a postdigital conversation, it is for applied linguistics perhaps its least important.<sup>1</sup>

While some might argue that the disciplinary adaptability and fluidity of applied linguistics has led to excessive ‘boundary patrolling’, where scholars are keen to define the limitations of their specific sub-disciplines, this characteristic is, in fact, one of the field’s greatest strengths. The inherent flexibility of applied linguistics allows scholarship to readily bend and adapt to encompass social, political, and mediatic change to the dynamics of meaning-making in society. Its interdisciplinary nature makes it open to change, drawing upon a multitude of theoretical perspectives and methodological tools from other disciplines, ensuring that it stays responsive, relevant, and adequately equipped to navigate the complex terrains of digital and societal transformation.

This brings us to the postdigital condition which enables and inspires a set of further developed research sensibilities which, I argue, have a bearing on the study of language. According to Fawns et al. (2023: 72), the postdigital is a broad concept that encapsulates ‘a societal condition, an approach to research and critical enquiry, or a theoretical perspective, sensibility, or philosophical position’. In 2014, the term entered into academic circles more centrally with a special issue titled ‘post-digital research’ edited by Andersen et al. (2014), but remained largely in the arts and practice based domains of academia.

Scholarship in this journal has since begun both interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary conversations around how the postdigital—as ‘a rupture in our existing theories and their continuation’ (Jandrić et al. 2018: 895)—allows researchers to locate inquiry at a nexus of interrelated challenges (see Arndt et al. 2019) rarely tackled in applied linguistics, social informatics, education, media studies, and other fields *together*, yet they indisputably weigh upon our historical moment. Some of these challenges include the impact of generative AI on literacy (see Robinson 2023), biomedical advances (Cruz 2022), algorithmic capitalism and surveillance (Ford et al. 2022), algorithmic populism (Maly 2018), and epistemic vices online (MacKenzie and Bhatt 2020, 2021).

All of these lines of postdigital inquiry, and many more, involve critical analyses of language at their various substrata and are thus central to an applied linguistics which must not remain in disciplinary isolation. In acknowledging the messy,

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<sup>1</sup> In the nascent stages of postdigital theorising—evident in the initial editions of *Postdigital Science and Education* and even earlier within artistic circles—digital-analog disparities and tensions were dominant themes. Cramer and Jandrić (2021) and Cascone and Jandrić (2021) discuss this early focus and how, and why, it has become obsolete.

entwined (Gourlay 2023), and unpredictable nature of the socio-technical relationships that constitute linguistic practice today, what is required is a more expansive view of ‘what counts’ as research in the field of applied linguistics, broadly defined. And that it needs to be ‘broadly defined’ is arguably the most significant aspect in a postdigital framing that offers new possibilities for inquiry and analysis.

## Postdigital Inquiry into Language and Literacy

If we talk about postdigital possibilities in applied linguistics, then what does a ‘rupture in existing theories’ look like? There have been other ‘ruptures’ in applied linguistics: critiques of rigid monolingualism, for example.<sup>2</sup> In recent times, the field of language and communication research has broadened both its methodological approaches and theoretical frameworks through a number of what could be described as ‘more-than-’ theories. These theories have shifted applied linguistics from an acknowledgment of multimodality in semiosis (see Kress and van Leeuwen 2001), and the incorporation of the notion of *translanguaging* (such as Wei 2017).

More recent conceptual developments discuss the integration of social and biosemiotics in the service of extending multimodality, as proposed by Campbell and Olteanu (2023). Other advancements in theory and methodology have emerged through the integration of posthumanist concepts, as they apply to both the act of reading (Hayles 2012) and the broader domain of applied linguistics (such as Pennycook 2018), a perspective that is also mirrored in literacy research (for example, Gourlay et al. 2021). Related to these are studies which have drawn from sociomaterial theories (for example, Gourlay and Oliver 2013; Bhatt 2017; Burnett and Merchant 2020).

All of these can be described as attempts to develop theories to open up applied linguistics to a wider framing of ‘what counts’—beyond glottocentric,<sup>3</sup> anthropocentric, and monolingual imaginaries of linguistic practice. While there is a concurrent body of work on digital literacies, it has often narrowed its scope to realms of procedural competency rather than concentrating on the linguistic and semiotic elements of meaning-making in (post)digital contexts.

So what does the postdigital portend for research in applied linguistics? In the context of my own work in literacy research, I would like to explain through this vignette as an illustrative example. It is from some data I collected as part of a recent project<sup>4</sup> in which I examined the everyday literacy practices of undergraduate students at a university. Here you can see the morning routine from Jing (not her real name). The data was gleaned from both a diary interview and an application which tracked her digital usage.

<sup>2</sup> One can, for example, see Labov’s (1972) studies on Black English Vernacular as a groundbreaking and persuasive critique of imposed monolingualism in educational institutions.

<sup>3</sup> Glottocentrism privileges verbal language and thus has the potential to be a form of *ethnocentrism*, and also leads to *anthropocentrism* (see Petrilli 2014).

<sup>4</sup> The data was collected in the run up to the project ‘How connected are students to campus technologies and official learning spaces? A study of digital literacy and writing in Higher Education’ funded by the Society for Research into Higher Education (see Bhatt and McFeeters 2019).

Jing gets up in the morning and immediately checks her phone and the app which monitors her sleep patterns. She notices some Weixin messages have arrived overnight from her friends and family in different countries, and quickly responds to some of these by typing on her cell phone. For others she uses voice replies because she cannot be bothered to type, then she quickly 'likes' some of her friends' posts which cheer her up. She gets out of bed and then checks the mail as she is expecting a letter from her solicitor, walking past the Chinese calligraphy in the hallway. She reads the letter as she opens her new packet of Turkish coffee relying on the instructional images. The letter needs to be signed and returned by post.

The account of Jing's morning literacy practices is a typical example of how literacy practices are tied to situations and events in daily life. In just 15 min, she engages in a wide range of literacy practices that encompass different modes and media and, as I argue, are best understood as postdigital.

Jing's use of a sleep app demonstrates that some of her literacy practices connect with her health and well-being concerns. She then responds to messages from friends and family, and leaves voice replies. The platform assists with transcription (and even translation for the recipient, if needed). She also engages in a kind of 'emotional/supportive labour' by liking posts. This contrasts with the solicitor's letter which is an example of how certain forms of literacy remain linked to paper-based modes, as she must sign the letter and return it by post. Her preparation of Turkish coffee requires her to 'read' the instructional images on the packet. And her calligraphy reflects a form of traditional heritage literacy (see Bhatt and Wang 2023; Bhatt, [forthcoming](#)) which serves a more emblematic purpose in her life.

A mere few minutes of Jing's rather mundane morning highlights the importance of understanding literacy research as a context-rich field of inquiry that is embedded in everyday life goals, and not the preserve of institutions. This is the commitment within the field of literacy studies, which has always been at the forefront of exploring language in this way. Scholars working within literacy studies (such as Street 1984; Gee 2000; Barton 2007; Barton and Hamilton 2012) have emphasised the significance of ethnographic investigations into literacy as situated at the level of the *everyday*, and being embedded in social, spatial, material, and historical contexts.

More recent incorporations of a theory of networks and assemblages, guided by the framework of sociomaterial theories, have also helped us to consider the broader range of influencing factors in literacy events such as the multiple forms within Jing's morning routine. The concept of literacy event was initially conceived upon face-to-face interactions with texts (bedtime stories in the work of Shirley Brice Heath, 1982). Later assemblage ideas developed this, and have allowed us to bring together different actors and materialities from different times and spaces in understanding literacy activity—particularly its *here-and-now-ness*. Just think of Jing's multiple events folded across different times and spaces, tools, and value systems. We can learn about this from work by Brandt and Clinton (2002), and through later developments by Kell (2009), Gourlay et al. (2014), Burnett and Merchant (2020), and others.

At the same time, there are increasing examples of offline language practices which are shaped and influenced by what were once thought of as natively online forms

of communication, including what some have termed ‘textspeak’ or ‘textese’. Take for example, shop signs that read as ‘Phones 4U’, the ‘@’ sign as a way to address someone, forms of ludic punctuation (multiple exclamation marks, for example), and use of the verb ‘like’ with reference to its Facebooks function (thumb up icon with ‘Like’).<sup>5</sup> These cases and many others like them are examples of a growing *enregisterment* of Internet language which is now not confined to an exclusively online or offline world (Barton and Lee 2013). Enregisterment refers to the process through which ‘a linguistic repertoire becomes differentiable within a language as a socially recognized register of forms’ (Agha 2003: 231). As networked communication becomes more commonplace (and thus postdigital), what linguists might have previously referred to as a specific feature of language that seemed to be exclusive to the Internet becomes a recognisable and ‘valid’ form of literate practice in everyday use.

Over 20 years ago, Wellman (2001) offered a prescient postdigital perspective to challenge conventional wisdom surrounding the impact of digitalisation on language and communication. Specifically, Wellman argued that the distinction often drawn between cyberspace and physical space is a ‘false dichotomy’, asserting that ‘many ties operate in both cyberspace and physical space’ (248). Rather, as Wellman emphasised, ‘computer-mediated communications supplement, arrange, and amplify in-person and telephone communications rather than replacing them’ (242).<sup>6</sup>

It is precisely in response to the kind of argument that Wellman made some two decades ago, that we can invoke the notion of ‘postdigital’ to help us explain what kinds of things could be researched by scholars of literacy studies and applied linguistics, and how that research could be carried out. While our conception of the postdigital could begin from the ‘false dichotomy’ argument, it is certainly not confined to it. There are a number of different understandings, and philosophical stances about the term postdigital (see Jandrić 2023 for an account of these) which can shape how scholars in applied linguistics may choose to employ the term with respect to their own research.

One way to deploy postdigital sensibilities is to consider people’s attachments to analogue, and even fondness for it, as central to their conceptions and practices of language. For example, consider memes and GIFs as the quintessential postdigital utterance that exemplifies the interwovenness between human and technological, predigital and postdigital (see Wagener 2021, 2023). This connection can be described as a *postdigital literacy ecology* (Bhatt 2023), drawing from David Barton’s (2007) use of the metaphor of ecology with respect to literacy. Within this kind of postdigital framing, we can see an ecology that intertwines literacy practices with the past and the present,<sup>7</sup> the analog and digital, and human and non-human. Therefore, the postdigital should not be misconstrued as a resignation that ‘the machinification of everything is complete’, and neither is it about a nostalgic

<sup>5</sup> Readers may visit this set of data posted by Carmen Lee on Flickr: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/onofflineproject/>. Accessed 8 September 2023.

<sup>6</sup> This echoes a similar argument made by Marshal McLuhan (in Jandrić 2017).

<sup>7</sup> Indeed, memes play a pivotal role in contemporary political movements, as evidenced by Richard Spencer, a well-known ‘alt-right’ activist in the USA, who stated, ‘[w]e memed alt-right into existence’ (VICE 2016).

attachment to analogue modes.<sup>8</sup> Rather, it is about delving deeper into the complexities of ecologies of meaning-making, which are not always digital, and uncovering new linguistic insights and knowledge.

## Political Discourse in Postdigital Times

Blommaert (2020) argued that postdigital environments are ‘new sociolinguistic environments’ and discourse analysis must pay attention to the new sociolinguistic conditions affecting contemporary forms of communication. Specifically looking at propaganda models, Blommaert argued that people are now targeted with political messages as members of very particular niche groups. This has led to a decidedly algorithmic populism (Maly 2018) in which there is not a singular or exclusive ‘mass media’ instrument by which a linear flow of propaganda and political messages will flow.

Today, we have multiple alternative media to contend with. Online political messaging has thus evolved into a form of niche or micro-marketing, facilitated by algorithms that create and perpetuate echo chambers, resulting in ‘loose, temporal and unstable coalitions between ... micro-audiences’ (Blommaert 2020: 393). A case in point is the Brexit referendum in the UK which was a coming together of people from across the political spectrum. Another example was the campaign to deter Afro-Americans from voting for the Democratic party in the 2016 US election. The highly sophisticated campaign divided 200 million voters in to 8 different subcategories for niche targeting of political messages. One sub-group, labelled as ‘Deterrence’, consisted overwhelmingly of black and other groups of colour, and were fed anti-Clinton adverts which focussed on out-of-context quotes to discredit her record on race relations (see MacKenzie and Bhatt 2021: 9).

Blommaert’s point is that these are new sociolinguistic environments and they necessitate new postdigital ways of theorising how political discourse occurs. Mass media still has a place in political messaging, but today’s public must contend with a complex media landscape, awash with political messages from both mass media and multitudes of alternative—often hyper-partisan—media. Digital platforms now mediate politics in ways that connect disparate groups, and allow for the rapid spread of ideas in ways that circumvent mainstream restrictions, and foster a sociolinguistic inter-dependence between politics, platforms and personal lives. Political communication in postdigital environments thus involves a multitude of actors, some of which are human and some non-human, but both types producing and receiving messages.<sup>9</sup> Political communication today is thus decidedly postdigital.

I attempted to address some of these issues with colleagues Alison MacKenzie and Jennifer Rose in our edited volume as part of the Postdigital Science and

<sup>8</sup> Retro-technologies will always have their place and usefulness. Florian Cramer explores this with the famous meme ‘[y]ou are not a real hipster until you take your typewriter to the park’, a humorous meme that satirises a preference for retro items like typewriters juxtaposed with modern life – a desire or need to re-connect with, or reclaim, analogue experience (see Cramer 2015).

<sup>9</sup> Events like the Cambridge Analytica scandal, the implementation of social credit scoring, the ‘robodebt’ controversy, and the existence of ‘click farms’ reveal a multifaceted and influential political economy that involves both human and non-human discursive actors.

Education book series<sup>10</sup> (MacKenzie et al. 2021). In line with our attempt to deploy postdigital sensibilities, we brought together various perspectives including studies of epistemology (which was our overall framing), political science, discourse and applied linguistics, social informatics, law, and other fields. Our attempt at a postdigital approach was to bring people from these fields together in conversation about the issues as one collective whole. In this respect, *postdigital transdisciplinarity* depends on our deployment of theories which are in Ruqiyah Hasan's (2002) terms 'exotropic'; that is to say, they are theories that can be open to dialogue with other theories. For Mackenzie et al., this book is one of a number of attempts to begin a conversation around digital epistemologies which can be shared across disciplines. That conversation is still ongoing.

## Postdigital Heritage Literacy

Another example is from my study on Sinophone-Muslim—or Sino-Muslim—heritage literacy in China (Bhatt and Wang 2023; Bhatt forthcoming). Since Sino-Muslim heritage literacy often manifests in artwork, many of the study's respondents are artists who specialise in the art of Sini calligraphy—or the culturally infused practice of Chinese-Islamic calligraphy.<sup>11</sup> A practice which shifted online due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

The artists' social media updates were all calligraphy related, often with images of their work alongside spiritual advice based on the calligraphy presented. Though for the latter they needed to tread carefully due to online censorship laws about religious language online (Weixin 2021). In works that overtly referenced religion within the Arabic calligraphic writing, the accompanying posts that provided translation and explanation had such explicit mentions of 'Islam' removed. In other words, instead of directly translating the original Arabic from a piece, they use other, more general, words like 'jiàomén' (教门), which roughly relates to 'teachings', to write another version altogether. Jiàomén can relate to Taoism or Buddhism depending on the context. It is a word that is deployed strategically in online posts—a word that is designed to be *noticed* by some, but not *detected* by an AI censoring system which is based—by and large—on key word detection. Platform censorship is both AI and human configured,<sup>12</sup> and usually based on religious or political key words, and words related to events deemed inimical to social harmony (see Ye and Zhao 2023).

This kind of semiotic practice—of tiptoeing along red lines and negotiating through 'sensitive word' detection—emerged repeatedly in the research data.

<sup>10</sup> See <https://www.springer.com/series/16439>. Accessed 8 September 2023.

<sup>11</sup> Sometimes referred to as *zhōngguó ālābó wén shūfǎ* (中国阿拉伯文书法), or 'Sini calligraphy' for short.

<sup>12</sup> I recall a tragic story of one human censor, an employee of a Chinese platform, who died due to overwork. Any mention of his identity and circumstances of his death were themselves censored on the very platform. Censoring the censor is indeed a very postdigital problem!

In everyday language, calligraphers engaged in a kind of ongoing negotiation (or, rather, self-censorship) between their historical heritage and modern systems of censorship which are enforced by both AI and humans. To translate the meanings of their writing-art directly might result in posts being removed in an online platform in which religious content is banned but intangible cultural heritage is not. Instead, they dressed up their messages as general pieces of advice. In discussions with me during fieldwork, they talked about advice-giving as central to their calligraphy role, in line with how they themselves were taught: ‘My Master would not just test my writing; he would test my temperament’, one calligrapher relates (see Bhatt, [forthcoming](#)).

Building on work by Bauman and Briggs (1990), Blommaert (2005), and others, I regard these kinds of elisions, deletions (and ultimately self-censorship) as forms of *situated re-entextualisation*, understood as the dynamic movement of certain elements of language and discourse into other settings, in particular moment such as an online post. Thus, my attempt to understand the calligraphers’ posts about their work requires an acknowledgement that their online linguistic practices, I would argue, are as important as their brushstrokes in the creation of their work and its interpretation as a postdigital form of heritage maintenance. From already entextualised original calligraphy (remember it is scriptural text depicted in Chinese style), to a redacted and distilled Chinese version beside it, with a further redacted and distilled text of a post beside that to create hidden references to religion in order to avoid being censored.

In only working with the first entextualisation (the hand-crafted work of art), the task is not complete. Because for these teachers, scriptural art requires an explanation, an exegesis of some sort—this is the way. In bygone times, this would have been in a lecture as teachers taught how to write sacred art, they also relayed its deeper meanings. However, in current postdigital times, this occurs through such entextualised online posts, except now they have a global and diverse audience and a complex AI language-based censoring system to contend with.

Recent work in literacy studies points to the fact that it is not just present elements which are enlisted to make up the literacy activity but also the non-present actors which lean into and take a role in shaping it. For these religious calligraphers, postdigital re-entextualisation is a way to attain a degree of agency in creating their work, explaining its significance, strategically re-glossing it to avoid censorship, and all while maintaining the attention of their audience as carriers and purveyors of Sino-Muslim heritage within a space that must remain secularised.

So far, the censoring system of the Weixin platform has not blocked them for religious content. It would be far too unwieldy to ban a commonly used word like *jiàomén*. This is also likely because Sini calligraphy is considered a form of national cultural heritage. We could say that ‘imagistically’ is allowed, but for textual explanations, the calligraphers play things much more carefully. Such heritage literacy practices, I would argue, take place within a ‘postdigital literacy ecology’ (Bhatt 2023) spanning Chinese art, Sini-Arabic art, Arabic poetry, religious theology, and a platform’s automated censorship system. It exemplifies the complex *platformisation* of literacy, art, and religion.

Furthermore, not only is the tip-toeing of linguistic red-lines a postdigital phenomenon but also the calligraphy practice—which by its nature is a very tactile



and hands-on art form—is created within the digital environment. Here, Sini calligraphy is a *postdigital mashup* that integrates performance-based practice and exegetal reading, with a wide online audience. There are, therefore, many ways one can examine this kind of heritage literacy in the postdigital age.<sup>13</sup>

Continuing with a literacies example, and also in the context of platforms, Robinson's (2022) research examines how platforms interface with algorithms to produce 'particular formations of literacy' and what those formations mean for ethical and equitable literacies in society. Platforms, in this sense, are understood as complex infrastructures that enable varying forms of linguistic production, social interaction, and economic activity. Platform practices are often specific kinds of literacy practices. A platform perspective to literacy and linguistic study is one that forces us to examine literacy at the 'sub-screenic' level (Lynch 2017), in other words how digital infrastructures and logics shape practices of literacy. A linguistic focus on platform practices can illuminate how linguistic activity is being reconfigured through a study of what happens on, with, behind, and beyond a platform. Robinson found that platform literacy practices were structured around the platform's economic *raison d'être*. And that understanding platform logics is essential in understanding users' literacy practices.

The success of platform capitalism is largely attributed to its deliberate use of secrecy and obfuscation; we simply do not know enough about how they operate, and how platforms can even serve as kinds of 'sponsors of literacy' (as Brandt 1998 defines it) in that they promote, enable, encourage, and limit users to certain forms of literacy (see Bhatt and MacKenzie 2019). Postdigital sensibilities here clearly take us far beyond any notion of 'digital literacy' as a procedural competency (see Bhatt 2017).

In terms of methodology, we need to disentangle the relational nature and the interwovenness of platform literacy practices, in other words bring platform research to bear upon literacy studies and applied linguistics more broadly. A postdigital world is a platformised world and, relatedly, an algorithmic one. For example, recent work by Hurley (2023) presents the idea of 'postdigital visual pentimenti' to capture the semiotics of Dubai's social media influencers. Hurley uses a layering of methods, including interviews with influencers, marketers, audience focus groups, and analyses of various corpora. In all of the above mentioned studies, the postdigital is invoked as a way to understand how boundaries are transcended, the multi-layered nature of meaning-making, and how tensions are brought to the fore through various agentive materialities.

Importantly, however, postdigital sensibilities demand more than simply creating a methods 'toolkit'. This brings us to another challenge: literacy researchers must grapple with issues concerning how the design features of digital tools and platforms—such as their algorithms and business models—shape specific formations of literacy. These formations, in turn, deeply impact people's wider

<sup>13</sup> The interplay between religious practice and the postdigital condition presents a compelling area of study. The pandemic catalysed a significant shift of various religious activities to online media, and was the focus of a recent collection titled *Postdigital Theologies: Technology, Belief, and Practice* (Savin-Baden and Reader 2022). Given the evolving 'post-pandemic' context, further research exploring the language practices associated with religion and heritage in a postdigital framing would be both timely and valuable.

engagements with language and, as has been discussed already, political messaging, heritage and religious practices, and social and economic activity.

## Concluding Comments

In conclusion, I began by highlighting the complexities that the postdigital condition poses for applied linguists, offering perhaps unprecedented challenges in the cross-cutting realms of language, literacy, and communication. However, I also underscored the critical importance of engaging with these challenges to address pressing global issues for which applied linguistics has an important role to play.

It may be incumbent upon individual researchers studying language and literacy to define what postdigital means in the context of their own work. This is essential not only to avert the pitfalls of hyper-specialisation but also to question the assumed discourse of inevitability and perpetual novelty associated with digitalisation. This effort extends to re-evaluating what constitutes an ‘evidence base’ and pondering how to generate new types of knowledge commensurate with our current postdigital lifestyles, and the evolving forms of semiotic engagement that occur as a result. Consequently, postdigital research is not merely interdisciplinary; it is also transdisciplinary. We must be willing to form new alliances and employ speculative methodologies (see Jandrić et al. 2022) that allow us to collaborate with individuals from diverse fields of expertise.

Such a mindset becomes increasingly crucial as we rapidly encounter a new wave of linguistic questions demanding a more expansive approach to thinking about applied linguistics. Such questions could include: What language ideologies and formations of literacy are being perpetuated by language models such as ChatGPT? How do these pre-determined linguistic patterns influence future language when they are subsequently (re-)integrated back into the chatbot’s database? What are the linguistic features that characterise online prejudices, bigotry, and the spread of fake news? How are the linguistic practices of religion and heritage impacted by AI and digital censorship? And in a future marked by the ubiquity of AI, will there even be a need to learn languages? These questions compel us to expand our scope of inquiry further, integrating various perspectives to better understand our rapidly changing postdigital linguistic landscape and relationship with language.

While defining this postdigital moment may remain an ever-moving target, acknowledging its existence is the first step in understanding how applied linguistics can respond in crucial next steps. By daring to delve into postdigital applied linguistics, we open new avenues for reflection, research, and understanding—both for our own experiences and for the collective memory we are creating for future academic inquiry.

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