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Diamond is a scientist's best friend: Counteracting systemic inequality in open access publishing

Sible Andringa¹, Maria Mos², Catherine van Beuningen³, Paz González⁴, Jos Hornikx⁵ and Rasmus Steinkrauss⁶

¹University of Amsterdam | ²Tilburg University | ³Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences | ⁴Leiden University | ⁵Radboud University | ⁶University of Groningen

Abstract The field of applied linguistics is increasingly adopting open science practices. As open access publication gains traction, ethical issues emerge that need to be addressed by the field. This viewpoint paper addresses the concern that open science is not equally open for everyone. This paper describes how open access publication is increasingly being commercialized and explains how open access publication coincides with systemic inequality. We offer the following viewpoints for the field to consider:

1. We are morally obligated to make our research output accessible.
2. Hybrid, Gold, and Green open access publishing lead to systemic inequality in open access publishing, benefiting commercial publishers and those working in research-intensive universities and rich countries.
3. Diamond open access publication removes the systemic inequalities; hence, Diamond open access should be prioritized over Hybrid, Gold, and Green open access publication models.
4. We should move away from publish-and-read agreements and Green open access publishing, because they prevent system change.
5. Through our choices in our work as researchers, editors, reviewers, authors and teachers, we can contribute to the transition towards truly equitable open access publishing practices.
6. Senior researchers are in the position and have the moral obligation to be drivers of these changes.

Keywords Diamond open access, Platinum open access, open science, applied linguistics, systemic inequality, scientific publishing, commercial publishing

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Corresponding author

Sible Andringa,
S.J.Andringa@uva.nl

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1 The importance of open science

The last two decades have witnessed a gradual but certain move towards the adoption of open science practices in many fields of science, including the field of applied linguistics. This started with open access publication, and gradually, other open science practices were also developed. While the developments are encouraging signs of the field's healthy engagement with and adoption of open science practices, there are also causes for concern. In this viewpoint paper, we want to redirect the attention towards the

need to publish our research articles open access. The issue we want to address is that open access publication is currently available only to those authors who can afford it. Where you work determines whether you can or cannot make your work openly available to everyone. Hence, pushing for equitable open access publication possibilities should be a primary concern of the field, a concern we should not forget about in our enthusiasm to develop other open science practices. Making our research instruments, data, and scripts, available is important, as it leads to better science, and better science is better service to society. However, the impact of such developments will be limited if the research that used or generated these outputs itself is not open.

The goal of the present viewpoint paper is to raise awareness for the systemic inequality that is present in current open access publishing, to explain the mechanisms behind inequality in open access publishing, and to argue that this inequality can only be remedied by rigorously adopting Diamond open access publication models. To this end, we will first briefly describe developments in the past few decades and provide an overview of current open access publication models and their shortcomings. We then sketch steps that can – and in our view: should – be taken towards truly accessible open access, arguing that the onus to take those steps is primarily on researchers in privileged positions, i.e., researchers with permanent positions in research intensive institutions, whose careers are less dependent on the need to publish in high impact publication venues, and who experience fewer financial barriers to publishing and reading scientific articles.

2 Developments towards open access and open science in applied linguistics

A major starting point for the open science movement was the Budapest Open Access Initiative (BOAI), a meeting organized by the Open Science Institute (now known as the Open Science Foundation), held in Budapest in 2001. At this meeting, open science was defined as (a set of) publication practices that make research products freely and publicly accessible, easily findable, and available for reuse without the imposition of major restrictions on such reuse. While pleas for open science can be traced back many centuries, the call for open science at the BOAI was inspired by the rise of the internet and the new, online publication practices these afforded. In the two decades since, as the open science movement has gained traction, the philosophy behind the open science movement has changed from verification of designs and procedures to collaboration and synthesis (Bolibaugh et al., 2021). Scholars have begun to see that open science is not only important for reasons of intellectual or epistemic accountability. Open science also helps to improve the quality of the research a field produces. Increased access leads to more transparency and better possibilities for reuse of instruments and replication (Marsden & Plonsky, 2018). It also leads to higher visibility and thus increased scientific and social impact. And finally, it reduces inequality by making knowledge equally accessible to all.

The movement towards open science is also changing the field of applied linguistics. In the wake of the open science movement, the field has witnessed many exciting developments that somehow make science more accessible. Marsden and Morgan-Short (2023) sketch the many ways in which open science can be practiced. Applied linguists have been actively developing such practices. Many journals have started to offer open access publication possibilities, a service now offered by almost every (if not all) journal(s) in our field. However, the field has also witnessed many more developments that either promote open science or are enabled by open science. For example, the field has seen the development and blossoming of IRIS, a field-specific repository for sharing research instruments, analysis scripts, datasets and postprints (<https://iris-database.org/>); there have been calls for more replication (Porte, 2012; McManus, 2021), for data sharing (Bolibaugh et al., 2021), and for sharing of scripts and procedures in supplementary files (In'namì et al., 2022); preregistration and registered report possibilities/practices have emerged (Marsden & Plonsky, 2018); platforms have been launched that increase accessibility of scientific research for wider audiences, such as OASIS (Marsden et al., 2018), TESOLgraphics (Chong, 2020) and the TBLT Language Learning Task Bank (Gurzynski-Weiss & IATBLT, 2020); there have been pledges to publish post-prints (Al-Hoori & Hiver, 2023); special issues and volumes have appeared (e.g., Plonsky, in press); and an AILA research network on open science has been established (Liu, 2023).

3 Models of open access publication: Accessibility, ownership, and costs

Given the huge benefits of open science, one would think that the transition from closed to open access publication would happen quickly. It has proven difficult, however. At its core, the transition from closed to open access publication models is about ownership and the financial cost of publication. In situations of closed access publication, authors transfer copyright to publishers. In return for publication, publishers may then monetize the research that is reported on; they oversee reuse and republication decisions and protection against infringement of such (i.e., the publishers') rights. Access is arranged through institutional subscription or one-off payments by potential readers. In the former situation, research institutes pay considerable sums to commercial publishers for their employees to be able to read publications reporting on research that was conducted often using public funds, by researchers in those same universities. In the latter situation, readers pay for access to single articles. Both mean that closed access research is available only to those who can subscribe, pay for access, or gain access through their affiliation.

In addition to the (lack of) accessibility to publish or read scientific articles, there is also a principled issue of authors no longer owning the work that is intellectually theirs. The development towards open science that coincided with technological advances in publishing has changed a lot, both in terms of ownership and the cost of publication. When authors publish open access, they ideally also retain ownership under a creative

Table 1 Open access publication types

Diamond/Platinum	Open access at no cost to authors
Green	Self-archiving of pre- and postprint in open repositories
Gold	APC-based open access with creative commons (CC) license
Bronze	APC-based open access without cc license or with unclear license
Hybrid*	Combination of APC-based open access and subscription

**Many Hybrid journals refer to their open access options as Gold open access*

commons license (www.creativecommons.org), that stipulates under what conditions others may use the materials that were openly published. A creative commons license states generically that others are free to reuse and distribute the work published if the original authors are properly credited. Therefore, open access models can solve this fundamental issue of intellectual ownership, depending on the agreements made.

Finances have always been the biggest obstacle for moving towards open access publication (Butler, 2003). How could we flip from a fully subscription-based system to a new and financially sustainable open access publication system? For publishers, the question has been: 'How can we continue to generate revenues if we cannot charge for access?' For authors, the question is: 'Where can I find the funds for making my article open?' Over the years, several models of open access publication have evolved. The BOAI suggested Gold publication models as the most viable solution. This refers to a publication model where journals charge authors a one-off fee, a so-called Author Processing Charge (APC), for publishing their work open access in their journal. Other solutions are listed in Table 1. Hybrid refers to journals that operate a subscription-based journal, but that allow for individual papers within their journal to be published open access if authors pay an open access fee. Bronze is similar to Gold and Hybrid but refers specifically to situations of unclear licensing policies. This mostly means that publishers rather than authors hold the copyright. As a result, there is no guarantee that articles will remain open access indefinitely. Green open access occurs when scholars archive pre-final versions of their paper in open repositories (preprints when posted prior to review; postprints when posted after review). Such versions often exist next to officially published versions and are used either to make papers available as soon as possible or to make papers that are published behind paywalls openly available. Commercial publishers often allow preprints, although they vary in what exactly they allow. Diamond (also called Platinum) models apply to journals that offer open access at no cost to authors. Such models rely on other sources of funding for publishers; most often these are membership fees generated by academic societies.

A recent large-scale bibliometric analysis of the articles published between 2015 and 2020 by the five largest publishers of academic research (the oligopoly of Elsevier, Sage, Springer-Nature, Taylor & Francis, Wiley) shows that the humanities and social sciences are dominated by journals operating Hybrid models (84.8%) (Butler et al., 2022). The

share of both Gold and Diamond open access publications are very small in comparison to other fields (11.8 and 3.3% respectively for the humanities compared to 65.6% and 11.2% for the natural sciences). There are no solid numbers on the share of open access articles in Hybrid journals. Averaging over all fields of science, Pinowar et al. (2019) suggested that approximately 31% of scientific papers was published open access in 2019, a number they projected to grow to 44% by 2025.

For applied linguists, this should be a familiar picture. If we consider the top 20 journals in Google's 'language & linguistics' category (that incidentally features many applied linguistic titles), we find no Gold journals in the list. It features eighteen Hybrid journals and two Diamond journals (*Studies in Second Language Learning and Teaching* and *Glossa*). As for the rate of open access papers in Hybrid journals: A recent small-scale survey for the field of applied linguistics suggests that 18% of the papers in five of the largest and most prominent Hybrid journals in our field appeared open access in 2021 (Alferink, 2022). This clearly suggests that change in our field is slow in comparison to other fields of science.

4 Systemic inequality of Bronze, Hybrid, Gold and Green open access models

There are many reasons to be concerned about the current status of open access publication in applied linguistics. However, the most important concern is that Gold, Bronze and Hybrid publication models enable open access only if authors can afford to pay for this. As a result, these systems exclude scholars from publication on economic grounds and force many of them to choose between publishing closed access or to go to journals of lower impact. This matter is aggravated by the fact that the current open access market is dominated by a small number of very large publishers that dictate the publication market. Butler et al. (2022) describe how the oligopoly have managed to retain their traditionally strong hold over the publication market by flipping their journals to Gold or Hybrid models, or by launching new such journals. They also show that the oligopoly charged an average APC of \$1989,- per article for publishing in Gold open access journals, while fees for Hybrid journals – that also receive subscription fees – amounted to \$2905,- on average. These prices far exceed the true cost of open access publishing (Van Noorden, 2013). The Fair Open Access Alliance estimates that an APC of \$1,000 should suffice to cover expenses for publishers (fairopenaccess.org), but many Gold and Diamond open access journals, including the *Dutch Journal of Applied Linguistics* (DuJAL) and the *Journal of the Second Language Association* (JESLA), show that it can be done for half that price.

The wish to publish open access and the adoption of Gold, Hybrid and Bronze models of publication has evolved into a highly profitable situation for publishers, which is a huge barrier to move towards more equitable systems of publication. Butler et al. (2022)

estimate that the five largest publishers earned one billion dollars in APC revenues alone between 2015 and 2018. In addition, publishers have struck so-called 'read-and-publish' agreements with academic societies, which allow researchers working under these agreements to publish their work open access for free and receive access to the publisher's titles in return for one lump sum payment. Scholars working at Dutch universities, for example, have been able to publish open access with many publishers (including the oligopoly) in recent years under such deals. Van Noorden (2020) describes how a deal between the German Max Planck Society and 34 Nature journals amounts to an open access fee of \$11,200 per article. These agreements strengthen the dominant position of the oligopoly. If researchers can publish open access for free in existing journals that have well-established reputations, there is little incentive left to make different choices. This makes it very hard to successfully launch more equitable platforms of publication.

The APC constructions and read-and-publish agreements affect scientists differently depending on whether their employer is covered by such agreements. Marsden and Morgan-Short (2023) point out that these deals are closed primarily between institutions and publishers in wealthy regions of the world, thus contributing to the inequality of the system, and current APC rates are insurmountable for many scholars who are not covered by such an agreement. This is certainly true for many scholars who work in the global south (Chiwere & Skelly, 2022; 2023), although we must acknowledge that many publishers have solidarity schemes in place to allow global south scholars to publish open access for free. Unfortunately, such schemes are not sufficiently inclusive, as Brazilian scholars can testify to (Kowaltowski et al., 2022), and they may well only exist to enable perpetuation of the current, highly profitable system. It is also important to note that the inequality issues of open access stretch far beyond global north and global south division lines. Scholars who do not work at research intensive academic institutions, such as colleagues working at Dutch universities of applied sciences, also struggle to pay for open access publication. They also fall outside the scope of the read-and-publish agreements that exist for university-based scholars, which means they must rely on Green and Diamond venues for open access publishing.

In a cynical development, we see that commercial publishers are using open access to quickly attract attention to new journals but are likely to limit access and install financial barriers once the initial establishment phase has passed. This way, their dominance in academic publishing is maintained, and the necessary systemic change pushed back. An example is the journal *Research Methods in Applied Linguistics* (RMAL), launched in 2022 by Elsevier. The journal is run by leading scholars in our field and has managed to attract an impressive array of papers in its short existence. Initially, the journal made all contributions openly available as 'full text access' (copyright owned by Elsevier) or 'open access' (creative commons license). RMAL is a Hybrid journal, however. Currently, the majority of the papers appearing in the journal are closed access. The publisher refers to read agreements, Gold (at an APC rate of \$1500) and Green open access possibilities. For Green open access, they mention an embargo period of 24 months (which incidentally

is substantially longer than the 6-month maximum that Dutch regulations stipulate, viz. the 'Taverne Amendment', <https://www.openaccess.nl/en/in-the-netherlands/you-share-we-take-care>).

Another problem of Gold, Hybrid and Bronze models and their potential for profit making is that this has attracted so-called predatory open access journals (Nejadghanbar et al., 2023). Such journals offer easy opportunities for publication, with APCs as their revenue model. They organize fast and efficient article processing by outsourcing much of the editorial tasks to cheap-labour regions. Clearly, rejection is not in their interest. Such journals are very appealing to scientists that have a need to put their research out, e.g., in countries where having an accepted indexed publication is a criterion for graduation in masters' and/or doctoral programs. Scholars have voiced fears that this may lead to validation of science that is sub-par and the subsequent risk of pseudo-science entering the academic discourse. Krawczyk and Kulczycki (2021) review how predatory journals have been discussed and point to the complexity of this issue. Vocal critics of predatory journals have appeared to reject open access publication models altogether and there are no clear definitions as to what predatory publishing is and what journals must be considered predatory. At the same time, the existence of such journals has led to negative attitudes towards open access journals altogether and thus is harmful to the cause. As a result, it is increasingly difficult for scholars to identify which journals are reputable. This too strengthens the position of the established, almost always non-diamond journals.

Green open access publishing counters many of the problems associated with Gold (and Hybrid and Bronze) publication. The problem with Green publishing, however, is that it consolidates and strengthens the current inequalities in much the same way as read-and-publish agreements do. Often, Green open access publishing is not an alternative way of publishing, but occurs in addition to closed, Gold, Hybrid or Bronze publishing. While laudable for making research open, Green publishing disincentives change towards better systems if it acts as a license for closed publishing. Marsden and Morgan-Short (2023) highlight other problems of Green publishing: the circulation of multiple versions of papers and the absence of peer-review quality checks. Thus, Green open access publishing merely treats the symptoms of closed access publishing, it makes research openly available that otherwise would not have been, but it does nothing to treat the causes. It may well stand in the way of change.

5 Diamond is a scientist's best friend

Diamond open access models are the only models that are truly inclusive. In our view, Diamond open access should become a strong default option for publication in applied linguistics. This view is also acknowledged by the BOAI, which no longer endorses Gold open access publication models. The initiative recommends moving away from commercial parties altogether, a concern fuelled by the observation that

publishers also acquire the platforms for archiving preprints, data, etc. It recommends open infrastructure for hosting open access outputs and to move away from read-and-publish agreements. In an ideal world, most (if not all) journals would allow authors to publish free of charge and all readers to access publications without having to pay a fee, obtain a membership, or be affiliated with particular (academic) institutions. It would also make sense to keep all research outputs in one place. Journals should provide environments for researchers to share their outputs (stimuli, analysis scripts, raw data, etc.) following the FAIR (findable, accessible, interoperable, reusable) principles (Wilkinson et al., 2016) and, it almost goes without saying, mindful of GDPR (General Data Protection Regulation) and privacy issues. This model is also highly compatible with publishing replication studies, meta-analyses, and pre-registered reports (cf. Liu et al., 2023, in their report on open scholarship in applied linguistics) – although those are not necessarily restricted to Diamond open access publications.

In this model the running costs of journals are covered by contributions from national science foundations, institutional libraries – which save a lot of money once current read-and-publish agreements become less important – supported by academic societies. Within this model, there continues to be a wide variety of journals: those that are highly selective and those that have lower barriers; some that welcome contributions from a very specific subfield and/or theoretical framework, and others that provide venues for publication of interdisciplinary work. What they all have in common is that they are financed and run by professionals and scientists who do not have any direct financial interest in sales prices and rates, but who are motivated to contribute to and share high-quality research output.

6 How can we move forward?

We appear caught in a system that we should want to change and, in our view, Diamond open access is the only way forward. Applied linguistics research in particular should be open and equitable, because many could profit from access to our research. Applied linguistics research tries to understand and improve language teaching and communication in many diverse settings (health, law, etc). Our research output is highly relevant for audiences well beyond those that currently have access to non-diamond publications. Hence, we are morally obligated to support and prioritize Diamond open access publication over other forms of open access publication, through submission, review and editorships. We think change is possible when we collectively take our responsibility. We should acknowledge that we have more power than we think over this matter. As Butler et al. (2022) point out, the profits that publishers make are based almost entirely on the hard work and reputations of the scholars that carry their journals. If journals thrive, they thrive because of our submissions, our reviewing effort, and our editorships. Most

of us do all these tasks for free. In 2008, the Research Information Network estimated that scholars contributed to publishers' profits by offering 1.9 billion pounds per year in unpaid labour (Hide, 2008), a number that will likely have gone up since then. This labour can be used to leverage change. We acknowledge that this is easier said than done, but there are things that we can do to make Diamond open access a strong default option. In this final section, we will discuss things we can do as a field, and things we can do in our individual capacities as authors, reviewers, PI's and teachers in higher education, editors, members of academic societies, and applied linguists in positions of academic influence at large.

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, or flipping existing journals. The latter is possible, as we have experienced ourselves when we took the plunge to move DuJAL from John Benjamins to OpenJournals.nl. *Glossa* famously took this step years before we did, and other journals have done the same. DuJAL was able to retain its name, while others basically started anew. Launching a Diamond journal or switching to Diamond open access comes with several practical and financial issues to solve. Journals need platforms to organize review and publication. The *Dutch Journal of Applied Linguistics* is powered by Open Journal Systems, which does not yet have the elaborate facilities as offered by the platforms in use by commercial publishers, but certainly suits all our needs and purposes.

Financial sustainability is the greater challenge: when publishing is free for authors and freely available for readers, who pays for the costs in administrative support, copy-editing, and technical support? Here, we suggest academic societies (AAAL, AILA, BAAL, or AVT and VIOT in The Netherlands), should play a pivotal role, as they can support Diamond open access journals financially through their membership fees and organizationally through their networks. The former should not be a tool to restrict access – Diamond publications are no longer truly Diamond if they can only be accessed by (paid) members of an academic society. Academic societies can also be a starting point for the development of new Diamond open access journals, as they often have established reputations and bring together researchers with similar interests.

For DuJAL, ANÉLA (the Dutch association of applied linguistics) provides financial support through its membership fees, even though a Diamond open access construction means these fees no longer provide exclusive access to the journal. Rather, the financial support is solidarity-based. DuJAL can publish twelve to fifteen neatly typeset articles on an annual budget of €5,000,-. Many academic societies that currently do not have journals – think of AILA, AAAL, BAAL – should easily be able to allocate such means to run their own Diamond journals, and we believe it is imperative that they do. In the longer term, when Diamond open access initiatives really take off, institutional and national means that are now allocated to subscriptions and read-and-publish agreements should be rerouted. Some university libraries already allocate some money to stimulate Diamond open access, see for instance the University of Amsterdam's

Diamond open access-fund (<https://uba.uva.nl/en/support/research/open-access/open-access.html#8-UvA-Diamond-Open-Access-Fund>), through which the UvA donates to Diamond journals when its employees publish in them.

Crucial to the success of new journals is a journal's status. Status strongly coincides with a journal's impact factor, which reflects the number of citations that articles in the journal receive. Unfortunately, impact is not established overnight. It can take many years before new journals have accumulated a good number of yearly citations and receive a listing on journal indexes, and many more years to receive a journal impact factor that makes a journal attractive for submission. However, while journal status is important to scholars, the case of RMAL shows how quickly a reputation can be built if new initiatives are shored up by leading scholars in the field. RMAL's editorial board boasts the most well-known names of the field and many scholars have already taken their excellent work to this journal, even though it is not listed yet. Many important lessons can be learned from this. It's not just the numbers that make reputations; the scholars that carry a journal may actually be more decisive. This also shows how much power we ourselves have and puts the responsibility for change on the shoulders of those who are leading voices in the field. Their editorship decisions can make a big difference to the success of any journal, including newly established Diamond open access journals.

On an individual level, there are also many small things that each of us can do. For these, too, it's senior researchers who should carry the brunt of the burden, as their decisions are less likely to reflect negatively on their careers. Authors, for example, should consider the publishing model of the journal they select before they submit their papers to journals, and if at all possible, prioritize Diamond journals. Authors can also include the accessibility of sources as one of the criteria in choosing what references to include in their own work. When asked to provide a review, reviewers could factor the publishing model of the journal into their decision to accept or decline the invitation. By accepting Diamond-journal review obligations, they contribute to high quality Diamond publications, whereas investing time in reviewing for journals with other models reinforces the status of those journals and benefits the commercial publisher.

We also want to highlight the importance of supporting academic and professional associations through memberships. They are a fantastic way of enhancing solidarity and equality in the field. Support (or continue to support) associations that publish Diamond journals through memberships, and encourage associations to launch journals if they do not offer this possibility yet. When in a position to teach and/or mentor students, it is important to explain the structure of different publishing models and discuss choices that graduate students have – we hope this text can contribute to those discussions, for example in (research) master's programs. For those of us in tenured and/or influential positions, we hope they commit themselves to affecting change as well: this can be in the form of searching for longer-term financial support for environments like Openjournals.nl, or for university libraries to support Diamond open access, by creating guidelines

emphasizing Diamond publication in research institutes, for requirements for (PhD) dissertations, and recognizing and valuing editorship of Diamond journals and Diamond publications in annual appraisal, among others.

7 Conclusion

To summarize, it's time for the field of applied linguistics to realize that our publication decisions are also ethical decisions. The current system perpetuates and reinforces inequality, as it excludes many scholars on economic grounds from publishing open access. Hence, we are morally obligated to prioritize Diamond open access publication over other forms of open science practices. Green publishing and read-and-publish agreements stand in the way of change towards a more equitable system. There are many small changes that each of us can make to help change the system by prioritizing Diamond open access for submissions and review. This change should not be left to future generations but should primarily be driven by senior researchers. For us, this has meant investing time in flipping DuJAL, turning it into a Diamond open access journal. We hope this development will be supported and that many others will take further steps towards truly equitable open access publication practices.

Author contributions

Sible Andringa & Maria Mos: Conceptualization; Writing – Original draft; writing – review and editing; Catherine van Beuningen, Paz González, Jos Hornikx, Rasmus Steinkrauss: writing – review and editing.

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Statement of interest

This viewpoint was written by the entire editorial board of DuJAL, a Diamond open access journal. The points we raise serve DuJAL's interests, but we believe they serve the entire academic community.

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

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