

## Study Quality in Applied Linguistics: Highlights from Dr. Luke Plonsky's Public Talk

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### INTRODUCTION

On October 15, 2024, the Center for International Foreign Language Teacher Education (CIFLTE) hosted a public talk by Dr. Luke Plonsky on study quality, research methods, and ethics in applied linguistics. Faculty and students from universities around the world attended the talk via Zoom.

Dr. Luke Plonsky is a Professor of Applied Linguistics at Northern Arizona University. In addition to teaching courses in second language (L2) acquisition and research methods, Professor Plonsky is a prolific researcher. With a primary focus on L2 research methodology, he has published over 100 articles, book chapters, and books. In 2024, Professor Plonsky edited the book *Open Science in Applied Linguistics* and co-authored the guidebook *Addressing Questionable Research Practices in Applied Linguistics: A Practical Guide*. Professor Plonsky currently serves as the Editor of *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, as well as Managing Editor of *Foreign Language Annals*, and General Editor of Applied Linguistics Press.

CIFLTE extends its deepest gratitude to Professor Plonsky for his stimulating talk.

### THE TALK

Professor Plonsky began the talk by unpacking the concept of *study quality* and emphasizing the need to actively assess, rather than assume, the quality of a study. After critiquing the few existing frameworks for evaluating study quality, he proposed his own framework consisting of four interrelated components:

1. **Transparency:** Described as a prerequisite for the other components, transparency was identified as both an area of progress and source of persistent challenges in the field. While initiatives such as open science practices and improved infrastructure have emerged, significant shortcomings remain. For instance, there is a critical need for more transparent reporting practices, such as specifying reliability estimates and statistical assumptions, to allow for replicability and confidence in findings.
2. **Methodological rigor:** Common practices in research design, instrumentation, and data analysis were critiqued. Issues such as small, non-diverse samples, unvalidated instruments, and overreliance on statistical significance could undermine the validity and reliability of a study. Such issues contribute to the recurring methodological weaknesses of research in the field.
3. **Ethics:** Questionable research practices (QRPs), such as suppressing findings that conflict with existing literature, demonstrated how the integrity of research can be compromised. QRPs may not always manifest themselves in absolute terms, such as plagiarism, falsification, or fabrication, but may instead lie on a continuum between scientific fraud and simple carelessness (Fanelli, 2009, p. e5738). Results from recent large-scale surveys revealed the pervasiveness of QRPs in applied linguistics.

4. **Societal contribution:** While not the focus of the talk, the importance of evaluating the societal impact of applied linguistics research was stressed. Applied linguists must consider the practical contributions, as well as contributions to other scientific disciplines, that their research makes.

In adopting this four-part framework, Professor Plonsky offered a candid yet constructive assessment of the current state of study quality in applied linguistics. He also offered a healthy dose of optimism by acknowledging recent gains in methodological awareness and innovation. He offered several suggestions for moving the field forward in a direction that prioritizes intellectual rigor and ethical responsibility, advocating for open science practices, robust researcher training, and field-specific guidelines. On an individual level, he issued a call to action, urging researchers to critically examine their own work through the lens of transparency, rigor, ethics, and societal contributions. In the words of Professor Plonsky, “it is our intellectual and ethical duty to produce more high-quality research.”

## Q&A SESSION

Following Professor Plonsky’s talk, the audience engaged in a lively Q&A session mainly focused on how to operationalize study quality across diverse research contexts. They discussed methodological rigor as something that must be evaluated in light of conceptual frameworks, constructs, research questions, and instruments, while also noting that not all studies need broad external validity if their aims are more exploratory or context-specific. Attendees recognized the value of both large-scale quantitative investigations and smaller, in-depth qualitative or mixed-methods studies for capturing a full range of phenomena in applied linguistics.

Questions arose about falsification, both as a means to challenge mainstream interpretations and as a gauge of the field’s overall health. Another key topic was whether Professor Plonsky’s four-part framework might contain contradictions, especially between methodological rigor and societal contributions. For example, a study with high ecological validity may offer substantial societal benefits yet be viewed as less rigorous than controlled, lab-based research. Professor Plonsky acknowledged these tensions and underscored the need for clarity in research scope, explicit disclosures of limitations, and adhering to ethical practices (e.g., pre-registration, labeling additional analyses).

Ultimately, the Q&A session reinforced that quality research in applied linguistics demands intellectual flexibility, ethical accountability, and a willingness to engage with—and learn from—contradictory perspectives.

For more information on Professor Plonsky’s research, [visit his website](#).

For more information about CIFLTE, including upcoming events, [visit their website](#).

## REFERENCES

Fanelli, D. (2009) How many scientists fabricate and falsify research? A systematic review and meta-analysis of survey data. *PLoS ONE*, 4(5), e5738.  
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