

APPLYING LINGUISTICS AND APPLIED LINGUISTICS IN 2000 AND BEYOND

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In this paper, I consider how applied linguistics is evolving in our 'changing context', the topic of this symposium, as well as how this field connects to other domains of linguistics. My objectives are to:

- (1) argue that applying linguistics and applied linguistics are NOT identical and the relation between the two has changed over time;
- (2) consider the interdisciplinary nature of applied linguistics;
- (3) review some of the current issues that are receiving attention in applied linguistics;
- (4) look to future issues that will concern us in the 'changing context' we are dealing with; and
- (5) suggest that the preparation of students in linguistics should equip them with the knowledge, skills, and DISPOSITION to work in applied domains — as a matter of employability and of professional responsibility.

Introduction

To begin, it is interesting to note that questions about preparing linguistics students to work on real world problems are by no means new. Roger Shuy, at the 1974 Georgetown University Roundtable on Languages and Linguistics, observed: 'As a result of its isolative behavior, linguistics is now beginning to suffer from not having a natural apprenticeship domain, making it difficult for graduates to find work' (cited in Byrd 1982:1). A few years later, Raskin (1982:3) commented in a similar fashion on the difficulty of even the 'best graduates' in finding an academic position and 'the nature of these graduates' training, which was exclusively "pure linguistics", made them virtually unemployable in any alternative professional capacity'.

The topic of professional responsibility has recently drawn some attention as well. This theme can be found in the anthropological fieldwork tradition where 'giving back' to the community is an important concern. It is also voiced in educational research where knowledge gained by studying schools, students, and educators, is expected to benefit those subjects. A recent symposium on ethics at the American Association for Applied Linguistics (AAAL) included such a discussion (Connor-Linton and Adger 1993), and other linguists have raised similar issues (Rickford 1997; Labov 1982). Sociolinguists like Walt Wolfram and Carolyn Adger have emphasized the importance of bringing vernacular dialect information

back to benefit the community of speakers and working to document endangered dialects, like the English of the Outer Banks in North Carolina, as well as endangered languages (Wolfram 1993).

Applying linguistics and applied linguistics

The field of applied linguistics (as a labeled discipline) was christened in 1946 at the University of Michigan as a term for taking a 'scientific' approach to language teaching. Over the years, the scope of the term gradually expanded — the first international applied linguistics conference in 1964 invited papers in two strands: foreign language teaching and automatic translation (Tucker 1996).

When the Center for Applied Linguistics (CAL) was founded in 1959, its first director, Charles Ferguson, described CAL's scope of work as 'to cover anything that had to do with solving practical language problems' (Ferguson 1998). The initial mandate specifically named language education (to improve the teaching of English around the world and to encourage and improve the teaching and learning of the less commonly taught languages), but added more general goals (to address social and educational problems involving language issues through research and to serve as a clearinghouse of information and convener of diverse groups around language-related issues). The context then was post-Sputnik, and increased global awareness was accompanied by concerns in this country that our educational system was not producing the language competence or the math and science abilities that our nation needed in order to compete with the powers of the world.

As the field continued to develop in the mid 1970s, its interdisciplinary roots became evident, as a group of professional organizations (including the Linguistic Society of America (LSA), along with CAL, the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE), the American Speech and Hearing Association (ASHA), Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL), and the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL)), came together to discuss forming a new association. In late 1977, the American Association for Applied Linguistics (AAAL) was established, and it held its first annual meeting in 1978 with the LSA. In a retrospective look at applied linguistics in his plenary address at AAAL's 25th annual meeting in 1993, Tucker noted a shift in emphasis in AAAL programs from the 1970s/1980s to the late 1980s/1990s, from a focus on language teaching to a broader range of issues including second language acquisition, language testing, language for specific purposes, and language policy and planning. The expansion was not just a U. S. phenomenon, however. Rampton (1995:233) recalls that:

In 1985, the chairperson of the British Association for Applied Linguistics (BAAL) noted: 'We need to be sure that there is not too heavy a bias towards language teaching'. Just five years later, the then chair observed: 'We may have to be careful not to exclude more traditional BAAL interests in EFL/ESOL/ESL'.

Rampton suggests that there was a shift away from language pedagogy and linguistics toward language and social phenomena more generally, 'drawing on anthropology, sociology, and media studies' (Rampton 1995:234). And in 1992, AILA described applied linguistics 'as a means to help solve specific problems in society ... in which language plays a role' (from AILA Vademecum, quoted in Tucker 1996).

Thus, the CHANGING CONTEXT in the latter half of the 20th century reframes language issues that emerge from practical social problems. It is not enough to 'apply linguistics' to these problems — we must build on insights from linguistics in conjunction with insights from other fields in interdisciplinary efforts. One way of looking at it is that applied linguistics ultimately seeks to answer questions outside of linguistics, in another arena, to which linguistic data, methods, or theories may be applied.

Applied linguistics as an interdisciplinary enterprise

Grabe and Kaplan (1992) in their *Introduction to Applied Linguistics* compare applied linguistics to engineering. Engineering gathers expertise from various disciplines (such as physics and chemistry), and engineers of different types rely on certain disciplines of science and mathematics to solve specific problems (physics to design and build a bridge, for example). In a similar fashion, we can think of applied linguistics as using the expertise developed in various fields of linguistics, and then adding insights from other disciplines for different language-related problems (such as anthropology or psychometrics). In other words, applied linguistics is inherently interdisciplinary.

There is considerable recent consensus about applied linguistics as interdisciplinary — Tucker (1996) applauds the field's 'rapid growth as an interdisciplinary field' in his entry on 'applied linguistics' on the LSA website; TESOL's *Applied Linguistics Forum* newsletter comments on its 'vitality and growth as an interdisciplinary field' (Thomas-Ruzic 1997:15).

At the Center for Applied Linguistics, we reflect that interdisciplinary trend—we find we must in order to address real world problems effectively. In a quick review of degrees held by current staff (which numbers about 55), we have a good number holding graduate degrees in linguistics, some in applied linguistics and sociolinguistics, but also degrees in specific languages, cognitive and social psychology, educational psychology, multicultural/bilingual/English as a second language education, educational measurement, health administration, among others. We frequently work with consultants from other fields as well, including law, sociology, and political science.

Current issues in applied linguistics

As we consider areas of current interest in applied linguistics, the changing context becomes very evident in its reflection in the 'real world' problems being addressed.

Consider, for example, language issues that arise related to the movement of refugees around the world. Although by no means a new phenomenon, concerns about refugees in the United States skyrocketed in the mid-1970s in the aftermath of the Vietnam War. There were tremendous demands for materials and services to help meet the language, cultural, and educational needs of Southeast Asian refugees. A huge amount of work was stimulated in adult and vocational education, instruction and assessment in English as a second language (ESL), and the development of native language resources while the concentrated flow of refugees continued from Southeast Asia. There are clearly many language issues embedded in addressing the needs of refugees, and this is an important arena for applied linguistics involvement. At the end of the 20th century, the refugee situation is quite different, and the language problems that come to the fore are different as well. With smaller numbers of refugees headed for the United States from diverse language/culture backgrounds, the strategies for assistance have to change. Shifts in the policy context affect the way in which government support is provided (for example, welfare policy reform in the U.S.) and create new priorities (greater emphasis on skills and language for employment, for example). As a result, serving the current needs of refugee families raises new issues in applied linguistics.

As applied linguistics reaches out to address language problems that arise in fields outside linguistics, numerous areas of ongoing work will take us well into the next millennium.

Innovative language education and assessment

The need for people from different language backgrounds to communicate is becoming even stronger as populations move, meet, and interact with more frequency. Expertise in language education and assessment is needed to help people achieve their linguistic goals and make good use of linguistic resources. A deeper understanding of language acquisition, first and additional, remains an important goal, to provide the grounding for innovative language education and assessment.

A promising trend in language instruction has been the movement toward integrating language and content. This manifests itself in many forms. Content-based language teaching uses interesting and appropriate subject matter as the vehicle for developing mastery of language forms and functions. It emphasizes meaning and meaningful uses of language that provide a scaffold for the learner to higher levels of language proficiency (differing considerably from earlier methodologies that emphasized drill and practice with rote memorization). For minority learners of the majority language in a society (English language learners in the United States, for example), this approach brings the advantage of incorporating content learning (school subjects or employment skills) into language teaching. Refinements of this approach continue to be investigated, including adjustments for proficiency and cognitive levels, attention to specific language forms that may be needed, and the use of authentic and/or accommodated materials (Christian & Rhodes 1998; Short 1991).

A stronger orientation toward proficiency as a goal of language instruction has brought a parallel emphasis on proficiency in assessment. As a result, rating language proficiency (both oral and written) continues to be explored. Proficiency levels are divided into finer distinctions and are being modified for new purposes and new groups of learners (see, for example, recent work on oral proficiency ratings for young children in Swender & Duncan 1998). Ways of administering assessments are also evolving. The basic, face-to-face, oral proficiency interview has been augmented by tape-mediated methods (both audio and video) (Stansfield & Kenyon 1996), and now computer-based proficiency testing is being developed. The changing technology context has obvious implications for both language teaching and assessment.

Crafting sensible approaches to linguistic diversity

Improved understanding of, and sensible approaches to, linguistic and cultural diversity in society are increasingly critical, particularly in schools and workplaces. Language is at the core, both in the real language differences that come into play and in the symbolic proxy it provides. Headlines in recent years on the hot issues of Ebonics and bilingual education demonstrate the widespread misunderstanding of the underpinnings of those issues and of language in general. As a member of LSA's Committee on Language in the School Curriculum from 1996 to 1998, I noted that most of the committee's discussion focused on language issues stemming from diversity. While we understand many of the linguistic principles underlying variation in language (vernacular and prestige dialects) and multilingualism in society, addressing the many educational and social issues that arise in connection with diversity remains a complex undertaking.

Our research, for example, points to an array of advantages stemming from the instruction of immigrant students through their native language while they learn English (and beyond). In the real world of schools in the United States, however, we find a serious shortage of qualified teachers who know the languages of students who are in the process of learning English, among other limitations in their readiness to work with second language learners. We cannot afford to offer a simple 'either/or' statement or prescription; we must consider the full picture and explore ways of tackling such issues using all the knowledge and resources that can be mustered from applied fields (in this example, through such means as increasing the preparation of bilingual teachers or finding alternative instructional methods and supports for the students) (Genesee 1999). Issues related to language diversity in schooling arise in many countries, of course, and it is common for students around the world to encounter schools where the language of instruction is not their mother tongue (Dutcher 1995).

Policy and planning in language-related contexts

Closely related to the two areas just discussed are policy and planning concerns in language-related contexts, an important area of applied linguistics application. Increases in diversity related to political developments call for policies to promote the welfare of individuals, groups, and societies. The movement of populations

around the world (the 20th Century has been called 'The Century of the Refugee') and the realignment of national boundaries has created enormous needs for policies to address educational, social, and political matters, and then planning to implement these policies. The decisions to be made require substantial information about languages, language use, and language learning, not to mention clarification of misunderstandings and debunking of myths in all of those areas. There are obvious language-policy decisions, such as the designation of an official language, as well as policy decisions where the role of language is less obvious, such as financial decisions about providing interpreters in court proceedings. As we know, the United States does not have an explicit formally stated language policy, but there are implicit language policies embodied in diverse federal, state, and local laws and regulations (Christian [Forthcoming]). Policy formulation and analysis that is informed by linguistic expertise is increasingly needed.

It is clear that much better information and understanding of how language works and how people learn languages is needed. Many myths and misconceptions about language pervade public discourse and underlie policy decisions at all levels. Many arguments against bilingual education, for example, can be traced to a belief that maintaining a native language lessens the 'space available' for mastering the majority language. There is also a popular conception that standard varieties of a language are somehow inherently better than vernacular varieties ('good' and 'bad' English, as we've all heard about) (Wolfram et al 1999). The link needs to be made between social/political issues and accurate linguistic information, a connection that can be found in the scope of applied linguistics.

Issues in business and the workplace

It has become almost a cliché to talk about the 'global' economy and globalization of business. As corporations and governments work multinationally, understanding how to accomplish communication across languages and cultures becomes increasingly important. Translation, interpretation, and language learning for specific purposes are skills that more and more businesses value. Many companies are themselves multinational and face situations not unlike multilingual societies. One such corporation, for example, grappled with a corporate language policy, deciding what language would be the common language across offices around the world (not surprisingly, English was chosen), and what levels of language skills were needed by staff in different positions in the various offices.

Language issues in the workplace have also grown in salience recently. In the mid-1980s, Shirley Brice Heath and Charles Ferguson organized and taught a course on 'Language in Professional Contexts' at the LSA Institute at the University of Illinois—Urbana/Champaign, one of the first attempts to bring together developing knowledge about professional varieties (primarily of English), including those in law, insurance, medicine, and so on, with a particular view toward what linguistics could contribute. Interest in discourse in professional settings is growing, and technology contexts (and applications) are of great concern now. As linguistic diversity in the workplace has gotten more attention, cross-

cultural communication, vocational language learning, and language assessment are emerging as bigger issues in need of input from applied linguists.

Future directions in applied linguistics

Working on the issues outlined in the last section is clearly going to take us well into the next millennium. For future directions in applied linguistics, we should also consider features of the changing context that will have implications for our work, as we think about problems outside linguistics that would benefit from linguistic tools and information.

A recent study of trends for non-profit organizations illuminated some of these changes underway. KPMG Peat Marwick 1997 undertook the study to inform public service organizations of the forces that will affect their work in the next decade. Several of the themes they consider relate clearly to language issues (demographic, economic, and technological), although the authors do not specifically draw those connections. A brief look at their conclusions can highlight focal areas — some ongoing, some new — that may call for attention from applied linguists.

Within the DEMOGRAPHIC theme, two trends are noteworthy here. First, the population will continue to grow more diverse, but the notion of a 'melting pot' is being transformed into an expectation of multiculturalism, where cultural diversity is appreciated and individuals take pride in their heritage. We may look forward to increasing interest in language revitalization and better cross-cultural communication. Second, the population will be significantly older: 'While one in every 25 people was over age 65 in 1900, by 2040, one in every four or five Americans will be over 65' (KPMG Peat Marwick 1997:2). Language issues related to aging will not only be medical in origin (language pathologies), but also social (cross-group communication patterns), and cognitive (language learning and development).

The ECONOMIC theme highlights a 'growing demand for knowledge workers' and an 'increase in international competition' for the United States. Preparing students and workers for 'knowledge' industries calls for different types of skills than workers have needed in the past, many of which depend on language-related competencies. They include new types of communication processes, literacy skills, and technical language skills, that need to be better understood so that they may be developed and assessed.

Finally, the TECHNOLOGICAL theme points out trends that may be having the most dramatic effects upon our lives. Technology is 'changing the way we learn, work, and govern' (KPMG Peat Marwick 1997:7). As people and institutions are increasingly linked through technology, communication and education are becoming independent of time and location, causing a transformation in our habits and expectations. This trend affects both the demands on language, as the medium of communication, and the ways in which we learn and assess language. For example, conceptions of what constitute 'literacy' are changing, as it expands to include visual, non-print, as well as print domains (consider the use of icons on

computers, fast-food restaurant cash registers, and elsewhere). There is also 'increased public access to information', that calls for more sophisticated systems for organizing and presenting information to diverse audiences.

In a review closer to home, a National Science Foundation report in 1996 looked at linguistics from the perspective of developing human capital, identifying research questions for the future and potential areas for contributions from linguistics (Wolfram & Schilling-Estes 1996). The panel was convened by Walt Wolfram and set its premise as follows:

Given the cognitive basis of the human language faculty and the sociocultural context in which language use is embedded, linguistic investigation has played and should continue to play a central role in advancing our basic understanding of the effective utilization of human capital. (Wolfram and Schilling-Estes 1996:1)

The panel found strong links between areas of linguistic research and potential contributions to inter-related issues that are basic to building human capital. These themes provide another perspective on issues outside linguistics that applied linguists can positively affect. They include:

- 'fostering successful families' (p. 4)
- 'building strong neighborhoods' (p. 5)
- 'educating for the future' (p. 6)
- 'employing a productive workforce' (p. 8)
- 'reducing disadvantage in a diverse society' (p. 9)
- 'overcoming poverty and deprivation' (p. 10)

Conclusion

This brief review is by no means exhaustive. Issues have been mentioned as indicative of the kinds of topics applied linguistics can and should be addressing, particularly as we move into through the changing contexts of the future. Linguists need to play a role in applied linguistics — if they don't, others will deal with language issues and not nearly as well — but they must be prepared to work with specialists from other disciplines and to draw on other knowledge-bases in addition to linguistics.

Students of linguistics must be allowed and encouraged to explore both applied and theoretical issues as they make their ways to their degrees and decide where to specialize. Part of the changing context is, of course, the changing student population. The typical graduate or even undergraduate students have significantly more work experience than in the past, and many are working professionally while they pursue their studies. This provides a natural venue for taking a problem-solving approach to linguistics learning. INTERNSHIPS or practica would also provide real experiences in real life problems, in areas of business, government, education, social services, and a wide variety of other settings.

Linguistics departments should also make excellent courses available to students in other specialties, to inspire knowledgeable and interested collabora-

tors in our future interdisciplinary efforts (as well as to help develop a better-informed citizenry).

Students of linguistics need to get into the field and work on theoretical issues (these are not mutually exclusive by any means!) to appreciate the value of both. If they head toward applied linguistics areas, in particular, they must be given the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to identify and address language problems in interdisciplinary ways. They also must understand the need to monitor the changing context to look for signs that will tell us where the practical language problems of the future lie. We must ensure that the accumulated knowledge and tools of linguistics remain at the table when language-related problems are taken up.

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