THE CHALLENGE OF APPLIED LINGUISTICS AS A KNOWLEDGE BUILDER

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Abstract: The attempt to encourage the productive availability of the academic research in the domain of applied linguistics makes the article focus on its development from real-life experiences to the curricular academic discipline and its spectacular investigation outcomes under science rigorousness. The emphasis prevails on identifying the relationship between theoretical interpretations and approaches and their diversified practicalities. The article develops insights of the domain from real-life-concerns to academic curricular disciplines and back to their corresponding coherent actual achievements of practicality. The newly born fields and their legitimate applications stand proof to the abounding creativity of the increasing innovative associations between linguistics and other academic research domains which result in further development closures making linguistics a never ending source of study for authentic knowledge building and practice.

Motto: The mystery of the Universe is its comprehensibility

Albert Einstein

Keywords: language centrality pragmatics, applied linguistics domain extension, human nature understanding, social and cultural development, language study-based technology

Historical Background Introduction

The increasing comprehension of nature, meaning and forces that make the world move are brought into our life by the advancement of science. The convergence of man and nature makes us dependent parts of nature and simultaneously, makes nature the object of our thoughts, actions and scientific investigations and confer human nature generic significance. Meaning has been added accurately to information by scientific methods, techniques of analysis, explanations and classifications. (Chomsky, 1982) Language centrality to life development and its understanding has been acknowledged as

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the power of universals, the basic expression of man's ability to transcend environment and break through the limits of his power. The development and extension of the integralist philosophical vision of David Hume considered language as an organic structure that belonged to the world seen as a whole. The mechanisms and their rules were the ones to make the wholeness of the world through the linking capacity of the language instrument. The pre-existent natural rule of the divine was not to be conceived but only applied and made public. The vocabulary of the time was self-speaking for the expression of the mechanicist concept: natural laws, social contract, the everlasting law principles, determined life rules, etc. It was the time of Newton's rules governing the world that was to draw people's behavior and activity. It was not man ruling the universe, but the law subduing man. (Commmager, 1998:316)

The revolution of language study approach turned the static and theoretical linguistics into an analytical instrument of science. The Evolutionist[1] and the American Pragmatism[2] made possible the movement from the static study of linguistic symbol to the dynamic study of language as an instrument of logical reaction that opened the opportunity to a mature new vision on it. The following deliberate undertaking of Darwin evolutionist principles against Newton philosophy[3] made language theoretical inductive study shift to an applicative deductive one. The library and laboratory type of study was replaced by productive, functional and interpretative analysis of language phenomena and processes. But the pragmatic approach went even deeper into applied solution search. Theoretical descriptions were not a subject of interest anymore, but its mechanisms sources and its living structures. Whether Evolutionism was a philosophical attitude, Pragmatism sought for analysis and solutions. The applied work in linguistic research was facilitated by the development of statistics and language corpus study principles in the 20th century that made applied linguistics a skyrocket successful instrument of democratic progress and prosperity based on commercial analysis rather than on a technical one.

It is our interest in the consistent real-life applications of linguistic research that makes us consider the configuration of its progress. The undertaking of our article

[1] *a common 19th century consideration of inherent development of biological progress through complex inherited change which included cultural and social evolution. (Boyd, and Richerson, 1985)*
[2] *philosophical approach that originated in the United States at the end of the 19th century. The 'classical pragmatists' were Charles Sanders Peirce (1839–1914), William James (1842–1910) and John Dewey (1859–1952).*
[3] Isaac Newton (1642–1727) British scientist who is credited with the invention of calculus a decade before Leibniz, with his theory of universal gravity and the transformation of early modern natural philosophy into modern physical science.

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encompasses the development of applied research of language into the diversified academic curriculum recognition that ultimately gives sense to its practical achievements for further knowledge building.

From definition to domain development

As the debates developed by any research domain depend on the starting definitions given to the topics under investigation, we decided to frame out the amplitude of *applied linguistics* domain based on interpretations of various criteria and research objectives and methods. Nevertheless, the delicacy and volatility of the domain makes its definition controversial and unstable.

The open nature of the academic unit of applied linguistics makes it difficult to define it as "it means many things to many people" (Cook, 2006) and it activates a whole array of theoretical and practical questions and concerns by adding research tracks to knowledge and understanding through the specific instrumentality of language. The cross-disciplinarity nature of applied linguistic concern is evidenced in most of the definitions given by the professionals involved in the matter. Yet, the issues placed at the "point at which all the branches of linguistics intersect with other disciplines" (Kaplan, 1980) are not always understood or valued appropriately. (Davies, 2007:2)

The acknowledgement of the wide-cross disciplinarity of the domain made attempts to define it in macro-level terms:

- theoretical and empirical investigation of real world problems in which language is a central issue (Brumfit,1997: 18-30)
- social and political problems in the world in which language is implicated (Cook, 2002:5)
- a practice-driven discipline that addresses language based problems in real world contexts (Grabe, 2002:3-12).

The general formulations delineate a wide and diversified range of real-life aspects, research methods, instruments, theories making applied linguistics a spreading umbrella to cover them all. The International Association for Applied Linguistics[4], the calls for specialized conferences, the names of distinct reviews, the titles of articles and

[4]*AILA was settled in 1964 as an association of various national organizations for applied linguistics. It has more than 8,000 members in more than 30 different applied linguistics associations around the world. It is the organizer of a high-profile World Congress of Applied Linguistics taking place once every three years and it issues two publications AILA News, a newsletter, and the AILA Review, an academic journal. (Ayoun, 2007:3).*

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books promote diversity of overlapping areas of academic research in the domain. They are the result of organic growth of professional identities which focus on their outcome as social products, not as domains of coherence.(Liddicoat, 2010) The relationship between its composing elements is settled by Spolsky (2005:26-36) as a 'cover term for a sizable group of semi-autonomous disciplines' with reference to language policies.

The closeness of *applied linguistics* to its mother domain of *linguistics* raises questions on whether particular areas of research come within applied linguistics or not and develops serial options on their commonality. Consequently, *applied linguistics* is defined according to its content (Halliday, 1990:176) and is made different by the various perspectives or points of view that make it branch up into cross-disciplinary domains which become more and more subordinated. Thus, the advancement of knowledge and understanding has generated thematic approaches that are not defined by content, but by aspect, perspective, or point of view.

The diversification of approaches and perspectives made the 19th century language research to start from the standpoint of language history, and extend its cross-complementarity in the 20th century. The language content research was given the status of curriculum subject which was followed by the domain endless subdivision accompanied by corresponding taxonomies: grammar, literature, then morphology, syntax, and vocabulary study, discourse analysis, etc. The argumentative 20th century structuralist, cybernetic and later cladistics approaches contributed to the redefinition of applied understanding of the systematic, self-regulating and growing individuation nature of languages. (Halliday, 1990:176) The *semiotic* perspective has investigated language phenomenon as information and associated it productively to psychology, sociology and language teaching activity that made the domain extend its complexness and many-sidedness that brought in the first issue of the Journal of Applied Linguistics at the mid 20th century. (Grabe, 2012:3-13)

The nomination phrase has been defined and interpreted differently since then, but it commonly referred to structures and functions of the second language acquisition and literacy. The real-world social and professional contextualization brought about the application of theoretical studies boost language teaching and learning, (Widdowson, 1977; 1983) multilingualism, (Edwards, 2009) language policies, standardization and planning, (Coulmas, 1991) language teacher training (Wallace, 1991). Consequently, language role in any human affairs has fostered responsibility of its centrality research on

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learning process and its pedagogy, technology, ideology, cognition and brain research, culture, socialization and pragmatics, language planning and policies. Approaches and standpoints make evident the relationship between the different definitions given to the domain and the corresponding current research outcomes.

The relationship between language theory and the process of teaching (Ortega, 2005) was reconsidered in terms of psychologically motivated learning strategies, neurologic mechanism of learning, and sociological approach to communication, cross-cultural communication that bounced language centrality to a variety of professions and social activities. Modern functionalist theories have integrated diachronic study of language in the cognitive sciences that converted the latest most sophisticated and advanced stages on brand-new language knowledge and learning development.

The given diversity of approaches and directions of the language study make new contextualized definitions of applied linguistics which are consistent with social, economic, cultural and political environments. The open areas of language use in professional settings, translation, speech pathology, literacy, and language education, are not merely applications of linguistic knowledge to these settings but they make semiautonomous and interdisciplinary operating areas such as anthropology, cultural studies, and psychology. (Pennycook, 2001)

The real-world practical problems are still driving the increasing diversity of the field which is now claiming further developments of corpus linguistics associated with the growing contribution of technology. (Kaplan, 2002: 514-15) bringing about further complexity of the domain definition:

- Literacy problems (linguistic and learning issues)
- Language contact problems (language and culture)
- Language inequality problems (ethnicity, class, region, gender, and age)
- Language policy and planning problems (status planning and corpus planning; ecology of language)
- Language assessment problems (validity, reliability, usability, responsibility)
- Language use problems (dialects, registers, discourse communities, gate-keeping situations, limited access to services)

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- Language and technology problems (learning, assessment, access and use)
- Translation and interpretation problems (on-line, off-line, technology assisted)
- Language pathology problems (aphasias, dyslexia, physical disabilities)

(*from Caudery (2002) revision of Kaplan. R. The Oxford Handbook of Applied linguistics, in TESL-EJ, Vol.6.no.3*)

The emergent theories on language learning, derived from Vygotskian socio-cultural speculations are believed to provide a considerable potential to illuminate each other (Ellis, and Larsen-Freemen, 2006:558-89; Lantolf, 2006:717-28), and cultural awareness in language acquisition process (Stern, 2003:589-593; Arbib, 2012), language learnability, (Brighton, Kirby, and Smith, 2005), cognition development through language learning (Bybee, 2010), brain shaping and behavioral science (Christiansen and Chater, 2008: 489-509; Evans, and Levinson, 2009:429-448), language change and development (Croft, 2000) artificial intelligence, (Holland, 1992) ecology of language (Mufwene, 2001) are now considered important dimensions of linguistic studies which enlarge the current definitions given to applied linguistics.

Academic constructs of Applied linguistics

Applied linguistics began academic life in the 1950's as a post graduate qualification. Its practical, policy oriented academic inquiry (Davies, 2007:11) currently calls for producing knowledge and understanding aiming their endorsement and assessment through scholar practices. (Appadurai, 1996:32) The recognition of applied linguistics research practices in academic terms derives rather from its generally accepted methods and truths (Shumway and Messer-Davidow, 1991:202) that make sense to its specific competence and authority. Academic ascendancy of applied linguistics involved theoretical and practical standards and rigour which are enforced by the scholar community of the discipline (Liddicoat, 2010) aiming to achieve two main functions:

- communicate about the knowledge outcome in areas of common interest
- produce, acknowledge and debate regulations and appropriate practices of the discipline (Parker, 2002:373-86; Liddicoat, 2010)

The development of academic constructs of applied linguistics curriculum resulted in a "continuous process of boundary-work designed to achieve an apparent differentiation

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of goals, methods, capabilities and substantive expertise" (Gieryn, 1983:781-95; Liddicoat, 2010) that are transferred into practical proficiency, know-how and breaking through technologies and instruments.

It was the Second World War historical and cultural environment that made applied linguistic research became a key academic driver for language teaching and learning to match the military needs of the American soldiers to speak and use efficiently the languages of the territories where they were dispatched. It was the time for the application of academic language analysis to language teaching that drove in the introduction of audio-lingual methods as a result of the rising behaviorist psychology. (Weideman, 1994: 3-23). Charles Fries[5] (1988:51-59) was the first language practitioner who claimed linguistic principles to work for the consistency of language contents management in the progress of language learning. (Weideman, 1994:3-23) The approach of the linear and hierarchic contrastive linguistic analysis which considered language structure beyond the sentence level, (Lado, 1957:135) called for the academic standards rule and specifically appropriate evaluation instruments. (Liddicoat, 2010)

The germane controversial second language research issues have been tremendously developed since 1980. The nature and effects of classroom discourse - the challenges and utility of linguistic theory and linguistic descriptions, what knowing a second language means in terms of proficiency and processing - nature and nurture in second language learning, how people process language in classrooms and beyond- the role of instruction and the roles of teachers, etc. (McDonough, 2002) Academic approaches to the language planning/policy developed in terms of education and professional training and deal with a wide geographical and conceptual scope. Topics like language choice, linguistic correctness, (self-) censorship, hate speech, linguistic ethnic and linguistic national identity, gender language or language of political power or professional acculturation process are curricular concerns offered by academic qualification in applied linguistics. (Davies, 2007:1-9) The concern in the second language acquisition theory and pedagogy (Schmitt, 2000:1-9) has further developed into a wide-range of sub-disciplines that have been fairly acknowledged as falling within the field of *applied linguistics* and made it an emergent discipline of the twenty-first century. (Grabe, 2012)

[5] *Fries, Charles Carpenter (1887-1967) was a linguist specialized in English teaching at the University of Michigan; concerned with the teaching methods that could be used for a language to be better taught and learnt*

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The theoretical models of language functions developed by Roman Jacobson[6] extended the linguistic practical concerns into new areas of language study and learning development, such as writing. (Hébert, 2011:710-744). His hypothesis on the phonemes, as the smallest units of speech sounds, which he considered as complexes of binary features, led to the further development of the 20th century new communication technology.

The academic interest that applied linguistics developed in the ability of language use made a sharp distinction between speaking and understanding which derives from the nature of their practicality. Chomskyan linguistics[7] , who disconsidered the social context of language use, but considered exclusively the intrinsic generative creativity of language, made systematicity of linguistic variations be acknowledged as an imperative object of study in itself. (Anshen&Arnoff, 1981: 63-72; Chomsky, 1966:975) Still, the *structuralist approach* contributed to the development of applied linguistics by the trivial support that governments gave for the teaching of languages, and made it central to the pragmatic development of cross-related professional fields pointing to the self-consciousness and self definition. (Hymes; Fought 1975:12-13) The relationship that he established between language and psychology made room to the curricular *cognitive psychology* that opened new paths for language acquisition theory in opposition to the B.F. Skinner's behaviorist verbal learning theory[8].

The development of the socio-political approach to the use and employment of language points to the broader, macroscopic social environment and to its further practical applications.

Conclusions

[6] *Russian-American linguist (1896, Moscow-1982, Boston), founder of the European movement of structural linguistics known as the School of Prague. The European political situation, made him flee successively from Russia to the universities of Copenhagen, Oslo, and Uppsala, Sweden, where he developed his teaching and research activity as visiting professor. In 1941 he started his teaching at Columbia University (1943–49) then he moved to Harvard University. (1949–67).*

[7] *According to Noam Chomsky, linguistic cognition and ability are the output of a universal inborn ability or "language acquisition device" (LAD) that enables individuals to use their mother tongue grammar systematically and produce phrases. His thesis claims that an inherent linguistic ability will acknowledge underlying syntactical relationship within a sentence. He argues that the basic logic or deep structures of languages are the same, and human mastery of mother tongue is genetically determined, not learned. The language aspects that humans must learn are termed surface structure. He makes the distinction between knowledge of language rules and structures – competence and language use – performance. (D'Agostino, 1986)*

[8] *B.F. Skinner (1904-1990) is credited to have developed the operant-conditioning learning function according to the reinforcement vs. punishment. His theory does not suggest the cognitive component of learning.*

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The truth of practical linguistic research associated to other domains needs to be looked for in terms of further social experience and development, as its applicability is more functional and useful in terms of social and economic objectives than its contents. It must meet and it should be studied in terms of social needs. The historical study of language opens to its capacity to innovate and create as a continued social product which is subject of permanent development and social engineering. Language study should focus on social advantage and wealth to defend individual rights and obligations in terms of safety and social liberties. (Commmager, 1998:384)

The impact of the applied linguistic research has been dramatically prompt and comprehensive due to its focus on its social context and practical potentiality rather than on internal functionality rules which made it highly respectable. Its pragmatic practicality has proved and instrument of making the individual adapt to social life realities in the nowadays of urban industrialized and political environment aiming to the rightful democratic social system.

The philosophy of applied linguistic research is committed to the wholeness and complexity of human nature and an instrument of universal consideration.

The pragmatics of applied linguistics is meant to develop knowledge resulting from life experience itself.

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