



HELLENIC REPUBLIC

National and Kapodistrian
University of Athens

Applied Linguistics to Foreign Language Teaching and Learning

Unit 1: An Introduction to Applied Linguistics

Bessie Dendrinou

School of Philosophy

Faculty of English Language and Literature

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1. What is Applied Linguistics?

As with many other disciplines in the Humanities, there are different views about what Applied Linguistics is.

Task 1:

Read the following definitions and think about the title question.

1. Whenever knowledge about language is used to solve a basic language-related problem, one may say that Applied Linguistics is being practiced. Applied Linguistics is a technology which makes abstract ideas and research findings accessible and relevant to the real world, it mediates between theory and practice (International Encyclopedia of Linguistics, 1992:76).
2. Applied Linguistics is concerned with a) the study of language and linguistics in relation to practical problems such as lexicography, translation etc.; b) the study of second and foreign language learning and teaching. [This discipline] ...uses information from sociology, psychology ...as well as from linguistics in order to develop its own theoretical models of language and language use, and then uses this information and theory in practical areas such as syllabus design, language planning etc. (Longman Dictionary of Applied Linguistics, 1985:15).
3. Applied Linguistics is the application of linguistic theories, descriptions and methods to the solution of language problems which have arisen in a range of human, cultural and social contexts Carter (1993: 3). If linguistics reifies "language" one can say that Applied Linguistics reifies more than language; it reifies "language practices".

2. What is the relationship between Linguistics and Applied Linguistics?

Task 2:

Read the three statements below and answer the title question.

1. A very common perception of Linguistics is that it constitutes a discipline whose purpose is the study of language with a view to understanding of how the linguistic system – disconnected from its social context and its users– is structured into meaningful patterns that reflect the operations of the mind. In case of this or similar conceptions of Linguistics, there is a sharp divide between this discipline, sometimes referred to as Theoretical (less often referred to as Autonomous) Linguistics and the field of Applied Linguistics, which is perceived as the broad field of language study and analysis that provides knowledge and information that may be of "practical value" in that it facilitates understanding of social practices, psychological or cognitive operations and pedagogic processes.
2. Linguistics, viewed as above, does not use the knowledge developed from linguistic study for the solution of problems in human, social and cultural contexts (as does Applied Linguistics). Moreover, it borrows no insights from other disciplines (as does 'Interdisciplinary' Linguistics, including Cognitive Linguistics, Psycholinguistics and Sociolinguistics). This is one reason why an alternative and perhaps more correct name for Theoretical Linguistics is Autonomous Linguistics. The main characteristic of this school of thought is that language is an autonomous meaning system; i.e. that the meaning of linguistic signs is arbitrary.
3. There are, however, other important schools of thought, which maintain that language is socially situated and therefore must be studied in relation to the sociocultural reality by which it is constructed and which it reproduces. Here, linguistic meaning is not autonomous and

language is not viewed or studied outside of the social context which it helps to interpret. In this tradition, Linguistics, the clear distinction between Theoretical, Applied and Interdisciplinary Linguistics becomes blurred.

Task 3:

Look at Tables 1 and 2 below, and say which of the views above seem to inform each of them.

Table 1: Campbell (1980)

| | | |
|---|-----------------------|--------------|
| Linguistics, Psychology/Psycholinguistics, Sociology/Sociolinguistics ⇒ | Applied Linguistics ⇒ | Pedagogy |
| Theoretician | Mediator | Practitioner |

Table 2: Areas of Linguistics

| Theoretical linguistics | Interdisciplinary linguistics | Applied linguistics |
|--|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Phonology, • Morphology, • Syntax & structural grammar, • Semantics, • Historical linguistics. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Psycholinguistics, • Sociolinguistics, • Pragmatics, • Discourse analysis, • Computational [and corpus] linguistics. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Applied Linguistics to language education, • Applied linguistics to foreign language education, • Translation studies, • Lexicography. |

Task 4:

Now look at another way of categorizing areas of linguistic study and think about the differences with the categorisation in Table 2.

Table 3: Ways of Studying Language

| Synchronic study of language | Diachronic study of language |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Study of the formal properties of language. • Study of meaning in and/or through language. • The study of the use of language (by users / in texts). | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The history of language. • The study of language birth, death, development and change over time. |
| Psycholinguistic study of language: Language acquisition | Psycholinguistic study of language: The development of cognition / knowledge |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How language is acquired by human beings. • How language is learned by groups or individuals. • How language competence and literacy are developed. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The operations of the mind/brain and the body. • How information is stored and retained. • How meaning is perceived and transmitted. • Language and the affective domain / |

| | |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How bilinguals or plurilinguals function. | emotion. |
| Sociolinguistic study of language: Language use | Sociolinguistic study of language: Language in society |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How language is used by social agents/subjects/individuals. • How language operates in different sociocultural contexts. • How language operates in discourse and text. • Language-thought and how it is represented. • Functions of language encoding and expressing social, ideological, political meanings. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regional and social varieties of language. • Attitudes to language. • Conflict over language(s). • Planning, protecting, promoting language(s). • Language as a marker of identity. • Language and social stratification, gender, age. • Language across cultures. |

3. What is the field of Applied Linguistics concerned with?

Because much of the work in the area deals with foreign language teaching, Applied Linguistics is often perceived as the field that uses insights from Linguistics for the benefit of foreign language education. However, such a view overlooks a great deal of important contributions of Applied Linguistics to a significant number of other areas, including studies in feminism (Feminist Linguistics), artificial intelligence and information technology (Computational and Corpus Linguistics), ecological studies (Eco-linguistics), Lexicography, Language planning and policy. Cook (2003: 8) presents a list of areas that concern Applied Linguistics and divides this list into three categories with their subsequent subcategories as in Table 6 below.

Task 5:

Taking into account what you know, think about Applied Linguistics in a broader perspective –as “problem-based researching into communication mediated issues in social life” (Candlin, in Sealy and Carter 2004: 17)– and thinking of additional areas, such as Literacy studies, Bilingualism, Contrastive Linguistics and Error Analysis, Cross-cultural and Intercultural communication, complete Table 4.

Table 4: Applied Linguistics

| Language and education | Language, work and the law | Language, information and effect |
|--|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • First language education, • Second language education, • Foreign language education, • Clinical linguistics, • Language testing. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workplace communication, • Language planning, • Forensic linguistics. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Literary stylistics, • Critical discourse analysis, • Translation and Interpretation, • Information design, • Lexicography. |

Task 6:

Now look at Table 5, with further divisions of one of the subcategories above, and think about whether there is any other division that you would add.

Table 5: Applied Linguistics to Foreign Language Education

- Interlanguage analysis,
- Classroom discourse (analysis),
- Academic writing,
- English for special purposes (ESP),
- Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL),
- Curriculum development and syllabus design,
- Materials design,
- Researching language learning,
- Researching the use of L1 in foreign language teaching.

Task 7:

On the basis of your knowledge and experience as foreign language learners, reflect and attempt to answer the questions below.

- What do you know about how languages are learned?
- How do differences among learners affect learning processes and teaching procedures?
- What motivations do learners have for learning English?
- What factors of context should teachers take into account?
- What roles can learners and teachers play in the in the language learning process?
- What roles can learning materials play in the classroom?

Task 8:

Reflect on your answers after you have read Chapter 1 of Johnson (2001).

Considering the type of knowledge, competence and skills which are to be developed in particular pedagogic contexts:

- How does one organize the content of what is to be taught and learnt? (Curriculum and syllabus development) – THE “WHAT”.
- How does s/he organize the teaching/learning process? (Planning knowledge transmission and classroom interaction) – THE “HOW”.

Considering the language learning aims and the teaching/learning setting:

- In what ways will the “what” and the “how” best be articulated in teaching/learning materials? (Materials design and/or selection).
- How will the learning outcomes be evaluated, assessed or measured? (Test construction and design of other measurement tools).

Table below 6 presents a schematic representation of the course content.

Table 6: Foreign language teaching and learning

| | |
|-------------------------------|---|
| Theory of language ⇨ | Developing the curriculum / syllabus |
| Theory of language learning ⇨ | Planning the teaching learning process |
| Theory of assessment ⇨ | Evaluating results |
| | ↓ Practices of EFL Teaching & Learning |

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Notes

Note on History of Published Versions:

The present work is the edition 1.0.

Reference Note:

Copyright National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, Bessie Dendrinou. Bessie Dendrinou. "Applied Linguistics to Foreign Language Teaching and Learning. An introduction to Applied Linguistics". Edition: 1.0. Athens 2014. Available at: <http://opencourses.uoa.gr/courses/ENL6/>.

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This work makes use of the following works:

Table 1: Based on Campbell R.N. (1980). Towards a redefinition of applied linguistics. In Kaplan R.B. (ed.) On the Scope of Applied Linguistics. Newbury House.

Financing

- The present educational material has been developed as part of the educational work of the instructor.
- The project “Open Academic Courses of the University of Athens” has only financed the reform of the educational material.
- The project is implemented under the operational program “Education and Lifelong Learning” and funded by the European Union (European Social Fund) and National Resources.

