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Applied linguistics beyond postmodernism

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Applied linguistics clearly has modernist roots, which have steadily been eroded by postmodernist views. Opposites, such as quantitative and qualitative, or positivist and postpositivist, are often used to characterise this intellectual conflict. The current ascendancy of a potentially modernist paradigm, a dynamic or complex systems approach, will be noteworthy for drawing our attention to at least two complex linguistic ideas that have not adequately been analysed in linguistic theory. A foundational, philosophical analysis of such trends, as attempted in this article, should adopt a fittingly humble stance. That kind of humility, however, also applies across paradigms: the arrival of a new paradigm in the field is a timely reminder that enduring domination of a single paradigm in any discipline remains unlikely.

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A recent analysis of the themes of positivism and postpositivism in applied linguistics once again made it clear to me that the history of applied linguistics can also be viewed – and perhaps more accurately as an interplay of modernist and postmodernist forces (Weideman 2013). In addition, the analysis reinforced my premise that conceptualisations of the foundations of the field of applied linguistics need to be done both in a historical and a systematic way. If an analysis surveys only the history of this discipline, it has no other than a historical measure by which to evaluate and assess the strengths of prevailing (and by that measure influential) paradigms (see Linn 2008). Yet, if it is backed by a systematic framework that allows an assessment of the relative strengths and merits of one approach as against another, whether that be an earlier or a subsequent approach, it has found a mode of evaluation that potentially has salutary effects on making a judgement also as to the integrity and wholeness of the discipline or, in some instances, the lack thereof.

If we take as the start of applied linguistics not merely the concern, stretching over many centuries, with language teaching and learning, or with the assessment of language ability, but rather the mid-twentieth-century effort to secure a rational, scientific basis for language teaching designs, then we are interpreting applied linguistic work as being of a very specific disciplinary nature. This discipline is concerned with design (Corder 1972: 6; Cope & Kalantzis 2000: 7). Applying scientific insight to the concrete and individual context need not, in every instance, lead to design: for that a further, separate stage of preparation and planning is necessary (Schuurman 1972: 362). In applied linguistics, however, that stage of forming and shaping is evident almost without fail. This systematic starting point, which I shall return to below, is important, because it holds across all the various interpretations, both modernist and postmodernist, of applied linguistic work over the past six decades.

Today, the designs in question relate in the main to how language courses are conceived and planned; how language tests are designed and developed, or to what plans and policies are devised and tailored to manage language across institutions such as schools or universities, across systems (such as education systems), or even countries, that need consistency in the official use of languages (see Shohamy 2008). What marks these designs as different from

the plans made before the twentieth century is that they qualify as applied linguistic work only if they can be backed by a theoretical rationale. There is interplay, therefore, between the leading technical design function of an applied linguistic artefact and its grounding analytical or theoretical basis (see Figure 1) (Weideman 2009a: 244). Among the many possible dimensions of applied linguistic designs, these two stand out as terminal, qualifying and foundational modes:

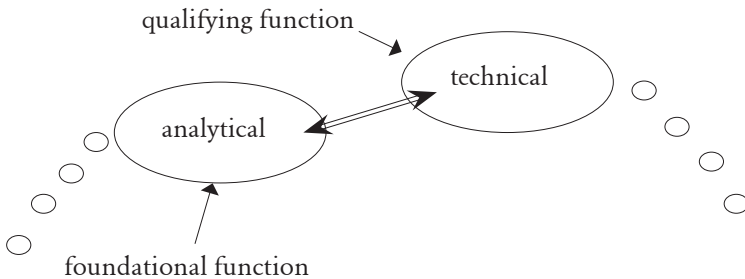


Figure 1: Terminal functions of an applied linguistic design

How does this systematic starting point then relate to what happened in the history of applied linguistics? Viewed historically, applied linguistics clearly has modernist roots. Among the many possible valid interpretations of the idea of ‘modernism’, this article proceeds from the assumption that it is best conceptualised as the idea that science is authoritative, and that in theoretical, analytical activity, we may find the ultimate answers to human problems. In applied linguistics, a modernist basis has been evident from the beginning as a progressivist bias, as Van Els et al. (1984: 11) have observed: “... by applying linguistics it was thought that the scientific status of the natural sciences, which had brought such great technological progress, would be conferred on linguistics as well”. In terms of systematic distinctions, this means that applied linguistics, at the outset, confused its foundational, analytical function with its leading technical design function. It attributes an overblown function to the ‘scientific’ basis of design. As will be illustrated below, postmodernism, on the other hand, mounts an intellectual challenge to modernism in its

anti-progressivist, anti-disciplinary and subversive stance (Pennycook 2004; McNamara 2012a). That modernism did not prevail, however, is equally clear when we survey the seven traditions or styles of doing applied linguistics that are evident in its relatively short modern history.

The uniqueness of each of the different styles or paradigms of devising applied linguistic solutions to language problems lies in the way that each provides a different theoretical rationale, or sometimes a whole set of such rationales for those designs mentioned earlier, that are the stock-in-trade of applied linguistics: language courses, language tests and language policies. Table 1 summarises the successive generations of applied linguistic work that have influenced the design of solutions to language problems (Weideman 2009b: 62).

Table 1: Seven successive traditions within applied linguistics

	Paradigm/Tradition	Characterised by
1	Linguistic/behaviourist	“scientific” approach
2	Linguistic “extended paradigm model”	language is a social phenomenon
3	Multidisciplinary model	attention not only to language, but also to learning theory and pedagogy
4	Second-language acquisition research	experimental and contextual research into how languages are learned
5	Constructivism	knowledge of a new language is interactively constructed
6	Postmodernism	political relations in teaching; multiplicity of perspectives
7	A dynamic/complex systems approach	language emergence organic and non-linear, through dynamic adaptation

This kind of characterisation of how applied linguistics has been done in the past is by no means unproblematic. I shall return to some of the difficulties inherent in this conceptualisation, but one example of such a difficulty is that there are alternatives to viewing the history of the discipline as half a dozen or so consecutive traditions. However, the main point of this interpretation of the history of applied linguistics is not only that there are unique, historically successive

styles of doing applied linguistics, but also that there is historical continuity among them. For example, it is clear that the second tradition advances the concerns of the first, by broadening our view of what is meant by ‘language’. Similarly, there are clear links between the multidisciplinary model proposed by third-generation applied linguistic work and the multiplicity of perspectives that characterise a good part of qualitative and ‘interpretive’, ethnographic work in the field, which undoubtedly belongs to postmodernist approaches (Van Els et al. 1984).

A first difficulty with this kind of characterisation, therefore, concerns its suggestion that the uniqueness of each tradition makes it watertight, that it contains no further hint of other influences. In human affairs, of which responsible academic and applied linguistic work is inescapably part, this kind of neatness of categorisation, of course, does not always hold, especially in light of actual practice. The historical continuity remarked on earlier thus indicates that there is more to the history of applied linguistics than a succession of uniquely different traditions. However, this categorisation nonetheless constitutes a first set of conceptual ‘handles’ by which we can attempt to understand historically different styles of applied linguistic work.

A second difficulty, of course, lies in the observation that there are several other ways of characterising the field. I shall, however, discuss some of these ways on the basis of the initial distinctions made earlier by interpreting these alternative characterisations against the backdrop of the framework set out in Table 1.

1. Further systematic ways of characterising the history of applied linguistics

As I remarked at the outset, describing applied linguistics as variations of modernism and postmodernism might be doing it more justice than to say that it is constituted by variations of positivist and postpositivist approaches. Kumaravadivelu (2006: 11), for example, uses these terms interchangeably. He characterises as postmodern a framework that runs counter to the “positivist, prescriptive research paradigm” that is characteristic of modernist approaches. Positivism is, therefore, equated with prescriptive designs, and not surprisingly. Early, modernist applied linguistics, the first generation of work

referred to earlier, awoke expectations that a 'scientific' (and, therefore, theoretically prescriptive) way could be found of fixing any and all problems that had to do, for example, with language teaching. It is exactly this dependence on the authority derived from 'science' that postmodernism contests.

The main differences between modernist and postmodernist approaches to applied linguistics, therefore, lie in the expectations they create (Weideman 2007). Postmodernist approaches not only contest the certainty of being able to obtain a 'scientific' solution to a language problem, but also actively strive to subvert it (Pennycook 2004). In fact, Pennycook (2004: 801) goes so far as to claim that critical, postmodernist applied linguistics creates antidisciplinarity. He does not care for scientific rigour in the sense – often also quantitative intended by modernist approaches. Contrast the following two definitions of applied linguistics (exhibits [1] and [2]) from his postmodernist point of view with the following two (exhibits [3] and [4]), drawn from one of the leading figures in second-generation, but still unmistakably modernist, applied linguistics:

(1) ... critical applied linguistics might be viewed as an approach to language related questions that springs from an assumption that we live amid a world of pain (Pennycook 2004: 797).

(2) Critical applied linguistics is not about developing a set of skills that will make the doing of applied linguistics more rigorous, more objective, but about making applied linguistics more politically accountable (Pennycook 2004: 798).

(3) By studying language in as scientific a manner as possible we should be able to make change in language teaching a matter of cumulative improvement (Wilkins 1975: 208).

(4) We refer to linguistics in an attempt to make the process of change in language teaching less subject to fashion and more dependent on the cumulative increase in our knowledge of language learning and teaching (Wilkins 1975: 228).

Without doubt, the last two definitions echo a reverence for the progressive discovery of truth through scientific analysis, and an improvement of the designs which follow that progression faithfully, that can only be associated with modernism. That kind of starting

point is evidence of a belief that goes far beyond the label ‘positivist’. It is a belief that lies at the heart of modernism.

What the positivist-postpositivist cline does illustrate well, however, is another characterisation that is often applied to research in applied linguistics, namely that between quantitative and qualitative methodologies. I have attempted in Figure 2 to summarise these opposites as continua, first so as to demonstrate the potential that each has for variation between extremes (see Weideman 2013). Secondly, the figure is not intended to illustrate anything more than that any such characterisation seems to overlap, intersect or be congruent, to some degree, with a number of other conceptualisations; what one may call a modernist/postmodernist cline, others may label a positivist/postpositivist range, or even a structuralist/poststructuralist one (McNamara 2012a: 481, note 3; Harissi et al. 2012: 541, note 5):

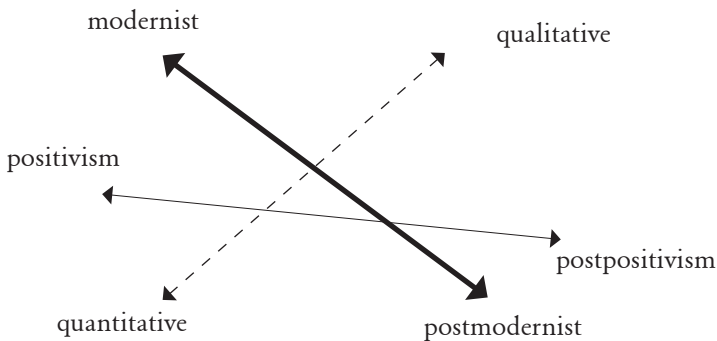


Figure 2: Various categorisations of approaches to applied linguistics

Positivism/postpositivism is, therefore, simply one of several kinds of categorisation that can be used to describe how we go about designing solutions within an applied linguistic framework. It acts, in this instance, as a kind of shorthand for a characterisation that encompasses all of the humanities: the contrast between quantitative and qualitative approaches (see Richards 2009). In a quantitative

approach, the emphasis is on empirical facts, especially as these are expressed in numbers. In a qualitative approach, the focus is, first, on the notion that our observations need analysis and interpretation and, secondly, especially in more politically radical styles of work, also political action.

2. Modernism versus postmodernism: a more encompassing categorisation

As the set of four definitions (exhibits 1 to 4, above) makes clear, however, the classification of styles of doing applied linguistics as 'modernist' and 'postmodernist' probably more accurately reflects the paradigmatic extremes within applied linguistics. Thus, it is noteworthy that almost every style of doing applied linguistics, right up to the sixth tradition, presents us, to a greater or lesser extent, with modernist assumptions. There was some indication, in fifth-generation work that was done from a constructivist point of view, and which in South Africa provided the theoretical basis for an important examination of language as medium of instruction policies at school level, that there may be alternatives to modernist approaches in applied linguistics (see MacDonald & Burroughs 1991). Yet it was not before the advent of ethnographic descriptions of classroom communication that a turning point was reached.

Within the broader postmodernist approach, such ethnographic description is evidence of a milder, at times politically less radical style of doing applied linguistics. It attempts to give 'thick', multifaceted and potentially diverse descriptions of problem situations, and interprets these in light of congruent evidence deriving from a multiplicity of sources and data sets (see Nunan 1992: 57). Its applied linguistic lineage is evidently to be found in third-generation work that emphasised multidisciplinary and, by implication, the multiplicity of perspectives that this brought to applied linguistic endeavour.

For more radical postmodernist approaches, designs that are made to solve language problems must also have accountability (Kumaravadivelu 2003; 2006; Pennycook 2004; Weideman 2006). Since the main intention of a postmodernist design is to begin with the identification of the conflicting and consensual dimensions of problematic language contexts that call for our attention, political

issues often predominate. What postmodernism has contributed to our understanding of improving such designs is that abusive power relations can detrimentally affect accountable solutions for language problems.

3. Does applied linguistics have a ‘source’ discipline?

Apart from the alternative descriptions of applied linguistic endeavour summarised in Figure 2, there is an additional one, which is connected to the relationship that a certain style of doing applied linguistics has to what some call its “source discipline”, linguistics. Though there are fundamentally insurmountable problems with this view, it is not uncommon. Apart from modernist-postmodernist and other categorisations, one could speak, in fact, of linguistic and other conceptualisations of applied linguistics.

It is clear from Table 1 that at least three traditions of applied linguistic work constitute linguistic conceptualisations of the field. They are first-, second- and fourth-generation work. In the third, to some extent in the fifth, and clearly in the sixth paradigm, postmodernism, we have other than linguistic conceptualisations.

Linguistic conceptualisations of applied linguistics derive from viewing applied linguistics as merely an extension of linguistics. Hence, Kaplan’s (1980: 10) thesis: “I would posit that applied linguistics constitutes the point at which all study of language comes together and becomes actualized”. The assumption is that there is a simple continuity between linguistics and applied linguistics, and the motivation for that assumption lies in the modernist starting point of, initially, first-generation applied linguistics, but also in other linguistically oriented traditions in the discipline. Compare, for example, the following claim by Wilkins (1975: 215, emphases added), who posits that:

(5) Linguistics is the subject we are concerned with and *because it has the same subject-matter as language teaching*, we are entitled to assume that it has greater importance ...

Similarly, in second-generation applied linguistics, there is an enduring emphasis on language. This emphasis has led to accusations

of its being technocratic in style, especially in its outlines of how language course syllabi should be designed (see, for instance, Wilkins 1976). It thus remained closely allied with the modernist beginnings so evident in first-generation work. Much the same kind of analysis can be made of the other 'linguistic' orientations among the different generations of applied linguistic work.

Once we have accepted the historical divide between modernism and postmodernism in the field, however, and once we have acknowledged that postmodernism, especially in its more decidedly political tenets, clearly breaks with the tradition of linguistics being the source discipline for applied linguistics, that notion loses all argumentative power. It is exposed as being a typically modernist premise, one that is necessary to sustain the modernist pretence of theoretical work being more authoritative if it can claim some 'scientific' backing. The exposure of the bankruptcy, for example, of what was supposed to be the 'scientific' rationale for the audio-lingual method (Weideman 2007), which flowed from first-generation applied linguistic designs, has put paid to this warped expectation.

Currently, given the dominance of postmodernist thought in applied linguistics, it is common to find a more than linguistic orientation, if not directly in the designs that are made (which are often identified as an Achilles heel of postmodernism), then at least in their execution and implementation. Therefore, asking hard questions such as whose interests are being served when large publishers 'dump' yesterday's designs on developing countries, sometimes with the collaboration of 'experts' from the developed world, as happened in South Africa in the 1980s, are the order of the day. If the former countries are also donor-dependent, what prevents an influential international language from dominating the politically powerless? Even the milder strain in this style of applied linguistic work, which is associated with an ethnographic, interpretive approach, is thoroughly postmodernist in orientation (Weideman 2003).

4. Can applied linguistics go beyond postmodernism?

In the academic world, in general, despite its recent ascendancy to become the dominant paradigm, there currently seems to be a weariness attached to postmodernist analyses. As a result, one finds a renewed

interest in alternative paradigms. For example, when I arrived on a working visit to the Rijksuniversiteit Groningen in the Netherlands in December 2010, there were posters up advertising a conference, under the title: “Beyond aftermaths: Contemporary (post-)postmodernism in the shadow of the twentieth century”. The conference website explains that in “the new millennium, the high tide of postmodernism has passed away. Indeed, writers, artists and thinkers are increasingly extending their scope beyond postmodernism’s voids and silences”, seeking a substitute for its “irony and relativism”, as well as for ways of going beyond the intractable contradictions of postmodern thought (International Conference 2010).¹ In the same fashion, a sense of imminent paradigm change was noticed in commentaries on applied linguistic work just prior to the turn of the century. For example, in introducing a review of applied linguistics at the end of the previous decade, Rampton (1997: 16) remarked:

[...] what does stand out in [...] the state of play in AL [applied linguistics ...] is the level of enthusiasm that authors show for the challenges ahead [...] It is difficult to say whether this forward orientation reflects the end of a phase of fragmentation and the resurgence of a spirit of cross-disciplinary interchange.

At present, that imminent sense of paradigm change has come to fruition in what I described earlier as a seventh tradition or style of applied linguistics, a complex systems approach (Larsen-Freeman & Cameron 2008; De Bot et al. 2007).

5. An emerging new paradigm

Complex systems thinking finds its roots in biology (Kramsch 2008; Larsen-Freeman & Cameron 2008: x, 5). Its key concepts revolve around the adaptability and potential of systems, in particular the ability to self-organise, and “the organic nature of change” within those systems (Larsen-Freeman & Cameron 2008: 1, 17, 33, 62. See also Beckner et al. 2009). The conceptual view of change presented, in this instance, is related not to its original physical understanding, but to a biotic interpretation: “... an organism’s ongoing activity continuously changes its neural states, just as growth changes the

1 <http://www.rug.nl/let/nieuws/LetArchief/2010/20101220_Beyond_Aftermaths>.

physical dimensions of the body” (Larsen-Freeman & Cameron 2008: 17, 29, 32, 72). Therefore, the emphasis on dynamics is an analogical biotic, or organically dynamic one.²

Contrary to the causal explanations that are so typical of modernist thinking, a dynamic systems approach further emphasises that the change being described is essentially non-linear, emerging from the interaction of the multiplicity of components of many interacting systems (Larsen-Freeman & Cameron 2008: 2). Change can be interrupted when such a complex set of interactions is attracted to provisionally stable states (Larsen-Freeman & Cameron 2008: 20, 43, 81, Chapter 3), as, for example, when a language has undergone a process of standardisation or, in the case of the individual, fossilisation. Further lingual phenomena that can be described in terms of such emergent and provisionally stable states are jargon, pidgins and creoles (Lee et al. 2009: 35). Again, such stability is merely a stable potential that can itself become dynamic when the multiplicity of interactions in the complex system that is language tips it out of its provisional stability to move again into uncertain, unstable territory. The main point is that a complex system is sufficiently flexible to maintain its stability through continuous adaptation (Larsen-Freeman & Cameron, 2008: 36, 56), but that also makes its growth trajectory unpredictable in linear terms.

Growth trajectories for unstable complex dynamic systems such as language growth may, however, yield regular patterns for the linguist and applied linguist to attend to. For example, the grammatical subsystem of a language may exhibit a recurrently regular pattern (Larsen-Freeman & Cameron 2008: 84). In its interaction with other systems and subsystems, the various components of the complex system that is language co-adapts for growth and development to occur. Of course, in a complex systems view, there are many more components than, say, lexical and grammatical ones: language also has various subsystems of discourse and lingual interaction in many different spheres.

2 Or dynamic systems, which is the other currently popular term for such an approach, and which is observable, for example, in the noteworthy work of Kees de Bot *c.s.*

The further contribution of a dynamic systems approach lies in the mapping and the mathematical and computer modelling of non-linear growth in a language, which is also variable across learners, and the way that this is nurtured or inhibited in the classroom (see Caspi 2010; Beckner et al. 2009: 12). This kind of perspective on language development, of course, generates new design principles for instructional tasks that should, according to Larsen-Freeman and Cameron (2008: 212), enhance the potential of learning and growth of learners' language if they can be designed "to challenge learners to exploit the meaning potential of their developing systems in new ways". In their observations in this regard, it is evident that Larsen-Freeman & Cameron (2008: 226) again make use of biotically tinged concepts:

[...] language resources of individuals exist only as latent potential to engage in appropriate patterns of interaction until realized in specific discourse environments [...] The challenge is for interaction, tasks and tests to be designed, planned, and managed so as to push and stretch an individual's language resources to the edge of their current potential.

Although the multiplicity of interacting systems is not limited to language, but also includes consideration of cognitive, affective, historical, social, educational and other systems, there remains a sense in which a complex systems approach continues to focus on language. Its alternative and challenge to earlier, generativist accounts of language learning is just that: a new account of language, of language learning, and of language growth.

6. Does it take us beyond postmodernism?

There is little doubt that an approach that views language growth and development from a complex, dynamic systems point of view will take and has already begun to take us beyond postmodernism. The more interesting question seems to be whether it will take us back to modernist ways of thought, and whether it constitutes a revival of that.

If the focus of a complex systems approach remains on language, it has clear affinities with fourth-generation work in second-language acquisition research. To some, its advent will signal merely the passing

of the baton from a generativist generation to one that adopts a complexity perspective. Yet, in terms of the modernist-postmodernist divide, second-language acquisition research, certainly as it was influenced by generativism, is clearly modernist in orientation. In the affinities a complex systems approach has with what some will view as experimental and technocratic styles of work, and its clear links to the natural sciences in its emergentism and use of analogical organic concepts, it might well appear to present a revival of modernism.

In my opinion, that will not be entirely fair. First, from the point of view of its laying bare, and opening up to our theoretical vision of complex linguistic concepts, it is making a substantially new contribution to linguistic (and potentially to applied linguistic) insight. From the systematic perspective that I am employing, there are at least three possible complex linguistic concepts (Weideman 2009c): an idea of the beginning, growth, maturation and possible loss of language (or languages, when one extends this beyond the individual); an idea of the highly complex interaction between lingual subject (the agent who produces language) and lingual object (the product), and the complex idea of the relationship and interplay between lingual norm or principle and lingual fact. Such complex linguistic ideas can only be understood in terms of a number – a multiplicity – of elementary linguistic concepts.

In my opinion, it cannot be contested that what is being dealt with in a dynamic or complex systems approach is at least the first of these, the idea of how language grows and develops, which is described by means of many elementary concepts. For example, the concept of multiple systems that interact and grow or decline is a clear reference within the lingual mode of reality to the numerical; the idea of change, pointed out earlier, singles out an echo that is originally physical, and the notion of lingual adaptability clearly echoes, within the lingual, the organic modality. Similarly, when complex interacting systems become productive in the use of the lingual resources and potential at their disposal, we have an analogically formative concept in the lingual modality. Finally, it should be clear that in the idea of systemic interactivity, we have a modal reference to the social dimension of experience. This is one illustration of how a dynamic systems perspective utilises many elementary linguistic concepts. These elementary linguistic concepts derive, as Verburg (1965, but see also

1951, 1971, 1976), a renowned Groningen linguist, had already alerted us to nearly half a century ago, from the coherence of the lingual (or “delotic”, as he termed it) mode of existence with all other dimensions of reality. The emerging perspective, of course, also relates strongly to the other two complex linguistic ideas, namely lingual subject and object, and lingual norm and fact, that are also understood, within this foundational framework, as becoming theoretically accessible to theorists when they are similarly analysed.

Secondly, a dynamic systems approach is clearly anti-modernist in its promotion of non-reductionist perspectives. It attempts to overcome many of the *-isms*, such as structuralism, generativism, and relativism that have historically plagued linguistic and applied linguistic theory.³

Thirdly, in close conjunction with this, it is decidedly anti-rationalist in approach, and intentionally focused on the empirical data at hand, specifically as these data give indications as to the lingual potential or resources at the disposal of individual lingual subjects.⁴

Fourthly, in this same connection, it may, therefore, but need not subscribe to the ideological divide between modernism and postmodernism.

When a dynamic systems theory begins to exert its influence more fully also in applied linguistic designs, one of the unanswered questions of this seventh style of applied linguistics will be what it makes of the political agenda of the postmodernist paradigm that preceded it, especially in its poststructuralist format, and the way that the latter has an orientation to how applied linguistic designs measure up to or inflict justice, pain, violence, suffering, fairness, as well as moral action and transformation (McNamara 2012a; 2012b; Kramsch 2012: 499). This may be where the hardest battles will be fought, and most of the practical compromises in designs made. The current silence on political issues affecting applied linguistic designs from those who work within a complex systems approach is no doubt an ominous one to those trained and used to working in a

3 See the various analyses in Lee et al. (2009).

4 See, for example, Larsen-Freeman & Cameron (2008: 219), and the remarks of Lee et al. (2009: 60) on what constitute linguistic data.

postmodernist idiom. However, I have little doubt that this emergent seventh paradigm has taken us beyond postmodernism.

7. A coherent framework for applied linguistics

A historical account of applied linguistics often indicates the further need for a systematic framework to assess the merits of such development across different traditions of doing applied linguistics (see Table 1) (see Rajagopalan 2004). We do not yet have such a framework, and the fairly fragmentary systematic insights utilised, in this instance, are not yet adequate to serve as such a framework. It can be said that these systematic analyses are of a foundational, philosophical nature. They are neither linguistic nor applied linguistic in character.

Such foundational analyses are not by that token useless, however. Their function is to illuminate and help understand even ideologically disparate paradigms, such as the modernist and postmodernist examples given earlier. They reveal twentieth-century applied linguistics as a discipline caught in a choice between technocracy and revolution. The current serious consideration of a number of complex linguistic ideas in a dynamic systems approach, however, makes it clear that such philosophical analyses will never move at the forefront of discovery. This part of foundational analysis cannot get ahead of real developments within a discipline. Although I could, for example, foresee, in the late 1970s and early 1980s, when I began to write a foundational analysis of linguistics that was published in adapted form many years later, that such complex linguistic ideas were necessary, the analysis of these had to wait for the field to produce them (Weideman 2009c). This means that those who do philosophical analyses must adopt a kind of humility in their endeavours. That kind of humility, however, also applies across paradigms: the arrival of a new paradigm in the field is a timely reminder that enduring domination of a single paradigm in a field remains unlikely. In all such instances, a philosophical analysis can provide a foundational framework for assessing the relative merits and contributions of each successive paradigm.

As a final and cautionary note, let me point out that the kinds of categorisations that have been part of the preceding discussion can never tell the whole story. Life, as well as designing solutions to

language problems through applied linguistic work, is messier than that. Since the various traditions, though set out as following chronologically, persist and sometimes exist side by side for many years, applied linguists in reality combine and accommodate various styles, often without noticing contradictions. A good example of this is probably one of the several current 'handbooks' of applied linguistics, which contains a number of analyses and commentaries that are seriously at odds, yet there is no indication of either the editor or the contributors being conscious of that (Kaplan 2002). It provides evidence, first, of some applied linguists persevering in the styles that they were trained, and of others mixing a number of approaches. Furthermore, it demonstrates how traditions within applied linguistics become institutionalised within higher education and publishing interests without a great deal of challenge. In this respect, postmodernist critiques of applied linguistic work are, unfortunately, still correct, and we may not see those challenges overcome until we have a more thoroughly worked out framework for the discipline.

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