

Albert Weideman

Five generations of applied linguistics: some framework issues

Summary

In recent years a number of discussions have sustained the debate on the definition of applied linguistics, a debate which addresses both ends of the spectrum of applied linguistic work: the philosophical and the practical. This paper attempts to situate its response to such (re)considerations within an interpretative framework, considering the conception of the discipline as it has evolved over five generations. The argument of the paper is that the many and varied understandings of applied linguistic work during this period confirm the relativity of the discipline and prevent its practitioners from entertaining the illusion that, because they are involved in 'applied science', their particular response to a language problem will provide a full and finite solution.

Vyf geslagte van toegepaste taalkunde: enkele grondslagkwessies

'n Aantal onlangse besprekings sit die debat oor die definisie van die toegepaste taalkunde voort. Die diskussie strek oor beide kante van die spektrum van toegepaste taalkundige werk: die filosofiese en die praktiese. Hierdie artikel poog om die diskussie te plaas in 'n raamwerk waarin dit vertolk kan word, en skets die geskiedenis van die dissipline deur die ontwikkeling daarvan deur vyf vorms (of opeenvolgende geslagte) te volg. Die argument is dat die verskeidenheid gestaltes wat die toegepaste taalkunde aangeneem het, 'n aanduiding is van die relatiwiteit van die dissipline. Hierdie relatiwiteit behoort beoefenaars te verhoed om te glo dat, aangesien hulle 'toegepaste wetenskap' beoefen, hulle ontwerpe altyd genoegsame oplossings vir taalprobleme sal bied.

A handful¹ of discussions (*cf* James 1993; Sridhar 1993; Masny 1996; Lightbown & Spada 1993; Stevick 1990) have reopened the debate on the definition of applied linguistics.² The first three of these discussions are of a foundational character, while the last two relate to language teaching and learning, thus emphasising that our definitions and redefinitions of applied linguistics can come from both ends of the spectrum of applied linguistic work: the philosophical and the practical or pedagogical. This paper attempts to situate its response to such (re)considerations within an interpretative framework.

Framework issues are themselves foundational issues. Normally, enquiries involving the framework for actions and endeavours attempt to answer a number of 'first questions':

- What is our vision, and what are the perspectives that support our work?
- What underlying views and assumptions colour and determine our actions?
- How is the world organised, and how do our own endeavours fit into that structure?

1 This is a substantially reworked and expanded version of a set of arguments presented at the SAALA 1994 conference.

2 Because, historically, applied linguistics has made its influence most emphatically felt in the field of language teaching, this discussion will refer freely to the influence of applied linguistics in that field. It may well be that in areas other than language teaching, such as translation, forensic linguistics and language planning, the notion of 'applying' linguistics has undergone a quite different historical development. I am informed by colleagues, however, that the problems of technician and positivist interpretations of the notion of 'applied' science remain much the same. I would welcome comparisons from those other fields which lie outside my current area of expertise (language teaching) with regard to the distinctions made in this discussion. Perhaps there are none, but certainly the notion of five different generations or historical 'waves' in applied linguistics as it relates to language teaching seemed to make sense to the audiences with whom these distinctions were first shared. In the rest of the article, therefore, some measure of indulgence is required from the reader: the references here to applied linguistics refer to the impact that it has had on language teaching.

The idea that we have of the world and its structure determines the way that we respond to that world, to the contexts in which we live and to our own actions (cf Masny 1996: 21, who refers to our "ways of understanding and ways of being in the world"). This responsiveness, or respons-ibility, is the very essence of our lives, as well as of our professional lives as language teachers, teacher trainers and applied linguists.

Our responsiveness, in this sense, is also always historically situated, in that we respond in and to a particular historical context.

All of this applies equally to our visions and practices as applied linguists.

1. The rise of applied linguistics

In order to begin to respond to framework questions such as those posed above, we need to gain a historical understanding of applied linguistics.

Applied linguistics as it relates to language teaching is a fairly modern phenomenon. It arose in the 1940s, in the latter stages of the Second World War. The war effort required American soldiers to be able to speak the languages of the Pacific, or of other places where American forces were engaged. Some theoretical linguists especially those with an intimate knowledge of the structure of the indigenous American Indian languages, responded to this need. At its inception, the discipline of applied linguistics thus was primarily concerned with the application of linguistic analyses to language teaching. Audio-lingualism, which marks the beginning of the modern application linguistics which presents a solution to language teaching, its authors believed could be justified by behaviourist psychology, in addition to linguistic analysis. Those of us who used language laboratories in the 60s will remember the Skinnerean approach that supported the learning theory behind audio-lingualism: the more one repeats things, the more likely one is to learn them.

Implicit in this approach was also a theory that, in the same way that the linguist dissects language for analytical purposes, one needs to divide language teaching into small units. It was never asked

whether units of analysis and units of learning could be the same. Furthermore, although the manner in which these units would actually come together in the mind of the learner remained a mystery to behaviourists, they still firmly believed that this would somehow transpire. In some fashion all fragments would be synthesized. Where the theory left a vacuum, common sense at least seemed to imply that smaller, more digestible units would be more easily learnable. This approach was imbued with the notion that learning takes place incrementally, in small portions.

Most importantly, to its proponents, audio-lingualism prescribed a method that was indebted to linguistic theory in respect of its "scientifically chosen and arranged" language teaching materials: Fries (1945) insists that this approach depends on materials that are arranged according to linguistic principles, and that the contribution of the techniques of scientific analysis to language teaching is to "provide a thorough and consistent check of the language material" in order to ensure that the language teaching method is effective in ensuring maximum progress in the language being learned by the student.³

There have, of course, been debates about whether the debt that audio-lingualism owes to linguistics is not much more indirect than is often claimed, or, indeed, whether the aural-oral procedure of audio-lingual teaching has anything to do with learning theory (cf Carroll 1971: 110), but that is another question. What matters is that the proponents of audio-lingualism believed that they were applying linguistic analysis and that, in doing so, their efforts were scientific and therefore authoritative. James (1993: 23) sums it up as follows:

This approach says that since linguistics is about language and it is language that we teach, linguistics must also be about L2 teaching.

- 3 I leave out of the discussion here the peculiarly British approach, discussed by Brown (1992: 133), in which "advanced students of English (or of Applied Linguistics) learnt to pronounce the consonants and vowels of English slowly and clearly in isolation, before combining them with other segments into words, carefully identifying the stressed syllable and, eventually, into sentences".

Applied linguistics, at its inception, therefore responded in the dual sense described above, to the way its originators saw the world and to the urgent demands of its historical context.

Of these, the first response was to return to haunt the fledgling discipline. The belief that scientific analysis will lead not only to truth but to the desired behaviour in the client has been widespread in applied linguistics. Indeed, it has been held as an article of faith, which, as Stevick (1990: 17) points out, is “pervasive, unrecognized, and therefore very powerful”. As Stevick (1990: 4), referring to Maley’s pronouncements, also explains, assumptions that remain untested “are comparable to the assumptions that lead to acceptance or rejection of what are called religions”. My thesis is therefore that the view which the originators of the discipline had of the world, *viz* that scientific analysis would be an authoritative guide to a desired outcome, was much stronger even than their responsiveness to an urgent historical demand. In fact, their second response was crucially determined by their first.

In an earlier analysis of the vacuity of Lado’s (1964: 49ff) claim that his seventeen “principles” of a “scientific approach” to language teaching were derivable from linguistic theory, I concluded:

Such statements on the ‘application’ of linguistics in language teaching would, no doubt, have been seen to be bordering on the absurd if it had not been for the aura of scientific truth in which they are dressed up. What is ludicrous upon subjecting them to closer scrutiny, however, becomes tragic when one is reminded that these principles provided the ‘scientific’ justification for one of the most influential approaches to the teaching of foreign languages, *viz*, the audio-lingual method (Weideman 1987: 42).

It is a point that applied linguists would do well to remember, and the rest of this discussion will attempt to articulate a way of becoming critically aware — responsible — in doing applied linguistics. In this sense I would agree with James (1993: 17) that applied linguistics “is still under-defined”.

2. The further historical development of applied linguistics

Applied linguistics responded in successive waves to a complex set of historical influences, and can be discerned to have undergone various adjustments to bring it into line with the ideas of new users and its context of use. In order to come to an understanding of these developments, I shall categorise them as five successive generations of the discipline, with the linguistic/behaviourist forefather discussed in section 1 above constituting the first of these.

The next generation can be characterised as continuing the linguistic tradition in applied linguistics. The initial kinds of analysis that were considered important, namely phonological, morphological and syntactical analysis, for a while remained prominent in applied linguistic work. But the scope of linguistic analysis itself soon broadened to include semantic studies, text linguistics, discourse analysis and all kinds of language studies that placed language in a social context and claimed, therefore, that language was a social phenomenon, an instrument of communication. These studies began to influence applied linguistics, as is evident in the development of some varieties of communicative teaching at the end of the 1970s and the beginning of the 80s. This generation would fall into what Sridhar (1993: 5) categorises as the "extended paradigm model" of applied linguistics. What all these developments ultimately yielded, however, remained a linguistic conception of applied linguistics which said, in essence, that in order to teach languages it was first necessary to make an analysis of language.

This conception did not endure. There was obviously something missing. For example, what was missing — in the communicative approach — at least initially was a theory of language learning. The audio-lingualists could at least claim such a theory for their designs, but in the early 1980s people began to ask what sort of learning theory underlay communicative language teaching? While many could readily agree that not only the forms of language but also its functions were important considerations in designing language courses, it was not clear how students would actually learn better at

the inception of communicative teaching. Initially this was the Achilles heel of the communicative approach.

As a result, the predominance of linguistic concerns in applied linguistics came under scrutiny, and those working in the field began to borrow from a multitude of other disciplines: from pedagogy, from psychology and especially from that branch of the latter that dealt with learning theory. The stimulus provided in what some still considered the source discipline, linguistics, by the rise of transformational generative grammar with its reliance on (and contribution to) cognitive psychology, was another cross-current that aided this development. In a word, by linking up with insights from various disciplines other than linguistics, third-generation applied linguistics became a multi-disciplinary enterprise.

It is difficult to summarise in a few sentences what was in effect a decade of criticism of and change in applied linguistics. One important criticism stands out, a concern that remained in spite of the fact that applied linguistics became a multi-disciplinary undertaking in the early-to-mid-80s. This criticism was remarkable in that it was evidence of a practical classroom concern that helped to change applied linguistics — a practitioner's concern, one might call it.

The criticism concerned the confusion of analytical units with units of learning. Once one has analysed a language into forms and sentences — all highly abstract, analytical objects, theoretical entities, not real ones — the question remains: are these necessarily the best units for learning a language that is not one's own? As Corder (1986: 186-7) puts it:

The syllabus that a teacher uses is essentially a linear one, a list of linguistic forms in a certain order. From all the evidence we have about the way linguistic knowledge develops spontaneously in the learner, that is not the way things happen.

The question remained unanswered in third-generation applied linguistics, even among those who entertained social views of language and were using other units of language such as notions and functions as the building blocks with which language courses could be designed.

Again, the influence of Chomskyan ideas on applied linguistics should not be underestimated. Chomsky's view of language was taken less as good linguistics to be applied in language teaching than as good psychology, a psychology that could potentially provide an explanation for how languages are learned, and how second languages are acquired. Research into second language acquisition was the characteristic feature, therefore, of what I would call fourth-generation applied linguistics. As Diane Larsen-Freeman (1993) pointed out in a keynote address to AILA, language teaching methods today, unlike those of the 60s, have grown out of and been influenced by research into second language acquisition.

This research gave applied linguistics the hope of finding out enough about how one learns another language to establish how language teachers can arrange things in a classroom — which is not normally a very friendly environment in which to learn a language — so as to facilitate language learning. Since it appeared that learning another language is easier and more successful outside the classroom than in it, the expectation was that second language acquisition research could tell us how to replicate in a classroom those conditions that exist outside it, which appear to make language learning easier. Hence, as Lightbown & Spada (1993: 72) remark:

The design of communicative language teaching programs has sought to replace some of the characteristics of traditional instruction with those more typical of natural acquisition contexts.

The influence of Krashen on third-generation applied linguistics perhaps stands out more than any other, and the language teaching methodologies that are a prime example of this influence come together in the "natural approach" (Krashen & Terrell 1983; Terrell 1985). These ideas struck a powerful chord in the minds of teachers who had already abandoned both traditional grammar translation methods and audio-lingualism for communicative teaching.

More recently, in the late eighties, applied linguistics, at least in the way that it is practised in South Africa, has come to rely more heavily on social theory. This fifth-generation type of applied linguistics is characterised more than anything else by constructivism. In a way, this has resulted in a revival of older ideas on experiential learning: that somehow, when we learn, we construct

knowledge in our interactions with others, be they teachers or peers. In this view, knowledge is systematically constructed in interactions with others:

In order to learn, students need an environment that provides both stimuli to learn and resources for learning. This rather stale observation takes on new meaning as we agree that students must construct their own knowledge [...] New knowledge comes only from the engagement of the student's own interest in something beyond her present understanding (Moulton 1994: 33).

In constructivism, incidentally, a belated psychological justification for communicative teaching could be found (cf Greyling 1993). All of the basic techniques of the communicative approach, *viz* information-gap exercises, role-play tasks and group information-gathering techniques, were ideal means of allowing the learner to build a language in interaction with others.

This generation of applied linguistic work is well represented by research that has been called 'interpretive' since

such research proposes that all knowledge is culturally embedded in specific social contexts, and that it therefore needs to be understood [...] from the particular points of view of the people acting in these contexts and how they collaborate to construct their realities socially (Cumming 1994: 685).

As Spada (1994: 686) points out, the value of such analysis is that it allows one to examine interactions (for example between teacher and learner, or between learner and learner) that may be more or less effective in facilitating language learning, thus allowing the inexperienced teacher to become sensitive to good (or ineffective) practice and the experienced teacher to reflect on and find a systematic, rational justification for effective classroom performance.

The five generations of applied linguistic work discussed above can be summarised in the following diagram:

	Description	Characterised by
1	Linguistic / behaviourist	'scientific' approach
2	Linguistic 'extended paradigm' model	language as a social phenomenon
3	Multi-disciplinary model	attention to learning theory and pedagogy as well
4	Second-language acquisition research	experimental research into how languages are learned
5	Constructivism	knowledge of a new language as interactively constructed

3. The effects of the historical development of applied linguistics

The development of applied linguistics, especially of the fourth generation (second-language acquisition research) and fifth generation (constructivist) has spawned a research industry with its own momentum. While this industry demands discussion in its own right, it deserves to be noted here that all of the divisions inherent in the various traditions of applied linguistic work outlined above are also present in this research. Cumming's (1994) survey, for example, outlines not only the descriptive approach that characterises the initial concerns of second-language acquisition research (such as the order of acquisition of morphemes, the role of comprehensible input in-language acquisition, and so on), but also current studies based on previous generations of applied linguistics such as text analysis (cf Connor 1994). The latter kind of investigation belongs squarely in what has been described here as second-generation applied linguistics, yet the studies referred to stretch well into the 90s. (I shall return in due course to the co-existence of successive generations of applied linguistics and the meaning of this for our interpretation of the discipline). In addition, Cumming's (1994) survey highlights the emergence of approaches that run counter to the empiricist and positivist traditions in the earlier research: ethnographic studies, for example, and, even more importantly, what the survey calls "ideological" orientations. The latter, as Pennycook's (1994)

contribution makes clear, are concerned with the political dimensions of language teaching and with the uneven distribution of power among participants (learners and teachers) in the language classroom. These orientations seek, for example, to expose unequal relations among those who prescribe how language teaching must be done (curriculum designers and planners) and those who have to implement their prescriptions. Critical and participatory approaches present an alternative to dominant mainstream approaches. Their underlying philosophy is critical of positivist research strategies and pursuits; their interpretation of the changes in language teaching is that we have not seen scientifically inspired progress, but rather a series of transformations that "are due principally to shifts in the social, cultural, political, and philosophical climate" (Pennycook 1989: 608).

Moreover, these new approaches have enlivened the debate on the merits of quantitative over qualitative research. In her survey of qualitative research, Lazaraton (1995) takes the view that the emergence of a qualitative research tradition points to a "second coming of age of the research in applied linguistics", the first being the quantitative research tradition, represented best by second-language acquisition research, or what this discussion has called fourth-generation applied linguistics. (For the use of the term "coming of age of the discipline" cf Henning 1986: 704). The merits and demerits of quantitative and qualitative research can never be argued on purely rational grounds. The differences are fundamental philosophical ones, relating to the way we see the world. As Nunan (1992: 10) points out,

One reason for the persistence of the distinction between quantitative and qualitative research is that the two approaches represent different ways of thinking about and understanding the world around us. Underlying the development of different research traditions and methods is a debate on the nature of knowledge and the status of assertions about the world, and the debate itself is ultimately a philosophical one.

Moreover, he continues:

Underpinning quantitative research is the positivistic notion that the basic function of research is to uncover facts and truths which

are independent of the researcher. Qualitative researchers question the notion of an objective reality (Nunan 1992: 20).

What, however, is the net effect of the increasing variety in the research traditions within applied linguistics? One might argue that this variety is itself an indication of an emerging sixth generation of applied linguistics, a post-modern generation accommodating a number of perspectives and, as Masny (1996: 3) states, positing the view that "second language education is political".

The main effect of the development of applied linguistics as a discipline is perhaps both professional and practical. There is no doubt that the five successive generations of applied linguistics described here have led, over the relatively short space of 50 years, to the professionalisation of applied linguistics. The power of applied linguistics (and of applied linguists) should therefore not be underestimated. When one submits a language course to a publisher today, for example, that publisher will send the draft to several referees, at least one of whom will write a note on whether the programme in question conforms to current ideas on second-language acquisition. In more progressive contexts, the person designing or reviewing a new language course for publication may now be more sensitive to the political dimensions of the course design, asking whether the material will empower or disempower the teacher. Such concerns belong to an emerging new tradition in applied linguistics. But whatever the tradition or perspective, the important point to note is that applied linguistics itself has gained institutional influence by means of its recognition as a profession.

Where the power of a human institution is under scrutiny, the next consideration is inevitably that of the limitations of that power. In the next section we shall briefly consider this aspect.

4. The limitations of applied linguistics

How do those affected by the historically developed power of applied linguistics, as described in the previous section, respond to it? Language teachers and teacher trainers in particular, whose daily working lives are affected most directly, would be wise to consider their deliberate response to applied linguistics, for they are the ones

most likely to fall victim to the latest and most fashionable, or oldest but most persuasive approach. However remote applied linguistics may therefore seem to be to these professionals, their knowledge of the field may determine whether they will be its victim or its beneficiary.

We should note, right at the outset, that while applied linguistics is a powerful modern institution, its power is not absolute. For example, between the intentions inherent in the designs of applied linguists and their actual implementation in the language classroom there is substantial room for interpretation and error. Moreover, as Stevick (1990: 14) points out:

we must also recognize that practical action is often based on more than knowledge of intellectual theories and their rational evaluation. Any action that is of any consequence is derived from a mixture of sources, some — but only some — of which are intellectual.

However great the fascination with our theoretically justified designs for language teaching, therefore, Stevick (1990: 14) warns against entertaining “the belief that they are sufficient for dealing with all important problems”. In the terminology I have adopted in this discussion, this is a framework or structural limitation to the historically developed power of applied linguistics.

This limitation is not the only one inherent in applied linguistics. In order to understand the further limitations we must note two things. Having considered the history of applied linguistics, we should consider, first, that in the development of applied linguistics, in fact at its very inception, a commitment of faith was made. The content of this commitment was that applied linguistics was a scientific endeavour and that, by virtue of being scientific, it was — in the Western mindset — automatically sound, trustworthy and reliable. It therefore had all those attributes that one would normally expect to ascribe to the objects of religious devotion: to a god, or to some divine power in our lives. In the works of the founding fathers of applied linguistics, certitudinal terminology abounds, and such a commitment of faith almost inevitably was bound to call up its antithesis. Jakobovits & Gordon (1974: 85, 86) probably gave the

best formulation of this opposition a good twenty years ago, when they remarked:

The 'expert' and his research have been elevated to totally unrealistic levels of respect and adoration [...]. This deference to an all-powerful research divinity is entirely misplaced

and proceeded to elaborate a position that emphasised beyond all else "the new consciousness of the youth generation, of freedom, of the self", the "freedom-giving leap into the unknown". As I have pointed out elsewhere (Weideman 1987: 82):

It is ironic that Western thought, having severed every relation between faith and science, should merely find a new commitment — in science itself — to replace the former set of beliefs. The distinction between commitment and analysis is therefore not one that is easily understood by those who confess both that science is the soundest knowledge we have and that actions that flow from scientific intervention and justification are, by virtue of this, better, more accurate and efficient.

The influence of this kind of thinking was not limited to the application of linguistic analyses to language teaching problems, but extended to other fields as well. French (1990: 547), working in adult literacy, complains about the claims "to educational usefulness that are made by the makers of programmes and materials that are supposedly based on linguistic principles" and about "the fetishism of 'scientifically designed' materials and methods". In fact, Masny's post-modern critique of applied linguistics identifies unequivocally the positivist thread that has run through successive waves of applied linguistic work, right up to what has been described here as fourth-generation applied linguistics:

Philosophically, they are based in a modern rationalist, positivist perspective. I want to propose the postmodern view that allows for other forms of knowledge to be validated [...] The postmodernists would argue that second language education is political (Masny 1996: 3; cf also p 11).

Essentially the same point is made by Pennycook (1989: 589), who sets out to demonstrate that prescriptive designs for language teaching reinforce "a positivist, progressivist and patriarchal understanding of teaching" and play "an important role in maintaining iniquities between, on the one hand, predominantly male academics

and, on the other, female teachers and language classrooms on the international power periphery". I shall return below to the task that faces applied linguistics if it is to counter the victimising effects of such imbalances of power.

The second point that one should note is that the historical development of applied linguistics should itself have alerted those who willingly put their faith in it to its relativity. As we saw in the preceding discussion, applied linguistics underwent five (generational) changes: one orthodoxy (eg audio-lingualism) yielding to another (communicative teaching) in several successive phases. Something that one puts one's faith in is not normally expected to change so quickly and dramatically.

In present-day language teaching, furthermore, one can distinguish at least three directions, all of which claim some scientific justification within applied linguistics as a discipline. These three can be identified as an authoritarian direction (embodied in all forms of traditional and grammar translation teaching, as well as in the implementation of audio-lingualism in the classroom); a technocratic direction (some interpretations of audio-lingualism, as well as the 'British' school of the mainstream communicative approach), and a revolutionary or humanistic one (as in Suggestopedia, or Counseling Learning). All are very much in evidence at this time. Stevick's (1990) recent re-appraisal of the latter direction; the fact that communicative language teaching is very much regarded as the reigning orthodoxy (Larsen-Freeman 1993), even though it may not amount to much more than lip-service in practice (cf Karavas-Doukas's 1996 investigation of this mismatch between belief and practice); and the adherence of many teachers to more conventional teaching methods or to audio-lingualism, all testify to the simultaneous existence of a variety of scientifically justified teaching practices. In addition to the historical relativity of applied linguistics, we should therefore also note the synchronic relativity of applied linguistic concept formation. Together, these two kinds of relativity point to one of the crucial limitations of applied linguistic endeavour.

Yet another limitation, already alluded to above, concerns what I would call framework or structural issues. Perhaps this is best

summed up in the statement that to analyse is not to design. Put differently: if we start doing applied linguistics from an uncritical belief in the sufficiency of scientific analysis, we are proceeding from a vision that oversteps the structural limitations of the endeavour. Analysing language, or even analysing a practical language problem, does not automatically give us any kind of solution. It may be the first step (with limited, historically biased analytical tools) towards gaining an equally limited, historically determined understanding of the problem. But it does not yield the solution required, a solution that normally finds embodiment in a design.

So if the historical evolution of our discipline is imbued with a firm belief in science as all-powerful, we have no alternative but to define, and redefine applied linguistics in order to bring it into line with an understanding that acknowledges its limitations.

5. Applied linguistics as a discipline of design

Many of those attempting to define applied linguistics have wrestled with the problems outlined in the previous section, and the most frequent solution has been an attempt to conceive of applied linguistics as a multi-disciplinary enterprise (cf James 1993; Weideman 1987: 56-71) in the way that third-generation applied linguistics set out to do. This is also characteristic of more recent approaches (cf Sridhar 1993: 13). But this does not adequately confront or explain some of the different historical understandings of applied linguistics. Furthermore, as Halliday (1992: 61) points out,

Our practice as language teachers depends more on our being able to adopt the complementary perspectives of two conflicting themes, that of 'learning' and that of 'meaning', than on putting together pieces from linguistics with pieces from psychology and sociology.

As is the case with language planning, preparing a solution for a language teaching problem "means introducing design processes and design features into a system" (Halliday 1992: 62) that does not have them. This is the key responsibility of applied linguistic endeavour.

In my own understanding, applied linguistics is best understood to entail a process of addressing language problems, gaining an understanding of them, and subjecting them to analysis — "adding

value", as James (1993: 20) describes it. But the final, most crucial step in this process is to propose a designed solution to the problem.

In the case of language teaching, such designs normally come in the shape of courses, programmes, teaching aids and materials. The point about the process of designing solutions for language problems, however, is that the understanding of the problem and the possible solution are present at each step. The solution may change from its initial conception, be influenced by a further (analytical) understanding of the problem, or may even be deliberately postponed until a great variety of factors have been considered, but it is present in some conceptual form from very early in the process. All design disciplines probably function in this way, but it is understandably difficult for the applied linguists who want to claim scientific validity for their efforts to acknowledge this.

In any event, coming up with a designed solution does not mean imposing it (even if one continues to subscribe to earlier, scientific views of applied linguistics). The user (along with his or her problem) remains central, as James correctly points out. There is a reciprocity (cf Cameron 1994 and Bygate & Letts 1994) in doing applied linguistics:

The system will atrophy if the user just sits waiting to be told what the designer assumes will be of interest to the user: there must be interaction (James 1993: 29).

6. The tasks of a redefined applied linguistics

It should be clear from the foregoing discussion that my own answer to the framework questions asked at the beginning suggests that the discipline of applied linguistics and its practitioners should adopt a much more humble stance than is evident in the positivist tradition within the discipline. However, assuming a more humble role does not mean that applied linguistics is less important as a human design action. Given the feasible tasks awaiting applied linguistic work implicit in the redefinition outlined above, I would claim that it has more than enough to do. Let me conclude by listing some of what I consider the most important tasks.

Applied linguistics can, and must (sometimes in opposition to its own historical power):

- *counter all efforts to make language teachers the victims of theory or of imposed designs*

The problem, as Ahellal (1993: 42) defines it, is that

The majority of teachers relate to applied linguistics as subordinate recipients. They take it for granted that it is the responsibility of the linguist, as a theoretician, and the applied linguist, as a mediator, to find solutions for classroom problems.

This means, positively, that teachers must be beneficiaries and that, in order to become beneficiaries, they should play an active role in the designing and redesigning of what they teach (Corder 1986: 189 echoes the same sentiment). It also means, of course, that academic applied linguistics and teacher training courses should introduce some form of critical understanding of the discipline.

- *introduce imaginative solutions to language problems*

It is beyond question that some applied linguistic designs have yielded mindless, boring solutions to language teaching problems. Our desire for imaginative solutions does not mean that we should grab at any novel, fashionable idea simply because it relieves the hard effort of learning something new. It does mean, however, that we should be trained to justify even our most creative and apparently innovative designs in terms of a larger framework.

- *emancipate teachers from toil and drudgery*

Applied linguistics has a good record in designing commercially produced teaching and testing materials (particularly the latter). If it is to take seriously the task of emancipating teachers from drudgery and from authoritarian prescriptivism, course designers should be required to leave room for creativity and interpretation, and not to attempt to prescribe everything in a teacher's manual.

- *evolve new methods for the disclosure of culture*

Foreign language teaching in Europe, stimulated greatly by the move towards the creation of the European Union and its predecessors, has not only given communicative language teaching a context in which to grow, but has opened up further

dimensions. There is a new awareness of the cultural component of language teaching that, as far as I can see, goes beyond the traditional imperialist and colonialist attitudes behind language teaching and moves towards a critical, reflective language teaching practice (Kramsch 1993).

- *liberate language teachers for works of service, care and mercy*

The context of language teaching in our own country, given the levels of illiteracy among the majority of our population, should be evidence enough of the need for thoughtful, caring applied linguistic designs for the solution of such problems. The discussion of these designs in fact constitutes the bulk of the contributions made at formally structured debates such as the annual SAALA conferences, and it is right that this should be so. (For two earlier foundational treatments of the subject matter of these conferences, cf Vorster 1980 and Young 1990). What is still needed is that participants in this endeavour do so responsibly and in a spirit of humility, and this paper has set out to create an awareness of a possible framework for this.

It should be clear from these conclusions that my view of applied linguistics makes it an emancipatory, liberating and healing enterprise. The tasks outlined above for a redefined discipline should also make it clear that in this conception of applied linguistics, practitioners are not only liberated from trends and dogmas, but empowered undertake to positive action. In an earlier appraisal, I concluded that

Applied linguists everywhere should be able to say to the world: here is assembled a group of dedicated experts, people informed both about the nature of language and about the acute problems accompanying the accessibility, acquisition, development, use and loss of language in our daily lives. We are a group dedicated not to give final answers to many of these problems, but determined rather to employ what skills we have mastered to the benefit of those who need us most: the underprivileged, the destitute, the handicapped. We are determined to lead our discipline into avenues that are beneficial to mankind, something that advocates of 'applied' science have sometimes miserably failed in doing (Weideman 1987: 174).

I would not wish to conclude differently today, and it is my hope that all associations of language practitioners in Africa will continue their work in this spirit.

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