

Lecture 01: Introducing Applied Linguistics

1. Defining Applied Linguistics

“Applied Linguistics means many things to many people.” (Cook 2006)

- “A mediation between theory and practice.” (Kaplan and Widdowson 1992)
- “A synthesis of research from a variety of disciplines, including linguistics.” (Hudson 1999)
- “AL is the theoretical and empirical investigation of real world problems in which language is a central issue.” (Brumfit, 1977)
- The focus of AL is on trying to resolve language based problems that people encounter in the real world, whether they be learners, teachers, supervisors, academics, lawyers, service providers, those who need social services, test makers, policy developers, dictionary makers, translators, or a whole range of clients.” (Spolsky, 2005)
- Applied Linguistics [is now] a cover term for a sizeable group of semi-autonomous disciplines, each dividing its parentage and allegiances between the formal study of language and other relevant fields, and each working to develop its own methodologies and principles. (Spolsky 2005)
- “Applied Linguistics is an interdisciplinary field of inquiry that addresses a broad range of language-related issues in order to understand their roles in the lives of individuals and conditions in society. It draws on a wide range of theoretical and methodological approaches from various disciplines—from the humanities to the social and natural sciences—as it develops its own knowledge-base about language, its users and uses, and their underlying social and material conditions.” (AAAL)

Applied Linguistics Vs Linguistics Applied

“Linguistic theory and description cannot, ... be deployed directly to solve the problems with which applied linguistics is concerned. One important reason is the nature of the problems themselves. They, too, like models of linguistics, represent certain perspectives on reality. Applied linguistics is not simply a matter of matching up findings about language with pre-existing problems but of using findings to explore how the perception of problems might be changed. It may be that when problems are reformulated from a different point of view they become more amenable to solution. This changed perception may then, in turn, have implications for linguistics.”

“If the interpretation of applied linguistics is very narrow so that what is being applied is only linguistics, then because linguistics, like other theoretical disciplines, deals with idealisations, it appears to have very little to say about the language-related problems in what we call the real world. If applied linguistics is interpreted ver broadly, then it must concern itself with everything to do with language. Neither position is tenable. Linguistics, it seems, must play an important role in applied linguistics but by no means the only role. Applied linguistics must also draw on psychology, sociology, education, measurement theory and so on.”

“...in the case of linguistics applied the assumption is that the problem can be reformulated by the direct and unilateral application of concepts and terms deriving from linguistic enquiry itself. That is to say, language problems are amenable to linguistic solutions. In the case of applied linguistics, intervention is crucially a matter of mediation. Here there is the recognition that linguistic insights are not self-evident but a matter of interpretation; that ideas and findings from linguistics can only be made relevant in reference to other perceptions and perspectives that define the context of the problem. Applied linguistics is in this respect a multilateral process which, of its nature, has to relate and reconcile different representations of reality, including that of linguistics without excluding others.”

→ Based on the quotes above classify the following problems:

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Problems of vocabulary and meaning	Language assessment problems
Problems of spelling	Language contact problems
Problems of grammar	Language teaching problems
Problems of writing	Language learning problems
Problems of developing new scripts	Language translation problems

Notes

2. The Scope of Applied Linguistics

“It was taken for granted in the 1960s and 1970s that applied linguistics was about language teaching... after the Second World War the expansion of language teaching (especially of English) revealed that many teachers and trainers and supervisors of teachers lacked knowledge about language. That gap is what applied linguistics was set up to fill...Its dedication to language teaching had been remarked in other areas of language use, especially institutional language use (Howatt 1984), leading to an explosion of applied linguistics training, methodology and, perhaps above all, labelling in those other areas. Thus in the Anniversary Issue of the ALAA Newsletter (January 2001: No. 44) we read of developments over the past twenty years which ‘draw on a greater range of disciplines in our research’ (Lewis 2001: 19): ‘applied linguistics is trying to resolve language based problems that people encounter in the real world’ (Grabe 2001: 25); ‘Applied Linguistics ... has undergone a significant broadening of its scope and now contributes its theoretical perspectives to a range of areas’ (Baynham 2001: 26)...Applied linguistics... encompasses: Language Acquisition (L1 and L2), Psycho/Neuro linguistics, Language Teaching, Sociolinguistics, Humor Studies, Pragmatics, Discourse Analysis/Rhetorics, Text/Processing/Translation, Computational Linguistics – Machine Translation, Corpus Linguistics, Language Control/Dialectology”

Types of problems addressed in AL according to Cook (2003):

Language and Education:

first-language education, when a child studies their home language or languages.

additional-language education, often divided into second-language education, when someone studies their society’s majority or official language which is not their home language, and foreign-language education, when someone studies the language of another country.

clinical linguistics: the study and treatment of speech and communication impairments, whether hereditary, developmental, or acquired (through injury, stroke, illness, or age).

language testing: the assessment and evaluation of language achievement and proficiency, both in first and additional languages, and for both general and specific purposes.

Language, work, and law:

workplace communication: the study of how language is used in the workplace, and how it contributes to the nature and power relations of different types of work.

language planning: the making of decisions, often supported by legislation, about the official status of languages and their institutional use, including their use in education.

forensic linguistics: the deployment of linguistic evidence in criminal and other legal investigations, for example, to establish the authorship of a document, or a profile of a speaker from a tape-recording.

Language, information, and effect:

literary stylistics: the study of the relationship between linguistic choices and effects in literature.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA): the study of the relationship between linguistic choices and effects in persuasive uses of language, of how these indoctrinate or manipulate (for example, in marketing and politics), and the counteracting of this through analysis.

translation and interpretation: the formulation of principles underlying the perceived equivalence between a stretch of language and its translation, and the practices of translating written text and interpreting spoken language.

information design: the arrangement and presentation of written language, including issues relating to typography and layout, choices of medium, and effective combinations of language with other means of communication such as pictures and diagrams.

lexicography: the planning and compiling of both monolingual and bilingual dictionaries, and other language reference works such as thesauri.

3. The Need for Applied Linguistics

Applied linguistics is a crucial interdisciplinary field primarily because it addresses and seeks to solve practical problems and improve situations related to language and its users. Unlike theoretical linguistics, which studies language in the abstract, applied linguistics focuses on the application of linguistic knowledge to real-world issues.

Applied linguistics recognizes that the knowledge and skills of a linguist alone are often insufficient to tackle complex language problems. Therefore, it draws upon the expertise and knowledge of other professionals from both within and outside the academic world. This interdisciplinary nature allows for a comprehensive approach to problem-solving.

While language teaching and learning have historically been a significant focus, applied linguistics extends its relevance to numerous other areas of human life. These include, but are not limited to, improving the diagnosis of speech pathologies, designing new orthographies, natural language processing, enhancing translator and interpreter training, developing valid language examinations, determining literacy levels, creating language teaching materials, providing workplace language training, and resolving communication differences between cultural groups.

- What language skills should children attain beyond basic literacy? (And what is basic literacy anyway? Reading and writing, or something more?)
- Should children speaking a dialect be encouraged to maintain it or steered towards the standard form of a language? (And, if so, how is that standard form decided and by whom?)
- In communities with more than one language which ones should be used in schools? (And does every child have a right to be educated in the language they use at home?)
- Should deaf children learn a sign language, or a combination of lip reading and speaking? (And are sign languages as complex as spoken ones?)
- Should everyone learn foreign languages and, if so, which one or ones? (And what is the best way to learn and teach them?)
- Should every child study literature? (And, if so, should it be established works or more modern ones? And should they study just their own national literature or that of other countries?)
- Languages change. Should this just be accepted as an inevitable fact or should change be controlled in some way?
- Some languages are dying out. Should that be prevented and, if so, how?
- Should the growth of English as the international lingua franca be welcomed or deplored?
- Is it better for people to learn each other's languages or use translations? (And what is accurate or 'good' translation? Could it ever be done by computer?)
- Is language being used for political oppression and indoctrination? (And, if so, should something be done about it?)
- Which languages should be used in law courts and official documents?

Notes

Further Reading

Berns, M., & Matsuda, K. (2006). Applied Linguistics: Overview and History. *Encyclopedia of Language & Linguistics*, 394-405. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1016/B0-08-044854-2/00599-X>