Subject Review: Applied Linguistics and Language Learning/ Teaching

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Abstract

This sentence discusses how fundamental sciences are applied by linguists to address language teaching problems. It highlights three reasons why language learners study a second or foreign language, emphasizing the need for practical application. The paper provides an overview of applied linguistics and its connection to second language education, emphasizing the need for further investigation in the education system. It also mentions how applied linguists help bridge the gap between teachers and researchers to improve language teaching methods based on theoretical insights.

Keywords*: Applied linguistics; communication; language teaching; Theoretical sciences; Problem in language teaching.*

Introduction

Applied linguistics, as a field, began to take shape in the mid-20th century, although its origins can be traced back to early language teaching methods. Scholars like Charles C. Fries and Leonard Bloomfield played pivotal roles in establishing the foundations of applied linguistics. This interdisciplinary field draws from various disciplines such as linguistics, psychology, education, sociology, and anthropology, applying linguistic theories and methods to address practical language-related issues.

The history of language teaching is a captivating journey that highlights the evolving nature of education and the shifting societal requirements. From the traditional Grammar-Translation method to the more contemporary Communicative Approach, the evolution of language teaching methods demonstrates the resilience and adaptability of pedagogical practices. It also emphasizes the significant influence of cultural, technological, and sociopolitical factors on the development of language teaching and learning over time. Looking ahead, language teaching will continue to evolve to meet the evolving demands of our constantly changing world.

Applied linguistics plays a crucial role in understanding and improving communication. In various multilingual communities, English is commonly adopted as a Second or Foreign language due to its global communicative importance. Proficiency levels in English vary, requiring learners to navigate from mastering grammar to understanding nuanced messages. Language learners typically study a second language for several reasons: 1) English is not their first language, with many immigrant and international students learning their native language in monolingual environments; 2) Limited exposure to subjects taught in English; and 3) A lack of opportunities to improve English communication skills.

Currently, applied linguistics has a limited reliance on traditional linguistic theories and tools. It seldom incorporates linguistic theories developed in the last two decades. Instead, it tends to favor theories rooted in postmodernism, psychology, or sociology over linguistics, with exceptions such as

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Chomsky and Jackendoff. Some practitioners even exhibit a reluctance to incorporate linguistic principles, preferring insights from diverse fields. This shift in perspective can be attributed to the extensive promotion of the generative model in the 1980s, which led to the perception that linguistics provides limited practical value. Consequently, there is waning interest in alternative approaches to linguistic practice today, including recent developments in phonetics and phonology.

In 1956, Noam Chomsky introduced the concepts of competence and performance in linguistics, positing that language proficiency is innate (competence) and that learners instinctively follow linguistic rules without explicit instruction in colloquial expressions or idioms. However, a comprehensive grasp of a second or foreign language necessitates practical application, encompassing both verbal and non-verbal communication. This paper delves into applied linguistics, which integrates various facets of language study into the education of second or foreign languages.

Applied linguistics has achieved notable feats, including the creation of writing systems for previously unwritten languages and the development of simplified languages for maritime use. Its contributions have been particularly significant in European Union initiatives focused on translation and linguistic diversity. Nevertheless, it's most impactful successes lie in the domain of language education. The curricula and teaching methods that gained global recognition from the 1970s onwards, often associated with the Council of Europe, exemplify this influence.

Overview of Applied Linguistics

Some decades ago, Chris Brumfit provided a definition of Applied Linguistics as the study of any "real-world problem where language plays a central role" (Brumfit, 1995, p. 27). This all-encompassing description encompasses a diverse array of fields, including forensic science, lexicography (dictionary creation), speech therapy, human-machine linguistic interaction, and many other areas. In more recent times, Applied Linguistics has evolved to address political and ideological concerns, examining how language encodes societal inequalities and contributes to unjust social structures (referred to as Critical Applied Linguistics, or CALx). It has also incorporated research from various sources like cognitive semantics, translation and translanguaging theory, postmodern sociolinguistics, postcolonial theory, symbolic power theory, and more [2]. These insights have been effectively applied to deepen our understanding of human communication.

Applied linguistics is often characterized by what Byrnes (2013) referred to as a "methodological turn" or, as Plonsky (2017) termed it, "methodological awareness" (p. 517). It pertains to the scientific investigation of how language is used in various contexts, both in and outside the classroom. In simpler terms, it involves putting language theories into practical application. This field engages professionals such as linguists, educators, psycholinguists, and philosophers who aim to provide accurate interpretations of information from unfamiliar domains using language (McDonough, 2022).

In another reference, McDonnough (2017) presents an additional perspective. He defines Applied Linguistics as an independent discipline focused on addressing a wide range of language-related concerns, particularly in the realms of language education, primarily second language education, and societal language issues (McDonnough, 2017, p. 11). The primary emphasis in the literature highlights that Applied Linguistics is inherently interdisciplinary (Madhu, 2019; Hrehovík, 2005). It encompasses various subfields such as psycholinguistics, sociolinguistics, computational linguistics, second language acquisition, discourse analysis, contrastive linguistics, multilingualism, and language teaching, all designed to tackle problems associated with practical language application.

The following section will discuss the application of applied linguistics in language teaching. It will explore whether language teaching is derived from applied linguistics. However, there are several challenges in applying linguistic research in language teaching, including methodological and technical issues, lack of practicality, lack of transferability, lack of collaboration, and lack of resources. These challenges can make it difficult to apply linguistic research in language teaching effectively.

The Applied Linguistics of Language Teaching

In the aftermath of the 20th century, educational institutions embraced applied linguistics due to its psychological underpinnings and its impact on educators and language learners. This field has played a significant role in shaping global curricula, assessments, and textbooks, as noted by Cook and Li Wei

(2009). However, non-native speakers of second or foreign languages often struggle with language comprehension and usage. Incorporating linguistic research into language teaching poses challenges related to methodology, technology, practicality, applicability, collaboration, and resources.

Applied linguists have influenced syllabi and tests worldwide, drawing from various language learning theories. From structuralism and behaviorism to Chomsky's autonomy ideas and Dell Hymes' social arguments, these theories have shaped language teaching methods. Cognitivism in psychology also contributed to task-based learning. However, these applications have often lacked specific findings on second language acquisition, making it challenging to base teaching methods on detailed knowledge of phonological acquisition sequences and learner errors.

It has become clear that language teaching methodologies are not culturally, politically, or ethically neutral. For example, communicative methodology transformed the role of teachers, potentially conflicting with cultural norms that revere teachers as wise authorities. Additionally, the choice of the native speaker as the model for language teaching raises questions about which native speaker to select, influenced more by status and power dynamics than objective criteria.

The core issue for language teachers is how to prepare for communicative and task-based activities effectively, and applied linguistics has not fully addressed the challenge of "bootstrapping" in language acquisition—how learners acquire the initial knowledge needed to master a language. The field has primarily focused on vocabulary analysis and frequency rather than offering detailed instructional methods for teaching new vocabulary. Teachers often turn to teacher training sources for such techniques.

The Research Of Applied Linguistic On Language Teaching

Applied linguistics and second language acquisition are often used interchangeably, but they are distinct fields. Second language acquisition primarily delves into theoretical language system study, while applied linguistics is more concerned with the practical aspects of language teaching and learning. Applied linguists have developed their own theories and methods, emphasizing the learner's perspective, in contrast to the language system-centered approach of second language acquisition. The creation of language teaching methods as established by Fauziati in 2002.

Applied linguistics plays a crucial role in connecting language teaching with academic research. It acts as a bridge between educators and researchers, contributing significantly to language instruction and addressing classroom challenges. The successes of applied linguistics have been particularly notable in language teaching, with significant impact on EU projects related to translation and linguistic diversity.

Initially, applied linguistics focused on second language acquisition, specifically on errors and contrastive analysis in the 1950s and 1960s. However, as contrastive analysis proved inadequate in predicting errors, researchers turned to Noam Chomsky's theory of universal grammar in the 1970s, although its influence in applied linguistics and language teaching was limited. In the 1990s, there was a shift towards employing research methods from cognitive psychology. Researchers in this field come from diverse disciplines including linguistics, anthropology, psychology, and education.

Applied linguistics plays a vital role in addressing real-world issues, particularly in the context of education. In 2017, more than ninety-nine candidates took the Slovene General Matura, a rigorous assessment similar to a standardized test for university admission. The results of the argumentative writing task revealed varying error rates, with a higher incidence of word-word errors (2.26) compared to phrase-word errors (1.37) and sentence-punctuation errors (1.12). As a result, the primary strategy for improving the writing task is to focus on teaching and refining individual words, as suggested by Dobrić et al. in 2021.

Conclusion

Applied linguistics is an essential field for comprehending language-related challenges and their implications for future learning. Its historical origins trace back to the 1950s, and this heritage continues to shape its intricate character. This subject is of significant interest to both educators and linguists who are dedicated to enhancing precise communication among learners. Applied linguistics intersects with various subfields within linguistics, and its practical implementation in education solidifies the

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connection between theoretical knowledge and the actual application of language. It also enhances educators' understanding of language and cultural aspects. To gain a deeper understanding of the link between applied linguistics and language instruction, it is advisable to conduct further research within the educational system. Incorporating insights from other linguistic domains can contribute to the resolution of lingering issues and challenges. Notwithstanding its achievements, there exist specific language development problems and societal conflicts where applied linguistics encounters limitations, and continuous research and experimentation are indispensable for advancement.

Acknowledgments

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