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Towards a Critical Applied Linguistics for the 1990s

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Like many other areas of the social sciences, applied linguistics developed into its present form during the age of high modernism. Yet, while many other areas are going through a difficult stage of reappraisal in response to postmodern critiques of modernism, applied linguistics has remained to date steadfastly bound to its modernist paradigm. The significance of the challenges to this mode of thinking, however, suggests that applied linguistics urgently needs to look afresh at its view of language and research, and to acknowledge new thinking on discourse, the subject, culture, objectivity and knowledge. Applied linguistics also needs to address the fundamental limitations of asocial, ahistorical and apolitical modes of inquiry for the highly political domain of second language education. What I am arguing for here is a pedagogically and politically engaged critical applied linguistics which is responsive to its social, cultural and political context and which uses a notion of transformative critique as its main mode of inquiry.

INTRODUCTION

We live in a world marked by fundamental inequalities: a world in which 40,000 children die every day in Third World countries; a world in which, in almost every society and culture, differences constructed around gender, race, ethnicity, class, age, sexual preference and other distinctions lead to massive inequalities; a world increasingly threatened by pollution and ecological disaster. I believe that to understand such inequalities we need to go beyond a view of politics as residing in the hands of nation states or "political leaders" and to understand ourselves within a set of global power

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relations. While it is therefore important to look at international relations, we should also be wary of reducing this to a socioeconomic description of world market forces. Rather, I suggest we need to look at the cultural and ideological bases of our work and lives in an effort to understand how they may be supportive of larger inequalities.

As applied linguists, we are involved in language and education, an intersection between two of the most fundamentally political aspects of life. I see societies as inequitably structured and dominated by hegemonic cultures and ideologies that limit the ways in which we can think about the world and, thus, the ways in which we can move towards changing it. I am also convinced that the learning of languages is closely bound up with both the maintenance of these inequalities and with the conditions needed to possibly change them. It is incumbent on applied linguists, therefore, to examine the ideological basis of the knowledge we produce. As Phillipson & Skutnabb-Kangas (1986) argue, "applied linguists help in *reproducing the material conditions for exploitation*, in a world characterized by unequally shared prosperity, waste, militarization, injustice, famine and disease" (p. 118). Applied linguists, they suggest, need to explore the ways in which our work supports the increasingly sophisticated forms of physical, social, and above all ideological coercion. As an educator and an applied linguist, therefore, I feel that my own project must always be both pedagogical and political.

In the hope that the addition of this new journal to the field of applied linguistics will allow and encourage the emergence of a greater variety of opinions and voices than can be found in what are today the important journals in the discipline, I have taken the rather presumptuous step of trying to write a where-are-we-now? and where-are-we-going? article. Unlike most articles of this type, however, which tend to dwell in self-congratulatory style on the many achievements made to date before describing the holes which need to be filled by more research, this article will take a far more critical attitude. I wish to argue that applied linguistics could do with a major overhaul, a rethinking of our work in response to the ideas I have outlined above. One of the major problems with which we are facing is that the predominant paradigms of applied linguistics offer no framework for exploring the politics of language education. What I wish to do in this brief article is to deconstruct some of the basic tenets of applied linguistics with a view to showing how they are located within a very specific modernist conception of the world. Since it is also my view that we need to develop means of conducting transformative critiques, I shall try to show how what I shall call a *principled postmodernism* can help us move, in the first instance, towards a *critical applied linguistics*. What I shall argue for, then, is a critical approach to applied linguistics which is far more responsive to social, cultural, and political concerns than has been the case with most work to date. In short, I shall argue for work that always looks both to critique and to transform, that seeks to involve itself in a moral and political project for change.

LANGUAGE AND RESEARCH IN APPLIED LINGUISTICS

In this section, I shall try to show how particular aspects of applied linguistics are very much children of the modernist era. While my views here will be necessarily simplified and overgeneralized, I think it is important to try to make some sort of broad characterization of the field. First of all, while many other areas of the social sciences are questioning their epistemological bases, applied linguistics appears to be continuing untroubled with its firm beliefs in the basic tenets of European Enlightenment thought and its two subsequent spinoffs, positivism and structuralism. This state of mind entails a continued faith in an apolitical, ahistorical view of language; in a clear divide between subject and object and thus in a notion of objectivity; in thought and experience prior to language; in the development of models and methods according to scientist principles and the subsequent testing of their validity by statistical means; in a belief in cumulative progress as a result of this gradual addition of "new" knowledge; and in the universal applicability of rationality and the truths and theories that it produces. I shall return to a discussion of criticisms of these views in the next section. Here, I shall endeavor to demonstrate how the predominant views of language and research in applied linguistics are related to these beliefs.[1]

A definition of language, as Williams (1977) has remarked, is always, implicitly or explicitly, a definition of human beings in the world. It is crucial that we understand both the origins of the particular view held predominantly in the West about language as well as the implications of this view for learning and communication. First, we should be aware that the notion of language as it grew up in Europe was intimately tied to the growth

of the nation state. As emerging states sought to wean their citizenry away from the church and to strengthen their hold over diverse groups of people by developing notions of a homogeneous ethnicity, the development of the notion of a language came to take on fundamental importance. This political construct was to take on even greater significance in the 19th century with the coming of industrialization and colonialism. This era saw attempts to invent a standardized language (Crowley, 1989) and to develop mass education as a powerful means of social control. As Harris (1981) describes the process, "the language myth in its modern form is a cultural product of Post-Renaissance Europe. It reflects the political psychology of nationalism, and an educational system devoted to standardizing the linguistic behavior of pupils" (p. 9). In the late 19th and 20th century, this view of language was taken up by linguistics and given the solemn blessing of a science.

The invention of a standardized version of a language is particularly important, for it stands at the center of one of the great myths of modern linguistics: the belief that there was a shift from prescriptive to descriptive linguistics in the 19th and 20th centuries. It is a commonplace assertion in most linguistics texts that the growth of scientific linguistics marked a change from attempts to stipulate what correct language use should be to the objective description of languages. As Crowley's (1989) extensive study of these claims shows, however, no such shift from prescription to description in fact took place: "The objectification of language .... is a construction of the history of the study of language in Britain that cannot be supported by the evidence ..., a discursive construction that serves particular social and rhetorical purposes" (pp. 13-14). Indeed, linguistics has been engaged as much in the creation and definition of standards as was the case in the supposedly prescriptive era, a process which, as Bourne (1988) has pointed out, reached its most powerful form in the generativists' attempt to locate language as a biologically determined construct in each isolated individual.

Other implicit assumptions have accompanied this view of language. Morgan (1987) suggests that the predominant understanding of language has been "correspondence theory" which assumes a one-to-one correspondence between objects, words and thoughts. Although this representationalist view of meaning was challenged by structuralists with their belief that meaning was determined by the internal relationships within a structure, it has remained the predominant way of viewing language. Similarly,

Harris (1981) argues that the "language myth" is based on two interrelated fallacies. The first is the "telementational" fallacy, whereby linguistic knowledge is taken to be a matter of knowing which words stand for which thoughts, words, therefore, being symbols created by humans for transferring thoughts from one mind to another. To achieve this, the second, the "determinacy" or "fixed code" fallacy, is invoked, whereby a language is taken to be a fixed and agreed-upon code for language communities to express their ideas.

Applied linguistics has also been greatly affected by the structuralist paradigms that have generally held sway since Saussure. The particular distinctions set up by Saussure marked an important turning point in the treatment of language: privileging the synchronic over the diachronic, the internal, structural relationships over external relationships, and assuming a dichotomy between the individual and society. The domination of these distinctions on 20th-century thought about language and language acquisition have resulted in the divorce of these studies from historical, social, cultural or political questions. The dualistic thinking of the European Enlightenment, strengthened by Saussure's distinctions, has thus led to a problematic divide between the individual and society, between culture and society, and between culture and cognition. Structuralist and positivist views have tended to stress society and cognition as the only areas amenable to objective research, thus focusing on the individual in cognitive isolation, for example, or ideal speech communities, while failing to acknowledge both culture as the primary signifying system by which we make sense of the world and language learning as taking place within relationships of power.

In the next section, I shall suggest a different conception of language, but first I shall indicate some of the implications for applied linguistics of the view outlined above. It is important to note the legacies of this Eurocentric view of language: both linguistics, in its presentation of family trees (Nayar, 1989), for example, and applied linguistics, especially in its language planning policies (Jernudd, 1981), have developed models of language and language use that reflect more a European view of the world than any other reality. In addition, the legacy of an ahistorical and apolitical approach to language centering on the notion of a rational individual, a view bolstered by the use of cognitive psychology as a basis for much psycholinguistic work, has led to conceptions of language and communication in which there is no space for the consideration of

questions of power and inequality. An apolitical and ahistorical view of language, after all, cannot account for competing struggles over meaning. Moreover, the telementational and fixed code fallacies that underlie much work in applied linguistics have led to a narrow emphasis on functionalism and communication. This view has tended to reduce language to a system for transmitting messages or for getting things done. Speaker A encodes ideas into the language and transmits the message to speaker B who then decodes the message. What this conception of language lacks is an understanding of language as an ideational signifying system that plays a central role in how we understand ourselves and the world.

Two problems connected to this merely functional view of language are the trivialization of content and an overemphasis on communicative competence. Language teaching has long had to struggle with the question of content: i.e., apart from language itself, what is a language lesson to be about? Unfortunately, with the spread of communicative language teaching, the belief grew up that as long as a message was passed from A to B, learning could take place. This led to an emphasis on any activity that would encourage one student to pass some form of message to another. These "interactive activities" and games came to dominate the language classroom and led to the ever-increasing trivialization of language learning and learners. While this clearly has important pedagogical and social implications, it should also, as Mukherjee (1986) has pointed out, be seen for its political implications:

> In ESL the puerile structure of content was not and is not about transmission of skills or critical understanding of concepts. It is geared to receiving situational instructions and learning how to assimilate as an 'object' into a structural order, into a value order, into a cultural order, into a linguistic order and, above all, into a racist order. (p. 46)

Indeed, as long as language teaching continues to trivialize itself, refusing to explore the cultural and political aspects of language learning, it will have more to do with assimilation than with any notion of empowerment.

The second closely connected problem is the notion of communicative competence. While the addition of other competences to the narrow view of linguistic competence -- sociolinguistic, strategic, paralinguistic and discourse competence -- have helped broaden the notion of communicative competence, the central issue of social appropriacy has remained isolated from the

question of the political desirability of language forms. Bourne (1988) argues that functional language teaching reworked the diverse possibilities in the notion of communicative competence into the transmission of fixed norms of appropriacy. And Peirce (1989) has suggested that "the teaching of English for communicative competence is in itself inadequate as a language-teaching goal if English teachers are interested in exploring how language shapes the subjectivities of their students and how it is implicated in power and dominance" (p. 406). Thus, if we teach for communicative competence without exploring both how language use has been historically constructed around questions of power and dominance as well as how in everyday usage it is also always involved in questions of power, we will once again be developing a teaching practice that has more to do with assimilation than empowerment.

Having sketched out some of what I see as the questions we need to raise about the received notions of language in much of applied linguistics, I would like now to look in particular at the implications of the predominance of the positivist paradigm in applied linguistic research. Books on applied linguistics often seem obsessed with methods and models. I have already discussed at some length the implications of the notion of methods elsewhere (Pennycook, 1989), so I shall only suggest here that similar objections might be raised against the proliferation of language learning models. The process of fixing a view of learning into diagrammatic form and then proceeding to try to test its validity according to the positivist methods of quantitative experimentation is once again a dangerously reductive move. While a reasonable case might be made for the use of models and methods as heuristic rather than ontological categories, that is, as temporary understandings through which we are passing, their canonization in the literature of applied linguistics has, on the contrary, accorded them the status of complete and adequate theories that can be applied to diverse settings (Nayar, 1989). This tendency to first technologize the learning process, then universalize the models by appealing to the objectivity of research methods, has long been a facet of modernist thinking.

It is probably true that applied linguistics is proud of its growing research tradition. I would suggest, however, that there are probably stronger grounds for concern than for celebration. First, and foremost, is the problem of the predominance of positivist, quantitative forms of research. In a review of research articles in *TESOL Quarterly*, Henning (1986) reports as a laudable development that the proportion of qualitative to quantitative

research had shifted from 88%:12% in 1970 to 39%:61% in 1985. While it is doubtless useful that, where appropriate, better research methods have been used, it is, I believe, highly problematic to celebrate this increasing domination of quantitative research. Research has tended to concentrate on proof rather than understanding, yet it is something of a pointless exercise to use sophisticated statistical means to try to show a causal relationship between variables about which we have very little understanding (Mitchell, 1985; Van Lier, 1988).

In a rarely cited article written over ten years ago, Ochsner (1979) argued for a balanced approach to research that acknowledged not only the nomothetic, positivist tradition, but also a hermeneutic approach. Unfortunately, his advice has gone unheeded as the steamroller of positivism has come to dominate so much of the work in applied linguistics. While discussions of research usually acknowledge that qualitative research should be complimentary to quantitative, what in fact happens is that qualitative research is used in a minor service capacity to the all-important quantitative: it is seen as useful for defining categories and variables, but not as an end itself. This inequity has serious implications because qualitative research has been ignored, underdeveloped and misunderstood, it is often equated with a limited conception of ethnography, which, as Watson-Gegeo (1988) has pointed out, on the one hand ignores many other qualitative research possibilities, and, on the other, has tended to caricature rather than characterize classrooms.

Although the nativist drive in second language acquisition (SLA) research to establish the 'natural' (exemplified by Krashen's attempts to define natural acquisition, a natural order of learning and a natural method for teaching), with its distinctly anti-classroom and anti-teacher agenda, is fortunately now in decline, much of SLA research still has little to say about classroom language learning (Van Lier, 1988). Indeed, despite claims to be dealing with classrooms, most of the research has been quasi-experimental, with students in small groups performing tasks set by experimenters. Such limited, positivist experiments, operating in the belief that language learning can be accounted for by quantitative measures of 'input' or 'interaction' (see Aston, 1986), have ignored basic sociolinguistic questions by comparing, for example, question patterns between pairs of strangers with question patterns between teachers and students in classrooms.

Research in SLA, through quantitative measures of hypostatized cause and effect relations in quasi-experimental settings, has treated the classroom as a site of mere linguistic transaction rather than trying to understand it as a complex locus of social interaction. Research exploring the social, cultural and political dynamics of second language classrooms has been minimal. Fundamental questions, such as the role of gender in classroom interaction and language acquisition, have thus received minimal attention (see Holmes, 1989, however, for work in this area). Furthermore, as Nayar (1989) has suggested, much of the research which has been done is completely inapplicable to most of the world, since it is conducted in utterly different circumstances from those in which most teachers and students find themselves. This would not be such a serious problem if it were not the case that North American research, with the universalizing tendencies of modernity, all the backing of prestigious universities and the supposed rigor of positivist methods, is exporting its findings as a form of universal truth to the rest of the world.

I could go on in this critical vein, but I feel by now that my central points have been made. What I have been trying to illustrate here are the severe limitations of most work in applied linguistics to date. These I have characterized as based on the tenets of modernism, especially its emphases on universal, foundational, and totalizing theories as well as on teleological, progressivist and positivist understandings of the world. These shortcomings have implications not only for applied linguistics but for students and teachers of ESL around the world. To the extent that these ideas are located within the modernist paradigm which has played such a predominant role in maintaining social and cultural inequalities, and to the extent that English language teaching, as Phillipson (1986) has shown, is intimately linked to neocolonialism, we as applied linguists would do well to look to other ways of conceptualizing the modern world. In the next section I shall give a brief overview of what such a principled postmodernism might entail before illustrating how critical projects have been taken up in fields related to applied linguistics.

AN EPISTEMOLOGICAL CRISIS AND PRINCIPLED POSTMODERNISM

In the previous section, I outlined some of what I see as the basic tenets of applied linguistics (with respect particularly to views

on language and research) and tried to show how these views are located within a very particular view of the world. In this section, I would like to sketch out what I see as the major challenges to modernist thought, which constitute a constellation of ideas that I am here grouping under the rubric of principled postmodernism: "postmodern" because these views involve a major re-evaluation of many of the most cherished beliefs of the modern era; "principled" because my interest here is to avoid the collapse into relativism or the language games popular in certain postmodern writing and to uphold a postmodernism that retains a notion of the political and ethical.

Although there has been a long tradition of critical work in scholastic circles, much of which has come under variations on a Marxist theme, recent powerful critical challenges appear to be shaking standard epistemologies more fundamentally to the core than before. It is not uncommon, for example, to find statements to the effect that philosophy itself has come to an end (Baynes, Bohman & McCarthy, 1986). Broadly speaking, these challenges may be grouped under the rubric of postmodernism which I will take here to include a variety of critical standpoints amongst which the emergent feminist and Third World voices are the most vibrant. Of particular concern are the more radical and political forms of postmodernism in the writings of Foucault and others (rather than the less political language games to be found in literary criticism and aesthetics); feminist viewpoints that go beyond seeking equal opportunities for participation to challenge the implications of the history of that unequal participation as it is represented in a massive body of patriarchal thought; and work from the Third World where scholars have emerged from the straightjackets of colonial and neocolonial education to challenge the foundations of Western academic thought.

Postmodernist work has been attempting to show how Western scholarship is located within the context of modernity, a very particular way of viewing the world which may well be in decline. These critiques have drawn attention to the totalizing or universalizing tendencies in modernist thought, particularly the belief in a transcendent form of rationality. The belief in history as linear and ordered has been challenged, especially with respect to its tendency to submerge alternative views of the world and assume a linear and upward path of progress. Highly questionable, too, has become the notion of the unified, rational subject, that rational, Cartesian being capable of knowing both the self and other objects.

Not unsurprisingly, these challenges have led to serious doubts about the nature of philosophical inquiry. Philosophers, and I believe all of us who are seeking to understand the underpinnings of our work in a broader sense, have had to respond to a number of challenges: questions about the local and the incommensurable in the face of claims to universality and foundationalism; the decentering of the subject and the concomitant sense of rationality in the face of emerging work on the unconscious, the will to power, the economy of desire and the formation of subjectivities in discourse; and questions about the modernist concept of representation -- that a knowing subject can stand independent of a world of objects -- in the face of the implications from Nietzsche's and Heidegger's work, which have suggested that we are all in and of this world and that there is no form of knowing outside the linguistic, social, historical and cultural frames within which we exist.

The focus of much postmodern criticism has been on science and philosophy. While critiques of positivism -- the incursion of natural scientific methods into the study of humans -- can be traced back through the Frankfurt School to Nietzsche and Kierkegaard, more recent postmodern critiques have shown how positivist thought has come to exercise extreme authority over substantial domains of our lives: we have become subjects of the normalizing gaze of medicine, psychiatry, and so on (see, e.g., Foucault, 1979). The critique of philosophy has challenged that discipline's most fundamental claims to be able to develop a theory of knowledge on any universalizable basis (see, for example, Baynes, Bohman & McCarthy, 1986). These criticisms of modernity, then, have aimed to show how predominant Western, and increasingly world, modes of thought are specific to a very particular time and place and represent only one of many possible epistemologies.

In a number of ways, postmodernism and feminism should, as Nicholson (1990) has pointed out, be natural allies in their critique of the hegemonic body of modernist knowledge. It is not surprising, then, that a wide range of feminist work has sought to deconstruct the Western, male tradition of academic thought and to develop new modes and forms of knowledge. Everywhere, the academic canon has been challenged as women have started to rewrite literary criticism, history, sociology, anthropology, science, philosophy, political science, psychology, psychoanalysis and more (for an excellent collection of articles, see De Lauretis, 1986). Women are not only redefining these domains, changing our understanding of notions such as the subject or knowledge, but are

shifting the whole ground on which academic work is done by stressing the personal (as always political), desire and memory. Recently, a number of feminist thinkers have started struggling with the problem of much feminist work continuing to reproduce the universalizing tendencies of modernist thought, especially in essentialized views of the female or universalized notions of women. As a number of the articles in Nicholson's (1990) collection suggest, however, taking up the postmodern challenge to locate struggle in the local represents a dangerous threat to the notion of gender as a unifying concept around which a struggle can be maintained. Nicholson suggests that a carefully constructed postmodern feminism can nevertheless overcome postmodern relativism and abandonment of grand theories by theorizing in ways inimical to essentialism, especially through historical work. While a postmodern critique of modernity's most firmly held beliefs (in a rational, unified subject, progress, or universalism) has outlined the specificity and limitations of modernist thought, feminist criticism has started to help us understand the gendered nature of that thinking and to suggest new ways of thinking about the world.

Not surprisingly, the universalizing tendencies of Western thought and the notion of linear, technological progress, with the West at the top of the scale, have received massive criticism from diverse Third World scholars as well. Just as we can observe the gradual incursion of one mode of thought into other domains of human experience in the West, so can we observe a similar expansion from First and Second World countries to the Third World, especially as this was sanctified within the discourses not only of economic development, but of educational and technological aid as well. Writers such as Nandy (e.g., 1983), Kothari (e.g., 1987), and Mazrui (e.g., 1986), amongst many others, have pointed out the limitations and dangers of monoparadigmatic Western thought: "The politics of diversity and plurality," Kothari argues, "by rendering the mainstream monolith irrelevant, becomes the foundation of an alternative post-modern era of action and knowledge" (pp. 279-280). The efforts of such thinkers to oppose the hegemony in the world of Western scientific thought also hold rich possibilities for the re-emergence of a diverse set of alternative epistemologies. Here, too, then, is a powerful form of transformative critique which argues against the received epistemologies of Western thought and seeks to re-discover, re-invent and create new and different ways of understanding the world.

Some areas of academic work have been going through major upheavals as the impact of this epistemological crisis has begun to be felt. Once the implications of the limited applicability of Western thought to many domains were confronted, anthropologists, for example, found their work in need of fundamental re-evaluation. Is it indeed useful to retain a notion of culture with its tendency always to essentialize others? Is it indeed possible at all to represent the Other? (For a discussion of these questions, see Clifford, 1988.) In the sociology of school knowledge, to take another example, radical new views have questioned the ideological bases of the curriculum, suggesting the need to re-evaluate assumptions that value one type of knowledge (academic) over others (everyday) (for a summary of these issues, see Whitty, 1985). And, as I have already mentioned, philosophy has arrived at the point where its very existence is being questioned. Despite these major upheavals, despite the "linguistic turn" that has brought many diverse thinkers outside the field of applied linguistics to agree on the impossibility of knowing outside language, applied linguistics appears to have continued blithely on with its continued faith in objectivity, in models and methods, in positivism, in an apolitical, ahistorical view of language, in a clear divide between subject and object, in thought and experience prior to language, and in the applicability of its theories to the rest of the world.

Recently, however, new perspectives relevant to applied linguistics have started to emerge (see also the discussion of critical perspectives in the next section). In an important book that re-addresses much thinking on the formation of the subject in language and psychology, Henriques, Hollway, Urwin, Venn & Walkerdine (1984) point to the theoretical weaknesses and political disadvantages in psychology's construction of the individual within the individual/society dichotomy and in the construction of the individual within positivist psychology both as an object of its study and as a site for social regulation. Arguing that psychology has constructed the modern individual (rather than reflecting some pregiven psychological entity), they point out that since it is important for us to understand the subject as multiple, contradictory and constructed within different discourses, we are thus obliged to look at power relations (and especially gender) in the formation of the subject in and through language. As Urwin (1984) suggests, Saussure's universal competence is rooted in the notion of a unitary subject and a common core rationality, independent of social processes. The sociolinguistic challenges to Chomsky's similar

view, while useful in their criticisms of the dangers in notions of homogeneity and innateness, have not challenged this fundamental belief in a unitary, rational subject and have continued to replicate Saussure's basic dualism of the individual vs. society. As Bourne (1988) suggests, the polarization of the new disciplines of sociolinguistics and psycholinguistics has only served to further reproduce and legitimize this internal/external dualism.

A great deal of recent rethinking of the notion of language (outside applied linguistics) has also been going on. After outlining the representationalist and structuralist views of meaning, Morgan (1987) subsequently offers a third view of language which he calls "dialogic discourse." Drawing on the work of Bakhtin/Volosinov and Foucault, this view is neither just a description of an abstract structure nor merely a theory of language, but a politics of representation, an understanding of how language is socially constructed and how it produces change and is changed in human life. It identifies language as a scene of struggle, where the world is always/already in the word. This poststructuralist view of language, the importance of which for better conceptualizing language teaching has been clearly demonstrated by Peirce (1989), centers on a notion of discourse as a complex of signs and practices that organizes social existence and meaning-making practices.[2] As Weedon (1987) has remarked "once language is understood in terms of competing discourses, competing ways of giving meaning to the world, which imply differences in the organization of social power, then language becomes an important site of political struggle" (p. 24). Fundamental to this view, too, is the notion that subjectivities are constituted in discourse. Instead of the rational, unified subject, capable of ideas and experiences prior to and outside language a poststructuralist view suggests that since subjectivities are constructed through and take up positions in competing discourses, they are therefore both multiple and contradictory spaces.

I have been trying in this section to sketch out some of the challenges to the predominant modernist paradigms posed by a broad postmodern critique. It would, however, be both an enormous and a presumptuous task to try at this juncture to set out explicit implications for applied linguistics. Nevertheless, I think it is worth making two final points about the ideas I am trying to put forward here. First, postmodern thinking can help us see the very particular nature of applied linguistics as it has developed in its modernist context. This should, at the very least, lead us to question the foundations of our work and the often implicit claims to

universality and progress as they are couched within positivist discourses.

Second, while I do not wish to suggest that applied linguists should now start blindly accepting the plethora of new ideas that are at present floating around (we should certainly also approach new and critical ideas critically), I do feel that we should at least be responding to them. When a domain of academic work continues along untroubled while some fundamental questions are being raised about the epistemological bases on which it is built, that domain may be poorly grounded in any understanding of the forms of knowledge that it is itself producing. I have tried to sketch out some of the challenges being made to our understandings of ourselves and the world, challenges that deal with positivism, language, representation, the subject and rationality. If anthropologists are questioning the continued use of a particular notion of culture and the possibility of ever representing the Other, if educators are asking difficult questions about the cultural politics of schooling and about the interests and politics of different forms of knowledge, if psychologists are questioning the construction and concomitant regulation of the subject within psychological discourses, if poststructuralists are emphasizing power, struggle and discourse in language as very different understandings of the construction of meaning, if positivist claims to knowledge are being questioned not only for their limitations but because of the interests they serve, then surely applied linguists need to ask serious questions about their own work.

I would like to suggest, therefore, a certain direction for this project, one which would allow us to move out of the postmodern diaspora. In order to take up what I have called a "principled postmodernism," we need to reinstate the political and the ethical as the principal elements of our academic work. While positivism submerged these issues beneath its scientific methods, postmodern thinking has by no means guaranteed their re-emergence. Thus, I think we need to find ways of dealing with questions of power as they have been developed by such thinkers as Foucault so that we can not only understand but also try to change inequalities. In the next section, I shall briefly outline four critical projects that try to deal with these issues, in the hope that this will give us a sense of a way forward for a critical applied linguistics.

CRITICAL LINGUISTICS, SOCIOLINGUISTICS, ETHNOGRAPHY AND PEDAGOGY

The use of the word "critical" is not intended to reference a notion of criticism only in terms of arguments against the canon of accepted thinking, but rather to include a notion of transformative critique. By this I mean that we as intellectuals and teachers need to take up moral and political stances in order to attempt to improve and change an inequitably structured world. By such criticism I do not mean the "fine-tuning" of models that so often passes for academic work, but work that seeks to understand the political implications of its practice. In this final section, I shall look briefly at critical linguistics, critical sociolinguistics, critical ethnography and critical pedagogy in the hope that these may give us some clues as to the ways in which we might construct a critical applied linguistics.

In an important addition to the small field of critical linguistics, Fairclough (1989) demonstrates how Critical Language Study (CLS) can reveal the processes by which language functions to maintain and change the power relations in society. He outlines two main purposes to his work: correcting "the widespread underestimation of the significance of language in the production, maintenance, and change of social relations of power," and increasing "consciousness of how language contributes to the domination of some people by others, because consciousness is the first step towards emancipation" (p. 1). In his criticism of standard approaches to language study, he argues that linguistics has operated with an idealized view of language, which has isolated it from the social and historical matrix in which it is so firmly embedded. Since sociolinguistics, he suggests, has been heavily influenced by positivism, it has thus tended to describe and correlate variation with simplistic understandings of social class but has never asked why such social variation exists or tried to change such conditions. Other approaches to the study of language use, such as pragmatics (in its Anglo-American strain) or conversation analysis, have also tended to concentrate on the individual and on "micro"-structures, rather than on exploring how language relates to social power. Drawing on the work of Foucault and Habermas, Fairclough argues that by analyzing the way power and ideology are inscribed in discourse, we can come to a critical awareness of the way language both reflects and constructs social inequality.

In his book on language use in late capitalist society, Mey (1985) makes a similar point. He argues that for traditional

sociolinguistics the present organization of society's material production is taken as the only natural one. Furthermore, sociology tends to ignore social classes and operates instead with a superficial form of social stratification, failing, therefore, to establish a connection between people's place in the social hierarchy and the linguistic and other forms of oppression to which they are subject. "A *critical* sociolinguistics, by contrast," Mey argues, "seeks to recognize the political and economic distortions that our society imposes on us. It attempts to explain the differences between *oppressed* and *oppressor* language by pointing out that the different classes have unequal access to societal power" (p. 342).

It is also possible, as Simon & Dippo (1986) have pointed out, to make research critical. Starting with the premise that "to actually *do* ethnography is to engage in a process of knowledge production" (p. 195), they argue that all modes of knowing and all particular knowledge forms are ideological (this is not merely a question of "bias," but rather a matter of whose interests are served by one's work). Any production of knowledge must therefore be made accountable to a specific project, which for Simon & Dippo is a pedagogical/political project that aims to transform an inequitably structured society by constructing a mode of learning and a conception of knowledge "that may enhance the possibility of collectively constituted thought and action" (p. 196). For ethnographic work to be critical, they argue, it requires (1) a problematic that is intended to reveal social practices as produced and regulated forms of action and meaning; (2) a means by which it can be taken up in the public sphere to foster critique and transformation of the society; and (3) a self-reflexive element that can address the situated character of the research as located within particular historical and institutional forms. Most importantly, such an ethnographic project not only goes beyond the limitations of positivist research, it also aims to go beyond merely hermeneutic concerns in favor of an emancipatory project.

There is now a fairly large body of work under the rubric of 'critical pedagogy' (e.g., Giroux, 1988). Viewing schools as cultural arenas where diverse ideological and social forms are in constant struggle, critical pedagogy seeks to understand and critique the historical and sociopolitical context of schooling and to develop pedagogical practices that aim not only to change the nature of schooling, but also the wider society. Taking knowledge as socially constructed and all claims to knowledge as therefore "interested," it seeks to explore and challenge the types of knowledge produced and

legitimated in schools. This position leads to an emphasis both on how subjectivities are constructed in and around schools and on student voice and popular culture as delegitimated forms of culture and knowledge that students bring to schools. As Simon (1987) puts it:

> We view educational practice as a form of cultural politics. For us such a practice is centrally concerned with the moral and analytical task of assessing whether specific forms encourage and make possible the realization of differentiated capacities, or whether they disable, deny, dilute, and distort those capacities. Equally, such a practice is for us concerned with the educational and political task of constructing new forms that would expand the range of social identities that people have the possibility of becoming. (p. 177)

CONCLUSION: CRITICAL APPLIED LINGUISTICS

What, then, might critical applied linguistics look like? From the brief discussion above of other critical approaches, I think some of the directions that it might take become clear. In his discussion of the ideologies implicit in different approaches to teaching writing, Berlin (1988) concludes that "every pedagogy is imbricated in ideology, in a set of tacit assumptions about what is real, what is good, what is possible, and how power ought to be distributed" (p. 492). I believe we have to take these considerations very seriously and try to see the connections between our work and far broader issues of social inequality. As applied linguists, we need to not only understand ourselves as intellectuals situated in very particular social, cultural and historical locations, but also to understand that the knowledge we produce is always interested. If we are concerned about the manifold and manifest inequities of the societies and the world we live in, then I believe we must start to take up moral and political projects to change those circumstances. This requires that we cease to operate with modes of intellectual inquiry that are asocial, apolitical or ahistorical.

I do not wish to appear, of course, to be providing some new prescription. Rather, my goals are to broaden the possibilities for the way in which we can investigate questions of language and education. We need to rethink what we mean by language, to investigate the very particular circumstances that have led to our current concepts and to see how, by taking up a view of discourse as

a complex of signs and practices that organize social existence and (re)production, we can view language as fundamental in both maintaining and changing the way we live and understand the world and ourselves. Similarly, we need to rethink language acquisition in its social, cultural and political contexts, taking into account gender, race and other relations of power as well as a notion of the subject as multiple and formed within different discourses. Research would do well to drop its obsession with quantitative proof and claims to objectivity. I am not suggesting that we should reject quantitative assessment by any means (I think the quantitative/qualitative debate obscures the issue); rather, we need to acknowledge the ideological basis of all our work, and, in my opinion, seek both to further understanding and to bring about change. We need to see schools as complex cultural arenas where diverse forms are constantly in struggle, and we need to understand, above all, the cultural politics of language teaching. We would also do well to be more humble in the world, listening to the many alternative views of language and learning, rather than preaching our views as the newest and best. Engaging in critical work is by no means easy, but I believe it is essential that those of us who feel that change must and can be brought about need to start developing a means of pursuing applied linguistics as a critical project.

Notes

[1]I should also acknowledge that I am well aware of a degree of diversity and dissention within what I am describing here as a homogeneous and hegemonic body of thought.

[2]See also the debate between Peirce and Dubois in the March, 1990 issue of *TESOL Quarterly*.

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