

Psycholinguistics in Applied Linguistics: Trends and Perspectives

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Abstract

This paper explores Applied Linguistics from the standpoint of Psycholinguistics. It reviews the scholarly definitions of the terms, the nuances associated with both disciplines, the latest trends and perspectives. The paper argues that Psycholinguistics contributes significantly in the understanding of language, and informs various including Applied Linguistics, Education, Communication Disorder and Technology.

1. Introduction

1.1 Scholarly Definitions of Applied Linguistics

Applied linguistics, according to Schmitt and Celce-Murcia (2002), is using what we know about language, how it is learned and how it is used, in order to achieve some problem in the real world. In broader sense, Wilkins (1999) defines says “Applied linguistics is concerned with increasing understanding of the role of language in human affairs and thereby with providing the knowledge necessary for those who are responsible for taking language-related decisions whether the need for these arises in the classroom, the workplace, the law court, or the laboratory” (as cited Schmitt & Celce-Murcia, 2002, p.1). Applied linguistics, according to Li (2014), actually refers to applying linguistic theory, other descriptions and skills in foreign language teaching. International Encyclopedia of Linguistics, (1992) defines Applied Linguistics as: “Whenever knowledge about language is used to solve a basic language-related problem, one may say that Applied Linguistics is being practiced. Applied Linguistics is a technology which makes abstract ideas and research findings acceptable and relevant to the real world, it mediates between theory and practice” (as cited in Dendrinos, n.d., p. 3).

According to Longman Dictionary of Applied Linguistics, 1985, Applied Linguistics is viewed as thus:

Applied Linguistics is concerned with (a) the study of language and linguistics in relation to practical problems such as lexicography, translation etc.; (b) the study of second and foreign language learning and teaching. [This discipline]... uses information from sociology, psychology...as well as from linguistics in order to develop its own theoretical

models of language and language use, and then uses this information and theory in practical areas such as syllabus design, language planning etc. (as cited in Dendrinos, n.d., p. 3).

Finally Corder (1974) defines Applied Linguistics as the utilization of knowledge about the nature of language achieved by linguistic research for the improvement of efficiency of some practical tasks in which language is a central component. From all these divergent but scholarly definitions, one thing that unites these definitions is that fact that Applied Linguistics is geared to solve practical problems in the world; one of which is the application of psycholinguistic approach in solving language –related problem.

1.2 Applied Linguistics and Multi-Disciplinary Subjects

Applied Linguistic is perceived to be an eclectic independent field developed in 1960s to be applied in other domains of language use. According to Li (2014), Applied Linguistics has extensive connections with many subjects, so it has the peculiarity of interdisciplinary subject. It is a burgeoning subject and covers a wide research range. Li (2014) explains that as linguistic researches continuously deepen and expand, many interdisciplinary subjects emerge continuously. This probably makes research range of applied linguistics becomes increasingly extensive which psycholinguistics as an integral part. It can be not just applied in various language subjects, but also applied in some interdisciplinary subjects related to linguistics. Therefore, applied linguistics can be applied in all subjects related to language teaching. In view of this, many scholars consider applied linguistics is a compressive subject which integrates multiple subjects.

Dendrinos (n.d.) however argues that because much works in the area deals with foreign language teaching, Applied Linguistics is often perceived as the field that uses insights from linguistics for the benefit of foreign language education. However, such a view overlooks a great deal of important contributions of Applied Linguistics to a significant number of other areas including Feminist Linguistics, Computational and Corpus Linguistics, Eco-linguistics, Psycholinguistics, lexicography and language planning and policy. Li (2014) adds applied linguistics is a product of theoretical knowledge of linguistics which combines social practice in long-term social development. In other words, linguistic theory crosses with other subjects and penetrates mutually, and finally a brand-new applied interdisciplinary subject forms.

2. Psycholinguistics

Historically the focus of most psycholinguists has been on first language (L1), acquisition of first language in children and in research on adult comprehension and production (Schmitt, 2002, p.133-140). The findings and concepts of psycholinguistics is used and studied by people in a variety of fields such as psychology, cognitive science linguistics, and neurolinguistic. There are several subdivisions within psycholinguistics that are based on the components that make up the language. The main interest of a psycholinguist is language development; language use and language break down. Perception, attention, motor planning and memory that is critical for language but are not unique to language is the other areas of psycholinguistic interest. More specifically a psycholinguist studies language, speech production and comprehension, using behavioral and neurological methods which traditionally are developed in the field of psychology though other methods such as corpus analysis are also widely used. Due to its interdisciplinary nature, psycholinguistics can be found in linguistics, psychology, cognitive science, communication science, communication disorders and other departments. The main of purpose of psycholinguistics is to outline and describe the process of producing and comprehending. Psycholinguistics, therefore, is the study of the cognitive processes that support the acquisition and use of language (Bot & Kroll, 2002, p. 133). The authors go ahead to add that the focus of most psycholinguistics has been on the first language (L1), in studies of acquisition in children and research on adult comprehension and production (p. 133). Barekat (2011) and Agbedo (2015), on their part, assert that psycholinguistics examines the psychological and neurobiological factors that predispose humans to acquire, use, comprehend and produce language completely. It is explained that the scope of psycholinguistics include language performance under normal circumstances and when it breaks down, for example, following brain damage. Barker (2015) says Psycholinguistics has traditionally been seen as concerned with the three major processes involved in human verbal communication, language comprehension, language production and language acquisition.

2.1 Sub-disciplines of Psycholinguistics

Psycholinguistics has developed rapidly and expanded into several sub-disciplines as cited in Purba (2018) below:

1. Theoretical psycholinguistics. It focused on theories of language relating to human mental processes in language, such as phonetics, diction, syntax design, discourse, and intonation.
2. Developmental psycholinguistics. It is related to language acquisition, both first language acquisition (L1) and second language acquisition (L2). It examines phonological, semantic, and syntactic acquisition, process in stages, gradually, and integrated.
3. Social psycholinguistics related to the social aspects of language, including social identity.
4. Educational psycholinguistics discussed general aspects of formal education at school, including the role of language in teaching reading teaching proficiency, and improving language ability to express thoughts and feelings.
5. Neuro-psycholinguistics focused on the relationship between language, language production, and the human brain. Neurology experts have managed to analyze the biological structure of the brain and analyzed what happens with the input language and how language output programmed and set up in the brain.

6. Experimental psycholinguistics covered and experimented in all language productions and language activities, language behavior, and language outcome.

7. Applied psycholinguistics concerned with the application of the findings of six sub-disciplines of psycholinguistics explained before in certain areas that require it, including psychology, linguistics, language learning, neurology, psychiatry, communications, and literature.

3. The Relationship between Psycholinguistics and Applied Linguistics

It has been established that Applied Linguistics is an independent field of study that accommodates other domains of language use which psycholinguistics is an integral part; this is where the relationship started. The second language acquisition seems to be one of the appropriate chunks of applied linguistics in the context. Language acquisition rightly belongs to an area of psycholinguistics. According to de Bot (2000), the psycholinguistic interest would be in the processing mechanisms involved in using more than one language and the acquisition of additional languages. The Applied Linguistics interest would be in understanding why language learners behave the way they do, or in other words, what the mechanisms are for L2 use and acquisition. Ultimately, interest also lies in interventions that change and improve those mechanisms. This interpretation means that multilingual processing can be defined as the intersection or shared interest across psycholinguistics and Applied Linguistics. The interest of the Applied linguistics also lies in interventions that change and improve mechanisms. Language transfer, overgeneralization, simplification and fossilization represents some psychological mechanism. The intersection or shared interest across psycholinguistics and applied linguistics is defined as multilingual processing.

4. Current Trend in Applied Linguistics

Applied linguistics continuously pushes out and establishes new theories. Applied linguistics becomes a relatively independent subject after development for some time. Many linguists and applied linguists establish many new theories, including cognitive theory. Cognitive theory

pushes applied linguistics study to a new height. So, applied linguistics study has developed to the stage of cognitive theory and social constructivist theory. They represent relatively advanced linguistic research theories in the world (Li, 2014).

Li (2014) adds that the development process of applied linguistics is human socialization process. Because social constructivist theory regards language as an important constituent part of social semantic system, language learners are important members in whole social group. Their ways of thinking and learning strategies will be restricted and influenced by specific social culture and social norms. From this perspective, learners' specific socio-cultural background and learning environment are closely related to cultivation and improvement of their language cognition competence. That is, interactions between learners and their surroundings will ultimately result in development of language cognition competence and language competence

The development of applied linguistics, according to Li (2014) requires knowing social cultures of various countries. Research and development trend of applied linguistics need to improve learners' social and culture consciousness, and attach importance to socio-cultural background of target language countries so as to provide a, interactive and penetrative possibility platform for language study and application. Applied linguistics is a multi-disciplinary aggregation and involves a wide range, and the research fields are complex and diversified. In view of these, in foreign language teaching, we should introduce more teaching theories in teaching process on the basis of comprehensiveness, openness and scientificity of applied linguistics so as to make foreign language teaching process more diversified and teaching strategies more flexible and make linguistic theory reflect its huge values in actual teaching process. Applied linguistics will make language teaching

become the research core of social educational circle under international background, and propose higher requirements and expectations for foreign language teachers. In particular, cooperative study of cross-school, cross-subject and cross-major experts and scholars will become an inevitable development trend.

5. Language Acquisition

Second language acquisition refers to a further language which is acquired after the first, usually after primary school. The acquisition of a second language never reaches the degree of proficiency of the first. The reason for this is that children start too late; in fact they are usually teenagers before being exposed to the second language. After puberty one cannot learn a second language as well as a first one, no matter how much time one invests in this. In this connection linguists generally make the distinction between *acquisition* - for the first language - and *learning* - for the second language after childhood. Language acquisition involves a dynamic process within constantly active mind that organizes the verbal material for storage. Factors involved in second language acquisition are divided into two categories:

- a. Psychological: It includes intellectual processing, memory, motor skills, motivation and attitude.
- b. Social: The types of situations, settings and interactions which an individual experiences can affect the learning of a second language. It includes natural situation in contrast to the classroom situation, EFL VS ESL situation.

5.1 Condition for Language Acquisition

Hauptseminar (2014), there are three conditions for language acquisitions. They include:

- a. Natural: This is characterised by continuous exposure to language data. This data is not ordered, i.e. the (child) learner is exposed to the performance of adult speakers of the language he/she is acquiring. There is little if any feedback to the acquirer with regard to this intake.
- b. Controlled: This is intervallic if not to say sporadic. Furthermore it takes place against the background of another language, usually the first language (L1) of the learners. In

exceptional cases acquisition can be both natural and controlled, i.e. where one obtains formal instruction (or gives it one to oneself) and lives in an environment where the target language is spoken. Controlled acquisition is further characterised by an ordered exposure to the data of the language.

- c. Guided Language Acquisition: This is an intermediary type between the two just discussed and is characterised by prescriptive corrections on the part of the child's contact persons, i.e. mother, father, etc. Corrections show the transfer of adult grammars to children whereas natural language acquisition shows the gradual approximation of the child's grammar to the adult's.

6. **Interest in Interest in Psycholinguistics**

Barekat (2011) maintains that the main interest in psycholinguistics is not confined to psychology and linguistics. According to him, many have been stimulated by its practical possibilities. One thinks of medical applications to the diagnosis and treatment of a heterogeneous variety of language disorders ranging from a simple stammering to the overwhelming complexities of aphasia. One thinks too of pedagogical applications of potential improvement in our methods for teaching reading and writing of second language. Barekat goes ahead to argue that if psycholinguistic principles were made sufficiently explicit, they could be applied to those technical concepts of the twentieth century. Principally, the central task of psycholinguistics is to describe the psychological processes that go on when people use sentences (Field, 2006, p. 93). The main object of research in psycholinguistics is the Study of the cognitive process that underlies the comprehension and production of language and the way cultural environment interacts with these two. More detailed subsections of psycholinguistics describes the language abilities of infants as they acquired their first words and develop their first grammatical skills, the representation and access of words (spoken and written) in the mental lexicon , the representation and process implicated in sentence processing and discourse comprehension , and finally the manner in which as we speak

words and sentences. Psycholinguistics is as much about the study of the human mind itself as it is about the study of minds ability to communicate and comprehend. Currently, psycholinguistics moves to a selection of current topics, beginning with the language abilities of newborn infants, and moving on from how infants represent the speech they here to , how they acquire first vocabulary and how later, as adults , they represent and access words in the mental lexicon (both spoken and written) . Psycholinguistics also attends to the acquisition of grammatical skills in children and the processing of sentences by adults to text and discourse understanding.

7. Summary and Conclusion

Summarily, this chapter provided different scholarly definitions of Applied Linguistics; it explained the roles of Applied Linguistics in other subjects/disciplines. It defined psycholinguistics and explains its sub-disciplines and its relationship with Applied Linguistics. Furthermore, the chapter explained the current trend in Applied Linguistics and language acquisition. Finally, it explicated the interest of psycholinguistics and its research paradigms. It is conclude that Applied Linguistics plays a crucial role in describing psycholinguistics. It is a mother figure that nurtures other linguistic disciplines; one of which is Psycholinguistics. Since one of the goals of Applied Linguistics is solving practical problems using the methodologies of language; Psycholinguistics helps in actualizing them. For example, Psycholinguistics helps to provide answers to problems relating to language and brain (neurolinguistics), language acquisition, computational linguistics, clinical linguistics and even applied psycholinguistics. All of these categorically define the relationship between Applied Linguistics and Psycholinguistics. This probably explains the reason why psycholinguistics remains an inseparable part of Applied Linguistics. One would always see the former in the latter.

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