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**IRAQI EFL COLLEGE INSTRUCTORS' AWARENESS OF  
SOME OF THE PROBLEMS OF APPLIED LINGUISTICS**

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**Research Article**

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**Abstract:**

Applied linguistics is one of the most influential disciplines that appeared in the twentieth century. This discipline received a major interest in many western countries. In many Arab countries; this discipline started to receive the attention gradually. This research is an attempt to investigate Iraqi instructors' background knowledge of applied linguistics at AL- Mustansiriyah University-English department and some instructors from different Iraqi universities. To collect the data, twenty instructors gave their opinions through a questionnaire, while, eight other instructors contributed through an interview. The results of this study showed a variation in the answers of the instructors. That is different and contradictory answers and opinions were given regarding some of the questions in the field. As a result, it is really preferable and recommended to do workshops to enhance the background knowledge of the instructors regarding this field.

**Key words:** Applied, Linguistics, Problems, Awareness.

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## 1. Introduction

Applied linguistics appeared and approved itself as a discipline of a great influence. Cook (2003, p.5) says that Applied linguistics is needed in everyday life. There are many issues and questions in the contemporary world that require the aid of applied linguistics. That is because applied linguistics is a discipline that focuses on the relation between language knowledge to the real world that requires the act of decision making. Many educational questions and issues in contemporary societies evolve to take different significance. To answer such questions and solve such issues, it would be a reasonable thing to understand different things about the use of language, to organize this knowledge, to formalize what people know, and to make such knowledge subject to rational consideration, in addition to the critical analysis. All of this can be considered as the goal of applied linguistics. The aim of this study is to investigate Iraqi EFL college instructors' background knowledge of applied linguistics. It tries to explore how this discipline is received by them and the position of this discipline among the other disciplines.

The hypothesis of the study is that Iraqi EFL college instructors have a contradictory knowledge of the discipline of applied linguistics.

The procedures which were followed in conducting this study include two methods. The first method is a questionnaire which was distributed to (20) college instructors to investigate their background knowledge of some of the questions that receive an interest in applied linguistics. The other group of college instructors were interviewed and asked to give their opinions about the role of applied linguistics in the world and its placement at the Iraqi universities. This study is limited to include only Iraqi EFL college instructors at the Department of English at AL-Mustansiriyah University and some instructors from different universities.

This study is significant since it focuses on a discipline that did not receive a lot of focus at many Iraqi universities. With this study, it is hoped that Iraqi EFL college instructors can have a better understanding of applied linguistics and realize its significance to be included as a main discipline with the other disciplines that are being taught at the universities. It is also hoped that college students can also benefit from this study and to see the role of applied linguistics more obviously.

## 2. Literature Review

Kaplan (2010, cited in De Bot, 2015 p.1) says that while the discipline of linguistics has a long history that dates back to ancient times of the Greek, Babylonian and Hindu, the discipline of applied linguistics is a newly born discipline. There is still a debate about when and how this discipline started.

There is a belief that applied linguistics appeared in the first half of the 20th century. Phakiti, De Costa, Plonsky, and Starfield (2018, p.6) see that applied linguistics is a youthful discipline that emerged in the latter half of the 20th century. Simpson (2011, p.1) agrees that the starting point of applied linguistics dates back to the middle of the 20th century. Applied linguistics appeared to give a support for the learning and teaching of the language.

Berns and Matsuda (2010, p. 6) say that applied linguistics started its twentieth-century modern version in 1941 when Michigan university established its English language institute, and the term appeared in 1948 when the “language learning” journal started its work. These two institutions made applied linguistics appears in its modern version, but the term of applied linguistics and its concept have a longer history. Thinkers who lived in older times were concerned with issues that have a relation with language and their implications in the real world. The focus was on how logical arguments are constructed, the development of style, the development of discourse, and teaching the art of producing discourse. Early Greek, Indian and Chinese focused on exploring how knowledge was created and negotiated through discourse. Greek sophists studied the language with a connection to other subjects like ethics, politics, and law and many different subjects. The Greek rhetoric was developed by Aristotle with his theory of persuasive discourse in different areas such as politics and ceremonials which played a significant role in the education of language. It also played an important role in developing modern theories about speech rhetoric and writing instructions.

Berns and Matsuda (2010, p. 6) also say that the rhetoric tradition of Greco-Roman focused on exploring the method in which discourse is produced. This included how ideas are developed and the style, in addition to teaching the best way in which language is used. Renaissance also renewed the focus on classical rhetoric. In the 17,18th centuries the taxonomic view of the disciplines made rhetoric without its intellectual components. In the 20th century the movement of the new rhetoric revived and expanded the original range of rhetoric, however taxonomic disciplinary made the influence of rhetoric on applied linguistics limited.

### **2.1 Definitions**

One of the most frequently asked questions in this discipline is about its definition. Simpson (2011, p. 1) defines it as an academic field that uses the knowledge of the language and attaches it to the process of decision making in real life.

Another definition is given by Richards and Schmidt (2010, p. 29), they see that applied linguistics is a discipline that focuses on the study of foreign and second language teaching and learning. It is a discipline that centers on the practical problems of the real world in which

language is the main focus. Simpson (2011, p. 1) says that applied linguistics as a discipline that interposes between the practice and the theory. Also, (Brumfit, 1995, p. 27 cited in Simpson, 2011, p. 2) defines applied linguistics as an academic field that makes empirical and theoretical exploration and investigation of the problems of the real life where language is the main problem.

Davies (2007, p.1) says that applied linguistics is a field that does not adapt itself with a stable definition. What is noticed about the definition in many books is that they are considered ostensive definitions. In ostensive definition, the discipline is defined by the types of the activities and concerns that the discipline focuses on. This is done to show and analyze the various methods and purposes of this discipline. Davies (2007, p.2) says that those who seek for a dictionary definition refuse ostensive definitions.

Davies (2007, p.3) points to a question, which is the source of the discipline. In other words, he refers to the question of what do applied linguistics applies. Two interpretations are given; narrow and board. The narrow interpretation is understood if the only thing being applied is theoretical linguistics, and since theoretical linguistics only focuses on idealisation, then incorporating real-world problems will not be relevant to theoretical linguistics since it will have a very little to say about these problems. The board interpretation is understood if applied linguistics concerned itself with everything in language. Neither of these two views are tenable. Davies (2007, p.3) says that Corder proposed a solution which is to focus on language teaching. That is, matters like speech therapy and language planning.

Davies (2007, p.4) says that there was a lot of discussion about the removal and changing of the term 'applied linguistics' on the basis that this term was confusing. Crystal (2008, p.31) says that in addition to applied linguistics, other fields have appeared such as educational linguistics.

Returning to the main point, De Bot (2015, p. 34) indicates that there are three general views about the definition. The first view is where applied linguistics is related to the problems of the real world and how to work out such problems with the support of linguistic tools and knowledge. Those who prefer this definition feel that a subfield like Second Language Acquisition is not related to applied linguistics since they do not deal with the problems of the real world. The second view is where Applied Linguistics overlaps with Second language Acquisition. Adapters of such definition see that problems of the real world are not regarded as the defining competent. The third view is the widest one. Supporters of such definition feel that applied linguistics is basically everything related to the language without any consideration to theoretical linguistics.

## 2.2 A Founder

Another question, who leads this field? This field is so diverse and splits a lot, that it is difficult to recognize an obvious leader. At least, who are famous in applied linguistics?

De bot interviewed a lot of influential people –informants- to discuss this matter. De bot (2015, p. 37-38) says that one of the opinions defined leaders as people who carry academic honesty, and various perspectives. A different opinion said that leaders can be defined as people who contribute by giving modern theories that are related to different disciplines, they are also reasonable for establishing and making the universal standards. Moreover, one opinion said that leaders are simply thinkers, and researchers. Furthermore, another opinion said that leaders not only carry academic weight, but they also contribute by being active in establishing different conferences, leading different well-known journals and many activities. Other opinion said that being academically respected is not enough; having a well-known figure can improve and strengthen the status of the field, even if such person is not really considered as an applied linguist.

Other informants listed their views of who should be considered as a leader by voting. In conclusion, De Bot (2015, p. 48) says that one cannot expect to find a Chomsky type of a leader in applied linguistics. Opinions agreed on the fact that leaders must carry a high academic reputation; they must be innovative, capable of focusing on different issues in the field, active in participating in different local and international conferences, and provide their experience in famous journals.

## 2.3 Applied vs. Theoretical

Cook (2003, p. 9-10) says that linguistics is a field of study where the language is scientifically studied. Theoretical linguistics search for generalities and in some degree introduces an abstract idealization of the language; it does not focus on how the language is experienced in the real life. Different and apposed theories are found in theoretical linguistics. One important kind of idealization is the one which Chomsky purposed in his generative model. Chomsky distinguished between two things, the first thing is competence, which is how language is represented in the mind, and the second thing is the performance, which is how language is used in everyday life by people. The focus of the linguists, in his view, is to concentrate on the competence. In sociolinguistics, the focus is on the relationship between the language and the society. Sociolinguistics tries to explore the systematic relations between different social groupings and contexts. Functional linguistics focuses on how the language is used to fulfill different purposes. Corpus linguistics search databanks for the frequency of the words and their combinations.

Cook (2003, p. 10) continues by saying that these approaches are much closer to the reality of experience than Chomsky's approach. They may seem a closer to applied linguistics. However, in their various ways, they also idealize the language from its actual use. The purpose of such approaches is to discuss and not to engage in the process of the decision making. Linguistics theories cannot be used directly to deal with the problems that applied linguistics is focused on. Applied linguistics is not simply about linking language findings with problems, but using these findings of the language to see how the perception of such problems can be changed. In some cases, looking at the problems from different points of views can make the problems more open and adjustable to solutions. Such different perceptions may also give implications for linguistics. Corder (1993, p. 10) says that applied linguists are consumers not producers of theories.

Cook (2003, p. 10) also says that applied linguistics methodology is a complex one. Applied linguistics needs to refer to the findings and the theories that are found in linguistics. It views different schools and approaches and make these approaches appropriate to the problems. It also investigates the needs and experience of the people who are involved in these problems. All in all, applied linguistics tries to connect these two perspectives with each other and reformulate each.

### **3. Research Methodology**

#### **3.1 Procedures**

In order to collect the data, two tools were used. The first tool is a questionnaire that focuses on some of the points in applied linguistics. The second tool is a number of interviews with some instructors to get more additional reviews. The aim is to investigate the college instructors' background knowledge of applied linguistics.

#### **3.2 Population**

To get a better understanding and clear view, a questionnaire was given to twenty instructors at AL- Mustansiriyah University- department of English, and other instructors from different Iraqi universities, for the academic year 2019-2020. In addition, eight other college instructors were interviewed to get more diverse opinions.

#### **3.3 Instrument**

In order to achieve the aim of the study, EFL college instructors were given a questionnaire that was constructed by the researcher. This questionnaire was distributed to gather data. This questionnaire introduces simple questions that can help in gathering the data of this research. The questionnaire consists of (12) questions that the instructors can answer by selecting 'agree', or 'disagree'. To back up the results of the questionnaire, interviews were made with eight instructors.

### 3.4 Face Validity

The questionnaire can be effective when a group of experts in the field revise, judge and approve its construction. Consequently, validity is the main thing that one focus on. In other words, the questionnaire needs to have face validity. For Brown (2001, p.388) face validity is the question of whether the type of the test is designed to test what is meant to be test.

To achieve this validity, a number of EFL experts who work at different universities were given this questionnaire to be examined and checked. Advices and suggestions were asked from the experts. The experts provided their opinions in general and about the quality of this questionnaire. The experts provided various opinions and approved, but with few modifications.

### Results of the questionnaire

The first instrument which was used to collect the data is a questionnaire. The questionnaire consisted of twelve items. The first item which was about the nature of the discipline of applied linguistics and the debate about it (12) instructors believed that there is a lot of debate about it (60%), while (8) said the opposite (40%). The second item which was about the idea that applied linguistics is the connectivity point of many disciplines, (18) instructors said yes (90%), and (2) said no (10%). The third item which was about whether the discipline is overrated, (13) instructors believed that it is overrated (65%), while (7) instructors (35%) disagreed with this idea. The fourth item which was about the starting point of applied linguistics, (4) instructors (20%) agreed that it is an old discipline with a history that dates back to ancient times, while (16) instructors (80%) disagreed with this idea. The fifth item which was about the view that applied linguistics is not well recognized at Iraqi universities, (12) instructors (60%) agreed with this point, while (8) instructors (40%) disagreed.

The sixth item which was about the idea that Iraqi college instructors do not focus on applied linguistics (9) instructors (45%) responded positively and (11) responded negatively (55%). The seventh item which was about the idea that applied linguistics does not contribute in solving instructors related problems (6) said yes (30%), and (14) said no (70%). The eighth item which was about the difficulty in bringing a definition of applied linguistics (12) said yes (60%), while (8) instructors said no (40%). The ninth item which was about the idea that applied linguistics has a leader and a founder (17) instructors said yes (85%), while (3) instructors said no (15%). The tenth item which was about the idea that applied and educational linguistics are similar (6) instructors approved with this idea (30%), while (14) instructors disapproved with this idea (70%). The eleventh item which was about the idea that applied linguistics and teaching methodologies are similar (11)

instructors answered yes (55%), while (9) instructors answered no (45%). The last item which was about the idea that linguistics, applied linguistics and educational linguistics are all similar (7) agreed with this idea (35%), and (13) instructors disapproved with this idea (65%).

### **Results of the Interview**

The second instrument which is used to gather data is a number of interviews. These interviews were made since it is felt that applied linguistics is a type of discipline which is not focused on a lot. These interviews functioned as a supportive tool to elicit opinions from the instructors. The researcher interviewed a group of eight specialized faculty members, and the following statements were given:

Instructor No (1) referred to the discipline as an exciting discipline that may offer a lot of things. He wondered about why applied linguistics did not develop faster as the way it is in the western countries. He also said that one can search the libraries for research topics about applied linguistics and he will find a lack of research topics about it. Still, he hoped that this discipline gets more attention.

Instructor No (2) gave another opinion which differs from the first instructor. He said that applied linguistics is probably has some recognition in the Arabic world, and this type of recognition is a good one and also a bright one that support in introducing the discipline. However, according to his point of view, in Iraqi contexts, the discipline of applied linguistics remains not so much focused on.

Instructor No (3) was asked about why the discipline of applied linguistics was not so much focused on. She said that many EFL instructors were accustomed that linguistics is the main topic that should be studied at the university. As a result, one can see a vast number of research topics about linguistics and its role in everyday life. However, linguistics is only one fragment of the whole picture. As she expressed, such picture is a beautiful and colorful picture in which every color –discipline- take its place in an elegant way.

Instructor No (4) agreed with the previous opinion and added his opinion about why the discipline of applied linguistics was not so much focused on. He said that this is because many instructors, probably, did not recognize the offers that such discipline may give. The remoteness from this discipline stemmed from the unawareness about such discipline. In addition, it is possible that there was not a full understanding of this discipline. It is perhaps that the connectivity of applied linguistics to a large number of disciplines made this discipline not fully understood. Obviously, it seemed that this discipline was a vague discipline.

Instructor No (5) was asked about the difference between linguistics and applied linguistics. She said that she read something about this in one of the books. She also said that whether it is theoretical or applied, they are very interesting disciplines. That is because each type is

directed toward something. Furthermore, she indicated that applied linguistics is only found in small introductions in some of the linguistics book that college instructors give to their students. However, not so much attention is given to this discipline. She also said that while applied linguistics is given in small and brief introductions, educational linguistics is never mentioned in these books. She suggested that college instructors must give applied linguistics some attention and then students or researchers can have a better understanding of its topics. After having a good understanding, students and researchers can enrich scientific research with good materials about this disciplines.

Instructor No (6) was confused when she was asked about the differences between these various types of linguistics. She thought that they are the same and that applied linguistics is basically a part of linguistics itself. That is because it is found in the general linguistics book which she teaches to her students. She did not have any idea about the term 'educational linguistics' since such term is not mentioned in the course that she teaches.

Instructor No (7) gave another different opinion; he said that due to his constant visits to the library, he found like two or three types of books with the title of applied linguistics on their covers in the college of the library, however, these books are not so much focused on.

Instructor No (8) said that he had some bits of knowledge about this discipline. That is because when he was doing some research about a topic in linguistics, he read something that made him interesting in knowing more about applied linguistics. In fact, he said that there was a question that made him more interesting in getting an additional knowledge. This question was about the best age that a child can acquire or teach a second or a foreign language. For him this was like a real-life educational problem that needed an answer.

### **Conclusion**

Opinions were given and it seems that applied linguistics is a kind of a discipline which is not so much focused on. It seems that Iraqi EFL college instructors have a contradictory knowledge about this discipline. However, this discipline is given a lot of attention in western universities. Though it may be seen as an ambitious field that is capable of dealing with a lot of the educational problems that may appear in life, it faces simple questions that are left without an answer. Among these questions is the problem of finding a suitable definition to attach to it. Probably, this uncertainty is what makes applied linguistics the way it is.

The second problem is the problem of finding an establishing personality or a founder of this discipline. This problem stems from the fact that the scope of applied linguistics is very wide and incorporates a

lot of other fields. Votes may be given for the most contributive personality -no matter what his field is- to be the leader, but a real establishing personality or a founder similar to Chomsky remains unknown in this field.

In general, the data shows a contradictory knowledge and confusion about the nature of this discipline. It is required that Iraqi EFL college instructors to be more enlightened about applied linguistics. Understanding the discipline will give the instructors an additional knowledge. A good recommendation is that it would be a good thing to do workshops about this discipline to shed some light and to highlight the significance of this discipline for educational issues that appear in the real world.

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