

APPLIED LINGUISTICS AND LANGUAGE TEACHING IN THE PHILIPPINES: THEORY AND IMPLICATIONS

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We need to go beyond the simplistic notion current in Philippine language circles that applied linguistics is synonymous or co-terminous with language education. Rather, there are areas of overlap between applied linguistics and language education, since both subject areas go beyond the boundaries of each other.

Applied linguistics goes beyond the description of the sound system, lexicon, syntax and discourse of a human signaling system, combining sounds and meanings to the uses of these systems or structures not only for communicating among human beings in a community but likewise for the creation of contemplable designs of art (heard or read) that serve the needs of beauty realized as linguistic art; one must likewise consider the use of linguistic structures to achieve different forms of communication (to explain, to describe, to tell a story, to persuade, to amuse).

The learning of language and the facilitation of this learning is a social and psychological process in the human individual's brain. For other human beings to learn human linguistic codes or what is known as language teaching calls for the convergence of both scientific knowledge (of language, of the human mind, of social interaction, of written codes) and art (the art of class management and class presentation and strategy for language learning). Still, other extensions of use of the signaling system have to do with the build-up of long texts for the creation of scientific community and the recording of the knowledge generated in publications, and more recently, electronic and digital media.

The practice or teaching praxis in different settings under different conditions and according to a predetermined and planned distribution of learning/teaching units is what is known as language education, which is a component of the more comprehensive activity of "paideia" or the handing down of knowledge and training and skills to the next generation.

Practical implications based on this clarification of theory and practice and using the Philippine context will constitute the more useful section of the address.

De Saussure made a distinction early in the last century between diachronic linguistics, which had dominated the century before, and synchronic linguistics, which was his area of focus and development.

The kind of linguistic investigation that goes across time, diachronics, was the *métier* of the nineteenth century lovers of the word or the philologists who, taking evolution and the development of species as their basic frame of reference in doing science, were interested in the origins of languages at the macrolevel and the origins of words at the microlevel. In the same way that Darwin and his naturalist investigators hypothesized about the origin of species and their development or evolution across time, investigators of social realities, using the biological paradigm, looked on social realities across time, traced their origins and their evolution to the present.

Transferring the metaphor from the study of living things to the study of social codes or signaling systems, and based on the earlier evidence of relationships among diverse languages that Sir William Jones in India had called attention to, showing the resemblances between the Northern languages of India and the languages of Europe, the metaphors of a biological tree of language, of families of languages, of mother and daughter languages and their lateral relationships, a hypothetical language family called the Indo-European languages was inferred and from this working hypothesis and the evidence of other elements of language systems, Indo-Aryan and Indo-European studies were the great contributions of the comparative philologists of the nineteenth century, who refined the comparative method, synthesized by Antoine Meillet, through their reconstructions of phonological and lexical elements, and by Delbrück and Brugmann for syntactic forms.

From the Indo-European family it was a logical step to move to other language families stimulated by the colonization of the New World, Asia and the Pacific, and later Africa. For the Pacific, Otto Dempwolff, a medical doctor in the Marianas, founded Austronesian Studies and set up a working group at Hamburg. Thus, the Philippine languages were studied using the comparative method with informants such as the late Professor Cecilio Lopez who completed his degree on the comparison between Malay (the base of Bahasa Indonesia and Bahasa Malaysia) and Ilocano syntax, and in effect, established comparative linguistics in the Philippines on a solid footing in the Department of Oriental Languages and Linguistics at the University of the Philippines under the leadership of a highway-engineer-turned-linguist in the person of Professor Otto Scheerer.

Synchronic linguistics, which found its first theoretician in Geneva in the person of Ferdinand de Saussure, did not arrive in the Philippines until the post-War period when the Michigan and UCLA linguists were trained under the impetus of the Philippine Center for Language Study.

However, a case can be made for the Spanish missionary linguists as our first synchronic linguists in the Philippines; they came up with the grammars of the Philippine languages in the Spanish Period, as early as the late sixteenth century. The *frailles* composed these *Artes* and *Vocabularios* (grammars and dictionaries) for their colleagues in order for the latter to learn the local languages. In some ways, then, these works could also be considered as early examples of applied linguistics although they were reference grammars and dictionaries more than teaching manuals in our contemporary sense.

The American pioneers in the synchronic descriptions of Tagalog were Frank Ringgold Blake of Johns Hopkins University and Leonard Bloomfield at the University of Illinois.

The post-War Filipino synchronic linguists described Philippine languages using structural linguistics as a frame of reference and arrived at descriptions of phonology and morphology and syntax as well as dictionaries.

However, the immediate type of linguistics that we learned in the post-War period in the Philippines was done largely with the notion of language teaching in mind, to teach Philippine languages to foreigners and to teach English to Filipino speakers in a contemporary model, learning from the experience of massive language learning that American academic linguists had gone through during the second World War, when speakers English had to be taught foreign languages quickly for the countries in which American forces were fighting the War.

In the Philippines, somewhat simplistically we called this kind of linguistics for language learning applied linguistics, and considered it synonymous with the teaching of English as a second language and the teaching of foreign languages, in addition to English and the teaching of Filipino and other Philippine languages to speakers of other languages, especially Western.

This account of historical and contemporary linguistics, descriptive and applied, has been necessary to make some necessary distinctions that the experience of formal language study has given us since the 1950s. What the stimulus of language study has provided us in the past fifty or more years is a more nuanced and more complicated picture of language study more than merely applying linguistic concepts to language teaching.

First of all, language teaching is merely one application of linguistics. There are many more. Indeed, in general, the application or use of scientific findings, a body of knowledge consisting of precise concepts, principles of how these concepts interrelate, and logically derived conclusions based on principles established and generalizations made from observation or from experiment, is called technology.

In the scientific study of language, which is both deductive (general principles established on the signaling systems of human beings) and inductive (general observations made about the behavior of human beings in the use of their signaling systems and the structure of these signaling systems), what one derives is a description of the language (in its sound system, its lexemic elements, its rules for creating sentences, its rules for relating sequences of sentences to create longer utterances or messages), an essential but not sufficient element for language teaching.

The findings of the scientific study of language may be used to create dictionaries, pedagogical teaching tools for teaching how to produce the sentences, compiling dictionaries for reference, compiling systematic descriptions of grammars for references, studying how these signaling systems are recorded through writing and other means of recording including electronic means, creating exercises on the use of these rules and elements to do things with words, to express one's feelings, to persuade, to describe, to tell a story, to convince, to amuse, to present one form of beauty or art, to get things done. Other applications of language study are the study of secret codes or cryptology, the use of language for

propaganda and for marketing in the mass media. These are forms of technology or scientific application or applied linguistics.

On the other hand, to teach a language, one needs more than a scientific description of a language (a grammar, a dictionary, a reference grammar, a manual of discourse). One also needs to be able to transfer this knowledge from one human being to another, from one human brain to another. This is teaching and it involves a different science, the science of mind or the science of mental processing, and it also involves art, the ways of presenting what one is teaching, its content, in ways that will help the human being pay attention, retain what he has learned, use what he has learned well and consistently. This has to do with pedagogy or teaching or language teaching, where what is taught must be available but must be complemented by techniques or creative or imaginative ways of imparting this knowledge. On the other side is the human being affected by the active teaching, by his own receptivity which is not merely passive but active and involves both mental and emotional components. This has to do with learning, a coordinate though distinct subject matter for the study of mind or the study for learning (there are many kinds), since not all that is taught is actually received or internalized or memorized or learned. Thus there is learning theory and there is learning praxis, of enabling the student to learn on his own, of self-teaching and ultimate learning. These are all facets of the complex form of learning involving the human brain and the human being's other powers. The latter has to do with language teaching and its correlative personal aspect, language learning.

For us linguists in the Philippines, our experience with descriptive linguistics and our efforts to make creative use of the scientific study of language for language teaching through its applications in learning situations, have borne fruit in some insights that are worth reviewing and discussing.

We now have better describers of the Philippine languages and students more aware of the structure of the English language and other foreign languages that we are trying to teach in our country. We have learned to look into the details of the sound system through phonetics and phonology, and we have gained the valuable insight that thought is expressed or symbolized orally or in writing by a code which we have learned to master at least in its main rules of formation and transformation. We have likewise become aware of some processes of text generation through rediscovering and being enriched by current insights into discourse and traditional rhetoric. In the process, we have likewise gained strategies for decoding and understanding long texts through reading and expressing themes of reality, both imaginative and empirical, through creative and technical writing. Moreover, we now have better understanding of how dictionaries are compiled, ideally based on a word frequency count of actual running texts and the use of a concordance for extracting nuances of meanings or semantics from different uses of the same phonological sequence. Thanks to the applications of the computer, we can use programs analyzing multiple texts quickly for these word counts and for what we have come to call concordances. Moreover, from cognitive psychology, we have gained insight into the process of language learning, of naturalistic observation, of the internalization of structures and spontaneous automatic production of long texts, and have some guesses of how language is processed in the brain, where it is processed (through neural networks in the brain), and have gained insight into short term, medium term and long term memory and storage. While we soon realized that a purely stimulus-response behaviorist model does not capture the complexity of the creative use of language, we have nevertheless recognized the role of imitation, repetition, and

memorization in language learning and continue to profit from the insights of the behaviorist model while aware of its limitations and oversimplifications.

We do not have full explanations but we do have descriptive adequacy regarding practices in the classroom, which of them seem to yield better results of retention, internalization, and some insights from experience of what works and what does not work, and have come to realize the vital importance of other factors such as motivation and attitude for successful language learning.

And yet, with all the new insights and the technological innovations and aids now possible and available to us, we have not been blessed with the same initial success we had in language teaching and seemingly resultant language learning that the Thomasites and the early Filipino teachers in the public school system attained with their language teaching characterized by what we now recognize as less than effective language teaching methods and presuppositions. By the time the Spaniards left the Philippines in 1898 after almost 350 years of colonization, the number of Filipinos able to speak Spanish has been estimated from a low of 4% to a high of 10% at most, and yet, after only 48 years of contact with English, our 1939 Census, the last before independence from the United States, reported that almost 30% of Filipinos perceived themselves able to speak English with basic communicative competence, a feat of language achievement probably unmatched by any other case in the history of mankind.

The next question we have to ask ourselves is:

Why the success with English and the nonsuccess with Spanish?

Here, the lessons of the social sciences have given us further insights into what is needed for large-scale societal language learning and the spread of bilingualism, factors of historical circumstances and social elements such as economic mobility, a desire to learn and the value of schooling in the culture, the organization of an efficient public school system, the immersion in English because of the colonial government's policy. All of these factors partially explain the success of the spread of English in this country during the American Period.

The post-colonial or the post-imperial situation however shows an ambiguous development, for while English has given us the benefits of Western learning and provided a common means of communication among a multilingual group of communities, *per accidens* it has not been a help towards nationalism, even democracy, and ultimately because of conflicting values, it has resulted in further social stratification, large-scale emigration and loss of intellectual talent in the country, and has not really promoted national and social economic development. It has made the Filipino fit for emigration and employment elsewhere but not necessarily a nationalist rooted in his country and his culture and dedicated to the values of democracy and egalitarianism in income and productivity in agriculture and industry.

The key insight from the language learning experience of the Filipino and the seeming lack of success in language teaching in ironically an independent social polity is that scientifically based language teaching does not always result in efficient language learning if other social conditions in a post-colonial world do not obtain. Thus linguistics, its applications to language teaching, and even teaching/learning based on scientific psychology,

demand a social component of motivation, promise of economic mobility, egalitarian distribution of the fruits of production, to be successful.

Thus, do we stand as a nation blessed by competent linguists and language-using technologists after 56 years of independence and after 52 years of scientific language teaching using the best of linguistics and its applications to the process of language teaching and language learning.