

Applied Linguistics

Towards a New Integration?

Lars Sigfred Evensen



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Applied Linguistics

Applied Linguistics is a journal of research and practice in the field of applied linguistics. It covers a wide range of topics, including language acquisition, language teaching, language testing, and language policy. The journal is published quarterly and is a leading journal in the field.

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Applied Linguistics:

Towards a New Integration?

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Applied linguistics is viewed from theory of science

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Glossary

Some terms used in this book appear infrequently in the Applied Linguistics literature. This glossary is a select list of such terms, as used in this book.

Abduction

An approach to logic where the researcher starts working inductively (see Induction) in order to develop empirically based hypotheses. The hypotheses are then tested deductively (see Deduction) in order to develop theory.

Axiology

A branch of moral philosophy focusing on the basic axioms that human beings act from.

Bracketing

A methodological principle within phenomenology, where the researcher creates necessary distance to a phenomenon by marking it (for example by brackets) as something non-given.

Constructionism

An approach to discourse where convention is seen as resulting from work within social groups.

Constructivism

An approach where human conceptions of reality are seen as resulting from microsocial (dyadic) interaction.

Contextualization

The signaling of how a specific utterance is meant to be understood in relation to a social context. Specific means of signaling are referred to as 'contextualization cues'.

Deduction

An approach to logic, where the researcher works from principled generalization in order to predict specific empirical outcomes.

Dialogism

A philosophical approach where discourse meaning is seen as coconstituted by immediate interaction and historical convention.

Diatope

An alternative term to 'discourse' or 'Discourse'. The term is used in this book to denote a dialogical understanding where microsocial, meso- and macrosocial interaction all contribute to discourse meaning (see Dialogism).

Eastern

A term used heuristically in this book to denote an ontological (see Ontology) position where more emphasis is put on relations than on objects with their attributes.

Eclecticism

A non-principled methodological approach leading to a combination of possibly disparate phenomena.

Emic

A system-internal view of phenomena (see Etic).

Epistemology

A branch of philosophy focusing on how we may arrive at valid or tenable insights.

Ethnography

An emic (see Emic) methodological approach where a specific culture is analyzed on its own premises.

Etic

A system-external view of phenomena (see Emic).

Hermeneutics

An interpretive, philological approach to text analysis. In this approach, a scholar moves between micro-level textual analysis and macro-level historical interpretation.

Heteroglossia

A term used within dialogism to refer to the inherent variability of any language, seen as a result of social complexity and struggle.

Induction

An approach to logic where researchers work from specific data towards principled generalization.

Interactionism

An approach to discourse where the emphasis is on immediate interaction between specific interlocutors.

Ontogenesis (see also Phylogenesis)

Development as seen from the perspective of an individual.

Ontology

A branch of philosophy where the focus is on (human conceptions of) reality.

Phenomenology

An approach to philosophy where the basic assumption is that any observation is coloured by the observer and the observer's point of view.

Phylogenesis

Development as seen from the perspective of a species (see Ontogenesis).

Solipsism

A principled ontological position of extreme individualism.

Tertium comparationis

An independent terrain (or 'third space') where differing approaches may be compared.

Western

A term used heuristically in this book to denote an ontological position where more emphasis is put on objects, with their attributes, than on relations between objects (see Eastern).

Preface

What does it mean to be an applied linguist, or doing applied linguistics (Candlin and Sarangi 2004a)? No easy answer is currently at hand, even after two generations of intellectual work. We are caught in some kind of a fix, it seems. And, to quote Dylan: 'There must be some way out of here, said the Joker to the Thief' (from 'All Along the Watchtower')! This book is devoted to a search for an intellectually tenable alternative interpretation of and approach to doing applied linguistics.

Around 1964, applied linguistics was in fact an integrated discipline with a consistent research paradigm, even if educationalists and computationalists were still struggling for hegemony over what became our international organization that very year – AILA (*Association Internationale de Linguistique Appliquée*). The winning faction – the educationalists – had a common theoretical basis in structural linguistics and behaviourist psychology. Educational applied linguistics had developed a research methodology in contrastive analysis, and a time-tested approach to foreign language teaching in its audiolingual approach. Applied linguistics was, in short, a natural *science*. Its future seemed bright indeed.

Since then, however, applied linguistics has been characterized by tensions as much as by integration, and the issue of disciplinary identity has been underlying much of the ongoing discussion, for instance at every single AILA congress since that first one in 1964. There are several underlying reasons for this state of affairs:

- the 1960s was a decade of fundamental intellectual and political upheaval;
- new theoretical developments brought the established theoretical foundation under attack;
- the basic methodology was empirically questioned;
- basic issues of a more philosophical nature (ontological or epistemological) were rarely addressed as such;
- a level of emerging compartmentalization has made it difficult to synthesize across fields like child language acquisition, second language acquisition, first and foreign language learning/teaching, the

acquisition of written language competence in a first or second language, and so on.

As a result, applied linguistics is still a term that should be read ungrammatically, ironically as a count noun in the plural (Sridhar 1993). To some extent this state of affairs seems natural, however. After all, most disciplines have problems defining their basic axioms, agendas and approaches. And many disciplines struggle with internal differences. Still, if intellectual progress is to be made *across* subfields within applied linguistics, there is a vital need to establish *some* form of current *tertium comparationis*, where it becomes possible for colleagues to *somehow* stand on each other's shoulders, as well as to discuss relevant issues *across* specialist areas such as child language acquisition, second language acquisition, first and foreign language learning/teaching, the acquisition of writing, Language for Specific Purposes, professional discourse, technologically mediated communication or any of the many other areas that are represented in any current AILA Congress.

Widdowson (2002: 3) addresses this issue when he talks about a 'persistent and pervasive uncertainty about the nature of the inquiry'. Poole (2002: 83) refers to Ochs and her 1997 call for intradisciplinary communication across 'parallel neighborhoods' within applied linguistics. Tucker (2000) formulates his concern more dramatically. In summing up the millennium edition of *The Annual Review of Applied linguistics*, he (2000: 243ff) notes quite sadly: 'I was left with the quite distinct impression that the centrifugal forces at work will inevitably lead to continuing fragmentation of the field and enhance the likelihood posited by Martin that applied linguistics could wind up as pidgin speakers of a range of theories, with theory so divorced from practice that any possibility of creolization is pretty much foreclosed'. Kaplan (2002b: vii) voices a similar concern: 'It is clear that applied linguistics lacks a central organizing theory. In some ways, the field seems to be fragmented into segments'.

After more than five decades of unresolved tensions it may thus be time to address the issue of intellectual integration again, for a new age, asking basic questions like: Do we in fact want integration?; or Is intellectual diversity such an asset that it should be given first priority? To the extent that we may want *some* level of integration, what might an alternative research paradigm, theory of applied linguistics or intellectual *tertium comparationis* look like? Whichever answer one would give to questions like these, I contend that a more explicitly defined basis for addressing them would be beneficial to all (cf. Cicourel 2007 on ecological validity).

My aim in this book is thus to both invite this discussion and contribute to it. To serve this double aim, I first (Chapter 1) suggest a metatheoretical

framework for the discussion itself, and then test the resulting framework as a possible tool for classifying central issues in the ongoing discussion. Next (Chapter 2), I take a look historically at the establishing and ensuing development of applied linguistics, with a specific focus on emerging diversity, but again suggesting what might be a generally viable alternative. Following this exercise in the history of our science, I try to test two major, alternative conceptions empirically – one with a focus on psycholinguistic categories of learning and an alternative one with a focus on contextual categories (Chapter 3).

In the second part of the book (Chapters 4–7), the discussion is centred on possibly viable alternatives of theory and methodology. Chapter 4 brings out some implications of the paradigmatic move from structuralist linguistic theory to 'communicative competence' and more current developments in its wake. In Chapter 5, the discussion centres on what I take to be a mismatch between recent theory of communication and received theory of learning across different fields of specialism within applied linguistics, and a possibly viable alternative to current fragmentation is suggested. In Chapter 6, I draw some methodological consequences of the discussion that far, pointing to an option that has in fact been around all the time, but still, somehow, not received the focus of attention. One particular alternative is empirically illustrated in Chapter 7.

The third and final part of the book (Chapter 8) refocuses on the basic question of integration. Do we want new intellectual orthodoxy, or do we opt for the ecological openness that Van Lier (1997a,b) has argued for? At a point in my presentation where I have introduced quite specific alternative theories of communication (dialogism) and learning (Vygotskian), as well as a new way of thinking about research methodology (abductive action research), it becomes clear that there are many theorists who have been working along lines similar to the ones that I build my exposition around. I endorse all of these in fundamental ways, but still choose to eke out an alternative. At this final point in the book, however, I still shall have many more fundamental questions than answers to offer, and the readers are invited to explore these.

If the different alternatives suggested in this book are indeed integrated, they still raise a number of deep-ranging questions, some of which are essentially philosophical. At this point in the discussion, I shall need to introduce a new terminological contrast. In Western intellectual life, we have so far tended to centre our discussions on theoretical or empirical objects with defining attributes (language, learners, strategies, etc.). The alternatives suggested in the final part of the book, however, all seem to start fairly consistently with *relations* rather than objects, and only secondarily with the objects entering into these relations. Accordingly, the

book ends with a discussion of 'phenomenologies' (working from objects seen as phenomena towards their relations) versus 'relationalities' (working from relations towards the objects embedded in these relations).

My basic concern is still not really with the answers suggested in this book. I am more concerned with stimulating a metadiscussion where it becomes possible to debate issues and findings across research fields, and thus – actually – *learn* from each other (cf. Sarangi and van Leuwen 2003; Ferris 2005). The basic function of this book will in this connection be to serve as a potential point of orientation for discussions towards a new alternative to the traditional paradigm that Widdowson (1980) aptly termed 'linguistics applied'.

It follows from the idea behind the book that it is not an introductory reader. Its primary audience consists of intellectuals who may themselves contribute to its discussions – fellow applied linguists, graduate and post-graduate students, and other scholars and practitioners with some professional interest in applied linguistics, issues of communication problems or more general issues across the applied–general research divide. It follows from this orientation that a number of things have had to be taken for granted. 'Classical' references are for instance not presented in any detail, and the number of supporting examples or explanatory expositions is consistently low, at several times just anecdotal. Still, the basic arguments of the book are supported in some depth by a selection of empirical studies (quantitative and qualitative) sequentially presented as the theoretical discussion moves forward.

Several of the chapters in the book are further developments of earlier publications, and thus mirror, to some extent, my intellectual trajectory over the past 30 years. Chapter 1 is a revised and expanded version of my 1996 symposium introduction at the AILA 96 congress in Jyväskylä, Finland, and the subsequent publication in *AILA Review* (Evensen 1997). Chapters 2 and 3 both build on my 1986 doctoral dissertation. Chapters 4, 5, 6 and 7 were written specifically for this book, but include material as well as selected points of theory and arguments that have been developed and presented as a series of closely related articles built on my 'Invisible teenagers?' study of the 1990s (Evensen 1999, 2000, 2001, 2002). Parts of Chapter 5 have been published as Evensen (2007, 2008). My final reflections in Chapter 8 in this book are new in their entirety, even if some general points were included in a symposium introduction to the *XII International Bakhtin Conference* in 2005 in Finland. Some of the interface between the arguments presented in my final chapter and general theory of culture is presented more extensively in Bostad *et al.* (2004) and my continuing work on Bakhtinian ontology.

Acknowledgements

This book should be read as an *utterance* in the Bakhtinian sense: I do contribute, but was never alone in formulating my own contribution. The book is thus a 'refracted' synthesis of others' work, as well as my own attempts to answer their utterances. It will gradually become clear to many readers that I most certainly stand on the shoulders of my intellectual forefathers (and some fundamentally important foremothers) in applied linguistics. I deeply honour them all. In order to be honest and constructive, I also criticize most of them. I recognize, however, that my debt to them is enormous.

More specifically, I acknowledge the support of my institution, The School of Humanities at the Norwegian University of Technology and Science, Trondheim. A major first draft for the book was written while I was on a full year sabbatical granted by that School. At our Department of Language and Communication Studies (where applied linguistics is one section), all of my colleagues have demonstrated interest in the prolonged progress of my work, and several have contributed directly. My former colleague Finn Bostad discussed theory of communication as well as theory of learning and new technologies on innumerable occasions. Marte Halse and Jon Smidt were instrumental in my gradual theoretical transition from social interactionism to dialogism (see Chapter 4). Olaf Husby and Ellen Andenaes have both been willing to share their expertise on second language acquisition research with me as much as Julie Feilberg has shared her expertise on child language acquisition research. Nancy Lea Eik-Nes has shared her native speaker expertise for the purpose of improving my at times awkward ESL writing, and has read the full manuscript with this obstacle in mind.

Similarly, several colleagues in our interdisciplinary writing research group since 1988 (the DEVEL project) have made invaluable contributions to my thinking. Within this group, I owe much of my appreciation of Vygotsky to my former doctoral student (now professor of education) Torlaug L. Hoel. Similarly, my interest in participatory action research was greatly stimulated by a Canadian visiting scholar in academic writing, Barbara Hoffman.

More specific points of my argument have developed in discussions with a large number of colleagues, nationally and internationally. I owe much

of my theory of communication embryos to the inspiration of stable discussion partners like Marty Nystrand (Madison), Per Linell (Linköping), Thomas Luckmann (Konstanz) and the members of the DEVEL writing research group here in Trondheim. Similarly, I owe important methodological insights to 'friendly provocateurs' like Leo Van Lier (Monterey).

I need to express my profound gratitude to the student and teacher informants quoted in Chapter 7. Without their informed consent to reproduce excerpts from quite heated writing sessions, it would have been difficult to discuss a potential role for abduction in generalizing across case studies.

During the production process, I have repeatedly received both support and constructive criticism from the series editors, Chris Candlin and Srikanth Sarangi. Their contribution has been instrumental in bringing off this publication.

More than anyone, however, I owe most of my early attempts and insights to my unforgettable mentor and dissertation supervisor, the late Professor Elisabeth Ingram (1928–87). This book is dedicated to her memory and intellectual heritage.

Applied linguistics as viewed from theory of science

Part I

Introduction

A tenet of this book is that philosophy of science may provide a more solid point of departure for discussing the nature of applied linguistics – an issue that has kept occupying our minds since the founding of our international organization, AILA. Granted such a starting point, different disciplines may be characterized on an independent intellectual basis. If it is the case that applied linguistics is a subdiscipline within linguistics, as many have claimed, such a basis will show how this is in fact so. If, on the other hand, applied linguistics is a discipline on its own, with characteristics that are qualitatively different from those of linguistics, an independent basis will bring out what differences are in that case relevant.

In this first part of the book, the approach is for this reason quite meta-theoretical, as opposed to the second part which deals with more familiar territory of theory and methodology. Part I starts with epistemology – a field that asks how it is possible to establish reliable knowledge. In discussing epistemology, I outline a set of specific analytical categories and use these to characterize applied linguistics in relation to general linguistics. In the second chapter, I address history of science – a field that asks how disciplines are formed, may develop, merge or separate. Again, the relationship between applied linguistics and general linguistics is central: Does historical development lead to a gradually closer connection with linguistics or to increasing separation? In the third chapter, two different conceptions of applied linguistics are confronted with an empirical material. Here, the intellectual approach is different. Rather than starting with abstract categories, I here start with the empirical world of practice. To what extent is there a fit between the world of practice, as practitioners see it, and different conceptions of applied linguistics?

Applied linguistics has often been approached from a 'linguistic' perspective. This approach implies attempting to characterize the discipline on the premises of another one. Such an attempt implies an 'external' (rather than an 'emic' (within) perspective. The effect of such an external intellectual strategy may be illustrated by a metaphor: If you investigate pearls in terms of their predefined 'appleness', your pearls may well be seen somehow, but they will inevitably come out as a bit queer. A

1 Applied linguistics as viewed from theory of science¹

Introduction

The theme of the 1996 AILA Congress was *Applied Linguistics Across Disciplines*, a theme reflecting one of the fundamental and challenging characteristics of applied linguistics (Widdowson 2005). This theme still continues to raise at least two important issues. First: Why is it that applied linguistics is so interdisciplinary? Or, to put this issue differently: Which fundamental characteristics might this interdisciplinarity possibly reflect, and thus reveal? The second important issue is: If being interdisciplinary in some sense, are we practising within a *multidisciplinary* field (in the most strict sense of the term 'multidisciplinary'), or are we rather taking part in the development of an emerging *transdiscipline* (nontechnically speaking, a discipline of its own)? If so, what are the characteristics of this particular transdiscipline?

The issue of defining the nature of applied linguistics (AL) has been raised at every AILA Congress so far (see Kaplan 2002b). It has also resulted in a considerable number of books and articles over several decades, some of which I shall return to below. Still, the issue remains largely unsettled (see Candlin and Sarangi 2004a; Bruthiaux *et al.* 2005). I suspect that there are at least three reasons for this state of affairs. The first reason has to do with a gap in most approaches undertaken in the discussions so far: The issues surrounding the theory of science have so far been relatively superficially addressed (but see Rajagopalan 2004). As we shall see, core issues of ontology, epistemology, history of science and sociology of knowledge have been explored only rarely and unsystematically. The second reason is that the task of defining applied linguistics has often been approached from a *linguistic* perspective. This approach implies attempting to characterize one discipline on the premises of another one. Such an attempt implies an 'etic' (without) rather than an 'emic' (within) perspective. The effect of such a partial intellectual strategy may be illustrated by a metaphor: If you investigate pears in terms of their predefined 'appleness', your pears may well make sense somehow, but they will inevitably come out as a bit queer. A

third reason is that individual contributions to the discussion have not been properly synthesized across the fields of study. With the lack of such synthesis it becomes difficult to stand on others' shoulders in order to bring the discussion further.

Openly facing the intellectual challenges implied by these three reasons, and in order to contribute to a more principled basis for self-understanding within applied linguistics, we need to develop an intellectual framework that can provide: (a) a principled platform for discussing many kinds of sciences/disciplines/subdisciplines in relation to each other; and (b) some system for sorting out earlier contributions to our field-specific debate.

In this first chapter, I want to suggest a tentative framework for classifying and characterizing disciplines or sciences, developed from a field-independent theory of science approach. In emphasizing field independence, I thus take an approach slightly different from the more AL-specific one taken by Rajagopalan (2004).

Within such a framework it may be shown that some core characteristics of applied linguistics derive from the combined nature of its primary research aims and research object. This approach will be developed stepwise, where I first spell out all top level categories before beginning to gradually specify these. The ensuing specification is developed in two steps. In the first step I derive general subcategories for each top level category; in the second step I discuss selected subcategories with specific reference to applied linguistics. During the presentation of the emerging, specified framework, I shall refer to earlier discussions in order to show how the framework may be used to synthesize earlier contributions. I shall specifically comment on two analytic categories, knowledge interest and primary research object, that may in combination point to a set of core characteristics of applied linguistics. As this discussion proceeds, I shall argue along the now established view that the general research aim that may best bring out underlying coherence in recent applied linguistics is that of working to solve certain practical problems in society, or to improve upon already institutionalized solutions to such problems. Similarly, I shall argue in favour of a more controversial case for seeing communication problems as the underlying research object that may best bring out underlying coherence. Furthermore, I shall argue that these characteristics may account for the interdisciplinary nature of applied linguistics.

Towards the end of the chapter, I try to draw the presented material together by carrying out an informal 'test' of the resulting framework's usefulness. I shall do so by presenting the picture that we may at that point draw of the relation between general linguistics and applied linguistics, the relation that has been at the heart of the debate so far.

Towards a general framework for characterizing disciplines

At one AILA Congress, Stig Eliasson (Eliasson 1987: 21) made the promising point that 'Any serious attempt at understanding what applied linguistics is will ... force us to scrutinize the latent organizational principles that underlie linguistic science as a whole'. In a situation where an extensive or enumerative strategy of simply listing the different areas of study which are claimed to constitute the domain of applied linguistics was still acceptable (see Kaplan (2002c) for a relatively recent example), Eliasson's call to scrutinize latent principles was an important step forward. However, his expression 'linguistic science as a whole' exemplifies what I presented above as a second reason for failure. Such an expression is problematic in that it builds an answer to the question into the question itself. If Eliasson was right in assuming that applied linguistics is a subdiscipline of linguistics, a neutral framework for characterizing disciplines ought to show both *that* this is so and *how* it is so. A fruitful framework for discussion should of course be relevant to our specific concerns as applied linguists or linguists, but not build predefined answers into our questions.

Eliasson (1987) still went on to propose two basic dimensions for his discussion – 'facets of subject matter' and 'mode of inquiry'. Within a theory of science tradition, these dimensions fall under the umbrella of 'epistemology' (philosophy of knowledge), that branch of theory of science that deals with issues of how we may arrive at valid, tenable insights. Other central aspects of theory of science, however, were left out of Eliasson's account. Still, I take Eliasson's proposed points as an argument that a category of *epistemology* should be included in a framework for discussing the nature of applied linguistics.

A second important field within the theory of science is *history of science*, a field that purports to account for how disciplines arise, develop, diversify or merge. Such historical study may reveal one discipline's relations with other disciplines and important interfaces between them. As we shall see in Chapter 2, it may even uncover the development of competing paradigms within a field itself. It may further uncover underlying epistemological and axiological assumptions.²

A third central field within the theory of science is *sociology of knowledge*, a field that works towards understanding the social organization of intellectual inquiry. Such understanding may bring out not only who has access to which aspects of knowledge, but also how knowledge is constructed and disseminated within a specific community. From a theory of science point of view, such study is important in that it may uncover how the social organization of a particular field of inquiry may affect the content

and direction of that intellectual inquiry itself. It thus resembles history of science in that it may indirectly shed light on the epistemological assumptions underlying a specific field.

Serious attempts at sorting out different issues involved in understanding the fundamental characteristics of any specific discipline should thus be based on (at least) the above three kinds of study: epistemology; history of science; and sociology of knowledge.

Towards making basic categories workable

The areas of study identified above are admittedly very broad, and thus appear to be less than operational tools for intellectual work in relation to specific disciplines like linguistics or applied linguistics. Each of the areas, furthermore, hosts important issues. In order to arrive at a more workable framework we hence need to specify each kind of study.

As to investigating the first area of inquiry – epistemology – Sarangi and Candlin (2001) have argued that applied linguists should reflexively consider our social positioning when carrying out research that is itself socially positioned. One way of handling this challenge *within* applied linguistics is to consider our ‘motivational relevancies’ (2001: 351). In this chapter I shall take a related approach, in considering different motivational relevancies *between* applied linguistics and other disciplines, notably general linguistics. In doing this, I shall take philosophy of science as my general starting point.

Habermas (1969), as will be elaborated in the next section, has shown that there will typically be different kinds of motivation lying behind intellectual work. Such motivations, which he terms ‘knowledge interests’, deeply affect the approach taken to acquiring insight (see also McNiff 2002). In recent discussions about the nature of applied linguistics as distinct from other disciplines, several scholars seem to acknowledge the importance of differing research motivations or purposes. In the general introduction to their 2004 *Handbook of Applied Linguistics*, Davies and Elder use terms like ‘concerned with’ or ‘interested in’, and they consequently state: ‘We distinguish linguistics and applied linguistics in terms of difference of orientation’ (Davies and Elder 2004b: 11). Even as to distinctions within applied linguistics itself, they claim that such distinctions are found not in differing topics, but ‘in the orientation of researchers, and why they are investigating a problem and collecting their data’ (Davies and Elder 2004b: 13).

In his introduction to Part I of the Handbook, Davies (2004) similarly uses the motivation category *within* applied linguistics to distinguish between ‘linguistics applied’ and ‘applied linguistics’. Elder (2004: 425) speaks about

‘the quintessentially AL concern with intervention’ in her introduction to Part 2 of the same volume. In a different publication, Grabe (2002: 4) echoes Brumfit (1991) in speaking about applied linguistics as ‘driven first by real-world problems rather than theoretical explorations’, and later in the same article states this position more strongly: ‘The key point ... is to recognize that it is the language-based problems in the world that drive applied linguistics’ (2002: 7). The editors of the international journal *Applied Linguistics* endorse such a view, and in a 2005 *Applied Linguistics* discussion article, Bygate uses research motivation to distinguish between currently competing approaches within applied linguistics.

I suggest that we need a first subcategory that may capture this specific aspect of Eliasson’s (1987: 22f) umbrella term ‘mode of inquiry’. Like Habermas (1969), I shall use the term ‘knowledge interest’ as a label for the category, but I shall use his term in a less ideological sense. Habermas had a critical, social agenda that is well-known, but I think that an ideologically more neutral position is needed for the inquiry of this chapter. In later chapters I shall turn to discussing more ideological positions and issues.

The general point for Habermas is that intellectual efforts are not intellectually neutral, being guided by purely intellectual tasks; they also reflect social positionings that influence the questions that guide our research and thus colour the answers that we may find. As we shall see, this subcategory of epistemology is particularly important for applied linguistics, in that it is traditionally used across disciplines to distinguish between general research and applied research. After having gradually introduced other subcategories below, I shall for this reason return to a more specific discussion of ‘knowledge interests’ towards the end of this chapter.

In elaborating his ‘mode of inquiry’, Eliasson (1987) further proposed subcategories for subject matter (defining the ‘object’ of our research) and methodology (how we actually go about trying to develop new insight). These subcategories seem quite obvious for inclusion in an epistemological framework. What Eliasson focused on in his 1987 article, however, was one subcategory that seems much less obvious, namely the status and nature of our theoretical platform (1987: 22f). Much of the earlier debate about applied linguistics has focused on what role theory plays in applied linguistics and the direction of theoretical influence between theoretical and applied linguistics (see for instance Corder (1973); Widdowson (1984) and Tomic and Shuy (1987) for differing views). It seems fruitful to include this subcategory in the framework, but disentangle the epistemological issue of theory from the historical one of direction of influence. I shall thus approach this discussion from a possibly unusual, but principled angle: What *kind* or

type of theory is being sought, and what are the implications of the type of theory for its role in our 'applied' work? The latter question may shed new light on the issue of influential direction.

My tentatively elaborated major category of epistemology thus ends up having four sub-categories:

- Knowledge interests
- Object of research
- Methodology
- Type of theory.

In studies of a second general area within the theory of science, *history of science*, several scholars have suggested that disciplines tend to develop not incrementally, but through stages or qualitative leaps. Popper (1974) talks about initial research as 'conjecture', thus indicating an early role for exploratory study. More important, though, is Kuhn's previous (1962) work on research paradigms, where he discusses disciplines being at preparadigmatic or paradigmatic stages. Both these scholars had their focus on natural science and seemed not to see much of a role in history for the kind of minute empirical description that has characterized much work in the social sciences and language-oriented disciplines.

A Norwegian sociologist and historian of science, Hellevik (1977), however, has proposed a three-stage model for the development of disciplines, where a postexploratory, but pretheoretical descriptive middle stage is posited. Such a stage model seems more adequate for capturing characteristics of several language-oriented disciplines, and I shall propose a subcategory for 'stage of development'. I shall return to Hellevik's stage model in the following section.

A second important aspect in studies of the history of science is the intellectual metahistory of specific disciplines: How has a discipline's view of its relationship with other disciplines developed? And what have been the more important issues in the internal discussions? In applied linguistics, one case in point seems to be precisely the discussion about 'directionality of influence' in relation to linguistic theory (see for instance Corder 1974): Is the direction of influence going from theory to application, or is this relationship a dialectical one, going both ways?

I thus suggest that a workable category of the history of science should comprise at least two subcategories:

- Stage of development
- Meta-oriented issues.

We have seen with the category of knowledge interests above that it reflects social organization and socially distributed ideology that cuts into epistemology. Such flections and re-flections are studied within *sociology of knowledge* – a third major area within the theory of science. When Strevens (1980) defined applied linguistics simply as 'What applied linguists do', he earned some ridicule at the time. Such a definition is not, however, as trivial as it may at first seem: The perennial question of 'who does it with whom' does in fact influence both what is being done and how it is being done (see Candlin and Sarangi 2004a). In particular, this is the case when relations become established in institutionalized form.

Trying to investigate applied linguistics through its potentially organized or institutional nature also deserves attention because such an approach is frequently involved in existing attempts at characterizing both applied linguistics and other disciplines. When discussing the status of applied linguistics, it has been both rhetorically and substantially tempting to demonstrate its established organizational nature with its first journal (*Language Learning*), appearing already in 1948, with a School of Applied Linguistics (in Edinburgh in 1956), with a Center for Applied Linguistics (CAL) in Washington since 1959, with an international organization (AILA) since 1964, and with an internationally respected academic study programme (also in Edinburgh) as early as 1973 (as exemplified in Kaplan 2002b: vii).

This organizational approach can also be used to characterize recent developments, as when Grabe (2002: 11) discusses the status of applied linguistics with respect to the 'markings of an academic discipline'. In a similar vein, Kaplan (2002: vii) notes that in his view language testing is now splitting off from applied linguistics because it has established its own organization and journal, whereas language planning is a border case in this respect, in that it has several journals but so far no separate organization. In Spolsky's (1999) *Concise Encyclopedia of Educational Linguistics*, a whole section is devoted to an overview of journals (Valdman 1999), associations (Young 1999b) and research centres (Spolsky 1999c), as well as a case-oriented article about the historically important *Summer Institute of Linguistics* (Bendor-Samuel 1999). More recently, there has also been a shift towards applied linguistics in the workplace and in the professions. This shift is reflected in a special issue of *Applied Linguistics* (Vol. 24 (3)) and the 2010 relaunching of *Journal of Applied Linguistics* as *Journal of Applied Linguistics and Professional Practice*. Sociology of knowledge may contribute insights at even deeper levels in that it also deals with professional perspectives and identities in relation to social organization. As interdisciplinary work has become more important across the knowledge societies of the current Western world, it has been realized that the epistemic

differences between disciplines are at the heart of intellectual and societal challenges that are only today beginning to be understood. In such contexts, sociology of knowledge may be important, not only at the metatheoretical level of this chapter, but even as an everyday research tool for working with the specific communication problems involved in interdisciplinary communication in institutionalized contexts.

Earlier discussions about the nature of applied linguistics have implicitly adopted a sociology of knowledge approach to the role of the applied linguist in intellectual work, in society, and in the interface between these two (see Evensen 1986b, 1987; Brumfit 1996). This discussion has evaluated a consumer role (Corder 1974), a mediator role (Eliasson 1987; Widdowson 2000b) and a primary contributor role (Shuy 1987; Ferguson 1989). The issue is currently not yet settled. I take the existence of this discussion as an argument that the third part of a general framework should comprise a subcategory about the role which the applied linguist takes and sees for him- or herself in the wider community and in the research community, again as compared to researcher roles taken in related disciplines.

Sociology of knowledge is of course specifically concerned with the organizational structure of intellectual inquiry. This issue has been particularly relevant for the everyday reality of applied linguists and other language scholars in many places. Should a separate department of applied linguistics be established, or does this activity properly belong within a linguistics or first language department? Does it perhaps more properly belong in a modern language department, or an education department? Such seemingly eternal, recurrent organizational issues have kept making many of us rather weary for decades, but for the current discussion it should at least be noted that such issues all fall within sociology of knowledge. In developing our basic framework, we should thus allow for subcategories that help us consider the influence of university department structure, professional organizations like AILA, professional journals, systems of conferences and professional networks of different kinds.

Arguably, the most obvious aspect of sociology of knowledge is, however, that which is most conspicuously secondary within applied linguistics so far. Professional identities and organizational structures heavily influence discourse practices (see Swales 1990). If it proves to be the case that applied linguists have discourse practices that are similar to linguists' practices, or different from those, this similarity or difference will shed important light on the status of applied linguistics as either a subdiscipline of linguistics or as a discipline of its own. So far, however, Dos Santos (1996) and Hyland (2005, 2010) seem to be relatively rare in investigating the discourse practices of applied linguists. A related aspect has however been illuminated by Sarangi

and van Leuven (2003) when they discuss whether applied linguists constitute a community of practice or not.

Our tentative development of a general third category of sociology of knowledge thus yields the following three tentative subcategories regarding a discipline or emerging transdiscipline:

- Its role in the wider intellectual community
- Its organizational structure
- Its discourse practices.

The above considerations in sum result in a more comprehensive framework for characterizing and discussing disciplines and their relationships. The tentative framework is presented in Figure 1.1.

EPISTEMOLOGY (what kind of knowledge is gained how)

- primary knowledge interest
- primary research object
- theoretical framework
- methodological tradition

HISTORY OF SCIENCE (where we came from/ how we got here)

- stage of development
- metaissues

SOCIOLOGY OF KNOWLEDGE (who does what with whom, and how)

- role concept
- institutionalization
- discourse practices

Figure 1.1. A tentative framework for characterizing disciplines/sciences

Towards elaborating epistemology: Some basic issues

A full discussion of all the points in Figure 1.1 falls beyond the scope of this introductory chapter and is a major task for future applied linguistics in general. The next chapter will be devoted to a more comprehensive discussion of the history of applied linguistics, and will be discussed below only to the extent that it is relevant to introducing categories that will be needed in a discussion of the specific relationship between applied linguistics and general linguistics. In the present section, I shall largely restrict myself to illustrating only some few of the epistemological subcategories developed above.

A primary knowledge interest for applied linguistics?

If we ask what kind of knowledge or insight that is searched for within applied linguistics, we will have to consider its primary knowledge interest. In introducing this term, Habermas (1969) described three alternative and mutually exclusive alternatives. The first one he termed a 'practical' interest. When driven by this interest, researchers work towards facilitating informed participation in general issues being discussed in the public *fora* of a modern state. This general function of research focuses on creating and maintaining a general knowledge bank for society. The wellbeing of democracy in a complex modern society depends on this knowledge interest. In the introduction to Chapter 2, I shall provide a sketch of the quite intriguing historical background for referring to such an interest as 'practical'.

The second interest introduced by Habermas is more particular, which he termed 'technical'. This research interest stimulates work that may respond to the administrative, political or technical needs of a specific power structure in a specific modern society. In current Western societies, most 'technical' (i.e. technological) research may be seen as driven by this second knowledge interest.

The third knowledge interest described by Habermas is equally particular, but conversely represents the interests of those who are placed outside of any specific power structure. This interest is thus one that he termed 'emancipatory', seeing it as underlying all 'critical' research agendas working towards social change.

Habermas' account of different research motivations was not, however, the first or the only one, even if the term 'knowledge interest' was his. In a much earlier account of the difference between 'human' and 'natural' sciences, German philosopher Dilthey (1883) drew a distinction between seeking knowledge in order to *explain* and seeking knowledge in order to *understand*. Nature is ontologically simple, he claimed, in the sense that everything happens subject to invariant laws. When we uncover all of these laws and the ways they act together, we may *explain* all natural phenomena as based on these laws. Such laws also operate with regard to human beings, of course, but within a cultural area of inquiry they do not have the same explanatory power. The reason for this difference is that human action reflects even other forces than the laws of nature.

Since humans act on causally intermediate understandings and agendas as well as on material causes, their behaviour can only partially or indirectly be causally explained by laws of nature. In methodological phraseology, such attempts at explanation would commit the serious epistemological error of ignoring all 'intervening variables', an error that is basic and well-known to an applied linguist with some training in language testing

or experimental methods. Psychologist Jerome Bruner addresses this issue when he states (1990: xiii) that: 'To insist upon explanation in terms of 'causes' simply bars us from trying to understand how human beings interpret their worlds and how *we* interpret *their* acts of interpretation [italics in the original].' Every human phenomenon that cannot be explained causally was defined by Dilthey as the particular focus of what he termed the 'spiritual', or human 'sciences' ('Die Geisteswissenschaften'), or currently the humanities, and interpretive social sciences). Such human "sciences" are thus, according to Dilthey, by ontological and epistemological necessity fundamentally interpretive.

Habermas' account of research motivation is not the last one on the issue, either. A wider approach developed during the previous century that covers two of the Habermasian interests, the technical and the emancipatory. I shall refer to this approach as a problem-driven one. There is, according to this line of thinking, a primary distinction to be made between the practical knowledge interest on the one hand, and the technical and emancipatory ones on the other: What the latter two knowledge interests have in common is that they both take some 'practical' problem as their starting point, a starting point for research that is meant as a basis for action to be taken in order to actually change the part of social reality that is being studied.

This phenomenological line of thinking is historically related to developments within epistemology in the philosophical tradition of Husserl. Within phenomenology it has been recognized that facing a practical problem frequently forces us to change our footing, so to speak, thus inviting a changed position in relation to (or fresh perspective on) the problem at hand. Such a changed position may lead to qualitatively new insight. Luckmann captures this general epistemological phenomenon by his dictum: 'If appropriate elements of knowledge cannot be applied without difficulty to cope with the problem at hand, one must begin to think' (1982: 257). It follows from this observation, I claim, that practical problems have an epistemological potential that is shared between technical and emancipatory knowledge interests.

Bearing such relations and distinctions in mind, we may now return to applied linguistics with questions about our dominant knowledge interest(s): Is it primarily to understand? Or, is it to explain? Or, is it to solve problems (or ameliorate them through improving already existing solutions)?

Formulating the epistemological alternatives this way may seem controversial in relation to current debates over 'critical' approaches to discourse and applied linguistics (see Chapter 2), but it in fact offers several advantages in terms of possibly defining applied linguistics as a whole.

Since the distinction between the first two alternative knowledge interests is frequently used outside the language sciences to distinguish between the natural sciences (which generally seek to explain) and the humanities and social sciences (which seek to understand), a focus on problem solution bridges our quest for self-understanding with general distinctions between the natural sciences and the (broadly defined) human sciences. Furthermore, the distinction between the 'practical' alternative on the one hand and the 'technical' or 'emancipatory' ones on the other is frequently used outside the language sciences to distinguish between general research and applied research. Thus, this way of formulating knowledge interests holds particular relevance to applied linguists. Applied research is then seen as research carried out in order to help solving everyday ('practical') problems in society.

It should be recognized that socially relevant research rarely starts from scratch, however. Through history, many attempts to solve practical problems have resulted in institutionalized solutions like schools, hospitals and a range of other institutions. For this reason, 'to help solving' most frequently implies efforts to improve upon such already institutionalized solutions to socially acknowledged problems – for instance through better informed perspectives on education, political action, technology or therapy (see Larsen-Freeman 2000; see also Davies 1999 and Davies and Elder 2004 on the 'amelioration' of language problems).

The combination of technical and emancipatory knowledge interests in the formulation of the third knowledge interest above – a problem-driven approach – even sheds light on current tensions within applied research, as we shall see in Chapter 2 and later chapters. These tensions between 'critical' and more conventional approaches have become important in recent developments within applied linguistics, and I shall return to these tensions towards the end of the next chapter. Let me for the moment just comment on the above characterization of applied research in relation to earlier discussions about the nature of applied linguistics. Much of the confusion that is so characteristic of earlier discussion may be interpreted as a call for a more fundamental understanding of the general relation between 'pure' and 'applied' research. In other areas of study, such general relations have been defined between natural science and technology, between biology and medicine, or between psychology and pedagogy, but in our case this issue is still painfully open. My proposed formulation of our basic research motivation may form a more fruitful basis for reaching such an understanding. In their introduction, Grabe and Kaplan (1992) refer to Stevrens's argued problem orientation as simply a matter of opinion. Their implied criticism seems to miss the above epistemological points.

A primary research object for applied linguistics?

More particular aspects of the proposed framework need to be explored in order to show how things may relate across categories. The framework's second epistemological category of 'primary research object' may be seen as partly dependent on the one of knowledge interest. The reason for this relation of partial dependence across categories is that our primary knowledge interest has important consequences for how we conceptualize, define or approach our research object. This dependence relation also implies that an object of research (like 'language' or 'second language learning') is not a natural given, but something that needs to be defined, however implicitly. The category of research object may thus in combination with the category of knowledge interest add important specificity to our understanding of disciplinarity – a specificity that makes even critical examination of the relation between applied linguistics and other language-oriented disciplines possible. Let me illustrate this possibility.

In addressing language-related issues we may make a distinction between studying some language system and studying communication where that system is a resource. Language-mediated communication is an extensionally wider term than language, we may observe, in that it implies also mental, social and cultural phenomena in addition to linguistic ones. It is quite uncontroversial to claim that studies of the language system have formed the core of general linguistics, even if areas like psycholinguistics, sociolinguistics and (linguistic) pragmatics have expanded its scope. For applied linguistics, this issue of an assumed core is not equally uncontroversial.

I want to address this controversy by first observing that there has been a particular fondness among applied linguists for what is sometimes called 'hyphenated linguistics' (socio-linguistics, psycho-linguistics, and so on). It may be hypothesized that it is exactly the extensional difference between language system and communication that logically explains this fondness, since the extensional difference between language and the wider notion of communication always tends to be minimized by the different forms of 'hyphenated linguistics'. I shall take this observed fondness as one indication that the research object of communication is in fact at the core of the underlying research interest in current applied linguistics. The next chapter will show how our disciplinary history brought about this shift in primary research object (that is, from language to communication). My argument thus implies a specification of our research object that differs from Stevrens' (1992), Brumfit's (1991, 1996) and Davies' (1999) term 'language related problems'. They all use this latter term to characterize the research object of applied linguistics, and their characterization is currently becoming a relatively established source of defining applied linguistics.

The notion of practical 'problem' also relates to my point about hyphenation. Central to any notion of a 'problem' is a discrepancy between what *is* actually the case, on the one hand, and what one *would like to be* the case, on the other. Put differently, the notion of a problem always implies a discrepancy between values, aims or goals on the one hand and current states of affairs (or available resources), on the other. Such discrepancies may arise from several sources, only some of which are verbal. The implication of this observation is that working intellectually from practical problems will in itself invite a wide perspective. Seen in relation to language, a problem-solving research interest will thus be served better by hyphenated than by non-hyphenated linguistics.

Again, this is one reason for suggesting communication rather than language to be the underlying primary research object in applied linguistics. Communication problems admittedly have language-related aspects as one absolutely central characteristic. At the same time, however, they also have mental, social, cultural and sometimes medical aspects – aspects that are traditionally studied in disciplines like psychology, sociology, anthropology or medicine. Further, any research-based solution to such problems, including improvements of already existing solutions, requires insights typically developed in disciplines like pedagogy, computer science, medicine and a range of technologies.

As we begin to see, the combination of knowledge interest and research object may thus shed light on both the interdisciplinary nature of applied linguistics and its relation to linguistics, simultaneously.

A methodological strategy for applied linguistics?

In the discussion so far in this chapter we have not addressed how practices of methodology may help characterize a discipline. Let me start this discussion by making a distinction that relates to logic, namely the distinction between inductive and deductive approaches. In this connection we may note that for a long time a discipline like sociology was characterized by a Weberian inductive approach (see below), working from empirical data towards intellectual generalization. Its neighbouring discipline experimental psychology, however, was largely characterized by an opposite, deductive strategy where initial generalizations in the form of hypotheses are put to the test in carefully controlled experiments. This distinction may help us grasp some of the many differences that characterize two social sciences that are both relevant for general as well as for applied linguistics. As regards logical preference, there is a resemblance between experimental psychology and the form of theoretical linguistics

that emerged with Chomsky, but where might we place applied linguistics in this respect?

The methodology of applied linguistics today seems to be a hybrid phenomenon, where early contrastive analysis, error analysis and performance analysis traditions are all close to an inductive strategy found also in descriptive linguistics. With the current increase in methodological diversity, however, there is a need to reconsider such underlying issues of methodology. It is well known that recent theoretical linguistics is dominated by a Popperian tradition of deductive falsification. In this tradition, a theoretical hypothesis is established; empirical predictions are derived from the hypothesis and then predictions are tested in order to prove them wrong, if this is at all possible. This intellectual approach is not embraced to the same extent in applied linguistics, even if it is characteristic of mainstream approaches in an area such as Second Language Acquisition (SLA) research. So what are the alternatives to a Popperian approach? We have a very strong empiricist tradition in applied linguistics (for instance in the 'methods and effects' studies of the 1960s and 1970s), but is this an inductive empiricism, like the Weberian tradition in sociology? Davies (1999: 55) has suggested so, but he emphasizes that both induction and deduction are needed.

In 1987, Shuy argued for the need to consider a third alternative, an abductive approach. Abductive thinking (a term originating from philosopher and semiotician Charles Sanders Peirce) focuses on working inductively at the start, but using empirical data to establish such very 'bold' hypotheses as may make even one's unexpected empirical observations look theoretically obvious. After having established such bold hypotheses, the abductive researcher then follows deductive principles to test them. According to Peirce, this form of logic, with its bold hypotheses, is the only approach that may conceivably yield qualitatively new insight.

Abductive thinking is related to Popperian falsification in that the development of theory is boldly related to interpretation, but in its working from empirical data, abductive thinking yields so-called 'grounded' theory (Glaser and Strauss 1967), something which deduction can never yield (see Davis 1995). On the other hand, abductive thinking differs from deductive thinking in its emphasis on empirical observation rather than on speculative 'conjecture' (Popper's term) in accounting for the development of the hypotheses themselves. Abductive thinking is simultaneously related to inductive thinking in its intellectual openness. It also, however, differs from induction in its boldness – its willingness to jump to (tentative) conclusions, so to speak, followed only *post hoc* by rigorous scrutiny.

One part of the appeal of Shuy's suggestion lies in its explanatory power. If deductive thinking was characteristic of general linguistics and abductive

thinking was characteristic of applied linguistics, we might easily explain, for instance, why there is only rarely such a thing as an armchair applied linguist, whereas the armchair linguist is a commonplace (note the abductive thinking exemplified in the conditional construction here). Still, we may question the content validity of Shuy's claim: The absence of armchair applied linguistics may equally well be ascribed to simple inductive empiricism. Only further study can empirically settle this issue of methodology across the general linguistics–applied linguistics divide.

A specific type of theory for applied linguistics?

Typologies of theories have generally developed from looking at the logical strategies that theories reflect and the type of empirical underpinnings they accordingly have. Some logical strategies are 'reductionist' in that they try to capture as much as possible of some aspect of reality with a set of principles that should be as minimal as possible. This is the use of Ockham's simplicity principle, and theories that are 'shaven' by his 'razor' are referred to in this tradition as conceptually 'elegant'. Opponents of this strategy refer to it as 'reductionism'. The logically opposite strategy is to try to make one's theory account for as much as possible within an empirical domain, frequently adding concepts and theoretical principles as one goes along. Such a strategy is frequently referred to as 'expansionist', and yields theoretical frameworks that are sometimes less than elegant but perhaps have better content validity.

The issue of what type of theory we as applied linguists (may) try to develop is a tricky one. So far, discussions have mainly been in terms of the specific content of different theories (Eliasson's (1987) discussion is an expanded example of this). What we have lacked, in my view, is a metadiscussion about the different kinds of theories that are in fact available. Early attempts to foreground this issue have been made by Widdowson (1984) and Bugarsky (1987). In Chapter 5, I shall return to this important issue from the point of view of second language acquisition research.

The role of theory in applied linguistics is a controversial issue even at a level primary to the issue of type of theory. Some see applied linguistics as so closely related to actual practice (for instance in language classrooms) that theory is no more a central concern than it is for any consultant. This view, however, has not been dominant during recent decades. For most applied linguists it has, of course, been recognized from the very beginning that theory is necessary for any practice to be principled (see Chapter 2). The question about theory is rather formulated in conjunction with an historical question about the direction of

theoretical influence. Should the applied linguist develop theories of his or her own, or exploit existing theories, most typically taken from linguistics? Let me sidetrack briefly to address this historical issue, as seen here from the point of view of epistemology.

Corder (1974) argued explicitly for a consumer role for the applied linguist. Empirically speaking, however, his position is hardly tenable today. It is relatively easy to demonstrate that applied concerns have in fact led to important theoretical insights, some of which were available already when Corder published his famous book. Let us just look at a brief list of well-known insights developing out of work in applied linguistics that speak against a consumer role:

- the field of sociolinguistics developed partly as a byproduct of investigating reading failure among Black adolescents in the mid- and late 1960s (see Evensen 1986b)
- the concept of 'communicative competence' developed out of work with 'deviant' child language acquisition in the 1960s (Hymes' own claim, see Evensen 1986b)
- theoretical concepts of 'interlanguage' and 'fossilization' have been developed (Selinker 1972)
- several competing theories of SLA (see Lantolf 1996a,b for early overview)
- a genre model of academic writing developed from ESP studies (Swales 1990)
- the operationalization and sophistication of 'communicative competence' carried out by Bachman and others in language testing, that links internally developed theory to methodological development (see Bachman 1990)
- critiques of shortcomings in 'received' pragmatic/linguistic theory on the basis of applied research (for instance Shuy's 1987 critique of speech act theory on the basis of applied forensic research).

Such contributions have in sum led to a more dialectical view of the direction of influence: Applied linguistics in this view uses theories developed elsewhere, contributes its own theoretical tools and even influences other disciplines such as general linguistics, as we shall see below.

A tricky remaining aspect, however, is whether the still limited theoretical contributions from applied linguistics have much in common. This of course brings us back to the issue of what type of theory we might be working towards. It is easy to see that our contributions have generally helped to broaden the scope of comparable linguistic thinking, thus perhaps leaning towards an expansionist strategy. But does this strategy imply that a

separate type of theory is developing, or is even being sought after? Some scholars in applied linguistics have addressed this issue.

Widdowson (1984), for example, argued that theoretical work in applied linguistics tends to imply a participant's perspective, whereas linguistic theorizing normally takes an observer's perspective. He did not make it clear, however, in which sense this distinction moves beyond the old emic/etic distinction within structural linguistics, a point which I shall return to below. Similarly, Shuy (1987) and Stevens (1992) have called for a constructivist or constructionist approach. It is not clear, however, how such calls relate specifically to applied linguistics and linguistics, when uttered in a generally poststructuralist intellectual climate.

What seems to be the case is that there is a tradition for theoretical reductionism (the quest for minimal, elegant theories) in general linguistics that is much less strong in applied linguistics. The debate over Krashen's Monitor model in the 1980s, for instance, seemed to imply a scepticism towards simplistic models (see Spolsky 1985; McLaughlin 1987), even if Ockham's razor is still a reliable ally in most mainstream SLA theorizing. Much of Widdowson's theoretical work (1984; 1990), furthermore, may be read as an opposition to both reductionism and eclecticism. Similarly, there seems to be a current quest for models that seek 'ecological' validity in the sense that they may account for the complex interplay between phenomena that are themselves complex (Stevens 1992; Lantolf 1996; Cicourel 1997, 2007, Seedhouse 2004). In brief, it seems that a strong tendency towards grounding in practice (Davies 1999) is not compatible with a strong form of reductionism.

Widdowson's approach may rest on an implicit concern: What kind of data should one be working from? Whereas general linguistics has worked with intuitively created data (like their starred ungrammatical sentences), recent applied linguistics has generally sought its empirical material from the outside social world, most typically from the language classroom. This may imply that our framework needs a subcategory of type of material as well as type of theory. If that is the case, it should be noted that once more there will be an interesting interplay at work between our categories: our data may tend to reflect (and influence) the type of theory we are working towards. The most obvious example of such interaction is in the sociological work towards grounded theory. Trying to break away from the simple inductive strategy of the Weberian research tradition within sociology, Glaser and Strauss (1967) made the theoretically important point that working from empirical data gathered in social practice, rather than from theoretical hypotheses, may give rise to what they called 'grounded theory' (see also Giddens 1984). One aspect of grounded theory is precisely that

it implies the participant perspective (which is also the mainstay of ethnomethodology, see Garfinkel 1967), that Widdowson was talking about.

A participant perspective may rest on purely epistemological grounds. In order to possibly be able to suggest practical solutions that are viable in some everyday social reality, we need to be able to view practical problems in the way that practitioners see them (see Chapter 6). But in order for such an epistemological process to happen, we also need to work closely with practitioners, over extended periods of time, what Sarangi (2007) calls 'thick participation'. This need forms a pull in a different direction, since working extensively with practitioners leads to the development of an interpersonal relationship where axiological issues of answerability and accountability arise (Candlin and Sarangi 2004b). Several recent discussions about applied linguistics touch on such issues, as summarized in Bygate (2005). Bygate himself formulates one issue ironically: 'Thanks for the problem, we might say to our lay colleagues, but we won't trouble you with a real-world response' (2005: 570).

The epistemological issue of 'etic' versus 'emic' stances in this way relates to another, axiological one. Whenever one refers to practical problems of 'language', there is an element of abstraction away from the real world implied by such a reference. Such abstraction is even implied in Widdowson's (2000b: 5) own approach, when he talks about 'linguistics applied' as well as 'applied linguistics' as follows: 'Both are involved in intervention, in the referring of linguistic insights of a theoretical or descriptive nature to some language problem in the real world'. Such a language focus, I would point out, implicitly invites seeing real world problems in terms of some linguistic system rather than in terms of participant, fellow humans, as problems concerning real people, although Widdowson does make reference also to those who have language problems. There is thus not a determinist connection from language to problem abstraction. Still, a focus on communication, to return to a point made earlier, more easily invites us to see problems in terms of those who are communicating. I shall return to such, and related issues of axiology in Chapters 4, 6 and 7.³

A history of our science? Some preliminary notes

The history of science will be addressed in more depth in our next chapter. In this section I shall illustrate only the subcategories suggested above by introducing a set of difficult questions. This is done in order to set the scene for an informal test of our tentative framework.

In the previous section we noted that a discipline seems to go through stages of development. According to Hellevik (1977), a new field or emerging discipline will find exploratory work important in order to arrive at

useful categories, terms and hypotheses. At this early stage, the question of data analysis is of secondary importance. It is not uncommon, however, to circumvent the problems inherent in this stage by a strategy of borrowing from already established disciplines. Early applied linguistics (see Chapter 2) seems to have been partially founded on such a strategy, in that it eagerly borrowed from both structural linguistics and behaviourist psychology. This strategy of borrowing from without may help explain the level of confusion that has been so remarkably persistent in later discussions of the nature and scope of applied linguistics.

At a second preparadigmatic stage of historical development, the generality of proposed categories and taxonomies, according to Hellevik, becomes important, and descriptive empirical work may take over. Such a descriptive strategy has been common in both social sciences and parts of the humanities (like dialect studies). At this middle stage of development, issues of data collection and descriptive analysis become central as the usefulness of categories is tested out.

At an ensuing third, 'paradigmatic' stage, the further development of existing theory becomes focal, through interpretive or deductive analysis. At this third stage of development, the issue of data collection again becomes secondary in importance. At this stage, a field or discipline is, according to Hellevik, regarded as well established, both internally and externally. Within the language-oriented disciplines, theoretical linguistics may seem to be a case in point for such a third, paradigmatic stage.

A topic of intellectual diversification is related to the above notion of stages in a discipline's development and maturation. As a discipline reaches paradigmatic status, it may also become diversified. The history of applied linguistics seems, interestingly, to exemplify such diversification processes in a somewhat ironic way. By the late 1960s, the apparent consensus about the centrality of linguistics was challenged from several sources (see Evensen 1986; Brumfit 1996), and most radically by Fraser and O'Donnell (1969). The challenge of the latter is exemplified by the following core passage:

Applied Linguistics is in essence a problem-centred discipline. It starts, that is, by asking not how this or that insight into language might be employed, but rather how this or that practical language problem might be solved, whether the theoretical answers are ready at hand or not. (Fraser and O'Donnell 1969: xi)

This important passage was no less than an embryonic programme for developing applied linguistics as a separate discipline on its own. It presupposes that applied linguistics has its separate basis (language problems) that calls

for independent intellectual work, including developing whatever theoretical tools might be needed. Granted that the older approach, which Widdowson (1980, 2000) termed 'linguistics applied', still lingered on, the 1960s thus ended with a situation where 'applied linguistics' for the first time should be interpreted as a plural count noun (Sridhar 1993).

Among the meta-issues discussed in applied linguistics, as we have seen, the directionality of influence between applied linguistics and general linguistics was the focal one for a long time. A temporary consensus on this issue seems to have been reached, however, by the mid-1980s (see Widdowson 1980, 1990; Tomic and Shuy 1987). After the reaching of a consensus, most applied linguists addressing the issue have been more or less strongly in favour of a bidirectional or dialectical view.

In the 1990s, a new issue about social responsibility and its underlying axiological premises became important (Cameron *et al.* (1992); but see Andenaes (1988) for an earlier example). This issue circled around the researcher's position in relation to her surrounding social environment. What role should the researcher assume between researcher and researched (Roberts 2003; Sarangi 2007)? Are we simply continuing the positivist tradition of doing research *on* practitioners? If not, what are the implications of alternatively doing research *for* practitioners? Should we take the step more fully and do research *with* practitioners? Second, what role should the researcher take in relation to pressing social issues? I shall return to such important issues in later chapters (2, 6 and 7), but we may note that this point of departure addresses the older issue of the role of the applied linguist as consumer or contributor from a more socially sensitive axiological angle.

A sociology of our science? Some preliminary notes

A sociology of science approach has not been taken as frequently as a history of science approach in recent applied linguistics (see Rajagopalan 2004). What has normally been the case, as we have seen, is that the existence of separate journals, conferences and professional associations has been referred to as evidence for our field's position in academic life. Other interesting issues have not been similarly commented on (but see Candlin and Sarangi 2004c; Sarangi 2007).

The issue of intellectual role has a theoretical side, as we have seen in discussing the history of science. It also has a different side, we noticed, in that issues of axiology and accountability have developed out of working in close contact with practitioners. Our research practice thus influences our role as researchers, even in a nontheoretical sense. To what extent does this role characterize applied linguistics in relation to other disciplines? This is an

important issue that deserves empirical study. There has been a critical turn in several human disciplines, and this turn also affects applied linguistics. It does not, however, to my knowledge affect general linguistics to a similar extent. If my impression is confirmed on this point, this difference is an example of how sociology of knowledge may illuminate the interface between general and applied linguistics, an important distinction to which we now turn.

Towards testing the tentative framework

As an illustration of what the proposed new framework may lead to, let me now try to compare general linguistics and applied linguistics, and see what kind of picture we may have at this point in the discussion. The picture we arrive at will, by implication, act as an informal test of the validity of my proposed framework. Summarizing the arguments and observations presented so far, a comparison may look like Figure 1.2.

	<i>General</i>	<i>Applied</i>
EPISTEMOLOGY		
-primary knowledge interest	-explain	-solve/ improve
-primary research object	-code structure/ code function	-comm. probl.s/ solutions
-theoretical framework	-systems theory	-systems theory/ -ecological valid.
	-reductionism	-grounded theory
-methodological tradition	-deductive	-in-/ abductive
	-constructed data	-empirical (/cist)
HISTORY OF SCIENCE		
-stage of development	-analytical	-descriptive/ analytical
-meta issues	-theory sophistication	-problem orientation -social role/ responsibility
SOSIOLOGY OF KNOWLEDGE		
-intellectual role conception	-contributor	-mediator (/contributor)
-institutionalization		
-department structure	-mixed picture	
-professional organizations	-partly separate	
-journals	-largely separate	
-conferences	-partly separate	
-discourse practices	-partly or largely separate?	

Figure 1.2. General and applied linguistics compared

In the epistemological part of this illustration, we see that general and applied linguistics seem to be driven by different knowledge interests. The problem orientation of applied linguistics also leads to a difference between our respective research objects. My focus on communication is certainly debatable within current applied linguistics, but this does not affect problem orientation as such. At the levels of theory and methodology, we notice similar differences, completing an epistemological picture with quite fundamental differences.

The history of science part of the picture also reveals differences between general and applied linguistics, but perhaps of a less serious nature. The most serious difference is derived from epistemology, in that social responsibility has not to a similar extent been a metaissue in general linguistics. Third, sociology of knowledge is the one part of the picture that does not contribute very much to illuminate the relation between applied linguistics and general linguistics, apart from illustrating the obvious fact that applied linguists partly inhabit the same terrain as do general linguists. It would be premature to make strong claims in this area, though, since a lack of clear differences may partly be due to a lack of properly targeted empirical studies.

The resulting tentative general picture emerging from this model seems indeed to be one of applied linguistics (perhaps slowly, but gradually) *emerging* as a discipline of its own (see Larsen-Freeman 2000), but with both principled and historical links to general linguistics, perhaps as its pet sibling (the occasional family quarrel included). Such a suggestion is controversial, however. Grabe (2002: 12) on the one hand speaks about 'the emerging disciplinary nature of applied linguistics', whereas Davis and Elder (2004: 4f), on the other, question even the point in searching for a disciplinary status, preferring to use the term 'subject'. The validity of my tentative picture above thus remains to be discussed. Parts of such a discussion will be taken up in the remaining chapters of this book.

Notes

1. The origin of this chapter is my introductory presentation to the 1996 AILA symposium *Fundamental characteristics of applied linguistics: Toward a deeper understanding of an emerging transdiscipline*. An early version was published as Evensen (1997).
2. In the AILA 1996 discussion following my introduction to a symposium about the fundamental characteristics of applied linguistics, it was pointed out that axiology was conspicuously absent from the picture that I presented. Axiology is a part of moral philosophy that studies the system of

values underlying human activity. It has seemed questionable to me whether axiology is a useful category for making distinctions between sciences and disciplines, but as shown in the last two paragraphs it may also be the case that axiological difference feeds on knowledge interests to such an extent that disciplines may come to differ as a result of that. The issue thus deserves closer attention in future study.

3. With the development towards heterogeneity that may be observed in recent social science, this dichotomy may no longer be accurate.

2 Competing paradigms in the history of applied linguistics

On the sad state of being 'applied': An introductory note

Before turning to the main topic of this chapter, an introductory historical note may be in order, since an historical presentation of anything termed 'applied' should consider the origins of the core distinction at hand, the distinction between general and applied research. In order to understand the slightly masked connotations and implications of this distinction, we need to look briefly at a well-known, but quite distant past in order to illustrate this relation from a history of science perspective.

The emerging democracy of the ancient Greece city state (*its polis*) was formed by a social class of slave owners. For the first time in documented history, a whole group of human beings were able to live their lives under conditions where manual labour was being taken care of by their slaves, leaving their owners 'free', in a quite specific sense, to spend their time on non-manual activities – within politics, philosophy and the arts. In his *Politics* (Book I, Chapter V), Aristotle discusses the opposition between a slave and his master. The slave, he says, is useful in the same way as a tame animal – for his bodily strength. The slave owner, on the other hand, is 'useless indeed for what slaves are employed in, but fit for civil life'.

The most highly valued activities for this group of slave owners were those that were going on in the public square, the *agora*. The *agora*, it may be argued, was the essence of the Greek democratic state, the single body where almost everything official took place. For this reason, the political and cultural activities of the *agora*, termed *praxis*, were the most important ones for the privileged 5 per cent of the Greek population that had access to the *agora*, by virtue of being *free men*. Norwegian philosopher Einar Øverenget writes about this in his (2003) book on Hannah Arendt: 'If you did not have the opportunity to leave the space of the household and participate in activities that had no purpose beyond themselves, it followed that you had no freedom. For this reason slaves were not free. The same applied to women and children' (Øverenget 2003: 242) [my translation, LSE].

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We should carefully note the meanings of both 'free' and of 'praxis' in this social-historical context. Freedom seems to at first have been interpreted quite strictly as material freedom from manual labour. There was thus nothing practical in this, in the modern sense connotated to the term 'praxis'. Quite to the contrary, practicalities in a modern sense were taken care of by slaves, or women. This historical situation came to colour the meaning of 'freedom' for ages to come, ages that are not yet over.

The ensuing Roman state was to develop this particular notion of freedom further in terms like *artes liberales*, the 'free' or 'liberal' arts, subjects of study that were to form the backbone of scholarship and education, even into our own time. Through the deeply religious Middle Ages, this notion of spiritual freedom came to be attached to a notion of 'purity', the purely spiritual concerns of good Christians as formulated by Augustine and others. Thus we ironically ended up with a situation where the everyday world of practicalities and manual labour was by implication connoted with a notion of impurity. This situation still holds today, I claim, and this fact forms the background for one of my reservations regarding the ideological colouring of Habermas' notion of a 'practical' research interest referred to in Chapter 1. His idea about the practical is, historically speaking, a slave owner's idea.

Today the distinction between general and applied research is still often coined in terms of 'pure' versus 'impure' research (Sarangi and van Leuwen 2003a). The term 'applied' derives from this tradition of thought, as we shall see later in this chapter, and thus implies a tacit hierarchy of values where pure research is *high* and applied research *low* (see the classic study of Western metaphors, Lakoff and Johnson (1980)). Ferris (2005: 93) puts this both bluntly and aptly when she states that 'many would attest to feeling marginalized and disrespected by (so-called) theoretical linguists who view the work of the former group [applied linguists] as lower in the academic food chain and thus quite uninteresting'. One of the major debates in the history of applied linguistics which I shall turn to below, can in my view not be properly understood without being seen as 'figure' against such a connotational 'ground'.

The empirical history of science, however, does not yield easily to such a received understanding of high and low in intellectual work. There are several examples where what today would be seen as applied disciplines, such as education and medicine, developed a long time before their general or pure 'mother' disciplines, psychology and human biology. A similar case can be made for geometry, as this branch of mathematics seems to have developed out of practical necessity related to farming along the regularly flooded Nile delta, as well as to seafarers sailing across the frequently stormy Mediterranean. In both cases material need led to the development of practical solutions

(the virtually based settling of estate borders after every seasonal Nile flooding in the one case; the navigational, celestially based reading and computing skill needed to survive at rough sea in the other) that were the birthplace of a set of principles that we today know as geometry.

On this introductory reflective note, let us leave the ancient and medieval stages to future study and move on to the more recent intellectual history of our matter at hand, applied linguistics.

This chapter presents the development of two different traditions within applied linguistics (see Evensen 1986; Sridhar 1993). The first, older tradition takes a selection of theoretical notions as its starting point in approaching applied issues, thus in effect yielding a client status to applied linguistics. A second, newer tradition takes language or communication problems (or institutionalized solutions to such problems) as its starting point. This wider approach invites considering applied linguistics as an emerging social science of its own. As the chapter shows, our historical development has implied a strong, but only partial move from the first towards the second of these two approaches. The current situation within applied linguistics is thus characterized more by tension, struggle and confusion than by consensus on any one approach.

Two approaches to applied linguistics

In humanistic and social science disciplines, the relation between theory and application is not yet well understood, as I think that the previous chapter has exemplified.¹ Still, the relation is crucial for reaching a valid understanding of applied linguistics. In an attempt to illuminate it with a view to epistemological validity, I find it useful to start by distinguishing between two historically developed major approaches. I shall tentatively refer to the first one as a 'theory-driven' approach and to the second as a 'problem-driven' approach.² Among these two, the theory-driven approach is the older one, and the one that for a long time was the most influential one. The alternative, problem-driven approach has been slowly gaining momentum during the last generation of researchers, even if it was not recognized in either older expositions such as Courchène (1983) or more recent examples as a 2004 *InJAL* editorial (see below).

A theory-driven approach

In presenting what I shall call the theory-driven approach, it is necessary to refer to some historical facts from the first time when the term 'applied

linguistics' began to be commonly used, around the Second World War (see Catford (1998) and Rajagopalan (2004) for some even earlier historical examples). At the outbreak of the Second World War, the US government was facing a situation where the need for foreign language teaching was just as sudden as it was acute (Markwardt 1948). A large-scale language teaching programme was developed, with a number of the leading linguists within the structuralist tradition being employed as consultants, authors of teaching materials and teachers (Moulton 1963).

It was natural for these linguistic scientists to conceive of their contribution as that of offering 'practical applications for modern, scientific linguistics' (Mackey 1966: 247). This attitude was particularly understandable when considering the optimistic atmosphere that pervaded positivist science at the time. For the first time in the history of mankind, it was believed, one had access to reliable and accurate linguistic analyses, based on large corpora which had been subjected to rigorous discovery procedures (see Lepschy 1970). Through contrastive analyses, it was thought, this science could both predict learning difficulty and give objective and reliable criteria for selection and gradation of course content, all of this based on a linguistic notion of structural complexity (see Lado 1957).

Under this approach, it was natural to assign a dependent role to applied linguistics as either a subfield of study within linguistics or as a practical, nonscientific field governed by linguistics. When Malmberg wrote his first *International Review of Applied Linguistics (IRAL)* editorial in 1967, he referred to applied linguistics as 'this new branch, among the numerous old ones – of linguistics' (Malmberg 1967: 1). The subservient role implied in this approach was expressed most eloquently by Corder when he, in a now infamous passage of his famous introductory monograph, described the applied linguist as a 'consumer ... of theories' (Corder 1973: 10).³

Even today it is easy to find scholars expressing similar views, derived from this tradition. In the 1998 special issue of the journal *Language Learning* (Vol. 48 (4)), celebrating its 50th anniversary as the very first journal of applied linguistics, Catford (1998) repeatedly refers to 'applications of linguistics' in a straightforward, nonqualified manner. In a Norwegian setting, applied linguistics used to be included in a widely used introductory reader in linguistics (Bjorvand *et al.* 1982: 275) as 'a discipline within linguistics' – and presented in that book's third appendix.

This subservient interpretation achieved an authoritative status as it became expressed in a number of early dictionary definitions. Hartmann and Stork (1972: 17) defined applied linguistics as follows: 'Linguistics can be used to solve practical language problems ...'. A few years later Crystal (1980: 28f) defined applied linguistics as 'A branch of LINGUISTICS where the

primary concern is the application of linguistic theories, methods and findings to the elucidation of LANGUAGE problems which have arisen in other areas of experience'. In a 1992 dictionary, he reiterated (1992: 24) 'the use of linguistic theories, methods and findings in elucidating and solving problems to do with language which have arisen in other areas of experience'. In the more recent 2003 edition of his 1980 dictionary, Crystal has kept his original definition unchanged (see also Crystal and Brumfit 2004).

We may note that social problems are acknowledged as the domain of application, but the applied work is still thought of as starting from linguistics. The same opening for problems, but with a linguistic anchoring, was expressed in yet another dictionary entry by Kaplan and Widdowson (1992: 76) when they spoke of 'the application of linguistic knowledge to real-world problems'. Similarly, Spolsky (1999b: 1) implied a language/linguistics anchoring when he tried to define the scope of a subdiscipline of educational linguistics in the following way: 'The scope of this growing field is best defined as the intersection of language and education'. This problem-oriented linguistics approach characterizes even more current statements.

In their programmatic editorial to *International Journal of Applied Linguistics* (2004, Vol. 14 (2): iii), the new editors talk about applied linguistics as 'essentially a process of mediated intervention which seeks a negotiated settlement of language problems through the reconciliation of different and sometimes conflicting perspectives. *As we see it, its central purpose is to make the linguistic disciplines relevant to what goes on in the non-disciplinary world*' [emphasis added]. This programme, in other words, repeats theory-orientation while acknowledging the relevance of language problems, and at the same time reinvoking the old perspective of the applied linguist as a mediator, basically working from the linguist's premises.

Even if linguistics undisputedly did play a dominant role in early applied linguistics, the general term 'theory-driven' rather than 'linguistics-driven' (or Widdowson's much more well-known 1980 term 'linguistics applied') is chosen to reflect the fact that linguistics was never our only theoretical source. Even if this fact is not frequently acknowledged in historically oriented expositions of applied linguistics (see Davies 1999), psychology was *de facto* a crucially important source of reference and influence in early, foundational applied linguistics. The most prominent structural linguist in the USA, Leonard Bloomfield (1933), was an ardent follower of behaviourist psychology, and this particular theoretical connection became a fundamental part of his 'Army Method', a foreign language teaching method that eventually led up to the influential audiolingual approach (see Lado 1948; Moulton 1963; Rivers 1964, 1968).

But this interdependence did not, it seems, affect the fundamental way in which early applied linguists thought about the relationship between linguistics and applied linguistics. When Malmberg's *IRAL* coeditor, Nickel, talked about the broad theoretical basis necessary for applied linguistics, he referred to it as being developed at 'various centres of linguistic research' (Nickel 1967: 52). In the next chapter, I shall try to take the psychological component into account when confronting the theory-driven approach with quantitative material from a large empirical study.

The theory-driven approach was not, however, unproblematic. Saporta (1966: 86) pointed out that many linguists and applied linguists, at the heyday of naive application of transformational-generative grammar, failed to make a distinction between the learning process of a student on the one hand and the linguistic structures that are the assumed outcome of that learning process, on the other. For the writer of pedagogical grammars or the practising teacher, he argued, this qualitative distinction between process and product ought to be crucial: Stimulating the learning processes of actual learners is the primary target for pedagogical grammars in applied linguistics, just as these processes are primary for the practising teacher. Pedagogical grammars should thus build on principles that are learning-oriented and processual, not exclusively linguistic.

A related distinction that ought to be made is the one between language and linguistics. In theoretical linguistics (as distinct from the descriptive linguistics of the Jespersen tradition) language examples are used primarily to illustrate theoretical issues. The applied linguist ought to ask if these issues coincide with the actual problems of the language learner or the language teacher (Widdowson 1980). This point was dimly grasped in the first decades of applied linguistics, in arguments for comprehensive language description – what Corder (1973: 145) saw as 'first level application'. What was not considered critically enough at the time, however, was that seeing descriptive linguistics as a primary level within applied linguistics implied that applied linguists were dependent on linguists for their intellectual progress.

The first one to develop a critical understanding of this dependence was, interestingly enough, Noam Chomsky. He obviously favoured a unidirectional understanding of the relation between theory and application, but his famous (1966: 38) statement that linguistic theory was 'in a state of flux and agitation', thus having little to offer to the language teacher, had a long-term liberating effect in that it invited rethinking of the relationship between linguistics and applied linguistics (see Widdowson 2000b).

The dominant notion of unidirectionality between theoretical and applied linguistics was also historically problematic. While it is beyond doubt that

linguistic theory has had an important and profound impact on applied linguistics, particularly in its first generation, we should also be able to offer principled accounts for those several cases where the directionality has in fact been reversed. The fundamental case is historical. Linell (2004) demonstrates convincingly how linguistics itself developed out of practical language concerns like developing national standards and teaching such standards. The Norwegian linguist Fossetøl (1983) similarly documented how the founding fathers of Norwegian theoretical linguistics were typically practising language teachers who saw the need for a more systematic theoretical basis for their classroom teaching (see Bialystok (1998) for a similar argument concerning the history of linguistics in the USA).

Even more interestingly, as seen from a non-Anglo perspective, is the historically prestructuralist Norwegian linguist (and national laureate) Ivar Aasen. His life-long intellectual project was to establish an impeccable scientific basis for establishing a genuinely Norwegian language in the post-colonial period following the country's liberation from Danish rule in 1814. Based on both intensive and extensive historical and dialectal studies (he walked on foot across major parts of Norway while doing field studies), he was able to publish his first grammar of Norwegian in 1848. This grammar was based on a clearly emancipatory research interest, and methodologically it was equally strongly based on what later came to be known as purely structuralist linguistic principles. This book, it should be pointed out, was published 85 years before Bloomfield's *Language*.

A more well-known historical example of such reversal of influence from within modern applied linguistics occurred in the middle and late 1960s. Studies of reading failure among urban black youngsters in the metropolitan USA led to 'rectifying' educational programmes like 'Head Start', programmes that turned out to be a failure. This educational failure invited systematic studies of the actual verbal practices of urban black youngsters. Such studies of Black English Vernacular led in turn to, for example, Labov's (1969) theoretical notion of variable rules in syntax, which in its turn contributed to a rapid development of sociolinguistics (see Evensen 1983a: 238). It is interesting to note within the context of this chapter that one of the founders of sociolinguistics, Charles Ferguson (1997), has characterized the early days of sociolinguistics as 'problem-driven' rather than 'theory-driven' (see Young (1999)).

A quite different example of applied research leading to theorizing may be taken from composition studies. In applied studies of discourse writing, it has long been observed that some students have problems with verb form sequence (see for example Evensen 1983b and Crystal in Crystal and Brumfit 2004). They sometimes shift back and forth, often with peculiar effects

for the reader. When analysing such problems, it is necessary to know which shifts in verb form sequence are in fact motivated ones in skilled writing. This discourse motivation for systematic shifts was largely unknown at the time, with some exceptions mentioned below.

Van Dijk (1977) analysed certain narrative parameters that seemed to trigger the use of pluperfect. Discourse analysis also showed that temporal adverbials sometimes signal shifts in verb form sequence (see for instance Wikberg 1978; Webber 1988 and references therein). Exploratory analyses of The Trondheim Corpus of Applied Linguistics (Evensen 1985) demonstrated similar behaviours of certain boundary marking verbal items (see 'well' and 'now' in the 'frame' category of Coulthard 1977: 101ff).

What temporal adverbials and such boundary markers have in common, is that they appear within a class of macrolevel discourse signals with potentially very large textual scope, a class which was analysed empirically within the Nordic NORDWRITE project as 'pointers to superstructure' (Evensen 1986c, 1990). The items in this class have important discourse functions as communicative signals of macrolevel discourse structures, but were at the time neither well delimited nor well analysed from a functional point of view. It was made clear that a number of pointers outside the subclass of temporal adverbials accompany shifts in verb form sequence, both in narrative and argumentative prose. It is not, however, the case that all pointers trigger verb form shifts. It is thus still only partially clear how the correspondence between pointer occurrence and shifts in verb form sequence actually works.

My general point in referring to such examples of everyday applied research leading to theoretical questions, that often include substantial elements of general research for the applied linguist, is not to argue for my own modest theoretical contributions, but simply to illustrate that the relation between theory and application is bidirectional in a way that is not easily accounted for within a theory-driven approach.

A further serious problem with the theory-driven approach was the increasingly multidisciplinary nature of research actually being carried out under the label of applied linguistics. During the last three decades, a growing number of increasingly complex interdisciplinary publications have appeared, and the number of sections or special interest groups during AILA conferences has been steadily increasing until recently. Even an early classic, Mackey's (1965) volume on language teaching analysis, covers a wide range of phenomena that is hard to reconcile with the theory-driven approach. Similarly, one can point to relatively early studies like Oller and Richards' (1973) collection of articles on language learner characteristics; Schumann's (1976a, 1976b) studies of the effects of politico-cultural dom-

inance patterns on second language acquisition; Chastain's (1976) overview for language teachers; Burstall's (1978) review of factors relevant to FL learning motivation; Williams' (1981) multivariate analyses of reading performance, and d'Anglejan and Renaud's (1985) study of predictors of second language acquisition.

Course design is a particularly illuminating example of the need for a more truly interdisciplinary approach. In his 1974 *Edinburgh Course in Applied Linguistics* presentation, Howatt effectively illustrates the complexity of phenomena that need to be simultaneously considered if one wants to develop a language course that may be hoped to work in the real educational world of a language classroom. His underlying model, referred to by my intellectual mentor Elisabeth Ingram as 'The Map of the World', is presented in Figure 2.1 (reproduced with permission).

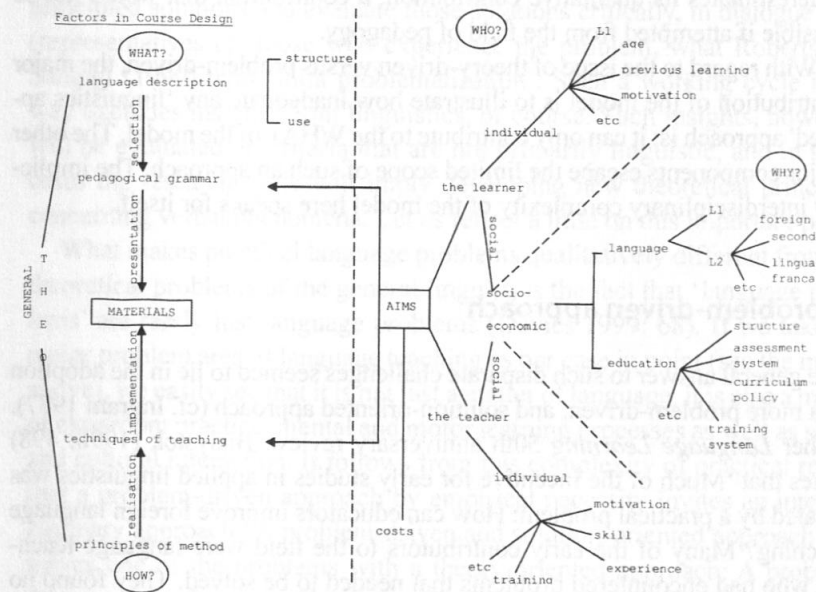


Figure 2.1. Howatt's 'Map of the World'

Howatt's model in Figure 2.1 presents course design as an intellectual process involving the classic set of factors involved in language didactics, the WHAT, HOW, WHO and WHY of language teaching. Such a set accounts for the selection and presentation of language to be learnt (the WHAT of course design) as well as the principles and techniques of teaching method to be used (the HOW of course design). Similarly it accounts

for the needs motivating the course to be designed (what kind of language in what kind of language situation and educational system; the WHY of course design) as well as the individual and socioeconomic characteristics of the learners and teachers to be involved in the actual teaching and learning processes of the course to be designed (the WHO of course design).

The core characteristic of the model, however, is its focus on the interplay between several sets of equally legitimate concerns. Thus the specific aims to be developed for the course occupy the central focus area of the model in that all the above factors influence the formulations of aims. Similarly, the aims that are developed feed back into both language presentation (pedagogical grammar) and teaching method. We may further notice that several areas of specialism for applied linguists are presupposed in the model. Examples of such areas are error analysis and needs analysis. The commonly heard argument that applied linguistics is just another word for language didactics thus underestimates its qualitative contribution, a contribution that would not be possible if attempted from the field of pedagogy.

With regard to the issue of theory-driven versus problem-driven, the major contribution of the model is to illustrate how inadequate any 'linguistics applied' approach is: it can only contribute to the WHAT of the model. The other major components escape the limited scope of such an approach. The implicitly interdisciplinary complexity of the model here speaks for itself.

A problem-driven approach

The general answer to such disparate challenges seemed to lie in the adoption of a more problem-driven, and solution-oriented approach (cf. Ingram 1977). In her *Language Learning* 50th anniversary review, Bialystok (1998: 498) states that 'Much of the incentive for early studies in applied linguistics was created by a practical problem: How can educators improve foreign language teaching? Many of the early contributors to the field were language teachers who had encountered problems that needed to be solved. They found no ready solutions and so were forced to critically explore the issues and create their own'. This newer conception of applied linguistics takes the practical object of research as its starting point. As noted in Chapter 1, as early as 1969, Fraser and O'Donnell had introduced their book on applied linguistics in first language teaching on such a footing. They stated, programmatically:

It would be wrong to think of its proper function as being that of discovering practical applications for linguistics; this would imply that we should begin with certain theoretical answers and work back towards such subsequent questions that fitted these answers.

Applied linguistics is in essence a problem-centred discipline. It starts, that is, by asking not how this or that insight into language might be employed, but rather how this or that practical language problem might be solved, whether the theoretical answers are ready to hand or not. (Fraser and O'Donnell 1969: xi)

In a more recent version of such a problem-driven approach, Davies (1999: 67) specifies that it is not any practical language problem that is the starting point for the applied linguist, but rather those recurrent problems that are recognized in society as being of some institutional concern. In such a specified view, we can see that 'theory ... becomes the servant and not the master' (Davies 1999: 60). In relation to the ancient Greek scenario of masters and slaves, this quote is interesting. When starting our work with institutionally recognized practical problems, it is no longer theory-driven. We will then need to work in a cycle where we analyse the problem, develop principled solutions and evaluate those solutions critically, in dialogue with (representatives of) those who experience the problem, what Roberts and Sarangi (1999) term 'joint problematization'. Such a working cycle in no way excludes insights from linguistics, of course. Such insights, however, will be evaluated on criteria that are not primarily linguistic, and in some cases the research cycle will imply developing new theoretical principles concerning verbal phenomena. Let us reflect a little on this important point.

What makes practical language problems qualitatively different from the theoretical problems of the general linguist, is the fact that 'language problems' are rarely just language problems (Davies 1999: 68). If we take the major problem area of language teaching as our case in point (see the model above), we easily see that it is not just a matter of language, it is also a matter of classroom practice, mental and motor learning processes as well as social and cultural interaction. It follows from this complexity of practical reality that a problem-driven approach by empirical necessity invites an interdisciplinary approach.⁴ A problem-driven and solution-oriented approach thus solves one of the problems with a theory-oriented approach: A problem-driven approach may easily account for the *de facto* interdisciplinary nature of work within applied linguistics. More specifically, we may begin to see that applied linguistics possibly emerges as disciplinary or transdisciplinary activity in that it has its own research agenda, one that is different from all its neighbouring disciplines.

Since applied linguistics starts in practical language problems and their solution, the concerns of the applied linguist dealing with, for instance, language teaching (an institutionalized solution which is far older than applied linguistics), will be different from the concerns of an educationalist or a psychologist. Thus, Mackey's (1966: 255) argument that 'claims that applied

linguistics can solve all the problems of language teaching are as unfounded as the claims that applied psychology can solve them' falls on a point that he seemed to never realize.

A problem-driven approach is programmatic in that it both explains why applied linguistics cannot properly be seen as a branch of linguistics, and simultaneously provides a basis for seeing applied linguistics as an embryonic discipline in its own right, with its own knowledge interest and research object (see the discussion in Chapter 1). Widdowson (1980) provided an apt conceptual (and deeply rhetorical) tool for seeing the difference within applied linguistics with his famous distinction between 'linguistics applied' and 'applied linguistics', a distinction which is closely related to the distinction between theory-driven and problem-driven research presented here.

Ingram (1980: 54) defined applied linguistics as 'that science which seeks insights from linguistics and other language-informative sciences, insights which produce principles on which is developed a methodology to solve specific language-related problems [emphasis added]'. At that point in time, even some dictionary definitions began to reflect the development of a problem-driven view. For example, Richards *et al.* (1985: 19) defined applied linguistics as:

1. the study of second and foreign language learning and teaching;
2. the study of language and linguistics in relation to practical problems. Applied linguistics uses information from sociology, psychology, anthropology and information theory 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, speech therapy, language planning, stylistics, etc. [emphasis added]

Quite a few applied linguists today acknowledge problem orientation without fully acknowledging the above interdisciplinary corollary. The main reason why this relation between orientation and corollary is not understood stems, I would suggest, from defending the historically motivated link between applied linguistics and the study of 'language'. Before questioning this link, however, I need to provide an updated background.

Davies (1999) states on the very first page of his introductory volume that there is very little controversy today over the purpose of work within applied linguistics, which he characterizes as 'to solve or at least ameliorate social problems involving language' (1999: 1). Here, the social dimensions of 'language problems' are explicitly addressed, but they are not seen as deriving from the very nature of communication itself. Rather, they are seen from the point of view of 'language'. I shall return to this latter point.

During the 1990s there seemed to develop a growing recognition of the first part of my argument in Chapter 1, that part which relates to problem-orientation. Brumfit (1991, 1995, 1997), for example, argued both convincingly and historically influentially for a practical problem-orientation that should be related to some real world (as opposed to the assumedly unreal world of scholars involved in purely theoretical research). Later, Davies (1999) and others followed track. The new millennium has seen several scholars even west of the Atlantic arguing along similar lines to the point of directly echoing Brumfit and Davies. Examples of such cross-Atlantic echoes are Kaplan (2002a, b, c), Poole (2002) and Grabe (2002). Ram-anathan (2005: 39) states that: 'most of us applied linguists hold on to the hope that it is in part in noting language-related problems in our collective machineries [like education systems, LSE] and in finding ways to alleviate them that our professional commitment lies'. The issue still remaining here, however, is the basic notion of the 'language-relatedness' of the practical problems of that assumedly real world. In what sense are real-world practical problems related to language? Let us now address this issue.

As I tried to argue in Chapter 1, a language-orientation takes our focus away from important developments within our history as applied linguists, notably the implications of our internally developed term 'communicative competence'. A language orientation also takes focus away from the real-life needs and interests of the actual human beings concerned (humans who are by implication easily sacrificed at the altar of a *system* that is traditionally at the depth of our heart – language). Thus even current problem-oriented accounts of applied linguistics, like Widdowson (2000b), takes our focus away from what is actually taking place in that posited real world – actual human beings trying to find access to the resources that are necessary for them as humans in order to cater for their current or future communication needs. These actual human beings, it should be noted, take little interest in 'language' (which is an abstract object of interest mostly for linguists); their actual interest lies in the needs of their equally actual past, present and future life trajectories (see Cook (2006) for one example of such interests).

This tendency towards academic abstraction from real life is reflected in the dominant terminology in even another area. When addressing the interdisciplinary nature of applied linguistics, a point that is today widely recognized, we still tend to use terms like 'linguistic' when we actually refer to verbal phenomena, and 'psychological' when we refer to relevant mental phenomena, *et cetera*. But do we really subscribe to the view that linguistics owns total definitional power over all forms of analysis of all things that are mediated through language? Do we similarly actually want to leave any question about language learning, motivation or identity to psychologists?

If the answer to such questions is *yes*, the implication is that we actively choose to adopt a subservient role in relation to any neighbouring discipline with interests that overlap ours. Throughout the rest of this book, I shall thus take pains to continue referring to verbal, mental, social, cultural, and so on, aspects of our work, rather than to refer to linguistic, psychological, sociological and anthropological aspects. My point in doing so, of course, lies in the long-term hope that our emerging transdiscipline may eventually contribute insights that would not be possible if conceived within the confines of any of our alternative, coexisting sister disciplines.

As pointed out in Chapter 1 and in the introduction to the present chapter, there is an underestimated dialectic between basic and applied research. One case of this dialectic is the historical development of variable rules in embryonic sociolinguistics. A second case is the paradigmatic notion of 'communicative competence'. Both of these theoretical developments took place in a research context where real life educational problems were a starting point. It may be seen as a paradox that a practical approach may yield more theoretical output than a linguistics-dependent one, but the reasons why this is so were presented in the previous chapter. In an historical context, it should be noted, however, that these theoretical developments took place only when the traditional dependence on linguistics was seriously questioned.

From theory-driven to problem-driven?

The presentation so far in this chapter may give the impression that a theory-driven paradigm has gradually yielded to a problem-driven paradigm. Davies (1999: 1) puts this view bluntly when he, as we have already seen, states: 'like medicine there is little disagreement about the purpose of applied linguistics, which is to solve or at least ameliorate social problems involving language'. Even if what he claims is partly the case, the current situation is much more complex than that, however. The old paradigm still lives on, even if it has been increasingly challenged, or simply left uninhabited by colleagues who vote with their feet. Even Davies himself (1999: 13) quotes the 'linguistics applied' position of H. D. Brown from 1987, and in his 2004 *Handbook* (with Elder), he devotes about half of the book to current examples of 'linguistics applied'.

Another, more general example of current complexity is the field of second language acquisition research. Here, a Universal Grammar approach is central even today (see my discussion to come in Chapter 5). A further example is the journal *IRAL* (*International Review of Applied Linguistics*), where a large portion of the contributions are still written within a clearly

theory-driven, linguistics-oriented paradigm. A third example can be found in dictionary definitions, as we have seen.

More importantly, different versions of problem-driven approaches have not led to a coherent alternative to the structural-behaviourist paradigm of the 1950s and 1960s. To continue referring to Sridhar's (1993) argument, the term 'applied linguistics' should still be read in the plural, with no common community of practice clearly at work. The issues introduced by some critical and postmodernist orientations to be discussed below in fact add to this plurality. In this wider intellectual picture, applied linguistics is, of course, not alone in facing such problematic heterogeneity. In 1990 psychologist Jerome Bruner stated (1990: ix) that he wrote his book 'at a time when psychology... has become fragmented as never before in its history. It has lost its center and risks losing the cohesion needed to assure the internal exchange that might justify a division of labor between its parts.'

In a new millennium: The tense state of recent metadiscussion

As the 1990s may be seen as a preliminary peak of heterogeneity within applied linguistics, it left a number of troublesome issues that are still as open as they are sore. One noticeable symptom of such a state of affairs is the number of in-depth articles and discussions that popped up towards the end of the 1990s and continued into the new millennium. Whereas the *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics* had contributed in-depth overview articles since 1980, this recent period saw the addition of discussion and position sections in several leading journals. Current examples of this new tendency are the discussion articles, response articles and *Forum* of the journal *Applied Linguistics* (for example Bygate 2005), the *Research Issues of TESOL Quarterly* (for example Lazaraton 2000), the *Conversations of Journal of Applied Linguistics* (for example Crystal and Brumfit 2004) and the *Viewpoint* section of *InJAL*, *The International Journal of Applied Linguistics* (for example Cameron 2006 and Widdowson 2006). In the 1990s we also saw a new emergence of extended discussions covering several consecutive issues of journals like *InJAL* and the *MLA Journal*. A journal like *InJAL* devoted a special issue in 1997 to discussing the nature of applied linguistics, and the discussion spilled into 1998. Similarly, the *MLA Journal* special issue in 1997 on sociocultural approaches to SLA invited discussion in later issues, a discussion that is still going on, more than a decade later.

We have also witnessed a series of publications trying to offer overviews. Basil Blackwell, Oxford University Press, Routledge and Mouton

have all published handbooks of applied linguistics, and several dictionaries of applied or educational linguistics have appeared (for example Spolsky 1999). The handbook introductions do not, however, easily reveal the level of tension that is actually there. Davies and Elder background their intellectual programme in an extended quote from the letter of invitation to their contributors, where they write that:

we intend to offer a coherent account of applied linguistics as an independent and coherent discipline, which, like similar vocational activities (for example general medicine, business studies, applied psychology, legal studies) seeks to marry practical experience and theoretical understanding of language development and language in use. (Davies and Elder 2004: 11)

Instead of seeing any tension, one is initially struck by the lack of new arguments in such publications. Kaplan and Grabe (2002) take a sociology of knowledge approach similar to that of Kaplan (1980), and Davies and Elder (2004) base their exposition on Widdowson's (1980) distinction between linguistics applied and applied linguistics. We further see that the old habit of characterizing applied linguistics extensionally is still at work. One case in point is Wilkins (1999: 7), who lists topics normally addressed at applied linguistics conferences or in international journals of applied linguistics. Still, his conclusion is that 'In its widest sense no coherent field of applied linguistics exists'.

The exposition of old arguments is at times even muddled and confused. Thus Kaplan writes in his Preface to *The Oxford Handbook of Applied Linguistics* (2002): 'Because the real-world language-based problems that applied linguists try to mediate are enormously diverse ..., it is unlikely that any single paradigm can speak to the diverse activity in the field' (Kaplan 2002: ix). On the following page, however, he writes: 'While there is no unifying paradigm yet, it is likely that one may evolve in the future' (2002: x). Readers are left to wonder.

Still, the underlying tension eventually spills out. In the Preface quoted above, Kaplan writes a seriously symptomatic passage that deserves to be quoted in full:

The editorial group spent quite a bit of time debating whether critical (applied) linguistics/critical pedagogy/critical discourse analysis should be included; on the grounds that critical applied linguistics rejects all theories of language, expresses 'skepticism towards all metanarratives (Lyotard 1984), and rejects traditional applied linguistics as an enterprise because it has allegedly never been neutral and has, rather, been hegemonic

(Rampton 1997b), the editorial group decided not to include the cluster of 'critical' activities [emphasis added]. Despite some omissions, the coverage is wide and comprehensive. (Kaplan 2002: x)

In other words, the underlying tension is in fact at such a level that outright censorship takes over. I shall return to the issue of critical developments below.

Let us therefore look into some of the issues and challenges mirrored by such symptoms of underlying tension and possible upheaval. Recent historical developments have led to a different accentuation within a problem-driven orientation, as well as new conflicts. The 1990s saw several developments towards more critical versions of applied linguistics, especially in Europe, under terms like Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough 1995; Wodak 1996; Luke 2002) or Critical Applied Linguistics (Pennycook 1994a, 1994b; Rampton 1997; Ramanathan 2002; Carlson 2004). Recent metadiscussion (see Chapter 1) has also raised an issue about the relation between general developments in intellectual research contexts and the future progress of applied linguistics. Thus, Brumfit (1997), Rampton (1997) and Davies (1999) all discuss the challenge posed by postmodern approaches to recent scholarship.

Common across critical orientations is a new willingness to address pressing societal issues of power, imperialism, class, race, gender and ideology, often with (neo-)Marxist overtones (Rajagopalan 2004). The knowledge interest is here a specification of the general one suggested in the previous chapter, namely the one of emancipation (Habermas 1969). This emancipatory knowledge interest has stimulated fresh perspectives and new empirical insights, but has also created extremely heated discussions, with established scholars like Widdowson (1999) and Davies (1999) defending more traditional and less openly ideological positions. Underlying this discussion is the implied critique that our traditional positions have been driven by what was described in Chapter 1 as a technical knowledge interest, an interest at the service of the existing power structures.

What Widdowson and Davies seem to underestimate in their attempted counter-attacks, is the role of Critical Discourse Analysis and Critical Applied Linguistics in finally addressing important axiological issues: From *whose* position does the applied linguist actually observe the world (see Becker 1967)? Admittedly, most applied linguists have tended to follow the early sociolinguistics tradition in somehow siding with the underdog, but this has not always been the case. One good example is the beginnings of applied linguistics that were described earlier in this chapter. Because this axiological question has not yet been properly addressed and digested, we

have thus lived under the danger of unintentionally supporting for instance an imperialist role for English as a world language (Phillipson 1992; Pennycook 1994b). Davies himself (1999: 114) recounts exactly such imperial needs and aspirations as spurring the original establishing of British applied linguistics. Whose needs were these? This is a deeply political and moral issue that he simply does not address at all in his historical exposition. For many other applied linguists, however, a new axiological awareness is something that is welcomed.

As a direct consequence of such discussion and its resulting new awareness, the British Association of Applied Linguistics developed an elaborate code of good practice (BAAL 1994, 1995, 2006). These criteria comprise relationships in research; responsibilities to informants, colleagues and students; responsibilities to applied linguistics at large; relationships with own institutions as well as external sponsors, and responsibilities to the public. All these relationships and responsibilities are specified systematically. As an example, responsibilities to informants are specified under the following headings: general responsibility, obtaining informed consent, respecting a person's decision not to participate, confidentiality and anonymity, deception and covert research, consulting informants on completion of research, balanced participation, research with children, internet research (BAAL 1994, 2006: 4ff).

Many of these criteria are ones that any researcher working in any social scientific and humanistic fields of study will subscribe to, but they also more specifically reflect the concerns that are made particularly relevant in applied research and applied linguistics within applied research (Rajagopalan 2004). In this book, the axiological issues of researcher position and good practice will be returned to, and further discussed in relation to discourse analysis in Chapter 4, and in relation to issues of methodology in Chapters 6 and 7. It will also be a basic element in the philosophical discussion in Chapter 8.

The critical approaches have been closely linked to certain aspects of postmodernism. Most evidently this may perhaps be seen in Fairclough's (1992) and Wodak's (1995) reliance on Foucault's ideological concept of 'discourse' as a count noun, where discourses and orders of discourse both symbolically reflect power and are core instruments of maintaining symbolic power. Uncovering such ideological mechanisms is a general emancipatory aim of critical approaches. There are also, however, less obvious aspects of postmodernism that have made their influence and need to be addressed. For example, what kind of status does postmodernism have in the epistemological picture presented in the previous chapter?

Widdowson and Davies are, in my view, right in claiming that postmodernism is not useful as a defining criterion for any science or discipline; rather, it is a general philosophical approach that is equally valid or invalid across a number of disciplines. Davies (1999: 132) quotes Docherty (1993: 1) emphasizing this generality: '[T]here is hardly a single field of intellectual endeavour which has not been touched by the "spectre" of the "postmodern". It leaves its trace in every cultural discipline.' Still, the post-structuralist aspect of postmodernism implies a scepticism towards structuralism that tangentially affects one specific aspect of our attempt at defining epistemological categories – the type of theory to be developed (see Chapter 1). As the new axiological awareness is something that many applied linguists welcome, they will be equally happy to bid farewell to traditional structuralism.

Postmodernism affects applied linguistics in multiple and controversial ways that still need to be better understood before they can be fully evaluated. The postmodern scepticism towards any notion of 'truth' and its following openness to multiple theoretical positions have for instance probably worked to ironically prevent the establishment of any coherent research paradigm in applied linguistics that could form an alternative to previous structuralism.

Postmodernism's lack of 'truth' and intellectual integration even needs to be discussed from the reverse axiological angle: If there is no truth to be unveiled 'out there' anywhere, what will then prevent neosophism (or the next Goebbels, for that matter) to eventually take over? And why side with anybody who is not out there anyway? Furthermore, if there are no grand theories anymore, why cherish postmodernism as exactly *the* grand theory? If only local theories are allowed, what may prevent a continuing 'Balkanization' of applied linguistics (van Lier 1997)? Their underlying ontological scepticism is an extremely troublesome aspect of some postmodernist positions.

These recent panintellectual developments also feed into sociology of knowledge in that they affect disciplines differently, contrary to claims referred to above. The critical discussion about positivism and structuralism has, for instance, affected applied linguistics more than it has probably affected theoretical linguistics, thus accentuating the already existing difference between the two. General intellectual developments may in this way indirectly affect our conceptions of what makes a discipline or a field of study.

Recent metadiscussion has raised even further issues of axiology. Such issues comprise the relation between theory and practice and our notions of what a paradigm is. In discussing the difficult relation between theory

and practice, van Lier (1997) noted that different applied linguists position themselves at different points along a scale ranging from pure theory orientation to pure practice orientation. Such positionings will have obvious, important consequences for our professional priorities and methodologies. Ferris (2005) discusses such priorities and methodologies along a white-collar–blue-collar continuum, where white-collar researchers have dominantly philosophical agendas whereas blue-collar researchers dominantly work with direct problem solving in some practical world. Less obviously, different positionings will have important consequences even for the principles and theories deriving from our professional experience.

A theory-driven orientation may easily lead to the kind of context-free dependence on, for instance, linguistic theory that characterized early applied linguistics. A purely problem-driven orientation, on the other hand, may easily lead to no theorizing whatsoever, with little generalizable value to be gained from the endeavour. Practice-oriented theory or theory-oriented practice, however, may lead to grounded theory, which may eventually change our perspectives of communication, language, learning and development. As Van Lier (1997) notes, '[P]ractical activity is the very stuff that the best theories are made of'. And he goes on: 'I think that it is the applied linguist, who works with language in the real world, who is most likely to have a realistic picture of what language is, and not the theoretical linguist who sifts data through several layers of idealization.'

In discussing homogeneity and plurality with regard to applied linguistics as a field or discipline, Van Lier (1997) points out its principled interdependence with other fields because of its interdisciplinary nature. Thus, Kuhn's traditional, closed-box notion of paradigm may not be the optimal one. One may rather consider an alternative notion where a paradigm is seen as an open, ecological system. Such systems are always in dialogue with other, related systems, and the borders between such systems are never absolute. This alternative position is very close to the one taken in this book.

In a different but related vein, Brumfit (1997) draws implications from his discussion of a weak version of postmodernist critique. The beneficial aspects of this critique concern simplistic faith in truth, theory and the objectivity of research. Today, only a few scholars will cling to notions of single or simple truths. Accordingly, progress can only take place at some *tertium comparationis* where competing positions are engaged in genuine, critical dialogue; thus 'communication between approaches has to be maintained' (1997: 27). Maintaining such communication, however, is a serious challenge in an applied linguistics increasingly characterized by what Van Lier (1997) termed 'Balkanization'. For communication to take place, some common intellectual framework needs to be defined. The implications of

open, ecological views on what the notion of 'paradigm' may entail will be returned to and further discussed in Chapter 8.

Conclusion

This chapter has documented a gradually increasing concern with practical problems, interdisciplinarity and axiology as core concerns for applied linguistics. It has also documented a growing concern with the apparent lack of coherence within the field. However, these concerns have not yet led to any general alternative that may challenge 'linguistics applied' through working out its alternative – an alternative which is characterized by coherence between epistemology, theory and methodology (see Crystal and Brumfit 2004). A more specific aim of this book grows out of this situation. The common project underlying Chapters 4 to 7 is to explore what such an alternative, open-but-coherent paradigm might look like, as a necessary basis for improved communication within applied linguistics itself. Before doing so, however, I shall present a national study intended to empirically test the adequacy of theory-driven and problem-driven approaches for dealing with practitioners' experience in language teaching within first and foreign language learning and teaching.

Notes

1. This chapter is to a large extent based on my earlier doctoral work (see Evensen 1986b). I would like to express my profound gratitude to my supervisor, the late Professor Elisabeth Ingram. I am also grateful to the general linguist Thorstein Fretheim, who read and commented critically on an earlier version.
2. A rudimentary exposition of this distinction appeared in Evensen (1986a). A related distinction is presented in Davies (1999: 12ff).
3. A few years later, Prof. Corder seemed to have left, or at least modified, this unidirectional view, cf. Corder (1977, 1978).
4. One exception to this claim is Krashen (1982), who advocated problem-orientation, but did not acknowledge the interdisciplinary consequence.

3 An empirical evaluation of competing paradigms

Introduction

The theory-driven and problem-driven traditions presented in the previous chapter both regard language teaching and language learning as the central arenas for the applied linguist. It is also generally accepted across both the traditions that relevance for the user is a chief criterion of quality in applied research. Granted these premises, an empirical design where different epistemological assumptions are confronted with user relevance is one way to empirically estimate the validity of those assumptions. In this chapter, I present an empirical investigation of the fit between the two traditions presented in the previous chapter on the one hand, and teacher and student perceptions of problems in language teaching/learning, on the other.

The two major approaches to applied linguistics imply different predictions as to where perceived problems will be located. The theory-driven approach predicts that problems related to teaching/learning of the verbal subject matter are dominant. The problem-driven approach, on the other hand, predicts a wider picture, where problems related to contextual phenomena are so relevant that the total picture of problems would become severely distorted if these factors are left out. The conceptual background for these different implicit predictions is illustrated in Figure 3.1.¹

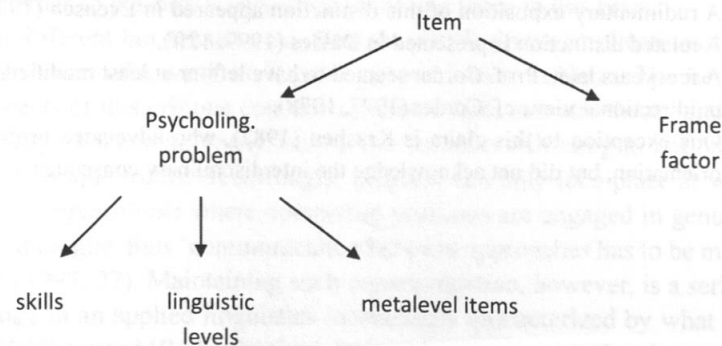


Figure 3.1. A simplified general taxonomy to classify perceived problems

In this figure, each item at the empirical level is first classified into either a subject matter ('psycholinguistic') problem of teaching/learning or a contextual problem relating to dominantly non-linguistic 'frame factors' (see below). For purposes of illustration, it is also suggested in the figure how these major categories may then be subdivided. Examples of such subdivision in the figure are given only for problems relating directly to the teaching or learning of language subject matter.

The above taxonomy was established on the basis of classroom discourse data. In this data, subject matter items were expressed as relating to either a specific skill (like listening), a specific level of linguistic analysis (like syntax) or an aspect of conscious knowledge (like grammatical analysis or knowledge of culture). Similar subdivisions were developed for contextual problems (like student motivation, classroom organization or educational characteristics of teaching material). I shall return to presenting these subdivisions in the section below.

As we shall see, the resulting picture is multifaceted, but one where contextual items dominate. This finding suggests that improved validity is possible with an interdisciplinary, problem-driven and solution-oriented approach to applied linguistics.

The study

In order to test the fit between the two competing approaches to applied linguistics on the one hand, and problem perceptions of language teachers and learners on the other, a doctoral study in Norway was designed as a national survey. In this study, a three-stage design was used (Evensen 1986b). At the first stage (1980), open-ended qualitative interviews were carried out, and open-ended essays were collected from teachers and learners in grades 9–12 in order to explore their general notion of problems in language learning/language teaching. This approach also gave access to the way such problems are formulated in classroom and staffroom discourse. In order to achieve content validity across target languages, problem perceptions were collected from teachers and learners of English as a foreign language and Norwegian as a first language.

On the basis of this exploratory material, a general but empirical taxonomy of student and teacher perceptions was created (see Figure 3.1), and questionnaires were developed on the basis of this model. The questionnaires were then tested through a small-scale, but nationally representative pilot study (1980). The pilot study in turn formed the basis for a large-scale, national survey (1981). The material from both the pilot and full-scale studies was analysed, mainly by univariate, bivariate and multivariate statistical techniques, even if open-ended items and a corpus of student participant writing

(The Trondheim Corpus of Applied Linguistics, Evensen 1983b) yielded qualitative data also at this stage. The different stages of the research design will be described in some detail below.

The exploratory stage

During the first stage of the study, open-ended interview material was collected from 22 teachers, and open-ended essay material was collected from 746 students, all at two lower and two higher secondary schools in the Trondheim region. Through discourse analysis of their problem formulations and a hermeneutic process of interpretation, macro and micro versions of a problem perception model were developed. The basic underlying practitioner perspective brought out by the model was one of teaching or learning subject matter through multiple interactions in the classroom. The macro and micro versions of the model are presented in Figure 3.2a and b.

As will be immediately clear from Figure 3.2a, the conceptual framework of practitioners evident in my data was one of a multiple set of phenomena framing the actual teaching and learning going on in the classroom. In this conceptual framework, the outer frame of international context was only briefly touched upon by my informants, whereas some parts of the national context were somewhat more in focus. Allocated to the national framing context were categories like national educational authorities, the economic resources and equipment of schools; national laws and regulations constraining local educational efforts, as well as national curricula and teaching materials developed by publishing houses. As the figure shows, some of the teaching materials used are developed also locally, and comments on these were categorized as belonging to a local context.

Exams, grades and evaluation were long debated issues in the political discussion about education at the time when my material was collected. The comments of practitioners clearly reflected this discussion, and they were allocated to the national context, even if much of the actual evaluation taking place would normally be seen as belonging to a local context. Most of the items derived from the exploratory study, however, clearly referred to a local context. These were items commenting on what is going on at the level of specific schools and classrooms, with their specific teachers, students, parents and peers, and classroom activities leading to specific learning outcomes, or in some cases not leading to the expected outcomes.

All of these framing categories are conceptually substantiated and empirically exemplified by raw data for the detailed empirical analysis in Evensen (1986b). Since this elaboration does not, however, directly relate to the meta issue addressed in this chapter, it is left out here for reasons of space constraints.

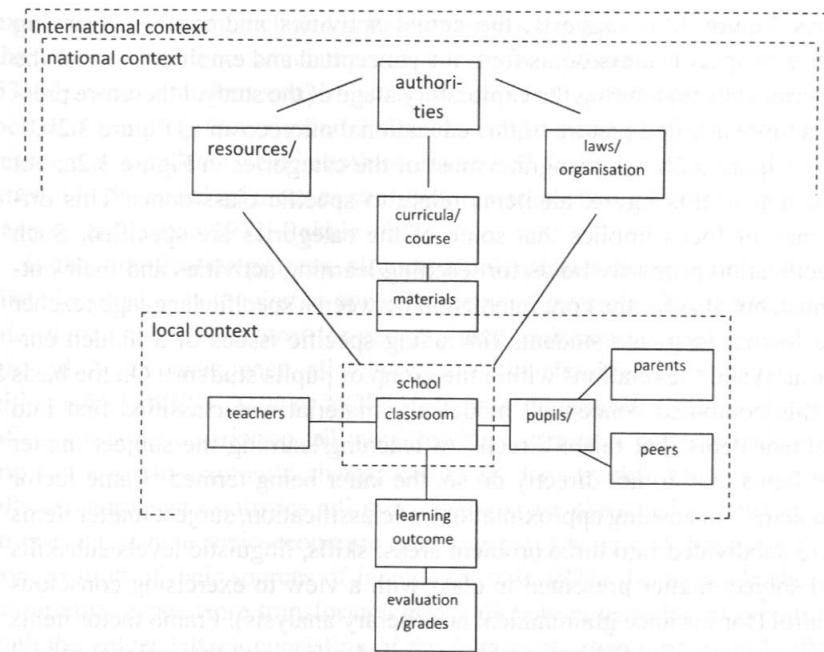


Figure 3.2. (a) A heuristic macro model of language teaching/learning

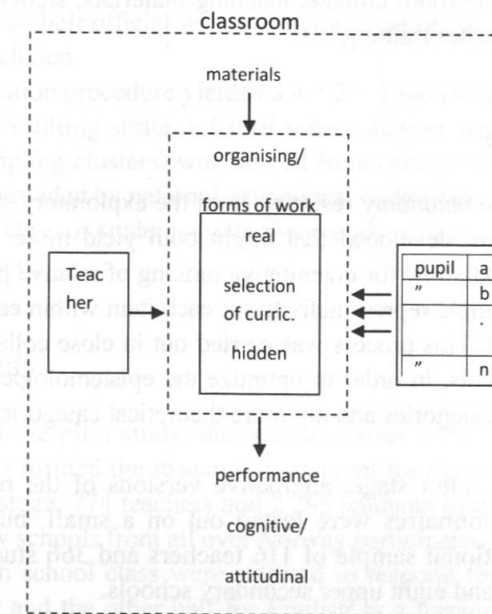


Figure 3.2. (b) A heuristic micro model of language teaching/learning

As Figure 3.2a suggests, the actual activities and teaching/learning events of specific classrooms form the conceptual and empirical core of the material collected during the exploratory stage of the study. I therefore present a more detailed picture of this educational microcosm as Figure 3.2b.

In Figure 3.2b, we recognize most of the categories in Figure 3.2a, but note that in this figure, all items relate to specific classrooms. This difference of focus implies that some of the categories are specified. Such specification primarily holds for teaching/learning activities and their outcomes, but also for the core interaction between a specific language teacher and his/her language students (including specific issues of a hidden curriculum) and the relations within the group of pupils/students. On the basis of this combined conceptual model, the material was classified first into problem items that relate directly to teaching/learning the subject matter and items that do not directly do so, the latter being termed 'frame factor problems'. In ensuing approximations of classification, subject matter items were subdivided into three problem areas: skills, linguistic levels/subskills and subject matter presented in class with a view to exercising conscious control (for instance grammatical and literary analysis). Frame factor items were similarly divided into problem areas dealing with the national school system and the resources available, course design (in particular the relative weighting of course content and exercise types), classroom methods, social interaction and classroom climate, teaching materials, student motivation, evaluation and teacher training.

The pilot stage

On the basis of the taxonomy resulting from the exploratory stage, tentative questionnaires were developed that might both yield more representative qualitative data and allow for quantitative ranking of relative problem intensity and within-sample representativity for each item within each group (see Oppenheim 1966). This process was carried out in close collaboration with teachers and students, in order to optimize the epistemological fit between their experiential categories and my more theoretical categories (see Sarangi 2007).

At the second, pilot stage, alternative versions of the resulting comprehensive questionnaires were tested out on a small, but statistically representative national sample of 116 teachers and 366 students at eight lower secondary and eight upper secondary schools.

Granted the small scale of this sample, it should be noted that the notion of representative sampling rests on one empirical criterion alone: that the

exact chance of being included in the sample is known for each individual in the total universe from which the sample is drawn (Moser and Kalton 1971: 63, 80). Simple random sampling may not, contrary to popular belief, be the best way to satisfy this criterion. In the present pilot and large-scale studies, teachers and students were in both cases selected through a sampling design known in the social sciences as stratified, nonproportional cluster sampling (Moser and Kalton 1971; Babbie 1973).

In the stratification process, all local municipalities in the country were first classified as belonging to one of Norway's four main dialectal regions in order to partially control for geographical variation in language background. As a consequence, all schools could be classified as belonging to either EAST, WEST, MID or NORTH. In order to include a crude measure of sociolinguistic variation, all municipalities were next classified according to the socio-economic characteristics of their workforce. For use in official Norwegian statistics, all municipalities are classified as belonging to one out of nine socio-economic community types, largely based on the composition of their sources of income (Skrede 1971). In my study these community types were transformed into a dichotomous index of urbanity with the values HIGH, consisting of the four most urban types, and LOW, consisting of the five least urban types. Lastly, all communities were classified according to their official choice of written language teaching variety. Since local communities in Norway have to choose between BOKMÅL or NYNORSK as their official written language variety of Norwegian, this variable was included.

This stratification procedure yielded a $4 \times 2 \times 2$ sampling matrix. Within each of the 16 resulting strata, a list of school classes with their teachers (that is, the sampling clusters) was formed from official school population lists that were provided by national educational authorities. For the national pilot study one class of students (with their teachers) was randomly drawn from each stratum.²

The main study

On the basis of the pilot study, the questionnaires were revised, and the revised versions formed the research instrument for the main stage of the survey. At this stage, 774 teachers and 2,295 students from 109 lower and upper secondary schools from all over Norway participated. Half of the students from each school class were selected to respond for Norwegian as a first language and the other half for English as a foreign language. The response rates at the participating schools were high or fairly high: 91.3 per cent for students and 73.0 per cent for teachers.

Data control

Questionnaire responses were controlled both manually and computationally to ensure data quality. In the manual controls, data was organized such that column errors during registration, like swapping codes for 'does not know' and 'nonresponse', would become easily visible. Additional tests of coding were also performed. All identity codings were replicated and tested for consistency, yielding an error rate of 0.078. In the computational controls, questionnaires with consecutive series of identical codes, like 3 (neutral mid-category), 6 (does not know) or 9 (nonresponse), were identified for manual inspection. Any mismatch between filter and follow up questions was similarly identified for manual inspection. These controls demonstrated that phenomena like error of central tendency or logical inconsistency were rare in the material.

As a result of these controls, 34 pupil questionnaires were excluded from further analysis. 11 teacher questionnaires were incomplete (mainly because of nonresponse starting towards the end of the questionnaire), but were kept for further analysis. The remaining questionnaires were finally tested for consistency through correlating spatially separate, but logically related variables inserted for control purposes. It might be expected that consistency would be lower for pupils than for teachers, and the resulting Gamma correlations for the pupil material are presented in Table 3.1. As the table demonstrates, the pupils, perhaps contrary to expectation, gave fairly consistent answers to logically related (antinomous) questions.

Table 3.1. Gamma correlations between control items in main study questionnaire

	<i>Gamma</i>
- books are too easy vs. - books are too difficult	-0.81
- much interesting material vs. - much dry, boring material	-0.82

Uni- and bivariate analyses

Indirectly, problem ranking of individual items may shed light on the issue of this study. Are items with extreme problem intensity on the scale of measurement (see below) dominantly found among the subject matter problems or among the frame factor problems? In the quantitative analysis, univari-

ate distributions were hence investigated for all items as a basis for relative ranking as to problem intensity and within-sample problem robustness.

As we have seen above, the exploratory stage had yielded data from staffroom and classroom discourse analysis. This analysis had revealed that both groups of informants used ordinal scales of a type ranging from 'very x' to 'very y' or from 'too x' to 'too y' (for example 'very easy' to 'very difficult' or 'too often' to 'too seldom'). On the basis of such formulations used by informants in the exploratory study, subject matter problems were investigated using a five-step, ordinal rating scale of perceived difficulty (see Moser and Kalton 1971: 344, 359). The frame factors were investigated using similar five-step rating scales (for instance degree of perceived difficulty; ideal weighting of content/classroom activities and degree of (dis-)like of the aspect covered by the item).³

Multivariate analyses

Selected problem areas were further analysed by parametric multivariate correlational techniques (factor analysis and multiple regression) (see Blalock 1960; Nie *et al.* 1975; Carmines and Zeller 1979; Lewis-Beck 1980; Hatch and Farhady 1982; Pedhazur 1982). Multivariate analysis was carried out tentatively in order to penetrate more deeply into the relative importance of subject matter problems and frame factor problems. In this study, factor analyses (alpha with oblique rotation) were first carried out on each item group (see Table 3.2; Evensen 1986b: 400ff), and additive indices were constructed from items with factor loadings of more than 0.40 on Factor 1 within each group. A sample factor analysis from the pupil data is presented in Table 3.2.

Table 3.2. Factor analysis (alpha with oblique rotation; mineigen = 0.9) of selected aspects of essay writing ($n = 1,080$)

	Factor loadings		Factor structure		h2
	Factor 1	Factor 2*	Factor 1	Factor 2	
Vocabulary	0.44	0.32	0.64	0.59	0.47
Orthography	0.70	*	0.67	0.37	0.45
Grammar	0.75	*	0.75	0.46	0.56
Punctuation	0.32	*	0.45	0.40	0.23
Cohesion	*	0.56	0.61	0.72	0.57
Disposition	*	0.80	0.37	0.72	0.53
Content (amount)	*	0.57	0.48	0.65	0.43

* Factor 1 explains 87.4% of the variance and Factor 2 12.6%. The adjusted eigenvalues are 6.12 and 0.89. The correlation between the factors is relatively high: 0.61.

This analysis reveals that in the pupil material, there was a relatively clear, but not orthogonal distinction between a formal dimension of correctness (items 2–4 in the table) and a textual dimension of structure and content (items 5–7). Item 1 (vocabulary), however, cuts across this distinction and scores on both dimensions. Furthermore, it seems clear that pupil perceptions of difficulty in essay writing were more closely related to the correctness dimension than to the textual dimension.

The resulting indices were tested for reliability, using Cronbach's Alpha (Carmines and Zeller 1979: 45; Nie and Hull 1979: 125ff). Sample resulting indices are presented in Table 3.3 with their internal reliabilities (Cronbach Alpha).

Table 3.3. Additive indices with internal reliabilities

Index	Cronbach alpha	
	Students	Teachers
<i>Four skills</i>		
productive	0.72	0.66
receptive	0.57	0.63
written	0.58	0.78
oral	0.60	0.23
	0.61	0.44
<i>Writing and its factors</i>		
essay writing	0.81	
factor 1	0.70	
factor 2	0.74	

Most reliability scores were in the range between 0.60 and 0.88, with a mean alpha score of 0.71. Exceptions were indices for oral and written skills in the teacher material. This result reflects a different underlying dimensionality in the teacher and pupil materials: Whereas the pupils conceived of skills more along the oral-written dimension, the teachers' conceptions were quite clearly more along the receptive-productive dimension. These different index reliabilities also reflect a robust general pattern in the study, where the pupil material yielded as statistically reliable data as did the teacher material, or in several cases even more so.

An index of difficulty in EFL writing based on items with difficulty ranking of writing sub-skills (a central aspect of the most difficult skill as perceived by the respondents) was used as the dependent variable in multiple regression analysis. The frame factor indices and the single (nonindexed) demographic variables of marks, gender and parents' social status were used as independent variables.

Results

Exploratory results

One of the major results of the whole study was suggested already during the qualitative, exploratory stage. Unexpectedly, the exploratory material had yielded a picture that was dominated by frame factors. This picture reappeared in the pilot study. The cross-tabulated distribution of item categories from the study is presented in Table 3.4. As in the rest of this chapter, results from the pupil data are presented first.

Table 3.4. Distribution of items in the pilot study: Main distinction between two categories ($N = 2,678$)

	Pupils/students		Teachers		Total	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Subject-matter problems	1,188	47.3	32	19.2	1,220	45.6
Frame-factor problems	1,320	52.6	134	80.2	1,454	54.3
Not classifiable	3	0.1	1	0.6	4	0.1
Sum	2,511	100.0	167	100.0	2,678	100.0

In the student material, we can see that 52.6 per cent of the registered items were related to frame factors. In the teacher material the picture was even more unexpected: 80.2 per cent of the items were related to frame factors. When breaking these results down by subgroups of respondents (English as a foreign language versus Norwegian as a first language; lower versus higher secondary schools), it appears that this tendency was quite robust even if frame factor problems are even more dominant in NL1 than in EFL (Evensen 1986b: 96). There was one exception, however, to this relative robustness: In the subgroup of pupils answering for EFL in lower secondary school (grades eight and nine; item $n = 785$) the majority of items (60.8 per cent) were subject matter problems. This result may suggest that subject matter items are relatively more important in introductory FL learning, or among young children learning a foreign language. This pattern does not seem to hold for their teachers, however. Even in this particular subgroup (item $n = 49$), only 28.6 per cent of the items reported were related to the subject matter.

Uni- and bivariate results

In the quantitative analysis of the main study material, the first task was to locate items with extreme intensity on a problem scale from 1 (lowest)

to 5 (highest) and allocate those to one of the two major categories. The most difficult items within each of the areas – skills, linguistic levels/sub-skills and knowledge oriented parts of the curricula – turned out not to be characterized by such problem intensity. In the pupil material ($n = 2,295$), the median for perceived difficulty was below the theoretical middle point of the scale, that is 2.423 (SD² 1.061), whereas in the teacher material ($n = 774$) the median for perceived difficulty was much higher: 3.910 (SD 0.836). We note, however, that the Standard Deviation is high in the pupil group, reflecting a high dispersion in the rankings of difficulty.⁴

For subskills/linguistic levels, the perceived difficulties were somewhat higher in the student group. Vocabulary and cohesion/coherence scored highest for the EFL sub-group specifying levels within writing, with medians of 2.994 (SD 0.972) and 2.974 (SD 1.042), respectively. In the teacher group, rankings of subskills were slightly different. In this group cohesion/coherence was ranked as most difficult with a median of 3.856 (SD 0.880). As we can see from these latter results, student rankings were not consistently lower than teacher rankings, even if there was such a general tendency in the material.

The most difficult among the subject matter items found in the study were located within the area of knowledge-oriented subject matter. For the student subgroup reported above (EFL writing in lower secondary school), the generally most difficult item was grammatical analysis, with a median of 3.324 (SD 1.133). The most difficult subject matter item in the whole student material, however, was literary interpretation for the NL1 upper secondary group ($n = 166$), with a median of 3.821 (SD 0.984). In the teacher material, the EFL lower secondary group ($n = 279$) ranked grammatical analysis as most difficult, with a median of 3.504 (SD 1.173). The most difficult subject matter item in the total teacher material was pragmatic analysis in the NL1 upper secondary group ($n = 110$), with a median of 4.458 (SD 0.738). This particular result is, as we shall see below, the only one in the study where a subject matter item ranks among those with the highest problem intensity in the whole study.

This preliminary overview shows that several of even the most difficult skill and levels oriented items clustered around the neutral middle area of the problem scale in the pupil material, and was somewhat higher for the teachers. Some of the knowledge oriented activities in upper secondary school, on the other hand, were considerably more difficult, and ranked among the most serious problems documented by the survey.

When contrasting this picture with the frame factor material, it is evident that serious problems, as perceived by the respondents, are much more frequent in the frame factor group. A selection of the most extreme items, with

their scales of measurement, is reported below. Since there are considerable differences between the teacher and pupil groups on this point, results for each group are presented separately.

In the total teacher material ($n = 774$), the methodological challenges of adapting their teaching to the needs of different pupils showed extreme results on two items. On an item about the difficulty of adapting tutoring to individual needs, the median was 4.656 (SD 0.731). In the NL1 upper secondary subgroup ($n = 110$), the median was as high as 4.712. On a related item regarding the difficulty of group level differentiation, the total sample median was 4.537 (SD 0.669).

A second item of significant teacher concern was the division in the educational system at that time between teaching in lower and upper secondary schools. Before the implementation of the national curriculum in 2006, there was very little contact between these system levels; the curricula were different, teaching materials were not coordinated, teacher education was largely different, and so on. On an item about contact between lower and upper secondary schools ranging from far too rarely (1) to far too frequently (5), the whole sample ($n = 774$) median was 1.295, with a SD as small as 0.646.

The pupils expressed concern with a number of issues relating to classroom methods. They shared this concern with their teachers, but their focus was qualitatively different. The students were more concerned with the passive roles they were assigned in most language classrooms and, interestingly, were concerned with the composition of their curricula. As to methods of classroom work, a set of items revealed that the students in the total sample shared a 'minus syndrome', in that their perceived problems were related to what they do *not* do, rather than to the frequency of what they actually do. One example of this syndrome is the perceived lack of work in small groups. For the whole student sample ($n = 2,295$), the median obtained was 1.382 (SD 0.939) on a scale ranging from far too rarely (1) to far too frequently (5). In the subgroup of lower secondary EFL pupils ($n = 788$), the median was as extreme as 1.271.

These results may also reflect a perceived lack of variety in everyday classroom work. Several items within the minus syndrome suggest such an interpretation. In the whole pupil sample, another item in the same set on the use of media in classroom work had an overall median of 1.555 (SD 0.936). In the subgroup of lower secondary NL1 pupils ($n = 824$), the median for this item was 1.336. In a part of the set relating to perhaps more entertaining methods of work – like drama, crosswords and games – the item on games had a median of 1.463 in the whole sample (SD 0.823). Among lower secondary NL1 respondents, the median was 1.345.

These items may yield the impression that students simply want to have fun in the classroom. Other important problems in the frame factor material, however, suggest a different interpretation. An item on how frequently they take part in process evaluation yielded a median of 1.752 (SD 0.961) for the whole sample. Among upper secondary EFL students ($n = 158$), the median for this item was 1.487. Similarly a set of items on the weighting of curriculum areas revealed that for the EFL group ($n = 1,127$) an item on dialects received a median of 1.696 (SD 1.069) on a scale ranging from far too little (1) to far too much (5). In interpreting this last result it may be relevant to point out that many students are motivated towards EFL because of its position as the common vernacular in the realms of popular music, sports and media. These realms are all characterized by regional and social variations, variations that seemed to be represented in Norwegian EFL teaching only rarely.

In comparing results across the above major problem types, it must be taken into account that differences in both scales and topics involved may influence the results. It may, for instance, be easier to use the extremes of a scale of frequency than the extremes of a scale of difficulty. Similarly, it may be easier to use the scalar extremes for a topic of pupil participation than for a topic of the teachers' own difficulties. Some of these interpretive difficulties will be discussed in the next section. Let us for the time being just note that, although not strictly comparable in terms of scales and topics, the above overview of perceived problem intensity reflects a general tendency in the study that the majority of serious problems are frame factor items.

Multivariate results

The following multivariate analysis was designed as a conceptually harsh 'worst case' test in relation to a problem-driven approach: What accounts for the perceived difficulty of particularly central subject matter items? Intuitively, it seemed likely that frame factors would not be central in the conceptual composition of this group of problems, particularly if represented by the most difficult skill across subgroups of respondents – EFL writing. A dominance of frame factors in even this kind of harsh design, however, would be particularly telling.

For this part of the study multiple regression analysis was chosen. To obtain input data for the regression analysis, correlations between EFL writing and a broad range of independent variables (subject matter and frame factor variables) were first calculated. These correlations were then fed into factor analyses in order to establish intercorrelations between independent variables (see Evensen 1986b: 394–417 for details). Such intercorrelations establish

groups of variables that may be interpreted as revealing some underlying conceptual phenomena – the hidden 'factors' identified by factor analysis.

Conceptually related variables with high loadings on the resulting factors were grouped to form indices, and the internal consistency of the resulting indices were again tested (using Cronbach Alpha). The indices were then used as independent variables in order to establish which kinds of phenomena exert most statistical influence on the selected dependent variable – perceived difficulty of EFL writing. The results from the multiple regression analysis are presented in Table 3.5.

Table 3.5. Regression between EFL students' ranking of writing difficulty and selected frame factors ($n = 322$)

<i>R</i> 0.78	Analysis of variance	DF	SS	<i>P</i> **
<i>R</i> 2 0.62	Regression	7	6,062.52	71.75
St. Error 3.47	Residual	314	3,790.30	
Variable	B	BETA	St. error of B	F
Motivation	-0.51	-0.32	0.08	38.71**
Term grade	-1.31	-0.27	0.21	39.96**
Tasks	-0.25	-0.23	0.05	25.20**
Gender	-0.12	-0.10	0.08	7.53**
Classroom methods	-0.53	-0.08	0.23	5.21*
Teaching materials	0.35	0.08	0.19	3.51*
Parental social status	-.43	0.08	0.21	4.28*
Constant	89.01			

**Significance < 0.01; *Significance < 0.05

As can be seen by the multiple regression coefficient (*R*2), 62 per cent of the variance in the dependent variable was common with (in statistical terms 'explained by') variance in the frame factor predictors. This result, which is the one that most directly answers the basic research question of the whole study, indicated that extra-linguistic frame factors play a major role also in perceptions of skill/subskill difficulty, even in the subgroup that was least likely to have their perceptions affected by frame factors.

Discussion

The preceding section presents results from several types of analyses, all pointing in the same direction. In order to maximize the epistemological fit

between applied linguistics on the one hand and teacher and student perceptions of problems on the other, a problem-driven and multidisciplinary approach is preferable. Put in other terms, a problem-driven approach seems to be more ecologically and pragmatically valid than a theory-oriented approach. The metatheoretical enterprise lying behind these results may, however, seem overly bold to some readers. In the following discussion I shall concentrate on some objections that may be raised.

In interpreting the qualitative data underlying the development of questionnaires used in my survey, it may be argued that skills and descriptive levels data are skewed by the fact that students and teachers have little conscious access to basic psycholinguistic processes, leaving the basic survey design strategy less than adequate (see discussions in Oller 1977, 1979). However, this argument is based on a category error, I would claim. The object of research here is not the working of underlying processes as these are investigated indirectly in psycholinguistic experiments, but those specific cases where there is a mismatch between teaching/learning objectives on the one hand and the (psycholinguistic) resources available for the task, on the other: What I have defined as a 'problem' in Chapter 1 thus exists. This problem state invites reflection, as was pointed out in Chapter 1, and is assumed to be consciously accessible to a large extent (see the methodological discussion in Schachter *et al.* (1976) on intuitive data in IL research).

As for the item ranking data, it may be challenged that the degree of difficulty actually measured is skewed by the fact that respondents tend to avoid admitting that something is very difficult. This factor is a well known methodological error in social science research, as is the closely related error of central tendency in survey research (see for instance Kornhauser and Sheatsley 1951: 543ff), but these sources of error cannot explain the results here, as we have seen. Students readily admit problems related to conscious (grammatical and literary) analysis. Thus it will have to be explained by non-spurious factors why medians are consistently much lower for skills and subskills/levels of linguistic description. Also, teacher rankings are generally consistent with student rankings across several items, even if the exact central tendencies for each item may be relatively far apart. Furthermore, in the case of teachers, their perceptions of difficulty are for the majority of items related to observed difficulty for their students, not for the teachers themselves.

The teacher results on educational classroom challenges are, in this context, substantial evidence not only for the core discussion of this chapter, but also seem highly relevant for the interpretation of exactly this potential methodological source of error in this kind of survey material. We have seen in the previous section that teachers have little difficulty in admitting their

own organizational shortcomings in the classroom – at times to an extreme degree. Even if they may partly put the blame on their own teacher education (with a median of 1.798, SD 0.974, on an item evaluating their education on a scale ranging from very bad (1) to very good (5) for a number of aspects), this is a point that reflects their own professional competence. We also saw that there are elements of external evidence that fit with the teacher rankings of problems relating to lack of *de facto* collaboration and coordination between primary and secondary schools in Norway.

There are similar reasons for taking the pupil data seriously as relevant to the issues investigated. We have seen that questionnaire items were formulated on the basis of discourse analysis, and there is thus an underlying logic of respect, involvement and participation across formulating the frame factor items reported above. Pupils yearn for respect as human beings in the class, and as respondents they saw this survey as a rare occasion for expressing their concerns on this point. They were even willing to work harder on a number of points granted a teaching with more relevance, involvement and participation (see Evensen 1986b: 442–7 for discussion). A further reason for having some confidence in the tendencies reported by the pupils is the consistent subtext in the openended material from all three stages of the study. The one comment running through all of the student material was the deep satisfaction of being (finally, at long last) taken seriously as a genuine participant in learning/teaching processes. At all grade levels there was also a remarkable absence of rejection, non-response or nonserious pupil comments in the questionnaires. Finally, the statistical tests of between item reliability in the pupil material were fairly satisfactory (with Gamma scores in the low 0.80s).

In interpreting the regression analyses in relation to the issue at hand, it may be objected that they are confounded to the extent that marks and task preference may partly reflect even verbal skills and subskills along with extralinguistic framing components like confidence, motivation, evaluation and social role (both in the peer group and in relation to the teacher). This theoretical objection may well be justified, meaning that any argument should not be based on the exact size of the multiple regression coefficient. Still, it seems clear that a substantial part of the variance even in this dependent variable (the perceived difficulty of writing) cannot be explained unless extralinguistic factors are granted some prominent role (see for instance the motivational variable which, apart from being a variable in its own right, may be assumed to cut into both the marks and task preference variables).

At a general philosophical level it may be objected that inductive problem orientation is as much a dead end for applied linguistics as it is for any other science (see Popper 1974). There is no such thing as even data without

some underlying theory of what is relevant for the issue at hand. There is considerable truth in this observation, even if inductive thinking has a more central epistemological role to play (for instance in strategically restricting the relevant interpretational space) than Popper's term 'conjectures' implies. Still, the issue is not whether one should start with or without theoretical preconceptions (one can never do without), but one of theoretical relevance. How does one know which theoretical insights are relevant without proper needs analysis? This needs analysis is not strictly atheoretical, but there is an influence from practice on theory involved in the process that Popper simply did not take into account when arguing the case for a strictly deductive approach. This role of inductive thinking is particularly important for emerging disciplines like applied linguistics, as was suggested in Chapter 1. In Chapter 7 I shall return to this issue.

Some readers may object at a meta-methodological level that an interdisciplinary approach, as implied above, leads to a combinatorial explosion, where the applied linguist has to know more or less everything. While this point is certainly relevant at the microlevel of the single research project, I cannot see it as a serious problem at the macrolevel of defining a 'trans-discipline' (once more borrowing De Matos' (1982) term). This becomes clear if one considers one time honoured applied science, that is medicine.⁵ Medical research has to draw on, and often develop further, a whole range of diverse disciplines. This is no threat to medicine as such. On the contrary, I would suggest that medicine may well be the most successful applied science so far. A similar argument relates to history as a discipline. No discipline can possibly investigate everything that has ever happened everywhere. The potential vastness of their research object, however, has never stopped historians from doing history.

The issue of epistemological fit is very relevant to discussing the traditional schisma between teachers and researchers (see Widdowson (1980: 86) on the search for an 'educationally relevant approach to language' and Davies (1999) on the primacy of practicality in more recent applied linguistics). It seems reasonable to suspect that the actual percolation from research into practical teaching (not to mention influence in the opposite direction) has been relatively slow and limited, even if there is an indirect route through national curricula via teaching material and assessment to the general classroom (see Simensen (1988), who documents the time lag involved in the relatively recent history of EFL in Norway).

There is, however, one looming exception to this general impression of slow percolation, namely processoriented writing. In Norway, this approach was first introduced by Mary K. Healy in 1985 and 1986 (see Ingram 1985). Apart from wide political impact, this approach was endorsed by an astonish-

ing number of practising teachers, often on a very scant mouth-to-ear basis. Why is it that teachers are so slow to accept most assumed improvements, but so frighteningly quick to accept others? Exceptional pedagogical presentation on Healy's part can only be part of the explanation. A more fundamental reason, I would hypothesize, is exactly the question of epistemological fit between a specific theoretical approach and the real, multifaceted everyday practical world that teachers and students constantly have to confront. Process oriented writing has exactly this multidisciplinary fit; other suggested improvements may have been too particularistic.

Conclusion

This chapter has presented a three-stage study of student and teacher perceptions of problems in language learning and teaching with respect to their implications for a theory-driven and a problem-driven approach to applied linguistics. Whereas a theory-driven approach by implication predicts that a majority of problems will be observed on items of language learning, a problem-driven approach predicts a more complex picture where even educational frame factors may play a substantial role.

At all the three stages of this study, frame factors did indeed play a substantial role in this material. As this chapter has shown, a complex picture was necessary already at the exploratory stage, in order to adequately account for the data. Within this picture, pedagogical interaction and local constraints in classroom contexts proved prominent. The multivariate part of the main study had its focus on testing the robustness of earlier findings by estimating the relative importance of subject matter items versus frame factors. The results show that most of the total variance in the data was in fact accounted for by frame factors, even when the investigated index was one of essay writing. The total picture presented thus strongly suggests that improved epistemological fit is possible within a multidisciplinary, problem-driven approach. This important insight leads to a number of new insights, but also raises a number of new issues.

One of the derived insights is that applied linguistics should be thought of as an emerging discipline, as argued in Chapter 1, and not simply as an adjunct to linguistics. Applied linguistics as a discipline should be defined by the interrelation of a number of phenomena. First, it has its own research object – practical communication problems. Second, it has its own aims – the fundamental one being to help solve or ameliorate those problems of communication on a principled basis of research. In society, attempts at solutions to such problems are, however, often implemented already,

for instance through a system for language teaching. This fact establishes a derived, but extremely important aim – to improve existing (attempts at) solutions. This derivation explains the historical emphasis in applied linguistics on improving language teaching, without implicitly restricting our scope to language teaching alone (Sarangi 2005). A problem-driven approach also gives a principled basis for seeing a fundamental relationship between different fields of study like language teaching, professional and institutional discourse, machine translation and language therapy (see for instance Crystal 1981).

A third defining phenomenon is theory development on a multi- or interdisciplinary basis. Although we are still at a historically early stage, we have already seen clear examples of this. One case is the tradition of inter-language theory (Selinker 1972), with subsequent work on strategies and variation (see for instance the papers in Davies *et al.* (1984) and the discussion in Chapter 5 of this volume). Another case is the development within one of Elisabeth Ingram's areas of research, language testing. In this field, the basic notion of communicative competence was refined and made operational more than twenty years ago (Bachman 1990).

A fourth defining phenomenon is the development of methodological approaches that reflect a general perspective developing out of defining applied linguistics in terms of its knowledge interest and object of research. Applied linguistics is multi or interdisciplinary in that it combines insights about language and communication with insights about mental, social and cultural phenomena, at times even technological or medical phenomena.

A fifth phenomenon is derived from all the above, but at a more sociological and practical level. The research tradition has created a number of separate departments, scientific journals, organizations, conferences and personal networks. Trivial as they may seem, such artefacts in the sociology of knowledge are important prerequisites for a development where a discipline is coming to regard itself as a discipline.

The resulting perspective from all of the above is one where I would propose a kind of relationality between applied linguistics and general linguistics as similar to the one between medicine and biology or the one between pedagogy and psychology. In drawing this parallel we also begin to see why, as Elisabeth Ingram often claimed, the term 'applied linguistics' is itself a misnomer. It is misleading in exactly the same way that the term 'applied biology' would be a misnomer for medicine.

This is not to say, as we noted in Chapter 1, that linguistics is unimportant for applied linguistics. Ingram (1978: 5) pointed out that different types of applied research questions require different interdisciplinary models (see also Buckingham and Eskey 1980: 3 for a similar claim). Given what I have

said above, it is important to emphasize that the communication component is the only constant in all such interdisciplinary models.⁵ Thus, linguistics *does* hold a special, privileged status among our neighbouring sciences.

Notes

1. I am grateful to the primary opponent during my 1986 doctoral disputation, Professor Sauli Takala, Jyväskylä, for this graphical presentation.
2. The biasing effect of such nonproportional sampling (in particular the systematic over-representation of small strata in the sample and the similar under-representation of large strata) was counterbalanced by a statistical weighting procedure in the ensuing statistical analysis of the quantitative part of the material (Nie *et al.* 1975). In such a weighting procedure, the statistical likelihood of a cluster being sampled *without stratification* is set as 1. The effect of stratification for each cell is then first calculated as a specific fraction (higher or smaller than 1). In the following statistical analyses, the inverse fraction is then added to each cell so that the result becomes 1, the same as it would have been without stratification and the resulting stratification bias.
3. The significances of the rankings were tested within each group of items with the Friedman test of variance (Siegel 1956: 166ff; Hull and Nie 1979: 66ff, 83). The significance of each couple of item rankings was tested with the use of the Wilcoxon matched pairs, signed ranks test (Siegel 1956: 75ff; Hull and Nie 1979: 66ff, 80), a test designed for ordinal data. Furthermore, the distributions and rankings were broken down by language and grade level. Central problem areas were then correlated with background variables like marks, gender and social background, using Kendall's Tau coefficient (Nie *et al.* 1970: 288ff; see also Hildebrand *et al.* 1977: 44f), a test similarly designed for ordinal data.
4. The results are based on ordinal data, and a percentile should preferably have been used as the measure of dispersion. In the available version of the statistical package then used (SPSS), however, this would have given much too crude (whole digit) results. For this reason, the conceptually inelegant alternative of reporting standard deviations was chosen.
5. I am grateful to Dr Arne Svindland, University of Bergen, for pointing out this fact to me.

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Let me first comment on one challenge implied by such an approach. An emerging transdiscipline eventually seeking to solve communication problems is confronted with a number of challenges. The applied researcher who wants his/her research to have maximal relevance for practical language teaching should, as we have seen, be studying educational, mental, social as well as cultural processes that are at work in the teaching/learning of a language – and verbal processes, structures and functions that are simultaneously at work. It seems that there is a general, but multifaceted relational principle governing the interaction between these processes. Language learning is both influenced by and influences the conditions under which it takes place, just as ordinary discourse is influenced by and influences its context (Mead 1934). This interrelational interaction, however, is not yet well understood. The general research task of penetrating deeper into this relation may be one of the most important challenges in today's applied linguistics, as viewed from the problem-driven approach. In the next chapter I shall take on part of this challenge, followed by similar challenges regarding other fundamental relations discussed in Chapters 5–7. All of these rela-

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Part II

Introduction

At this point in the book, it is clear that a number of pressing issues in current applied linguistics have still not yet been discussed. These are, for example, core issues of what we mean by language and learning. Related to these issues there are important issues of our history of science: How have our views on language and learning developed, and what views may be tenable today? More specifically, an overarching tension within current applied linguistics concerns quite antagonistically differing views of learning within Second Language Acquisition research. There are two reasons why these issues have not been dealt with so far. The first reason is that I needed to finalize the discussion about the nature of applied linguistics before digging more deeply into any other matter. The second reason is that such issues are played out within broader issues that need their own chapters. In the second part of this book, I shall devote space to discussing different aspects of current challenges more deeply, one at a time. The overarching aim will be to discuss what a coherent approach to current applied linguistics may look like.

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tional issues will form the basis for a final reflection in the third and last part of the book, Chapter 8.

The first issue to be addressed within this complexity is what perspective on language and discourse may be fruitful to take for future applied linguistics. This is the issue that I now turn to.

4 Communication and discourse: Towards an integrated view

Introduction

In the preceding chapters of this book, different approaches to applied linguistics have been presented and discussed. I have tried to analyse the differences between these approaches, but my aim in doing so has been to present a background for addressing the issue of a potential new integration. In the introductory chapter, I noted that 'there is a vital need to establish some form of current *tertium comparationis*' (p. vii this volume). It is such a *tertium* that I shall try to present in the next three chapters. Within this larger picture, the current chapter is devoted to discussing ontological concepts like communication and discourse, as these concepts have been understood at different points in the historical development of applied linguistics. On the basis of this discussion, I then suggest an integrated approach toward the end of the chapter.

In discussing the primary object of research in Chapter 1, it was noted that we have had a fondness for 'hyphenated linguistics', like psycholinguistics and sociolinguistics. These hyphenated forms tend to minimize the distinction between language as a system and communication as a process, thus increasing the extensional scope of our interpretive framework. I took this fondness as an indication that communication has always been an important underlying premise, a premise which today has moved to the core of our research interest. In this sense, applied linguistics has undergone a communicative turn, like many social sciences (see Sarangi and Coulthard 2000). Around 1980, this new core was taken as established enough for writing a book about discourse intonation in language teaching (Brazil *et al.* 1980), which presented 'a view of language as discourse and communication, where utterance value depends crucially on interactive function within the discourse' (Candlin 1980: ix). Several intellectual developments helped create this shift during the many intellectual upheavals of the 1960s and 1970s. I shall return to this shift.

The early upheavals may in retrospect seem somewhat formalistic, in their initial tendencies towards valuing form over function, text over discourse and

the macrosocial over the microsocial aspects of communication, but they still led to a shift in orientation that forms the basis for this chapter. I shall assume that this somewhat indiscriminate and partly skewed openness to then ongoing reorientation can be understood better with the need for a qualitative shift in mind. As a consequence of this intellectual development, communication has become a prime focus in applied linguistics, but also one that needs to be better, and perhaps more discriminately understood.

In particular, there are problematic underlying issues of microsocial versus macrosocial understandings of communication-in-context that currently need to be discussed (Sarangi and Coulthard 2000). As we shall see, this distinction has theoretical and ethical consequences that have not yet been sufficiently discussed. The aim of this chapter is thus again to contribute to fruitful discussion rather than to suggest which theory might ultimately be better than others.

An historical backdrop

In order to understand what the communicative turn implied for applied linguistics, it is necessary to look at developments in linguistics, linguistic pragmatics, ethnography of communication, text linguistics, sociolinguistics and sociology. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, Chomsky's (1957, 1965) radically new approach to grammar created a room for theoretical reorientation, a room that initially strengthened the bond between general and applied linguists. Soon, however, alternatives like Austin's (1962) concept of 'speech acts' and its elaboration by Searle (1969) came to redirect this openness, thus stimulating among applied linguists an interest in 'language in use', which was an all-pervasive slogan in the mid-1970s. This particular reorientation was strengthened by the related concept of 'language functions' (Halliday 1973), a concept that found its way into language curricula through the seminal work of Wilkins (1972) and others. A few years later, Grice's (1975) cooperative principle and its related maxims of cooperative verbal conduct added to the force of this redirection.

The notion of speech acts was incorporated into different forms of early discourse analysis, both as a basis for a functionalist perspective on language and as a unit of analysis (see Turner 1974; Mountford 1975; Sinclair and Coulthard 1975; Coulthard 1977). In Schiffrin's words: 'Although speech act theory was not first developed as a means of analyzing discourse, particular issues in speech act theory (e.g. the problem of indirect speech acts, multifunctionality and context dependence ...) led to discourse analysis' (1994: 7).

This particular reorientation was tremendously strengthened by Dell Hymes ([1966] 1972), whose applied work with deviant L1 acquisition, speech communities and ethnography of communication (Gumperz and Hymes 1964) constituted a critique of Chomsky. As noted in Chapter 1, Hymes' familiarity with deviant child language acquisition had led him to realize that linguistic competence was not *all* that was required for language acquisition to be successful, and he coined the more appropriate and encompassing term 'communicative competence'.

Hymes' choice of the term 'communicative competence' was a deliberate move in the direction of granting a primary status to communication. This is evident from the joint preface of Dell Hymes and John J. Gumperz's coedited (1972) volume on sociolinguistics: 'The present work integrates in a single volume some major directions of research on the social basis of verbal communication' (Gumperz and Hymes 1972a: v). This primary status was even more pronounced in Hymes' following (1974) collection of articles, where he stated in the introductory chapter that 'it is not linguistics, but ethnography, not language, but communication, which must provide the frame of reference within which the place of language in culture and society is to be assessed' (1974: 4). The work of Hymes was globally spread and discussed among applied linguists, and it fundamentally affected our thinking in research areas as different as L1 acquisition and language testing. I would like to claim that his work instigated no less than a paradigmatic upheaval.

At roughly the same time, applied studies of Black English Vernacular had led William Labov (1969, 1972) to formulate variable rules within syntax and phonology, where observed grammatical variability was systematically accounted for by situational and societal contexts. In this way, he was able to demonstrate how context seems to systematically influence linguistic realization. During the 1970s, this wider, social perspective was strengthened by work that demonstrated systematic textual relations across sentences (Halliday and Hasan 1976; De Beaugrande and Dressler 1981). Even if text linguistics was primarily concerned with formal relations between semantic propositions and syntactic clauses, its initial term for this concern was 'discourse analysis', following the original terminology of Harris (1952). It also led to intellectual openness in its concern with patterns beyond the single sentence. This aspect, together with Halliday and Hasan's concepts of 'coherence' and 'cohesion' helped stimulate the development of discourse analysis as a focal term in applied linguistics (see Mountford 1975; Brown and Yule 1983; Marsh 1983).

Michael Halliday was also involved with a more basic project, which continues to be influential. He wanted to demonstrate, phylogenetically (1973, 1978), ontogenetically (1975) and historically (1989), how macro-social relationships and functions are fundamental for the development of

even the most minute systemic aspects of any language. In his famous (1973, 1978) matching of thematic 'field', social 'tenor' and symbolic 'mode', on the one hand, with his macrofunctions of the 'ideational', the 'interpersonal' and the 'textual', on the other hand, he was able both to derive a detailed functional grammar (including aspects of coherent text).

The work of an important research group in Birmingham (with Sinclair, Coulthard, Swales and others) was inspired by Halliday's categories as well as by speech act pragmatics. This work was influential in its immediate educational relevance; it used classroom interaction as a primary source of data (see Sinclair and Coulthard 1975). It was also influential in that it combined categories of interactional functions with linguistic categories in the functional tradition of Halliday into a 'programme of research into the structures of interactive discourse' (Brazil *et al.* 1980: xiii).

The notion of 'language in use', it seemed, accounted for almost all of this work. Brown and Yule captured this general relation when they opened their introduction to early discourse analysis by stating (1983: 1): 'The analysis of discourse is, necessarily, the analysis of language in use.' The notion of language use hence invited further studies under the new umbrella term 'discourse analysis'.

One more important communicative dimension – actual human beings – was supplemented from social science scholars working in the USA in the innovative climate of the 1960s and 1970s. Microsociologist Erving Goffman tried to show how people orchestrate their interaction in everyday situations with certain agendas that he characterized with terms taken from the theatre (1967). Examples of such terms are *role*, *face*, *footing*, *staging* and *frame*, which found their way into applied linguistics through early second language scholars like Richards (1982). Two of these became particularly important. 'Face' is a term that became known through Brown and Levinson's influential (1978) work on politeness. Through this work it was shown how interlocutors systematically work during interaction to avoid acts that may mutually threaten respect or self-respect. Politeness is thus a more fundamental aspect of communication than had been traditionally assumed (Richards 1982: 24ff).

'Frame' (Goffman 1974) is a term developed to capture how we consistently interpret actual experience as exemplars of recurring social situations. In everyday life there is thus continuous framing going on. In intercultural communication, such frames are particularly important (Richards 1982). Later work by Gumperz (1982a, 1982b) and other scholars demonstrated how the language system actually requires such frames in order to function properly in discourse. In particular, it is the invoking of frames that allows aspects of utterances to act as cues for discourse interpretation, what Gumperz refers to as 'contextualization cues'.

At roughly the same time, Labov had taken his applied sociolinguistic work one important step further in his new studies together with Fanshel of therapeutic discourse (Labov and Fanshel 1977). Labov and Fanshel studied psychotherapeutic work as a form of conversation and thus supplemented a framework of sociolinguistic analysis with an important interactional dimension. In doing this, they viewed conversation as 'a matrix of utterances, propositions and actions' (1977: 37). In historical retrospect, the most important aspect of the matrix may be one that systematically places the analysis of any utterance within an explicitly and systematically addressed co- and contextual embedding, as a form of social action – 'what it means to do something with words' (Labov and Fanshel 1977: 58). And it is ultimately this embedding that for Labov brings interaction back into a sociolinguistic framework:

We find that the crucial actions in establishing coherence of sequencing in conversation are not such speech acts as requests and assertions, but rather challenges, defences and retreats, which have to do with the status of the participants, their rights and obligations, and their changing relationships in terms of social organization. We define interaction as action that affects (alters or maintains) the relations of the self and others in face-to-face communication. These relations move along several dimensions which have been identified most usefully as power and solidarity. (Labov and Fanshel 1977: 58f)

What the above quite different approaches to communication share, is a very important new willingness to base one's analysis on people and their locally specific interaction, rather than solely on language units and their functional interrelations (see Richards 1982): 'We have come to understand conversation as a means that people use to deal with one another', say Labov and Fanshel (1977: 30). Brown and Yule echo this orientation when they state (1983: ix) that 'we have insisted that it is people who communicate and people who interpret'. In other words, discourse is a social as much as a semiotic phenomenon (see Sarangi and Coulthard 2000).

Discourse and communication: From openness to terminological diversity and confusion

In the above intellectual climate, a certain diversity in the uses of terms like 'text' and 'discourse' was evident. Thus, De Beaugrande and Dressler's (1981) introduction to text linguistics offered a set of criteria for textuality, but simultaneously stated that the purpose of the exercise was to address

issues of 'human interaction' (1981: 3). Accordingly, they included among their 'standards of textuality' things like 'intentionality' and 'situationality'. Later, a more integrated view, where issues of language form are always subservient to issues of social interaction came to be more dominant, just like Labov and Fanshel (1977) had convincingly argued. This view was still, however, concealing conflicts, ones that were eventually to lead Pennycook to write his important (1994) article on 'Incommensurable discourses', discussing different uses of the term 'discourse' within applied linguistics.

To help avoid terminological confusion, we need to disentangle some major aspects of discourse and communication that rest on the social rather than on the verbal side of the communication coin. In my effort to do so below, I shall initially focus on the difference between understandings that consider discourse to be contextualized primarily in a microsocial (dominantly two-party, or 'dyadic') reality of specific individuals who need to interact, as opposed to understandings that consider discourse to be contextualized primarily in a macrosocial world of groups, their interests and practices. The relation between such understandings is a central problem not only for applied linguistics, but also for social theory (Sealey and Carter 2004).

For the sake of clarifying the issue, I shall take ontological ideal types as my starting point – approaches that in extreme form may give near-exclusive priority to each of these social aspects of discourse and interaction. In doing this, it needs to be clearly recognized that both theories and individual researcher positions distribute along a continuum rather than at the extremes of a dichotomy. Positions may also change over time. Thus, Scollon and Scollon (1981) were concerned with intergroup phenomena in interethnic communication, but later (2007) came to emphasize a more fine-tuned 'nexus' approach where interindividual action is important. A different case in point is Sealey and Carter (2004), where the focus is on the relationship between applied linguistics and social theory. In discussing the continuum between approaches to social theory that emphasize *either* societal 'structure' *or* individual 'agency' (2004: 6ff), these researchers point out how arguments for extreme positions disguise the need for a more considerate, relational approach. This search for a relational, multiperspectived approach is a concern also for Crichton (2010). As will become apparent toward the end of this chapter, I shall similarly end up arguing a case for one relational position on this ontological issue.

'Social interactionism' in studies of discourse and interaction

During the late 1970s and early 1980s, a theoretical perspective emerged (see Sarangi 2010) where the contextual grounding in discourse analysis

was dominantly microsocial, with a focus on dyadic interaction between specific speakers and hearers (and the symbolic needs created by this interaction – situated in the *here and now*).

Brazil *et al.* (1980: 15) stated: 'It may be helpful to think, in diagrammatic terms, of the speaker seeing his world and the hearer's as overlapping ..., and to see him as faced, as he composes, with a moment by moment decision as to whether what he says can be assumed to be shared or not.' A few years later, Britton (1983) presented a similar moment by moment perspective on writing, in an influential article with the telling title 'Shaping at the point of utterance'.

This development towards a discourse perspective was first evident in studies of children's first language acquisition, however, during the mid-1970s. In her 1978 book, Hatch quotes from Huang's unpublished 1970 MA thesis (1978a: 407):

- P: Oh-oh !
 J: What?
 P: this (points to an ant)
 J: It's an ant
 P: ant

...

We see in this excerpt how specific discourse participants may create verbal expression jointly, thus creating also a microsocial bed for language acquisition. R. Scollon wrote his thesis on joint construction of meaning in ongoing discourse (see Scollon 1976). In a similar vein, Keenan (1976) discussed attention getting as a crucial form of conversation initiation. Both joint construction and attention getting are phenomena that theoretically presuppose specific interlocutors.

A microsocial (dominantly two-party, or 'dyadic') approach to discourse was soon adopted also in studies of second language acquisition, with Evelyn Hatch and her postgraduate students among the pioneers (see Hatch 1978b). Their research approach was initially methodological, in that it used discourse embedding as a possible source of explanation for grammar acquisition, but it was still instrumental in inviting a general discourse-oriented approach to doing applied linguistics.

Hatch (1978a) combined first language child-adult discourse studies and the Conversation Analysis-inspired approach of Beck (1978) to analyse several case studies within child-adult and adult-adult second language acquisition, and with this dyadic approach she demonstrated considerable similarity between early first and second language acquisition. Beck (1978) had extended the then dominant methodology by using non-elicited con-

versations as data, in child-child interaction. In the ensuing (1978) studies by Hatch and Beck, their interactional focus was on turns and turn taking, topic nominations and local development, individuals' discourse strategies, repairs and on more acquisition-specific phenomena like repetition, floor-holding, hesitation and form-oriented language play. In all of these cases, an interactionally 'negotiated', step by step construction of discourse and discourse meaning was evident. This interactionist approach was further developed in Larsen-Freeman's (1980) volume, where for the first time a whole book was devoted to different forms of 'Discourse analysis in second language research'.

In the 1980s, a negotiative perspective came to be applied to written interaction as well (Nystrand 1986), and I shall follow Nystrand (1992) in characterizing this microsocial approach a 'social interactionist' view of communication (as he analysed it in opposition to a macrosocially oriented 'social constructionist' view). Since it may not be immediately evident at this point in the book how a negotiative perspective can be valid for written discourse, I shall offer a brief illustration (taken from Evensen 1999).

In a writing session, a group of teenagers in lower secondary school had been invited to write about issues currently on their minds, and these texts were to be both read and replied to by teenagers in a sister class. 'Elzbieta', an existentially troubled immigrant, wrote the following:

I don't know what and who I am going
to write to. It may be to you ... [teacher's first name].
I'm thinking of writing about mistreatment
of children and how we shall avoid –
perhaps not avoid, but be prepared
for it. I know a person who
was (not mistreated like that, mistreated
but **MISTREATED** if you know or
see what I mean). Now
I shall tell you about some incidents
which this person experienced (it
is not me and I can not tell
who it is because I promised). It was
a nice summer's day. She was at
a school camp, (actually it was from the church)
and it was coming toward an end ...

In this draft excerpt, we can clearly see how Elzbieta within a multivoiced text directly addresses her teacher in her introduction, and negotiates meaning with her teacher, a teacher who is later to give response to her draft (as

are a group of fellow students in a 'response group', see Healy 1980). We can also infer that the information in her first parentheses must be directed at this particular teacher reader.

It may be objected that the clear addressivity of this excerpt was induced by its special context of situation, but that is exactly the interactionist point: every piece of writing has its similarly specific context of situation, with specific readers (Nystrand 1986). This contextual principle holds for even the academic article or monograph where many readers will not be known. Even here some of them will actually be known – your editor, your anticipated opponents and supporters, other colleagues who are known to be interested and so on. Bazerman (1988, 2000) has shown how even a wide range of current and historical genres, including scientific articles, have developed out of something as microsocially situational as letter writing, a basic form of writing with as clearly defined writer-reader relationships as in conversation. The general point within a social interactionist approach is that written interaction is seen as reciprocally communicative in the same way as is everyday oral interaction, even if there are basic material, contextual and formal differences between oral and written discourse.

'Social interactionism' in all cases leans towards a microsocial world, where specific individuals communicate with each other. In its focus, social interactionism thus resembles positions within social theory that take individual 'agency' rather than societal 'structure' as their starting point (see Sealey and Carter 2004: 5ff). Within a social interactionist perspective, discourse is a semiotic meeting place between specific interlocutors, each of whom are socially situated in specific ways, but have in common needs for social interaction. The meeting place metaphor implies that instead of focusing on how a message is transmitted from sender to receiver (see Shannon and Weaver 1949; Reddy 1979), the focus is on a how a temporary and temporal dialectic between interlocutors is jointly established. Both speaker and listener (or writer and reader) contribute to the discourse underway, in dynamically and reciprocally shifting roles. This alternative perspective may be graphically presented as shown in Figure 4.1.

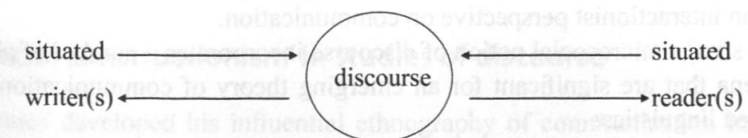


Figure 4.1. A socio-interactionist model of (written) communication

This model starts with the situatedness of discourse participants and the intersubjectivity being established between them as they build, through gradual 'attunement to the attunement of the other' (Rommetveit 1974), some joint ontological understanding. The situatedness of discourse participants, however, implies difference. When ways of being situated are perfectly similar, there is little need to communicate (see Nystrand and Wiemelt 1993; Linell 1998: 14). It is a need to overcome this difference for some purpose which feeds communication and brings it to life in interaction. It follows from this perspective that communication is both a bridge over difference and a bridge built by difference. In interactionist models of communication, discourse is thus a semiotic meeting place between specific human beings who interact (represented by the upper set of arrows in the graphical model). The core metaphor of 'negotiation of meaning' captures this basic aspect of discourse in a microsocial world.

Several other essential aspects of communication follow from a microsocial perspective. Discourse is a dynamic phenomenon, developed sequentially by the parties involved (with openings, dynamics of turn distribution, pauses and hesitation, closings and so on in oral discourse). Discourse is also functional, both regulating and supporting social interaction (with dynamics of functional discourse acts, adjacency pairs and so on). There is a need for participants to both establish common ground and move beyond it (with deixis, interaction management, grounding relations or topic-comment structures). Since some tension is frequently involved, correction is similarly often involved, as well as face saving, opposition, clarification and justification. The upper set of arrows in the model thus captures both textual aspects and aspects of the immediate social environment.

Not only do discourse participants influence each other by their contributions, however; they are also themselves influenced by their own contributions (the lower set of arrows in the model). During a writing process, for instance, the writer is influenced by both the emerging text and the mental processes accompanying it. A parallel reflection process accompanies speech. Similarly, reflection-while-listening (or reading) may deeply affect the listener (or reader). Both the tensions of discourse and the reciprocal processes of verbalization and interpretation stimulate thinking and reflection. There is thus an aspect of learning and identity formation built into an interactionist perspective on communication.

In sum, a microsocial notion of discourse incorporates a number of phenomena that are significant for an emerging theory of communication in applied linguistics:

- utterances, turns and turn-taking, initiatives and responses
- communicative, discourse-functional acts and local strategies

- local (joint) management resulting in moment-to-moment sequential organization (act sequences)
- joint development of topic
- ongoing negotiation (and joint construction) of meaning, resulting in local and thematic coherence
- social coordination as well as identity formation in the *here* and *now*
- a gradually unfolding, partially and temporarily shared, joint understanding.

While acknowledging that a social interactionist dimension accounts for essential aspects of discourse, there are simultaneously essential aspects that an extreme form of interactionism *cannot* account for. The reason for this is that an interactionist model (as an ideal type) presupposes that relevant semiotic resources are available to interlocutors as given. And the model cannot account for how. Strict interactionism implies the corollary that relevant semiotic resources are created anew by interlocutors each time that they communicate.

Interactionist analyses often refer to conventional verbal elements (phonological, syntactic, lexical, textual or paralinguistic), however, as somehow given. Since immediate interaction itself cannot explain how these elements are in fact given, their explanation must lie elsewhere. Most real life interlocutors will, no doubt, acknowledge that verbal convention is central to communication. Still, radical interactionism is, strictly speaking, a logical impossibility as an elaborate communication theory.

Accordingly, it is necessary to consider a larger social context than the one made available by specific interlocutors and their immediate situatedness. Such a necessity invites us to consider macrosocial, historical and cultural aspects of communication. I shall follow Nystrand (1992) in using the umbrella term 'social constructionism' for approaches that treat macrosocial aspects (and hence aspects of verbal convention) as primary in communication.¹ These approaches resemble positions in social theory where societal 'structure' is taken as the starting point rather than individual 'agency' (Sealey and Carter 2004: 7ff).

'Social constructionism' in studies of discourse

Hymes developed his influential ethnography of communication in concert with Gumperz (1962), within a framework where the group concept of 'speech communities' was central. It was recognized by Hymes and his contemporaries that individual interaction plays a substantial role in com-

munication, but this role was seen as one of rule-governed 'realization'. In other words, macrosocial terms such as 'community', 'domains', 'roles', 'codes', 'varieties', 'rules' and 'code repertoires' were taken to be theoretically primary. Similarly, although the notion of 'speech event' (Hymes 1972b, 1974) reflected a genuine concern with actual, *in situ* communication between specific interlocutors, even this notion was investigated with an eye towards its conventional, rule governed basis: 'It is of speech events and speech acts that one writes formal rules for their occurrence and characteristics' (Hymes 1972b: 56). The term 'speech event' itself, he stated, 'will be restricted to activities, or aspects of activities, that are directly governed by rules or norms for the use of speech' (Hymes 1974: 52). His approach here resonates with one developed later by Levinson (1979), with his more socially specific notion of 'activity type'.

Such a macrosocial approach was natural when the research agenda was largely ethnographic, cross-cultural or sociolinguistic. A code orientation was also strengthened in applied linguistics by the need to relate discourse studies to the dominantly syntactic focus of first or second language acquisition research at the time. Several researchers initially used natural discourse only as an improved source of data for investigating how certain strictly conventional linguistic items were learned (see for instance Vander Brook *et al.* (1980) on Yes/No questions; and Wagner-Gough (1976) on verb forms).

Moving from a concern with the actual dynamics of communication to a concern with community-based convention for communication also seemed to be called for when investigating institutionalized discourse. In oral discourse, this was the case in classroom discourse studies, where several analyses focused on stable power relations yielding teachers' consistent control over the floor (Sinclair and Coulthard 1975; Cazden 1988), or how error is corrected (Chaudron 1977). In written discourse, an institutional focus was central when developing a discourse approach to communication for specific purposes (such as English for Science and Technology, EST). In these EST studies, the focus was on functional relations in discourse, like verb sequences or sequences of rhetorical moves, building functional discourse blocks within specific academic genres (Lackstrom *et al.* 1973; Selinker *et al.* 1976, 1978).

The macrosocial notion of speech communities once again became influential when students of academic written discourse began struggling with the still difficult concept of 'genre'. Swales (1990) built directly on this heritage from Hymes when he developed his notion of 'discourse communities' as the social bed where genres develop, with their defining characteristics (like recurrent purposes and within-group nomenclature).

Macrosocial and institutional frameworks are similarly important when a social emancipatory agenda is central, as is implicitly the case within systemic linguistics and explicitly the case within Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). More recently and explicitly, an emancipatory agenda also lies behind Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough 1992, 1995), where the purpose is to make visible (and hence amendable) the social power relations embedded in (and often hidden by) discourse practices. In this approach, historical and institutionalized patterns and systems of discourse play a prominent role. In CDA, some Foucault-inspired notion of 'Discourse' is frequently employed, and this different use of a core term adds to the fuzziness of meaning(s) attached to it.

I choose to simplify and idealize the above picture by extending Nystrom's (1992) terminology through labelling all such macrosocial approaches to communication as 'social constructionist'. According to constructionist theories, 'Discourse' occurs at a sociocultural point of intersection where communicative convention emerges as a result of the interplay between social groups, their cultural-historical situatedness, their organization, interests, ideologies, purposes and available semiotic resources (Figure 4.2).

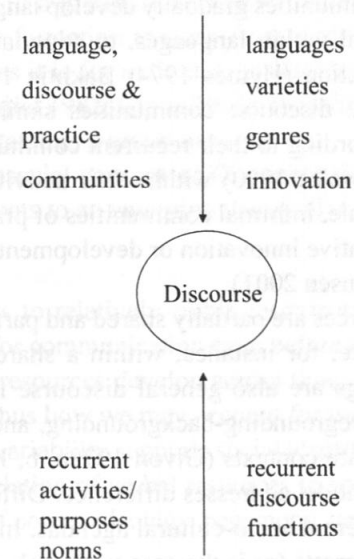


Figure 4.2. A social constructionist model of (written) communication

In this model, social aspects are shown on the left hand side and semiotic resources on the right hand side. This immediate opposition is meant

to bring out the traditional idea that convention is developed in concord with social organization and thus also parallels it. Simultaneously, there is a vertical interplay between an upper 'system side' and a lower 'function side' in the model. On the social (left hand) side of the model, this interplay operates between different social levels of organization and their associated activities and purposes (Miller 1984; Swales 1990; Clark 1996). On the semiotic (right hand) side of the model, a similar interplay operates between relatively stable semiotic organization (see Halliday's (1978) 'textual meta-function') and recurrent discourse functions.

Several important aspects of discourse are brought out by such a macrosocial framework. It demonstrates that not only does communication require interaction of specific participants, it also requires communicative resources that need not be reinvented *in toto* every time one communicates. The framework thus solves one basic logical-theoretical problem with a radical interactionist approach.

A social constructionist dimension furthermore brings attention to the interplay between different levels of (relatively) stable social organization and (relatively) stable communicative resources. What Lotman (1990) calls the 'semiosphere' within a culture, is a complex phenomenon. Societally large-scale speech communities gradually develop languages, as well as the variation that is typical within languages, to stimulate and regulate their communicative interaction (Hymes 1974; Bakhtin 1986; Lotman 1990). Socially medium-scale discourse communities similarly develop genres within a language according to their recurrent communicative purposes or tasks (Miller 1984; Swales 1990) within their activities (Levinson 1979; Clark 1996). Small-scale, informal communities of practice are social sites of ongoing communicative innovation or development from below (Brown and Duguid 1991; Evensen 2001).

Conventional resources are partially shared and partially not. Most communication takes place, for instance, within a shared language. Shared across social groupings are also general discourse functions (like comparisons, contrasts, foregrounding-backgrounding, and so on) that tend to appear across immediate contexts (Givon 1979a, b; Hopper and Traugott 1993). Still, also this model addresses difference. Different levels of social organization have different socio-cultural agendas. In many cases, groups may have differing interests (as is the case with such antagonist groupings as are studied in CDA). Since signs and sign systems carry their socio-cultural history along as 'coloured shades of meaning', variability is built into both their meaning and their conventional use. It follows from this acknowledgement of difference that variability as well as tension are important also in constructionist models of communication.

While interactionism invites a focus on the ephemeral aspects of communication, constructionism implies a measure of cultural and historical stability, even when arguing for a dynamic interpretation (see Berkenkotter and Huckin 1995: 199). It is along this dimension that we find the semiotic resources that have been 'sedimented' over time as languages, language varieties and (relatively stable) genres.

In presenting interactionism, I tried to show that microsocial communication is purposeful for the participants both in terms of social interaction and in terms of learning and personal development. Similarly, constructionism brings out shared purposes within social groups like discourse communities. One example of such a joint agenda is the need to find ways of disseminating and discussing results within scientific communities. Recurrent purposes are instrumental for the development of academic genres, including the formation of functional blocks of communication needed to construct discourse in specific genres. One example of such blocks is what the Birmingham group (Sinclair and Coulthart 1975; Swales 1990) termed 'moves' of discourse.

Similarly, the development of genres within a discourse community will contribute to the further development of that community and members' sense of belonging to a group. In this sense, we may claim that there is a measure of identity formation at work even at macrosocial levels of communication, much as it is for individual interlocutors at microsocial levels (see for example Tajfel 1982; Clyne 2005). In taking part in group practices you confirm your status as a group member.

In sum, a macrosocial concept of Discourse also contributes a number of significant elements to an emerging theory of communication in applied linguistics:

- how access to relatively stable resources for meaning-making is available for communication even before its actual onset
- how such resources develop across time, space and social groupings, and thus how we may account for their inherent variability
- how such variability supports social identity and identity formation
- how the relation of verbal resources to social groups gives access to issues of power, ideology, hegemony, verbal inequality and resistance
- how resources of genre contribute to global discourse coherence.

There is always a 'however', however. Even if this approach has a lot to offer, there are several problems with a radical macrosocial approach to discourse. Most frequently noted is a terminological issue involved. We may notice that the term 'discourse' is used with different meanings within inter-

actionist and constructionist frameworks. This difference has led to a blurring of the term within our field, and confusion for our students. Gee (1996) has addressed this issue, and attempted to clarify different terminological uses by proposing lower-case initial *d* in 'discourse' when discussing immediate interaction and upper-case *D* (that is 'Discourse') whenever discussing macrosocial convention. In the above model, I have chosen to follow this convention.

A second problem is more fundamental, as it relates to the dynamism and mutuality implied by the terms 'discourse' and 'Discourse' alike. It is not at all clear to what extent the framework, in its ideal type form, accounts for actual interaction in communication. For this reason we may formulate a series of critical questions:

- Do groups like (speech or discourse communities) really ever communicate as such, or is it always specific people within and across communities who actually communicate? For, if groups really communicate *as groups*, how do they actually do so?
- Similarly, do groups ever develop anything (like a language or a genre) *as groups*, or is it again the case that it is individual group members who think up new symbolic tools in interaction, tools which are then gradually taken up by more and more specific members because they fulfil joint functions or respond to common needs within the group (see Berger and Luckman 1967)?
- We may thus ask, rhetorically but fundamentally theoretically: Where are the real human beings in social constructionism (see Lantolf 1993)?

Unless it can be explained how groups actually communicate as groups, or change convention as groups, a radical version of constructionism faces a similar logical challenge as the one facing radical interactionism: '[T]here are no large-scale relationships between language and society that do not depend on individual interaction for their realization', claimed Hymes's close colleague, Joshua Fishman (1972: 31).

Foolishly simple, but fundamental questions like these may make us realize the difference between genuine speakers and the idealized notion of 'the Speaker'. In terms of genre, a similar important distinction is the one between real readers and the idealized notion of 'the Reader' (Nystrand 1986). Unqualified macrosocial thinking implicitly invites a level of idealization that is both empirically and theoretically questionable. The real group member within such a perspective easily becomes a bundle of social variables more than a genuine human being. Spinning the term 'humanoid', we may characterize such a bundle of variables as a 'socioid'. The basic

characteristic of socioids is their predictability, a predictability that is given because they are to such a large, but unacknowledged, extent *determined* by their specific social attributes. This is exactly what makes socioids different from human beings (see Sealey and Carter 2004 for a similar discussion of 'structure' in relation to 'agency').

When working with practical relevance, as is the case with so many applied linguists, any notion of determination raises deep axiological questions – questions related to our basic axioms, and hence our implied values. We normally want our research efforts to have effects in the world, but not without regard for the practitioners of that world. We want, for instance, to stimulate learners in their learning processes through our research, but we do not want to actually *determine* their learning (or their teachers' teaching). To the applied linguist, (radical) social constructionism thus creates even an ethical challenge. In educational contexts, for instance, the relative stability of macrolevel notions like 'language' and 'genre' is an ever-returning excuse for reimplementing formalist approaches to teaching, often under the heading 'new' (see 'new genre approaches', 'new rhetoric', and so on). So, adopting a constructionist approach may implicitly and unwillingly invite a return to old, formalist educational practices under the disguise of educational innovation. As researchers involved with practical changes, we have to be accountable also in relation to such likely uptakes of our well-intended research efforts. Put differently, when discussing improved ways of acquisition, do we implicitly talk about learners as '*objects of teaching*' or as '*subjects in learning*'? These are, in my view, among the fundamental axiological questions raised by different theoretical approaches to discourse and human interaction.

Through reinterpretation towards theoretical integration: Dialogism?

Since different theoretical approaches raise axiological questions, there is a need to look for axiologically sensitive, reflexive approaches to discourse and interaction, thus making visible the frequently tacit axioms that theories are built from.

The first communication theorists to take up this challenge in a systematic way were, to the best of my knowledge, the Russian philosopher Michail Bakhtin ([1919] 1990) and his colleagues within the so-called 'Bakhtin Circle' (see Voloshinov [1929]1973; Titunik 1973; Brandist 2002). In his programmatic 1919 essay, Bakhtin (1993) started a life-long series of critical discussions of relations between established dichotomies – verbal

interaction and language, language and literature, art and life, theory and practice, self and other – being fundamentally sceptical to all of these. In this essay, Bakhtin focused on the relationship between art and life as a case of the relationship between theory and practice. He claimed that it is only in the *tension* of this opposition, seen as a relation, that a person can become a human individual.

The notion of ‘answerability’ (or response-ability) is, in his line of thought, the key to reaching our goals, in interaction with others. By answerability he refers to an interpersonally co-constitutive relation. In his view, theory without practice is invalid, even as theory. Similarly, everyday life that never looks or moves beyond itself (see art) is invalid, even as everyday life. It is in a joint *movement beyond what is currently given* (Bostad *et al.* 2004) that the basis for both life and art lies.

Such a human ontology of ‘moving beyond’ is a basic axiological category. ‘Reality’ is not a fixed collection of entities as much as it is an emerging ecology of processes, intentionalities, relations, tensions and forces. And the basic carrier of emergence is, in his philosophy, nothing less than the utterance – which brings us back to familiar territory. It is precisely through dialogue with others, and our contributions to such dialogue, that we learn and develop, as well as contribute to developing others and the world around us; it is through utterances that we coordinate our everyday work, solve common problems, discuss research findings or create works of art. Within this intellectual framework, dialogue is not socially marginal, but *the* fundamental phenomenon of human life.

In the dialogical relation between an utterance’s addressivity and its responsivity we find the axiological potential that Bakhtin and his colleagues brought out. An utterance is always addressed to someone, and it not only invites response, but requires a response for interaction to continue. Simultaneously, it is an answer to other utterances, and builds more or less directly on others’ utterances. An utterance thus presupposes a dynamic social world of continuing mutuality. For interaction and development to continue, a measure of accountability is needed between discourse participants.

Furthermore, utterers are positioned (both materially and semiotically) in ways that both help and hinder their progress. Any human observation is necessarily tied to a deictic anchor. Our points of view (‘positions’) are derived from our anchor, the points from where we actually view. Through our differing positionings, we see things that our fellow human beings do not see, and *vice versa*. In Bakhtin’s terminology, we have some ‘excess of seeing’ in relation to fellow human beings, and, simultaneously, we have ‘excess of blindness’ in relation to their similar excess of seeing in relation

to us (Holquist 1990b: xxvi). We are thus epistemologically dependent on each other, be it in everyday life, communication or in art. This is a point taken up by Sarangi and Candlin (2001: 382) in their call for a ‘mutuality of perspective’.

Bakhtin’s emphasis on mutual ‘excess of seeing’ has practical implications. In a language classroom, one implication is that each student has something genuine to offer. The world of dialogism is thus a democratic, albeit heterogeneous world. Within this framework applied linguists might find a new basis for critically re-viewing the relationship between radical interactionist and radical constructionist approaches. In my previous presentation of these alternatives I have noted several points where perspective and research agenda overlap. In my above sketch of dialogism the readers have probably also noted a number of points where there is a familiar ring to both approaches. Granted dialogism, this familiarity may hide some potential for an integrated perspective on macro- as well as micro-social aspects of communication.

Before we proceed to exploring this potential, it is necessary to make it clear that dialogism implies also a major reconceptualization of language. It follows from its emergent communicative perspective (Lähtenmäki 2004) that ‘language’ should be seen as a resource for communication, and not viewed only as form within what Voloshinov (1973) termed ‘abstract objectivism’. In Bakhtin’s (1984) strategic call for a new ‘metalinguistics’ (which was meant to include not only general linguistics, but also a socially oriented study of literature), his basic claim was to start with utterances and their functions, in relation to specific interactants, in relation to sociohistorical contexts and in relation to surrounding utterances: ‘Language lives only in the dialogic interaction of those who make use of it’, he claims (1984: 183). A similar claim was made by his colleague Voloshinov when he so aptly stated that ‘verbal interaction is the basic reality of language’ (1973: 94).

Also in American research, similar perspectives toward a ‘peopled semiotics’ have been suggested. The forerunner of symbolic interactionism, George Herbert Mead (1934), developed a discourse-oriented theory of social psychology where ‘selves’ are influenced by their social contexts primarily through their participation in discourse; but they also influence those contexts through their contributions to discourse. As was the case with Bakhtin, Mead furthermore made a distinction between the self as seen from within (his ‘I’) and the self as seen through the eyes of others (his ‘Me’). Working in a similar vein, social phenomenologist Alfred Schütz (1984: 153) characterized language as ‘sedimented social acts in which communication took place’. Individual ‘agency’ is implied in such formulations, as is a deeply formative social ‘structure’.

Language, in all of these views, is not so much a matter of biology or abstract form as it is a matter of immediate, but recurring human needs and obligations actualized by generic aspects of specific communicative situations. Because of their recurring nature, these aspects over time lead to what Schütz terms 'typification' and 'sedimentation' (see Givon (1979a, b); Hopper and Traugott (1993) on historical grammaticalization of pragmatic processes), and such processes will result in relatively stable semiotic resources, including knowledge: 'Typifications are made routinely available to the members of a society in the semantic categories of a given language, and hence as socially distributed contents of a societal stock of knowledge' (Schütz 1989: 15).

On this basis of intellectual history let me return to the immediate issue of micro and macro perspectives. How do these reconceptualizing positions relate to the relationship between interactionism and constructionism? I shall attempt to show the relationship first through Per Linell's notion of 'double dialogue' (see Linell 1998), and then through notions of intertextuality and contextualization.

Towards an integrated model of communication

We have seen that a macrosocial view of communication may easily disguise human interaction. This is not, however, necessarily so. One particular interactional approach may in fact capture even macrosocial phenomena. Linell observes that a specific dialogue *itself* enters into dialogue – with earlier and ensuing dialogues. Dialogue is for this reason a double-natured phenomenon: 'Dialogue exhibits a double dialogicality; it is 'dialogical' both in the contexts of *in situ* interaction and within the sociocultural practices established over long traditions of indulging in such interactions' (Linell 1998: 54). Each dialogue is a reciprocal meeting-place for specific interlocutors, as interactionism brings out. However, each immediate dialogue is simultaneously in dialogue with cultural, social and semiotic resources through its relation to other dialogues.

Linell's observation invites a new perspective on communication where aspects of both interactionism and constructionism may be given a common interpretation. As social interactionism highlights, there *is* a dialogue going on between specific speaker and listener/writer and reader. This foregrounded dialogue, however, does not exclude other, backgrounded dialogues that are going on simultaneously – dialogues between the ongoing dialogue and earlier dialogues and dialogues with sedimented symbolic resources available for the creation of discourse. Social interactionism captures essential aspects of this, but needs to be transcended.

Similarly, as social constructionism highlights, there *are* cultural conventions that are relevant when we communicate. Linell refers to these as 'sociocultural practices' (loc. cit.). These practices are not something fixed that we *use*, as the term 'language use' may imply. Conventions are not straitjackets in everyday sociocultural life. They were created by 'us', and are there for 'us'. Whenever the need arises, we may cross the borders of convention, and verbal innovation may take place (see examples in Evensen 2001). We thus arrive at a point where social theorist Layder may be used as a summary:

Macro phenomena make no sense unless they are related to the social activities of individuals who reproduce them over time. Conversely, micro phenomena cannot be fully understood by exclusive reference to their internal dynamics so to speak; they have to be seen to be conditioned by circumstances inherited from the past. (Layder 1993: 102f)

Dialogic theory of genre (Bakhtin 1986) places the anchoring of convention in ongoing, specific instances of interaction. Genre starts in specific utterances, and always develops from specific utterances, as these are 'refracted' across discourse events by human interlocutors. It follows from Bakhtin's approach that specific interaction is foregrounded in a grounding relation where continually emerging convention is backgrounded.² From this grounding relation follows an adaptability of genre and a substantial room for social agency.

Within a dialogical framework, the relation between microsocial interaction and macrosocial construction is not just an eclectic addition of factors. This can be seen from Bakhtin's thinking about 'architectonics', a general metaphor that refers to the relating of parts into a qualitatively new whole (Holquist 1990b). One form of architectonics is the merging of time and space in literary narrative, which he terms the 'chronotope' (Bakhtin 1981). The chronotope is characterized as one integrated unit, and Bakhtin states (1981: 84): 'We will give the name chronotope to the *intrinsic connectedness* of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature'. In specifying this perspective, he states: 'What counts for us is *the inseparability* of space and time (time as the fourth dimension of space)' [emphasis added]. Here, Bakhtin sees the relation as analytical aspects like those of an Einsteinian four-dimensional space.

Bakhtin's notion of 'chronotope' may not itself be directly relevant for our purposes as applied linguists, but I think that his general approach to relations is. When he states: 'This *intersection of axes* and *fusion of indicators* characterizes the artistic chronotope' (loc. cit.) [emphases added],

he suggests a graphical form that may also be used to represent the relation between interactionist and constructionist dimensions of communication. Taking Bakhtin's approach, I have tried, in Figure 4.3, to capture the reciprocity and inseparability of dimensions within one integrated model of communication. In this model, each dimension should always be interpreted with an eye to the other, thus transcending the problematic distinction between 'discourse' and 'Discourse'.

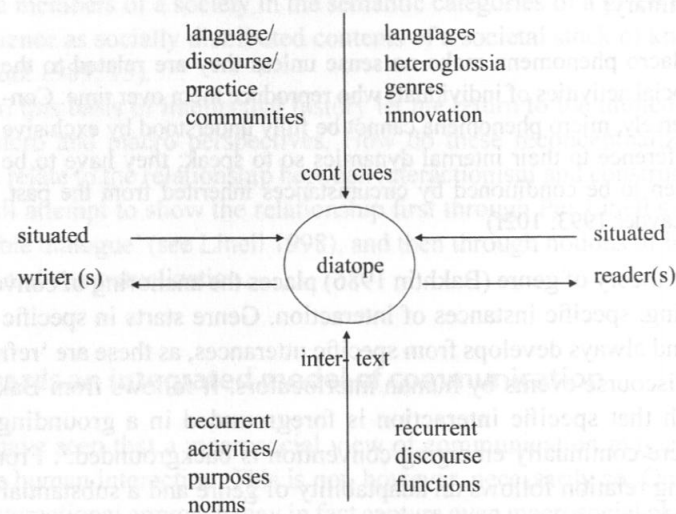


Figure 4.3. A dialogical model of (written) communication

To avoid terminological confusion, this model replaces terms like 'discourse' or 'Discourse' with an alternative term – 'diatope'. With this new term, the model highlights the interconnectedness between and fusion of dimensions, while retaining a focus on the processual nature of communication. The two dimensions of communication captured by interactionists and constructionists are, as observed in the diatope, two analytical aspects feeding into *one* unfolding meaning process.³

Within this dialogical framework, immediate interaction will simultaneously be interpreted through the lens of more stable resources for meaning making. Hence what appears in immediate discourse, *here and now*, is never taken strictly out of the blue. Similarly, the stability implied by the constructionist dimension should be interpreted through the lens of immediate interaction. Languages and genres are seen from this perspective not as static objects, but as dynamic and flexible resources that gradually develop and change as they are being 'used'. Convention is a continually emerging resource.

The notion of 'intertextuality' (Kristeva 1980) plays a major role in demonstrating how the claimed merging of dimensions can actually be the case. It has been commonplace in interactionist theory to acknowledge the role of adjacent utterances for the formulation and interpretation of any specific utterance. Dialogism incorporates this insight, but brings the interrelation one qualitative step further. Utterances have an important discourse role also of being the specific link between any ongoing dialogue and earlier and ensuing dialogues. Utterances point outside the ongoing dialogue and give access to resources from other dialogues. In the dialogical principle of 'incorporating a relationship to someone else's utterances as an indispensable element' (Bakhtin 1984: 186) lies the premise that the relationships may also be to utterances from different speech events. In this way, an ongoing dialogue is not just taking place *within* the current speech event, but simultaneously *across* speech events. In my earlier example of written interaction, for example, Elzbieta's interactional framing of her draft is in dialogue with very specific previous responses from her teacher concerning a writer's audience.

It follows from such an intertextual principle that any utterance carries echoes of similar utterances in related contexts with it, which thus ring at the back of interlocutors' minds as the unfolding discourse proceeds. Thus, any utterance has those current negotiative communicative elements in it that are acknowledged by interactionism, but simultaneously it has very specific conventional and cultural elements in it. It is for this reason that we can recognize how a statement in discourse can be not just a contribution to the discourse at hand, but simultaneously a hidden polemic against a similar statement uttered in a different speech event, or an implied answer to it.

These echoes across events are mostly specific (if not always consciously so). For the applied linguist this implies that both language learning and culture learning are tied to specific, situated instances of language and culture. Learners do not learn language or culture in theoretically pre-defined or educationally pre-packaged clusters, but through specific, situated utterances that are interpreted by the individual learner as meaningful, functional examples of that which is to be learnt, given her/his learning agenda. In this view, theoretical classification on the part of the learner is always a *post hoc* phenomenon, contrary to the implicit assumptions of many approaches to teaching.

At the same time, any utterance 'refracts' the echoes it carries, thus fitting these echoes to the participants, situation and purposes at hand. In refracting available *semiosis* (Evensen 2001) resources, we benefit from convention without being the victims of convention. Whenever available resources are inadequate, we may construct entirely new ones. The theoretical linguists' starred sentences are a good example of this innovative freedom.

Intertextual processes are also at play between the utterer's utterance and earlier utterances by the same utterer. Since uttering is a (partially) reflective process, this mechanism supports the auto-poetic and learning processes of discourse mentioned earlier with regard to social interactionism. In introducing earlier utterances, dialogism thus points to an existential aspect of its theory. 'To be means to communicate dialogically', says Bakhtin (1984: 252).

The actual merging of immediate utterance and convention also takes place through other discourse mechanisms. Intertextual bridging is not the only form of bridging between the discourse-specific and the cultural. Other forms hinge on frames and contextualization. Throughout their history, human beings have had to act on the basis of limited and partial evidence. For such reasons, we tend to generalize on the basis of immediate experience. We tend to jump from token to type. Both Schütz and Bakhtin have been shown earlier to include a notion of typification. A more recent, and more specific version of this principle has proved useful in discourse and acquisition studies under terms like frame theory. A sociocultural version of frame theory (e.g. Goffman 1974) accounts for exactly how singular social experience is interpreted holistically in terms of *types* of cultural experience that Goffman terms 'frames'. A constructionist approach may account for the frame phenomenon as such, but not for how a specific frame in discourse is actually invoked, as we shall immediately see (see Hall 1995).

It is Gumperz (1980, 1982) who should be credited with identifying one particular missing link on this point. His work on 'contextualization' points to specific verbal resources ('contextualization cues') that are used to signal the assumed or negotiated frame anchoring of a specific utterance or a larger discourse sequence like a paragraph. A diatope model places this phenomenon as one of the 'fusers' in the diatope.

I want to characterize some aspects of the diatope further. The most important aspect is that the diatope is the locus of *meaning* in human interaction. In dialogism, meaning is always specific to the occasion, but simultaneously always transcends the occasion. Luckmann (1982: 251) saw this link when he stated: 'Meaning is thus constituted in the consciousness of the relation – and of the kind of relation – that obtains between a concrete experience and something else'. In such a relational perspective, meaning is not a sudden, but an emerging process (Lähteenmäki 2004). Borrowing a term from reading researcher Judith A. Langer, discourse meaning is a process of gradual 'envisionment' (Langer 1990).

The notion of a diatope also adds more theoretical specificity. A second basic element concerns discourse acts and those social *activities* (Levinson 1979; Clark 1996; Linell 1998, 2009) that they are embedded in. The rela-

tion between these categories is not one of set membership in ordinary systems theory, but rather one of coconstitution. A specific discourse act may remain unclassifiable until framed in a specific activity. In the same relation, seen from the opposite angle, social activities will not take place until demonstrated to the participants by some of the specific acts (or act sequences) that are seen as integral to the activity.

A third element concerns different levels of discourse coherence. It has long been recognized (Agar and Hobbs 1982) that coherence is complex, linking utterance to utterance in functional and thematic ways (local and thematic coherence), but also submerging a sequence of utterances to an overarching 'architecture' with general goals and genre patterns (global coherence). The diatope is the specific place, I claim, where local, thematic and global aspects of coherence join forces in the creation of meaning.

A fourth element concerns a different, but related aspect of discourse meaning. It is today well known in discourse analysis that what is meant is more than what is said. Figuratively speaking, the overt contributions to discourse form a foreground against a large background of inferencing and shared, tacit knowledge. Constructionism can explain both the conventional aspects of overt contributions and such tacit elements, but not the interplay between the immediate foreground and such background in discourse interpretation. Neither can interactionism; it faces the same problem, but the other way around. The notion of diatope, on the other hand, also invites a relational view of discourse meaning in the sense of an emerging relation of 'relief' between foreground and background. This relief carries a perspective in discourse meaning, and thus captures otherwise vague concepts like interlocutors' 'perspective' on the topic at hand (Evensen 2001, 2002, 2004).

A fifth element concerns the meanings of conventional linguistic items. Whereas constructionism would to some extent regard these as *a priori* givens, and interactionism simply could not account for them, dialogism would regard them as underdetermined meaning potentials (see Wold 1992; Linell 1998: 118ff). Verbal items need specific contexts for their actualization, and thus only get a (temporarily) fixed meaning in a specific, peopled context. The diatope is hence the *locus* of actual meaning, at all levels of description.

A sixth element concerns the notion of 'discourse practice(s)'.⁴ Contrary to most current theory (even including Voloshinov (1973) and (Linell 1998)), a dialogical approach implies that practices belong not on the constructionist axis in the model, but in the 'fusion of elements' in the diatope (see Evensen (2004) for empirical support). This particular redefinition has wide-ranging significance for the ongoing discussion in applied linguistics

of formalism versus individualist romanticism in teaching of writing and other areas of language instruction or therapy.

In summing up this section, I want to claim that dialogism offers a principled tool for handling much of the complexity of communication and meaning. I am not, however, the first one in applied linguistics to suggest dialogism as a frame of reference. In his 1993 article, James P. Lantolf argued along lines very similar in approach to the ones above (even if Lantolf stressed the constructionist dimension more than I do). In her 1995 article, Joan Kelly Hall similarly used several Bakhtinian key terms in her attempt to argue for a sociohistorical basis for research in Second Language Learning/Acquisition. Still it is important to maintain that through dialogism it becomes possible to both conceive of and to rethink relations between:

- 'Context of situation' and 'context of culture' (Malinowski 1923): These terms will remain differentiated in dialogism, but we are invited to think once more about their relationship.
- 'Significant others' and 'the generalized other' (Mead 1934): We are once more invited to think about relations between our specific experiences and understandings, but also about how we learn to generalize across instances as we reach higher levels of communicative competence.
- The symbolic, auto-poetic meaning of uttering: For the first time we are invited on theoretical grounds to incorporate the aspect of how we craft (or 'author', to follow Bakhtin's parlance) ourselves through communication as an integrated and integrative aspect of our work in applied linguistics (Evensen 1997).
- 'Discourse' and 'practice of discourse' (Gee) are seen as a coconstitutive relationship.
- Interaction and convention are viewed in a way that makes both solipsism and determinism theoretically impossible, by the same token.

Thus far in this discussion, it may seem that the terms 'discourse' and 'communication' have been conflated, which needs addressing. The notion of communication, we have seen, is focused on the relationship between humans – their social coordination and their sharing of experience, knowledge and values. The term 'discourse' is in this context strongly coloured by its relationship to communication, but it adds specificity. Like the term 'dialogue' (*dia logos* – through/between words or spirits), the term 'discourse' implies (and thus invites) a focus on the mediation itself. This mediation is most fundamentally verbal, but rarely exclusively verbal (including elements ranging

from paraverbal to multimodal and multimedial). Where the term 'communication' focuses our attention on the *that* and *what* of communication, the term 'discourse' or 'diatope' focuses our attention on the *how* of communication as a mediated phenomenon. And for a discipline with a problem orientation it is exactly the *how* of communication which is normally at stake.

Conclusion

When introducing what he termed a 'sociological' approach to the study of language, Voloshinov (1973: 95f) tried to outline a research programme for this major reconceptualization. He suggested a methodological strategy with three steps: (1) to study forms and types of verbal interaction in specific contexts; (2) to study the forms of particular utterances as instances of genre; and (3) a reexamination of linguistic description on the basis of (1) and (2). It seems clear that this ambitious program is far from being completed, even more than eighty years later. In particular, the third step in his programme is a major challenge.

Several functional linguists have to a limited extent tried to approach a somewhat similar type of programme since Firth (1950) raised it in the West after the Second World War. Following Firth, Halliday has approached this programme, mainly from the point of view of grammar, but he has largely disregarded immediate interaction (step 1). Conversation analysts have approached step 1, but have largely disregarded grammar. Functional linguists like Givon and Hopper have approached step 3 directly, from phylogenesis (grammaticalization) and language typology, but like Halliday have largely disregarded step 1. Social phenomenologists like Schütz and Luckmann have approached it from an epistemological and protosociological point of view, but have largely disregarded any specifics of step 3. We may thus conclude that current dialogism is far from being an adequately specified approach to communication and the semiotic resources serving communication.

In this conclusion lies also an implication of a need to evaluate the early contributions of Voloshinov, Bakhtin and others critically. There were important differences within the Bakhtin Circle (see Brandist 2002: Voloshinov was for instance a sort of Marxist, which Bakhtin was not; Voloshinov approached the diatope 'from above' whereas Bakhtin approached it 'from below'), and recent detailed study of oral, written and technological interaction has offered a number of insights that were not available in the 1920s. This is one reason why I second Linell's wide angle approach, where 'dialogism' is not restricted to the work of its founding fathers, but viewed as an ongoing, constantly developing project (see also Bostad *et al.* 2004).

In this ongoing project, Voloshinov's programme invites a focus on methodology and research strategy. The discussion of communication theory in this chapter has led us to see that, for applied work, issues of addressivity and answerability are central to communication theory. We have also seen that ethical issues are intertwined with theoretical issues. The notion of answerability has implications, in other words, for our own research practice in applied linguistics. We need to speak about communication in such a way that we do not unwillingly invite new straitjackets in the world of practice. Such an awareness has strong implications even for methodology. This is consequently my topic for an ensuing chapter. But first we need to consider an important issue even more closely related to theory of communication in applied linguistics – the theory of learning.

Notes

1. 'Constructionism' is not an optimal term for these approaches, since it may easily be conflated with 'constructivism'. Similarly Linell (1998: 59ff) gives an overview of several different uses of the term. I have not yet been able to find a better alternative, however, and choose to stay with it. For the purposes of this chapter, it will be used to refer to approaches where social reality is 'constructed' in a group-oriented social context.
2. I am grateful to Harald Nilsen for the insight that the construction dimension contributes to the meaning of interaction by functioning as background in a grounding relation where interactionist discourse is figure. The full discursive meaning of interaction is to be found in the relation between these two dimensions, see Chapter 7.
3. Lotman (1990) was inspired by the ecological term 'biosphere' when coining his term 'semiosphere'. I have been similarly inspired, by the ecological term 'biotope', the term 'dialogue' and Bakhtin's term 'chronotope' when coining the suggested term 'diatope' for the merging of 'discourse' and 'Discourse'.
4. Some scholars (e.g. Linell 2009) prefer the term 'praxis'. I refrain from using this term for historical reasons. As indicated in Chapter 2, the term arose in classical Greece when for the first time in history, slave owners were freed from manual labour, and were thus able to devote their time to 'pure' arts (see the notion of freedom reflected in the later Latin term 'artes liberales') and intellectual-political activity in the *polis* (the public domain). Activity in the *polis* was referred to as 'praxis'. The term is thus part of an extremely upper class (slave owner) intellectual tradition that makes it very difficult to disentangle issues like the relations between theory and practice, or between 'pure' and 'applied' research. These are issues that I shall return to in the next chapter.

5 Approaches to learning

Introduction

Just as the linguistic structuralism of early applied linguistics presupposed a parallel behaviourist theory of learning (structural language habits), any view of language and communication similarly carries with it presuppositions about the nature of learning, whether explicitly acknowledged or not. It is thus important for continued professional progress that we make such presuppositions explicit and discuss them critically.

There are several important issues that should be addressed through such scrutiny. One issue relates to the specific *locus* of learning. As this issue lies behind some of the paradigmatic tension that currently characterizes our discipline, a discussion of *locus* will be central in this chapter. It has been widely assumed that the prime locus of language learning is the central nervous system of the individual learner. Learning certainly has to somehow affect the individual learner in this way, but to what extent and in what sense can learning to communicate be thought of as a purely individual process?

In addition to this issue, applied linguistics has a need for communicability and transferability, both when it comes to the theory of learning and with regard to theories of communication and research methodologies (see Larsen-Freeman 2000). Unless we can establish some level of basis for meaningful intellectual discussion about our understanding of learning processes, we are bound to remain in the current position of rather endlessly talking *past* or *at* each other rather than *to and with* each other. In the long run, we entertain the risk of even starting from scratch in our separate intellectual compartments or sub-compartments at times. The following example illustrates this problem.

A national, interdisciplinary writing research group was established in Norway toward the end of the 1980s, after a few years of practical classroom process-oriented writing (POW) efforts (Evensen *et al.* 1991). In Norway, this was the first time children's acquisition of written language competencies was studied systematically. One of the astonishing things soon noted by some research colleagues in first language didactics was that error seemed to accompany progress in learning. These colleagues were astonished, and

one of them formulated a classroom-oriented slogan: 'The first time a new error is made by a child writer, the school should hoist its flag!' This insight was in other words as new to these first language didactics colleagues as it was commonplace to an applied linguist who knew his Corder.

What this example illustrates, is the need for intellectuals to share insight across our fields of expertise. Further on in this chapter I shall maintain that this is exactly what is still happening in current applied linguistics when it comes to the issue of *locus*. As Tolman (1999: 76) points out, for example, Vygotsky (1978: 63) was concerned with fossilized behaviour as a general psychological phenomenon in the early 1930s, but he was not referred to when this issue became central in second language acquisition (SLA) research.

A different example may illustrate the same problem, still within SLA, concerning the current issue of the role of social identity in acquisition. It has been pointed out that this notion of identity has been less than clear (McNamara 1997). The definitional borders between two meanings of 'social' – a group affiliation-oriented 'social identity' (see Tajfel 1982) on the one hand and an individual-as-microsocial-oriented 'personal identity' (Luckmann 1982) on the other – have been discussed in relation to both socialization and writing research, however. The microsocial perspective reflected in the term 'personal identity' makes the border between the two senses of 'identity' problematic to draw in certain empirical contexts (see Evensen (1995) as a case in point), but the discussion would certainly inform our applied linguistics research. I thus take it as a less than prudent strategy when several SLA researchers have rejected recent criticism on the grounds that it has been voiced from applied linguists who work outside the mainstream of their particular field (see Block 2003, Ch. 5).

In this chapter, some currently dominant conceptualizations of learning will be critically discussed as viewed from an alternative Vygotskian approach. This critique, however, also concerns some aspects of sociocultural approaches. The chapter thus ends by suggesting a more considerate approach to learning as a platform for fruitful discussion rather than as some new master theory of learning.

An historical backdrop

As we have seen, linguistic structuralism once worked perfectly in tandem with psychological behaviourism (Bloomfield 1933). This dual paradigm blossomed unquestioned until Chomsky's revolution. But what was the new

alternative in terms of learning? Chomsky was initially rather vague on this point. He suggested a mentalism (Chomsky 1965, 1968) where human creativity, many applied linguists thought, was illustrated by generative rules. What most of us did not realize at the time was that the intended meaning of 'generative' was taken from mathematics (the working logic of algorithms). There was some room for 'creativity' in this approach, in the technical sense that a finite set of rules may yield an infinite set of outcomes (for example, grammatical sentences), but this is no more creative than an algorithm leading to a similar result in a computer each time, even when the input data is different.

The work of Chomsky's cognitive psychologist colleague George Miller (1956) made it clear that a computer metaphor was closer to the intended reality than a creativity metaphor (Rommetveit 1974). Similar to how the Central Processing Unit (CPU) of a computer processes incoming data (input) according to a set of rules predefined by the programmer, the (individual-as-universal) human mind operates on verbal input according to a set of predefined principles, and its processing 'creates' new results (output).

Such principles formed the basis for advances in studies of language learning in applied linguistics for quite some time. As we shall see below, the exact period of time implied by 'for quite a while' proved to be different across subdisciplines within AL. Since the psycholinguistic framework is still the prevalent one in second language acquisition (SLA) research, in the form of a general *Input-Interaction-Output model* (Block 2003), this discipline will be given particular attention below.

While a computer metaphor implies a focus on input and output, there is more to the metaphor as it was further developed within SLA studies. Central to the immediate formulation in language learning studies was a concern with grammatical hypothesis formulation and testing on the basis of incoming data. Such formulation was seen as one cause of error (Corder 1967) and an essential element in the development of learners' interlanguage (Selinker 1972). As the field progressed, theorising about learners' formulation and testing of hypotheses was subsumed under a new concern with strategies of learning and communication (Faerch and Kasper 1987). Furthermore, cognitive notions of working memory versus long term memory became common (see McLaughlin 1987), metaphorically mirroring the computer architecture of RAM versus hard disk.

More recent developments have led to considerable refinements within the computer metaphor. The interactionist approach beginning with Long (1985) is arguably the most interesting one. An important characteristic of this approach (see Gass (2002) for an overview) is that it recognizes the importance of verbal interaction for acquisition. It does so, however, mostly

as a way of increasing the amount of verbal input to the learner, or more specifically, gearing the input more closely to the learner's needs. It is thus slightly misleading when one refers to this approach as *the Input-Interaction-Output model* (see Block 2003), since interaction is subsumed under the basic input category in this approach. Still it is a refinement of the computer metaphor in that it recognises one form of social activity within it.

Two years after Chomsky published his mentalist claim (Chomsky 1968), it was revealed that the particular 'programmer' of learner algorithms was in fact a biologist. Language was now seen as part of biology and the study of language consequently constitutes a part of natural science. This fact might have alerted applied linguists to certain implied epistemological problems, but the inclination of the day was still largely positivist. According to such a natural science approach to language learning, unconscious processing of assumedly scant and degenerate data is central to the setting of neurologically inborn, grammatical parameters according to a set of neurobiological principles that are themselves universal (Chomsky 1981). The result is a 'grammar' (an inborn set of principles producing the algorithms that lead to intuitively grammatical sentences). Since the parameters behind this grammar are assumed to be universal, the study of any competent individual may equally well represent them.

The intellectual trajectory outlined above might seem inevitable if it were not for the fact that it took quite different paths in other domains of applied linguistics – paths that cognitivist/universal grammar proponents seem not to have considered seriously. The first ones to opt for an alternative theory were the child language acquisition researchers of the mid- and late 1970s (see for example Donaldson 1978). Doing their research in an historical climate where Piaget's (1955) stage theory of development was the received theoretical basis, they noted that in certain interactional, naturalistic settings children were much more advanced in their speaking than their 'stage of development' would normally predict. Actual children were in other words outperforming received theory, granted certain contextual characteristics.

Donaldson turned to the learning theory of Lev Vygotsky for an alternative source of explanation. Vygotsky (1978: 57) claimed that individual learning basically happens twice: First, things are rudimentarily mastered in microsocial interaction (what he termed *intermental* learning). As this learning is consolidated (by interactive repetition, social imitation, semi-otic mediation), mastery starts occurring even in individual action; it is becoming internalized (what he termed *intramental* learning). Through a mediating process of increasing individual control (see Cazden 1994: 173), learning moves from the *intermental* to the *intramental*, from *between* persons to *within* persons. Self-addressed, inner speech serves as one of the

bridging tools in this process towards individual control (see Ohta (2000) for empirical ESL examples). The microsocial aspect of intermental learning led Vygotsky to formulate his now famous 'With a little help from my friends' notion, his concept of a 'zone of proximal development' that may account for what is learnable, granted previous learning/development and current support in the immediate social environment (see Cazden (2008) on the Russian origin and different translations of this term).

On the basis of such a theory, Donaldson was able to explain her theoretically 'deviant' data through abductive logic. Similarly, L. E. Bernstein (1981) demonstrated how discourse ellipsis emerged among 2-3 year olds in mother-initiated, child-supportive sequences before it occurred in child-initiated sequences. The earliest form of ellipsis found in her data occurred in the basic interactional discourse function of answers to questions. She also demonstrated how children's advances in learning governed the complexity of the 'motherese' of their mothers (that is their gradually building down the scaffold of simplification, to the extent that it was becoming superfluous). Such work eventually led to a shift in the learning paradigm of child language acquisition research, where Vygotsky replaced Piaget as the major source of inspiration.

In sum, such studies imply that the basic presuppositions of Chomsky about children's language learning are empirically misguided. Children do not learn languages quickly and effortlessly; they spend most of their waking hours, for many years, being involved in one way or another with language acquisition. Ellis (1998: 641) states this insight flatly in a statement about second language learning implications: 'Fluent language users have had tens of thousands of hours on task'. Furthermore, the language 'input' that children are surrounded by, is in no way scant and degenerate; it is specifically designed to meet their needs and capacities by their caregivers, in situations that are socially transparent and meaningful to the child. The whole literature on 'caretaker speech' (see, for example, Gallaway and Richards 1994) demonstrates the extreme complexity and contextual flexibility of the verbal and discursual adaptation processes involved. A concern with actively investigating discourse environments should perhaps not be expected from a theoretical position that in principle disregards performance (Chomsky 1965), but the systematic disregard of empirical studies across fields of study (my first point above) is still as remarkable as it is regrettable.

A similar change took place in written language acquisition research. Britton and his colleagues (Britton *et al.* 1975) had observed that the immediate social environment of children or adolescents was important to their written language acquisition. Development seemed to be stimulated in edu-

cational situations where the teacher took the role of a 'trusted adult'. This empirical observation could be theoretically illuminated by reference to George Herbert Mead's (1934) notion of 'significant others'; as youngsters we primarily learn and become socialized in interaction with not just anybody, but with people who *mean* something to us; people we depend on, identify with, look up to or admire. What Britton and his colleagues found was that this principle is valid even for teachers. But it was Vygotsky who came to be the focal source of inspiration even in the field of written language acquisition research.

Recent lack of integration

In second language acquisition research, intellectual development has, until quite recently, taken a quite different path. This is remarkable, since an interactionist view was introduced quite early, as when Wagner-Gough and Hatch (1975) saw syntactic competence as growing out of interaction and discourse, as we saw in Chapter 4. Also, SLA scholars of the time (including some later on; see Hall and Verplaetse (2000)) were keenly aware of the developments within child language acquisition studies. More recently a range of issues have been raised that resonate poorly with a cognitivist position. One case in point is the issue of identity formation in SLA, as discussed in Norton (1995) and Block (2007). Here, the socially oriented position of Goffman (1959) is made relevant in order to discuss terms like 'face' and 'footing', but cognitivist terms are not.

Still working within the cognitivism of Chomskyan psycholinguistics, or its twin universal grammar (UG) mainstream, most researchers within the field have remained true to a computer metaphor of learning. Rod Ellis (1997: 37) states: 'The prevailing perspective on interlanguage is psycholinguistic, as reflected in the metaphor of the computer'. Central to this metaphor are notions like 'input', 'processing' and 'output'. The educational or naturalistic language material available to the learner is regarded as 'input' to certain processes that result in changes within 'the black box' (Long 1980) that may be indirectly inferred from their output (the interlanguage data that they provide).

In some forms of current SLA research, UG is supposed to be operative in second language acquisition (see Mitchell and Myles (1998) for an overview). The programme of UG suggests that SLA is a testing field for a linguistic theory more than it is a form of applied linguistics with any practical human or social concerns (Rajagopalan 2004). More specifically it yields an exclusive focus on formal aspects of the emerging grammar of the individ-

ual second language learner, as this is viewed to be the result from a form of neurological hardwiring (learning as parameter setting), granted only a minimum of language input. There are basic differences between a cognitivist approach and the UG approach (see Mitchell and Myles 1998: 72f). However, since they share the basic input-output metaphor as well as natural science notions of networks (modules) of individually speaking very simple, automatic neurological mechanisms, it still seems natural to treat them under one common umbrella for the purposes of this chapter. While doing this, however, I clearly acknowledge that there are important theoretical differences even within the hard core of SLA research.

The underlying computer metaphor was historically useful in that it made it possible to develop techniques for collecting and analysing studies of extremely minute processes in the learner. Still, the metaphor has flaws that only a few moments of literal reading will disclose. A computer is a wonderful mechanical device for handling symbols, but in a mechanical device issues of meaning and relevance are of no significance. In language learning, however, issues of meaning and relevance need to be central. In reporting on Di Pietro's (1987) work on strategic interaction, Lantolf (1993: 220) notes that 'one is struck by his overriding concern with the need to foreground the humanity of second and foreign language learners'. Such a concern is not accidental. Language learners are not computers, but human beings (Andenaes 1989). The implications of this profound fact surely need to be discussed critically. Some forms of recent SLA research, for example, suggest that 'participation' (see McCormick and Donato 2000; Block 2003) may be a better term for what, in the computer metaphor, is referred to as 'input', a reformulation that Bernstein pointed out for child language acquisition research already in 1981.

Metaphors are dangerous allies. In the case of the computer metaphor, issues of human concern and relevance have come to play close to no role in most mainstream SLA research, beyond simple, technical comprehension of verbal stimuli. This aspect of recent intellectual history amounts to an implicit claim about the fundamental mechanism of language acquisition: it is in a genuine sense meaningless and irrelevant to the learner. Such an assumption seems hardly tenable, even in terms of face validity, but mainstream colleagues in this field implicitly build their work on it. At this point, current SLA joins general linguistics in being in deep trouble, ontologically and axiologically, even at the simplest level of face validity.

Some SL researchers have attempted to argue for a sociohistorical or sociocultural alternative, with James P. Lantolf, William Frawley, Joan Kelly Hall and Leo van Lier among the leading representatives (see Hall and Verplaetse 2000b; Block 2003; Littlewood 2004 for an overview). An

early example was Frawley and Lantolf (1985). Ensuing examples were Lantolf and Ahmed (1989), Lantolf and Appel (1994), Hall (1993, 1995), Lantolf (1996a), Siegal (1996), Lantolf (2000) and Lantolf and Poehner (2004). Similarly, Breen (1985) criticized SLA research for its alleged psychological naïvety, proposing a sociocognitive alternative based on insights from classroom studies. Breen did not directly refer to Vygotsky, but his line of argument was compatible with the Vygotskian tradition.

Vygotsky-oriented examples are still relatively marginal in the field, however, even if they slowly begin to enter standard textbooks (see Ellis 1997:48f; Mitchell and Myles 1998) and research anthologies (Hall and Verplaetse 2000; Kramsch 2004a; Littlewood 2004). Many research articles have been published in journals outside the core ones like *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*. One example of this tendency is a series of special issues of the *Modern Language Journal* since 1994. The first of these special issues (78 (4); edited by James P. Lantolf) focused on SLA grammatical studies, but subsequent issues (81 (3) (1997), edited by Alan Firth and Johannes Wagner; and 82 (4) (1998), edited by Rebecca L. Oxford and Martha Nyikos) focused more on SLA discourse.

A Vygotskian alternative?

Ellis (1997: 89) has argued against the possibility of using any one learning theory in SLA research: 'What single theory can adequately encompass such disparate metaphors as 'investment', 'social distance', 'accommodation', 'scaffolding', 'noticing', 'interfacing', 'fossilization', 'monitoring' 'avoidance', 'Machiavellian motivation', 'intervention', and so on?'. This argument may potentially hold if we think of 'theory' in a narrow sense, but the need for communicability within applied linguistics invites me to consider general frameworks for understanding learning rather than proposing more specific theories. As Kramsch (1995) has argued, a theory is as much a perspective on the world as it is an explanatory device. As seen through such a wider lens, the issue Ellis raises needs to be rephrased: Do the phenomena listed above have things in common that may be understood within one single coherent framework? If so, this observation might guide the field in an alternative direction, since no computer metaphor or neurological theory can possibly account for the social aspects in Ellis' list.

What needs to be seriously considered, in my view, is the radically alternative possibility that a socially oriented framework may be useful for understanding even cognitive or neurological aspects of learning (see Larsen-Freeman 2004). Vygotsky's *dictum* that learning and development moves from *intermental* to *intra*mental seems to imply exactly such a pos-

sibility. The movement of learning from *between* to *within* is made possible in his theorizing through the workings of some mediational system, prototypically language. The inner logic of a mediational system is appropriated by learners along with their learning, but once appropriated, this inner logic will affect its 'users' in return. Cognitive structures, for instance, are qualitatively restructured or transformed as such mediated processes continue. This phenomenon of restructuring has been frequently observed in mainstream SLA studies (see, for instance, Gass and Selinker 1994: 157ff).

If Vygotsky was correct in his notion of two developmental planes, SLA might have as much to gain from taking him seriously as have other sub-disciplines within applied linguistics. Below, I shall consider such a strong version of a claim for Vygotsky even in SLA, before returning to my own position, a weaker version emphasizing communicability in the form of a general frame of reference available to all.

In a review article Han (2004) regrets the relative lack of longitudinal studies in SLA research on fossilization. Her regret illustrates how Vygotsky might be relevant even in methodological terms. He strongly advocates studying developmental microprocesses – genesis – in order to understand even aspects of competence (as temporary products), by taking what he terms a 'genetic' approach: Granted a specific level of biological maturation, new mental abilities and structures can only be properly understood if we account, in detail, for their genesis – how they are brought about in real time.¹ In applying such an approach, he also advocates cautious design to control for possible interaction between phenomena relevant to learning, another requirement emphasized by Han. Some such methodological issues will be further discussed in Chapters 6 and 7.

The interaction of phenomena relates to an issue brought up by Seedhouse (2004: 244ff). In advocating Conversation Analysis (CA) as a viable approach for applied linguistics, Seedhouse emphasizes the importance of establishing a qualitative, *-emic* basis (see the participant perspective discussed in Chapter 1) before designing any quantitative studies from an *-etic* basis (a research perspective where empirical phenomena are seen from without). The core of Seedhouse's critique is that current SLA research disregards crucial qualitative aspects of the socially embedded verbal input that second language learners have to work from in their attempts to learn a second language.

CA has a basic, sociological agenda of demonstrating how ordinary *folk* manage their social lives in their everyday reality, but a Vygotskian agenda is different in this respect. For Vygotsky, the core concern was human development, not social interaction as such. He certainly saw human interaction as the prime social bed of development, but nevertheless focused on those

instances where interaction not only manages social reality between interlocutors, but moves them beyond that reality.

The much debated issue of *i+1* is another example of potential benefits for SLA studies from considering Vygotsky. The basis for this issue was an attempted refinement made within the computational framework. Krashen (1982) noted that not any sort of input is useable by the learner. To illustrate his point, let me offer the following anecdotal evidence: I wrote most of the first draft for this chapter in my friends' apartment in Tuscany, where I was surrounded by Italian as a second language. Most of this 'input' was not at all available for learning; my Italian was still so poor that most of what was said or read was simply not comprehensible. As Krashen pointed out, for input to become 'intake' (the part of input that is actually processed by the computer (Corder 1967)), the input must be comprehensible. This was the core of Krashen's (1985) Input hypothesis. On the basis of this hypothesis, he derived a related, metaphorical one: The input that can lead to learning has to be only slightly beyond the current level of competence (what he referred to as *i+1*).

Schinke-Llano (1993) argued that Vygotsky's Zone of proximal development can explain the observations behind Krashen's (now rejected) *i+1* hypothesis, and also in fact be compatible with the basic premises of this branch of SLA research. The latter part of the argument was strongly criticized by Dunn and Lantolf (1998), who pointed to the incommensurability at basic philosophical levels between Vygotsky's premises and those of Krashen and his tradition. Still, the first part of Schinke-Llano's argument deserves further attention.

Much of the criticism earlier directed against Krashen's *i+1* hypothesis was based on its vagueness (McLaughlin 1987; Gass 2002). How is the notion of 'i' (interlanguage competence) defined (*in toto*)? And, what is the exact claim of the *+1* principle? In a Vygotskian framework, the answer to both of these critical sub-questions is built into the very definition of the zone of proximal development – the distance between what a learner can specifically achieve on her own, and what she can achieve in interaction with adults or more capable peers (Vygotsky 1978: 86). Thus, the 'i', as seen from Vygotsky's point of view, is the level of competence relevant to *the specific task at hand* within an ongoing activity, a level that the learner has a consolidated, observable ability to carry out on her own. This exact level may be empirically documented for such tasks in a preliminary, general sense. The relevant level of competence and the specifics of the task are both further refined during the specific interaction resulting in the learning (cf. Chapter 4). In this way *i+1* actually may become accessible to empirical investigation.

In my anecdotal Tuscany case, such a task presented itself towards the end of my very first stay there. After our summer holiday, my family was preparing for our leave the next day and 'talked to' the caretaker, a very friendly old monolingual man. One pressing issue in this encounter was how/where to deliver the set of keys to the apartment; we did not know where the caretaker lived and were not able to convey the time of our departure. Within his stream of inaccessible Italian, I could nevertheless see the caretaker repeatedly pointing to the huge stone ashtray by the entrance door where we kept the keys, and it eventually dawned on me that he wanted us to just leave the keys inside and slam the door shut, as he had his own keys. More important for the sake of this chapter, was my recognition of a repeated lexical item, *chiave* (the masculine Italian word for key). In accordance with a point to be made below, my initial acquisition of this lexical item was only partial, however, since I in this particular deictic context understood *chiave* to be a plural form referring to the multiple keys in the set.

A domain-specific definition of *i+1* may seem vague for researchers working away from any field of practice, but in everyday educational reality, most teachers have a reasonably clear (for their everyday professional purposes) analysis of their individual students' level of competence in different social situations of 'language use'. In an educational world of today where portfolio assessment is common, parts of this analysis may frequently even be documented for individual learners. For researchers to make this principle work for us, however, a situationally defined entry-level competence has to be specifically assessed, followed by meaningful interaction and close investigation of verbal learner activity during and after the interaction (Lantolf and Poehner 2004). Since observable signs of learning may in some cases be delayed (see the literature on a 'silent period' in language learning), a Vygotskian approach in this area thus calls for some level of longitudinal research, much like what Han (2004) called for. Such a point is close to the actual meaning of 'historical' in the label 'socio-historical', which is frequently used when referring to Vygotsky (see Wertsch 1981b).

The situationally defined *i+1*, second, is exactly what the learner is able to accomplish, there and then, in interaction with more capable interlocutors (in their potential role as *significant others*). Such temporary accomplishments are extremely vulnerable, however. Unless further stimulated, they may never appear again. The role of the instructor is, accordingly, to build a temporary 'scaffold' (Wood *et al.* 1976; Cazden 1994, 2008) around the most advanced attempts of the learner (as sometimes signalled by new errors (see Evensen (1992) on discourse 'turbulence'), in order for them to become consolidated. The theoretical construct of a zone of proximal devel-

opment hence not only explains part of the learning process, it also suggests interactional teaching and assessment strategies from its very learning principle (see Cazden 2008).

SLA research has largely confirmed Krashen's general underlying idea that comprehensibility is required, but with several qualifications beyond Corder's early distinction between 'input' and 'intake' (see Gass and Madden (1985) for an early overview, in particular Larsen-Freeman (1985)). One essential qualification is the socially relational, negotiated nature of input. Input is actively modified by many native speakers to the assumed level of hearer competence, as 'caretaker' (i.e. caregiver) speech. Even nonnative speakers modify their 'output' when speaking to other non-native interlocutors with lower proficiency (Takahashi 1989). Similarly, there are differences between learners as to their ability to actually craft the input they then receive – their ability to be 'input generators'. Their role as learners, furthermore, is not a passive one; as learners, the 'output' they create may be equally important for learning as the input they are offered. This is a basic tenet of Swain's (1985) 'output hypothesis'. We may note here that Swain uses the term '*comprehensible* output' [my emphasis], a term that is interactionally essential, but one that would be superfluous, or meaningless within a strict computer metaphor. All a computer would yield is *recognizable* output. All of the components within the emerging complex picture may vary, it seems, with the situationally salient social or epistemological domain in question (Sato 1985; see Selinker and Douglas 1985; Douglas and Selinker 1987). This dynamic picture fits with the frequently observed variations in SL learners' interlanguage (see Gass *et al.* 1989 for an overview).

We will note that such relational qualifications are exactly what one would expect from the start if working within a Vygotskian framework. Learning takes place within a specific social context where participants continually adjust to each other, and occasionally support each other (Foster and Ohta 2005), while at the same time carrying out their different agendas as social subjects. Variation at multiple levels is thus as fundamentally commonplace as is the 'heteroglossia' of language itself. Also, the relational picture emerging from SLA research on 'input' is, in an ironic sense, an argument for the tripartite basic structure of discourse emphasised in dialogism (Linell 1998, 2009) – it is only the relation between a hearer's *response* utterance (part ii) and its subsequent follow-up by the initial speaker (part iii) that actually settles the discourse-functional value of any single utterance.

Tarone (1989) has argued that neither 'inner processing' models of second language acquisition nor purely external 'social models' of sociolinguistic and discursal factors suffice to explain the specifics of observed variation in second language acquisition. Ellis (1989: 35) has similarly argued: 'Pat-

terned variability is the product of psycholinguistic as well as sociolinguistic and linguistic factors, the three interacting in ways that are not yet clear.' It is interesting to note that Vygotsky's approach to internalization offers a non-eclectic, principled account of how sociocultural interaction, symbolic resources and cognitive processes all interact in developmental processes. Where current cognitive or social Western theories tend to single out specific explanatory aspects at the expense of others within this complexity, Vygotsky and his followers tried to understand exactly the interrelations between these aspects, as the interrelations emerge and may reveal themselves developmentally through analysis of interactional microgenesis or developmental macrogenesis. Furthermore, the Vygotskian tradition is a thoroughly empirical one where the empirical, controlled verification of theoretical predictions that Tarone (1989) has called for is very much in focus.

One interrelation has been prominent in recent clashes between psycholinguistically and sociolinguistically oriented SL researchers. This is the issue of second language *use* versus second language *acquisition* (see Block 2003). One of the central arguments advocated by psycholinguistically oriented SLA researchers for rejecting the challenge of a sociolinguistic agenda is that sociolinguistically oriented SL studies have tended to document SL *use*, without demonstrating how such use may actually lead to *acquisition* (see, for example, Gass 1998, 2002, 2009; Kasper 1997; Long 1997; Larsen-Freeman 2000; Tarone 2000 for an overview). Unless it can be shown how use leads to acquisition, the argument goes, a sociolinguistic agenda is of little promise to SLA research. In her overview, Tarone gives an account of several empirical studies that have, in fact, shown how use leads to acquisition. She also, however, points to the scarcity of studies demonstrating how differential use may potentially lead to the differential acquisition that is implied by a sociolinguistic approach.

Early in the new millennium, the situation had thus reached somewhat of an impasse, even if Tarone (2000) tried to suggest alternative routes out of that impasse such as the chaos/complexity approach of Larsen-Freeman (1997). De Bot *et al.* (2007) have similarly suggested that an ecological Dynamic Systems Theory may be developed into an alternative route. There have been even rare attempts by representatives of both camps to investigate the same dataset from different approaches in order to arrive at a richer understanding. One example of such an attempt is Foster and Ohta (2005).

Within a Vygotskian approach it would be necessary to specify the exact social context of *any* assumed learning process, among other things, to avoid premature generalization across such contexts. This is one central aspect of his microgenetic methodological approach. One could certainly not stop there, however. The whole methodological point would be to chart in

detail the succeeding goings-on in terms of learning – with a specific focus on exactly the kinds of mental restructuring that are at the heart of interlanguage theory. Thus, at least this particular current battle within SLA research seems unnecessary. Any serious consideration of Vygotsky's methodological heritage would prove the point. Here, sociolinguists and socioculturalists might have as much to learn from Vygotsky as have psycholinguists. In fact, Cazden (2008: 208) points out that a collaborative team 'might be able to design performance tests that meet the socioculturalists' demands for authenticity and the psycholinguists' demand for generalizability.'

We saw in Chapter 2 that within applied linguistics there is currently competition between different approaches. Several researchers have pointed to tensions within SLA studies on the issue of social *versus* cognitive factors, where Larsen-Freeman has noted a 'crescendo of dissonance' (2000: 168) and has expressed fear of 'internecine feuding and fragmentation' (2000: 165, 174). Similarly, Tarone (2000: 185) has implicitly warned against a situation where applied linguistics in general may possibly dismiss SLA research altogether, presumably as a fossilized field. Experiences of similar dismissal is reported and discussed in Leki (2000). Such deep concerns speak to the importance of the issues discussed above.

Most of what has been written about Vygotsky in applied linguistics has focused on his notion of 'a zone of proximal development' (ZPD). This focus has obvious didactic reasons, since it is a way of accounting for how it is that a social environment may (or may not) facilitate learning and development, be it in child language acquisition, written language acquisition, classroom discourse, SLA or any other subdiscipline within applied linguistics. There is more to Vygotsky, however, than this narrowly fashionable acronym ZPD, and we might consider his contribution as relevant to all empirical fields within applied linguistics.

A wider perspective

In discussing a possibly wider relevance of Vygotsky, I shall start from an old issue – the role of imitation in language and discourse learning. Further on in this section, I shall include issues that are of specific relevance to SLA research, as well as issues that are of relevance to more general issues.

Imitation revisited

It follows from the interactional aspects of the ZPD that the issue of imitation may possibly reopen, without the association with behaviourism that

once closed the issue: Our professional interest in imitation at that time waned as our belief in behaviourist stimulus-response learning waned. Still, as every parent knows, imitation does *somehow* play a role in language acquisition. Similarly, imitation occurs regularly in published learner data. But how can it play a role? A Vygotskian framework may account for how this can be the case, without any need for reopening presuppositions of learning without context or meaning. First, we may note that most language acquisition occurs in interactional situations, even when situated in a classroom. These situations normally have some joint social meaning to their participants (see Artigal (1993) for a detailed discussion). And the activities being carried out in these situations have an internal logic that helps participants to focus their joint attention on specific functional aspects of tasks (Leont'ev 1978; Engeström 1987; Artigal 1993).

Second, since verbal communication is involved, specific human beings are always involved – and there are always specific social relations between those involved. The primary relation for our purpose here will be that of interpersonal identification. Vygotsky's expression 'more capable peers' both hints at, and masks this relation. Simply put, when we interact, not all interlocutors are equal to our role in interaction. It is when we interact with people whom we are attached to or identify with in some sense that we lean towards attuning our behaviour to theirs (Rommetveit 1974). I would claim that this interpersonal relation to significant others is essential for a social approach to learning. Only when the interactional relation is one of identification (partial, for some purpose), we may start imitating. Imitation is thus not, it seems, an entirely general phenomenon in learning, but it still plays a role important enough for one telling fact to occur that was noted in early sociolinguistic research: Children beyond the age of three or four start adopting the language variety of their everyday playmates, even at the expense of that of their parents, whenever there is such a conflict of varieties involved (Labov 1972).

Interactional imitation is not, however, a matter of mechanical copying. As seen within the Bakhtinian framework of Chapter 4, it is a matter of refraction. As seen within a related Vygotskian framework, it is a matter of 'appropriation' (Aljaafreh and Lantolf 1994: 467). This Western term accentuates the active and selective role played by the learner, in which the learner acquires certain aspects of verbal phenomena, and disregards others.² In appropriating relevant 'mediational means' (Wertsch 1991), the learner adapts them to her/ his situation. Appropriation is thus a term that captures the well documented phenomenon of partial learning. Simultaneously, the learner's mental world may start being restructured.

An extract from an ethnographic case study of early writing acquisition (Evensen 1995) may illustrate the complex role of imitation in the zone of proximal development.

In this situation, Daddy has sneaked away briefly to his home office during a holiday to work on some urgent matter. His daughter, 'Siri' (3 years; 4 months) suddenly comes barging in, asking him what he is doing. He is writing, he tells her. She, too, wants to write, she says. Daddy quickly saves his file (!), places Siri on his lap, opens a new file for her and switches on Caps Lock. And Siri writes! She slowly searches the keyboard half-silently for letters that she nominates as she goes along. Daddy eventually starts helping her find the nominated letters that she has difficulty locating. What she writes is:

SIRIMAMAPAPA

Later, during this holiday, Siri starts reappearing frequently in the home office as Daddy on repeated occasions tries to sneak away. She repeats writing the above textual embryo several times, and then starts expanding on it:

SIRIMAMAPAPAGRANMAGRANPA

The general elements of imitation are as clear in this study (doing what she sees her Daddy as doing), as are the elements of identification and meaningfulness to the learner. We can also see how Siri appropriates writing in this context, turning it, as Evensen (1995) argues, into a project of creating a personal identity for herself as a 'big' girl through becoming a writer.

The interpersonal aspect of contextualized imitation implies a challenge for instructors. In order to facilitate this aspect of learning, they need to create a social environment, a classroom culture, where learners may identify with them – not as peers, as many progressive teachers have mistakenly thought – but as what Britton *et al.* (1975) termed 'trusted adults'. The notion of appropriation similarly requires a dialogic approach to classroom procedures of the kind argued for in the previous chapter (see Nystrand 1997). In order to develop a voice through appropriation, the learner needs to be both heard and acknowledged. As Cazden (2008: 209) puts it: '[A]ppropriation can be reciprocal. Parents and teachers can be said to appropriate learners' utterances in order to revoice, or recast, more linguistically mature formulations, which individual learners can then appropriate into their individual cognitive system.'

Spiral learning

An aspect of Vygotsky's approach that has not attracted the attention it deserves in language learning is a corollary to the above emphasis on micro-

social embedding. This emphasis has deep implications for our view of competence. Where a computer metaphor invites a simple, dichotomous view (a learner either *can X* or *cannot X*), or Krashen's overly categorical distinction between 'acquisition' and 'learning' (Gregg 1984; Gass and Selinker 1994: 148f), a social approach invites a complex, but ordinal view (where competence is a gradable phenomenon developing from *less* to *more*, or from *shallow* to *deep*).

In this ordinal view you initially learn certain socioperceptually salient aspects of X in certain contexts. When you come across the same phenomenon in a different context, however, different aspects of X are likely to be made salient, and your learning of X may extend or expand, and may eventually become automatic (see McLaughlin 1987). Speaking of the relationship between meaning and form in clause connectors, Vygotsky (1986: 220) acknowledges Piaget with the insight that 'the child uses subordinate clauses with *because*, *although* etc. long before he grasps the structures of meaning corresponding to these syntactic forms'. In such expanding learning across contexts, contradictions between new experience and previous representation may arise, thus feeding restructuring processes (see Gass and Selinker 1994: 157ff for SLA examples). In certain cases, the whole structure of competence is thus changed as learning proceeds. Vygotsky (1986) offers a range of examples of such restructuring, with analysis of their mediational rationale.

We may note that such a view of learning implies a possibility that certain acquired phenomena will be appropriated in contexts where they are explicitly topicalized through scaffolding. They are thus cases of 'learning', in Krashen's specific sense. As they are expanded across contexts, however, it is natural that certain, recurrent aspects of the phenomena will be automatized. A Vygotskian perspective thus expects a form of interaction between pure acquisition in Krashen's sense and learning. As a result of this, the criticism that McLaughlin (1987) formulated to reject Krashen's acquisition hypothesis will not be entirely valid from a Vygotskian perspective.

This insight into the dynamic aspects of competence is extremely relevant to language learning, because even simple language phenomena are complex in this cross-contextual way. Let us take verb forms as an example: Is it when you fully learnt the distinction between present and preterit (see Schachter 1998: 556)? Is it when you mastered the basic morphology, including strong forms, without any understanding? Is it when you master the verb sequencing involved in reported speech? Is it when you mastered the aspectual and pragmatic distinction between 'Chomsky claims' and 'Chomsky claimed' in academic writing? Is it when you switch correctly between Method section and Discussion section of your research article in

terms of verb form sequence? Is it when you master modal uses of the preterit? Is it when you master all grounding phenomena involving the present and the preterit verb form groups (see Weinrich 1964)? In other words, Vygotsky invites us to view learning as possibly going deeper and deeper as we keep learning the 'same' phenomenon in new contexts. Learning in his basically human approach actually becomes *a way of life* rather than a temporary chore to be completed as quickly and effortlessly as possible. For classroom teaching and therapy, Vygotsky's view of competence invites a spiral approach, where you orchestrate your teaching or therapy in such a way that your pupils or patients may frequently revisit already 'learnt' phenomena in new contexts which will allow their learning to expand, grow deeper and eventually restructure to a higher level.

Vygotsky as a materialist

Schinke-Llano (1993) was, as we saw earlier in this chapter, criticized for assuming commensurability between Vygotsky and Krashen. This criticism was partly correct, but still deserves further comment. The criticism was correct as far as positivism and universalist individualism is concerned. Vygotsky worked within a sociohistorical cognitive framework, where it was the inside of 'the black box' that was his major concern. It is also correct, as Lantolf (2008) points out, that Vygotsky was mainly concerned with learning as a result of explicit teaching where Krashen's concern to a large extent was with informal (partly incidental) acquisition. Still the criticism of Duff and Lantolf (1998) hides important aspects of Vygotsky's philosophical basis.

As a dialectical-materialist Marxist, Vygotsky methodologically worked 'from the social outside and in' more than 'from the cognitive inside and out'. As he claims: 'All the higher functions [of psychological processes] originate in actual relations between human individuals' (1986: 57). He had no problems with notions of biological determination, however (see McCafferty 1994: 422), and he carried out laboratory research as geared to minute measurement as that of any psycholinguist. Furthermore, he was in intimate, albeit critical dialogue with not only Piaget, but also his behaviourist international colleagues of his time. The major differences between him and psycholinguistic cognitivism lie in his intellectually starting in the social rather than in the individual, his concern with specifically human psychological phenomena like signs, and in his microhistorical as well as developmental approach to explanation. He worked through social and microhistorical genesis rather than from a system-internal (computer metaphor) approach related to the Saussurean tradition's preference for synchrony.

One implication of Vygotsky's materialism is that he most certainly acknowledged neurological systems within human psychology. As these subsystems develop, however, they are at times restructured, and sometimes merge into higher-order systems with functions qualitatively different from their coconstituting ones (see his favourite example of water in an ironically dialectical relation to its components of hydrogen and oxygen). A corollary of this approach is that system-internal properties (like language structure) certainly affect prototypical learning sequences. He also emphasized the critical role of language (and other semiotic tools) in bringing mental restructuring about. Thus, we may begin to see that Vygotsky does in fact make it possible to incorporate empirical SLA findings about even assumed 'natural orders' in acquisition into a social approach to learning.

Vygotsky's theory of the sign

Like Bakhtin (see Chapter 4), Vygotsky received his original intellectual training as a philologist, in fact focusing on the reading of literature as artistic appreciation, and like all the members of the Bakhtin Circle, he was preoccupied with semiotics. The 'Eastern' semiotics being developed at that time, however, was radically different from the earlier Saussurean tradition that underlies modern linguistics in the West, and still deserves to be studied. In this Eastern branch of semiotics (see Voloshinov 1973), it was emphasized that signs are partly material (physical), but it in no way follows from their materiality that signs are 'things' in the normal sense. As material phenomena, they are assigned their function as signs by their specific, but recurrent connection with human beings. Actual human beings are thus a constitutive aspect of 'the sign-hood of signs' (Evensen 2001). As mediating entities, signs mediate both interpersonally between actual people and ideationally between people and their surroundings. Thus both meaning and learning spring out of dialogue and belong to dialogue, making dialogue a core aspect of all forms of learning and culture, even though Vygotsky took pains to separate analytically between discourse and learning as intimately intertwined, but qualitatively different phenomena.

As symbolic tools, furthermore, signs both reflect the functional dynamics of the social matrix that created them and deeply affect their creators in return. In addition, they are transcendent in the sense that they always mediate between different social realities (those of their origin, those of their subsequent trajectories in historical-cultural time and space; those of imagined possible or alternative worlds, as well as that of the specific situation currently at hand). Finally and fundamentally, signs mediate between the

meaning organism and its immediate context; they mediate between what is external and what is internal to the meaning-making organism (see Leiman (1999) for discussion).

That people are affected in return by the signs they create, opens a possibility for a more integrated approach to building communicative competence and social/personal identity simultaneously, a connection that is relevant to several disciplines within applied linguistics. But this potential requires a rethinking of the cultural aspects of language lessons. In the Vygotskian view of the sign, culture rests in the discourse itself (see Sherzer 1987), not as some external, institutional topic to be studied separately. This semiotic view of culture (see Geertz 1974) implies close attention to details of ongoing discourse, a tradition that dates back in applied linguistics to the ethnography of communication and interactional sociolinguistics of the 1960s and 1970s (see Schiffrin 1994).

Locus revisited

On the basis of the above exposition, let us return to the issue of *locus*. Because of mediation, learning transcends any individual's central nervous system. It certainly takes place also in that particular locus, but only subsequently, as one aspect of a reciprocal relation with other persons in certain social activities, and their associated artefacts. Many of us have experienced how we may perform better in a second language with certain interlocutors than with others, or how our competencies may depend on certain activities or artefacts (for example the authorial 'thinking with the keyboard' or the artistic 'seeing with your paintbrush'). This experience reflects the fact that at least some forms of competence are socially and materially distributed to the extent that acquired competence cannot be seen as exclusively located in any single central nervous system. This is an insight that has been documented in several studies of complex social performance, like the operating brain surgeon or the operator of a city traffic system (Heath and Luff 2000). None of these highly skilled specialists are able to carry all of their competence home, so to speak, whenever they leave their work. Our firmly internalized single brain-level competence is thus only one part of our potential capacity in a social world.

Can Vygotsky contribute to an integrated approach?

For applied linguistics there seem to be several potentials in adopting a Vygotskian approach to language learning, in the least as a common frame-

work for discussion across different areas of specialism. In outline form, these potentials may be summarized as follows:

- The approach offers an integrated perspective on learning and may be used to account for cultural, situational, cognitive, neurological and discursal/linguistic aspects simultaneously. The opposite does not seem to hold for any of the alternative, more particularistic theories of learning currently available.
- It offers a series of theoretical concepts that in principle, if not yet in practice, make more refined studies possible. Examples of such openings from SLA research are the nature of 'input' (Gass 2002), learner characteristics (Firth and Wagner 1997; Hall 1997), learner strategies (Donato and McCormick 1994), metacognitive self-regulation (McCafferty 1994), the nature of competence (Hall 1997), ESL literacy (Cazden 1994), the contribution of classroom discourse (Hall and Verplaetse 2000), group processes (Nyikos and Hashimoto 1997), classroom culture (Hall 1997), the potential of corrective feedback (see Aljaafreh and Lantolf 1994; Ohta 2000), and even our understanding of language (Firth and Wagner 1997; Hall 1997). In some cases a more comprehensive theoretical model has been called for in order to clarify contradictory results. An example of this is the study of the relationship between different forms of verbal interaction and acquisition (see Mitchell and Myles (1998: 130ff). A Vygotskian perspective offers such a model.
- It invites and supports both qualitative and quantitative methodologies.
- It invites qualitatively more refined research designs, for instance in terms of traditionally abstract participant categories like native versus non-native speakers (Appel and Lantolf 1994; Firth and Wagner 1997; Hall and Verplaetse 2000) or negative feedback (Aljaafreh and Lantolf 1994; Han 2005).

On this basis if we return to the issue underlying all the chapters of this book – that of an alternative, *integrated* framework – there are several links between the dialogical view of discourse presented in the previous chapter and a Vygotskian approach to learning. Vygotsky worked to establish a sociohistorical framework where *genesis* and the potentials and trajectories of genesis were fundamental to his methodological attempts at explaining phenomena of learning. As seen from the perspective of neo-Vygotskian Activity Theory, he might be criticized for paying too much attention to microsocio interaction, and too little to larger societal forces. To those who find the diatope perspective of the previous chapter informative; such a crit-

icism would miss the point, however. The fact is that he held a dialectical view of the relationship between micro- and macrosocial phenomena. In this core respect, his approach closely resembles the approach taken by some of his contemporaries in the Bakhtin Circle.

Vygotsky also had good methodological reasons for not building any theoretical answer into the way he formulated his methodological question. Macrolevel generalizations like Language, Culture, Society, Class or History simply *cannot* be available as such to the small child (or any other learner) who has not yet acquired communicative competence. Similarly, a societal, macrosocial picture cannot be directly available to the child learner, or seen as operating on the learning child through other than specific interactions with specific peers or adults. Thus, large-scale social, historical and cultural phenomena have to be methodologically accessible via interaction in the local sense. To Vygotsky, the symbolic tool of mediation – discourse in particular – plays exactly this crucial role as a link, both *between* people and *within* people. In particular, he valued the role of written language as the secondary level form of mediation with high generalizing and abstracting power. There is thus a second level of close affinity between a dialogist approach to discourse and a Vygotskian approach to learning: The underlying semiotics is closely similar.

There are even close links between Vygotsky's approach to learning and the problem-oriented epistemology advocated in Chapter 1. Vygotsky preferred to work with children and adults who had mental or developmental problems to cope with, and his work was partly geared to improving their lot. He started his career as a psychologist, as a cofounder of the *Institute of Defectology* in Moscow. He referred to the discipline that he sought to establish as *pedology* (a neologism based on 'pedagogy' and 'psychology'). His problem-orientation, working with people who were at the time referred to as 'the retarded' was thus an essential framework for him. Vygotsky was in this sense an applied researcher concerned with developing theory whose precise purpose was to ameliorate (see Davies 1999).

Conclusion

My countering of Ellis' claim against *any* one theory of learning presupposes a strong version of a role for a Vygotskian approach. There are, as we have seen, a series of good reasons for assigning such a paradigmatic role to his framework, but the position I am arguing for in this chapter is still a weaker one. It seems to me that the only available framework for actually discussing learning across disciplines and approaches is a socio-historical approach that acknowledges social cognition as well as material

processes underlying cognition. This aspect of Vygotsky's approach has so far not been recognized in discussions within applied linguistics, even if it is acknowledged within more educational psychology orientations like neo-Vygotskian activity theory (Engeström 1987).

Some readers may have wondered why I have not frequently used the term 'sociocultural' in the above discussions. There are several reasons for that. The first reason has to do with my reading of Vygotsky. As I have tried to show, his methodology was not sociocultural in any strict sense; it was primarily microgenetic. The now dominant term thus implies a risk of over-interpreting Vygotsky on this point. A second reason has to do with the ideological overtones that 'sociocultural' has taken on in current SLA controversy, including a quite hostile rhetoric. Contrary to this rhetoric, I have tried to argue the case for a more considerate 'tertium comparationis' version, and I want to stay out of several aspects of current controversy in order to be able to put forward an intellectual argument. A third reason implies both of the preceding ones. The term 'sociocultural' invites the kind of conflation between micro- and macrosocial aspects that I have taken pains to sort out for verbal communication in Chapter 4. Until similar sorting out has been accomplished for current theory of learning, I opt for a less committal terminology. In Chapter 8, I shall return to this issue.

The existence of several competing theoretical frameworks for understanding learning may in principle be beneficial for development in both dialogical and Vygotskian terms. For such benefits to occur, however, genuine dialogue across positions is needed, and this can only take place if some joint intellectual framework is established. Several researchers who worry about the current proliferation of partial theories in SLA have argued along similar lines (see Lantolf and Ahmed 1989: 94; Larsen-Freeman and Long 1991: 288; Larsen-Freeman 2000). Discussing the possible danger of monolithic approaches, Larsen-Freeman and Long (1991: 290) still refer to 'the unifying (not stultifying) effect which a good theory can have'. In 2000, Larsen-Freeman is more direct on this issue: 'At the risk of overstating the need, I might even say that what is required is a paradigm shift...or at least a shared epistemology' (2000: 173). What I suggest, in other words, is one part of a general, integrated framework that may hopefully be constructive for dialogue, but not for establishing some monolithic intellectual regime. It is thus not the case, as Lantolf (2008) assumes, that I naïvely attempt to reconcile Vygotskian and cognitivist approaches; what is needed is a framework that may be constructive for dialogue – a Vygotskian framework (Evensen 2008).

Notes

1. Cazden (2008: 206) offers an interesting account of her first experience with this approach when she visited Vygotsky's Institute of Defectology in 1978: 'At the institute, [Ann] Brown and I were shown tests whose critical difference from our usual practices is that instead of presenting children with a standardized task and noting whether they succeed or fail, the adult presents the task, offering simplifying aids as needed, and noting the child's ability to complete subsequent puzzles with fewer of the graduated aids'. This meeting informed her work with instruction, she notes, while Brown was inspired to work with dynamic assessment, a topic that will briefly reappear in Chapter 6.
2. It also sometimes happens that a learner uses the appropriated phenomenon in ways that were not there in the input. A writing acquisition study that I shall return to in Chapter 7 has documented both of these aspects of appropriation, as one focal pupil started using discourse-initial definitions in argumentative prose (Evensen 2002).

6 Approaches to research methodology

Introduction: Rethinking methodological requirements

Even when applied linguistics was first established, issues of research methodology were prominent, ranging from issues of contrastive and error analyses to performance analyses, and from issues of effect studies (see Hatch and Farhady 1982) to issues of classroom discourse analysis (Mehan 1979; Cazden 1986, 1988; Chaudron 1988; van Lier 1988, 1997b; Nunan 1989, 1991). Since the 1980s, issues concerning programme evaluation (Beretta and Davies 1985; Beretta 1986a, b; Johnson 1989; Alderson and Beretta 1992; Nunan 1992; Kramsch 1995) and qualitative research (Watson-Gegeo 1988; Hornberger 1994; Davis 1995) have been central.

During the 1990s, however, some of these discussions began to be more paradigmatically oriented. One early example was the 1991 special issue (Vol. 13, No. 2) of *Studies in Second Language Acquisition* on methods of SLA research, where contributors like Grotjahn and Nunan invited qualitative reorientations. Here, Nunan concluded (1991: 266) that 'virtually all of the studies analyzed [in his review article] are narrow in focus and scope'. He made the important point (1991: 262) that 'it may well be that a more basic, philosophical orientation will dictate which questions one considers worth asking in the first place'.

The ensuing discussion about the basic orientation of second language acquisition research (*Applied Linguistics* 1993/4; Lantolf 1996) was a late critique of positivism, and Hall's (1993, 1995) argument for a sociohistorical approach to face-to-face SL interaction as well as Davis' (1995) call for qualitative methodologies had similar overtones. Edge and Richards' (1998) article was a discussion of the epistemological consequences of a paradigmatic alternative to positivist rationalism. Several papers in Kramsch (1995) in a similar vein linked differing views of 'language' in foreign language teaching programmes to issues of methodology. In the new millennium, McNiff's (2002) critical discussion of her own trajectory as an action researcher trained in applied linguistics is a good example of how growing axiological concerns during the 1990s led to some fundamental reconceptualizations of our methodological practices.

A forerunner to the paradigmatic shift was the emergence of a considerable ethnographic tradition in applied linguistics during the 1980s (see Harklau (2005) for an historical and empirical overview), following educational classroom studies of the 1970s – like Mehan's (1979) important I-R-E study of classroom discourse. An early case was Seliger and Long (1983), and a summary of this emergence was Watson-Gegeo (1988), who attempted to sort out the then recent developments and issues in qualitative approaches to SLA, from what she termed rather superficial 'blitzkrieg ethnography' to maturing attempts. In defining ethnography in relation to terms like 'qualitative' and 'naturalistic' (see also Hornberger 1994), Watson-Gegeo emphasized the culture-embedded, everyday and meaningful character of ethnographic data. An ethnographic approach is holistic, and culture and meaning are integrated aspects of the analysis rather than separate, contributing 'factors'. Accordingly, interpretive observation of patterns within naturalistic group interaction is central to the methodology.

Important in Watson-Gegeo's account was her (1988: 578) insistence that ethnography starts with a theoretical framework rather than with the 'blank slate' that has at times been assumed in ethnography outside anthropology. Without such a theoretical basis, researchers will have preconceptions deriving from their implicit ontology. Still, trying to represent meaningful events and patterns *as seen by the participants* is at the heart of ethnographic analysis. This implies a grounded, *emic* approach to analysis that often results in a way of reporting studies not dealt with by Watson-Gegeo, so-called 'thick description' (Geertz 1973). In thick description, the participants' local 'world' is reported in such processual detail that cultural meaning will appear and make the empirical basis for specific analysis transparent to the critical reader.

What she does bring out, however, is that an ethnographic approach has repercussions on theory of language and learning, implying that a discourse-oriented view of language is taken, and that communicative competence is seen as developing in and through social interaction in situationally specific, but culturally salient contexts (see also Allwright 1988). Within such an implied framework, learning is seen more as socialization than as acquisition in any technical sense (see the computer metaphor of the previous chapter). Within a more recent framework, Van Lier (1997) has pointed out that the holism of ethnography implies a more fundamentally ecological way of thinking, with important consequences for how we view context. And an ecological approach is the basic characteristic of all contributions in Kramsch (2002).

In the new millennium, a development forecast by the classroom studies of Mehan and others has contributed to the paradigmatic discussion about

our research tradition – that of conversation analysis. Originating in ethnomethodology and microsociology, we observed in Chapter 2 that conversation analysis (CA) was influential in bringing about an analytic shift in the orientation of many applied linguists from 'language' towards 'discourse', even if this approach was not originally an applied one. It is thus not surprising that CA has now found a place in studies of classroom discourse (see Seedhouse 2004) and is currently growing in importance (see Richards and Seedhouse 2005), but some of its characteristics invite a major reconceptualization also of phenomena such as learning and competence. It is thus a relevant approach for some of the issues discussed in Chapter 5.

Like ethnography, CA takes an *emic* and holistic approach to human interaction, but its basic characteristic in contrast to ethnography is that it systematically starts in verbal interaction and goes on to detail the sequential patterns of that interaction. In applied linguistics this means that such applied versions of CA may shed new light on issues of interaction, acquisition and competence, even in institutional contexts (see Antaki 2011). As an example, Seedhouse (2004: 226ff) offers a systematic overview of how applied CA may lead to qualitative reinterpretation of data from classroom discourse studies, SLA native/non-native interaction as well as speech therapy. He also shows how the approach may lead to a more valid empirical basis for materials development, task design and proficiency assessment. Such a wide-ranging potential has to do with CA's focus on interactional detail as well as its epistemological underpinnings. The focus on interactional detail reveals not only how existing teaching materials may violate interactional norms, but, perhaps more importantly, how learners may achieve joint interactional goals with even very limited verbal resources. In this way CA invites a change in perspective on learners and their competence – away from a traditional inclination toward deficit or failure towards a more positive appreciation of their contextual resources and potential.

In its epistemological underpinnings CA's research interest is 'practical', directed at understanding rather than problem solution (see Chapter 1). Within this practical epistemological framework it achieves its aim through a minutely descriptive, sequentially oriented research strategy. For applied linguistics it thus serves an *enabling* function in that its results may lead to better informed action on the part of practitioners rather than an *enacting* role, with direct intervention by researchers (Richards 2005: 5). Still, Antaki (2011) tries to demonstrate how even an interventionist approach may be supported by applied CA.

As compared with the epistemological discussion in Chapter 1, however, neither ethnography nor CA is characterized by any inherent general orientation towards practical problems and their amelioration or solution.

Having said this, it should be pointed out that there was a critical dimension in the work of several proponents of ethnography of communication throughout most of the twentieth century. As pointed out by Scollon and Scollon (2007), several linguistic anthropologists shared an emancipatory knowledge interest in fighting racism and culturally based marginalization through their research or activism.

Still, the similarity between ethnography and CA calls for methodological reflection and discussion within applied linguistics, in terms of its paradigmatic coherence. Before going more deeply and critically into this core issue, however, a note of caution seems appropriate. There is, or should be, no capitalized research Method or Methodology in intellectual work. In discussing the role of CA in applied linguistics, Seedhouse (2004: 235f) states this point quite strongly: 'AL is inherently multidisciplinary and does not have a single research paradigm to which all AL should conform. From the AL perspective, then, CA is one methodology in its array of methodologies which may be brought to bear on problems or issues relating to naturally occurring language'. The simple reason for such a caution is that a method is always primarily a tool for finding answers to certain questions, and no more than that. This implies that a method is always chosen on the basis of one's general research interests as well as specific research questions. I have tried to bring out several critical issues connected with such interests earlier in this book, but there is still a host of relevant and important questions to be asked in applied linguistics, and unless methodological pluralism and hybridity continue to prevail, our general applied linguistics project is bound to suffer. It is particularly important to make this clear in a chapter where I shall eventually consider different alternative methodological approaches on the basis of their internal consistency with the philosophical, historical and theoretical premises that have been developed this far in previous chapters.

Ethical and political maturation: No virgins around anymore

We have, as documented in Chapter 2, witnessed a new interest in ethical and political aspects of doing research. An outspoken example is Cameron *et al.* (1992), who used the Foucaultian observation that power and knowledge are closely aligned phenomena as a basis for observing that applied research (notably the work of the *Summer Institute of Linguistics*) may frequently serve imperialist power interests (see also Pennycook 1994a, b). On this basis they raised the ethical and methodological issue of whether we are doing research *on* people, research *for* people, research *on and for* people, research *with* people, or research *on, with and for* people (the latter option

is the one that they advocate). Holliday (1994) similarly discussed several moral dilemmas of the foreigner researcher trying to work for improvement in culturally different local educational communities.

These discussions have a counterpart in recent discussion within communication theory. As pointed out in Chapter 4, dialogism has an axiological basis that emphasizes answerability (response-ability), and particularly so in applied research. There is thus a conspicuous resonance between recent theoretical and methodological discussions (Sarangi and Candlin 2004c). Below, I shall use this resonance as a basis for further exploration.

In Chapter 1, I noted that we want our efforts to have practical consequences. We do not, however, want to prescribe, even less to determine practice on behalf of practitioners. This open attitude implies, as Cameron *et al.* (1992) argue, that we have to find ways of doing research *with* and *for* practitioners and other stakeholders, in such a way that they become *subjects in research* rather than *objects of research* (see my similar distinction between seeing learners as *subjects in learning* rather than merely *objects of teaching* in the next chapter).

Contrary to the position of Cameron *et al.*, however, I shall choose to exclude research *on* people from their general recipe of *on, with and for*. They (1992: 14ff) argue convincingly that research *on* people tends to go with a positivist, disengaged researcher position, and that research *on*, with the patronizing addition of *for*, may be equally positivist; but they offer no arguments for including this option in their *on, for and with* recipe. One possible implied argument may be that they recognize a need for the reflexive researcher to keep some critical distance from one's research subjects. We shall see below, however, that such distance will follow from a dialogical understanding, without necessitating research *on* human research objects.

We saw in Chapter 4 that dialogists use the double situatedness of utterances and the mutuality involved in verbal interaction as a basis for developing a whole new philosophy. Cameron *et al.* (1992: 23) might possibly have felt a need for such a philosophy when they stated: 'The question before us is how we can make our research methods more open, interactive and dialogic', having argued (1992: 22) that doing research *with* people implies a need for interaction and dialogue with our research *subjects*. Sarangi (2007) has voiced similar concerns with his calls for 'thick participation' and 'joint problematization'. In Sarangi (2005), he outlines four different paradigms of research as a background to these terms.

A 'pure' paradigm is according to Sarangi characterized by its motivation of enlightenment (see the practical research interest discussed in Chapter 1); whereas an applied paradigm is characterized with reference to Corder (1973) consumer model and 'the clinical mentality'. The two

remaining paradigms are particularly relevant to issues of methodology in that they are marked by researcher-researched relationships more than by their knowledge interests or motivational relevancies. Within these relationships, a 'consultancy' paradigm is the more traditional one. In this paradigm the researcher is characterized as a rather distanced 'expert trouble shooter in a problem-solving ethos' (Sarangi 2005: 373). A 'consultative' paradigm, on the other hand, seeks a collaborative stance where the professional practitioner has vital expertise to offer. As a consequence, a 'consultative research network is premised upon collaborative partnership, mutual respect and trust' (2005: 374). Such a consultative approach will be central to my argument in this chapter.

Research on, for or *with*: Dialogism as synthesis

Possible contributions of dialogism need to be explored critically. What might a dialogical approach to doing research in applied linguistics look like? And to what extent, if any, can dialogism shed new light on methodology and research strategy?

It has long been recognized in applied linguistics that practitioners and other stakeholders have access to insights that are invaluable if the goal is to develop what Cole (1996) terms 'sustainable improvements in the social world'. As insiders, they have what Bakhtin (1990: 12) would call an 'excess of seeing' in relation to the researcher, a resource that is not tapped when practitioners are placed in traditional roles of experimental 'subjects' or respondents. By the same token we may note that researchers will have a similar 'excess of seeing' in relation to practitioners, partly by being outsiders (Bakhtin's *other*) and partly by having a theoretical understanding. Such understanding, I would claim, may be crucial for practical results not to wane under the pressure of everyday compromises.

Dialogism may thus offer an epistemological, non-patronizing reason for doing research *with* people. In this perspective there is a mutual *intellectual* dependence between researcher and practitioner when working to improve (see Sarangi's 'joint problematization'). This interdependence is often underestimated in qualitative research. Here, the role of the researcher frequently tends to be downplayed in the name of non-interference or democracy. Non-interference is a basic principle in ethnography; being a 'participant observer' does not at all imply actively influencing what it is that is being observed. Democracy is similarly a cornerstone in much teacher research. The researcher in this tradition is basically a facilitator at the service of the practitioner (see Nunan 1992; Auerbach 1994). Since relevant facts and relations are often only tacitly available, even for the insider practitioner, we need

a research approach, that may also help bring otherwise hidden elements into the open. Holliday (2004: 277) notes about postpositivist qualitative research that it has a weakness in that it 'does not lend itself to revealing hidden or counter cultures'. A case history may illustrate the importance of such hidden or counter cultures when educational innovation is attempted:

During the middle and late 1980s, a large group of teachers, teacher trainers and researchers in Norway met regularly to discuss ways of improving a process oriented approach to the teaching of writing, which had quite recently been introduced in Norway (Ingram 1985). One of the participant teachers was a newcomer at her secondary school, and hence insecure, so she decided to only informally explore this new approach, without talking too much with her teacher colleagues about it. Her modest attempts turned out to be a huge success with her students, however, and her innovative efforts inadvertently surfaced when students in other teachers' classes (who had heard rumours from their friends) started demanding similar approaches from the teachers of their own classes. The result was quite catastrophic, in the form of a sudden and total ostracism of the newcomer by her colleagues.

As a researcher, I was extremely surprised and confused at the time by this dramatic course of events. I had worked as an EFL teacher at the very same school a few years earlier and worked there with practical innovation, with no similar problems. Before leaving this secondary school to start with my doctoral research, I had even engaged those very same colleagues as advisors when planning my doctoral work on perceived problems in language teaching (the study reported in Chapter 3). These colleagues had gradually come to share their own problems with me relatively openly, as I had shared mine with them, and we had discussed ways of solving them, and jointly explored alternative approaches, and discussed our experiences as we went along.

In retrospect, however, there were several contextual aspects that might explain the difference in reception. Most fundamentally, I believe, there was a tacit cultural dimension of (private) professional freedom versus (collective) professional obligation that was basic at this school, without any of us (she, I, our colleagues) consciously realizing it. My intended innovation had been strictly non-obligational, whereas her totally unintended innovation turned out to be extremely obligational, and our colleagues wanted absolutely none of that. The lack of *pre facto* information and dialogue added to this problem.

My point in sharing this case history is to illustrate that this possibly crucial tacit dimension would not have been brought into the open unless actually

changing the social reality it was embedded in, and thus inadvertently tinkering with it.

Suggested improvements, furthermore, always need to stand the test of specific, institutionalized contexts, with their local cultures (Holliday (1994), activity systems (Engeström 1987) and largely tacit understandings, roles and practices. There is thus an ecology in the practical world (see van Lier 1997; Cicourel 2007) that needs to be recognized in order to avoid what Holliday (1994) metaphorically terms 'tissue rejection', or other kinds of long term failure. Cole (1996) captures this axiological challenge when he raises the issue of the sustainability of research. How can we get at approaches that may stand 'the pudding test' (the proof of the pudding ...), even when the extra resources and attention implied by any research project are eventually withdrawn (see Davies 1999: 22)?

From dialogic interdependence to ecological validity

Since I now talk about an ecology in the social world, I shall start discussing 'the pudding test' as an issue of 'ecological validity' (Cicourel 1996, 2007), rather than using the traditional term 'pragmatic validity' to refer to real world transferability of research findings (see Seedhouse 2004: 256f for discussion). Van Lier (1997) argues for a similar approach when he rejects the notion of pragmatic validity because of its positivist overtones. The term 'pragmatic validity' (see for instance Pedhazur 1982) is normally taken to be an aspect of *external* research validity. As my argument hopefully shows, however, the issue of ecological validity has an equally important aspect of *internal* validity.

Traditionally, we have tried to develop research instruments that 'sample' our research objects proportionally well, as the term 'content validity' reveals. This term, however, normally implies a view where the empirical world is seen as a set of objects with specific properties. This view, I would claim, underestimates the important role of the *relations* between the phenomena under investigation (see Chapters 7 and 8). When human interaction is the issue, some of these phenomena are even relationally coconstituted. Discourse meaning is the prime example of such relational coconstitution (see Chapter 4). Hall (1995: 219) states that 'much of what has been done has led only to the development of typologies of factors ... as yet, there has been little attempt to posit relations among these factors.'

I shall for this reason explore a fundamentally relational approach in the remaining two chapters, but at this point I simply want to claim that phenomena of human discourse and discourse learning cannot be understood well until their interrelations are represented well in our research designs

(see Candlin and Sarangi 2004b). If these interrelations are represented well, for instance in capturing discourse meaning, such internal validity may by the same token have external validity (see Cicourel (1997, 2007) on ecological validity). This will be my major point. To the extent we manage to design for internal validity in this relational sense, we may start talking about ecological validity in a way that can transcend the traditional distinction between internal and external validity. Whenever a research design captures the essential relations involved in the phenomena under study (Crichton 2010), ecological validity will be established. External validity may then follow as a function of internal validity. I hope to illustrate this point in some empirical detail in the next chapter.

Several prerequisites seem to be immediately given by a criterion of boldly facing 'King Reality' in this. One prerequisite is the need to work closely with practitioners and other stakeholders, who have an intimate experience of the particular ecology at hand, and can intuitively adjust an ongoing innovation to fit that ecology better. In other words, a participatory stance should be taken. A second prerequisite is to follow some kind of an interpretive approach. Quantitative studies will certainly continue to keep playing an important role of serving our research, but it is hard to see how we can meet an ecological validity criterion without a substantial element of qualitative, interpretive work.

Most researchers who realize this have, like Davis (1995), argued for ethnographic approaches, but there may be a conflict of knowledge interests here that needs to be discussed more critically before accepting her stimulating argument.

Understanding for improvement: Beyond observation?

Most ethnographic and ethnomethodological approaches were developed in order to *understand* phenomena rather than to *improve* them (see Geertz 1973; Schegloff *et al.* 2002 and the discussion in Chapter 1). In all applied research, understanding must be a prerequisite for trying to improve (see Allwright (1988) on the importance of actual classroom specifics). But granted a primacy of improvement as a knowledge interest for applied linguistics, ethnographic and ethnomethodological approaches have shortcomings and may be subject to criticism. Scollon and Scollon (2007) seemed to have realized this point with their argument for making mediated *action* our primary analytical unit, rather than units taken primarily from language or the culture of bounded social groups (see also Kramsch 2009).

We saw in the previous chapter that Vygotsky advocated a methodological approach that focused on detailing the *genesis* of phenomena under

investigation, at temporal micro or macro levels of development. In SLA, this focus is demonstrated for instance, in the dynamic approach to assessment, where instruction and assessment are seamlessly combined in the zone of proximal development (Lantolf and Poehner 2004). Vygotsky's attitude seems partly resonant with the more historically oriented position taken in Bakhtin's 'Toward a methodology for the human sciences' (1986: 159): 'Each particular phenomenon is submerged in the primordial elements of the *origins of existence*' [emphasis in the original]. With its thick description, current ethnography seems to have a clear potential for revealing temporal development. Even if his methodological notes focus on the 'great time' (versus 'small time') of the genesis of genre in literature, Bakhtin (1993) also focuses on unique aspects of the nature of human reality, as reflected in his term 'the once-occurring event' (1993: 1). It would seem that thick description based on participant observation may in certain cases be a fruitful strategy for capturing the once-occurrence of events, but Bakhtin simultaneously emphasizes the responsibility involved in event participation: There is an 'ought' for any unique person in any unique human situation. This is a call in Bakhtin for not only 'thick description' but similarly one for what Sarangi (2007) terms 'thick participation'.

Vygotsky's argument for a developing a 'pedology' (an educationally sensitive psychology) to stimulate developments for the less fortunate may be seen as one example of this responsibility (see Chapter 5). By just observing, while staying aloof from the 'ought' of the situation, we actually avoid both our social responsibility and accountability (see Widdowson 2005; Sarangi and Candlin 2004). Ethnography in applied research may thus easily fall into a trap related to the one implied by more traditional research methods, namely that of abstracting in a way that distorts critical aspects of 'the once-occurring event' (Bakhtin 1993: 1f). Simply put: if taking part in a problematic situation, we should, in accordance with Bakhtin's 'ought', do something about it. We are thus led to think in a direction where other, less common methodological approaches may in fact have more to offer. I shall return to this important point further below.

The prerequisites of working with practitioners and taking an interpretive approach imply a third prerequisite, namely reflection-oriented dialogue. If practical adjustments to local reality are not discussed critically, the adjustments will gradually bend towards a 'Return to Square One'. There are always so many everyday considerations and stumbling blocks that will make a return to *status quo* the simpler and practically more tenable alternative, in the long run.

Doing research *with* practitioners: Implications of accountability

As noted in Chapter 4, verbal communication builds on difference, and only partly bridges difference. This aspect of discourse is very relevant also for research methodology. When doing research in order to improve, we need to relate to stakeholders whose practical and political agendas will be partly different from our own. Holliday (1994) argues that such necessary differences imply a need for partly hidden agendas on behalf of the researchers. This is an important ethical point deserving close scrutiny in future discussion. I realize that this will to some extent be the case, as when we cannot openly state our hypotheses without unduly inviting specific results, but that is simply a case of one research-ethical principle overriding another. Before we fully accept Holliday's argument, I would like to point out that there may be a potential in the *diatope* of Chapter 4 that may at least alleviate this ethical problem.

Dialogism puts strong emphasis on accountability. This point seems particularly relevant for working to change reality. The easy way out of moral obligation is to stay aloof, for instance, by adopting purely noninterventive methodologies, leaving any aspect of change solely with the practitioner (see Nunan 1992; Auerbach 1994). This is an obvious way to avoid possible criticism, but one that may not be the best way to improve the situation for learners, teachers, medics or other professional practitioners. The reason is simple: trying something new (whatever its contents or direction) will always collide with a number of institutional and practical forces working to reestablish *status quo*; without initial allies and robust strategies, practitioners' efforts are likely to gradually look more like their starting point, except for the added strain of not succeeding.

In this situation, I would advocate a bolder, more accountable approach where we take a participatory stance, dare engage with practitioners, stimulate their efforts as reliable long-term allies (see Scollon and Scollon's (2007) 'joint partnership'; see also Sarangi and Candlin (2011)), and face the consequences honestly whenever we may fail. The bolder alternative will certainly invite criticism (at times most justified), but in my view of applied linguistics this simply goes with the job. Daring to change reality in order to eventually improve it is basically what we, in my view, are being paid for.

I thus arrive at a point of possible paradox, where my line of argument leads toward an approach that has still been relatively marginal in applied linguistics, even if several researchers have practised it in one way or another. Cameron *et al.* (1992: 24) were on to a related argument when they

stated that 'making space for subjects' agendas might mean allowing the researched to select a focus for joint work, or serving as a resource or facilitator for research they undertake themselves. There are obvious similarities here with the tradition of "action research" ... (see also Grabe (2002: 7) and Burns (2005)). The alternative I have in mind is a variant of action research: interpretive, participatory action research.

Characteristics of general action research

Action research has several characteristics that seem to fit the discussions in Chapters 1 and 4, as well as the requirements discussed so far in this chapter. The label 'action research' derives from efforts of taking action in order to change social reality, as the term was first developed by social psychologist Kurt Lewin (1946), in his work on social problems in the post-war United States. His approach was later taken up by social psychologists, sociologists, and educationalists (see Greenwood and Levin (1998) for a general historical overview and Kemmis and McTaggart (1988) for an educationally oriented exposition). The basic term thus reflects an agenda of improvement similar to that of applied linguistics, even if the research field was initially quite different. In the words of Kemmis and McTaggart (1988: 22), 'Action research is an approach to *improving education by changing it and learning from the consequences of changes*'.

The collocation of 'action' and 'research' simultaneously reflects an epistemological orientation, however, that needs to be pointed out (Greenwood and Levin 1998, Chapter 5; Kemmis and McTaggart 1988: 6, 22). We have seen above how 'tinkering with reality' may reveal aspects of reality that might otherwise be hard to get at. This insight has been standard in action research, with its philosophical roots in the American pragmatism of Dewey, James and Peirce. Kurt Lewin is famous not just for his saying that nothing is as practical as a good theory; he also became famous for his claim that the best way to come to understand something is by trying to change it (Greenwood and Levin 1998: 19).

Social phenomenology (as well as some forms of ethnomethodology, see Garfinkel 1967: 35–75) has grasped a similar aspect of this epistemological point with its term 'bracketing': Once you step into some wall (physically or figuratively), your immediate reaction will be to step back. This stepping back will change your position in a way that may invite a slightly different angle to some problematic reality, as well as creating the distance necessary for viewing it more properly. The epistemological gain from working with problem solution is thus double. Tinkering with reality may reveal aspects

that are otherwise hidden, and simultaneously invite a slightly different perspective. Social phenomenologist Thomas Luckmann (1982: 257) states this epistemological insight bluntly: 'If appropriate elements of knowledge cannot be applied without difficulty to cope with the problem at hand, one must begin to think.'

A third aspect of action research is its concern with empowering practitioners (see the argument in Cameron *et al.* 1992). Doing research *with* and *for* practitioners will, by its dialogic nature, increase their insight into their own situation as well as offer first hand experience of how their situation can be changed (see Kemmis and McTaggart 1988: 12, 22; Crookes 1993: 134). As a consequence, a measure of empowering or democracy is built into the nature of the methodology. Action research consequently has a democratizing effect. Dewey saw this link between the characteristic of change and the characteristic of local participation. In his view, an intimate relation between action and thought is a requirement for democracy. Democracy both requires and creates active and reflective participation, and its goal direction is one of continuous improvement. Paolo Freire further developed this link in his well-known educational programme (see Greenwood and Levin 1998: 72ff).

Several aspects of action research are corollaries to the requirements introduced above. It first follows from the social, problematic origins of research issues as well as from the democratizing agenda that it should be conceived as a group phenomenon. Kemmis and McTaggart (1988) repeatedly emphasize that individual action is not a sufficient condition for research to be termed action research (even if Nunan (1992: 18) argues against this claim). The necessary research group may in some instances consist of practitioners alone (for instance, teacher researchers), but more commonly an action research group will be a consortium of researcher(s) and practitioner professionals.

Second, it follows from the criterion of participation that dialogue, critical reflection/ self-reflection and cogenerative learning and planning are integral aspects of action research projects (Crookes 1993: 134f). Since groups are designing and observing changes, they need to discuss and reflect on change in order to improve their social reality, as well as document their observations and progress (Kemmis and McTaggart 1988). Through these dialogical processes they will inadvertently learn and develop as a group.

Third, it follows from the practical, social needs motivating the research, as well as from the emphasis on group dialogue and reflection, that action research will typically transcend traditional distinctions between theory and practice, in a way that is frequently advocated in applied linguistics (see for example Davies 1999). In the words of Kemmis and McTaggart (1988:

6), action research thus 'provides a way of working which links theory and practice into the one whole: ideas-in-action'. To the applied linguist, such emphasis on ideas-in-practice is promising indeed (see Jones and Stubbe 2004; Ferris 2005).

It further follows from the three defining characteristics that action research supplements the view of sustainability presented in Holliday (1994) or Cole (1996). While Cole viewed sustainability as an issue of withstanding time and resources, and Holliday emphasized the problem of 'tissue rejection' in social organizations, action research views sustainability as an issue of even learning capacities, or competence for future development steered by local participants themselves (Kemmis and McTaggart 1988: 5, 12, 23ff; Greenwood and Levin 1998: 18).

Kurt Lewin conceived of doing action research as a cyclical process involving recurring stages in group activities: *planning, acting, observing* and *reflecting* (see Kemmis and McTaggart 1988: 8). Through each such cycle, understanding is deepened and, as a consequence, more accurately relevant plans are developed for improved action that may in turn lead to new reflections, further developed plans, actions and improvements. Action research is thus a continual, expanding process that may be graphically presented as an arrow of cycles digging deeper and deeper into some relevant matter of concern (see the Vygotskian spiral view of learning discussed in Chapter 5).

Action research in applied linguistics: A brief overview

As mentioned above, action research has so far been relatively marginal in applied linguistics. For this reason I shall treat more or less participatory versions of action research under one umbrella. There are several studies and overviews from the last 20 years worth referring to (see Crookes (1993) and Burns (2005) for elaboration).

Barndt (1986) reports several studies where participatory action research was used to further the interests of ESL learners in their workplace and local communities. Nunan (1989) discusses how action research may be used to empower language teachers by assisting them in improving their teaching, and thus their professional standing in terms of curriculum development and more general control over their working situation.

In his book on research methods in language acquisition research, Nunan (1992) includes a chapter on action research, but one which presents a harshly shaven version, where the emphasis is put on teacher research. In his version, the collective nature of action research is toned down, as is the

motivation for change, and the role of the researcher is reduced to that of an assistant for teacher-initiated classroom research (see also Allwright 1992). On the other hand, he suggests teacher replication as a validating option (1992: 20), a point that I shall pick up in the next chapter. In her overview article, Auerman (1994) also places teacher initiation and problem definition as an important part of the empowering motivation. Like Nunan, she emphasizes the ideological aspect of carrying out research in order to serve practitioners, but places more emphasis on the close relation between analysis and social action. In recent work, Allwright has placed more emphasis on involving learners as well as teachers in what is now termed 'exploratory practitioner research', where one aim is to create an inclusive joint environment for exploration in learning (Allwright and Hanks 2008).

Crookes (1993) reviews different forms of action research in a stimulating discussion article and, like Nunan and Auerman, argues for its positive role through its relevance to teaching practice, its support of critical reflection on (largely institutional) everyday constraints, and its potential for recruiting practising teachers to research. Contrary to Nunan, however, he emphasizes the distinction between action research and teacher research. While admitting that it is the 'teacher-research version of action research which has surfaced in the literature of SL research and pedagogy' (1993: 132), Crookes sees a more central role for the researcher (in the close cooperation between practitioner and researcher) than what both Nunan and Auerbach advocate.

One reason for such a bolder stance is Crookes' sardonic claim that one hundred years of educational reform have been successfully resisted, and classrooms and lesson may 'be almost the same as they were many decades ago' (1993: 133). Such system-level self-preservation mechanisms may be better understood from the outside. In particular, some level of critical theory will be needed for teacher efforts to succeed. Even so, as a more recent review article (Burns 2005) indicates, an orientation towards teacher research has maintained its central role in the relatively few action-oriented studies that have been carried out in applied linguistics since the Crookes review appeared more than a decade earlier than Burns' review.

There are still notable exceptions to this tendency. One example is a New Zealand project carried out to improve professional workplace communication reported in Jones and Stubbe (2004). In this longitudinal study, researchers with backgrounds in sociolinguistics and organizational communication collaborated with practitioners in public and private organizations to stimulate 'reflective practice' (Schön 1983). Under an approach that explicitly referenced to the Cameron *et al.* (1992) principle of doing research *with* practitioners, the project researchers collaborated on a par-

ticipatory basis with practitioners in locating, analysing and dealing with relevant problems of workplace communication. In doing so, the researchers came to value the epistemological asset formed through a combination of insiders' detailed but often tacit understanding and their own 'outsider' view as scholars. In this way, the total group was able to develop a joint understanding of professional communication that went beyond positing rules for effective communication or implementing existing audit systems.

From challenges and problems to possible Participatory Action Research improvements

It follows from the set of premises presented in this book that the action research approach that I suggest is a participatory version that may form part of an integrated paradigm for applied linguistics. This follows from the discussion in Chapter 4 of accountability, as well as from the Bakhtinian point about 'excess of seeing' and Cameron *et al.*'s emphasis on doing research *with* practitioners. In the version presented in the next empirical chapter, it will furthermore be evident that Allwright and Hanks' (2008) point about making learners visible participants in an inclusive research environment is taken.

In evaluating participatory action research (PAR) as a possible option for applied linguistics, there are a number of challenges that need to be faced before proceeding to empirical detail. A central one has to do with its alleged naivety. In suggesting an alternative methodology for activity theory, Engeström (1999: 35) talked about action research in general as naïve in its proclaimed idealization of 'spontaneous ideas and efforts coming from practitioners' (see the above criticism of Crookes 1993). It should be clear from my exposition, however, that this is a criticism that will hardly hold for the kind of PAR proposed in this chapter. Still, Engeström points to an antiintellectual tendency in some forms of action research, towards sacrificing mutuality and democratic ideals for a 'hypercorrective' form of asymmetry where the practitioner rules, and the researcher simply wags along as a facilitator for teacher research. His observation thus invites reflection.

The observation also invites reflection on a related point about the micro-social-macrosocial divide discussed in Chapter 4. Is it possible to arrive at a methodological approach within PAR that may simultaneously shed light on microsocial and macrosocial phenomena? Crichton's (2010) attempts to achieve exactly this with his multiperspectived approach, in order that it may become possible, in the words of Cicourel (1981: 56) to 'sustain one level while demonstrating that the other is an integral part'. For such a com-

bination to be possible, it will be necessary to carry out analyses in the diatope of Chapter 4 in such a way that situation-transcending influences (from discourse practices, interests and ideologies) become visible.

Second, there is a tendency in some forms of action research, as in other forms of qualitative research, towards cherishing research without preconceived hypotheses. The basic premise of such a tendency is that it is possible to begin research without preconception. I have suggested earlier in this chapter that this premise is strictly speaking impossible; we need preunderstanding in order to understand anything whatsoever. Without preconception in the form of 'interpretation-in-advance' there simply can be no meaningful perception beyond the biologically determined form that is characteristic of the more primitive animal species. The methodological, ethical and political challenge is thus rather to reflexively acknowledge our preconceptions openly. Also, as Watson-Gegeo (1988) pointed out, research without a clear initial theoretical orientation may invite the influence of hidden researcher stereotypes.

The case made in Chapter 1 is that what typically motivates the applied linguist is some pre-existing communication problem in social reality (or an issue historically derived from such a communication problem). A general preconception that necessarily follows from this situation is one of understanding-in-order-to-change-in-order-to-help-solving. Such a stance should of course in no way preclude intellectual openness; the problem acknowledged may lie in a different area than what was originally thought, and it may have other and more important aspects than the ones that were initially focused on (see the next chapter for examples). The answer to this challenge seems to combine a necessary preorientation with openness and critical, dialogical reflection and reflexivity.

The social embeddedness and interpretive stance of action research are characteristics that both imply what Mehan (1991) terms 'microanalytic myopia' and Engeström (1999: 36) terms 'radical localism'. To applied linguists, this concern is a mixed blessing. On the one hand we want to take holistic approaches, at least to the extent that we want sustainable improvement. On the other hand we traditionally want 'portability' across the uniqueness of locally embedded acts and events in our research material – what Davies (1999: 22) terms 'extendability'. At this point we face one of the major challenges of action research (see Greenwood and Levin (1998) for a detailed discussion): Case studies and ethnographic 'thick descriptions' may flourish without very much coming out of them in terms of generalized insight. Will the same sad fate hit action research in applied linguistics? If so, what are its contributions in terms of ecological validity? Is there any way to handle this paradox?

The answer to this complex challenge does not yet seem satisfactorily clear. Greenwood and Levin (1998: 80ff) suggest a series of validity criteria that only partially yield a satisfactory answer. Like most qualitative researchers, they offer 'credibility' as a criterion, where practitioners may recognize their own everyday world in the empirical world described in the research. Credibility is an issue of proper contextualization as well as an issue of sufficiently contextualized ways of reporting research. Local participation is an important requirement for achieving credibility, as we have seen, and the Bakhtinian (1990) notion of 'excess of seeing' adds to the argument here. No one would disagree with this criterion, but it does not accurately address portability, apart from yielding access to insight for others who may be inclined to test out similar solutions in their own local contexts. Neither does it address the well-known problem of 'Dr Fox', a rhetorically apt, charismatic leader who may attract considerable support in initial phases of work, even without having much of lasting value to offer.

Greenwood and Levin's primary criterion of validity is that of 'workability' (1998: 76, 80f): A proposed solution has validity to the extent that it turns out to actually solve the problem(s) in the actual local context. This is a good example of using 'the pudding test', but granted that so many are actually starving in a situation so ironically full of diverse puddings, I would pose a follow-up question and address it as a very important issue: What is it, specifically, about such valid cases that makes them work? If satisfactory answers to this crucial question could be given, more appetite could possibly be appeased. Portability will certainly require recontextualization, but is there a way of getting at the core insights in workable solutions that may suggest some underlying level of portability?

Again I shall turn to Bakhtin for hints in order to illuminate the issue. In his (1993) discussion of the epistemological clash between the uniqueness of the once-occurring event and the overly abstract approach of most research methods that were available at the time [written in the early 1920s], he points out that there will be aspects or relationships within the uniqueness of the single event that are recurrent, even if their unique meaning there and then will itself never recur.

In his essay towards a moral philosophy of the act (1993: 54), Bakhtin talks about such situation-transcending aspects as 'moments' or 'architectonic points': 'These basic moments are I-for-myself, the other-for-me, and I-for-the-other. All the values of actual life and culture are arranged around the basic architectonic points of the actual world of the performed act or deed: scientific values, aesthetic values, political values (including both social and ethical values), and, finally, religious values' (1993: 54).

His observation suggests that we may possibly look even in methodology for 'moments' or 'architectonic points' that may at some discussable level be generalizable across specific events. Vygotsky (1986) implied such an approach when he consistently argued for looking for qualitative relations more than for attributes of objects. His water example has become famous: How on earth can water – a compound of oxygen and hydrogen – be used to extinguish fire? Oxygen feeds fire, and hydrogen burns! It is only a very specific, qualitative and quantitative relation between the two flammable basic elements that is useful for fire fighters. It is the coconstituted unit of water that is indispensable for extinguishing fire. And this relational unit is portable, it should be noted, across contexts. Water will remain water in your garden hose as well as in Italy's beautiful Lago di Como.

Social science action researchers recognize this strategy as a potential, given their old search for Weberian 'traits' (see examples in Greenwood and Levin (1998: 84ff)). Lewin himself noted the figurative potential in the biological insight that behind quite different *phenotypes* there may still be the same *genotype*. Social phenomenologists have made a similar point in their concern with typification and sedimentation (see Chapters 4 and 5). There is, I think, a fundamentally human additional reason for this possibility, apart from the empirical reasons given from applied linguistics by Larsen-Freeman (2004: 43). Things (tokens) simply *have* to be recognizable for us (as types) to be able to communicate, to learn, to reason or to scrutinize. For them to be recognizable, furthermore, they need to carry something generalizable, or we shall at least be able to read (or misread) something generalizable into them. If not, we would have to continually start from the scratch in performing *anything* at all. Human existence is, in an everyday sense, simply inconceivable without typification and generalization. A world of radical uniqueness is by necessity a world completely without recognizable meaning – a world of chaos, confusion and madness. Every single human thought requires generalization, claims Vygotsky (1986: 217).

Seemingly, then, we might be forced back into the old hat of variables and attributes after all, although perhaps in new fancy dress. The situation may not be quite as bad as that, however. What I want to propose, is an ontological strategy where *relations* are seen as constitutional and hence focal. And this radical proposal is not the same as looking for crucial variables (here: contextual attributes). Please note in this context that Bakhtin's 'moments' or 'points' are all relations, as is Vygotsky's water. A methodological consequence of a relational ontology, it seems, is that we shall need to always specify what we see as the *focal relations* in our empirical results, be they single cases, complex activity systems or large-scale quantitative treatments. This core issue will be addressed and elaborated in the next, empirical chapter.

The distinction between relations and sets of attributes points to a need for relational specification that may lead to a level of generalization that will not be overly abstracted. Only when granted such specification may we start looking for real world 'retesting' of hypotheses developed in single PAR projects. We shall have to look for *relationally* similar PAR projects, much along the lines argued by Cole (1996), who discusses the experimental tradition in psychology critically, but now based on a qualitative way of thinking and doing research.

Towards reconceptualizing participatory action research

The genesis-oriented experimental tradition of Vygotsky (1978, 1981) has a lot to offer to a new methodological approach, because of its being anchored in a relational ontology. Still it also contains at least one major pitfall. In trying to recreate life contexts *in the laboratory*, Vygotsky certainly underestimated both the role and the ecology of specific, immediate contexts. What I would suggest is rather to experiment with exploratory agendas in the real world, and then carry out *post hoc* scrutiny in a different, but *relationally* similar real world, in order to arrive at sustainable results.

Such a strategy differs quite radically from most ethnography and case study methodology, but it will still be basically interpretive. Like ethnography it offers a way of researcher socialization into practice that is 'needed for aligning analysts' "interpretive procedures" with those under study' (Sarangi 2007: 581), but unlike ethnography it implies an actively involved and accountable role for the researcher as a 'thick participant'.

Most experimental research has been hypothetical-deductive in its research logic. As I briefly discussed in Chapter 1, there are reasons to seriously consider an abductive alternative, as Shuy (1987) has suggested. In this alternative, one works inductively at the first stage of research, but uses one's analysis of empirical data to develop 'bold' hypotheses. After having established such bold hypotheses, the abductive researcher at later stages follows deductive principles to test these. Due to its empirical anchoring, abductive research may thus yield grounded theory. The next chapter will illustrate this process with data from educational writing, where highly unusual communicative processes have been analysed to establish a hypothesis about what *relations* there are that may explain the unusual character of the data as well as form the basis for later hypothesis testing in different local contexts where the same relations hold.

If we want applied linguistics to contribute substantially to even theoretical development, this research logic seems particularly fruitful. If we manage to develop bold hypotheses that may explain even counterintuitive

findings and statistical 'outliers', and subject these to relational scrutiny across contexts, such hypotheses are more likely to lead to theoretical innovation than are more traditional research logics. In the previous chapter, I implicitly illustrated how abductive logic was instrumental in a paradigm shift in child language acquisition research. In this case, data that did not fit a developmental stage model was reinterpreted within a Vygotskian perspective where social support is included among the relevant aspects of the learning situation. Similar examples of unreflected abduction have occurred also in SLA research. Gass and Selinker (1994: 171f), for instance, reported a study of /r/ accuracy by Thai learners which gave confusing results when combining levels of formality with a supposedly crucial segment position (initial versus final), until a native language factor was included in the explanatory matrix relatively accidentally, and the data subsequently reanalysed.

Conclusion

So far in my argument, I may have given the impression that there should be *One Received Methodological Approach* in AL. Any such position would be sadly mistaken, however. Any method is good only to the extent that it can give valid and reliable answers to both relevant and specific research questions, and cohere with our theory and earlier empirical work. It is very easy to think of relevant research questions in applied linguistics where participatory action research may not at all be the optimal method.

One type of such questions develops in situations where necessary basic research is still not available, and we have to provide it ourselves (a typical case of the general-applied research dialectic discussed in Chapter 1). In evaluating educational development in writing acquisition, for instance, a basic understanding of preeducational development, as well as longitudinal understanding of acquisition across educational levels, have been missing. It has thus been necessary to study pre-educational material that is only available as a series of single cases (see Farr 1984; Evensen 1995). In such situations, of course, PAR will not be the appropriate option.

A very different illustrative case has to do with stakeholders. In some work driven by an emancipatory knowledge interest (see Chapter 1; Carlson 2004), for instance in critical studies of mass media, political propaganda, sexist discourse or otherwise repressive communicative practices, certain stakeholders may simply be viewed as 'the enemy'. In such cases, it needs to be openly recognized that different ethical concerns may be at odds, and that a stand may need to be taken. This stand may imply that research *with* and *for* is not at all an appropriate option. Quite to the contrary, in such

atypical cases research *on* may be the only ethically accountable approach available. In certain cases, this will be the case even in 'normal' educational work. Several British colleagues have thus attempted to soften the effects of extremist right-wing policies in the wake of Thatcherism.

I thus simply suggest a methodological approach that seems *coherent* with the epistemological basis, theory of communication and theory of learning presented in the earlier chapters of this book. The suggested methodological approach is meant to serve as a point of reference for what I believe to be our most pressing general agenda, namely that of communicability and possible synergy in today's maturing applied linguistics – current research beyond 'linguistics applied'.

7 A methodological illustration

Introduction

In this chapter I illustrate the methodological discussion of the previous chapter. The illustration will be taken from a longitudinal participatory action research (PAR) project that started in 1992, with data collection going on until 1998. The practical-educational background for this project was the Norwegian efforts since the mid-1980s to develop further a process oriented approach to the teaching of writing (POW; see Honig (1986) for a general overview). In particular, several of the actors involved with this form of national classroom development wanted to go beyond what was seen as a rather narrow focus on narrative genres, as POW had developed up to then in the USA.

It has been argued that qualitative research designs like case studies tend to yield results with little generalizing power. The main issue in this chapter will therefore be the question of ontological portability: How can some relationally constituted reality possibly be investigated across locally situated single cases? The data reported will primarily be used as an illustration of this issue. The chapter illustrates how a set of relations may first be identified in specific local situations and then exploited abductively to form hypotheses across similarly designed cases. If similar sets of relations can be identified across situationally different cases, this is an argument for potential generalization across qualitative studies. The chapter also discusses certain limitations of the suggested methodology. One example of such limitations is the influence of differing agendas between practitioners and researchers.

Invisible teenagers?

A group of three lower secondary school teachers and an applied linguist in suburban Trondheim, Norway, decided to concentrate their efforts on argumentative writing, which combines a clear writer voice – something cherished within process-oriented writing (POW) (Moffet 1986) – with norms of factual prose that are both relevant to the teaching of genre and essential to practising democracy in a modern society. Argumentation is also a form

of writing that may correct teacher stereotypes of what goes on inside teenagers' minds. It was known from teaching experience that POW implies a personal relevance that invites more openness and boldness in student writing. Earlier research (see Evensen 1991, 1992) had demonstrated that personal relevance is evident also with argumentative assignments. Relevance to the students is indeed relevant also for their teachers; it is essential to be informed about what our students are genuinely concerned with for those writing teachers who want to work communicatively and offer helpful response.

The aspect of teacher empathy in the jointly planned research eventually gave the project its name – 'Invisible teenagers?'. This name, furthermore, reveals a shared ideological and methodological agenda once thematized by Vygotsky (1983: 149), when commenting on the methods of child psychology up to his time he noted that they had one thing in common: 'negative characterization of the child. All these methods tell us about what the child does not have or what is lacking in the child compared with the adult.'

Through its concern with drafts and group discussions of drafts, POW, on the other hand, had made student writer potential a more clearly visible aspect to many teachers, thus inviting a more positive and empowering view. In this more positive view, childhood and adolescence are respected as such, and not only as a preparation for adult life, and students are seen as human beings who actually have something to offer, and who consequently should be treated as active subjects in learning processes more than as just passive objects of teaching processes (see Cazden 2008). Still, it was realized that this recent view was not shared by many stakeholders in our educational system, and that its practical educational value would not be generally acknowledged. The project name was intended to help thematize this issue.

The project was planned as a series of incrementally constructed stages, where each consecutive stage built the preceding one into it (see Vygotsky 1986). To allow normal school work to go on while the project was in progress, these stages were weeks or months apart in the participant teachers' individual plans for the term. The stages of the 'Invisible teenagers?' project design were the following:

- At stage I, students wrote on the basis of a traditional set of writing assignments, like they do under pre-POW teaching of writing, but instead of writing the assignments in the traditional way, they pre-wrote and wrote drafts that they presented to a peer response group and then revised them. This stage was intended to ensure comparability of data with an assumed minimal platform in POW (see the standard critique of such an approach in Hillocks 1986).

- At stage II, students were invited to write on the basis of an individual topic of their own choosing, a topic that was individually felt to be highly relevant. To invite thematically relevant writing (Luckmann 1982; Smidt 1988), students were given several colloquial prompts to choose from, for example:
 - It really ticks me off when ...
 - One thing I would be willing to fight for is ...
 - And that's final!

This stage was meant to ensure the personal relevance of topic.

- At a more communally oriented stage III, the students wrote for readers in a sister class located in a school in a different part of the region. At this stage, each student got an additional response from either their teacher or the researcher, with a focus on discourse coherence. This stage offered an audience of unknown peers and response was geared to communicating with the unknown, but socioculturally similar readers. It was thus meant to grasp any effects of beginning to establish a more genuinely communicative setting.
- At a follow-up stage IV, the students wrote in reply to an argumentative text of their own choosing from a writer in their sister class. Through this step, a genuinely communicative setting was meant to be established.
- At stage V, a discourse forum was established with the students, where solutions to recurring, but specific discourse problems during continued writing to sister class peers were discussed in the class between response and rewriting. The design of this stage reflected discussions in the PAR group about explicit, formal teaching. The resulting agreement was formulated as a group-internal slogan: 'Grammar upon need; never before need'. Only at this stage were societal norms of argumentative decency and efficiency systematically discussed.

This jointly produced design might give the impression of completely shared agendas. This was only partly the case, however. The research group had both largely overlapping and slightly differing agendas. The teachers involved had once been students at the researcher's intermediate undergraduate course in discourse analysis for response purposes in POW. All project members had later met for an extended period as active participants in a biweekly reflection seminar organized by one of the researcher's colleagues. There was thus a shared interest in discussing response work and other issues of POW critically. Agendas were also similar in the group's

aims to further develop POW in terms of genre, and to make student writer potential more clearly visible while helping to realize it.

Second, several of the communicative principles of POW were shared, like valuing relevance of writer's topic, allotting time for informal prewriting, offering response to early drafts while respecting authorial ownership, ensuring genuinely interested readers, postponing issues of correctness until editing for publishing, and so on. Third, the group shared a concern with the specific issue of where/how to approach explicit teaching of formal, textual and grammatical aspects of language. This issue had been thematized by the debate that was raging over POW, the role of genre and teaching of genre in Australia at the time (see Freedman and Medway 1994). Group members were furthermore jointly concerned with the sustainability (Cole 1996) of POW as a classroom oriented innovation that was still weakly anchored in the Norwegian national educational system, and it was felt that it would need to be kept developing for it to keep alive.

Agendas were still slightly different. The classroom teachers were more exclusively oriented towards tenable classroom methods than the researcher. Similarly, their taking part in a university and national research council-sponsored research project would mean increased status for them among colleagues and in relation to local school authorities, and might open future career opportunities. This interest was not shared by the researcher to the same extent, being an established university professor.

The researcher, on the other hand, had a particular interest in issues of theory of grounding. Earlier Nordic research on EFL (*NORDWRITE Reports I, III*) had suggested that effective backgrounding in writing was a prime developmental dimension, at least at intermediate and advanced levels of acquisition. This finding was indirectly supported by American research in EL1 and ESL writing (Cohen and Riel 1989), where communication with peers across cultural and geographical distance seemed to invite more elaboration and hence more backgrounding in students' written discourse. Genuine written communication, it thus seemed, might stimulate writers' development with respect to grounding.

The jointly shared agenda was also gradually influenced by more mundane requirements and problems. One of the teachers involved had developed prolonged health problems and was struggling with carrying out the postpilot part of the project while trying to keep up with everyday chores. There were also a number of severe social problems in her class that demanded a lot of extra attention. She thus had to leave the project after its initial pilot year. Among the remaining two teachers, one was working intensively with computers, and the joint project was gradually adjusted to make it fit this interest more closely. The second teacher was oriented towards artwork. After the initial pilot year, she became involved

in an international artwork project. The group decided to turn that project into a resource for our PAR project and included an international student publication with elaborate illustrations in our third project year. During the fourth year, all of this went into electronic publication of a student-run class paper that was technically produced in a semiprofessional way (using *QuarkXpress*). For this particular subproject, one of our advanced Multimedia Lab students, who worked regularly for the local university student union's biweekly newspaper, was hired as the project students' technical assistant. Thus, the project gradually found its final shape in the local ecology that it was operating within.

Theoretical orientation: Grounding and interaction

The project researcher had an interest in issues of grounding as a developmentally sensitive aspect of learning to write. It is time to look more closely at this aspect, and I shall start with theory, thus incidentally elaborating on the general theoretical platform presented in Chapter 4. Theory of grounding extends the notion of meaning in the diatope in order to capture meaning phenomena like *focus* and a much more slippery one, *perspective*.

As seen within a dialogical framework, a focus is established in discourse through foregrounding certain communicative acts (Linell 1998). An established focus can only be a focus, however, as foregrounded in relation to something that is backgrounded (Nystrand 1986), an interpretational status which is partly signalled in the verbal discourse (the diatope model's interaction dimension) and partly culturally given as tacit understanding (the model's construction dimension). Perspective emerges in this relation as the relation between foregrounded and backgrounded acts, as this relation unfolds during the emerging topography of discourse.¹ Bearing the discussion of dialogism in Chapters 4 and 6 in mind, I would like to point out that the relation between foreground and background in creating discourse is a co-constitutive one.

One of the fascinating things about the grounding relation is that it seems to be operative at so many levels of language and discourse description, from the guiding metaphor of hypertext down to detailed aspects of meaning within the syntactic phrase or even within the semantics of single verbs. The relation is even independent of the mode of mediation (Halliday 1978; Kress 1997), since it also appears in visual communication, in art and in architecture. This all-pervasiveness is a symptom of the importance of grounding, and hence an argument for paying closer attention to it in meaning-oriented research.

Grounding relations in written interaction are often signalled in fairly stable, conventional ways, some of which are strictly grammatical (see Hopper 1979, 1982; Weber 1983; Reinhart 1984; Chvany 1985; Fleischman 1985; Bäcklund 1988):

- main and matrix clauses are conventional signals of foregrounding, whereas subordinate clauses are conventional signals of backgrounding
- indeterminate articles are signals of foregrounding, prototypically to introduce new discourse referents, whereas determinate articles are signals of backgrounding
- at the syntactic phrase level, modifiers are signals of foregrounding, whereas kernels are signals of backgrounding
- action verbs are signals of foregrounding, as the prototypical action sequence in narrative exemplifies, whereas stative verbs are signals of backgrounding (in for instance setting sections in narrative). This particular grounding relation, however, depends on genre. In factual prose, for instance, the relation is reversed (see the backgrounded methods sections in research articles)
- marked modality is a conventional signal of narrative backgrounding, communicating speaker values and attitudes whereas unmarked modality signals narrative foreground
- at the level of paralinguistics, increased voice volume, marked voice quality, emphatic stress and accented segment pronunciation are signals of foregrounding, whereas increased pace marks backgrounding
- at the parallel level of typography, larger font size and markings like bold, italic and underlining are normally signals of foregrounding, whereas smaller font size, indented sections, footnotes/endnotes and tables/figures are signals of backgrounding
- at the interface between syntax and discourse dynamism, given information is backgrounded, whereas new information is foregrounded
- at the level of discourse organization, an argument is usually foregrounded, whereas its justification, elaboration or backing is backgrounded
- in narratives, the narrated action sequence is normally foregrounded, whereas description sections, dialogue sequences, and so on, are backgrounded. In factual prose, this relation is reversed
- in scientific articles, action sequences (that is methods sections) are background to an argumentative foreground, and the shift from the one to the other is signalled by a shift in verb sequence, and so on.

Not all essential aspects of grounding are captured by such conventions, however. Any utterance is foregrounded also in relation to what is not actually uttered, but still meant. What this implies, is that discourse-relevant phenomena like inferencing are an important element of discourse background, sometimes adding essential meaning to what is actually uttered foreground. Similarly, those aspects of shared encyclopaedic and cultural knowledge that are made relevant during communication form an important part of the backgrounding process in discourse. Adopting the theory of grounding is thus one way of analytically getting at cultural elements that are activated in and through communication.

The above emphasis on convention may seem to imply a stance to language and discourse phenomena different from the one argued for in Chapter 4. As argued in Evensen (2001, 2002), however, I see the emergence of grounding phenomena in student writing as exemplifying the need for a *diatope* in our model of communication. I shall briefly review my case for such a stance.

In one of the classes involved in the PAR project, during stage II, the teenage girl 'Kari' had written an argumentative first draft advocating the playing of the folk music-oriented two-row accordion (see below). In accordance with the POW approach of her teacher, she had brought her draft to her peer response group. After the group session, she started rewriting, simply copying from her first draft, but then changed her mind. She first wrote (1) [my translation, including my rendering of misspellings in the original, LSE. See this chapter's Appendix for coding conventions and original transcripts of all data in this chapter]:

THE TWO-ROW ACCORDION

I love playing the two-row accordion because
it exciting, innteresting and <it is deleted> not to forget innspiring.

She then blotted out this embryonic paragraph with a huge X, wrote DRAFT in capital letters and started with a new paragraph:

DRAFT

THE TWO-ROW ACCORDEON

A 'torader' is a kind of accordion,
just a bit smaller an it has just two
rows you can play on.

I love to that innstrument because
it is exciting, innteresting and not least
innspirin.

...

In this writing process, Kari was negotiating meaning through discourse with her peers in a response group (Nystrand 1986), also possibly with her teacher as a 'significant other' (Mead 1934). In this negotiation, Kari needed to make what had so far been unilaterally known, *mutually* known. Her way of elaborating the unilaterally known was through sequentially foregrounding a *definition*, which is conventionally a backgrounding act. We can see that her foregrounding act came as a result of communicative pressure from her peers. Her peers were developing a hip hop culture at the time of this writing event, and they had queried about the meaning of her term 'torader'. We may note that she placed her definition discourse-initially, where it would be needed in this immediate communication context with peers who, she realized, perhaps did not even know what she was talking about. The definition hence occurs in a discourse position which is highly unlikely within the conventional genre, argumentative prose. Thus, her immediate interactional context is arguably prominent in relation to the conventional genre as well as its patterns of grounding.

Granted the teaching traditions of Norwegian primary schools, it is not likely that Kari had ever come across definitions as subject matter to be learnt, and she certainly had not come across it that far in her lower secondary programme. Still, her foregrounding act did not appear out of the blue. Growing up in a literate Western culture, she was bound to have come across discourse-functional definitions, even if she had not formally learnt them in school. She accordingly negotiated meaning with her peers with a relevant aspect of literate culture somehow ringing at the back of her mind (see Bakhtin 1986) as an underdetermined, vaguely defined possibility that she opted for, based on her own immediate communicative needs. In other words, she was not in any simple way using a pre-established discourse pattern. In her specific formulation of it, it partly developed there and then. The 2001 article that I take this example from, offers similar examples, as well as several examples of how previously unknown language forms may develop, upon need, in the *diatope*.

How can material from such a case study illustrate the specific case made for action research in the previous chapter? Two case histories from the data speak similarly to the issues of grounding and portability. On this slightly broadened empirical basis I hope to also illustrate how hypotheses can develop abductively.

Portability across case histories

In discussing the issue of portability in the previous chapter, I briefly linked the focus on possibly portable relations to the case for abductive thinking. Since abductive thinking may start with seemingly odd observations, here

I draw upon two case histories that had such oddness in common. Do they still illuminate the research question of grounding? Do they still have substantial relations in common? If so, are these relations portable in the sense that they can be scrutinized *post hoc* in other, similarly local contexts?

The case of O. K.

During the second stage of our pilot year, the students were to write a text on the basis of prompts intended to maximize topical relevance. A medium-skilled tenth grade student, whom I shall refer to as 'O. K.', wrote an extremely critical and provocative piece arguing against teachers who had recently been on strike. I later learned that his father was out of work at the time; his mother was a health professional, and the teachers' strike had been discussed several times in their home over meals. An excerpt will render a flavour of his second stage composition:

Through attitudes created by the teachers' organizations I get an impression that teachers take everything negatively. Say no to everything. Scared of new things and changes. This I think is horrible with respect to [the fact] that it is to a large extent they who have power over the future and [over] me.

Teachers' working hours in relation to their wages have now been referred to a lot. It is quite arrogant to claim that one has a harder workload than other professional groups. (The wearer of the shoe knows where it hurts.) As an example the teachers almost always compare themselves to groups who earn more than them, and who according to them have less workload. I have never heard teachers compare themselves to groups who earn less, like for instance health care personnel ...

The teachers must be spoilt. They grouch over most things. I have a disgusting example: A short while ago teachers were on strike, at the same time as many per cent of Norway's population were out of work. Does that seem smart? No, it makes no sense. Firstly, they should keep quiet in such a situation, secondly they had no reason for going on strike. It is on the whole idiotic to go on strike. Teachers see no other solution than playing truant from work.

Childish. Think about all who would have taken their jobs without almost any pay.

Since the issue of offering a genuine audience was important in our action research project, O. K.'s teacher chose to move immediately on to a local alternative to our planned stage three in this particular case, without my knowing until later, and brought the text to a local representative of the teachers' national union, who wrote the following in reply to O. K.:

Rather than entering an argument to your specific points, I choose rather to offer a general comment.

1. A text is not argumentative by characterizing others' arguments and using derogatory words about them. This is a trap which is easy to fall into when one takes a position on an issue one does not know anything about ...

5. [Your] Last paragraph starts with 'what should be done?'. Here there is no single constructive proposal. Instead <here something is missing from copying> your branding of others' positions.

6. On the basis of this I do not wish to argue against your different claims as there first needs to be created a basis for such an argumentation.

This rejecting reply spurred O. K. on to writing a comment back, at the teacher representative this time:

To [teacher's first name]

Your reaction to my essay shows that its content was better than I thought in advance.

In this letter I want to comment briefly on the content of your opinion about my essay.

Pt. 1: It may be the case that I have fallen into a trap, but then you have fallen into a bigger trap with your reply.

Pt. 2: I sat watching the programme from the teaching association's meeting in Trondheim. There it was said that teachers had to have such long a vacation to recover after a school year (the cause must then be that they claimed to have a harder work than others with a three week holiday).

Pt. 3: To orient oneself in the topic one only needs to keep a little informed by newspapers and TV. The teachers are often in the papers complaining and grouching. Therefore I have oriented myself sufficiently in this case.

What you refer to when you say that I have no knowledge of 'the most elementary rules in working life in general', I would have found interesting to hear.

Pt. 4: I the situations [where] I have used the phrases idiotic, helpless and keep quiet, I mean it. This has nothing to do with branding the opinions of others.

Pt. 5: If you read the text, my proposal is clearly and evidently written. Otherwise I hope you take the time to read my composition until you have understood its content. I want you to read the last sentence of my first paragraph particularly well. It was in good faith that I wrote this text.

Regards

«O.K.»

Copy : Rector and [homeroom teacher's initials]

At this point O. K.'s teacher can no longer refrain from taking part himself. He writes a quasi-formal letter to his student at midnight, including a diary specifying what he has done thus far during this particular day up to the point of writing. He concludes with an appeal: 'Well, O. K. Do you see the point? I take a full holiday during X-mas and other "holidays" with a clear conscience! This was enough about teachers' holidays.'

At the next point in the educational process, the written discussion takes a dramatic turn. O. K.'s teacher receives a letter from O. K.'s father, who cannot refrain from taking part either:

I refer to a composition about [name of teacher organization], comment from 'N.N.' and reply to 'N.' from 'O.'.

The only firm [ground] I have in this case are the above-mentioned texts. The rest is built on scattered impressions. If my impressions are correct, though, I have as a father to address you as homeroom teacher.

'O. K.' has been given the task of writing argumentative compositions. When he chooses a topic which concerns the teachers, however, he gets unappreciative reactions. One may then of course be tempted to think that the composition must have been good. From what I have understood, 'O.' thinks so. However, we can nevertheless not allow ourselves to ignore what may develop

in a pupil (child) - teacher relationship as a consequence of attitudes forthcoming in the letter from 'N.' I expect other [kinds of] reaction from one positioned to be the teacher of my son, and am confident that this will be discussed with him by the rector of the school.

In this situation, O. K.'s teacher decides to write a joint letter to his class co-coordinator, to the rector, to the local representative N.N. and to O. K.'s father, giving a thorough account of what has taken place and what the educational aims behind the process have thus far been. Following this, a very difficult and prolonged process of clearing up matters takes place, with N. N. writing an extended joint letter to O. K. and his father; the father writing a joint letter in reply to all teachers at his son's school, and so on.

I shall return to issues of analysing grounding in the next section, but let me first present a different set of equally challenging data.

The case of Arnie and the timid Vietnamese girl

The O. K. event occurred during pilot testing of the research plan, but group members were soon to learn that this was no one-of-its-kind type of phenomenon. The group had only just started their third stage three weeks later when O. K.'s new classmate, 'Arnie' (a timid boy who had been mobbed in a previous class and hence been transferred to this class, but had watched the success of O. K. with close attention), produced an extremely disturbing text. A translated excerpt will suggest the flavour of his initial (digitally produced) composition:

The immigrants are a problem

The immigrants are a problem to us, they come here and receive a house, a car and a log cabin. Our jobs they receive as well. Some of them may have a hard time, but they come to sponge us.

What happens with a refugee is that he is placed in a refugee center and stays there until he gets a residence permit. I know somebody who worked as a cook at <...> refugee center. The refugees were not satisfied with Norwegian meat cakes and potatoes, neither would they have soup or bread with cheese. They demanded ox meat and rice cakes. The manager once could not eat his homemade lunch basket with liver paté, they held that they could be punished by Allah. This goes too far. Even I would not have given a nigger even the LEFTOVERS after me.

This ideologically very loaded text provoked his project teacher to openly confront Arnie, by bringing a newspaper article about Neo-nazis into class for discussion, specifically referring to Arnie's composition. This class session, however, provoked Arnie into writing a formal letter to his teacher:

Concerning your statements on November 25, 1992

After you showed us this excerpt from <...> [a Norwegian tabloid newspaper] about neonazism I was angry by your characterizing me as a neonazi and that I hate the Jews. True enough I am a racist, and I evidently do not like the immigrants. But I do not hate the Jews for this reason and I am in no way planning to kill one somebody.

His teacher wrote a formal letter in reply (same date):

I did not characterise you as a neo-nazi, but I said that the copy from <newspaper> from Saturday 21.11.92 was dedicated to you because I get the impression that you hold opinions that are close to what a nazi would mean and regrettably means today.

...

All texts in the project were at this stage brought to a sister class, where the students chose which text(s) they wanted to reply to. The sister class teacher chose to read the texts aloud in her class, to exemplify what students in the sister class had on their minds. She invited her students to discuss what a good response to a text might look like. She then let them write responses to a text of their own choosing.

Arnie's text created general fury in this class, and was discussed vehemently, and most students wrote in response to him. Thi, a very shy, quiet and culturally 'invisible' Vietnamese girl, wrote the following response, encouraged by her fellow students:

TO YOU WHO WRITE ABOUT "RACISM"

I think <inserted: that> you have written a good text, but let me tell you one thing, that I am myself a foreigner. Your text hurt me a lot, even if you only have written about Negroes. Let me tell you <inserted:that> all the names that you think are strange, are as strange as your own name.

I and my family do not come here to take anything from you. We were chased out of our country, and it was that Norwegian boat who was willing to receive us (and we are grateful).

I have lived in Norway all my life, and <...deleted> like it very much here. I have now been <...deleted> to primary school for 8 ½, and am glad that nobody in my class is like you. We are in fact two in my class.

Most of the other responses from Thi's class, however, were so violently hostile to Arnie that Thi's teacher decided to suppress these. She also initiated an ensuing class project on racism. During the next stage in the project programme, Thi wrote her composition on the basis of Arnie's earlier text:

Me and my family had to flee our home country, because my father <something deleted> had helped the American soldiers. Iff we had not <deletion> fled, <deletion> then the communists would have locked <deletion> him up for lifetime.

<Deletion> My parents do <deletion> not want me and my brother to experience this. They just hope that we shall have a <deletion> bright future, when we arrive in a different country. But what help is in that? Even if we lead a happy life now, this will not mean that things will work out for the rest of our lives.

...

My teacher of Norwegian has <changed from had> read a racist text for the whole class once, and none of us <deleted> liked what this person wrote about. <here several words are deleted>

<new page>

I can admit that I think it is a very good <several words are deleted> text. But deep inside I hate him so intensely that nobody can express themselves about it. <themselves added later> He surely thinks it is fun to bother people. <deleted>

Me and my family do not come here to take anything from you (the Norwegians). The only thing we are seeking is peace. I only want to say that those who are racist will never be satisfied with what we foreigners do.

You (the racists) think that we only stay at home to be idle, while you have to work, and when we eventually work, you say <deleted> that we take your jobs away. <A part is deleted.> What is it <it is inserted later> really that you are <are is inserted later> afraid of? We are not dangerous.

...

At the ensuing stage, Arnie wrote a more moderate, semiracist text, parodying the Norwegian King's speech on TV and radio on New Year's Eve, with an ironic twist to the King's conventional term of address: 'Dear fellow countrymen'.

Towards the end of the year, however, one week before the class split forever, Arnie addressed his class and declared himself to be a homosexual. This, it now turned out, might have been his hidden agenda (perhaps even to himself). Could he stand up to openly defend an unpopular position? The O. K. process might have given him hope that this was in fact possible, and he might have wanted to give it a try.

When the researcher later interviewed him, at the end of the pilot project process, Arnie had turned into a fairly good writer; he was no longer a timid creature, but a confident, yet soft-spoken young man who for the first time looked straight into the researcher's eyes.

Analysis of grounding

In all of these case histories, the texts students had written during stage I had little elaboration. The disturbing processes reported above (see Evensen (2000) for a discussion of ethical issues), however, instigated a development where backgrounding developed rapidly. All of the students involved defended very controversial positions which needed explicit underpinning and elaboration, and, like Kari, they started carrying out backgrounding discourse acts that had never been taught in class.

When O. K. claims that teachers are negative, he both expands on this claim and makes his evaluative premise of teachers' power explicit. When discussing teachers' working hours, he uses a polarization technique of contrasting their argument with the working situation of other groups who may work more and still earn less. The whole argument is gradually framed within his emerging attempt to establish an (however defiant) interpersonal framework for the discussion. He is also able to draw on a case he knows about through his own mother's work setting and family discussions he has taken part in.

Arnie's shocking claim about immigrants is also substantiated by a specific story illustrating immigrants' alleged lack of gratitude. He also contextualizes the issue by offering background information about normal procedures when immigrants are received in Norway. Like O. K., he is able to draw on his personal knowledge and his social network as a future cook (see below). Thi illustrates her argument by sketching her family's history and motives for coming to Norway as refugees. Like O. K., she justifies her strong emotional reaction by contrasting Arnie's attitudes with attitudes she

has observed elsewhere in her experience with Norwegian teenagers. Like Arnie and O. K., she is able to draw on personal experience in making her case in her writing.

Ontological relations spelt out

In the previous chapter it was suggested that the relational ontology of dialogism may offer a possible way of generalizing action research via spelling out relations that are assumed to be central to the specific results obtained in specific local contexts. If we, for the sake of the argument, assume that the above case histories exemplify successful acquisition in terms of grounding, are there any such relations in common across these cases?

Let me start by offering a few general observations. The data first demonstrates that genuine communication *can* in fact occur in an educational context, contrary to claims of some who hold that the 'schoolish' nature of schools can never be transcended (Ongstad 1997). Second, we may note that when genuine communication does occur, an educational 'revolution' may take place (Evensen 2000). Things may simply get out of hand for the teacher, and the discourse processes start following their own internal logic, even to a point of transgressing their institutional framework. This, however, only seems to happen when two conditions are met simultaneously – that discursive power is granted and that power is taken by those who are not used to having much of it. During the six year period of data collection, these conditions were met simultaneously on a limited number of occasions. What normally happened was that power was not taken even when granted. As Ellis (2001: 26) has laconically noted: 'Classroom learners may or may not respond in the way intended'.

When power was taken, furthermore, it was taken because the topics, for very different reasons, were highly relevant to the students involved (see Smidt 1988). Thus, for most of the students involved, stage two in the PAR programme turned out to be more important in terms of general writer progress than any of the others, contrary to the researcher's initial assumptions favouring the later 'communicative' steps in the design.

Third, it seems that there was a long-term, positive effect on both the personalities and the competencies of every single student involved in dramatic processes like the ones reported above. Prior to his clash with teachers, O. K. had been a relatively average student, contrary to the impression that the excerpts may have given. His initial, provoking text was what his teacher characterized as 'his second breakthrough as a writer'. But this breakthrough brought him up to a level that he was able to keep up afterwards, all through the school year. In retrospect, years later, he wrote to

his teacher that the heated educational processes he had taken part in were extremely fruitful for his intellectual and personal development. He took his further education in the armed forces, and today holds a director position in his own company.

Also for Arnie and Thi, the personal effects were considerable. After an extremely turbulent ensuing teenager life as a locally 'public' homosexual and an interim, troublesome career as a cook, Arnie today is a tour director for an international travel agency; he works in an international, multiracial environment which he thoroughly enjoys, holding no racist views whatsoever (personal communication). Thi, the timid Vietnamese girl, had found herself in the midst of outraged class members, who all rallied around her and stood up for her. Through this process she rapidly developed her competencies. She was no longer the invisible Asian girl she used to be, but an articulate and visibly resourceful person. To her teacher, she years later confided that she had never thought that *she*, the shyest among the shy, would turn into the semi-public adviser for other immigrant teenagers that she had then become. Today, Thi has a good tertiary education and holds a high position within a knowledge-based industry.

Which relations are those that may be extracted from these PAR case histories? The first relation that I want to point out is the one between the writer and the writer's topic. In the above cases, there are two specific aspects of relation holding between the writer and his/her topic. In all of the reported cases the writer had first chosen a topic that had considerable personal relevance, just like the project design had both assumed and encouraged. In the above cases this specific aspect implied also a second one. The student writers all chose relevant topics that they had personal, local knowledge about (see Polanyi 1966). This second aspect seems obvious in retrospect; it is difficult to imagine elaborate backgrounding without adequate knowledge.

A second general relation is the one between the writer and the teacher. In all the reported cases, the student writers had chosen to place their bet on their confidence in the teacher as an empathic, interpersonally reliable reader. This is also an aspect that is integral to POW practices. When planning the project, it had been tacitly assumed that such confidence (see Britton *et al.*'s (1975) teacher in the role of 'trusted adult', discussed in Chapter 5) would simply follow from the POW context and be the case for all writers. This rather naïve assumption turned out to not hold for perhaps most of our student writers. Quite to the contrary, many of them wrote trite commonsensical school essays arguing commonsense positions about trivial issues, with very little grounding offered (or indeed needed). And fellow students often wholeheartedly agreed with them in their response essays, again with little grounding offered (or needed). In other words, they were

mainly doing what they were told to in a context that, to them, was still schoolish, without investing more energy in the process than was institutionally needed (see Ongstad's (1997) argument).

The second relation also has an aspect of power. Within a student writer – 'trusted adult' communicative contract, discursive power is granted and may be taken. In all cases (even the ethically controversial ones like Arnie's) power was granted in the project, but it was still quite frequently not taken. Some of the students, like the first one I referred to, Kari, approached the project with considerable reservation, and decided to refrain from risking much until perhaps further on in the process. Some of the students never seemed to dare to have confidence in a genuine interpersonal contract, but the student writers discussed above all did.

A third relation is the one between student writer and (child or adult) reader. In both the above cases, the process started with a student arguing for a claim that was genuinely controversial in the local context that it was read within. The heat, however, did not really turn on until a reader response was offered that both emphasized the controversy and contributed to it. The case histories thus illustrate the dialogical point that communication is fed by difference and tension. But neither this point nor several of the above ones had been consciously acknowledged during project planning.

This analysis leaves us with a set of specified relations of different kinds (writer – topic, student – teacher and student writer – student reader, see Dysthe (2000)). In sum, they form a set that may, in itself, be viewed as an explanatory hypothesis that may be tested out by participatory action research in different local contexts.

Discussion: Relations and abduction

My next aim is to discuss the potential role of abduction in relation to theorizing from PAR research. An abductive approach often leads one to start with observations that are somehow hard to place within one's existing framework, and then go on from there to conceive of an alternative framework that would make even these observations seem like expected ones. The alternative framework will then have to be tested *post hoc* in different, equally specific local contexts.

We may note that the case histories have things in common apart from their perhaps frightening idiosyncrasies of teachers losing control over the educational situation (Evensen 2000). It is ethically and politically hard to think about loss of teacher control as an essential prerequisite for emerging backgrounding in student writing. It is therefore tempting to look for commonal-

ity elsewhere. I would expand the set of relations presented in the previous section and suggest that a core relation is that of argumentative heat between discourse participants. The case histories were all characterized by genuine, extremely heated argumentation. All aspects of the relations described above seem to potentially follow from this genuine argumentative heat:

- personal relevance is a prerequisite for genuine involvement;
- knowledge of topic follows from genuine involvement;
- confidence in the educational system (discursive power both granted and taken) is a prerequisite for putting forward controversial claims in class;
- a controversial claim is a prerequisite for heated response;
- a controversy is only established by heated response;
- being involved in such controversy leads to acquisition of grounding.

This metarelation of heated genuine argumentation is a hypothesis of its own (a higher level unit of analysis, see Vygotsky (1986)). It essentially states that a context of (expected or actual) controversy stimulates developing grounding in student writing. The case histories are thus not just special cases of a genuinely communicative approach to language teaching, but also ones that add to our understanding of what communication in the classroom may mean. Many applied linguists have historically treated 'communication' as a quite idyllic concept, initially one to be practised, for instance, by information gap exercises or the like. The data reported in this chapter suggests radically upping the ante for what the concept of communication in the classroom may imply. It may imply involving pupils or students in communicative activities that are genuinely relevant to their lives as human beings, in and outside of school. It also means taking students (as well as their communicative potential) extremely seriously (see Allwright and Hanks 2008). It furthermore implies a recognition of genuine communication in the classroom as a, quite literally speaking, high risk activity. The PAR classrooms were at times out of control in ways that created ethical conflicts for those involved (Evensen 2000). The case for communication in the data is thus a strong one in more than one sense.

If the above metahypothesis about heated argumentation holds, it simultaneously means that our PAR classrooms created local contexts that were similar to the ones where backgrounding developed historically in argumentative prose. They may thus have an even wider, theoretical significance than their significance for communicative writing classrooms seems to reveal. Latour and Wolgar (1979) and Bazerman (1988) both demonstrate

in their studies of laboratory life (Latour and Wolgar) and the history of the experimental research article (Bazerman) how it is only when scientific controversy begins to rage, that conventions of argumentative backgrounding (definitions, methods sections, references, graphical models or tables, and so on) begin to develop. The PAR case histories are still a special case of a genuinely communicative approach to language teaching, but can furthermore be analysed also in relation to historical developments in society. In addition, they add to the theory of grounding by showing its educational potential and genre sensitivity.

The above examples also illustrate how a PAR approach may respond to the challenge of combining micro- and macro-social understandings. The data reported in this chapter demonstrates that not only microsocial interaction is essential to the ongoing processes of teaching and learning, but also individual histories (the Thi case), intertextuality (the Arnie case), different motivational relevancies (see Sarangi and Candlin 2001), critiques of established teaching practices (the O. K. case), experiential knowledge across social groups like teachers and social workers (O. K.) or immigrants and ethnic Norwegians (Arnie and Thi) and teacher ideologies (O. K.). Contrasting such data with relationally similar data from different local contexts may add to the richness of this emerging contextual picture.

Discourse theory of grounding has so far taken its main inspiration from Gestalt psychology of perception. This source of inspiration easily leads to an exclusive focus on semantic relations of grounding. A case in point is when the storyline of narrative has typically been seen in the literature (Reinhart 1984) as foreground against a background of description and dialogue. The social interactional relations, however – like what the narrative shows – have not been equally emphasized (Weber 1983). The above case histories demonstrate, if my extracted hypothesis of the metarelation holds, that grounding is (even) a central tool for handling interpersonal tension and controversy. Grounding is thus also (perhaps even mainly) a pragmatic relation, like Weber (1983) suggests. Within this general pragmatic relation, different contexts of interaction lead to different genres with different specific mechanisms of grounding, or different workings of similar mechanisms. It is thus premature to generalize from grounding relations in argumentative prose to grounding relations in other genres. Narrative has been much studied in the theoretical literature on grounding; argumentation much less so. The study thus invites more genre sensitive analyses of grounding. Within such studies, the pragmatics of grounding, as I have outlined it above, becomes one more reason for taking a dialogical approach to communication.

Conclusion

The last two chapters have attempted to develop a methodological approach in applied linguistics that may cohere with the set of premises developed in earlier chapters. This methodological approach, broadly called participative action research (PAR), combines working-to-improve with close cooperation with practitioners. As this chapter has demonstrated, however, a PAR approach may run into problems, one of which is generalizing across qualitative cases. It still seems possible to combine an abductive logic with a relational ontology, in order to abstract assumedly core relations that may potentially hold across specific local situations. The chapter is thus an attempt to illustrate such a design with data taken from a set of case studies within a longitudinal PAR project. It is also an illustration of a topic that was discussed in Chapter 1, namely how applied research may yield theoretical outcomes for general research.

The issue of ontological portability in applied research hinges on our understanding of relations. This is an underlying challenge that has kept surfacing throughout this book. I therefore choose to end my monographical inquiry with a theoretical and quite philosophical chapter on relations, as discussed from an ontological point of view.

Note

1. The rendition of data in this chapter is made according to the following conventions: The texts were originally transcribed in Times New Roman, 12 points, line spacing 1.3. For the sake of clarity, however, all data excerpts are in this book rendered in Courier New. In the transcripts, all corrections or remaining errors are reproduced as in the original. Page breaks are marked by the transcriber in <...> comments, set off to the right. Textual deletions, and additions are similarly marked by <...> transcriber comments, as are multimodal aspects.

Excluded parts of the data, for the purposes of this chapter, are marked by <...> by the researcher. Explanatory researcher comments are marked by [...].

Anonymity is preserved throughout by an N. N. or a pseudonym marked by '...', both categories added by the researcher.

Appendix

Transcripts (in Norwegian)

Excerpt from "Kari"'s first draft, stage 2:

TORADEREN.

Jeg elsker å spille torader fordi det spennende, innteressant og <det er er strøket> ikke minst inspirerende. ~~<the first paragraph is blotted out>~~

KLADD

TORADEREN.

En Torader er et slags trekspill, bare litt mindre å det er bare to rader du kan spille på. Jeg elsker å det instrumentet fordi fordi det er spennende, innteressant, og ikke minst <det er er overstrøket> inspirerende.

...

Excerpt from O. K.'s second draft, stage 3:

Gjennom holdninger skapt av lærernes organisasjoner får jeg inntrykk av at lærerne tar alt negativt. Sier nei til alt. Redd

for nye ting og endringer. Dette mener jeg er horribelt med

tanke på at det er stort sett de som har makt over fremtiden og

meg. Jeg skriver dette med håp om at lærerne vil tenke over konsekvensen av å bli offer for disse holdningene.

Lærernes arbeidsdag i forhold til deres lønn er nå mye omtalt. Det er ganske arrogant å hevde at en selv har hardere arbeidspress

enn andre arbeidsgrupper. (Den vet best hvor skoen trykker,

som har den på). Som eksempel sammenligner lærerne seg nesten

alltid med yrkesgrupper som tjener bedre enn dem, og som etter

deres mening har et mindre arbeidspress. Jeg har aldri hørt at

lærerne har sammenlignet seg med grupper som tjener dårligere, som for eksempel helsepersonell

...

Lærerne må være bortskjemte. De syter over det meste. Jeg har

et frastøtende eksempel: For kort tid tilbake var lærere i

streik, samtidig som mange prosent av Norges befolkning gikk

arbeidsledige. Virker det lurt? Nei, det er helt uforståelig. For

det første burde de holde munn i en slik situasjon, for det andre

hadde de ingen grunn til å streike. Det er i det hele tatt idiotisk

å streike. Lærere ser ingen annen løsning enn å skulke jobben.

Barnslig. Tenk på alle som ville tatt deres jobber nesten foruten

lønn.

...

Excerpt from the local teacher union representative's "general comment":

I stede for å gå inn på en argumentering til de enkelte punktene, velger jeg heller å gi en generell kommentar.

1. En tekst er ikke argumenterende ved at andres argumenter blir stemplet og brukt skjellsord om. Dette er en felle som er lett å gå når en tar stilling til en sak som en ikke vet noe om.

...

5. Siste avsnitt starter med «hva bør gjøres?». Her er ikke et eneste konstruktivt forslag. I stedet <Her er noe kommet bort i kopieringen> <...> stempelingen av andres meninger.

6. Ut fra dette ønsker jeg ikke å argumentere mot de ulike påstander da det først må skapes et grunnlag for en slik argumentasjon.

...

O. K.'s comment back at the local representative:

Din reaksjon på min stil viser at innholdet var bedre enn jeg på forhånd trodde.

Jeg vil i dette brevet kort kommentere innholdet i din mening om min stil.

Pkt. 1: Det kan hende jeg har gått i en felle, men da har du gått i en større felle med ditt svar.

pkt. 2: Jeg satt og så på programmet fra Norsk undervisningsforbund sitt møte i Trondheim. Der ble det sagt at lærerne måtte ha så lang ferie for å komme seg etter et skoleår(årsaken måtte da være at de mente å ha hardere arbeid enn andre med tre ukers ferie.

pkt. 3: For å sette seg inn i temaet i min stil trenger man bare å følge litt med i aviser og TV. Lærerne er ofte ute i aviser og klager og syter. Derfor har jeg satt meg nok inn i denne saken. Hva du sikter til når du sier at jeg ikke har kjennskap til «de mest elementære regler i arbeidslivet generelt», skulle det ha vært interessant å høre.

Pkt. 4: I de situasjonene jeg har brukt uttrykket idiotisk, hjelpeløst og holde munn, mener jeg det. Det har ingen ting med å stemple andres meninger. <Ny side>

Pkt 5: Hvis du leser teksten, står forslaget klart og tydelig skrevet. Ellers håper jeg du tar deg tid til å lese stilen til du har forstått innholdet. Jeg vil at du skal lese siste setning i første avsnitt ekstra godt. Det var med god mening jeg skrev denne teksten.

Hilsen

«O. K.»

Kopi: Rektor og [teacher's initials]

The excerpt from his teacher's comment (dated November 30, 1992):

Vel, «O.». Do you see the point? Jeg avspasserer med god samvittighet i jula og i andre "ferier!" Det var nok om lærerferier.

Excerpt from the letter from O. K.'s father:

Jeg viser til en stil om ... kommentar fra «N. N.» og svar til «N» fra «O».

Det eneste faste jeg har i denne saken er ovennevnte skriv. Resten bygges på

spredte inntrykk. Dersom mine inntrykk er riktige, må jeg imidlertid som far

henvende meg til deg som klasseforstander.

«O. K.» har fått som oppgave å skrive argumenterende stiler. Når han velger et tema

som berører lærerne, får han imidlertid helt uforstående reaksjoner. En kan da

selvfølgelig fristes til å mene at stilen må ha blitt god. Ut i fra hva jeg har

forstått, mener «O.» det. Vi kan likevel ikke tillate oss å se bort fra hva som kan

oppstå i et elev (barn) - lærerforhold som følge av holdninger som fremkommer i

brevet fra «N» [the local representative's first name]. Jeg forventer andre reaksjoner av en som er satt til lærer for min sønn, og har tillit til at dette taes opp med han av

skolens rektor.

...

Excerpt from Arnie's first essay:

Innvandrerne er et problem

Innvandrerne er et problem for oss, de kommer og får hus, bil og hytte. Jobben våre får de også. Noen av dem har det kanskje vanskelig, men de kommer for å snylte oss.

Det som skjer med en asylsøker er at han blir plassert på et asylmottak og der er han helt til han for tillatelse til å oppholde seg i landet. Jeg kjenner en som jobbet som kokk på ... asylmottak. Asylsøkerne var ikke fornøyd med norske kjøttkaker og poteter, de ville heller ikke ha suppe eller brød med ost. De forlangte oksekjøtt og rislapper. Bestyreren kunne en gang ikke spise nista si med leverpostei, de mente at de kunne bli straffet av allah. Dette går for langt. Selv jeg ville ikke gitt en svarting RESTENE etter meg en gang.

...

His follow up comment to his teacher (dated November 26, 1992):

Anngående dine uttalelser 25. November 1992

Etter at du viste dette utdraget fra <newspaper> om nynazisme ble jeg forbannet over at du stempler meg som nynazist og at jeg hater jødene. Riktignok er jeg rasist, og åpenbart liker jeg ikke innvandrere. Men jeg hater ikke jødene av den grunn og jeg har på ingen måte tenkt å drepe en noen.

...

His teacher's reply [dated the same day]:

Jeg har ikke stemplet deg som nynazist, men jeg sa at kopien fra

<newspaper> lørdag 21.11.92 var tilegnet deg fordi jeg oppfatter det slik

at du har meninger som ligger nært opp til hva en nazist hadde og dessverre har i dag.

...

Thi's first response to Arnie (undated):

TIL DEG SOM SKRIVER OM "RASISME"

Jeg synes <innføydt: at> du har skrevet en bra tekst, men jeg skal fortelle deg en ting, at jeg er selv utlending. Teksten din såret meg veldig mye, selv om du har bare skrevet om negre. Jeg skal si deg <innføydt: at> alle de navnene som du synes er rare, er like rare som ditt eget navn.

Jeg og familien min kommer ikke hit for å ta fra dere noen ting. Vi ble jagd ut av landet vårt, og det var det Norske båten som <...> var villig til å ta imot oss (og det er vi takknemlig for).

Jeg har bodd her i Norge i hele mitt liv, og <...strøket> trives veldig godt her. Jeg har nå gått <...> 8 ½ på grunnskole, og er glad for at ingen i klassen min er som deg. Det er faktisk to av oss i klassen min.

Excerpt from Thi's ensuing essay:

...

Jeg og familien min måtte flykte fra hjemlandet vårt, fordi at min far <noe er strøket> hadde hjulpet de Amerikanske soldatene. Vis vi hadde ikke <overstrykning> rømt, <overstrykning> da ville kommunistene sperret <overstrykning> ham inne for livstid. <Overstrykning> Foreldrene mine vil ikke <overstrykninger> at jeg og broren min skal få oppleve dette. De håper bare at vi skal få en <overstrykninger> lys fremtid, når vi <overstrykninger> ankommer til et annet land. Men hva hjelper det? Selv om vi lever et lykkelig

liv nå, så vil ikke det bety at vi kommer til å få det godt
resten av livet vårt.

...

Norsklæreren min har <forandret fra hadde> lest en rasist
tekst for hele klassen en gang, og ingen av oss <strøket>
likte det som den personen skrev om. <her er flere ord strøket>

<ny side>

Jeg kan innrømme at jeg synes det er kjempebra <flere ord er
strøket>

tekst. Men innerst inni så hater jeg ham så inderlig at ingen kan
uttrykke seg for det. <seg for er satt inn senere> Han synes sikkert
at det er artig å plage folk. <strøket>

Jeg og familien kommer ikke hit for å ta fra dere (nordmennene)
noen ting. Det eneste vi er ute etter er fred. Jeg vil bare si at
de som er rasist blir aldri fornøyd med det som vi utlendinger gjør.

Dere (rasistene) mener at vi er bare hjemme å late oss, mens dere må
jobbe, og når vi først er på jobb, så sier <strøket> dere at vi tar
ifra dere jobbene. <En del er strøket.> Hva er det <det er satt
inn senere>

egentlig dere er <er er satt inn senere> redde for? vi er ikke
farlige.

...

Part III

Introduction

Having explored issues of communication theory, theory of learning and approaches to methodology in Part II – all with respect to potential integration of applied linguistics – we eventually arrive at a final point where there is a need to pull our chestnuts out of the fire. At this point it is time to address our future and ask how we might think.

In 1945 the outstanding US engineer Vannevar Bush published a paradigm-breaking essay on technological possibilities that would eventually lead to hypermedia and Google – with his notion of ‘links’. He chose to call his radical essay ‘How we may think’. This title, however, was an intertextual reference to Dewey’s (1910) book *How We Think*. The difference as well as relation between these titles are both relevant to the last part of this book.

The preceding chapters have presented a way of conceptualizing applied linguistics that provides an epistemological and historical understanding which can be intimately linked to a theory of communication and a theory of learning as well as to a methodological approach. I think all these links cohere with the underlying conceptualization, and, in sum, visualize a coherent alternative to current compartmentalization. Still, at different points in discussing different aspects of this conceptualization it has become clear that they share an ontological characteristic – that of being fundamentally relational in nature. Thus, it seems, there is a need to consider what a relational ontology might imply for applied linguistics. Such an inquiry is the topic of the next, last section.

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In this last part of the book an attempt is made to explore further into the nature of my proposed links between an epistemological and historical understanding, on the one hand, and theory of communication and learning as well as methodology on the other hand. In this last chapter, I argue that all the proposed approaches to metatheory, theory and methodology have a relational perspective in common. In the words of Candlin and Sarangi (2004: 225): 'The theme of "doing applied linguistics" is ... best understood in terms of what might be called "interrelationality", i.e. the interweaving of relational trajectories, as both topic and resource.' In a similar vein, Kramsch (2002b: 20) has observed that 'meaning lies in relationships between artifacts, persons, and events, not in the objects themselves'. Such observations lead us from epistemology to ontology, our conceptions of reality. If it is indeed tenable that our basic phenomena of discourse and learning are of a relational nature, how should this relational nature be understood? A definitive answer to this question points beyond the horizon of this book, but it is still important to begin querying into possible answers.

8 A relational way ahead?

Introduction

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In doing so, I first present several alternative ontological approaches to relationism. I then critically discuss some of the approaches that have proved relevant to applied linguistics. This discussion points weakly in the direction of a dialogic approach, but it still leaves a number of slippery issues unanswered. I therefore end the chapter with a quest for continued discussion of this issue, a form of exploration into different kinds of relationisms. Ironically, the book thus ends, it might seem, in basic rather than applied research. But all the questions I address here arise from conducting applied research as the previous chapters attest.

Two initial questions have kept haunting me: How many dimensions of reality do we assume when we practise applied linguistics, and how are these dimensions related? In the Western world we have been brought up to think in Aristotelian terms of triads – like 'objects with their attributes' (height, width and depth) in the natural sciences, the distinction between first person, second person and third person (I-you-it) in tradi-

tional grammar, and the semiotic triangle of form, meaning and function. At the same time, we may note, both the history of applied linguistics and the recent history of general linguistics are full of binary distinctions, like NP and VP, process and product, input and output, teacher and learner, and language and communication. Somehow, the present book argues at the borders of such traditions, and it may accordingly be time to question our own fundamental assumptions about reality – what philosophers term ‘ontology’.

As we saw in Chapter 4, Einstein began to question a three-dimensional worldview in the natural sciences. A three-dimensional world is in one sense true, but it presupposes a static, frozen universe. As Einstein saw it, a fourth dimension of time (see terms like process, development or learning) is a necessary assumption to grasp the nature of reality. His claim seems to be obviously true, even to outsiders to his field of theoretical physics. Similarly, a recent discourse theoretician like Linell (2009) has begun to question even semiotic triads, arguing for at least a four-dimensional view even in this field. In this final chapter I shall not pursue the issue of number of dimensions, however; what I want to do is rather direct our attention to the ontological underpinnings of our joint project, applied linguistics.

As has been apparent throughout this book, my argument has typically (and implicitly) been built around a series of fundamental *binary* relationships – or dichotomies (Markova 2003). Some of these are antinomies that continue causing concerns in applied linguistics. These are relationships between general and applied research, between theory and practice, between researchers and practitioners affected by our research, between interlocutors in communication, between language and social situation, between situational and cultural contexts, between discourse and learning and between teachers and students. The discussions, it turns out, have by some inner logic led to an emerging general perspective on the different issues involved. It has become gradually evident that an understanding of many of the terms involved in these relationships has required a wider ontological, relational thinking for their clarification and understanding. Examples are between-utterance discourse meaning, the relationship between discourse acts and activities and discourse adjustments between native and nonnative speakers. Old categories like speaker-hearer or writer-reader may also serve as examples of this paradox, granted the perspective presented in Chapter 4. I find this observation stimulating in that it may point ahead towards future reconceptualization. It is also intriguing, since there are so many different ways of approaching relations and relationships.

A traditional approach to understanding complexity in language-related sciences is the set-member systemic relationship (including formal relationships of coordination or subordination and functional ones used in

characterizing discourse acts or textual connection). A historically relevant methodological option in applied linguistics is the causal relationship, which in a weak, statistical version carried a lot of weight in the 1960s and 1970s era of methods-with-effects studies of language teaching. The assumedly causal relationship has also demonstrated its historically robust relevance in more recent second language acquisition studies.

A different, critical way of approaching relations is the Marxist view of (frequently antagonistic) forces – theses and their antitheses – striving dialectically towards synthesis at some higher level. This view may be found implicit in some forms of applied sociolinguistics, in Activity Theory and in some studies within critical discourse analysis or critical applied linguistics. But there are even further, less easily visible aspects of relationships. There is a relational perspective shared by such different approaches (see Kramsch (2002a) for further examples). And this commonality is the one that I suggest we explore. Much current research in applied linguistics is somehow qualitatively different from the structuralist, positivist paradigm that seemed so firmly established at the beginning of the 1960s. In that paradigm, the relationship between theory and practice was seen to be unidirectional – from theoretical speculation to practical implementation. Language was viewed through the lens of set-member (cybernetic) systems theory. Learning and development were both viewed within a framework of cause and effect, as was illustrated with the computer metaphor presented in Chapter 5, and our research subjects or respondents were seen as bundles of variables (objects with attributes) which we did research *on*.

Even if this tradition still continues, and is particularly strong in some forms of SLA research, we have seen that it is no longer unchallenged. We have seen that the challenges are paradigmatic in nature and consist of competing views ranging from theory of science through theory of language, communication and learning to research methodology. Which, if any, are viable alternative ways of viewing relations? Is there some general approach that may offer internal coherence across fields and issues?

I thus choose to end this book close to where it started, in the theory of science. The end-point-from-where-I-now-view is still qualitatively different from my starting point. The discussions in the book have gradually turned our attention to issues of ontology, in addition to previous issues of epistemology: It turns out that many of the issues discussed reflect some deep differences in our ways of viewing one part of reality – the focal phenomena of our empirical research. These differences need to be explored, and I want to explore one ontological distinction that seems to hold particular promise. Let me gradually introduce this important distinction through another one, the Bakhtinian distinction between dialogism and monologism (Holquist 1990a; Linell 1998, 2009).

Dialogism versus monologism

Following this distinction, the first established tradition in applied linguistics was one of 'monologism'. Monologism represents an ontological view of communication as the encoding, expression, transfer and ensuing interpretation of one single intention, one single voice. This single voice is normally that of the speaker, but it may also be the masked voice of some institution speaking through a human representative (as a dummy or 'talking head'). This intention or voice exists prior to the discourse at hand and is not challengeable by the unfolding discourse. A monologist view of communication normally goes together with a view of language as reflected in the core term of 'code', that is a system of fixed entities with fixed meanings (due to their stable position within a systems cybernetics of meaning).

A further characteristic of monologism is a set of basic (partly Cartesian) dichotomies: Covert competence is seen within this tradition as qualitatively different from overt performance. Expression and content are interfaced, but otherwise only accidentally (conventionally) related; language is seen as basically (in the sense of being genetically given) different from communication, and in communication interlocutors are seen as autonomous, strictly rational agents (see discussion in Greenall 2001). Communication is basically about information transfer; interpersonal relations, affect and values are marginalized; and discourse and learning are regarded as qualitatively different phenomena. I shall not present a set of arguments *pro aut contra* such a position here (see Linell (1998: 4ff; 17ff, 33, 39; 2004) for an historical overview and discussion), but simply observe that dialogism implies a different stance on all the above points. Where monologism views communication as encoding (and decoding), dialogism views it as a relational interaction process, where meaning emerges as a result of negotiation. As a result, the single voice of monologism is replaced by multiple voices in dialogism. Where monologism views language as a fully specified code, dialogism sees it as an undetermined meaning potential, requiring context for specific meaning to emerge. In monologism, the focus is on information transfer, whereas in dialogism the focus is on interpersonal relations and the interests and values involved in such relations. Where monologism represents discourse participants as strictly rational agents, dialogism thus also acknowledges different values, attitudes and interests. The above differences all lie in dialogism's underlying ontological relationism, it may seem. This is a point that I now want to explore.

Dialogism as ontological relationism

A relational approach to ontology has epistemological implications that will have methodological consequences. If we take the discourse function of a single utterance (or some other discourse act) as our case, it is now commonplace to note that such units may (and frequently will) be multifunctional. A single discourse unit should consequently not be the basic unit of our analysis; it will only be a unit in a *post facto* manner. In order to determine the interactional function(s) of a discourse unit like the single utterance, we need access not only to social context, but also to at least a preceding utterance. On the basis of a specific relationship to a preceding unit we may form a working hypothesis about its discourse function. However, this hypothesis can in its turn only be substantiated or falsified on the basis of some following unit(s). In this way we see that (at least) three units are needed to confirm any specific analysis about the discourse function of any single unit. Only a three-member sequence may hence form a minimal basic unit for discourse analysis (Linell 1988: 7; see Scollon and Scollon 2004). We should also note that the relevant utterances forming such a basic unit are not necessarily adjacent.

If we generalize from such a conceptualisation, we may begin to see that what defines a unit is actually a nesting relationship, where units both receive their characteristics by being embedded in larger units and simultaneously contribute to shaping those higher-order units (see Kramsch 2002b; Larsen-Freeman 2002; Linell 2009). For linguistically and discursively trained readers, such claims of course have a familiar ring to them. It may even seem that what I am claiming here is once more pretty much old hat. It has been recognized since Saussure (1916) that the value of a single entity within 'la langue' can only be established on the basis of its position within the relevant parameters of the system. Halliday (1973, 1978) has made similar claims in his notion of 'meaning' as any specifically occurring selection (and hence positioning) from within the meaning potential of an entire (sub-)system. Accordingly, it may be countered, I am only presenting commonplace wisdom in new parlance, as new insights. This is not the case, however.

The plurality of relationisms: A critical discussion

As indicated in the introduction to this chapter, there are several competing kinds of relationism (see Markova 2003), and the systemic one is only one kind: functional relations like mechanic causality and Marxist dialectics are alternative relationisms. All the three kinds of relationism are different from

each other to the extent that they may hardly be held as simultaneous positions within one approach. The situation becomes even more complex when we note that the current debate in applied linguistics has suggested even more alternative relationisms. Van Lier (1997b, 2002) has suggested an ecological linguistics based on social semiotics; Larsen-Freeman (2002) has suggested complexity theory as a way of understanding language learning and socialisation, and De Bot, Verspoor and Lowie (2005) have suggested a Dynamic Systems Theory.

Relationism as ecology

Kramsch (2002b) seems content noticing that ecological approaches are now being played at Center Court. I am not equally content, I am afraid. I do of course note with profound interest that such statements imply that we are once more at a paradigmatic turning point – one that I think has been slowly underway since the spread of the paradigm-challenging concept of ‘communicative competence’ in the early 1970s. I also note important common ground between different relationisms that are currently competing for attention. The essential example of common ground is that relationisms accentuate the way that relationships deeply influence whatever is related. All relationisms thus imply some form of holism. They also accentuate the dynamic, emergent nature of relationships. Furthermore, they demonstrate how discourse and context are quite seamlessly bridged through the workings of signs. Such common ground testifies to recent achievements and is an important platform for future progress.

Still, I suspect that not all ‘ecological’ alternatives may be equal. There are certain tensions between them that also need to be frankly addressed. One case in point is the distinction between a natural science understanding and a human science understanding. As noted in Chapter 1, in natural science, causal epistemology leaves no principled room for human understanding (and intention) intervening between cause and effect, whereas the humanities build on exactly such intervention as its basic epistemological principle, and current social science acknowledges its fundamental relevance. Natural science approaches like ecology, connectionism and complexity theory are all being developed in order to understand very complex phenomena, but their ontological basis on this crucial point is still very different from relational theory within the humanities or social sciences. De Bot *et al.* admit this problem frankly (2005: 117) when they state that ‘Even though a DST [Dynamic systems theory] approach sounds like (and basically is) *an ultimately mechanistic metaphor* [emphasis added] for language and language use, it is able to make clear the link between the social and the

psychological aspects of the individual and language through the interconnectedness of systems’.

A second case in point is the different forms of social semiotics involved. The relationship between ‘Western’ social semiotics and ‘Eastern’ dialogism is one example. In his case for ecolinguistics, Van Lier (2002) argues for a Peircean *triadic* understanding of signs (with referential, personal and functional aspects), as does genre researcher Ongstad (2004). In a triadic approach, ideational reality is given equal attention to interpersonal and textual realities. Reference is of course not a controversial phenomenon in itself, but its ontological status in social semiotic theory in fact is. In dialogical theory, the outside world is only understandable for us through human interaction (interpersonal mediation), and is, phenomenologically speaking, a derived and thus secondary phenomenon (Markova 2003). By the same token, interpersonal reality is primary, even when referring to some phenomenon in the outside world.

This primacy has consequences for our understanding of signs. Bakhtin noted repeatedly that any sign is a populated phenomenon, carrying other voices before we infuse them with our own perceptions and voices. Elsewhere (Evensen 2001) I similarly argue that actual people are constitutive of the very sign-hood of signs.

The starting point for much recent social semiotics is different. It starts in exploring the multiple functionality of single signs and the sign systems they form. In this functionality, the pointing function is seen as a basic one, as Van Lier observes. There is no disagreement here. The controversy is an ontological one hidden behind all of this. Simply put, dialogism starts with *people* where most social semiotics starts with *system* (see Evensen 2001; Markova 2003). This ontological difference has potentially important axiological consequences in applied research, for instance in the subject or object role assigned to learners. Starting from actual people yields a subject role more easily accessible than starting from a pre-defined system. An object role, on the other hand, is theoretically compatible with any system-oriented theory, but not equally so with a people-oriented theory. A similar argument may be considered when evaluating the contribution of chaos or complexity theory, another system-oriented approach.

Closely related to this point is the assumption that systemic relations are stable and predictable. Semiosis is hence, as Halliday points out, choices made from the multitude of options within a ready-made system. It is not difficult to agree with this aspect of sign systems. We very frequently communicate in this simple way, for example in small talk or when writing shopping lists. Still, a systemic approach can only with some difficulty capture the creativity frequently involved in human communication, even

in language acquisition; its element of 'moving beyond' (Evensen 2001; Bostad *et al.* 2004b). The peopled and contextually underdetermined nature of signs open for their remaking 'on the hoof', whenever need arises. A dialogical understanding may account for both the conventional and creative aspects of semiosis, whereas a systemic semiotics can only with difficulty do so.

Relationism as dialectics

Let me move to a third example of difference between relationisms, one that may seem to be of more purely philosophical interest. Activity theory views relationships as dialectical ones, as did Vygotsky and Bakhtin's Marxist colleague Voloshinov. Bakhtinian dialogism, on the other hand, emphasizes co-constitution, but does not embrace dialectics as a general way of understanding relationships. This ontological difference has, to my knowledge, not yet been subject to systematic inquiry, but may have important epistemological consequences. One argument in favour of activity theory may be that its dialectical approach can make it more suited to understanding how controversy and contradiction within activity systems may spur development and innovation. Engeström (1993: 8) states that 'activity systems are best viewed as complex formations in which *equilibrium is an exception and tensions, disturbances and local innovations are the rule and the engine of change*' [emphasis added]. It remains an open question, however, whether or not a dialectical dichotomy of opposing forces is the optimal view for understanding all the phenomena that are central in either activity research or applied linguistics; it may be optimal for just some of the central ones; ones where inequality, struggle or frozen practices are at issue. Thus I do acknowledge that dialectics plays an important role in some relationships, but I tend towards seeing this as one special form of relationism.

Voloshinov (1973), sadly, is a case for why this is a point worth making. In his truly groundbreaking discussion of the philosophical role of verbal interaction, he demonstrates convincingly how a dialectical, Marxist approach may be illuminating in disentangling complex issues within the philosophy of language, ideology and social psychology, with one single move – by simply pointing out the nature of signs as a material bridge between material existence, social interaction and human consciousness. There is one problem with his dauntingly brilliant materialist approach, though, one that illustrates the deep ideological differences between him and his close colleague and friend Bakhtin: 'Social psychology in fact is not located anywhere within (...) but entirely and completely *without* – in the word, the gesture, the act. There is nothing left unexpressed in it, noth-

ing 'inner' about it – it is wholly on the outside, wholly brought out in exchanges, wholly taken up in material, above all in the material of the word' (Voloshinov 1973: 19).

As demonstrated in this astonishingly 'postmodern' materialist quote, Voloshinov may dialectically explain system changes, but he simply *cannot* (and certainly will not) explain how actual individual social humans may be *creators* of material reality; he can only explain how they are socially *created*. Bakhtin also emphasizes the deeply *created* aspects of human beings and their own creation, but he still (like G. H. Mead) views individuals as possible creators in one of his early writings: 'I experience myself essentially by encompassing any boundaries, any body – by extending myself beyond any bounds' (Bakhtin 1990: 40). And further, on the same page, he claims that:

there is always something essential in me that I can set over against the world, namely, my inner self-activity, my subjectivity, which confronts the outside world as object, and which is incapable of being contained in it. This inner self-activity of mine exceeds both nature and the world: I always have an outlet along the line of my experience of myself in the act (...) of the world – I always have a loophole, as it were, through which I can save myself from being no more than a natural given.

In one of his later writings (1986: 161) he similarly talks about 'the anticipated context of the future: a sense that I am taking a new step (have progressed)'.

Whereas Voloshinov thus sees humans as created, Bakhtin additionally sees a possibility for 'moving beyond what is given', the basic prerequisite for cultural creation (see Bostad *et al.* (2004b) for discussion). It seems, as I remarked in Chapter 5, without even face validity to suppose that phenomena like language learning and the acquisition of communicative competence can be genuinely and wholly understood as simply something created (from the social interplay of outside forces). Current literature from qualitative research in applied linguistics is full of empirical examples to the contrary.

Lillis (2003) has addressed this issue of dialectics versus dialogism in a paradigmatically oriented article about developing academic literacies. In her article she observes (2003: 195f) that a Critical Language Awareness (CLA) approach to the teaching of academic writing tends to assume a dialectical understanding of meaning making that is characterized by first its orientation towards synthesis as the goal of meaning making. It will be noted that in my analysis of communication in Chapter 4, I showed how a

dialogical view emphasizes partial, temporary bridging of difference as a much more typical case than such a synthesis. It is open to critical discussion the extent to which such partial bridging of difference in communication is truly a case of dialectics in the Marxist sense.

Second, Lillis observes that CLA tends to prefer binary *either-or* framings where 'one version of truth is privileged over others' (2003: 196). Examples of such ideologically loaded oppositions are dominant/dominated, oppressive/non-oppressive, dominant/oppositional, or existing/alternative. Such oppositions, she notes, also tend to go with an ironic *we/they* opposition between students and teachers, where teachers are seen to act *on behalf of* students. The ideological content of this position, I would add, resonates with what Cameron *et al.* (1992) termed a *research for* position for the applied researcher, where the researcher is the one who knows what is good for those whose interests the research is meant to serve (see Chapter 6).

Bakhtin's writing supports Lillis' second point quite directly. On several occasions he describes binary dialectics as a quite monological move away from everyday reality into overly abstracted theory (1984: 10): 'Extracted ... into a systematically monological context (even the most dialectic), the idea inevitably loses its uniqueness and is transformed into a poor philosophical assertion'.

Third, Lillis, and in concert with the above Bakhtin quote, observes that an implicit consequence of this stance seems to be that constructive pedagogical *design* is frequently sacrificed at the altar of detached pedagogical *critique*. She leaves it to Kress (2000: 160) to state the political consequences of such a one-sided emphasis on critique: 'Critique leaves the initial definition of the domain of analysis to the past, to past production'. Perhaps even more interesting is her epistemological comment that Kress accentuates the interests of actual designers in pedagogical design. Both teacher and student may play active roles in educational design, as illustrated by the emphasis put in modern design on dialogue. Thus, meaning making is supported in educational design, rather than being controlled. Lillis argues (2003: 197) that participants' perspectives should be valued in meaning making, leaving even imaginative leaps for the student a real option in learning processes. Such a people- and dialogue-oriented stance differs from any systems-oriented stance, even a dialectical one.

Old terminology as a stumbling block

When exploring new paths, old terms may act as stumbling blocks. The differences between relationisms noted above raises even a further issue –

the meaning of currently fashionable theoretical terms like 'sociocultural'. What exactly is the scope of this term and what are its specific implications? In Chapter 4, I discussed a set of problems with related distinctions between the core terms *discourse* and *Discourse*, commenting on shortcomings with both. In Chapter 5, I discussed the relationship or incommensurability between a Vygotskian approach and more mechanistic approaches to learning in earlier applied linguistics.

The difference between readings of Vygotsky as a sociocultural hero, however, illustrates that his name may be used to cover quite different understandings of semiotic, social, historical and cultural embeddings of learning. Since Vygotsky is frequently referred to in 'sociocultural' studies, I may illustrate the complexity of this term with reference to one specific aspect of his approach. In his empirical work, he was quite one-sidedly attending to microsocial embedding at the expense of more embracing societal embedding, and might in this sense seem naïve to larger forces in society. Even if he fully acknowledged the crucial role of language as a cultural element in human development, the time horizon in his (1984) 'genetic' approach to learning is still microhistorical, closely tied to what goes on in two-party, object-oriented experimental interaction.

Vygotsky typically worked in a dyadic or small group setting where various cultural artefacts and immediately situated tasks were introduced. In this way, he was able to pinpoint qualitative interpersonal and mediational aspects of individual learning. In such settings he took great care to make processual aspects explicit, emphasizing the microhistorical genesis of emerging competence, leading to his famous 'genetic' interpretational approach to research methodology (Vygotsky 1984). It thus seems more reasonable to label his approach a 'sociohistorical' one than a 'sociocultural' one. He saw his ideological role as a Marxist, it seems, as that of being one contributor among many others to the joint interdisciplinary creation of a new, general Soviet social theory of action, which was one of the central tasks defined in post-revolutionary Russia.

A second figure frequently associated with the term 'sociocultural' in current research is Bakhtin. He certainly was concerned with cultural aspects of interpersonal (and intellectual) life, and he took a much more macrohistorical approach to development than did Vygotsky. But at the same time, Bakhtin shared Vygotsky's reluctance towards discussing societal aspects. It may be argued that a combination of Vygotsky and Bakhtin may be captured by the term 'sociocultural', but the exact sharing of the implied terminological burden is rarely made specific beyond the level of lip service.

Furthermore, Bakhtin had a strictly humanistic conception of culture (as the result of human striving to move beyond what is given, toward what

he termed 'consummation', see Bostad *et al.* (2004b), quite different from the social science conceptions that dominate in current sociocultural work, where 'culture' is seen as the historically sedimented, shared aspects of human perception, thought and action: 'As long as man is alive, he lives from the fact that he is not yet perfected, and has not yet said his last words', says Bakhtin (1984a: 78). His notion of human 'consummation' (1990) not only implies the relating of parts into an architectonic whole but, more fundamentally, implies a constant striving towards the realization of what has not yet been. In his movement beyond lies, for instance, individual agency, even if the context for such agency is always deeply social (as when we are considering what has not yet been in inner dialogue as we formulate our forthcoming research paper).

A genre is to Bakhtin thus a sociohistorical embedding for individual situated action, but in individuals' attempted consummation we may also (when need arises) move beyond a genre, or move the genre beyond its current confines. Within such a perspective, culture becomes both a type of process and the products of such processes. Dialogical theory hence views culture as emergent and dynamic, rather than stable and given. Culture, when viewed through the lens of dialogism, furthermore, has both ethics and aesthetics at its very core, as has ecological educational linguistics (see Van Lier 1997b).

There are several reasons for such a dialogical focus on ethics and aesthetics. Moving towards what has not yet been can only take place granted some sort of direction, a point where axiology again enters the picture. The unattainable, yet fundamental goal of consummation is a striving towards something conceived of, and this 'something' of necessity has value for the striver, ethically and/or aesthetically. A human ontology based on moving beyond is thus by necessity an axiological project. Values are not solipsistic, however; they develop in interaction with others, and they embed us in different forms of community with others as an aspect of intersubjectivity. They are thus social.

As a result of their social nature, values not only give direction to our 'moving beyond'; they simultaneously imply (a companion of) obligation, making any cultural activity subject to what Bakhtin terms 'responsibility'. It follows that the relationship between values (and hence culture) and life is intimate. Culture is not something societally lofty to Bakhtin, something 'over and above' everyday life of actual people, but rather 'life looking beyond itself'. It follows from such a dialogical perspective that culture is embodied and a core matter for absolutely everybody. Bakhtin bet his own doctoral thesis (1984b) on demonstrating the deep epistemological significance of folk practices in what had often been seen as the ultimate of vul-

garity – the medieval carnival and its illegitimate offspring, carnivalesque literature. If we, on this basis, once more return to the notion of sociocultural, we see how a dialogic perspective of the cultural phenomena is actually quite different from the perspectives invoked in current uses of the term sociocultural.

The relationship of culture to life also has a different side, however, since ontology is not just a question of human ontology. The Bakhtin Circle's interest in dialogical ontology encompassed what were then revolutionary ideas in natural science. Bakhtin was deeply fascinated by the new physics of Einstein, Planck and Bohr, and counted a mathematician, Kagan, and a biologist, Kanaev, among his close friends (Holquist 1990: xv). In a dialogical view, reality follows not as a fixed collection of entities (objects) as much as an emerging collection of processes, relationships, tensions and forces, even outside human ontology. But this general, relational ontology of emergence is used also for cultural theory, as when Bakhtin (1981) used insights from Einstein's physical theory of relativity (time as the fourth dimension of space) to develop his notion of the 'chronotope' in artistic literature.

Still, human beings differ from other parts of reality in our intentionally moving beyond. We can only move beyond what is given because we, as human beings, have the capacity to imagine what may lie beyond. This imagination requires the workings of signs. And the workings of signs raise issues of meaning, which brings us back to exactly where the work for applied linguists starts.

Dialogue as ontological lens

Dialogism was presented at some length in Chapter 4, and has been extensively referred to above. It is still necessary to elaborate its ontological nature, however, in order to evaluate its potential as an ontology for future applied linguistics. In dialogism, strict transfer of meaning is seen as a very special form of communication – one that goes with the undisputed power of a political dictator or a religious body. Stalin's Soviet Union and Khomeini's Iran may serve as historical examples. Bakhtin thus did recognize the existence of monological utterances, and he characterized them with an everyday term of his time – 'the authoritative word' (Bakhtin 1984a).

Normal discourse, however, is characterized by utterances in dialogue (Bakhtin 1986). In dialogue, there can normally be no strictly single intention or voice. As we saw in Chapter 4, current communicative acts are always crafted in response to earlier acts, and are thus influenced by other voices and intentions. This is the 'responsivity' of utterances. They are, fur-

thermore, always directed towards somebody (their 'addressivity'), and the existence of an 'other' in discourse influences our intentions and voice even prior to the crafting of any utterance. Third, any utterance invites further response and thus has some element of initiative. An utterance's meaning can thus not be understood without reference to its embedding in ongoing discourse as it is being negotiated 'on the hoof' in discursive and inter-discursive reality. Neither can it be understood without its interpersonal embedding. Intentions and voices blend as dialogue temporarily bridges difference in understanding (what social psychologists term 'interpersonal social reality').

It follows from the internal logic of dialogue that even language cannot work as a system in any decontextualized sense. In this line of thinking, all conventional language and discourse elements are coloured by their previous use and are thus anchored in their dialogical history. This anchoring paradoxically implies that element meanings are all underdetermined, requiring contextual embedding to be temporarily fixed; no element has an entirely fixed code meaning prior to actual discourse (see Linell (1998) for an extended discussion). Contextual under-determination, in its turn, implies that discourse meaning is also always an emergent phenomenon (Lähteenmäki 2004).

We may see that dialogism leaves no room for simple dichotomies; discourse elements are coloured by their previous, current and subsequent relationships. Similarly, discourse participants create a 'temporarily shared social reality' (Rommetveit 1974) that bridges the difference between interlocutors in dialogical space. In Chapter 4, we saw how situational and cultural meanings merge in the 'diatope'.

What all of these characteristics of dialogism reflect, we have noted, is a specific underlying *relational* ontology. In the relational ontology of dialogism, phenomena are understood and investigated via those relationships that anchor and colour them, historically and concurrently. Any definition within dialogism should thus be relational, which is difficult to achieve for intellectuals trained in Western thinking. Bakhtin himself was relational to the extent that even his style of presentation seems indirect, and is felt by many to be awkward and cumbersome. Bakhtin keeps circling around the phenomena under his lens in order to show from different angles their multiply relational anchoring, rather than attempting to define them in a traditionally Western sense, as objects with attributes. This consistent characteristic makes his writing hard to access for a Western, at least for an Anglo-American audience. His metaphorical (relationally holistic) style of writing may seem as vague and evasive as his lengthy historical anchoring may seem overly elaborate. Still, his relationism resonates with the ontological development of this book and stimulates further inquiry.

Refocusing the ontological search from entities to relations

In elaborating the distinction between relational and nonrelational ontologies, I shall need first to suggest a fundamental distinction. If we suppose that mainstream research in applied linguistics sees the world as consisting primarily of *entities* (material or mental objects) which are defined by their attributes, our view has consequences for how relationships between these entities are conceived. It does not of course follow from such a position that relationships between objects are of little interest; applied linguistics is full of examples to the contrary, but it does follow that relationships are not constitutive of our research objects as such. Rather, relationships are seen as *post hoc*, derived phenomena. Mainstream applied linguistics seems to have accepted essentialism in the sense that 'essentialist theories maintain that some objects have *essence*, that is, they have certain properties without which they could not exist (Bostad *et al.* 2004b: 1).

Since it is the defining characteristic of all phenomenologies that one is concerned with understanding the basic nature of phenomena (realities of the natural and social world), I would like to temporarily refer to such a position as 'phenomenological'. Genuine philosophical phenomenologists will justifiably oppose this use of the term, since the point of Husserlian phenomenology was exactly to demonstrate that things 'out there' are *not* directly accessible in any other way than through the inevitably positioned eyes of the beholder. Phenomena are thus relational, in this Husserlian sense. Since my thinking is deeply influenced by the Husserlian tradition within phenomenology (in particular, the work of Alfred Schütz and Thomas Luckmann), I need to emphasize that I only temporarily use this term in a partial sense for a specific purpose here.

In my discussion of relationships in this book, we have seen that several of the phenomena considered seem to be of a different nature than the ones captured by standard Western *object-with-attributes-in-three-dimensional-space* understanding. Situated communication is an example *par excellence*. We have seen for instance that not only is discourse meaning jointly produced by discourse partners, but the relationship between communicative acts and activities coconstitutes both acts and activities. Here, we have examples of cases where the relationship is not *post hoc*, but a constitutive or coconstitutive phenomenon. Communication, in other words, seems to share some basic characteristics with ecologies (see Van Lier 1997b, 2002; Larsen-Freeman 2002).

This ontological observation leads me to some epistemological speculation. Where would we end in our applied linguistics research if we were to make an abductive leap so that we tried to see the relevant relationships as

the basic, the primary phenomena, and the objects involved as only secondary? I would like to invite my readers into shared exploration along such lines, and I propose the term 'interrelational ontologies' for the perspectives resulting from such a strategy – that is, a thinking inspired by the study of different forms of relationism. Such a suggestion is not as radical as it may immediately seem. Linguists have, after all, seen the relational element (the verb) as the core of even formal sentences.

Which interrelational ontology for applied linguistics?

My above points are meant to illustrate a need to relabel the current situation in applied linguistics. Our current situation is certainly not basically one of consolidated accomplishment, but rather a strategically exploratory one: What are the basic assumptions underlying different relationisms? Which of these assumptions are compatible, and which are not? Which of these assumptions may be translated into viable approaches to empirical research? And, which of these assumptions may fit the knowledge interest of applied linguistics in such a sense that it may form an ontological basis for possible new integration? Such questions in my opinion need to be seriously discussed before accepting any premature answers. I thus refrain from arguing that dialogism *is* the answer to the fundamental ontological challenge. When I have elaborated on it above, it is simply because it is the most promising platform I have seen available when trying to demonstrate a number of issues that emerge when taking an ontological approach.

This is why I have chosen to end my book by suggesting a systematic study of relationships and relationisms – as one important prerequisite for finding a robust strategy for moving beyond what is given in our discipline. It thus seems sensible to postpone our use of any ideological exclamation marks until such study matures. I nevertheless share the satisfaction of Claire Kramsch in one further important respect. The above questions are the ones that belong to an intellectually more penetrating stage, I believe, ones that indexically signal our growing maturation as an emergent discipline on our own terms. I thus look forward to combining continued action in empirical reality with extended, contemplative sittings on some philosopher's stone.

From the highly theoretical to the deeply practical

In a book about integration at the level of research paradigms, it may seem strange to raise the issue of practical implications of the principles advo-

cated. Still, the arguments presented have a number of implications for action (see Scollon and Scollon 2007):

- The possibly most important contribution of this book is its account of how being an applied linguist is a philosophically accountable, unique project that should be evaluated on its own premises, rather than those of any neighbour's. My hope is that this account might result in fostering self-confidence and direction, among practitioners and researchers alike.
- A defining argument is that applied linguistics is basically fuelled by underlying communication problems. Since such problems arise in specific social settings, it follows that the obvious meeting place for researchers and practitioners alike is such settings, with their everyday, recurring problems.
- An integrated approach to applied linguistics as a separate discipline makes it possible to use core terms in ways that are not predetermined by other disciplines. We could thus start discussing mental phenomena instead of 'psychological' ones; verbal phenomena (of all kinds, across modalities) instead of 'linguistic' ones; social phenomena instead of 'sociological' ones; cultural phenomena instead of 'anthropological' ones, *et cetera*. In this way it would become easier to develop our own perspectives of the phenomena that we keep investigating, and our own theories about their interrelation.
- A relational approach invites axiological reflection. The possibly most important result of such reflection is to 'reformat' learners from being 'objects of teaching' into a qualitatively different role as 'subjects in learning' (see Oller 1974). A pervasive focus on *subjects* would make more clearly visible their life histories, aspirations, ongoing identity work and numerous other aspects that could only direct our efforts towards an even more rewarding direction of 'thick participation' (Layder 1993, Sarangi 2007). In such a new role, learners might turn out to have a lot to offer, even to researchers.
- The relational approach invites a close link between researchers, practitioners and learners in joint explorations, where mutual 'excess of seeing' might be exploited strategically in order to forge new insights. Such insight might help developing 'grounded theory', theory that might by the same token have 'ecological validity' (Cicourel 2007). Similarly, as illustrated in Chapter 3, giving voice to practitioners and learners may through analysis yield insight at even metatheoretical levels.

- A relational approach would invite ongoing discussion about the local ecologies that we keep trying-to-understand-in-order-to-improve. Jointly, we might thus come up with qualitatively different approaches to problem solution.
- In practising PAR, an abductive approach opens a new possibility for practitioners (and learners) to invest their experience into developing not only their practice, but even such grounded theory.
- A relational approach would invite ongoing discussion of our different social and societal roles as intellectuals, thus counteracting the possibility of being anybody's 'useful idiots'.
- A nondialogical approach to teaching will at times be disguised by overly idyllic descriptions of teachers and learners. The approach to communication taken in this book is far from idyllic, however; it rather flags different interests, roles and agendas, much like Goffman did. A less idyllic approach opens up more critical approaches, both in terms of educational practice and research, without falling victim to a one-sided pedagogical critique without a simultaneous constructive design (Lillis 2003).

I dialogically invite all readers to help developing the above list.

Final remarks on integration

I hope to have clarified the reasons for my consistently preferring 'weak hypothesis' approaches to the overarching topic of the book. Some of my readers may perhaps have the suspicion that I am really arguing a closed case after all, for one specific integrative view that may save our future as a separate discipline. I have certainly tried to the best of my ability to suggest a set of approaches that are both consistent with the epistemological underpinnings presented in Chapter 1 and compatible with each other. In this sense my line of argument is similar to a theory. The current multiplicity of relationisms, however, should alert us to the fact that we are nowhere near what may be truly credible answers to the basic questions listed above. In the meantime, I choose to stay with dialogism as my general research perspective, admittedly as an approximation, but one that so far seems to hold more promise than any of the alternatives I have seen presented this far.

Even if I do believe in some integration as a necessary prerequisite for progress, a closed case can hardly be my serious belief when one considers all there is left to know. I have, for instance, repeatedly argued for a 'major reconceptualization' of language. Several linguists and communication researchers have already been involved in such a project for quite

a long time – Talmy Givon, Paul Hopper, Per Linell and Sandy Thompson are sample names, but in no way a representative list – but we should not consider their task an easy one. I have been involved in single aspects of this broad project (like verb sequence and signals of superstructure in discourse, or theory of grounding as seen from dialogism) for more than two decades, and I have learned what it takes the hard way (see Evensen 1986, 1992, 2001, 2004).

Being involved in such prolonged intellectual processes, one quickly learns that the outcome is *always* different from the one initially expected, without exception. My starting point in all but the first of the above examples was for instance quite formal 'text linguistics applied', pure and simple. We therefore have to think about our future in qualitatively different terms. My best guess at this particular 'point of utterance' (Britton's (1983) term) is that what will remain of my having borrowed the linguist's armchair or philosopher's stone for a while, is a quest for a more dynamical, specific and hence arguably holistic line of thinking, where we do not *lose* ourselves in areas of specialism or ideological positionings, but look for a principled 'tertium comparationis' where single research efforts may be scrutinized and (hopefully from time to time) synthesized.

What this amounts to is to second Van Lier's (1997b) plea for an ecological openness in applied linguistics, while similarly disagreeing with any eclectic position which implies that anything relational goes. Since our task is a complex one, we certainly shall continue to need a variety of available approaches. But for such openness to be truly fruitful, it has to be anchored at some point of contact, some point of reference and some level of communication between participants, across projects and specialist interests. In other words, there is a need to (re)establish even *intellectual* relations within applied linguistics.

In this sense, my project is related to the stimulating one argued by Ferris (2005) around her discussion of the metaphorical white-collar – blue-collar continuum. She associates the white-collar position within applied linguistics with being concerned with more philosophical issues. This book might seem to be the extreme example of that position. She conversely associates the blue-collar position with being concerned with immediate problem solving in specific second language writing classrooms. In discussing such positions she frankly flags her own anchoring at the blue-collar end. She still ends up arguing that there is a lot to be learned across anchorings. She even makes a case for more philosophical blue-collar work as well as for more problem solving white-collar work. I would like to see this book as actually falling within the latter of these positions (see for example Chapter 7).

I will be astonished if it does not turn out to be the case that from time to time more will be learned from positions argued *against* in my book than from the ones argued *for*.

Intellectual openness needs to be constantly tested, however. When, for instance, new theoretical developments take place in child language research, or in research on professional communication, such developments should to some extent be discussed even in second language acquisition research. Similarly, when some writing research colleagues discovered the constructive role of error in writing acquisition in the mid 1980s (see Chapter 5), such a 'discovery' should simply not have been necessary. That particular wheel had already been running smoothly for decades. When different qualitative methods are exploited, findings should at times be discussed across those methods, as has been usually practice in quantitative studies. I thus see a need to supplement van Lier's plea with a plea for a higher degree of *relations* among both researchers and practitioners, at least among those of us who are somehow working beyond the 'linguistics applied' paradigm. In other words, my suggested focus on interrelational ontology may hopefully carry a message also *within* applied linguistics.

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Studies in Applied Linguistics

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Applied Linguistics

Towards a New Integration?

Lars Sigfred Evensen

The nature of applied linguistics is an issue that has reappeared again and again over several decades. The established paradigm met severe difficulty during the 1960s, but has never been replaced by a coherent alternative. The major aim of this book is to present a new approach to the discussion about the nature of applied linguistics, one that investigates its deeper theory of science underpinnings. A second important aim is to explore what an alternative might look like, granted diverse developments since the original paradigm began to be questioned. Rather than argue the case for one specific alternative, the book suggest a viable *tertium comparationis* for intellectual discussion across current tension and disparity. Such a common ground is strongly needed within graduate and postgraduate programmes.

The first part of this book presents applied linguistics as seen within theory and history of science. The emerging picture is empirically confronted with the world of practitioners. The second part presents tentative integration, in theory of language, theory of learning and research methodology, and ends with an empirical study illustrating principles of research. The third part returns to theory of science, discussing ontological aspects of our core research object – problems of linguistic communication.

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