Book Review
Critical Applied Linguistics: A Critical Introduction

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There is no doubt concerning the inspiring and impressive nature of the book as it comprehensively presents an overview of Critical Applied Linguistics (CAL), its different domains, and a critical look at other theories. More than a decade ago, the term CAL was coined by Alastair Pennycook as a reaction to the concept of applied linguistics which was devoid of any influence of criticality including critical pedagogy, critical discourse analysis, and critical ethnography. In this book, the author in fact acknowledges applied linguistics in terms of postmodern approach.

The author commences chapter one titled as **"Introducing Critical Applied Linguistics"**, by an elaboration of "critical" and "applied linguistics". In his sense, applied linguistics is a broad area of language use in professional settings, translation, speech pathology, literacy, and language education. It is also claimed that in spite of drawing on different disciplines such as sociology, anthropology, education, and cultural studies, it is an independent field. By the term "critical', he indicates that it is much more than mere addition of a critical approach to applied linguistics. It, indeed, consists of a constant questioning of the normative assumptions, and a restive problematization of the givens of applied linguistics. Then he provides two definitions of the concept of "critical", as it deals with the development of objective methods for problem solving and text understanding. That is, social distance and objectivity cannot be achieved unless there should be an engagement with social critique. Second definition highlights the fact that it should go beyond mere correlations between language and society. So, it should move toward posing questions concerning concepts of power, disparity, desire, difference, resistance, and transformation.

Here, the author accentuates that he intends not to develop a model for applied linguistics rather to explore its complexity. He then demonstrates that CAL deals with critical social inquiry and theory in terms of both micro and macro relations; it relates applied linguistics to the broader social, cultural, and political domains. It is also concerned with the antidisciplinary of praxis, the preferred futures, and heterosis. In fact, CAL is constituted on the basis of major domains of literacy, critical discourse analysis, language testing, teaching, translation, language planning, and language in the work place.

Pennycook in **"The Politics of Knowledge"** argues that there is an interdependence between critical work and theory. He counters those arguments that consider CAL as a field which does not take any theory into account. It is then discussed that there is a need for a theoretical framework about different issues such as politics, social structure, pedagogy and language. The chapter moves on with a discussion of the relationship between politics and knowledge and their interdependence with language. He states that an understanding of language is tied up with the cultural politics of the every day social behaviour of the society.

Politics in Pennycook's sense does not mean policy making or any of the formal areas of politics; rather it refers to Foucaultian views and ideas. He states that the notion of power is the main concern of politics. He also maintains that language is related to power and how power is exercised through different tasks like teaching, learning languages, and translation.

In this chapter, the interrelations of power, language, and knowledge are also illuminated from four different perspectives. The first perspective as "central autonomous" is liberal and deals with theories of structuralism, democratic egalitarianism, and objective rational inquiry. According to this perspective, applied linguistics should be kept separate from politics. Based on the second perspective which is called "anarcho-autonomy", positivism, reason, and realism are emphasized. Chomsky's position that is believed to be a radical leftist is also associated with this orientation. Chomsky holds the view that there is little use for CAL and the study of language should be separated from political questions. In other words, he puts emphasis on the position that the theoretical account should be disconnected from the politics. The humanist or universalist position of Chomsky indeed stresses the underlying human commonalities or focuses on similarities rather than differences. In fact, the emphasis on similarity denies context and difference.

The next perspective, "emancipatory modernism", also emphasizes the significance of science, rationalism, and realism. Furthermore, it relates the political analysis to the study of language use. In other words, it seeks to analyze the relations between language use and the social, and political orientations. Although this view differs fundamentally from Chomsky's on the relation between language and politics, it shares some similarities in terms of viewing scientific knowledge as its goal. Thus, while drawing on a neo-Marxist analysis of power and ideology, its ultimate goal is making awareness and emancipation, it adheres to a hierarchy of knowledge production that places the scientific knowledge at the summit.

The last Pennycook's orientation is "problematizing practices" in which language is fundamentally bound up with politics but it also expresses skepticism about science, truth claims, and emancipation position outside the ideology. CAL is in fact associated with this position drawing on poststructuralist, postmodernist, and postcolonial approaches. Actually, the problematizing practices perspective suggests a broader view and a comprehensive understanding of CAL.

The author in chapter three **"The Politics of Language"** views language use in different contexts. The chapter begins with making a distinction between liberal and critical sociolinguistics. The liberal position was in fact a severe response to conservative perspective which holds the view that nonstandard varieties of English give rise to the disadvantage of its users. Critical social theorists criticize the liberal sociolinguistics associal class, social justice, and how inequality is produced and maintained are not taken into account. The liberal position in fact makes an emphasis on the appropriateness but it has also been criticized by CDA practitioners. The author reviews topics such as critical sociolinguistics, language planning, and politics to elaborate different issues including the global spread of English, language rights, linguistic imperialism, postcolonialism, and resistance. Language planning and language policy inherently operate with a political view of language. It is believed that the problem with language policy is the way it has been uncritically developed. With a "veneer of scientific objectivity", language planning has avoided to address the political and social issues concerning language change, use, and development. In fact, what CAL benefits from the existing sociolinguistics and language planning frameworks is to make a connection between the issues of power, inequality, and racism.

Actually, two domains of sociolinguistics that have been criticized by social theorists include work on language and language rights. Phillipson (1992) has raised questions concerning the issue of linguistic imperialism and dominance of English which are considered to be due to the economic and political purposes. The other domain which needs to be critically considered is the issue of language rights. We are living with the language wrongs which are the product of monolingualism because it is assumed that multilingualism is taken as a danger to the security of the nation state. In this chapter, it is also discussed that what is regarded as the human linguistic right is the right to identify with the mother tongue, to maintain and develop it. A relevant notion used by the author is "resistance" the most crucial element in critical theorizing. In fact, this concept refers to the resistance against oppression imposed by ideological and social structures. The author further demonstrates that postcolonization is not a mere progression of colonization as it challenges the Western thought and civilization in the form of imperialism and capitalism. The postcolonial thought adds new insights about language and diversity in terms of a historical understanding of language use, a nonessentialist position including appropriation and hybridity, and the focus on the local context of language.

The author in chapter four **"The Politics of the Texts"** has a focus on the broad field of critical approaches to textual analysis such as critical literacy, critical discourse analysis, and critical language awareness. The critical analysis of the texts as a social practice dependent on the social and political contexts and ideology which plays a crucial role in text production and understanding are discussed in the current chapter. Since critical literacy stresses the relations between language and broader social and political concerns, change, diversity, and enfranchisement, it is also connected to CAL.

Then, Pennycook provides an overview of critical discourse analysis (CDA) as an influential approach to text analysis. CDA is related to CAL as both have a common interest in a political aspect of language, the social change, and the relationship between language and society. Then, it is discussed that the goal of CDA is to reveal ideological systems and how they are related to the broader social order. In fact, ideological positions are the views of particular groups with social power which can be uncovered in texts where ideologies reproduce social relations of power. The author continues the discussion of CDA with a critical evaluation of a number of scholars' work on CDA such as van Dijk, Fairclough, Wodak, and Foucault to show how the notion of ideology and language has not been clarified due to the various positions on language, truth, and power.

Another focus of this chapter is on Critical Language Awareness which is an attempt to apply principles of CDA to the classroom. It is actually a part of a larger movement to reintroduce an explicit and critical focus on language in classrooms. CLA is in fact in contrast to the liberal approaches to teaching which evolved in reaction to explicit grammar instruction and explicit pedagogies. The main goal of CLA is empowering the disadvantaged students through explicit teaching of language genres. This genre-based movement which draws on genre theory has been criticized as it is devoid of any well-developed theory of language and power and just relies on the structuralistic systemic functional model.

The author further introduces Critical Pedagogy (CP) which was developed in North America on the basis of the ground breaking work of Freire (1970) entitled as *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. The central key in CP is the notion of voice which opens up a space for the marginalized to speak, read, and write so that the voicing leads to the transformation of their lives and the social system. However, what is left ambiguous in this pedagogy is that how voicing leads to transformation.

Pennycook wraps up the chapter by providing the readers with a detailed argument for a model of applied Post-structuralism. Post-structuralism takes a very different view towards science, objectivity, and truth which are unproblematic for structuralism. A key feature is that it does not see the notion of reality located in the material world or individual but rather as a concept produced by social and cultural organizations. Post-structuralism employs a skeptic attitude towards common assumptions and givens. Another important aspect is its anti-essentialist stance which means constant questioning of any pregiven categories, especially those that suggest underlying essence. In the nutshell, Post-structuralism has a focus on the political nature of the literacy, the fact that literacy practices are embodied in the social context, the crucial processes of text production and interpretation, textual analysis as the social analysis, and the requirement for pedagogical action, resistance, and change.

As title of chapter five **"The Politics of Pedagogy"** suggests, it has a focus on the practical considerations of raised issues in classrooms and pedagogy. So, three perspectives of schooling are presented in the chapter. The first perspective which is the standard view of language or the basis of applied linguistics sees classrooms as the neutral sites of pedagogical transaction as teachers impart their knowledge of language to students and students are bombard with chunks of information. Based on this viewpoint, classrooms as the apolitical sites are devoid of any social relations and all knowledge is neutral. Reproductive approach as the next perspective states that knowledge reflects the dominant ideologies; hence, through language classrooms these ideologies, the dynamics of power, and the external social roles emanating from outside of the classroom are reproduced leading to the inequality in every aspect of language classrooms. Drawing on Post- structuralism, Resistance standpoint reflects the view that all classroom happenings are understood socially and politically. That is, all knowledge is political and the classrooms are the sites of cultural struggle.

The issues of structure, agency, determinism, and resistance are then discussed in the pursuing part of the chapter. Pennycook believes that language classrooms are microcosm of the social and cultural world reflecting, reproducing and changing the world. The relationships in the classroom are seen as a form of post- structuration through which discourse and subjectivity reproduce and change each other. Thus, everything done in the complex politics of classroom is affected by the ideological, social, political, and cultural aspects of the outside world while at the same time they are interpreted and appropriated. Students in the social and political context of the classroom resist and appropriate what occur there.

Critical pedagogy as the focus of the next part of the chapter aims to develop students' voices to challenge and resist marginalization and exclusion through interrogating the taken-for- granted knowledge and assumptions. The major drawback of this approach lies in the lack of any pedagogical practices while it includes grand theorizing remarks. The chapter ends with a focus on the postmodernism and education. In fact, postmodernism is more of a philosophical questioning of many of the foundational concepts of received knowledge, is anti essentialist, and anti foundationalist and opposed to grand narratives. It attempts to understand the phenomena in more local concepts than in terms of grand theories or utopian of equality. Actually, it refers to a state of mind, a critical posture, a different way of seeing and thinking not a fixed position or unchanging set of critical techniques.

The author in **"The Politics of Difference"** deals with the concept of difference as an area which has been totally ignored in applied linguistics. Actually, much of applied linguistics is adverse to any serious engagement with otherness, dismissing the real possibilities of difference. There are two ways to justify such neglect; one might be the

dominance of positivistic approaches in applied linguistics which have had a focus on control, regulation, and denial forms of otherness that has caused to take the issue of difference as unimportant at the cost of generalizations. For instance, much research in applied linguistics, though insightful in many areas, totally ignores the issue of difference.

Moreover, there are approaches to practice and research that acknowledge difference but do so along static and predefined forms of differing. For example, research studies can be seen in TESOL and applied linguistics in which terms such as 'foreign' or 'other' abound. In these studies, the aim is to show a static nature of the culture where the English culture is shown modern and normal while the cultures of other countries are fixed, traditional, and exotic. The critical applied linguistics, on the other hand, deals with the acknowledgment of this issue that how L2 learning and language classrooms are linked with identity formation and transformation.

The chapter moves towards the end with a focus on different areas such as dominance, difference, and performativity with respect to language, gender, and sexuality. The dominance perspective assumes that the difference between women's and men's linguistic usage is interpreted as reflexes of the dominant-subordinate relationship between men and women. This view maintains that language use reflects different social power. Thus, the possibility of change presupposes that women should be taught to use the powerful language. Based on difference view, men and women are socialized separately. They use language differently and misunderstand each other. This approach holds that men and women should be taught to understand their competitive and cooperative ways. In fact, these two approaches are problematic in dealing with concept of gender. Based on the third position, gender and sex are not given categories and they are interrelated with other forms of power. Hence, male and female identities are performed through language. Regarding the importance of identity and subject position, CAL is concerned with the formation of students' identities and subject positions within the context of the classroom. The key concerns within CAL include taking students' interests and desires into account in order to see transformation.

The author discusses themes and concepts such as politics of knowledge, language, text, pedagogy of previous chapters in **"Applied Linguistics with an Attitude"**. In fact, this chapter is concerned with a strong argument on the development of a critical attitude toward applied linguistics. Then, he presents further guidelines for a critical praxis. It is argued that CAL is not a bland version of liberal-ostrichist applied linguistics, rather a political version. While derived from Applied Linguistics and borrowing from critical pedagogy, critical discourse analysis, and critical literacy, it is considered as a separate field. However, from the outset, CAL avoids some of the rigidities and dogmas that have been attached to areas such as critical pedagogy, critical discourse analysis, and critical literacy. It is actually seen as a way of thinking, a way of going about applied linguistics that constantly attempts to push our thinking and understanding forward.

Despite the fact that CAL is based on applied linguistics, it is totally different from applied linguistics since applied linguistics does not touch the problems and issues faced by language users. In addition, applied linguistics has become an arcane, sectarian, and theory-oriented discipline that is distanced from the realities of language use. Penneycook argues that CAL is not seen as a set of techniques or prescriptions, rather he offers them as framing ideas for critical praxis. In fact, CAL needs a sense of critical that is part of a definitive form of politics. This does not mean to establish a given political standpoint but to bring into being new schemes of politicization. This links to the demand to perceive CAL as an open-ended

construction, and a constantly shifting approach that is contested, incessantly perspectival and multiply-sited.

Critical Evaluation of the Book

Overall, this book is informative, insightful and thought provoking as it takes a critical position towards the field of mainstream applied linguistics. It indeed offers a critical lens to see different areas such as applied linguistics, education, literacy, and translation. It nicely introduces different schools of thought as a journey from structuralism to poststructuralism and postmodernism, so the reader can enthusiastically engage with the text and gain a thoroughly deep understanding accordingly. As a reader of the text, I found its chapters so illuminating and appealing since before, I had limited knowledge in some areas. The tables in each chapter to highlight the summary of information was also helpful for me to understand the proposed framework of the chapter as it presented the ideas like what is perpetuated by concept mapping.

However, due to the highly complicated writing of the book, it appears to be somehow difficult for novices especially those who do not have sufficient background in terms of critical discourse analysis, sociolinguistics, critical literacy, and critical pedagogy. So, readers are highly advised to consult some sources prior to reading such source of knowledge, as they should possess sufficient knowledge in different areas in order to foster their understandings of the text. My next dilemma was Penneycook's claim as CAL would overcome the problem of theory/practice which was commonly seen in applied linguistics but it was not shown how this would be viable during the years. One more problem can be the contradictory statements seen throughout the book. On the one hand, the reader is convinced with Pennycook's claims that CAL is strongly self-reflective, critical of the received canon of knowledge, not accepting essentialism, standard methodology or techniques, a form of antidisciplinary knowledge, a way of thinking and doing things critically, avoiding any static model, and pursuing the approach to language learning and teaching which is always dynamic. On the other hand, we examine statements that are in sharp contrast to the above arguments. The author states that CAL is political from the outset, an instrument which leads to change in the world, a reflection of language which alters social relations. Then, the author also mentions that we need to develop an adequate theory of CAL based on an engagement with questions of moral and ethics. The problem with all these statements is that Penneycook assumes CAL to be completely distant from mainstream critical theories, methods, techniques, and models, incessantly questioning, and skeptical. While at the same time, he indicates that it should be a tool based on moral codes and ethics to create change. In addition, as teaching foreign or second languages is dependent on linguistic theories and findings, it would be of much help to the practitioners in second or foreign language teaching if a significant proportion of the book content was devoted to this area. How does CAL contribute to a language teacher? (Moorhouse, 2014; Safari & Pourhashemi, 2015; Safari & Rashidi, 2015) Answers to this question and other questions similar to this one might be looked for in this book and other related ones.

Reference

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