

A History of Applied Linguistics: From 1980 to the present

Author: Kees de Bot

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Reviewer: Duangkamon Klungthong,

Language Institute, Thammasat University Lampang Center

Bangkok, Thailand

Duangkamon.k@litu.tu.ac.th

Kees de Bot, one of the leading applied linguists (AL), tries to give the field overview in a historical context using a theme-based approach. The book contains 11 chapters. In chapter 1, the author describes his well-established academic background to provide credibility. Then he explains the reason for the chosen years 1980-2010 and his working definition of AL for the book, which I find them rather subjective. The author chooses the year 1980-2010 merely on his involvement in the field, and his AL definition “the development and use of multiple languages” (p.4) might be too open. Furthermore, the informants were chosen based on his personal network. However, he clarifies that it is the readers’ responsibility to deeply analyze the views by themselves because he does not think that he can dictate the final conclusions, and suggests using this book as an introduction to the field or a basic trend-linkage.

Chapter 2 describes the informants. The author notes on the representativeness problem resulting from the arbitrary selection. Most informants are from western Europe and North America. The data-collection tools were face to face interview and the author’s self-made questionnaire. Confusingly, the names shown in table 2.1 and 2.2 do not match the actual numbers of interviewees and questionnaire respondents he later describes on pages 12 and 50.

The definitions of AL are discussed in chapter 3. Different views from the informants are shared, and three tendencies emerge. First, AL deals with real-world problems using linguistics tools and knowledge. Second, AL is equal with Second Language Acquisition (SLA). Third, and the most popular, AL is everything related to languages but not theoretical linguistics. The author later guides that “adhering to one does not exclude the others” (p. 34).

Chapter 4 talks about the leaders of the AL. There are 58 of 228 names mentioned at least four times as leaders. The numerous other names reflect the expansion of AL to subfields that have their own leaders, because “the field was not uniformly defined” (p. 38). It is interdisciplinary by nature. Thus, AL leaders tend to be broad-minded, and followers likewise.

Last, typical qualifications of leaders are illustrated.

Chapter 5 explores the most important articles and books in AL. A core of leading journals in the field is listed. While the other journals are more peripheral, they display the multidisciplinary character of the field. However, neither articles nor books are marked as the core publications that all AL students must read. The names and roles of prominent publishers supporting and defining AL are presented.

In chapter 6, 7, and 8, the author structures AL major trends into three sets. Many topics are mentioned in chapter 6 and 7 with brief explanations and comments, which I assume they follow the objective set for the book as the introduction to AL. Chapter 6 talks

about main trends I: *theoretical and methodological aspects* such as linguistic theories, theory construction and SLA, the growth of Socio-Cultural Theory, the impact of corpus linguistics, discourse analysis and conversational analysis. Chapter 7 deals with main trends II: *psycholinguistic, sociolinguistic, and education aspects*; for instance, language attrition and language lost, individual differences, multilingualism and L3, language policy, vocabulary acquisition, and teacher education.

Chapter 8 discusses main trends III: *Complex Dynamic System Theory*, which the author personally praises it as a paradigm shift. CDST sees language as “a complex adaptive system” and second language development as “a dynamic process” (p. 88). This approach can underlie many research topics such as language processing models, code switching, variation in language development, and motivation.

Chapter 9 talks about citations. The data were collected from the informants’ publications. The author uses Hirsch’s h-index and the number of citations to indicate the researchers’ impact. Other details related to citations are included e.g. a comparison of single- vs. multiple-authored publications, a journal impact factor and its unpleasing results due to the authors and journal editors’ excessive need of it.

The influence of AL research on language learning and teaching is examined in chapter 10. The informants’ views are grouped into five answers: I don’t know, no application, negative impact, little or no impact, and some impact. The last one is most agreeable.

Chapter 11 concludes important ideas from all the chapters and the author’s final remarks. He says, despite AL’s relatively young history, it is now a prestigious discipline independent from linguistics. He acknowledges the subjectivity and invites others to share their perspectives. As mentioned before, the book gives the overview and leaves ample space for readers to interpret AL on their own. Personally, I think the readers must be open-minded and dare to think otherwise as the field naturally purports them.

About the reviewer

Duangkamon Klungthong is an English lecturer affiliated with Language Institute, Thammasat University Lampang Center in Thailand. Her research interests are language assessment and evaluation, teaching English as a foreign language, and second language acquisition.