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Book Review

de Bot, K. (2015) *A History of Applied Linguistics: From 1980 to the Present*. New York: Routledge.154 pages. ISBN 978-1-1-138-82066-1

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Applied linguistics as a distinct area of inquiry has been discussed widely, dealing primarily with the question of its nature, *raison d'être*, and logic definitive of the discipline as an autonomous discipline, and provoking intense interest throughout its relatively brief history. From a sociological vantage point, applied linguistics has earned a communal research platform and carved out an academic niche among an intellectual audience by establishing affiliated national organizations of the international federation of national and regional associations of applied linguistics (i.e., AILA), holding well-established conferences including, but not confined to, AILA triennial conference, AAAL annual conference, BAAL annual conference and other national annual symposia, securing institutional positions in innumerable universities around the world, educating 'new' applied linguists within departments of applied linguistics and language studies, attracting its burgeoning community of senior and junior researchers who identify themselves as applied linguists, publication of scholarly journals, handbooks, books and textbooks with applied linguistics as their integrating core focus, and so forth. On the other hand, at the present stage of development it seems the metascientific and historical study of the major aspects, universes of discourse, and objectives of applied linguistics discipline has received scant attention. To redress conceivably this deficiency Kees de Bot's monograph '*A History of Applied Linguistics*' is devoted to a historical overview of applied linguistics.

The book, as its title plainly attests, is written to depict *fons et origo* of applied linguistics with a historical overtone. Instead of tracing out a chronological narration and quotidian history, the book appropriates a theme-based reconstruction and representation of the past history of discipline over the last 30 years to tender applied linguistics graduate students and

(maturing) researchers working further afield, with an organizing scheme of how, when, where, which, and by whom a core set of theoretical trends in applied linguistics have been advanced. The book, since de Bot contends that there is dearth of research on the history of applied linguistics compared with history of foreign language teaching, is characterized by endeavoring “to present the present state of the field of AL [applied linguistics] within a historical context” (p. 1) paving the way for the future historiographies of the discipline. To lend such a historical doctrine cogency and to obtain takes of a sample that can represent the entire field, “based on [author’s] own network and knowledge of the field” (p. 9), a phalanx of well-established and well-cited scholars of different paradigmatic persuasions are interviewed and surveyed by a self-designed questionnaire. The volume consists of 9 chapters preceded by an introduction and concluded with closing reflections and is followed by three appendices, pivoting mainly on describing and analyzing the data collected from the informants—namely, their demographic and academic background, their socialization point into the field, their definition of applied linguistics, the names of influential leaders, their most important ‘mentors’ and ‘followers’, seminal articles, agenda-setting books, generative research trends identified by paradigmatic instances that echo the broader current of field, and improvements in language education attributable to the contributions of applied linguistics. All the chapters are clearly written in a very accessible, lucid and engaging academic prose. The book, bringing the kind of conscientious scholarship imperative to making inroads into the temporal scope of discipline, is an interesting contribution and a timely work on documenting, and being reflexive of, the history of applied linguistics. No one interested in following developments of discipline, waxing and waning of some key research traditions, theoretical trends, conceptual grounds, and influential works from a personal perspective of a well-known applied linguist with a productive career, can fail to profit from a reading of this work.

To set the stage toward appreciating the preferences and priorities made in terms of research programs, sampling of informants and intellectual foci for study, the author in the introduction provides a biographical sketch of his professional development as an applied linguist. Adducing some support from a couple of informants of his research, publication of an influential article by Canale and Swain (1980), foundation of a leading journal of the field *Applied Linguistics* (OUP) and his own socialization into the discipline, the author dates 1980 as the commencement window for his study and 2010 for windup period. It is my contention that the rationale behind opting for 1980-2010 period as starting point for *re-presenting* the

history of applied linguistics because “this is the period I [author] was involved in the field” (p. 3) is perhaps a fundamental flaw for any descriptive chronicle and historical narrative of the dynamics of an academic discipline. It is a truism that every historical perspective, irrespective of how much attention is paid to comprehensiveness and objectivity of the account, is by any means a subjective and partial treatise. The point at issue here, however, is how a writer of a historical narrative systematically and adequately distances his choice of which disciplinary milestones to include in the discussion and so applied linguists from whom he collects his research data from being arbitrary and personalized. By all accounts, it can still be argued that the author embraces a perspective from the standpoint of his own convictions.

Applied linguistics- a multidisciplinary, scientific, factual, and problem-oriented enterprise- has been grappling with some thorny considerations and contentious issues since its inception, boiling down to three broad-brush points: (a) demarcating purportedly its disciplinary watersheds, with its own subject matter and a body of ordered knowledge, from the feeding and lateral disciplines such as language teaching, linguistics, psychology, sociology, education, and so on, (b) setting and defining its own distinctive ontological axioms, epistemological presuppositions, and methodological heuristics which distinguish it from other disciplines especially from the parent linguistics and language teaching disciplines, and (c) contributing theoretically and methodologically, and propagating its findings and results, to other disciplines as a *propaedeutic* discipline that deals systematically with targeted language-oriented issues and problems of practical import, engendering a body of new scientific knowledge to be wielded by its own sub-disciplines and adjacent fields of study rather than being a *parasitic* discipline (see also McNamara, 2015) which subordinately invokes the unmediated intellectual capital, conceptual and theoretical frameworks, and methodological and empirical lines of inquiry of other disciplines to bear on the scientific investigation of problems of language-grounded kind.

In chapter three, de Bot embarks on a brief discussion of far-from-crystalline definition of applied linguistics that has been of longstanding concern within the field. He stakes out too broad a definition to frame his research on: “[the definition of applied linguistics is] the study of the development and use of multiple languages” (p.28). Yet it does not follow, in the view of the author, that probing the nature and delineating the disciplinary terminus of applied linguistics is a necessary prerequisite, and the attendant diverging vantage points an intractable problem, for practicing applied linguistics. In order to tease apart de Bot’s

definition, I should like note two points: Firstly, one may envision an intrinsic goal for applied linguistics entailing understanding, describing and explaining the developmental process of multiple languages as well as pursuing a utilitarian goal in that applied linguistics sets out to solve problems corresponding to use of language in real world. It nevertheless remains the case that the epistemic goal of advancing our knowledge of language-related phenomena and the extrinsic goal of improving the use of language-dependent procedures in solving practical problems are two sides of a relational dependency of theory and practice in the scientific activity of doing applied linguistics. Given de Bot's disciplinary orientation, he apparently demotes applied linguistics to research streams which aim to come to terms with language development and use, ruling out some important sub-disciplines associated with the field, to name a few, such as language policy and planning, rhetoric and stylistics, translation and interpretation studies, cultural linguistics, language literacy, critical discourse analysis, language testing and assessment, and critical applied linguistics. This counterfactual reduction of applied linguistics to language development and use is enough here to allow me to conclude that de Bot's stipulative, and indeed circumscribing, definition obviates *a priori* - at least implicitly - all discussions of cultural, ideological, social, technological and discursive aspects of language-anchored practices, and in doing so leaves major realms of applied linguistics research cores unexamined. There is no consensus about what would count as definitional characteristics of applied linguistics, de Bot's rightly contends, but also about identity autonomy of applied linguistics or lack thereof (i.e., heteronomy) with regard to other disciplines. Linguistics arguably is one of the disciplines which has afforded the most yielding set of premises extant in applied linguistics, not to mention language pedagogy. Demarcating the boundaries between 'theoretical linguistics' and 'applied linguistics' and eschewing what I dub as *scope-mistake* - assuming that (theoretical) linguistics theories, models, hypotheses, and concepts are directly and immediately applicable to applied linguistics problems and phenomena, and the other way round- have been so much discussed in the literature. One should not be surprised thus that Widdowson (2000), among others, has argued repeatedly that 'applied linguistics' is not 'linguistics applied', trying to convincingly reason that equating these two is not only untenable, it also delegitimizes the multidisciplinary and epistemically independent nature of applied linguistics. In view of the fact that a marked cleavage in (theoretical) linguistics has been growing between a school that was premised on Chomskian universal grammar and mentalistic reality as opposed to a usage-based camp which is postulated on the stochastic matching of form-meaning-use and empirical reality, de Bot maintains that "this [usage based] type of linguistics is much more

amenable to views of language as a social construct... [and] AL [applied linguistics] as aimed at language problems as experienced in the real world, can more easily contribute to such problems (p.30)". Perhaps it is more than a mere intuitive presumption to think that for de Bot usage-based linguistics given that its data comes from language use in social hull harbingers plausibility, if not unavoidability, of invoking linguistics to tackle real-world problems in applied linguistics research. I, in line with Widdowson (2000) and contra de Bot's assumption, contend that direct inapplicability of linguistics to material-world problems holds whether or not (theoretical) linguistics has shifted its focus from describing the subjective and internal knowledge of the abstract code of a single individual to explicating how objectively and empirically this knowledge is actualized and practiced in the real world inter-individually.

One of the most fascinating and compelling is his chapter on what de Bot labels 'the dynamic turn' in applied linguistics. One is treated to a relatively copious description of complex dynamic systems theory (CDST) intending to induce a certain personal voiceprint. CDST is a nascent conceptual scheme developed and constituted by attempts to articulate a novel research program which considers language a complex, dynamic, adaptive, and self-organizing system, challenging current SLA theories which are arguably based on Newtonian conceptions of causality, objective knowledge, and reductionism. There are two general currents within 'the dynamic turn' in applied linguistics scholarship accommodating a different variety of usages. One current is a well-researched interpretation of CDST that elsewhere I have termed 'contextual DST' and, broadly construed, is affiliated with usage-based linguistics, considering language use a necessary and sufficient condition for development of language system over time (e.g., de Bot & Larsen-Freeman, 2011). Another reading called 'dialectical DST' repays deeper probing in directions ignored by contextual DST, being predicated on a view of language as a purposive, dynamic, complex and processual system which emerges from the dialectical and dialogical synthesis of socialized cognition and cognized social across different temporal events by an agentive language user internally coupled with immediate and sociocultural umwelt (Karimi-Aghdam, 2016). Departing from contextual DST that rightly refutes inborn language faculty endowed by nature, de Bot provides a levelheaded and punctilious description of the new trend, rarely venturing far from what some applied linguists including himself have previously discussed and concluded.

Despite these criticisms, the book is persuasive in its central claims and, recruiting a broad range of contemporary voices, brings fresh and pertinent evidence to be applied to issues important to applied linguistics. Useful and an accessible read, the book, though necessarily speculative at times, has laid out an agenda for future research and helps foster fruitful debate about our understanding of the disciplinary maturity of applied linguistics. For the initiated attempting to explore applied linguistics in more depth, nevertheless de Bot's book has much less to offer nor does it draw upon viewpoints from applied linguists working in South America, Africa and Asia.

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