Applied linguistics beyond postmodernism

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ABSTRACT

Viewed historically, applied linguistics clearly has modernist roots. Yet the expectations awakened by its inception in a "scientific" approach to solving language problems have steadily been eroded by postmodernist views and the approaches associated with those. This battle has been fought over a number of decades, at times with truly radical fervour, often using opposites to characterise the intellectual conflict, such as quantitative and qualitative, or positivist and postpositivist. Given the recent predominance of postmodernist views in applied linguistics, this article asks whether it is possible for modernist paradigms again to begin to influence the field, by looking at the rise of a new paradigm that will affect both linguistics and applied linguistics. In terms of foundational distinctions, a dynamic or complex systems approach will certainly be noteworthy for drawing our attention to at least two truly complex linguistic ideas that have not adequately been analysed in linguistic theory. These are, first, the complex linguistic idea of the origin, growth, maturation and possible loss of language, and, second, the idea of the complex relationship between lingual subject and object. The serious consideration of these in a number of recent analyses done from a complex or dynamic systems point of view is an indication that a foundational analysis, though wholly necessary and illuminating, rarely moves at the forefront of theoretical discovery. Like all philosophical analysis, it should therefore adopt a fittingly humble stance. That kind of humility, however, applies across paradigms as well: the arrival of a new paradigm in the field is a timely reminder that enduring domination of a single paradigm in a field remains unlikely. What a philosophical analysis can, in such a case, accomplish is to provide a foundational framework for assessing the relative merits and contributions of each successive paradigm.

Uit 'n geskiedkundige oogpunt vind die toegepaste taalkunde ongetwyfeld sy wortels in die modernisme. Tog is die verwagtinge wat geskep is deur sy ontstaan in 'n "wetenskaplike" benadering tot die oplossing van taalprobleme algaande weggekalwe deur postmodernistiese beskouinge en benaderings. Hierdie soms hewige twis het 'n dekade-lange stryd ontketen, gekenmerk deur kontrasterende terme waarmee die intellektuele konflik beskryf is: kwantitatief en kwalitatief, of positivisties en postpositivisties. In die lig van die huidige dominante posisie van postmodernistiese beskouings in die toegepaste taalkunde vra hierdie bydrae of dit moontlik is dat die modernisme kan herrys, deur te kyk na die opkoms van 'n nuwe paradigma wat sal inwerk op beide die linguistiek en die toegepaste taalkunde. Uit die hoek van grondslag-onderskeidings sal 'n dinamiese of komplekse stelselsbenadering die klem laat val op ten minste twee komplekse linguistiese idees wat nog nooit behoorlik ondersoek is nie. Daar is

eerstens die komplekse linguistiese idee van die ontstaan, groei, rypwording en moontlike verlies van taal, en tweedens die gedagte van die komplekse verhouding tussen linguale subjek en objek. Die aantal onlangse analises in hierdie verband vanuit 'n komplekse stelsels-perspektief bevestig dat grondslagstudie selde teoretiese ontdekking voorafgaan. Alhoewel grondslagstudie beslis nodig en leersaam is, word nederigheid verlang. Dit geld egter ook paradigmas, aangesien geen enkele benadering voortdurend dominant sal wees nie, soos die geskiedenis leer. Die waarde van 'n filosofiese analise kan dus eerder gesien word in die daarstelling van 'n grondliggende raamwerk waarteen die meriete en bydraes van die agtereenvolgende paradigmas oorweeg kan word.

Historical and systematic analysis

A recent analysis (Weideman 2011) of the themes of positivism and postpositivism in applied linguistics once again made it clear to me that the history of applied linguistics can also be viewed – and perhaps more accurately - as an interplay of modernist and postmodernist forces. In addition, the analysis reinforced my premise that conceptualisations of the foundations of the field of applied linguistics need to be done both in a historical and a systematic way. If an analysis surveys only the history of this discipline (cf. Linn 2008), it has no other than a historical measure by which to evaluate and assess the strengths of prevailing (and by that measure influential) paradigms. Yet, if it is backed up by a systematic framework that allows an assessment of the relative strengths and merits of one approach as against another, whether that be an earlier or a subsequent approach, it has found a mode of evaluation that potentially has salutary effects on making a judgement also as to the integrity and wholeness of the discipline or, in some cases, the lack of it.

If we take as the start of applied linguistics not merely the concern, stretching over many centuries, with language teaching and learning (Linn 2008), or with the assessment of language ability, but rather the mid-20th century effort (Fries 1945; Lado 1964; Stevick 1971: 2) to secure a rational, scientific basis for language teaching designs, then we are interpreting applied linguistic work as being of a very specific disciplinary nature. That is that it is a discipline concerned with design (Corder 1972: 6f.; Cope & Kalantzis 2000: 7). This systematic starting point, which I shall return to below, is important because it holds across all the various interpretations, both modernist and postmodernist, of applied linguistic work over the past six decades.

Today, the designs in question relate in the main to how language *courses* are conceived and planned; how language *tests* are designed and developed; or to what plans and *policies* are devised to manage language across institutions like schools or universities, across systems (such as education systems), or even countries, that need consistency in the official use of languages (for the last two, cf. Shohamy 2008). What marks these designs as different from the plans made before the 20th century is that they qualify as applied linguistic work only if they can be backed up by a theoretical rationale. There is an interplay, therefore, between the leading technical design function of an applied linguistic artefact and its grounding analytical or theoretical basis,

as in Figure 1, below (Weideman 2009a: 244). Amongst the many possible dimensions of applied linguistic designs, these two stand out as terminal, qualifying and foundational, modes:
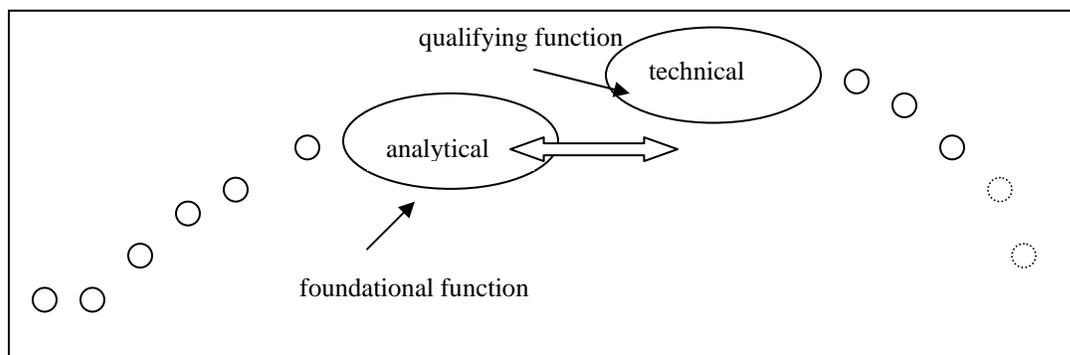
Figure 1: Terminal functions of an applied linguistic design

How does this systematic starting point then relate to what happened in the history of applied linguistics? Viewed historically, applied linguistics clearly has modernist roots. In terms of systematic evaluation, that means that it confused its foundational, analytical function with its leading technical design function. It attributes an overblown function to the "scientific" basis of design. That modernism did not prevail, however, is equally clear when we survey the seven traditions or styles of doing applied linguistics that are evident in its relatively short modern history.

The uniqueness of each of the different styles or paradigms of devising applied linguistic solutions to language problems lies in the way that each provides a different theoretical rationale, or sometimes a whole set of such rationales, for those designs mentioned above that are the stock in trade of applied linguistics: language courses, language tests and language policies. The successive generations of applied linguistic work that have influenced the design of solutions to language problems are summarised in Table 1 below (Weideman 2009b: 62):

Table 1: Seven successive traditions within applied linguistics

	Paradigm/Tradition	Characterized by
(1)	Linguistic/behaviourist	"scientific" approach
(2)	Linguistic "extended paradigm model"	language is a social phenomenon
(3)	Multi-disciplinary model	attention not only to language, but also to learning theory and pedagogy
(4)	Second language acquisition research	experimental research into how languages are learned
(5)	Constructivism	knowledge of a new language is interactively constructed
(6)	Postmodernism	political relations in teaching; multiplicity of perspectives
(7)	A dynamic/complex systems approach	language emergence organic and non-linear, through dynamic adaptation

There are a number of difficulties in characterising the ways in which applied linguistics has been done in the past in this manner, which I shall return to below. However, the main point of this interpretation of the history of applied linguistics is not only that there are unique, historically successive styles of doing applied linguistics, but also that there is historical continuity among them. So, for example, it is clear that the second tradition advances the concerns of the first, by broadening our view of what is meant by "language". Similarly, there are clear links between the multi-disciplinary model proposed by third generation applied linguistic work (Van Els *et al.* 1984) and the multiplicity of perspectives that characterise a good part of qualitative and "interpretive", ethnographic work in the field, which belongs to postmodernist approaches.

A first difficulty with this kind of characterisation therefore concerns its suggestion that the uniqueness of each tradition makes it watertight, that there is no hint of other influence discernible. In human affairs, of which responsible academic and applied linguistic work is

inescapably part, this kind of neatness of categorisation of course does not always hold, especially in light of actual practice. The historical continuity that we have remarked on in the previous paragraph thus indicates that there is more to the history of applied linguistics than a succession of uniquely different traditions. But this categorisation nonetheless constitutes a first set of conceptual "handles" by which we can attempt to understand historically different styles of applied linguistic work.

A second difficulty, of course, lies in the observation that there are several other ways of characterising the field. When I turn next to a discussion of some of these, I shall, however, discuss them on the basis of the initial distinctions made above by interpreting these alternative characterisations against the backdrop of the framework set out in Table 1.

Further systematic ways of characterising the history of applied linguistics

As I remarked at the outset, describing applied linguistics as variations of modernism and postmodernism might be a more accurate way of doing it justice than to say that it is constituted by variations of positivist and postpositivist approaches. Kumaravadivelu (2006: 11), for example, uses these terms interchangeably. He characterises as postmodern a framework that runs counter to the "positivist, prescriptive research paradigm" that is characteristic of modernist approaches. Positivism is therefore equated with prescriptive designs, and not surprisingly. Early, modernist applied linguistics, the first generation of work referred to above, awoke expectations that a "scientific" (and therefore theoretically prescriptive) way could be found of fixing any and all problems that had to do, for example, with language teaching. It is exactly this dependence on the authority derived from "science" that postmodernism contests.

The main differences between modernist and postmodernist approaches to applied linguistics therefore lie in the expectations they create (Weideman 2007). Postmodernist approaches not only contest the certainty of being able to obtain a "scientific" solution to a language problem, but actively strive to subvert it (Pennycook 2004). Pennycook, in fact, goes so far as to claim that critical, postmodernist applied linguistics creates anti-disciplinarity (2004: 801). He does not care for scientific rigour in the sense – often also quantitative - intended by modernist approaches. Contrast the following two definitions (exhibits [1] and [2]) of applied linguistics from his postmodernist point of view with the following two (exhibits [3] and [4]),

drawn from one of the leading figures in second generation, but still unmistakably modernist, applied linguistics:

(1) … critical applied linguistics might be viewed as an approach to language related questions that springs from an assumption that we live amid a world of pain (Pennycook 2004: 797f.).

(2) Critical applied linguistics is not about developing a set of skills that will make the doing of applied linguistics more rigorous, more objective, but about making applied linguistics more politically accountable (Pennycook 2004: 798).

(3) By studying language in as scientific a manner as possible we should be able to make change in language teaching a matter of cumulative improvement (Wilkins 1975: 208).

(4) We refer to linguistics in an attempt to make the process of change in language teaching less subject to fashion and more dependent on the cumulative increase in our knowledge of language learning and teaching (Wilkins 1975: 228).

Without doubt the last two definitions echo a reverence for the progressive discovery of truth through scientific analysis, and an improvement of the designs that follow that progression faithfully, that can only be associated with modernism. That kind of starting point is evidence of a belief that goes well beyond the label "positivist." It is a belief that lies at the heart of modernism.

What the positivist-postpositivist cline does illustrate well, however, is another characterisation that is often applied to research in applied linguistics, that between quantitative and qualitative methodologies. I have attempted in Figure 2 below to summarise these opposites as continua, so as to accommodate the potential that each has for variation between extremes (Weideman 2011):

modernist

qualitative

positivism

postpositivism

quantitative

postmodernist
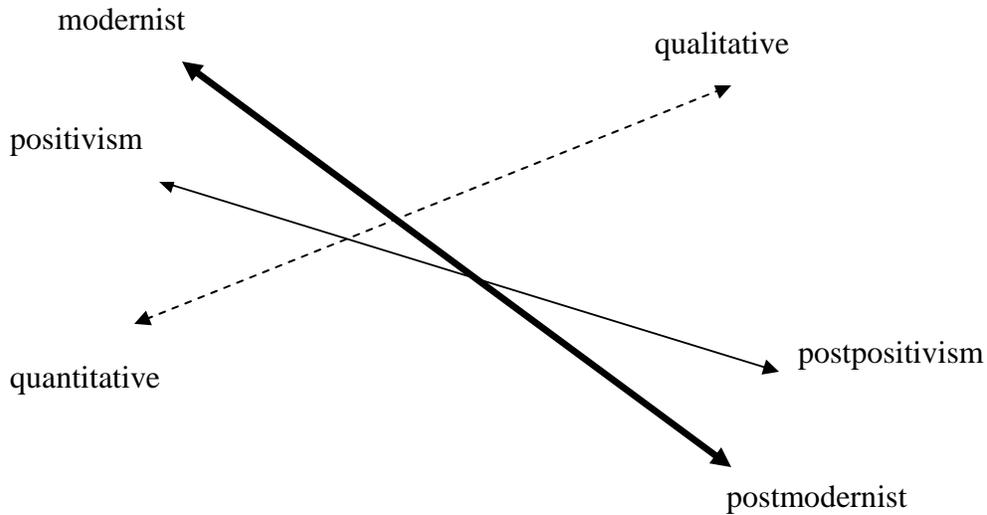
Figure 2: Various categorisations of approaches to applied linguistics

Positivism/postpositivism is therefore just one of several kinds of categorisation that can be used to describe how we go about designing solutions within an applied linguistic framework. It acts here as a kind of shorthand for a characterisation that encompasses all of the humanities: the contrast between quantitative and qualitative approaches (cf. Richards, 2009). In a quantitative approach, as the term indicates, the emphasis is on empirical facts, especially as these are expressed in numbers. In a qualitative approach, on the other hand, the focus is, first, on the notion that our observations need analysis and interpretation, and, second, especially in more politically radical styles of work, also political action.

Modernism versus postmodernism a more encompassing categorisation

As the set of four definitions (exhibits 1-4, above) makes clear, however, the classification of styles of doing applied linguistics as "modernist" and "postmodernist" probably more accurately reflects the paradigmatic extremes within applied linguistics. Thus, it is noteworthy that almost every style of doing applied linguistics, right up to the sixth tradition, presents us to a greater or lesser extent with modernist assumptions. There was some indication, in fifth generation work that was done from a constructivist point of view, and which in South Africa provided the theoretical basis for an important examination of language as medium of instruction policies (cf.

MacDonald & Burroughs 1991) at school level, that there may be alternatives to modernist approaches in applied linguistics. Yet it was not really before the advent of ethnographic descriptions of classroom communication that a turning point was reached.

Within the broader postmodernist approach, such ethnographic description is evidence of a milder, at times politically less radical style of doing applied linguistics. It attempts to give "thick", multi-faceted and potentially diverse descriptions of problem situations, and interprets these in light of congruent evidence deriving from a multiplicity of sources and data sets (cf. Nunan 1992: 57f.). Its applied linguistic lineage is evidently to be found in third generation work, that emphasised multi-disciplinarity, and, by implication, the multiplicity of perspectives that this brought to applied linguistic endeavour.

For more radical postmodernist approaches, designs that are made to solve language problems must also have accountability (Kumaravadivelu 2003, 2006; Pennycook 2004; Weideman 2006). Since the main intention of a postmodernist design is to begin with the identification of the conflicting and consensual dimensions of problematic language contexts that call for our attention, political issues often predominate. What postmodernism has contributed to our understanding of improving such designs is that abusive power relations can detrimentally affect accountable solutions for language problems.

Does applied linguistics have a "source" discipline?

Apart from the alternative descriptions of applied linguistic endeavour summarised in Figure 2 above, there is an additional one, which is related to the relationship that a certain style of doing applied linguistics has to what some call its "source discipline", linguistics. Though there are fundamentally insurmountable problems with this view, it is not uncommon. Apart from modernist-postmodernist and other categorisations, one could speak, in fact, of linguistic and other conceptualisations of applied linguistics.

It is clear from Table 1 that at least three traditions of applied linguistic work constitute *linguistic* conceptualisations of the field. They are first, second and fourth generation work. In the third, to some extent in the fifth, and clearly in the sixth paradigm, postmodernism, we have other than linguistic conceptualisations.

Linguistic conceptualisations of applied linguistics derive from viewing applied linguistics as nothing more than an extension of linguistics. Hence Kaplan's (1980: 10) thesis: "I would posit that applied linguistics constitutes the point at which all study of language comes together and becomes actualized." The assumption is that there is a simple continuity between linguistics and applied linguistics, and the motivation for that assumption lies in the modernist starting point of, initially, first generation applied linguistics, but also in other linguistically oriented traditions in the discipline. Compare, for example, the following claim by Wilkins (1975: 215; emphases added), who posits that:

> (5) Linguistics is the subject we are concerned with and *because it has the same subject-matter as language teaching*, we are entitled to assume that is has greater importance...

Similarly, in second generation applied linguistics, there is an enduring emphasis on language. This emphasis has led to accusations of its being technocratic in style, especially in its outlines of how language course syllabi should be designed (cf. e.g. Wilkins 1976). It thus remained closely allied with the modernist beginnings so evident in first generation work. Much the same kind of analysis can be made of the other "linguistic" orientations among the different generations of applied linguistic work.

Once we have accepted the historical divide between modernism and postmodernism in the field, however, and once we have acknowledged that postmodernism, especially in its more decidedly political tenets, clearly breaks with the tradition of linguistics being the source discipline for applied linguistics, that notion loses all argumentative power. It is exposed as being a typically modernist premise, and one that is necessary to sustain the modernist pretence of theoretical work being more authoritative if it can claim some "scientific" backing. The exposure of the bankruptcy, for example, of what was supposed to be the "scientific" rationale for the audio-lingual method (Weideman 2007), which flowed from first generation applied linguistic designs, has put paid to this warped expectation.

Today, given the dominance of postmodernist thought in applied linguistics, it is common to find a more than linguistic orientation, if not directly in the designs that are made (which are often identified as an Achilles heel of postmodernism), then at least in their execution and

implementation. So asking hard questions such as whose interests are being served when large publishers "dump" yesterday's designs on developing countries, sometimes with the collaboration of "experts" from the developed world, as happened in South Africa in the 1980s, are the order of the day. If the former countries are also donor-dependent, what prevents an influential international language from dominating the politically powerless? Even the milder strain in this style of applied linguistic work, which is associated with an ethnographic, interpretive approach (Weideman 2003), is thoroughly postmodernist in orientation.

Can applied linguistics go beyond postmodernism?

In the academic world in general, there currently seems to be a weariness attached to postmodernist analyses, and a renewed interest in alternative paradigms. For example, when I arrived on a working visit to the Rijksuniversiteit Groningen in the Netherlands in December 2010, there were posters up advertising a conference, under the title: "Beyond Aftermaths - Contemporary (Post-)Postmodernism in the Shadow of the Twentieth Century." The conference website explains that in "the new millennium, the high tide of postmodernism has passed away. Indeed, writers, artists and thinkers are increasingly extending their scope beyond postmodernism's voids and silences," seeking a substitute for its "irony and relativism", as well as for ways of going beyond the intractable contradictions of postmodern thought (International conference 2010). The sense of imminent paradigm change was noticed in commentaries on applied linguistic work just before the turn of the century. For example, in introducing a review of applied linguistics at the end of the previous decade, Rampton (1997: 16) remarked:

> … what does stand out in … the state of play in AL [applied linguistics] … is the level of enthusiasm that authors show for the challenges ahead… It is difficult to say whether this forward orientation reflects the end of a phase of fragmentation and the resurgence of a spirit of cross-disciplinary interchange …

Today, that imminent sense of paradigm change has come to fruition in what I have described above as a seventh tradition or style of applied linguistics, a complex systems approach (Larsen-Freeman & Cameron 2008; De Bot, Lowie & Verspoor 2007).

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An emerging new paradigm

Complex systems thinking finds its roots in biology (Kramsch 2008; Larsen-Freeman & Cameron 2008: x, 5). Its key concepts revolve around the adaptability (Larsen-Freeman & Cameron 2008: 33; cf. also Beckner *et al.* 2009) and potential of systems, especially the ability to self-organise (Larsen-Freeman & Cameron 2008: 62), and "the organic nature of change" within those systems (2008: 1, 17). The conceptual view of change presented here is related not to its original physical understanding, but to a biotic interpretation: "… an organism's ongoing activity continuously changes its neural states, just as growth changes the physical dimensions of the body", these authors remark (2008: 17; cf. too 29, 32, 72). So the emphasis on dynamics (or dynamic systems, which is the other currently popular term for such an approach, and which is observable, for example, in the noteworthy work of Kees de Bot *c.s.*) is an analogical biotic, or organically dynamic one.

Contrary to the causal explanations that are so typical of modernist thinking, a dynamic systems approach further emphasises that the change being described is essentially non-linear, emerging from the interaction of the multiplicity of components of many interacting systems (Larsen-Freeman & Cameron 2008: 2). And change can be interrupted when such a complex set of interactions is attracted to provisionally stable states (Larsen-Freeman & Cameron 2008: 20, 43, 81, Chapter 3), as, for example, when a language has undergone a process of standardisation or, in the case of the individual, fossilisation. Further lingual phenomena that can be described in terms of such emergent and provisionally stable states are jargon, pidgins and creoles (Lee *et al.* 2009: 35ff.). Again, such stability is merely a stable potential, that can itself become dynamic when the multiplicity of interactions in the complex system that is language tips it out of its provisional stability to move again into uncertain, unstable territory. The main point is that a complex system is flexible enough to maintain its stability through continuous adaptation (Larsen-Freeman & Cameron, 2008: 56; cf. too 36), but that also makes its growth trajectory unpredictable in linear terms.

Growth trajectories for unstable complex dynamic systems such as language growth may, however, yield regular patterns for the linguist and applied linguist to attend to. So, for example, the grammatical subsystem of a language may exhibit a recurrently regular pattern (Larsen-Freeman & Cameron 2008: 84). In its interaction with other systems and subsystems, the various

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components of the complex system that is language co-adapts for growth and development to occur. And of course, in a complex systems view, there are many more components than, say, lexical and grammatical ones: language also has various subsystems of discourse and lingual interaction in many different spheres.

The further contribution of a dynamic systems approach lies in the mapping and the mathematical and computer modelling (cf. Caspi 2010; Beckner *et al*. 2009: 12) of non-linear growth in a language, which is also variable across learners, and the way that this is nurtured or inhibited in the classroom. This kind of perspective on language development of course generates new design principles for instructional tasks, that should, according to Larsen-Freeman and Cameron (2008: 212), enhance the potential of learning and growth of learners' language if they can be designed "to challenge learners to exploit the meaning potential of their developing systems in new ways". In their observations in this regard, it is evident that Larsen-Freeman and Cameron (2008: 226) again make use of biotically tinged concepts:

> … language resources of individuals exist only as latent potential to engage in appropriate patterns of interaction until realized in specific discourse environments… The challenge is for interaction, tasks and tests to be designed, planned, and managed so as to push and stretch an individual's language resources to the edge of their current potential.

Though the multiplicity of interacting systems is not limited to language, but also includes consideration of cognitive, affective, historical, social, educational and other systems, there remains a sense in which a complex systems approach continues to focus on language. Its alternative and challenge to earlier, generativist accounts of language learning is just that: a new account of language, of language learning, and of language growth.

Does it take us beyond postmodernism?

There is little doubt that an approach that views language growth and development from a complex, dynamic systems point of view will take and has already begun to take us beyond postmodernism. The more interesting question seems to be whether it will take us back to modernist ways of thought, and whether it constitutes a revival of that.

If the focus of a complex systems approach remains on language, it has clear affinities with fourth generation work in second language acquisition research. To some, its advent will signal merely the passing of the baton from a generativist generation to one that adopts a complexity perspective. Yet, in terms of the modernist-postmodernist divide, second language acquisition research, certainly as it was influenced by generativism, is clearly modernist in orientation. In the affinities a complex systems approach has with what some will see as experimental and technocratic styles of work, and its clear links to the natural sciences in its emergentism and use of organic concepts, it might well appear to present a revival of modernism.

In my opinion that will not be entirely fair. First, from the point of view of its laying bare, and opening up to our theoretical vision complex linguistic concepts, it is making a substantially new contribution to linguistic (and potentially to applied linguistic) insight. From the systematic perspective (Weideman 2009c) that I am employing, there are at least three possible complex linguistic concepts. They are, first, an idea of the *beginning, growth, maturation* and possible *loss* of language (or languages, when one extends this beyond the individual); second, an idea of the highly complex interaction between *lingual subject* (the agent who produces language) and *lingual object* (the product); and, third, the complex idea of the relationship and interplay between *lingual norm* or principle and *lingual fact*. Such complex linguistic ideas can only be understood in terms of a number – a multiplicity – of elementary linguistic concepts.

It cannot be contested, I think, that what is being dealt with in a dynamic or complex systems approach is at least the first of these, the idea of how language grows and develops, which is described through many elementary concepts. So, for example, the concept of multiple systems that interact and grow or decline is a clear reference within the lingual mode of reality to the numerical; the idea of change, as has been pointed out above, singles out an echo that is originally physical; and the notion of lingual adaptability clearly echoes, within the lingual, the organic modality. Similarly, when complex interacting systems become productive in the use of the lingual resources and potential at their disposal, we have an analogically formative concept in the lingual modality. Finally, it should be clear that in the idea of systemic interactivity, we have a modal reference to the social dimension of experience. This is one illustration of how a dynamic systems perspective utilizes many elementary linguistic concepts. These elementary linguistic concepts derive, as Verburg (1965, but cf. too 1951, 1971, 1976), a renowned

Groningen linguist, had already alerted us to almost half a century ago, from the coherence of the lingual (or "delotic" as he termed it) mode of existence with all other dimensions of reality. And the emerging perspective of course also relates strongly to the other two complex linguistic ideas, that of lingual subject and object, and lingual norm and fact, that are also understood, within this foundational framework, as becoming theoretically accessible to theorists when they are similarly analyzed.

Second, a dynamic systems approach is clearly anti-modernist in its promotion of non-reductionist perspectives. It attempts to overcome many of the *–isms*, such as structuralism, generativism, and relativism that have historically plagued linguistic and applied linguistic theory (cf. again the various analyses in Lee *et al.* 2009). Third, in close conjunction with this, it is decidedly anti-rationalist in approach, and intentionally focussed on the empirical data at hand (cf. for example Larsen-Freeman & Cameron, 2008: 219, and the remarks of Lee *et al*. 2009: 60 on what constitutes linguistic data), specifically as these data give indications as to the lingual potential or resources at the disposal of individual lingual subjects.

Fourth, in this same connection, it may, therefore, but need not subscribe to the ideological divide between modernism and postmodernism.

When a dynamic systems theory begins to exert its influence more fully also in applied linguistic designs, one of the unanswered questions of this seventh style of applied linguistics will be what it makes of the political agenda of the postmodernist paradigm that preceded it. This may be where the hardest battles will be fought, and most of the practical compromises in designs made. The current silence on political issues affecting applied linguistic designs from those who work within a complex systems approach is no doubt an ominous one to those trained and used to working in a postmodernist idiom. But I have little doubt that this emergent seventh paradigm has taken us beyond postmodernism.

A coherent framework for applied linguistics

A historical account of applied linguistics (cf. Rajagopalan 2004) often indicates the further need for a systematic framework to assess the merits of such development across different traditions of doing applied linguistics as set out in Table 1 above. We do not yet have such a framework, and the fairly fragmentary systematic insights utilised here are not yet adequate to serve as such a framework. What can be said is that these systematic analyses are of a foundational, philosophical nature. They are neither linguistic nor applied linguistic in character.

Such foundational analyses are not by that token useless, however. Their function is to illuminate and help understand even ideologically disparate paradigms, such as the modernist and postmodernist examples given above. They reveal 20th century applied linguistics as a discipline caught in a choice between technocracy and revolution. The current serious consideration of a number of complex linguistic ideas in a dynamic systems approach, however, makes it clear that such philosophical analyses will never move at the forefront of discovery. This part of foundational analysis cannot get ahead of real developments within a discipline. Though I could for example foresee, in the late 1970s and early 1980s, when I began to write a foundational analysis of linguistics that was published in adapted form many years later (Weideman 2009c), that such complex linguistic ideas were necessary, the analysis of these had to wait for the field to produce them. This means that those who do philosophical analyses must adopt a certain humility in their endeavours. That kind of humility, however, applies across paradigms as well: the arrival of a new paradigm in the field is a timely reminder that enduring domination of a single paradigm in a field remains unlikely. What a philosophical analysis can in all such cases accomplish is to provide a foundational framework for assessing the relative merits and contributions of each successive paradigm.

As a final and cautionary note, let me point out that the kinds of categorisations that have been part of the preceding discussion can never tell the whole story. Life, as well as designing solutions to language problems through applied linguistic work, is messier than that. Since the various traditions, though set out as following chronologically, persist and sometimes exist side by side for many years, applied linguists in reality combine and accommodate various styles, sometimes without noticing contradictions. A good example of this is probably one of the several

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current "handbooks" of applied linguistics (Kaplan 2002), which contains a number of analyses and commentaries that are seriously at odds, yet there is no indication of either the editor or the contributors being conscious of that. It provides evidence, first, of some applied linguists persevering in the styles that they were trained, and of others mixing a number of approaches. Furthermore, it demonstrates how traditions within applied linguistics get institutionalised within higher education and publishing interests without much challenge. In this respect, postmodernist critiques of applied linguistic work are, unfortunately, still correct, and we may not see those challenges overcome until we have a more thoroughly worked-out framework for the discipline.

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