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Albert Weideman

Responsible Design in Applied Linguistics: Theory and Practice

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Prologue

The idea to write this book was prompted by discussions that I have had over many years not only with fellow applied linguists but also with my students and with scholars from many other disciplines. In that sense, it is not insular, attending only to concerns within the single discipline – applied linguistics – that appears in its title. In particular, it was prompted by a discussion I had in 2005 with two scholars, both from other disciplines, whose views I value very highly: the philosopher, Danie Strauss, and the erudite historian and philosopher of science, Kerry Hollingsworth. They encouraged me to explore cross-disciplinary, foundational themes, and Kerry's practical support meant that he also became the publisher of one and joint publisher of a second of two books I wrote on the foundations of linguistics: *Beyond Expression: A Systematic Study of the Foundations of Linguistics* (2009) and *A Framework for the Study of Linguistics* (2011). Both these and the current study undertake to discover the philosophical foundations of our theoretical endeavors.

Such foundational analysis can best be achieved with reference to the historical development of a discipline. It needs to be complemented, however, by a systematic account of the varying emphases in that disciplinary history. These two angles, the historical and the systematic, are once more the theoretical backbone of this book, as they were for the former two mentioned above. The argument will be similar as well. This is that an analysis that operates only in historical terms misses the conceptual point: for work in a discipline to become interpretable, it needs systematic insight that transcends disciplinary boundaries.

The history of a discipline remains important, nonetheless. It provides the content of what should be analysed in a systematic manner. Very often we treat the history of a field in a cursory, even peremptory manner. As the subsequent analysis will illustrate, I thought it worthwhile once more to engage directly with some of the pioneering ideas in the development of the discipline. This engagement is achieved by referring to the original, sometimes awkward or even misleading claims (with the benefit of twenty-first-century hindsight) made by earlier practitioners, rather than merely summarising their conceptualisations before critically discarding them, as is conventional. Our bland paraphrasing of what has gone before too often blunts their meaning.

In these original pronouncements, the evolution of the discipline shows a slowly unfolding realisation: that in the development of applied linguistics we may discern several phases. The first realisation is that a purely linguistic basis for the discipline is untenable and the second that an interdisciplinary foundation may be more desirable, before the thoughts turn, thirdly, to a possible mediating, bridging role for the field. Gradually, in this emergent realisation, that mediation function begins to crystallise as a disciplinary focus on a fourth conceptualisation of our task. That focus is that designs for applied linguistic interventions are intended to solve what are often regarded as truly large-scale (or at least pervasive) language problems and especially problems that have inequality and unfairness as contextual ingredients. The first three chapters attempt to uncover the emergence of these realisations, while the fifth is a preliminary definition of what might be the theoretical and philosophical bases for such a design discipline, since the nature of the 'mediation' that was thought to characterise applied linguistics has never been adequately articulated.

Yet, as the analysis demonstrates, even after this incrementally achieved development, the historical beginning of applied linguistics continued to haunt the discipline, since that inception point had sown the seeds of a modernist *hubris*, a pretension that the solutions it proposed have some 'scientific' sanction (Chap. 4). The fledgling design discipline has since often found itself caught in a vice: the choice between taking either a technocratic or a revolutionary direction. Chapter 6 gives some illustrations of how this choice played out in certain developments in a major subdiscipline of applied linguistics, language teaching design, in the last quarter of the twentieth century.

The increasing differentiation of themes, interests and subfields in the discipline in that same time led to new developments and, eventually, to a move to ensure that applied linguists become accountable for their designs (Chap. 7). This accountability was understood to involve not only the theoretical defensibility of the designed intervention (an openness to scrutiny by peers) but also to the public at large. Postmodernism had arrived and become dominant. With that new orthodoxy, new focuses and priorities for the field emerged. The great variety of methodologies and styles of doing responsible design work in applied linguistics reviewed in Chap. 8 is an indication of how the discipline has grown and flourished. Today, applied linguists are beginning to explore where the discipline will go after and beyond postmodernism, so one likely current contender, dynamic systems theory, is also given a hearing in that same chapter.

If one surveys the history of a discipline, the systematic questions that arise from that narrative must centre on the very basic: Where does the discipline derive from? Where is the discipline heading? What directions has it already taken? Which direction should it rather avoid in future? Which should it embrace? The historical development of applied linguistics as it is set out in this book therefore clearly has to be complemented by an appraisal of the relative worth of all of the variation in design and methods that have been developed. Such an appraisal can best be done responsibly if we have a theoretical framework for the discipline, a philosophically robust conceptualisation of its work. The final chapter asks whether the field is ripe for such an emerging theory of applied linguistics, a question that is even more relevant

in light of its past aversion to 'theoretical' work, clinging as it did to a notion that its designed solutions made it a merely 'practical' endeavor.

Applied linguists propose designs, and that design emphasis indicates that the technical dimension of our experience plays a leading role in our work. Design, along with shaping, planning, forming, facilitating and arranging, is at the centre of applied linguistic work. How the design emphasis that leads the technically defensible solution interacts with the rational grounds for such designs is a question that needs to be answered, however, despite the 'practical' pretensions of our discipline. However practical or impractical the plan or design may be to solve an applied linguistic problem, having that plan or design is not enough to make it qualify as an applied linguistic artefact. In the design of the plan, there must be reference to a theoretical grounding for it. The question of what the relationship is between the leading technical function of the design and its basis in theory can best be answered with reference to a philosophical or foundational framework. One needs to step back from both the design and the theory that may inform the design in order to articulate that relationship.

When informed of my intention to attempt to conceptualise a theory of applied linguistics, a sceptical colleague, who has just completed their own empirical survey of applied linguistics, commented that none of their informants had indicated the need for such a theory. My response was that I do not find that at all surprising. Though my own presentations of foundational issues in the field have been tolerated and even appreciated, applied linguists, given their predilection for the practical, are singularly unenthusiastic about philosophical questions that affect the field. This may be because their design work, done on behalf of the truly disadvantaged, is so urgent that they have no time or energy to raise these questions. Or perhaps it is because they are comfortable with the paradigm they currently utilise to deal with the apparently intractable language problem that they are grappling with. Or it may be, most plausibly perhaps, that they are hesitant because they realise that foundational questions that affect applied linguistics are not themselves applied linguistic questions.

A discipline cannot define itself.

To achieve that, we need to step back from disciplinary endeavor and be prepared to ask and answer philosophical questions. Applied linguists may justifiably feel that they are ill-equipped to engage in philosophical debate. However, if they do not engage with the foundations of their discipline, they do run the risk of becoming either the victims of fashion, uncritically accepting the latest and most fashionable, or being caught in the slipstream of the institutionally dominant paradigm in their work or scholarly environments.

The theory of applied linguistics to be attempted here must in the first instance serve to prevent us from becoming victims of paradigms. It can best do so by identifying the different orientations that our applied linguistic designs use as starting points. In addition, a theory of applied linguistics needs to give us a robust theoretical basis from which to appreciate the relative strengths and weaknesses of historically successive paradigms that influence our designs. Despite the possible detractions, therefore, this book is an attempt to make a start with that project.

Of course the presentation and analysis that follow are partial, and without doubt many will miss their own pet theme or favourite methodology, their narrower or broader interpretation of a well-researched theme or strand or even their preferred conceptualisation of the discipline. The only defences I have for such partiality are that, first, in all of my engagement with the discipline since the 1980s, I have yet to find an other than partial perspective, or even an unprejudiced, neutral starting point. There are ample illustrations of how contested a definition for the field is, and to insist that everyone has to subscribe to a mainstream or majority opinion is either to deny that a variety of perspectives is possible or merely intolerant. The discussion in Chap. 10 of several renewed attempts at defining and redefining applied linguistics provides an analysis of that dilemma. Moreover, I would need to point out that the deliberate choice of philosophical perspective that I have made has at least put my own preference firmly in the spotlight and open to scrutiny. That openness is not always characteristic of such discussion: even in analysing and trying to understand the theoretical foundations of our work, we hedge and shy away from acknowledging the inevitable partiality and prejudice that we bring not only to scholarly work but to human interaction generally. We may, for example, refuse to admit that we still bow to the prime myth of modernity, the unattainable goal of 'scientific' objectivity, while our terminology and analyses indicate differently. Or, rejecting modernism, we may refuse to see that postmodernism brings with it its own ideological restraints, despite our well-intentioned efforts to achieve through it an emancipatory goal. We turn a blind eye when liberatory ideology suppresses dissent and promotes intellectual intolerance.

What I hope is unique about the argument proposed here is that it characterises applied linguistics as a design discipline. As I shall attempt to demonstrate in what follows, that design emphasis is present both in modernist and postmodernist conceptions of the field – a rare point of congruence and one that we therefore should not ignore, since it has the potential of providing a unifying perspective on what constitutes responsible language intervention design. I know that the characterisation of our field as a design discipline is potentially both controversial (from the perspective of those who have contrary views) and contentious (from the point of view of others who will feel that such a stand will omit too much from the current 'broad church' view of applied linguistics taken by what is supposed to be a majority). We should note that, even if it were possible to 'prove' that the latter is indeed a majority view, such proof and the methodology to arrive at such a conclusion will themselves probably be as contestable as the simultaneous assumption that the majority must be correct. In both cases, I can only plead for patience, and a brief suspension of judgement, so that the argument - of how the design feature of our solutions to language problems characterises responsible design work - can be allowed to emerge, to be heard and to be understood. If that argument for the present amounts to a dissenting view, I therefore plead for toleration. As I have stated, I do not purposely wish to omit any approach, subfield or angle, and especially I do not wish to offend or slight any other area of applied linguistic practice; I hope to propose, rather, a worthwhile distinction between linguistics and applied linguistics to show how all that we currently have in the 'broad church' perspective may still be

conceptually accommodated in either of the two disciplines but then in terms of systematic, philosophical distinctions that are theoretically a great deal more defensible than currently conventional views.

A third defence for being open about my choice of theoretical starting point is the continued demonstration to me of its robustness, as I began to employ it many years ago as a young scholar and as, in time, its revealing analyses have enabled me to understand developments and insights in the discipline that I would otherwise have failed to notice. Of course, then, those insights are also biased, but having admitted that, I also have to acknowledge their usefulness, not only to me but also to many of the students whom I have taught and supervised.

This book is an attempt to share further some of that usefulness with others.

Bloemfontein, South Africa Albert Weideman
July 2015

Acknowledgements

My engagement with the discipline of applied linguistics began many years ago with the writing of a thesis to meet the requirements for the degree of Doctor Litterarum in the Faculty of Arts of the University of the Free State. I was privileged to have as supervisor of that preliminary study Christo van Rensburg, whose mentorship and guidance continue to inspire me, many years hence. Many of the themes and arguments of that earlier study have endured and are echoed in the current set of reflections that I offer here after a career-long involvement in the field.

My colleagues Danie Strauss and Dirk van den Berg clarified many points as I progressed with my original engagement with the field, and Phil Brouwer I remember helped me to see a crucial argument. Theo du Plessis, my former head of department, was already as supportive as he now is, many years hence; then, as now, he was always prepared to help. In the very happy year that I spent at the University of Essex, especially the late John Roberts provided a critical sounding board that helped me to formulate with greater clarity and care some of my initial ideas.

One encounter from that time stands out, however, and that was the intense discussion with my external examiner at Essex, Alan Davies. What others may think of as a chance encounter had momentous consequences for me as a scholar. And that discussion was still, after 30 years, not quite concluded at the time of Alan's passing away at the end of 2015. We kept in touch through all of these years, but Alan's recommendations and suggestions have continued to have the same effect they had on that unseasonably cold morning in June 1983, when we forgot about the time, and the demands on it by others who also needed to be interviewed. Neither of us can be described as inconsiderate, but on that day we forgot about all our other commitments.

I am grateful for the help I received from all, as well as for the support and encouragement I have received from numerous other institutions, colleagues and scholars, friends, relatives and family. The National Research Foundation, which makes financial resources available to researchers with few strings attached, needs to be specifically thanked for their contribution. Two colleagues deserve further mention, Marjolijn Verspoor and Kees de Bot, for graciously making a space for me to spend a month every year at the Rijksuniversiteit Groningen, where I had the time

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Contents

Chapter 1
The Foundations of a Discipline of Design

1.1 A Sense of Direction in Applied Linguistics

How many practising applied linguists set aside sufficient time to consider the foundations of their discipline? How do they deal with the difficult questions about it, like: What delimits the field of applied linguistics? How does conceptualisation become possible within it? How is one to judge the various competing and complementary approaches to it? These are not easy questions, nor are their answers always apparent. This book is about these questions. It deals with an underresearched but important component of the discipline, namely its foundations and its philosophical undertow, that are sometimes inappropriately peripheral to the interests of practising applied linguists. It is a small consolation, perhaps, that this is not the case only in the field of applied linguistics: while the need for the process is generally acknowledged, scientists' reflecting upon their own thinking is not exactly a thriving academic enterprise in any discipline today.

Of course practising theorists and academics who pursue this apparently conventional line, to engage in the study of their particular discipline in an unreflective manner, place their work at risk, since reflection and deliberation are at the core of applied linguistic designs (and certainly of more than applied linguistic designs: cf. Schön 1983, 1987). We cannot as applied linguists propose responsibly designed solutions to language problems if we remain ignorant of our theoretical foundations. This is not the only risk. There is the further risk that the limits, the nature and sometimes even the very direction and purpose of a field of intellectual endeavor then appear not to be the scientist's explicit concern. It seems in such cases that our own thinking and the plans we make are not considered important enough to constitute theoretical problems in their own right; that the critical examination of our own theoretical pursuits, our potentially hidden starting points, our own theoretical perspectives and the analytical and technical practices that follow from these perhaps need only be done occasionally, if at all. It is ironic that in a scholarly world where critical practice has become the order of the day, we embrace such a

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limited conception of what constitutes the practice of our design and theoretical skills, perhaps never in a lifetime of work realising that we may be the willing and uncritical servants of some ideology.

Though these observations refer to the practice of science in general, this may be true also, and perhaps especially, of those disciplines marked as 'applied' science, as we shall note again below, when the historical origins of the discipline are examined. When we consider how applied linguistics is practised, it is true that some excuses spring readily to mind for a lack of reflection on what its designs and developed solutions are based. Applied linguistics is in the first instance a design discipline that assists us in making plans in order to overcome language problems. It casts those plans into the form of designed interventions, usually in the shape of national or institutional language policies, curricula, course material or language assessments (Weideman 2011: 14; De Bot 2015: 138). In this definition, it is inevitably involved with problems that affect people, and also their livelihoods. The simple fact is that many language problems are so urgent, and call for such immediate remedy and intervention, that their solutions may be rushed or lack deliberation, not to mention the theoretical rationale that is so intimately part of the justification of any good design.

What applied linguists should be looking for in their designed solutions to language problems are responsible designs. But how those can be achieved, and what would, for example, constitute an adequate theoretical rationale for the designed intervention, are questions that can really only be answered with reference to the answers applied linguists give to the unavoidable foundational questions of their discipline. That is the theme of this book, and the discussion will steer towards how a sense of direction can be discovered for the discipline, and while working in it. Before continuing with the articulation of that, however, let us briefly examine one case of why we should not yield to the temptations of avoiding these questions and their answers.

1.2 Not All Designs Are Defensible

Let us take one example of a language problem that was urgently in need of a solution: students from disadvantaged backgrounds arriving in much greater numbers than before at university at a time of great societal change, as in South Africa recently, from the mid-1990s onwards. The level of academic literacy of these newly arriving students may well be of such a nature that, if urgent steps are not taken to develop their ability to handle academic discourse, they are sure to fail. Who will blame university administrators who see the problem and take the first and most obvious solution? The students seem to need 'language', so it should be arranged that they 'get' it. For many, the obvious solution if one does not 'have' a language, is that one can be 'given' it. If only it were so easy! If the instruction, furthermore, is old fashioned and out of date, based on methods of language teaching dating back to the 1930s, it can always be justified (and often is) by saying it is

better than nothing. Or, to press home the point of how easily a bad or insufficient design can be adopted as a solution, take another example relating to these same students. They communicate with their lecturers mainly through writing. If they write badly, this is what everyone thinks needs to be remedied – and, if one takes a skills-based view of language, defensibly so. Not for a moment may those who develop the remedy consider that their skills-based view of language problems may yield an inappropriate design to solve it. What has worked in one context (the USA) – the presentation of courses in writing, or 'composition', or even the establishment of writing centres – is simply called in to provide a solution in another, where a focus, for example, on reading may have been much more appropriate, and may have been a great deal more effective (cf. Weideman 2007b; Van der Walt 2007). As Lillis (2003: 197) points out, the teaching of 'composition' in the US constitutes a very "influential student writing research site", but is not necessarily the only or even most desirable way of going about developing academic literacy.

Would an intensive reading, rather than a writing course, have been a better solution, then? An intervention that focuses only on reading may similarly expose itself to criticism in the current climate within applied linguistics. Indeed, there is a valid critique of a skills-based approach by a number of leading scholars. Bachman and Palmer (1996: 75f.), for example, conclude their persuasive critique of a skills-based approach as follows:

> We would thus not consider language skills to be part of language ability at all, but to be the contextualized realization of the ability to use language in the performance of specific language use tasks. We would … argue that it is not useful to think in terms of 'skills', but to think in terms of specific activities or tasks in which language is used purposefully.

Their plea is for taking a sample from the real-life, highly contextualised language that is the target of the solution. In real life, the distinctions between skills such as 'listening', 'reading', 'writing' and 'speaking' tend to be more problematic than one would assume. Can one, in an academic setting, for example, talk about listening without considering the processing of the language being heard, and after processing, the salient parts of it being written down after having been processed, and subsequent to the writing, one's referring to it again by reading it, before perhaps finally asking for clarification ('speaking') about it? Where are the boundaries among all of these – mostly cognitive – processes, that we simply try to conceptualise as a skill such as 'listening', 'writing', 'reading' or 'speaking'? They are clearly not as easily demarcated. Kumaravadivelu (2003: 225–231) has, in a similar way, pointed out that the historical roots of a skills-based approach lie in the behaviorism of the 1950s; that all good teachers have always known that one cannot teach skills separately; that these 'skills' combine and are combined in all language use; that from a pedagogical point of view one has to be wary of isolating one skill. He remarks: "Skill separation is … a remnant of a bygone era and has very little empirical or experiential justification" (Kumaravadivelu 2003: 226).

Neither the naïve solution of attempting to 'give' language to learners, nor the skills development approach, therefore, today seems to have an adequate, defensible theoretical basis that would constitute a rationale for the solutions proposed.

Even if one mounts a defence of an intervention focused on a single skill, like writing, by pointing out that what is actually happening in such classes is not merely the teaching and learning of writing, but of critical thinking, as well as cognitive and self-identity development, the nurturing of learners' problem-solving capacity in a supportive environment, and the like, one still is left with unanswered design questions. If the ways of conceptualising our designs are important, as Ivanic (2004: 220) correctly declares, then conceiving of what we are supposed to do as 'writing', for example, constitutes an uncritical acceptance of a historically institutionalised arrangement, viz. that what we should be teaching is writing. This arrangement, that politically entrenches and privileges writing over a number of alternatives, of course benefits the proponents of writing: it constitutes nothing less than their livelihood as applied linguists, and will probably be vigorously defended by them (cf. Weideman 2007b; Van der Walt 2007). In a truly critical approach, however, we should question the very conception of such a historical arrangement, no matter how influential and powerful it may be at present, as a consequence of being privileged organisationally. So the proliferation of "writing centres" at institutions of higher education in South Africa and elsewhere would qualify, in postmodern, critical terms, as that kind of institutionalisation of writing that is 'reproductive', i.e. merely replicating, but now at an organisational and therefore, potentially much more powerful and influential level—since it is institutionally sanctioned—that which is happening in the US and perhaps other parts of the Western world. The irony that many such a writing centre would pride itself on taking a critical, politically aware view of student writing (Ivanic 2004) would of course be lost on those involved. When such interventions are mounted without deliberation, but as the apparently obvious, fashionable or intuitive solution, the political foundations on which the establishment of the centre itself is based are hidden from view, even from the eyes of those involved most closely in its day-to-day operation, and even if their own ideological convictions actually demand a critical consideration of the political bases of their own work and that of others.

The point made in the first section is therefore again relevant: in which direction do applied linguists intend their designs to go? It should be obvious that the first, the obvious or the intuitive solution is not always the best. A student recently came up to me after a master's class in applied linguistics I was teaching at a university in the Netherlands on the topic of "Tradition and innovation in language teaching", and asked how he could teach pronunciation. What he meant was to challenge me: he thought it could not possibly be taught communicatively, but only by utilising older techniques, which involved mindless drills and teachers explaining as much of the grammatical structure of the target language to students as they could, in the hope that those explanations would miraculously convert to language learning in the students. When pressed for more information, it turned out that what his students needed was not how to pronounce English like native speakers, but to be able to communicate fluently about the manufacturing process in their Asian factory with Western advisors and counterparts. What this student had was a solution that actually had little reference to the problem. That is where applied linguistic designs that are carried out without deliberation are normally headed, but surely that direction is not one that can be defended with any level of professional integrity.

The various more intuitive or more sophisticated ways of determining learners' language needs, also for business and professional purposes, have been ably surveyed (e.g. by Flowerdew 2013), but it is clear that no way of conceptualising learners' needs (or sometimes 'wants') is immune to the beliefs of the course designer (Flowerdew 2013: 337), a point I shall be returning to below. As Spolsky (2010: 139f), Hult (2010b) observes, there are numerous examples not only of bad designs in the field of language teaching, but also of inadequate language management. Some of these arrangements (or lack of such) in the field of medical care can in fact be life threatening. In such cases there is an added political edge: "… one is shocked to realize how little effect research evidence has on government and politicians," Spolsky (2010: 140) notes. So the challenge remains for applied linguists to combat myths and naïve assumptions in public, in order to make it possible to arrive at theoretically defensible designs.

1.3 In Search of Responsible Designs

The cases of designed interventions referred to above illustrate how close to the everyday business of applied linguists foundational questions are. A pertinent question that applied linguists must therefore always ask of themselves and their proposed interventions is: are we merely chasing a new fashion, or are there serious social and theoretical rationales for what we are designing? In addition, in view of the enormous political power that publishing houses have in delivering course materials to locations all over the world – another example of solutions earnestly chasing an assumed problem – we should ask: are our designs contextually appropriate?

Can all of this, specifically the lack of deliberate design of such interventions, be overcome if we simply find a 'scientific' rationale for such plans? Unfortunately not, as we shall see below. Not everyone agrees with all possible theoretical perspectives that may underlie and support our designs, and most recently there are tendencies within applied linguistics that have legitimate concerns with the very idea of 'rational' solutions.

What this means is that our understanding, insight and perception in applied linguistics have grown much over the last 50 years, but our ability to make sense of this development of our discipline is not possible without reflection upon the foundations of the field. Without reflection on what our work builds upon, from which starting points and assumptions our designs derive, a sense of direction in applied linguistic study cannot emerge. Yet there is no doubt that applied linguistics needs a sense of direction, since its designs are affecting the lives of more and more people every day. It is a discipline that needs to be accountable in at least two senses (cf. Bygate 2004). First, applied linguistics needs to be accountable in a social sense, to the people who are affected by the designed solutions it wishes to persuade them to adopt. Second, it needs to be accountable in an academic way, theoretically, in order to make a rational defence of its designs possible. There may, of course, be conflicts between what makes sense socially and what is defensible theoretically, as

was implied in the examples cited above. There may be a contradiction, in other words, between the immediately obvious, intuitive, socially acceptable designed solution ("We must teach them academic writing") and the theoretically defensible alternative ("The design should be contextually sensitive to what constitutes academic discourse, and preferably be skills-neutral"). In that case, there may be a third responsibility on the designer of the solution: to mediate between these, and negotiate the best alternative. But it should be clear that the responsibilities of applied linguists therefore lie at least in both a social and in a theoretical, scientific, direction, or in what Hult (2010a, b: 23f.) identifies as the kind of disciplinary work that is accomplished along an axis between reflection on the one hand and action on the other (see also Warriner 2010: 63). It will be the argument of this book that such a sense of responsibility can best be based upon a foundational or philosophical understanding of the nature of the field. Below, I shall continue to use the term 'foundations' and the adjectival form ('foundational') throughout in the sense of "that which concerns the (theoretical) bases, i.e. the nature, limits and limitations" of a field of study.

1.4 Historical Sense and Professionality Matter

Apart from those already referred to above, there are at least three further specific reasons for taking a hard, critical look at the foundations of applied linguistics.

The first specific reason is that, when the label 'applied' is attached to a field of theoretical endeavor, it gives rise to a whole range of expectations, conditioned by centuries of Western scientific reflection. Stimulated for the greater part by an unfailing belief in progress and the achievements of humankind, Western scientific thought has throughout its history fostered the idea that the instrument of such progress and achievement is to be found in rational thought itself, i.e. in the human's intellectual capacities. However much this belief has been undermined by postmodern relativism in the theory of science, it has persisted with an ideological tenacity where, in the name of science and technology, Western thinkers have proclaimed it:

> … [T]he major motive in western culture today is man's will to master and control, combined with the idea of technology as applied science. People … find assurance and confidence in a tacit, religious devotion to the scientific method, used in gaining mastery of practical affairs … [S]cientific knowledge and its practical application have been accorded superior status (Schuurman 1977: 52, 55, 56).

Even among those who have most seriously questioned the bases of Western thought, in particular its proclaimed autonomy, the idolatrous belief in science as the soundest knowledge we have is flourishing.

The question that one must raise in this regard is whether this belief in scientific progress that was characteristic of applied linguistics at its inception, still is part of what we know as "applied linguistics" today, and, if that is the case, what the consequences are in terms of our expectations of the results of applied linguistic

research. There is therefore a historical reason for potentially skewed expectations of what direction applied linguistics should take.

The second reason for a thorough reconsideration of the foundations of applied linguistics, that is closely tied up with the first, concerns the significance for applied linguistics of the near crisis proportions of the problems faced by those "applied sciences" – particularly technology – that appeared on the historical horizon at an earlier stage. The dilemma of being between technocracy and revolution (the title of an inaugural address at the University of Eindhoven in 1973; cf. Schuurman 1977: chapter 1), of having to choose between technocratic and revolutionary ideals, in fact the age-old question in Western history of freedom and determinism, liberty and bondage, is today no longer reserved for the application of the natural sciences. In technocratic thinking, for example, it has been argued that the technical-scientific method must be extended to "analyze man himself, to dissect society, and from there to reconstruct the future" (Schuurman 1977: 3; cf. too Schuurman 1972: 363). And indeed, in that part of applied linguistics that is concerned with language teaching, we notice such technocratic ideals at work in the audio-lingual method (cf. the section "The reflection of linguistic theory in language teaching" below, Chap. 2, and Chap. 4, "The expectations of the results of applied linguistics research") and in some interpretations of communicative language teaching (cf. below, Chap. 6, "Communicative teaching: the mainstream" and Chap. 8, "The linguistic 'extended paradigm' model"), while in other approaches, particularly the so-called humanistic methods, the operation of a revolutionary ideology is evident (cf. below, Chap. 6, "Humanistic language teaching: a revolutionary option"). When we subsequently discuss the various generations or styles of doing applied linguistics, a number of further historical connections with technocratic and revolutionary ideals will become evident.

This divergence between technocratic and revolutionary directions for applied linguistics is dealt with in greater detail below (Chap. 6), but already at this stage I wish to point out that applied linguistics is not, and will not be, immune to the dilemmas of other 'applied' sciences. The dilemma of how these assign a privileged status to 'scientific' knowledge or what Schön (1987: xi) calls "[t]echnical rationality … [that] treats professional competence as the application of privileged knowledge … to problems of practice" is evident not only in applied linguistic designs. Though I have chosen in this book to retain the label "applied linguistics", much of the current dissatisfaction with that now internationally conventional label for the discipline has its origin in this contested notion of 'application'. Hence the call, for example, from Spolsky (2008) and others (Hult 2008, 2010), for an alternative perspective, a point that I return to below in several discussions of "educational linguistics".

The need for some sense of direction in applied linguistics therefore becomes ever more crucial. It is essential for helping those working in the discipline to resolve these dilemmas, even while they are sometimes not obvious on the surface to those who are involved in the field every day. A sense of direction is required if applied linguistics is to avoid the pitfalls encountered in (and to some extent engendered by) the 'applications' of science in other areas.

The third reason for attending to the foundations of the discipline is a professional one. It concerns the professionality with which new applied linguists are inducted into the discipline, and the responsibilities of those training them (Weideman 2007a: 589) to create among the newly inducted a sense of both the history and the nature of the discipline. As McNamara (2008: 304) has observed: "It is important to keep alive an understanding of the theoretical perspectives that have been proposed in the past so that their enduring relevance is appreciated …"

Traditionally, applied linguistics has for the greater part been synonymous with the scientific study of second and foreign language teaching and learning (Crystal 1981: 1). Its initial reflective focus was almost exclusively adjusted to making theoretical connections between linguistics and language teaching, as well as subsequently – and perhaps to a lesser extent than was or is desirable – forging links between the latter and psychology and pedagogy.

Today, of course, the scope of applied linguistics has broadened to include not only these concerns, but also lexicography, translation science, the investigation of speech disorders and disabilities, and a host of other areas. Nevertheless, it is the former interpretation that, perhaps only for historical reasons, still describes its central area of involvement, and it is this interpretation of the field that will be used for the majority of the illustrations offered in this book. This does not mean, in my opinion, that the theoretical characterization of applied linguistics to be attempted here has no significance for areas other than language teaching. It would probably, with minor qualifications, turn out to be valid for most of these, if not in fact, then at least in principle. However, since my personal experience and expertise in areas outside of language teaching and testing are more limited, I would rather leave it to others to draw such conclusions. For the sake of both clarity and brevity, therefore, this investigation of the foundations of applied linguistics will be limited to its traditional concern with language teaching and learning, and the assessment of language ability.

After offering a provisional clarification of the foundations of applied linguistics below (Chap. 2), the problems inherent in some further earlier and contemporary definitions of applied linguistics are discussed in greater detail (Chap. 3), before the scientific status of applied linguistics is discussed (Chap. 4) and a redefinition of the field is attempted (Chap. 5). In the chapter following that, the significance of this characterization of applied linguistics is illustrated in one traditional and two later approaches to the teaching of second and foreign languages. The move to go "beyond method" and towards accountability is dealt with in Chap. 7, while a historical summary characterising the various styles and themes in applied linguistic designs is offered in Chap. 8. A central question of the history of the discipline is its development beyond its modernist beginnings. The remainder of the discussion therefore deals with some further burning issues of direction in applied linguistics: Given its history, will it be able to move also beyond postmodernism? Chap. 9 deals with the themes of innovation and continuity in applied linguistics, themes that have implications for the future of applied linguistics, a discussion of which concludes the final two chapters, that deal, respectively, with the ongoing quest to define the field, and with an emerging theoretical framework for the discipline.

The perspective from which this book will argue the case of what constitutes responsible design is an unashamedly philosophical one. Its thesis is simple: no theoretical consideration of the bases of the discipline of applied linguistics is possible without taking a critical look at its philosophical points of departure. What this also means, as may be apparent from the outline given above, and will become more apparent as the argument unfolds, is that such a consideration has both a historical and a systematic side.

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