

Defining Our Field: Unity in Diversity

Six months ago, in our inaugural issue, *Issues in Applied Linguistics* called for responses from our readers to two questions:

What is applied linguistics?

What should applied linguistics be?

We were motivated to pose these fundamental questions as founders of a new journal in an emerging field, whose own graduate program in applied linguistics was in the process of becoming an independent department. This transition has raised important issues concerning our academic identity and research agenda for the future, not only for ourselves but for the larger academic community with whom we interact and exchange expertise.

Fourteen replies¹ were received in response to our questions from graduate students and researchers in the U.S. and from as far away as Brasil, Finland, Romania, and Israel. In addition to geographical diversity, the respondents represent various departmental affiliations, including sociology, Germanic languages, English, health services, linguistics, psycholinguistics, brain research, and applied linguistics. Moreover, the views expressed in the contributions not only reflect different ways of approaching the questions, they embody many of the current emphases encompassed by our interdisciplinary field.

IAL would like to thank all the contributors for helping make this Roundtable possible.

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VI. (Re)analyzing Applied Linguistics

Our final contributor, Emanuel Schegloff, proposes a definition of applied linguistics which is radically different from the other contributions since it is based on a question we did not ask: Who is an applied linguist? This singular point of departure effectively deconstructs our original exercise and forces all of us to reconsider what it is we do.

Emanuel Schegloff, Department of Sociology, UCLA

For those who view linguistics as being primarily concerned with formulating an account of the knowledge which defines particular languages and Language, "applied linguistics," if it exists at all, is concerned with the application of linguistics to practical problems, such as helping people to learn languages, to overcome problems in speaking or understanding, or to adapt language for specialized uses. "Applied linguists" (in this view) are professionals who "apply" what is known (by linguistics) about Language to these specific settings or undertakings. Applied linguistics, then, is the application by one group of professionals of the knowledge developed about Language/language by another group of professionals.

Might we explore another version, or vision? If there is something like the linguist's notion of a principled or abstract grasp of Language, its first-order graspers are its practitioners, that is, those who *employ it* in the first instance (rather than those who are *employed to study it*). If there is a "faculty" for language, then it is not in universities, but in *practitioners*, that is, those who practice. By "practicing" I mean here exercising a knowledge-based skill, as in "practicing medicine," rather than upgrading or maintaining one's skill, as in "practicing the piano." In this sense, "applied linguists" refers to the ordinary users of a language, the ordinary members of a society or culture who, in the first instance, have knowledge of (the) Language and who apply that knowledge to do the things they ordinarily (or extraordinarily) do with it. Every moment and act of talking, hearing, writing, reading, etc. are moments in which the resources of language are applied to some practical activity. Virtually everyone is, then, an "applied linguist."

What then is applied linguistics? Perhaps it is the study of what applied linguists do, and how they do it. *Applied linguistics* might then, in a peculiar twist with a double sense, be better termed *the study of applied linguistics*.