

**Tikrit University**

**Collage of Education for Humanities**

**English Department**



Applied Linguistics

Higher Studies- M.A.

**Language Teaching: Art / Science**

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2024-2025

## **Language Teaching : Art and Science**

People often say that language teaching is an art -a highly skilled activity which is learned by careful observation and patient practice, then it is a harmless platitude. However, what often lies behind the assertion is that science and art are mutually exclusive science can indeed play a role in language teaching, even if it cannot be fully captured by a set of rules or algorithms. Language teaching involves many complex, interrelated variables that are not easily quantified. These variables include the aptitude and personality of the pupils, their intellectual capacities, their attitude or motivation towards learning. These are all matters which have been investigated by educational psychologists and some aspects of them at least are now describable, measurable and controllable.

There is a considerable body of knowledge available about the nature of human language, about how it is learned and what part it plays in the life of the individual and the community, which has been developed through linguistic research. This knowledge can provide important guidance for language teachers.

Ultimately, the effective language teaching requires drawing on both the **art** of skilled practice and the **scientific insights** provided by fields like linguistics. The interplay of these two elements is crucial for successful language instruction.

## **Applied linguistics and language teaching**

This is not another book on language teaching. This one is about the contribution that the discoveries and methods of those who study language scientifically, that is, the linguist, the psycholinguist and the sociolinguist (to

mention only the most important groups), can make to the solution of some of the problems which arise in the course of planning, organizing and carrying out a language-teaching program.

Applied linguistics is the application of linguistic knowledge to various practical activities involving language, not just language teaching. There are other fields like speech therapy and literary criticism that like speech therapy and literary criticism that can benefit from understanding the nature of human language.

The application of linguistic knowledge to some object- or **applied linguistics**, as its name implies- is an activity. It is not a theoretical study. It makes use of the findings of theoretical studies. The applied linguist is a consumer, or user, not a producer, of theories. **Language teaching** is also an activity, but teaching languages is not the same activity as applied linguistics. However, if we interpret language teaching in the very broadest sense, to include all the planning and decision-making which takes place outside the classroom, then there may be an element of applied linguistics in all language teaching. Just as there may be an element of applied linguistics in all speech therapy or all literary criticism.

Despite the extensive study of language over many centuries, there are still many aspects of language that we know little about. However, the pace and rigor of linguistic investigation have increased significantly in recent years, allowing linguistic studies to be considered more scientific. As a field of study, applied linguistics is relatively young, for this reason it can, as yet, scarcely claim to give firm answers to any but a few problems in language teaching.

### **The language-teaching operation**

Corder introduced ‘**total language-teaching operation**’, because term **teaching** is too vague in its meaning, as it primarily refers to the activity of the teacher in the classroom in his interaction with his pupils. Whereas language teaching involves a much broader aspects such as planning, detailed preparation, correcting, assessing progress, etc.

What teachers do not always so readily recognize is that their work is dependent on the work of others who also contribute to or determine what goes on in the classroom, such as those who prepare materials ( textbooks, visual aids, etc.) and plans ( syllabus, timetable, etc.). In the overall teaching operation, all planning and decision-making at whatever level that directly or indirectly affects what goes on in the classroom is considered part of the total teaching operation. The task of the teacher is to create the conditions in which learning can most advantageously take place, and all decisions that bear on that objective are part of the total teaching operation.

Decision and plans are made at various levels, from the highest political and governmental level down to the administration level within the school itself. At the **highest level** the decisions are political and made by governments and ministries. Decisions at this level are of a very general nature: whether languages are to be taught; which languages to be taught; and how much money is to be available for training and paying teachers. In multilingual countries, especially in Africa and Asia, the decisions about which languages to teach and at what level in the educational system are difficult and are often made based on sociolinguistic studies of language distribution and functions in the community. This is an area of linguistic studies sometimes known as *language planning*.

When such fundamentally political decisions have been made there is another aspect of planning and decision-making which is based on economic, administrative and social considerations within the country.

All these fundamental decisions concerning language learning and teaching are part of the hierarchical structure of the total language-teaching operation.

The **second level** is concerned with the implementation of decision with the regarding what to teach and how to teach and how to organize it, at this level the contributions of linguistics to language teaching is principally effective. Applied linguistics has to do with devising syllabuses and materials for carrying out the intentions of education authorities, whether local or national. Syllabus relate to specific languages to be taught to more or less specific groups of learners for more or less specific purposes within more or less specific limitations of time and money. Textbooks and teaching materials are the concrete realizations of the syllabus plan.

The **third level** of decision-making in language teaching is the classroom, where the linguistic contribution is primarily psychological in nature, focused on how people learn second languages. But there are also other important non-linguistic considerations like motivation, attitude, intelligence, and personality that impact the teaching process. Those how plan at the second level do not have detailed information available to the classroom teacher, and can only take account of these variables in the most general way. One does not meet syllabuses or teaching materials specifically devised for intelligent but uninterested twelve years old!

The devising of syllabuses and teaching materials has traditionally the domain of experienced teachers, but increasingly this is being done through a cooperative effort involving teachers working together with specialists in

the subject matter (often themselves trained teachers), that **Corder** refers to as “applied linguists”.

The applied linguist is a contributor to the whole language-teaching operation. He does not control it, nor does the classroom teacher, nor, for the matter, does for that matter, does the headmaster or the Minister of Education. It is a cooperative venture. The better the contributors’ (e.g. applied linguist, classroom teacher, education authorities) understanding of the principles behind the decision-making, the better chances of the whole operation being successful. But we must expect that all along the line compromises will have to be made, as different factors like psycholinguistic knowledge, political and economic considerations may conflict with each other. The final plan represents a compromise between the different contributors to the language-teaching operation.

All the contributors to a total teaching operation are involved in its success: society, as represented by education authorities, the applied linguist and the classroom teacher. It is difficult to define success in all educational operations, as different stakeholders (society, teacher, students) may define success differently. **Society** might define it in terms of social integration, commercial pay-off, or some concept of the ‘educated man’ ; the **teacher** might define it in terms of academic achievement, or the ‘fulfillment of the individual’ ; the **applied linguist** in term of the attainment of some measurable performance skills in the language. But it is individuals who learn language and they do so for many different reasons: because they enjoy it, because it is useful in their academic advancement or in their future careers, or because it opens for them opportunities for social and cultural

contact and enrichment. The **individual learner's** own conception of success is the most important, as what may be considered a success for one person could be a failure for another. There is no single universal definition of success when it comes to language learning and educational outcomes. The definition varies based on the individual's goals and needs.

Yet, there is no proposed means for measuring success in language learning in society's term - cultural, social or commercial. However, to the extent that the teacher's, the learner's, and the applied linguist's aims can be specified in linguistic terms as the attainment of specific skills and knowledge, a way of measuring these can be devised. Linguistics provides a framework for describing what we mean by skill in, and knowledge of, a language and consequently makes it possible to show that one way of teaching or one set of teaching materials is more effective than another for achieving a particular aim with a particular group of learners. There can be no systematic improvement in language teaching without reference to the knowledge about language that linguistics gives us.

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