

Critical Applied Linguistics: Concerns and Domains

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Abstract

Critical applied linguistics seems a new phenomenon and a point under the study. Thus much has not been written and wider debts were not made on it whether to be kept as an autonomous discipline or to be studied just under mainstream division, applied linguistics. So, the intention of the current article is to just mention some points on the issue focusing on concerns and domains in brief. So it will contribute to the amelioration of the disciplines.

1. DEFINITION:

Before we move in to the discussion of critical applied linguistics, it is better first to have a brief look at what the root subject applied linguistic really mean. So applied linguistics is the branch of linguistics (language science) that deals with the foreign and second language education and the study of application of linguistics theories in language related problems. The first concept was the oldest explanation assigned to the subject when the discipline was introduced and coined by the American linguists in 1940. So that, even most applied linguists to day prefer to relate the meaning of the discipline to the old concept. But the new approach defines applied linguistics as the application of language theories in diverse linguistic related contexts. These may include the speech pathology, translation, language pedagogy, and other aspects of applied linguists.

But, when we come to critical applied linguistics, we are dealing with the critical study of the aspects of applied linguistics. It is not a mere addition of criticality to applied linguistics but continuous and sustainable, uninterrupted, skeptical and critical investigation in to the diverse fields of applied linguistics. Critical applied linguistics actually take the strong version of the new definition of applied linguistics, the application of linguist theory in applied contexts like translation, speech disorder, critical pedagogy and others. Critical applied linguistics counts the following basic concerns: praxis, criticality, and critical social study, and critical school theory, self-reflectivity, problematizing the givens, preferred future, micro-macro relation and heterosis. Each will be exposed next.

2. MAJOR CONCERNS

2.1 PRAXIS: refers to the integration and cooperation of desire and action or theory and practices. In the traditional view, theory or action is superior and highly respected than practices or desire. The relationship between the two was unequal. The role of practice and desire were suppressed with stereotyped vision. But critical applied linguistics pays due focus on both theory and practice and desire and action. So the unequal power relation between theory and practice as well as desire and action were abolished in the case of critical applied linguistics.

2.2 CRITICALITY: critical applied linguistics is the most critical discipline in dazzling things from diverse angles. Criticality is concerned with critical study of social problems. In fact criticality refers to the logical and examined reflection of things. It is systematic, critical, objective analysis of facts and problems from various angles. As to the beliefs of critical applied linguistics, criticality can be taught in classroom situation. Critical reading, listening, speaking and writing can be taught in language classes. Thus the concept of criticality in applied linguistics also works with the subject itself. Criticality is not just a matter of mapping micro applied linguistics in to the macro social relation, but sustainable critical study of the areas of critical applied linguistics and all social relations and problems.

2.3 CRITICAL SOCIAL STUDY: refers to the careful examination of social relation. Critical applied linguistics was based on the assumption that social relation is full of pains and suffrages. So it needs critical examination. The power imbalance, difference, injustice, hegemony, suppression, colonization, subduing and etc. are some of the critical cases that critical applied linguistics majorly deals with. Thus using critical approaches, critical applied linguistics studies the social problems. The study describes, explains, expresses and interprets the social problem. Then it calls for the political interventions. In studying the painful social relation, critical applied linguistics sides the victimized group in the social relations.

2.4 CRITICAL SCHOOL THEORY: the basic foundation of critical applied linguistics lies on the philosophies of school of critical social theories. The schools were established in Frankfurt, Germany and founded by the famous German scholars, Marxist and neo Marxist thinkers. The theory was based on the existence of pains in

social life and concerned with the study of those problems and sought solutions for the same. Frankfurt critical school theory was emanated with sympathy for the people victimized in the social relations. The schools deals with detailed study of the society and describe, present and interpret the social problems. The school then calls for the political measures to be taken to solve the problems. A number of fields were based on the assumptions of critical school theory including critical applied linguistics, history, anthropology, sociology, political sciences, culture studies, communication studies, medial studies and others.

2.5 SELF-REFLEXIVITY: refers to the self-introspection quality of the subjects, critical applied linguistics. In the cases of human being, self-reflexivity deals with an act of listening deep in to our own soul, evaluate ourselves in multiple perspectives as our lives, our success, failure, performances, relations with others and etc. Critical applied linguistics does not only concern with the study of other social and related issues in a critical way. It also critically evaluates itself whether it is well doing its roles or not. So, critical study of the discipline works with itself as well.

2.6 PREFERRED FUTURE: refers to one of the concerns of critical applied linguistics. Critical applied linguistics deals with critical social studies. In so doing it does not only study the problem plainly just for the sake of studying. But through description, expression, explanation and interpretation of the problems, it works on how to establish harmonious life among individuals, groups, societies and the nations. Thus, the preferred future for all was the main concerns and dream of critical applied linguistics. The subject believes that humans are created equally irrespective of nothing else, and life is too short so that everyone needs to entertain life equally, peacefully, richly, abundantly and harmoniously.

2.7 MICRO-MACRO RELATIONS: refers to the application of critical applied linguistics in the study of the larger social problems. Here, micro stands for conceptual and methodological narrowness of applied linguistics in studying the wider, macro social relations and problems. The concept of the relation is to entail the incompleteness of critical applied linguistics in studying the society. It claims that the social problems are intricate so that it needs collaboration with related disciplines including feminism, subalterns, American dreams, post colonialism, gender studies, culture studies, media studies and so forth. Moreover, it needs to work with more autonomous and independent disciplines including sociology, anthropology, history, communication and literature studies and so forth.

2.8 HETROSIS: Refers to the autonomy and ideological approaches. The concept was that critical applied linguistics is a sovereign field of study in its own right, but it needs to be integrated with other fields which were based on critical theory. Feminism, postmodernism, colonialism, subaltern studies and others. On top, it needs to be integrated with independent fields as sociology, anthropology, sociolinguistics, culture studies, media and communication studies and other related fields. Therefore, the complex social matters could be explained so further.

2.9 PROBLEMATIZING THE GIVENS: the approach here deals with constant questioning of the givens. Some practices which lasted for so long within the community seem as if they have divine role and supernatural origins. Thus, critical applied linguistics deals with these practices, beliefs, attitudes, rituals and all very critically. For instance the relation between men and women pertaining to social relation seems as if it is divine and natural. But in reality not, for it is just a social practice that has sent its root deep in the society and looked as if it is from heavenly father. Thus, such issues are critically dealt in critical applied linguistics. In critical applied linguistics, nothing resists critical scrutiny related to social relations. The socio-economic, political, cultural; the power relation, injustice, right and wrongs, subjugation, suppression, segregation, subdued acts in terms of sex, disability, religious, economic and cultural issues are critically studied.

Comprehensively, critical applied linguistics deals with critical study of all the aspects of applied linguistics. In so doing, the subject has been stratified in to concerns which may contain nine basic elements praxis, criticality, and critical social study, self-reflexivity, preferred future, heterosis, critical school theory and so forth. In addition to the concerns, critical applied linguistics does have fundamental domains which will be the major issues of discussion in the next sections.

3. DOMAINS OF CRITICAL APPLIED LINGUISTICS

Domains in the context of critical applied linguistics refer to the major sub-fields of the discipline of critical applied linguistics. The foremost domains of critical applied linguistics subsumes the proceeding major domains: CDA and Critical Literacy, Critical Approach to Translation, Critical Approach to Language Teaching, Critical Approach to Language Testing, Language Planning, Policy and Right, Language, Literacy and Work Place Language Use. Therefore, for the sake of clarification and elaboration purpose, we better have a deep look in to

the domains:

3.1 CDA AND CRITICAL LITERACY: CDA stands for Critical Discourse Analysis. CDA deals with the study of the text in relation to the context. Critical discourse analysis deals with the study of how language or text is used in a context holding discursive social relation, power, domination, hegemony, control, sexual, racial, subjugation and cultural discriminations are being perpetuated with in the community. As CDA relies on the critical social theory, identifying, describing, explaining and interpreting the problem, it calls for the political intervention standing in the sides of the victimized people in the social relations. CDA and critical literacy often put under critical language awareness (CLA) which contains text analysis, critical pedagogy and critical translations. Critical literacy deals with the reshaping of literacy education for those who were marginalized from literacy education, reading and writing in their own mother tongue. Critical literacy deals with reading and writing in vernacular languages. But because of multiple reasons, peoples could be relegated from the rights to learn to read and write in their own language because of their culture, religion, cast, political affiliation, economic status, gender, sex, physical disabilities and others.

Critical literacy does have broader social foundations as do CDA. There are diverse orientations to literacy counting critical pedagogy, feminist and post structural approaches and text analytic approaches. CDA would generally fall in to the last category aimed as it is providing tools for the critical analysis of texts in a context. So critical discourse analysis and critical literacy, stands in the sides of people protected from their own vernacular language. CDA has larger political aim of putting the forms of texts, the processes of production of texts, the process of reading, together with the structure of power that have given rise to them in to crisis. CDA aims to show how linguistic discursive practices are linked to the wider sociopolitical structure of power and domination. It focuses on the role of discourse in the production and challenges of dominance and hegemony.

3.2 CRITICAL TRANSLATION: the other most important domain of textual analysis related to critical applied linguistics is translation. Here, the concern of critical applied linguistics is not to study or make critical comments on certain translation works. It is not concerned with the correction of technical problems that occurred as a result of lack of knowledge or experience in translation work. But it is much concerned with the politics of translation, the ways in which translation and interpretation of the original texts of the target languages were related to concerns such as class, gender, difference, ideology, and social context.

Translation holds a number of discursive practices and social relations. Moreover, the politics of translation extends to translation from one target language to the others all the time, the translation of texts from English to other languages and not the other way round; the devaluation of native values, culture, norms and ethics; and the use of standard accent, the power relation between the source and target culture and etc. were sign posts for political nature of translation. Most translation works in the colonial and post-colonial period exactly reflects the political nature of translation. We used to translate from English to other languages and not the reverse. We observe the dominant power relation between the English source language to other target languages. Thus, translation needs careful observation of what the translation is claiming in conveying meaning, in transferring codes from source to target language. Most translation works of the postcolonial period contains distorted conceptions of the indigenous culture, identity, language, history, politics, ethics, morals and local resources.

3.3 CRITICAL APPROACH TO TEACHING: Here, this concept deals with critical observation of language teaching practices. It was based on the assumption that language teaching is not free from political conceptions. This is because schools are social institutions where people can interact and learn from one another. Classroom learning is a talk. So what is there in the society is there in the school. Language pedagogical contexts are mainly associated with class difference-the way in which the target language teachers treat her foreign students, the way foreign students in the target classes evaluate themselves in relation to their identity is the major indication of the language classes. Gender is also an aspect of critical aspect of language teaching. It mainly refers to how females are being treated in the classroom, the due respect they have, the extent to which their sound, needs and interests in a class is considered. Sexuality and sexual identity is also another significant aspect of political nature of language teaching. The ways in which homo, hero, transgender, gays, and lesbians are treated in a class by the curriculum, syllabus, school principals, teachers, students, and related stakeholders were the major focuses of critical language teaching.

The curriculum, syllabus, materials, methods, assessment, feedback provision etc. have political agenda at their deep back. Moreover, the way teachers teach and students learn, the ways in which texts were designed, the syllabus were presented, the way students communicate with teachers, and the style in which students interact together and etc. were never free from the dominant belief in social life. Thus critical applied linguistic dictates critical study of language teaching practices in the school and classroom context in critical and perilous manners.

3.4 CRITICAL APPROACH TO TESTING: language testing has been resistant to critical challenges for long ago. But, since recently, scholars reported what they saw as crucial features of critical language testing. Critical language testing (CLT) starts with the assumption that the act of language testing is not neutral. Rather it is a product of cultural, social, political, educational and ideological agenda that shape the life of individual participants, teachers and students. Thus several features of CLT were mentioned: test takers are seen as political subjects in political context, tests are deeply embodied in cultural, educational, and political arena where different ideological and social forms are in straggle making it difficult to consider that a test is just a test. CLT asks whose agendas are used through tests; it demands that what vision of the society tests presupposes, it asks whose knowledge the test is based on, and whether this knowledge is negotiable; it considers the meaning of test scores and the extent to which this is open to interpretation; and it challenges psychometric tradition of language testing.

The conception also introduced an important paradigms shift and put many new criteria for understanding validity in to play: consequential, systemic, interpretive and ethical all of which have more to do with the effects of test than what criteria of internal validity. The argument is that language testing is always political that we need to become aware of the effects of tests and that the way forward is to develop more domestic tests in which test takers and other local bodies are given greater involvement in planning, construction, administration, correction and noticing. Thus, there is a demand to see the domains of applied linguistics from classroom to text and tests, as naturally bound with larger social, cultural and political context.

As teaching, testing is not free from conveying the dominant beliefs, philosophies, hegemony and others in a society. Critical applied linguistics looks in to how tests are planned, designed, administered, corrected, notified and interpreted. Behind each steps, there is political agenda to run with. The way in which test are planned and conducted may not just to evaluate students' academic performance alone, but also there is a secret to run. Similarly planning, administration, correction and notification were associated political agenda. For instance, if the test constructor, administer, corrector and the potential students are from the same social, cultural, political, economic background, the students could benefit much form it. But the other side of the students would be victimized. So, testing needs care as to the views of critical applied linguistics. Thus the contents, administration, correction, notification of tests must be critically studded.

The argument claims that language tests must be indigenous, locally constructed; culture free, corrected through psychometric and none psychometric means, serve the interest of the minority, and needs to fulfill validity, reliability, practicality, backwash effects criteria. If the test fails to do so the results would not be valid.

3.5 LANGUAGE POLICY AND RIGHT: language policy and rights are close elements. Language policy always favors the rights of one language and at the same time disfavors the others. Both policy and rights are political in concept. Language policy making is the duty of the politicians, so that the way they decide how to use one language either in the office, community, or educational context are all a matter of politics. Currently, mono-legalism is under threat, while multilingualism is prospering. Similarly the extension of alien language in a local context is a hazard for local language. For instance, the global status of English is a deadly threat for most local languages as it causes power imbalance and raise a question of right which is called language imperialism. Language colonialism is the state where local languages are under the threat and control of a foreign language. Scholars are warning the world to take care of the effect of multilingualism over the monolinguals and the mother tongue before severe risks to come.

3.6 LANGUAGE, LITERACE AND WORKPLACE: Refers to the use of language in work places. The ways on which different professionals use language to communicate in the workplace reflects discursive relation. Dominance, power, suppression and other forms of discursive relations were reproduced in professional workplace. Study shows that the communication among the prosecutor and the suspect, the doctor and the patient, the boss and subordinate were in most cases associated with power imbalance, hegemony, suppression and subjugations. Moreover, some empirical studies also indicate that women often suppressed in workplace not because of the soundness of her ideas, but just because she is a woman, feminine. So, workplace language use needs critical studies.

Generally, critical applied linguistics contains five major domains: CDA and language literacy, critical approaches to translation, teaching, testing, and language planning and policy and language, literacy and work place language use. These are only some of the common domains of critical applied linguistics and these are not complete enumerations. To windup, critical applied linguistics contains major concerns and domains. The concerns are the basic premises for critical applied linguistics; while, the domains contain subdivisions under the subject.

REFERENCES

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