

Members' publications

In this new column we offer Research SIG members the opportunity to highlight their own research-related publications (books, articles, and so on), either in a short article – ideally offering something more than the publication itself, for example the story of how you came to research or write it – or by means of an interview (which we could carry out with you or which you could arrange yourself). In this issue we begin the new series with an author-arranged conversation.,,

Mapping applied linguistics from the bottom-up: A conversation

Chris Hall, Patrick Smith and Rachel Wicaksono

Applied linguistics (AL) is undergoing changes in its scope, both professionally and globally. Here, ReSIG members Chris Hall (C), Patrick Smith (P) and Rachel Wicaksono (R) - the authors of Mapping Applied Linguistics, published by Routledge in 2011, talk about how their book reflects on and aims to shape these changes. They discuss the contribution of technology to the changing landscape of AL, their 'mapping' metaphor, and the opportunities for students and practitioners to participate in a new, interactive website, www.mapping.com. The video of an earlier chat between Rachel and Chris can be seen in full on this website; in the new piece below they have tidied up their recorded thoughts, and Patrick has joined the 'conversation'.

R: Chris, where were you and what were you doing when you first thought about mapping applied linguistics?

C: Well, I was in Mexico with Patrick where we were colleagues at the University of the Americas in Cholula. The idea for the book came from our conversations and the teaching we were doing there – we had reshaped the MA programme in Second Language Teaching (English and Spanish) and broadened it to be more of an applied linguistics programme. Patrick's background is socio-cultural theory, his PhD was in language, reading and culture and he's worked a lot in literacy and bilingual education. My background is very

different, in theoretical linguistics and psycholinguistics, and we came together with other colleagues working in areas of applied linguistics including Mexican Sign Language, the maintenance of indigenous languages, literacy, bilingual education, English language teaching and other areas. Even though we had such different backgrounds, we were able to contribute to each others', and our students' development, and that's where the book really came from, the realisation that, by working together, we could enrich our students' learning experiences.

R: Where did the idea for the title, 'Mapping Applied Linguistics', come from?

C: It was Patrick's idea! There is a quote in the Preface that summarises why we chose the mapping metaphor:

to make maps is to organize oneself, to generate new connections and be able to transform the material and immaterial conditions in which we are immersed. It isn't the territory, but it definitely produces territory (Casas-Cortes and Cobarrubios, 2008, p. 62)

P: I'm not sure I can take credit for the title, because it really came out of our three-way discussions. As Chris mentioned, the synergy of working across disciplines and with colleagues and students from different parts of the world has resulted in new ways of thinking about applied linguistics, including the notion of mapping. For example, I remember reading and listening to Rachel's ideas about additional language teaching, discourse analysis, and learning technologies, and being struck by how richly they were informed by her experiences of teaching English and teacher training in Southeast Asia. At a time when the field of applied linguistics is quickly growing beyond its English-language origins and UK /US confines, mapping seems an apt metaphor.

R: So, you're talking about a new way of organising the discipline of applied linguistics; including thinking about the scope of the discipline, the relationship between linguistics and applied linguistics, the connections with other disciplines, and the production of a guide, or map, for students and practitioners of applied linguistics.

P: That's right, but always recognising that the map is never finished and also that the borders that we think are there are often not. In fact, one of our main ideas was that applied linguistics is about crossing borders, in so many senses.

R: Yes, and that tied in with our ideas about varieties of languages and the ways in which artificial (political) borders between languages can be used against speakers of those languages.

C: And, as we call them, 'clients' of applied linguistics, including, for example, English language learners who do not necessarily need the 'native speaker' model which is being delivered to them. So that was one of the major issues that informed our thinking and something we're still working on in our ongoing research.

R: So, challenging the idea of 'authentic' English being something that is to be found within the borders of England with the other Englishes beyond the borders being in need of 'correction'.

C: Yes. Of course, the other kinds of borders we were interested in breaking through were between the different disciplines. In the third section of the book, for example, we go beyond the traditional borders of applied linguistics as it has been narrowly conceived in the past and look at lexicography, translation, language pathology and forensic linguistics; areas which are not normally seen as within the territory of applied linguistics.

P: This is one of the most exciting aspects of the project, isn't it? The idea that applied linguistics can be a window on or point of entry into related disciplines, and a way of conceptualizing new knowledge gained by reading in other fields. I think that applied linguistics can also be seen as a kind of shield, an intellectual protective charm against misguided instruction. For me, the identity of 'applied linguist' is a potentially powerful one for any of us who have felt frustrated at times by the confines of a single discipline. It's also, hopefully, an economically advantageous one, given the collaboration that is increasingly expected of language professionals.

R: OK. One other point which we could make now was that when we were writing the book, Chris and I were in York, Patrick was in Texas and we had to find a way of writing collaboratively, so we got very interested in ways of using internet technology to work together.

P: Yes, co-authoring the book from our locations in different universities and countries showed us the advantages and potential of internet collaboration. We were able to hold our regular Skype sessions from laptops in different time zones, such as when Rachel was in Paris or travelling in China with Chris, or when he was stranded in Seville during the eruption of the volcano in Iceland in April 2010. At the same time, we experienced some of its limitations. This helped us envision, as we do in the final chapter, "Prospects and Perspectives", how these new language-related technologies are going to affect the lives of clients and the working lives of applied linguistics practitioners.

C: Yes, and we realised at the same time that technology is a way in which, increasingly, students and practitioners are being empowered to become active members of an international community of

applied linguists. One of the major principles that emerged out of the writing of the book was our shared philosophy, including trying to contribute to a more bottom-up, participatory, kind of applied linguistics, which includes all the players.

R: So, using some of this technology, we've developed a companion website, www.mapping.com, in an attempt to create a community space in which practitioners from different areas of applied linguistics will be able to participate. Contributors to mapping.com will be able to tell other members of the community about their own experiences and opinions, as well as asking questions and sharing resources - building applied linguistics from the bottom up.

P: Yes and we've got examples of that in the final chapter of the book in which we introduce five practitioners from different areas of the world. The videos of our interviews with them on mapping.com would be good models for anyone who wants to contribute to the website.

R: So we hope that readers of the book will also get involved in the website and that this will be a new opportunity to participate in the creation of applied linguistics from the bottom up.

P: Another thing to mention is that in the Introduction of the book we focused on what we call the five main ingredients of applied linguistics. Chris, do you want to say something about these?

C: Well, the first main ingredient was the 'centrality of client needs'. Not everyone might like the choice of the word 'client', and we certainly don't mean to imply that there are market forces which drive the discipline, but we believe in the importance of starting with the problems that are experienced by the users of language, problems which applied linguists should aim to help them resolve. This is one way in which applied linguistics is different from theoretical linguistics.

R: Yes, and it's often not just actual but also perceived needs, including the perceptions of the people which surround the client, which is what can make our clients' language problems so complex.

P: The second ingredient is what we've called a 'pragmatic orientation', an idea which links to our mapping metaphor. We've already said that maps are not a neutral representation of the territory; they are inevitably a selection of the features of the territory which get noticed by the mapper. We are admitting that our representation of applied linguistics is also a selection of aspects of the disciplinary landscape, and stressing that it is important for us, and for other applied linguists, to be explicit about the assumptions that we/they are making about language and language users. But also to be prepared to select different

approaches to the solution of their clients' needs from a range of different social and cognitive/psychological positions.

C: Right. So the third central feature of applied linguistics as we see it, and which we thrashed out a number of times in the course of writing the book, is that language must be seen as both a sociocultural and a cognitive/psychological phenomenon and that, although these two approaches are often seen as incompatible, applied linguists ignore either one of them at their peril.

R: Yes. The fourth ingredient of applied linguistics is about role-shifting and collaboration and I think this goes back to what Chris said about where the idea of the book came from, at a time when he and Patrick were working with a diverse group of language professionals. My experience too is that my own language profession, the teaching of English as an additional language, requires teachers to know something about other areas of applied linguistics; for example, language pathology, in situations where a student has speech or hearing difficulties. We want to make the point that, while a language professional may have expertise in a particular area of the discipline, they can benefit from learning about the practices of language professionals working in other areas as well as from talking to and collaborating with them.

C: And ultimately, of course, we're all students aren't we?

R: Yes, necessarily!

P: Rachel, do you want to say something about the fifth ingredient of applied linguistics, 'mode of enquiry'?

R: OK. Well, the fifth ingredient bundles the first four together. What we're saying is that the sum of our first four ingredients adds up to a distinctive way of practising our profession, of seeing the world as a complex place which needs to be understood from both social/cultural and cognitive/psychological perspectives, where ideological positions are acknowledged but not seen as restricting us to particular ways of thinking/doing, and where language problems are best tackled collaboratively. So, the result of the first four ingredients is a way of being that is unique to applied linguistics.

C: Well, we hope that you enjoy reading the book and find it useful.

R: And that the process continues after you've finished reading the last page, and that you get involved in mapping.com.

P: Yes, we look forward to hearing your stories and reading your contributions on the website.

C: And interacting with you!

References

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