DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 389 194 FL 023 401

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TITLE Politics and Change in Research in Applied Linguistics. Occasional Papers, 28.
INSTITUTION Southampton Univ. (England). Centre for Language Education.
PUB DATE Aug 94
NOTE 38p.
PUB TYPE Information Analyses (070)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Applied Linguistics; *Educational Trends; Foreign Countries; *Language Research; *Political Influences; *Scholarship; *Social Change; Trend Analysis
IDENTIFIERS *United Kingdom

ABSTRACT

A discussion of recent research trends in British applied linguistics looks at the way in which social processes, sociology, anthropology, and media studies appear to have replaced pedagogy, linguistics, and psychology as major areas of investigation. In examining this trend, two models of literacy (autonomous and notional) are examined and extended to other branches of applied linguistics. A shift from autonomous to ideological is then traced as it relates to two relatively recent political processes: (1) a series of government initiatives in language education in the late 1980s, including a model of the English language for use in schools and development of a national curriculum, and (2) a more general redefinition and critique of liberalism. Four possible directions are envisioned for applied linguistics research in such an emerging political order, characterized by free market economics and cultural authoritarianism: service to the state; competition in the market; independent analysis and critique; and new social movements. Implications of these directions for applied linguistics in general, and for new Ph.D.'s in particular, are examined. (MSE)

CENTRE FOR LANGUAGE IN EDUCATION

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON

OCCASIONAL PAPERS, 28

POLITICS AND CHANGE IN RESEARCH IN APPLIED LINGUISTICS

BEN RAMPTON

AUGUST 1994

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Abstract*

This paper begins by noting the way in which social processes, sociology, anthropology and media studies recently seem to have replaced pedogogy, linguistics and psychology as the major preoccupations in British applied linguistics (AL). To try to make sense of this shift, it first borrows Street's notions of 'autonomous' and 'ideological' models of literacy (1984) and extends them to other branches of applied linguistics. It then tries to situate this move from 'autonomous' to 'ideological' applied linguistics within two fairly recent political processes: (a) the switch of focus from overseas to UK language education occurring in the late 1930s; (b) the more general redefinition and critique of liberalism. With the grounds for an ideological (socio-cultural/ecological) interpretation of applied linguistics established, the paper then sketches out four positions that AL research can occupy in an emerging political order characterised by free market economics and cultural authoritarianism: service to the state, competition on the market, independant analysis and critique, and new social movements. It illustrates and discusses the implications of these options for applied linguistics in general and for AL PhDs in particular.

0 Introduction

This paper speculates about what seems to be quite a fundamental change in applied linguistics in Britain. Compared with the situation ten years ago, it is much less common today for applied linguists to feel isolated and remote from the users of their research (cf Meara 1985:15; Trim 1985:3,5). To work out some of the reasons for this shift, the paper takes Brian Street's distinction between autonomous and ideological models of literacy and extends it to other areas of applied linguistics, situating it both in the recent political experience of applied linguists locally in Britain, and in the more general crisis and transformation of liberalism. It seems to me that a new set of social and political possibilities are emerging for applied linguistic research, and after trying to define them, I shall consider some implications for the PhD.

1 A shift in British applied linguistics

In 1985, the Chairperson of the British Association for Applied Linguistics (BAAL) noted: "We need to be sure that there is not too heavy a bias towards language teaching" (Brumfit 1985b:5). Just five years later, the then Chair observed: "We may have to be careful not to exclude more traditional BAAL interests in EFL/ESOL/ESL" (Stubbs 1990:para 1.2). Something seemed to be happening in the Association, and if the titles of BAAL annual meetings have any value as evidence, it certainly looks as though there has been a shift in interest over the last ten year, away from language pedagogy, linguistics and psychology towards language and more general social phenomena and processes, drawing on anthropology, sociology and media studies (cf also Mitchell 1991; Meara 1992:8).[1]

Admittedly, the evidence for this change is a little impressionistic, and it would be worth carrying out a detailed analysis of the conference programmes themselves. But trusting the judgment of BAAL chairpeople past and present, I would like to take the reality of this British change for granted, and to interpret it as a move from 'autonomous' to 'ideological' models of applied linguistics.

These terms come from Brian Street's ground-breaking 1984 study of literacy, in which he characterises the 'autonomous model of literacy' as follows:

a. literacy is seen as a neutral technology.
b. Research focuses on cognitive processes. It is particularly concerned with the development of rationality, logic, disembedded thought, and it is assumed that the mental consequences of literacy are universal.
c. People are divided up into literate and non-literate. For research, literacy provides the central dimension for social differentiation.
d. Being literate is regarded as better than being non-literate.
e. Written text is regarded as quite distinct from speech.
f. Research on literacy is regarded as objective and politically neutral.

All this contrasts with the 'ideological' model, in which

a. literacies are seen as deeply implicated in their socio-

cultural contexts. Like all technologies, they are seen as the value-laden products of social and political processes.

b. Research focuses on the social practices and social relationships that literacy is involved in, and the emphasis is on different kinds of literacy in different social and historical contexts.

c. The distinction between literate and non-literate can only be understood when it is set alongside a wide range of other social identities.

d. Being non-literate is not necessarily a disadvantage.

e. Spoken and written language are intricately interwoven.

f. All research is socially embedded and value-laden, and neither literacy nor research can ever be understood outside historically specific contexts.

In fact, this distinction between autonomous and ideological approaches is relevant to much more than just literacy. Street's discussion draws heavily on the debates about social class and linguistic disadvantage that were central in the 1970s and early 80s (Bernstein, Wells etc), and his definitions also help make sense of areas of applied linguistics that he might well not have anticipated. His account of the autonomous model does not have to be adapted very much to be fitted to some of the major currents of research into the teaching and acquisition of English as a second language. For example,

a. applied linguistics and English language teaching (ELT) have often been described as neutral technologies (eg Corder 1973:12-13; Munby 1978; cf Phillipson 1992:65ff).

b. The governing interest in second language acquisition (SLA) research is cognition and grammatical development. There is a certain amount of predominantly psychometric concern with factors like age, language background, personality, learning style and the formality of the setting, but these are generally only seen as antecedent constraints on the central processes of grammar acquisition. There is also a preeminent concern with discovering universal patterns (Ellis 1985:Ch1; Klein 1986:Ch1).

c. Social identities and relationships are generally treated only schematically. Though they may be mentioned by way of preliminary contextualisation, specific social positions

soon drop from view, and overwhelming priority is given to a naked distinction between learner and native speaker.

d. People who know English (and other dominant languages) are assumed to be better off than people who don't.

e. There has been a strong tendency to regard language learner language as an unstable but distinct system in its own right (Corder 1974:161; Nemser 1974:56; Selinker 1974:35). As a culturally specific communicative activity, bilingual language mixing has generally been neglected.

f. Research on SLA is regarded as objective and essentially neutral politically (cf the edition of Applied Linguistics devoted to SLA research issues (14/3 1993)).

In fact, second language acquisition research provides a useful reminder that the shift from autonomous to ideological applied linguistics is by no means inevitable or general, and the strength of the autonomous impulse in SLA is illustrated by John Schumann's recent interest in explaining the social, psychological and affective dimensions of second language learning in terms of neural structures and molecular genetics (Schumann 1993:301-2). Even so, it is not difficult to imagine what an ideological model of second language acquisition would look like, there are incipient signs of one developing in Britain (eg Robert & Simonot 1987, Bourne 1988, Rampton 1987, 1991a, 1995:Ch 11, forthcoming), and in the second language teaching in British schools, it has actually been dominant (cf Brumfit, Ellis & Levine (eds) 1985; Levine 1990, (ed) 1990).

The suggestion is, then, that the contrast between autonomous and ideological models maybe resonates across applied linguistics quite widely, and that although there is obviously significant variation across different subfields, the influence of the ideological model is growing within British applied linguistics. To try to find out why, it is now worth turning to the politics of language education.

2 'Autonomous', 'Ideological' and the politics of language education

In his discussion of literacy, Street argues that the autonomous model of literacy fits with a particular view of

world development. He sees the distinction between literate and non-literate as a reconceptualisation of stereotypes about primitive and modern cultures, and he analyses the autonomous emphasis on decontextualised rationality, neutral technology and universal benefits as a major justification for the transplantation of Western education to countries of the South. In fact, there are a number of striking similarities between Street's description of autonomous literacy as a warrant for cultural imperialism and Robert Phillipson's analysis of English language teaching.

Phillipson (1992) stresses ELT's claims to being a neutral technology and he argues that this has made it acceptable in countries which have achieved political independance fairly recently. As with literacy, ELT has been cast as an essential requirement for modernisation, and a lack of emphasis on the sociocultural particularity of language learning has increased the international marketability of ELT and enhanced the claims for global relevance made by British and American research. A sharp division between learner and native speakers has guaranteed a central place for British and American teachers and scholars, who have also been exempt from the need to know any indigenous languages by audiolingual and direct method pedagogies (supplemented, maybe, by the view that language learner language had a distinct system of its own).

The implication is, then, that with both literacy and ELT, autonomous models have lent support to an unequal political relationship between the industrialised West and the non-industrial Third World. It is not my aim here to try to evaluate this argument in any detail, but it is quite striking that the spread of ideological models in British applied linguistics has been closely intertwined with a switch of attention, away from ELT overseas to language education back at home.

This switch of focus has been driven by a series of government initiatives in language education during the late 1980s: first by the government's desire for a model of the English language for use in schools, and after that, by the setting up of a national curriculum (for a first hand account of these, see Cox 1992:242-271). These initiatives have called

for applied linguists to design language policies for their own country, where it was be much harder to claim that it was their job to be politically and socially detached. And just as important, they have also brought applied linguistics face to face with an indigenous tradition of language education that has been much more committed to local community roots, and much more explicitly concerned about the politics of language use.[2]

It is not appropriate here to get into detailed discussion of the events and processes involved in this encounter. But an impression of the shift in applied linguistics set in motion by the flurry of government initiatives can be seen in a few representative publications, before and after. Carter (ed) 1982 Linguistics for the Teacher and Stubbs & Hillier 1983 Readings in Language, Schools and Classrooms are two collections focussing on British language education: academics based in linguistics and language departments represented about 90% of the contributors in the first of these, and about 60% in the second. In both volumes, only about 1 in ten of the contributors were professional educationalists working outside higher education. In contrast, Carter's 1990 collection Knowledge About Language addresses many of the same issues, but less than a quarter of the contributors are based in HE language and linguistics, while non-HE educationalists represent about a third. In fact there are also very clear qualitative differences. Carter's 1982 introduction describes the collection as programmatic and polemical, flying linguistic ideas in front of a suspicious audience much more at ease with language in education than educational linguistics. In contrast, the 1990 text emerges from within a multi-million pound teacher training programme; it declares that distinctions between educational linguistics and language in education are now "(potentially)... passe" (1990:19); and it claims to articulate an approach to language which "ensures that ideological issues are quite central" (1990:18).[3]

I shall refer back to some of this history a little later. But before that, it is worth stressing that the outcome of this particular chain of events was also profoundly influenced by a much larger shift in the spirit of the times. Autonomous

approaches have been deeply affected by the crisis and transformation of liberalism, to which I shall now turn.

3 Liberalism in crisis and the impact on autonomous AL

It is worth first trying to identify some of liberalism's central tenets, and then pointing to their intricate connections with the assumptions of the autonomous approach. After that, I shall describe some of the assaults that have been made on liberalism, and then glance at the post- and/or neo-liberal habitat that now seems to be developing.

The liberal tradition is highly complex and diverse. But according to Gray

> "Common to all variants of the liberal tradition is a definite conception, distinctively modern in character, of man and society. What are the several elements of this conception? It is **individualist**, in that it asserts the moral primacy of the person against the claims of any social collectivity; **egalitarian**, inasmuch as it confers on all men the same moral status and denies the relevance to legal or political order of differences in moral worth among human beings; **universalist**, affirming the moral unity of the human species and according second importance to specific historic associations and cultural forms; and **meliorist** in its affirmation of the corrigibility and improvability of all social institutions and political arrangements. It is this conception of man and society which gives liberalism a definite identity which transcends its vast internal variety and complexity" (Gray 1986:x)

Several points need to be amplified and added, drawing on the analysis of liberalism produced by Frazer & Lacey 1993:

- **The liberal conception of the individual.** "The vision of the individual... is an a-historical one: individuals come into the world with essential characteristics which proceed from their very humanity... The individual is... essentially and morally what has been called a 'disembodied self'; what makes her or him a person, a moral subject, are pre-social or transcendent features of human beings" (Frazer & Lacey 1993:45)

- **The individual and the state.** "There is a dual, ambiguous analysis of the state in the liberal tradition. First, flowing from the focus on the moral individual we find a deep-seated aversion to state power, and an acute awareness of its dangers... But equally central is a belief in the power of state policy as the promoter of social change and, especially, social progress... One way in which [an attempt is made to resolve this tension] is in the separation between public and private realms. The state's activities are to be limited to a clearly demarcated public sphere, whilst human individuality and diversity is to be respected in the private sphere" (ibid p 47)
- **Legitimacy.** The state's legitimacy is a crucial issue in the liberal tradition. "It can only claim legitimacy if it... commands consent, and a particular, public, universal conception of law has been understood to be a condition of this consent. There must be an end to arbitrariness... The public and universal conception of law has a commitment to rationality at its heart" (ibid pp 49-50)
- **Rationality.** There is also a strong sense of reason as impartiality. "An impartial judgment [is seen as] one that proceeds from an unbiased stance towards the possibilities that are being judged... the reasoner must stand apart from his own emotions, desires and interests... abstracting... away from the concrete situation" (ibid p 48).
- **Social policy and welfare.** Finally, within some strands of liberal thought, "the conviction that social reality is understandable and knowable, as predictable as physical reality... [has brought] with it the conviction that social policy and technology might be used to ameliorate poverty, unhappiness and other ills" (ibid p 50).

What connections does this have with autonomous models of literacy and language learning?

- The kinds of cognition valued most highly in autonomous literacy research closely reflect the conceptions of rationality privileged in liberalism: context-free abstraction, detachment, disembedded thought (cf Street 1984:2).
- So do autonomous beliefs in the neutrality of research.

- The tendency to ignore or neutralise the influence of 'background' social variables/identities links with liberalism's a-historical, a-social perception of the person, its 'disembodied selves' (cf the priorisation of the literate/non-literate, learner/native speaker distinctions in autonomous literacy and in SLA)
- The autonomous preoccupation with cognitive universals links with liberal universalism.
- Liberalism's belief that technology and social policy can lead to social improvement is echoed in the modernising mission that Street and Phillipson identify in autonomous literacy and ELT.

Autonomous models of language use are deeply permeated by liberal assumptions, and it is inevitable that when liberalism comes under attack, autonomous AL's foundations will also start to tremble.

Critiques of the liberal perspective are themselves very considerable in their variety, range and complexity, but Frazer & Lacey identify three fundamental positions (1993:26-31):

i. One group of critics have a commitment to the modern values of equality, liberty and the rule of law, but they emphasise the way liberal politics and the modern era have consistently failed to protect these values. The 'freedom' of industrial society is seen as a sham; modernity is characterised by an alienating atomism; the restriction of politics to the public domain obscures the realities of eg patriarchy and racism in interpersonal relations; and the market is inefficient and unjust (cf Marxism, democratic socialism, anarchism, feminism).

ii. Another set of critics rejects the actual values of liberalism. They oppose individual liberty, individual rights and equality, and long for the reconstruction of older social relations, values and practices. In place of the rational or scientific wisdom central to liberal modernity, this group harks back to ideas about 'the word' and the wisdom of fathers and monarchs (cf reactionary conservatism).

iii. Frazer & Lacey characterise a third and more recent set of criticisms as postmodern. These are many-stranded, but

> they subsume at least two broad perspectives. One school of thought argues that Western societies are actually in a new era, profoundly affected by new information technologies, by a decline in traditional political institutions, and by the rise of new social movements. Another line of thought argues for the emergence of a entirely new perspective, abandonning the failed liberal project of rationality together with the hope that social science can understand and harness the laws of social life. The liberal values of individuality, freedom and equality are themselves regarded as biased in the interests of powerful groups, and 'grand theories' which make claims to truth (eg Marxism and utilitarianism) are either treated sceptically or are seen as repressive instruments of power.

In concert (or cacophony), these lines of attack make it very hard to maintain undiluted faith in the fundamental autonomy of individuals, in consensus and voluntary contract as the basis of social life, in the impartiality of reason and the separation of fact and value, and in the improving mission of social science. In one way or another, they make the ideological model of language use seem a safer starting point than the autonomous. In addition, they also point to a number of alternative positions starting to emerge in the new terrain looming up around us.

Liberalism remains an extremely important force in this new (dis)order, and it is still a vital source of political ideals. But at least for the time being, liberalism seems to be radically changing the form that it took in the 35 years after World War Two. In the economic sphere, it has become dominant as the free market. State control of all sectors of the economy is being enormously reduced by deregulation and privatisation, priority is being given to the consumer's freedom to choose, and the logic of the market is becoming increasingly universal, as more and more areas of activity are forced to reorganise, reconceptualised in terms of commodity production, distribution and consumption (regardless of whether they are concerned with cars, crime, learning or health) (Fairclough 1992a:207). But at the same time, liberalism's

advance in the economic sphere has been matched by its decline in the realms of civil life and culture. The state is abandoning rational social planning and cutting back on welfare, regarding the latter as overcostly and antipathetic to the competitive individualism cherished in Conservative economics. And in other respects, government is becoming increasingly absolutist, shifting power from elected bodies to political appointees, operating more and more by fiat than consent, preaching private morality and the values of social integration, faith, loyalty, and primordial fixed ties.

It seems to me that applied linguistics can respond to these new circumstances in at least four different ways.

4 Contemporary options for AL research

The four options I envisage are:

1. service to the state
2. competition on the market
3. independant analysis and critique
4. new social movements

These are ideal types: many projects involve several of these, and I shall refer to some fuzzy boundaries in due course. Even so, they make sense of quite a lot of research, and they also allow us to pinpoint a number of different sets of risks and opportunities.

4.1 Service to the state

This is a path that many applied linguists have followed, either serving on government committees, working on government research and development contracts, or simply responding in detail to government reports and consultations (cf eg the BAAL Newsletters between 1987 to 1993 [numbers 28, 31, 36, 40, 44, 45]). But unfortunately, central government has gradually become more authoritarian and less interested in new knowledge and open debate. The 1980s began with curriculum design very much in the hands of local education authorities and schools, and with direct government funding for research on linguistic diversity (the Linguistic Minorities Project 1985). In contrast, the 1990s began with a centralised national

curriculum, and with the government's attempt to suppress the training materials produced by the Language in the National Curriculum Project, partly because it felt that not enough attention was given to Standard English (Carter 1992). Over the intervening years, government research contracts have become increasingly restrictive (limiting the right of researchers to publish their work as well as their autonomy in the conduct of investigations [Pettigrew 1992:4]), and expert opinion on language and education has been treated with growing disdain (Brumfit 1991:49; Carter 1992:18), the development of National Curriculum English being gradually shifted over into the hands of a narrow band of businessman and New Right ideologues (Clanchy 1993; Rampton 1993:2-3).

In a number of ways, applied linguists and language educationalists has been able to benefit from these developments. Reactionary initiatives have been converted into liberal products (eg the Cox Report, the LINC project) and new liaisons have been forged both in common opposition and by the exigencies of national curriculum design. We now have a 'samizdat' version of the LINC materials, and academic and professional opinion has converged on something approaching a consensus model of language for education (LINC 1992; Carter (ed) 1990). Even so, central government retains a great deal of power to impose a curriculum to its own taste, and pressure remains for a back-to-basics English curriculum that seeks the reconstruction of (a mythic image of) older social relations, values and practices (Frazer & Lacey 1992:30, cited on page 9 above): Standard English monolingualism, the English literary heritage, neat handwriting and accurate spelling, to the exclusion or detriment of linguistic and cultural diversity, media studies, composition, even information technology (Perera 1993:25; Anderson 1994:17).

Overall, even though government remains a very major source of funding for applied social research (Pettigrew 1992:6), service to the state is an option that applied linguists may now be wary of.

4.2 Competition in the market

It is very hard to generalise about contracted research and

development work. This covers many branches of applied linguistics (ESP, lexicography, forensic linguistics, communication skills training, voice training etc etc), and many different sponsors, varying considerably in their approaches to business and employment (manufacturers, publishers, education bodies, voluntary sector organisations and so on). There are however a number of fairly obvious generic risks associated with commercial contract work (cf BAAL 1994):

- **Limited time.** Sponsors often work to quite tight schedules, and like to see the product of an investigation fairly soon. This can restrict the amount of time an applied linguist has to find out about the environment they are supposed to research in, and it makes it more convenient to work with autonomous models of language use rather than ideological ones. Time pressures can also inhibit consideration of alternative data interpretations, impede theoretical generalisation, and prevent attention to issues emerging during and after the project.
- **Overrapport with sponsors.** Researchers generally need to spend time negotiating the conduct of their work with their sponsors, and there is a risk of this developing into overrapport, so that research turns into personnel management, public relations, or advertising. The academic community often plays no significant role in the discussion of a project, and this may mean less exposure to creative doubt and different theoretical accounts.
- **Irrelevant expertise.** Complex workplace problems often involve much more than issues of communication. This can be difficult to recognise at the outset of a project, and once it is under way, it may be tempting to conceal the limitations of one's expertise.
- **Publication.** Sometimes sponsors feel that they not only buy but also own the research they pay for (Pettigrew 1992:4), and researchers can be pressured to sacrifice their right to publish, one of the cornerstones of academic freedom. Sponsors also often like a product they can use, which leaves less room for the scepticism and uncertainty customary in academic work.

Counterposed to these risks, however, there is often scope for applied linguists to negotiate the terms and conditions of their work, and this is increased if they are based in a supportive institution that allows them time to work and think sheltered from market pressures. And if every publication makes quite clear the conditions governing its production, there is less scope for spurious exploitation of the prestige and credibility normally associated with independant research.

4.3 Independant analysis and critique

Of the four options being considered, this is the closest to the liberal ideal of the academic as a detached source of commentary and analysis. In fact, there is no reason why this should be sealed off from the other options, and it can of course play crucial role both feeding off and into involvements outside the academy. Even so, emerging social and political conditions present a number of problematic issues for academics seeking social or educational relevance in their work (though many of course do not). Theorists of post-modernity have suggested that with declining faith in rational social planning, intellectuals have lost their legislative function and that their academic freedom has been bestowed by their irrelevance. Bauman (1992:Ch1) argues that surveillance and seduction have now become the central principles of social order, and that the legitimating and directing role that intellectuals used to play in the early modern period has now passed instead to entertainment professionals and to technical experts serving bureaucratic power. Whether or not one agrees with that particular analysis, one's sense of the practical relevance of academic work is bound to be affected by the way one thinks that power is organised in contemporary society.

If, in Fairclough's terms, "domination is achieved by an uncompromising imposition of rules, norms and conventions" (1992:94), there are likely to be strict limits on the scope for constructive academic intervention in social affairs (and as already suggested in section 4.1 above, there is some support for this view in the recent history of British language education). Similarly, it is also going to be quite difficult for the intellectual to make a contribution if social and

political life is characterised as a disparate and fragmented plurality of values, interests and power centres (Thompson 1984:63; Bauman 1992:195-7; Fairclough 1992:95). In this second context, though their task certainly is not impossible, academic voices will have to struggle quite hard for public attention, in competition with a lot of others.

If however, one takes the view that ruling groups dominate through hegemony, winning the support of subordinate groups through ideology (Fairclough 1992:92), the prospects of social relevance improve. In the first instance, there must be central ideological discourses that academics can actually identify, and after that, critical deconstruction can be seen as an important political task, a discursive interruption of the production of oppressive meanings. With Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), this is a perspective that has recently become particularly important within BAAL. It is not, however, without its difficulties.

If, for example, you believe that power operates through the pretence of consent, it is tempting to target political philosophies that actively claim consent as the basis of legitimacy. That tends to mean liberalism, which is a good target (a) because there are a great many liberal texts focussing on social and educational policy, and (b) because extensive critiques of it are readily available (cf Section 3 above). In contrast, it is much harder to get discursive tabs on the new state absolutism, partly because it works secretively behind closed doors, and partly because it often works through visceral rituals which linguistics is not very good at analysing (cf Rampton 1995:Ch1.4). This certainly seems to be the case if you look at the New Right's contribution to language education policy: apart from the occasional pamphlet (eg Marenbon 1987), one has to rely on leaks and newspaper reports for any insight into its background thinking. These differences in self-presentation lead to some unfortunate effects, which can be seen in critical analyses of language education policy. A lot of time and care is given to the deconstruction of liberal pedagogies, while the fundamentalist Right is either ignored or covered in a paragraph (cf eg Carter 1988, Rampton 1991b, Fairclough 1992b).

The end result is that critical analysts end up doing the work of the absolutists for them, attacking the perspective that has already weakened and neglecting the one that's on the rise.

Beyond that, as Fairclough makes quite clear (1992:223), critical discourse analysis needs to work out ways of distinguishing social relations organised through hegemony from those that where 'dominance' or 'fragmentation' capture the realities of power. Without that differentiation, CDA risks theoretical inflexibility, imposing schematic social models that are out of phase with contemporary experience (cf Wexler 1987). And finally, as with any ivory tower analysis and critique, there is a danger of CDA either missing or misreading radical cultural and political innovation at the grassroots. This is the central concern of the fourth option for research - new social movements.

4.4 New social movements

New social movements are becoming an increasingly important reference point in sociology (eg Touraine 1981, Melucci 1980, Gilroy 1987:Ch6; Giddens 1989:624-630), but as far as I am aware, they have not been much discussed in socio- or applied linguistics (though cf Rampton 1995:Part II). In order to provide a (more speculative and less critical) discussion of the position that these offer for applied linguistic research, it is worth beginning with a fairly general sketch.

The new social movements - for example the peace movement, the women's movement, the anti-racist movement, the anti-roads movement - are often characterised as distinctively postmodern. It is suggested that capital versus labour no longer forms the central axis of social conflict (Habermas 1981:33; Touraine 1981:10ff), that the boundaries between public and private have been eroded, and that "control reaches beyond production into areas of consumption, services and social relations" (Melucci 1980:217). "Modes of subordination [now] exert an influence on social systems, on interpersonal relations and on the very structure of the individual" (ibid p 218), and it is at the seam between the life-world and the economic/ administrative complex that the new conflicts arise (Habermas 1981). Counterposed to dominant modes of control, the new social

movements are opposed to "the reification of the communicative spheres of action" (Habermas 1981:33), they aim for "control of a field of autonomy or independance vis a vis the system" (Gilroy 1987:226), and they are concerned with "the defence of identity" and "the reappropriation of space, time and of relationships between individuals in their day to day lives" (Gilroy 1987:224-5; Touraine 1981:7).

Social movements are never fully coherent (Touraine 1981:84), and contrary to some versions of ideology critique (Hammersley 1992:Ch6), their political aims and potential cannot be taken as read - they need to be established empirically. Their rallying calls are very varied: creativity and individual desire against the established order, liberation from the shackles of tradition, nature against the excesses of technology. These issues are an essential baseline for the development of a politically potent force, but they are not enough on their own. If they are to be politically effective, social movements also need to show an awareness of the general problems of society, they need to move beyond the confines of particular institutions, to join up with other forces, and to enunciate alternative cultural orientations, grand models of history, culture and social relations with which to win back their lives from the dominating cultural orientations of an identified adversary.

This is where social scientists can play a role. According to Touraine (1981), the political potential of a social movement is directly related to its commitment to social, cultural and political analysis, and the long-term involvement of academic analysts can help to develop it beyond deviance, simple protest, or romanticism. It is easy for a movement to become either regressively utopian or absolutist, reducing reality to the unity of a global principle, and identifying society with the sacred solidarity of the group (Melucci 1980:222). Analysts can play a crucial role in getting movements to work and live with a complex plurality of interests.

The theory of social movements is much more elaborate than this, but it is a potentially attractive approach, partly because it avoids many of the presuppositions of structural-

functionalism, Marxism and other grand theories, and partly because it appears to offer a detailed model of the practical contribution of analysis, a model of action research that is sober but ambitious in its politics and theory (Touraine 1981). It is certainly not at all hard to think of educational and sociolinguistic phenomena that might be productively considered from this perspective. The heterogeneous groundswell of local cultural struggle basic to social movements seems well evidenced in certain forms of community writing (cf Gregory 1991), and for examples of the interaction between academics and activists developing into a significant political force, it would be worth looking at a range of minority language movements, or even at the network of English and Media Studies teachers that has developed around the London Institute of Education (cf eg Jones & West 1988). Social movements need not, of course, lean Leftwards, and it would also be worth paying close attention to the English-Only campaign in the US.

The suggestion is, then, that service to the state, competition on the market, independant critique and new social movements represent four major options for applied linguistics in a period when it is becoming increasingly hard to retain unquestionning commitment the traditional liberal assumptions of autonomous research. As has already been said, these are ideal types, and in reality, there are innumerable overlaps and ambiguities: government privatisation policies blur the boundaries between the market and the state; the 1993 White Paper on Science and Technology forces commercial principles into the heartlands of independent inquiry (OST 1993); Industrial Language Training (ILT) brought ideological models of language use into commercial contract settings (Roberts et al 1992); ideology critique and community writing have found their way into state schooling (DES 1988:12; DES 1989:paras 2.20-2.27; Czerniewska 199?; Ivanic & Moss 1991); intellectual involvement in grassroots activity can easily turn into theoretical imposition (Lather 1986a,b; Wexler 1987; Hammersley 1992:Ch 6); radical notions of research on-for-and-with can fit comfortably with state propaganda and commercial public relations (Toolan 1993:143; Cameron et al 1992,1993b,c). These ambiguities and tensions, however, do not invalidate the

general map I have tried to provide, and in some cases, efforts to resolve them only make its orientation points stand out more clearly: state support for ILT was ended, a top-down cascade model of teacher education was preferred to the suggestion of a bottom up National Language project (DES 1988:70), and ideology-critical media studies and community-oriented process writing are being squeezed by the National Curriculum.

5 Positioning the PhD

In the final part of this paper, I shall try to demonstrate the value of this 'map' of structural positions for applied linguistic research by using it to clarify some central issues and options surrounding one particular aspect of research as an institution - the PhD.

At present, there is a good deal of dispute about the (i) the institutional siting for research and (ii) the primary purpose of the PhD.

On the one hand, there is considerable pressure to centralise research in a limited number of centres of excellence (identified and subsequently funded through a series of research assessment exercises; cf ESRC 1992). But at the same time, with the recent abolition of the traditional distinction between universities and polytechnics, there has also been a significant growth and diversification of PhD research opportunities. Even though their records and resourcing in research are relatively modest, many of the old polytechnics and Higher Education colleges are now offering doctoral studentships for the first time (Times Higher 23.7.93 page 10).

In addition to these conflicting developments in the organisation of research, there is also tension between the traditional view of the PhD as an important piece of creative problem-solving, and more recent definitions of the PhD as a research apprenticeship, involving intensive interdisciplinary training in generic research methods (cf Rampton 1988). This latter view is most strongly, though not exclusively, represented in recent government proposals for a Masters degree in research, in which students are supposed to acquire

transferable skills which would also be valuable to non-academic employers, industry and commerce (OST 1993:Chapter 7; OST 1994; cf also Times Higher 11.2.94, 22.4.94, 20.5.94). These skills could be acquired prior to substantial engagement with the particular issues that students might actually want to address in their PhDs, and indeed it has also been suggested that when the 'MRes' is established, there should be fewer doctoral studentships available. Finally, generic research training courses would require good research facilities, a wider range of expert methodological input, and a lot of students to be cost-effective (Meara 1992a:7). For all of these reasons, the technical apprenticeship model of postgraduate research favours established centres of research excellence, not the former colleges and polytechnics.

This emphasis on techniques independent of the motivating questions - on the how separated from the why, who, when and where - represents a major resurgence of the autonomous model of research. Now, however, it is explicitly positioned within market values rather than in the old liberal tradition of disinterested inquiry, and it is heavily backed by an authoritarian government (which is also, incidently, intent on destroying critical, locally rooted research through its policies on teacher education[4]).

The organisation of doctoral research is still contested and evolving, but in order to prepare properly against them, it is worth rehearsing what the worst effects of an autonomous approach to the doctorate might be.

The concentration of research opportunities in just a few centres of excellence could lead to the creation of a postgraduate student body that was itself inclined to towards relatively a-contextual research work. Siting research in only a few institutions would favour people who were young, free of family commitments, and able to move - it would be harder for people with strong neighbourhood ties or substantial professional incomes. Furthermore, in comparison with the-PhD-as-creative-problem-solving, the apprenticeship model is itself likely to be less attractive to people who want to address compelling personal and professional questions that they have been mulling over for several years. Methodology sessions

unconnected to the issues they want to address are likely to be a source of impatience, and for people who see the PhD as the key or culmination of their life's work, there is not likely to be much appeal in the prospect of careers as jobbing researchers working on issues decided by other people (Brumfit 1985:72; BAAL 1990:15). A preference for relatively unrooted students might make little difference to disciplines where people move into postgraduate study immediately after their first degree, but it could have a major impact on areas like applied linguistics and education, where very often people only start on doctorates after a substantial period outside higher education (Brumfit 1985:76; Meara 1992:6).

There could also be a significant impact on the kind of research that actually got done. If students with substantial non-academic commitments were deterred, one might be more likely to find research 'speaking from nowhere', research informed only by 'knowledge that' and 'knowledge how', not by 'knowledge of what it is to...' (Brumfit 1984:7). Relatively disembedded from grassroots/chalkface experience, the range of issues actually addressed might also be much be narrower, again with a significant impact for applied linguistics. For example, according to Robert Phillipson, major institutions concerned with ELT have generally focused on evaluation and development, and have conspicuously failed to support any large scale research on fundamental issues (1992:Chapter 8). 'Hard core' research has been overwhelmingly small-scale, conducted by experienced (ex-)professionals with a strong personal commitment to their topic, and the doctorate has been the principal vehicle (1992:227). What would be the prospects for that kind of work if the technical apprenticeship model of the PhD becomes ascendant?

In reality of course, the situation is more complex than this picture suggests. The original proposal for a Research Masters degree encountered a great deal of well-organised hostility, and a more recent version has recommended that 50% of a student's time should be spent on a specific research project (cf OST 1993; OST 1994:7; Higher 11.2.94). In recognition of the needs of people with family and other commitments, the Economic and Social Research Council now funds

part-time research students and it is considering mid-career research fellowships for practictionners (ESRC 1992; ESRC 1993:1 -15; BAAL NL 42 1992:10). To mitigate against the worst effects of geographical concentration, collaboration between institutions and regionally based training networks are being widely discussed (eg ESRC 1991:para A8; Meara 1992), and the contribution of the ex-polytechnics also remains to be seen - though at present there may not be many with large and well-established research cultures, more of their students come from their local areas, there is often a strong institutional tradition of applied research closely tied to specific user groups, and there is perhaps potential for developing the kind of sophisticated action research identified above with the new social movements.[5]

In addition, of course, the 'worst case scenario' sketched above assumes a rather too simple and deterministic relationship between places, people and topics. Irrespective of their locations or backgrounds, there is always some scope for students and supervisors to try to steer PhD research in directions of their own choosing, provided that they are aware of the kinds of option that the 'map' tries to identify.

Potentially, the social experience of writing a PhD involves interaction with a range of people, groups, and institutions: family and friends, student peers, academics, informants, professional ex-colleagues, sponsors, mass media and public life in general. Academic text production also varies both in the particular groups which it chooses to prioritise as interlocutors, as well as in the communicative roles in which it seeks to position them. This variation is systematic, and if the discussion and map of perspectives and positions identified in section 4 make sense, they carry implications both about the particular groups that students might try to engage with, and about the manner in which they can try to do so. If, for example, the research has designs on the market, it is likely that consultation with actual or potential sponsors (and maybe ex-colleagues) will figure significantly. In independant analysis and critique, mass public texts may suffice as the central form of non-academic discourse, while if new social movements are seen as a potential destination, then

a student would also be likely to work hard on developing theoretical dialogue with informants. And at a more general level, if a student is committed to the ideological rather than to the autonomous model, he/she is more likely to make family and friends a relevant intellectual reference point in the research.

This discussion of the PhD suggests, I hope, the heuristic value of the model of contemporary options that seem to be emerging in the crisis of liberalism. It also shows the continuing value of the autonomous-ideological distinction, and a few concluding remarks about the distinction's relationship to research validity are now in order, if only to make explicit one of the fundamental assumptions underpinning the arguments presented here.

6 Conclusion: the crucial issue of validity

Because it rejects a sharp distinction between fact and value and sees personal, moral, social and historical factors as being important throughout the research process (in topic selection, project design, fieldwork, analysis and dissemination), validity issues are more complex in the ideological than in the autonomous approach. The rejection of neutral objectivity as an ideal can lead to the view that judgements about research are simply a matter of personal preference (Hammersely 1992:58-59), and indeed questions of empirical validity have sometimes been treated rather lightly in research with explicit political commitments (Lather 1986a,b; Wexler 1987; Rampton 1995:Ch 5.8).

But the ideological view that direct, culturally unmediated apprehension of reality is impossible does not mean that reality extends no further than the researcher's own opinion, and the relatively modest assumption that there are phenomena beyond one's own current state of consciousness is itself enough to warrant a central place for questions of validity. Researchers can never be completely disengaged from their findings (cf both Long 1993:233 and Hammersley 1992:69, each working within very different traditions), but research methods can help to hold idiosyncratic perceptions and preferences in

check. Indeed, an understanding of these methods is one of the principal goals of any PhD research training.

Doing a PhD, students learn to be accountable to logic and evidence, to triangulate across data-sources, methods and theories, to look for counterpatterns not just convergence, to be as explicit as they can about their procedures, and to be generally careful, systematic and sceptical. These habits are essential in any kind of research, regardless of whether it is governed by autonomous or ideological assumptions, and one doesn't have to believe in an autonomous voice of reason or in the transmogrifying power of context-free research procedures to be critical of inconsistency, a disregard for evidence, and ignorance about alternative accounts: to feel that it generates more rather than less trustworthy knowledge within an ideological idiom, it is often sufficient just to see research as a particularly concentrated execution of some fairly common cultural practices (Hymes 1980:105; Heath 1983:339,354; Hammersley and Atkinson 1983:2,235; Hammersley 1992:69-72), and to help readers contextualise what they say, researchers can try to give a reflexive account of their own activity in the empirical fields that they seek to analyse (in this light, judgments of the adequacy of a research report can rely more on an understanding of its context than a measure of its context-independence).

And of course, finally, the political costs of a disregard for validity are very considerable. Validity criteria and procedures provide a perspective that any researcher needs if they are going to recognise and overcome the dangers characteristic of each of the positions on the 'map': dogma-induced misrepresentation in service to the state, superficiality in the free market, theoretical imposition in ideology critique, romanticism about new social movements, and so forth. More generally, it is hard to see how the distinctive contribution of research to social debate can rest on anything other than the baseline of its relatively focused tradition of commitment to validity.

Notes

* Though the misapprehensions remain my own, this paper has benefitted from conversations with Bari Samitta, and from discussions with Joanna Channell, Pauline Rea-Dickins, Celia Roberts and Joan Swann about a code of practice for applied linguistics (cf BAAL 1994). A shorter version was presented as keynote paper at the 4th RIAL (Research Issues in Applied Linguistics) Seminar, on "Power, Ethics and Validity", Centre for Research in Language Education, Lancaster University, 27-29 June 1994.

1 The titles of BAAL Annual Meetings have been: 1984 "Language description, contact and acquisition"; 1985 "Spoken Language"; 1986 "Written Language"; 1987 "Applied Linguistics in Society"; 1988 "Words"; 1989 "Language and Power"; 1990 "Language and Nation"; 1991 "Language and Culture"; 1992 "Evaluating Theory and Practice in Applied Linguistics"; 1993 "Language in a Changing Europe"; 1994 "Language and Change"; 1995 "Language and Education"

2 A brief comparative description of AL and the indigenous tradition will help to explain the impact of this encounter.

Prior to the late 1980s, pedagogically-oriented applied linguistics hadn't had much to do with British schools. Admittedly, there was a broadly Hallidayan current of applied linguistics which maintained a steady interest in UK schooling for over two decades (and which has now moved centre stage). But during this period, much of the interest here was either descriptive (eg Stubbs 1976, 1986; Halliday 1978; Wells 1981) or simply programmatic (Carter 1982:1). A deep and detailed involvement in syllabus and methodology was much more widespread in the applied linguistics which focussed on international ELT/EFL (cf the work of eg Corder, Wilkins, Widdowson). But as Phillipson makes clear, the character of professional activity in EFL/ELT imposes certain constraints. Teachers often work on 2 to 3 year contracts, as politically unenfranchised expatriates responsible for the development of very specific linguistic skills, often in higher education. This allows a high level of technical specialisation, but it agitates against the development of explicitly political language curricula. It also encourages the top down spread of ideas from universities in metropolitan countries: students on EFL MAs generally go abroad again, and this inevitably restricts the development of a continuous dialogue between practitionners, advisors and academics (cf Meara 1985:15-16).

Rather than looking to educational or applied linguistics for research and guidance, which they have tended to regard with suspicion (Carter 1982; Rosen 1988), school teachers in Britain have looked much more to the language in education tradition associated with names like Barnes, Britton and Rosen (eg 1969). In English Mother Teacher (EMT) teaching as in other areas of UK school teaching, a lot of importance has been attached to pastoral issues and 'the development of the whole child', and the school has been seen as a site for the performance of much more than just the roles of teacher and learner. English mother tongue teaching has placed high value on local community ties and developed curricula that are

explicitly addressed to the politics of language and class, language and race, language and gender. University language education departments have also been able to build close links with local schools, and so ideas have developed much more from the bottom up. So whereas, as I have already suggested, ELT-oriented AL inclined towards autonomous accounts of language use, ELT has inclined much more towards the ideological.

In 1987, the Secretary of State for Education set up the Kingman committee, instructing it to produce a model of the English language that would be relevant for schools in England and Wales (cf Jones & West (eds) 1988; Rampton, Bourne & Cameron 1988, Bourne & Cameron 1988). In what was widely interpreted as a deliberate snub, there was noone on the committee with a widely recognised track record of English teaching in UK schools (Rosen 1988). Instead, in a pattern that was repeated with the Cox committee (Fairhall 1988), the Government nominated two eminent applied linguists (Gill Brown and Henry Widdowson). Not only did it look as though applied linguistics was being enticed into a special relationship with Thatcherism: it also looked as though it was tuning up for a dictatorial invasion of the territories dominated hitherto by the indigenous traditions of language education. Indeed, it would probably have done so if it had followed Pit Corder's influential early view of AL's role: "Applied linguistics has to do with the devising of syllabuses and materials for carrying out the intentions of education authorities, whether local or national" (1973:13).

In the event, Widdowson submitted a dissident minority report, saying that the Report should have given much more critical attention to the aims of an educational model of language (DES 1988:77-78). And when it was discussed at a special meeting of BAAL and the Linguistics Association of Great Britain, applied linguists did not engage with the linguistic technicalities of the Kingman Report as one might have expected, but instead responded with ideology critique, focussing on the Report's gaps, omissions and hidden political agendas (cf Bourne & Bloor (eds) 1989; Brumfit 1989:37). These were important breaks with the autonomous tradition in applied linguistics. It represented an increase in the scope for dialogue with educationalists working in English mother tongue, and this became more important and more productive over the next few years, when further calls were made for applied linguists to contribute to development of national language education policy (cf Stubbs 1988:7-8; Carter 1990b:15).

3 In this quotation, the ambiguity of 'quite' is presumably strategic.

4 Educational research in Britain - some of it applied linguistic - has been endangered by a number of government initiatives. Meara summarises the risks of one of these - the (chaotic) relocation of initial teacher training, away from colleges and universities and into schools - as follows:

> "[We] are concerned that the move towards teaching schools will have the effect of loosening the... links between teacher training and research. The schools themselves will not be able to provide a good research environment, and will

not be able to support the development of innovative and enterprising approaches to the curriculum. At the same time, University-based research and development groups will lose their direct connection with schools and become less able to affect what goes on in classrooms. Contrary to the popular view, many researchers are strongly committed to doing practical research which is of immediate relevance to the community at large, and any loosening of the ties between research and the wider community is something we would very much regret" (Meara 1992b:4)

A number of initiatives now mean that in comparison with the situation ten years ago, far fewer teachers working in the UK are able to undertake a period of full-time postgraduate study (Hirst 1988:16-17; ESRC 1992b), and education research has also been threatened with severance from the rest of higher education by an Education Bill seeking to reposition educational research under a Government controlled Teacher Training Agency (Teacher Education Alliance 1994; Bourne 1994).

5 Even so, for the new universities to develop that kind of research base, they will need to overcome some quite substantial challenges. They will need to avoid the temptation to treat AL research studentships as a lucrative international marketing opportunity (Anon 1993:23-27), they will need to ensure that user groups does not just mean industry and commerce, and they will need to find ways of funding the alternatives (cf Meara 1985:15).

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