

EVOLUTION OF APPLIED LINGUISTICS IN BRAZIL

EVOLUÇÃO DA LINGUÍSTICA APLICADA NO BRASIL

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ABSTRACT

In this article, we present the course of Applied Linguistics (AL) in Brazil, which goes from the application of linguistics to AL called *indiscipline*. We note how the inter / trans / interdisciplinary profile of AL can contribute to a teaching that provides the student with a more conscious and reflective character of the use of his own language. The methodology we use in this approach is of the bibliographic type. This type of research has led us to understand that AL is, above all, a differentiated way of doing science in a complex society. Therefore, the proposal of this approach of studies distances itself from the purely linguistic conception gaining a predominantly sociological position, since it considers the language / language as mediator of the practices of interaction in several social domains.

Keywords: Mother Language; Literature; Society.

RESUMO

Neste trabalho, apresentamos o percurso da Linguística Aplicada (LA) no Brasil, que vai desde a aplicação da linguística à LA dita *indisciplinar*. Procuramos compreender como o perfil inter/trans/indisciplinar da LA pode contribuir para um ensino que propicie ao aluno um caráter mais consciente e reflexivo do uso de sua própria língua. A metodologia que utilizamos nesta abordagem é do tipo bibliográfico. Esse tipo de pesquisa nos levou a entender que a LA é, sobretudo, uma maneira diferenciada de se fazer ciência em uma sociedade complexa. Logo, a proposta desta abordagem de estudos distancia-se da concepção puramente linguística ganhando uma postura predominantemente sociológica, pois considera a língua/linguagem como mediadora das práticas de interação em diversos domínios sociais.

Palavras-chave: Língua Materna; Letramento; Sociedade.

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“More important than worrying about the limits of a research area is trying to operate within a knowledge-building view that attempts to understand the research question from the perspective of various areas of knowledge in order to integrate them”

(MOITA LOPES, 2006, p. 98).

1 INTRODUCTION

In this work, we try to present a little of the historical course of Applied Linguistics (AL) in Brazil, considering the multiple facets that it acquired over the years. In this sense, we start from the assumption that it is, in fact, an approach to language studies that is constantly delineated. The instability as the AL conceives its studies makes it a form of investigation imminently dependent on the other areas of human knowledge.

In this case, we revisit the words of Moita Lopes (2006), in the epigraph of this article, in which knowledge is conceived as something built through the relation between knowledge of several areas of human knowledge. Therefore, knowledge is only possible through a dialogue that is constantly constructed between different scientific perspectives.

This reasoning is consistent with the AL conception that we assume in this approach. In the Brazilian scenario, investigations in the field of language are becoming increasingly open to interdisciplinary dialogues.

In this context, applied linguists opt for predominantly qualitative research, since they believe that language phenomena are intrinsically associated with the interactional situation in which they occur (MOITA LOPES, 2013).

For this reason, AL assumes, in globalized modernity, a research profile that is primarily interpretative, which requires the researcher to take into account philosophical, psychological, sociological and pedagogical questions of language.

2 LANGUAGE AS A SOCIAL INSTRUMENT

In order to understand language, it is necessary to take into account the complex discursive web that surrounds it. In other words, assigning meaning to the various linguistic manifestations necessarily implies the social dynamics in which people live and relate. Therefore, we understand that language is a social phenomenon that is directly linked to the ideological, cultural and identity factors of a given community.

In this sense, we say that the relations between people are mediated by multiple languages that are increasingly synchronized with the current unstable situation of a postmodern society. Therefore, human relations are increasingly liquid (BAUMAN, 2004), being materialized by demonstrations of an equally complex language².

It is in this context of postmodernity that AL seems to gain space and consolidate itself in the field of academic-scientific investigations. Taking into account social issues, AL understands that language is a kind of photograph of society that uses it in interactional processes.

In this way:

AL, thanks to its focus on the production of social realities by discursive practice, is in ideal opposition to visibilize and understand the resistance of groups that, from the periphery, produce new knowledge in a process of transforming the global through the local (KLEIMAN, 2013, p.53).

The knowledge that Kleiman (2013) refers to is precisely the knowledge produced by socially marginalized social groups, which are called southern voices (MOITA LOPES, 2006; KLEIMAN, 2013). In this way, the AL understands that, in order to give meaning to language, we must start from the concrete context of its realization, considering the various social domains.

Thus, AL assumes that it is necessary to consider the social situation of linguistic use so that it may be possible to reflect on language, developing ever more conscious and functional skills. It is at this point that the applied linguists establish a bridge with the studies of the literacy, much discussed in the ambit of the AL.

The meaning we give to the term literacy comes from Street (1984) in understanding it as a set of socio-discursive practices capable of semiotizing actions among the subjects at the moment of interaction. Such semiotizations consist of a process of critical-reflexive awareness about writing and reading skills in a particular social domain.

In Brazil, the confluence between literacy and AL studies occurs in research that problematizes the reflexive use of language in various social contexts. However, even though it is an approach that encompasses all social institutions, AL in Brazil has great strength when

² Therefore, we say that language “explicitly and implicitly transposes the particularities of the peoples, in order to represent their evolution, from a diachronic point of view. With this, it is pertinent to suppose that it is the main means of historical cultivation, since it contains all the construction not only grammatical, but above all, cultural of a given linguistic community, singling it out” (PEREIRA, 2013).

it comes to the relationship between subjects in the school environment. Therefore, Brazilian applied linguistics still prioritize the issue of language teaching (maternal or foreign) as a fertile problem for debates, considering literacy of different types. About this, we believe that:

It is in school, the literacy agency par excellence of our society, that spaces must be created to experiment with forms of participation in literate social practices, and therefore I also believe in the pertinence of assuming the literacy, or rather, the multiple literatures of social life, As the structuring goal of school work in all cycles (KLEIMAN, 2007, p.5).

The school is seen, in the field of AL research in Brazil, as a basic institution for the development of literacy practices, based on the assumption that it is a social institution par excellence. We agree with Kleiman (2007), considering that the school is an ideological apparatus capable of transiting in several social domains, thus covering subjects from various cultural and economic contexts.

In short, research in AL in Brazil considers language and society as inseparable factors, that is, one survives in the other. Literacy, then, appears in this context as mediating practice among the members of this society, which reflect the fluidity of the environment in which they live.

3 APPLIED LINGUISTICS OR LINGUISTICS APPLICATION?

In this section, we begin the historical course of AL, which ends up giving a double meaning to the term applied linguistic, a discussion that, even today, is still quite present among applied linguists.

For methodological purposes, AL began in the 1940s, having as historical context the Second World War. In this situation, this approach to language studies was exclusively concerned with the development of teaching materials that would help to teach foreign languages, especially to the people of the countries involved in the war.

In this way, AL is born with the primary intention of acting in the field of teaching/learning of languages. This facet, still today, continues being very recurrent in researches developed with this approach. However, it is only in 1964 that AL wins an International Association, driven by the repercussion of its first international event (MOITA LOPES, 2013).

In Brazil, discussions about AL became more strenuous in the 1980s. At that time, the concept of the applied linguistic term was still very much linked to the pragmatism of structuralist studies, starting from it for any application attempts. That is to say, the immediate application of a given structuralist model in a given teaching situation in the school was attempted, as they tried to do with morphology and syntax, for example.

Thus, it was still far from the dialogical stance of one of the approaches that would later become one of the most interdisciplinary ways of doing science in the social realm. On this, in the 1980s:

Applying Linguistics was not in any way very different from what other fields were doing in using the principles of linguistic structuralism in Anthropology and Semiotics, for example. On the one hand, linguistics was applied to the description of languages, as is the case of the books of Souza and Silva and Koch, 1983, entitled *Linguistics Applied to Portuguese: syntax and morphology*; And, on the other, to the teaching of foreign languages. This is how AL started (MOITA LOPES, 2013, p.12).

The Moita Lopes (2013) citation, transposed above, summarizes the way AL was viewed in the context of academic research in the 1980s: AL was actually an application of structuralist linguistics with the primary purpose of describing language. We know that both syntax and morphology are paradigms of structuralist linguistics that analyze linguistic procedures in a traditional and autonomous way, without necessarily considering extralinguistic factors to construct the meaning of language.

This position was probably motivated by the enthusiasm of traditional linguistics, a science that was considered new at the time, assuming that the beginning of the twentieth century was the golden phase of Saussurian studies. Today, we perceive that it was an “applicationist possibility” driven by the hurried and little problematizing way of the hegemonic theories of the time, which did not consider other factors than purely linguistic (MOITA LOPES, 2006).

Over the years, in the 1990s, AL gained a new facet, more detached from the theoretical contribution of structuralist linguistics, much closer to the vision we have today. In the 1990s, more precisely in the second half of this decade, AL showed itself to be far more complex than a simple application of linguistics. It was "a kind of interface that advances through frontier zones of different disciplines" (SIGNORINI, 1998, p. 100), a conception that until now has been timeless for the studies applied in the Human and Social Sciences.

The interdisciplinary principles of AL have become even more solid over the years. In the first decade of the twenty-first century, the idea that it is impossible to assume any phenomena of language devoid of a concrete social situation that would allow such linguistic use was already clear. In this sense, applied linguists defended AL “not as a discipline, but as an area of study” (MOITA LOPES, 2006, p.97).

As late as 2013, applied linguists are even more distant from the 1980s conception of AL. In this sense, Kleiman (2013):

I defend a Critical Applied Linguistics with an agenda that, in consonance with its interventional methodological vocation, breaks the monopoly of knowledge of the universities and other institutions that bring together groups of researchers and intellectuals and takes as one of its objectives the elaboration of curricula that favor, for One side, the appropriation of these knowledge by groups at the periphery of the hegemonic centers and, on the other hand, the legitimation of the knowledge produced by these groups (KLEIMAN, 2013, p. 42).

Thus, according to Kleiman's words, AL is, in fact, a position that the researcher must assume in his research, considering that no theory can answer absolutely everything about its object of research. In this sense, it is necessary to problematize, breaking the idea of hegemony that has settled in the contemporary society. For this, it is necessary to consider the voices of socially peripheralized subjects, since they are necessary to the relations between different knowledge in the complexity of the research object.

In short, many facets have been taken over by AL over the years. However, it is necessary to understand that this evolution continues, because it is an approach, above all, social. In an attempt to keep up with society that is constantly reformulating, AL presents a course in constant construction, always considering language/language as organic, therefore mutable phenomena.

4 THE TRANSFORMATIONS OF AL

As we said before, there were several conceptions about AL, always trying to consider the specificities of the historical context that propitiated such modifications of concept. We will call these turnaround modifications (MOITA LOPES, 2013). For methodological purposes, we consider, in this work, what we understand to be the first and second turns.

In the world scenario, in the 1970s, the questions and concerns about what, in fact, would be applied linguistics begin. A more interdisciplinary perspective, born at a time when structuralist linguistics was hegemonic, marked a real revolution in the way we view AL studies. So we have what we call the first turn.

The hegemony of structuralist linguistics was questioned by Widdowson in proposing that AL become autonomous in relation to the science that originated it. It begins at this moment to think about the distinction between linguistics (of theoretical basis) and AL (of more social and problematizing base).

According to Widdowson (1979): “Applied Linguistics can only be an autonomous area of research insofar as it gets rid of linguistic hegemony and denies the connotations of its own name” (WIDDOWSON apud MOITA LOPES, 2013, page 15) .

Very revolutionary at the time, Widdowson's words underlie the real proposal of the first turn: the detachment of structuralist linguistics and the proposal to introduce, in the field of language research, a linguistic that takes social phenomena more into account in line with linguistic ones .

According to Moita Lopes (2006), the AL problematizes questions that can not be answered solely by a linguistic theory alone. This is due to its naturally interdisciplinary profile, which requires a direct dialogue with other areas of human knowledge, since it assumes that the manifestations of language imbricate the social and psychological aspects of the subject.

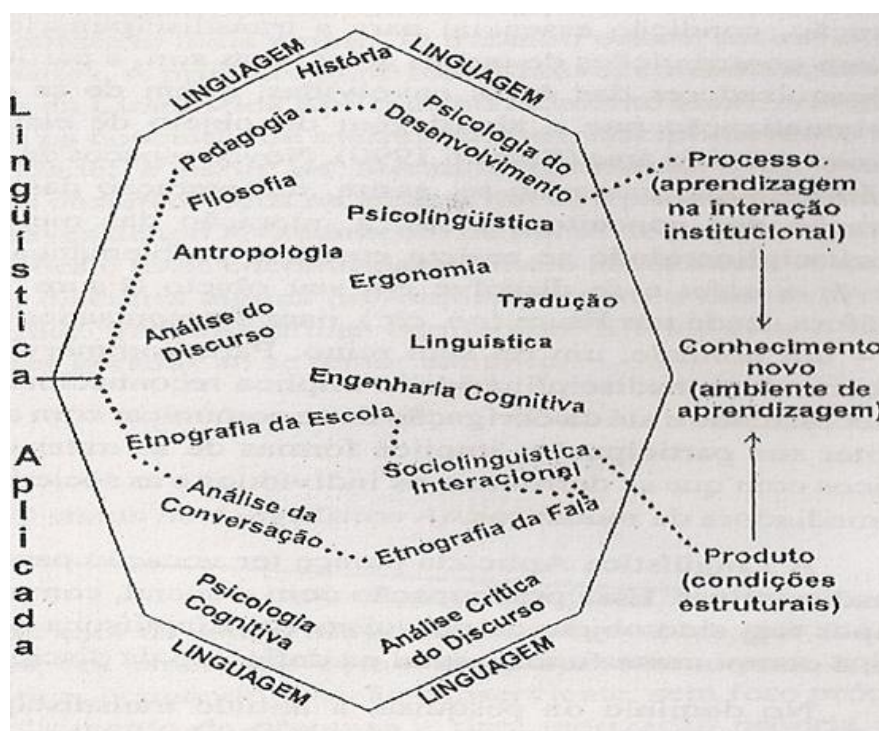
The argument that led to an interdisciplinary discourse, at that time, attempted to encompass situations-problems that in some way had to do with the classroom, in view of AL appeal to studies that involved language teaching / learning, Much reverberated among the Brazilian scholars of the area.

Moita Lopes (2013) states that “although the inter / transdisciplinary nature of AL is almost a truism, it is in Brazil that this dialogue with the knowledge and the logic of other disciplines is perhaps more noticeable than in other places” (p. 17).

There are several studies developed on the trans / interdisciplinary profile of AL, considering the school as a social institution possessing ideological powers. Therefore, once again, the school is presented to us as a fruitful context for the development of this type of research.

Notice Figure 1, outlined below. It is an image, taken from Moita Lopes (2003), which helps us to understand the trans / interdisciplinary conception, very widespread in AL studies.

Figure 1: Transdisciplinary relationship in AL



Removed from: Moita Lopes (2003)

The figure above illustrates the movement of interdependence between diverse knowledges. This dialogic posture permeates the precepts of AL until today, since it considers that all sciences study, in a certain way, the language in some of its modality. According to the image, language encompasses sciences such as Discourse Analysis, Sociolinguistics, Psycholinguistics, Philosophy and many others, which help to build the nature of the process of linguistic interaction in the learning environment.

The idea of making AL more trans / interdisciplinary, as early as the 1990s, was another great revolution in studies of this nature. It is the possibility of using AL not only to understand linguistic phenomena in school contexts but also in any other institutional contexts, since language mediates the interaction between subjects, regardless of the social

domain to which they belong. We are referring, then, to the second turn, which consecrates AL as a fully applicable approach to any social phenomena, not just language teaching / learning.

According to Moita Lopes (2006), “contrary to what happens frequently in other parts of the world, in Brazil, research in AL has spread to a number of different contexts of the classroom” (p.19). The literature studies, already discussed in the second section of this paper, and cultural studies, which rightly question the constant construction of the subjects' identities, gain strength in this turn.

Thus, the interdisciplinary look of AL seeks to explain also any linguistic phenomena provided by the relationship/social interaction in all social environments.

5 AL INDISCIPLINARY

The current AL phase gives it an even more mixed profile. In this sense, we say that it is, in fact, a position that the researcher must adopt when presenting a research proposal. Thus, in the face of the fluid modernization of the contemporary world, the miscegenation, which applied linguists refer to, makes AL an undisciplined area (MOITA LOPES, 2003, MOITA LOPES, 2013).

The undisciplined nature dealt with by Moita Lopes proposes an AL that is increasingly distant from the structuralism that dominated it in the 1980s, bringing it even closer to sociology. This measure seems pertinent to us if we consider that language is hypersemiotic and, therefore, a fundamental element to think the world itself from other areas of Human and Social Sciences, not only linguistic theories.

The meaning we give the term hypersemiotic is consistent with the meaning attributed by Moita Lopes to the word hypersemiotization, which he uses in the text *From Application of Linguistics to Indisciplinary Applied Linguistics* (2013). In this text, the author explains that language occurs in a number of ways that, at the same time, help build meaning in a given interactive situation.

In the undisciplinary proposal of Moita Lopes, it is pertinent to consider the discursive subject through the theoretical apparatus of social constructionism. This conception of subject questions the construction of a uniformed and predictable being. The socioconstructionist theories point to a subject in constant construction, therefore a social being fragmented, heterogeneous and with contradictory identities. The complexity with

which the subject is proposed in Indisciplinary AL tries to reflect an equally complex society, full of controversies and instabilities (MOITA LOPES, 2006).

Still on the important contributions of the undisciplined AL to contemporary studies of language, Silva (2014) endorses that this field of research is “informed by theories originating and transformed from different disciplines of knowledge, due to the empowerment of minority or visible groups” (p. 22).

In short, to think that a single discipline can answer absolutely everything about a particular object of research is to have, at the very least, a naive view on how to do science in the social realm. We propose a more undisciplined stance of language studies, assuming that it mediates interactions between subjects in an increasingly unstable society.

6 FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

In the course of this work, we present the course of evolution of AL in the Brazilian scenario. With this, we perceive that this is an approach in constant reformulation, considering that it seeks to follow the modifications of a highly organic society.

In this sense, we believe that it is necessary to rethink the way of making investigations in the scope of Human and Social Sciences, in order to consider the social factor as determinant for any phenomena of language originated in a concrete interactional situation. Thus, it is necessary to take into account sociocultural, historical and political issues that help coercively build the pillars of a postmodern society.

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