Review of "*Critical Applied Linguistics: A Critical Re-Introduction* (Pennycook, 2021)"

Hoda Sistani*

¹Ph.D. Candidate, Department of English, Shahreza Branch, Islamic Azad University, Shahreza, Iran

1. Chapters overview

The book provides a comprehensive overview of Critical Applied Linguistics (CAL), including its different domains and a critical analysis of other theories. It was coined by Alastair Pennycook to incorporate criticality into applied linguistics, covering critical pedagogy, discourse analysis, and ethnography. The author also acknowledges the postmodern approach in applied linguistics.

Critical applied linguistics is an approach that explores the link between language and society, focusing on power dynamics, unequal access to resources, exclusionary ideologies, and the influence of identity and agency. It goes beyond aesthetic or rational analysis and aims to promote social change by addressing issues of injustice, inequality, and discrimination. Influenced by Critical Theory, it also considers feminist theory and critical exploration of sexual identity and race. The field encompasses various areas of study including critical sociolinguistics, discourse analysis, literacy, translation, second language pedagogies, and language testing. Critical applied linguistics challenges traditional sociolinguistics by examining language policy, social inequality, language commodification, and minority languages. It also applies critical approaches to texts and pedagogy, emphasizing the importance of critical

---

* Corresponding Author's E-mail address: hodasistani87@gmail.com

pedagogy in language education and the need for critical analysis in language testing. Collaboration, activism, reflexivity, and hope are key elements of this field.

Chapter 2 introduces critical applied linguistics and emphasizes the importance of theory in understanding the politics of language. The author discusses the connection between language and power, exploring different views on power, including modernist and postmodernist perspectives. They critique the idea that language is solely a cognitive system and highlight the need for a nuanced understanding of its political aspects. The chapter examines the liberal egalitarian approach and argues that it fails to address broader social and political concerns. The author also discusses the relationship between language and social justice and explores feminist, antiracist, decolonial, and neo-Marxist approaches within critical applied linguistics. The chapter concludes by discussing the postmodern or poststructuralist approach and its valuable perspective on power dynamics. It emphasizes the importance of adopting a critical approach and viewing language within broader social and political contexts in applied linguistics.

In Chapter 3 the author focuses on the relationship between knowledge and politics, with a specific focus on language policy, multilingualism, and language rights. It challenges the glorification of English and advocates for the recognition and support of first languages. This chapter criticizes the World Englishes framework for overlooking power dynamics and access issues, arguing for a more critical approach that addresses language inequalities and injustices. It also examines linguistic imperialism, language ecology, and language rights, emphasizing the importance of protecting linguistic human rights. The enforceability of these rights is a concern, and the chapter suggests a promotion-oriented language rights approach. It discusses language politics, identity, language shift, and the role of English in power dynamics. The chapter highlights the significance of English in local economies, popular culture, communication, and education. It explores the reproduction orientation and resistance perspective in relation to power and inequality, emphasizing the importance of decolonizing language and the implications for postcolonial communities in education. The chapter calls for a decolonial stance and recognizes the impact of colonialism on marginalized groups. It critically examines postcolonial studies and emphasizes the relevance of the decolonial option in challenging colonial ideologies and dismantling colonial structures. The chapter concludes by calling for a more nuanced understanding of language and power, challenging dominant linguistic ideologies, and advocating for critical applied linguistics to address

linguistic disparities and discrimination, actively contributing to social change and alternative perspectives.

Chapter 4 explores the importance of critically examining differences in applied linguistics and highlights the limitations of simplistic categorizations and stereotypes. The influence of Orientalism in applied linguistic writings on Japan is discussed, emphasizing the constructed nature of difference. The construction of differences in language learner identities is examined, as well as various perspectives on gender and power. Recognizing differences is seen as a social concept that goes beyond cultural respect. The division between mainstream SLA research and alternative approaches incorporating sociocultural factors is explored, with a focus on the importance of social and cultural contexts in language learning. The Performing Subjectivities perspective is introduced, emphasizing the role of social categories in language learning while acknowledging institutional power. The influence of language on gender identities is explored, and the need for inclusivity and intersectionality in English language teaching is emphasized. Queer theory is presented as a framework that challenges traditional conceptions of gender and sexuality. The chapter concludes by emphasizing the performative nature of identity and the significance of considering the body in language studies, recognizing the role of culture and the importance of transformative action that acknowledges human differences. Affective, performative, and embodied approaches to teaching, research, and activism are seen as crucial in critical applied linguistics.

Chapter 5 provides a critical evaluation of Critical Discourse Analysis/Studies (CDA/S), discussing its strengths, assumptions, and weaknesses. CDA/S aims to critique capitalist society by unveiling ideologies and their representations. Scholars debate the close relationship between discourse and ideology, with CDA/S focusing on power, truth, and unequal relations. Language, location, and materiality are important considerations for CDA/S, which should expand its scope to include other languages and contexts. Poststructuralism challenges traditional approaches by questioning categories and addressing local inequalities. Critical literacy, a domain of applied CDA, enables students to critically analyze the world through reading, writing, and communication skills. Access and explicit pedagogy are debated, but power dynamics and assumptions must be critically examined. Alternative approaches emphasize the inclusion of different languages, cultures, and forms of knowledge to amplify marginalized voices and transform exclusionary social systems. A nuanced understanding of power, language, and literacy

is crucial for effective text analysis, considering sociohistorical associations and cultural meanings. Critical literacy and education should prioritize understanding the impact of discourses on diverse communities and embrace inclusivity.

Chapter 6 explores the political nature of language education and its impact on learners' socioeconomic roles and power dynamics. The classroom is a reflection of society, influenced by and influencing the broader social and political order. Unfortunately, schools often perpetuate social inequality and linguistic dominance. The theory of social reproduction examines how educational institutions maintain social inequality, while cultural reproduction theories focus on language-based socialization that limits access to knowledge for a select few. Pedagogical approaches should respect and incorporate the cultures and practices of all students. Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital explains the unequal distribution of academic achievement, but his approach has been criticized. Resistance, change, and critical language pedagogies challenge existing structures and promote empowerment. Cultural politics involve questioning whose versions of reality gain influence in education. Critical pedagogy aims to empower marginalized students but has faced criticism for imposing a political agenda. Critical language pedagogies address cultural stereotypes and promote academic success and cultural competence. Decolonizing education and adopting critical perspectives involve recognizing the colonizing role of language pedagogy and promoting intercultural understanding. Ethical considerations should guide language education in addressing power dynamics and creating inclusive environments. In conclusion, language education is political, and addressing power dynamics, challenging dominant ideologies, and fostering inclusivity are essential for social justice and empowerment.

Chapter 7 discusses critical applied linguistics and its role in addressing social inequalities and promoting social change. It explores various critical approaches, such as sociolinguistics, social justice perspectives, queer theory, and raciolinguistics. These approaches are concerned with inequalities and aim to move beyond individualism and liberalism. The text suggests integrating critical applied linguistics into language learning, translation, and workplace language use while emphasizing the importance of debate and dissent. It highlights the lack of critical perspectives in applied linguistics courses and emphasizes the need for transformative change and the inclusion of marginalized voices and knowledge systems. The text also outlines key principles for applying AI technology to support critical applied linguistics, emphasizing research, theoretical rigor, understanding

power dynamics, and avoiding reductionist approaches. The book aims to address social inequities and reshape global knowledge production in applied linguistics.

2. Evaluation of the Book

This book provides an informative and thought-provoking critique of mainstream applied linguistics. It explores different areas such as education, literacy, and translation, offering a journey through various schools of thought. The chapters are illuminating and appealing, particularly for readers with limited knowledge in certain areas. The tables in each chapter aid understanding by presenting information in a conceptual framework. The book's complex writing makes it challenging, particularly for beginners without a strong background in critical discourse analysis, sociolinguistics, critical literacy, and critical pedagogy. Prior to reading, readers should consult additional sources to enhance their understanding. CAL is said to address the theory/practice issue in applied linguistics, but the book lacks practical examples. Contradictory statements also exist within the text.

Pennycook argues that CAL is a self-reflective, critical, and dynamic approach to language learning and teaching. It rejects essentialism, standard methodology, and static models in favor of a constantly questioning and skeptical attitude. However, the author also claims that CAL is political, leading to a change in the world and altering social relations. They emphasize the need for an ethical theory of CAL. This presents a contradiction as Pennycook suggests CAL be distant from mainstream theories while also advocating for a tool based on moral codes and ethics. Additionally, the book could benefit language teachers by providing more content on linguistic theories and findings.

The book is highly complex and may be difficult for inexperienced readers without a background in critical discourse analysis, sociolinguistics, critical literacy, and critical pedagogy. It is recommended that readers consult additional sources before engaging with the book in order to fully understand its content. One concern is the claim that CAL (Critical Applied Linguistics) addresses the problem of theory/practice in applied linguistics, but it is not clear how this is achieved. The book also presents contradictory statements, with CAL being described as both self-reflective and critical, yet also political and aimed at changing social relations. The author suggests that CAL should be detached from mainstream theories and methods, while also emphasizing the importance of moral and ethical engagement. The book could benefit from a greater focus on second language teaching and its relationship to CAL. Readers seeking answers

related to language teaching and similar questions can explore this book and related literature.

References

Pennycook, A. (2021). *Critical Applied Linguistics: A Critical Re-Introduction (2nd ed.).* Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003090571