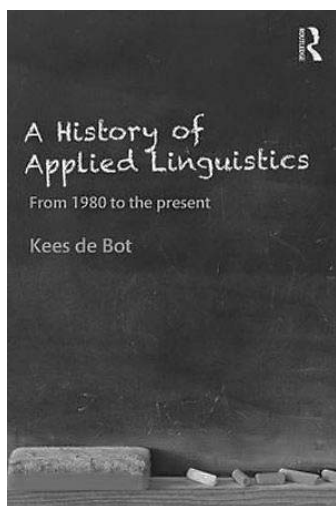


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de Bot's *A History of Applied Linguistics* (2015): A reader's response

Haris Adhikari



de Bot, K. (2015). *A History of Applied Linguistics: From 1980 to the present*. London: Routledge. Pages - 154. Price - US\$ 77.99 (Paperback). ISBN 978-1-1-138-82066-1

A History of Applied Linguistics (2015) authored by Kees de Bot is an important book, not only because it covers the overall historical development of applied linguistics (AL), from 1980 until 2010, as a nascent field of research in language acquisition and application, but also because it is based on data gathered through survey questionnaires, interviews, and systematic reviews. Written in lucid language, the book is divided into eleven parts, and is largely inductively grounded.

Students, teachers, teacher trainers, and researchers – of all levels – may find it quite helpful.

de Bot tries to make the book as authentic as possible by incorporating voices of scholars working in the field of (second) language teaching and learning and research on language use. In addition, he maps the field of AL and analyzes the areas covered or not covered by it, scanning through different conference themes, research papers, book chapters and books published in the field of (second) language teaching and research on language use. Alongside, he tries to demarcate the field of applied linguistics and its scope by considering or comparing different factual as well as conceptual variables that come from his research data and the leading scholars he consults. Overall, the book covers language acquisition theories, pedagogical developments, newer approaches in AL research, and issues of AL's impact in the domains of language teaching and learning.

de Bot synthesizes three definitions of AL out of the interviews and surveys he conducts with experts, teachers and researchers – those who mainly work in the field of second

language acquisition (SLA). First, AL concerns real world problems, with multiple languages, with ways to solve them on the basis of linguistic knowledge and tools; second, it overlaps with SLA; and third, it is everything that has to do with language, apart from theoretical linguistics. His informant scholar William Grabe points out that AL addresses real world problems as they relate to discrimination, language learning problems, attrition, aging migrants, instruction, and assessment, among others.

Alongside, de Bot warns us that these views might have been biased because they mainly come from SLA experts. His first demarcation regarding the selection of his participants functions as a clear line between AL or American Association of Applied Linguistics (AAAL) and TESOL. He observes TESOL is all about English, as its name suggests, while AAAL aims at a larger range of languages. And most of his informants come from AL or AAAL. de Bot's second demarcation concerns a large group of researchers doing experimental work on multilingual processing. He says their works have been influential and sometimes address core AL issues as well. Yet, they have not been included in the list of his participants because they would not define themselves primarily as applied linguists. The third category concerns with researchers doing neurolinguistics research, which includes works both on language pathology (bilingual aphasia, bilingual aspects of neuro-degeneration, including aging) and neuro-imaging. de Bot observes that this is a world of its own where many researchers' works have been influential; but their works are not essentially AL, so he does not include them. Overall, for the surveys and interviews, he selects researcher-participants who have engaged themselves in more than one language.

On the other hand, de Bot consults two other reliable sources: International Association of Applied Linguistics (AILA) and American Association of Applied Linguistics (AAAL). AILA defines applied linguistics as something that differs from linguistics in general, mainly with respect to its explicit orientation towards practical, everyday problems related to language and communication. AAAL defines it as an interdisciplinary field of inquiry that addresses a broad range of language-related issues in order to improve the lives of individuals and conditions in society. de Bot himself views AL as quite close to SLA. He himself defines AL as development and use of multiple languages.

Applied linguistics' different distinct features, scopes, theoretical and methodological trends, and future directions are also highlighted by way of comparison, survey analysis and synthesis. The book provides findings-based arguments. The data gathered from his informants hold differing views on the question of AL's autonomy and associations. From them, primarily three categories emerge: unity, fragmentation and compartmentalization. But most informants focus on its openness. de Bot uses the major categories of his data to make distinctions among disciplines clear. For example, he points out that TESOL is closer to teaching and learning (pedagogies) or SLA; whereas AL is closer to different uses of language and applied linguistic research.

The book touches upon how modern theoretical developments in AL came about through

mid-twentieth century developments of psycholinguistics, sociolinguistics, Chomsky's Generative Grammar (GG), Usage based (UB) approaches with cognitive linguistics as its main component, Social Cultural Theory (SCT), Halliday's Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG), Complex Dynamic Systems Theory, and Corpus linguistics. de Bot observes that all of these paradigms or approaches focused on one or the other areas of their own interests, often criticizing their precedents. Later, from the 1990s, direction of and influences over AL changed every seven years or so, and since then, the field has fragmented significantly. Therefore, it has become harder to identify clear influential leaders in the field of AL. Yet, there are prolific leading researchers in different domains of AL.

His informants emphatically highlight the growing importance of a number of areas, namely, language shifts in migration settings, language attrition, English as a Lingua Franca (ELF), conservative and liberal lines of accepting and undermining varieties of English used across the world, variability and variation in interlanguage, linguistic landscapes, role of AL in language teaching, enormous revival in attention to vocabulary, growth in content and language integrated learning (CLIL), and teacher education or empowerment. Together, the author devotes some space to AL's ever-growing interest in corpus linguistics, pragmatics, use of technology, meta-analysis and overview studies, and generalizability as a far cry in AL, among others.

de Bot contends that the definition of psycholinguistics in AL is not clear, for it seems to refer to all the approaches that see language primarily as an individual's commodity that is in the brain. For example, Universal Grammar (UG) and cognitive linguistics talk about an innate, special language acquisition device. He points out its main concern: How humans develop and use languages, which is quite the same also in SLA. In recent times, its major preoccupation, apart from the role of linguistics input, has been to see how L2 acquisition is different from L1 acquisition.

His participants view the recent development of multilingualism not as a deficit but as a resource. In particular, de Bot highlights Vivian Cook's idea of 'multiple competence' in multilingualism, which hints at the fact that the bilingual (or trilingual, quadrilingual and so on) is not two monolinguals in one, or two separate languages in one brain. Instead, it is the acquisition of a second language that leads to a reorganization of the language system with different languages influencing one another. His participants also observe that L3 community is a major development in this area, for it has grown considerably and shows good promises.

His informants opine that, though long in use until recently, Chomsky's GG or UG (Universal Grammar) is no longer in the trend, as it was earlier. Chomsky observed that children are born with an understanding of how languages work, which is referred to as UG, and this helps them to quickly identify and follow the principles and parameters of those languages. Therefore, this is driven more by assumptions than by empirical data, and generalizes how only in linear ways all children and people learn languages. However, some scholars view that the developments of generative linguistic approaches

have benefitted a lot in L2 and L3 research.

To go with de Bot, Usage Based (UB) approaches like Social-cultural Theory came as reactions to GG and other neo-behaviorist psycholinguistics. These approaches claimed that grammar is not innate, as GG assumed, and language development occurs rather as a result of (purposeful) interaction and environment. They stressed that patterns of use emerge through interaction and input, and not from rules. Together, he presents his informants' observations that highlight the emergence and growth of SCT as one of the most popular trends in AL in the last decade. SCT had remained marginal in earlier decades. Similarly, his participants take cognitive linguistics, SCT and SLA as complementary to one another.

In addition, de Bot's informants observe that Halliday's SFG is the study of how people exchange meaning by languaging. In SFG, grammar is viewed as functional, and language as the product of human interaction, i.e., in the process of carrying out certain functions in eco-social environments. Purpose in language use and its functions hold central place in this approach. But according to William Grabe, SFG is not sufficiently based on empirical evidence, and therefore, the theory is arcane, its terminologies are complex, and the texts based on it are often painful to read.

Then what follows is the emergence of the dynamic perspective on cognition in general and language processing in particular, which has been viewed as the most influential development in AL. According to de Bot's informants, the rise of the view of language as a complex dynamic system (CDS), with its reliance on Complex Dynamic Systems Theory (CDST), has cast doubt on the validity of the more traditional models of language acquisition and use. CDST views cognition as a result of interactions among mind, body and environment. It views language processing as incremental and there is no internal feedback or feedforward, but linguistic communities and environment at play. It views that any open complex system, such as the bilingual mind, interacts continuously with its environment and will continuously change over time. Many of de Bot's informants see the use of CDST in language as a new paradigm shift that fills the gap left by formal or linear linguistic models like psycholinguistics, sociolinguistics or GG (including UG). In the beginning of the chapter titled 'Dynamic Turn', de Bot informs that he speaks in the chapter from his interest and expertise in CDST. He concedes that CDST truly represents a paradigm shift. He says that CDST perspective provides us with concepts and tools for various aspects of AL that other theories have simply overlooked.

In recent times, corpus linguistics (CL) is another influential trend in AL, as claimed by de Bot in chapter six, which is devoted to theoretical aspects and research methodology. CL claims that corpora are based on authentic language use. So, language teaching materials should be based on such language. However, he buys into the idea that what is relevant and authentic for a native speaker in a specific situation is not necessarily relevant for a learner who is in a totally different situation. In this sense, CL has not

properly considered contextual factors that may have important roles to play. In this connection, he observes that what makes language authentic is not its co-occurrence as text but its use as discourse. In this sense too, contextual factors can never be undermined. On the other hand, it just happens to quarrel with the growing area of the varieties of a particular language, and this is evident in CL's relation with the English language and its global varieties.

Then, in this connection, de Bot moves on to discourse or conversational analysis, which in the 1960s and 1970s focused merely on syntactic/ grammatical factors. Now it takes deep interest in pragmatics. Earlier structurally linear, now it embraces non-linearity with a broad view, and considers multimodality of language use as its study area. In addition, de Bot devotes some space to critical approaches (CA), such as critical discourse analysis (CDA). His informants observe that AL has not yet fully embraced critical approaches in real sense; it only has flirted with CA. In this respect, Albert Weideman remarks that a post-modern analysis without political action is vacuous. Similarly, Robert Phillipson observes that there is a reluctance to be multi-disciplinary and more critical in the field of AL in general. This is followed by what de Bot's participants have to say about neurolinguistics and neurobiology of language.

John Schumann, the only leading scholar in the field according to de Bot, observes that the main aim of neurolinguistics has been to show that there is a neural correlate of the language acquisition device in the brain. He says this approach presents subjects with specific stimuli representing certain linguistic phenomena or rules and sees how specific parts of the brain show activity. The view on the brain is essentially modular, i.e., there are parts of the brain that are dedicated to certain tasks. But de Bot observes that researchers in neurobiology of language take a different perspective: the brain is degenerate, in no way modular. Through use, parts of the brain become functional, and they can do various things and are colonized and reused according to need. But the entry fee to do proper research in the area of neurobiology is high, as Schumann mentions, and it is not clear whether the investment is worthwhile.

Overall, the majority of de Bot's informants see a growth of research with a relativist perspective, than with a rationalist one, and a substantial development of the SCT community in the field of AL. So is the case with CDST, as claimed in the chapter titled 'Dynamic Turn'.

The author observes that research methods in AL, which were initially imported from other disciplines like sociology, anthropology, psychology and neuroscience, now range from grammaticality judgments to think aloud protocols and very detailed conversational analysis techniques, surveys and various neuro-imaging techniques. At present, multi-method approaches are becoming popular, such as neuro-imaging combined with eye movement registration, or variation analysis and reaction time data. Similarly, multilevel analysis, time series analysis, log-linear modeling, and Monte Carlo iterations, among others, can now be found in many more recent publications.

According to Peter Robinson, there has been so much growth and sophistication in AL research methods and tools, also of interdisciplinary nature, and this is a major development. This is followed by the politics involved in citations, role of publishers, databases and data sources for citation analysis, AL journals and their impact, and helpful insights into publication dynamics.

de Bot then turns to the impact of AL in teaching and learning practices, which is analyzed through the participants' varied and multiple voices ranging from no application of AL to its substantial huge impact in teaching and learning. But very few of the participants see AL's real impact in teaching and learning. Most of the participants observe that, though a hot cake in theories and policies, AL still lacks its presence in practices, for it does not care to use its findings in real sense. Its researchers still do things for themselves and to not really help improve teaching and learning in classrooms. Traditional practices are still being used, even online – such as structural online grammar practice lessons. Therefore, it is still not the dominant trend in teaching and learning.

Jim Lantolf and Norbert Schmitt feel that the impact of AL on teaching should go through teacher education; but they do not see such things happening. However, Patricia Duff observes that immersion programs, CLIL, and corpus-based, data driven, usage-based, and multimodal approaches have definitely improved – because of AL research. Other participants observe that project oriented approaches, growth of the scope of L2 and L3, agentic learning, inclusive and holistic approaches, and language testing modalities and their use have benefitted from AL research.

Some problems and gaps in AL de Bot cites from his informants:

1. L2 or L3 learning is often depicted as complex and difficult when compared to L1 learning. This is a negative and dangerous framing, according to Lourdes Ortega, because they can unwittingly perpetuate a deficiency view of multilingualism and encourage disciplinary isolationism.
2. There is much to be done as to why language users code switch. These phenomena are largely unclear, according to Bot and his participants.
3. Barbara Seidlhofer says that some approaches to language and multilingualism claim to be linked to neuroscience without being sufficiently well informed. This is dangerous. This sometimes leads to claims being made that go well beyond the data. Similarly, other participants observe that there is a fashion of linking different linguistic issues, say, in multilingualism, to neurolinguistics and neurobiology of language. This should not be done unless one's data actually supports what one has claimed.
4. CDST says that complexity emerges out of the iterative application of simple

procedures, so it is not necessary to postulate innate knowledge. Instead, the dynamics, the flux and the fluidity of the phenomena under study should be valued. But in practice these assumptions are often ignored. Also, some of de Bot's scholar participants are not clear whether CDST is a theory or a metaphor.

5. Rod Ellis says that the interconnectedness between components of linguistic study should include a link between the social, the cognitive and the linguistic aspects of language use. So far, he observes, no study has shown that convincingly.
6. Variation in the data is usually taken as clouding the real data. This understanding should change. Every single context should be valued, and multiple approaches and multi-layered lenses should be adopted. These things are important at least in multilingual approaches to SLA, CDST, CT or CDA.
7. William Grabe feels that SCT needs to be based on empirical research; introspection is not enough. However, de Bot's other participants take introspective thinking (data) as equally valid to be taken as empirical data as are quantification, statistics, stimulated recalls, and thinking aloud protocols.
8. One of the major trends in AL is the move from seeing language as a more or less stable formal system to viewing it as a dynamic, adaptive, process-oriented system whose acquisition is usage based, as is evident in CDST, SCT, Cognitive Linguistics or Systemic Functional Linguistics. This view is endorsed by many of de Bot's informants. However, Diane Larsen-Freeman expresses her worries about this new perspective. She says that it is difficult to convey the power of this new approach to conceiving familiar phenomena, and ironically, we are limited by our language itself in reflecting its dynamaticity.
9. de Bot observes that there is a problem in corpus linguistics: the accessibility of data has led to a substantial growth of language description at the expense of theorizing. Barbara Seidlhofer puts it thus: Digging deep in corpus data is easy, even a BA student can do it, because corpora are very accessible, but the reflection on those data is lacking.
10. His participants also point at the fact that replication of corpus linguistics or descriptive grammar is difficult in classroom practices, as it keeps on varying.
11. There should be more serious (not light as in current practice) use of critical approaches in AL. AL should also openly embrace interdisciplinary or even transdisciplinary approaches.
12. de Bot's informants observe that because individuals differ in their developmental paths, there should be even more rise in longitudinal case studies.

13. More research should be done on the interconnectedness of embedded subsystems in a language, because changes in one system may lead to changes in other systems.
14. Even the ever-growing advancement of technology, computers and the Internet have not been able to obliterate traditional ways of teaching, such as the use of structural online grammar teaching or monolingual teaching approaches.
15. Even with the rise of CDST or CT, grammar still dominates; and there is still much to be done in AL's area of vocabulary acquisition. Bot cites Norbert Schmitt as saying that there is a need for an overall theory of vocabulary acquisition.
16. People working within TBLT (task-based language teaching) rarely come up with limitations on the use of tasks in classrooms, or on the use of different types of tasks. Having clarity about these issues is important.
17. de Bot's informants observe that AL researchers, teacher trainers and teachers should work in harmonious unity. Dictation will not work. But there are quarrels among them. Teachers blame teacher trainers and AL researchers blame the rest of them. Teachers should stop focusing only on fluency and teacher trainers should train teachers also about innovative language teaching synthesized from the findings of AL research, apart from what they usually teach about adolescent psychology and classroom management. AL researchers also should take teachers' questions on their research agendas. To this, Donald Freeman adds that teaching is not only a matter of trainable behavior but individual and collective sense making through social activity.
18. Teachers as well as educational institutions have also not been to fully able to use newer developments like the principles and parameters of language testing and washback.

As revealed so far, de Bot has taken a safe approach to probing into different aspects of AL by resorting to the 'for and against arguments' provided by his informants as well as other available suitable data. This helped me read AL's important ideas critically or contextually, that is, in the frame of its historical development from 1980 till 2010. Similarly, the book provided me with reasons for why certain theoretical trends or models in AL and SLA lost their grounds or became popular. This too was helpful for me to figure out a logical advancement in these fields.

I also found the book helpful to understand the ongoing dialectics in AL's relation to other fields and disciplines, for it offers a window to the major crucial issues that AL has long confronted (for example, compartmentalization, representation, hostility, collaboration, application, and impact). Similarly, de Bot's survey into the most impactful journals in the field of AL is highly informative.

I am really inspired by how the book has been prepared. Thoroughly research-based books as this are rare. This is more so in Nepal. Nepali writers and publishers who publish educational textbooks can learn a lot from it.

However, de Bot's three demarcations concerning his selection of participants in chapter two exclude areas of first language acquisition, conversational analysis, discourse analysis, forensic linguistics, text linguistics, and stylistics, among others. That is, all of his participants come from areas where they work in more than one language. Here, de Bot is clearly biased for SLA. In a way, this approach itself can be seen as quite linear, which excludes so many other areas where linguists have been working on pragmatic sides of linguistics. I felt that he should have devoted one or two chapters in the book on linguists working on singular languages as well. That would have made the book even more interesting.

Personally, I became curious about the usefulness of L3 in the field of translation, apart from teaching. How is the knowledge and skills gained from L3? Do they help to do better translation? This is going to be one of my next ruminations, inspired by the book. Another major topic of inquiry I plan to probe into is as follows:

In the book, what I found confusing is de Bot's unquestioning citation of Bak et al.'s (1987) concept of self-organized criticality (SOC), which results from a system developed out of interactions with environment and internal reorganization. Such a system tends to be attracted to critical states in which even a minor change can create unpredictable effects on the system. The confusion is that the evolution to such a delicate state occurs without design from any outside agent; such a delicate, critical state is established solely because of the dynamical interactions among individual elements of the system (pp. 95-96). The contradiction here is this: The system is in the environment, and the environment and the system are in constant interactions. How come SOC is intrinsic only to the system and not the environment?

Contributor:

Haris C. Adhikari is a widely published poet and translator from Nepal. A lecturer of English at Kathmandu University, Adhikari co-edits *Polysemy*, a journal of interdisciplinary research and writing published out of DoMIC, KU. He has three books of poetry and translation to his credit, and is currently working on his upcoming book of Nepali poetry and an experimental poetry project- clipoetry, apart from works of research. He has served as a researcher, interviewer, translator and contributor for *Nepal Monitor*, a semi-scholarly online journal from Nepal, and has been a guest translator for *Grey Sparrow*, a US based literary journal.