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## **Overlapping and divergent agendas: writing and applied linguistics research**

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### **Abstract**

*The contribution of post-modern approaches to our understanding of writing and applied linguistics research features prominently in a number of recent discussions that survey these two fields (Lillis 2003, Ivanic 2004, Weideman 2003a and Rajagopalan 2004). An examination of these discussions of approaches to writing enables one not only to critique them, but also to compare them with characterisations of different modes of applied linguistic work. The comparison reveals a number of possible gaps in research on writing, and suggests that the latter may have something to learn from the historical development of applied linguistics. An added benefit is that such an analysis may also reveal (and suggest ways of dealing with) a number of uncritical assumptions in post-modern approaches to writing.*

### **Post-modern approaches**

When aimed at the design of solutions to practical problems, especially in the so-called applied disciplines that concern themselves with human development, academic endeavour is characterised by a never-ending search for improvement and refinement. This is certainly true of applied linguistics, which in this contribution shall be defined as a discipline of design, concerning itself with the solution of language problems (cf. Weideman 1999, 2003a, 2003b). Though applied linguistics of course encompasses the design of solutions to all manner of language problems, historically its concerns have been dominated by problems related to language teaching and learning. Because most of my own experience lies in this sub-field of applied linguistics, the discussion below will refer mostly to that. This does not imply that other areas (cf. Davies 1999 for a broad discussion) are not worthwhile, merely that the focus here will be limited mainly to the design of applied linguistic

solutions to language learning and teaching problems, and not to the solution, for example, of lexicographical, forensic, translation or language management issues.

Over the years, applied linguistic work has been influenced by a number of traditions or approaches. These approaches determine the content and style, the what and the how of the solutions that are proposed (cf. Rajagopalan 2004, Weideman 2003a). Each of these traditions has generated not only its own style of research (cf. Brown 2004), but also, and most importantly perhaps, its own research agenda. Each has made its own contribution to our understanding of the discipline, up to and including the current set of post-modern, critical approaches to applied linguistics (for a recent discussion, cf. Pennycook 2004; cf. also Pennycook 1989, 1994, 1999; Rampton 1997). The contribution of a post-modern approach to our understanding of how we conceive of what constitutes responsible research not only in applied linguistics in general, but also in research on writing in particular, lies mainly in its identification of the political forces that are at work in language practice (cf. too Rampton 1995): how power relations, and specifically unequal power relations, that get embedded and institutionalised in organisational structures and arrangements, influence (and bedevil) such practice.

Critical applied linguistics is particularly concerned with the harm (or ‘pain’ as Pennycook 2004: 797-798 terms it) that designed solutions, especially when institutionalised in organisational and other arrangements, can cause, and how we may eliminate or at least begin to compensate for such harm. Post-modern approaches, of which critical applied linguistics is certainly the most prominent, critique these organisational arrangements specifically in respect of the structural or institutional inequalities and injustices that they first legitimate, and then help to reinforce. These approaches require that applied linguistic analyses account for the ways in which we structure, implement or arrange solutions to language problems. We leave aside for the moment the point of criticism of critical approaches themselves that is often made, viz. that there is not enough follow-through from such analyses to the point that they affect the designed solutions (cf. the concerns expressed by Lillis 2003). Let me give a brief example of what such an analysis for the sake of accountability can achieve. If language learners are identified before arriving at an institution as possessing limited language proficiency, and such identification results in their being exposed to limited materials, hemmed in by lowered expectations, and provided with inferior levels of support (cf. Gebhard 1999: 553), they are institutionally condemned to failure, since they are then getting exactly the opposite of what they need: a rich variety of materials, high expectations from teachers, and substantial institutional support. However much the learners themselves might intend to develop their language in order to improve their performance to the level required by the institution, the institutional arrangements that treat them as less proficient prevent them from doing so.

Having identified, through such analysis, the power relations that, instead of eliminating ‘pain’, cause it, the applied linguist should therefore in (re)designing the solution to the language problem take cognisance of the results of the analysis. Critical applied linguistics (or at least one variant of it — cf. again Pennycook 2004

for a discussion of four potentially different interpretations) is thus not satisfied merely by identifying the inequality. The analysis must result in changing or transforming the situation. In this emphasis, post-modern applied linguistics shares with previous traditions and research in the field the concern with improvement and refinement of our designed solutions to language problems that was referred to at the beginning of this discussion.

So far, not much has been said about writing, the second term referred to in the title. What approaches to writing, and to research in writing, do we find in the literature? The short answer is: more or less the same approaches that have, over time, informed applied linguistics. To a certain degree, this is to be expected: in the discussions of different approaches to writing that will be discussed here (Lillis 2003, Ivanic 2004), the research into writing is in the first instance directed at improving the teaching of writing, and gaining an understanding of how we learn to write – much the same concerns as are in evidence in applied linguistics solutions to language learning and teaching problems in general. For this observer, who came to this discussion in the first instance not as an expert on writing, but rather as an applied linguist more familiar with the design and development of language teaching and testing materials, the congruence appeared noteworthy and significant. There is a remarkable degree of similarity in the approaches adopted by each (for not dissimilar but slightly alternative views and systematisation, cf. Leki 2002, Johns 2005). The focus of this contribution, however, will be not only the overlap between the two fields (or sub-fields, but that is not our concern, since I do not wish to go into a debate about the relationship between the two, although I shall refer below to the absence of ‘writing’ from institutionalised applied linguistic discussion and a recent handbook). Rather, the focus will be on the interesting divergences in approach that we find when we compare the two endeavours.

What should be noted here, however, is that in a number of recent discussions, both of writing (Leki 2002, Lillis 2003, Ivanic 2004, Johns 2005) and of applied linguistics (Rajagopalan 2004, Weideman 2003a), post-modern approaches achieve a prominence as being characteristic of current practice (and, if not yet characteristic, then at least as desirable). In the final section that sets out the conclusions reached in our analysis, we return to what appears to be the shared typifying feature of post-modern applied linguistics and writing research.

## **Purpose**

The purpose of this discussion will therefore be to examine some recent expositions of approaches both to writing and to applied linguistics, and to see, first, where they converge, and next — perhaps more interestingly — where they differ. As the comparison and discussion will show, there may be pointers in such an analysis that happen to be beneficial to our continuing refinement of both of these fields.

The comparison should be interesting for another two reasons. First, in discussions of writing and approaches to writing the terms ‘writing’ and ‘applied

linguistics' are sometimes used interchangeably, without problematising the relationship (if any) between the two. Second, in institutionalised applied linguistics, such as the lists of topics or themes that circumscribe applied linguistics, and are used by organisations such as AILA, the omission of the term 'writing' is glaring. In the list of AILA scientific commissions that Davies (1999: 19) gives, 'writing' does not occur at all.

An additional motivation for doing this comparison is that there is a singular lack of meta-discussion, i.e., a critical analysis of the various published discussions that provide a survey or overview of these fields. One may speculate about the reasons for this; one reason certainly is that to many applied linguists this is not real applied linguistic work, or perhaps too theoretical, or too far removed from the service orientation that is so typical of much work in the field. It is true, of course, that meta-analysis belongs to the philosophy of applied linguistics, to the foundational work that underlies the discipline. But it is nonetheless worthwhile and necessary, and, as I hope to show below, illuminating.

Furthermore, as the analysis below will indicate, post-modern, critical approaches to writing deserve to be analysed critically on their own terms as well. How critical are current approaches to writing, for example, to the institutional settings that legitimate their own existence within the academic context? Is there a potential crisis for critical approaches in achieving the prominence and status that they currently enjoy (Billig 2000)? How do they fare pedagogically when measured on their own terms?

### **Characterisations of approaches to writing**

We discuss first two characterisations of different approaches to writing, that found in Lillis (2003), and that of Ivanic (2004). Though Lillis's work is influenced substantially by that of Ivanic and others, and so can be expected to share many of the features of Ivanic's characterisation that will be discussed below, my motivation for including her views lies in her interest in exploring the *design* features of especially critical approaches to writing. "Academic literacies' has proved to be highly generative as a critical research frame," she notes, "but as a design frame it has yet to be developed" (Lillis 2003: 185). Her intention, in defining 'design' as the action of applying such critical analyses to teaching, is therefore wholly aligned with the definition of applied linguistics given above, and provides a first bridge between our understanding of writing research, on the one hand, and, on the other, applied linguistic endeavour. If research has no effect on pedagogical design, at least in the sense of providing a theoretical rationale for the designed solution, then it will have little interest either for the applied linguist or, one presumes, for the designer of writing materials.

Both Lillis and Ivanic present their characterisations of different approaches to writing in schematic form, and this presentation makes them more immediately accessible. Drawing on earlier work by Ivanic and others, Lillis tabulates first the status of the approach (on a range from 'dominant' to 'oppositional'); then the

theory of language underlying the approach; third, the student writing pedagogy that flows from this; and finally the educational goals (ranging from ‘monologic’ to ‘dialogic’ to ‘critical’) associated with each approach. The defining characteristics of an approach seem to derive mainly from the second and third sets of distinguishing features, so for the purposes of the current analysis the essence of Lillis’s diagrammatic representation (2003: 194: her Table 1) can therefore be further condensed as follows:

**Table 1: Approaches to writing (Lillis 2003)**

<b>Theory of language</b>	<b>Pedagogy</b>
Language as autonomous system	Skills approach
Language as individual meaning	Creative self-expression
Language as discursive practices	Socialisation into these
Language as genres with features	Explicit teaching of these
Language as ideological practice	Challenging the <i>status quo</i>

Though Lillis’s intention is not to fall prey to a mere ‘dialectic’ approach (2003: 195 *et seq.*) in which binary opposites are identified, but rather to adopt a “dialogic both/and” (2003: 199) approach, the whole discussion is interspersed with such opposites, especially in characterising the differences in status between what she calls the ‘dominant’ discourse and the critical or ‘oppositional’ framework. The following (Table 2) summarises some of the terminology employed to characterise the differences:

**Table 2: Oppositions in the discourse (Lillis 2003)**

<b>Dominant</b>	<b>Critical</b>
conventional	imaginative
controlling	free, emancipatory, supportive
reproductive	new, future-oriented
homogeneous	heterogeneous
static	living
uncritical (single truth)	inconclusive
ossified	participative, valuing student perspective
abstract	contextual, supportive

The trouble with these characterisations, it seems to me, is the use of emotive terms to describe the position with which one does not agree. It is unavoidable, probably,

that a presentation of the views of other theoretical viewpoints than one's own may be coloured by prejudice. For the sake of fairness it is best, therefore, not to describe the viewpoints of the other in one's own terms. To present a teacher with a choice of adopting either a deficit approach (cf. Kapp 2004: 246) that is at the same time distant, authoritative, clinical, cold, impersonal, conflict-generating, and rigid, or one that promotes warmth, personal concern, fulfilment, the development of an own true self and identity, and which may nurture the harmonious, spiritual, emotive and poetic, may not be entirely fair, since it leaves little choice.

But what if we take the critical stance that Lillis adopts on its own terms? She is entirely in agreement with Bakhtin's statement (Lillis 2003: 198) that "(n)othing conclusive has yet taken place in the world, the ultimate word ... has not yet been spoken, ... everything is still in the future and will always be in the future." The untenability of this extreme relativist position should be clear: it demands that we acknowledge it as 'authoritative', and so commands our 'unconditional allegiance' (both terms from Bakhtin, used with approval by Lillis in the same passage and argument – p. 198 – but then to indicate the unacceptability of the opposite position). What are we to make of this? The one exception to the truth that nothing is conclusive must be the statement that nothing is conclusive. Although it claims to refer to everything, it in fact needs to refer to everything else, but not to itself. For if the statement itself is indeed also inconclusive (as everything in the world, about which no authoritative word has yet been spoken), then we can comfortably ignore it; it can anchor neither our beliefs about writing nor, certainly, our designs, without undermining its own validity.

A key to understanding and interpreting all approaches, not only post-modern, critical ones, is the recognition that our theoretical work, rather than being based on hard, cold facts, is based on beliefs, such as the belief that everything is inconclusive. It is one of the main contributions of critical approaches, in fact, that they have demonstrated to the academic community at large that nothing is neutral, and that we must critically examine our theoretical starting points. It is on these terms that we should also examine not only what preceded post-modern approaches in history, but also the starting points of critical approaches that are themselves part of post-modernism.

The second characterisation of approaches to writing that we turn to is that of Ivanic (2004). She explicitly acknowledges the point made in the previous paragraph: that it is beliefs that underlie our theoretical work, and that it is these that need examination. In distinguishing between various 'discourses of writing' (as different paradigms about, or approaches to writing), she in fact defines such discourses as

constellations of beliefs about writing, beliefs about learning to write, ways of talking about writing, and the sorts of approaches to teaching and assessment which are likely to be associated with these beliefs (Ivanic 2004: 224).

Ivanic's presentation of the six different discourses thus distinguishes between their different views of language, the beliefs about writing and learning to

write underlying them, approaches to the teaching of writing, and assessment criteria. Since our main concern is with the design of instructional materials, we again summarise this framework in two columns, referring to the identification of the discourses, and the approach that each has to teaching writing (Table 3, below):

**Table 3: Discourses of writing (Ivanic 2004: 225, Figure 2)**

<b>Discourse (paradigm)</b>	<b>Approach</b>
A skills discourse	Skills approaches
A creativity discourse	Creative self-expression
A process discourse	The process approach
A genre discourse	The genre approach
A social practices discourse	Functional approaches
A sociopolitical discourse	Critical literacy

The expected degree of overlap and similarity with the diagrammatic representation of Lillis's (2003) position in Table 1 above should be evident. In the exposition and discussion of these discourses about writing, there is a similar congruence. For example, in describing the sixth paradigm (Sociopolitical discourse), which is comparable to Lillis's fifth approach (Language as ideological practice), the terminology Ivanic uses closely resembles that of Lillis: that the approach fosters the production of "heterogeneous, nonconformist texts and practices which challenge and subvert norms and conventions... (by writers who) can play their part in resisting and contesting the status quo, and ultimately in contributing to ... change" (2004: 238). And where Lillis distinguishes between a move from a 'dominant' to a 'critical' paradigm, Ivanic (2004: 241) acknowledges the progression from a restrictive view of language to an open view in the more recent paradigms.

### **Some preliminary critical questions**

Before turning to the similarities and differences between these characterisations of approaches to writing (and research on writing: cf. Ivanic 2004: 240) and perspectives on different traditions of doing applied linguistics, a number of initial questions surface.

First, though both characterisations outlined above are critical of skills-based approaches, the implication is that at least one of the four skills (listening, speaking, reading, writing) that have been historically identified, namely writing, need not itself be critically examined. Both analyses are silent on this point. The arguments against a skills-based approach are, however, important and noteworthy. Bachman & Palmer, for example, conclude their persuasive critique of a skills-based approach as follows:

We would thus not consider language skills to be part of language ability at all, but to be the contextualized realization of the ability to use language in the performance of specific language use tasks. We would ... argue that it is not useful to think in terms of 'skills', but to think in terms of specific activities or tasks in which language is used purposefully (1996: 75f.).

Similarly, Kumaravadivelu (2003: 225-231) has pointed out that the historical roots of a skills-based approach lie in the behaviourism of the 1950s; that all good teachers have always known that one cannot teach skills separately; that these 'skills' combine and are combined in all language use; that from a pedagogical point of view one has to be wary of isolating one skill. He remarks: "Skill separation is ... a remnant of a bygone era and has very little empirical or experiential justification" (Kumaravadivelu 2003: 226). One therefore cannot simultaneously hold both that a skills approach is undesirable, and that skills cannot, and should not be the basis of one's approach, only to turn around and say: but I still wish to teach this.

Of course, those who subscribe to critical and other post-modern approaches to writing would protest at this juncture, pointing out that it is the *approach* to writing that makes the difference, not writing *per se*. Their defence in this case may be that one should not confuse an instrumental view of writing with an alternative, critical conception of teaching and developing it. Moreover, what is actually happening in such writing classes is not merely the teaching and learning of writing, but of critical thinking, as well as cognitive and self-identity development, growing problem-solving capacity in a supportive environment, and the like. Still, if ways of conceptualising are important, as Ivanic (2004: 220) correctly declares, then conceiving of what we are supposed to do as 'writing' constitutes an uncritical acceptance of an historically institutionalised arrangement, viz. that what we should be teaching is writing. This arrangement, that politically entrenches and privileges writing over a number of alternatives that we shall return to below, of course benefits the proponents of writing: it constitutes nothing less than their livelihood, and will probably be as vigorously defended as the rest of the *status quo* is currently being critiqued by them. As Lillis (2003: 197) points out, the teaching of 'composition' in the US constitutes a very "influential student writing research site", but is not necessarily the only or even most desirable way of going about developing academic literacy. Surely, in a truly critical approach, we should question the very conception of such an historical arrangement, however influential and powerful it may be? Instead, what has happened in South Africa, at least, is the proliferation of 'writing centres' at institutions of higher education. Would that kind of institutionalisation of writing itself not qualify as 'reproductive', i.e. merely replicating, but now at an organisational and therefore potentially much more powerful and influential level — since it is institutionally sanctioned — that which is happening in the US and perhaps other parts of the Western world?

These questions become all the more pertinent when one considers that, if indeed we could isolate one skill that is of crucial importance to students at higher education institutions, where such centres dedicated to writing are being set up,



might we not have considered reading as the focus of our intervention? Some forty years ago, there was much attention in South African universities to the inadequate reading levels of students, and it was fashionable to lament their lack of reading ‘skill’. Do we have empirical evidence that this situation has now changed, and that we no longer need to worry about reading, or are we simply chasing a new fashion, one delivered by the currently most prominent and influential discourse in the field of writing and applied linguistics research? Is there enough evidence of the contextual appropriateness — a criterion frequently employed by critical approaches — of such institutional development as we have referred to above?

A second set of initial critical questions arises from the unashamedly language-based framework that the characterisations of approaches to writing under discussion adopt. In Ivanic’s words, “the discourses I have identified ... derive from views about language” (2004: 240), and the same is true of the distinctions made by Lillis (2003). This is typical not only of different ways of conceptualising and researching writing, but also, as we shall see below, characteristic of at least two very influential earlier directions in applied linguistics. Is language alone, or one’s view of language, sufficient, though, in providing a rationale for instructional design? The history of applied linguistic concept-formation indicates otherwise.

Indeed, though there are critical questions to be raised against a multi-disciplinary conceptualisation of applied linguistics, which we will again refer to below, the contribution of such an approach in the case of applied linguistics research is that it problematised teaching and learning language (as two actions that need inputs from, respectively, the disciplines of pedagogy and psychology), as against the uncritical and naïve previous acceptance of linguistic categories as the building blocks of both teaching and learning. Perhaps even more important for the current discussion, this view stimulated empirical research by suggesting a possible (multi-disciplinary) agenda.

In the characterisations of writing being referred to here, there is indeed, in addition to the prominence given to language, some reference to ‘learning to write’ as well as to teaching, but the beliefs about ‘learning to write’ identified in each of the discourses appear to be founded on assumptions (“You learn to write by writing on topics that interest you”; “Learning to write includes understanding why different types of writing are the way they are, and taking a position among alternatives” – Ivanic 2004: 225, also 235) rather than on theory or the results of empirical investigations. The assumptions sound alluring, but there is no reference to actual (empirical or other) research that has probed them. If there is one lesson in the history of applied linguistics, it is that however intuitively acceptable an assumption about learning may sound, it deserves critical examination. One may consider here the number of demonstrably false assumptions made about language learning that were already known at the time that Lightbown & Spada (1993: cf. p. xv, but especially Chapter 6) began to summarise and popularise this for language teachers and course designers. This knowledge, as well as a number of subsequent studies, has indeed reformed language course design (for a discussion, cf. Weideman 2003b). Has it similarly informed the design of the teaching of writing?

The point about empirical (or other) research calls up a third set of concerns, which relate to the anti-assessment bias that is evident in some current approaches to writing. As Ivanic (2004: 239), with reference to the sociopolitical approach to writing, puts it: “The notion of assessment is antithetical to this discourse.” An implicit but unstated criterion, she observes, may be that writing can be judged by the extent to which it manages to unmask the political power relations on which it is built, or the degree to which it fosters equality. But, as Ivanic goes on to ask, how does one measure this? Both of these appear to be unmeasurable, and even gauging the quality of the writing in terms of its political consequences seems an impossibility. I would suggest that the anti-measurement bias of critical approaches is possibly related to an anti-empirical approach to academic work, which in turn is related to the valid criticism of rationalist approaches to design. Such approaches would hold that once we have discovered their version of scientific truth, the incorporation of that truth into instructional design would be an authoritative solution to the language learning and teaching problem. In applied linguistics, however, neither the latter approach nor such naivety about measurable entities or actions holds sway any longer. But there is some appreciation that quantitative evidence is not *ipso facto* wholly corrupt, and may well point the designer into alternative directions. If measuring the political consequences of writing is impossible, one should at least attempt to enquire about the fairness, to students who are at the receiving end of the pedagogy, of developing competence in writing in a certain way (as compared to others). If teaching and learning to write is about social responsibility (Ivanic 2004: 239), then the teacher must be accountable for the effectiveness of the way in which students are taught, as opposed to alternative ways.

### **Alternative frameworks**

The discussion so far suggests that there are a number of alternative ways to look at the problem of teaching and learning language. Specifically, for those struggling to find better solutions to the problem of writing, that problem is almost exclusively embedded in the context of higher education, and tied up with all the complex questions that surround the concept of academic literacy. It is from this context that a number of alternatives present themselves:

- *What if we don't isolate writing as a skill?*

Will it not be more productive, in other words, to acknowledge, in the very terminology that we adopt, that the problem is greater than that of mastering a single skill? What possibilities are opened by the acceptance that in order to become academically literate, a number of ‘skills’ are inseparably intertwined, and that the conceptual clarity that we achieve by separating them, has no, or may perhaps even have negative and restrictive, effects on the learning?

- *What if such isolation is itself a leftover from a bygone era?*

Does the conceptual isolation of writing, implying that it is a separately treatable problem, not derive from historical antecedents, specifically writing composition classes in US universities, that are no longer or at least not necessarily contextually appropriate in other places, such as South Africa? If we uncritically accept that what was relevant in decades past in one context will automatically be useful in another, then we leave unexamined, and untouched by critical engagement, one very powerful historical approach. That, I would suggest, is not in line with the post-modern maxim of being accountable for one's designs.

- *What about viewing the problem from a different perspective?*

There are numerous examples in applied linguistic work over the past five decades that demonstrate how viewing the same problem from a different perspective sometimes breaks a logjam, and opens our eyes to alternative ways of doing. The field of second language acquisition studies presents an array of such examples, specifically in the gains made for language teaching design in looking at such acquisition from an interactional instead of individual angle.

In my own work, looking at the problem for students in institutions of higher education as one of academic literacy has resolved a number of issues, including a variety of instructional design problems. What therefore if, instead of requiring students to become skilful in academic listening, speaking, reading or writing skills (or worse, even in just one of these), one takes as the basis of their instruction a construct of academic literacy that asks, for example, that they learn to demonstrate a competence in academic vocabulary; make sense of metaphor and idiom in academic usage; see relations between different parts of academic texts; become literate in interpreting graphs and diagrams; learn to recognise and manipulate different genres and text types; distinguish main points from peripheral ones, see the difference between essential and non-essential, fact and opinion or cause and effect; compare by classifying and categorising; or learn how to use different language functions (defining, concluding, etc.) to build an argument (cf. Weideman 2003c: xi for a more comprehensive list)?

Such a definition, we may note, has no reference to writing, or reading, or listening. It is in effect neutral in respect of these traditionally separate 'skills'. Yet, in conjunction with the requirements that seeking, processing and producing academic information is what constitutes a typical academic task, this kind of blueprint for academic literacy is highly productive in generating and justifying the design of instructional materials, and of doing so in a way that emphasises not only writing, but exploits all the other 'skills' as well.

- *What is / are potentially omitted from the characterisations of writing?*

On their own terms, and in respect of their characterisations of different approaches to writing, we may assume that the discussions referred to above are adequate, and constitute acceptable versions of what has happened in the history of writing. Of course, one need not take a purely historical view: as we have already observed, other categorisations (cf. e.g. Johns 2005) are possible.

The question that then remains, is: what do frameworks about the work done in related fields or disciplines tell us about possible gaps or omissions in the work done historically on writing? Does writing have anything to learn from its academic next-door neighbours? And will such comparison help it to resolve any difficulties?

Perhaps, before we attempt to answer this last question in the next section, it is appropriate to point out that in discussing different approaches to writing, we have also been discussing various frameworks that have been influential in generating research and research agendas for writing (and for applied linguistics in general, as discussed in the next section). Indeed, as Ivanic unequivocally states (2004: 240), this is the major potential contribution of viewing writing in terms of the framework she has developed. In addition, there may be ‘hybrid instantiations’ of some of the discourses in concrete practices (Ivanic 2004: 240, cf. also 241). The same is true of designs for teaching and learning language, that we turn to now: in the design of instructional materials and in teaching practice, influences from various applied linguistic traditions may be evident.

### **Characterisations of applied linguistics**

Having looked at characterisations of different approaches to writing, we turn now to consider two current views on approaches to applied linguistics. For the sake of brevity, I shall not consider the old debate of whether applied linguistics is ‘linguistics applied’ or ‘applied linguistics’ (cf. Davies 1999: 12 *et passim*). With Pennycook (2004: 801), I agree that this is a peripheral issue in striving to articulate an adequate definition of applied linguistics, and that we need to go “beyond even a view of applied linguistics as a domain of interdisciplinary work.” Viewed as a discipline of design, as we have suggested above, applied linguistics has nonetheless historically been conceived in a number of different ways.

Rajagopalan’s analysis of the landmarks of early applied linguistics (2004: 399f.) identifies roughly the same points as Weideman (2003a), and there is agreement between them, too, on their appreciation of the role of subsequent traditions in applied linguistics such as second language acquisition studies (Rajagopalan 2004: 402f.), multi-disciplinary approaches (Rajagopalan 2004: 407, 410), as well as critical applied linguistics, that “contribute[s] to correcting historically instituted social injustices and pave the way for ... emancipation” (Rajagopalan 2004: 414). In addition, both analyses regard the critical turn that

applied linguistics has recently taken, and its concern with ethical questions and accountability, as a sign of maturity, of the coming of age of the discipline. What is equally significant for the current discussion is that while both refer generously to language teaching, Rajagopalan (2004) makes no mention of the teaching of writing. In fact, in the whole *Handbook of applied linguistics* (Davies & Elder 2004) in which Rajagopalan's analysis appears, not a single chapter title refers to writing. (Unlike in the rival handbook of applied linguistics that — tellingly perhaps — originated in the US [Kaplan 2002] which has a solid chapter on second language writing: Leki 2002). It is as if the lack of reference to applied linguistics in discussions of approaches to writing, at least in the UK, is reciprocated here, and it reinforces the suspicion that there may be an unhealthy divergence in approaches to writing and applied linguistics.

Since Rajagopalan's and Weideman's analyses are largely in agreement, we again, for the sake of clarity and brevity, use only the schematic characterisation of the six different traditions (or generations, or models) of applied linguistic work that can be found in Weideman's analysis, and is given in Table 4, below:

**Table 4: Six traditions of applied linguistics (Weideman 2003a)**

<b>Model / Tradition</b>	<b>Characterised by</b>
Linguistic / behaviourist	'scientific' approach
Linguistic 'extended paradigm model'	language is a social phenomenon
Multi-disciplinary model	attention not only to language, but also to learning theory and pedagogy
Second language acquisition research	experimental research into how languages are learned
Constructivism	knowledge of a new language is interactively constructed
Post-modernism	political relations in teaching; multiplicity of perspectives

The similarities with the characterisation of different approaches to writing are obvious: the first applied linguistic tradition, which was heavily influenced by behaviourist theories, is not dissimilar to the skills discourse (and view of language) distinguished by both Ivanic (2004) and Lillis (2003). Likewise, the last tradition (post-modernism), with its emphasis on political relations in teaching, and the appreciation of a multiplicity of perspectives, is similar to the critical approach in the discussions of writing ('language as ideological practice' in Lillis, and 'sociopolitical discourse' in Ivanic).

In taking a view of language as an essentially social phenomenon, where genre, text type and discourse are functionally used to achieve interactive, communicative goals in a specific social context, much of the current

(sociopolitical) and some of the earlier work in writing (specifically what Ivanić calls a social practices discourse: 2004: 225, 234-237, but also the genre discourse) goes back to what Weideman (2003a) identifies as the linguistic ‘extended paradigm’ model of doing applied linguistics, i.e. to the tradition that moved us from a restrictive to an open view of language, and alerted both course and test designers to the insight that language is more than syntax and vocabulary, or combinations of sound and meaning; that it is also an interactive, social instrument that we use to communicate with one another in specific settings. In its appreciation for context, for genre, and for interactivity, a post-modern, critical approach to writing no doubt reaches back to this extended linguistic model.

What, then, of the generations of applied linguistic work that fit in between this initial and current state? The traditions or paradigms that, according to the analyses currently under discussion, have been skipped in the scholarly investigation of writing, are the multi-disciplinary approach, second language acquisition research, and, perhaps to a lesser extent, constructivism (which is at least mentioned in passing). It is worth noting that it is these three traditions, more than any others, that have been most productive in generating a research agenda for applied linguistic work, and for providing designers of language teaching materials with the results of empirical work that could be employed to justify such designs. The oldest of the three, the multi-disciplinary approach (cf. Van Els, Bongaerts, Extra, Van Os & Janssen-van Dielen 1984), for example, can be credited with emphasising that applied linguistic investigation aimed at improving language teaching must be conceived of as language education research, and squarely confront not only the linguistic features, but also the issues that concern pedagogy and learning. Second language acquisition (SLA) research has probably been the most productive in this respect (for two surveys, half a generation apart, that summarise the potential role and contribution of second language acquisition research, cf. Lightbown 1985 and 2000). The meaning of these contributions lies mainly in their making empirical work and analyses useful once again in a context where the excesses and hubris of the initial ‘scientific’ approach had almost terminated the respectability of any analysis based on measurement.

The implication of this comparison is to ask: where, in research on writing, has a similar set of research agendas been generated? There is, of course, empirical work being done on writing. Of that reports found in the *Journal of second language writing* are probably a prime example, and the dozens of articles recently extracted by Silva & Patton (2004; cf. also the examples given in Leki 2002: 62-63) for this journal from a wide variety of other sources a particularly illustrative one. But even among these, though implied and obliquely referred to, articles on how second language users acquire writing are not abundant. As Leki (2004: 66) points out, in commenting on ‘this astonishing lack of interdisciplinary interface’, “oddly, there has thus far been little interdisciplinary cross-fertilization between SLA and L2 writing, little examination, for example, of language acquisition through L2 writing...” At least there are debates based on reviews of some empirical evidence, such as those between Truscott (2004, but also 1996) and his detractors (e.g.

Chandler 2004) on the efficacy or not of error correction. However, it is interesting to note that one finds no reference to such debate in the surveys of different approaches to writing research that have been the focus of the discussion here, and that one is hard pressed to find a single reference to empirical work on the acquisition of writing in them, specifically to empirical work based on the critical approaches being promoted in them. Leki's (2004: 68) explanation for this is that there is still only infrequent reference "in L2 writing research to theorists and researchers of critical language awareness and the new literacies movements, such as Street, Rampton, Gee, Fairclough ..."

The further implication must then be that research on writing may have something to learn from the research traditions that inform applied linguistic designs. The latter have generated a large body of empirical investigation on conditions for learning language, some of the more recent being classroom-based (and therefore contextually more appropriate than purely experimental work — cf. Allwright 2005).

### **Some preliminary conclusions**

The analysis of different ways of characterising research into writing on the one hand, and of conceptualising various traditions of applied linguistic work on the other, leads to at least three conclusions in addition to the critical questions raised earlier.

First, from the point of view of course designers who wish to provide a theoretical or analytical rationale for their work, an isolating focus on writing can lead only to an impoverished, and probably uncritical, perspective. There is nothing wrong in believing that becoming a competent academic writer constitutes a crucially important result of becoming academically literate. However, since there is much that precedes one's preparation in achieving this, notably processes of information seeking, processing and production that may or may not employ writing skills, but other competences, the act of conceptualising and then calling one's support and development planning by a name that tells not even half the story is misleading (especially to unsophisticated newcomers) and unnecessarily restrictive. In fact, one might ask whether it is not perhaps the focus on writing that in the first instance produces the undesirable effect of 'reproduction', 'fossilised use', 'subservience', and so forth, that the analysts whose work has been discussed here so often employ to characterise conventional approaches to writing. Will all of this really disappear once we adopt a critical pedagogy? What if the sites where critical pedagogy in writing is conducted are themselves but institutional replications of a dominant, repressive ideology?

Second, the almost exclusive emphasis on language in characterisations of writing further impoverishes the instructional designer's perspective. If we can learn in this respect from applied linguistics, it is that not only linguistic and political factors come into play, but a number of others too.

Third, there is no necessity for post-modern approaches to be anti-assessment. In fact, there is a vigorous and growing tradition (Shohamy 2001, 2004; cf. too Brindley 2002) in language testing that aligns itself wholly, even in name, with critical approaches. Such a critical approach to language testing emphasises, in the same way as do critical traditions both in applied linguistics and in writing, that language test designs need to be transparent, i.e. make available as much information as possible about the test, the reasons for its administration, its construct, scoring method and content, to those taking it. A good example of an attempt at such transparency can be found in information about the Test of Academic Literacy Levels (TALL) that is administered annually to about 14000 students at three South African universities, which is distributed both in pamphlet form, and online (cf. Unit for Academic Literacy 2006). Post-modern, critical approaches call upon those involved in all language teaching designs to be accountable for those designs, and making such information available is the first step towards becoming more accountable.

Finally, it is indeed in the aspect of accountability that specifically critical, and more generally post-modern approaches, find their characteristic feature. Though not all the review articles discussed here articulate this in exactly the same way, it is clear that their appreciation of recent approaches is closely related to what Rajagopalan (2004: 413) calls “the growing interest among scholars in the ethical implications of their work in the field.” I trust that the discussion here has made some contribution to making our designs for language teaching both more transparent and accountable.

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