Applied Linguistics and Professional Discourse Studies[1]

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Preliminaries

My focus here is Applied Linguistics and Professional Discourse Studies, more specifically, the connective 'and' between these two disciplinary activities which can be strengthened further. I will not go into definitional labour (in more than one sense): definitions of Applied Linguistics have been attempted by so many in the past, but no one seems happy with someone else's characterisation of what Applied Linguistics is or what applied linguists do (Candlin and Sarangi 2004). The questions persist however: What is it that we practise in our everyday working lives? How do we spot applied linguistic talent amongst us?

My colleague asked me as I walked in: "Should I introduce you as an applied linguist or a sociolinguist or a discourse analyst or what is it?" This series of hyper-questioning is suggestive of real and potential disciplinary boundaries – that there are marked divisions of expert labour and that each one of us carries only one label and does not inhabit across the boundaries. If one were to embrace the label of 'applied linguist', there is the tendency to interpret such a label along the lines of so-called mainstream Applied Linguistics, i.e.,

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[1] This paper is primarily based on a presentation given at UFJF, Juiz de Fora, Brazil, 05 June 2007. Given the lapse of time, it has been thoroughly updated, with relevant references included, while retaining the informal tone of the oral presentation.

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language education and language acquisition. I would like to suggest that Applied Linguistics is much more than language education in the classroom setting or language acquisition in natural settings. We can extend the circumference of Applied Linguistics to the clinic, the courtroom, the corporate business sector, the public spheres and professional spaces more generally, where we have something to offer, where we can apply our knowledge and hopefully bring about a difference. Such an impact will of course depend on how we conceptualise our interventions, on whose sides we position ourselves (Becker 1967) and whether or not we feel welcomed rather than imposing ourselves (Bosk 1992). I am reminded of Watson (1997) reporting the challenge he faced when carrying out an interview-based study in an organisational setting, focusing on the middle management. Consider the following excerpt from an interview (M1 and M2 are managers; TJW is the academic and the interviewer):

01	M1:	I don't think we've had a lot of professors working with us down here before.
02	M2:	I suppose you're really just another consultant, in academic guise.
03	TJW:	Absolutely not. I am not a consultant. I am here to work as part of management. I've got to earn my keep here at Parkside. I shall not be writing a report for the company at any stage - or recommending anything. I shall write a book, after I've left - using my experience here to reflect on what is happening to managerial work in modern organisations.
04	M3:	Oh ho. So we are going to be in a book then. That's a good laugh. All of us blokes are hairy-arsed factory managers. I don't think that you'll get a lot from us. We don't go on for your fancy management - you know, business college - talk.
05	M2:	We can easily tell you how not to do it though. We know all about fuck-ups. But Terry's right. I dare say we won't use the sort of language you want for your posh book.

(Watson 1997: 211-212)

What we see here is that the researcher's identity as an impartial, 'professional stranger' (Agar 1980) is being challenged; the managers' strong feelings about outsiders posing as consultants are being ventilated; a distinction is being made between the posh academic researchers and the managers/workers on factory floors (lads, blokes). We can see that two different languages (discourses) − marking the boundary between the researcher and the researched − are evident in terms of presentation of selves and priorities, with attendant concerns about trust and credibility. In a sense, the managers' threat to use their vernacular in the presence of the researcher is compatible with the researcher's search for authentic, naturalistic data, which is preferable to the informants appropriating the 'fancy management and business college talk' in an attempt to 'play' or 'play at' the research game.

Turning now to Professional Discourse Studies, which is the second part of my title, this research tradition has been around for thirty/forty years covering fields as diverse as medicine, law, social work, mediation, journalism, business firms and so on (for an overview, see Candlin and Sarangi 2011). However, there is little evidence of explicit orientation within this tradition to application of discourse-based findings as is the case within Applied Linguistics. In a nutshell, these two fields of study − Applied Linguistics and Professional Discourse Studies − have been developing in parallel, with little cross-over or marriage of interests. Having regularly crossed these boundaries (for a detailed account, see Sarangi 2002, Sarangi 2005), I would like to share my perspective based on first-hand research/collaboration experience in the professional contexts of healthcare, social work and education.

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1. Four research paradigms

Let me begin with a very broad characterisation of four kinds of research paradigms within which to position Applied Linguistics and Professional Discourse Studies. The first paradigm is pure, fundamental research, which is a distant cousin of applied disciplines such as Applied Linguistics. The primary motivation for undertaking pure research is to gain knowledge, to push the boundaries, and to be enlightened, as has been the case with the first wave of Professional Discourse Studies. Pure research can be framed, to draw a parallel, as art for art sake, or for that matter, as science for science sake. Routinely concerns are raised about heavily funded science research which does not address everyday societal concerns in their immediacy. Pure, blue sky research has its value in society, but not in an applicable sense.

In juxtaposition to pure research stands applied research which is driven by a practical, hands-on mentality. It is a form of engineering, with targeted intervention by the researchers during or following the research process. Through applied research one wants to make a difference that is tangible and, if possible, immediate – the teacher teaches better, the doctor communicates more effectively, the patient understands risk prior to making decisions etc. What is known as 'action research' or 'participatory research' is applied research par excellence. Seen this way, Applied Linguistics can potentially be transformative, with planned and unplanned consequences.

The third paradigm is 'consultancy', which lies at the bottom end of the research continuum. It has a problem-solving mentality, similar to applied research, but may not be informed by specific research findings as such. Skilled expertise is involved in both paradigms, except that in the case of consultancy immediate problem-solving takes priority. David Crystal's (2004) profiling of the applied linguist as a 'jobbing linguist' fits this scenario. Applied research, as we know, is more than consultancy; it goes beyond quick-fixing the problem as a plumber or an electrician would do. I would suggest that consultancy relies on prior knowledge and skills whereas applied research is more contingently framed, with the application-minded researcher professing an interest to learn and revisit their knowledge base when applying their expertise.

This takes me to the fourth paradigm, which is 'consultative'. It involves two-way reflexivity – on our part as researchers as well as those who we are engaged with in our research. A key condition for consultative research is collaboration, i.e., presenting problems are approached jointly with the people whose work we want to transform. Professional Discourse Studies in more recent years seem to embrace such a perspective (for sample case studies, see Candlin and Sarangi 2011) which includes a readiness on our part to question our own knowledge and assumptions when steering intervention.

2. Aborting the pure-applied dichotomy

Having set up a four-fold distinction, I retrace my footsteps to suggest that the boundary between 'pure' and 'applied' is never clear-cut. The same research can be either basic or applied depending on two things: the site of research and who might use the findings generated through the research. So even if we label our work as 'applied', the lack of visible uptake or impact will render our findings unapplied. Even when research findings have potential applicability, they fall short of being 'applied research'. A professed or tacit motivation may underpin such research endeavour, but it retains its status as basic, pure research. Research findings that do not travel remain static, even frozen.

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According to Brooks (1967: 24), "As definite categories, basic and applied tend to be meaningless – in themselves – but as positions on a scale within a given environment they probably do have some significance". In essence, pure and applied are not two different categories, they are two different points on a scale, they are part of a continuum. Anything one does as applied research has an element of purity in it; it is unlikely that any research can be atheoretical. So, rather than think of applied and pure research as either-or, one should consider 'pure' and 'applied' in terms of more-or-less. On a temporal dimension, research that is considered pure today can potentially attain the status of applied research tomorrow.

The prefix 'applied' does not only characterise the discipline of Linguistics, it also characterises many other disciplines: Applied Physics, Applied Biology, Applied Biotechnology, Applied Engineering, Applied Psychology, Applied Ethics etc. How do other discipline-driven applied practices correspond (or not) with ours? Let me provide an illustrative example from Anthropology. Radcliffe-Brown, back in 1929, addressed the Science Congress of the Pan-Pacific region with the following words to stress that Anthropology is an applied discipline:

> Anthropology is gradually establishing its claim to be regarded as a study
> which has an immediate practical value in connection with the administration
> and education of backward peoples […] (Radcliffe-Brown 1958: 39).

Anthropology thus is not just about studying exotic cultures and their everyday ritual practices from an emic perspective. In studying such practices anthropologists can apply their knowledge for the betterment of the people under investigation: "This development has raised the question 'what sort of anthropological investigations are of practical value in connection with such problems of administration?'" (Radcliffe-Brown 1958: 39).

As applied linguists, if we think that our knowledge is going to be of value then we have to first pause and think what kinds of research questions we should ask; by extension, what type of research methodology we should adopt; and what type of practically relevant knowledge we should generate. Within Anthropology, Radcliffe-Brown suggests a distinction between historical and functional methods. Anthropology tends to be historical as it tries to capture what happened developmentally. But if one were to foreground a functional purpose, this should be signalled in a different framing of the research questions, accompanied by a matching methodological and analytical mindset. To quote Radcliffe-Brown again: "if anthropological science is to give any important help in relation to practical problems of government and education it must abandon speculative attempts to conjecture the unknown past and must devote itself to the functional study of culture" (1958: 41).

Let me turn to the domain of science where the distinction between 'pure' and 'applied' is more pronounced. The following quote represents the code of practice of the National Academy of Sciences in the USA:

> A good applied scientist should first of all be a good scientist by standards
> similar to those applied to basic scientists. However, a primary difference
> between basic and applied scientists lies in their respective attitudes toward
> disciplinary specialisation and personal recognition by professional peers.
> Good applied science usually, though not always, requires greater breadth
> and a more eclectic attitude toward knowledge… The applied scientist must
> often be satisfied with just enough understanding for his immediate purposes
> and cannot pursue every interesting lead to its logical conclusion. He must be
> interested in more than strictly intellectual solutions. (1967: 7)

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In many academic scientific circles, applied researchers wearing the label 'applied' are looked down upon and are marginalised as being second-class cousins compared to those who work in laboratory settings with their white coats on to push the boundaries of knowledge. Underpinning this hierarchically motivated division of expert labour is the symbolic status of the specialised, in-depth, knowledge of the laboratory scientist vs. the generalised, eclectic knowledge of the applied researcher. We should acknowledge that the applied scientists harbour a different attitude to knowledge: knowledge that is functional rather than historical in Radcliffe-Brown's terms. Imagine if every doctor were expected to know everything about the human physiology, the patient's psyche etc. rather than being committed to using the limited knowledge s/he has for a particular purpose in the immediate context. The generalist knowledge of the professional most often finds a context-driven outlet.

3. Pursuit of intellectualism or expertise?

A useful distinction here is between 'intellectuals' and 'experts' (Shills 1968) on the grounds of differential distribution of knowledge and differential commitments to knowledge-use, similar to the pure-applied distinction. Merton (1957) maps the distinction between 'intellectuals' and 'experts' as follows: intellectuals generate knowledge and experts apply knowledge. In other words, expert knowledge is essentially functional. Professionals such as teachers, doctors, lawyers, social workers, mediators therefore fall under the expert category as they mediate knowledge generated by intellectuals for the benefit of their clients. Applied linguists and professional discourse analysts, in this sense, can be regarded as experts, without claiming for themselves a rigorously intellectual platform.

Stehr (1994) takes this distinction between intellectuals and experts further in an important way by questioning the naïve demarcation between knowledge creation and knowledge application. For him, professional practitioners as applied experts can be both 'knowledge-disseminating' and 'knowledge-bearing' since they actively produce a certain kind of knowledge through the very process of doing their work. In the sphere of mainstream Applied Linguistics, language teachers utilise their practical, experiential knowledge in the very process of disseminating received knowledge, thus shaping and enhancing the body of knowledge.

Professional practice draws upon specialised knowledge, but this specialised knowledge goes beyond the scientific technical knowledge gained from the textbook via formal qualification. The textbook knowledge is invariably complemented with experiential knowledge. As an outsider researcher, simple exposure to textbook-based professional knowledge falls short of acquiring professional expertise. One does not become a doctor by brooding over medical textbooks. Likewise, reading a number of books on discourse analysis does not make one a discourse analyst unless such a programmatic reading is accompanied by hands-on experience of analysing discourse data. A further extension of experiential knowledge is the knowledge of technological know-how. In the healthcare sector, the professional must know how to operate technical equipment and make sense of the resultant output. In addition, professional practice draws upon the requisite knowledge about how a given institution/organisation works – a kind of systemic knowledge. In the UK, a doctor needs to know how the National Health Service is organised in order to become effective in delivering patient care. In the educational context, an awareness of the curriculum will count towards systemic knowledge. But all the above knowledge types need to be manifest in what may be called communicative knowledge/expertise in functionally specific ways.

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Shirley Brice Heath (1979) points out that in communicative settings professionals do not necessarily code their knowledge explicitly in language. Firstly, the professional does not always explain what they mean or what they do because they think that the clients should not be burdened with expert knowledge. So a recording of a conversation between a doctor and a patient does not afford us direct access to expert knowledge. It is, however, the case that the doctor tacitly draws upon his/her reserve of expert knowledge without necessarily transmitting that knowledge to the patient. The patient does not become a doctor after visiting the doctor. There is always going to be an asymmetrical difference in their claims to knowledge and knowledge-use. Furthermore, according to Heath (1979), the healthcare professional will articulate their knowledge to elicit responses from the patient, without revealing the motivations behind such elicitation techniques. As Heath points out:

> Professionals have, therefore, been socialised to have certain perceptions of their role in communicative tasks, and they have been trained to use language as an instrument to maintain that role and to accomplish ends often known only to them in interchanges. (Heath 1979:108)

Given the restricted nature of the patient's response behaviour, we are also not afforded access to the patient's lifeworld at the level of language/interaction.

To summarise thus far, the boundary between 'pure' and 'applied' breaks down when we fix our gaze on professional practice. Professional practice is constituted in 'know that' (content-based) and 'know-how' (procedure-based) knowledge, both of which may not be manifest explicitly at the communicative level. Schön (1983: viii) reinforces this hidden dimension of professional knowledge in practice/action as follows:

> Competent practitioners usually know more than they can say. They exhibit a kind of knowing-in-practice, most of which is tacit. Nevertheless, starting with protocols of actual performance, it is possible to construct and test models of knowing. Indeed, practitioners themselves often reveal a capacity for reflection on their intuitive knowing in the midst of action and sometimes use this capacity to cope with the unique, uncertain, and conflicted situations of practice.

4. Applied Linguistics is a verb

Echoing Brian Street's (1993) slogan 'culture is a verb' to move away from definitional traps surrounding 'what is culture' towards 'what we do with culture', we should ask 'what we do with Applied Linguistics', or better, 'what we do as applied linguists'. Michael Halliday's (2006) reflection, in a recent interview, on the question of whether Applied Linguistics is a discipline or a field of action or a theme is instructive:

> People sometimes say, well Applied Linguistics is just a collection of different things. You're doing education or you're doing law, or you're doing medicine or whatever, but I don't think it is. As I say, I think it is unified by this broader sense that most of the professional and, indeed, the daily forms of activity that we find ourselves in involve meaning in some way or another. Now we may not do anything about it, fine. But if we do, then it's Applied Linguistics. (Halliday 2006:115)

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In other words, whether we like it or not, we are doing Applied Linguistics because in everyday life we are making meaning and trying to understand language in context-specific ways. And he continues:

> I do see Applied Linguistics as a problem-solving form of activity. In fact I would say that generally about theories if you like. I tend to have a problem-solving approach to theory in general – theories are a way of getting on with dealing with something, and that may be a highly abstract research problem or it may be something very practical. So I think the two notions in that sense are very complementary … I never have seen a very clear distinction between Linguistics and Applied Linguistics. (Halliday 2006:113-114)

For Halliday, every problem requires both theoretical and practical orientations. This perspective underscores his view that Applied Linguistics is primarily a theme. Halliday dissolves the gulf between theory and practice, or between 'pure' and 'applied', while giving 'applied' an expansive meaning potential. Note his emphasis on language as we know and use it, not linguistics as a scientific discipline. This chimes with Shirley Brice Heath's (2004:91) following observation, also in the context of an interview:

> The whole idea is that so many of us live our lives applying linguistics and yet we don't even think about it. It's hard for many in what I think of as the first two generations of identified 'applied linguists' to move away from the idea that applied linguistics has a role to play in anything that really matters to us as members of communities. Yet for the newer generation for whom narrow specialisation has become the norm, it is increasingly difficult to find young people who see the wide ranging practicalities and theoretical possibilities in the field.

The practically-relevant sense of 'doing' is strongly endorsed by Christopher Brumfit (1997) when he says Applied Linguistics is about understanding 'language-related problems' in so-called 'non-specialist language practices' (pp. 92-3). Professionals in the fields of medicine, law, engineering, computing and so on may not naturally regard language/interaction as central to their everyday work practices, which may thus go unnoticed. This is the kind of interventionist space applied linguists as language and discourse practitioners can inhabit as a way of promoting what may be called 'joint noticings'. Celia Roberts (2003) agues that we should not only be committed to addressing real-life problems, but we should be addressing such problems together with the people who have ownership of such problems, beginning with 'joint problematisation' (Roberts and Sarangi 1999) and leading to collaborative and consultative accomplishments. Or, there remains a risk of promoting an ethos of, as Roberts (2003) puts it, 'applied linguistics applied', i.e., applied linguists becoming far removed from real-life practices while seemingly analysing them – a shortcoming usually associated with professional discourse researchers.

At this point let me revisit Pit Corder, the father of Applied Linguistics in Britain, especially his book 'Introducing Applied Linguistics' (1973). Although limited by scope in primarily engaging with language teaching, Corder's thinking about the principles and practices surrounding Applied Linguistics may have some current currency. For Pit Corder (1973:10), in a canonical sense, Applied Linguistics is "the application of linguistic knowledge to some object – or, applied linguistics, as its name implies – is an activity. It is not a theoretical study. It makes use of the findings of theoretical studies". Corder seems to claim that theory and application must be kept separate, which is in striking contrast to Halliday's position above that all theories have an applied edge to them. Corder goes on to

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argue that "the applied linguist is a consumer, or user, not a producer, of theories" (p. 10; cf. Stehr's [1994] distinction earlier between 'knowledge-bearing' and 'knowledge-disseminating'). If the applied linguist were to be put in a consumer role, there is no reason to believe that they are only consumers of Linguistics; they are equally likely to be consumers of Psychology, History, Sociology, Education and Anthropology, among others. We know that in teaching students how to learn a language, just grammar is not enough; we need to understand their cognition, their motivations, attitudes and emotions as wells as their sociocultural upbringing.

Corder draws upon foreign language teaching as one particular exemplar of successful Applied Linguistics, to the extent that foreign language teaching has almost appropriated and colonised the term 'Applied Linguistics'. At the same time, Corder issues the following caution: "The linguistic approach is responsible for determining how we *describe* what we are to teach. This is not the same as saying that it *determines* what we teach. It contributes nothing to specifying how we teach" (Corder 1973:31, emphasis in original). In other words, it is not a straightforward application, but a form of mediation. Applied Linguistics becomes Mediated Linguistics.

In sum, we can profile the applied linguist in four different ways: firstly, as mediator, the applied linguist becomes a go-between with regard to the 'knowledge-bearing' agents and the knowledge users; secondly, as problem solver, the applied linguist becomes the 'jobbing linguist', to use David Crystal's (2004) term; thirdly, following Christopher Brumfit (2004), the applied linguist as educator becomes proactive in preventing problems to occur; and finally, as joint collaborator, the applied linguist works alongside professional practitioners in real-life settings. As Brumfit (2004) points out, real world problems do not come packaged according to the narrowly specific expertise of individual applied linguists, and overlooking this fact may lead to 'metaphorical pretence':

> All studies of social phenomena have on the one hand a concern to idealise, which is essentially a metaphorical pretence that you can isolate the phenomenon that you're looking at, and on the other the need to be embedded in real-world practice.

The pretence underlying our research practice can be very real if the phenomena under study remain decontextualised. The applied linguistic discovery about professional practice does not logically translate into practical relevance.

5. Epistemological challenges in studying professional practice

Making specifics such as the microcosm of social action/interaction a topic of study is deeply embedded in many research paradigms: hermeneutics, phenomenology, ethnography, ethnomethodology and symbolic interactionism. This is captured by Douglas (1971:11) rather boldly:

> *Any scientific understanding of human action, at whatever level of ordering or generality, must begin with and be built upon an understanding of the everyday life of the members performing those actions*. (To fail to see this and to act in accord with it is to commit what we might call the *fallacy of abstractionism*, that is, the fallacy of believing that you can know in a more abstract form what you do not know in the particular form.) (Emphasis in original)

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Juxtaposed to the above statement, one should also recognise what might be labelled the 'fallacy of interactionsim'. Labov and Fanshel (1977) draw attention to 'the paradox of microanalysis': any general understanding of events may be distorted when specific aspects of those events become the primary focus of investigation, thus broadly echoing Brumfit's caution about metaphorical pretence.

The problems associated with Professional Discourse Studies can be seen in terms of boundary crossing. There are three aspects I wish to draw attention to. First, the issue of access: how we negotiate access with different kinds of practitioners whose practices we want to study; not only their 'frontsatge' activities, but also what goes on in the 'backstage'. Access to the 'backstage', apart from generating new data, is central to making sense of 'frontstage' activities. However, a majority of professional discourse studies in healthcare is dedicated only to the 'frontstage' clinic encounter between doctors and patients because of ease of access. Similarly, classroom interaction constitutes the 'frontstage' activity, which is easily observable and recordable. Closely linked to access to data is Labov's (1972) notion of the 'observer's paradox'. The very attempt at collecting authentic data corrupts the data because of the researcher's co-presence. In other words, real data always escapes when one wants to capture it. Moreover, it is one thing to beg access as an outsider researcher and quite another to be in a position of being invited – the latter can result in amassing a wealth of data (including backstage activities) while guaranteeing uptake trajectories, although not without tensions (Bosk 1992).

Second, the nature of our participation in the context of gathering the data can introduce what I have elsewhere referred to as the 'participant's paradox' (Sarangi 2002, Sarangi 2007). In a clinic or classroom setting, the more the researcher tries to behave as a neutral, fly-on-the-wall personae, the more the performance of the participants is likely to be influenced. In other words, by presenting ourselves naturally as non-fly, human researchers we can minimise the participant bias. Here we are talking about not just co-presence, but the nature of participation during co-presence. Goffman's distinction between sphere of interaction and sphere of participation is useful. The researcher by providing eye contact, minimal cues when oriented to in a clinic or in a classroom (sphere of interaction) does no harm as would the researcher expressing an opinion, negatively or positively, about the efficacy of a treatment option or by answering a teacher's question which is targeted at students (sphere of participation).

Third, how do we as analysts approach data constitutive of professional practice? Even if we have access to recorded data, enriched by our co-presence at the data setting, can we adequately analyse professional discourse data based on our expertise alone? As language/communication experts we may have a very naïve view about what constitutes professional practice, or what lies behind the raw recorded data. No doubt there is more to professional conduct than just language and interaction that we profess our expertise in. As Lynch and Sharrock (2003:xxxix) remind us:

> Although the sequential procedures that make up what conversation analysts
> call 'talk in interaction' are evident in, and important for, the organisation of
> practices in a variety of social institutions, it is not enough to say that, for
> example, a jury deliberation or a medical diagnosis is an 'organisation of
> talk'.

Our attempt at analysing the interactional context can compromise what may be happening at the level of content (cf. Cicourel 1981). Both the tacit and specialised

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dimensions of professional knowledge are bound to pose analytic challenges for outsider researchers despite their expertise in analysing language, context, interaction etc. If we truly subscribe to the view that language is context-specific then the professional practitioners know the context and the language from inside out through the process of professional socialisation (cf. Heath's [1979] observation earlier) compared to our position in terms of outside-in. The worst case scenario is when outsider analysts adopt too literal an approach in their interpretation of observable professional conduct. Consider the following comment in the context of psychotherapy:

> A 'fly on the wall' who did not know we were doing psychotherapy would not necessarily suspect that that was what we were doing: he would see and hear only an ordinary conversation. What defines the conversation as psychotherapy is simply our goal in conducting the conversation. (O'Hanlon and Wilk 1987: 177)

In addition to the risk of misinterpretation, there is also the issue of under-interpretation. There may be a tendency to reducing therapy, counselling, consultation to mere conversation and interaction.

Interpretive ambivalence of the kind alluded to above constitutes the basis of what I call the 'analyst's paradox' (Sarangi 2002, Sarangi 2007). Incorporating the tacit knowledge that informs professional practice into our analytical commentary is a way of minimising the analyst's paradox, while accomplishing 'ecological validity' (Cicourel 2007). Rather than being constrained by our ignorance and our partial exposure to professional conduct via the data at our disposal, our analytic commentary will be enriched by the supplementary insights provided by the professional practitioners themselves. To put strongly, communication/discourse analysts will always remain partial in their interpretation of professional conduct because of their expertise in only analysing language and interaction, thus risking reducing professional conduct to what they have expertise in – a form of 'terministic screening', to use Kenneth Burke's (1965) apt phrase. By extension, we need to ask professionals, as part of the consultative, collaborative research framework as discussed earlier, what they think is going on: we can only know what is going on by asking those who are involved in the (inter)action. The analyst's paradox as discussed here easily maps on to the notion of triangulation as it is understood widely.

If we revisit the earlier data setting involving the academic researcher and the managers, we can see how the three paradoxes are at work. The observer's paradox can be minimised or heightened depending on how the managers choose to speak, whether they speak as before or adopt the language of business management. The participant's paradox can be minimised or heightened depending on whether the academic researcher continues to talk in his academic genre or chooses to appropriate the language of his informants, although the latter strategy may be viewed with suspicion. The analyst's paradox pertains to the difficulty the academic researcher may face when confronted with the local managers' context-specific knowledge schema framed in an opaque vernacular style.

6. Categorisation as the hallmark of professional practice

Categorisation is central to all professional activity. Goodwin (1994) characterises 'professional vision' in terms of three discursive components. Firstly, 'coding' what is observable, with the assumption that this activity will be different for different professions;

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even within a given profession the differences in specialities may lead to coding observables differently. Secondly, following coding, 'highlighting' what might be significant/salient – a kind of figure-ground marking – in light of prevailing professional expertise. This is where functional expertise in context-sensitive ways, as discussed earlier, comes to the fore. Thirdly, professionals articulate representations of their understandings for the benefit of others, especially their peer group.

As professionals, applied linguists and discourse analysts also follow the categorisation practices of coding, highlighting and articulating representations, while allowing for differences (Sarangi and Candlin 2011). Within our profession, what is further nuanced is that categorisation both constitutes our professional practice and becomes our object of study, i.e., we also process professional practice through our categories. Another cognate notion is recontextualisation: through categorisation a doctor may recontextualise the patient's symptoms to fit into an available model of medical expertise. Categorisation and recontextualisation practices, like any form of classification, centrally involve language and are never neutral and objective. These are subject to our perception and interpretation; there is always an alternative categorisation possible for a prior categorisation. Of course the general challenge remains: how do we align the participants' emic categorisation of actions and events with the analysts' etic categories?

I now turn to three questions related to our professional categorisation practices. First, how do analytic categories emerge from the data? It is now common practice to say this is inductive and emergent. How exactly do categories emerge? Does the data speak? It is probable that analysts working within Grounded Theory, Ethnomethodology, Phenomenology etc who are committed to the inductive method of looking may come up with different emergent categories from the same data. Second, and relatedly, to what extent a particular category might blind one to other ways of looking at the same phenomenon? This is what Kenneth Burke (1965) calls 'terministic screening', i.e., we create a screen in front of our eyes; we see things in a particular way and do not see them in any other way. According to Burke, this is illustrative of our 'trained incapacities': `every way of seeing is also a way of not seeing' (Burke 1965:49). That is, we take pains to educate ourselves to become incapable of looking at things from an alternative perspective. In other words, we become incapacitated with our expertise. As outlined earlier, a model of working within the collaborative, consultative paradigm may alleviate this incapacity to a certain extent.

Finally, working together with professional practitioners does not always guarantee aligned perspectives. Not only that there may be instances of disagreement over categorisation, but also discourse analytic categories, however inductively driven, may not make sense to professional counterparts and may even be dissonant with their understanding of their own practice. Tensions are bound to surface and need to be addressed, again collaboratively without one party imposing their categorical views on the other. As part of a consultative, collaborative research project in genetic counselling (Sarangi et al 2003), two analytic categories – counsellors' initiation of therapeutic frames and clients' use of normalisation strategies – which were proposed by the discourse analysts based on empirical data and prior literature received resistance from the genetics professional colleagues. The term 'therapeutic frame' initially created some dissonance, as the professionals did not see themselves as doing therapy; they saw their duty as adequately preparing clients for potentially unfavourable test results. Following discussion, we agreed to use a less evaluative label – reflective frame – which did not bring with it the baggage of therapy as a professional activity and identity. An advantage of this re-labelling was that it allowed us to reformulate

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our analytic focus in terms of how hypothetical-reflective questions featured within the counselling agenda across conditions and session types.

With regard to the second analytic category, clients' normalisation strategies, it turned out that this category, apart from being negatively framed, concealed rather than revealed what was going on in a counselling session. The challenge from professional colleagues resulted in going back to the data and identifying several strategies within the umbrella concept of 'normalisation'. Following discussion, 'psychosocial adjustment' seemed a better label to capture the clients' coping strategies.

Overall, it may be that the analytic categories themselves are not problematic but the metalanguage that can shroud the analytic categories may become an obstacle for potential uptake of findings as far as the professional community is concerned. The main challenge then is whether our analytic categories can help professional practitioners understand their practice, and possibly improve their practice at the level of communicative expertise.

7. Adjusting the analytic lens

Like laboratory scientists adjusting the lens of their microscope to identify cell structure, applied linguists and discourse analysts need to adjust their analytic lens when engaging with their data. In consultative, collaborative research it is important that this adjustment of the analytic lens is jointly negotiated. As Clarke (2005: 191) suggests: "professionals will perhaps be more enthusiastic about collaboration if the lens used to study their activities could be switched to even a slightly lower power – do not make it too powerful: that is of your interest, not ours – so that the give and take of discussion over a longer period – perhaps even during the whole of a consultation – could be examined". Clarke continues with this microscope metaphor and suggests:

> The analyst must steer between the Scylla of decontextualisation and the Charybdis of over-generalisation. A microscopist would remind us of the need to use a lens of appropriate magnification – neither too high power (removing essential context) nor too low power (revealing insufficient detail).
> (Clarke 2005:189).

The extent to which the 'context' is taken into account assumes crucial significance, thus mediating between over-interpretation and under-interpretation of the data under investigation.

A parallel can be drawn between the microscope and the paint brush, especially with regard to the difference between sketch painting and watercolour painting. Arber (1964), writing about the nature of biological research, draws upon the domain of art:

> A sketch of a landscape in pen-and-ink outline may be much *clearer* than a corresponding water-colour, but, in the painting, mistiness, and effects of hue and light, which can only be hinted at in a black-and-white drawing, can be given their full significance. The water-colour thus comes nearer to full representational truth than the sharply definite ink outline. The translation of a landscape into black-and-white demands a method which recalls, where writing is concerned, an unsparing technique of pruning and rejection, which eases matters for the audience by focusing upon a few selected factors; this process is liable to degenerate into skeletal abstraction, in which reality, in its concreteness, fades out of sight. (Arber 1964: 56) (emphasis in original)

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When engaging with data, we as analysts need to make an informed choice about our perspective. As Goffman (1974:8) puts it:

> Any event can be described in terms of a focus that includes a wide swathe or a narrow one – and as a related but not identical matter – in terms of a focus that is close up or distant. And no one has a theory as to what particular span or level will come to be the ones employed.

In approaching discourse data, the analyst, if interested in microscopic details, needs to realise that a microscope has its limitations – one does not use a microscope to read a novel or gaze at the solar system. A telescope rather than a microscope is the tool one needs to view distant things as well as to cope with the abundance of data. This is similar to the choice between black-and-white and water-colour drawing. Just like a painter choosing the right kind of brushes and colours, the discourse analyst has to decide which of the tools and materials to utilise during an analytic task in anticipation of making the findings applicable.

8. An exercise in data analysis

In what follows, given the space constraints, I narrate an analytical experience crossing the borders of Applied Linguistics and Professional Discourse Studies. The data context is genetic counselling for inherited conditions, with a particular focus on whether or not a client undertakes genetic testing to determine the risk for self as well as for other family members. My involvement in this project was as an invited researcher, with a brief to describe what goes on genetic counselling sessions, and possibly influencing professional practice based on empirically grounded findings. I approached genetic counselling sessions as a hybrid activity type (Sarangi 2000), with an added interest in comparing interactional trajectories across counselling sessions in order to identify similarities and differences. Analytically, my starting point was to select three counselling sessions and map them structurally as well as interactionally (for a detailed account see Sarangi 2010). From the interactional mapping, which comprises distribution of turns in terms of frequency and volume, two of the sessions showed that the genetic professionals (the counsellor and the specialist nurse) spoke most of the time (up to 80-90%) compared to the client and their partners. In the third encounter, the interactional landscape was remarkably different, with the client and her partner talking most of the time (up to 80%) as would be expected in therapeutic and counselling encounters. A thematic analysis revealed that, in the latter case, the client had many other health concerns that needed to be discussed.

This kind of analysis, at a very crude level, reveals interesting interactional patterns that will be of relevance to genetic counsellors. However, one has to be cautious about drawing inferences such as one type of interactional landscape is more client-centred than others. Instead, we must make sense of the findings in relation to the 'context' of genetic counselling while allowing for different priorities of different clients. Before jumping to conclusions, we need to know more generally what the purpose of genetic counselling is and what might be the specific circumstances relating to clients and their problems. The differences in interactional patterns do not straightforwardly suggest value-laden categories such as dominance, paternalism etc. on the part of genetic professionals. Given the complexity associated with inheritance of genetic disorders, genetic counsellors devote a good deal of time explaining risks of occurrence, risks of knowing and risks of disclosure of genetic

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status. Such explanations are targeted at the client's understanding of their situation before making decisions about genetic testing.

Conclusion

Let me conclude by raising a few questions for further reflection: What are the guiding ethical principles for 'responsible' applied linguistic analytical practice? Do we have an interpretive licence when it comes to studying professional practice? More crucially, do we possess the relevant expertise to interpret the phenomena under study (cf. analyst's paradox)? If not, how do we acquire this expertise?

Methodologically speaking, any analysis of professional practice needs to find a midway between 'constructionism' and 'radical situationalism' in order to avoid 'microanalytic myopia' (Mehan 1991). For continuing our applied linguistic work in a professional setting, rather than remaining committed to a particular methodological and analytical framework, we should be more committed to the research site, and this might mean we combine methodologies and triangulate different ways of looking at things so as not to become trapped in either 'terministic screening' or 'metaphorical pretence'.

Discourse analysis is best seen as a methodological toolbox which can help us to find evidence in the data, both at the level of what is said and what is not said, and how something is said, but this does not give us a platform to assess, positively or negatively, what professional knowledge is. We have to suspend our judgments concerning efficacy of professional practice. Our analytic categories are as open to challenge as we challenge the categories of the professional practitioners. According to Funtowicz and Ravetz (1992), the days of 'applied science' are over, where expert knowledge can undisputedly be imported for application. The expert knowledge itself is marked by uncertainty and the interests of stakeholders are manifold, calling for weighing up the costs and benefits of expert knowledge. We are, according to Funtowicz and Ravetz (1992), in the throes of 'post-normal science' – where values surrounding decisions are more complex than the scientific facts available to base such decisions on.

In such a climate of 'post-normal science', ensuring uptake of discourse analytic findings will remain a key challenge (Roberts and Sarangi 2003, Sarangi and Candlin 2003). The challenge is both a matter of what we find (discovery) and how we choose to disseminate our findings. Becker et al (1961) capture this tension between researchers' analytic stance and their obligation for disseminating research findings:

> "But our purpose is not criticism, but observation and analysis. When we report what we have learned, it is important that we do so faithfully. We have a double duty - to our own profession of social observation and analysis and to those who have allowed us to observe their conduct. We do not report everything we observe, for to do so would violate confidences and otherwise do harm. On the other hand, we must take care not to bias our analyses and conclusions. Finding a proper balance between our obligations to our informants and the organisation, on the one hand, and our scientific duty, on the other, is not easy."

If we extend the above observation, it can be said that discourse analytic findings may not only be irrelevant but also harmful if not monitored adequately.

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Following Collins and Evans (2002), the goal for both applied linguists and professional discourse analysts is to inculcate 'discretionary expertise' which, in our context, must comprise:

- discriminating between discovery and usefulness;
- discriminating between different traditions of discourse analysis in relation to their analytic focus and usefulness (i.e., to go beyond the idea that by applying our analytic framework we make our work relevant);
- discriminating between variations of professional practice and account for such differences in terms of discoursal evidence.

The challenge remains: our ability to discriminate across patterned differences as in the case of interactional mapping, and to be able to offer an interpretation of such differences for potential uptake. The connective 'and', with which I begun, is paramount in building ties between applied linguists and discourse analysts as well as between applied linguists, discourse analysts and professional practitioners as a way of negotiating the epistemology of our professional practice.

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