Special Feature

Coping with change in applied linguistics

David Crystal and Christopher Brumfit in conversation

David Crystal (DC) and Christopher Brumfit (CB)

CB: I'll start by saying that one of the things about applied linguistics is that it seems to be always changing, and also the people who are doing it seem themselves to change. David, would you class yourself primarily as a linguist or an applied linguist or as somebody who skips across that divide. How do you feel about your role?

DC: Well, I always think of myself as a linguist, in the first instance. That's what I say when people ask me 'What are you?' But deep down I think I should really be saying I'm an applied linguist because, from the very beginning of my career, I found myself being pulled in that direction – usually without intending to be. In my original English degree at London there were several linguistically-oriented courses, and I was fortunate enough to get formal phonetics training. When I did my PhD it was a straight linguistics topic, on non-segmental phonology. My first really big book was based on this, *Prosodic Systems and Intonation in English*. But right from the outset I found it impossible to be a 'straight'

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linguist, because people would come up with language problems and ask for help, and you just have to respond. I think there can be very few linguists who haven't found themselves in that sort of position at some point in their careers. I've always had a problem-solving conception of applied linguistics, as a consequence, but it has never been pro-active in my case.

CB: This is a key point. I suppose that there were definitions in the 70s which talked about linguistics as providing technical support for practical activities, but there are also a lot of applied linguists with similar profiles to mine, which is really the exact opposite, where they start off outside linguistics proper. I didn't do a first degree in linguistics; I did my masters in applied linguistics as a result of discovering that teaching required you to know a lot more about language than you got from a conventional English degree.

There were a lot of people who would class themselves as applied linguists but might not class themselves necessarily as pure linguists who are trying to make sense of practice and raise their experiential understanding to a more theoretical level, researching and getting empirical data to support a project. So either professional practice or linguistics may be starting points. And it's also very noticeable to me that almost all major British linguists have engaged in applied linguistic activity of considerable distinction – whether one thinks of Randolph Quirk or John Sinclair or John Lyons, there is a very strong tradition in British linguistics of stylistics, of educational linguistics and so on being something which people trained and primarily practising in formal or descriptive linguistics will also engage with.

DC: I've often worked with people who've had the professional perspective, and it's interesting to see what happens when linguists encounter practitioners in a collaborative enterprise. You expect there to be an immediate meeting of minds, and sometimes there is, but usually making that bridge actually turns out to be rather more difficult than you expect. Even after working in the clinical field for a long time, I would meet people who had started out as speech therapists and then done an MA in linguistics, and it was still quite difficult sometimes to get that meeting of minds.

CB: I think this is partly that if you're a practitioner you're engaged, even if you're centring on language, with a lot more than just language; you're engaged with learning styles, with organisation and management of

classrooms, or human response to someone encountering difficulties, and it's very hard to isolate the linguistic component.

DC: That's right, there's always another set of values – and of course it is these which a linguist has to learn to understand and respect. I think many of the early conflicts between people doing applied linguistics back in the 60s and 70s arose because linguists didn't respect the range of non-linguistic factors that underlay the problem they were asked to help solve. But what has never ceased to amaze me about applied linguistics as a profession is how impossible it is to be exhaustive about the set of problem areas to which the subject can in principle make a contribution. There is an opposite impression around, but this comes, I think, from the way foreign language teaching issues dominated our field for so long. And even after other domains had been 'acquired', when you went to applied linguistics conferences you'd still get this impression from the way the subject was presented as a fixed set of topics. You'd be asked to make a contribution to 'one of the following areas', and you'd see a list of a dozen or so categories, such as stylistics, forensics, lexicography, and so on. You got the feeling that the aim was to draw a line around the subject, and that any theory of applied linguistics should be restricted to these domains. My experience has been quite the contrary – that it is impossible to delimit the area of applied linguistics because society keeps changing, and new types of problems keep coming up to which linguistics can make a problem-solving contribution.

CB: So you would say that applied linguistics is really an orientation – a particular kind of research perspective on the world at large which could be used for almost any problem that the practitioner applies?

DC: Yes. I don't think the linguistics I do – in the sense of providing theory, methodology, and empirical findings – has changed very much over the past 40 years. But what does change is the domain where all this can be applied. For instance, a year ago I had no idea that there might be a domain which I now find myself routinely calling 'applied historical linguistics'. What is that, you might well ask? We all know what historical linguistics is, but to what kind of problem might its findings be applied? Well, I found out when I was contacted by Shakespeare's Globe in London, who wanted to mount an original pronunciation version of *Romeo and Juliet* as part of an 'original practices' production. They needed a transcript which would reflect Shakespearian pronunciation in a way which would allow it to be taught to the actors. Now I've never

been one to resist a challenge, especially when a new area turns up out of the blue – that is part of the fun of our subject – so I suddenly find myself reviewing what we know about Early Modern English and attempting to write a transcript. But immediately I found myself in applied linguistics, for what kind of transcript should it be? Full IPA (International Phonetic Association)? Simplified IPA? Mixed IPA and orthography? Respelling? The choice was dependent on the needs and abilities of the actors, and the amount of rehearsal time available. There was also a whole set of values defining their world which were completely unlike anything in the field of historical linguistics. After all, their job is not to apply linguistics. Their job is to put on a good production which the audience will enjoy. As a result, they introduce all kinds of considerations into the linguistic mix which were not there before. For instance, I offered them a transcription of a word like *transgression* with the ending as [sion] or [shion] – a change which was taking place in the early 1600s. The [s] form was probably felt to be more conservative than the [sh] form, so I gave the older characters in the play the former and the younger characters the latter. That's the linguistics job done. What the director and actors then had to do was discuss this decision in terms of whether it made dramaturgical sense. In the end, in this particular example, the director took the view that, in an original practices production, the audience would expect the actors to sound different from the present day, so in cases where there was real variation it would make sense to always opt for the older variant, regardless of age. This is not a decision based on linguistic values, but you have to respect it.

CB: This is also presumably the crafting of authenticity, which must have some audience in mind as well. I mean it's a rather odd position to be in, producing an authentic text from the past for an audience of today when the interaction is not actually with the past but with today.

DC: It's the classical paradox which the Globe has to confront by its very existence. But from a linguistic point of view, a whole range of intriguing issues come up – of intelligibility, for instance. After all, this is a professional theatre, they've got to make money. The Globe was very tentative about doing original pronunciation at all – they only did it in three performances – because they felt it was going to be unintelligible to the audience. In fact, it isn't. It's no more different from modern RP (Received Pronunciation) than many regional dialects are today. But – and this relates to the general point you raised – from the point of view of applied linguistics, in discussing these issues with the people at the Globe, I found myself talking about exactly the same kinds of thing

as I've discussed before in relation to ELT, clinical linguistics, and other domains – pragmatic effects, simplification, intelligibility, and so on.

CB: But it also appears that once the linguist intervenes, the event itself changes, people's reactions change in response to that, and it may well be that there is some moulding of acting style or of expectations of audiences and so on which is going on at the same time…. I wonder if I could take you back, though. You remarked earlier that the kinds of categories you are using now are not wildly different from those you were using 20 or 30 years ago. It seems to me that this is quite an interesting issue because the example that you have given is language variation, and one thing that does seem to have happened in the last 30 years is that sociolinguistic studies have made us much clearer about the immense range of variation that pertains even in relatively restricted linguistic circumstances, even among single individuals across domains, let alone among different people in different circumstances. Hasn't that actually had quite a big impact on the way in which descriptive linguistics has to see itself in terms of the degree of idealisation and factors of that kind?

DC: Yes, it has, and my thinking in the Globe experiment was very much informed by sociolinguistic notions, and some of these – such as Elizabethan notions of class – did surface in the discussions I had with the actors and the director. But the issues that were of crucial importance to the actors were not sociolinguistic ones. They were much more basic things like 'How do you pronounce that sound? Where is it made in the mouth?' Everyday phonetics. In that sense the situation hasn't changed.

CB: Probably like training opera singers to sing in a foreign language.

DC: Yes. Or to give a different example, from educational linguistics. Back in the 1960s I was talking to teachers about parts of speech and what is syntax and all the usual things, and now in 2005 I find myself doing the same sort of lecture as I was doing 40 years ago, hardly changed at all. People are asking the same sorts of questions as we were attempting to answer in the 1960s and 70s. *Plus ça change…*

CB: One might argue though that those of us who are committed to some kind of metalinguistic competence for teachers and learners have been resounding failures over the last 30, 40 years. Except possibly for a slight push from government in the National Literacy Strategy in recent years, in the English-speaking world, mother tongue teachers have responded less well to the advent of linguistics than we hoped would happen a few decades ago.

DC: Well, we may not have got a great deal into the hands of teachers through publication – I had several teacher-orientated projects in the 70s and 80s which never went ahead – but there was an awful lot of INSET work going on all the time. I don't know about you, but I was out lecturing to HMIs (Her Majesty's Inspectors), teachers, and others, about once a month regularly for years. Depressing as it was at the time, to feel you weren't getting anywhere – especially after the Bullock Report – I'd like to think that we helped form a climate of opinion which was never lost sight of over those decades, and which is paying off now.

CB: There is also though a sense in which over this period that we're talking about the world's linguistic shape has changed very radically. Indeed I think you are on record as saying that it's changed more substantially in the decade at the very end of the 20th century than in any similar period in the last 500 years.

DC: Absolutely. My little book called *The Language Revolution* argues this point as forcefully as I can. I think in the 1990s three striking developments took place. First, we encountered the reality of having a global language. Secondly, we realised there was a crisis of language endangerment, with some half the world's languages dying – a fact which I heard unequivocally stated for the first time only in 1992. And thirdly, there was the arrival of the Internet, in the sense that the World Wide Web was introduced in 1991, and most people only started to use email and chat rooms by the mid-decade. These three developments it seems to me completely altered our linguistic perception of the world. And applied linguistics still has not caught up with it. Suddenly we find an array of new types of problem requesting solution, and even ten years on, many of these domains – and especially the Internet – are still not being approached by applied linguists with the enthusiasm that is needed. My book *Language and the Internet*, for example, wasn't an exercise in applied linguistics: it was simply a linguist's take on a new domain of language. There is plenty that the applied linguist could be doing to take forward Internet science, but few seem to be doing it. Nor is my *Language Death* a book on applied linguistics: it's an attempt to provide an account of a particular linguistic situation. It's not a set of recommendations about how you manage the problem. That side of things is in its infancy. These are just a couple of examples of new applied domains. There are many others. Applied linguistics in 20–30 years' time will look nothing like the applied linguistics of the last few decades, it seems to me.

CB: Can I make a point about some of the concepts used to describe these changes? I mean, you could see the three things that you describe as all aspects of one single phenomenon. Globalisation is rather glibly used as a term, but undoubtedly there is some sense in which cultures which used to be able to exist in relatively isolated form are now no longer able to do so because they are increasingly technologically in contact with everybody else. One symptom of that is the Internet which, as several people have remarked, including yourself, cuts both ways. It's good for language variety as well as causing some centralisation towards English. One very striking thing is the way Ministries of Education are making the first foreign language the same one, English, across many countries that previously had had French or Russian or other languages as the first one. This in itself has suddenly changed our notions about world language – the quantitative change actually led to a qualitative change in the nature of multilingualism because there is now a single default source of cross-national communication. And the business of language death seems to me to be something which is a symptom of globalisation – though it's quite complicated to analyse. Anybody who has got any history at all can list a whole range of languages which have long been dead but which we've been aware of. What's new now is that the replacement tends towards the same relatively limited range of large regional languages. That is the big difference.

DC: I acknowledge that emphasis, certainly. If we count up all the languages which we have written records about that we know have died in the past 2000 or so years until the mid-20th century, we only get a few hundred, which is in stark contrast with what has happened in the last half of the 20th century, with a language dying every two weeks or so on average. Globalisation I think has changed everything, though we mustn't minimise the effect on language loss of disease and other local disasters and of course in some countries aggressive actions against ethnic languages. But the cultural assimilation that comes from globalisation is undoubtedly the primary factor which has speeded things up.

CB: Which in a sense is the product of communication, so in a way language use has created language loss.

DC: At the same time, I see the Internet as being a new source of optimism for many languages. It's interesting to see how an originally 100 per cent English-language medium has changed so rapidly in the course of just a decade. In 2003 we saw the amount of English on the Internet fall to less

than 50 per cent. And we ain't seen nothing yet, because there are parts of the world which have hardly been affected by the Internet yet – Africa, for example – and the balance of languages will alter dramatically once these areas get online.

CB: The other interesting thing of course is that the Internet presupposes literacy so that an acceleration of literacy is critical.

DC: Yes, at the moment literacy is a critical factor – but even there things will change. In a generation's time a lot of Internet communication will be auditory-vocal, which will bring speech to the fore. It's already beginning to be, with such developments as broadband telephony. Sadly that will be too late for many currently endangered languages. And yet you never know. With Internet technology it's very difficult to predict even a few months ahead.

CB: Right. But let's move on. In the examples we've been referring to, we've been picking up ways in which we work as 'jobbing linguists' – someone who offers technical skills in the service of somebody else's activity. Is there not an applied linguistic claim which is slightly more aggressive – more relating to Henry Widdowson's 'applied linguistics' as distinct from 'linguistics applied'? Here there's also a theoretical dimension to the field, a dimension of explaining the operation of language in the world in such a way that politicians, journalists, the lay public, professionals, understand that what they were describing may not have been quite as it appeared to them, in which actually one has got to have something rather more synoptic than the answers to 'problems' in inverted commas?

DC: I'm very happy with being described as a 'jobbing linguist', actually. I think there are two issues. One is that popularisation is an important branch of applied linguistics. I think all linguists should try to do it, and stop doing it if they find they're no good at it. At the same time, I'm immensely attracted by the prospect of devising a theory of applied linguistics – that is, a theory which begins by exploring the principles and methods that have emerged in different kinds of applied linguistic domains. Are there correspondences between such diverse worlds as the clinical, educational, and forensic, to mention just three?

Now, such studies that do get written are, I suppose, data for the synoptic view that you talk about, but I don't know who is actually the person who steps back and does this. Anyone who has worked in several domains of applied linguistics could do it, but they'd have to find the time. And as I've said, the problem with applied linguistics is that it sucks you in so

much, takes up so much of your energy, so much of your time, so much of your money very often, that you end up not having the opportunity to stand back and write the more general book that needs to be written. I mean is there a book called 'a theory of applied linguistics'?

CB: When I asked the question I wasn't really thinking of a single theory of applied linguistics, although there are people who argue that applied linguists are actually doing what linguistics claims to be doing because they are producing language that is instantiated.

DC: That's an interesting perspective too – that applied linguistics can raise issues that will actually help linguistics develop as a subject.

CB: Well, some people have taken that position.

DC: I know, and it's a position I've held myself, because I've often found myself turning to linguistics for help only to find that there's no help to be had. My very first big academic article arose from that situation. It was called 'Specification and English tenses', published in 1966 in the first volume of the *Journal of Linguistics*. I started to write it after working on one of the London University ELT summer schools. The students would be asking me such questions as 'How can we learn the tenses in English, if the present tense has got a dozen or more meanings?' When they saw my puzzlement, they would show me their textbooks in which there would be a long list of the habitual and all the other meanings assigned to English tense forms. I would point out that it was the adverbs that were actually causing most of the meaning differences. And they would respond by asking me to give them a full description. Which adverbs go with which tense forms? I looked around, and at the time there was nothing – so I ended up writing an article that was semi-theoretical, semi-descriptive, trying to provide a linguistic solution to what had begun as an applied linguistic question. And then you are faced with a dilemma: do you go back and become a linguist again in order to help solve the problem, or do you stay an applied linguist and ask for an easier problem to solve? I've found myself doing both, and it is that trading relationship between linguistics and applied linguistics which is at the same time both enervating and frustrating.

CB: But there are dimensions of language use that simply don't get into a discussion structured in this way. For example, you had linguistics predicated on a kind of metaphor: how would language look if we could isolate it from everything else? Then you could construct models which are much more coherent than they would be if they were more

contingent – because you've managed to eliminate some of the world activity that goes on around language. But of course when people need to use those models, as teachers or speech therapists or whatever, they've got to go back into real world activity again. And the question is: is an isolated model as useful as it was thought to be in the 50s and 60s when contemporary linguistics took its present shape? And that goes back to the issue we were talking about rather earlier, about the sociolinguistic impact. It is very clear that nobody fits the models quite as closely as we thought they did. We used to think, for example, that people who were RP speakers and used the standard language were relatively coherent and somewhere fairly close to written language in their language use. Those few that 'speak writing' actually appear quite bizarre when you hear what they say, so what does one then do with that evidence? 'That may not matter', many language teachers might say, 'we can sort that out in the wash, we use these fictions as a way of getting people started. And then they become autonomous beings and get on with things in their own way'. On the other hand you could say that tidiness is actually falsifying the nature of what language is like and introducing constructs which may not be awfully helpful.

DC: I think the model still works well enough. But you do have to make sure that the fictions are useful.

CB: As with any science.

DC: Science is a world of half-truths. The clinical world is the one I know best, as it developed from scratch over a 20-year period. Much of the time, in the early years, was devoted to developing the series of procedures that we called clinical linguistic 'profiles'. Now it was quite plain, at the outset, that if I were to devise a linguistic profile of the kind that I'd done before in stylistics, with hundreds of variables, this would swamp any speech therapist, especially one with no linguistics background (this was before the days when linguistics became a routine part of speech therapy training). Equally, if I went to the opposite extreme and used some of the very crude categories that were being promulgated by the 'language in use' cadre of the time – categories like 'transactional' and 'creative' – that would be of no use. So I had to go for a halfway stage. And that halfway stage means that both sides have to give a bit. There has to be compromise. The linguistics side has to accept a certain amount of simplification of the descriptive statements that have to be made and the speech therapy side has got to be prepared to take on board a certain amount of unfamiliar technicality. The poor applied

linguist is thus going to get stick from both sides. I certainly did! One of the most important attributes of applied linguists is that they should have thick skins. But if you stick to your guns, compromise solutions can be made to work.

CB: Yeah – but I think I've got a slightly different take on this because I think what motivated me all the time was really a desire to understand language practices, if you like, for the normal situation, for normal speakers. On the back of which we should be able to deal with 'problems' when they crop up.

DC: Yes, that is different.

CB: Most of the time when someone is in a law court, or when somebody has a linguistic disability of some kind, or when they are in a 'deficit' situation as when they have to learn something, they vary from the practice of language users in non-disadvantaged situations. That's why almost the first paper I ever presented was arguing that applied linguistics had to get to grips with English mother tongue teaching in the UK, rather than concentrating as it then did on EFL – educationally a more marginal concern – on the grounds that unless it got to grips with English mother tongue teaching it wasn't actually engaging with normal language practice – practice with implications for all other language operations. Such learners are going through a process which the school can guide but can't actually create because it doesn't have a monopoly of linguistic experience. Yet we do desperately need to know what it is that is going on in 'normal' language use, and that may suggest radical rethinking, for example that our basic descriptive terms may not be helpful. For instance, is the concept 'a language' useful any more? As we said earlier, we've seen much work in recent years from people like Ben Rampton about stylistic crossings of one sort or another. The notion of language in multilingual contexts being in a constant process of fluctuation and change is a cliché in sociolinguistic analyses on border areas. With the massive migration that's already a feature of the 21st century, one of the other big changes (and we didn't refer to it when we were talking about the new global conditions) is that almost everybody is, everywhere, on a border, exposed to multilingualism, multidialectalism, and therefore to the possibility of developing a multilingual repertoire. There is increasing empirical evidence supporting 'a repertoire' (cross-stylistic and cross-linguistic) as a better conceptual tool than 'a language'.

DC: Agreed.

CB: For example, on European websites, there are sites and chat-rooms that operate translingually, providing valuable data. There is clearly a great deal of practice in multinational communication of one sort or another which is relatively cross-lingual, even when you are talking about English as an auxiliary language, and certainly when you move away from English. I wonder whether naming languages as discrete entities is helpful in linguistic description, as distinct from as a political statement or as a convenient demarcation for educational use. Language-border crossing is the norm as soon as you look at language activity in almost any diverse community. Single, 'pure' languages are political inventions to make political points. Linguistic practice is to shift among different repertoires, some of which we keep relatively discrete and enclosed and some of which we don't. But if we think of ourselves as primarily defined as native-speakers of a single language we end up claiming an exclusivity that makes communication hard to explain. And perhaps I should add that there's a big danger of the world shift that you referred to earlier resulting in the so-called English-speaking nations defining themselves as highly educated monolinguals, users of *this* language, in a world where everybody else highly educated will operate languages of regional communication as well as a language of international communication. And the cultural implications of that self-selected isolation are worrying.

DC: Your point about 'language' is really interesting. I totally agree with you about the changing character of the multilingual experience. This is my perception of the Web, for instance, which is rapidly becoming a novel multilingual environment. And the cultural question is surely the big question raised by English as a global language. Taking on board a new variety of global English means taking on board the associated culture – and how is that to be identified, described, and taught? As new varieties of English have come into being, the question of mutual intelligibility raised by code-mixing languages such as Singlish makes you realise that old conceptions of language simply cannot explain the reality that's out there. I too have become increasingly suspicious of using the term 'language' as opposed to some such notion as 'variety'.

CB: The other thing that has emerged from this though is that the dominance of English has been discussed in terms of those who are dominated by it, for example in Phillipson and Skutnab-Kangas's arguments. I'm much more concerned about the impact on those who have traditionally defined themselves as English speakers, partly because of the risks arising from cultural isolation of the powerful. People will vote with

their tongues; many English speakers are not going to rush out and start learning other languages if they perceive that the other person's English is always going to be better than their other language, whatever it is. For the impact on the English speaking countries, there's increasing evidence – John Edwards amongst others has produced this – that English speakers are likely to be learning other languages less. The relationships therefore between language and culture, between language and cross-cultural understanding, become absolutely crucial, because if we don't cross cultures through multilingualism we're going to have to find some other ways of accommodating ourselves to the constant interplay with different cultures, religions, aspirations, political agendas which are inherent in successful communication.

DC: We seem to be in a transitional period.

CB: Yes, clearly.

DC: At the same time, although governments do not always do the right thing as far as language teaching in schools is concerned, I have found a popular renewal of interest in language awareness – in foreign language awareness and foreign language learning – which wasn't there 10 years or so ago. Take the big shock that the American government had a few years ago, when the situations in Afghanistan and Iraq blew up, and they realised how few people they had available who could speak the required languages. Or take the economic situation, where companies who wish to sell goods abroad, in an increasingly competitive international market, are beginning to realise that some foreign language awareness can help to clinch a sale.

CB: What is increasingly being found is that if companies wish to employ multilinguals they don't go and employ native English speakers. They can find somebody with native speaker competence in other languages who is also a quasi-native speaker of English.

DC: But how long does it take, Chris, before these over-arching considerations influence the people who make the decisions to foster a multilingual environment as routine? What worries me most is that the current policy is going to reduce the pool of qualified language teachers and the interested kids to such an extent that we enter an irreversible decline.

CB: There is an argument that that is already happening.

DC: Yes.

CB: It is very clear that at the moment (in Britain anyway) the number of

people who are specialist language graduates is shrinking so fast that you can't get a large enough pool of language teachers.

DC: This is the absolute disaster scenario for me. What an irony – just at the time when people are saying 'Oh yes, I see that we do really need to have foreign languages', and we find we can't keep up with demand.

CB: It's already the case that on PGCE (Post Graduate Certificate in Education) courses in Britain for training foreign language teachers, in many courses the majority of the teachers are in fact native speakers of the language from France and Germany and Spain.

DC: Of course, an interesting side-effect of this, in areas like ELT, is that a much greater tolerance seems to be emerging for non-RP accents and non-standard English. This is my biggest linguistic enthusiasm of the moment, actually, as I've tried to express in the pages of *The Stories of English*. I think a really significant development of the 1990s was the way nonstandard English began to acquire an element of prestige it has never had before, and the historical background to this was a story that needed to be told. But this kind of new attitude towards the relationship between nonstandard and standard actually has its parallels in the ELT world as well, where RP is increasingly being viewed as just one accent amongst many – because most teachers of English in the world don't speak it.

CB: As was obvious to me in Africa at the end of the 60s, where teachers could really only teach the English that they spoke. If what they spoke was a local variety then that was the main model to which learners were exposed, and you have to find a way of somehow sorting how that relates to international intelligibility.

DC: Traditional notions of the English 'language' become very difficult to work with, when you see so much local variation.

CB: And also it's unhelpful to people who are setting out to learn languages, because the idea that you might actually have a repertoire of styles that you move up and down and in and out of, and that these may incorporate crossing into what conventionally are thought of as other languages, and that these repertoires would be determined primarily by what is intelligible to those with whom you are interacting, is possibly more liberating than the notion that you have one language and there's this other language there and you have to move into it and you've got to be very good at it.

DC: Indeed. Traditional notions don't help us here. So, Chris, let me ask you, by way of bringing this to a close, if someone were to write a book today called *Introducing Applied Linguistics*...

CB: As Pit Corder did...

DC: Now that was a book which assumed that the subject was essentially language teaching.

CB: Yes.

DC: That's right, so if you were to write a book called *Introducing Applied Linguistics* today, given all that we know and that we've been talking about, where would you start, and what frame of reference would be in it for you?

CB: I would want to frame it by saying that 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. Actually all phenomena are contingent because in the world things are always tied to other things. On the one hand you've got idealisation; on the other hand you've got the constant need for the renewal of connection. Some disciplines veer more in one direction, some more in the other. Applied linguistics is placing itself as less idealised than linguistics but still can't avoid some degree of principled idealisation. So what are the principles on which one bases idealisation? That's the sort of starting point I think.

DC: It's in the next chapter, perhaps, where your book might be very different from mine. My next chapter would be an analysis of the nature of the problems that these diverse areas of applied linguistics present, and an attempt to find parallels between them. This would be an exercise completely unlinguistic in character – almost a job analysis.

CB: But I think there would be an important point to precede that, and that is: 'why on earth should anybody feel that you should bring together issues that relate to clinical linguistics and issues that relate, for example, to language teaching?' I think the answer is that language is actually so central to human identity that anything that happens to language in any circumstances has potential relevance to use of language in any other and that studying language in ageing may reveal truths about language learning.

DC: That's an interesting approach.

CB: Without it you might argue that there shouldn't be 'applied linguistics' at all – why don't we just have 'pedagogical linguistics' and 'stylistics' and so on?

DC: Well that's the interesting point, it seems to me. Which areas of applied linguistics do permit these interactions and which don't? Or do they all, in some shape or form? For instance, I find lot of trading relationships between, say, mother tongue teaching and foreign language teaching, like you do, but on the other hand there are some areas of applied linguistics, such as lexicography, which are much less obviously related to other domains. I wonder sometimes if it will ever be possible to establish a unifying set of considerations to give coherence to our field. But I'm in no doubt that this is what we have to try to do.