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Abstract

In promoting a social realist approach to research, the current paper first argues that applied linguistics should be reframed as an interdisciplinary field of study in order to provide a more complete view of real-world events. It then suggests that studies which adhere to a Foucauldian post-structuralist approach generally fail to distinguish between structure and agency, and thus do not provide a complex view of reality. In contrast, a social realist approach, which favors a multi-disciplinary research strategy, sees structure and agency as distinct and emergent entities. This facilitates a focus on the multi-directional relationship between these two entities. The paper then criticizes three post- structuralist critical discourse analysis (CDA) researches, one which focuses on the South Korean EFL context and two which focus on the Japanese EFL context. It then analyzes one of the few genuine social realist researches to date. This leads to a possible template for social realist research specifically concerned with the Japanese EFL context.

Keywords: applied linguistics, post-structuralism, social realism, critical discourse analysis, Japanese EFL context

1. Introduction

The current paper proposes that applied linguistics, which is primarily concerned with the relationship between second language learning theory and pedagogy (Schmitt 2002), should be reframed as an interdisciplinary field of study. Following Corson (1997) and Kramsch's (2002) ecological approach to research methodology, it argues for applied linguistics to include concepts from fields such as theoretical linguistics, sociology, psychology, political sciences, philosophy, and other field deemed relevant to the study of human communication.

The paper then borrows from sociology in particular by further arguing that researchers focusing on the Japanese EFL context, as well as the consumers of such research, should remain critical of studies which, either explicitly or implicitly, adhere to a Foucauldian post-structuralist approach. While post-structuralism research provides valuable insights into the relationship between power and discourse, it fails to make an important distinction between power (structure) and human subjectivity (agency). In other words, this type of research tends to conflate structure and agency by arguing that agency is entirely the product of structure. This stance effectively renders any analysis of human subjectivity highly problematic, because it assumes that human actions are paralyzed by overwhelming structural pressures.

In response to this, a social realist approach to applied linguistic research (Archer 2004, Bhaskar 1975, 1989, Carter & New 2004, Carter & Sealey 2000, Corson 1997, Layder 1998, Sealey & Carter 2004, Sealey 2007) assumes that structure and agency are distinct and emergent entities. An emergent entity is both irreducible and has a constitution which is greater than the sum of its parts. Furthermore, social realist research is mainly concerned with how structure and agency develop their distinctiveness and how they mutually influence one another (i.e., their multi-directional relationship). This departure from a traditional atomistic approach to research (which characterizes psycholinguistics in that it views complex systems by taking them apart and by analyzing each component in a de-contextualized fashion), towards a relational approach to research, highlights the ecological nature of the social realist approach. This new movement in applied linguistic research, which has yet to take solid roots, is designed to provide a more complete and rich epistemological understanding of real-world events.

From a methodological standpoint, the current paper focuses on critical discourse analysis (CDA) (Fairclough 2010). In his later work, Fairclough describes a specific CDA approach which recalls social realism by arguing that the complex interaction between structure and agency throughout the generation of discourse in various forms deserves a closer look, one which CDA is capable of providing.

Gradually, the Japanese EFL context comes under consideration, with an analysis of three post-structuralist CDA researches, namely Sungwon's (2007) (which incidentally focuses on the South Korean context, yet provides a parallel view into the Japanese context),

Liddicoat (2008), and Hammond (2006). The latter two specifically focus on the Japanese context. An investigation of how structure and agency are being accounted for in these three studies reinforces the view that, while post-structuralist studies do provide valuable information on the relationship between discourse and power, they generally fail to integrate human agency as distinct and essential aspect in their equation.

By drawing heavily on Sealey and Carter (2004), forerunners in social realist applied linguistic research, the paper further argues that providing a clearer account of agency provides a much more complex and accurate view of reality. To strengthen that view, the paper ends with a glimpse into one of the very few genuine social realist researches to date (Belz 2002). This leads to a tentative template for a social realist CDA research which focuses specifically on the Japanese EFL context.

2. Applied linguistics as interdisciplinary study

Applied linguistics is an area concerned with the application of linguistic theory in the real world. Carter (in Sealey and Carter 2004: 17) argues that the main focus of applied linguistics is the application of theories drawn from language studies which focus on language as a social phenomenon. Like all applied systems, it is complex, creative, dynamic and adaptive to different contexts. More specifically, applied linguistics is at the interface between language theory and pedagogy. Sealey and Carter (2004: 17) are more explicit: applied linguistics is essentially about "problem-based researching into communication". All these definitions position language as a social phenomenon. Consequently, any description of language — and of language learning — divorced from its social context (e.g., Chomsky's nativist approach, psycholinguistic approaches to language learning) provides a limited view of reality. However, if contextual and temporal elements are integrated into research analysis, outlooks must be significantly increased. As a result, the field of applied linguistics must be situated at the intersection of a dynamic exchange between various fields of study, ranging from theoretical linguistics, sociology, psychology, political sciences, philosophy, and other fields which are concerned with human communication (Corson 1997).

Cameron and Larsen-Freeman (2007: 227) underline a central problem in current applied linguistics: "[c]hange is inherent to most of our concerns as applied linguists, and yet in our theories we everywhere find processes converted into objects." As Larsen-Freeman (2002: 40) points out, "it is meaningless to attempt to understand something by taking it apart,

explaining the behavior of the parts, and finally aggregating these partial explanations into an explanation of the whole. Instead of dichotomizing, we are encouraged to look for interconnections." This logic is at the heart of ecological approaches to research methodologies.

As such, Larsen-Freeman (2002), Ellis and Larsen-Freeman (2006), and Cameron and Larsen-Freeman (2007) propose that researching a complex system — here, language learning — requires a greater emphasis on the dynamic relationships between the components of that system rather than on the individual components themselves. This approach is, according to them, best viewed through complex systems theory. Their argument originates from close analysis of a wide variety of researches which demonstrate that causal relationships rarely follow a "one-to-one" pattern. As they point out, often in the real world, the effect is disproportionate to the cause. In addition, a complexity approach to research of real-world events attempts to avoid dichotomies, such as *form/function*, *langue/parole*, or *native/non-native speakers*. Through a process of essentialization and oversimplification, these dichotomies have led to increasingly static theoretical concepts in applied linguistics.

While complexity theory appears to be ideal to language research methodology, the current paper instead focuses on the concepts of ecology and of emergentism (see Section 3 below). It does so to reinforce the position that social realist theory, which borrows much from complexity theory, has the capacity to bring current applied linguistics research out of its dualistic and static epistemological stance, towards a more complex approach to observing the world. In other words, because social realism is a fundamentally ecological approach, that it borrows much from complexity theory, and that it sees components of complex systems as emergent entities, it has greater potential for providing a better view of language learning as a complex system.

Ellis and Larsen-Freeman's (2006) view of language development as procedural web as opposed to ladder has significant value here. As it is commonly agreed upon, language learning isn't a matter of accumulating units of knowledge about the target language and culture. It is a complex and dynamic process of linguistic, personal, social, and human development. A variety of issues, ranging from the linguistic to the social, influences how language learners manage the task. As such, different levels must be considered in the task of uncovering causal relationships: language structures, learners' minds, socio-political real-

ities in classrooms and local communities, etc. Moreover, because of linguistic, social, political and historical reasons, the target language and culture are constantly changing, rendering them rather elusive 'objects of study' for learners. In short, explaining the reasons and processes of success or failure in language learning may not lead to clear-cut, one-to-one causal relationships. On the contrary, there may be multiple causes as time unfolds and as learners find themselves in different contexts.

Reframing the field as an interdisciplinary study can attract strong criticisms from two angles. First, researchers with vested interests in protecting the "sovereignty" of their discipline may see this as a needless, if not suspicious, intrusion into their own territory. In other words, the act of blending a variety of theories from different fields might be seen as an act which trivializes aspects of current epistemological knowledge. Second, and much in the same lines as the first, combining theories from different fields may be perceived as a move towards increasing theoretical relativism. Extending this view further, the argument can be made that if applied linguistics is to gain a stronger, more legitimate foothold amongst the various fields of human knowledge, it should prioritize approaches aimed at greater systematic empiricism. In that sense, an ecological approach to research can be seen as a serious threat to such initiative.

This paper sees such criticisms as the product of a confusion between the ontological (the reality that exists) and the epistemological (what humans know about that reality). As argued later, a social realist perspective champions a multi-disciplinary approach precisely because it perceives reality (the ontological) as something which exists independently from people's understanding of it (the epistemological). Social realism is rather clear in making the point that the complexity of reality cannot be contained within single unifying theories. Instead, a variety of viewpoints can provide greater epistemological validity. If the epistemological has any chance to reflect the ontological more accurately, a multitude of research tools is therefore needed. On the other hand, the central reason why such multi-disciplinary approach to research might be criticized by more orthodox and conservative perspectives is that these perspectives understand the epistemological to be equivalent to the ontological. This assumption, however, is clearly convoluted and misguided. This is what Bhaskar (1989: 133) considers an "epistemic fallacy". The bottom line is that, whatever research methodology is employed, at no point should the researcher assume that his or her knowledge of reality is equivalent to that reality. At best, it can only be a reflection of it.

In that perspective, even if multi-disciplinary research fails to uncover clear-cut, one-to-one causal relationships, this should not, in effect, diminish the validity of the epistemological knowledge accumulated by that research. In fact, there is a greater danger of doing otherwise: by simplifying reality in order to construct unifying theories based on assumed causality, researchers can then become trapped in their own rhetoric, or as Sarup (1993: 97) says, they may become "prisoners of their own discourse". The current paper actually sees this process as the disappearance of the ontological into the epistemological. This sort of move seriously limits possibilities for alternative viewpoints, and might even contribute to the creation of ideological, dogmatic positions. As Ellis and Larsen-Freeman (2006: 563) warn, "[t]o attribute causality to any one variable (or even a constellation of variables) without taking time and context into account is misguided." They add that the quest for causality is misguided because "the effect of variables waxes and wanes" (*ibid*).

Taking all this into account, researchers interested in interdisciplinary studies and social realism, who make a clear distinction between the ontological and the epistemological, while remaining focused on a realist understanding of real-world phenomena, require greater methodological flexibility. These applied linguists need creative thinking when establishing connections between theories. Of course, these theories must be perceived as having common epistemological interests. As mentioned earlier, this sort of initiative is contained within an ecological approach to research (Kramsch 2002). Sealey and Carter (2004: 26) define this approach as one which requires a re-conceptualization of language and language learning as fragmented, stratified, relational human activities.

Interestingly, their perspectives on ecological approaches and on 'language learning and use as intersubjective practices' (*ibid*) bridge with CDA, with its emphasis on language as a site of struggle for the control of power and cultural memory (Kramsch 2002, Fairclough 2010). This particular point resurfaces in the section on CDA below. Suffice to say, interdisciplinary research is possible when the focus is placed on how various theories and concepts from different fields share common issues. Social realism then claims that their culmination should provide a more complex view on reality.

Social realist theory, contrary to most current applied linguistic research, strongly encourages this type of exchange. As Corson (1997: 166) argues, "if critical realism were to become a guiding philosophy for applied linguistics, then the epistemology ethically suited to

the field would be a much more inclusive theory of knowledge than the one that presently dominates it." The next section discusses post-structuralism, which is seen as standing in sharp contrast to social realism. This leads to a discussion on how social realism may benefit applied linguistic research.

3. From post-structuralism to social realism

According to Sealey and Carter (2004), the central question of sociology is whether humans create society (emphasis placed on agency) or society creates humans (emphasis placed on structure). This question, while unanswerable in itself, has been at the center of much debate between different factions. Interactionism favors agency, while structuralism favors structure. Post-structuralism pushes the idea even further by arguing that human subjectivity is itself determined by social structures. This section criticizes post-structuralism in order to provide stronger basis for arguments favoring social realism.

Post-structuralism stresses the role of discourse (as socially-constructed element) in the constitution of the self and in the social relations of everyday life. As such, reality can be observed in how language is used. However, observation of such reality cannot be based on the researcher's intuitions alone. It must be observed through a systematic study of the use of language in all social spheres. It is assumed that, through the study of discourse, structure becomes apparent. As Foucault (in Olssen 2004: 59), a central figure in post-structuralist thought, clarifies: "my object is not language but the archive, that is to say, the accumulated existence of discourses." He is essentially concerned with how structure (here, embodied in the accumulated shape, the history of, discourse) determines human agency. The Foucaul-dian view on discourse argues that, while humans produce discourse, they only do so as a product of social structures which establish the parameters of that discourse. In other words, human agency exists only because it is generated by structure. In much of his works, Foucault adds that both adherence to and resistance against structure is determined by structure itself. Again, human subjectivity is entirely determined by social structure. This even includes acts of resistance against structure. Post-structuralist thinkers such as Derrida (1978) and Habermas (1972) also emphasize the role of social structures as central guiding force behind human discourse. They take from Foucault (1967) and Marcuse (1964), who describe human life as more or less devoid of any human possibilities.

Here lies the problem at the heart of post-structuralism: it fails to provide valid explana-

tions for real world events related to human agency which stand apart from structural dynamics.　As Sarup (1993) points out, "there is no freedom in Foucault's world, nor does he have a theory of [human] emancipation [...] The critical capacity of Foucault's work is paralyzed because the reader is made to think that the project of social transformation is vain, trivial, hopeless". (p.98)　A central reason why the processes of human agency, as embodied in the concept of social transformation, are futile is that, with Foucault, there is no single, central source of power that can be identified.　Power is everywhere and everything. Assuming that humans do manage to operate beyond a complete capitulation to structural forces, the only things they can achieve is at the local level, with little effect upon the global. In the end, structure always wins.

As argued above, this creates significant complications for the analysis of human agency. If human agency disappears within structure, there is no reason to look for it, except to look at structure itself.　Problems surface when research actually locates instances of agency overriding structure (e.g., self-consciousness, indexicality, cognition, etc.).　At that point, post-structuralist researchers are forced to conflate these elements with structure, or simply to overlook them altogether.　This is an example of how an overly rigid (i.e., ideological) research methodology actually impedes a realist account of observable facts.　In the case of post-structuralist research, the central relationship between structure and agency, which is at the heart of sociology, becomes nullified.

Concerning CDA, Olssen (2004) argues that a Foucauldian approach to discourse analysis,

> "asserts the historical constitution of our most prized certainties about ourselves and the world in its attempts to de-naturalize explanations for the existence of phenomena.　In education, the discourse of mental testing with its particular truths regarding intelligence and children's development are amenable to such an analysis.　It analyses discourse in its relation to social structures and has an explicit focus on power and on bodies.　It is interested in institutional analysis and technologies of power aiming to isolate the mechanisms by which power operates.　Through its focus on power, also, it aims to document how culture attempts to normalize individuals through increasingly rationalized means, by constituting normality [...] Power relations are thus pivotal." (p.60-61)

Of course, such approach to applied linguistic and sociological research does provide valuable insight into the relationship between power and discourse, and especially of instances where human agency is intensely limited by structure. Needless to say, such cases do occur in reality. Yet, these cases do not speak for all that can be observed in the real world. Explaining that reality is a much more complex process than a simple matter of positioning structure as the principal cause for the existence of agency.

It is clear that the complexity of reality significantly undermines attempts towards the formulation and establishment of unifying theories. Layder (1998: 86) points out that "social reality should not and cannot be understood as a unitary whole which is susceptible only to one kind of explanatory principle, theoretical assumption, or methodological approach." As such, Foucault's approach to discourse as both constitutive of all forms of reality, and constituted by structure, must be called into question. As Luke (2009) points out, "even if the social field can be understood as largely constituted by discourse, not everything in the real world is shaped as such. Moreover, not all forms of discourse affect human subjectivity" (p. 292–293). He goes on to argue that, "the ubiquitous post-structuralist observation that we can account fully for the world through discourse, or rather for the world's partiality and continually deferred (in discourse) meaning, is at worst glib and at best partial." (*ibid*) The current paper does not actually claim that post-structuralism should be dismissed entirely. Reiterating earlier arguments, it does possess genuine epistemological value. Yet, its short-comings are simply too significant to make it an acceptable approach for an entire research. In other words, if employed, post-structuralism must be combined with other contrasting perspectives.

Let's apply this discussion to a tangible research problem. Claiming, for example, that Japanese learners of English adopt particular positions in rapport with the target language (e.g., 'shyness' and unwillingness to speak in the L2, failure to learn the L2 despite years of study, holding stereotypical views of the target culture, etc.) as a response to the pressures of social structures (educators, schools, curricula, language policies, nationalist ideologies such as *nihonjinron*, etc.) assumes that agency can only originate from structure — a key post-structuralist stance. This view assumes that Japanese learners have no choice but to yield to these pressures through the means described above. While this may reveal impor-tant aspects of the complex and dynamic relationship between Japanese language learners and the environment in which they learn the L2, it does so at the expense of the learners

themselves. It is possible that some Japanese human agents, consciously or unconsciously, may feel powerless and incapable to act outside social conventions and pressures. But to claim that each and every one of them is facing such predicament suggests a marked ideological stance.

Instead, the researcher interested in these issues needs to focus on both structure and agency a) as separate entities evolving in their own right, and b) as mutually influencing one another. This essentially describes causal relationships as fragmented and multi-directional, something which post-structuralism is not equipped to achieve. In response to the limitations of post-structuralism, Archer (2004: 17) explains the importance of social realism as such:

> "Too often we are presented with reductionist accounts, which either make all that we are the gift of society or, conversely, which claim that all society is can be derived from what we are. Instead, both humanity and society have their own *sui generis* properties and powers, which makes their interplay the central issue of social theory for all time."

Here, the concept of *emergence*, central to social realism, is highlighted. Sealey and Carter (2004: 77) define the process of emergence as,

> "the generation of new entities or phenomena from the combination of other entities or phenomena. Because the new entity is emergent from this combination, it possesses certain distinct features, namely: irreducibility to any of its constituent elements; autonomy from any of its constituent elements; the ability to interact with any of its constituent elements."

Recalling an earlier argument, social realism stresses that reality is different from humans' knowledge of it. It argues that the ontological and the epistemological are themselves emergent realities, irreducible to one another, and each greater than the sum of their constituents. The same argument is made concerning agency and structure. While each can influence one another, both are greater than the sum of their parts, and possess elements that are distinct from one another. There are two principal properties to structure: first, it possessed anteriority (i.e., when a human is born, certain social structures already exist), and

second, it has the ability to both enable and constraint human agency (i.e., a young homeless person may not think about being accepted to a reputable university, while a young middle class person may expect it to happen in the near future).　A human agent, on the other hand, is self-conscious, has intentions, is able to both think, to have emotions, and can use language and non-linguistic means to express ideas.　While structure may influence some of these processes to a certain degree, it is clear that certain features of human agency exist independently from structure, and vice-versa.

Once the concept of emergence is considered, it then becomes necessary to go back to agency and structure, and see how they are separate entities, and also how they relate to one another.　For Bhaskar (1989), it is true that human discourses are determined by structural dynamics, yet conversely human activities do affect these structures.　This is true simply because of the very real presence of human emancipation in history.　Fairclough (2001: 23) defines agency by maintaining somewhat of a penchant towards post-structuralism: "the individual is able to act only in so far as there are social conventions to act within [...] people are enabled through being constrained: they are able to act on condition that they act within the constraints of types of practice — or of discourse."　This argument does manage to separate agency from discourse, but it does so by framing it within structure.　In other words, agency is free to act, but within the constraints established by structure.　In mild contrast, Carter and New (2004: 6) argue that "[p]eople as agents and actors are influenced, though not determined, by their structural situations.　People choose what they do, but they make their choice from a structurally and culturally generated range of options — which they do not choose."　Here, human agency remains outside structure because it is effectively not determined by it.　Also, while structure and agency do influence each other to a large degree, some aspects of agency remain beyond the reach of structure, and vice-versa.

Sealey and Carter (2004: 12) state that, "[t]he realist view [...] is committed to an explanatory model in which the interplay between preexistent structures, having causal powers and properties, and people, possessing distinctive causal powers and properties of their own, results in contingent yet explicable outcomes."　They add that,

> "[i]t is important to emphasize that it is human beings - and not languages
> - which do things in the social world.　In seeking to accomplish things in the
> world, social actors must use language.　Whenever they do so, however,

there is an engagement with the linguistic resources available or accessible
to them. Through this engagement they experience these resources in
enabling and constraining ways." (*ibid*: 83)

In short, social realism holds that agency is a distinct entity from structure inasmuch as
not all human actions are generated by social forces and pressures. This means that some
of the things people do originate from within themselves. In contrast, not all social struc-
tures are determined by humans as a result of human interaction with these structures.
Some of these structures persist, a reality which is accounted for by the notion of anteced-
ence. Moreover, even if humans do not desire it, structures can limit human agency
nevertheless.

This sort of relationship is highly complex, hence the use of the adjective "multi-
directional". While neither agency nor structure can be reduced to the other, they do in fact
share a history. This is why a realist observation of the complexity of real-world phenom-
ena as they occur requires a relational and ecological approach. One way for researchers
interested in exploring this relationship is to use people's accounts as they are expressed, and
then set about confirming their reality and their constitution in the real world. Doing so
places due importance on the multi-directional relationship between structure and agency.
The next section sketches a general approach to a social realist applied research methodol-
ogy.

4. The basic design of a social realist research methodology

In effect, the social realist approach contrasts with post-structuralism most when it
argues for a more "foundational role for human practice" (Sealey and Carter, 2004: 54). In
terms of research design, this implies an emphasis on what human actors do, how they are
creating discourse, and how their agentive role both differ from social structures and are
influenced by them. But more fundamentally, social realist theory "advocate[es] a recogni-
tion of the stratified nature of the social world. That is, the social world comprises
structure, agency and culture (including language as a cultural emergent property), and each
of these has distinctive properties and powers." (*ibid*: 184) Translating this epistemological
stance into research methodology, Corson (1997: 169) provides an interesting sequence of
steps:

"To adequately interpret the structural influences that affect people's lives, the first object of research is to discover what is in people's minds about the world of human affairs. Social reality is interpreted by discovering what people report its reality to be for them, and then trying to confirm the reality for them of the things that they report. Later stages involve explaining the operation of structural influences, and using that knowledge to promote emancipator change of some kind as a morally binding response."

In a realist approach to research, it is highly recommended to distinguish between structure, agency and culture, to observe their characteristics, and to uncover the relationship which also binds them together. For that, it is crucial to not limit oneself to a single theory or approach, especially when researching the area of applied linguistics, in which so many factors come into play. As Corson (1997) points out, the use of a single theory about reality "remains a belief system; it is a dogma, an ideology that doubtless contains many prejudices and imprecisions that over time will turn out to be serious errors" (p.175). When actually doing research, this implies that the multitude of elements at play in a complex system must be theorized from a variety of scientific approaches. Then, their "in the real world" actuality must be measured following a variety of investigative tools.

The following section discusses CDA more specifically by bringing Fairclough's (2000) argument that CDA can contribute greatly to developing social theory through a "transdisciplinary engagement with social theory and analysis" (p.163), which is parallel to a social realist approach to applied linguistic research.

5. CDA from a social realist perspective

While Fairclough's CDA approach places a strong emphasis on power and structure as determinant of discourse types and discourse practices, it must be pointed out that he does not adhere to a strictly post-structural viewpoint. Moreover, he highlights the importance of CDA in establishing greater power balance in the world, something which is assumed to be within the realm of human agency. As he sums up, "critical analysis of discourse is nothing if it is not a resource for struggle against domination (2001: 216).

Fairclough's CDA methodology is fundamentally multi-disciplinary. It allows research

to focus on elements ranging from the linguistic to the social. At the linguistic level, the construction of texts is explored, and at the social level, the processes that create power and knowledge are explored. CDA can be applied to both spoken and written discourse. While it opens perspectives into how discourse unfolds in real life, CDA also provides insight into the origins of particular types of discourses, and also how such discourses may evolve in the future (Chouliaraki & Fairclough 1999: 4). It is, in other words, an ideal tool for researching real-life events at play within the realm of human communication.

Furthermore, a social realist approach to CDA research should be careful not to blur the distinction between structure and agency, instead emphasizing the emergent nature of these two ontological realities. Also, this type of research should not claim that reality is entirely embodied in language use. As such, not every aspect of reality can be observed through discourse analysis. Yet, not all CDA research to date has followed this caution. The following discusses an example of CDA research which claims to represent reality, yet fails to adhere to social realist tenets.

In her extensive ─ and now often quoted ─ research on five adult female immigrants in Canada, Norton (2000) makes the claim that, "in order to understand social structures we need to understand inequitable relations of power based on gender, race, ethnicity and sexual orientation" (p.21). Shortly preceding this statement, she warns that CDA researchers' main task is "to investigate the complex relationship between social structure on the one hand, and human agency on the other, without resorting to deterministic or reductionist analyses" (*ibid*). However, Norton gradually overlooks her own caution, and reaches conclusions based on the assumption that her informants' accounts of their experience are accurate reflections of the reality of power and of oppressive social structures and their effects unto the lives of immigrants in Canada. Slowly and gradually, the assumption that her findings can be generalized to include people other than those five immigrant women begins to surface. Even if at times, she asks readers to refrain from making such generalization, the phrasing of her findings and conclusions embodies a different message.

While Norton's research reveals valuable insight into the reality faced by adult female immigrants in Canada, and about the relationship between discourse and structure, one must remain somewhat critical of it. CDA researchers following a social realist approach should be careful to equate human accounts of reality, as expressed through discourse, with

ontological knowledge. The reason is that, as Sealey and Carter (2004) point out, these accounts "are inescapably partial" (p.105).

In discussing new developments in CDA, Fairclough (2010: 164) argues that current research should work "with a realist and specifically critical realist ontology which asserts that there is a real world which exists independently of our (always limited) knowledge of it and of whether or how we represent it". He adds that CDA analysis should reject "versions of discourse theory which collapse the distinction between reality and discourse [i.e., the Foucauldian post-structuralist stance]" (*ibid*).

Of course, a social realist CDA approach to research should indeed acknowledge that reality, while possessing mind-independent characteristics (e.g., antecedence), is also socially constructed. Hence, social realism (in Fairclough's words, critical realism) must include a clear definition of discourse and how it produces the multi-directional relationships that bind structure and agency, while not conflating them. The next section discusses three post-structuralist CDA studies which focus more specifically on analysis of written discourse.

6. Three examples of post-structuralist CDA research focusing on the Japanese and Korean EFL contexts

The first example of post-structuralist CDA research is Sungwon (2007), which focuses on the impact of globalization in the formulation and implementation of foreign language policies in South Korea. The study was selected for the current paper because, not only is it a good example of post-structuralist research, it is thought to be equally revealing of the Japanese EFL context. Sungwon analyzes South Korean language policy documents, and uncovers a central paradox where EFL teaching is being promoted in theory as a vehicle for greater internationalization of a nation's citizens, while in practice acts as a tool to reinforce a national identity based on an essentialized native language and culture. The author argues that while the English teaching industry in South Korea has become one of the growth industries in the nation, and that most South Korean companies have included English proficiency as an integral part of their recruitment policies, English is still largely perceived as a threat to South Korean national identity, even as far as being a reminder of the horrors of the Japanese occupation during the first half of the 20th Century.

In Sungwon's (2007) analysis, it is argued that the forces of globalism have a dual effect

upon ethnic groups and nations around the world: one being the opening of national frontiers and the homogeneization of world culture, and the other being greater efforts by such ethnic groups and nations to assert their identities and cultures in response to such pressures.   More significantly, while language policies in those nations appear to be geared towards mitigating the threat of globalism — i.e., the west — unto local cultures, Sungwon notes that, "many Koreans regard the current saturation of English language and American culture as an opportunity for the nation to assert itself on the world stage" (p.51).   Yet, the central conclusion is that the discourse on English in South Korea remains fixed on strengthening another form of discourse, one which is aimed at affirming an essentialized national identity for the purpose of mitigating a perceived colonizing force.   More than that, this paradoxical process is assumed to have a direct impact upon the population of language learners in the country.   Thus, despite possible — and fleeting mentions of — instances which may contrast with this view of reality, the reader is left with the impression that structure 'persists' over agency in the South Korean EFL context.   Nevertheless, Sungwon's paper does contain some interesting insights, and this paper is comfortable in claiming that it does reflect a similar situation in Japan (Hashimoto 2007, Reesor 2002, Seargeants 2009).

The next CDA study under focus is Liddicoat (2008), which directly concerns the Japanese EFL context.   He provides an interesting CDA analysis of Japanese language policies from the perspective of *nihonjinron* [theory of the Japanese people].   He argues that nationalist ideologies and essentialized concepts of Japanese identity directly affect the "framing" of the discourse on intercultural understanding, and that this process is developed discursively in government's language policies.   This perspective on the Japanese EFL context mirrors Horibe (1998) and Kubota (1998, 1999, 2002), who maintain that the introduction of English in Japan has, in effect, always been perceived as a colonizing force from the West, especially the United States.   As such, the discourse on English has become a paradoxical discourse on Japanese nationalism.   These researchers argue that English should instead become part of a discourse on linguistic and cultural pluralism in Japan, an argument also made by Sungwon about South Korea, and by Liddicoat concerning Japan.   Yet, it is understood that this 'new direction' is currently problematic because the reality 'on the ground' remains fixed on two central aspects.   On the one hand, English is promoted both as a window into the outside world and as means for both Japanese individuals and institutions to gain better access to symbolic and economic capital (Bourdieu 1991) within Japan — therefore becoming another tool for regulating those who have access to these forms of

capital and those who don't.   On the other hand, English is seen as a culturally invading entity, necessitating resistance through assimilation into the local culture (e.g., *katakana* English and *juken eigo* in Japan) and transformed into a tool for the reaffirmation and strengthening of the local language and culture.   The fixedness of these aspects is thought to be a clear indication that social structure limits agency to the point where one determines the other.   No account of contrasting forms of discourse is provided.

Hammond (2006) is perhaps the most revealing study here, for it uses CDA methodology to demonstrate how human agency is entirely the product of larger social discourses and practices, without human agents even being aware of it.   Hammond analyzes written reflections by Japanese university EFL learners on a simulated racial inequality exercise. Upon initial analysis, the exercise appears to have played a beneficial role in educating learners about racial inequality.   But a closer CDA analysis reveals that the students' reflections themselves contained elements of a discourse of diversion from racism, revealing a discourse of "color-blindness".   Marx (2009) and Herrera & Rodriguez Morales (2009) warn against the negative impacts of nurturing "color- blindness" in a discourse on racism, a reality which apparently Hammond manages to uncover in her study.   She builds her argumentation with a short history of race relations in Japan, pointing out the essentialist nature of the mainstream discourse on Japanese identity.   She argues that such discourse is reinforced by keeping other forms of identities and discourses on the outskirts of Japanese society.   She then argues that discourse is a vehicle through which social practices are constructed, and that CDA allows the researcher to reveal how this relationship is articulated.   Her central position is that people's ideological assumptions are not only explained by larger social practices, they are entirely created by them.   Consequently, people are largely unaware of how their own language use is shaped by a discourse which normalizes power inequalities, an argument which surfaces in Fairclough (2001) in his discussions on culture. Hammond borrows from Canagarajah (1999) when arguing that an ideology of inequality is submerged deeply within everyday discourse practices of Japanese EFL learners, and that, without proper pedagogical interventions, this reality may go unnoticed and unchallenged. While many would agree with such views, the central assumption remains that only social conventions (structure) have the ability to change discourse practices 'on the ground'. Human agents are understood to be largely incapable of questioning or challenging this reality of oppression on their own, or at least not without pedagogical intervention.   Again, the reader is left with the image of a weakened human agent, subjected to overwhelming

structural pressures.

Near the end, she discusses the limitations of her study, one of which strikes as a major epistemological shortcoming: "because the simulation exercise cannot be assumed to replicate real-life experiences of racism, discussions and written reflections based on actual experiences could be examined and compared with those gained from the exercise" (Hammond 2006: 564). Yet, after having made this statement, which effectively divorces the epistemological from the ontological, she pursues her analysis based on the assumption that her study is indeed a true reflection of reality. From this standpoint, she confidently proceeds with a discussion on pedagogical implications. Again, this exemplifies Bhaskar's (1989: 133) epistemic fallacy argument.

Overall, Hammond's argumentation appears to have genuine value, and seems to provide real insight into the discourse of racism within the Japanese context, a topic of analysis mostly hidden from view. Yet, one cannot help but think that her argumentation is highly convoluted. Without a multi-faceted, multi-disciplinary approach to research, without a look into reality itself (as opposed to simulation of reality), and without a more extensive account of learner discourse (which would probably include contrasting viewpoints), it is difficult to assume that her conclusions truly reflect ontological knowledge. Because she superficially questions her own methodology and interpretation, then quickly moves beyond such self-criticism towards the formulation of claims about reality, it can be said that Hammond appears less concerned with trying to make sense of the data collected than making knowledge claims (Sealey 2007: 643).

A common characteristic of post-structuralist studies focusing on the Japanese context is that they rarely highlight the presence, even the mere possibility, of contrasting forms of discourse. They do so by conflating both social structures and human agency into uni-directional, uni-dimensional realities. In Japan, structures may include nationalist EFL policies, English as tool to reinforce national identity, English as tool for access to symbolic and economic capital, English in the media, etc. Agency can be defined by how actual language teaching and learning practices occur in schools, how the citizens at large accept, transform, or resist structural pressures, how people perceive the use of English in the media, and even how people may simply overlook these structural realities and act according to their own perspectives. A close analysis of structure and agency as separate entities, and then as

entities mutually influencing each other, would instead provide greater insight into what is really going on.

Another common aspect of these post-structuralist studies can be found in their concluding remarks: all forms of oppressing discourses can be challenged, and in some cases, are beginning to be challenged. Unfortunately, the reader is left to imagine what those forms of resistance are, and how they are being deployed in the real world. Liddicoat (2008) indirectly draws from Sugimoto and Mouer's (2009) comparison of "the great and the little traditions" in the sociology of Japan, when he mentions a new current in academic research on Japan which is beginning to question the discourse on Japanese cultural homogeneity, and that cultural pluralism is forging an increasingly stronger presence within academia. Yet, this positive viewpoint remains rather divorced from the classroom reality, as if genuine changes are now only possible within the detached world of research and theory construction. Even if his assessment includes a fleeting mention of how Japanese EFL textbooks have become, to a certain degree, "more sensitive in recent years to the issues of equality and human rights" (p.42), it is unclear how all of this applies to human agency, or how educators and learners are dealing with any of this. At one point, he argues that minority students are gradually being integrated in the regular school system, hinting at the possibility that productive changes do take place within the school system as a result of greater, more assertive human agency. But in fact, this claim must seriously be questioned, especially considering Kanno's (2008) thorough study of bilingual education in Japan, which directly contradicts Liddicoat's assessment.

Both Liddicoat and Sungwon use the concept of resistance against oppressive forces in order to provide a glimpse into human agency. Sungwon argues that, while language policies are aimed at reinforcing nationalism in response to globalism, many Koreans do not appear to adhere to such ideology. Indeed, perhaps the most explicit － and judicious － assessment of agency and of its relationship with structure comes at the very end of Liddicoat's study, when he makes the point that the prevalent essentialist discourse on Japanese national identity is gradually being replaced in the media and among the public at large by a new form of intercultural discourse. This emerging form of discourse emphasizes the "cool" by playing "with ethnicity for aesthetic effect" (Liddicoat 2008: 43). He rightfully argues that the concept of "cool" is a departure from a clear articulation of Japanese identity, towards a transformation of that identity through aesthetic manipulation and mutation for

the fulfillment of more personal objectives.　But in the very last sentence, he moves back to a post-structuralist stance by claiming that these new forms of discourse, however interesting they may be, do not influence the official nationalist policies on education.　Sungwon also makes this sort of retraction.　In other words, readers are left with the impression that social structures are simply too powerful for human agents to ever question them.　Human agents are, unfortunately, too weak to successfully improve their situation on their own.

As mentioned earlier, post-structuralism, as an epistemological perspective, does provide important clues as to the relationship between power and discourse.　But it does so by obscuring the distinction between human subjectivity and social structures, assuming that the former is a product of the latter.　At first glance, post-structuralist studies appear to regard agency as a genuine reality, in that most of them state that there is a possibility for human agents to resist the structures that oppress them.　This unfortunately adds the illusion that post-structuralism itself is concerned with the betterment of society and the eradication of unequal relationships.　Yet, without any account of how this actually takes place, and without the integration of this account into the final analysis, post-structuralism remains committed to the primacy of structure over agency.　Therefore, one must be critical of research which mentions the possibility for human resistance near the very end of its argumentation — without explaining its processes, much less provide clear evidence for it in the real world — and which then moves back to a discourse whereby the study of structure alone accounts for reality as a whole.　The following section provides an example of research which specifically shies away from such convoluted argumentation.

7. An example of, and a possible template for, social realist CDA research

As underlined by Sealey and Carter (2004), while social realism is gradually being noticed in the field of applied linguistics, there are currently few researches which have adopted a social realist approach.　They mention Belz (2002) as being one of those.　The following discusses Belz, and includes some observations as to how social realist theory can be transformed into research methodology, and how it allows researchers to gain a more complete and richer view of reality.

Belz focuses on German-American telecollaboration, which refers to Internet communication between pairs of learners located in different places, embedded in different contexts and settings.　Her methodological approach is multi-leveled, combining both quantitative

and qualitative data. She distinguishes context and setting － structure － from situated activity and self － agency. Each layer is observed through both quantitative and qualitative research tools. Furthermore, her conclusions refrain from establishing clear causal relationships or making deterministic claims to truth. Instead, she argues that the relationship between context/setting and situated activity/self is multi-directional, and therefore no single cause can be revealed. Different forms of discourse are analyzed, yet are always correlated with other forms of analysis, ranging from psychology, political science, technology, applied linguistics, etc. Most importantly, in framing both structure and agency as distinct, non-static, and negotiated entities, she is able to locate instances where "learner agency appears to override particular institutional pressures" (p.73), thereby pinpointing a real-world example of the independence of agency from structure, while remaining focused on observing the multi-directional relationship between them. While she refrains from making fixed statements about causality, she remains confident that her overall analysis, being ecologically rich, can act as solid basis for a concluding discussion on pedagogical implications.

Extrapolating from Betz (2002: 62) and Sealey and Carter (2004: 204), it is now possible to design a strategy for an applied linguistic CDA research methodology which follows social realist tenets. As such, the following example attempts to demonstrate how a social realist approach to CDA research might unfold.

<u>Central question</u>: What limit/affect young Japanese junior and senior high school EFL learners' development of a voice in the L2?

Of course, an actual research would include a series of sub-questions. Yet, for the sake of clarity and conciseness, the current paper limits itself to one central question. The first step in this research would be to theorize each aspect of this research question. This would, for example, involve a conceptualization of the notion of 'voice' and of 'voice in the L2'. It would also include extensive descriptions and analyses of the reality which pertains to the Japanese junior and senior high school EFL context. This would be the stage where a multi-disciplinary, ecological approach would become most salient: theories and concepts from Japanese history, political science, psychology, language studies (specifically pertaining to the spread of English as a *lingua franca*), and many other fields are sure to provide crucial insights into this particular EFL context. Gradually, a clearer picture of all the elements

which form agency and those which form structure would be revealed, which would become vital in the formulation of a stratified approach to answering the research question. The second step would describe an observable reality, which would then become the focus of inquiry. The third step would require the researcher to formulate general and relevant causal propositions. The fourth step would involve the development of testable propositions. The fifth step would focus on the actual empirical research, based on all the previous steps. The sixth step would conclude the research by the identification of relevant findings found in Step 5, and how these explain the observable reality described in Step 2. The following table provides a possible structure by which the different types of data could be analyzed.

This template for CDA research pertaining to the Japanese EFL context is specifically concerned with how structure and agency evolve apart from one another, and how they interact to create the observable reality. Therefore, by equally analyzing both language teachers and learners' production of discourse, as well as discourse produced in language learning textbooks and government language policies, all of which can be correlated to an

Areas	Types of data	
	Qualitative	Quantitative
Structure (Context & Setting)	Theoretical and interpretive analysis of: ● previous scholarly publications; ● institutional histories; ● foreign language policies; ● in-class EFL textbooks; ● transcribed interviews with teachers; ● questionnaires to learners; ● teachers' biographical survey.	● data collected from scholarly publications (focusing on the history and the current Japanese EFL context); ● statistic correlations between variables, from questionnaires; ● counting occurrence of revealing linguistic features in discourse (language policy statements, textbooks, teacher talk, etc.)
Agency (Situated activities & Self)	Theoretical and interpretive analysis of: ● transcribed learner/teacher interviews ● learner diaries ● questionnaires to learners ● classroom discourse ● learners' biographical survey	● statistic correlations between variables, from questionnaires; ● counting occurrence of revealing linguistic features in discourse (written materials, student and teacher talk, etc.)
Relationship between structure and agency	Theoretical and interpretive study of the multidirectional relationship between structure and agency, specifically dealing with: ● how agency and structure evolve apart from one another ● how agency and structure mutually influence one another ● instances when learner agency is expressed through acts of resistance against institutional pressures ● instances when learner agency overrides particular institutional pressures ● instances when learner agency is expressed through acts of consensus with institutional forces ● instances when learner agency is shaped by particular institutional pressures	

analysis of the history of the Japanese EFL context and its fundamental dynamics, it becomes possible for the researcher working with this project to feel confident in assuming that the epistemological is moving closer to the ontological. Of course, this can only be an assumption. Yet, this possibility is amplified because structure and agency are not conflated. Again, it is probable that causality remains elusive. Yet such research can remain pertinent to the Japanese context precisely because more has been revealed and analyzed through a variety of epistemological lenses. From that standpoint, a discussion on pedagogical implications becomes even more possible and relevant.

8. Conclusion

The argument has been made that the task of the applied linguist is indeed more complex. It is not simply a matter of finding causal relationships for real-world events by deconstructing complex systems and observing each component in a de-contextualized fashion. Burns (2000) points out that the emphasis in naturalistic investigation (which is obviously a major focus for applied linguistics), is concerned with "an explication of 'meaning' rather than the isolation of 'truth'" (p.390). Furthermore, the task of uncovering the full panoply of factors at play within complex systems — and the process of language learning is certainly one of them — requires a multi-disciplinary approach. As Bourdieu argues, "[t]he transgression of disciplinary boundaries is a prerequisite for scientific advance" (in van Lier, 2002: 140). Of course, research requires a dose of humility as well, for at no point should the researcher assume that epistemological knowledge can ever be complete enough to entirely submerge ontological knowledge.

Arguing for a social realist approach to applied linguistic research inevitably calls into question most of the research done in the field to date. It is indeed a risky epistemological stance to adopt. Yet, as long as applied linguists are willing to question what they do, and as long as they remain steadfastly concentrated on a realist account of events in the real world, in all their richness and complexity, this type of questioning should effectively work towards significant improvements of existing applied linguistic research practices.

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