

Developments and Possibilities in Applied Sociolinguistics

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Abstract

Daniel Long. 2001. Developments and Possibilities in Applied Sociolinguistics. *The Sociolinguistic Journal of Korea*, 9(2). 필자는, 학문이나 연구를 통해서 얻어진 연구성과는 일상생활에 적용, 응용 가능해야 한다고 생각한다. 이러한 의견은 어디까지나 필자의 개인적인 의견이지만, 이와 같은 사회언어학적인 연구성과의 사회적인 응용에 대한 입장에 찬동하는 학자도 적지 않을 것이다. 따라서 본 논문은 언어와 진술, 언어와 법률, 언어와 오락, 언어와 직장, 언어와 의학, 언어와 기계, 언어와 사회복지, 외국어 교육 등 사회언어학의 사회적인 적용, 응용이라는 시각에서 여러 연구자의 구체적인 연구 사례와 필자의 연구 결과를 간략하게 살펴보았다.

필자는, 과학적인 연구 방법에 의해서 얻어진 사회언어학적인 연구 성과는 (1)누구나 이해하기 쉽고 간명해야 하며, 나아가서는 (2)어떠한 구체적인 목적에도 곧 바로 응용할 수 있어야 하며, (3)금후의 사회언어학적인 연구는 이러한 방향으로 전개되어야 한다고 생각한다.

I. Applying Linguistic and Sociolinguistic Knowledge to Non-linguistic Tasks

The fruits of academic research should always be "applicable". This is my personal belief, but I think few scholars would disagree with me. Most sociolinguists have considered the usefulness of their conclusions, and most

could probably discuss the applicability, if questioned about it. The problem is simply that applications are not discussed enough in research papers. I myself have felt this contradiction, and am constantly striving to determine the significance of my results, to place them within the context of other research, and to identify their potential applications.

After the 1995 Hanshin earthquake, I resolved to alleviate the gap between the applied sociolinguistics I imagined as an ideal and the actual state of my own research. Later, along with my fellow researchers in the Variation Theory Forum of Japan, I attempted to realize some of these goals in the book *Applied Sociolinguistics*, which came out in Japan several months ago (Long, Miyaji, Nakai 2001). In this paper, I will reiterate some ideas which I outlined in the initial chapter of that book.¹⁾

Item 1. Types of Linguistic Knowledge and Fields of their Application
(Long, et al. 2001)

		Type of Knowledge Applied	
		(Non-Sociolinguistic) Linguistic Knowledge	Sociolinguistic Knowledge
Field to which Knowledge is Applied	Language Education	1	2
	Fields other than Language Education	3	4

In Item 1 below, I have used a simple quadrant diagram to show four types of linguistic applications. Field 1 represents the area which most of us imagine upon hearing "applied linguistics": the application of non-sociolinguistic (phonological, lexical, syntactic, etc.) knowledge to the vocation of language teaching. Field 2 represents application of sociolinguistic data to this vocation. I

1) An earlier version of this paper was delivered at the meeting of the Sociolinguistic Society of Korea, November 17, 2001. I would like to thank Society President Dr. Hahn-Sok Wang, and Dr. Young-Cheol Yim for giving me the opportunity to speak.

will deal with this area at the end of this paper. Field 3 represents the application of non-sociolinguistic knowledge to occupations which traditionally have been less clearly associated with linguistics than language education. Field 4 includes the applications of sociolinguistic knowledge to these fields. Most of this paper will concentrate on topics in the last field.

II. Linguistics and Warfare

Within the long course of human history, we repeatedly find examples of the use and abuse of linguistic knowledge, particularly of knowledge regarding linguistic variation. One of the oldest surviving examples of this is found in the Old Testament of the Bible (Item 2).

Item 2. Knowledge of Linguistic Variation used for Violent Means

The Gileadites captured the fords of the Jordan leading to Ephraim, and whenever a survivor of Ephraim said, "Let me cross over," the men of Gilead asked him, "Are you an Ephraimite?" If he replied, "No," they said, "All right, say 'Shibboleth.'" If he said, "Sibboleth," because he could not pronounce the word correctly, they seized him and killed him at the fords of the Jordan. Forty-two thousand Ephraimites were killed at that time.

Judges 12:5-6 (NIV Bible)

This historical event is thought to have occurred around the year 1105 B.C. Two related Semite language groups had been at war. The victorious Gileadites' variety of the language used [sh], but the Gileadites were aware that their enemies used [s] instead. This is one of the oldest recorded accounts of the tragic use of sociolinguistic knowledge. This story reminds those of us in North-east Asia of the 1923 Great Kanto earthquake, when roving bands of vigilantes

demanding that passersby pronounce expressions such as "juu en go jussen" which had voiced consonants in the initial position, or conversely, expressions with voiceless consonants in the medial position. Those who failed to pronounce these correctly were identified as Koreans and slaughtered on the spot.²⁾

Examples of the use, misuse, and abuse of sociolinguistic knowledge for violent and military purposes abound in other languages such as English as well, demonstrating that the dark side of human nature has changed little in the past several millennia. In the English world, *roger* is the word used in two-way radio transmissions to acknowledge that a message has been received and understood. Although this usage dates slightly predates World War II (see Item 3), the word functioned during the war as a kind of phonological litmus test. The United States military reckoned they could use this word to determine if the voice at the other end of a radio transmission was a Japanese spy or not, owing to the widespread knowledge that initial and post-vocalic /r/ sounds of English were difficult sounds for Japanese speakers to produce.

Item 3. History of the Term "Roger" (from *Oxford English Dictionary*)

Roger

1941 *Amer. Speech* XVI. 168/1 Roger! Expression used instead of okay or right. (Air Corps).

1947 *Amer. Speech* XXII. 110 In radio procedure the letter R, or roger, possesses the code designations 'received', or 'I have received your message', when signalled by the station addressed... Nevertheless, since radio operators or pilots signalling roger are receipting for a message, it has also come to mean unofficially 'O.K.' or 'I understand'.

In the same period, the British were using language variation to befuddle

2) A paper of the authors in Japanese (Long 1998) discusses incidents such as this through an analysis of rumors as sociolinguistic behavior.

German would-be eavesdroppers. The BBC, who had always been sticklers for standard (RP) accents, deliberately chose announcers with the Yorkshire accent, one with a reputation for being difficult to comprehend even for other native English speakers.

III. Linguistics and the Law

Some peacetime applications of sociolinguistic knowledge and techniques are to be found in various legal arenas. One example is the use of accents and dialects to identify criminals. A famous fictional account of this is found in Matsumoto Seicho's crime novel *Suna no utsuwa*. Detectives are searching for a suspect who has been overheard talking in a *zu-zu ben* accent. Their search focuses on the Tohoku region until they learn from a dialect scholar that the Izumo accent also shares the phonological characteristics of *zu-zu ben*, and this linguistic information aids them in finding the criminal. A real life case, albeit linguistically an unsuccessful one, is found in the Glico-Morinaga kidnapping/ candy poisoning/ extortion case. Linguists such as Kindaichi Haruhiko and Sanada Shinji theorized about the regional origin of the caller in several extortion phone calls. A paper delivered before the Dialectological Circle of Japan (Kasuya 1987) regarding research at the Scientific Crime Research Laboratory of the Japanese Police Bureau is one of the few examples of an attempt to systematize this type of research.

Two fascinating examples from the English world are to be found in the work of William Labov (1988). In the first, Labov was asked to assist on a criminal case in which a suspect was accused on placing a threatening phone call. Item 4 shows a phonetic analysis of the caller's vowel system, in which the words *on*, *off*, *bomb* and *positive* all cluster together showing that they are pronounced with the same phoneme. Item 5 shows the analysis of the arrested suspect's vowel system in which *off* clearly belongs to a different phoneme.

A third well-known example of the legal application of sociolinguistic knowledge comes from the 1979 "Ann Arbor Case". In that year, a court in Detroit ruled that a school in Michigan (United States), must consider the special characteristics of the African American Vernacular English (AAVE) spoken by the majority of its students when planning the curriculum. This can be regarded as the first judicial recognition of AAVE as a distinct variety of English with its own rules and history. The judge, in his summation, described AAVE as:

a language system which is part of the English language but different in significant respects from the Standard English used in the school setting, the commercial world, the world of the arts and science, among the professions, and in government. It is and has been used at some time by 80 per cent of the Black people of this country and has as its genesis the transitional or pidgin language of the slaves, which after a generation became a creole language. Since then it has constantly been refined and brought closer to the mainstream of society. It still flourishes in areas where there are concentrations of Black people. It contains aspects of southern dialect and is used largely by Black people in their casual conversation and informal talk.

IV. Linguistics and Entertainment

The American author Mark Twain was famous for his portrayal of American vernacular speech in his novel *Huckleberry Finn*, but a degree of knowledge regarding sociolinguistic language variation (though not always accurate or complete) has been an attribute of skilled writers for centuries.

In more recent times, cinema and television have provided opportunities for trained linguists to practice their skills and apply their specialized knowledge. One well-known example is from the television and movie series *Star Trek*. Generations of movie-goers had become accustomed to the ad hoc mumbo-

jumbo spoken by the African natives of Tarzan movies and the American Indians of westerns, but producers of this science fiction series wanted a credible language for a race of extra-terrestrials to speak. They hired a linguist to create a phonology, syntax and vocabulary for the imaginary Klingon language, and today loyal fans purchase conversation tapes (Item 7) and English-Klingon dictionaries.³⁾

Item 7. "Klingon", a language designed for use in movies



Another result of the push in cinema towards linguistic realism is the steady increase in the use of dialect coaches to train actors to speak English in a specific regional or social dialect, or with a foreign accent. Two of the academic organizations with which I am associated have active members who are employed not in academia but as dialect coaches in movies and television. In the United States, Hollywood dialect coach Allyn Partin has presented

3) An interesting chapter on Klingon is included (Okrand 1998), along other articles on non-traditional applications of linguistic knowledge, in Oaks 1998.

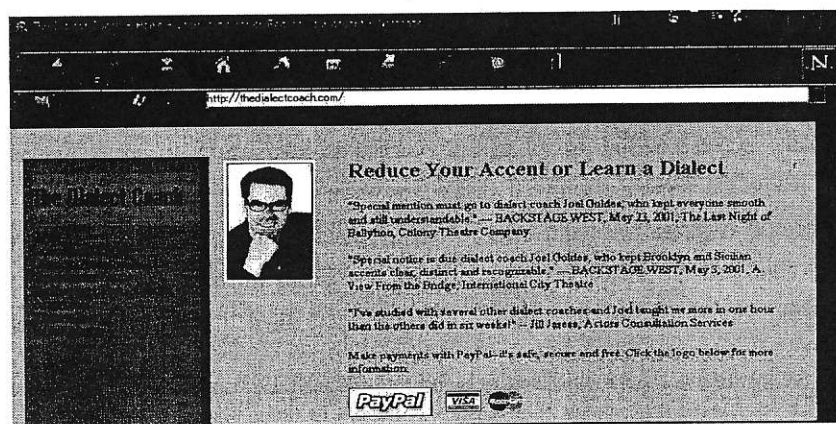
several papers at the American Dialect Society. In Japan, Oohara Jouko has been active in the Dialectological Circle of Japan and in the founding of a study group specifically to delve into issues for dialect coaches.

V. Linguistics and the Workplace

In addition to linguists' roles behind the cameras, they have themselves been, on rare occasions, the subject of plays or movies. The most famous of these is Professor Henry Higgins, portrayed in *Pygmalion* and *My Fair Lady*. This character, inspired by the famous phonologist Daniel Jones, attempts to "correct" the non-standard accent of a speaker of London cockney, an urban working class variety.

This brings us to a discussion of the second job of dialect coaches. In addition to training people (namely actors) to speak in a specific dialect, they also coach people (mostly business people) in how to hide their native dialect. This process is commonly characterized as "loosing" or "reducing" one's accent. Obviously, in linguistic terms, there is no such thing as "loosing" one's

Item 8. Home Page of A Professional "Accent Reduction" Expert (Dialectian?)



dialect; one is merely gaining command of a more socially-accepted, mainstream variety of the language. Nonetheless, Dialect Coaches (such as the one whose home page is pictured in Item 8) are in demand by business and professional people seeking to change their stigmatized dialects.

Research from the discourse analysis side of sociolinguistics is readily applied to the business world as well. Deborah Tannen's commercial success writing and selling books on workplace communication has proved the importance and commercial viability of this field of linguistic enquiry.

VI. Linguistics and Medicine

A knowledge of sociolinguistics is applicable to medical-related fields. The concept of informed consent has received a great deal of attention in recent years, and discourse-oriented analyses of doctor-patient conversations conducted in the past two or three decades are readily applicable to the solution of problems associated with such exchanges.

Perhaps the most obvious connections between linguistics and medicine are in the field of speech pathology. But as the following passage illustrates, there is a danger of speech pathologists in schools finding children with certain phonological features of non-standard language varieties and mistakenly diagnosing them as speech impediments. A knowledge of sociolinguistic variation would help avoid such detrimental errors.

Articulation testing is one of the areas in which dialect bias is most readily apparent. Typically, the articulation test consists of the examiner showing a series of pictures to the child. The child is told to name the item in the picture. (Already we have the potential of serious cultural bias in the types of pictures chosen to be included.) In each item, the examiner is looking for the production of certain sounds in particular positions. For example, in an item such as run, he may be examining the production of the initial r and the final n. Unfortunately,

in most of these tests, articulatory development is measured solely in terms of Standard English norms. Thus, in a commonly used articulation test such as the Templin-Darley Test of Articulation, sounds such as the diphthong ay in *pie*, th in *teeth*, r in *car*, st cluster in *nest*, and th in *there* are all considered diagnostic in determining articulatory development. If the prescribed sound is not produced, it is scored as a "misarticulation, substitution," or "omission".

(Wolfram and Fasold, 1974: 209).

Although the passage is over a quarter century old, the types of problems it describes have not been completely absolved in English and in other languages.

VII. Linguistics and Engineering

The role of linguists in the field of technology has expanded dramatically over the past few decades, but opportunities are not limited just to voice recognition, speech synthesis, parsing and machine translation. Recently Car Navigation Systems sold in Japan let the buyer select from various regional varieties of Japanese in addition to Standard Japanese, namely the dialects of Kansai, Akita, Ibaragi and Kagoshima. Sociolinguists' knowledge of social, regional and gender variation in language will be invaluable as machines become more and more interactive with humans, and machines "learn" to accommodate the quirks of human's communication, rather than the reverse.

Sociolinguistic knowledge is necessary in technology, not only for these language varieties, but also with respect to discourse features. For example, a voice-activated interactive car navigation system will need to be able to recognize the pragmatic meanings of phrases such as the self-addressed rhetorical questions ("Why didn't I turn when I had the chance!") or statements of frustration phrased as grammatical questions ("Why didn't you tell me the street was closed off after five!").

VIII. Linguistics and Social Welfare

In a 1999 dialogue, renowned Japanese sociolinguist Munemasa Tokugawa proposed the concept of *Welfare Linguistics* (Tokugawa and Neustupny 1999). A thorough survey of this concept is beyond the scope of this paper, but since the article is in Japanese, and since Tokugawa died the following year before he had the opportunity to flesh out his ideas further, it is worth listing the topics Tokugawa discussed as likely candidates for research in this subfield of sociolinguistics. Welfare Linguistics would include issues such as language pathology, minority languages, dialects, linguistic identity, language and the elderly, discrimination issues, gender issues, language education, orthographic policies, information technology, information processing, and language management.

In the aftermath of the 1995 Great Hanshin Earthquake, I conducted a series of surveys focusing on the welfare of non-native speaker residents in such emergency situations, namely the communication and information problems which they encountered. Below I introduce just three topics. (Readers of Japanese may refer to the original paper for further analyses. Long 1997; see also Long and Kang 1996.)

In the studies, I used some typical sociolinguistic tools for a not so typical purpose. I was studying the language used in emergency news broadcasts in Japan in order to see what sorts of communication barriers they presented to non-native speaker residents in Japan. Emergency announcements at the time of the Hanshin earthquake were broadcasted in Japanese and in English (as some regular news broadcasts are). English broadcasts such as these are aimed not only at English natives, but at foreigners living in Japan in general. In the paper, I examined (1) the practicality of multilingual broadcasts, (2) the practicality of prepared translations, (3) the usefulness (content-wise) of the information broadcasted, (4) the applicability of the information broadcasted, (5)

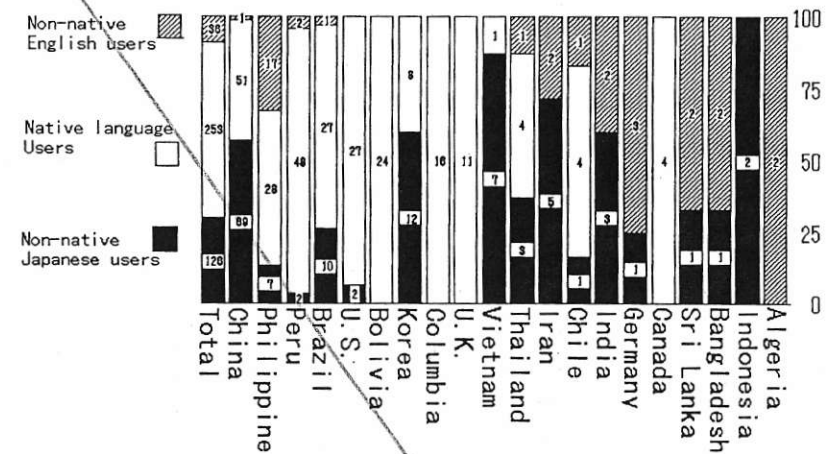
the language of choice for foreigners, (6) problems with the Japanese used in the broadcasts, (7) frequency of usage and level of difficulty of the vocabulary of the broadcasts, (8) length of sentences in broadcasts and their comprehensibility, (9) structure and complexity of sentences in broadcasts, and lastly (10) proposed the development and usage of a register of "simple Japanese". In this paper, I will concentrate only on issues 5, 8 and 9.

I first had to determine whether or not the English broadcasts would be accessible to foreigners. (I am using "foreigner" to mean not people of non-Japanese nationality or ethnicity, but those who are non-native speakers of the language. Thus many Koreans of Japanese descent living in Japan would not be included, while a number of returnees, Chinese war orphans, naturalized foreigners, etc. would be included.) Having no direct empirical data upon which to make such generalizations, I turned to data regarding the language choice of foreigners living in Kobe collected immediately after the earthquake. Of course, data collected by such standard instruments as experiments, questionnaires or interviews would also have been enlightening, but the fact that existing data had been collected from people who had actually experienced the problems upon which the paper focused made this data particularly appealing.

The data in Item 9 shows the language of choice by foreigners calling into a temporary emergency advice center. Japanese volunteers proficient in English were present all the time. Volunteers who spoke Chinese, Tagalog, Spanish, Portuguese, Korean, Vietnamese, French, Thai and Indonesian were on duty, but only at certain times. Thus foreigners who were lucky enough to phone in at these times could choose to speak in their native tongues, but those who were not so lucky had the choice of speaking Japanese or English. For callers not from English speaking countries, such as Australia or the United States, this meant a choice between non-native English and non-native Japanese. The data below show that when faced with such a choice, foreigners in Japan

chose non-native Japanese at a rate of over three to one.

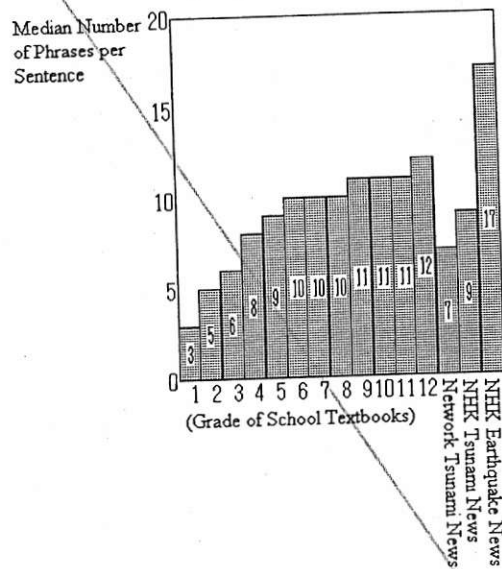
Item 9. Language Used by Foreign in an Emergency (Long 1997)



In Item 10, we see the results of a quantitative analysis I conducted comparing the median length of sentences (measured in the number of phrases per sentence) uttered in three different emergency television broadcasts with the median length of sentences in school textbooks of various grades. Two of the emergency broadcasts (dealing with a tsunami alert) were non-scripted and in dialogue form, and hence contained shorter sentences than the scripted announcements broadcast in the aftermath of the earthquake. Sentences in these two broadcasts were shorter than those found in high school textbooks. We must keep in mind, however, that textbooks are a written medium—we can go back and reread sentences that we did not understand the first time. With television broadcasts this type of rechecking is impossible. The situation is even more dire with the reading of scripted emergency announcements. For the sender of these messages, they are in a written medium, and their length reflects this fact. They have been written and rewritten by a team of experts.

For the receiver of the message, however, they come in a spoken form. There is a gap here between the luxury of the sender being able to carefully craft lengthy written sentences and the panic of the receiver who has to catch and comprehend all these phrases before they dissipate into thin air.

Item 10. Sentence Length in School Textbooks and Emergency Broadcasts (Long 1997)

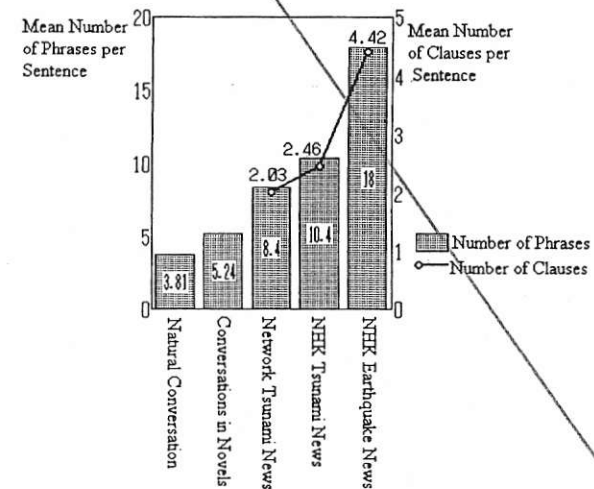


In Item 11, I compared the length of sentences in these emergency broadcasts with two types of conversational data, one for natural spoken conversation, and one for representations of conversations in novels. Since both of these data sets originally used mean sentence length, I have given those figures for my emergency broadcast data as well (as opposed the median length in the previous graph). We see here that even the impromptu dialogue used in the two tsunami broadcasts contains considerably longer sentences

than those found in conversation.

Of course, long sentences are not necessarily difficult to understand. There are long but simply constructed sentences—"Evacuation sites include ... (followed by a long list of place names)." Conversely there are medium length sentences which have (for example) several predicates and complex phrase structures. As a measure of sentence complexity, I counted the number of clauses (not phrases) per sentence. In Item 11, I compared the complexity of sentences used in the three emergency broadcasts analyzed and found that the sentences in the scripted emergency alerts and announcements made after the earthquake are more than twice as complex as the other two data sets.

Item 11. Sentence Complexity - Emergency Broadcasts & Conversation (Long 1997)



These quantitative data were combined in the original paper with qualitative analyses (too lengthy to discuss here) from interviews with non-native speaker victims of the 1995 earthquake. Overall, the studies applied various sociolinguistic tools to give us some indication of just how daunting a task

non-native speakers face in trying to obtain life and death information from complicated emergency broadcasts.

IX. Linguistics and Foreign (Second) Language Education

The table in Item 12 helps to illustrate the significance of sociolinguistic knowledge for teachers of foreign languages. The table makes a distinction based on whether or not the knowledge is taught directly to the students. Another distinction is whether or not the knowledge is applied in the classroom. Quadrant 1 contains knowledge that is taught directly to the students, and taught to them in the classroom. One example of knowledge contained here might be honorifics or "treatment expressions". Findings from sociolinguistic surveys, for example, that Japanese people increasingly use the verb *ageru* (rather than *yaru*) for "give", even when discussing giving food to a pet or giving water to a plant, would directly affect the way in which a teacher taught such expressions to her students.

Quadrant 2 represents knowledge that IS taught directly to one's students, but is NOT taught to them as part of the classroom curriculum. Examples of this might include knowledge regarding the use of slang or dialectal forms which have recently come into popularity. The Japanese language teacher might not be familiar with the usage or meaning of the expressions himself, but could learn about them from reading research articles about them. This knowledge might not be appropriate for inclusion in the regular classroom drills, but the teacher must be prepared for the questions of a student who has heard them and asks about them during office hours.

Quadrant 3 represents knowledge which IS directly relevant to the classroom curriculum, but is NOT itself taught to the students as such. Knowledge from studies of interlanguage might be included here. A teacher's knowing the intricacies of interlanguage - or simply being aware of the

existence of such phenomena - would directly affect the way she interacted with her students during instructional periods. Obviously, however, the students themselves would only become more confused if their foreign language instructor began trying to make them aware of the intricacies of the interlanguage rules to which they were unconsciously adhering.

Finally, Quadrant 4 represents knowledge which is NOT directly applicable to classroom teaching, NOR is it knowledge conveyed directly to the students. It is, however, knowledge that the foreign language instructor, as a language professional, should possess. Examples of this would be a basic knowledge of the historical development of the language, or of the distribution of the major dialects and the linguistic features which characterize them.

Item 12. The Application of Sociolinguistic Knowledge and L2 Education

		Knowledge Applied inside Classroom?	
		Yes	No
Knowledge Taught Directly to Students?	Yes	1	2
	No	3	4

X. Conclusion

Before my final remarks, let me say one thing regarding objectivity. I wholeheartedly believe that we as sociolinguists should be - must be, as scientists - objective in our methodologies. This is paramount in any scientific pursuit. At the same time, however, I do not believe that our desire as human beings and members of the communities we live in to alleviate real social ills in any way compromises our objectivity as social scientists (see also Labov 1988 on this). We need only think of examples from the natural sciences, a biologist, say, who (employing objective scientific methods) searches for the cure to a specific disease out of a will to server humankind.

In this short essay, I have attempted to highlight some less commonly discussed fields in which sociolinguistic knowledge may be beneficially applied. In the future I see three challenges facing those of us who seek to increase the applicability of our research.

One is the challenge of increasing the number of non-major enrollees in our sociolinguistics courses. For example law students should be encouraged to take a sociolinguistics class to aid them in their legal counseling. A business major enrolled would learn that speaking with a non-standard accent is not an indication of one's lack of intelligence - but at the same time that there are still enough people in the business world who do NOT realize this fact, that she nonetheless needs to be aware of certain regionally marked features in her speech. Of course, regional and social language variation is not the area of sociolinguistics that is relevant to the business world.

The second challenge is for us in sociolinguistics to overcome what may be simply a case of over modesty. We need to have more confidence in the practicality, applicability and significance of our research, and to more actively and enthusiastically promote them.

The third challenge for us is to strive for more ingenuity in finding novel and creative ways to practically apply the results of our research to the solution of real problems in the world around us. These need not always be issues as dire as the outcome of a murder trial. They could be as light as the problem of how to advise an actress on speaking with a particular accent. They are useful applications of our field nonetheless.

This paper has provided more questions than answers but if it helps stimulate discussion among those in our field throughout the world, then I feel it will have accomplished much or its purpose.

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