



## Plenary Speech

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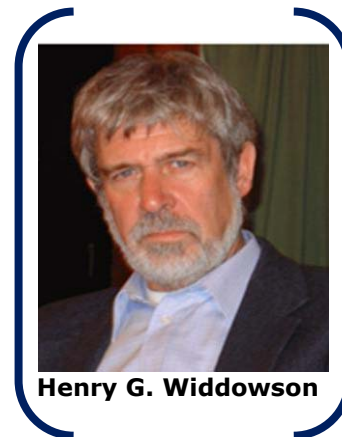
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#### Linguistics Expertise and Language Experience: Applied Linguistics and English Teaching

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## Abstract

The basic assumption in applied linguistics is that the expert disciplinary study of linguistics can yield insights which can be applied to an understanding of how language is actually experienced, and so provide a principled basis for intervention by proposing ways of resolving the problems that people's experience in using and learning language gives rise to. But the validity of this assumption depends on how is expertise in linguistics to be defined, and how far, as it has been conventionally practiced, can it claim to account for the reality of how individuals experience language? What, for example, does it tell us, and not tell us, about how users and learners think and feel about their own and other peoples' language, and what effect their attitude has on their using and learning? These are crucial questions about the scope of linguistics and its applied linguistic relevance since they have an immediate and urgent bearing on the problematic issues that applied linguistics would claim to address of how communication is enacted across different lingua-cultural and ideological borders in a globalized world. Since this global communication is predominantly mediated by the expedient use of English as a lingua franca, it raises the applied linguistic question that this talk will be centrally concerned with of what pedagogic implications this has for how English is conventionally taught as a foreign language subject.

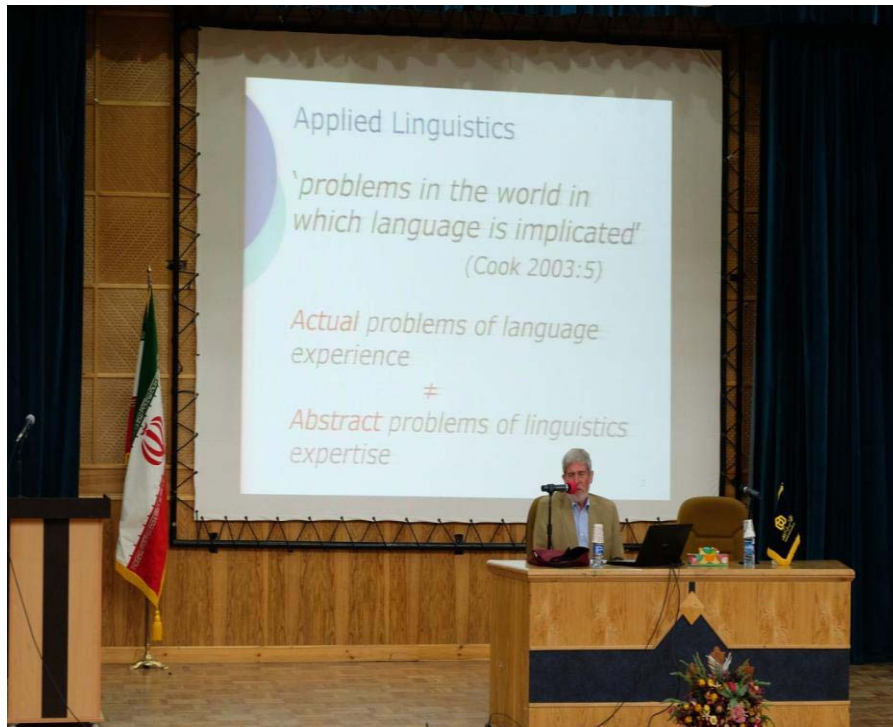
**Keywords:** Applied Linguistics, English as Lingua Franca, Communal competence, Creativity, Capability

I would like to say first how wonderful it is for me and for my wife, Barbara Seidlhofer to be here, and I am sorry that we were not here three days ago. Thinking of the past Farzad Salahshour and I got, back a long way as he has mentioned, he is an enormous creative I think to the profession, and I am very proud to think that I have made some small contribution to his career. As you know there is quite a long history of an association between Tabriz and British scholarship. The ESP project in Tabriz many years ago was in part directed by another student of mine, Martin Bates also in Edinburg. The difference between him and Salahshour was that Farzad moved from Edinburgh to work with me in the University of Essex. It was for me a very rewarding experience. You must not get the impression that this was a unilateral benefit from me to him. On the contrary, I think all teachers know, regarding the Teachers' Day, that what makes a teacher is the relationship with the students, and students have as much advantage and credit as the teachers do. It is often the case that for example when one examines a PhD thesis, you are actually also examining the teacher. What you have is a joint enterprise and the relationship between teacher and student is always — if it is to be effective — a bilateral one; an interdependent one where both sides benefit. That actually is one of the issues that I will be touching upon today.

Another theme — and again it very much relates to Farzad and me and our association — is how times change. Of course, we say “I haven't seen you for a long time and you haven't changed a bit; you are still the same as you always were”, but of course we know it's true only up to a point because there are of course traces of time: One gets a little gray; maybe one loses a little bit of vital energy; some things do change, and I think we must recognize that in education, and particularly in Language Education, and even more particularly perhaps in English Language Education because the world has changed over the past twenty-five, thirty years. The status of English has changed; claims to its use and his ownership have changed; it is no longer so much a domestic property of the native speakers, but it is a language which can and has been appropriated for all manner of other purposes, for research for example. We have just mentioned this to the Vice Director of Research here at this university; for diplomacy, for conflict resolution, for business, for everything associated with that globalized world. So the language has changed, the status and the role of English has changed. So, one ought to suppose “should the teaching of English also change correspondingly?”

So let me begin my talk after this rather long preface. I have a number of Power Point slides; this was one of the techniques of the advanced technology that I had to learn. Again, with one's increasing age it becomes less easy to adapt to all of this technical wizardry. But what I propose to do is to talk to these slides, and hope that I will be able to make some coherent connection between them. In other words, I hope that the text which these slides represent will be interpreted by you in a coherent discourse that you will, in a way, piece out my imperfections with your thoughts.

Those, of course, are not my words. As many of you might recognize, they are the words of William Shakespeare.



Literature is also going to be represented in a minor way because I believe that the role and the nature of the English language has changed, and this change has made one realize the crucial feature of creativity in language use, and we see this in the use of English as a Lingua Franca, for example, where people can and do creatively make use of the resources of English and do not, necessarily, have to conform to the conventions of the standard language. That, of course, reminds one of creative writing – as it is called – and the literary use of language. Just like literature, the English as a Lingua Franca has its creativity and is notable in many ways because it is creative. So it links up with the literal use of language and there are many – and I won't do that now – but I could cite poetic texts and discuss the creativity in just the same way as one might discuss the creativity of texts produced by users of English as a Lingua Franca who are not native speakers; some users of English as a Lingua Franca of course are native speakers, but many are not. So the notion of creativity, the notion of how one exploits the resources of language in order to achieve an impact and achieve an effect, is as relevant to the everyday use of English as it is to literature and to poetry? So in a sense, they are realizations of the same basic use of language.

Right, so my title is: Linguistics Expertise and Language Experience: Applied Linguistics in English Language Teaching. The title comes from literature, i.e., T S Elliot's "... *to seize and clutch and penetrate; expert beyond experience...*", The point that I would like to make is that in linguistics we get a claim to expertise as the disciplinary study of language. Linguistics does claim to reveal features in language by means of expertise beyond experience. Applied linguistics as — this is a quotation from Guy Cook — *defining those problems in the world in which language is implicated* is concerned not with the abstractions of linguistics because by expertise one means that one is abstracting from actuality some underlying features which are not immediately apparent; they are not experienced directly but are cognitively abstracted. So linguistics is concerned with the abstraction, i.e., the abstract nature of language. But applied linguistics is concerned with the actual problems of language experience. So these are all the same clearly, and you can't equate the actual problems of language experience with the abstract problems of the linguistics expertise. So linguistics could never capture the reality of actual experience.

The point of applied linguistics — that is, the claim of applied linguistics — is that it mediates between the expertise and experience; that somehow a connection could be made between the two; that the actuality of problems can be, in some sense, explained or clarified or resolved even by reference to the abstract expertise categories of linguistics. These categories and expertise are based upon an idealization of abstraction from actually-occurring reality. So the question that arises in applied linguistics is what kind of insights about language can linguistics expertise reveal? There has been a lot of discussion about the nature of Applied Linguistics and how it is not the same as Linguistics Applied, and you may well be familiar with this discussion. But if it is the case — this I take it is the case — that no disciplinary abstraction can capture the experience reality of individuals, whether this is language or anything else. If that is the case, then there must be some way of making this abstraction actual in reference to the real problems of the world. There must be some insights that enable you to reformulate what these problems might be. That is, Linguistics Applied would say: well, we can directly relate these abstractions to reality.

So what insights does linguistics expertise provide? Well, linguistics is essentially concerned with competence, and that of course is a term and a concept that has been *established orthodox*, so to speak, for a very long time. Linguistic competence is the knowledge of the encoding rules and communicative competence is the knowledge of usage conventions of how people actually make use of the rules in communicative behavior. As you know, linguistic competence is Chomsky's concept of the knowledge of the actually coding rules, the grammar, and the sentences that a speaker has of his/her language. Communicative competence is a matter of judging not just facts — which is the possible in Hymes' terms, and I

assume you're familiar with this formulation — but also, as Hymes points out, if you're competent in a language, you're able to make judgments not only whether a piece or a sample of language is grammatically correct and well-formed in terms of encoding rules but also whether it is relatively easy to process cognitively speaking and psychologically speaking; whether it is appropriate to the context in which it is used; and whether it's actually done; and whether it is actually practiced as having been performed. That's for the meaning of competence.

In both cases, however, notice that there is the same basic presupposition. In Chomsky's words: "... ideal speaker-listener, in a completely homogeneous speech community, who knows its language perfectly" (Chomsky, 1965: 3). I know of course he has been much criticized for how we can talk about ideal speaker/listener? There is a set of speech communities that are not homogeneous and so on, but if you look at what Hymes says, you get the same presupposition of a norm; of a native speaker norm; an ideal native speaker in fact: "There is an important sense" says Hymes "in which a normal member of a community has knowledge with respect to all these aspects of communicative system available to him" (Hymes, 1972: 282), that's to say, possible, feasible, appropriate, and so on. System is a normative notion. A system is a system as it has internal consistency and is stable. So in both cases we're talking about a norm; an ideal set of stable conditions.

So whether we want to talk about linguistic or communicative competence, the same normative assumption is made: That competence is competence in *a* language which is spoken by *a* community, and it's *the* community and *the* language that together constitute the norm. So, in both cases what we are talking about is communal competence -- whether it's linguistic or communicative. It is communal; it is the competence of a normal or an ideal representative speaker of a particular community. So Competence, Community and Communication are very closely interrelated. The three C's, so to speak, merge into one basic assumption of the norm: The normal communication. So, linguistics, I'm suggesting, is essentially normative. That's the way linguistics is, generally speaking, being conducted on a normative basis. It presupposes a social or communal norm. *The* language is the language spoken by *the* community; *a* language is spoken by *a* community, and the two are related.

Thus the object of linguistics expertise is concerned with competence, i.e., a norm of knowledge or behavior. It's also assumed to be the language subject; the subject that is taught. And competence is represented as being the basic objective. The assumption with communicative competence these days — whether they are talking about Task-Based learning or whatever — is that the ultimate objective is to achieve native-speaker competent. So the foreign language subject is based on the teaching of competent; normative competent; the competent of a particular community, and I think when one looks at the language subject, and in our case English as a subject to be taught in schools and elsewhere, there are two

considerations to simplify matters. Well, that's to think of defining a subject, and actually this applies to any pedagogically defined subject whether this was English or any other thing.

The first consideration is what is the objective? What is it that at the end of a course, learners will have assumed to have achieved? That's the objective, the aim, and the target, if you would like. The second is the process. What do you have to do, or what the learners have to do to get to the objective? How do you design the subject which has a particular objective and a particular process which is effective in achieving it? So these are the two considerations that I think are important to recognize.

Going back to the expertise and experience issue, I previously talked about the experience of users; the experience of language learners — I mean their actual experience — is also in many ways problematic and that's why Applied Linguistics is concerned with the problems of language experience in the real world. In this case, it is the language experienced by learners in the real world; and what's the real world for the learners? Their real world is there in the classroom. There we are, and it is their experience that we are concerned with as teachers. It's controlled by teaching. That is, I think, important to note; at least — if it is not the case with traditional way of thinking — it certainly is true about English teaching. Therefore, the objective is a matter of controlling the learner into conformity to competent. So conformity overrides everything else in terms of the objective. If you don't conform to these native speaker norms, you get a bad result in the exam; so clearly it's important for the language teacher to ensure that the learners are prepared to conform to what the examination requires; that examination requires competence, and that competence requires conformity. Now this objective relates to a particular community since competence is normative. What it means is that the objective in English — we are thinking of English teaching but it could apply to any language — is to initiate learners into the membership of a native speaker community in some way, or at least to identify with that native speaker community. Because competence is based on the communal norm of the speakers, the objective is to make learners as much native speakers as possible by conforming to them. The degrees of non-conformity represent the degrees of error.

I think this raises a question in terms of the objective of identifying with or beginning for membership of a particular native speaker community. I think it raises a question of what foreign language teaching and learning actually means? What are we talking about? Learning English as a foreign language; English for the speakers of other languages; so English is a foreign language, and English teaching is one example of the teaching of foreign languages. I think it is important to consider what is it that makes a language foreign? There are different kinds of foreignness in different languages and, therefore, one might assume different learning objectives. There will be even more things about it; a language is only foreign in relation to

ones' own. But these relationships between own language and other language enormously vary, e.g., about the relationship between Chinese and Japanese. Learning Japanese in China is a very different experience from learning Japanese in Austria. Languages which are, so to speak, domestic border languages are foreign in a very different way from languages which are geographically and socio-politically remote. It's the nature of the foreignness that one has to understand if one is teaching a foreign language because unless you could identify the nature of foreignness, then you can't know what your objective is going to be. So if you are teaching Japanese as a foreign language for example, depending on where you are teaching it, the foreignness relationship is very different; if you are teaching it in China, that's one thing; you're teaching it in Austria, it is another thing; you are teaching it in Iran, it is a very different thing. So, Japanese as a foreign language, teaching Japanese to speakers of other languages depends on who the speakers of other languages are. The same will be true of German, for example.

Now in the case of Japanese it may well be because Japanese is only spoken by the Japanese; the people of the language are very closely associated because it makes sense to say if you're teaching Japanese, you can't avoid really teaching Japanese social behavior, cultural morals and so on because the community of the language is already very closely related. Particularly your reason for learning Japanese is likely to be that you wish to identify somewhere or at least be able to be on equal terms socially and communally with the Japanese. With teaching German to speakers of other languages, it may be less so, partly because there are at least three countries that speak German. If one picks up Farsi as a foreign language and teaching Farsi to speakers of other languages, then who are the speakers of the other language? How do these other languages relate to Farsi?

I won't go into this, but there has been a good discussion of course particularly by the French philosopher, Pierre Bourdieu, about different kinds of capital. He talks about how languages have different kinds of capital for different people. So languages have a high cultural capital or social capital. In other words, they are valuable because of the social advantage you get from learning them or the cultural advantage that may be true for some people studying English. They may see English as having enormous cultural capital so they study English literature, for example. Fine, that's the objective. Other languages have high economic capital. Where you don't care about the culture and you are not interested in the social life of the English speakers, English has a high capital; a high economic capital. It is worth learning because it provides a certain economic advantage.

So, different foreignnesses of the other languages are clearly relevant to defining what the different objectives are, and as I mentioned briefly right at the beginning, one of the issues that is of a very considerable concern — in particular professor Seidlhofer's concern — is making clear what the nature of the foreignness to the speakers of English is. English as a *lingua franca* — it used to be English as



lingua franca — means that the foreignness of English, that is the otherness of English is not the same as the otherness of other languages. It has become a language mainly because of the economic capital, the technology, its diplomatic value, its value for negotiation, conflict resolution and so on. It has become appropriated by an enormous range of people who speak other languages; so its foreignness is distinctive.

I just mentioned that different kinds of capital, as Bourdieu calls it, must be in different purposes for learning and different objectives are therefore defined. With English, unlike other languages, it's essentially not for *intra-communal* communication; not a communication within a bounded community but *inter-communal* communication globally across primary communities. So it can't be defined in terms of competence which is normative and is related to intra-communal communication. What I'm suggesting is in reference to the work of professor Seidlhofer that the global use of English is the actual experience of English. Going back to the experience and expertise, if expertise depends on the concept of competence, it does not correspond to the actual experience of English globally as an inter-communal means of international communication. People talk about real English. This was for sometime a popular slogan: "help the learner with the real English; authentic English; the English that English speakers actually use". What is actually performed, in Hymes' sense, is not real for most users of English in the world. That reality is the reality of native speaker communities not the reality of the experience of most users of English who are now majority in the world. Therefore, English has naturally become denationalized; uncoupled from its primary culture.

So, we have double use of English as a lingua franca in the inter-communal use of language: *Communication without community* where there is no well-defined English-speaking community. It is constantly-shifting-and-changing networks of interaction through digital communication and so on. There is no English-speaking community. And the other is *communication without competence* because it communicates without conformity to the norm. Since Communicative Language Teaching teaches communicative competence, it isn't actually teaching communication. Its focus is not on how language is used in communication; its focus is on how English is used particularly among a particular community of native speakers. It focuses on the form. The objective is to acquire the form that communication takes in native speaking community not how language is used as a resource for communication because if you look at the examples of classroom practice, e.g., Task-based Learning and so on, there may be some allowance made for learner initiative, but if they use language — not only English but other linguistic resources they may have at their disposal — to achieve their communicative objective, that does not count as being an acceptable result unless it leads to conformity. So although there may be a kind of initiative going on among learners,



ultimately the objective is conformity: To bring the linguistic forms they use into conformity with the conventional and the correct.

Here you get these sentences as an example by Michael Swan through his excellent book, *Practical English Usage*. If you assume that English learners — all English learners whatever they learning it for — are required to conform, then of course *Practical English Usage* means English usage by the English mainly or sometimes by the Americans — We allow them to use English from time to time! But basically you need to conform and therefore pass your exam. Therefore *Practical English Usage* says don't say this. It's a common mistake: "It's often raining here"; "It can rain this evening"; "I gave to her my address"; "Please explain me what you want"; "I object to tell them my age"; "No doubt the world is getting warmer". Well the fact is that people do say these. There has been a long time even the native speakers say these. Certainly, if you look at the kind of data Barbara Seidlhofer is giving, people say all these things all the time and they communicate in a perfectly-effective way. So, communication and competence are not the same thing.

I'm suggesting that thinking about the two aspects of the English language subject i.e., the objective and the process, we need to rethink the objective in the light of globalization. The conventional objective is, I'm suggesting, irrelevant in many cases; and if it is relevant you've got to explain why? If it is relevant to conform to native speaker norms; if you got a good argument, fine! We are not ruling that out as a possible objective. But if you do have that objective, do not take it because it has always been the objective, but in a changing world why is this still relevant? So there is a need to realign the objective with other problems involving language in the real world. You are realigning objective with experience; the real experience that people have with English when they have to cope with situation in the real world, whether it is diplomacy or business negotiation or conflict resolution or whatever it may be. This really is the challenge of making English as a lingua franca a genuinely Applied Linguistics' concern because it is concerned with the real world in a big way. So I am suggesting this and of course it is my take on this. I do not want you to assume it as a kind of new enlightenment. I am putting this forward as an issue that seems to me we need to critically think about. What I am suggesting in order to provoke discussion is that the present orthodox approach to reality is irrelevant; it's unrealistic; and here we come to what I call the pedagogy of failure.

So far I have looked at this from the point of view of the objective. What about from the point of view of the pedagogic process? Well I talked about how users experience and how the experience of English users ought to affect how we define the objective. I want now just to mention how learners experience. So we move from the objective defined to the process.

How do learners experience English? What makes English foreign for the

learners? What is the process of teaching and learning? And this is almost always in that direction; it is always in that sequence: language teaching and learning; it isn't very often language learning and teaching. That itself presupposes a certain hierarchical relationship. So, sometimes I think that often the assumption is that these are converse dependencies; that teaching and learning as verbs in English are the same as *giving* and *taking*; *selling* and *buying*. That's to say, you give something, and that presupposes that it is taken; I give this to you and you take this from me. I sell this to you; therefore, automatically you buy this as a result; and in the same way, I teach this to you, automatically you learn it. So there is an assumption of independences in the same way as giving/taking and selling/buying. So "she is teaching me English" always presupposes that there are learners; you cannot teach without learners. But in saying "she is learning English", teachers are not presupposed. So you can learn without teaching; teachers are not necessary for learning. We know that we learn on our own, and ultimately learning is a very private individual experience.

So, English Taught as a Foreign Language, i.e., ETFL is not necessarily the same as English Learnt as a Foreign Language, ELFL. We know that the teachers spend a lot of time teaching while learners, annoyingly and perversely, don't learn. Why don't they learn? "I taught them that scores of times, but they still haven't learnt it. It's their fault." Well, it is clear that this dependency does not work because you cannot say "I sold you this several times, you still haven't bought it". That makes no sense! I have given you this you have not taken it! That does not make any sense. But "I've taught you this, you still haven't learnt it!" makes sense; why?

So, teaching English is not the same as learning English because learning English does not conform to teaching English. Conformity again comes on the scene.

As with the learner experience of language, and similarly as users — learners are also users — when they come up with nonconformist results which are still effectively communicative, they are clearly communicatively capable; furthermore, they bring to the learning of a foreign language, i.e., English, a capability for communicating that they have already acquired in their own language or languages. Learners are actually linguistically quite sophisticated. They already know how language is used to communicate. They have that experience for five, ten or fifteen years often with more than one language of course!

So, what is the nature of learner language actually? Normally it is stigmatized as "full of errors", right? What is wrong with my learners is that they produce errors, all right? But you could see errors as the learners attempt to learn, and these are part of the learning process; and not only that but part of the using process. Maybe, the learners are making the most effective use of whatever resource they have got to get their meaning across. They get penalized for it if it is not correct; but nevertheless, the motivation may be communicative. So the error may be a sign that the learners

are attempting to use the foreign language in the same way as they use their own. It is interesting, to me at least; we are thinking about it that the errors, so called, that learners produce are often those which are most resistant to teaching; they are of least communicative value; teachers can spend a very long time in vain trying to get learners to conform and to produce certain correct forms. This may be in vain because the correctness is not essential to the communicative value of the expression. So, in a way, the teacher is teaching against communication, undermining the efforts of the learner to be communicatively capable and using their own experience to extend it into the acquiring of a wider linguistic resource.

So when you say the learner has a certain communicative authenticity, it is not the authenticity of the native speaker; what is authentic for the native speaker is not necessarily authentic for the non-native speaker. What is authentic in terms of what is recorded in the corpus of English of native English speakers cannot often be made real in the context of the learning platform. So the reality of the language for the learner is not at all the same as the reality of the language for the native speaker. What we find here is that if we think about correctness and conformity in terms of what is communicatively appropriate and effective and keep it as a free source in order to get their meaning across and achieve it, this is a good deal of communicative capability; so why should they be penalized because it does not conform? Learning, therefore, is seen as a reflex of teaching; what learners learn is given credit to the extent that it corresponds to what is taught; then examinations are examinations of what is taught not what is learned; they assess English taught as a foreign language but not English learnt as a foreign language. Although lip service is paid to the idea of learner autonomy and learner initiative, it will work only up to point so long as you are controlling the conformity eventually.

Let me talk about the relationship of learning and teaching. These are not so much learners as *teachees*; *teachees* in the sense that if you have an employer you have an employee. In the same way, the way we generally conceive of English teaching is that learners are actually converted into *teachees*; that what they learn is only credited to the extent that it conforms to what is taught; totally dependent on the teacher; a *teachee* is a dependency; that is, you can't have an employee without an employer. The employer controls the employee, and the *teachee* is controlled by the teacher. But the learner is not.

Let's, at the end, focus on Teaching English to Speakers of other Languages, TESOL. What I have been suggesting for your consideration is the need to think again about English: What does English mean? What significance does it have? What is valuable? Whose English are we talking about? Teaching English *to* speakers of other languages is unidirectional. I got English; I teach it over to you. And you speak other languages; you accept unilaterally what I give you; *To* not *For*. It is not teaching English *for* speakers of other languages. It is teaching English *to* speakers of other languages. Prepositions can be quite significant as those dealing

with critical discourse analysis would know. To speak about teaching English to speakers of other languages is as if you are all defined in one category; you are all speakers of other languages. Whether you are Iranians or Japanese or Chinese or German, you are all foreign; they are all other as if you are all the same. You are not of course all the same. Other languages are foreign in different ways, and the speakers of other languages are clearly very different.

So I am suggesting that we should look at the way we define all of the features of the subject we are supposed to be teaching in terms both of the objective and of the process. I am suggesting that we should think in terms of *communication* beyond *conformity* and *capability* beyond *competent*. I am suggesting that the orthodox view is that English and native language is what English taught as a foreign language is. So English as a native language is the competence which is the object and the process of English taught as a foreign language. But if one is looking at English learnt as a foreign language, how English is learnt and used as a foreign language is much closer to English as a lingua franca. I am suggesting that we should change or at least consider changing the association — I started with thinking of expertise — from the frame of reference being English as a native language, which is English taught, to shift the focus to look at how English learners or foreigners actually correspond more closely to the use of English as lingua franca not only in objective but in process.

Finally going back to the title, expertise in linguistics and experience of language, what kind of insights are relevant to Applied Linguistics of English language teaching? What I would suggest is the kind of insight through which we consider the linguistics of *language*; of how language is used because this is not the same as looking at the characteristics of *a language*. We should focus on *communication*; how language is used in communication and we see how this works with English as lingua franca studies where the very process of using the resources of language to achieve communication is made so clearly overt. You can see it happening so to speak before your very eyes. One should think of *capability to communicate* rather than *competence* which is fixed to linguistics and communicative norm. I want you to think of *creativity*, which is what I referred to at the beginning, rather than *conformity*.

I am suggesting that we need to recognize that the world has changed from days in Essex, working with Farzad; that the world of English has changed; that we are living in the world of international globalized digital communication. Just as the nature of separate languages has become quite clearer than before, so certainly we cannot really think of English as it was before. Therefore, we should not think of linguistics as we thought of it before; but more in terms of the linguistics of learning English as a lingua franca. Thank you very much.

### Author's Biography

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**Professor Henry Widdowson** is an internationally acclaimed authority in applied linguistics and language teaching. His many books, articles, and lectures have been seminal in establishing both the field of applied linguistics and its mode of enquiry. For many years he was the Applied Linguistics adviser to Oxford University Press. He was the co-editor of *Language Teaching: A Scheme for Teacher Education* and the series editor of *Oxford Introductions to Language Study* and the author of *Linguistics* in the same series. He is series adviser of *Oxford Bookworms Collection*. Widdowson is co-editor of *Language Teaching: A Scheme for Teacher Education*. He is the series editor of *Oxford Introductions to Language Study* and the author of *Linguistics* (1996) in the same series.

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