

How to teach (applied) linguistics from the EFL teacher trainee's perspective

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This pedagogical article problematizes the learning and teaching of (applied) linguistics and proposes some activities to teach this field from the practice of English teaching. Often, courses in linguistics are too theoretical or too oriented to delivering academic content via lecturing. Nevertheless, research suggests that trainee teachers in second language teacher education programs do not always find courses of linguistics useful due to their teaching methodology and the challenge of studying them in a language students are still learning. To tackle this issue, this paper presents some activities using content and language integrated learning to facilitate applied linguistics learning in language teacher education.

Introduction

Quite often, it has been argued that (applied) linguistics courses¹ are theoretical, abstract, too oriented to research (Abrahams & Farias, 2010; Bartels, 2005; Busch, 2010; Tang, 2008), and they do not always reflect the needs of teachers of English as a foreign language (EFL) (Forman, 2015; Nicholas & Starks, 2014). Sometimes, there is a mismatch between the nature of these courses in the universities and what is happening in second language classrooms around the world (Moore & Lorenzo, 2015). Mostly, because “applied linguists have their own, quite proper research and theoretical concerns” (Maley, 2009, p. 189), which are different from the practical and busy agenda of the EFL teacher. Therefore, it is important to have student-centered activities in the (applied) linguistics class (Kuiper, 2011), so they can help trainees learn or practice their English skills while they study language-related areas (Correa, 2014) in second language teaching education (SLTE) programs.

One approach that many (applied) linguists use, sometimes unconsciously, is content and language integrated learning (CLIL). According to Marsh and Frigols (2013, p. 1) this “is a dual-focused educational approach in which an additional language is used for the learning and teaching of both content and language”. Therefore, it helps lecturers to teach content through the scaffolding of the learners’ language level (Banegas, 2020), where trainees can use their linguistic resources to understand the contents at the same time they continue learning English.

However, the focus on content in CLIL has shifted towards the development of competencies within a multilingual context (Ball, 2016). In this line of thought, not only what is learnt is important but the language support provided by educators becomes a pivotal factor (Hu & Gao, 2021).

To shed light on this issue, the task of reflecting on the methodology to learn and teach (applied) linguistics has been done cooperatively in this paper. Rodrigo is a lecturer and Valentina is a final practicum student and research assistant in an SLTE program in Southern Chile. This article is based on a collection of techniques to teach (applied) linguistics for EFL teacher training purposes (undergraduate students) based on our work together and although they have been used in the Chilean context, they can be easily used with a wider audience. Normally, articles are written from the perspective of the researcher only and that is why a collaboration as this one is innovative because it allowed us to reflect on EFL teacher training from the lecturer and the trainee’s perspective. In our experience, they have helped us to teach (applied) linguistics while supporting English learning, but without losing the academic rigour of the discipline (Anderson, 2016).

Activity 1: Deconstructing definitions (at least B1 English, 20 minutes approx.)

A good strategy to start discussing complex topics is to have a key definition and decompose it to analyze each keyword in detail. For example, this

is a definition provided by Ortega (2007a, p. 225) about second language acquisition (SLA): “the theories that offer the most viable explanations about the human capacity to learn additional languages (L2) besides the first (L1)”. Certain words or phrases have been highlighted to make learners define them, so we can ask them:

1. What is a ‘theory’?
2. Why are ‘explanations’ or ‘the human capacity’ underlined?
3. What is ‘a first language’ and how is this different from a ‘second or foreign language’?

If they don’t know each other, they can discuss these preliminary questions in pairs to define the content of the course. Once we share our answers, we take one of the underlined concepts and a new definition is provided, for example, the word ‘theory’:

VanPatten and Williams (2007a, p. 2): A theory is defined as a “set of statements about natural phenomena that explain why these phenomena occur the way they do”.

Then, they are asked to underline some key concepts they think are important to define ‘theory’, for instance: ‘natural phenomena’ and we continue with the analysis. It is important to make them remember the core of the course, so we ask them to paste these definitions in their notebook and we also place them in a relevant space in the university online platform. We always come back to it and sometimes trainees, unconsciously, learn them by heart. Importantly, this activity serves as a good introduction to learning SLA terminology, where teacher trainees learn new vocabulary in English while they study (applied) linguistics. However, one challenge is the understandable and comprehensive use of definitions as some of them could still be quite abstract and therefore, it is advisable not to overwhelm trainees with so many of these statements in one session only.

Activity 2: Common misunderstandings (B1 English, 10 minutes approx.)

Trainees are given small pieces of paper to answer the following questions in the first class of an (applied) linguistics course:

1. What do you think the course is about?
2. What do linguists do?

After some minutes, they put their answers in a box or bag. If this is the first time they are taking

a course in (applied) linguistics they commonly write the following answers:

1. Course content: This is a course about the structure of English.
2. The linguists’ task: Linguists learn many languages.

Although different answers are closer to the idea behind a course in (applied) linguistics, these have been the two most frequent responses from our students. To solve these misunderstandings, the use of metaphors has been useful. So we tell them that, for example, a biologist studies nature and he/she puts cells under a microscope to understand how nature works. In the same way, we are going to be language ‘scientists’ and we are going to put language under the microscope to see how it works. And if second language learning is our object of study, we will try to understand what happens when learners study English as a foreign language and we will put that process under the microscope. We tell them that not all researchers wear white aprons and linguists are good examples of this. In the same way, we tell them that a computer engineer understands how a laptop works, a mechanic understands the functioning of cars and an (applied) linguist understands, among other things, how languages are learned. Sometimes these metaphors are accompanied by a projected picture of a computer or a car as Figures 1 and 2 show, and this provokes interesting ‘aha’ moments in the class.

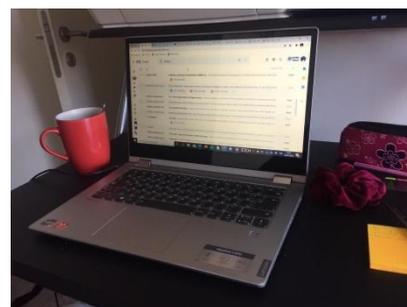


Figure 1. Valentina’s computer



Figure 2. Rodrigo’s car

Activity 3: Tricky statements
(B1 English, 30 minutes approx.)

Trainees receive a list of tricky statements about second/foreign language learning so they could tell us if they agree or disagree with them. For example, a good choice to start is ‘The Beliefs about Language Learning Inventory’ (BALLI) by Horwitz (1988), Lightbrown and Spada’s set of statements (2016, pp. 3-4) or a different list can be created with a specific course in mind. Some examples of these ‘tricky statements’ are:

1. The best dialect of English to be taught is ‘UK English’.
2. All students learn a foreign language in the same way.
3. Memorization is the most important strategy to learn a second language.

Some of these statements are easy to answer. However, in most of them, the answer is neither true nor false, so interesting conversations are initiated and this is fantastic because we seek to stimulate class discussion and the L2 use. If learners have experience teaching, we can use their classroom situations or critical episodes to discuss the statements. Then, we explain linguistic phenomena from what they have analyzed. For instance:

1. The best way to give oral feedback is to correct students immediately.
2. L1 is normally a problem to learn a second language.

When discussing this first statement, different types of feedback will emerge (recast, corrective feedback, delayed feedback, etc.) and this will be an opportunity to explore theory from their English teaching practice. In the case of the second one, most of our students have reported that Spanish, mostly Chilean Spanish, represents a problem to learn English. This is because it would be a “bad type of Spanish” and actually, this misconception can be applied to many languages and dialects around the world. So again, this is a teaching opportunity to highlight the types of transfer (negative as well as positive), the concept of interlanguage, the structural similarities between European languages, among others, but also to explain descriptivism/prescriptivism, prestige dialects/languages, etc. It is important to group trainees in pairs or small groups to mix those trainees with better speaking skills with those who need more support to talk. In addition, the

activity can be too long at times and its length will depend on the trainees’ expertise with (applied) linguistics as well as on their English level.

Activity 4: The (trainee) teacher as a researcher
(B2 English, 30 minutes approx. in selected classes)

Getting practical research training is something that EFL teacher candidates really enjoy. For example, in an SLA course, it is understood that two processes complement each other: L1 acquisition and L2 learning. Therefore, we use both in a small research project so they can analyze real language data, considering students “can be simultaneously data-generators and investigators” (Chung, 2011, p. 35).

Trainees are asked to collect this data from their classes, experiences as learners or family members. We ask them to write down L1 samples from children learning Spanish or people they know. Actually, many of our students have reported that they remember examples from Rodrigo’s eleven nieces and nephews that he has used to illustrate the contents. Quickly, EFL teacher trainees start to give examples about their own siblings, children or friends and we analyze those in light of the L1 theories and stages.

In addition, we analyze common mistakes from learners of Chilean Spanish, or any other dialect. They are asked to identify the type of mistake or communicative strategy that learners are employing, not just as research data but also to make them feel aware about their own use of the L2 (Donoso & Gómez, 2018). Some trainees are already teaching in their practicums in schools, so they bring the videos of their classes and we analyze them. We also analyze their textbooks to find evidence of how the interlanguage and the input advances to higher levels of language proficiency and we explain how they fit with the SLA theories that we have studied. Some trainees have recorded themselves speaking English with native speakers or with other non-native speakers and this is also useful material for our analysis. Again, this is useful to help them collect data and become aware of their teacher-talk and the grammar and vocabulary they use in class (Arellano, 2019).

However, one problem is that trainees are often new to research protocols, so it is useful to help them along the way. This is done not only by socializing the final research instructions or evaluation criteria as in any other assessment tasks, but also by giving them space in class to put their analysis into writing. A suitable strategy,

once they have their data, is creating an outline of their report on an informative poster before the actual writing. A very popular tool to do this is the user-friendly website <https://www.canva.com/> so they can share the product digitally with their classmates. After they receive feedback, trainees start writing and they are given time slots in selected classes so that we can check the progress of their reports.

This helps to understand how they systematize the data, their difficulties in academic writing and their sense of responsibility. Quite often, a common problem is that they include little theory to support their analysis or they do not know how to cite appropriately. Hence, reading their report drafts in class gives us the possibility to prevent academic problems such as plagiarism or lack of academic rigor. Another

common problem for trainees is leaving the analysis for the last days before the report submission. Besides, it is not strange that trainees do not bring data for the analysis so it is necessary to remind them of this important task throughout the semester during the class and via the online platforms of the course.

Activity 5: Intertextuality in modern movies (B2 English, 20 minutes approx.)

For the topic of intertextuality, trainees are told to watch a video about the popular movie Shrek to notice the different elements that refer to other children’s stories, whose link can be found here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U5DyOgvmizE>.

Some of the characters and stories can be identified as seen on Table .

Stories	Characters
Goldilocks and the Three Bears	Papa Bear, Mama Bear and Baby Bear.
Three Blind Mice	The three blind mice.
Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs	Snow White, Doc, Grumpy, Happy, Sleepy, Dopey, Bashful, Sneezy.
The Little Red Riding Hood	The wolf.

Table 1. Characters and stories

Some issues that might arise during the activity are that trainees are not familiar with the names of the stories or characters in English, or that they do not know all of them. For the former, they can make use of technology and search on their mobile phones, whereas for the latter, it is important to select a video with enough famous characters. In the case of this clip, there is a wide variety of popular fairy tales, therefore, trainees will most likely recognize some of them, which can also be linked to literature or cultural topics.

Later, they can answer some guiding questions to help them understand the concept of intertextuality:

1. What is happening in the video?

2. What characters do you recognize from it? Where are they from?
3. Do you remember having seen characters from different stories together in another movie or show?

Once the trainees answer, the lecturer can guide the conversation towards the contents and introduce the concept of intertextuality more explicitly.

Activity 6: Deconstructing language-related jokes (B1 English, 20 minutes approx.)

For the following activity, trainees are shown several jokes as a warm-up activity. Some

examples that can be projected by the teacher are the following:

1. “What kind of animal comes out only on cloudy days?--A reindeer”. (Dunn & Jones, 2007, p. 63).
2. “What did the rabbit give his girlfriend?--A 24 carrot ring”. (Dunn & Jones, 2007, p. 81).

The aim is to analyze their meanings to identify the structures, phrases, or keywords that gave away the meaning and references within the text that turn them into a joke. In its analysis, different topics from general linguistics might be explored, such as:

- i) Intertextuality ii) Grice’s maxims iii) Ambiguity iv) Literary figures
- v) Homonymy, polysemy, synonymy, antonymy, metonymy, etc.
- vi) Reference vii) Tacit and explicit knowledge viii) Denotation and connotation
- ix) Literal and non-literal use of language x) Morphological/phonological analysis

The discussion can be used to introduce some new concepts, clarify some common misconceptions or test the trainees’ knowledge before the beginning of a course or unit. According to Aarons (2012), jokes are not always easy to interpret as they are not always translatable to the students’ L1 and if they do, they might lose part of their semantic content. This issue in the translation will make many of the previously mentioned concepts appear so they can be further discussed in class. In addition, this is also a good activity to relate jokes to cultural content, although some might require a more advanced level of English.

Activity 7: Reading between the lines (C1, 40 minutes approx.)²

It comes quite clear that newspapers enjoy a good political analysis, and it is a fact that the authors’ political views play a role in the type of articles they write. What is behind a title or the body of a piece of news can reveal what the author’s inclinations are and that is why using discourse analysis techniques is such a great idea to illustrate ideologies. It is also recommendable to use well-known events in local papers so that trainees can relate the content with the way it is said, fostering a better comprehension of the text so they can focus on the analysis. The teacher can make use of a piece of news we present here, as

figure 3 shows, or one of a similar nature. The article can be found in a local newspaper written in English, which can be accessed using the following link:

<https://santiagotimes.cl/2020/06/24/brazil-judge-orders-bolsonaro-to-wear-a-face-mask-in-public/>



Figure 3. Screenshot of a *Santiago Times* article

The debate around this piece of news can focus on some questions to direct the trainees’ interventions and this can be a good strategy to introduce critical discourse analysis (CDA), for example:

1. What can you infer from the image?
2. What knowledge do you have that could help you understand the article?
3. Are there any biases or preconceptions you can identify when you look at the picture?
4. Which lexico-grammatical items help the author to create meaning?

Examples of local resources combine headlines with pictures, fostering their skills to analyze multimodality. First, the lecturer can confirm trainees have enough background information by using these visual aids to make sure they are ready for the analysis. In addition, trainees can also get informed about their country’s current affairs while they practice their linguistic and analytical skills.

One big challenge is that, sometimes, the allocated time is not enough for trainees to analyze the paper as pieces of news require advanced English to be read and understood. To solve this, a sample analysis can be shown

in class and the rest of the text can be left as homework to be revised in the next session. The language proficiency problems trainees could have are powerful indicators of their level of linguistic competence and what needs to be done to address their weaknesses.

Activity 8: Deconstructing linguistic stereotypes (C1 English, 30 minutes approx.)

Based on an analysis made by Soares (2017), the topic of language ideologies and stereotypes can be explored using CDA techniques. It starts with the lecturer showing the trainees clips of a popular Disney movie, which focuses on the characters' voices and accents, whose link can be found below:

[youtube.com/watch?v=Ula_LL6difY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ula_LL6difY)

Then, trainees can look for linguistic evidence to answer some of these questions in small groups or pairs:

1. What is the audience of this movie?
2. What accents or dialects can you identify in the movie? (British, Hispanic, African-American, etc.)
3. What personality traits do you attribute to each of the characters? (lazy, mean, weak, untrustworthy, etc.)
4. Is there any relation to the types of accents and the attributes you identified? Do you identify any stereotypes?
5. Why do you feel these relations or stereotypes exist? What is their impact on the viewers?
6. Does American history have any connection with the stereotypes?

For the questions above, the lecturer can guide the conversation towards gender, ethnic or racial discrimination and stereotypes, how they are portrayed in films and how that affects the world around us, either positively or negatively. This activity can be the starting point to introduce some sociolinguistic elements, while emphasizing the reasons behind the perpetuation of these stereotypes, why they should be abolished and the way diversity enriches our communities.

Activity 9: A movie about linguistics (B2 English - 15 minutes approx.)

It is not a secret that people like movies and there is one, in particular, that has been quite useful in some of our (applied) linguistics courses: *Arrival*. This is a movie about an alien invasion in which a linguist is hired to decipher an alien language to know why they came to Earth. It is one of the few popular movies where linguistics plays such a relevant role and we watch it at the end of an introduction to linguistics or a general linguistics course if we have enough time. The official trailer can be found below:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AMqyWT075KY>

We use this movie at the end of the course because it allows trainees to identify certain topics that we have covered during the semester. Some of them are: the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, morphological analysis, language data, the arbitrariness of the linguistic sign, translation practices, spoken versus written language, systems of communication, among others. Normally, trainees like it so much that many watch the movie again after the class with their family members or friends (as homework) and this also works as a motivational task so they realize the practicality of what they have learned during the term. However, it is suggested to use subtitles (in English) to make sure they can understand the movie plot successfully.

Final thoughts

Our approach to teaching (applied) linguistics is to work from the trainees' needs, examples, and experiences (Potts, 2011) so we can explain the theory from practice while developing their language competencies. However, the world of academia normally functions in the opposite way where a copious amount of research-based theory is given in a lecture and then trainees are forced to think about examples from the abstract explanation of linguistic phenomena (Arellano, 2020).

For instance, Van Lier explains this problem as follows:

Instead of the usual linguistic sub-topics such as phonetics, syntax, discourse analysis and so on, I propose that we identify language-related themes... Within each theme, it is inevitable that straightforward linguistic phenomena of phonology, syntax, discourse, etc. will need

to be explored at some point. This exploration will necessitate a certain amount of linguistic study in the traditional sense, but it is very important that such study is now motivated by a real-life question that requires an answer (Van Lier, 1992, p. 102).

Therefore, it is imperative to think about the audience we are teaching. Learning (applied) linguistics for research purposes is different than learning it as an EFL teacher candidate. (Applied) linguistics is still a very young discipline and we are still learning about the different strategies to motivate our students in what seems to be a very theoretical and harsh area to be learned (Abreu, 2015). According to our experience, learning theory from the practice of engaging with teaching issues and real-life examples is an interesting alternative to replace a focus on lecturing about language facts. The next step would be to visit (applied) linguistics lessons to see how instruction in other courses looks like, to conduct experimental studies using different strategies and techniques - including the ones reported here - and to elicit the stakeholders' views about the perception of the training they receive. Importantly, the activities we propose here are not exclusive to a Spanish-speaking audience as they can be easily applied to trainees of different linguistic backgrounds. In addition, the local resources we have used (as the newspapers or the social media accounts) can be replaced with other aids that illustrate the local interests of our readership.

Last but not least, we make sure to talk to other professors of the program as sometimes (applied) linguistics modules are prerequisites for language teaching methodology courses. In that way, we make sure to cover the learning component of language processing so that they can develop their teaching skills in the next courses with a solid, but practical foundation.

Notes

1. We group theoretical linguistics and applied linguistics in the same umbrella term: (applied) linguistics, as the distinction between these two fields is not that clear in the SLTE curricula. In addition, their differences are based on the compartmentalisation of knowledge and language teachers do not make these contrasts when using

their linguistic knowledge base to teach English as a foreign language.

2. The source presented here is a newspaper in English, which is free and publicly available.

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