Research Areas in Applied Linguistics

a. **Research in language teaching and learning.** Language learning and language teacher education are now placing emphasis on language awareness, attention and learning, 'focus on forms' for language learning, learning from dialogic interactions, task-based learning, content-based learning/ content and language integrated learning (CLIL), and teacher as researcher through action research. Research in language learning has shifted in recent years toward a focus on information processing, the importance of more general cognitive learning principles, the emergence of language ability from extended meaningful exposure and relevant practice, and the awareness of how language is used and the functions that it serves.

Additionally, applied linguistics may direct more attention to issues of motivation, attitudes, and affect because those factors potentially influence many language-based problems.

b. **Research in language teacher development.** Applied linguistics must support practitioners throughout their mediation with all aspects of communicative competence, balancing language understanding so that it combines grammaticality, appropriateness, feasibility, and examples from attested sources. A further emphasis for language teacher education needs to become the move of engaging teachers in the practice of action research. This trend to train teachers as reflective practitioners inquiring into the effectiveness of teaching and learning in local classroom settings needs to increase in the coming decade.

c. **Research in critical studies.** Critical awareness, critical discourse analysis, critical pedagogy, critical assessment practices, and ethics in language assessment and language teaching are all territories that deserve further exploration. The relation itself between critical research and certain approaches to research that constitute explicitly ideological lenses or frames (e.g., feminism) through which any data or situations can be analyzed deserves looking into.

d. **Research in multilingualism.** Another thread in applied linguistics that is worth researching addresses multilingualism and bilingual interaction in school, community, and work and in professional settings or policy issues at regional and national levels. As the majority of people are to some extent bilingual, and because this bilingualism is associated

with the need to negotiate life situations with other cultural and language groups, this area of research is becoming fundamental to applied linguistics concerns. Multilingualism covers topical issues in bilingual education, migrations of groups of people to new language settings, equity and fairness in social services, and language policies related to multiple language use (or the restriction thereof).

e.   Research in language testing and assessment. Testing and assessment issues are not be limited to testing applications but may have in future a much greater influence on other areas of applied linguistics research. Issues such as validity, fairness, and ethics may extend into other area of applied linguistics. While validity remains a major theme for language testing, new interpretations of the concept could be explored in other areas of applied linguistic research and data collection.

More generally, ethics in assessment, the roles of standardized assessment, standards for professionalism, and critical language testing are all new directions of study in language assessment and, by extension, in applied linguistics.

Another major direction in language assessment with significant implications for applied linguistics is the greater emphasis being given to *assessment for learning* (sometimes discussed as *formative assessment).* As this trend is likely to grow considerably in the coming decade, studies on this topic may become extremely useful.

The established directions of study in applied linguistics, which have produced solid work both in the US and the UK could also be explored further in the Romanian context: language contact problems (bilingualism, shift, spread, loss, maintenance, social and cultural interactions); language inequality problems (ethnicity, class, region, gender, and age); language pathology; language policy and planning problems (corpus planning, acquisition planning, ecology of language, multilingualism, political factors); language and technology problems (learning, assessment, access, use); language use problems (dialects, registers, discourse communities, limited access to services and resources); literacy problems (orthography development, new scripts, resource development, learning issues).

These categories can certainly be further expanded, and themes in each category could be elaborated into research topics in and of themselves. As long as we accept that it is the language-based problems in the world that drive applied linguistics, such problems may lead researchers to use knowledge from other fields apart from linguistics, and thereby impose the interdisciplinarity that is a defining aspect of applied linguistics.