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## Evaluating Titles of MA Theses and PhD Dissertations in Applied Linguistics in Kurdistan Region Universities

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**Abstract**

It is widely acknowledged and viewed that Applied Linguistics has yet to be neatly and clearly defined or classified into precise categories. Thus, this study aims at identifying the macro subfields of Applied Linguistics that have been emphasized in the titles of MA theses and PhD dissertations at universities in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq between 2007 and 2021, as well as, sorting out the titles into categories based on those identified and/or discovered common macro subfields. Following that, the titles will be examined to determine which subfield has been given more attention.

This paper, first, highlights the history of Applied Linguistics, in which its changes and developments are discussed throughout the years in separate decades starting from 1950 to the present time, in which seminal research and studies of key scholars and pioneers in the field are reviewed. Since the field has been defined differently according to various linguists and evolved across time, it is worth providing those definitions and changes to conclusively showcase the subfields. Additionally, several well-formed and well-researched categorizations of the sub-fields of Applied Linguistics are presented to have grounds to classify MA theses and PhD dissertation titles that have been conducted at the universities in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq accordingly.

The findings of this analysis offer a scholarly foundation that assists applied linguists in approaching the discipline's subfields with a measured and balanced perspective in their future studies. This study will be significant for newly done research in the field of Applied Linguistics in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq and provides encyclopedic information and/or basic grounds.



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## 1. Introduction

According to the researchers in the field of Applied Linguistics (AL, hereafter), this field basically focuses on solving language-related problems. From its inception, AL was driven by the issues related to language teaching and this, as a result, has created a sort of confusion among the field experts in defining what actually AL is. Therefore, it is not surprising that this confusion can be easily seen while evaluating MA theses and PhD dissertation titles conducted in the field of AL in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI). However, AL is more than just merely 'language teaching'. In fact, it caters to problems related to language usage. Hence, all those problems and any other related ones will be investigated in this paper.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 History of Applied Linguistics (AL)

In this section, different categories of the sub-fields of AL will be addressed in order to enlist all the areas that have been introduced and researched in the field. These include all major and minor subfields that belong to it. They could be categorized as 'macro' and 'micro' subfields of AL. However, this research only takes the 'macro' subfields into consideration since the 'micro' subfields would often intersect which creates an overlap and makes the distinction difficult.

To begin with, a well-known history of AL dates back to the early 1950s at the time of the first publication of the journal "Language Learning: A Journal of Applied Linguistics". Although its origins are argued to have different starting points, especially from a British point of view, the birth of the aforementioned journal tends to be a solid point applied linguists agree upon. In the 1950s, the term Applied Linguistics (AL) has been defined differently from its inception. According to Grabe (2002, p.3), AL was firmly tied to second language teaching and the minor focus was on literacy of the first language and some issues related to language arts.

This was followed by what Corder (1973), Rivers (1968), and Halliday, McIntosh, and Stevens (1964) believed about AL in which all attention was given to "related practical language issues". Much of the literature during the same period of time emphasizes that AL made contributions to "language assessment, language policies, and second language acquisition (SLA)". In brief, all of the language real-world uses were dealt with as part of AL (Grabe, 2002). As a result, AL has come out as a feasible ground for solving language issues.

The discussions and analyses of AL continued in the 1970s as addressing solving real-world language problems as an inseparable part of language teaching. In this decade, AL maintained its focus on language teaching, language assessment, and SLA while some other subfields such as multilingualism, language minority rights, language planning and policy, and teacher training were added to it (Kaplan, 1980; Widdowson, 1980). In brief, it is noted that AL revolves around all aspects related to language teaching in the 60s and 70s of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Davies, 2001). Much of the literature since the 1980s emphasized AL through language assessment, language use in professional settings, translation, lexicography, and the use of technology in language. Interestingly, the Journal of Applied Linguistics and the Annual Review (ARAL) have documented all of these changes that took place over the years (Grabe, 2002).

Further, since the beginning of the 1990s, AL has always been an umbrella term to cover all areas of language teaching and language learning (Robinson, 2001; Gass, 1988). Secondly, it included a number of "critical studies" that covered "critical awareness, critical discourse analysis, critical pedagogy, student rights, critical assessment practices, and ethics in language assessment" (Davies, 1999b; Fairclough, 1995; McNamara, 1998; Pennycook, 1997b; Rampton, 1997b; Van Lier, 1995-1997 as cited in Grabe, 2002). The third emphasis was on using the language in settings that are formal, professional, and academic. This was followed by using the language in real-world situations. Following these, a contemporary perspective has been offered by Davies (2001) in which the major subfields of AL enlisted for scholars and researchers to focus on, were; "L1 and L2 acquisition, communications in professional settings, communication disorders, language and the media, language and the law, language policy and planning, translation and interpretation, language

and technology, stylistics and rhetoric, literacy, discourse and conversational analysis, and sign language research”.

Additionally, Carter and Nunan (2001, cited in Schmitt, 2002) also enlisted several subfields in which AL focuses on that are; “literacy, speech pathology, deaf education, interpreting and translating, communication practices, lexicography, and first language acquisition.” Furthermore, Grabe (2002) argues that there are a number of broad branches of AL, which are; second language acquisition (SLA), language assessment and testing, language policy and planning, lexicography, multilingualism, and corpus linguistics.

Consequently, due to having inter-relations with other sub-fields, the American Association for Applied Linguistics - AAAL (2002) provides 11 topic areas for researchers in the field of AL to explore since these areas tend to be the most significant ones to serve the research quality in the field, which are:

- language education
- acquisition and loss,
- bilingualism,
- discourse analysis,
- literacy,
- rhetoric and stylistics,
- language for special purposes,
- psycholinguistics,
- second and foreign language pedagogy,
- language assessment,
- language policy and planning.

In addition to these, AAAL (2002) has also enlisted 22 sub-areas or strands for AL as follows:

- antiracism, decolonization, and intersectionality for system transformation,
- assessment and evaluation,
- bilingual, immersion, heritage, and language minority education,
- language cognition and brain research,
- corpus linguistics,
- analysis of discourse and interaction,
- educational linguistics,
- language, culture, socialization and pragmatics,
- language and ideology,
- language maintenance and revitalization,
- language, planning and policy,
- second and foreign language pedagogy,
- phonology/Phonetics and oral communication,
- research methodology,
- reading, writing, and literacy,
- second language acquisition, language acquisition, and attrition,
- sociolinguistics,
- language and technology,
- teacher education, beliefs, and identities,
- translation, interpretation, and language access,
- text analysis (written discourse),
- vocabulary and lexical studies.

According to Davies (2007), micro-perspectives in AL include fields such as language planning and policy, language education policy, and language testing and assessment. Micro-perspectives encompass areas like SLA, discourse analysis, and second language teaching. Moreover, Groom and

Littlemore (2011) offer a route for scholars to conduct research and explore the field of AL, that are listed as the following:

- language teaching methodology,
- syllabus and materials design,
- language testing,
- languages for specific purposes,
- second language acquisition,
- language policy and planning,
- forensic linguistics,
- sociolinguistics and critical discourse analysis,
- translation studies,
- lexicography.

Additionally, many have failed to encompass or list all the subfields of AL inclusively, however, there appears to be a rather conclusive categorization that is introduced by Hall, Smith, and Wicaksono (2017) who classify major topics in the field into three sub-categories of (a) language and everyday use, (b) language learning and education, (c) language and expert uses, as shown in the table below.

Table 1. AL categorization by Hall, Smith, and Wickson (2011)

Language and everyday use	Language learning and education	Language and expert use
Language variation	Literacy	Translation
Discourse analysis	Language and Education	Lexicography
Language policy and planning	Bilingual and Multilingual education	Forensic linguistics
	Additional language education	Language pathology
		Prospects and Perspectives

In addition to the subfields of AL, Schmitt and Rodgers (2020) offer seven essential areas of research which are; SLA, psycholinguistics, sociolinguistics, forensic linguistics, and multilingualism, as well as, language learner styles, strategies, and motivation. Among the seven, the last three are new subfields added to AL. They argue that these are major subfields of AL that play an umbrella role covering minor ones.

As AL has evolved, British Association of Applied Linguistics - BAAL (2022) has proposed a number of Special Interest Groups (SIGs). This means researchers could contribute to the groups of areas of AL according to their specialty and interests as the following:

- corpus linguistics,
- English as an additional language,
- health and science communication,
- intercultural communication,
- language, gender, and sexuality,
- language and new media,
- language learning and teaching,
- language policy,
- linguistic ethnography,

- linguistics and knowledge about language in education,
- multilingualism,
- professional, academic, and work-based literacies,
- research synthesis in applied linguistics,
- testing, evaluation, and assessment,
- vocabulary studies.

All in all, although each applied linguist has defined AL the way they contributed to it, and this has enriched the field, the major issue with their definitions and classifications is that some sub-fields of AL tend to be fallen into more than one category, therefore, it appears to be quite problematic to take them into a mere consideration.

To sum up, the historical background of AL can be shown in a table providing common subfields in each decade from the 1950s to the 2020s. (*See table 2*)

Table 2. Common subfields of AL per decade from the 1950s to the 2020s

Decade	Common subfields in macro subfields										
1950s	Second language teaching	First language literacy									
1960s	Language assessment	Language policy	Second language acquisition (SLA)								
1970s	Multilingualism	Language minority rights	Teacher training	Language planning And Policy (LPP)							
1980s	Language use in professional settings	Translation	Use of technology in language	Lexicography							
1990s	Communication disorders	Language and the media	Sign language research	Language and the law	Stylistics and	Literacy	Discourse and conversational	Socialization			
2000s	Corpus linguistics	Antiracism and decolonization	Text analysis (written discourse)	Language cognition and brain research	Educational linguistics	Language and culture	Language maintenance and revitalization	Second and foreign language	Phonology/Phonetics and Oral	Research Methodology	Sociolinguistics
2010s	Language teaching methodology	Syllabus and material	Language for specific purposes								
2020s	Psycholinguistics	Health and science	Linguistic ethnography	Intercultural communication	Language and gender	Language and new					

Yet, the previous table seems to have missed some of the macro subfields of AL; thus, there is possible confusion since some subfields may fall into more than one column. Hence, this paper introduces a list

that includes all common macro subfields that are mentioned and studied throughout the literature of AL reviewed in this paper. For each macro, all common micro subfields are also categorized accordingly.

In summary, based on reviewing the literature, this paper sets the current map of AL by providing all of its mentioned Macro and Micro subfields which is the first aim of the study to be achieved. However, it only focuses on the macro subfields. In addition, table (3) illustrates all common macro subfields of AL according to its literature and academic experts in KRI.

Table 3. Common macro-AL subfields

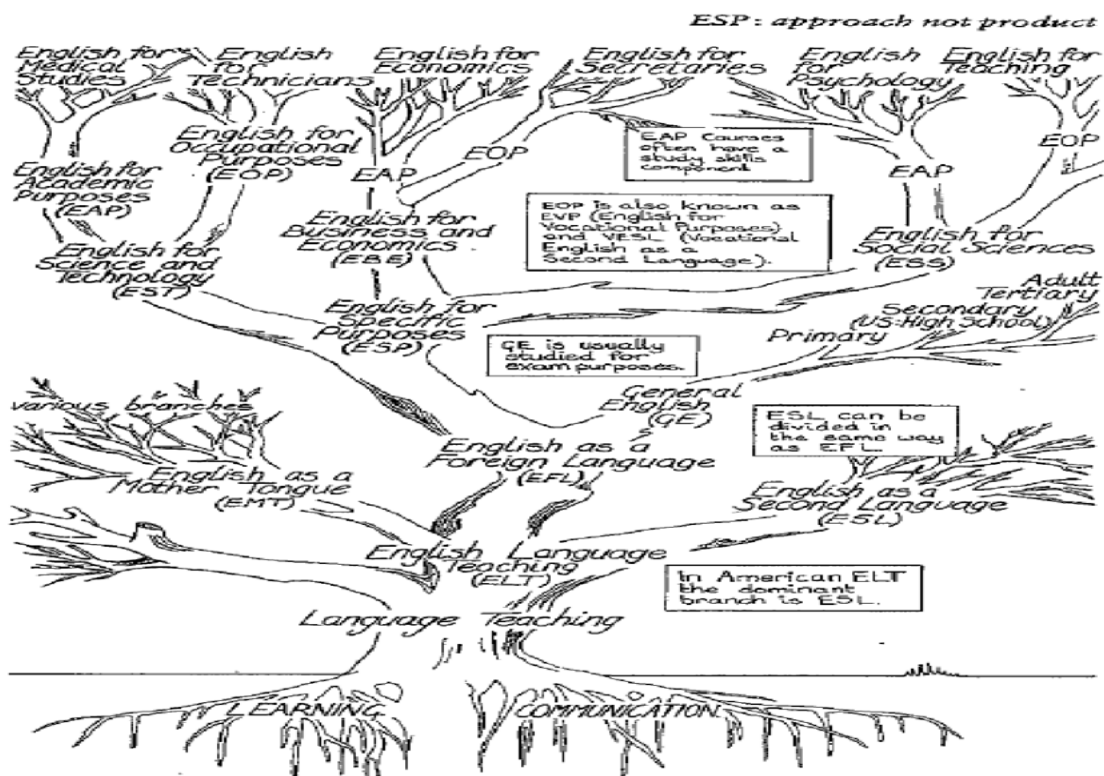
No.	Macro subfields
1	ELT
2	Language planning and policy
3	Assessment and evaluation
4	Translation studies
5	Language and technology
6	Discourse analysis
7	Curriculum development
8	Psycholinguistics and neurolinguistics
9	Sociolinguistics
10	Forensic linguistics
11	Corpus linguistics
12	Pragmatics
13	Creative writing studies

## 1.2. Macro subfields

### 1. English Language Teaching (ELT)

ELT started from the spread of the British Empire and it has grown exponentially since then. Nowadays, it is one of the top focused fields in Education around the globe. According to Hutchinson and Water (1987), ELT is rooted in Language Teaching. The field of ELT is clearly illustrated through the following branching structure. (*See Diagram 1*).

Diagram 1. English language teaching tree branches by Hutchinson and Water (1987)



Therefore, as a macro sub-field of AL, ELT includes English as a Mother Tongue (EMT), English as a Second Language (ESL), and English as a Foreign Language (EFL). It further explained that EFL can also be divided into General English (GE) and English for Specific Purposes (ESP). Besides, since AL is concerned with addressing and investigating real-world issues of language teaching, it proves the fact that ELT is an inseparable part of AL (Khansir, 2013).

## 2. Language planning and policy (LPP)

According to Goundar (2018), LPP “is one of the fastest growing subdisciplines of applied linguistics.” Collectively, LPP refers to direct official interventions to regulate a certain language or any variety of that particular language. However, some divide both language planning and language policy, and thus, provide a definition(s) for each. On one hand, according to Cooper (1989, p. 45), “language planning refers to deliberate efforts to influence the behavior of others with respect to the acquisition, structure, or functional allocation of their language codes.” Additionally, McGroarty (1997, p.1) defines language policy as “the combination of official decisions and prevailing public practices related to language education and use.”

## 3. Assessment and evaluation

It is necessary to clarify what is meant by ‘assessment and evaluation’ in AL because both words tend to have a rather conclusive meaning than taking them literally for granted. They are commonly used interchangeably although there is a significant difference between them in any field, including in Education, AL in this case. As far as AL is concerned, evaluations and assessments are done for various reasons, such as; monitoring one’s educational progress, various governmental purposes, as part of job applications, and as part of their professional development and promotion. Meidasari (2015) explains that “assessment is the process of gathering evidence of what the child can do. Evaluation is the process that follows this collection of data, including analysis and reflection, as well as decisions based on the data.” Further, when it comes to teaching and learning languages, assessments and evaluations are

executed to assess and evaluate accuracy and fluency which are firmly tied to everyday language uses and implications, i.e., Applied Linguistics.

#### **4. Translation studies**

Grabe (2002) labels 'translation' as a subfield of AL that deals with language issues in authentic contexts. As globalization and human movements have grown, and as spreading interest among countries concerned in the last century or so, translation and interpretation needs have become more in high demand. According to Baker and Pérez-González (2011), "translation and interpreting are forms of linguistic mediation that involves rendering written or oral text from one language to another. As language-based activities that have practical implications, they are often seen as falling within the remit of applied linguistics."

#### **5. Language and technology**

Since the inception of technological advancements, language and technology have grown hand in hand, and this relationship has greatly impacted the field of AL (Haliday, 1985, cited in Dodigovic and Jeaco, 2021). In fact, major advancements happened in language learning and teaching due to new technology and its implications inside and outside classrooms, i.e., learning in person and/or online. Dodigovic and Jeaco (2021) argue that "one of the ways technology has enhanced language learning activities both in the classroom and for online teaching has been through the development of new platforms for collaboration." Since AL deals with the real-life usages of language and since technological advancements have supported teaching and learning languages more profoundly, one can argue that language and technology are inseparable. Thus, it can be labeled as a subfield of AL.

#### **6. Discourse analysis**

Harris (1954) was the first to use the term 'discourse analyses'. His main focus was providing a way to analyze both connected speech and writing. Discourse analysis, therefore, "is the systematic study of naturally occurring (not hypothetical) communication in the broadest sense, at the level of meaning (rather than as physical acts or features)" (Bavelas et al., 2002). In addition, Jorgensen and Philips (2002) state that discourse analysis studies patterns of spoken utterances and written texts that tend to partake in various contexts of our social life. Thus, one can strongly argue that the core practice of 'discourse analyses revolve around language in use either spoken or written which makes it one of the macro subfields of AL.

#### **7. Curriculum development**

With the increasing demand for up-to-date curriculum, curriculum development has become a significant subfield in AL. Kranthi (2017) defines it as a "planned, purposeful, progressive, and systematic process to create positive improvements in the educational system." Since AL provides further, up-to-date understandings of how languages are acquired and taught more effectively, curriculum developers tend to base their curriculum on such understandings.

#### **8. Psycholinguistics and neurolinguistics**

On one hand, as the name suggests, the term 'psycholinguistics' is the combination of two language disciplines, psychology and linguistics. It caters to the psychological aspects that are considered in learning and teaching languages. It covers three sub-areas; "language production, language perception, and language acquisition. Language production refers to the processes involved in creating and expressing meaning through language. Language perception refers to processes involved in interpreting and understanding both written and spoken language. Language acquisition refers to the process of acquiring a native or a second language" (Purba, 2018).

On the other hand, the term 'neurolinguistics' is simply the combination of 'neuro' that refers to the brain and 'linguistics'. According to Ahlsen (cited in Simpson, 2011), it is a type of study that is related to language and its connection with the brain. It "is a truly interdisciplinary pursuit, involving

neuroscience, psychology, linguistics, speech pathology and biology. Its relevance to therapy in particular makes it an applied linguistic concern.” According to the aforementioned definitions, it can be noted that both ‘psycholinguistics and neurolinguistics’ are studies of language in use either contextualized or produced which puts them within the boundaries of AL.

### **9. Sociolinguistics**

Any relation between language and its users in society is investigated within the field of ‘sociolinguistics’. According to Spolsky (1998), when this field is integrated with Applied Linguistics, it is redefined as ‘Applied Sociolinguistics’. Moreover, it is also important to acknowledge that there are social factors that can have impacts on our language which are “geographical location, gender, our parents/carers, race, age, and socioeconomic status” (Beinhoff, 2013). These social factors, consequently, would have key impacts on language teaching, learning, and pedagogy which are inseparable sub-areas of AL.

### **10. Forensic linguistics**

Due to the importance of the role of language in court and legal matters, forensic linguistics was introduced and brought into the field of AL to provide solid grounds for spoken and written language that are law or court-based. Grau (2023) states that “Forensic linguistics is an emerging multidisciplinary field within applied linguistics that focuses on the various intersections between language and law. To ensure a fair and effective legal process, it is crucial to have an understanding of linguistic principles in order to avoid misinterpretations or misunderstandings.”

### **11. Corpus linguistics**

There are multiple definitions of corpus linguistics. For Bennett (2010), it “approaches the study of language in use through corpora (singular: corpus). A corpus is a large, principled collection of naturally occurring examples of language stored electronically.” The phrase ‘language in use’ is one of the major characteristics that AL is also recognized with, whether it is produced physically or electronically. Corpus linguistics, therefore, can certainly be considered a significant area of study in AL.

### **12. Pragmatics**

Pragmatics is an essential aspect of linguistic inquiry that investigates the complex relationship between linguistic signs and their users. For Verscheuren (1999), it is a field of study that examines the various factors that influence our selection of language in social interactions and the impact that our choices have on others. These pragmatic factors contribute to determining the sounds, grammatical structures, and vocabulary that we use to convey the intended meaning of our communication. As far as AL is concerned, both AL and Pragmatics are used interchangeably, however, Crystal (2008, p. 379) argues that “the field focuses on an ‘area’ between semantics, sociolinguistics and extra linguistic context; but the boundaries with these other domains are as yet incapable of precise definition. Hence, Pragmatics can be regarded as one of the macro subfields of AL through its overlap in a number of subfields and/or areas”.

### **13. Creative writing studies**

Finally, the field of ‘creative writing studies, a discipline that has emerged relatively recently as a distinct macro subfield within AL, merits consideration. Rasool (2021) posits that ‘creative writing study’ constitutes an autonomous domain of inquiry with AL, and this recognition has consequently led to its inclusion as a principal in the present research.

### 3. Methodology

This section explains the research design and the data collection process. The first section describes the research design, data collection process, sampling, validity and reliability, and data analysis method.

#### 3.1 Research design

This paper primarily follows a quantitative approach to analyze the collected data. According to Lan (2020), one could choose to follow a quantitative, qualitative or mixed-methods approach in the field of social sciences as per the research need. However, it is also argued that the difference between quantitative and qualitative methodologies is so evident, asserting that they adhere to two distinct research paradigms, making them lose their essence if mixed (Dorney, 2007, p.29). Therefore, this research adopts a quantitative method in analyzing the results. In AL, in particular, high-quality research depends primarily on producing and/or gathering quantitative data for certain research to be reliable and generalizable (Loewen and Gass, 2009, cited in Razavipour and Raji, 2022).

#### 3.2 Data collection procedure

The data collection process was conducted in two phases. First, consent was gained from the universities in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq as well as the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research to ensure research ethical considerations. Second, personal visits were paid to each university to receive either hard copies or soft copies of MA theses and PhD dissertations conducted in AL between 2007 to 2021 at those esteemed universities

#### 3.3 Sampling

Significantly, the entire population available is considered. This sampling method is known as a 'census' or 'complete enumeration', in which every sample within the population is included in the study. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (n.d.), "a census is a study of every unit, everyone or everything, in a population. It is known as a complete enumeration, which means a complete count" certainly that has advantages and disadvantages. The challenges/disadvantages could be seen as one of the limitations of this study.

Table 4. Advantages and disadvantages of census (or complete enumeration sampling)

Advantages of a Census	Disadvantages of a Census
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- provides a true measure of the population (no sampling error)</li> <li>- benchmark data may be obtained for future studies</li> <li>- detailed information about small sub-groups within the population is more likely to be available</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- may be difficult to enumerate all units of the population within the available time</li> <li>- higher costs, both in staff and monetary terms, than for a sample</li> <li>- generally, takes longer to collect, process, and release data than from a sample</li> </ul>

Therefore, the research chooses this sampling method due to the fact that there is no fundamental issue with the method and its advantages far outweigh the disadvantages. However, the data collection process involved a great deal of hardship, took longer, and cost more than expected.

Consequently, all available data which were 91 MA theses and PhD dissertations gathered from all KRI universities in which such data is available. Furthermore, the samples are selected based on three criteria: (a) the research fields that is Applied Linguistics, ELT, and TESOL (b) from 2007 to 2021, (c) at the public and private universities in Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI). These samples were

selected intentionally because they all meet those three requirements, which is called ‘purposive sampling’.

Besides, purposive sampling or judgmental sampling refers to a type of sampling in which “units are selected because they have characteristics that you need in your sample. In other words, units are selected ‘on purpose’ in purposive sampling.”

### 3.4. Validity and Reliability

Center for Applied Linguistics (n.d.) argues that validity pertains to the extent to which a measure or standard can accurately assess the intended construct. For this purpose, face validity is achieved by checking the list of the common macro subfields of AL by a panel of jury members consisting of 12 professors, researchers, PhD holders, and specialists in AL in KRI. It is also worth mentioning that face validity refers to whether a rubric or a standard can measure what it should measure (Bhandari, 2023). In this context, there was a unanimous consensus among the jury members regarding the thorough and well-structured categorization of the subfields.

On the other hand, reliability deals with the way a particular element is measured, and consistency should be obtained from and achieved in case this measurement, standard, or rubric is used or put into practice after the first trial (Rosemary and Happy, 2014). Additionally, this research has followed ‘inter-rater reliability’ in which researchers evaluate the consistency and stability of the research data analysis and results. This will, as a result, ensure to maintain the quality and credibility of the research data and outcomes. Mcleod (2023) states that “inter-rater reliability, often termed inter-observer reliability, refers to the extent to which different raters or evaluators agree in assessing a particular phenomenon, behavior, or characteristic. It is a measure of consistency and agreement between individuals scoring or evaluating the same items or behaviors”.

For this purpose, the data was analyzed and discussed with two esteemed and reputable professors, one in applied linguistics and the other in linguistics to ensure each research sample (MA these or PhD dissertation) is put on its macro subfield category.

### 3.5 Data analysis method

Since there is not an available category or fixed, conclusive definition of AL, hence, the field’s literature is reviewed chronologically. As a result, all macro subfields of AL are listed to be able to categorize the theses and dissertations accordingly. In other words, the data is analyzed in two phases. First, a database is prepared to categorize the titles. For this purpose, they are analyzed quantitatively. Second, the subfield frequencies and percentages are discussed to make suggestions and recommendations to concerned universities and authorities for future endeavors in AL.

## 4.Results and discussion

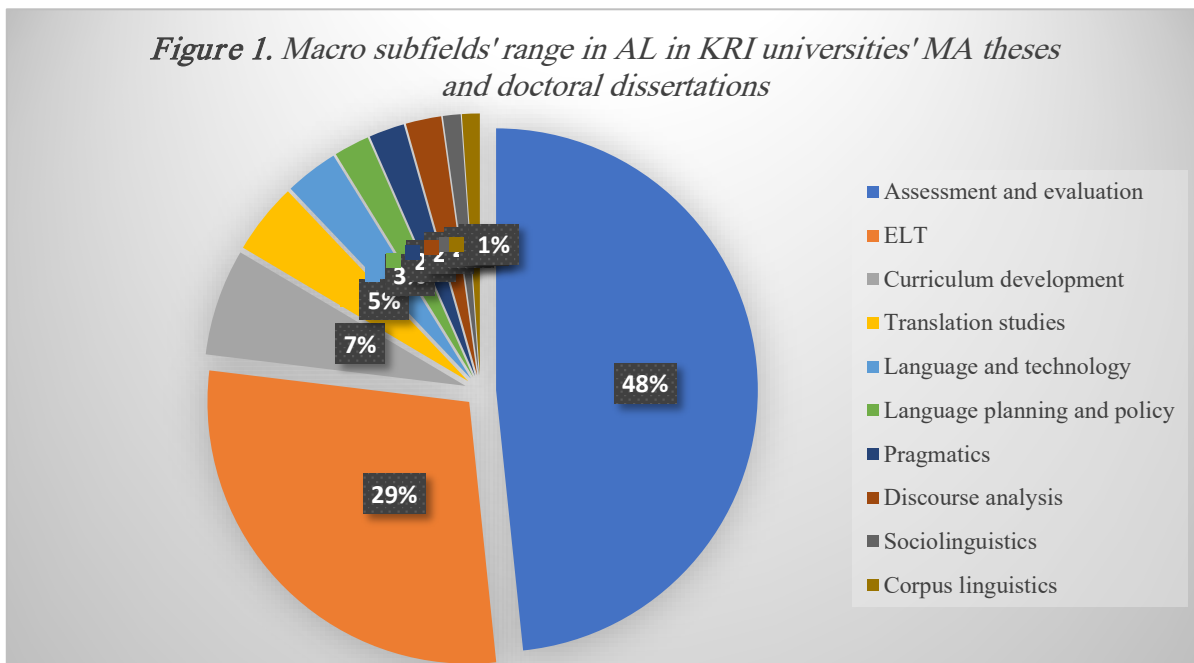
There are thirteen common macro subfields of AL this paper has enlisted based on the literature in AL since no clear-cut, fixed classification has been offered due to the fact that the field has always been defined differently by applied linguists over time. Therefore, a number of jury members were assigned to ensure that the subfields were concise and inclusive. Consequently, this paper can be regarded as original since it adds substantial value to the literature of AL. The table below shows the macro subfields’ frequency between 2007 and 2021 according to the study data.

Table 5. Number of researches in common macro subfields of AL

No.	Macro subfields	No. of research
1	Assessment and evaluation	44

2	ELT	26
3	Curriculum development	6
4	Translation studies	4
5	Language and technology	3
6	Language planning and policy	2
7	Pragmatics	2
8	Discourse analysis	2
9	Sociolinguistics	1
10	Corpus linguistics	1
11	Psycholinguistics and neurolinguistics	0
12	Forensic linguistics	0
13	Creative writing studies	0
	<b>Total</b>	<b>91</b>

*Figure 1. Macro subfields' range in AL in KRI universities' MA theses and doctoral dissertations*



To begin with, the first macro subfield of ‘Assessment and Evaluation’ appears to be the most researched with 44 theses and dissertations, that is 48 percent. This clearly shows a significant interest in the assessment and evaluation of various aspects of language use and application. It may also indicate a practical concern for improving language education and ensuring that language assessments are valid and reliable. This is highly likely because language assessment and evaluation are often conducted systematically providing teachers and scholars in AL with practical information to measure language proficiency, learning outcomes, and the effectiveness of language programs. This process, as a result, is regarded essential for understanding the language acquisition process and making informed decisions in language education as a whole.

Moreover, during a language assessment process, data is collected on learners' language abilities, often through tests, assignments, or other means. The aim is to measure what learners know and can do at a particular point in time. On the other hand, evaluations involve interpreting and making judgments based on assessment data. They include determining the effectiveness of teaching methods, curriculum design, and overall program outcomes. Brown (2004) emphasizes the significance of assessment in language teaching and provides insights into various assessment methods and their implications for language education, namely; teaching and learning.

This is followed by English Language Teaching (ELT) in which 26 theses/dissertations were conducted accounting for 29%. ELT has been the backbone of the field of AL since its inception. This number in KRI university theses indicates the field's continuous significance as far as AL is concerned. The samples virtually focus on pedagogical methods and approaches suggesting that improving language teaching and learning remains a priority.

According to Graddol (2006) and Crystal (2003), there is considerable emphasis on ELT research thanks to several contributing factors. English has attained the status of the world's lingua franca. As a result, the demand for effective English language instruction is high, encouraging researchers to investigate various aspects of language teaching and learning within an English language context.

In the KRI context, there appears to be a number of contributing factors along with what Graddol (2006) and Crystal (2003) argue. Some program degrees are awarded in ELT and that seems to be the primary reason that the titles are within the area. Further, 'Curriculum Development' has a fairly smaller number of research projects compared to the aforementioned two with 7% only. This could indicate that while it is still a relevant area of study, it may not be receiving as much attention as other subfields. There might, alternatively, be other reasons why this field is under-researched so far despite the significance it adds to AL. This subfield is often viewed as a particularly challenging research domain (Walker, n.d.).

Unexpectedly, 'Translation Studies' appear to be a less-researched macro subfield in the KRI context with 5%. This could indicate a specific interest in translation-related issues or that translation is less of a focus compared to other areas already discussed. Or else, there might be another reason why AL has not accommodated a much larger number of translation studies within the AL realm.

In the contemporary global landscape, although a firm, robust interconnection exists with the utilization of technological advancements including the field of language teaching and learning, the subfield of 'Language and Technology' has three theses only, and that is 3%. Hence, there seems not to be a growing interest in the integration and utilization of technology into AL research, although there have been rapid, continuous advancements in technology in recent years related to language research, AL, in particular.

The final five least researched subfields are Language Planning and Policy (LPP), Pragmatics, Discourse Analysis (DA), Sociolinguistics, and Corpus Linguistics with 8% collectively. This interestingly suggests niche areas within AL. LPP often explores the socio-political aspects of language use and language policies that are expected to be further researched in the KRI context, however, the rest seem to be catered for in the theoretical linguistics area since the conventional opinion was used to regard them as theoretical rather than applied linguistics. However, focusing on these five subfields could provide valuable insights into research practices for KRI university bodies and academics.

Despite the fact that this analysis demonstrates that the priorities within the field of AL have evolved over the years, with certain subfields gaining and losing prominence, it appears that the subfields of 'Psycholinguistics and Neurolinguistics', 'Forensic Linguistics' and 'Creative Writing Studies' have been entirely overlooked. Although one PhD dissertation was conducted in 2022 at Salahaddin University-Erbil that is a 'Creative Writing Study' categorizing it as an independent macro subfield

within the scope of AL but not taking it as one of the samples since this dissertation samples are taken from 2007 to 2021.

Overall, the data indicates a predominant interest in ‘Assessment and Evaluation’ and ‘ELT’ within the field of AL. This distribution of theses/dissertations across these subfields can reflect the current priorities and trends within the discipline, which may evolve over time as new challenges and opportunities emerge in language education and research. It is also important to note that the number in each subfield can vary over time and in different research contexts, and this analysis is based on the collected data snapshot.

Furthermore, to highlight the changes over the years from 2007 to 2021, the following table presents the dominant area(s) for each year.

**Table 6.** Macro subfields per year (from 2007 to 2021)

<b>No.</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Macro subfields</b>
<b>1</b>	2007	Assessment and evaluation
<b>2</b>	2008	Discourse analysis
<b>3</b>	2010	Assessment and evaluation
<b>4</b>	2011	Assessment and evaluation
<b>5</b>	2012	Assessment and evaluation
<b>6</b>	2013	Assessment and evaluation, ELT
<b>7</b>	2014	Assessment and evaluation, ELT
<b>8</b>	2015	Assessment and evaluation, Curriculum development
<b>9</b>	2016	Assessment and evaluation, ELT,
<b>10</b>	2017	Assessment and evaluation
<b>11</b>	2018	Language planning and policy (LPP)
<b>12</b>	2019	Assessment and evaluation, ELT, Translation studies, Curriculum development
<b>13</b>	2020	Assessment and evaluation, ELT, Language and technology
<b>14</b>	2021	ELT

In the academic analysis of Table 6, one could methodically dissect the categorized progression and the frequency of different macro subfields within AL over the years, from 2007 to 2021. The table enumerates the focal macro subfields for each year providing a longitudinal snapshot of predominant research interests and areas of pedagogical focus and interest in the discipline.

From an initial review, ‘Assessment and Evaluation’ is a recurrent subfield, appearing consistently from 2007 through 2021, with the sole exception of 2018 in which ELT takes the lead by a small margin. This pattern suggests a sustained and overarching emphasis on this area within AL, underscoring its significance and perhaps pointing to the evolving standards and methodologies of language assessment and the impact of such evaluations on education policies.

The subfield of ‘ELT’, while absent in the initial years, started its presence in 2013 and persists with increasing frequency, indicating a growing concern for the methods and practice of teaching English

as a foreign or second language. Its emergence may be reflective of globalization trends and its inevitable rise of English as a lingua franca, necessitating expanded research into effective teaching strategies.

Noticeably, ‘Curriculum Development’ and ‘LPP’ are less frequently listed but emerge sporadically, suggesting that while they are of interest, they may be more context-specific or influenced by particular shifts or MA theses and PhD dissertation supervisors’ opinions in their submitted proposals since MA theses and PhD dissertation proposals have officially been offered by supervisors, not their students at KRI universities. This is one of the challenges that has been addressed by universities so that students initiate their study proposals based on their interests and the field’s needs.

Furthermore, the inclusion of ‘Translation Studies’ and ‘Language and Technology’ in later years illustrates the diversification of the field and its responsiveness to technological advancements and the increasingly multilingual context of language use in this century.

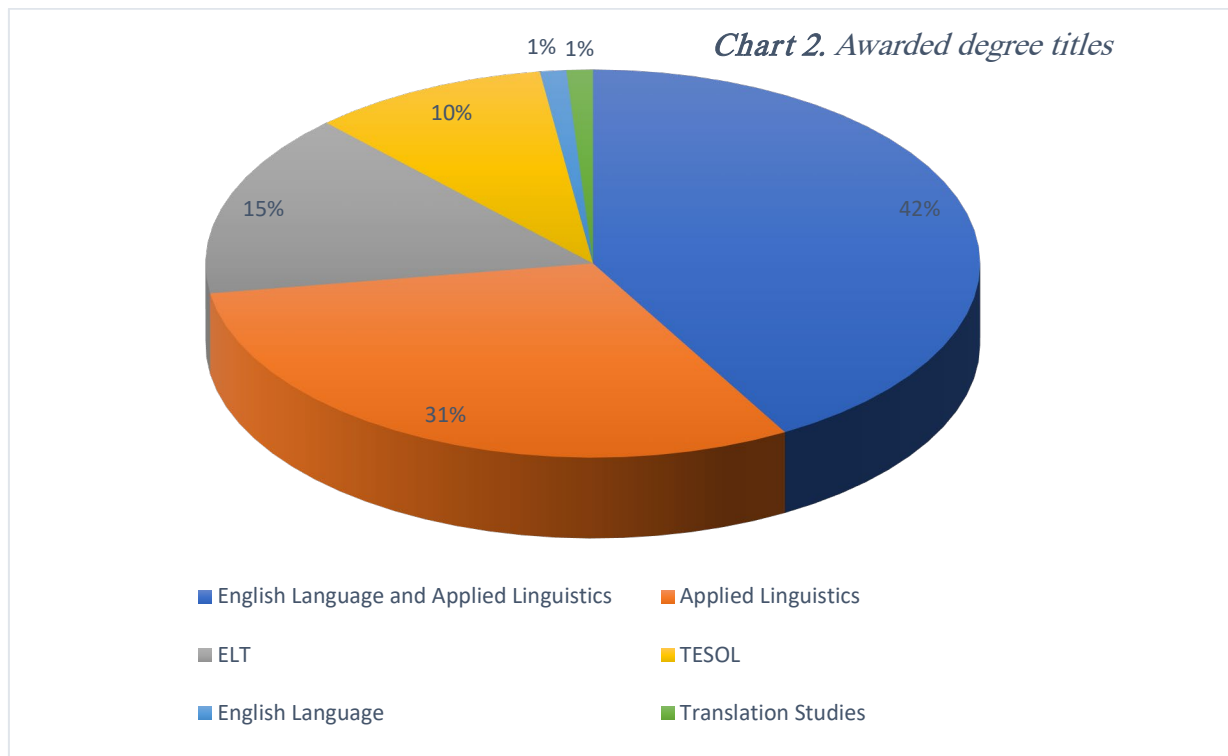
The table can also be analyzed from the perspective of methodological trends, funding opportunities, and scholarly discourse, adopting a critical approach to understanding how these subfields align with or diverge from global educational trends, technological developments, socio-political movements, and academic networking.

An MA thesis or doctoral dissertation rooted in such analytical discourse would likely benefit from triangulating this data with additional quantitative and qualitative methods, possibly including an examination of relevant publication outputs, funding allocations, and policy developments. This would potentially reveal broader systematic changes and the interplay between these subfields and the stakeholders within the discipline of AL.

Moreover, due to the fact that there has not been a fixed, academic route for the specialists in AL in KRI universities, there seems to be confusion when degree titles are offered to and obtained by postgraduate students in the field of Applied Linguistics. The following table enlists the degree titles awarded.

Table 7. MA and PhD awarded degree titles between 2007-2021 in AL at KRI universities

No.	Degree titles awarded	Number of studies
1	English Language and Applied Linguistics	38
2	Applied Linguistics	28
3	ELT	14
4	TESOL	9
5	English Language	1
6	Translation Studies	1
	<b>Total</b>	<b>91</b>



To embark on, it is noticeable that the degree titles granted were not compliant with what this study suggests as the macro subfields of AL. It appears to be confusion while awarding the degree titles to the postgraduate students, enrolled either in MA or PhD. As a result, the most prevalent degree titles are ‘English language and Applied Linguistics’ and ‘Applied Linguistics’ with 28 studies (42%) and 22 studies (31%) respectively. These degree titles, however, are not subfields of Applied Linguistics, they are indeed the covering field itself.

The third most awarded degree title is ‘ELT’ which is well within the macro subfields of AL with eight studies accounting for 13%. This is followed by ‘TESOL’ with 15% only although it is one of the macro subfields. After these follow two different degree awards of ‘English Language’ and ‘Translation Studies’ the first doesn’t belong to the subfields but the latter is one of them. Additionally, despite the fact that ‘Translation Studies’ is a genuine subfield of AL, it only officially accounts for 1% of the total number of studies conducted from 2007 to 2021 at KRI universities.

In summary, it can be argued that degree titles awarded in AL in KRI universities from 2007 to 2021 demonstrate a diversity of academic offerings and indicate the recognition of even some distinct subfields within AL, however, the confusion is quite apparent since non-AL and non-macro degree titles awarded to postgraduate researchers and they account for the majority of the studies conducted in this regard. There needs to be a genuine concern to address, research, and discuss any confusion and error to provide practical grounds for future endeavors in the field.

## 2. Conclusion and recommendations

### 5.1 Conclusion

In the course of this dissertation, a thorough examination of the macro subfields of AL has been conducted, highlighting the diverse and dynamic nature of the field. The study identified thirteen macro subfields based on the literature and expert inputs, providing a structured framework for understanding the landscape of AL research. The analyses disclose that ‘Assessment and Evaluation’ and ‘ELT’ emerge as areas of primary interest, dominating the research scene over the period from 2007 to 2021.

Such a trend underscores the field's commitment to enhancing both the methodologies of language education and the efficacy of assessment protocols, aligning scholarly pursuits with the urgent demand for educational application and advancement.

This research also brought to light a relatively lower level of research activity in other subfields, notably 'Translation Studies', 'Language and Technology', and 'Curriculum Development'. Notably, the complete absence of the three macro subfields of 'Psycholinguistics and Neurolinguistics', 'Forensic Linguistics', and 'Creative Writing Studies' in the data gathered, could point to potential uncharted territories within the AL research area. The analysis further demonstrated consistent interest in 'assessment and evaluation' across the years, suggesting it to be a perennial area of focus, while interest in other subfields has fluctuated over time.

Further, scrutiny of the titles of degrees awarded highlighted an intriguing mismatch between the categorized subfields within the discipline and the actual designations given to postgraduate-level students. The widespread use of umbrella terms like 'English Language and Applied Linguistics' or simply 'Applied Linguistics' for degree titles points to a kind of vagueness. The generalization could potentially hinder the progression and establishment of specialized niches within the field of AL.

## 5.2 Recommendations

Recommendations can be formulated across several streams, as the findings offer insights applicable to multiple areas:

1. Encouragement of diverse research areas: Higher education bodies such as universities and research institutions should consider, promote, and support research across a broader range of subfields within AL. This could be achieved through targeted funding, special research groups, and dedicated conferences or symposiums that focus on unresearched and/or under-researched areas such as 'Psycholinguistics and Neurolinguistics', 'Forensic Linguistics', and 'Creative Writing Studies'.
2. Degree title alignment with a research focus: It is apparent that there is a necessity for the alignment of degree titles to mirror more accurately the distinct subfields within AL to provide a clear-cut representation of the researcher's area of expertise. Academic institutions are encouraged to reassess and potentially amend their policies concerning the conferment of degrees and adopt precise titles such as 'Assessment and Evaluation in AL', 'TESOL', and 'ELT', thereby reducing confusion and ambiguity, and enhancing academic and professional recognition.
3. Enhanced curriculum development: Considering the relatively limited research engagement in 'Curriculum Development', it is advisable that academic programs and materials allocate more attention to this critical area. Developing comprehensive curricula that address recent and modern curricula that tackle current issues in language education and integrate cutting-edge teaching techniques tends to substantially contribute to the field.
4. Technology integration: With only a small percentage of research dedicated to 'Language and Technology', it becomes evident that there is a clear opportunity to explore the intersection of technological advancements and language acquisition and learning. It would be beneficial to investigate the potential of digital innovations and tools, online platforms, and artificial intelligence (AI) in enhancing and even transforming language education and assessments through KRI universities.
5. Educational policy and planning initiatives: Studying 'LPP' should be expanded to address the sociopolitical aspects of language usage. Collaborative projects that bring together policymakers, educators, language experts, and applied linguists could yield valuable insights regarding the implementation and impact of language policies, especially in multilingual and multicultural contexts.
6. Regular review of AL in KRI: The dynamic nature of AL necessitates regular reviews of research trends and emerging areas and subfields. Academic institutions would need to set up processes that regularly evaluate the current state of research, which will help ensure that educational and

academic programs and funding priorities are responsive to new developments and needs as far as higher education is concerned.

7. Interdisciplinary research promotion: Encouraging and fostering interdisciplinary research that bridges AL with other fields such as cognitive science, sociology, and technology are likely yield groundbreaking methods and a richer grasp of how language operates. For this, collaborative projects and cross-disciplinary seminars, workshops and symposiums can facilitate this integration.

By addressing these recommendations, the field of AL can continue to evolve, fostering a more inclusive and comprehensive research environment that accommodates diverse perspectives and emerging challenges. This will ultimately contribute to the advancement of language education and the broader understanding of language in society.

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## هه‌سه‌نگاندنی ناویشانی نامی ماستەر و تیزی دکتوراکان که له بواری زمانه‌وانی کاره‌کیدا له زانکۆکانی ههریمی کوردستان ئەنجام دراوان

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### پوخته

به‌شیوه‌یه‌کی به‌ربلای دان به‌وه‌دا ده‌نریت که زمانه‌وانی کاره‌کی هه‌شتا به‌ وردی و به‌ پرونی پیناسه‌ نه‌کراوه‌ یان پۆلین نه‌کراوه‌ بۆ پۆلینکردنیکی ورد. بۆیه‌ ئامانجی ئەم توێژینه‌وه‌یه‌ دیاریکردنی بواره‌ سه‌ره‌کیه‌کانی زمانه‌وانی کاره‌کی که له ناویشانی تیزه‌کانی ماستەر و دکتورا له زانکۆکانی ههریمی کوردستانی عێراق له نیوان سالانی 2007 و 2021 جه‌ختیان له‌سه‌ر کراوه‌ته‌وه‌. هه‌روه‌ها، پۆلینکردنی ناویشانه‌کان بۆ بواره‌ سه‌ره‌کیه‌کان له‌سه‌ر بانه‌مای ئەو بواره‌ی که ده‌ستتیشانکراوان و/یان دۆزراوه‌ته‌وه‌. پاشان، لیکۆلینه‌وه‌ بۆ ناویشانه‌کان ده‌کریت بۆ دیاریکردنی ئەوه‌ی کام بواره‌ گرنگی زیاتری پێدراوه‌.

ئەم توێژینه‌وه‌یه‌ سه‌ره‌تا تیشک ده‌خاته‌ سه‌ر میژووی زمانه‌وانی کاره‌کی که گۆرانکاری و په‌ره‌سه‌ندنه‌کانی به‌ درێژایی سه‌له‌کان له ده‌یان سالی جیادا تاوتوێ ده‌کرین له 1950 هه‌هه‌ تا ئیستا که تینیدا لیکۆلینه‌وه‌ و توێژینه‌وه‌ گرنگه‌کانی توێژه‌ران و پێشه‌نگه‌کانی ئەم بواره‌ پێداچوونه‌وه‌ ده‌کرین. له‌به‌رئه‌وه‌ی ئەم بواره‌ به‌ گۆیه‌ی زمانه‌وانی (که‌سانی پسه‌پۆری زمانه‌وانی) پیناسه‌ی جیاجیای بۆ کراوه‌ و به‌ تێپه‌رپوونی کات په‌ره‌ی سه‌ندووه‌، شایه‌نی ئەوه‌یه‌ ئەو پیناسه‌ و گۆرانکاریانه‌ بخره‌ به‌ ده‌سته‌ بۆ ئەوه‌ی بتوانین به‌ ته‌واوه‌تی بواره‌ سه‌ره‌کی و لاوه‌کیه‌کان پێشان بده‌ن. سه‌ره‌رای ئەوه‌ش، ژماره‌یه‌ک پۆلینی باش و توێژینه‌وه‌ی به‌رچاو له‌سه‌ر بواره‌کانی زمانه‌وانی کاره‌کی پێشکه‌ش ده‌کرین بۆ ئەوه‌ی ببنه‌ هۆکاریک بۆ پۆلینکردنی تیزه‌کانی ماستەر و ناویشانی دکتوراکان که له زانکۆکانی ههریمی کوردستانی عێراق به‌م شیوه‌یه‌ ئەنجام دراوه‌.

ده‌ره‌نجامه‌کانی ئەم شیکردنه‌وه‌یه‌ بانه‌مایه‌کی زانستی پێشکه‌ش ده‌کات که یارمه‌تی که‌سانی شاره‌زا له بواری زمانه‌وانی کاره‌کی ده‌دات، بۆ نزیکبوونه‌وه‌ له بواره‌ سه‌ره‌کی و لاوه‌کیه‌کانی ئەم بابه‌ته‌ به‌ تێروانینیکی رۆن و هاوسه‌نگ له لیکۆلینه‌وه‌ی داهااتووایندا. ئەم توێژینه‌وه‌یه‌ گرنگ ده‌بیت بۆ هه‌ر توێژینه‌وه‌یه‌کی نوێ له بواری زمانه‌وانی کاره‌کی ئەنجام بدریت له ههریمی کوردستانی عێراق و زانیاری ئینسایکلۆپیدیای و/یان بانه‌مای بته‌رته‌ی دا بین ده‌کات بۆیان.

**هه‌روه‌ها سه‌ره‌کیه‌کان:** بواره‌ سه‌ره‌کیه‌کانی زمانه‌وانی کاره‌کی، نامی ماستەر، تیزی دکتورا، ههریمی کوردستانی عێراق

### تقییم عناوین رسائال الماجستير والدكتوراه في اللغويات التطبيقية في جامعات اقليم كوردستان

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### ملخص

لم يتم تعريف أو تصنيف علم اللغة التطبيقي بدقة ووضوح إلى عناصر ومكونات محددة. وبالتالي، تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى تحديد المجالات الفرعية الكلية لعلم اللغة التطبيقية التي تم التركيز عليها في عناوين رسائل الماجستير ورسائل الدكتوراه في جامعات إقليم كوردستان العراق بين عامي 2007 و 2021، وكذلك فرز العناوين إلى فئات على أساس الحقول الفرعية الماكرو المشتركة التي تم تحديدها أو اكتشافها. بعد ذلك، سيتم دراسة العناوين لتحديد أي حقل فرعي حظي بمزيد من الاهتمام.

تسلط هذا البحث الضوء أولاً على تاريخ علم اللغة التطبيقي حيث تتم مناقشة تغيراته وتطوراتها على مر السنين في عقود منفصلة بدءاً من عام 1950 وحتى الوقت الحاضر، حيث يتم استعراض الأبحاث والدراسات الرائدة لأهم العلماء والرواد في هذا المجال. نظرًا لأن المجال قد تم تعريفه بشكل مختلف وفقًا لأراء اللغويين وتطورها عبر الزمن، فمن المفيد تقديم تلك التعريفات والتغييرات من أجل عرض الحقول الفرعية بشكل أوسع. بالإضافة إلى ذلك، تم تقديم عدد من التصنيفات للمجالات الفرعية لعلم اللغة التطبيقية من أجل الحصول على أسس لتصنيف رسائل الماجستير وعناوين رسائل الدكتوراه التي تم إجراؤها في جامعات إقليم كردستان العراق.

تقدم نتائج هذا التحليل أساسًا علميًا يساعد اللغويين التطبيقيين على التعامل مع الحقول الفرعية للانضباط بمنظور مدرّوس ومتوازن في دراساتهم المستقبلية. ستكون هذه الدراسة ذا أهمية كبيرة للأبحاث التي تم إجراؤها حديثًا في مجال اللغويات التطبيقية في إقليم كوردستان العراق وتوفر معلومات موسوعية وأسس جوهرية.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** اللغويات التطبيقية، رسالة الماجستير، رسالة الدكتوراه، اقليم كردستان العراق