

# Preface

It may appear odd that in the context of language acquisition, the contribution of consciousness was originally discussed almost exclusively in terms of its absence. Indeed, the very definition of language acquisition in children stresses the unconscious nature of linguistic development accompanied by little effort or awareness.

It is no wonder then that the idea of unconscious processes took on an air of superiority also in the case of second and foreign language acquisition, and conscious reflection evident in monitoring came to be viewed as unnatural. If awareness was considered a positive at all, it was as something of a consolation prize rather than a true asset. It resembled a deficiency that is evident but is better left unmentioned, like a prosthesis for missing unconscious automaticity and intuition. As a result, in foreign language teaching, especially in communicative methodology models, direct grammar instruction was avoided or at best considered a necessary evil, as if in the hope that if conscious control is not overused, then natural processes will spontaneously kick in.

The rationale behind this attitude is sound enough. “Lower” modes of language functioning such as handling grammar or phonology should not and do not require anything like rapt attention. This makes evolutionary sense. Given that language is one of the first skills acquired by children, it must be tailored to their cognitive style marked precisely by little reflective attention.

Further, it is not just that there is no need for conscious analysis of one’s production, but that such conscious analysis is often impossible, even if we chose to focus on fine details of language production. As Jackendoff (1997) observes, many aspects of language functioning are under the radar of awareness and cannot register in a person’s conscious attention. “We can’t be aware of the frequency analysis our auditory system performs on an incoming sound wave; we just hear a sound” and processes like this happen “as if by magic” (p. 181). Thus, listeners are unaware of features like aspiration, vowel shortening, or voicing. This does not mean that learners cannot understand the principles responsible for allophonic processes, “[b]ut even when we figure out how the brain does it, we still won’t be able to catch ourselves in the act!” (p. 181). This applies to a range of examples of linguistic phenomena, and Jackendoff ventures that the lexicon and the rules of grammar are in fact opaque to conscious report.

However, in the last two decades or so, language awareness has become a fairly popular topic in the literature on second language acquisition. This has no doubt been due to the recognition that, for better or worse, awareness is a hallmark of adult intelligence and by extension, there is really no good reason why it should not aid linguistic acquisition. This about-face is, of course, contingent on one's views of language. If one accepts strictly nativist arguments of language as a predisposition to be developed within the critical period, then practice accompanied by awareness makes little difference. But if the nativist model is adopted in a weaker form, leaving some room for neuroplasticity as vindicated by recent research, language could reasonably be assumed to be like other skills mastered through diligent mindful practice.

Recent research and theorizing has largely been concerned with the role of awareness from the teacher's perspective. Briefly, scholars have looked at the correlation between the teacher's formal knowledge of the language system and the benefits that this knowledge can bring. Among the most obvious questions has been how exactly the teacher's understanding of the nature of language improves the effectiveness of teaching. Somewhat less attention, initially at least, was devoted to awareness in learners. This is probably because most L2 learners are children and adolescents, traditionally believed to benefit mostly from learning by doing rather than by reflecting on form.

This has changed significantly in the last couple of years, when increasingly more scholars began to investigate how language awareness can enable learners to attain proficiency. The present volume is a reflection and product of this surge in interest in the learner's explicit understanding of language. Studies featured here analyze the awareness in advanced learners, mostly university students—proficient users of English and learners of other languages, but above all adults capable of grasping abstract details about the structure of the language system. Most chapters in the volume look at how language awareness affects the outcomes of foreign and second language acquisition in advanced learners. The authors focus on questions such as how much linguistic knowledge is open to the learner's conscious experience, what should and should not be considered knowledge of language, how language awareness can be enhanced in the classroom, and most crucially, what effects language awareness can have on attained proficiency.

Although the chapters in this volume interlock with each other along several dimensions, the volume is divided into three parts in terms of the specific focus taken by the authors.

The first part, titled *Teaching*, opens with Hanna Komorowska's critical discussion of the development of the concept of language awareness in language teaching followed by an analysis of consciousness and awareness studies in areas other than applied linguistics. In the second chapter in this part Roger Berry considers the use of instruments designed to study language awareness and discusses the dangers awaiting LA researchers failing to distinguish terminology from metalanguage in LA tests. Zbigniew Możejko's study investigates teachers' and learners' views on language awareness, attempting to elicit exactly what they understand by the term and how the understanding affects teaching practice. In the

last chapter of this part, Ewa Guz extends the study of the relation between language awareness and teaching practice to metalinguistic awareness raising. Her report on a study on metalinguistic knowledge among three groups of Polish users of English concludes with a suggestion on how to improve unsatisfactory levels in the teachers' and learners' levels of language awareness.

The second part of this volume encompasses the research of language awareness scholars with an emphasis on learning. Mirosław Pawlak opens the part with a broad overview of empirical studies on learners' awareness of the corrective feedback they receive in the process of learning and points to possible future directions of research in this area. The three chapters to follow concentrate on various aspects of language awareness and phonetics interface. Monika Grotek's chapter tackles the issue of language awareness in the university curriculum of practical phonetics and phonology, and presents the results of a study in students' perception of effectiveness of language awareness activities among English philology freshmen. Marcin Bergier's contribution presents the results of an experimental study of the impact of explicit phonetic instruction on no release burst in cluster contexts on the acquisition of the segments. The results show that metaphonetic awareness facilitates the acquisition process. Also, the research conducted by Ewa Czajka into learners' awareness of word-level stress brings similar results suggesting tentatively that theoretical instruction is conducive to the elimination of word stress errors. Aneta Kot's contribution adds to the growing literature on the use of conversational hedges. She addresses the issue of learners' preferences regarding various types of activities aiming to raise their awareness of pragmatic functions of hedges. Teresa Maria Włosowicz investigates the problem of language awareness in the context of language attrition among two groups of L3/L4 learners showing that language awareness is strongly dependent on an array of factors such as learners' motivation and needs. Ewa Guz's chapter nominates as the object of her study advanced learners' perception and recognition of formulaic sequences and shows that learners of English are largely unaware of its lexically patterned nature. The final two chapters in this part are devoted to questions related to the role of language awareness in foreign text comprehension by university learners of English. Liliana Piasecka studies how learners use their knowledge in a jigsaw reading and listening task and Katarzyna Papaja details the ways in which they apply metacognitive strategies in L2 reading tasks.

The chapters grouped in the third part, *Culture*, focus on culture-related aspects of language awareness and relate the notion to a number of theoretical backgrounds.

Danuta Gabryś-Barker falls firmly into this category with her careful analysis of restaurant naming habits in the culturally distinct contexts of Portugal and Poland. She argues that the awareness of different conceptualizations of culturally grounded phenomena is necessary for the development of intercultural communicative competence. Also concerned with the role of culture is Beata Malczewska-Webb, who examines the association between linguistic and cultural awareness and students' cultural background in Australia. The last two chapters in this volume deal with the question of English as a lingua franca. Anna Nizegorodcew's chapter

reports on the results of a study on Polish and Ukrainian students' perception of English as a lingua franca and shows that the concept of EFL is approved of by even those desiring native speaker proficiency in English. Similar results have been obtained in a study presented in the final chapter by Anna Mystkowska-Wiertelak and Jakub Bielak, whose findings show that although becoming native-like is still the objective of many learners, their perception of a native speaker as a model to follow has changed in the world dominated by English as lingua franca.

We hope that this collection of very carefully selected studies well documents the research in a thriving and dynamic field of enquiry and that it will be not only useful but also inspiring.

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## Reference

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Awareness in Action

The Role of Consciousness in Language Acquisition

Łyda, A.; Szcześniak, K. (Eds.)

2014, XVI, 268 p. 29 illus., Hardcover

ISBN: 978-3-319-00460-0