

THE USE OF LANGUAGE AWARENESS AS A METHODOLOGY

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Abstract. The work outlines the justification of the Language Awareness and its effectiveness in the teaching process. The utilization and features of Language Awareness have been investigated and demonstrated with researchers' views. The use of Language Awareness is highlighted as a methodology.

Key words: Language Awareness, methodology, explicit, education, knowledge, pedagogy, perception.

The role of language in education has been a key interest in research for a number of decades and has been studied from various perspectives. Educational researchers all over the world have been interested in this area. Many ways have been developed to investigate how language is addressed in education. Researchers have been interested in overall language development, as well as foreign and second language learning. Another area related to the role of language in education that has received an increasing amount of attention is language awareness. The curriculum states that a language aware teacher is a model for language and a teacher of subject specific Language. The current demand for more challenging, creative, and future-oriented language education calls for a more holistic view on language teaching and learning. A holistic view on language education should take into account linguistic, sociocultural and personal aspects and should pay attention to 'real-life language using situations where listening, speaking, reading and writing interact and intertwine'. Language awareness, defined as 'explicit knowledge about language, and conscious perception and sensitivity in language learning, language teaching and language use', fits with this holistic view on language teaching and learning. Language awareness aims to complement language learning by learning about language, it promotes linguistic reflection and it stimulates the use of higher-order and creative thinking skills.

The National Council on Language in Education (NCLE) Working Party
on

Languages Awareness has put forth the following succinct definition of LA:

'Language awareness is a person's sensitivity to and conscious awareness of the nature of language and its role in human life', and further specified three broad parameters, in which language learners' sensitivity and awareness develop: the cognitive parameter (e.g. being aware of language patterns), the affective parameter (e.g. developing positive attitudes towards foreign languages and their speakers), and the social parameter (e.g. enhancing learners' effectiveness in such social roles as citizens and customers) [3:107-122].

Language Awareness as a methodology has been advanced by Wright and Bolitho, and Borg, focusing on Language Awareness in language teacher education. Wright and Bolitho view Language Awareness as 'a methodology with which to explore language and language use, and its connections with and implications for classroom practice'. Their methodological framework of Language Awareness activities, targeted at ELT teachers and teacher trainers, is built on the fundamental knowledge about language (KAL) of the teaching profession, which is crucial yet often underdeveloped. Language Awareness work sensitizes teachers to linguistic phenomena and inspires their inquiry into language, 'by exploring language, by reflecting on discoveries and previous knowledge, by seeing language in different ways'. With the conviction that only a linguistically-aware teacher can enhance language learning, Wright and Bolitho promote Language Awareness with a top-down approach: first experimenting possibilities of Language Awareness activities and demonstrating them for teachers, then inducing principles of their design, and eventually equipping teachers with the necessary expertise and an expanded and enriched knowledge base to apply Language Awareness work in their language classrooms.

Derived from Wright's and Bolitho's [5; 292-304] views, Borg [2; 61-73] looks into the principles underlying Language Awareness as methodology in

foreign language teaching. Different from the general understanding of Language Awareness as a concept, his view gives insights into the characteristics of both Language Awareness methodology and Language Awareness -oriented teacher training. His central claim is again the importance of exploration of the ever-changing language, stating that 'learning about language- is the on-going investigation of a dynamic phenomenon'. He depicts how 'discovery-oriented tasks which are both affectively and cognitively motivating' can foster learners' explicit understanding of language and an awareness of their own learning.

The main features of his Language Awareness methodology include:

- 1) 'learning about language as an on-going investigation of a dynamic phenomenon';
- 2) 'talking about the language' as the indispensable means of learning a language;
- 3) 'learner-centered exploration and discovery' as the most effective process;
- 4) learners' affective and cognitive engagement for effective awareness-raising;
- 5) development of learners' 'knowledge about language' and 'skills for continuous autonomous learning'.

In his later attempt to promote collaboration between language educators and linguists, Borg reiterates Language Awareness as 'a pedagogical tool - a methodology in the sense of a set of processes through which learning about language can be promoted'. The underlying linguistic, educational and psychological principles are predominantly classroom-oriented, justifying the need for Language Awareness as a pedagogical approach and highlighting some characteristics of LA-oriented teaching.

Borg identifies the following defining features of Language Awareness as a methodology:

- 1) Language Awareness enables learners to perceive language meaningfully by evaluating their preconceptions about language;
- 2) Language Awareness allows learners to use language accurately and creatively for self-expression and social interactions, by incorporating cognitive

and humanistic views of language and language learning, and by making learning about language motivating and cognitively challenging;

3) Language Awareness makes language study interactive by encouraging learners' investigation into language and sharing their findings;

4) Language Awareness fosters learners' examination of their own understandings of language by encouraging them to analyze language data and to test and revise their hypotheses continually;

5) the multi-dimensional Language Awareness work, embracing every aspect of language - morphology, phonology, semantics, syntax, etc. - permits language analysis from a multitude of perspectives;

6) Language Awareness fosters learners' personal attachment to and ownership of their work by actively engaging them in exploring language;

7) Language Awareness develops learners' skills for continued autonomous learning by giving them access to resources for language study.

In a review of effective Language Awareness as a methodology in teacher training, Borg lists the demands of Language Awareness from language teachers in order to become effective in teaching. Borg firstly refers to the need of teachers themselves to be linguistically aware of the teaching content. In order to achieve this, teachers should develop skills that will convey the understanding of subject matter into classroom practice.

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