

Review of “Teacher Language Awareness”

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Language teachers have expressed the importance of the concept of *language awareness* in different educational settings. Wright and Bolitho (1993) state that teachers who are aware of their language development would be more likely to engage in various tasks such as developing teaching materials and contributing to the English language curriculum. “Yet training courses in ELT rarely take into account the language demands which the communicative approach makes on teachers” (Cullen, 1994, p. 162). “It is expected that the language teacher will have a holistic understanding of the language being taught in terms of its components, cultural nuances and general use” (Glasgow, 2008, p. 322). The language awareness of teachers depends on different factors such as the cultural context, theory and pedagogical practice.

The book “Teacher Language Awareness” is based on Andrews’ 30 years of research on the language awareness competence levels of English language teachers from different secondary schools in Hong Kong. Andrews stresses that “the possession of an adequate level of *Teacher Language Awareness (TLA)* is essential attribute of any competent L2 teacher” (2007, p. 9). This book targets pre-service and in-service language teachers who would want to understand the developmental process of acquiring and using language, particularly in the teaching of grammar.

At the end of each chapter, there are questions for readers to reflect on the concept of TLA from a theoretical or practical standpoint based on their knowledge as well as learning and teaching experiences.

The first chapter gives a brief historical introduction to the emergence of TLA since the 1970s, relating this concept with the teaching of grammar and second language teaching. In the first part of the chapter, the growing interest in the “language awareness movement” is discussed. Next, the author introduces the concept of *explicit knowledge* and how it is connected with *implicit knowledge*. This leads to a discussion on how these two types of knowledge relate to *declarative/procedural knowledge*, *consciousness* and the acquisition of learning. Then, Andrews examines the relationship between language awareness, *consciousness-raising* and the language awareness of teachers. The chapter ends with an exchange of views about the importance of TLA in second language (L2) learning contexts.

The second chapter focuses readers more on the language awareness of teachers, and talks about the natural role of TLA and how it functions in language teaching and learning situations. Andrews focuses on second language teaching and learning, and refers to the grammar aspect when it comes to TLA. A number of issues on TLA are also equally related to first language teaching, and the author states that the construct of TLA does not only apply to grammar, but other aspects as well. The chapter starts with the question: “What is Teacher Language Awareness?” The concept of TLA is examined in relationship to language proficiency and *pedagogical content knowledge*. Then, the chapter presents reasons for the importance of TLA for L2 teachers, exploring the relationship between TLA and L2 teaching. This is followed by a discussion of how teacher behaviour is affected by TLA, and its significance for how learners receive target language input in L2 classrooms. In the conclusion of this chapter, the author examines the use of TLA in teaching and its significance for the way language teachers’ deal with language-related issues during lesson preparation as well as classroom teaching.

The third chapter talks about the strong attention given to grammar in language teaching and the challenges of form-focused instruction in the last 30–40 years. Then, the fundamental reason behind the challenges of form-focused instruction is discussed before reevaluating the importance and use of form-focused instruction in view of the theory and research of second language acquisition. It also looks at the “grammar debate” about what should be added when describing the grammar of a language, before discussing the significance of TLA for the different views held in the grammar debate.

The fourth chapter pays attention to L2 teachers’ cognition, specifically focusing on their beliefs and feelings about the subject matter. It starts off by investigating teacher cognitions and their relationship with beliefs and knowledge. Then, there is a short review of L2 teacher cognitions. The chapter then elaborates on the relationship between L2 teachers’ cognitions and their teaching. It ends by exploring the beliefs and feelings of a group of teachers in a case study which makes reference to grammar and their development of their subject-matter cognitions.

The fifth chapter looks at the influence of TLA on L2 teachers’ teaching and their interactions with the content of learning. The chapter starts off by giving a brief account of how TLA influences various teachers’ interactions with the learning content, before focusing on the link between TLA and teaching/learning materials.

The sixth chapter examines the influence of TLA on L2 teachers with teaching experience of different degrees. The chapter starts off with a concise introduction of concepts in the literature on teacher education, focusing on the stages of a teacher’s development and the characteristics of the language teaching expertise. This is followed by a presentation of quantitative data derived from observations of language teachers at novice and advanced beginner levels. The main part of the chapter focuses on a discussion of qualitative data derived from research on the TLA of expert/proficient L2 teachers and one “expert” teacher.

The seventh chapter tries to examine the dispassionate issue of native speaker (NS) and non-native speaker (NNS) L2 teachers, specifically focusing on the TLA of teachers of L2 English. The chapter starts off by talking about the background of the issue. It then analyzes the debates and research findings relating to the comparative qualities of NS and NNS teachers according to the three types of language-related knowledge of TLA: knowledge of language (proficiency of language), knowledge about language (subject matter consisting of declarative knowledge) and knowledge of students (focusing on the learners’ cognitive knowledge in relation to subject matter). The chapter ends with a discussion about English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) and how ELF potentially affects the circumstances of the comparative qualities of NS and NNS teachers.

The eighth chapter talks about the association between student learning and TLA. The chapter starts off by talking about problems relating to the effective connections between student learning and TLA. The research is based on three themes: teachers’ subject-matter knowledge; teacher engagement with the content of learning; and teacher’s awareness of learner difficulties.

The ninth chapter talks about matters relating to the process of how L2 teachers’ language awareness develops and the rationale of designing courses and activities relating to TLA. The chapter also focuses on the development of L2 teachers’ language awareness based on the design of a particular grammar-based course.

The book will benefit language teachers in their professional development as it will enhance their understanding of the concept of TLA and supplement their theoretical and pedagogical knowledge in language learning and teaching.

The book will also be of interest to language researchers who would like to research TLA which would help to expand our knowledge on the process of how a language teacher becomes aware of his/her language from a learning, preparing and teaching perspective.

References

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