

<https://doi.org/10.59982/18294359-23.14-cl-10>

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Abstract

Within the field of Applied Linguistics, language awareness movement has developed a descriptive approach to language teaching and learning, which entails a higher level of attention to language use in context and a higher degree of engagement in the discovery of how the language system functions. The concern related to the ways of enhancing language awareness can be mitigated by addressing the language corpora as a contemporary reaction against prescriptive methodologies. This article aims to emphasize the importance of language awareness and sheds light on the valuable potential of language corpora as an awareness-raising tool both for teachers and for learners. This insight, deriving from a range of sources of evidence, is believed to be beneficial for the participants of the ELT community, as it can provide useful information as to how they could compensate for the deficiencies of a conventional EFL classroom (e.g. authenticity of language data and enhancement of language awareness).

Keywords: language awareness, language corpora, descriptive methodology, learner engagement; discovery learning.

Introduction

Both language and language awareness are constantly changing their content, and Corpus Linguistics can serve as an awareness-raising platform with its promising pedagogical potential. The **aim** of the present study is, therefore, to provide an account of the role of language corpora as one potential contemporary technological response given to one of the main concerns in the EFL classroom related to the increase in language awareness. The research **objectives** defined are as follows: to introduce the construct of language awareness, thus setting the scene for further discussion on the role of corpus linguistics in relation to it, to conduct a survey of the contribution of language corpora to raising both the learners' and the teachers' language awareness, supported by empirical evidence from corpus-based studies. Descriptive research and synthesis **methods** have been applied to explore ways in which corpus-driven

technological solutions can enhance learners' and educators' consciousness and make them independent, aware, and reflective practitioners.

Understanding the Construct of Language Awareness

Carter [64-65] defines language awareness (LA) as “the development in learners of an enhanced consciousness and sensitivity to the forms and functions of language”. Garcia [385-400] elaborates on the three concepts of language use, its teaching, and its learning as knowledge of language, knowledge about language, and pedagogical practice, respectively. Knowledge of language refers to the language user’s proficiency, which includes awareness of social and pragmatic norms and appropriate use of language in various situations. Knowledge about language requires awareness of forms and functions of a language system on the part of the language analyst. And, pedagogical practice

includes consciousness-raising language learning opportunities. The idea of LA was introduced by Eric Hawkins, ‘the father of LA’, who put forth the solution of ‘language apprenticeship’. It embraced such important factors of LA, as high proficiency of mother language for cross-linguistic analysis, learning to listen for ‘successful language learning’, ‘ouverture aux langues’ as awakening to language differences as interesting and not threatening, learning how to learn for language exploration, and progressive awareness of language as a complete social system [Hawkins, 124-142]. In the context of foreign language learning, it was a response to the belief that the role of language teaching should be not only helping students master the target language but also enabling them to solve language-related issues in general. LA enriches learners’ knowledge of language by exploring, noticing, and reflecting on how linguistic forms and functions work and assists internalization and appropriate use of language [Bourke, 12-21].

To avoid misperceptions, linguists attempt to clarify the difference between LA methodology and traditional grammar teaching in second language acquisition. Bourke [12-21] explains that the traditional approach provides learners with explicit grammar knowledge, whereas LA approach is “a reaction against such top down transmission of explicit knowledge”. In response to prescriptive approaches to language learning, which were based on more formalistic methodologies and characterized by atomistic language analysis, LA movement has developed a descriptive approach that deals with more holistic and discourse-level practices [Carter, 64-65]. As a pedagogic approach, LA motivates learners to pay attention to language in use and gain insights on how the linguistic system works. Moreover, LA methodology is based on a process-oriented approach where learners are actively engaged in discovering language-related aspects [Bourke, 12-21]. Hence, it is more interested in eliciting learners’ ability to comment on how language forms function, rather than the correct production [Carter, 64-65].

To develop metalanguage, learning should incorporate cognitive processes of ‘noticing’ and ‘consciousness-raising’, which allows for the language to become intake [Schmidt, 129-158].

“Nothing can be learned unless it is noticed” [Schmidt, 137]. To make a language aspect noticeable, Schmidt suggests perceptual salience within language and between languages. This type of intellectual stimulation fosters learners’ involvement in discovering language aspects by inducing linguistic rules, increases motivation by affectively engaging learners, and enables them to recognize the social and contextual effects of language by reflecting upon it [Carter, 64-65].

The core features of an LA methodology, as summarized by Borg cited in Svalberg [287-308] are as follows: (1) investigating language as a dynamic phenomenon rather than awareness of a fixed body of established facts on an ongoing basis; (2) discussing about language analytically on the part of learners; (3) engaging learners in exploration and discovery; (4) developing learners’ knowledge about and of language, as well as their learning skills, thus fostering self-regulation; (5) stimulating learning both cognitively and affectively.

Svalberg [287-308] stresses that engagement with language or ‘linguaging’ is a complex and dynamic process where cognitive engagement demands focused attention and construction of knowledge, affective involvement develops autonomous, meaningful, and positive attitude to language, and social engagement refers to interaction. Thus, the basis of teaching LA is constructivism which aims at actively engaging learners into discovery learning, fostering learner autonomy, developing metalanguage, and functioning at affective, cognitive, and social levels.

Raising Learners’ Language Awareness through Language Corpora

Traditionally, language instruction was retrospective where learners had to reproduce already known answers to previously posed questions [Kozulin, 192]. It was passive in nature as it transmitted knowledge through one-way channel of instruction where learners’ role was to listen, watch, and take notes. The digital era necessitated prospective education where learners’ should continuously develop their cognitive strategies through an active role. This urge is based on Piaget’s hypothesis that for a child to optimize his natural curiosity and ability to discover, he needs a

motivating and problem-solving environment. Another assumption is Vygotsky's claim that a child as an independent learner is the outcome and not the starting point of the education process [Kozulin, 192]. The learner takes on the responsibility for construction of knowledge in a motivating and interactive environment, guided by the teacher. With the technological developments, the concept of literacy, which was previously defined as writing and reading ability, now requires a more complex definition: 'multi-literacies', which includes a high proficiency in digital and online competencies [O'Keeffe & Farr, 389-418].

The role of corpus linguistics as a language awareness-raising tool is significant for language learners. As one technology-based approach to language pedagogy, it provides an environment for the development of learners' cognitive strategies with the help of metalinguistic awareness activities. While in the traditional classroom, linguistic forms were taught by the teacher with direct explanations in the form of oversimplified and abstract generalizations, awareness-raising activities engage learners with language, challenge them cognitively to compare, analyze, and construct their own generalizations. Thus, the emphasis is shifted from deductive to inductive learning, where learners 'notice' the real language use in the form of concordance input, and discover lexico-grammatical patterns by themselves [O'Keeffe et al, 332]. In this respect, the use of corpus-based solutions fits well with the SLA concept of 'noticing' [Mishan & Timmis, 23]. "They start noticing features of the data for themselves – at time features that had not been noticed by the teacher. This type of reflective learning enables learners to raise their language awareness of the relationship of the linguistic form with its function, meaning, and context of use [Chambers, 416-430]. To fully understand how the language form functions in relation to its meaning, learners should get systematic multiple exposures to the linguistic item in different contexts. Corpus consultation instantly exposes learners to a large number of attested examples, which he would not have time to read or interact verbally enough to encounter them and raise LA. The teacher's role as provider of input and facts about language diminishes and he takes on the role of a co-

researcher and facilitator. The learner becomes a language explorer and through concordancing process he induces the language rule and constructs his own knowledge without obtaining feedback on the correct answer. Moreover, when language learners have a chance to manipulate language through meaningful engagement with language, they acquire more language knowledge and retain more information for longer time [Reppen, 120]. Another important convergence of learner-centered environment is that by cognitively stimulating learners to solve problems and raising their awareness of conceptual growth, it fosters learner autonomy, which pursues the key idea of constructivism: learning is construction of knowledge and effective learning is active learning.

Raising Teachers' Language Awareness through Language Corpora

Teacher's language awareness (TLA) has become another concern in the field of LA. Andrews [75-90] offers a complex view of TLA, which entails that language awareness of the teacher consists of both subject-matter knowledge and communicative LA at a metacognitive level, termed as 'cognition about cognition'. Through reflection upon and mediation of the subject-matter knowledge, the teacher ensures useful input for learners and effective teaching. This view underlines the bi-dimensional nature of TLA, where the subject-matter knowledge, constituting the declarative dimension, is in dynamic interaction with cognitive, reflective, communicative abilities, constituting the procedural dimension [Andrews, 75-90].

A necessary precondition for learning is clearly the input that learners are exposed to. TLA plays a crucial filtering role in structuring input, since the teacher needs to mediate output of any source and make it available to learners as input [Andrews, 75-90]. Thus, the quality of TLA affects a number of tasks performed by the teacher, including identification of learning objectives, taking into account learners' age and previous learning, selection of appropriate learning materials and tasks that meet the expected learning outcomes. Along this line, TLA enables the teacher to filter the input, to make salient the key linguistic items in the prepared input, to appropriately exemplify and

clarify the input, and to monitor learners' and own output. TLA can also help the teacher to react spontaneously and constructively to issues in real time, to assist learners in making useful generalizations, to limit the potentially confusing sources in the learning input, and to continuously reflect on the impact of such mediation on the quality of learning [Andrews, 75-90]. To complete the understanding of the construct of TLA, Andrews [75-90] extends on the factors within the procedural dimension that are likely to affect the application or impact of TLA in teaching. These are contextual factors, such as time and syllabus, attitudinal factors, including confidence, willingness to engage with language-related issues, and personality factors, among which are reflectiveness, alertness, vision, and sensitivity. He underscores the importance of teachers' engagement with language without undermining the role of others in pedagogical practice and calls for further research that would address such issues as the impact of the nature, the variations of engagement on the development and application of TLA.

To equip teachers with the critical evaluative skills for effective teaching, they need to receive certain education [Farr & O'Keeffe, 268-282]. Researchers [Chappelle, 433-444; Zareva, 69-79] suggest integrating corpus literacy in initial teacher education as a tool for raising teachers' language awareness and pedagogical awareness, as well as engendering the spirit of enquiry, if the corpus findings are to reach the 'right' audience, that is language learners [Farr & O'Keeffe, 268-282]. Murphy and Riordan [388-403] provide an up-to-date account of the corpus types and use. With the help of active participation with technology, teachers will be able to recognize the conceptual and practical value of technology. They will develop positive attitude, increase confidence, and feel empowered as teachers.

The role of corpus revolution in contributing to the description and our understanding of the language and material design is undoubtedly significant [Gilmore, 506-530], as opposed to textbooks designed on our faulty intuition about language [O'Keeffe & Farr, 389-418]. As Paran [499] puts it, "Intuitions and beliefs are not reliable when complex issues such as teaching and learning

are concerned." Corpus findings have informed improved dictionaries, grammar books. However, the inclusion of corpus data cannot bring 'reality' to the classroom if the classroom language prescriptions are determined upon partial description of decontextualized language. Thus, language teachers need to be aware that no pedagogical theory, method, or philosophy can be absolutely promising. And, since the teacher's role is to mediate for language learning needs, teachers have the responsibility to critically evaluate and recontextualize the corpus-based descriptions [Farr & O'Keeffe, 268-282].

ELT educators are obliged to equip pre- or in-service teachers with the necessary skills and knowledge of working with corpora. First, teachers need to know the functions and applications of corpus software and develop technological competence [Farr & O'Keeffe, 268-282]. The software provides frequency information, collocations, information about the language use in different registers, compares how two words are used, and helps us visualize the key word in context. Teachers can use two distinctive approaches for teaching and research purposes: corpus-driven approach, which deals with data without any predispositions and promotes inductive learning; and corpus-based approach, which attempts to test and reinforce hypotheses or theoretical frameworks. Also, student teachers need to explore both quantitative and qualitative methods of corpus-data analysis. Another distinction they should know is between 'hand outs' and 'hands on'. The former allows wider access, saves class time, and lowers the affective filter of technophobes, whereas the latter allows for more a learner-centred constructivist approach, which will cognitively stimulate learners to solve problems and foster learner autonomy through direct computer-based processes.

Related Studies

The impact of metalinguistic awareness activities can be illustrated by the following studies. Radwan [69-87] researched the contribution of focused attention to form. The findings showed positive correlation between learners' language awareness and their performance. However, the researcher notices that language awareness at the level of understanding and not just noticing can

facilitate language acquisition. Another study conducted by Lyamkina and Ryshina-Pankova [270-289] illustrated how learners could make contextually appropriate linguistic choices through metalinguistic awareness tasks. Liu's [2548–2558] case study focused on the role of corpora in raising learners' language awareness by exploring the use of certain prescriptive rules in different corpora. He observed the potential of corpora as a tool for raising learners' awareness of the dynamic nature and broader use of language, as well as the context-appropriate use of lexico-grammatical patterns. Although pedagogical literature on the effectiveness of corpora in raising learners' LA is scant, and the empirical research conducted so far is mostly qualitative, the results and reactions are generally positive. Nevertheless, teachers themselves need to be flexible and innovative by raising their own LA to be able to facilitate learners' language acquisition.

Corpus use has been investigated more in language classrooms than in teacher education. Coniam [19] exemplifies some practical applications of corpus-based tasks in teacher education. O'Keeffe & Farr's [389-419] work is an extension of these applications with the aim of raising both socio-cultural and linguistic awareness. Another study reports on the contribution of a corpus-based intervention to the international teaching assistants' language awareness [Fernandez & Yuldashev, 91-107]. Still another paper reveals the beneficial effect of corpus training both on teachers' awareness of language and on learners' awareness of English vocabulary [Çalışkan, & Gönen, 190-210]. Ebrahimi

and Faghih [120-135] report on MA TEFL students' heightened awareness of descriptive grammar due to exposure to real corpus data in context and deeper cognitive understanding of language as a system. A similar sentiment was echoed in the study of Zareva [69-79]. Here, it is worth mentioning Farr and O'Keeffe's [268-282] look to the future stating that "The conditions seem ripe for a future where the integration of corpus linguistics in teacher education will be a given."

Conclusion

Considerable progress has been made in language pedagogy; however, language awareness remains very relevant in today's education. The complex dynamic system of language requires a learning environment that can develop learners' consciousness and sensitivity to linguistic forms and functions. The central argument of this study is that language corpora provide the necessary tools for raising language awareness by exposing language practitioners to multiple instances of real language use in multiple contexts and encouraging construction of knowledge and expertise through induction, inquiry, reflection, and discovery. This article challenges the prescriptive approach to language learning, which is characterized by formalistic methodologies. It calls for more attention to the descriptive corpus-driven approach, which is process-oriented and allows both teachers and learners to secure progressive awareness of how language system works, thus imbuing a strong commitment to ongoing knowledge development.

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Ներկայացվել է՝ 22.03.2023թ.

Ուղարկվել է գրախոսման՝ 13.06.2023թ.