

Book Review

*Teacher language awareness in the ecological perspective:
A collaborative inquiry based on languaging*

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The job of the teacher has recently undergone many drastic redefinitions, from allotting him or her a central position in the instructional system which invested him or her with a significant amount of control over all educational activities in the classroom, to the role of the facilitator who supports students' genuine endeavors. The emerging image of the teacher has been fostered by reflection on how human beings learn and build their reality, mostly in the form of constructivism, which maintains that human thought is a process of the development and revision of constructs (Kelly, 1963) rather than a passive conceptualization of ready-made ideas, as well as social constructionism (Burger & Luckmann, 1966), which accounts for the collective image of reality. In the light of this reflection, pedagogy required a radical reform, which ultimately led to the centralization of the learner.

The ongoing redefinition of the role of the teacher has also affected language pedagogy and found application in the umbrella term of autonomy in language teaching (e.g., Benson, 2001). This new role for the language teacher has

also been inspired by a new conceptualization of what language is. Post-structural visions of language articulate its interactional character, with some scholars expressing doubts regarding the fixity of the linguistic code (Harris, 1981) and the perception of grammar as an emerging quality (MacWhinney, 1999), or "sedimentation of frequently used forms" (Hopper, 1998). One should also not forget the political burden inscribed in human linguistic activity and the concern that language teaching may be seen as a political act, as maintained by the neo-Marxist critical school.

The book in question has been firmly built on thinking about language in this post-structural perspective, and most of the aforementioned references are frequently quoted in the publication. Hadrian Lankiewicz additionally assumes the so-called ecological perspective on language teaching, or, more appropriately, learning, since this primary human activity should dominate over the secondary activity, which teaching seems to be. All these considerations require, as he purports, the development of critical ecological language awareness among teachers, which is expected to result, as corroborated by his research, in the more autonomous linguistic behavior of language teachers, the discarding of the banking model of language teaching, as well as in learners being allowed to resume their agency in the language learning process. Such a new mindset requires reflection on the part of the teacher, both on the nature of language and its teaching. The volume offers, in equal proportions, solid theoretical underpinnings, practical solutions and suggestions for how teacher education could meet the desired ends.

The structure of the book seems to be well-thought out, delineating consecutively the concept of the ecology of language learning (Chapter One), the application of critical ecological issues to foreign language teaching (Chapter Two), the platform for critical ecological language awareness (Chapter Three) and extensive research (Chapter Four). The whole book comprises 368 pages, with one third devoted to collaborative inquiry, which conforms to the methodological requirements imposed by an ecological study and meets the principles of ecological validity. In a sense, the whole endeavor also represents the author's own critical ecological language awareness, whose knowledge of the literature, as inferred from the theoretical chapters of the volume, gives ample proof of his holistic acquaintance with the critical ecological approach to language and its teaching.

Since, as we learn from the pages of the book, ecolinguistics is a burgeoning new subdiscipline in applied linguistics, the author resolves to offer a holistic presentation of its historical background in the first chapter, including the theories which support an ecological approach to language study and form constitutive elements of the ecological paradigm. Subsequently, he relates these to research on second language acquisition.

In Chapter Two, critical ecological issues are translated, first, into critical ecological thinking, as manifested by critical pedagogy, critical discourse analysis, the transgression of the postmodern in the form of critical pedagogy as well as ecopedagogy, and, second, into the whole critical slant for L2 teaching. The author, in turn, considers respectively normativity and standardization, the notion of accountability, language appropriateness, neocolonial forces and post-colonial diversity, concluding this section with a presentation of the critical role of autonomy in language learning.

Chapter Three lays the foundations for the focal notion: critical ecological language awareness. This equips the reader with a new mindset before confronting him/her with a practical application of ecological thinking included in the last chapter which consists in raising critical ecological awareness reflective activities. Despite the internal intricacies of the theories presented, the effort is ultimately very rewarding and the reader can find not only a comprehensive model for critical ecological language awareness, but also a vision of the language teacher as a transformative eco-pedagogue, rather than an artisan whose sole task is to develop language skills.

The real asset of the volume, however, seems to be the innovative research grounded in the ecological perspective, and fully accounting for its ecological validity. Its uniqueness may be derived from its 'double construction', meaning that the methodology in use is both as exemplary good teaching practice for developing critical language awareness and a research tool. The research data is processed qualitatively and quantitatively. In doing so, the author relies on the principle of methodological triangulation. Thereby, research data is obtained through transcribed protocols of video recorded task sessions, reflective meetings, diaries, narratives and questionnaires. Most of all, however, to underscore the deep contextualization, typical of any ecological research, the author adopted a collaborative inquiry and embedded his own research goals in students' reflective activities. In this way, he made his participants partners in the research rather than the object of the study. Collaboration on the part of the students resulted in a more reliable analysis of the whole event.

The research is longitudinal: it lasted for two semesters at a teacher training institution in Northern Poland and the part pertaining to developing critical language awareness included eight seminar students involved in fifteen reflective tasks, which constituted a foundation for further action. The whole collaborative inquiry cycle, as delineated by Heron (1992), requires the application of various *modes of knowing*: experiential, presentational, propositional and practical, which elicit various reflections on the nature of language and its learning. Yet the reflective process is expressed through what the author calls *linguaging*, which stands for the co-constructive nature of language in shaping human thinking,

as opposed to *telementation* which visualizes language as a conveyor of thought. Hence, reflection is never an individual phenomenon, but resides in the space of collective, or symmetrical, scaffolding through a collaborative dialogue. In order to offer tangible examples of reflective activities, the author identified microgenetic moments to account for the changes which take place in students' attitudes towards language. Lankiewicz propounds that the desired change should reflect the interactional character of language, which is used not only as a means of communication, but also as a way of maintaining relations between people. Consequently, the author analyzes students' reflections on the nature of language mostly on the inter-mental plane, which stands for transactions of thought between research participants. Finally, the qualitative data, gathered from task protocols, diaries and narratives, is juxtaposed with quantitative data elicited through a questionnaire. The latter is intended to measure students' linguistic mindset regarding the scales pertaining to the theories of language, understanding variationism and normativity, perception of language contact, or visualizing foreign language learning and teaching. It also includes such issues as marginalization of language teachers, political aspects of linguistic decisions, English as a lingua franca and, ultimately, the pedagogical practicality derived from the ecological vision of language. The data obtained from the questionnaire in the target group is compared with a broader frame of reference (control group, piloting group), with the expectation that the statistical information will corroborate the qualitative, which it does.

Considering the above, the volume constitutes a comprehensive presentation of issues pertaining to the development of critical language awareness among prospective language teachers. The whole undertaking, apart from the thorough theoretical elaboration, which includes the author's own critical language awareness model, presents a practical template to be applied in organizing academic courses which aim at developing student reflection and agency. This proposal offers a good alternative for the dominant model of education, which is basically expository, despite the common recognition of the centrality of the learner. It is beyond doubt that teacher education fulfills a significant formative stage in developing the teacher's basic beliefs, shaping his or her "'ways of knowing', to be reiterated in different configurations in their future careers, as has been stipulated by Borg (2003). Therefore, the proposal contained on the pages of the book presents a valuable source to draw on. Needless to say, the expected impact of the suggested tasks which aim to generate reflection has been confirmed by in-depth research analyses, including pilot studies and statistical procedures. Even if any ecological research, such as this, is limited in its statistical range, it gains validity through deep contextualization and reference by analogy, as is maintained by the promoters of phenomenological inquiries (Kramersch & Steffensen, 2008).

The whole volume, logical in structure as it is, at times invokes the same theories and ideas to support various points the author makes, yet these apparently erratic references serve their purpose for the reader who is not well-acquainted with ecolinguistic issues and render each chapter a well-rounded unit. Therefore, in all respects, the book offers a unique perspective towards language and its teaching, presenting a vision of language teachers as transformative intellectuals, and this view may function as a counterbalance to the ability-oriented, uncritical, 'lukewarm' language teacher education which undoubtedly epitomizes the present day crisis in the humanities. Without exaggeration, this volume may profoundly stimulate and refresh thinking about language and its teaching. It may, as the author indicates in the concluding remarks, be an inspiration for language teacher educators in tailoring their syllabi, or organizers of methodology refresher courses for those in service. Needless to say, the ideas presented on the pages of the book constitute a counterbalance to the dominant accountability-driven education in the globalization era, which requires the application of transparency tools, such as, for example, the European Qualification Framework. The expectation of fast and tangible results in language education, both with respect to language learners and potential language teachers, constitutes an echo of neoliberal policies in the realm of language education (Holborow, 2015). However, it may miss the point and leave them vulnerable to indoctrination or hegemonic forces (Gramsci, 1971). Thereby, the development of critical language awareness among prospective language teachers seems to be a prerequisite for an autonomy-oriented education, so vital in the era of globalization. Ultimately, the reviewed volume may be worthwhile reading for national decision-makers of educational policies who need to remember that the development of an autonomous language teacher requires the application of an *extended epistemology* (Heron 1992) and, above all, time. These qualities clash markedly with the organization of the schooling system dictated by the sanctified principle of *laissez faire*, which, operating with the notion of accountability, values verifiable outcomes (a key notion of the European Qualification Framework) more than qualitative didactic virtues.

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