LANGUAGE AWARENESS IN A COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH TO LANGUAGE TEACHING AND LEARNING

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The importance of language awareness has been highlighted in the most recent policy document of the European Commission, in response to the disappointing progress of European citizens towards the aim of proficiency in a first language and in two other languages. Language awareness has a long history and many meanings and is well placed to draw together a range of strategies aiming to improve language learning and teaching in European education. This paper argues that the broad scope of language awareness provides both opportunities and challenges for educators and policy makers. It examines the experience of language awareness in the UK and suggests lessons that might be learned from its achievements and from the challenges it encountered. In particular, targeted initiatives will be required to explore the barriers that remain to be overcome, new research will be required, along with the development of tools, strategies and collaborations to extend language awareness into areas where it can bring fresh benefits.

1 Introduction

Language awareness has a long history and many meanings. At its most modest, it involves learners acquiring explicit knowledge of the patterns of grammar and discourse in the languages they are learning or using. At its most ambitious, it foregrounds the important ways in which language pervades all of human activity, especially the ways we think and communicate. As a result, language awareness is well placed to draw together a broad range of strategies aiming to improve language learning and teaching in European education. This paper argues that the broad scope of language awareness provides both opportunities and challenges for educators and policy makers. It examines the experience of language awareness in the UK and suggests lessons that might be learned from its achievements and from the challenges it encountered.

The importance of language awareness has been highlighted in the most recent policy document of the European Commission: *Proposal for a Council Recommendation on a comprehensive approach to the teaching and learning of languages*.(European Commission 2018b) The document is set in the context of the disappointing progress of European citizens towards the aim of proficiency in a first language and in two other languages. The Commission's proposal is that there is a need 'to invest in language learning by focussing on learning outcomes' and 'to improve language learning in compulsory education by increasing language-awareness in school education'.(European Commission, 2018b: 2)

The conception of language awareness is developed in the accompanying documentation, which explains that:

> Language awareness in schools implies embracing an overarching approach to languages: teaching the language of schooling and supporting literacy and language development across the curricula, supporting the learning of ethnic-minority mother tongue(s), the teaching and learning of various other languages (including also dead languages and sign languages).(European Commission, 2018a: 15)

The 'overarching approach' involves three main areas of school education where language is recognised as having a crucial role, but which are most commonly treated as quite distinct issues. They address the three explicit social challenges of raising literacy, integrating immigrants from different language backgrounds, and improving the level of proficiency achieved by second language learners. Combining the three areas is the basis for a comprehensive strategy incorporating language awareness. For policy-makers, this has the advantage of enabling language related issues to be linked together in ways

that have not often been done, with the potential benefit of solving several social problems with a single approach. In addition, language awareness may have broader benefits, such as stimulating the motivation of learners to acquire more than one second language, and introducing language dimensions in the teaching of other subjects. The aim of securing these multifaceted benefits can be readily justified at a theoretical level, the difficulties in achieving the aim lie primarily in the practical challenges that must be addressed.

For educators in general, language awareness has the advantage of being conceptually satisfying. It shows the connections between a range of learning activities that are usually thought of as quite separate. It encompasses such capabilities as developing competence in one's own language, learning a foreign language, using language to build knowledge and understanding of the world, and developing the ability to reflect on the nature of language use by oneself and by others. In that sense, it links with the Socratic injunction to 'know thyself' and with the humanistic vision of the connectedness of all human life. At a theoretical level, the promotion of language awareness is almost self-evidently a valuable aim. However, the difficulties arise in the implementation of language awareness in teaching programmes, which must answer a range of practical questions. Which kinds of programmes? How much emphasis (or curriculum time)? Does language awareness complement or replace existing activities? And how can teachers acquire the necessary strategies and tools to implement it?

The Commission proposal begins to address the practical steps that will be required to support a strategy of developing language awareness. Before discussing these, however, it will be useful to examine the practical experience of educators who have sought to introduce the language awareness approach in one country, the United Kingdom, over a number of years. The challenges they have encountered and the solutions they have proposed may help to inform future thinking on the issue within a wider European context.

2 The language awareness experience in the UK

The emergence of interest in language awareness in the UK began in the early 1970s among language educators concerned with the teaching of English and of foreign languages in British schools. Their work was stimulated by a series of national reports that highlighted the poor levels of literacy in English in many schools, (Bullock, 1975; Kingman, 1988), the disappointing results following the introduction of French in primary schools, (Burstall *et al.,* 1974) and the challenges of including modern languages in the newly introduced National Curriculum in England. (Harris 1990) Many language educators contributed to the debates, (Brumfit, 1988; Carter, 1990), and the most prominent advocate of

language awareness was Eric Hawkins, whose book, *Awareness of Language*, became the standard work on the subject. (Hawkins, 1987) In 1992, a new journal was launched, with the title *Language Awareness*, to study the role of explicit knowledge about language in the process of language learning and to build bridges between the language sciences and other disciplines[1].This was followed by the establishment of an international Association for Language Awareness, which sponsors the journal and continues to encourage research and development, and to support advocacy of the approach[2].

The aspirations of the language awareness movement were to transform the paradigm for language learning, by showing links between the different types of language learned (national language as mother tongue, minority language spoken at home, second or foreign language) and by showing the cognitive importance of language in other disciplines. It promoted the vision of an awakening to languages, an 'ouverture aux langues', in the early years of schooling, followed by an apprenticeship in how to learn languages at secondary level, and a solid basis for learning whatever different languages were needed in adulthood. There is no doubt that many of the ideas have been influential in different areas of practice, but it has been an influence 'en pointillé', with some areas of impressive development but others where resistance has been met. For example, the argument for language awareness was largely accepted by educators in the teaching of English as a second or foreign language, (Carter, 1990) and in the teaching of literacy and English as a first language. (Tulasiewicz, 1997) Language awareness is now an established part of methodologies for both branches of teaching[3]. The logic of this adoption in that learners develop their understanding of key terms and concepts used to describe language, and are able to apply this knowledge practically to facilitate language learning. A distinctive element of this approach is that learners acquire their metalinguistic understanding through English, the language they are learning, and thereby increase the scope of what they can articulate in that language. Discussion of metalanguage in the 'target language' appears entirely natural, since teachers and learners frequently do not have a shared first language.

On the other hand, although language awareness was strongly advocated by a number of foreign language teachers, they were not able to secure general agreement to their innovative proposals in primary school. On the one hand,

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[1] See 'Aims and scope', Language Awareness, https://www.tandfonline.com/action/journalInformation?show=aimsScope&journalCode=rmla20 (accessed 14 December 2018).

[2] Association for Language Awareness, Homepage, http://www.languageawareness.org (accessed 14 December 2018).

[3] See, for example, the Cambridge English website, 'Language knowledge and awareness': https://www.cambridgeenglish.org/teaching-english/cambridge-english-teaching-framework/language-knowledge-and-awareness-for-teaching/ (accessed 14 December 2018).

it would have been a significant departure from existing practice and on the other, it would have the effect of replacing the learning of a particular language by the learning of knowledge of languages in general. They had more success in adding awareness to secondary school foreign language learning, but the British programmes tend to favour cultural awareness rather than language awareness. (Department for Education, 2013) Cultural awareness is more clearly supportive of the learning of a particular language through an engagement with the cultures associated with the language. Language awareness, by contrast, tends to engage discussion of structural and comparative aspects of language through English, a language shared by teachers and learners, at the expense of the 'target language'.

Some 25 years after he had first advocated the approach, Eric Hawkins offered his reflections on the barriers to success for language awareness. (Hawkins, 1999) Some of his concerns were specific to the United Kingdom. For example, he pointed to the inherent uncertainty over which languages would be needed by learners in their future development. This remains a problem in Britain, a predominantly English-speaking country where no particular second language will clearly be required by most learners. Young people may learn French, Spanish, German, Chinese or another language at primary school, may then switch to a different language in secondary school, and then discover that they need a different language in their adult life. This gives a cogency to the argument that students need an awareness of language diversity and the cognitive tools to learn a new language. In other European countries, where English has become the almost universal first foreign language, the argument from uncertainty has less force. It would, however, support the view that language awareness would prepare young people for learning a second foreign language, where there remains uncertainty around which language would be most appropriate.

Most of Hawkins's analysis raises significant issues that are not nation-specific, and that need to be addressed in advocating language awareness to support the improvement of language learning across Europe. Of particular relevance is his view that there are tensions between different conceptions and priorities in language education. Three of these pose particular challenges for current attempts to promote language awareness:

- Tensions between different theories of language acquisition;
- Tensions between different purposes for language learning.
- Tensions between different groups of educators and practitioners;

At their most severe, these tensions may take the form of fundamental conflicts, but they may also be amenable to alleviation. The challenge to European language policy is to recognise the objective basis for these tensions

and to devise ways of alleviating them through development and collaboration. The next three sections will examine each of these areas in turn.

3 Tensions between different theories of language acquisition

Language learning has always responded to the predominant conceptions of language acquisition, which have been reflected in changing approaches to pedagogy. The traditional approach across Europe was the one based on grammar and translation, long associated with the learning of classical Greek and Latin, and adopted by foreign language learning in schools. (Richards & Rodgers, 2001) Although this had been modified considerably from the method elaborated in the 18th century, it was still the underlying form of language teaching practiced into the 1960s, when it was confronted with a concerted challenge by what are now accepted as communicative approaches. The grammar-translation method was based on the acquisition of knowledge about the language, primarily its grammatical structures, into which the relevant vocabulary could be inserted, with appropriate modifications. Language was acquired by translating written material from one language into the other, thereby practising the different grammatical structures and extending the knowledge of vocabulary, particularly through the medium of writing. The communicative approach, on the contrary, took its starting point from the linguistics of Chomsky, which argued that people have an innate faculty for language acquisition, and that language is acquired by dint of exposure to large quantities of authentic material, particularly spoken language. The ascendency of the communicative approach occurred at the same time as the language awareness approach was being promoted, with the result that language awareness could appear as a retrograde attempt to reinstate knowledge about language. Hawkins observed that: 'Talking about the language and grammar became no-go areas.' (Hawkins, 1999: 134)

During the 1980s and 1990s, the communicative approach softened to make space for some language knowledge, and there was some recognition of the contribution of contrastive linguistics as an aid to language learning through talking about language(s). However, the tension between communication and knowledge of language is still very evident in contemporary approaches to foreign language learning. The *Common European Framework*, for example, recognises the role of language awareness, especially in primary school learning, but compares language learning to learning to drive a car, with the implication that as competence increases, the role of self-reflection and declarative knowledge of the process will diminish. (Council for Cultural Cooperation, 2001: 12) In its forceful advocacy of plurilingualism, the *Framework* sees a role for communicative and intercultural competences in enabling learners to

build a plurilingual repertoire, but does not discuss the role of knowledge about language in this task.

Most branches of language learning and literacy studies now incorporate some element of explicit knowledge of language. There are suggestions that neuroscience now identifies 'two separate but complementary routes of explicit and implicit learning'. (Bolitho *et al.*, 2003: 253), but there remains a tension between explicitly learning the structures of syntax, discourse or text on the one hand, and implicitly acquiring communicative competence on the other. The idea of separate but complementary routes to learning language holds the potential to resolve this tension, provided that both routes can be shown to support the same objective. More generally, the growing evidence about the neurophysiology of language use and language learning needs to be incorporated more firmly into pedagogy. (Mehmedbegovic & Bak, 2017)

Undoubtedly, a declarative knowledge of language can support the acquisition of language proficiency, but the ways in which it does so may differ quite significantly for learners of different language backgrounds. For example, learners seeking to improve their native language will have different needs from those seeking to learn the language of a country to which they have migrated, and different needs from those who are learning a modern foreign or classical language. It is also likely that the social background of learners will affect their response to knowledge of language. For example, learners from a literate elite background will learn differently than those from disadvantaged social backgrounds. Explicit knowledge may appear helpful to one group but may appear as an obstacle to the other. The same argument may well apply to learners from different cultural or educational traditions. As a result, the use of explicit knowledge to support language learning must take account of the wide variety of learners. This may provide some alleviation of the tension between knowledge and proficiency, However, the aspirations of language awareness go significantly beyond acquiring proficiency, and to that extent raise questions about the purpose of language education.

4 Tensions between different purposes for language learning

In his review of progress over 25 years, Hawkins pointed to the competing priorities between instrumental purposes for language learning and broader educational goals. He identified this as a fundamental problem and dramatized it as 'Foreign Language as Education, not simply Instruction in a Skill'. (Hawkins, 1999: 134) To illustrate his point, he argued that language learning brings benefits that cannot be reduced to improved proficiency. The benefits included the personal enrichment opened up by the 'sheer exhilaration of the journey into a foreign language and a foreign culture'. (p.134) They also

included three significant benefits for the learners' cognitive development.

First, learning a second language has a positive feedback on the learner's perception of their own language and culture. It may bring a new awareness of how language works and improve their mastery of their first language. It may encourage them to reflect critically about the attitudes and assumptions in their own culture, and in particular to question the stereotypes which are adopted unthinkingly. Second, language learning compels learners to match words and meaning. They become aware that words carry a subtle array of meanings and that different choices of word for the same object will evoke different responses from different audiences. 'Learning to mean' is the first step toward a critical language awareness that connects to a broader initiation into critical discourse analysis. Third, language learning develops the 'mathetic' function in learners: their capability to learn and acquire knowledge. Language learners use language to learn about the world and to go beyond what they are familiar with. Particularly in adolescent boys, it makes them more linguistically secure and better able to communicate in a literate and articulate manner.

These wider educational benefits of language learning are often rehearsed as reasons to study languages in schools, but they are not consistently incorporated into programmes of study, and are not always made explicit in the descriptors of learning outcomes. An example of this discrepancy can be found in the current national curriculum for modern foreign languages in England[4]. The purpose of study is stated in broad terms:

> Learning a foreign language is a liberation from insularity and provides an opening to other cultures. A high-quality languages education should foster pupils' curiosity and deepen their understanding of the world. The teaching should enable pupils to express their ideas and thoughts in another language and to understand and respond to its speakers, both in speech and in writing. It should also provide opportunities for them to communicate for practical purposes, learn new ways of thinking and read great literature in the original language. Language teaching should provide the foundation for learning further languages, equipping pupils to study and work in other countries[5].

As a statement of why languages belong in the curriculum, it sets out high aspirations: liberating pupils from insularity, opening them to other cultures, fostering their curiosity and deepening their understanding of the world. The

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[4] I am indebted to Bernadette Holmes and Peter Downes for their insights into the debates surrounding the ministerial guidance for language programmes. The presentation of it here is of course my own responsibility.

[5] Statutory guidance: National curriculum in England: languages programmes of study', Department for Education website: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-curriculum-in-england-languages-progammes-of-study/national-curriculum-in-england-languages-progammes-of-study (accessed 14 December 2018).

text carries clear echoes of the humanistic vision of Eric Hawkins, sketched out above. It also echoes the generous ideals of the European Commission's language strategy document, *A New Framework Strategy for Multilingualism*, which argued that speaking more than one language 'encourages us to become more open to other people's cultures and outlooks, improves cognitive skills and strengthens learners' mother tongue skills'. (European Commission, 2005: II.I.I) However, when language learning is broken down into its elements for practical implementation, these aspirations are subordinated to the principal goal of language proficiency. The same English national curriculum guidance sets out the subject content for pupils aged 7-11 (Key Stage 2), which begins:

> Teaching may be of any modern or ancient foreign language and should focus on enabling pupils to make substantial progress in one language. The teaching should provide an appropriate balance of spoken and written language and should lay the foundations for further foreign language teaching at key stage 3. It should enable pupils to understand and communicate ideas, facts and feelings in speech and writing, focused on familiar and routine matters, using their knowledge of phonology, grammatical structures and vocabulary[6].

More detailed activities include understanding and making meaning, expressing ideas and comparing grammatical features of the foreign language with those of English. However, their role is determined by the overarching aim of making 'substantial progress in one language'. Language awareness has a supportive but subordinate role.

The ministerial guidance certainly rules out the approach urged by some language awareness advocates, which is to devote the first years of language learning to a broad exposure to languages in their diversity and a discovery of the general patterns of language and discourse. An example of this, prioritising multi-lingual language awareness, was set out in a recent development project: 'Discovering Language'. In the pilot study, primary school pupils achieved a range of learning outcomes, including learning how different languages 'work', listening carefully to different sound patterns and intonation, becoming multi-culturally more aware and enjoying learning. Pupils also acquired language learning foundation skills which they could apply in secondary school, whichever languages they learn there. (Downes, 2014) Several primary schools have used this approach with success, but more are reluctant to adopt it because it appears to conflict with the government priority of making substantial progress in one language.

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[6] Statutory guidance: National curriculum in England: languages programmes of study', Department for Education website: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-curriculum-in-england-languages-progammes-of-study/national-curriculum-in-england-languages-progammes-of-study (accessed 14 December 2018).

This case clearly illustrates the tension between language awareness and language proficiency. While the case is specific to the UK, which does not select any particular language for primary school learning, the tension may be even more acute in countries where one second language is learned by the majority of pupils, and where the desire for proficiency in that language may be more acute. In most of Europe, English is the predominant second language, and there is likely to be resistance to any approach the detracts from making good progress in that language. Conversely, the advocates of a more multilingual approach to language learning may see the advantages of replacing the early study of English with the discovery of a rich array of languages through a language awareness programme. The tension between the two approaches is unlikely to diminish in the near future, and it is likely that in practice the benefits of language awareness will need to be integrated with the achievement of proficiency rather than presented as an alternative to it.

The tension identified here is not specific to language learning, and is to be found in most school subjects. Every discipline is able to present broad purposes that enhance its learners' lives, for example by stimulating curiosity, fostering discovery, encouraging critical thinking or opening new ways of seeing. These purposes are always in tension with acquiring proficiency in the knowledge and skills specified in the curriculum. It is often found that learning outcomes are limited to the acquisition of knowledge and skills, and in that case, the tension with broader perspectives is increased. The tension is further increased when the knowledge and skills are constrained by particular social requirements or career paths. The later stages of school and higher education are no doubt more likely to include these constraints, and there is always a risk that the acquisition of specific knowledge or skills can push out the broader purposes of personal development.

Identifying the risk is an important step towards managing it, and there are many methods for achieving a better balance between language acquisition and personal development. Some of these methods involve consideration of the whole curriculum, but some can be introduced into individual subjects. One subject-specific approach is to include values and attitudes more explicitly in the learning outcomes of a programme, whether as specific outcomes or as contributions to the broader purposes of education in the particular curriculum or sector concerned. An example of how this might be done is presented in the *European Profile for Language Teacher Education*, which identifies three groups of learning outcomes: Knowledge and Understanding, Strategies and Skills, and Values. (Kelly & Grenfell, 2004)

5 Tensions between different groups of educators and practitioners

Language awareness is seen by the European Commission as being able to provide solutions across the range of language education. It has already been suggested that this will require a degree of differentiation between different groups of learners. Experience suggests that it will also require a recognition of the different groups of teachers and educators. Eric Hawkins painted an unpromising picture of relations between these groups in the 1970s:

> Twenty-five years ago, in the UK, the different kinds of language teacher (of foreign languages, English mother tongue, English as a second language, ethnic minority languages and the classics) remained sealed off from each other, in schools, universities and training colleges. Teachers of these subjects never went into each other's classrooms to hear what their colleagues were saying about language. They had not even tried to agree a common vocabulary in which to talk about language. (Hawkins, 1999: 124)

By the end of the 20th century, Hawkins lamented that 'the absence of collaboration still blocks the development of a coherent language apprenticeship in the schools', though he recognised that the Association for Language Awareness and its journal had promoted discussion of the issues. He also noted at least one pioneering project in the parallel training of foreign language and English teachers. (Pomphrey & Moger, 1999) Twenty years later, he would have had several more initiatives to report and in the UK a growing culture of cooperation between different groups. (Turner, 2001; Hawkes, 2013, Bedford, 2018) He would certainly have recognised the progress made by the *Common European Framework* towards providing a common vocabulary in which to discuss languages.

The distinct identities of different groups of practitioners are still very much in evidence, based partly in the different needs of the learners in their charge, which have already been mentioned and are undoubtedly the main priority of teachers. However, the way those needs are addressed is strongly influenced by the educational trajectory of the teachers, and by the particular social circumstances in which they work.

For first and second languages in schools, the educational trajectory of teachers is usually embedded in well-understood career pathways. Studies of European second language teachers have shown that the pathways vary significantly from country to country, and between the different phases of schooling, especially between primary and secondary schools. (Kelly, Grenfell, & Jones, 2003) For the most part, teachers follow a higher education programme, which leads to a degree and to a teaching qualification, often at

postgraduate level. In the course of this itinerary, trainee teachers are likely to be directed into studies targeted at the type of teaching they intend to pursue. Hence, trainees for primary school will have a general educational training, certainly including a focus on the language of instruction and perhaps on one or more other languages. In contrast, trainees for secondary school will usually specialise in the particular language they intend to teach, which may be the first language of the country or one or more second languages. As a result, secondary school teachers are likely to have pursued quite distinct courses of study and training, depending on whether they teach the national language or a foreign language. A further differentiation is that first language teachers are likely to be citizens of the country, often from birth. Teachers of second languages, by contrast, will in many cases have a personal background in the language they teach, often as citizens of another country where that language is spoken as a first language, and will hold qualifications obtained in their home country.

The different education and training pathways of first and second language teachers are reinforced by the professional organisation of their career. This is most evident at secondary level, where very often they will be located in different departments within their school. It is also visible in the external support structures, particularly in professional associations, which are typically organised separately for first and second language teachers. For example, in the UK, the Association for Language Learning is 'the UK's major subject association for those involved in the teaching foreign languages at all levels'[7]. It was formed in 1990 from the amalgamation of seven UK associations of language teachers, which mainly represented different languages. Its counterpart for first language teachers in the UK is the English Association, which aims to 'further knowledge, understanding and enjoyment of the English language and its literatures and to foster good practice in its teaching and learning at all levels'[8]. It was formed in 1906 and received a Royal Charter in 2006. Both of the associations have extensive international links with similar bodies in other countries. Both associations have limited links with other groups of language teachers. The Association for Language Learning has links with teachers of 'world languages', including the minority or 'community' languages spoken in the UK, while the English Association has links with teachers of literacy. However, there is little evidence that the two associations have any contact with each other or make common cause on any issues of mutual concern.

This example of the professional life of language teachers is specific to the UK, but reflects a common pattern in other European countries: teachers of the

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[7] See 'What is ALL?', Association for Language Learning website, https://www.all-languages.org.uk/about/what-is-all/ (accessed 14 December 2018).

[8] See 'About the English Association' on the English Association website: https://www2.le.ac.uk/offices/english-association/about-us (accessed 14 December 2018).

first or national language have little contact with teachers of second or foreign languages. In addition, the relations between second language teachers are often fragmented by the existence in many countries of associations devoted to a particular second language (e.g. English, French, Chinese) or a group of cognate languages (e.g. Romance, Germanic, Slavic). The diversity is often reinforced by international networks with the same focus on particular languages, and by the activity of embassies and cultural institutes who seek to support the language of their home country. It should be noted, though, that over the last decade or more, embassies and cultural institutes have been active in combining their efforts to promote the learning of languages more generally and to avoid excessive partisanship in support of individual languages. This is a good example of the important value of cooperation.

While the itinerary of first and second language teachers in schools can be mapped with reasonable accuracy, the career paths of other language teachers are more varied and fluid. The teachers of a national language as a foreign language are increasingly numerous, particularly in the most popular languages. Entire educational industries have grown up to provide services in English as a Second or Other Language, in Français langue étrangère, and in other major languages. Though more recent than school-based teaching, career paths are beginning to be established, through the provision of certificates and diplomas, especially at postgraduate level. However, the higher education experience, national origins and linguistic profile of these teachers are highly diverse. Many of them chose this career at a relatively late stage and often gain experience of teaching in a variety of locations and in several different sectors, including the growing private educational sectors. For personal and professional reasons, they are often highly mobile and the majority are likely to have short-term contracts rather than settled long-term posts. This diversity is also found among teachers of the language of instruction to learners from other language backgrounds, especially teaching the children of newly arrived immigrants in schools, or providing services for adult migrants. For this reason, too, the organisations to which these teachers may belong are more diverse and more specialised in the services they offer. Even more diverse is the group of teachers of minority or 'community' languages, who work to support pupils' proficiency in their home language. Most are not full-time teachers and may offer their expertise on a voluntary basis, and outside the formal school system.

A final group that needs to be considered for engagement is teachers from other disciplines, who might be drawn into adopting language awareness in their pedagogy. In principle, this could involve teachers from any educational background and career path, affiliated to any professional association of teachers. Many supporters of language awareness espouse the notion that 'every teacher is a language teacher', at least to the extent that they are experts in the

language of their subject in their own language, even if they lack the ability to introduce other languages into consideration. Particular subject areas may lend themselves to adopting a more multilingual form of language awareness, such as music, history or geography, where a number of teachers have embraced content and language integrated learning (CLIL) and have recognised the added value that language diversity can bring to subject knowledge.

The attitude of these different groups towards language awareness inevitably displays a wide variation, based on the range of different itineraries and professional identities of the teachers and the educational needs of the learners. The kind of argument that will resonate with generalist primary school teachers may not appeal to a specialist teacher of foreign language in secondary school, for example, let alone to a specialist geography teacher. These differences appear as tensions from the point of view of advocates of language awareness, and imply that each of the teacher groups will need to be addressed in different terms in order to highlight the benefits that language awareness could bring in their specific circumstances.

A further complexity is introduced by the importance of other stakeholders in determining the pedagogical approaches to be adopted. A short list of stakeholders would include policy makers such as ministries, politicians, examination and inspection agencies, expert advisers and think tanks. It would include school leaders and managers, who often have an influential role in determining how a curriculum is implemented within a school. It would include parents, who may exercise considerable influence locally on schools and nationally on government policy, whether individually or through representative bodies. And it might well include learners themselves, who are often vocal in articulating their learning needs and may 'vote with their feet', by embracing or resisting particular approaches. The task of persuading these stakeholders to welcome language awareness will similarly require a flexible and differentiated approach.

6 Lessons to be learned

Language awareness has accompanied language learning to a greater or lesser extent for many years, taking many forms in different contexts. In practical terms the European Commission has proposed supporting the development of language awareness in schools and training centres by such steps as supporting the mobility of learners, enabling teachers to address the use of specific language in his or her respective subject area, strengthening learners' competence in the language of schooling, valuing linguistic diversity of learners and validating language competences that are not part of the curriculum. It has proposed to support teachers and educators by investing in the initial and

continuing education of language teachers to maintain a broad language offer (including preparation for linguistic diversity in the classroom), promoting study periods abroad for students intending to become teachers, integrating learning mobility into the education of all language teachers and promoting eTwinning. (European Commission, 2018b: 14)

All of these proposals develop the portfolio of support that is already available for language education, and will be essential in giving a firmer presence to language awareness in the practice of language teaching. In addition, the foregoing discussion of challenges that have arisen in past efforts to promote language awareness suggests that targeted initiatives will be required in order to overcome the inherent tensions that accompany it. These have created barriers that will require research and development and collaborative projects if they are to be addressed effectively.

The tension between different theories of language acquisition underlies some of the barriers. The constant evolution of theories and of language pedagogies provides scope for a larger place to be negotiated for language awareness, no doubt in a reconceptualised form. This will need to be achieved through research by specialists in applied linguistics and language educators, working together as much as possible. The insights and understandings they reach can then be developed into approaches for particular language learning sectors, and potentially into tools that can be shared across sectors, meeting the ambitions of policy makers and educators to incorporate language awareness across different areas of language learning and extending it to other subject areas.

The tensions between different purposes for language learning similarly generate obstacles to language awareness. The key challenge is to achieve a suitable balance between language acquisition, knowledge of language and personal development. Undoubtedly the balance will vary between language learning contexts. Further research and development is required, involving educators and policy makers, to tease out the complexities, and especially to bring to the surface aspects of language awareness that can create a bridge between language proficiency and personal growth. This would help to give educational specificity to the Slovak proverb that 'Koľko jazykov vieš, toľkokrát si človekom' (The more languages you know, the more of a person you are) (European Commission, 2005: 2). The results of these reflections need to be embodied not only in policy documents but also in tools that can readily be adopted by teachers in classrooms. Beyond this, the learning outcomes of teaching programmes need to be reviewed to provide explicit recognition of the values of personal development that are still mainly implicit in documentation.

Tensions between different groups of educators and practitioners present a number of barriers to the extension of language awareness. Fortunately, this is

an area where the European Commission and member states can readily build on progress that has already been made. The major task is to 'break down the silos', and on past experience, this can be significantly enabled by encouraging cooperation between different groups and different countries. The experience of many projects funded by national governments or by European programmes is that innovative thinking can be facilitated by bringing people together from different directions and that new relationships can be established between groups that had little previous contact[9]. A particular focus for cooperative projects in language awareness could be pedagogical materials for teachers, and further development of teacher education, including continuing professional development.

Foregrounding language awareness in a comprehensive approach to language teaching and learning is an ambitious project, which promises significant social and educational benefits. It can draw on half a century of experience during which some areas of language education have successfully embraced language awareness. And it can learn from the other areas in which language awareness has had a more limited impact. Targeted initiatives will be required to explore the barriers that remain to be overcome and the steps that are needed to address them. This will involve new research and the development of tools and strategies that can support the extension of language awareness into areas where it can bring fresh benefits. It will also require the collaborative projects and new networks of educators and practitioners who will take forward the implementation of proposals. None of these initiatives is beyond the power of European bodies and nation states to put in place. If policy makers provide the necessary resources and support, they will be able to shape developments that not only strengthen the learning and teaching of languages across different areas, but also offer many learners and teachers the wider cognitive and cultural benefits that enhanced awareness of language can bring.

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[9] here are many examples of such cooperation, but the projects undertaken or sponsored by the Conseil européen pour les langues/ European Language Council since the mid 1990s provide an excellent sample in the area of higher education languages. See 'Projects' in the CEL/ELC website: http://www.celelc.org (accessed 14 December 2018).

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