

BOOK REVIEWS

**Peter Garrett & Cots, Josep M. Cots (eds.) (2018) *The Routledge Handbook of Language Awareness*. London: Routledge.
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Language Awareness is an important topic in language education, and in recent years it has gained even more ground after the area of applied language study recognised that the Chomskyan (monolingual) notion of native-speaker-hearer is largely a myth. In second/foreign language education (SLA) in past decades the native speaker was set as the model for the learner. Teachers were preferably native speakers of the language they taught, and their learners were expected to aim toward native speaker competence. Now, it is common knowledge that the vast majority of language learners are plurilingual and multicultural even before they join the SLA class, and therefore they come already equipped with a certain level of language and metalinguistic awareness. In this context there can be no doubt that this book edited by Garrett and Cots is auspicious.

The Routledge Handbook of Language Awareness (2018) consists of three parts, covered in 510 pages. The first part focusses on 'Language Teaching and Teachers'; the second part is about 'Language Learning and Learners'; and the third part goes 'Beyond Language Pedagogy'. There are a total of thirty chapters, which on the whole, give a good overview of the field, bringing together theory and research and making it easily accessible in one book.

There is no one definition of 'Language Awareness' (LA), and the different chapters explore the various meanings and notions associated with this important area of language education. From a historical perspective, LA became very important in the 1980s when Eric Hawkins (1981, 1984) argued for programmes of study about languages in school, "in reaction to the poor literacy rates and the poor record of foreign language learning in UK schools" (Cots & Garrett, 2018, p. 3). The Association of Language Awareness (ALA)

which was subsequently established in 1994, and continues to organise international conferences and publishes the journal *Language Awareness* (launched in 1992), defines LA as “explicit knowledge about language, and conscious perception and sensitivity in language learning, language teaching and language use” (ALA web-site). I think that an even clearer interpretation is that language awareness “examines relationships between language form, meaning, context and use” (Cots & Garrett, 2018, p. 63). An insight into some of the chapters will further illustrate the conceptualisation and application of language awareness.

In the first part, eleven chapters tackle different aspects of teaching and teacher development, ranging from teachers’ beliefs to a discussion on form-focused instruction and the teaching of the four skills (listening, speaking, reading, writing), to the teaching of critical literacy, literature and creativity, to English as a Lingua Franca, English as a medium of instruction and assessment. Andrea Young opens Part 1 with a realistic treatment of language awareness issues that emanate within the context of primary classrooms where the linguistic diversity of pupils can be tapped. She explains which misconceptions can be stifling the language development of the children, and discusses the challenges and opportunities for the promotion of inclusive language education policies at school. I like Young’s conclusion which emphasises the need for all practitioners in education to have a greater understanding, empathy, experience of, and knowledge about, language and languages. This certainly strikes a chord for me considering that in Malta early childhood educators and primary teachers have a very meagre space in their training dedicated to these areas, and I wish to raise awareness about the consequences of this.

Nine chapters form the second part of this Handbook. They are very varied in their approaches and I shall mention two that I find particularly useful. Chapter 13, entitled ‘The Study of Metalinguistic Constructs in Second Language Acquisition Research’ is enlightening because metalinguistic awareness is analysed as knowledge, as reflection, as activity and as an ability. The rest of the chapter is dedicated to metalinguistic development in an L2. In chapter 15, Oliveira and Ançã present a detailed analysis of plurilingualism and plurilingual competence, and discuss their interconnections with language awareness. I find this chapter particularly stimulating having myself worked on the production of the Council of Europe’s *Framework of Reference for Pluralistic Approaches to Languages and*

Cultures (Candelier et al. 2012) which lists numerous descriptors that could be considered as promoting language awareness. It is interesting that these authors end their chapter with a reference to the Council of Europe's goals and point to the inevitability and urgency of continuing working on the interconnections between plurilingual competence and language awareness.

In the third part, another nine chapters widen the horizons of language awareness to areas like folk linguistics, minority language contexts, diasporic contexts and translation. The last chapter presents a neo-Gramscian analysis of language awareness.

Finally, while this *Routledge Handbook* can be considered exhaustive in the treatment of the topic, I would like to underline my disappointment at not finding any chapter that treats the topic of language awareness in the first language classroom, that is, in contexts where children (or indeed adults) are learning about their own language/s. There is no doubt in my mind that language awareness is totally relevant in L1 education, and I think that it might be a timely suggestion to produce a book, or a collection of studies in this area.

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