

## ENHANCING LANGUAGE AWARENESS IN MULTILINGUAL EFL CLASSES

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### Abstract

*The fact that any language has its set of varieties serves to emphasise that it is important to have the right attitude and possess sufficient knowledge of the language to function in a multilingual society. Living in such a society, Indonesians must realize that an awareness needs to be created amongst EFL learners in the country about possessing the right attitude and knowledge of English, and this can only be done through the education system. This paper explores the concept of language awareness and links this specifically to methods of developing EFL awareness among multilingual students at the Ahmad Dahlan University in Yogyakarta, Indonesia. The study is grounded in Hawkins' and Fairclough's concepts of Critical Language Awareness, and its development and application by other experts. These basic concepts are employed to understand the significance of language awareness and the implications on EFL teaching methodology. The study reveals that Language Awareness undoubtedly has great significance for both EFL teachers and students. This paper proposes some ways to enhance students' language awareness that could be applied in multilingual EFL classes.*

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**Keywords:** *multilingual, language awareness, EFL teaching.*

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### Introduction

Language is not only a matter of grammar, but also the actual use in daily communication. Therefore, the users and learners must recognize and realize the fact that any language have their set of varieties and function based on various contexts. It can also be argued that the mastery of language use and communicative functions are more needed than the mastery of grammar or the description of syntactic composition of sentences. Dealing with this, Gumperz (in Wardhaugh, 1986: 241) says that "Whereas linguistic competence covers the speaker's ability to produce grammatically correct sentences, communicative competence describes his ability to select forms which appropriately reflect the social norms governing behavior in specific encounters". The argument reinforces the significant role of critical language awareness (CLA) in teaching and learning English in multilingual community.

Critical Language Awareness (later called Language Awareness), is initially defined by Fairclough (in Farias, 2010: par 5) as “conscious attention to properties of language and language use as an element of language education”. Then, Association for Language Awareness (ALA) defines Language Awareness as “explicit knowledge about language, and conscious perception and sensitivity in language learning, language teaching and language use” (2009: par 1). In short, CLA concerns with the learners’ and teachers’ ability to be conscious and sensitive with language education and use.

Dealing with that, it can be said that the learners and teachers are not only required to possess ‘linguistic competence’ but also ‘communicative competence’. Both of the competences are more needed in multilingual community in which there is more than one language used by the members. In this case, the English teaching and learning process in multilingual community has its own characteristics that learners and teachers must possess the right and sufficient knowledge of the language function. Living in such a society, they must realize that awareness needs to be created amongst EFL learners about possessing the right attitude and knowledge of English, and this can only be done through the education system. This paper explores the concept of language awareness and links this specifically to methods of developing EFL awareness among multilingual students at the Ahmad Dahlan University in Yogyakarta, Indonesia. This paper also proposes some ways to enhance students’ language awareness that could be applied in multilingual EFL classes.

### **Critical Language Awareness**

“...I woke up the next morning, thinking about those words – immensely proud to realize that not only had I written so much at one time, but I’d written words that I never knew were in the world. Moreover, with a little effort, I also could remember what many of these words meant...” (Malcolm X in Eschholz, et.all: 1978: 3)

The quotation above is taken from Malcolms X’s article “Coming to an Awareness of Language” (in The Autobiography of Malcolm X) written in his prison life. He told his first experience about being aware of the language use or the power of language. He came to an earlier awareness that words or language mean so much and can open the world. What can be learnt from his experience is that someone, even, in prison is able to realize and be aware of language use that, no wonder, the others who live in multilingual community should have more language awareness.

Language Awareness (Critical Language Awareness), as it is mentioned before, is “conscious attention to properties of language and

language use as an element of language education". Language Awareness also refers to explicit knowledge about and sensitivity to language issues. Promoters of Language Awareness believe that there are societal benefits to developing conscious understanding of how language is structured, used, and acquired, as well as learning about attitudes and their effect upon interpersonal interaction, work relations, professional activities, community life, and family socialization practices (Pousada, 1997: par 3).

To better understand Language Awareness, it is essential to follow the history. Pousada (1997: par 5-9) notes that in 1984, E.W. Hawkins published a book titled *Awareness of Language: An Introduction*, in which he held that in order to learn about the world, human beings have to distinguish, order, induce, and generalize, all of which are capacities developed through the use and awareness (at some level) of language. As speakers mature, they develop insights into the structures and functions of language, the value of language in their personal lives, and the role of language in their society and culture. When they go on to learn foreign languages, this knowledge provides points of reference or comparison that help to modify initial ethnocentric impressions or attitudes.

Hawkins (in Pousada) strongly believed that a native language awareness curriculum would serve as a bridge to foreign language learning. He thought that if sufficient native language awareness were developed, then foreign language acquisition would progress more efficiently. Pousada adds that some researchers (McLaren, Fairclough, Morgan) stress that Language Awareness must go beyond mere knowledge of correct linguistic forms and goals to include consciousness of how language and social power are related. This is referred to a Critical Language Awareness. A teacher attempting to develop Critical Language Awareness needs to be explicit about when, where, and how specific language practices are used to position people socially. Then, other researchers (Green and Hecht) limit the task of developing of Language Awareness to teaching students about: (1) the structures and functions of the languages at their disposal; (2) the value of these languages in their personal lives; (3) the role of language in general in human society; and (4) the new perspectives on human communication they can achieve from comparing languages.

In addition to that, Donmall (in Farias, 2010: par 5) describes language awareness as involving "a person's sensitivity to and conscious awareness of the nature of language and its role in human life". According to Donmall, language awareness operates on three distinctive levels: a) the cognitive level, referring to awareness of language patterns; b) the affective level, i.e. with regard to forming attitudes; c) the social

level, which references the improvement of learners' effectiveness as communicators. Moreover, Arndt, Harvey and Nuttall (in Farias, 2010: par 7) regard a focus on language awareness as bringing numerous benefits, such as: a) speakers are more appreciative of the complexity and sophistication of communication through language; b) LA methodology offers a productive and rewarding route for exploring the richness and complexity of language; c) Speakers are encouraged to consider what is involved in attempts to transfer L1 skills to another language and thus to draw inferential relationships between languages, which is one of the first steps in developing intercultural communication skills; and d) LA helps, perhaps on the most practical level, so that those who are involved in ELT derive a broadened, deepened understanding of how English works.

Specifically, Fairclough (1989) talks deeper in his book *Language and Power* about Critical Language Awareness (CLA). He argues that language use (discourse) is not a matter of performing tasks, it is also a matter of expressing and constituting and reproducing social identities and social relations, including crucially relations of power. He adds that education is not just passing things on (though it is partly that); it is developing the child's critical consciousness of her environment and her critical self-consciousness, and her capacity to contribute to the shaping and reshaping of her social world. He also proposes the model which provides two main guiding principles: 1) Marrying awareness and practice: developing children's potential language capabilities depends on a marriage of purposeful discourse practice and critical language awareness; 2) Building on experience: critical language awareness should be built upon the existing language capabilities and experience of children.

Now, how about CLA in multicultural and multilingual society? Svalberg (in Hartman and Simon, 2008: par 8-9) says that CLA deals with language as discourse, i.e. with verbal interaction as social practice. CLA considers discourse from three perspectives: social context, socio-cognitive process and text (spoken-written). It can be understood that social, cultural and linguistic awareness, and language learning are mutually facilitating. In this case, there are positive effects of being multilingual, such as enhanced meta-linguistic awareness and multilingual capacity, creative thinking, pragmatic competence, communicative sensitivity, translation skills and linguistic and meta-linguistic knowledge (Hartman and Simon, 2008: par 10).

### **Some Ways to Enhance Critical Language Awareness In Multilingual EFL Class**

The basic concepts in the theoretical framework above are employed to understand the significance of language awareness and the

implications on EFL teaching methodology. This paper proposes some ways to enhance students' language awareness that could be applied in multilingual EFL classes.

### **Showing the Students the Language Varieties**

As it is known, languages vary in a number of ways. One language may have many variations. The fact must be understood by the teacher, then, must be informed to the students. Both of the teacher and students must realize and recognize the language varieties. For example, based on the level of formality, Martin Joos (in Chaer and Leonie Agustina, 1995: 92-95) divides language having five styles: frozen, formal, consultative, casual and intimate style. Each of them has their own characteristics and functions. Besides, the other expert (in Wijana, 1996) states strategies in English such as: less polite (e.g. *Got any change?*), rather polite (e.g. *Have you got any change?*), polite (e.g. *I am sorry to trouble you, do you by any chance to have change of a dollar?*), and the most polite (e.g. *It's so embarrassing, but I don't have any change*). The other variation may consist of some dialects like American English, British English, Australian English, etc.

After being shown the language varieties, the students are asked to understand when, where, to whom, and in what situation the varieties are used in conversation. By understanding and recognizing the form and the use of English, the teacher and students get broadened and deepened knowledge of how English works.

### **Giving Examples of Language Use on Products Covers or Advertisements**

In the class, teachers could bring some examples of language use on products covers or advertisements. Then, teachers could ask the students to understand how language works and see how advertisements bring "loaded" words and "hidden persuader language". For example, the following advertisement could be analyzed.

**What every young executive worth his GTI should know.**

(taken from Mills, *Feminist Stylistics*, 1995: 75)

Besides showing the linguistic rules in the advertisement above, teachers could ask the students to critically analyze it and find "behind the line". Teachers could ask such questions: To whom is the advertisement addressed? Why did the advertiser use the words? Why did the advertiser use the generic pronoun "his" in the advertisement?

### **Showing the Students the Multilingualism Phenomena**

Multilingualism (the ability to use more than one language) is very common in Asia, like Indonesia, and it is a considerable and supporting situation for students to get language awareness more easily. By mastering more than one language, students are more ready to be led to critical language awareness. To do so, teachers could show and ask the students to analyze the language use in the multilingualism phenomena.

The examples of multilingual use, of course, can be found in multilingual society in which the speakers use more than one language in one utterance. For example, it can be found in the phenomena of code-mixing and code-switching. The following information can be one of examples.

**Dasi Import. Rp 20.000,-. Jangan Ditawar Lagi Yach... Please!!!**

From the language use above, teachers can ask students to understand and analyze the code-mixing and code-switching phenomena. In such phenomena, the language users in multilingual society (Indonesia) mix Indonesian word '*dasi*' (tie) and English word '*import*' and switch from Indonesian sentence (*Jangan Ditawar Lagi Yach...*) into English sentence (*Please*). Such phenomena are very common in Indonesia that teachers have abundant examples to be shown to the students. This presentation of language use in multilingual phenomena in the class, then, will enhance the students' language awareness.

### **Asking the Students to be Critical on the Language Use in their Daily Lives**

Being critical is usually characterized by careful analysis and judgment (Neufeldt, 1995: 329). In the process of English teaching and learning, teachers should train the students to be critical by recognizing and analyzing the language use in their daily lives. The teachers could ask the students to find the examples of language use in their surrounding, then to show the examples in their presentation in the class.

For example, the language use such as "THANGS YOU FOR COME TO FISITING US/Terimakasih atas kunjungan Anda" can be found in a certain tourist resort. From the example, students can be asked to recognize the grammatical errors and to analyze the context of the language use. The context contains the speaker's social, economical and educational background, the place, etc. From the speaker's background, it can be understood that the person who writes/talks in such English must be the one who does not know much about English and must be not quite educated. In short, the 5W and H questions like 'Who is the speaker?', 'When is the utterance spoken?' 'Where does the speaker speak the utterance?', 'What does the speaker mean?', 'Why does the speaker use such utterance?' and 'How does the speaker say the utterance?' could be

asked to the students to make them more critical on the language use in their daily lives.

### **Asking the Students to Examine Various Texts in a Critical Manner**

Various texts from different sources can also be presented in the class to be examined by the students in a critical manner. For example, the following text can be examined and analyzed.

#### **Fishing for Girls**

Wednesday night, Howard asked Glenn if he wanted to go fishing and girl-watching that weekend at Santa Fe Lake. "We'll leave Friday morning and return late Sunday night," he said. Glenn said he had to clean out his garage, so Howard went by himself.

Howard had also planned to lie around the hotel pool, soak up the sun, read a good book, and look at pretty women in their bathing suits. His own apartment didn't have a pool, so whenever he traveled, he always liked to stay at a place with a pool. But when he arrived at the hotel about noon, he saw that there were no pretty girls at the pool. There were no girls at all. There was nobody at the pool, because the pool was empty. It was being repaired all that week. The staff had "forgotten" to tell Howard this little detail.

Howard called Glenn late Friday night.

"How was the fishing?" Glenn asked.

"Didn't see any, didn't catch any," replied Howard.

"Well, did you catch any women?"

"No. And don't even ask how many beauties I saw at the pool. I didn't go to any bars. But I did go to a Mongolian all-you-can-eat place and had a good dinner. I think one of the waitresses liked me. She asked me if I wanted extra ketchup."

"Well, I hope you said yes. Any time a woman asks you if you want extra anything, that's female code. It means they like you."

"I said no. There was a whole bottle right in front of me."

"Well, you blew it. I don't know when you're going to learn to pick up on those signals. Next time I'll go with you and show you all the tricks."

"If you knew all the tricks, you wouldn't be divorced three times."

Source: <http://www.rong-chang.com/qa2/stories/story055.htm>

After being asked to read the texts, the students can be asked to explain and answer the questions such as: 'Why did the characters in the story say such kind of utterances?', 'Why did the writer use those words rather than another word?' 'Categorize the words which describe men and women (gender)', 'Think about the 'negative' or 'positive' or 'neutral' statements in the story', etc.

### **Asking the Students to Compare Bilingual Texts and to Recognize the Language Use**

The students who live in multilingual society, of course, get great chance to master more than one language that they can be asked to compare bilingual/multilingual texts and to recognize the language use. Such bilingual text can be presented in the class.

*Akhirnya Muhammad memutuskan untuk menerima tawaran yang diberikan Khadijah untuk mengelola bisnisnya ke Siria. Sebelum berangkat, Khadijah berkata kepada Muhammad. "Ini daftar barang yang akan dibawa ke Siria." "Bagaimana masalah harga penjualan di sana?" tanya Muhammad.*

*(Finally Mohammed decided to take Khadijah's offer to run a business to Syria. Before He left, Khadijah said to Mohammed. "Here's the lists of the merchandise that will be brought to Syria". "How about the price there?" asked Mohammed.)*

(taken from "The Story of Muhammad, Memimpin Rombongan Dagang ke Siria/Leading the Merchant Group to Syria",  
Majalah Aku Anak Saleh, Edisi 09, 2006, p. 11)

By comparing the language use in the story above, the students not only recognize the words/vocabulary and grammar used in Indonesian and English, but also critically analyzes the language use in both of them. In this case, the students are not only trained to translate texts, but also be more sensitive on the language use in their bilingual/multilingual society.

### **Training the Students to Use Language more responsibly and effectively**

After being asked to examine, analyze and compare the language phenomena in multilingual society, the students must be trained to use language more responsibly and effectively. Responsibly means “to be able to distinguish between right and wrong and to think and act rationally and hence accountable for one’s behavior” (Neufeldt, 1995: 1144) and effectively means “producing a definite or desired result; efficient; actual, not merely potential or theoretical” (Neufeldt, 1995: 432).

In fact, the activities of examining, analyzing and comparing the language use phenomena can train the students to use language more responsibly and effectively. By understanding the language varieties and language use in multilingual society, the students should be able to choose and select the words/varieties properly based on the contexts. They can use language responsibly by considering the person they are talking to, the place and the time/situation while they are talking. In this case, they can also use the language effectively in their communication. By comparing two languages in proper manner, they can distinguish grammatically correct and incorrect utterances. Then, by examining and analyzing the language use in critical manner, the students are accustomed of using language rationally. They must think deeper first and understand the effects of the words before uttering them in their communication.

### **Conclusion**

In multilingual EFL class, learners are required to master both linguistic competence and communicative competence. By mastering both of the competencies, learners will not only have ability to produce grammatically correct sentences but also have ability to select language forms which appropriately reflect the social norms governing behavior based on the context. In this case, understanding how language works and being sensitive to language issues (Language Awareness/LA) become significant activities in multilingual EFL class. Moreover, Critical Language Awareness (CLA) will lead the students to use language critically, responsibly and effectively.

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