

MODULE 1

1.4 - LANGUAGE AWARENESS

When you are teaching a language, there is no doubt that your students will ask you many questions, on vocabulary and grammar, and they will ask questions why something is the way it is, “why you use a particular tense in a sentence, or why a certain linguistic form is used over another one”. You will have to be able to respond to these questions, meaning that you have to know well the language that you are teaching over and above speaking and understanding it.

Language awareness is essentially concerned with subject-matter knowledge and its impact upon teaching.

Thornbry's book on Teacher Language Awareness, or TLA, that focuses language awareness of L2 teachers (i.e. teachers of a Foreign or Second Language, defines Language awareness as ‘the knowledge that teachers have of the underlying systems of the language that enables them to teach effectively’ It is the understanding the grammar rules of a language and knowing how they are used and it is applicable to teachers of any language that is not the mother tongue of their students.

The Edge, ELT Journal goes further to state that As language teachers, we think about, talk about, and use language frequently, but we may or may not be aware of the ways in which we do it.

This awareness is what is referred to as teacher language awareness, and we access our TLA in many different ways, but it has three domains,

The User Domain which centers on your ability to use the language as well as knowing the sociocultural norms of the language, context and so on.

The Analyst Domain that addresses your ability to analyse the language, and understand its parts and structures, forms and functions, and finally,

The Teacher Domain includes general knowledge, such as how to manage a classroom or pace a lesson, as well as content knowledge, which is your ability to present lessons in and about English in such a way that your students understand and are engaged in your class,

Language Awareness blends 1) content about language, 2) language skills, 3) the possibility to influence the students' attitude, their motivation and other factors and lastly, the student level of language learning and how other languages they already know affects how they learn the one that you are teaching, these factors allow the teacher to think about the language content from the learners point of view, and put in to consideration the potential difficulties the learner may have

Language awareness includes three crucial elements: Form, Meaning and Pronunciation.

FORM includes all the grammatical structures, words, and phrases we use to convey a certain message. Each form carries a particular meaning and as such serves as a tool for conveying intended message. (For example I had cake: subject past verb object demonstrate an action that already happened).

MEANING is the message we want to convey or communicate. We need to use grammatical structures. It is important to know the difference between the meaning and the structure. E.g., In the sentence, I teach English, the form of the verb is present simple, but the meaning is an action I do regularly.

PRONUNCIATION is the way we say the words and it is based on the set of complex rules that need to be followed to understand and be understood. It also includes word stress, sentence stress and intonation, all of which can both convey a meaning as well as change it. (I read a book, I read a book)

One way of achieving language awareness is to become more 'language aware'. Being language aware means that, you understand the possible challenges that language presents to learning. A teacher who is 'language aware' understands why students face these difficulties and what they can do to support students.

Why is it important to be language aware you may ask... teachers are language aware, become better language users in the classroom. this helps them also target their language use better to what their students' abilities are, and this essentially makes the students better learners.

The importance of teachers being language aware, is not just for the teachers themselves, but also has a great impact on their students. teachers who are more language aware, and who can use language appropriately, are better equipped to communicate effectively. They are also more able to understand how sometimes, problems related to the subject are not just technical, but may be related to the language that is used.

When we want to demonstrate language awareness the first thing to do is Make sure we use the correct vocabulary while ensuring that the language used is within the students' level e.g. By avoiding idioms (it's raining cats and dogs) or phrasal verbs (she makes a mean lasagna), but if it happens you can introduce it to the class by asking, can anyone tell me what it means? Keep the culture of your students in mind, be professional and avoid using slang as well as things that may cause offence. 2.check that the students understand what is being said, don't assume you know what the students know. An effective way to determine this is for example is to choose a vocabulary or phrase and ask the students to give you their understanding of it instead of asking the students if they have a question. Another great way of demonstrating language Awareness is by building on your students' vocabulary when possible,

All in all, Good teaching involves a most mysterious feature;; it is art, not science . . . It is important for the teacher to be able to highlight the learner perspective, when

determining how we select and package the information and examples we make available to our students in the hopes of promoting learning. This also means that you become an explorer of your language and may make tons of new discoveries that you can share with the learners.

