

# MODULE 1

## 1.4 - LANGUAGE AWARENESS

### What does it mean to have linguistic awareness?

When you teach, your students ask you many questions. Some typical questions are:

"Why do you say that?"

"Why did you use the past perfect here and the imperfect here?"

A good teacher knows how to answer these questions. To answer these questions, it is not enough to speak and understand a language. A good teacher in fact knows the language he or she teaches in depth.

Having **linguistic awareness** means knowing a language thoroughly and being able to teach it. The more you have linguistic awareness, the better you can teach.

In general, there are 3 levels of linguistic awareness:

1. **User Domain.** This is the level of normal native speakers. All native speakers can speak their language well and know how to use it. For example:

a native speaker knows very well that if you go into a clothes shop you cannot say: 'Good morning, I would like a coffee'.

1. **Analyst's domain.** This is the level of a native speaker who has studied his mother tongue well. He knows the rules of the language and can 'name' these rules. For example:

a native speaker who has studied his mother tongue well knows that if he says "Good morning, I would like a coffee", then he is using the verb "to want" conjugated to the present conditional;

1. **Teacher's domain.** This is the level of teachers. Language teachers know how to speak their language well, they know how to 'name' the rules of their language, and they also know how to do other things. For example: manage a class, calculate the length of a lesson, organise the lesson to help students learn in an easy and relaxed way.

A very good teacher knows how to change the way a student behaves when using a language, understands the level of his students well and knows that students' languages can change the way a student speaks a foreign language.

In short, a good teacher immediately understands his students' difficulties.

### How does a language work?

To have a good linguistic awareness, you need to study how a language works. To simplify, imagine that in all languages there are 3 elements:

- The **form** (= the *grammar*). All forms of a language have a meaning. For example, in the sentence:

Tomorrow I **go** to the beach

there is an adverb of time (tomorrow), a verb in the present tense (go) and a place complement (where do I go? To the sea)

- The **meaning** (= *the message*). In all languages, to communicate a meaning, we must use a linguistic form. For example, in the sentence:

Tomorrow I go to the beach

"go" is the present of the verb to go. But the adverb of time "tomorrow" makes it clear that in this case "go" has a future and not a present meaning.

- The **pronunciation** (= *the sounds of the language*). The way we say words is very important for understanding and being understood. Pronunciation also includes intonation. For example, there is a difference between these three sentences:

Tomorrow I go to the beach.

Tomorrow I go to the beach?

Tomorrow I go to the beach!

### How can I have good language awareness?

A teacher with good language awareness is not only a good teacher, but also has good students, who know their language of study better and generally understand how languages work.

In fact, a teacher with language awareness understands why students have difficulties and what to do to help them.

What are the tricks of the trade for using our language awareness? Here are some examples:

- Use a **vocabulary** appropriate to the student's level. If the student is a beginner, speak simply. Do not be too **formal** or **informal**. Do not use **idioms**, **slang** or **swear** words. If you accidentally speak this way, ask the class, "Does anyone know what this word means?";
- Be sure that the students understand what you are saying. Never assume that the students understand everything. In class, you can choose a word or phrase and ask the students: "**What did you understand?**". Avoid asking students if they have any questions;
- In other words, **put yourself in the student's place**. Think of a time when you went to a foreign country where you did not speak the language. How did you want other people to speak to you? Here, talk to your student like this!