

Editorial

Raising Critical Awareness of Language: A Curriculum Aim for the New Millennium

We welcome the invitation to edit this special issue of *Language Awareness*, focusing on Critical Language Awareness (CLA), for three reasons. Firstly, it gives us the opportunity to reassess the contribution of the concept of CLA to thinking about language education, a concept with which we have been associated since four of us first coined the term 12 years ago. Secondly, it gives us an opportunity to examine the history of the concept over the last 12 years: to see how it has been applied in practice and to see how colleagues have explored and developed particular aspects of it in greater detail. Thirdly, we are pleased to have the opportunity to bring the issue of CLA to the forefront of the attention of readers of *Language Awareness* making available the latest theory and research in the area, and arguing for a critical dimension to Language Awareness-raising in all the settings and circumstances in which colleagues are working as teachers and researchers.

In this introduction we present the views of language and language learning which underpin the idea of CLA as a curriculum aim, we outline how CLA has been applied in practice over the past 12 years, and how thinking about CLA has developed over the same period (see also Clark & Ivanič, 1997b). Finally we introduce the papers in this volume, showing how they relate to one another. We argue that Language Awareness-raising which ignores issues of ideology, subject-positioning and power is in danger of complicity with social inequities maintained by language, and that the need for CLA in the language curriculum is as urgent as ever.

The concept 'Critical Language Awareness' grew out of two developments in the 1980s in Britain: the Language Awareness movement and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as an approach to the study of language. By 1987 the 'Language Awareness' movement in Britain was well-established, with several publications presenting the rationale for raising awareness about aspects of language as a curriculum aim (for example, Donmall, 1985; Hawkins, 1984). This movement helped to establish the view that making language itself an object of study, particularly in the early years of secondary education, would help learners in their first encounters with foreign languages, would recognise the achievements and contributions of the increasing numbers of bilingual children in British schools, and may also help children develop their spoken and written English. There were already course materials in use in secondary schools (for example, Aplin, 1981; Hawkins, 1985) which were designed to support explicit teaching about the forms, structures and functions of language, about differences between spoken and written language, about the history of language, languages of the world and linguistic variation.

In 1987 Norman Fairclough was working on the final version of his book *Language and Power* (eventually published in 1989) in which he was establishing

the foundations of what is now well known as Critical Discourse Analysis. The fundamental principles of CDA are that language is a social practice, that language is shaped by and shapes values, beliefs and power relations in its sociocultural context, and that language use can contribute to discursive and social change (Fairclough, 1989, 1992a, 1995). Four of us at Lancaster (Norman Fairclough, Marilyn Martin-Jones and the two of us) saw this social view of language as an essential component of education. Building on the work already done by the Language Awareness movement, we formulated the rationale for what we called a *critical* awareness of language as a curriculum aim. We were proposing that raising awareness about language should include the understandings about language which were being developed within CDA. We saw the objectives of bringing CLA into the curriculum as helping learners to develop more consciousness and control over the way they use language and over the way they are positioned by other people's use of language. A corollary of awareness is action: the understandings gained by CLA should equip learners to recognise, challenge and ultimately contribute to changing social inequities inscribed in discourse practices, and thus to be more responsible citizens.

We first made the term 'Critical Language Awareness' public in a presentation at the British Association for Applied Linguistics meeting in September 1987, and the article on which this presentation was based was widely circulated in unpublished form until it appeared in *Language and Education* in 1990/91 (Clark *et al.*, 1990, 1991). This publication was closely followed by a collection of articles which expanded on various aspects of CLA and showed how it can be applied in practice (Fairclough, 1992b).

Since then there have been many developments, some of them conducive to the raising of CLA in educational settings, some iniquitous to it. Between the first presentation of our paper in 1987 and its subsequent publication in 1990/91, the teaching of English in the UK was influenced by the Language in the National Curriculum (LINC) project 1988–1992 (see Carter, 1990), and the first version of the National Curriculum Orders (DES, 1990). On the positive side, the LINC project took account of the concept of CLA, building it into their 'cascade' training programme for teachers, and into the Materials for Professional Development which they prepared for publication (LINC Coordinators, 1992). This meant that many leading educational professionals attempted to devise ways of raising awareness about the social and ideological nature of language among British teachers, with a view to this awareness becoming a part of what would be taught in classrooms. This development was nipped in the bud by the fact that the British government, having funded the LINC project, refused to publish the materials it produced. This may ultimately have had the opposite to the intended effect, since these banned materials were quite widely circulated in unpublished form and gained a certain radical currency through being subversive. However, the possibility of CLA taking on in schools was dealt a further blow by the imposition of the 1990 version of the National Curriculum. Firstly, these set no attainment targets for knowledge about language, effectively marginalising explicit attention to Language Awareness of any sort in schools. Secondly, the orders placed such an enormous burden of coverage and administration on primary and secondary school teachers that they had no time for anything other than the

curriculum content and aims which were specified as statutory requirements. So even those teachers most convinced by and committed to the ideas they had encountered through the LINC project were unable to put them into practice in their classrooms. As Alison Sealey's paper in this volume shows, more recent curriculum and policy documents designed to specify what is taught in primary schools and what is taught to primary school teachers have continued to be based on a very limited view of language, reducing the notion of Language Awareness to little more than knowledge about phoneme-grapheme relationships and the nature of 'Standard English', taking no account of the social and ideological nature of language.

In adult basic education the same pattern can be seen. There was widespread interest in the late 1980s and early 1990s in CLA as a valuable part of the curriculum, focused mainly around the Inner London Education Authority (ILEA) initiative and materials which were eventually published as *Language and Power* (ILEA Afro-Caribbean Language and Literacy Project in Further and Adult Education, 1990). This was eroded in the 1990s by the closure of the ILEA, and by pressure for classes to follow a Wordpower syllabus (Adult Literacy and Basic Skills Unit, 1989), focusing on achieving functional objectives (see Thompson, 1990; O'Rourke *et al.*, 1992 for critiques of these developments in Adult Basic Education policy).

The argument in favour of CLA as a curriculum aim has been strengthened by the work of Hilary Janks in South Africa. She developed a series of materials with the specific aim of developing CLA in South African secondary schools (Janks, 1993a). She piloted these and wrote about issues concerning their use (Janks, 1993b, 1996). These materials are now available internationally as a model for how CLA can be fostered through classroom activities.

Over the last ten years several people have focused on the value of CLA for bilingual learners where their language of instruction (usually English) is a second or foreign language (Martin-Jones, Clark, Wallace). We suggest that two developments were responsible for this. Firstly, academics and practitioners who were concerned about bilingualism, language maintenance and language rights were extremely active in this period, arguing that teachers should pay explicit attention to the status of languages and should encourage learners to stand up for their rights to use languages other than the dominant one(s), even when this would be flouting conventions and rules of 'appropriacy'. Secondly, the history of the 'Communicative Approach' to language teaching intersects with the history of the Language Awareness movement. The 'Communicative Approach' had been in vogue throughout the 1980s. By 1990 some of the disadvantages of an exclusively communicative approach were well recognised, and there were increasing arguments among the language teaching community for 'consciousness raising', for 'explicit teaching about language', for a 'cognitive approach' to complement what could be learned by immersion in and exposure to the foreign or second language (see Ellis, 1997). The result has been an interest in developing explicit knowledge about language in second and foreign language classrooms alongside other aspects of language development, and several teachers and theorists have included CLA as part of this explicit knowledge, as Catherine Wallace's paper in this volume shows.

CLA has continued to be central to our own work, both in our practice as language support providers, and in our research. In our role as language educators, since 1986 we have jointly developed and taught a course for postgraduate students in the Department of Linguistics and Modern English Language at Lancaster University, currently entitled 'Academic Discourse Practices: A Critical Approach'. The underlying principle of this course is that we adopt a CLA approach to the teaching of academic writing. We provide opportunities for students to examine and critique dominant academic discourse practices within linguistics and social science more generally. We aim to help students become more aware of the complex relationship between the institution, discourse, social power relations, identities and agency in shaping these practices. Raising critical awareness of these issues with our students allows us to focus on discourse choices and the way they position writers and readers. Students are encouraged to use language that will align them with sociopolitical values, beliefs and practices to which they are committed, if necessary opposing dominant academic discourse conventions in their own academic work and future teaching, thereby contributing to discursive and social change. Romy Clark runs similar courses for a wide range of departments in the Faculties of Social Science and Humanities. (Such courses are discussed in more detail in Clark, 1992, 1993b; Clark & Ivanič, 1991, 1997a.)

This approach entails the following pedagogic principles.

- *socially situated learning*:
that the teaching and learning of academic literacy practices in higher education must be firmly located within the departments to which students belong, so that language can be discussed in relation to real social contexts.
- *mainstreaming*:
that CLA work must be made available to all students, not only special groups such as those for whom English is an additional language, or those identified as having 'problems' (see also the discussion of this issue in Catherine Wallace's article).
- *a questioning approach*:
constantly asking the questions: 'Why are conventions/practices the way they are?' 'In whose interests do they operate?' 'What views of knowledge and representations of the world do they perpetuate?' 'What are the possible alternatives?'

In practice, this means that in our sessions on academic writing we focus on the coursework assignments students have to write for assessment in the department. These assignments provide the context and purpose for all discussions, ensuring that we are not talking about writing in a social vacuum, but examining and undertaking real writing for real readers. We do not aim to tell students how to write their assignments; rather to provide a critical forum for raising issues and considering alternatives. Students consider the ideological implications of writing in particular ways, with a view to feeling able to write in ways that more closely relate to who they are and how they would like to position themselves within the discourse community.

The syllabus is flexible and student-driven, but our focus on CLA leads us to

include the following elements in it, many of which do not figure in other approaches to academic literacy:

- (1) raising consciousness about issues of power and status in relation to writing in an academic context;
- (2) raising consciousness about how writing is embedded in a sociocultural and institutional context;
- (3) demystifying and problematising reading and writing processes and practices;
- (4) recognising that difficulty with writing is not an individual deficit but an inherent feature of the writing process;
- (5) Emphasising that writing is a thinking process which entails not just accurate use of language but also engaging with meaning for a purpose;
- (6) critically examining the relationship between context, purpose and form;
- (7) raising awareness about ways in which writing constructs the writer's identity;
- (8) paying attention to the writer–reader relationship;
- (9) understanding the cultural factors and beliefs about originality and ownership which surround intertextual practices, including attribution, referencing and 'plagiarism';
- (10) critically examining argumentation purposes and practices;
- (11) questioning traditional notions of correctness and appropriacy.

As researchers we have taken a CDA approach to a variety of topics. In each case the pedagogic implication of our research has been that critical awareness of some of the features we have identified would benefit language learners. Romy Clark has undertaken research with the playwright Trevor Griffiths, identifying the processes and practices in which he engages as he works on his plays (see Clark & Ivanič, 1997a, Chapter 4), comparing the readings of readers with different ideological predispositions (Clark, 1993a; Clark & Ivanič, 1997a, Chapter 7), and using CDA to compare a written screenplay with the text of its performance as directed by Ken Loach (Clark, 1999). Roz Ivanič studied the discursive construction of writer identity through case studies of eight mature students in higher education in England, showing how they were positioned by the discursive resources on which they were drawing, and how they reacted to this positioning when it was made explicit (Ivanič, 1994, 1998). Together we have examined writing as a social practice in terms of its political power, its contexts and purposes, processes and practices, the role of the writer, the role of the reader, and issues of correctness and standardisation (Clark & Ivanič, 1997a). Roz is currently undertaking a longitudinal study of children's writing for learning, part of which involves identifying the views of scientific knowledge which are inscribed in the discourses on which they are drawing as they engage in project work in primary school (Ivanič, 1999). The upshot of this work has been an increasing sense that CLA as a curriculum aim is not only relevant but even crucial to modern life: people need to understand the ideological nature of discourse in order to gain control over the way in which their communicative practices contribute to the maintenance or contestation of particular representations of the world and relations of power. For this reason we see the topic

as very timely for this journal, and have welcomed the opportunity to commission papers which examine and present selected aspects of CLA as it is currently being theorised and practised.

The papers in this special issue of the journal come from a wide range of educational settings: Primary Education in the UK, English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) in Higher Education in the UK, and Higher Education in The Republic of South Africa. They also reflect a wide range of concerns, all illustrating the urgent need for and advantages of pedagogic practices which are premised on a view of language and language learning as social practices. The papers are organised to reflect a relationship between social context, educational policy, pedagogic practice and social action: Norman Fairclough's paper contextualises the need for CLA in an understanding of global socioeconomic tendencies; Alison Sealey's paper focuses on the need for CDA and CLA to inform educational policy; Catherine Wallace's paper addresses theoretical issues underpinning the practice of CLA; and the volume ends with Hilary Janks' discussion of the relationship between CLA and social action.

Fairclough's paper starts with a reminder of what our first paper on CLA in 1987 argued for, namely that CLA should be a basic concern in language education at all ages and levels. He argues that the need for new educational practices in the new global social order is greater than ever. His paper demonstrates this through an examination of the connection between discourse and the new economic order, using the discourse of 'flexibility' as an example. He examines the relationship between discourse, knowledge and social change, between discourse and identities, and between discourse and democracy. He ends with a discussion of educational issues, with reference to the Dearing Report *Higher Education in the Learning Society* (National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education, 1997), presenting a robust critique of the view of communication as 'skill'.

Sealey's paper shows how current policy documents crucial to teaching primary school children about language still focus on the notion of an individual child learning and applying in an unproblematic way a prescriptive set of rules and skills in a de-socialised, decontextualised, depoliticised vacuum. This, she argues, is also a consequence of a transmissive view of teaching and learning (as is also found in the Dearing Report). She puts forward an alternative view of language use, drawing on concepts from realist social theory (structure and agency, emergence and collective agency).

Wallace reflects on a number of theoretical and practical issues raised by a course in critical reading for postgraduate ESOL students. She critically examines some of the concepts central to CLA: emancipation, empowerment, difference, opposition and resistance. She suggests, controversially, that in the 'interpretive community' of the classroom, teachers should aim for 'commonality not difference' and encourage shared interpretations. She illustrates this discussion with details of a critical reading course she has taught and researched in London.

Janks' contribution, from The Republic of South Africa, discusses the use of student journals as a means of assessment for a postgraduate CLA course. Her analysis of the student journals highlights and problematises a central tenet of CLA: that CLA equips students with a greater sense of their own agency and

ability to engage in action to challenge and transform the educational and wider social world within which they operate.

In conclusion, we hope that this collection will help to raise awareness about the importance of CLA for people entering the 21st century, that it will stimulate engagement with the issues raised in these papers and, above all, that it will encourage more teachers to try out CLA-raising activities in their classrooms.

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