

## Crazy English

T. Oschepkova, EL Teacher,  
State Technical University, Omsk

**D**o you speak English? It seems to be a very simple question to answer, but not many speakers of the language can identify what they know about the language and what enables them to speak it. This is what language awareness is: explicit knowledge about the language, or as B.G. Donmal defines it, "a person's sensitivity to and conscious awareness of the nature of language and its role in human life" [4].

Many of the teachers are convinced that analyzing the language and doing linguistic research is not their job. Nevertheless, many methodologists, including R. Carter, S. Thornbury and M. Spratt have proven the opposite – language awareness can be beneficial for the teacher and consequently have a positive influence on his / her teaching / learning process and the students' achievements. Among such consequences are teacher's abilities to:

- evaluate, select and adapt a coursebook or additional materials for the class (knowing basic components of the language and the skills that are required by the syllabus the teacher can select materials which are appropriate for his / her teaching / learning situation),
- anticipate learners' problems (being aware that... is a typical mistake for a Russian-speaking student, a teacher could design more activities to avoid it),
- plan lessons (knowing that the modal verb *ought to* is specific in meaning and less spread in every-day communication, the teacher can avoid mentioning it or discuss it at the later stages),
- field learners' queries about the language (e.g. they may ask you why J. Lo sings "My love **don't** cost a thing" whereas you always insist on -s-forms in the third person singular),
- deal with learners' errors (having noticed the error in the student's utterance "It was a tremendously exciting match. Nevertheless I hope you enjoyed it" the teacher can explain that the reason of it is the misuse of the discourse marker. Instead of using the linking element with the meaning of consequence, the student chose one with the meaning of contrast).

"If doctors choose not to baffle their patients with complex anatomical terminology, this does not exempt them from the requirement to know as much as they humanly can about anatomy. Likewise, language teachers... whether or not they choose to make explicit to the learners the systems underlying the language they are teaching, they are still bound to be authorities in the language itself." [8] What's more, analyzing the language can keep the teachers interested in the job through broadening their purview and satisfying their natural linguistic curiosity.

We take English for granted. But if we explore its paradoxes, we find that boxing rings are square, and a guinea

pig is neither from Guinea nor is it a pig. There is no egg in eggplant or ham in hamburger, neither apple nor pine in pineapple. Blackberries are red when they are green. Sweetmeats are candies, while sweetbreads, which aren't sweet, are meat. And why is it that writers write, but fingers don't fing, grocers don't groce, and hammers don't ham? If the plural of tooth is teeth, why isn't the plural of booth beeth? Is cheese the plural of choose? If a vegetarian eats vegetables, what does a humanitarian eat? When the stars are out, they are visible, but when the lights are out, they are invisible. And why, when I wind up my watch, I start it, but when I wind up this essay, I end it? Let's face it: English is a crazy language and it could be seen at all the levels.

If we look at the level of pronunciation, we can state that the same combination of letters can be pronounced differently, e.g. compare: **heard** but **beard**, **meat** but **great** but **threat**; **here** but **there**, **dear** but **pear**, **rose** but **lose**, **word** but **sword**.

The development of modern technologies such as mobile phones and Internet has a great influence on the language, in particular on its spelling. The whole information is shortened to its minimum to save time and money. We write ILBL8T meaning "I will be late" and RUOK? instead of "Are you okay?". So, don't be surprised if you get a message from your boyfriend saying "D u wnt 2 go out 2 nite?".

The tendency of saving language means can be seen at the morphemic level as well. Such words as brunch (breakfast + lunch), Oxbridge (Oxford + Cambridge), slanguage (slang + language) are already well recognized. Well-spread word-building elements are used to create new words, such as TV-ese – a TV-viewer (compare Chinese, Portuguese), jeepable – possible to be crossed in a jeep (compare drinkable, portable).

There is a great amount of fact from the history of the language which are not only amazing but helpful for understanding the inconsistencies of the language. For example, it could be interesting to learn how the meaning of the word *attic* degraded. It comes from the classical word *attic* which means "having characteristics peculiarly Athenian", and we know that the architecture in the Athenians was notable for its symmetry, grace and refinement. So, from the historical point of view the most fascinating rooms in the house should be attic but it is something different from what we mean by this word now. The word has even acquired a negative connotation which the expression "to have rats in the attic" possesses.

To sum it up, knowing the peculiarities of the language or "its nature" is vital. Analyzing the language is equally important as developing skills and linguistic competence. Thus, there should be some tools that will enable the teacher and the students to discover more about language compo-

nents. "One way of making language learners more aware of the way in which the language is used is to make them do an exercise about language, just as they do exercises about other topics like hobbies, films" [5]. Further on some samples of such "tools" focused on various aspects of the language are presented.

**No. 1**

This activity is aimed at comparing formal and informal styles of the language.

Task: Here are some polite English phrases and their equivalents in broken English. Can you match them?

1. I wonder if you could spare me a minute and kindly explain how this sophisticated mechanism works?
  2. Excuse me, sir. I should be obliged to you if you could tell me the price of that silk scarf.
  3. I wonder if you could possibly ask your mother to be so kind as to come with you next Sunday.
  4. Excuse me. May I have the pleasure of the next dance?
  5. I wonder if you would be kind enough to pass me the salt, please.
  6. Could you hold on please?
- a) Wait
  - b) Hi! Dance?
  - c) Please. This thing. Works? How?
  - d) Please, the salt.
  - e) That scarf, please. How much?
  - f) Next Sunday. Bring your Mom.

Key: 1c, 2e, 3f, 4b, 5d, 6a

**No. 2**

This activity is aimed at analysing examples of idiomatic expressions existing in the language and the meaning they convey.

Task: Match the idiomatic expressions with their meanings.

1. to be the apple of one's eye
  2. to go bananas
  3. a lemon
  4. a bowl of cherries
  5. a carrot
- a) to become wild or angry
  - b) someone who is foolish or worthless
  - c) a promised reward for doing something
  - d) something very very pleasant
  - e) to be one's favourite (person or thing)

Key: 1e, 2a, 3b, 4d, 5c

**Bibliography**

1. Arndt V., Harvey P. & Nuttall J. *Alive to Language*. – CUP, 2000.
2. Bolitho R. and Tomlinson B. *Discover English*. – Heinemann, 1995.
3. Carter R. *Investigating English Discourse/Language, Literacy and Literature*. – London, NY, 1997.

**No. 3**

This activity is aimed at comparing two variants of the English language which coexist in the modern English-speaking world – British and American.

Task: Do this puzzle. Give American equivalents for the following British words:

- |              |                  |
|--------------|------------------|
| 1. lift      | 9. dinner jacket |
| 2. post      | 10. sweets       |
| 3. timetable | 11. petrol       |
| 4. flat      | 12. queue        |
| 5. ill       | 13. film         |
| 6. holidays  | 14. shop         |
| 7. autumn    | 15. maths        |
| 8. trousers  |                  |

Key: 1 – elevator, 2 – mail, 3 – schedule, 4 – appartment, 5 – sick, 6 – vacation, 7 – fall, 8 – pants, 9 – tuxedo, 10 – candy, 11 – gas, 12 – line, 13 – movie, 14 – store, 15 – math

**So, if the English language is crazy, why not be crazy about it?**

4. Donmal B. G. *Language Awareness: NCLE Reports and Papers*. – London: CILT, 1985.
5. Harmer J. *The Practice of English Language Teaching*. – Longman, 1999.
6. Scrivener J. *Learning Teaching*. – Macmillan, 1994.
7. Spratt M. *English for the Teacher*. – CUP, 1994.
8. Thornbury S. *About Language*. – CUP, 1997.