



Language Awareness and Second Language Acquisition: Is there a link?

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Abstract

The conceptual analysis of language awareness has been extensively investigated with varying connotations. The first objective of this research study is to investigate the extent of the interaction between the development of language awareness and second language acquisition. As a second objective, this study hypothesizes that the conceptual definition of language awareness, in terms of being a linguistic terminology, needed further clarification, and this could be explored through categorizing data that are derived from selected published articles into common themes. Process mapping research methodology is effectively used in this linguistic study. The articles that are thematically explored within this research study are selected based on the fact that they used language awareness as a separate linguistic conceptual entity within the scope of their research. The results of this study suggest that a process modeling technique can be used to associate collected data within categories in order to show the common themes of language awareness. Even though the overall data were partly inconclusive due to lack of consistency in the terminological use of the term “language awareness,” this research study suggests categorical relationships in a conceptual process model and shows that language awareness has a positive impact on the language acquisition process.

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Öz

Dil bilinci süregelen bilimsel çalışmalarda sıkça irdelenmesine rağmen farklı çağrışımlarda kullanılmaktadır. Bu araştırmanın ilk hedefi, dil bilincinin gelişimi ile ikinci dil edinimi arasındaki etkileşimin kapsamını incelemektir. İkinci amaç olarak; bu çalışma, dil bilinci kavramının dilbilimsel bir terminoloji olarak netlik kazanması gerektiği tezini savunmuştur. Dil bilinci üzerine yayımlanmış makalelerden elde edilen verilerin ortak temalara göre süreç sınıflandırılması yoluyla araştırılabileceği hipotezi savunulmuş ve ortak kavramsal temalar tespit edilmiştir. Bu dilbilimsel yayımda süreç haritalama araştırma metodu etkili bir biçimde kullanılmıştır. Bu araştırma çalışmasında; dil bilinci kavramı açısından incelenen makalelerde, dil bilinci bağımsız bir dilbilimsel kavram olarak kapsamlı irdelenmiş ve incelenmiştir. Bu çalışmanın sonuçları, dil farkındalığıyla ilişkili ortak temaları göstermek için toplanan verileri kategorilerle ilişkilendirmek için süreç modelleme tekniğinin etkili kullanılabileceğini göstermektedir. Araştırma çalışmalarında “dil bilinci” ibaresinin terminolojik kullanımındaki veriler kısmen tutarsızlık teşkil etse de; bu araştırma, kavramsal ve kategorik süreç haritalama metodu yöntemiyle dil farkındalığının ikinci dil edinim sürecine olumlu etkisi olduğunu göstermiştir.

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Introduction

The function of language awareness (LA) in the second language (L2) acquisition has been widely debated (Astuti, 2020; Andrews & Lin, 2017; Balyasnikova & Ufimtseva; Cenoz et al., 2017; Fairclough, 2014). Yet, researchers did not agree whether language awareness precedes language development (Kennedy & Trofimovich, 2010, Leonet et al., 2020), or whether it is an integral and inseparable side of language acquisition (Jessner, 2008, Gui et al., 2020). There is no doubt that LA is a complex term to be clarified (Francis, 2020; Garrett & Cots, 2017; Konderak, 2016), and the term often contextually stayed ambiguous due to the plurality of voices. Researchers either used the term LA to state multiple linguistic concepts or referred to a wide spectrum of ideas that prevented semantic clarity. In light of this idea, raising awareness for a second language versus gaining consciousness on second language acquisition can be perceived in two distinctive contexts. In fact, a learner can experience awareness on what s/he already knows in terms of an awakening process, whereas gaining consciousness within the second language acquisition context can refer to activities that are related to creating new knowledge (James, 1992, Weaver, 2020, Walker, 2020).

Accordingly, it is necessary to look at how some researchers referred to the term LA based on a philosophical approach that is restricted by a single academic discipline, while others preferred to use a much broader term that could mean multiple semantic entities. Berry (2005) specifically revealed that different interpretations of the same term for LA are used in both applied linguistics and LA fields. Notably, another complexity of the term LA was also indicated in Berry (2005), Fortune (2005), and Svalberg's (2005) research studies, where they discussed how the meaning of the term metalanguage differs from one study to another. Berry (2005) investigated the concept of metalanguage on the basis of the "definitions of the concept and different approaches to it, its scope and the domains in which it plays a role, related terms, its relationship to LA, as well as the variety of dimensions in which it features" (p. 3). What's more, Berry (2005) revealed that the term metalanguage does not explicitly reflect the meaning as it is used in the literature of applied linguistics. Instead, he indicated that there was a need to map out a research agenda in order to establish the essence and value of the term in the applied linguistics (Berry, 2005). Thus, this study delves into the data relationships of the term LA regarding terminologies being used in applied linguistics research area in order to explore possible categorical relationships.

Statement of Research Methodology

Research studies on LA have plenty of logical evidence to support empirical relationships across shared studies on LA; however, the use of the terminology for expressing the concept of LA creates confusion to see direct thematic relationships. In this research study, the correlations between the use of these terminologies are connected to a possible process model. Furthermore, this study hypothesizes: (1) clarification is needed to relate linguistic terminology that is related to LA in order to explore the concept of LA from a more empirical perspective; (2) major significant areas that impact LA or metalinguistic awareness should be explored. In an attempt to investigate these hypotheses, this study intends to answer the following research question: In what ways does language awareness interact with second language learning? The findings of this research study may have possible social and pedagogical implications that would shed light on future studies that focus on LA as a movement rather than a concept.

Findings

Evaluation, Synthesis, and Discussion

Recent research articles that focused on LA reveals that language learners become critiques of their own learning process because of self-discovery. This self-consciousness state results in making better choices in developing language learning strategies. The terminology of LA refers to a general spectrum as indicated above. On the other hand, it should be remarked that metalinguistic awareness and LA share the same qualities as both refer to a consciousness level in all language-related tasks (See Figure 1).



Figure 1. *The relationship between metalinguistic awareness and language awareness*

The question arises here with this relationship is whether there are subcategories of metalinguistic awareness or LA that a language learner experiences during a language learning process? The answer to this question is complicated because former research studies did not make a distinction because of inconclusive data. This is not to deny that Berry (2005) categorized the term metalanguage into two categories as reflexive and non-reflexive (See Figure 2).

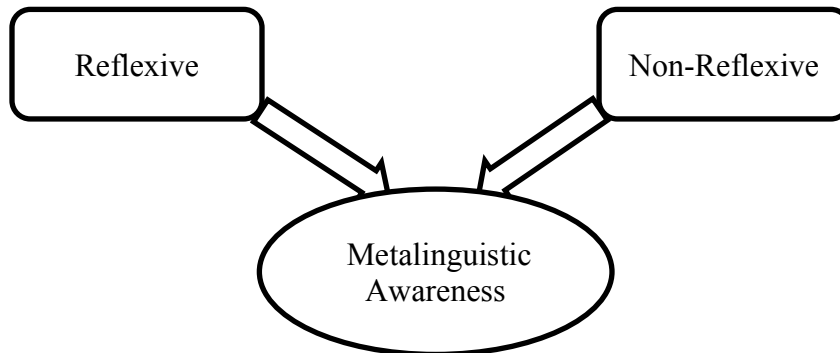


Figure 2. *The components of metalinguistic awareness*

According to his research study, reflexive metalinguistic awareness refers to the concept of language like a tool in a reflective manner, whereas the non-reflexive way of looking at language occurs by questioning “one language (e.g. English) as a metalanguage to describe another language (e.g. French) (p.7).” In other words, reflexive metalinguistic awareness is all about self-discovery and analysis, while non-reflexive metalinguistic awareness is using language as an object to make the target language more meaningful or explicit. The latter one approaches languages systematically and obviously attempts to improve effective learning strategies consciously. Additionally, it should be noted that the reflexive aspect of metalinguistic awareness is central to this study. Thus, the term “consciousness” that results from self-discovery at simultaneous instances gradually turns into “language awareness” or “metalinguistic awareness” over time.

Perhaps the most obvious example of this is the process of interlanguage awareness. In his research study, Fortune (2005) indicated that consciousness-raising activities help learners to realize target language features by obtaining interlanguage awareness. His research study compared two former research studies using the same linguistic tool with two different sets of participants as intermediate and advanced learners. A mixed group of advanced English learners (Italian, Arabic, Spanish, Korean, Japanese, and Georgian) was involved in dictogloss activities. Then, the students took notes while a short text was read aloud to them twice at a normal speed in the target language. Next, pairs of students wrote grammatically accurate texts within the same context by avoiding the use of the same syntactic forms or lexical items. Fortune (2005) stated that: “The examination of transcripts of learner interactions provided evidence that metalanguage can play a facilitative role in focusing attention and deciding on which form to use” (p.21). To put it simply, metalanguage occurs when the learner focuses on which forms are accurate among many other alternatives because of a language learner’s conscious awareness state (See Figure 3). By this definition, the question that arises here is whether language learners can self-correct their own linguistic errors by activating their metalanguage?

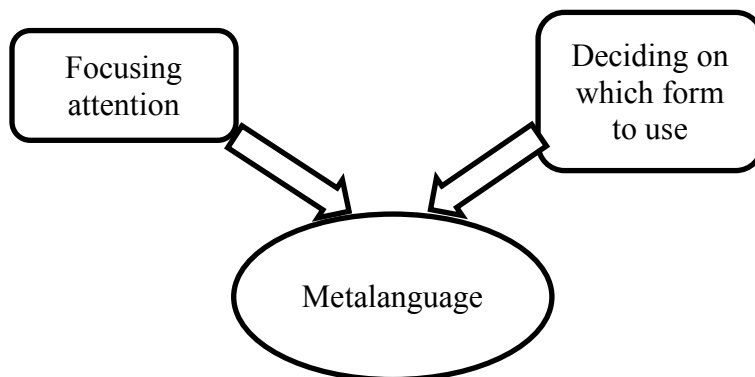


Figure 3. *Metalanguage: A language learner’s conscious awareness state*

Bouffard and Sarkar (2008) investigated whether young children are capable of correcting their own errors by gaining LA. Language tasks used in this research study were specifically designed for improving LA. Through communication on error correction, repair, and self-analysis, students were expected to correct their non-target forms of utterances in classroom-based activities. It was specified in this research study that learners used purposeful learning strategies to figure out how the target language worked, and they developed an understanding for their first language transfer errors. The results of this research study pointed out that even young children are capable of noticing and correcting their errors as a result of gaining LA. This finding maps out that metalinguistic awareness can be both fostered and achieved through effective communication on error correction within the wider intellectual and pedagogical context of metalinguistic awareness regardless of the learners' maturity level (See Figure 4)

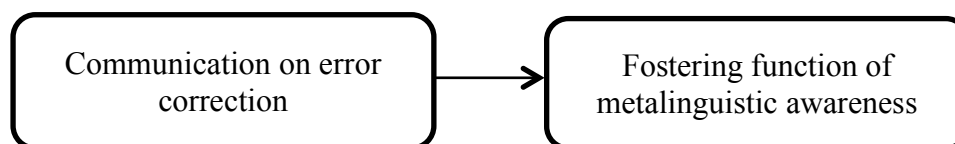


Figure 4. *Fostering function of metalinguistic awareness*

In another research study that also focused on error correction, Lasagabaster and Sierra (2005) stated that error correction has been debated for so long, and there has been a controversy among researchers on how to correct errors and what possible outcomes error correction is entitled to. Their research study investigated whether students use their prior learning strategies as a result of effective error corrections in a classroom environment. The results of their research study indicated that simply correcting students' errors had no positive impact on students' learning. On the other hand, this research reflected that communication between students and teachers about error corrections made teachers realize what sort of pedagogical implications in error correction techniques were useful in fostering students' metalinguistic awareness (See Figure 5).

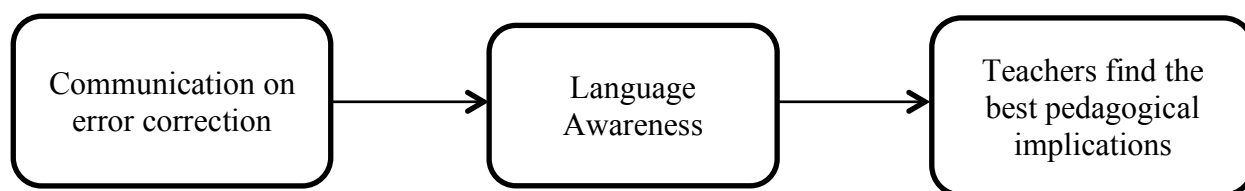


Figure 5. *The effect of language awareness on error correction*

Specifically, it was stated in Lasagabaster and Sierra's (2005) research study that the most efficient form of error correction took place when expanded time and longer explanation were devoted to constructing metalinguistic awareness. This finding draws attention to the fact that questions whether error correction strategies by activating LA are also effective in oral language skills?

Yiakoumetti et al. (2005) researched whether explicit knowledge sourced by LA had an influence on students' linguistic performance and language attitudes. The focus was on bidialectal students' adaptation to Standard Greek by reducing the Cypriot dialectal interferences. A language learning program was developed to use LA as a learning strategy. The results of this study showed that LA improved students' language attitudes by enhancing their linguistic production in the standard language. As a result, their oral production of standard variety improved, and Cypriot dialectal interferences were reduced in ways that led to an improvement in the target variety of this language (See Figure 6).

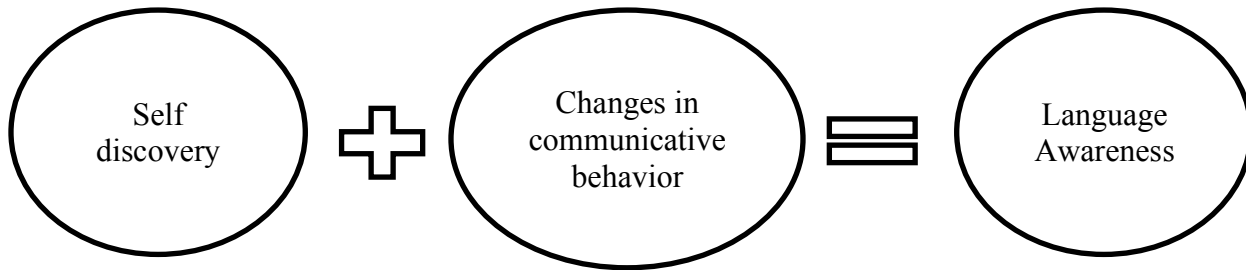


Figure 6. *The components of language awareness*

In a similar research study, Kennedy and Trofimovich (2010) explored the interaction between L2 learners' LA and the quality of their L2 pronunciation in terms of accentedness, comprehensibility, and fluency. The participants were involved in a language program where suprasegmental aspects of pronunciation were the focus of instruction for thirteen weeks, and dialogue journal entries were used as an indicator of self-expression. The analysis of students' pronunciation revealed that language learning, as a meaningful context, resulted in better pronunciation skills that were closely related to LA. Accordingly, Verdugo (2006) investigated the relationship between the intonation of a foreign language and the impact of LA on perceptive and productive processes of Spanish-native language learners. The researcher considered the complexity of the notion awareness when it comes to pronunciation as prosodic features of a target language, and such detection of quality needed thorough examination. In Vergudo's (2006) research study, a computer-assisted methodology was used to determine learners' awareness of speech through form and meaning. In addition to this strategy, this research study also focused on the extent of prosodic features when controlled by spontaneous utterances. Both a pretest and a posttest were used to analyze two different groups of learners. The utterances of the participants were analyzed by four native English speakers. The results of these tests revealed that participants in the experiment group experienced an improvement in prosodic performance in addition to gaining intonation awareness. Above mentioned research studies suggest that LA improves awareness for improving pronunciation skills of L2 learners (See Figure 7). Does it also affect L2 learners' writing skills?

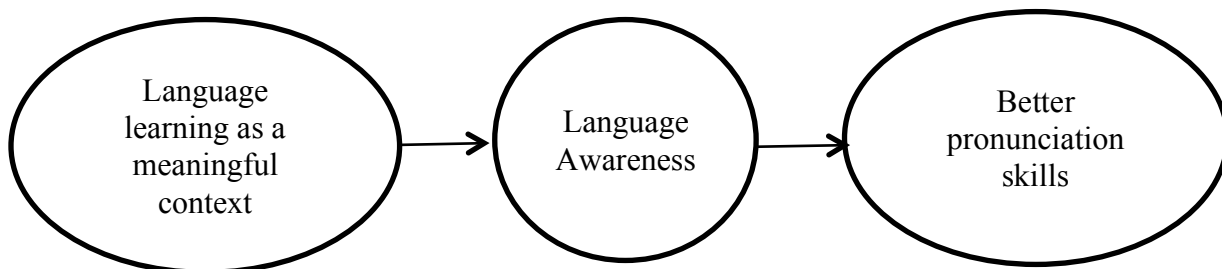


Figure 7. *The process relationship of language awareness and pronunciation*

Hebe & Storey (2006) explored the relationship between writing and writing performance improvement among 36 English as a second language (ESL) students during a three-month university writing program. The impact of LA was in question in their research study considering the difference between declarative knowledge and procedural knowledge construction. The participants kept reflective journals that focused on strategies to implement effective writing in short paragraphs and complete essays. At the end of the study, it was pointed out that high proficiency students performed better in their writing tasks as well as demonstrating greater awareness. The overall results of their research study showed that gaining LA resulted in enhanced writing performance in L2. In addition to Hebe & Storey's (2006) research study, Basetti (2005) also examined whether LA had an impact on L2 learners' writing performance. But, Basetti (2005) had a different approach and hypothesized that L2 writers are competent in two different writing systems as a result of LA. In fact, Basetti (2005) claimed that L2 learners not only use their first language as a writing system, but they also use a target language's writing system. This research study is peculiar regarding native and target language as discrete units of different linguistic systems. It was stated in Basetti's (2005) research study that L2 writers gradually develop an awareness that monolinguals are lacking because L2 writers acquire awareness by having the chance to compare and contrast two different linguistic systems. Since

monolinguals do not experience to write in another writing system, they never have the chance to realize these linguistic units as part of their native language writing system. Basetti (2005) investigated these research questions: “Do English learners of Chinese as a Foreign Language (CFL) apply their word awareness to identifying words in Chinese? Do they have a different concept of the Chinese word compared with Chinese natives?” (Basetti, 2005, pp.340). The participants were tested for their perception of word awareness in both their first and second languages. The results of this research study showed that the participants used their native language to obtain awareness in the target language’s writing system. In conclusion, LA in a target language brings along proficiency in two different writing systems and results in enhanced writing performance (See Figure 8). Since performing in two different writing systems require cultural awareness, does LA have any influence on cultural issues?

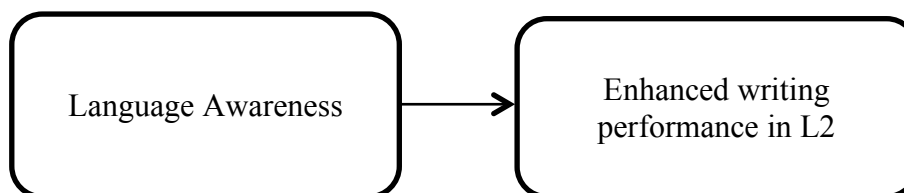


Figure 8. *Language awareness on writing performance*

In a research study conducted by Zapata (2005), the participants of 17 intermediate L2 Spanish students were required to complete a series of language tasks. The purpose was to improve students’ cultural awareness towards target culture. Using LA as a classroom technique and providing learning opportunities for these students to gain a critical perspective helped students to compare their home culture to the target culture. The results of this study indicated that using LA as a classroom technique enhances students’ understanding of the target culture. Similarly, based on Johnson and Nelson’s (2010) research study, critical consciousness and transformation are two important indicators in a foreign language classroom with adult learners. Their research study arises the question of whether adult learners obtain a perspective of transformation after studying a foreign language even if they did not become proficient in the target language. The result of these studies indicated that participants had an increased awareness of their cultural identity and diversity, and they became aware of ethnocentricity after taking a foreign language class regardless of their improvement (See Figure 9).

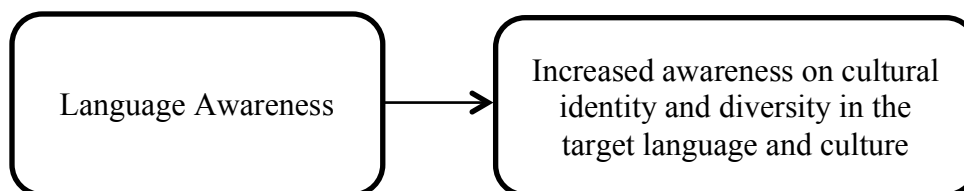


Figure 9. *The impact of language awareness on the culture*

Sicola (2005) investigated LA from another interesting cultural perspective. Her study focused on how LA affected communicative behavior in the first language (L1) unlike the fact that numerous researchers investigated L1 interference. This small scale study represented how participants interacted in their native culture and whether their communicative styles were influenced by exposure to the target culture. The results of this study demonstrated that LA functioned as an instrument that represented self-discovery about changes occurring in communicative behaviors. Thus, activating consciousness about communicative behaviors after being exposed to a target culture highlighted the issue of a reverse culture shock by suggesting pedagogical implications (See Figure 10). Consequently, the question that arises here is: What other possible effects does LA have on cultural issues?

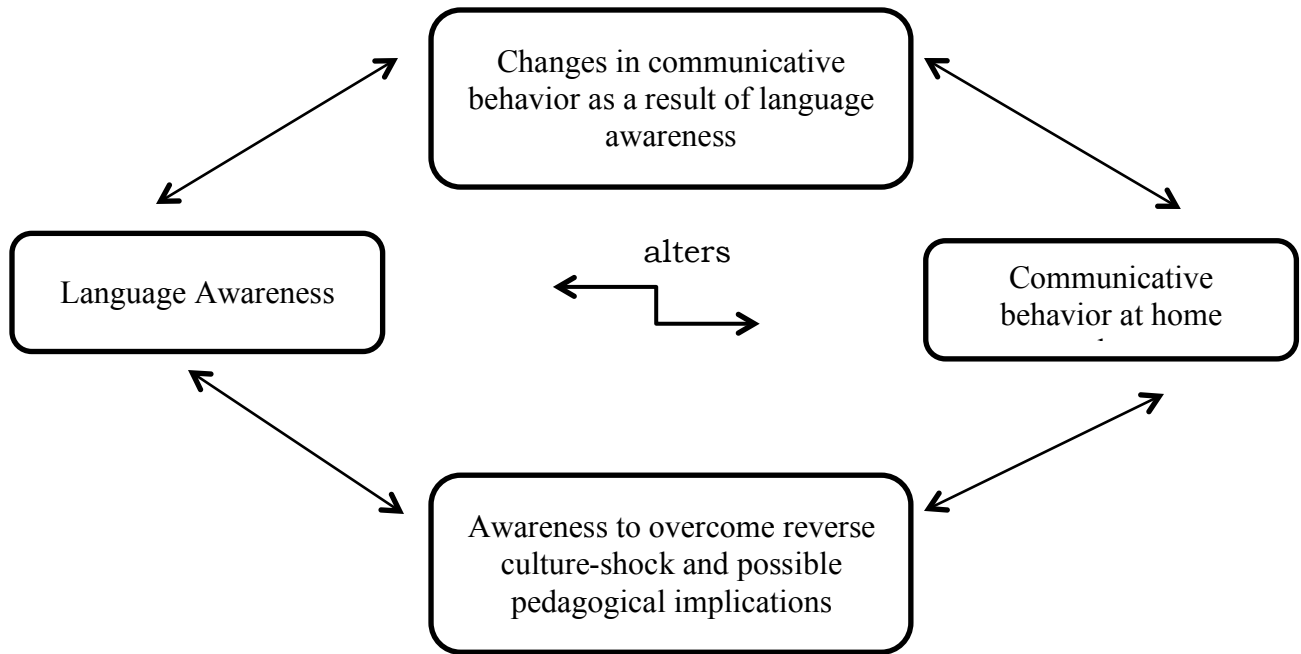


Figure 10. *The cycle of language awareness towards a cultural modification*

Marr (2005) described “language shock” as an important part of culture shock and investigated whether there was a way to gain sociolinguistic awareness about language in a target culture. The data derived from participants’ questionnaires in Marr’s research study (2005) suggested that building sociolinguistic awareness takes time; however, there can be pedagogical implementations to prevent language and culture shock by creating a friendlier learning environment. Additionally, this research study also suggested that preparing students on what to expect from the target culture occurs as a result of LA. Therefore, the growth of language awareness is not only closely tied to other aspects such as language shock that is nested within a culture shock, but language awareness could also lead to a wider transformation at a sociological level (See Figure 11).

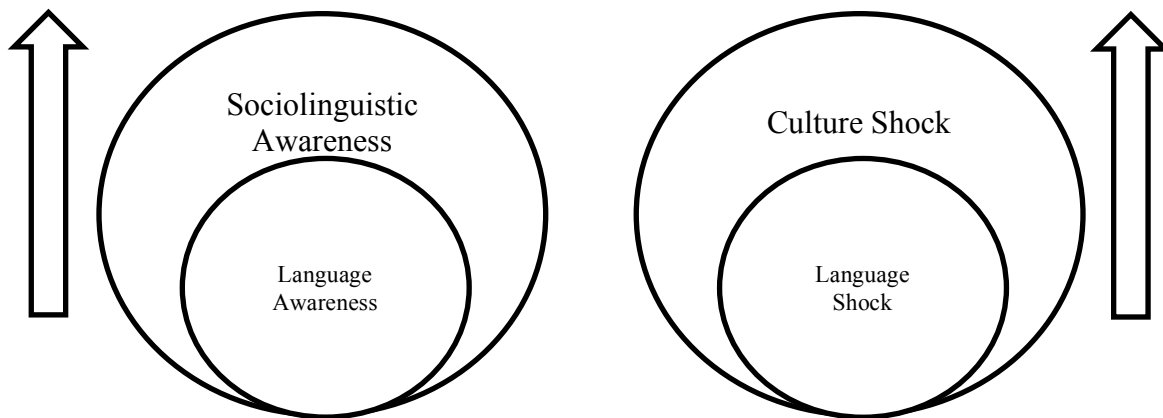


Figure 11. *The complex growth of language awareness after a culture shock*

Accordingly, Zhou (2009) showed the importance of having LA when there is an unrealistic expectation from a language program. Failure to fulfill unrealistic expectations can result in disappointment on behalf of language learners, and in fact, will fail future success. In Zhou’s (2009) research study, the participants were asked to describe their learning goals in detail before they start a particular language program for two years. Even though learners had the motivation, they did not have the sense to develop strategies to improve their L2. The results of this study suggested that teachers should think of strategies to raise LA for achievable and unachievable goals. In

addition, teachers should guide their students so that they would be able to realize weaknesses in their language learning process, and they should choose context-based activities to achieve their learning goals. Thus, the degree of purposeful and positive learning goals bring along language awareness related success (See Figure 12). Another interesting question comes to mind here is: “Is there a way to measure the extent of LA during second language acquisition?”

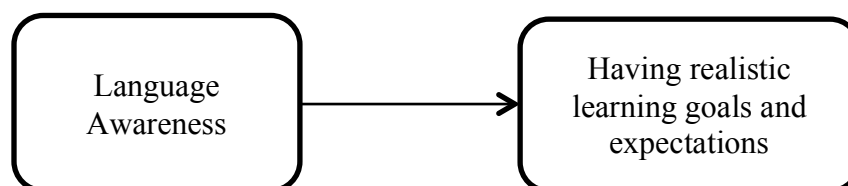


Figure 12. *The purpose of language awareness*

Ammar et al. (2010) investigated the extent of L2 learners’ awareness and questioned the act of formation ability and how this awareness interacted with their L2 performance. A grammaticality judgment test was applied, and interviews were conducted. The results indicated that most of the students were unaware of the differences in their L1 (French) and L2 (English). On the other hand, a positive correlation has supported the evidence that students’ awareness of L1/L2 question formation increased their ability to judge form questions of both yes/no and Wh- in English as a result of activating their metalinguistic awareness. The following questions were investigated in this study:

- (1) What evidence is there of French L1 influence on students’ ability to judge and to form questions in L2 English?
- (2) Are students aware of differences between the formation of English and French questions?
- (3) What is the relationship between learners’ awareness of L1/L2 differences and their success in judging or constructing L2 English questions? (Ammar et al., 2010, p. 133)

Ammar et al. (2010) referred to two indicators that facilitated both L2 acquisition and performance. According to Ammar et al. (2010), students should be aware of the differences between L1 and L2 linguistic features noting that there is neither a need nor a possibility to cover all grammatical differences of this sort. Ammar et al. (2010) also indicated that continuous and explicit instruction would help students to become automatized after gaining LA. Consequently, meaningful classroom practices should be in place in order to lead self-discovery and success in language classrooms to increase the level of LA.

Statement of Conclusion

This research study attempted to answer whether language awareness (LA) interacts with second language (L2) learning or not. Each research study that was conceptually explored in this research study investigated the concept of LA in an attempt to clarify the specific contexts that LA interacts with L2 acquisition. It should be noted that the concept of “metalinguistic awareness” was treated as the linguistically equivalent of the concept of “language awareness.” The published articles that referred to LA as part of a linguistic terminology was specifically chosen to detect commonalities as well as contrasting qualities to answer the research questions of this present `research study. Even though the overall data were inconclusive due to lack of consistency in the terminological use of the term LA, the following categorical relationships (See Figure 13) were found after each related linguistic category was associated with the concept of LA.

- LA is widely used as the equivalent version of metalinguistic awareness (Bastian et al., 2017).
- Increased level of communication that occurs as a result of LA help students with error correction, and helps teachers to choose the best pedagogical implications for their students (Amjadiparvar & Zarrin, 2019; Lasagabaster & Sierra, 2005; Yiakoumetti et al., 2005; Sicola, 2005).
- The cultural implication of LA reverses culture shock and increases awareness on cultural identity in the target language (Zapata, 2005; Johnson & Nelson, 2010, Sicola, 2005; Marr, 2005).
- LA has a positive impact on oral language skills (Derwing, 2017; Kotarcic & Swiggers, 2020), and results in better pronunciation skills (Kennedy & Trofimovich, 2010; Verdugo, 2006).

- LA creates consciousness on deciding which forms to use instead of others and enhances language learners' writing performance (Basetti, 2005; Fortune, 2005; Bouffard & Sarkar, 2008; Lasagabaster & Sierra, 2005).
- LA transforms the language acquisition process into a context-based language environment where learners have realistic learning goals and expectations (Ammar et al., 2010; Oliveira, A. L., & Ançã)

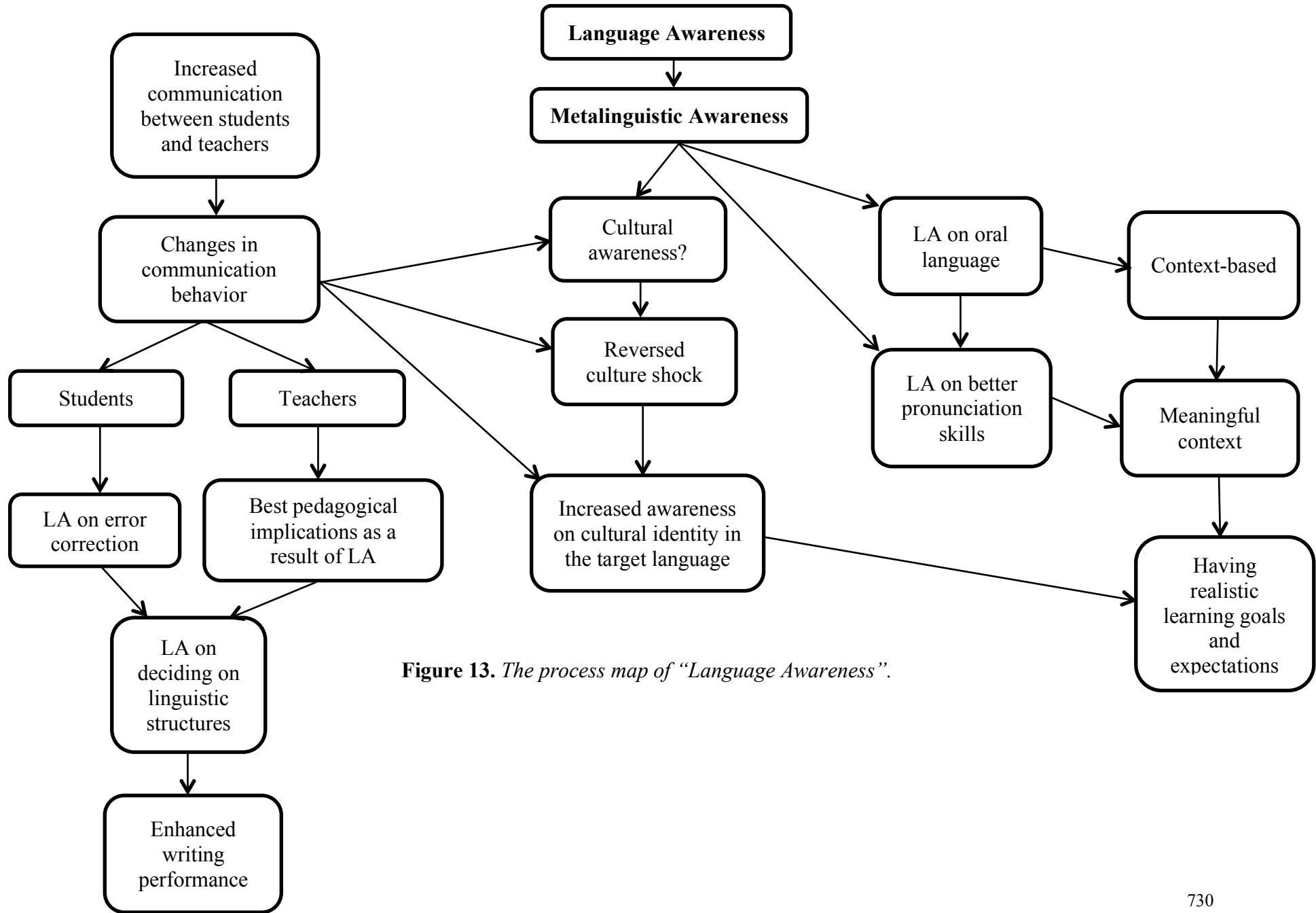


Figure 13. The process map of “Language Awareness”.

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