The Importance of Language Awareness

*Ambiguities in the understanding of language awareness and the practical implications*

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Abstract

The aim of this essay has been to investigate the role of language awareness (LA), from a teacher’s perspective in today’s Swedish upper secondary school, related to foreign language learning (with the emphasis on the cognitive aspects), and to investigate why it is important to give more attention to LA as a concept in order to enhance language acquisition. The investigation has been carried out through qualitative in-depth interviews with six foreign language teachers. The result shows that the teachers’ views of the concept do not cover all aspects of LA and that there are theoretical and practical ambiguities in the views concerning the cognitive aspects. The conclusion points to the necessity of clarification of LA and that LA ought to be explicitly mentioned and developed in the curriculum. Finally, the conclusion underlines the need of LA methodology in order to facilitate teaching in the aim of improving language learning through pupils’ metacognition.

Keywords: Language Awareness, Foreign language learning, Metacognition, Explicit learning, Upper secondary school
1 Introduction

This essay deals with the importance of language awareness (LA) in foreign language acquisition¹ and teachers’ understanding of the concept of language awareness. The emphasis will be on the cognitive aspects of language awareness.

My essential motive as a future language teacher lies in stimulating pupils to develop an ability to think critically about language and to create a challenging and an inspirational environment in which pupils are encouraged to realise that learning is a process related to oneself. This implies the importance of being able to understand one’s own way of thinking and the use of language as a medium in order to learn a foreign language. In other words, my ambitions involve stimulating metacognition of my future pupils.

In research on foreign language learning, language awareness is usually related to cognitive psychology and associated with the study of the thinking process in learning contexts, i.e. how knowledge is established and how thoughts are organised.

In the Swedish language syllabus of English and modern languages, language awareness is mainly linked to goals to aim for concerning the pupil’s own learning progress and learning approaches, which is often called learner autonomy. Language awareness is for this reason relevant to consider in language learning contexts since it underlines the importance of focusing on the learner and at the same time tries to answer questions like: “What, why and how do we learn?” To work with language awareness means to clarify, analyse and question and as such, it does not merely imply a way of being explorative about language but it also implies that explicit learning is preferable to implicit learning. Nowadays, the implicit learning approach is still predominant in language learning contexts, due to strong influences from researchers like Chomsky (1975) and Krashen (1981). Current research, of for example Robinson (1995) actually shows that explicit learning fosters language acquisition in a positive way and that is why the enhancement of language awareness becomes of such importance in language learning contexts.

When language awareness emerged as a concept related to language teaching in the beginning of the 1980s it was in a context of researchers starting to question the

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¹ Krashen gave rise to the distinction between acquisition and learning in which acquisition involves unconscious learning through input and communication and learning involves conscious learning. However, the general sense of acquisition is the same as learning without the distinction. These terms will be applied here in their general sense.
traditional ideas and opinions of language teaching in order to improve language education. Eric Hawkins, who is regarded as the founder of the theory of language awareness, explains in *Awareness of Language: An Introduction* (1984:2) that the focus must be shifted from the teacher to “the child’s eye” and one of Hawkins’ aims in language awareness was that pupils in their foreign language learning should be stimulated to ask questions about language, how it functions and what role it plays in people’s lives; in other words, to have an explicit approach to different phenomena of language. In this respect, the scope of language awareness does not treat the cognitive aspects of language learning solely and therefore LA is regarded as very holistic.

2 Aim and Research Questions

The aim of this thesis is to investigate the role of language awareness from a teacher’s perspective in today’s Swedish upper secondary school in relation to foreign language learning, and to investigate why it is important to give more attention to language awareness as a concept in order to enhance language acquisition. This essay will attempt to answer the following central problems:

- How do foreign language teachers understand the concept of language awareness?
- How do foreign language teachers relate their understanding of language awareness to the Swedish syllabus?
- How do foreign language teachers convert their understanding of language awareness into teaching practices?

3 Historical Background

Language awareness emerged as a movement in the UK in the beginning of the 1980s, founded by the linguist Eric Hawkins, mainly as a reaction to dominant theories about language learning based on behaviourist principles of habit formation. The LA movement was also a reaction to mainstream researchers dealing with language learning who strongly favoured the Direct hypothesis theory (Krashen), which means that they considered the language learning process exclusively to be an unconscious process through communication and input. Hawkins’ idea was to underline *explicit* reflection on language and critical understanding and as a step further he wanted to stimulate an understanding of language by implementing language awareness into the curriculum,
through the perspective of the child. The chief aim was to challenge pupils to ask questions about language which so many take for granted and thus help them to overcome any difficulties that emerged in their school education, especially in the transition from primary to secondary school. ‘Language across the curriculum’ (Hawkins, 1984:26) became a concept in this context where LA would strengthen coherence in the child’s education by being considered both vertically and horizontally in the school programme. Hawkins (1984:4) writes in *Awareness of Language: An Introduction*:

> Within such a programme our aim is to offer an approach to language teaching that will bring teachers together across disciplines and school frontiers to plan and teach it, while helping all pupils, but especially the slower learners, to make sense of what is too often a fragmented and haphazard linguistic apprenticeship.

Hawkins meant that by offering a forum where language diversity could be discussed, the new curriculum element would challenge linguistic prejudice through open discussions and greater awareness in order to create a counterweight to the linguistic establishment that tended to represent parochial and prejudiced standpoints (Hawkins, 1984).

Hawkins’ (1984:4) proposals of language awareness are very concrete and pragmatic in the outline and became an inspirational factor in the LA movement. His proposals, aimed at the ages of 11-14, include:

- facilitating the start of foreign language studies
- assisting with ‘the explosion of concepts and language’ introduced by new subjects at the secondary school
- connecting different aspects of language education (English, modern languages, minority languages)
- challenging linguistic prejudice and parochialism through open discussion and greater awareness

However, in today’s forum of LA other perspectives are given as an explanation to the birth of the LA movement. Jessner (2006), quoted in Svalberg (2007), argues that the LA movement is due to social and economic developments, such as migration, globalization, international trade, and international conflict. This perspective is also represented in continental Europe where LA researchers are more concerned about
socio-linguistic issues than with literacy skills. Research and practise deal more frequently with multilingualism, language attitudes, and citizenship (Svalberg, 2007).

However, it is important to mention the focus of LA in the fields of linguistics, applied linguistics and language teaching. It is particularly essential to mention the focus of LA in connection with the cognitive processes involved in language learning.

4 Terms and Definitions

Language awareness is described and defined in various ways in the used sources and it is difficult to give the concept a clear definition, particularly due to its holistic application and the different dimensions it contributes to. Besides, in language awareness there is the cognitive connotation, which in itself opens up for various questions.

Before treating the cognitive aspects of language awareness, the most frequent definitions of LA will be mentioned.

The National Council in the UK for Language in Education (N.C.L.E) which supported research on language awareness in the beginning of the LA movement, gave the following definition in 1985, quoted in Malmberg (2001:141): “Language awareness is a person’s sensitivity to and conscious awareness of the nature of language and its role in human life”.

The Association of Language Awareness (ALA), founded in 1994 by for example Garrett and van Lier, is an organisation that aims at supporting and promoting activities and research on language awareness. ALA gives the following definition: “Language Awareness can be defined as explicit knowledge about language, and conscious perception and sensitivity in language learning, language teaching and language use” (ALA website).

The abovementioned definitions seek to cover a general meaning of language awareness. However, it is the terminology that represents the cognitive aspect of language awareness in relation to foreign language learning that will be highlighted through a closer examination. The cognitive terms in the abovementioned definitions are: conscious awareness and explicit knowledge and these will be examined in relation to Schmidt’s (1994a) concept of consciousness.
4.1 Cognitive Aspects of Language Awareness

4.1.1 Explicit and Implicit Learning

To understand the role of awareness in learning it is important to see the contrasts between *implicit* and *explicit* learning and to realise that there are differing opinions in the language awareness debate as to whether explicit learning has a positive influence or not on language acquisition. According to Norris & Ortega’s (2000) analysis of 49 published studies on the matter, there is evidence that explicit learning is more effective than implicit learning (Svalberg, 2007). The position of language awareness in this debate is clearly for the value of explicit learning. However, as Svalberg (2007) points out, it is important to see what kind of explicit knowledge is most facilitative and also in relation to what kind of language features. For example, in a study carried out by Robinson (1995) learning seemed to occur with more success when the learners themselves had to realise and verbalise a certain grammatical rule (inductive method), instead of having it as part of an instruction from a teacher.

In explicit learning the learner is aware of and actively involved in processing the input. The learning *process* is then distinguished from knowledge, regarded as a *product* of traditional facts. Explicit learning implies that the learner gets involved on a metacognitive level. Metacognition, according to the *New Oxford Dictionary of English* (1998:1162), is the “awareness and understanding of one’s own thought process”. A way of performing the understanding of one’s own thought process involves the use of metalanguage. In this respect, explicit learning implicates that the learner is capable of describing his/her thought process and talking about a particular characteristic of knowledge, with help from a more or less formal metalanguage.

Implicit learning on the other hand is acquired without awareness, unavailable to conscious memory (even after acquisition), and put to use spontaneously without conscious control, for example through linguistic competence. As such, implicit learning is intuitive and not analysed and the learner is not capable of describing the acquired knowledge or talking about the language on a metacognitive level.

Some researchers who are influenced by Krashen’s theories on language acquisition argue that there is no interaction between explicit and implicit learning. Other

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2 The emphasis on learning as a *process* is developed from a constructivist view of knowledge. Language is regarded as a dynamic phenomenon and not as a static *product* of established knowledge, which implies that LA has its platform on the constructivist view of knowledge.

3 *Metalanguage* involves either the use of formal terminology, or the informal way of talking about language.
researchers claim that an interaction between both is possible in the learning process, which implies that there must be noticing (will be explained below) in the moment of learning (Schmidt, 1994a; Robinson, 1995). Schmidt (1995) states that all learning requires attention and that implicit learning is not possible without awareness.

However, in today’s debate on implicit and explicit learning the majority of researchers seem to take a more careful standpoint suggesting that explicit learning facilitates language learning without actually excluding the impact of implicit acquisition (Svalberg, 2007; Al-Hejin, 2004).

4.1.2 Consciousness/Awareness, Attention and Noticing

In order to clarify the notion of consciousness and to understand the cognitive aspects of language awareness it becomes relevant to mention Schmidt’s (1994a) definition of consciousness, as it is one of the most cited in the literature about language awareness. Ellis (1994), quoted in Al-Hejin (2004:14), points out that: “Schmidt is one of the few linguists who have adopted the conceptual and experimental rigours of experimental psychology in answering questions concerning the role of consciousness in L2 acquisition”.

Schmidt (1994a) distinguishes four common meanings of the word consciousness and these are:

1. Consciousness as intention. In learning this highlights a contrast between intentional (on purpose) and incidental learning. For example, the acquisition of a first language is always incidental since we never choose to learn our mother tongue (Chomsky, 1975).

2. Consciousness as attention. This includes such notions as noticing and focusing. Schmidt means that noticing is the necessary and sufficient condition for converting input into intake. This is called the Noticing Hypothesis.

3. Consciousness as awareness. In this sense, consciousness means ‘having knowledge of’, either perceptually or metacognitively. In language learning it often refers to knowing rules, but it could also refer to noticing, which makes it hard to distinguish consciousness as attention (and hence noticing) from consciousness as awareness.

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4 Concerning Schmidt’s treatment on consciousness in learning, both L2 or SLA and foreign language learning are mentioned indistinguishably (see Schmidt, 1994a).

5 Intake refers to a process or structure through which something is taken in, whereas input refers to what is taken in.
4. Consciousness as control. This is the performance of routine tasks including language using that we do with a great deal of automaticity without much conscious effort.

From Schmidt’s distinctions, we see that attention and awareness actually come together in the notion of noticing and as such one could say that this is, from a cognitive point of view, the essence of language awareness, which also could be stated in Schmidt’s (1994b:179) definition of noticing: “noticing is the registration (detection) of the occurrence of a stimulus event in conscious awareness and subsequent storage in long term memory”.

According to Schmidt there are different levels of awareness that have to be considered. Schmidt (1995:29) says that a low level of awareness refers to noticing and a high level of awareness refers to understanding, which he defines as “recognition of a general principle, rule or pattern”, that is to say the recognition of a deeper level of abstraction. Schmidt (1995) means that despite the different levels of awareness in the learning process, there is still attention and as such also awareness. Schmidt (1995:1) writes: “Several studies purporting to demonstrate learning without attention are shown to really have demonstrated only a low level of learning associated with a low level of attention”.

4.1.3 Summery of Terms and Definitions

What we can learn from Schmidt’s distinctions of consciousness, is that the learning process is based on awareness, attention and noticing. Furthermore, in Schmidt’s distinctions of consciousness, it is emphasised that learning does require noticing and awareness and as such language learning cannot occur unconsciously.

Considering the abovementioned discussion, LA could be summarised in the following brief definition: Language awareness, from its cognitive perspective, is conscious language learning on a meta-cognitive level with a learner-centred approach.

In this respect, LA is by definition interdependent with explicit learning, because in explicit learning the learner is aware and actively involved in processing the input, which is in itself a demonstration of metacognition. As such, explicit learning and instruction become crucial in the classroom, because they stimulate language awareness and enhance language acquisition.
4.2 The Scope of Language Awareness

As previously mentioned LA is a holistic concept and the abovementioned cognitive aspect of LA must be seen in the holistic perspective of language awareness, which makes it relevant to introduce the holistic scope of LA, formulated by James & Garrett (1991).

James & Garrett (1991), both lecturers in Linguistics at the University of Wales, describe the holistic concept of language awareness in *Language Awareness in the Classroom* (1991) where they divide the concept of LA into five different domains, which are: The affective, social, power, cognitive and performance domain.

Firstly, the affective domain, which also could be discerned from the definitions of ALA and N.C.L.E, deals with the relationship between the learner’s feelings and mental thinking. From this perspective, the language awareness approach seeks to consider the learner’s entire person by encouraging him/her to contribute experiences and personal relevance in the learning process. The affective domain also includes the feeling of knowing in language learning contexts.

Secondly, the social domain looks at the consequences of our globalising society where problems often arise from ethnic diversities, due to cultural and linguistic frictions. A way of tackling these problems, through a language awareness approach, is to see the cognitive and cultural benefits of multilingual classrooms.

In the Power domain, James and Garrett (1991) look at the language as an instrument of manipulation and refer as such to the term *conscientisation*, formulated by the social engineer Freire (1972). This term, quoted in James & Garrett (1991:14):

> involves alerting people to the hidden meanings, tacit assumptions and rethorical traps laid by those who traditionally have most access to the media for verbal communication. These may be governments, bureaucracies, the Church, commerce, or, worst of all, unscrupulous individuals.

The Power domain of language awareness is habitually called Critical Language Awareness (CLA), which normally is a term in literature and deals with for example the reader/writer relationship and interpersonal meanings. However, concerning language awareness and the abovementioned power domain, CLA underlines for example that communication performances in learning contexts could include discussions how language attitudes and values are formed socially and politically and how minority
languages and their speakers are represented. For example, in the classroom it could involve that pupils discuss what kinds of cultural representations that are presented in the textbooks in order to see if and why there are any minority cultures that are excluded or majority cultures that are overrepresented.

As previously been mentioned and what James & Garrett (1991) also make an account for, the cognitive domain deals with the relation between language and thought where metalinguistic awareness, reflection and analysis are highlighted. James & Garrett (1991) also bring up learner’s reflection in his/her own learning process.

Finally, the performance domain deals with language in use, communication strategies and the activity of talking about language with a more or less formal metalanguage.

What could be stated concerning James and Garrett’s (1991) scope of language awareness is that all domains tend to intermingle with one another. Moreover, as James and Garrett point out, this division of LA is a way to clarify and to give a consensus to the meaning of the concept. From a teacher’s perspective these domains could also serve to facilitate the LA work in the language classroom as the scope covers many relevant and important aspects of language that could be useful in arising pupils’ awareness.

4.3 Language Awareness in the Swedish Curriculum

What actually happens in the classroom is a reflection of what is formulated in the curriculum and syllabus. This is why it becomes interesting to see to what extent language awareness is present in these documents. In the Swedish syllabus as of the year 2000, formulated by The Swedish National agency for education, the cognitive aspect of language awareness is to some extent implemented in the criteria of goals to aim for. Six stages of seven are expressed as follows in the syllabus of modern languages:

Pupils should:
Stage 1: be able to reflect on their own learning of e.g. words and phrases
Stage 2: be able to reflect on their own learning e.g. pronunciation and reading
Stage 3: be able to reflect on how their own learning progresses
Stage 4: be able to reflect on and draw conclusions about their way of learning the language
Stage 5: be able to consciously use and evaluate different learning approaches to promote their own learning
Stage 6: be able to evaluate their work in order to change and enhance their learning (www.skolverket.se).

In the syllabus of English it says that the teaching of English “should aim to ensure that pupils develop their ability to reflect over and take responsibility for their own language learning and consciously use different ways of working to support their own learning” (www.skolverket.se).

What we can see in the Swedish syllabus of English and modern languages, is that there is a focal point on learning how to learn which relates to the cognitive aspect of LA. What we also can discern form the syllabus is a learner-centred approach where learner engagement is central in the process of learning.

Nonetheless, what is interesting to conclude concerning the Swedish language syllabus, is that language awareness is implicitly present in the syllabus. Moreover, it is neither worked out clearly in detail, nor mentioned by name.

4.3.1 Learner Autonomy and Affective Engagement

Because of the fact that there is a learner-centred approach throughout the entire language syllabus and that language awareness also focuses on the learner it becomes relevant to mention learner autonomy and affective engagement as these notions correlate with a language awareness approach.

van Lier (1996) who gave rise to the notion of learner autonomy states that the learning process depends on the learner’s responsibility, regulation, choice and motivation. van Lier (1996) treats the concept of learner autonomy by focusing simultaneously on awareness and authenticity, through what he calls the AAA (awareness, autonomy and authenticity) curriculum. He states the obvious that teaching cannot cause or force learning. Teaching can as best encourage and guide learning. According to van Lier (1996) there are two central aspects of learner autonomy and these are: choice and responsibility. If the learner is passive in the receiving of an instruction, the level of attention or noticing (Schmidt, 1995) is very weak and as such the learner becomes unfocused. van Lier (1996:13) writes: “The autonomous learner must be able to make significant decisions about what is to be learned, as well as how and when to do it. Further, the autonomous learner is responsible for learning as well as lack of learning…”.
In other words, having a language awareness approach in the classroom interrelates with the learner’s choice and responsibility and as such, the engagement of the learner is essential for the existence of language awareness.

It is difficult to value the importance of learner autonomy and language awareness in general, without considering the affective aspects of learner engagement. van Lier (1996), Borg (1994) and James & Garrett (1991) claim that learner engagement needs to be both cognitive and affective in order to enhance learning. Generally, the affective aspects are seen in relation to culture and identity. However Borg (1994) states that the affective aspect also has an impact on the language learning process in general, more specifically on work on linguistics, such as grammar or syntax. When a learner engages with the language or, by using the terminology of Schmidt (1994a), when the learner notices and is attentive, then he/she is able to react cognitively and emotionally on the received information. As mentioned, learner autonomy depends on choice and regulation; however, it is important to create a balance between the affective and the cognitive aspects in order to stimulate the language learning process. That means basically that pupils through a learner autonomy approach cannot be left to rely on interest alone. Guidance by a teacher is required.

5 Method

The investigation in this research is conducted through a qualitative method. The purpose of this method is to highlight the concept of language awareness, its meaning and use through the perspective of six different teachers who teach foreign languages at Upper secondary school in Sweden.

5.1 Choice of Method and Collection of Data

More specifically, the method I use in my investigation is through qualitative in-depth interviews. As I am investigating the nature of something (the teachers’ view of a specific phenomenon) the quantitative method, which refers to the amount of something, would be inappropriate in this case. I have also excluded using questionnaires in my investigation, because of the cursory information they tend to give. Nevertheless, questionnaires, in addition to in-depth interviews, may give a broad and solid result. Moreover, it is often recommended to use different methods that complement one another in order to achieve the most scientific result possible.
However, in this research, I found the qualitative in-depth interview method exclusively relevant due to the semi-structured character of my research questions.

Even though the qualitative interview method is considered the most suitable for research of this kind, it is often regarded as not being scientific in the sense that it lacks objectivity, mainly due to the human interaction in the interview situation. Still, the qualitative interview gives, in the best cases, a fair picture of different phenomena in school contexts, since the subjects communicate their situation to others, from their own perspective and in their own words. Kvale (1996:69) writes in *Interviews: An introduction to Qualitative Research Interviewing* that “Today’s social science students acquire a professional competency in analyzing the social world as a mathematically constituted universe, but remain amateurs in the face of a linguistically constituted social world.” What Kvale underlines, by referring to Bernstein (1983) and his work *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism*, is the dialogical concept of truth, in which participants in a discourse seek true knowledge through rational argumentation. And the medium of a discourse is language, which is neither objective nor subjective, but intersubjective.

What Kvale (1996) and Bernstein (1983) theoretically refer to and what I also bear in mind throughout this essay is the theory of hermeneutics, in particularly the Hermeneutical Circle. In research methodology hermeneutics involves cultivating the ability to understand things from somebody else’s point of view where the interpretation and the description of such is essential. The interpretation is seen as a process, hence the Hermeneutical Circle, in which ideas and conceptions (the individual parts) are determined by the global meaning (the whole). In practise it means that the interpretation of the individual parts of the interviews may change the original meaning of the totality, which in turn influences the meaning of the individual parts, and so on. The idea is that the hermeneutical interpretation, despite and thanks to its infinite process, will end up eliminating all contradictions and ambiguities, and as such achieve a solid scientific result (Kvale, 1996). The reason I found the hermeneutical analysis appropriate in this research is because of the importance of the process in the interpretation in contrast to focusing on a result that somehow tries to signify objective and therefore true knowledge. In hermeneutical research there is no such thing as true knowledge, because it is the process itself that is highlighted.
The form of the interview questions are to a certain extent determined in advance and partly adopted and adjusted to the answers, which means that they have a semi-structured outlook. The reason for this is to obtain spontaneity in the conversation, which could be helpful in getting as much information as possible. I have for the same reason tried to carry out the interviews as naturally as possible in order to avoid restricted or hesitating answers from the teachers.

5.2 Selection
I have interviewed six different teachers who teach foreign languages in Upper secondary school from four different schools in the south of Sweden. Four of the teachers were contacted because I had met them already and the other two were selected randomly. The teachers that I already had encountered were introduced to me in an organised meeting by the school where I did my teaching training. All teachers teach English and modern languages. Underneath, I will give some information about the six teachers. In order to facilitate the presentations of the results, I have chosen to give the teachers fictive names.

**Björn** is about 35 years old. He teaches English and French. His pupils follow the programmes of Social Science and Natural Science. Björn has worked in the teaching profession for 9 years.

**Karin** is about 50 years old. She teaches English and French. Her pupils follow the programmes of Arts, Natural Science and Social Science. Karin has worked in the teaching profession for 29 years.

**Sofia** is about 45 years old. She teaches English and French. Her pupils follow the programmes of Social Science and Natural Science. Sofia has worked in the teaching profession for 19 years.

**Anna** is about 30 years old. She teaches English and Spanish. Her pupils follow the programmes of Social Science, Natural Science and Technology. Anna has worked in the teaching profession for 5 months.

**Siv** is about 45 years old. She teaches English and Spanish. Her pupils follow the programmes of Social Sciences and Vehicle. Siv has worked for 22 years in the teaching profession.

**Gunn** is about 65 years old. She teaches English and German. Her pupils follow the programmes of Social Sciences and Natural Sciences. Gunn has worked for 40 years in the teaching profession.
5.3 Procedure and Ethical Aspects

All the teachers were contacted by e-mail. I wrote directly to the teachers that I had previously met and contacted the other two teachers through the deputy head of one school who gave me their e-mail addresses. In order to respect the ethical guidelines, the subject and purpose of the research were given in the e-mails, with a total guarantee for protected anonymity. In order to underline the importance of the ethical issues and to assure the teachers of these, I reminded them once more of their protected anonymity before each interview started.

The interviews were carried out on six different occasions with one teacher at a time. All the interviews took place at the teachers’ school, either in their work-room or in an empty classroom. I found it beneficial to be in the work-room as it is most likely an environment where the teachers feel at ease. Repstad (1987) says that the environment where the interview takes place has a great influence on the general atmosphere thus also the outcome of the interview. A familiar environment influences the interviewee in a positive way. The atmosphere of an interview setting is an element not to ignore, however obvious that may seem, since it actually could determine the final result of the interview.

Each interview was recorded after receiving permission from the teachers. There are many advantages to be had from recording an interview. Firstly, it is necessary to record in order to maintain a natural conversation where I, as a researcher, can observe other important details, such as gestures, facial expressions etc. These would most probably remain unnoticed if one were taking notes. The way things are said and how they are said involves eye contact with the interviewee and this is vital to get a clear and proper understanding of the answers.

Secondly, there is the practical aspect of recording, which gives the researcher the possibility of doing transcriptions of the interviews, an absolute necessity if one is to analyse the information thoroughly.

Directly, after each interview I made a note of some important impressions, questions and ideas that I had collected during the interviews. Repstad (1987) and Kvale (1996) recommend this while the reflections are still fresh in the researcher’s mind. To do this directly after each interview helped me to reconstruct the interview at the time of analysis.
The interviews took approximately one hour to complete, with the exception of one in which the subject showed a great interest and got very involved with the questions. This interview was completed in just under two hours. To allow one hour for the interview proved reasonable since it seemed to be adequate time for the subjects to consider and develop each answer thoroughly, while at the same time it was not so long that the interviewees lost interest in the subject. After every interview I asked each teacher for permission to re-contact them in the event of any shortcomings, which is recommended in the ethical guidelines of social scientific research (Repstad, 1987).

6 Results

In this chapter a presentation of the results will be given, which are based on the completed interviews. In order to show a clear picture, in accordance with the essential ideas of the essay, the presentation of the results is divided into three subsections. The first subsection deals with the results in relation to the entire scope of language awareness. The second deals with learner autonomy and affective engagement. Finally, the third subsection deals with explicit- and implicit learning and metalanguage.

As mentioned in the section on method, the results of the interviews are considered as productions of texts and will be examined as such through a hermeneutical analysis. That is to say that I will claim to make generalisations by keeping in mind the individual parts of one single text (interview) in relation to the totality of the interview. Nonetheless, all the results will be given through one subsection at a time in order to clarify the presentation and prepare the readers for the subsequent analysis. The results will be described through selected examples given as quotations from the interviews.

The order of the presentations of the teachers is based upon similarities and differences, that is to say, a presentation is first given of views that are similar to one another and are put in contrast to presentations that differ from the first ones. For an overview of all the questions, see appendix.

6.1 Answers in Relation to the Holistic Scope of Language Awareness

In a compilation of the different views given to the question *How do you understand the concept of language awareness?*, it is interesting to observe that all of the different domains of language awareness could be discerned from the answers.
Firstly, there is the aspect of feeling for language, which is presented in four of the six answers. That is to say that Björn, Sofia, Anna and Siv describe their understanding of language awareness as “different nuances and variations in languages” and that being aware means to know “how and when to nuance and vary the language”.

A second aspect that is discerned from the answers is what deals with different values in languages given by Karin. Karin refers to linguistic authorities that somehow seek to create an ideology of what is considered as correct or incorrect. Karin says:

Language awareness could be all of these values in languages, for example that there are people (she refers to authorities, my remark) who give themselves airs of being superior and who say what is wrong and what is correct, which I think is wrong to do. However, one can say that something is considered as being more consistent, logical or communicative because of this or that, because there could be misinterpretations etc…there are lots of values in languages.

Karin declares that a good approach concerning values in languages, involves that one should question why a certain way of expression is regarded as more appropriate or correct than another, which she encourages her pupils to do through reflective and critical thinking.

A third aspect, which is represented in the different views of LA is articulated by Karin, Siv and Björn and deals with the multilingual aspect. Karin and Siv say that having a multilingual classroom opens up the possibility of becoming more aware and refer as such to the comparison between languages. Siv talks about the multilingual classroom as something positive as it also involves a way of paying attention to the individual. As an example, Siv refers to a survey she carried out in one English class. She investigated how many languages that were represented by the pupils and the result gave the number of 22 different languages in the one class. According to Siv, a way of giving attention to the multilingual representation in the language classroom could be by stimulating the pupils to use their multilingual competences in the learning process of a foreign language with a comparative method where languages are seen in contrast to one another. This is also something Siv practises in her teaching at for example communication performances where pupils could be told to compare certain features of pronunciation of the target language to their mother tongue. Siv tells about another example, in which the Arabic fricative glottal [h]-phoneme is the same as the fricative
glottal [ ʰ ]-phoneme in Spanish. The pupils were encouraged to notice this similar feature of pronunciation. Siv explains further that encouraging pupils to make comparisons between the target language and their competences of other languages, is a way of erasing the common idea among pupils that English, German, French or Spanish, are languages worth mentioning as a “language one knows” whereas other minor languages are not. To pay attention to the variety of languages that are present in a language class is something Siv considers important by declaring the following: “It strengthens the awareness to make a comparison with one’s own mother tongue by trying to use a more contrastive method”. Moreover, Siv states: “I think that the teacher education should include more linguistic contrastive studies”.

Karin also presents her view of LA in relation to the multilingual aspect saying that pupils often have an idea that “if you already know one foreign language then it gets easier to learn a third and a fourth one and so on” and points out in the answer of the first question that language awareness implies the aspect of comparing languages. This vision of the multilingual aspect of language awareness was stressed in the view of Siv and to a lesser extent in the views of Karin and Björn. Björn mentions very briefly the connection between the comparison of language and language awareness.

A fourth aspect that is discerned from the answers deals with communication tasks and is given by Anna who describes her understanding of the concept of language awareness as “being aware of why you talk as you do and why you get a specific response”. Anna says that language awareness involves being aware of the effect of one’s own utterances and knowing how to make adjustments in communications.

Another aspect of the answers is what deals with talking about languages. Karin and Sofia mention the “reasoning about languages” in their view of the answer to the question. Sofia mentions that “analysing” also has to do with the talking about languages. The reasoning or talking about languages also correlates with the cognitive aspect of language awareness, as it involves the stage of metacognition. The cognitive aspect or domain of language awareness, which is discerned from the answers, will be presented in the next and last paragraph.

The cognitive aspect dealing with the awareness of one’s own learning process was not discerned from more than two answers, that is to say in the answers of Björn and Anna. Björn and Anna mention this aspect in terms of “awareness of how to learn”.

Finally, it is also worth mentioning the view of Gunn concerning the first question as it diverges considerably from the others. She answers as follows to the question How do
you understand the concept of language awareness?: “Have no idea what it is…I don’t really understand what it is” and after a short discussion about the fact that language awareness often is seen in relation to the pupil’s own learning process formulated in goals to aim for in the syllabus, Gunn answers: “the pupils are not particularly aware”. According to Gunn, the pupils do not understand that they “have to learn” and they must constantly be reminded of the importance of “working with the language” or the importance of “swotting”.

6.2 Answers in Relation to Learner Autonomy and Affective Engagement

As we have seen, Björn and Anna mention the pupil’s own learning process in their views of the previous question. However the questions that deal with learner autonomy and affective engagement were thoroughly answered by each teacher and their different views will be presented underneath.

To the question How do you relate yourself to pupil’s independence and auto regulation in his or her learning process?, Karin underlines the importance of guidance by a teacher in order to make pupils progress and avoid what she calls “hazardous search on the internet” and “text replacements” (she refers to the frequent phenomenon of copying texts from the internet, my remark). Karin says that “learner autonomy must be conquered with help from a teacher” and that pupils, especially in the transition stage from compulsory to upper secondary school, must have a period of training where they get used to work more independently. In general, Karin emphasises independent learning, reflection and critical thinking throughout the entire interview and explains that she considers herself rather a coach than a teacher who is receptive to criticism.

To the question In what way do you think that pupil’s affective engagement influences his or her learning process?, Karin explains that it is important to “see the personality of the pupils as something valuable” at the same time as they learn to be “reflective and critical”. Besides, she says that: “pupils’ affective engagement very often fades away in the action of achievement” and therefore it becomes important to have a learner approach from the very start where the focus is put on the individual.

Sofia and Anna also describe learner autonomy and affective engagement as something crucial. Particularly, Sofia emphasises the affective aspects and highlights the importance of “emotional identification”, which becomes evident in the classroom in reading tasks where the pupils are often free to make their own choices concerning literature. Sofia also tries to “provoke” the pupils in order to make them affectively
engaged in communicative tasks. As Karin, Sofia says the guidance of a teacher is vital concerning the pupils’ choice and responsibility.

Also, Anna points out the importance of affective engagement and tries to stimulate the pupils’ feelings through for example listening to music, but says at the same time that “everything doesn’t have to be pleasant, still there must always be a sense of purpose”. Moreover, Anna points out that it is vital to give required means to the pupils to stimulate them to learn how to learn.

Gunn also underlines that teaching cannot involve constant pleasure, which she expresses as “It’s not an entertainment business that we’re dealing with”. However she tries to be conscious about what the pupils are interested in and tries to think of varying the lessons.

Björn considers the pupils’ affective engagement important, but expresses the difficulty in paying attention to everyone in one class, which in the worst of cases could result in no one getting the required attention in order to stimulate affective engagement. Besides, Björn stresses that it is the responsibility of each pupil to find the “inner motivation”, that the teacher can give the means and guidance in their process of learning, and that “it is not up to the teacher to do the rest”. Nevertheless, Björn tries to introduce a way of thinking about the learning process by giving recommendations to the pupils and to let them give advice to each other concerning how to learn in an effective way. Finally, it must be underlined that Björn who brings up the learner autonomy aspect in the first question also relates this aspect to the language syllabus and the goals to aim for. However, he declares that he experiences difficulties in stimulating the pupils to become good at learning how to learn.

Finally, Siv says that the affective engagement is vital in the learning process and that “the pupils have a so called affective filter” which has to be considered. A way of doing this, according to Siv, is through variation and surprises. In reading activities the pupils are given “reading journals” in order to create individual engagement and to make them “motivated” and “aware”. However, Siv declares that there could be more focus on what concerns the reflection and awareness of the pupils’ own learning and the evaluation of their own learning processes, which is something Siv experiences as difficult.

Through the answers given to the question dealing with learner autonomy and affective engagement, the teachers, except from Karin, claim that it is difficult to
stimulate the pupils in terms of auto-regulation. Just like Gunn, Björn says: “I feel unsuccessful in stimulating the pupils to become better learners”.

6.3 Answers in Relation to Explicit/Implicit Learning and Metalanguage

As previously stated in the section on terms and definitions, language awareness is interdependent with explicit learning. The fact that language awareness requires involved and engaged learners in the language learning process depends on the use of language, as the cognitive process gets verbalised through language. In the theory of language awareness the use of language is regarded as a medium in the process of learning interactively with oneself or with others. Talking about language, involves the use of metalanguage, either by using a formal or an informal terminology.

To the question *How important is it to develop and apply metalanguage in order to learn the language and to be a good learner?*, Anna answers that there could be a point of using metalanguage in the language classroom as it would facilitate the language learning process. Anna says:

> It facilitates… it compresses the language. It facilitates language learning I think. Sometimes it is a disadvantage for the pupils’ language awareness not to use meta-language… there is a fear of metalanguage.

Anna also declares that the pupils lack the knowledge of a formal way of talking about language and an example is given from a lesson when her pupils were going to analyse a sentence, in which they did not understand how to analyse the component parts and the meaning of subject, object and predicate. Anna explains further on that she generally does not apply metalanguage in practise.

Concerning the question *What are the advantages of having an explicit learning approach that is to say to explain, clarify and to talk about the language as such?*, Anna explains:

> I think there are more and less effective ways. Being explicit could involve that I say ”This is how it is”. It could erase ambiguities pretty quickly. It could be fast and effective. Another way is to let the pupils notice the explicit… to work inductively for example. What is the rule? Why is it like this? You let them reflect on something. The advantages are that being
explicit clarifies and explains, but the explicit is not sufficient. You have to do something with it. You have to apply it in a natural way.

Concerning the question *What are the advantages of not being explicit and to trust the implicit way of learning a language?* Anna answers:

I try to expose them to a lot of input. They hear words and when they have heard them a couple of times they might finally stick… input could lead to a certain intuitive knowledge and the input that the pupils get in English for example, is very important… The input the pupils get in English is much more important than my grammatical explanations.

Anna who describes her understanding of language awareness in terms of communication skills in the first question, continues to emphasise the practising of communication in the questions dealing with explicit- and implicit learning. Anna continues: “Sometimes it is a disadvantage for the pupils’ language awareness not to have a metalanguage. At the same time it is important to foster communication skills. It is hard to find a balance.”

Siv also brings up the same problem as Anna, saying that explicit instruction is a problem, as many of the pupils do not understand the meaning of the grammatical terminology. To the question about metalanguage, Siv answers the following: “You cannot use that in a complicated way. The level of our pupils’ ability…You have to explain the grammatical terms. You cannot talk about that quickly…our pupils cannot deal with that.” Siv also points out that when she gives an explanation of the system of the target language, it is by many pupils regarded as an obstacle rather than something helpful. Siv says for this reason that implicit learning is more effective as:

Everyone understands, because instead of explaining what and how to do it with the help of different formal terms they just concentrate on doing it…for example if they are told to practise conditional phrases in English they are given examples and based on the examples they will understand.

To the question about advantages of explicit learning, Siv answers:

Some pupils enjoy that and think it’s very good. They are given the system and things become clear. For other pupils there is some kind of barrier to learning it on that level.
Usually I give them explanations with the grammatical terminology, however I usually say it is optional. They can choose…usually, I apply explicit learning methods…but not always.

Siv explains further that she often encourages pupils to formulate their own rules at grammar tasks and tries to let them think contrastively. She also points out that pupils are told to correct their own errors when writing.

To let the pupils formulate their own grammar rules through an inductive method is something Karin points out as well. As mentioned, Karin focuses on the stimulation of the pupil’s reflective and critical thinking. For example, if there is a question that somebody raises in the language class, Karin turns it into a collective question in order to let everyone participate. Karin says:

I love explicit instruction but I would stop applying it if the pupils didn’t like it too. They are taught to talk about these things…they become so much better learners. I think they get human dignity…when they go through a linguistic reasoning they get confidence… The questions must be clarified.

Karin applies an explicit method in order to foster reflection among the pupils, moreover she points out that the pupils like to be exposed to that kind of learning method. Concerning the use of metalanguage, she uses the grammatical terminology, that is to say the formal way of talking about language and does not experience, as Siv and Anna do, that the pupils have problems understanding this. As mentioned in the previous section, Karin underlines the importance of guidance in her teaching in order to train the pupils to become independent and responsible learners. The importance of guidance by a teacher is something Karin points out again in the questions dealing with explicit learning and meta language: “If this meta-learning didn’t exist, then we would just have distributed a text book with a disc before leaving the classroom…I think we are required (she refers to the teachers, my remark)”.

Sofia, also experiences that the pupils are helped by the use of metalanguage, that they actually want that knowledge and that they miss it. Sofia gives a very thorough answer to the question How important is it to develop and apply metalanguage in order to learn the language and to become a good learner?:
It is important...I think it is important, because it gets so much easier if one knows what to talk about. You don’t tell a child to go and get that white thing in the refrigerator. It could be anything...It’s of the same importance that the pupils learn ...of course not everything at once...but that they learn the terminology along with the increasing level of complicated tasks. When I explain something I use metalanguage. Metalanguage *is* important.

Sofia explains further that explanations very often are required of what the meaning of the terms are and that she tries to simplify in order to clarify the terms, but that is only possible up to a point. She continues:

Anyone could learn metalanguage. It’s not some Einstein knowledge...A language consists of grammar just as the human body consists of cells, and not to consider that would be like letting things take so much more time...it’s easy to get a fossilised language...you make yourself understood, but maybe you want more than that, maybe you want to be able to express yourself with nuances...It depends on what you want with the language. I think that the learning gets faster if you have language awareness.

It is obvious that Sofia emphasises the application of metalanguage as she thinks it facilitates the language learning. She also points out that the pupils actually need and want metalinguistic knowledge. In the description of applied methods in grammar tasks, Sofia underlines the significance of letting the pupils formulate their own grammar rules together with direct application.

Concerning the question that deals with implicit and explicit knowledge Sofia declares that implicit learning would only be possible if one were spending time in a target language environment as “everything in the classroom is artificial and the amount of language lessons are not sufficient to reach the level of input that is required to learn implicitly”. According to Sofia an explicit learning approach is the only way to learn constructively.

Björn is of the same point of view as Sofia concerning implicit learning, which means that he considers implicit learning dependent on exterior factors as for example culture and that this way of learning would be most effective if one were spending time in the target language country. Björn says: “To let the language learning process happen more implicitly is an assimilation in fact. School is not an authentic language place and no one is a native speaker.” Björn indicates that the ideal situation for implicit learning to work out effectively is in a situation of constant input, which is not the case in the...
foreign language classroom. When correcting writing tasks, Björn applies explicit instruction but in communication tasks he has an implicit learning approach. He points out:

It is more important that a pupil at a certain stage can express him/her self with sense than to manage to say everything grammatically correct at the same time. There must be a goal at each stage. In a text situation I show them the mistakes and that’s the focus at that stage.

Björn applies explicit learning more to text and grammar based exercises and implicit learning to communication based tasks. He also says that to work explicitly with grammatical problems involves some problems, as many pupils are not cognitively mature. Björn states: “I think it is important that the pupils get some tools in order to treat grammatical problems…. I can feel that pupils are not cognitively mature in all cases”. Björn describes explicit learning in grammar studies as something difficult, due to the pupils’ different levels of cognition but says on the other hand that the language learning would become easier to master with the help of metalanguage. Björn gives an example from one lesson in which the pupils were practising the French object-predicate and he had to analyse the different components of the sentence. Björn explains:

I had to analyse the different components of the sentence and it was the first time that many of the pupils ever had done that…It would be of great help if the pupils knew more terms in order to prevent confusion between the old and the new terminology. I miss a formulation of knowledge in the goals to attain instead of formulation of skills.

What Björn underlines is that metalanguage is required in order to understand the meanings of new terms that come along with language learning and that knowledge of metalinguistic terminology is important in order to avoid confusion between old and newly acquired terms. We can see that Björn is of the same opinion as Anna and Siv concerning the difficulty in applying a metalanguage and that the reason for this is based on pupils’ inability to understand the terminology. However, they all point out that metalanguage is required and useful in the language learning process.
Concerning the use of metalanguage and the talk about language, Gunn also underlines that it is important to be able to use metalanguage, but that most pupils do not know the grammatical terms. She points out:

I have to have endless patience because even though I go through the terms many times they still don’t know what it is about. For example, I explain what the past tense is because I presume they don’t know. I think the reason is that everyone just thinks that those things are really hard to learn and that all the complicated words are difficult to learn…to know the metalanguage would give more certainty and reliability and prevent many ambiguities.

In the view of Gunn, there is a similarity with Anna who expresses that there is a fear of using metalanguage among pupils. Gunn says as well that pupils judge the words as hard to learn beforehand and that this idea of metalanguage would create a barrier to learning.

Concerning explicit and implicit learning, Gunn says that clear explanations are required in order to achieve a “good treatment” of the language and to become aware of how different items work in the language. Gunn also points out that she does not believe in implicit learning by saying: “In English they get a lot of input, which makes them believe that they master the language which is not true, because I have never encountered so many weak pupils in English as I have during these last years…It’s important to clarify certain things.”

Here it becomes clear that Gunn does not regard implicit learning as anything effective and that explicit learning, and instruction, is required in order to foster awareness of the language. However, she explains that she has diminished her ambitions enormously during the last years, due to the lack of “interest and motivation” among the pupils. Gunn says: “I explain things and bring it up but I cannot have the ambition that everyone will learn it…I have stopped having that…I have reduced my ambitions enormously”. This becomes obvious when Gunn describes her practises in for example writing tasks. After the pupils have handed in their texts, Gunn corrects a few things and gives them back to the pupils. To the question What happens to the texts afterwards? Do they rewrite them again, or do they correct them by themselves? Gunn answers:

No I ‘m not like that…I cannot go on insisting on that and they cannot go on doing that either. They do not even go through the texts they are handed back. I feel that all that time I spend on
correcting the texts that I just shouldn’t have bothered. It would be enough to read them through and to make a note if they are good etc. The pupils are mostly interested in if they get a good grade or not.

It is obvious that Gunn has “given up her ambitions” and that having an approach in the classroom that fosters awareness would be pointless. Gunn explains that when the pupils are given communication tasks which they perform through a dialogue in peers, they finish very quickly and the engagement is very low. However, she expresses that she would prefer to have another approach and points out that her conscientiousness in the classroom used to be greater. Moreover, it becomes clear that the concept of language awareness and its methodology is something unfamiliar to Gunn, which is underlined in the first answer as it is in this last one:

These questions are very difficult…yes, I have a lot of experience, but at the same time I ask myself “What do I do?” This reasoning isn’t my cup of tea. I feel that all these beautiful words about explicit and meta and all this isn’t really my thing. I cannot deliver this to the kind of pupils I have.

7 Analysis

7.1 How do Foreign Language Teachers Understand the Concept of Language Awareness?
As we have seen in the answers to the first question it is interesting to observe that there are various views given to the concept of language awareness by the six teachers. The different perspectives also make clear that the concept of language awareness is very holistic and that LA could be considered in numerous ways.

Four of the six teachers, that is Björn, Sofia, Anna and Siv, describe their understanding of language awareness in terms of “having a feeling for different nuances and variations in language” and that it entails “knowing how and when to nuance and vary the language in writing and communication”. In James & Garrett’s (1991:13) scope of language awareness, the aspect of “nuances and variations” is presented in the affective domain and is described as the “relation between knowledge and feeling”, and that “consciousness includes intellect and affect”. As been previously mentioned, the explicit learning approach makes pupils become active in their learning process, which refers to the relation between feeling and intellect. In other words, in order to notice
(Schmidt, 1994a) and to be aware of a specific item requires personal engagement. It is only then we can construct knowledge.

Karin who associates language awareness with the presence of “different values in languages” says that awareness involves being able to question why a certain expression is regarded as more appropriate or correct than another. Karin’s view refers to James & Garrett’s (1991) power domain, in which language is regarded as an instrument of manipulation. Karin underlines the importance of stimulating pupils to reflective thinking and to ask questions. From this perspective it becomes important to raise pupils awareness of how language is applied as a manipulative tool in different contexts, as well as to see the political and social implications in language. An example could be to study how language is used in advertisement and how it tries to manipulate the reader.

Siv, Karin and Björn bring up the multilingual aspect, which corresponds to the social domain. The social domain of language awareness emphasises linguistic tolerance and highlights the cognitive advantages of multilingual classrooms. The contrastive method, which Siv brings up, is discussed in Tornberg (1997) and is often seen in relation to the multilingual classroom. It involves not only an interference of the native speaking language. It involves also being aware of the structure of both mother tongue and target language in order to facilitate the explicit knowledge of languages. To work through a socio-linguistic perspective would just as Siv points out, raise pupils’ awareness of different cultures and languages and therefore create tolerance between cultures or sub-cultures, which is something that becomes more and more relevant in today’s multicultural classroom. This vision of the multilingual aspect of language awareness was stressed in the description of Siv and to a lesser extent in the description of Karin and Björn.

Anna describes her understanding of LA in relation to communication strategies, which refers to the performance domain. James & Garrett (1991) point out that language learners only make progress in their skills when they become aware of what they do not know. And to realise what you do not know involves a comparison of what one does with what other people do. In other words, if we refer to Anna, it means that language awareness in this sense implies to notice the effect of one’s own utterances and knowing how to do adjustments in communications. This also has to do with the affective domain as it involves the feeling of knowing.

Karin and Sofia mention the activity of talking analytically about languages, which also refers to the performance domain. James & Garrett (1991) state that in the act of
verbalising a problem or a mismatch in a dialogue with another will help us to realise what we know as well as what we do not know, hence the importance of explicit knowledge. In this case we have implicit knowledge, which is turned into awareness, thanks to the explicit learning approach.

What we can see in these descriptions is that the teachers actually understand the concept in different ways, both theoretically and practically and that all views can be linked to the holistic scope of LA, articulated by James & Garrett (1991).

Nevertheless, it is interesting to observe that the cognitive aspect dealing with the awareness of one’s own learning process was not discerned from more than two answers, the ones of Björn and Anna. Björn and Anna mention this aspect but it is not highlighted compared to the other aspects. Moreover, in the answer to the question about the pupil’s independent learning it becomes clear that the majority of the teachers find it hard to stimulate the pupils to become good learners and that the pupils are even regarded as “unaware” and “cognitively immature” by some teachers.

Finally, there is Gunn who is the only teacher that is totally unfamiliar with the concept. She makes it clear that “she has given up her ambitions” to teach in a way that foster pupils’ awareness because of pupils’ lack of motivation and ability to learn. However, if we look at her answers to the question about explicit- and implicit learning we see that she favours explicit learning, which could explain to a certain degree that she does have an understanding of the concept, although it is very vague. When talking to Gunn it becomes clear that she has difficulties describing her teaching practices, which has to do with the fact that she does not have a clear idea of what she wants to achieve with her teaching. This could also explain to a certain degree why her pupils are not engaged and unaware learners. Could there be a connection between the teacher’s ambition to foster language awareness and the pupil’s engagement in the learning process? I think the connection is very strong and that the application of methods that fosters pupils’ language awareness requires teachers who are very familiar with the concept.

7.2 How do Foreign Language Teachers Relate Their Understanding of Language Awareness to the Swedish Syllabus?

The cognitive aspects as they are formulated in the language syllabus are mentioned only by Björn and Anna. However, it is only Björn who makes the connection between the cognitive aspects and the syllabus. In general, it is interesting and not surprising to
detect the difficulty among the teachers to make the connection between their understanding of language awareness, and the Swedish syllabus. The fact that language awareness is not explicitly expressed in the Swedish syllabus, explains of course the difficulty to make this connection and could as a consequence also explain why there are only two teachers who mention the cognitive aspects in the first question. However, if we look at the answers to the question about the pupil’s independent learning, we can see that the majority of the teachers value independent learning as very important, although they find it as hard to stimulate the pupils to become good independent learners. Concerning the fact that pupils often have difficulties overcoming the transition stage from primary to secondary school, it makes sense that they would need guidance and training in order to become independent learners, which is something that Karin and Sofia point out. In order to avoid the fact that pupils could easily feel confused and lack a sense of control by the responsibility they are given in their learning process it is important to verbalise, either in interaction with oneself or others, different ways of learning. This involves a metacognitive approach from the pupils, which with help and guidance from the teacher will get them used to consciously using and evaluating different learning approaches to promote their own learning. The fact that this kind of explicit learning approach is required in order to foster language learning, justifies the need for precise emphasis on the concept of language awareness in the syllabus. Another aspect of the problem is that the teachers experience difficulties stimulating the pupils to become independent learners, which opens a discussion on the fact that teachers would require deeper knowledge of a language awareness methodology.

7.3 How do Foreign Language Teachers Convert their Understanding of Language Awareness into Teaching Practices?

In the views articulated about the advantages of explicit- and implicit learning it is interesting to discover that some teachers are ambiguous in the way they talk about explicit- and implicit learning, which highlight the fact that they have difficulties understanding the meaning. What we can see in the views of Anna is that she associates explicit learning with explanations given by a teacher, or with pupils practising inductively, sometimes with help from metalanguage. She associates implicit learning with input, communication tasks and intuitive knowledge. From the way Anna talks about both it becomes clear that she favours communication tasks due to the importance
of input and intuitive knowledge. As such, Anna puts the fostering of communication skills, which she equates with implicit learning, in opposition to explicit learning and analysis of different items of language. In other words, Anna does not associate explicit learning with communication tasks, which indicates that Anna relates explicit learning exclusively to grammar tasks.

Björn’s view on explicit- and implicit learning is similar to Anna’s. As has been previously mentioned, Björn applies explicit learning to text- and grammar based performances and implicit learning to communication based performances, which draws attention to contradiction in his answer as he earlier in the interview makes clear that implicit learning is not possible in the classroom as the level of input is very low in artificial environments. To have a language awareness approach in the classroom does not mean that explicit learning cannot be applied to communication tasks, which Björn and Anna seem to believe. Even though there are mostly LA research on writing and reading, there are a few studies on speaking and listening that show that noticing (Schmidt, 1994a) on specific features together with explicit instruction increase the level of awareness. For example, it has been proved based on a study of Spanish speaking EFL (English as a foreign language) learners that explicit instruction and noticing on a specific feature in communication tasks improves intonation and prosody (Svalberg, 2007). This could suggest that pupils should be told to focus on a specific item (pronunciation, intonation, prosody etc) in communication tasks, in addition to the structured meaning-based communication tasks they usually are given. The language awareness theory actually points out that different items of language that are considered separate from each are in fact closely interwoven in the construction of meanings and of form, both in communication and in writing. For this reason also, language awareness is considered as holistic in the sense that the learning of a language is not constructed upon isolated tasks, but rather as different items that are related to one another (Bolitho&Carter, 2003:256).

To combine noticing (Schmidt, 1994a) with explicit instruction in communication tasks could be applied in many ways. Siv for example, applies what would be described as an explicit approach to communication tasks when she tells her pupils to notice similarities and differences in the pronunciation of both target language and mother tongue. As Siv points out, this kind of explicit instruction in communication tasks raises pupil’s language awareness. Similarly, the contrastive method, applied by Siv, fosters
awareness in terms of cultural education, which becomes of such prime concern in a multilingual classroom reflecting the increasingly globalising world of ours.

Gunn makes clear that she considers explicit learning the most suitable in the language classroom; however when describing her practises it becomes clear that she is not acquainted with a methodology that fosters language awareness. For example, as a contrary to Siv, Gunn does not apply explicit instruction in communication tasks. Moreover, the fact that her pupils not are told to work with the texts they are given back proves that Gunn does not foster awareness in practise.

Concerning metalanguage and its importance in the explicit learning approach, it is thought-provoking to observe that the majority of the teachers consider metalanguage an important tool in learning. There are two teachers, Karin and Sofia, who point out that the pupils actually want and need metalinguistic knowledge. Nevertheless, many teachers express the difficulty in applying metalanguage, due to the unfamiliar terminology. Sofia says that anyone could learn a metalanguage, that it is not “some Einstein knowledge” which could explain to some extent that there seems to be a fear among the pupils and teachers in using a metalanguage in practise, which Anna and Gunn also point out.

If the pupils become familiar to the activity of talking about language on a metacognitive level with or without a formal terminology, then it also becomes easier to foster language awareness. Karin who actively practises an explicit approach, experiences the talk about language as successful. Her pupils actually like it and they get “human dignity” when they go through a linguistic reasoning.
8 Conclusion

The aim of this paper has been to investigate the role of language awareness from a teacher’s perspective and to investigate why it is important to give more attention to language awareness as a concept in order to enhance language acquisition.

The conclusion we can draw according to the analysis of this essay is that the six teachers’ understanding of LA is in fact limited to only one or two of the five domains of language awareness. Therefore, it becomes appropriate to stress that LA should be understood as a holistic concept where all the domains intermingle in different ways in the language classroom. More importantly, the concept of LA should be explicitly defined and developed in the curriculum from its holistic aspects with the encouragement of the pupils’ metacognition at its core. Metacognition (and explicit learning as its practise) is the key to fostering LA in its holistic sense. Metacognition opens the door to all the domains it covers. This implies that LA because of its holistic scope encourages pupils to be more creative and explorative in their learning process.

To have a holistic approach to language in order to stimulate awareness requires teachers who have knowledge of the different dimensions of language awareness and what the methodological implications of such are in practise.

Concerning research on language acquisition, it is of great importance that teachers follow developments in research in order to see what is valuable for pupil’s learning. A lot of important research on for example the benefits of explicit learning in language learning that very briefly has been introduced in this essay, never reach the world of the teacher in an effective way. What would be required in order to create a better link between the world of research and the world of teaching practises?

Moreover, it is a main concern that the concept of language awareness is incorporated into teacher education. Concerning the fact that many teachers in my research find it hard to stimulate the pupils to become conscious learners, would require a precise methodology of language awareness given in both teacher education and as further teacher training.

The fact that many teachers in this investigation experience metalanguage as something crucial in the explicit learning approach and that many pupils express the need for metalinguistic knowledge, would suggest that the activity of talking about language, with or without a formal terminology, should be included in language studies.
at an earlier stage. In this way pupils would become familiar with a language awareness approach as early as possible in their learning of a foreign language. This also suggests the emphasis on applying metalanguage and the activity of talking about language in L1 learning. It also suggests a greater cooperation between teachers across subjects, something that is suggested by Hawkins and the idea of ‘Language across the curriculum’. Could for example a better collaboration between foreign language teachers and L1 teachers foster better learning by shaping aware and engaged pupils?

In the interviews some of the teachers articulated the following proverb: “You can lead a horse to water but you can’t make him drink”. As a final statement of this essay, I think that the horse must find his way to the water by himself and that the role of the teacher should be simply to clear the way. This is what exploring a language, through a language awareness approach, is essentially about. Why should we have pre-formulated questions? The creativity and the process of learning lie in finding the answers just as in posing the questions.
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Frågor till intervju

1. Hur länge har du varit verksam som språklärare?

2. Vilka program har du?

3. Vad kan man när man kan ett språk, enligt din åsikt?

4. Vad har du för förståelse av begreppet språklig medvetenhet?

5. Vad innebär en elevcentrerad undervisning för dig?

6. Vad finns det för fördelar med att förtydliga, beskriva och tala om olika språkliga problem i språkinlärningen? (Explicit språkinlärning)

7. Vilka fördelar finns det med att inte analysera eller beskriva olika språkliga problem och bara förlita sig till den intuitiva förmågan att lära sig ett språk? (Implicit språkinlärning.)

8. Hur samstämmer din förståelse av språklig medvetenhet till kursplanerna?

9. Hur samstämmer din förståelse av språklig medvetenhet till målbeskrivningarna i språk?

10. På vilket sätt tror du elevens känslomässiga engagemang har inverkan på hennes/hans inlärning?

11. På vilket sätt kan elevens utforskande om språket gynna eller missgynna deras inlärning?

12. Hur förhåller du dig till elevens självständighet och självreglering i sin inlärning?

13. Hur viktigt är det att utveckla ett metaspråk för att lära sig språket och för att bli en bra inlärare?


15. Hur omsätter du din förståelse av språklig medvetenhet i det språkliga klassrummet?

16. Hur gör man för att få eleverna att tänka kring språket på ett metakognitivt plan? Är det lätt, svårt?


18. På vilket sätt försöker du stimulera eleverna till att bli självständiga inlärare?
19. Vilka metoder använder du för att eleverna ska bli känsломässigt engagerade inlärare?

20. Kan du sammanfatta vilka metoder du anser bäst för att eleven ska förbättra sitt lärande?

21. Vilka metoder använder du eller vilka övningar ger du inom följande områden för att främja elevens inlärning och för att stimulera eleven till att öka sin insikt om hur den egna inlärmningen går till?

   Vid textarbete?
   Kommunikationsövningar?
   Skrivarbete?