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ABSTRACT

This paper traces the development of Language Awareness and Critical Language Awareness from their development in the United Kingdom to the Canadian school context and beyond. The term "Language Awareness" (LA), a feature of the British educational system since the 1972 establishment of national study of literacy in classrooms in the United Kingdom, refers to a language awareness element in the school curriculum in late elementary or early secondary school. Basic to the definition of LA is the goal of getting students to become sensitive to the role that language plays in every usage, including school life. In teaching LA, educators want students to understand the roles of politics and culture as they are played out in everyday uses of language. Critical Language Awareness (CLA) represents a conscious attempt to move beyond existing conceptions of LA to pay more attention to relevant social aspects of language. Although LA, and CLA, as theoretical constructs are relatively new to teachers in Canada, they have been used in some classrooms following the introduction of LA in teacher education classes at the University of Calgary by W. Tulasiewicz. Two projects using LA in the classrooms of Native Canadians are described. Two other attempts to develop CLA strategies for use with Native Canadian children are also described briefly. LA and CLA approaches can make a considerable contribution to the literacy development of students. (Contains 16 references.) (SLD)

Critical Language Awareness: Implications for Classrooms in a Canadian Context

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Introduction

The term **Language Awareness** has been a feature of the British educational system since the setting up in 1972 of a national inquiry, conducted by the Bullock Committee, into the teaching of literacy in classrooms in the United Kingdom. Language Awareness (or LA) refers specifically to the work by a group of British language teachers, educationalists and applied linguists of a new (since 1980) language awareness element in the school curriculum at the top end of primary school or in the early years of secondary school (Hawkins, 1984). Hawkins states that as a curriculum element, LA also bridges the gap between the different aspects of language awareness (English/foreign language/ethnic minority mother tongue/English as a second language) which he says are being taught in isolation (p. 4). Basically, the philosophy underlying the teaching of LA (or Knowledge About Language, KAL) seems to be to challenge students to ask questions about language. This suggests a need to develop courses which will take into account principles of child language development and promote a deeper understanding of the role of language in literacy development.

Basic to the definition of language awareness is the goal of getting students to become sensitive to the role that language plays in every usage, including school life. Thus, asking questions about language, learning to listen (educating the ear), and attempting to grasp the relationship between spoken and written forms of language, all serve to define what educators see as foundational to the definition of **awareness of language**.(Hawkins, 1984)

Language Awareness is, therefore, more than just a linguistics enterprise. In teaching LA, we want to have students understand the role of culture and politics as these are played out in our everyday uses of language. Hence, a programme which attempts to introduce LA to students will

want to include reflective practices which deal with the role of language in the classroom, at home, in the work place, and in the cultural context in which both teachers and students find themselves on a daily basis. Thus, "who gets to talk and who just mainly listens" should become part of the language awareness agenda. In so doing both students and teachers become empowered and language awareness is allowed to become an enlightened forum for critical literacy (Knoblauch and Brannon, 1993).

In keeping with the notion of critical literacy, **Critical Language Awareness (CLA)** represents a conscious attempt to move beyond existing conceptions of LA, to focus on the nature of alternative conceptions of LA, and their practical implementations in a variety of educational contexts (i.e. primary and secondary schools, universities, and colleges of higher education). CLA builds upon what Fairclough (1989, 1992), Kress (1989), Mey (1985), and others have called 'critical language study', 'critical linguistics' or 'critical discourse analysis'. The basis for this shift in focus has been cogently argued by Fairclough (1982) on the grounds that LA programmes have, in the past, been insufficiently 'critical'. In other words, they have failed to pay attention to relevant social aspects of language. In particular they have neglected to provide students with sufficient opportunities to examine the relationships between language and power, aspects which ought to be highlighted in language education curricula.

LA (and CLA) programmes have received particular emphasis in classrooms in the United Kingdom. There seems to be a close link between LA and Whole Language although these link have not been explicitly developed. What seems evident, though, is that programmes of instruction that are language-based have an affinity with LA practices as they are found in such British publications as Language Matters (see, for example, the 1998 issue on Story and Story-

telling, volumes 2 & 3). Purcell-Gates (1995) in her review article, "Language Arts Research for the 21st Century: A Diversity of Perspectives Among Researchers", states,

> The need for language users to recognize the value and power of their native, or primary, language is highlighted by critical theorists. A heightened awareness of the socioeconomic and political power issues contextualizing literacy and language use, development and "success" lies at the heart of this work. Research on the impact of awakening learners to these issues is critical to the children of the 21st century as we work to facilitate access to literacy to many of the previously underserved populations of this country and of the world (p.57).

This statement, and others, reflects the emphasis that Fairclough (1992) and others have placed on the need for researchers and educators to address the critical element needed in programmes of instruction for children across the grades.

Our purpose will be to briefly describe what LA looks in classrooms in Canadian schools and to attempt to how LA/CLA -based activities could be utilized in classrooms in North America generally. To do so, we will review the development of LA/CLA activities in classrooms in Western Canada and follow by describing how such activities could be utilized in classrooms where language is the focus of instruction across the grades and across subject-matter disciplines.

Language Awareness in a Canadian context

What seems apparent to us is that Language Awareness, as a theoretical construct, is a relatively new concept to most Canadian teachers. However, this is not to say that teachers and faulty have not undertaken work in this area. Belanger (1996), in an address given at the Shifting Strands Conference in Vancouver, April, 1996, presented a number of LA strategies to a group of

practising teachers. These were of a more traditional nature and dealt with such basic issues as teaching vocabulary, studying word origins, and developing sensitivity to grammatical nuances in language.

To our knowledge, work on Language Awareness in Alberta was initiated through the efforts of Professor Witold Tulasiewicz of Cambridge University who came to the University of Calgary in 1990 to teach a course in language Awareness through our Education In-Service office. These quarter-course offerings, given during Spring and Summer, were designed to introduce experienced teacher to the practical implications of LA and, because of their pragmatic content, they attracted a lot of teachers at all grade levels. Bilash and Tulasiewicz (1995) worked collaboratively in delivering these courses and the teachers who enrolled in them were able to develop materials that were based on British content but were now adapted to Canadian classrooms. A listing of these activities demonstrates the applicability of such activities for classrooms beyond a Canadian context: synonyms and expressions; social register; counting; language dialect; Cyrillic alphabet; word origins; scripts; and, word order. A full description of these activities and teacher reaction is to be found in Bilash and Tulasiewicz article (1995).

Subsequent work in using LA activities was undertaken by students who took the courses over a period of approximately five years. A detailed listing of all the strategies undertaken is beyond the scope of this paper. Rather, we will offer a selective description of some of the more pertinent activities in the hope that their descriptions will enable one to see how these activities can be applied in just about any classroom on this continent (and, perhaps, in any educational context).

Rowney (1994, 1995) initiated a classroom research project with her grade four students while she was taking our Spring, 1994 course on Language Awareness. Using **The Talking Earth (George, 1983)**, a novel about Seminole Indians who lived in the Florida everglades, she was able to get her students to use the novel as a focal point for doing comparative research on Alberta natives. The students created illustrations and a wall chart listing words that arose out of their reading and class discussions. For Rowney, was able to get her students to use The Talking Earth as a focal point for doing comparative research on Alberta natives. The students created illustrations and a wall chart listing words that arose out of their reading and class discussions. For Rowney, this unit provided an important forum for developing a sensitivity to Native culture through composing letters to native children, through daily spelling instruction in words that reflected native concepts (e.g. tepee, bannock, medicine Wheel, and so on), through informal journal entries where students reflected on Native culture, and through reading related literature on natives. This was a consciousness-raising activity for many of these children who came from homes where exposure to native culture was virtually non-existent. the experience was also beneficial in that there was a native child in the class who came from a nearby reserve. This child was able to share his knowledge of life on the reserve and, in so doing, dispell a number of myths about reserve life that existed it he understandings of parents about natives.

In a follow-up project, Rowney (1995) set up an electronic pen-pal communication project with the Crescent Town School, a school in Ontario where 200 languages were represented. Using all 25 students in her grade 4 class at Springbank Elementary (a school located in a rural area of Alberta), she worked to have her students construct profiles of what a comparable group of grade 4 students at the Crescent Town School might look like, what language(s) they might

speak, and what the school might look like in comparison to their own school. Each student was encouraged to construct a character sketch which would include a visual representation accompanied by a written description of customs, languages spoken, favourite colours, favourite sayings, and favoured sports. These sketches were included, along with an accompanying letter, and sent by electronic mail to the Crescent Town School. What was instructive for us was to see how students at Springback envisioned their Crescent Town couterparts. One student, in particular, drew a picture of a Crescent Town student sliding down a playground slide and uttering the phrase "awesome". Although this does represent an overlay of a Western Canadian view on things, it does show how regional views of school life influence how we see others.

Unfortunately, despite the attempts by Springback student to contact Crescent Town children, only one reply was received, despite the three letters sent from Springbank. As we learned later, the basic problem was that children at Crescent Town School were unable to communicate effectively enough in English to make the exchanges fruitful and meaningful events for the two groups. The one reply sent Springbank contained pictures and drawings accompanied by each child's signature. Nevertheless, this activity was an important one because it helped to sensitize the English-only speaking students to the other worlds, languages, customs, and cultures represented at Crescent Town School (see also Feuerverger, 1989).

Critical Language Awareness

To this point, we have attempted to show how language Awareness activities can be applied to classrooms in Canadian classrooms and elsewhere. LA, as sensitizing concept and activity, can be applied in any classroom where language is the focus of instruction. In this

respect, LA activities (or strategies) have the potential to enhance a student's understanding of language in its broadest sense. Moreover, LA should be applicable in a variety of contexts, even beyond its application in ESL classrooms. Critical Language Awareness (CLA) practices should provide an added dimension to LA practices particularly in the domain of power relationships that are found in our daily uses of language. Fairclough (1992) provides three reasons for this: there are changes in the ways in which power and social control are exercised (eg. classroom language, or the language of medical consultations); changes in contemporary society in language practices - for example, changes is ways of talking as part of changes in professional-client relationships; and language itself as a target for change (p. 3).

Teachers who adopt this critical perspective on teaching language I the classroom can make a significant contribution t to the literacy development of their students. As Fairclough (1992) argues, CLA can be seen as an important prerequisite for an effective democratic citizenry. A number of examples present themselves: the language of the workplace; how professional-client interactions are structured, specifically between teachers and students or between solicitors and their clients. In Canada (and in most democratic countries), this is particularly true in the case of politicians and their constituents. In this respect, classrooms need to become places where CLA is used to educate children in the important tasks of learning how to adopt a critical stance on issues of a social and political nature. Newspaper editorials, for one, provide excellent content for examining the political content of messages that are continually being given to the public as "the truth" (or Foucault's Regime of Truth).

CLA and Classroom Practice: Two Examples

The examples which follow are intended to illustrate our efforts to develop classroom strategies which reflect a CLA orientation. The first of these came from a lesson strategy provided by Professor Anthony Adams of Cambridge. During the Spring Term of 1995, Professor Adams and Tulasiewicz co-taught a half-course with us (EDCI 699.27). It was Professor Adams who introduced the class to the idea of the Language Map on the first day of the course.

The assignment asked students to construct a visual 'map' tracing their linguistic history from birth to the present time. Once the visual map had been created, labels could be attached describing each aspect of the individual's language journey. When we examined the maps created by students in this graduate class, we were struck by the apparent differences between maps constructed by our White students, we were presented with a linear arrangement of event. some arranged in the form of a wheel, others in list form. From the Native students we were given a visual presentation arranged in four corners. (See Figure 1)

Place Figure 1 about here

This way of presenting or re-presenting reality is in keeping with Native attempts to depict events (in this case, one's linguistic tradition) in terms of four phases, as in the case of North, East, South, and West or in some arrangement of four. This indirect form of depiction is typical of the aboriginal manner in which life is depicted. Ward (1997) claims that Aboriginal stories rarely state an explicit lesson, but leave it to the listeners to take what they need form the tale. In addition the tradition of the medicine wheel seems tied to the concept of the Language Maps we

received from our students.

A follow-up activity, developed by one of our graduate students (a Maori) was designed to show student how words derived from English have found their way into both the Maori and Japanese languages respectively. This activity not only shows how English words have been 'taken on' by these respective languages, they also show how each native tongue has, in turn, had its influence on the borrowed English word (see Figure 2). Perhaps the most evident example is the transformation of the English word 'ice cream' into Japanese 'aisukuriimu'.

Place Figure 2 about here

Critical Language Awareness in North American Classrooms

So far we have presented activities which we felt had application for Canadian classrooms. However, as one can readily see, these activities could also be easily adapted for most classrooms in both the United States and across Canada. One activity which we feel has almost universal application is counting. Not only is it a universal phenomenon, it is critically important in terms of raising consciousness of how closely connected we are in terms of the similarity of our numbering system but also in terms of our closeness with respect to the 'names' we give to our respective numbers. Figure 3 demonstrates this affinity while, at the same time, reflecting the obvious differences, for example, between Japanese and English.

Place Figure 3 about here

Another example, which we adapted from a workbook (written over twenty years ago), demonstrates how English words have differing meanings across English-speaking countries and also the example provides students with the opportunity to critically analyze the shift in meanings of words over time (see Figure 4)...What stands out here is that words which had a specific meaning for a specific country have now changed because of the global nature of communication by way of television. For example, most British people would now be aware of the multiple meanings of the word 'hockey' while Americans and Canadians would easily recognize that trousers and pants are I the same ball part semantically. On the other hand, 'plimsolls' might not be recognized as a word that is now found in everyday usage int he United Kingdom. As a matter of fact, 'Nikes' or 'Adidas' might be the preferred usage in today's parlance.

Place Figure 4 about here

Conclusion

What we attempted to do was to trace the development of LA and CLA from its development in the United Kingdom to the Canadian school context and beyond. Although work in Language Awareness has been on going in schools in North America, our experience with LA has been restricted to schools in Alberta and Ontario. Work in CLA is relatively new (at least, for us since the appearance of Fairclough's, 1992, text). One of the major problems in developing LA/CLA materials has to do with definition. The definitions offered by Fairclough (1992) and by Ivanic (1990) provide a useful focus for developing materials for classroom use. In terms of our own work they provide an important conceptual framework for researching the effects of LA/CLA in classrooms and for developing instructional materials for use in classrooms generally.

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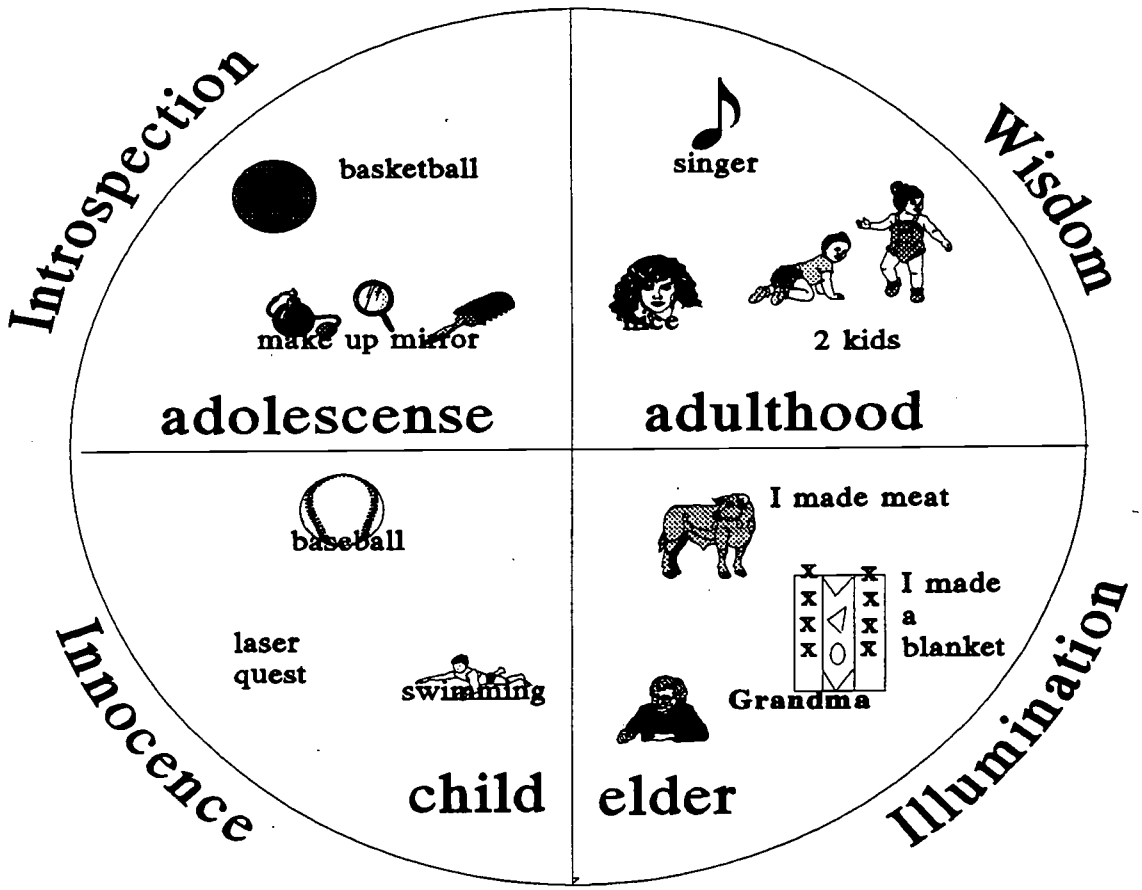
Figure 1: Language Arts



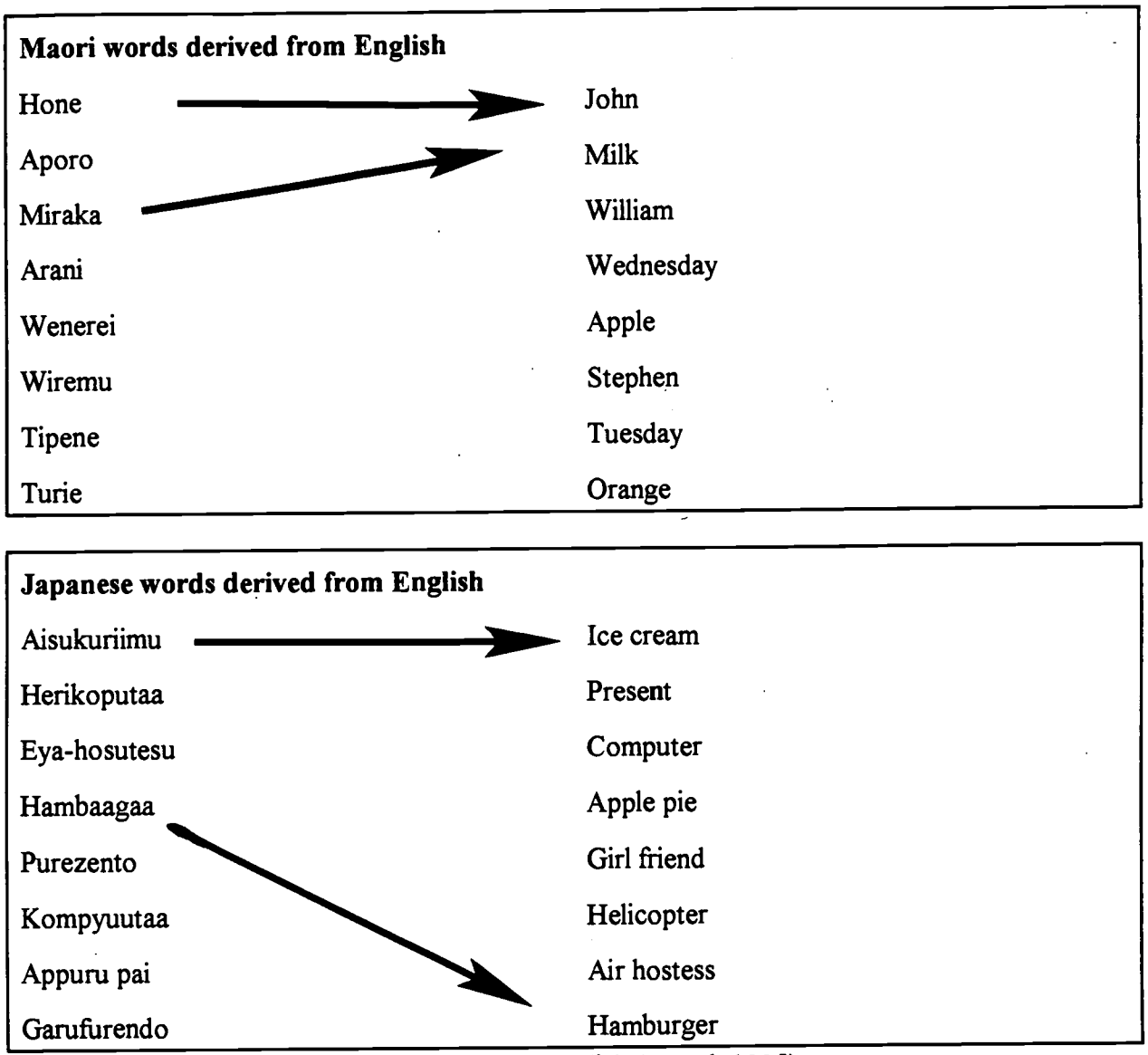


Figure 2: Maori/Japanese words derived from English (Broad, 1995)

Counting Around the World

English	Swahili (Kenya)	Spanish	Japanese	German
one	moja (MOH-jah)	uno (oo-noh)	ichi (ee-chee)	ein (ine)
two	mbili MBEE-lee	dos (dohs)	ni (nee)	zwei (zwy)
three	tatu (TAH-too)	tres (trace)	san (sahn)	drei (dry)
four	nne (N-neh)	cuatro (qua-troh)	shi (shee)	vier (fear)
five	tano (TAH-noh)	cinco (seen-koh)	go (goh)	funf (foonf)
six	sita (SEE-tah)	seis (sayce)	roku (roh-koo)	sechs (zecks)
seven	saba (SAH-bah)	siete (see-et-ay)	shichi (shee-chee)	sieben (zee-ben)
eight	nane (NAH-neh)	ocho (nu-ay-vay)	hachi (hah-chee)	acht (achkt)
nine	tisa (TEE-sah)	neuve (nu-ay-vay)	ku (koo)	neun (noyn)
ten	kumi (KOO-mee)	diez (dee-ace)	ju (joo)	zehn (zayn)

Figure 3 (source unknown)

Different English words/similar meanings		
Britan	Canada	United States
	soccer	soccer
hockey	field hockey	field hockey
stands	bleachers	
nil/nought	zero	zero
pavement	sidewalk	sidewalk
	TV	TV
chips	chips/French fries	French fries
ice cream soda	milkshake	malt
plimsolls		sneakers
rubbish	garbage	garbage
post code		
trousers	pants	pants
caravan	trailer	trailer
nappies		
rubber	eraser	eraser
petrol	gas	gas
lorry		

Figure 4 (source unknown)

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